CHAPTER II
EVOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE SELF
IN EARLY BUDDHIST TEXTS
It may be said that two different streams of thought are found regarding the nature of the self in Indian philosophy. They are:

1. The conception of the self in the orthodox systems which is traceable in the Vedas and the Upanisads, and

2. The Buddhist conception of the self.

In general, it may be pointed out that the self according to the orthodox interpretations is permanent, substantial, and impervious to change. It remains firm, unshaken, immutable and identical amidst all kinds of change. Some of the Upanisads regard the self (Atman) as universal and identical with ultimate reality (Brahman). Some of the orthodox schools (e.g. Purva-Mimamsa and Nyaya) regard the self naively as jīva. Further, in most of the orthodox schools the problem of the nature of the self comes into prominence as a theological problem i.e. in the light of the problem of relation between God and the individual souls and their liberation from bondage.

On the other hand, in Buddhism the theological problem is not focussed at all. Besides, Buddhism does not believe in the self of a permanent and substantial nature since according to it, nothing is permanent in this universe. Kṣāṇikavāda (doctrine of impermanence)
goes so far as to deny identity, permanence and fixed character of anything including the self. This doctrine is therefore related to Anātmavāda or the theory of the unreality of the self. The Buddha regards everything to be evanescent and therefore, nothing to be permanent, and that whatever is subject to change cannot be a self, "sabe dhammā anattā" — everything that is experienced has no self because impermanence and unsubstantiality are the very nature of things — the self is not experienced at all.

The doctrine of impermanence, being a fundamental doctrine in Buddhism is related to all other Buddhist doctrines to some extent and hence can be traced in most of the texts in some form or the other:

"Impermanent, monks, are compounded things. Unstable, monks, are compounded things. Insecure, monks, are compounded things. So, monks, be ye dissatisfied with all things of this world, be ye repelled by them, be ye utterly free from them!"

"... there is no material form that is permanent, stable, eternal, by nature unchanging, like

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unto the eternal, so that thus it will stand fast.\textsuperscript{3}

"It is impossible, monks, it cannot come to pass, that a person who is possessed of (right) view should regard anyone phenomenon as permanent. But, monks, it is quite possible for the uneducated manyfolk to do so."\textsuperscript{4}

(The same is repeated for happiness and self).

Whereas all the so called orthodox systems of the Indian philosophy have accepted the Upaniṣadic conception of the self in one manner or the other, almost all the


schools of Buddhist philosophy, on the contrary, have rejected the idea of the permanent self. This point has been ignored by those interpreters of Buddhism who find a close similarity between the Upaniṣadic philosophy and early Buddhism. Whatever may be the influence of the Upaniṣads on early Buddhism it is nevertheless true that the denial of the reality of the self finds strong support particularly in the early Buddhist sources. In fact, the denial of the self confers on Buddhist philosophy a unique position in Indian thought. Stcherbatsky goes so far as to treat Buddhism and the denial of the soul as synonyms:

"The No-Soul theory is another name for Buddhism."^5

And Edward Conze is of the same opinion:

^5 Cf. "Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a soul, Self or Atman. According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality and it produces harmful thoughts of 'me' and 'mine' selfish desire, craving, attachment, hatred, ill-will, conceit, pride, egoism and other defilements, impurities, and problems. It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations." Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (Bedford, 1959), p. 51.

"The great contribution of Buddhist 'philosophy' lies in the methods it worked out to impress the truth of not-self on our reluctant minds, ...." ^7

But among early Indian interpreters of ancient Buddhist thought (especially noticeable among the Vedântins), subjective-bias interpretations of Buddhism have led to differences of opinion regarding the nature of the self. But in recent age a close study of the early Buddhist sources have revealed that the Buddha remained true and consistent to his doctrine of the self, at some places explicitly and at others implicitly.

The self is referred to by various names in the early Buddhist texts such as attâ, jïva, sattâ, puggala etc. The five Nikâyas of the Sutta pitaka have dealt with the problem to a considerable extent in a clear manner. But Buddha's attitude to the problem is traceable even in the Vinayîpitaka. In Mahâvagga the sermon delivered at Benares clearly presents his views regarding the idea of the self:

"The body (Rûpa), O Bhikkhus, is not the self. If the body, O Bhikkhus, were the self, the body would not be subject to disease, and we should be able to say: "Let my body be such

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and such a one, let my body not be such and such a one." But since the body, O Bhikkhus, is not the self, therefore the body is subject to disease, and we are not able to say: "Let my body be such and such a one, let my body not be such and such a one."

