Concept of Atman/Soul in Hinduism and Buddhism

Section - 2

Concept of Atman in Hinduism

The word Atman technically means 'the Divinity'. So, in the Upanishads, except for a few places, the word Atman has been generally used for God, absolute Divinity. Brihadaranyak Upanishad says, "The supreme Divinity should be desired by a soul to be visualized." Aitreya Upanishad says, "The supreme Divinity (God) existed before the creation of this universe." The word 'brahm' means the absolute Divinity who is absolutely great and makes a soul great like himself after God realization. In Hinduism, Atman is considered the essential 'self' of a person. The pre-Buddhist Upanishads link the Self to the feeling "I am."

Atman refers to the non-material self, which never changes. It is distinct from both the mind and the external body. This real self is beyond the temporary designations we normally ascribe to ourselves, in terms of race, gender, species and nationality.

In the Upanishads, the term ‘brahma’ mostly refers to the personal form of God and occasionally to the impersonal (nirakar) aspect of God, which is mentioned in the verse seven in the Mandukyopnishad. The reason is that the nirakar aspect of God or nirakar brahma is formless and actionless and so it is only the ‘Purusha,’ the personal form of God, who does all the things. The Upanishads describe the kindness of God awarding liberation and His abode to the souls, and the creation of the universe. This is the work of the personal god only. That's why, there is very little description of the nirakar brahma in them.¹

Brahma is derived from the root 'brh', which means 'to grow or expand' and refers to 'the power which of itself burst into utterance as prayer.' Philosophically speaking, therefore, Brahman is "the power or primary principle which spontaneously manifests itself as the universe."²

The second Upanishadic term atman for the ultimate reality is applied to whatever constitutes the essential part of anything, more particularly. The Vedic philosophers and later, the Upanishadic sages, tried to discover not merely a cosmic principle or the source of the universe as a whole, but the psychic principle or the inner essence of man.
In the hymns of *Rigveda*, *Atman* refers both to the ultimate essence of the universe and the vital breath in man. In the *Upanishads*, the word *Brahman* is used in the former sense, while the word *Atman* denotes the inmost essence in man. The basic doctrine of the *Upanishads* involves the identification of *Brahman* with *Atman*. The Supreme God manifests itself in supreme truth in every Soul.

The most important thing is that nirakar brahma, being an existence of absolutely dormant virtues (*avyakt shakti*), can never even manifest its blissfulness. It is like the subtle dormant state of the beauty of a flower that dormantly exists in its seed that has not even taken the shape of a plant. So, wherever the *Upanishads* talk about the Divine knowledge of Bliss (*chidanand*) of *brahma*, they only refer to the personal form of God and not the nirakar brahm.

The *Upanishads* offer two facts. The first one is that the soul does not belong to maya or the mayic world because it itself is an eternal, infinitesimal and Divine entity. The second one is that the soul has a natural and eternal relationship with God. The *Upanishads* describe this fact with their aphorism like *tattavamasi*. It means Soul (in its pure form) is substantially the same as God, like a drop of the ocean and the ocean itself. Soul Belongs to God as it is eternally related to Him. Souls are unlimited in number. But the truth is that the souls in the mayic realm are eternally blemished with the association of maya which is an eternally existing delusive power of God that appears and multiplies itself in the form of this world.

There are many interesting perspectives on the ‘self’ in Hinduism, ranging from the self as eternal servant of God to the self as being identified with God. The understanding of the ‘self’ as eternal supports the idea of reincarnation. In the incarnation, the same eternal being can inhabit temporary bodies.

Some versions of *Yoga* argue that, through their spiritual practices, one can come into direct contact with one's real self or *atman*. Meanwhile, other Hindu philosophical and religious theories suggest that the *atman* possessed by each individual is a reflection of the *Brahman* or absolute in the universe. The real immortal self of human beings is identical with brahman. Spiritual liberation or ‘moksha’ takes place when the *atman* and the *Brahman* join and become united. This was probably the anathema to Buddhist philosophy. This based itself rather on the absence of a real self, *anatman*. It is on this basis that Buddhism denies the existence of the *atman*. The notion of the self is closely
linked with that of the personality and also with the construction of the parts of the individual. Many arguments arose and still arise within Buddhism about its nature, or better, lack of essential nature.

