Preface

Status of the external world is a vital problem in philosophy, east and west. All important philosophies right from very early period, have analysed this problem from different point of view. With its history of more than two thousand five hundred years, Buddhism has made significant contribution towards solving this problem.

The term 'status' is taken here to mean the position, place and reality of the world and the term 'external' is used to mean here the appearance of the world and its inner process and activities. Therefore, the problem ‘status of the external world' means the position, place and reality of the world and its inner process and activities.

What is the world? is a common question of all human minds. Is it real or unreal? How has the world originated? Does God or soul exist? Buddha avoids all these problems as unnecessary thoughts of human mind. Whenever his followers put these questions to him, he kept silence. Altogether fourteen such questions are known as the 'indeterminate questions' (avyakrta) in Buddhism. Discussion of such questions without knowing the real truth about human existence is useless and even harmful. This is not the mark of agnosticism of the Buddha. This is the mark of awareness of reality of the world. The Buddha only points out the way of life through which one can attain the highest goal of life.

Our main aim in this work is to give a clear statement of status of the external world, according to Buddhism. For this purpose, we have covered the early and later Buddhist views of the external world. The work is based on the study of original sources as far as possible and we have also made use of various secondary sources. In the study of the different schools of Buddhist philosophy we have found
the three common points about the world, viz, 1) The world is a process of dependent origination 2) The world is momentary and 3) The world is unsubstantial or soulless. As a philosophical requirement, we have often referred to the systems Lokayata and Vedanta. At times, we have also tried to compare Buddhist views with those of David Hume, Kant, and William James.


In the introductory chapter, we have briefly discussed the life story of Buddha and the ethical, religious and philosophical contribution of Buddhist philosophy. We have also introduced the philosophical system of early and later Buddhism. In the last part of this chapter, we have discussed the historical background of Buddhist philosophy, the four Buddhist councils, art and literature of Buddhist philosophy, the philosophy of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism and the philosophy of three major schools viz, - (1) Sthaviravada or Theravada (2) Sarvastivada and (3) Mahasangika school.

The Second Chapter deals with the problem of ‘suffering’, its cause and two inner logical characteristics of Buddhist philosophy. In the middle part of the chapter, we have discussed the meaning of Pratityasamutpada or the theory of dependent origination, the chain of causality and the wheel of life. In the last part of the chapter, we have touched on the nature of dependence of things of the world, causality, momentariness, re-birth, conception of soul substance, and the karmavada.

The Third Chapter contains the historical background of Vaibhasika and Sautrantika schools, i.e Sarvastivada philosophy. We have also mentioned the
dharma or element theory its view on external world, force of the world, concept of
Dhatu and the Karmavada of Vaibhasika and Sautrantika schools. In the last part of
the chapter, we have discussed the epistemological problem of Vaibhasika and
Sautrantika schools.

In the Fourth Chapter, we have mentioned the historical background
of Madhyamika school, Nagarjuna’s method of dialectic, nature of dialectic.
meaning of Pratityasamutpada and Madhyamika view on the external world. In the
middle part of the chapter we have pointed out some important arguments of
Mulamadhyamikakarika concerning to the problem. In the last part of the chapter,
we have mentioned the Madhyamika concept and meaning of Sunyata, nature and
the grades of reality of the external world.

The Fifth Chapter discusses the historical background of Vijnanavada
school, the concept of Vijnana and its views on external world, arguments against
the existence of external world and the concept and ground of reality of the world.
In the last part of this chapter, we have discussed Dignaga’s and Dharmakirti’s
logical analysis of the external world, reality of mental and material world and the
nature of the Vijnana.

In the Concluding Chapter, we have culled together the various
conclusions arrived at in the preceding chapters and have organized those.

(Sibaraj Chetry)