(The same is repeated for sensation, perception and saṁkhāras).°

"Now what do you think, O Bhikkhus, is the body permanent or perishable?"

'It is perishable lord.'

'And that which is perishable, does that cause pain or joy?'

'It causes pain, Lord.'

'And that which is perishable, painful, subject to change, is it possible to regard that in this way:

'This is mine, this am I, this is myself?'

'That is impossible, Lord.'

(The same is repeated for sensation)."°

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"Therefore, O Bhikkhus, whatever body has been, will be, and is now, belonging or not belonging to sentient beings, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, distant or near, all that body is not mine, is not me, is not myself: thus it should be considered by right knowledge according to the truth."\(^{10}\)

Keeping in view this truth, the true listener of the sermon feels aversion towards the body, sensation, perception, samkhāras and consciousness. He gets rid of passion, becomes free and thus comes to realise that there is no re-birth.\(^{11}\)

In the Brahmajāla Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya different postulations of the heretics regarding the doctrine of the self have been thoroughly analysed and then refuted. As many as sixty-two\(^{12}\) erroneous speculations about the idea of the self (eighteen arising due to the


\(^{11}\)T.W. Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg (tr.), op. cit., p. 101.

ignorance of the past and forty-four owing to that of
the future) have been discussed. The 'Eternalists'
characterise the soul and the world as eternal;\(^{13}\) to
others who are in some respects 'Eternalists' and in other
respects 'Non-Eternalists' the soul and the world are
partly eternal and partly non-eternal;\(^{14}\) the 'Semi-
Eternalists' consider the soul and the world as semi-
 eternal;\(^{15}\) the 'Extensionists' believe in the finity and
infinity of the world;\(^{16}\) the 'Eel-wrigglers' present
misleading statements and do not stick to any specific
point;\(^{17}\) the 'Fortuitous — Originists' hold the view
that the soul and world originate without a cause;\(^{18}\)
'Believers in Future Life' think that the soul after
death is conscious;\(^{19}\) some maintain that the soul after
death is unconscious;\(^{20}\) others hold the uncommitted view

\(^{13}\)Ibid., pp. 27-29.
\(^{14}\)Ibid., pp. 30-32.
\(^{15}\)Ibid., pp. 33-35.
\(^{16}\)Ibid., pp. 35-37.
\(^{17}\)Ibid., pp. 37-40.
\(^{18}\)Ibid., pp. 41-42.
\(^{19}\)Ibid., pp. 43-45.
\(^{20}\)Ibid., pp. 45-46.
that the soul after death is neither conscious nor unconscious; the 'Annihilists' admit the destruction or annihilation of the soul on the dissolution of the body and finally, the believers in the 'Theory of Happiness in this Life', think of the complete liberation of the soul in this cosmic world.

All such doctrines which present erroneous interpretation of the self fall into any one of the sixty-two speculations of the aforesaid theorisers. Just as a fisherman catches fish of all the sizes from a pond with his fine net, similarly all the wrong postulations about the nature of the self have been enmeshed in the net of these sixty-two theories. Such wrong philosophising arises due to shallow knowledge and one-sided approach to the worldly objects. These speculations are based on sense-perception which leads to craving and further results.

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21Ibid., p. 46.
22Ibid., pp. 46-49.
23Ibid., pp. 49-51. Cf. "Is it a mere chance, or is it the actual result of the necessities of the case, that this question of 'souls' is put into the forefront of this collection, just as it is the point treated first at the greatest length in the Kathāvatthu, and put first also in the Milinda?" T.W. Rhys Davids (tr.), The Questions of King Milinda, Part II, S.B.E. Vol. 36 (Reprint, Delhi, 1969), Intro. p. xxiii.
in becoming, re-birth, grief and 'lamentation'. But the Tathāgata is fully aware of the pernicious results caused by harbouring faith in any of these speculations, because he has realised and attained such a knowledge which is more profound and perfect than these theories and lies beyond the reach of mere reasoning.

It is clear from the above refutation that the orthodox speculations which characterise the soul as eternal, conscious or unconscious etc., are not only rejected but the very idea of the reality of the self is questioned by the Buddha.

Further, during the course of a conversation with Poṭṭhapāda, the Buddha refuted the viewpoint of the orthodox speculators who regard the self as entering into a state of supreme bliss. According to the Buddha it is as absurd and ridiculous as to fall in love with a beautiful damsel whom one has never seen nor known before, or as one tries to raise a ladder on a crossing to reach the upper storey of a mansion without having any idea of its exact location and height. Those who hold such a conception of the soul,

25Ibid., p. 53.
26Ibid., pp. 29, 35, 37, 40, 42, 43, 44-45.
27Ibid., pp. 26, 30, 35, 37, 40, 42, 43, 45, 46.
28Ibid., pp. 257-59.
can neither possess adequate knowledge, nor can practically realise the state of bliss.\textsuperscript{29} In this manner the Buddha by refuting all the orthodox interpretations of the self has prepared a favourable ground to maintain his theory of the unreality of the self.