For the self to achieve liberation, it has to know reality, both kinds of reality: its own and that of the ultimate cause of the world. Question arises- Does the individuality of the self survive after liberation? According to Sankara, it does not, but Ramanuja argues that it does. Sankara suggests that the self is what lies behind consciousness. This itself is similar to light. Consciousness and what lies behind it are both the same sort of thing. The self is the basis to the activity of consciousness. Consciousness is the way in which the self expresses itself. It represents the manner in which it acts. But it is important to make a clear distinction here between them, he claims, by contrast with the Advaitin who mixes them up.

Another form of inquiry follows - What scope is there to distinguish between the self and consciousness in this way? We have experience of a self that is different from its acts of consciousness, because the acts of consciousness are always changing while the self seems to be relatively permanent. He further argues that, not only is the self the basis of consciousness, it is also the object of consciousness. This is the case because, in every act of knowledge, the self is aware through consciousness of something else. It is also aware that it is aware. In other words, it is also aware of itself. This is not a separate act of consciousness, but rather is part and parcel of the activity of consciousness itself. The significance of this doctrine emerges when it is contrasted with Sankara's concept of dreamless sleep (susupti). According to Sankara, in such sleep the individual self disappears. All that remains is consciousness. This is to be identified with the absolute self. From this, it follows that the individual self is really an illusion. There is an eternal self which is presupposed by individual experiences. The nature of the self is something that we intuit, and it is known through our experience. Sankara disapproves of the Nyaya argument that we can know the self through inference. This argument starts with a series of experiences, and then appeals to the notion of a self to which they belong.

Sankara suggests that we have no reason to think that those experiences are part of ‘my self’ as opposed to ‘someone else’ unless we already accept the existence of such a self, which is circular. Such a self can be accepted as existing right from the start of experience, although its real status has to be qualified. Ramanuja agrees that consciousness
persists in dreamless sleep, but does not accept Sankara's conclusion, since the former argues that a type of self-awareness continues in the experience of dreamless sleep. After all, when we wake up, we attribute the experience to an individual self, and so have no reason not to think that such a self persisted during the sleep. In such sleep, the self is aware of itself only as a subject, but he discounts the significance of the dreamless sleep. This does indeed provide an example of bliss, the same sort of bliss that arises on liberation, but this is only a pale reflection of the fully fledged bliss of liberation. Dreamless sleep merely provides a temporary relief from samsara, while when the self is in contact with Brahman, complete relief is affected. By contrast, Ramanuja argues that our experience is essentially dualist, since we distinguish between the knower and the object of knowledge. Madhva also suggests that the individual differences between people must be based on their different selves, and goes further than Ramanuja in arguing that souls cannot be alike.

Atman has two rather contrasting meanings. In this sense, it can mean the ultimate reality of a person. It also means the superficial aspects of the personality with which we tend to identify ourselves. The more we get to know ourselves as we really are, the further we can see behind the superficial to the essential aspects of ourselves. But these superficial aspects can be important as well. According to Advaita Vedanta, only the universal brahman is ultimately real. The ordinary personality and its notion of identity are illusory. Yet there is also an elaborate theory of the personality and how it survives during change, in particular transmigration. Although the self may not be ultimately real, it is still real enough as a part of our experience to be analysable in terms of a self that can undergo change and yet remain to a degree the same. Advaitins are particularly interested in the nature of brahman, while at the same time they are keenly aware of the conceptual difficulties in describing the nature of something that is absolutely one and without differentiation.

Concept of Atman in Buddhism

In the Buddhist philosophy, they argue that, if there had been a real self, it would have possessed certain characteristics. These include permanence, immutability, absence of suffering and being unaffected by prior events. A real self would have been happy since it would have been aware of itself. It would not have been changed and it would not have been dependent on anything else. But the self, in so far as we experience it, is very
different in such a description. This suggests that the real self and the human self are entirely distinct. The notion of a persistent self is an illusion from which we ought to free ourselves. Such mental liberation is a stage on the route to liberation.

