CHAPTER - I

THE EMERGENCE OF BUDDHISM IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTESTING PHILOSOPHIES AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN ANCIENT INDIA

The Buddhism of the Buddha\(^1\), during the 2500 years of its existence, has survived both as glory and defeat among the fierce encounters it met with other faiths and philosophies, not only in India, but also in other parts of the world. The first encounter, when Buddhism itself came into existence on Indian horizon in 6th century B.C., came up with Vedicism, the cult of vedas, which is said to constitute the driving force of ancient Aryan culture and civilization.

The rituals and sacrifices of vedic religion gradually developed into a highly precise, elaborate and bloody cult that created a community of priests who preached worship of gods for individual gains. The art of imprecation was considerably in practice. The vedas also refer to a particular social system based on the four-fold classification of human beings -- the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras -- known as

1. Since many interpretations of the Buddhist philosophy are in circulation among the schools of Buddhism all over world, the phrase is used to mean original Buddhism i.e., Dhamma originally told by the Buddha himself.
varna vyavastha. That social stratification later on turned into a tyranny of casteism and untouchability. The classification was not natural. It was arbitrarily developed for the supremacy of certain—classes. Subsequently, the so-called higher classes, particularly the Brahmins, were beneficiaries from the vedic rituals and castes and the lower castes driven by them into a mass of serfs; they were condemned to live as sub-human beings.

It was the Buddha who, for the first time, opposed the social system, dogmatism and priesthood of vedic cult. The Buddha created a new social order based on the equality of men, their fraternity and universal brotherhood. It was he who first denounced the worthlessness of sacrifice of animals to gods, and taught man the value of social service. It was he who emancipated man from the thraldom of vedic religion. It was he, again, who released man from the iron heel of confederacy of priests. And it was he who first told man to exercise his reason and not meekly to follow the dogma of vedic religion.

It is said that the Buddha liberated man from the domination of priests, from the idea of institutionalized mediation between man and God, and from the spiritual and
liturgical dogmatism of a priesthood. By rejecting the caste system, the Buddha became the greatest social reformer of his age. His teachings were directed to all men, and not to a given caste or group. He opposed the blood sacrifice of animals which was characteristic of Brahmanism.  

It was Buddhism's successful revolt against Vedicism and Brahmanism. The subsequent course of history favoured the Buddhist transformation of socio-religious life. It was the liberalism and humanism of Buddhism, whose influence went for beyond the spheres of religion and philosophy, that contributed to the disruption of Vedic religious and social pattern and ushered in a classless society.  

It happened after Buddhism had been officially propagated during the Mauryan period. It was indeed Ashoka, with his humanitarian Mission, who preached the universal Dhamma.

The indestructible foundation of the whole of human life is its philosophy. It is an effective weapon against religious fanaticism and superstition. It provides a life throughout like, showing the correct way


of solving human problems that agitate men's minds. Philosophy is imbued with the utmost faith in the human intellect, in the power of knowledge, in man's ability to fathom all the secrets of the world around him, and to create an order of justice based on reason and love.

Social environment is a sort of an order; it consists of varied customs, traditions, beliefs, and types of organisation, which exist within the social group in which men are socialised. It is the order of social institutions. The sociological imperatives of social environment are such that can be understood and manipulated by men; they are not given by some unseen power. Though they are not of the individual's making, yet they exert an influence upon them which is compelling. The social environment is an infinitely rich ideological universe of meanings unified into systems of language, science, religion, philosophy, laws, ethics, etc., and includes the totality of the best actions of mankind.

A philosophy, which does not present a world outlook, is decidedly lacking in comprehensive understanding. It is incomplete, unworthy to be practised. A correct comprehensive understanding then becomes the essential basis of all philosophies of human
interest. In the absence of a correct world understanding, natural events would dominate human life there by creating several interruptions in the course of progress and prosperity. Man’s philosophical insight is both a "process of self expression and of penetration into the environment about him". A correct understanding of the world is necessary in everyday living and this is given by philosophical insight. So it is a philosophy only when it present a correct world understanding. Buddhism performs all these functions.

In other words, Vedic, Upanishadic, Sankhya and Lokayata philosophies lack systemic coherence in relation to Buddhist philosophy.

The Purusa Sukta, hymn in the Rigveda, refers to the origin of different classes (varnas) by the Supreme God. For the prosperity of the world, the creator, from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet, created the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras, respectively. These four classes are called by the name of ‘chaturvarnya’ as an ideal organization of society. It was elaborated in rigid rules in the Brahmanic period, and later on, by Manu- Smriti. There was division of occupations among these classes.

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The occupation of the Brahmins was learning, teaching and the performance of religious rites. The occupation of Kshatriyas was fighting. Trade was assigned to the Vaishyas. The occupation of the Shudras was service of the three superior classes. As a rule, one class could not transgress the occupation of the other. The Shudra, because he was on the lowest rung of the social ladder, was denied the rights to education and arms. These two rights were also denied to the women of all classes as the Hindu shastras (religious books) state.

In Brahmanic society, a man's life was divided into four stages. The first was called Brahmacharya; its object was study and education. The second was the stage of Grahastha which meant a married life. The third was Vanaprastha the object of which was to familiarize a man with the life of a hermit, i.e., serving the family ties. And the fourth was the stage of Sanyasa. Its chief object was to enable the man to go in search of God and seek union with him. The first and the last stages were not open to the shudras and women.

The core idea of Brahmanic philosophy is the theory of Karma. The birth of a man is the result of his past Karmas done in previous life. It is one of the main subject of the theory of transmigration of soul, which
means that what a man is in this life is wholly due to his previous Karmas (deeds) done in the former life.

