PREFACE

The ethical import of Buddhist philosophy has profoundly influenced humanity; the metaphysical aspect of Buddhist thought is no less significant, but it poses many intriguing problems and the conception of the self is one of them. No doubt the metaphysical and the ethical cannot be separated, but due to special emphasis on ethics in Buddhism, they remain irreconcilable. The present work aims at presenting a historical and critical exposition of the doctrine of the self in early Buddhism.

The work is based on the main Buddhist sources and hence the common Vedāntic and stereotyped interpretations of the problem have been ignored. My chief aim is the true and faithful presentation of the doctrine of the self strictly in conformity with Buddhist teachings. After various philosophical enquiries an attempt has been made to show that the Buddha denied the reality of the self and his successors never deflected from this path. In the evolution of the doctrine of the self three main phases viz. early Buddhist Dialogues, the Milindapañha and later Buddhism have been traced out. The work is divided into five chapters, the first is introductory and gives a description of the main Buddhist sources and the basic texts. The problem as discussed in the Pāli
Tripitakas has been minutely explained in chapter II, and the appendix to this chapter describes the relation between the self and Nirvāṇa in Buddhist philosophy. The doctrine of the self as analysed in the Milindapañha forms the subject-matter of chapter III. In order to maintain a historical link, a brief survey of the development of the idea of the self in the Mahāyāna schools of the Yogācāra and the Mādhyamika is given in chapter IV. In the last chapter a critical appraisal has been made and the significance of the problem which leads to scepticism has been explained.

My approach has been throughout critical and analytical and hence to support my viewpoint a comparative account forms an important part of this work. Mainly Indian sources of Buddhism have been utilised, however, references to non-Indian sources have also been made, wherever necessary.

I, most gratefully, acknowledge my immense indebtedness and deep sense of gratitude to my revered teacher Dr. N.S.S. Raman, Professor of Philosophy, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi - India (formerly Reader, Department of Philosophy, Panjab University, Chandigarh - India) under whose scholarly guidance and strict supervision, I have the proud privilege to accomplish this entire work. His generous, benign and
unstinted help has always been a source of inspiration and incessant encouragement to me in my research work, for which I shall ever be extremely thankful. I further express my sincere obligations to him for the pains he took in going through the manuscript of my thesis and for offering many valuable suggestions and instructive criticism for its improvement. I have nothing but profoundest regards and deepest reverence for all his gentleness and kindness he has shown to me during this arduous venture.

I am also deeply indebted to Dr. Prem Nath, Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy, Panjab University, Chandigarh, for his inspiration, moral support and facilities provided to me from time to time. My grateful thanks are due to my friend Mr. N.N. Mall, Lecturer, Department of Physical Education, Panjab University, Chandigarh, who persuaded me to undertake this research work.

I feel very much obliged to my uncle Mr. V.P. Verma, Senior Assistant Librarian, Parliament Library, New Delhi, for his ever-ready help in arranging many valuable and useful books on loan for me from different libraries of India.

My compliments are due to Mr. C.M. Mittal, who typed the manuscript very laboriously in record time.
I also acknowledge my deep debt of obligation to all the authors whose works I have consulted and referred to.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Mrs. N. Verma whose unflinching assistance and constant encouragement brought this hazardous task to fruition.

Buddhapurñimā, 1974.

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