The idea of Atman entails the idea of the self as a spiritual rather than material being. Thus, there is a strong dimension of Hinduism which emphasises detachment from the material world and promotes practices such as asceticism. Thus it could be said that, in this world, a spiritual being, the Atman, has a human experience rather than a human being having a spiritual experience.

Thus, a person has to recognize this truth that he is under the bondage of maya. So he has to renounce his ignorance by properly understanding the fact that he does not belong to this mayic world. He only belongs to his Divine beloved God with whom he has all kinds of sweet relationships. After knowing that, he has to love Him wholeheartedly and selflessly. Upon god realization, the worshipper of the nirakar brahma enters the absolutely dormant state of the Divinity called kaivalya moksha and stays there forever in a kind of totally passed out state, because the nirakar brahma itself is an actionless dormant Divinity.

The only Hindu school of thought that flatly denies the existence of Atman is the Charvaka School. The Charvaka regards consciousness as a mere product of matter. Consciousness is inseparable from life. It is always found associated with the body and is destroyed with the body's disintegration. As Madhavacharya writes in Sarva-darshana-samgraha:

> From the four original principles or elements alone, when transformed into the body, consciousness is produced, just as the power is developed from the mixing of certain ingredients; and then these are destroyed, consciousness at once perishes also... Therefore, the soul is only the body distinguished by the attribute of intelligence, since there is no evidence for any self distinct from the body. 4

Sankara, the advaita philosopher, refutes Charvaka's theory of soullessness. His argument mainly involves the Charvaka claim that life-movements, consciousness, memory and the related intellectual function belong to the body for the simple reason that they are experienced only in the body and not without it. According to Sankara, life movements and the like do not sometimes exist even when the body exists (as at death), and hence they cannot be products of the body.
Buddhist Concept of Soul and Anatma

The Buddhist term Anatman (Sanskrit), or Anatta (Pali) is an adjective in the Digha Nikaya Sutra. It refers to the nature of phenomena as being devoid of the Soul. That is the uncompounded subjective Self (Atman) which is the “light (dipam), and only refuge”. Of the 662 occurrences of the term Anatta in the Digha Nikayas, its usage is restricted to referring to twenty two nouns (forms, feelings, perception, experiences, consciousness, the eye, eye-consciousness, desires, mental formations, ear, nose, tongue, body, lusts, things unreal, etc.), all phenomenal, as they are Selfless (anatta). Contrary to countless many popular (=profane, or =consensus, from which the truth can ‘never be gathered’) books written outside the scope of Buddhist doctrine, there is no “Doctrine of anatta/anaatman” mentioned anywhere in the sutras. Rather anatta is used only to refer to impermanent things/phenomena as other than the Soul, to be anatta, or Self-less (anatta).

Specifically in sutra, anatta is used to describe the temporal and unreal nature of any and all composite, phenomenal, and temporal things, from macrocosmic to microcosmic, be it matter as pertains the physical body, the cosmos at large, including any and all mental machinations which are of the nature of arising and passing. Anatta in sutra is synonymous and interchangeable with the terms dukkha (suffering) and anicca (impermanent). All three terms are often used in triplet in making a blanket statement as regards any and all phenomena; such as: All these aggregates are anicca, dukkha, and anatta.

Anatta refers specifically and only to the absence of the permanent soul as pertains any or all of the psycho-physical (nama-rupa) attributes, or khandhas (skandhas, aggregates). The five-aggregates constitute a being—aggregates of material and mental forces which are changing all the time—and are the prime causes of suffering. Buddha sums up the nature of the fives khandhas in Majjima Nikaya: All corporeal phenomena whether part, present or future, one's own or external, gross or subtle, lofty or low, far or near, all belong to the group of corporeality; all feelings belong to the group of feelings all perceptions belong to the group of perception; all mental formations belong to the group of formations; all consciousness belongs to the group of consciousness.