There was an emphasis on sacrifice in the Brahmanical rituals. The increasing dominance of the idea of sacrifice helped to exalt the position of the priests. These priests declared that salvation of the soul could be had only by the due performance of Vedic sacrifices and observance of religious rites and ceremonies and the offering of gifts to Brahmins. The result was that priesthood became a profession and a hereditary one. The priest who possessed the vedic lore became the accredited intermediaries between gods and men and the dispensers of the divine grace.

To put it briefly, the Brahmanic period was marked by the observance of caste and the asramas, emphasis on sacrifice, the eternity of the Vedas, the supermacy of the priest and a belief in the transmigration of an individual's soul.

On the question of authorship of Upanishads, divergent views are projected. It is popularly believed that the authors of Upanishads belonged to different cultural backgrounds and belief systems. Hence some of
the Upanishads opposed to the vedic thought questioned divine origin of the vedas. They denied the efficacy attributed to sacrifices, to funeral oblations, and gifts to the priests, which are the fundamentals of brahmanic philosophy. Some other Upanishads which were probably written by organized groups, adopted essence of vedic teaching. The Upanishads are said to form concluding portions of vedas, and are called as Vedanta (the end of the Vedas). The central thesis of these Upanishads is that Brahma is the ultimate reality which is spiritual and that Atman is the same as Brahma. The Brahma is eternal and unchanging principle.

The Upanishadic philosophy regards 'Brahma' as the 'ultimate reality'. In some of the advanced speculations of the Upanishads, it came to mean the pure knower or the pure consciousness. Thus, according to the idealistic outlook that finally emerged in the Upanishads, the ultimate reality is pure consciousness. The corollary, is that the material world normally experienced has no intrinsic reality of its own. This was the starting point of all idealistic philosophies which came in sharp conflict with the materialistic ideas of ancient Indian thought.

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5. Chattopadhyay, D. Indian Philosophy, Delhi, 1964, p. 75.
In the Upanishads, there is also the conception of the Lord of *Karmam*, who administers the law and gives reward according one's past deeds. He is *Isvara*, the *Apara Brahman*, the dispenser of justice. So it can be concluded that the core idea of *Vendanta* i.e., *Karma* theory, is justified by Upanishadic taught. The Karmic belief propogated that by doing service to Brahmans the Shudras could improve their status in the next birth. And the Lord of *Karmam* of Upanishadic thought in fact justifies the exploitative nature of believe system under the grab of providing higher status to lower rungs in the next life. This is only to make suppressed people not to revolt against the Brahmanical social order which is the basis of the whole Brahmanical culture. Hence for the deprived communities the Lord of *Karmam* -- the *Apara Brahman*, could only dispense injustice.

Apart from Vedic and Upanishadic philosophies, there were also materialistic ideas in Ancient Indian thought. The first school of thought that professed 'materialism' was *Charavaka* philosophy, also known as the *Lokayata-darsana*.

The fundamental feature of the *Lokayata* materialism is its theory of 'deha-vada': the view that

self is nothing but the body. Consciousness is a function of the body. Consciousness does not inhere in the particles of matter. When these particles come or evolve themselves to be arranged, they show signs of life. Life and consciousness are identical. Man's thinking power ceases to function when the dissolution of physical body takes place. Consequently, there remains no consciousness after the body has perished. Hence there is nothing to transmigrate. In other words, the Lokayata materialism holds that mind is only a form or product of body. The ultimate reality is matter.\textsuperscript{7}

A thing unperceivable by sense organs, is not acceptable to charavakas. They recognise four elements of existence: earth, water, air and fire. The ether does not exist, because it is perceivable. In the same way, there is no immortality of soul and no existence of God. Hence the Lokayata knows nothing apart from nature, the material world.

Sankhya philosophy of Kapil was another materialistic thought. His philosophy is based on three principles: First, every true statement must be supported

\textsuperscript{7} Shastri D.R., \textit{A Short History of Indian Materialism Sensationalism and Hedonism}, Calcutta, 1957, pp. 17-20.
by proof. The second principle of his philosophy relates to casualty: creation and its cause. Kapil denied the theory that there was a being who created the Universe. Prakriti is the material cause of the world, not God, because there is no God. The total material Universe is the effect of Prakriti. There is no god to create the universe. It is a self evolved world. So only a definite product can be produced from a definite material; and only a specific material can yield a specific result.

The third principle relates to the existence of three gunas and their interaction. The process of development of the unevolved (Prakriti) is through the activities of three constituents (gunas) of which it is made up: 'Sattva', which corresponds to what we call as light in nature, which reveals and causes pleasure to man; 'Raja' is that which impels and moves, what produces activity; and 'Tamas' is heavy and puts under restraint, it produces the state of indifference or inactivity.

These three constituents act essentially in close relation; but they overpower and support one another and intermingle with one another. They are like the constituents of a lamp, the flame, the oil and the wick. When these three constituents (gunas) are in perfect
balance, none overpowering the other, the Universe appears static (Achetan) and ceases to evolve. When they are not in balance, one overpowers the other, the Universe becomes dynamic (Sachetan) and evolution begins. Kapil said the constituents become unblanced, due to disturbance in the balance of the three gunas and the disturbance was due to the presence of DUKKHA (suffering), i.e., disequilibrium in the original nature of the gunas.

The Prakriti, as conceived in Sankhya philosophy, is not only complex and all-pervasive; it also evolves or undergoes change perpetually. Naturally the things that develop out of it are also conceived as sharing in its fluid character. The whole of the physical Universe emanates from it; and, since it is conceived as ultimate and independent; the explanation so far may be characterized as naturalistic.