There is a discussion on the conception of the soul and consciousness in Poṭṭhapāda Suttanta of the Dīgha Nikāya, where Poṭṭhapāda puts questions to the Buddha regarding the similarity of soul and consciousness and the Buddha replies as follows:

"'Is then, Sir, the consciousness identical with a man's soul, or is consciousness one thing, and the soul another?'

'But what then, Poṭṭhapāda? Do you really fall back on the soul?'

'I take for granted, Sir, a material soul, having form, built up of the four elements, nourished by solid food.'

'And if there were such a soul, Poṭṭhapāda, then, even so, your consciousness would be one thing, and your soul another. That, Poṭṭhapāda, you may know by the following considerations. Granting, Poṭṭhapāda, a material soul, having form, built up of the four elements, nourished by solid food:

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 259.
still some ideas, some states of consciousness, would arise to the man, and others would pass away. On this account also, Poṭṭhapāda, you can see how consciousness must be one thing, and soul another'.

One sees here the futility of identifying soul with consciousness or with mind, and with something formless. The above interesting dialogue is continued in the following manner:

"'But is it possible, Sir, for me to understand whether consciousness is the man's soul or the one is different from the other?'

'Hard is it for you, Poṭṭhapāda, holding, as you do, different views, other things approving themselves to you, setting different aims before yourself, striving after a different perfection, trained in a different system of doctrine, to grasp this matter'.'

The Buddha also describes the three forms of personality which according to him are commonly acknowledged in the world:

"... material, immaterial and formless. The

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Ibid., p. 254.
first has form, is made up of the four elements and is nourished by solid food. The second has no form, is made up of mind, has all its greater and lesser limbs complete, and all the organs perfect. The third is without form, and is made up of consciousness only."  

But these modes of personality are merely expressions, names or designations for practical purposes and have no reality from metaphysical point of view.  

Sutta No. 15 of the Mahā-nidāna-Suttanta throws some light on the nature of the self, when the Buddha mentions several ways in which the soul can be described. In the first place, the soul can be said to have form and is minute. Or in the second place the soul may be said to have form and is boundless. Thirdly, the soul is said formless, boundless and minute. Finally the soul may also said to be formless and boundless. Further, the Buddha also says that a soul can either be regarded as feeling or need not to be regarded as sentient. Or again, it may be regarded as not identical with feeling, it may not be

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32Ibid., pp. 259-260.


non-sentient; the soul may have feeling, it may have the property of sentience. And feeling may itself be difficult to explain. If feeling is of three kinds — happy feeling, painful feeling, neutral feeling, then the soul cannot be either or all of these.\textsuperscript{35}

The Buddha has not accepted any of these aspects as characterising the soul:

"... either as feeling or as non-sentient or as having feeling, — then he, thus refraining from such views, grasps at nothing whatever in the world; and not grasping he trembles not; and trembling not, he by himself attains to perfect peace."\textsuperscript{36}

It is obvious from the above arguments that it is very essential that one should shake off mistaken notions of the self to attain complete peace.

The Buddha repeatedly stresses upon his disciples that the physical world is transitory and without self. In the Cūlasaccaka sutta, he declares:

"Material shape, monks, is impermanent, feeling is impermanent, perception is impermanent, the habitual tendencies are impermanent, consciousness is impermanent. Material shape, monks, is not

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 63.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 65.
self, feeling is not self, perception is not self, the habitual tendencies are not self, consciousness is not self; all conditioned things are impermanent, all things are not self."\textsuperscript{37}

Further, in the same Sutta during the course of a discussion in the Licchavi Assembly between Saccaka and himself, he, in a very precise and compact manner presents his views that rūpa and vijñāna are non-eternal and without significance, so also the saṁkhāras and dhamma. Here we find a very developed form of the doctrine of anattā with reference to the five skandhas.\textsuperscript{38}

The Buddha admits only states of consciousness which comprise the transient human thoughts and fleeting sensations. These states can hardly be regarded as identical with the static self. The underlying Buddhist view which is fundamental to almost all the schools of Buddhism, is that universe is in a constant flux\textsuperscript{39} and that there is nothing permanent and fixed; the self being the subject of such experience and of fleeting sensations


\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., pp. 285-89.