According to the Buddha, none of the five aggregates alone is the self or soul (atta). Apart from these there remains nothing to be called the soul.
The Pali compound term and noun for “no soul” is natthatta, not the term anatta. This is mentioned at Samyutta Nikaya 4.400. In this part, Gautama Buddha was asked if there “was no-soul (natthatta)”. To this, Gautama equated this position to be a Nihilistic heresy (ucchedavada). Common throughout Buddhist sutra (and Vedanta as well) is the denial of psycho-physical attributes of the mere empirical self to be the Soul, or confused with same. The Buddhist paradigm as regards phenomena is “Na me so atta” (this/these are not my soul). This is most common utterance of Gautama the Buddha in the Nikayas, where “na me so atta” = Anatta/Atman. In sutra, to hold the view that there was “no-Soul” (natthatta) is = natthika (nihilist).

One way that karma is used in Buddhism is to explain transmigration of souls and reincarnation. Buddha did not believe that a soul passes from one body to another, or also called anatta. Instead, he said there is a series of causes that connects each life to the next life. The way that our previous lives were led brings us to the way our current life is lived. This then may seem that we have no power over how our life will be lived which is untrue. Even though our life right now was produced from what acts were done in the past, our will is only influenced but still free. That is to say, we still have the freedom to form our own destinies. This process only says that the results from actions (ideas, impressions, feelings, streams of consciousness) will carry over the next life.

There is no soul that passes on. Buddha used an analogy about flames on a candle to describe this transmigration. Lighting a candle from the flame of another candle does not mean the original flame is on the latter candle. It only means the flame of the first candle caused the flame of the latter candle just as the actions of a previous life is the ignition to the next life. As the candle does not actually pass its flame on to the next candle, the previous life does not pass anything (a soul) on to its next life. Likewise, what an individual desires or feels is not caused because something was transported in the body, which had those desires and feelings.

Buddhism differs from the atheism (Skt. Nastika, Pali natthika) in affirming a spiritual nature. That is not in any noticeable form, but immeasurable, infinite, and inaccessible to observation. Of which, therefore, empirical science can neither affirm nor deny the reality thereof of him who has ‘Gone to That [Brahman]’ (tathatta). It is to the Atman as distinguished from oneself (nama-rupa/khandhas, mere self as =anatta) i.e., whatever is phenomenal and formal (Skt. and Pali nama-rupa, and savinnana-kaya) “name
and appearance”, and the “body with its consciousness”⁵. ‘Nonbeing (asat, natthiti ‘the all is ultimately not’) both of these positions are existential antinomies, and heresies of annihilationism]’.

In contrast to the above, it has been incorrectly asserted that affirmation of the Atman is = sassatavada (conventionally deemed ‘eternalism’). However, the Pali term sasastavada is never associated with the Atman, but that the Atman was an agent (karmin) in and of samsara which is subject to the whims of becoming (bhava), or which is meant kammavada; such as sassatavada in sutta = atta ca so loka ca (the Atman and the world are one), or: ‘Being (sat, attiti [views of either sabbamatthi ‘the all is entirety’, and sabbamekattan ‘the all is one’s Soul’⁶ both are heresies of perpetualism]). Sasastavada is the wrong conception that one is perpetually (sassata) bound within samsara and that merit is the highest attainment for either this life or for the next. The heretical antinomy to nihilism (vibhava, or = ucchedavada) is not, nor in sutta, the Atman, but bhava (becoming, agencyship). Forever, or eternal becoming is nowhere in sutta identified with the Atman. The Atman is “never an agent (karmin)”, and “has never become anything” (=bhava). These antinomies of bhava (sassatavada) and vibhava (ucchedavada) both entail illogical positions untenable to the Vedantic or Buddhist Atman. However, the concept of “eternalism” as =Atman has been the fallacious secondary crutch for supporting the no-Atman commentarialists position on anatta implying = there is no Atman.

According to the philosophical premise of Gautama the Buddha, the initiate to Buddhism, who is to be “shown the way to Immortality (amata)”⁷, wherein liberation of the spirit/mind [Greek = nous] (cittavimutta; Greek = epistrophe) is effectuated through the expansion of wisdom and the meditative practices of sati and samadhi (assimilation, or synthesis, complete disobjectification with all objective [unreal] ‘reality’), must first be educated away from his former ignorance-based (avijja) materialistic proclivities in that he (the common fool) “saw any of these forms, feelings, this body in whole or part, to be my Self/Atman, to be that which I am by nature”.