The above brief description of Vedantic, Upanishadic, Charvaka and Sankhya philosophies enable us to understand Buddhist thought since Buddhism did not arise some where in isolated environment of Indian philosophical thought. Certainly it lied its foundations

on already existed thoughts and Gautama Buddha modified and rationalised them. Buddha's thought inherited all the best elements of the philosophies which preceded it. However, Buddhism was not a simple continuation of previous philosophical ideas. It was fundamentally a new discovery, a new philosophy. The Buddhist philosophy is a discovery in the sense that it is the result of inquiry and investigation into the conditions of human life on earth and understanding of the working of human instincts with which man is born, the moulding of his instincts and dispositions which man has formed as a result of history and tradition and which working to his detriment.\(^{10}\)

During the life-time of Sidhartha Gautama, there was an atmosphere of war, social conflict and political change. He was born in the family of king Suddhodana of kapilvastu in northern India, whose men came into clash with the neighbouring state of Koliyas, on the question of distribution of water of river Rohini. The military chief proposed a violent war against the Koliyas for setting the water dispute. Sidhartha, as a member of the military Sangha, protested against the proposal of war so vigorously that his protest resulted in his exile.\(^{11}\)


\(^{11}\) See for more details: Ambedkar B.R., *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Introductory I.
However, finally the war was averted and matter of water dispute was settled peacefully. When Siddhartha received this news in exile, he was happy. But it made him very uneasy, at same time. He had left his home because he was opposed to war. The war had ended in peace.

The problem of war is essentially a problem of conflict. It is only a part of a larger problem (i.e. of universal struggle for survival and existence). This conflict is going on not only between kings and nations, between house-holders, between father and son, between sister and brother, between companion and companion. The conflict between nation is occasional. But the conflict between classes is constant and perpetual. It is this which is the root of all sorrow and suffering in the world.

The Buddha left home on account of war. But he could not go back home although the war between the Sakyas and Koliyas had ended. Now his problem had become wider. He had to find a solution for this problem of social conflict.\(^{12}\) The question can be posed to non-Buddhist philosophies of ancient India, that how far do these

philosophies offer a solution to the problem of social conflict?

The non-Buddhist philosophies had their own limitations. They could not give correct world-view and so could not offer a solution to social conflict. They were all engaged in speculation and imagination about the origins of the universe. They did not apply their thoughts to the problems of society, where as Buddha did it.

In the Vedic hymns, the Buddha saw nothing that was morally elevating. Similarly, he did not find anything in the philosophical ideas of the Vedic philosophies. Their theories were mere speculations which were neither logical nor factual. Their contributions to philosophy, created no world outlook, no social values necessary for human happiness. One thing that they collectively did was that they touched the very corner of the materialistic philosophy which the Buddha did not accept as a whole.

The Buddha rejected the Brahmanic philosophy as a whole. He repudiated its thesis that the Vedas were infallible and their authority could never be questioned.
In his opinion, everything must be open to re-examination and re-consideration in order to know the real truth. Infallibility of the Vedas meant complete denial of freedom of thought. He was equally opposed to the brahmanic priesthood and the way in which sacrifices were performed. For him, there was no virtue in false sacrifice.

The most repugnant theory, the Buddha thought, was the theory of Chatturvarnya. It did not appear him, 'natural organization'. Its class composition was compulsory and arbitrary. It was a society made to order. It intensified class-conflict, because it was based on, in Ambedkarine term 'graded inequality'. Inequality exists in every society in some or other form; but the Inequality preached by Brahmanism was its official doctrine. The Brahmanic philosophy did not believe in equality. Far from producing harmony, graded inequality produced in Hindu society an ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt, which has been a perpetual source of social conflict. This social order did not serve the interests of all, much less did it advance the welfare of all. Indeed, it was deliberately designed to make many serve the interests of the few. In it man was made to serve a class of self-styled supermen. It was calculated to supress and exploit the weak and to keep
them in a state of complete subjugation.¹³ For these reasons, the Buddha condemned the theory of varna vyavastha. It is the root of Indian caste system and still is keeping the people divided into rigid social groups like enemies.

The Brahmanic law of Karma was vehemently opposed by the Buddha, because this law was aimed to cut down the very spirit of revolt. It misdirected the people by saying that no one was responsible for the suffering of man except he himself. Revolt could not alter the state of suffering; for suffering was fixed by his past Karma as his lot in this life. Brahmanism preached a retributive theory of Karma which was opposed to the human way of life. By preaching the ideal of Chaturvarna, Brahmanism divided the people into four rigid classes on the one hand, and on the other, it isolated the individual from social effects by giving a false theory of Karma. That is why the Buddha rejected the whole philosophy of Brahmanism.

It is said that the Buddha was influenced by the basic teaching of Upanishads. It is not true. There is a basic difference between Buddhism and Upanishadic

¹³. Ibid.
philosophy. The Buddha did not believe that 'Brahma was a reality'. There was no proof for its existence. It was sheer speculation.

'How can anything be reality about which no one knows anything?', asked the Buddha. Therefore, he had no difficulty in rejecting the Upanishads and their ideas as being based on pure imagination. The philosophy of Upanishads was purely idealistic -- 'world denying speculative superstructure', in which the Buddha had no interest. His was a philosophy basically opposed to idealism of Upanishads. He propounded a theory of 'dynamic realism' which believed in the changing character of reality itself, where as the Brahman, as the ultimate reality, was regarded as an 'unchanging principle'. The Upanishadic stand is basically wrong and, therefore, its idealistic outlook became an obstacle in the way of people's dynamic thinking.