\textsuperscript{39}"Nadi soto viya' ('like the current of a river') is the Buddhist idea of existence." S.Z. Aung and Mrs. Rhys Davids(tr.), \textit{Compendium of Philosophy} (London, 1910), p. 8.
cannot itself be regarded as constant and fixed. From the point of view of Buddhist psychology an individual is merely a 'saṁghāta' or an aggregate of the physical and the psychical or the material and the mental elements. Nothing lies beyond the ken of this aggregate which is 'nāma-rūpa' as Buddhists call it. It may be observed here that this 'nāma-rūpa' is different from the Upaniṣadic nāma-rūpa as the latter conveys simply the literal meanings of name and form. In Buddhist philosophy nāma stands for the subtle, psychical and sensuous elements. And rūpa stands for physical elements consisting of sense-data arising out of external objects and of the translucent matter of these sense organs. The individual is a psycho-physical organism which is an aggregate of psychical and physical factors, simply known to us in English terminology as mind and matter.

There is another explanation of nāma-rūpa according to which the living organism is considered to be an

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aggregate of five skandhas or mental states namely,
(i) rūpa (material element), (ii) vedanā (feeling),
(iii) Vijnāna (consciousness), (iv) saṃjñā (cognition)
and (v) saṃskāras (mental dispositions). Out of these
five skandhas, rūpa is the only factor which stands for
material elements and the rest for the psychical attributes
of the self. In the Majjhima Nikāya a highly developed
analysis of the five skandhas is given. In Sutta No. 28
of the Majjhima Nikāya the Buddha in a sermon gives an
exposition of the five skandhas where the human being is
regarded as an aggregate of transient matter and mind.
The five skandhas are:

"... the group of grasping after material shape,
the group of grasping after feeling, the group
of grasping after perception, the group
of grasping after habitual tendencies, the group
of grasping after consciousness." 41

41 M.L.S. I, p. 231. Cf. ibid., p. 360; M.L.S.
III, pp. 66-67; B.G.S. IV, p. 301; B.K.S. III, pp. 3-5,
85, 108, 158; Visuddhimagga Chap. xiv, Warren, pp. 155-56,
492-95; Mrs. Rhys Davids (tr.), A Buddhist Manual of
Psychological Ethics (2nd ed. London, 1923), pp. 25, 30-32,
95; E.R. Gooneratne (ed.), Dhatukatha (London, 1892),
pp. 117 f. Stcherbatsky in his book The Central Conception
of Buddhism (Delhi, 1970, p. 59) has given a detailed
Classification of the elements into āyatanas and dhātus.
The five skandhas, twelve āyatanas and eighteen dhātus
are called collectively dhammas or the elements of
existence.
These five skandhas are 'anguish', and desire is the root cause of them. It is more erroneous to call mind as the self rather than the body because the body may last for some time but the mind is constantly changing and it cannot be called as the self:

"It were better, brethren, if the untaught manyfolk approached this body, child of the great four elements, as the self rather than the mind. Why so? Seen is it, brethren, how this body, child of the four great elements, persists for a year, persists for two years, persists for three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty years, persists for forty, for fifty years, persists for a hundred years and even longer. But this, brethren, that we call thought, that we call mind, that we call consciousness, that arises as one thing, and ceases as another, whether by night or by day. Just as a monkey, brethren, faring through the woods, through the great forest catches hold of bough, letting it go seizes another, even so that which we call thought, mind, consciousness, that arises as one thing, ceases as another, both by night and by day."  

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43 M.L.S. III, p. 66.
44 B.K.S. II, pp. 65 f.
It appears here that the theory of the unreality of the self is the natural outcome of the theory of five skandhas and of the doctrine of momentariness with which the doctrine of dependent origination (Pratītyasamutpāda) is co-related. When everything that is experienced is a part of the chain of causation, how can anything be regarded as permanent? The idea of an abiding, eternal entity in man or outside, whether we call it Ātman, jīva, puruṣa, buddhi, ahamkāra etc. or by any other name is considered to be either phenomenal or totally illusory, though this standpoint is the logical outcome of the empiricism of the original teaching of the Buddha. There is no doubt that Buddha himself realised that there is no permanent, abiding principle in the universe, and that everything is constantly changing like the flow of a stream (this idea was adopted by the later Vījñānavādins) or the flame of a candle.

As in Majjhima Nikāya, so also in the Khandha-Vagga of the Saṁyutta Nikāya the impermanence and

transitoriness is described in detail along with the denial of an eternal self:

"'Body, brethren, is without the self. Feeling is without the self: perception, the activities ... Consciousness is without the self. Thus seeing (the well-taught Ariyan disciple is repelled... and realizes) ... "for life in these conditions there is no hereafter'.'\"46

The question is closely connected with that of Nirvāṇa. After all, if the self is unreal, in what sense can we talk of its liberation? This question will be taken up separately towards the end of this chapter.