Teaching through negative methodology of anatta in sutta pertains solely to things phenomenal. These things were: “subject to perpetual change; therefore unfit to declare of such things ‘these are mine, these are what I am, that these are my Soul’”⁸. The one scriptural passage in which Gautama is asked by a layperson what the meaning of anatta is as follows: At one time in Savatthi, the venerable Radha seated herself and asked
of the Blessed Lord Buddha: “Anatta, anatta I hear said venerable. What pray tell does Anatta mean?” “Just this Radha, form is not the Soul (anatta), sensations are not the Soul (anatta), perceptions are not the Soul (anatta), assemblages are not the Soul (anatta), consciousness is not the Soul (anatta). Seeing thusly, this is the end of birth, the Brahman life has been fulfilled, what must be done has been done.” 9

Anatta, which has been taught in the Nikayas, has only relative value as it is directly conducive to subjective awakening, or illumination. It is not an absolute one. It does not say or imply simply that the Soul (atta, Atman) has no reality, but that certain things (five aggregates), with which the unlearned man (fool = puthujjana, as is always implied in spiritual texts, a materialist) identifies himself, are not the Soul (anatta). That is why, one should grow disgusted with them, become detached from them and be liberated. This principle of the extremely abused and misunderstood term anatta does not negate the Soul as such, but denies Selfhood to those things that constitute the non-self (anatta), showing them thereby to be empty of any ultimate value and to be repudiated.

Instead of nullifying the Atman (Soul) doctrine, it in fact compliments and affirms it in the most logical method by which Subjective is initially gained, that by and through objective negation. It has been said that: ‘No Indian school of thought has ever regarded the human soul (another error, since the soul is not a possession of, nor is of the nature of the persona, or ‘human’) or the carrier of human personal identity as a permanent substance (literally meaning, absurdly permanent impermanence. This is certainly true when referring to the empirical persona (mere self aggregates=pancakhanda, as opposed to the Person, spirit, Atman). That the Atman is not to be understood as a thinking substance, phenomena, or eternal soul, is certainly the case, and logically cannot be otherwise.

Anatta is a key principle in the doctrine of Buddhism and the metaphysics, thereof quantifying anatta and being meant all physical and mental consubstantial and temporal objectivity. All are compounded things either in simplex (matter, hyle) or complex (mental). As an-atta is meant not-Subject (=object [phenomena]), those things, as Buddhism declares “the unlearned fool bemuses himself as being (those things)”’. “What do you suppose, followers, if people were carrying off into the Jeta grove bunches of sticks, grasses, branches, and leaves and did with them as they wished or burned them up, would it occur to you: These people are carrying us off, are doing as they please with us, and are burning us? No, indeed not Lord. And how so? Because Lord, none of that is our Soul, nor
what our Soul subsists upon! Just so followers, what is not who you are, do away with it, when you have made done with that, it will lead to your bliss and welfare for as long as time lasts. What is that you are not? Form, followers, is not who you are, neither are sensations, perceptions, experiences, consciousness