The Lokayata philosophy, too could not attract the Buddha. In fact, the Buddha recoiognized the materiality and knowability of the world; he did not believe in rituals, Soul and God; yet he opposed to the pleasure-seeking activities preached by the ancient materialists.
Moreover, there was not a mature and comprehensive world outlook in the philosophy of Lokayata.

Of all the philosophers, the Buddha was greatly impressed by the doctrines of Kapil. He realized that some of his ideas were reasonable; but the integral view of ultimate reality has been muddled in it as a result of dualistic thinking. The notion of ‘perpetual change’ and the idea of natural law (Svabhava-vada) are also Vitiated by this separation. Buddha accepted only three things from the philosophy of Kapil:

i) that reality must be based on proof; ii) that there was no logical (factual) basis for the presumption that God exists and He created the world; and iii) that there is Dukkha in the world.

The non-Buddhist philosophy believed in the understanding and explanation of the origins of the world, the existence of God, the immortality of Soul, the number of elements, etc. It was a philosophy of contemplative, inactive and passive nature, which inevitably led to a denial of reforming the social practice, the material conditions of life. The philosophers spent most of their
time either in defence of idealism or materialism each of whom, therefore, was involved in an extremist attitude.

The Buddha could not accept a view like one based on any extremism, either idealism or materialism. He thought active participation and intervention in human life so as to change it, to reform it in order to make this world worth-living. The Buddhist philosophy believed in the transformation of the material world and the reformation of human mind. It did not cling to worthless traditional sterile and speculative ideas, unrelated to human interests. It avoided philosophical extremism -- speculative idealism and enervating materialism. It always stood for a change, if it was necessary. The ideas which did not satisfy the reason of Buddha were rejected by him. Thus arose a new philosophy which moulded the subsequent course of world-history.

The Vedic and Upanishadic philosophies did not do justice to those people who were appraised and exploited. More and more they ran counter to both the development of science and progressive social movements. They aroused the protest of conscientious, honest-minded social scientists and philosophers, as indeed of all those who put the interests of the people foremost and a radiant
future for mankind above themselves. In ancient India, it was the Buddhist philosophy which guided the people in this direction and showed a real way for social emancipation. Today the people of Asia are realizing the need of Buddhism and the increasing attention is also being paid in the west for Buddhist thought.

The Buddha was a practical reformer. So he was basically an ethical teacher, not a metaphysician. He avoided discussing fruitless controversies regarding the atman (Soul) and the Brahma,- these were dominant in the arguments of intellectuals in his time. He avoided the metaphysical questions like: whether the soul was different from the body, whether it survived death, whether the world was finite or infinite, eternal or non-eternal, etc. Discussion of problems for the solution of which there is not sufficient evidence leads only to different partial views like the conflicting one-sided accounts of an elephant given by different blind persons who touch its different parts.

Instead of discussing metaphysical questions, which are ethically useless and intellectually uncertain, the Buddha always tried to enlighten persons on the most

important questions of sorrow, its origin, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation. He addressed himself to the worldly problems. In Buddha's own words, "this does profit, has to do with fundamentals of religion, and tends to aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom and nirvana" 15 . The Buddha said that the world is full of sorrows and people suffer on account of desires. If desires are conquered, nirvana will be attained. In other words, he gave answers to his questions, these are called as catvari aryasatyani (for noble truths). They are: (1) life in the world is full of suffering (2) There is cause of this suffering (3) It is possible to stop suffering. (4) There is a path which leads to the cessation of suffering (dukha, duhka - Samudaya; dukha nirodha, duhka nirodha marga). All the teachings of Gautama centre round these four. That is to say there is suffering; that suffering necessarily has a cause: that in order to suppress the evil one must know the right way. 16

The origin of life's evil is explained by the Buddha in the light of his special conception of natural


16. The theme is worked out in the first Sermon addressed to the five disciples, majjhima-nikakya, I, Warren, op. cit., p. 48.
causation theory of Pratitya Samutpada, which was propounded by Gautama Buddha. According to it, nothing is unconditional; the existence of everything depends on some conditions. As the existence of every event depends on some conditions, there must be something which being there our misery comes into existence. Buddha says since there is birth (Jati), there is life’s suffering (Jara-marana, i.e. old age, death despair, grief). If a man were not born, he would not have been subject to these miserable states.

The twelve fold Pratiya Samupada or casual production (cause and effect theory) otherwise termed the 12 Nidanas (causes) -- these are: AVIDYA (Ignorance); SAMSKRAS (impressions); VIJNANA (clear consciousness); NAMRUPA (name-and-from); SADAYATANA (the six organs of sense); SPARSA (contact-of the senses with exterior objects); VEDANA (feeling); TRISNA (desire); UPADANA (clinging, effort); BHAVA (becoming, begining of existence); JATI (birth, existence); JARAMARANAM.

17. Since every human body consists of an aggregate of physical and mental elements, of the 5 skandhas, such as being can be designed as namarupa.

18. The definition Majjhima-Nikaya, I, p. 266 is: YA VEDANASU NANDI, TAD UPADANAM; as to the 4 upadanas, see there p. 66; Samyutta-Nikaya, II Warren, op.cit., p. 3.
SOKAPARIDEVNA DU KH DAURAMANASYOPAYA SAH (old age and death, sorrows, tamentation, pain, grief, despondency).\textsuperscript{19}

So the twelve links in the chain of suffering, are (1) suffering in life is due to (2) birth, which is due to (3) the will to be born, which is due to (4) our mental clinging to objects. Clinging again is due to (5) thirst or desire for objects. This again is due to (6) sense-experience which is due to (7) sense object-contact, which again is due to (8) the six organs of cognition; these organs are dependent on (9) the embroyine organism (composed of mind and body), which again could not develop without (10) some initial consciousness, which again hails from (11) the impressions of the experience of past life, which lastly are due to (12) ignorance of truth. Thus there are twelve links in the chain of causation. This is called \textit{Bhara-cakra} (the wheel of re-birth or the wheel of causation). Even today by turning the wheel, Buddhists remind themselves the teaching of the Buddha.