There are another passages which clearly indicate Buddha's viewpoint regarding the impermanence of the self. For example in Part III of Samyutta Nikāya the Buddha remarks:

"Body, brethren is impermanent. What is impermanent that is suffering. What is suffering, that is void of the self. What is void of the self, that is not mine, I am not it, it is not myself. That is how it is to be regarded by perfect insight of what it really is.\"47

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Numerous other passages\textsuperscript{48} may be quoted in support of this standpoint which his disciples seemed to have propagated far and wide. Dependence and adherence to physical body gives rise to erroneous views.\textsuperscript{49} Hence the ordinary men, who are not well-versed in the Buddhist doctrine regard the body as the self, feeling as the self, perception as the self, consciousness as the self.\textsuperscript{50} It results in wrong view of satkāyadrsti.\textsuperscript{51} But on the contrary, those who are well-trained and fully understand the Buddhist norms do not regard the body, feeling, perception, consciousness, activities etc. as the self. Because such false notions lead to untold misery, sorrow and lamentation. Therefore the body should be regarded (as has already been repeatedly emphasised) "This is not mine; this am not I; this is not

\textsuperscript{48}The idea that the body, feeling, perception, activities are devoid of self is repeated emphatically a number of times in Nikāyas and other texts of early Buddhism, e.g., B.K.S. III, pp. 22, 23, 83, 97, 98, 141; B.K.S. IV, p. 278.

\textsuperscript{49}B.K.S. III, pp. 151-53.

\textsuperscript{50}M.L.S. I, p. 362.

the self of me" - that is how it should be seen in right manner with perfect insight. The right knowledge is that the apparent things should be taken as they really are. So what does not belong to us and what is impermanent, we should not covet it. Again, in a discussion between the venerable Sāriputta and Yamaka at Jeta Grove, as reported in part III of *Samyutta Nikāya*, it is explained that the well-taught Aryan disciple understands the nature of the self in a better manner, than one who has to learn to discern a critical philosophical doctrine from a naive belief.


53 B.K.S. III, pp. 98, 141.

54 "But the well-taught Aryan disciple who discerns those that are Aryans ... who is well trained in the Worthy Norm... regards not the body as the Self, nor the Self as having body, nor body as being in the Self, nor the Self as being in the body. He regards not feeling, perception, Self as being in the body. He regards not feeling, perception, the activities and consciousness in this way. He regards the impermanent body, as it really is, as impermanent; and so does he regards the others factors ... as impermanent. He regards the woeful body, the woeful feeling, perception, the activities, and consciousness, as woeful, as they really are... He approaches not a body, lays not hold of a body, is not assured, "I have the Self". He approaches not feeling, perception and other factors, lays not hold of them, is not assured, "I have the Self"." B.K.S. III, p. 99.
It also seems to be Buddha's opinion that false and vain feeling of 'I am' creates the illusory idea of the self; the ego has no reality. This is similar to Kant's criticism of Descartes that the 'I think, therefore, I am', is a bare form without content. One might conclude also that the contrary proposition is equally true: 'I think not, I am not'. To understand this truth is the realisation and attainment of perfect peace leading to Nirvāṇa. On this deep-rooted conceit of 'I' in man, there is an eloquent discussion in the Khemaka sub-section of the Samyutta Nikāya between a mendicant named Khemaka and the other group of mendicants. The mendicant brethren ask Khemaka whether he sees in the five aggregates his self or any thing pertaining to self. The venerable Khemaka replies:

"I discern no Self nor aught pertaining to the Self."55

To this the mendicant brethren say that if such is the case he should be an Arahant free from all impurities and disqualifications. But Khemaka is plain on this point:

"Though, friends, I discern in the fivefold gasping-groups no Self nor aught pertaining to the Self, yet am I not arahant, nor one in whom the āsavas are destroyed. Though, friend, I see that I have

got the idea of "I am" in the fivefold grasping-group, yet do I not discern that I am this "I am".  

To the question as to what is meant by the 'I am', Khemaka explains that 'I am' is neither matter, nor body, nor perception, nor mental dispositions nor consciousness, nor any thing without them. Though one possesses the feeling of 'I am' in the context of the five aggregates, yet one cannot explicitly see it, and declare "This is I am". Khemaka continues:

"Just as, friends, in the case of the scent of a blue lotus or a white lotus, — if one should say: 'the scent belongs to the petals or the colour or the fibres of it', would he be rightly describing the scent?"