Just as ‘disgusting (anatta) doctrine’ cannot make logical sense, neither does ‘anatta doctrine’ bring light to studies of Buddhism what anatta is contextually or its philosophical importance as being merely a qualifier of that which is evil, foul, disgusting, phenomenal and repulsive (= anatta). Anatta is of course a doctrinal tenant within Buddhism. However, as conventionally and irrationally conceived, there is absolutely no such creature in Buddhism as a "no-Soul doctrine". What has Buddhism to say of the Self? "That's not my Self" (na me so atta). This, and the term "non Self-ishness" (anatta) predicated of the world and all "things" (sabbe dhamma anatta). These are identical with the Brahmanical "of those who are mortal, there is no Self/Soul", (anatmahi martyah).11 “The Soul is the refuge that I have gone unto”. For anatta is not said of the Self/Soul but what it is not. There is never and nowhere in sutra, a ‘doctrine of no-Soul’, but a doctrine of what the Soul is not (form is anatta, feelings are anatta, etc.). It is of course true that the Buddha denied the existence of the mere empirical “self” in the very meaning of “my-self” (this person so-and-so, namarupa, anatta). The Buddha denied the immortal (amata), the unborn (ajata), Supreme-Self (mahatta), uncaused (samskrta), undying (amara) and eternal (nicca) of the Upanishads. That is palpably false, for he frequently speaks of this Self, or Spirit (mahapurisha), and nowhere more clearly than in the too often repeated formula 'na me so atta’, “This/these are not my Soul” (na me so atta’= anatta/anAtman), excluding body (rupa) and the components of empirical consciousness (vinnana/ nama), a statement to which the words of Sankhara are peculiarly opposite, “Whenever we deny something unreal, is it in reference to something real”, since it was not for the Buddha, but for the nihilist (nathhika), to deny the Soul. For, “yad anatta…na me so atta, “what is anatta… (means) that is not my Atman"12. The extremely descriptive illumination of all things which are Selfless (anattati) will be both meaningless and a waste of much time.

Anatta is a Pali term used in Buddhist thought and meaning not-self' (Sanskrit, anatman). This is one of the three marks of all conditioned existence and is central to Buddhist teaching. It was devised to stand in opposition to the notion of atman, the idea of
a constant and eternal self, which is a significant notion in Indian philosophy at the time of
the Buddha. The Buddhist theory of selflessness is predominantly a rejection of Hindu
orthodox philosophy. It has led to a very creative debate between the traditions. Buddhist
philosophers regard the Hindu notion of the self as an expression of the reification that
binds humanity to a misguided notion of what is real, while Hindu thinkers regard the
denial of the self as equivalent to nihilism. The idea of such a self is misleading, according
to Buddhism, since it is no more than an idea that we apply to the flow of consciousness,
and if we closely examine the contents of consciousness we can find no such self in it. For
Buddhism this is a crucial point, since it is the illusion that there is a self which leads to an
incorrect view of reality and so to suffering (dukkha). Once we rid ourselves of this notion,
we are on the route to escape from suffering. It is difficult to overemphasize the
significance of this notion in Buddhist philosophy.

An interesting question has often been asked about the doctrine of not-self. That
is, why the self is not actually denied, while the not-self is described as a vital notion for us
to grasp. The reason seems to be the desire to avoid the appearance of Buddhism being
nihilist, and also to vindicate the role of the not-self for our salvation. The not-self doctrine
can be regarded as an example of skilful means to employ a device that human beings want
to use to transcend the negative consequences of that device. The idea of the self is a
leading instance of attachment. It is through such attachment that we become linked to
suffering and frustration, because we do not realize that what we are attached to is
constantly changing and impermanent. The notion of the real self is a useful notion in that
it explains what we find so attractive about the idea of a permanent subject of
consciousness, and can be used to encapsulate so much of what is in fact illusory but which
seems to be solid. The point of identifying things with not-self is to point out how illusory
they are, and how we should let go of them in just the same way that we should let go of
the self. What we need to do is appreciate how suffering, change and not-self characterize
everything in which we ordinarily have confidence. This exercise sets us on the route to
nirvana.

The role of the not-self, then, is to provide us with a reason to let go of the
phenomena that imply the existence of a self. There is no need to attack the notion of the
self directly, because contemplating the nature of the experiences that presuppose that
notion brings out not only how empty they are, but also how empty is the notion that they
presuppose. The point is to embody one's suspicion of the reality of phenomena in one's practice, and not disprove a particular concept which can then remain unconnected to our behaviour. One of the interesting features of Buddhist philosophy is the suspicion of philosophy itself, in the sense of the defense of or attack on different theoretical views. There is even uneasiness about what might be regarded as correct views, because adhering to these is also a form of attachment. They are held by us due to some prior cause which links that attachment to the impermanent. This eventually leads to impermanence and frustration. On the other hand, one can hold the right views in the right way. This involves going beyond the process of holding views entirely because it is identified with a form of direct intuition. From this, it follows that adhering to a doctrine of not-self can be just as destructive as believing in the self. What we need to do is change until we can see things as not-self. The question remains, however, - is this not itself a view that has been defended and to which we might well become attached, although that is through practice instead of in theory?