Buddha’s important contribution is that, the conception that the external phenomenon of life or the living organism is due to an internal impetus of desire,

\textsuperscript{19} Warren, \textit{Ibid}.  

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conscious or unconscious. The Buddha’s basic principle of the explanation of life, namely that bhava (internal predisposition,) the tendency to be leads to birth existence of the body or that consciousness is the condition of the development of the embryo, that the having body is not caused simply by collection of pieces of matter, but is the outward manifestation or explosion of an internal urge.

How can there be the cessation of suffering? The Buddha answered, suffering must cease if its cause is stopped i.e., misery depends on some conditions. If these conditions are removed, misery would cease. But the important and difficult thing is to understand clearly the exact nature of the state called cessation (nirvāṇa) of misery.

One thing should be made clear here is that, cessation of suffering i.e., nirvana, is attainable in this very life. The state of liberation from misery is attainable in this very life, if certain conditions are fulfilled. Misery depends on some conditions. If these conditions are removed, misery would cease. But one has to understand clearly cessation (nirvāṇa) of misery i.e., nirvana the extinction of passions and not having worldly attachment lead a person to perfect wisdom, who has broken
the fetters that bound him to the world, therefore he is liberated - he is an Arhat (a venerable person). Nirvana means blown out, blown out light, which is the state of liberated one.

Nirvana is not inactivity as its ordinarily misunderstood. It is full of action. The Buddha clearly said that there are two kinds of action. One: Action work with attachment, hatred and infatuation (raga, dvesa, moha); two: Action without all these. The first one strengthens desire to cling to the world and this result into a Karma which cause for rebirth. The second one does not create karma causing rebirth\textsuperscript{20}. In the story of enlightenment\textsuperscript{21} also he teaches same thing.

After attainment of nirvana, Buddha set the example of selfless service of fellow beings. By his own example Buddha shows that Arhat no need to shun activity but to develop love and sympathy for all beings and to share his wisdom with them and work for their moral uplift. So that nirvana means not a total extinction of existence.

\textsuperscript{20} Anguttara-Nikaya III, 33, Warren, pp. 215f.
\textsuperscript{21} Majjhima-Nikaya, 26, Ibid., pp. 339f.
According to Buddha nirvana stops rebirth, which means the extinction of all misery and of the conditions that cause future existence in this world after death. Buddha maintained silence about the condition of the liberated after death. Then what is the gain of nirvana, if Buddha is not explicit about the fate of a liberated person after death? Nirvana gives double gain: stopping of re-birth and future misery, and attainment of perfect peace in this life. It is a relief from all painful experience from which human kind suffers. We can understand this because all of us have experience at least of temporary feelings of relief from some pain or other, such as freedom from disease, debt, slavery, imprisonment.22

Buddhist teacher of the later period Nagarjuna tried to convey to Milinda (Menander, the Greek King) the idea of the blissful character of nirvana. Nirvana is profound like an ocean, lofty like a mountain peak, sweek like honey 23. So according to Buddhist belief the real nature of nirvana can only be realized and not described in terms of ordinary experience.

22. Samanna-phala-sutta, Rhys Davids, Dialogues, I, op.cit., p. 84.  
No Buddhist doctrine has been so much misunderstood as that of Nirvana, which is the 'state of the unconditioned'. Translated literally it means: 'the blowing out', as of a candle, or 'becoming cool' with regard to sensuous experience. It has also been mistranslated as 'total annihilation'. It is the attainment by the individual one of unity with the All-Embracing one, and, unlike the Jewish and Christian Heaven, it is not the final abode of the immortal soul, nor yet a condition of spiritual absoluteness. It is the state of perfect Enlightenment, attainable not necessarily after the decease of the body, but also here on Earth while in the flesh - this being the aim of contemplation, meditation, and non-attachment, as in Yoga.

It is the realization that there is no duality, that Nirvana and the Sangsara (the world of manifestation, of illusion, of 'becoming'), that time and eternity, are indistinguishably one. It is neither 'being' nor non-being and as such it is not intellectually realisable; nor is it conceivable by the unenlightened. Aldous Huxley has said that Gautama declined to make any statement in regard to the ultimate divine reality. All he would talk about was Nirvana, which is the name of the experience that comes to the totally selfless and one-pointed.24

What is the path (Marga) to liberation (nirvana)? Buddha recommended eight fold path (astangika marga)\textsuperscript{25}. This gives in a nut shell the essentials of Buddha's ethics. This path is open to all, monks as well as laymen\textsuperscript{26}.

The eightfold path \textsuperscript{27} is the part of the first discourse called "Dammacakkapavattana Sutta" (turning wheel of the law) delivered by Buddha. This Sutta opens with the statement that one should avoid the two extremes, one being the life of a worldly man, performing rituals and ceremonies but at the same time immersed in pleasures and the other the life of a recluse dedicated to self-mortifications. One has to choose middle path, which will open up the eyes of knowledge and lead a person to the peaceful state and ultimately to enlightenment and nirvana (final emancipation).

The middle path consists eightfolds which are classified under three heads, moral precepts (sila), mental development (citta) and knowledge (panna).