'Surely not, friend'.

'Then how, would he be right in describing it?'

'Surely, friend, by speaking of the scent of the flower.'

Khemaka further remarks that the feeling of 'I am' persists even in a person who is on the verge of attainment of peace. But as soon as one becomes free from the fetters of one's empirical nature and realises the supreme goal, this feeling of 'I am' should disappear altogether, just as

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57 Ibid., pp. 109-10.
the laundry smell of a freshly cleaned, washed cloth disappears when it is put in a scented box (This is an illustration from the original text). 58

It is reported that this discussion was welcomed since it satisfied every one. It showed such philosophical enlightenment that Khemaka along with the brethren mendicants became an arahant, rising above the worldly temptations and getting finally rid of the feeling of 'I am'. The experience and contemplation of impermanence helps in getting rid of the false idea of 'I am' as the self:

"The perceiving of impermanence, brethren, if practised and enlarged, wears out all sensual lust, all lust of rebirth, all ignorance wears out, tears out all conceit of "I am"." 59

Mind is emancipated from the false dogmas and conceit of 'I' by cultivating the thought of impermanence and self-denial. In the Aṅguttara Nikāya also, Buddha while teaching Dhamma to the venerable Sāriputta, advised him to get rid of the false feelings of 'I' and 'mine' to

58 Ibid., p. 110.
In the Alagaddūpama sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya, the soul-theory is rejected by the Buddha who discusses it with his disciples in the following manner:

"Could you, monks, grasp that grasping of the theory of self, so that by grasping that theory of self there would not arise grief, suffering, anguish, lamentation, despair? But do you, monks, see that the grasping of the theory of self, from the grasping of which theory of self there would not arise grief, suffering, anguish, lamentation, despair?"

"No, Lord."

"Good, monks. Neither do I, monks, see that grasping of the theory of self from the grasping of which there would not arise grief, suffering, anguish, lamentation, despair."

60 "Then, Śāriputta, you must train yourself thus: In this body together with its consciousness, there shall be no notion of "I" and "mine", no tendency to vain conceit. Likewise in all external objects there shall be no such notion or tendency. We will so abide in the attainment of the heart's release, the release by insight, that we have no notion of "I" and "mine", no tendency to vain conceit. That is how you must train yourself." B.G.S. I, p. 117.

The theory of the soul in the non-Buddhist tendencies of thought (e.g. in the Upaniṣads) is not directly referred to by the Buddha. He may have made implied references to some of the tendencies, but nowhere does he refer to the Upaniṣads by name. And at the time of the Buddha, the six orthodox schools had not developed at all.

It is well-known that the Buddha was silent about some of the basic questions of metaphysics. On the question of the nature of the self too, the Buddha is said to have been silent. In the Saṁyutta Nikāya, Part iv, there is an interesting and meaningful passage about Buddha's silence which may be quoted here:

"... Vacchagotta the Wanderer went to visit the Exalted One ... and said:-

'Now, master Gotama, is there a self?'
At these words the Exalted One was silent.
'How, then, master Gotama, is there not a self?'
For a second time also the Exalted One was silent.
Then Vacchagotta the Wanderer rose from his seat and went away.
Now not long after the departure of the Wanderer, the Venerable Ānanda said to the Exalted One:-
'How is it, lord, that the Exalted One gave no answer to the question of the Wanderer Vacchagotta?'

'If, Ānanda, when asked by the Wanderer: "Is there a self?" I had replied to him: "There is a self", then Ānanda, that would be siding with the recluses and brahmins who are eternalists.

But if, Ānanda, when asked: "Is there not a self?" I had replied that it does not exist, that, Ānanda, would be siding with those recluses and brahmins who are annihilationists.

Again, Ānanda, when asked by the Wanderer: "Is there a self?" had I replied that there is, would my reply be in accordance with the knowledge that all things are impermanent?'

'Surely not, lord'.

'Again, Ānanda, when asked by Vacchagotta the Wanderer: "Is there not a self?" had I replied that there is not, it would have been more bewilderment for the bewildered Vacchagotta. For he would have said: "Formerly indeed I had a self, but now I have not one any more".'

The silence of the Buddha is one of the ultimate questions of philosophy. There is a difference of opinion among the scholars. The Vedāntic interpreters of Buddhism (e.g. S. Radhakrishnan, T.R.V. Murti, P.T. Raju etc.) believe that the silence suggests a higher reality. What he denied was only the reality of the empirical:

"While agreeing with the Upaniṣads that the world of origination, decease, and suffering is not the true refuge of the soul, Buddha is silent about the Ātman enunciated in the Upaniṣads. He neither affirms nor denies its existence."\(^{63}\)

Radhakrishnan carries the analogy between the Upaniṣads and the Buddhist theory here a little too far.