One of the characteristics of nirvana is that it is the opposite of everything that characterizes the appearance of our world, in the sense that it is permanent and happy. One might expect it also to be the opposite of not-self, but this is not the case. Nirvana is the highest form of emptiness. Since it is empty, it cannot include the self. The self is intimately connected to the human personality. As the forms of attachment implicit in the personality are weakened and eventually replaced, the self certainly does not make a comeback. The notion of the permanent self disappears. As a result, nirvana is realized. The characteristics of the self, its permanence and immutability, do survive in nirvana, and indeed represent the nature of the ultimate end, but not as parts of a reconstructed real self. The notion of a real self is shown to be illusory in nirvana because the latter involves establishing as real and permanent what goes far beyond the narrow and selfish aspects of the ordinary notion of the human self. The latter characteristics cannot survive in nirvana, which is precisely its opposite.

In later schools of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, such as Sarvastivada, Vajrayana, Madhyamika, and lastly Zen, the oldest existing texts (Nikayas) of Buddhism predate all these later schools of Buddhism. Anatta is never used pejoratively in any sense in the Nikayas by Gautama the Buddha. He himself has said: “Both formerly and now, I’ve never been a nihilist (vinayika), never been one who teaches the annihilation of a being.
rather taught only the source of suffering, and its ending (avijja).”\footnote{13} Further by investigation into the reference, one can be directed as to a further understanding of this ‘negative’ methodology which the term anatta illuminates. It should be noted with great importance that the founder of Advaita Vedanta, Samkara used the term anatman lavishly in the exact same manner as does Buddhism. However, in all of time since his passing, none have accused Samkara of propounding a denial of the Atman. Such as: “Atma-anatma vivekah kartavyo bandha muktaye”-“The wiseman should discriminate between the Atman and the non-atman (anatman) in order to be liberated.”\footnote{14}, “Anatman cintanam tyakta kasmalam duhkah karanam, vintayatmanam ananda rupam yan-mukti karanam.” -“Give up all that is non-atman (anatman), which is the cause of all misery, think only of the Atman, which is blissful and the locus of all liberation.”\footnote{15}

Every qualifying characteristic is, as the non-atman (anatman), comparable to the empty hand. The intellect, its modifications, and objects are the non-atman (anatman). The gain of the non-atman (anatman) is no gain at all. Therefore, one should give up the notion that one is the non-atman (anatman). In none of the Buddhist suttas is there support for "there is non-atman" theories of anatta. The message is simply to cease regarding the very khandhas in those terms by which the notion of Atman has, itself, been so easily misinterpreted. As has been shown, detaching oneself from the phenomenal desire for the psycho-physical existence was also a central part of Samkara’s strategy. There is, hence, nothing in the suttas that Samkara, the chief proponent of Advaita Vedanta, would have disagreed with.

“A Doctrine of Anatta” exists as a status quo, however, there exists no substantiation for same in sutta for Buddhism’s denial of the Atman, or in using the term anatta in anything but a positive sense in denying Self-Nature, the Soul, to any one of an aggregation of corporeal and empirical phenomena which were by their very transitory nature, “impermanent (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and Selfless (anatta)”.

In fact, the term “Anatmavada” is a concept utterly foreign to Buddhist sutta, existing in only non-doctrinal Theravada, in some Mahayana, and Madhyamika commentaries. The perfect contextual usage of anatta in sutta: “Whatever form, feelings, perceptions, experiences, or consciousness there are (the five aggregates), these he sees to be without permanence, as suffering, as ill, as a plague, a boil, a sting, a pain, an affliction, as foreign, as otherness, as empty (sunya), as Selfless (anattato). So he turns his mind
Critical Comparison regarding the concepts of Atman in Hinduism and Buddhism

The Upanishadic "Self" shares certain characteristics with nibbana of Buddhism. Both are permanent, beyond suffering, and unconditioned. However, the Buddha shunned any attempt to see the spiritual goal in terms of "Self" because in his framework, the craving for a permanent self is the very thing which keeps a person in the round of uncontrollable rebirth, preventing him or her from attaining nibbana. Both in the Upanishads and in common usage, self/Self is linked to the sense of "I am".