\textsuperscript{25} Full discussion occurs in Digha-nikaya-sutta, 22, Warren \textit{op.cit}, pp. 372-74.


\textsuperscript{27} Four noble truths are the other part of the Buddha's first sermon.
The middle path is as follows:

**SILA**

Right speech (samma vacca)
Right deeds (Samma Kammata)
Right means of livelihood (Samma-ajiva)

**CITTA**

Right exertion (Samma Vayama)
Right mindfulness (Samma Sati)
Right meditation (Samma Samadhi)

**PANNA**

Right resolution (Samma Sankappa)
Right View (Samma Ditthi)\(^28\)

According to Pali texts, right speech means refraining from speaking falsehood, malicious words, hash and frivolous talk; Right deeds mean, refraining from killing, stealing and misconduct; Right Means of livelihood meant for, refraining from earning livelihood by improper means; Right exertion means exertion to remove the existing evil thoughts, to keep the mind free from being polluted by fresh evil thoughts, and to preserve and increase the good thoughts; right mind fullness means mindfulness of all that is happening within the body and mind including feelings, and observant of things of the

world and at the same time suppressing covetousness (abhijjha) and avoiding mental depression (domanassa).

Right meditation means: (a) the meditator's mind does not roam (avitakka-avicara) about but is concentrated on the object of meditation (cetaso ekodibhavam), becomes internally serene, and derives pleasure on account of full concentration. (b) The Meditator's mind is to rise above pleasure caused by acquisition of certain virtues and displeasure caused by the thoughts of impermanence, death and so forth and to attain mental equanimity. He still inwardly feels happy and remains alert, being watchful of what is passing in his body and mind, and his body feels at ease like that of a person after a deep sleep. (c) The meditator's mind remains undisturbed by any kind of feeling, happy or unhappy and as he has got rid of all mental impurities, his mind attains perfect equanimity, and remains alert to the subtlest movement of his mind and body.29

Right resolution meant for renunciation and resolution for refraining from hatred and injury to other beings; Right view means realisation of the truth that worldly existence is misery, root of such misery, end of

29. Ibid., III, p. 268; IV, p. 265.
such misery and the path leading to the end of such misery.

The eightfold path deals with all the aspects of a spiritual life, viz., ethical, psychological and epistemological.

In the *Magga Samyutta*\(^{30}\) the eightfold path is described as the spiritual guide (Kalyanamitta) and is shown as conferring all the spiritual benefits that a Buddhist adept would desire to have. The benefits are cessation or eradication of: (1) Suffering due to birth, old age and death; there are three kinds of sufferings, viz., sufferings as they are (dukkha), sufferings transmitted from past life (Samskara - Dukkhata) and sufferings due to change (Viparinama dukkhata); (2) attachment (ragadvesa), hatred (dosa) and Delusion (Moha); (3) strong desire (Chanda), reflection (Vitakka) and perception (Sanna); (4) Thirst for worldly objects (Kama-tanha), for repeated existence (bhava-tanha) and for self-destruction (Vibhava-tanha);

(5) Impurities of desire (kamasava), of re-existence (bhayasava) (i.e. in one of the three spheres as

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worldly beings (kamabhava) as gods (rupa, bhava) and as higher gods without material body (anupabhava), of ignorance (ajjasava) and also of wrong views (ditthasava); (6) strong attachment to worldly objects (Kamupadana), to wrong views (ditth- Upadana), to rituals and ceremonies (silabbatupa dana), and to belief in a self (attavadupadana); (7) Seven inclinations (anusaya), such as attachment (Kamaraga) to worldly objects, enmity (Patigha), Wrong View (ditthi), doubt about the triratna (Vicikiccha), Pride (mana), desire for existence (bhavaraga) and ignorance (avijja); (8) Five Kinds of pleasures derived through the contact of five sense - organs with their respective objects;

(9) Five hindrances (nivaranas) to nirvana, viz., strong desire (Kamacchanda), hatred (Vyapada), slothfulness (thinamiddha), arrogance and suspicions (uddhacca -Kukkucca), and doubt about the triratna (Vicikiccha). Kamacchanda arises and grows on account of attractive characteristics of objects (Sudhani Mitta) while byapada for inimical feelings (patighas), thinamiddha for sleep, overeating, weakness of mind, uddhaccakkukku for lack of quietness (avupasama) and vicikiccha for objects which cause doubt. (10) five lower fetters (orambhagiyani samojanani), viz., belief in a self (Sakkayaditthi), doubt about the Triratna (Vickiccha),
belief in rituals and ceremonies (Silabasta); strong desire (Kamacchanda) and hatred (byapada); (11) Five higher fetters (Uddhambagiyani Sammojanani), viz., attachment for existence in the Rupaloka (i.e. gods with physical body), Pride (mana), arrogance (Uddhacca) and ignorance (avijja).

The positive benefits, derived through the practice of the eightfold path, when it is accompanied by solitude (Viveka), detachment (Viraga), cessation of inclinations (nirodha) and sacrifice (Vosagga) are: (1) attainment of the four fruits of sanctification (Samannaphalas i.e. Sotapatti, Sakadagami, anagami and arhatta). (2) Attainment of higher powers (abhinna)\textsuperscript{31} (3) Perfection in the thirty seven dhammas leading to full enlightenment (bodhi, Bodhi pakkhiya, dhammas): (4) And lastly, to the realisation of Nibbana the immoral (amata).