"The Upaniṣads arrive at the ground of all things by stripping the self of veil after veil of contingency. At the end of the process they find the universal self which is none of these finite entities, though the ground of them all. Buddha holds the same view, though he does not state it definitely. He denies the immortality of the fleeting elements which constitute the complex empirical individual."\(^{64}\)

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\(^{64}\)Ibid., p. 388.
On the other hand, L. de la Vallée Poussin asserts that the Buddha did not believe in any eternal self or absolute reality.

"All the mystic of psychological data — all idea of a transcendent self, of an immanent absolute — that could give any support to a conception of survival of whatever kind, personal or impersonal, have been sedulously destroyed by Buddhist philosophy." 65

It may be more correct to say that the Buddha was against unnecessary philosophical disputation regarding traditional metaphysical questions 66 about the world, soul and ultimate

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66 In many Buddhist texts ten 'avyakatāni' or 'indeterminates' are described as insoluble and inexplicable about which the Buddha expressed no opinion and remained silent. They are:

1. Is the world eternal?
2. Is the world not eternal?
3. Is the world infinite?
4. Is the world not infinite?
5. Is the soul the same as the body?
6. Is the soul one thing, and the body another?
7. Does one who gained the truth live again after death?
8. Does he not live after the death?
9. Does he both live again, and not live again, after death?
10. Does he neither live again, nor not live again, after death?"

Cf. Dialogues of the Buddha, Part I, pp. 202-203, 205, 254; B.K.S. IV, p. 266; Psychological Ethics, sections
reality. The Tathāgata has to be free from all theories while leaving all these questions open. The Buddha criticises traditional dogmatics. The successors of the Buddha however, take a more extremist sceptical attitude carrying forward Buddha's openness to its logical conclusions.

The Dhammapada, especially the sections Attavagga, Bhākhuvagga and Maggavagga also deal with the denial of the permanent nature of the self by the Buddha. In Maggavagga there is an exposition of the negation of the self. Each component thing of the world is said to be governed by 'anicca' (impermanence), 'dukkha' (Sorrow), and 'anattā' (no self). All the worldly things are transitory because they lack identity and are dependent on one another, they are full of sorrow. But only the wise realise this truth 'sabe saṁkhāra anicca...' 67 (all created things are impermanent), 'sabe saṁkhāra dukkha...' 68 (all created

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68 Ibid., Verse 278, p. 146. Cf. "Whatever pain arises is all in consequence of the saṁkhāra, by the destruction of the saṁkhāras there will be no origin of pain." V. Fausboll (tr.), *The Suttanipāta* (Reprint, Delhi, 1968), Verse 731, p. 135.
things are sorrowful), and 'sabe dhammā anātta...'⁶⁹ (all elements of being are not-self). Only when these truths are realised, is one led to the path of purity.

The Attavagga gives a very simple connotation of the self. It conveys the simple meaning of 'I' and 'you' devoid of any mystic and metaphysical significance. In its mention of the empirical self the Attavagga describes some inherent moral qualities. The empirical self has to be guided, tamed and liberated from bondage.

"The self is the lord of self; who else could be the lord? With self well subdued a man finds a lord who is difficult to obtain."⁷⁰

"The evil done by one self, born of one self, produced by oneself, crushes the fool even as a diamond breaks a precious stone."⁷¹

Elsewhere in the Dhammapada the self is used in empirical sense. It must be remembered that there are some ethical

⁶⁹S. Radhakrishnan (tr.), The Dhammapada (London, 1950), Verse 279, pp. 146-47.


injunctions containing the Eightfold Path referred to the empirical self i.e. the self which has been trained ethically with a view to achieving a wholesome development and perfection:

"Rouse your self by your self, examine your self by your self. Thus guarded by your self and attentive you, mendicant, will live happy." 72

"For self is the lord of self; self is the refuge of self; therefore curb yourself even as a merchant curbs a fine horse." 73

In some suttas of Udāna also we find the self used in an empirical sense e.g., it is remarked:

"The whole wide world we traverse with our thought, Finding, to man naught dearer than the self, Since aye so dear the self to others is, Let the self lover harm no other man." 74

In Thera-qāṭha, Kula—the Brahman emphasised the significance of self-mastery and heart's taming in human life and remarked:

72 S. Radhakrishnan (tr.), op. cit., Verse 379, p. 176.

73 Ibid., Verse 380, p. 176.

"The conduit-makers lead the stream,
Fletchers coerce the arrow-shaft,
The joiners mould the wooden plank;
The self — 'tis that the pious tame."  