The main philosophical difference between Hinduism and Buddhism is that the concept of Atman was rejected by the Buddha. Terms like anatman (not-self) and shunya (voidness) are at the core of all Buddhist traditions. The permanent transcendence of the belief in the separate existence of the self is integral to the enlightenment of an Arhat.

The Buddha criticized conceiving theories even of a unitary soul or identity immanent in all things as unskillful. In fact, according to the Buddha's statement in Khandha Samyutta 47, all thoughts about self are necessarily, whether the thinker is aware of it or not, thoughts about the five aggregates or one of them.

Two ideas are psychologically deep-rooted in man: self-protection and self-preservation. For self-protection man has created God, on whom he depends for his own protection, safety, and security, just as a child depends on its parent. For self-preservation man has conceived the idea of an immortal Soul or Atman, which will live eternally. In his ignorance, fear, weakness, and desire, man needs these two things to console himself. Hence, he clings to them deeply and fanatically. The Buddha's teaching does not support this ignorance, fear, weakness, and desire, but aims at making man enlightened by removing them and destroying them, striking at their very root. According to Buddhism, our ideas of God and Soul are false and empty. Though highly developed as theories, they are all the same extremely subtle mental projections, garbed in an intricate metaphysical and philosophical phraseology. These ideas are so deep-rooted in man, and so near and dear to him, that he does not wish to hear, nor does he want to understand, any teaching against them. The Buddha knew this quite well. In fact, he said that his teaching was 'against the current,' against man's selfish desires.
The Buddha denies the existence of self, as conceived in the *Upanishadic* tradition, in the *Alagaddupama Sutta*. Possibly the most famous *Upanishadic* dictum is *tat tvam asi*, "thou art that." Transposed into first person, the Pali version is *eso ham asmi*, "I am this." This is said in several *sutta* to be false. The full statement declared to be incorrect is "This is mine, I am this, this is my self/essence." This is often rejected as a wrong view. The *Alagaduppama Sutta* rejects this and other obvious echoes of surviving *Upanishadic* statements as well (these are not mentioned as such in the commentaries, and seem not to have been noticed until modern times). Moreover, the passage denies that one’s self is the same as the world and that one will become the world self at death. The Buddha tells the monks that people worry about something that is non-existent externally (*bahiddhaa asati*) and non-existent internally (*ajjhattam asati*). He is referring respectively to the soul/essence of the world and of the individual. The most basic presupposition of early *Brahminic* cosmology is the identification of man and the cosmos and liberation for the yogin was thought to only occur at death, with the adept's union with *brahman*. The Buddha's rejection of these theories is therefore one instance of the Buddha's attack on the whole enterprise of *Upanishadic* ontology.

The term *anatman* is found not only in Buddhist sutras, but also in the *Upanishads* and lavishly so in the writings of Samkara as mentioned earlier. *Anatman* is a common through negative (*neti neti*, not this, not that) teaching method common to *Vedanta*, Neoplatonism, Buddhism, early Christian mystics, and others, wherein nothing affirmative can be said of what is “beyond speculation, beyond words, and concepts” thereby eliminating all positive characteristics that might be thought to apply to the Soul, or be attributed to it. Self-Nature (*svabhava / Atman*) can never be known objectively, but only through “the denial of all things which it (the Soul) is not”. The Subject (Witness/Atman) cannot be negated (Subject precedes any object of negation, even and also false attempts at Subject/Witness negation =nihilism). Objective negation culminates in Subjective liberation, not to mention is the most expedient means to Atman-realization (*Atmanbodhi, cittavimutta, pannavimutta, etc.*).
Notes and References:


5. *Digha Nikaya* 2.100. [DN2.100]

6. *Samyutta Nikaya* 2.77. [SN 2.77]

7. *Ibid*.


9. *Samyutta Nikaya* 2. 77. [SN 2.77]


11. *Majjhima Nikaya* 1.141. [MN 1.141]