To sum up the essential points of the eightfold path (Buddha’s ethical teachings), it may be noted first that the path consists of three main things - conduct

\textsuperscript{31}Five higher powers: Divyacaksu (Divine eyes), Divyas-trotra (Divine ears), paracitta Jnana (reading other’s thoughts, Oyrvabuvasa Jnana (remembering one’s past existences) and rddhividhi-jnana (attainment of miraculous powers).
(sila), concentration (Samadhi) and knowledge (Prajna) harmoniously cultivated.

In Indian philosophy knowledge and morality are thought inseparable not simply because morality, or doing of good, depends on the knowledge of what is good, about which all philosophers would agree, but also because perfection of knowledge is regarded as impossible without morality, perfect control of passions and prejudices. Buddha explicitly states in one of his discourses that virtue and wisdom purify each other and two are inseparable 32.

In the eighthfold path, 'right views' - a mere intellectual apprehension of the four fold truth. The mind is not yet purged of the previous wrong ideas and the passions or wrong emotions arising there from; moreover, old habits of thinking, speaking and acting also continue still. In a word, conflicting forces - the new good ones and the old bad ones- create, in terms of modern psychology, a divided personality.

All the steps furnish a continuous discipline for resolving this conflict by reforming the old personality.

32. In Sonadanda-Sutta, Rhys Davids, op.cit., p. 156.
Repeated contemplation of what is true and good, training of the will and emotion accordingly, through steadfast determination and passionless behaviour, gradually achieve the harmonious personality in which thought and will and emotion are all thoroughly cultured and purified in the light of truth. The last step of perfect concentration is thus made possible by the removal of all obstacles.

The result of this unhampered concentration on truth is perfect insight or wisdom, to which the riddle of existence stands clearly revealed once for all. Ignorance and desire are cut at their roots and the source of misery vanishes. Perfect wisdom, perfect goodness and perfect equanimity - complete relief from suffering - are simultaneously attained, therefore in nirvana.

To discuss the ideas about man and the world in Buddha’s ethical teachings, it is essential to mention four views, on which his ethics mainly depends, namely:
The theory of dependent origination (Pratitya Samutpada), i.e. conditional existence of the things. The theory of

33. Four stages progressively attained by the initiative, on the path or stream leading to nirvana are distinguished viz. the stages of a stream (one who has entered the stream, the path) a sakrdagamin (one who will return only once again to this world), an Anagamin (one who will not return and an Arhat liberated in this very life).
Karma; the theory of change; and the theory of non-existence of the soul.

Pratitya Samutpada (dependent origination) is the foundation of all the teachings of the Buddha. There is a spontaneous and universal law of casuation which conditions the appearance of all events, mental and physical. This law (dhamma or dharma) works automatically without the help of any conscious guide. In accordance with it, whenever a particular event (the cause) appears, it is followed by another particular event (the effect). On getting the cause, the effect arises. The existence of everything is conditional, dependent on a cause. Nothing happens fortuitously or by chance. This is called the theory of dependent-origination (Pratityasamutpada in Sanskrit and Paticcasamuppada in pali).34

This view, as Buddha himself makes clear, avoids two extreme views: On the one hand, eternalism or the theory that some reality eternally exists independently of any condition and, on the other hand, nihilism or the theory that something existing can be annihilated or can cease to be Buddha claims, therefore, to hold the middle

view,\textsuperscript{35} namely, that everything that we perceive possesses an existence but it is dependent on something else, and that thing in turn does not perish without leaving some effect.

The Buddha attaches so much importance to the understanding of the theory that he calls this the Dhamma. He asks us to put aside questions of the beginning and the end. And his Dhamma is that being thus, this comes to be. From the coming to be of that, this arises. That being absent, this does not happen. From the cessation of that, this ceases. He says that he who sees the paticca samuppada sees the Dhamma, and he who sees the Dhamma, sees the paticcasamuppada. It is the failure to grasp this standpoint which, Buddha asserts, is the cause of all our troubles\textsuperscript{36}. According to Rhys Davids, later Buddhism does not pay much heed to this theory. But Buddha himself says that this theory is very profound\textsuperscript{37}.

The theory of Karma is an aspect of the principle of causation. According to this doctrine, the present existence of an individual is, as according to that of Karma, the effect of its past; and its future would be the

\textsuperscript{36} Mahanidana-sutta, Warren, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
effect of its present existence. This has been very clearly already in connection with the explanation of the origin of suffering in the light of the theory of dependent origination. The law of Karma is only a special form of the more general law of causation is conceived by Buddha.

Whatever exists, arises from some condition and is, therefore, impermanent. Buddha repeatedly teaches, all things are subject to change and decay. As everything originates from some condition, it disappears when the condition ceases to be. Whatever has a beginning has also an end. Therefore, Buddha says, "know that whatever exists arises from causes and conditions and is in every respect impermanent. 38.

The common belief is that there is a permanent substance in man, namely, the soul. But this belief is untenable because of the law of universal change and impermanence.

The law of change is universal; neither man, nor any other being, animate or inanimate, is example from it. 38. Mahaparinirvana-sutra, Quoted in Yamakamisogen's Systems of Buddhistic Thought, p. 9.
It is commonly believed that in man there is an abiding substance called the Soul (atma), which persists through changes that overcome the body, exists before birth and after death, and migrates from one body to another. Consistently with his theories of conditional existence and universal change, Buddha denies the existence of such soul.

But it may be asked, how does he then explain the continuity of a person through different births, or even through the different states of childhood, youth and old age? Though denying the continuity of an identical substance in man, the Buddha does not deny the continuity of the stream of successive states that compose his life. Life is an unbroken series of states: each of these states depends on the condition just preceding and gives rise to the one just succeeding it.

Therefore, the continuity of the life series is, based on a causal connection running through the different states. This continuity is often explained with the example of a lamp burning throughout the night. The flame of each moment is dependent on its own conditions and different from that of another moment which is dependent on other conditions. Yet there is an unbroken succession of the different flames. Again as from one flame another
may be lighted, and though the two are different, they are connected causally.

Similarly, the end-state of this life may cause the beginning of the next. Therefore, rebirth is not transmigration, i.e. the migration of the same soul into another body; it is the causation of the next life by the present\textsuperscript{39}. Thus the soul is replaced by continuous stream of states.

The essence of the Buddha’s teachings is cessation of suffering. Rhys Davids observes that the theory of dependent origination (in its double aspect of explaining the world and explaining the origin of suffering), together with the formula of the eightfold path, gives us "not only the whole of early Buddhism in a nutshell, but also just those points concerning which we find the most emphatic affirmations of Dhamma as Dhamma ascribed to Gautama" \textsuperscript{40}.

The Buddha’s attempt to avoid metaphysics gives rise to a new kind of metaphysics. Inspite of the Buddha’s aversion to theoretical speculation, he never

\textsuperscript{39} Warren, H.C., \textit{Buddhism in Translations}, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 234f.

\textsuperscript{40} Rhys Davids, T.W., \textit{Dialogues of the Buddha}, Part III, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 44.
wanted to accept, nor did he encourage his followers to accept, any course of action without reasoning and criticism. He was extremely rational and contemplative, and wanted to penetrate into the very roots of human existence, and tried to supply the full justification of the ethical principles he followed and taught. Therefore, it was no wonder that he himself incidentally laid down the foundation of a philosophical system.

His philosophy, partly expressed and partly implicit, may be called positivism in so far as he taught that our thoughts should be confined to this world and to the improvement of our existence here. It may be called phenomenalism in so far as he taught that we were sure only of the phenomena we experienced. Therefore, it is a kind of empiricism in method because experience, according to him, was the source of knowledge.

The different aspects of his philosophy come to be developed by his followers along different lines as they were required to justify the Buddha’s teaching, to defend it from the severe criticism it had to face in India and outside, and to convert other thinkers to their faith.
Ten questions\textsuperscript{41} are often mentioned by the Buddha as uncertain, ethically unprofitable and so not discussed (Vyakata) by him: (1) Is the world eternal? (2) Is it non-eternal?. (3) Is it finite? (4) Is it infinite? (5) Is the soul the same as the body? (6) Is it different from the body (7) Does one who has known the truth (Tathagatha) live again after the death? (8) Does he not live again after death? (9) Does he both live again and not-live again after death? (10) Does he neither live nor not-live again after death.

The Buddha’s reluctance to discuss the ten metaphysical questions concerning things beyond our experience and his silence about them came to be interpreted by his followers in different lights. Some took this attitude as only the sign of a through going empiricism which must frankly admit the inability of mind to decide non-empirical questions.

According to this explanation, the Buddha’s attitude would be regarded as scepticism. Some other followers, mostly the Mahayanists, interpreted Buddha’s view neither as a denial of reality beyond objective of ordinary experience, nor as a denial of any means of

\textsuperscript{41} Potthapada Sutta, in Dialogues of the Buddha, Part I, Rhys Davids, T.W. \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 254-57.

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knowing the non-empirical reality, but only as signifying the indescribability of that transcendental experience and reality. The justification of this last interpretation can be obtained from some facts of the Buddha's life and teachings. Ordinary empiricists believe that our sense-experience is the only basis of all our knowledge; they do not admit the possibility of any non-sensuous experience.

However, the Buddha taught the possibility of man's attaining in nirvana an experience or consciousness which was not generated by the activity of the sense. The Supreme Value and importance that he attached to this non-empirical consciousness, justify his followers in supposing that he regarded this as the supreme reality as well. The fact that the nemesis of neglected metaphysics overtakes Buddhism soon after the founder's passing away.

Buddhism, basically, ethical-religious movement. Buddhism finds its special place among all religions, for its importance to ethics. One way of characterising the Buddhist ethical tradition is to note the close association between the central Buddhist insight into reality as selfless (anatman) or empty (Sunya) on the one hand, and authentic moral activity on the other. Insight into selflessness or emptiness informs moral activity, while moral activity supports the cultivation of insight.
Another characteristic of Buddhist ethics is that the moral character of human action is closely associated with the intention that constitutes it. It is simply presumed that actions constituted by good intentions will, by virtue of the universal order that structures reality, lead to good and pleasant results for the individual and for society; and that actions constituted by bad intentions will, by virtue of that same universal order, lead to an unpleasant results for the individual and for society.

An important characteristic of Buddhist ethics is that it combines an adherence to percepts and responsibilities with an emphasis on the rooting out of vices and the cultivation of virtues. These rule-oriented and vice or virtue oriented modes of ethical activity are occasionally seem to be in tension, but Buddhists have largely assumed that they mesh together in a manner that is mutually supportive.

Buddhist communities have differentiated among levels of ethical responsibility and attainment. These levels are often associated with various stages of steriological achievement. They are also commonly correlated with the institutional and social hierarchies
that have traditionally characterized Buddhist societies. Finally, it is the humanity which matters, not divinity, in the Buddhist social thought. Hence, it can be said that, Buddhist ethical religious system is nothing but a pragmatic (i.e. Madhye-marga or middle path) approach to the operation of human society.

We have traced the emergence of Buddhist thought within the context of contesting philosophies and social conditions in ancient India. Our tentative conclusion is that the Buddha’s insight into the human condition and his experiential philosophies stood test of time. The implicit purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate early Buddhism’s appeal and attraction to the 20th-century social reformer like Ambedkar.