These and many other passages do not conflict with sceptical passages which doubt the reality of the self in early Buddhist texts, because in any system of ethics assumptions of self-identity in the empirical sphere of conduct is indispensable. Otherwise we cannot in any sense talk about freedom or responsibility. It may be more correct to say that while metaphysically, self-identity can never be established, in the moral situation (where suffering, guilt and responsibility are fundamental notions), the self can never be doubted. This may be another reason why the Buddha treated with contempt all philosophical quibbling and himself refused to talk about ultimate metaphysical questions. Seen in this context it would be realised that there is no mysticism attached to Buddha's silence.

The evolution of the doctrine of the self continues to be conspicuous in the verses of the Thera-gāthā and the Therī-gāthā. There are many verses proclaiming the impermanent and transitory nature of worldly things.

A few will be quoted here:

"There is no life that lasteth evermore,
Nor permanence in things from causes come.
They are reborn, the factors of our life,
Thereafter they dissolve and die away."\(^{76}\)

"When he by wisdom doth discern and see:
'IMPERMANENT IS EVERYTHING IN LIFE',
Then he at all this suffering feels disgust.
Lo! herein lies the way to purity."\(^{77}\)

One can progress towards complete release by realising that everything is transient. The dynamic character of things leads to the worldly ills, therefore, sorrow can be eliminated only by realising this truth:

"'And understand that transiency is ill,
Is empty, without soul, is bane and bale;
Restrain thy mind's discursive vagrancies':-
So wast thou wont, my heart, to urge on me."\(^{78}\)

"When by wisdom doth discern and see,
That 'EVERYTHING IN LIFE IS BOUND TO ILL',
That 'EVERYTHING IN LIFE IS VOID OF SOUL',
Then he at all this suffering feels disgust,

\(^{76}\text{Ibid., V. 121, p. 110.}\)

\(^{77}\text{Ibid., V. 676, p. 285. (The capital letters are as used in the text).}\)

\(^{78}\text{Ibid., V. 1117, p. 375.}\)
Lo! herein lies the way to purity."

In canto No. 3 of the Therigāthā also the dynamic character of the self is being confirmed by one of the Bhikkhunis of the Order:

"To me she came, that noble Bhikkhuni,
Who was my foster-mother in the faith —
She taught to me the Norm, wherein I learnt,
The nature of this transitory self."

The problem of the self is further elaborated in another important text Kathāvatthu. It is actually one of the basic problems of this text. Like the Brahmajālasutta of the Dīgha Nikāya and the Lakkhanapaṇha of the 'Questions of King Milinda', the problem of the self has been dealt with in the very beginning of the Kathāvatthu.

79 Ibid., V. 678, p. 286. (The capital letters are as used in the text).


81 Dialogues of the Buddha, Part I, pp. 27 ff.


83 Cf. "It cannot be doubted that the authors of the Kathāvatthu and the Milinda were perfectly justified in putting this crucial question in the very forefront of their discussion — just as the Buddha himself, as is well known, made it the subject of the very first discourse he addressed to his earliest converted followers, the Anattā-lakkhana Sutta, included both in the Vinaya and in the Aṅguttara Nikāya." T.W. Rhys Davids (tr.), The Questions of King Milinda, Part II, S.B.E. Vol. 36 (Reprint, Delhi, 1969), p. xxi.
This has been discussed in a dramatic conversational manner. The main idea of the Kathavatthu is to refute the orthodox dogmas and doctrines of various schools and sub-schools of Buddhist thought which were opposed to the Theravādin doctrine of the self. The very first point discussed in the text is "Of the Existence of a Personal Entity" or the problem of the reality of a permanent self. There is a discussion between the Theravādin and the Puggalavādin; the latter believes in the permanent and abiding character of the self and considers that the self is real.  

"Theravādin:— Is 'the person' known in the sense of a real and ultimate fact? 
Puggalavādin:— Yes."  

"Puggalavādin:— Is the 'person' not known in the sense of a real and ultimate fact? 
Theravādin:— No, it is not known."

It is clear from the above conversation that Puggalavādins' belief in a real and permanent self is rejected by the Theravādins.

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85 Ibid., p. 8.
86 Ibid., p. 8.
87 Ibid., p. 9.
Theravādins. There is another discussion between the Theravādin and the Puggalavādin regarding personal entity and material quality:

"Th. Is the person known in the sense of a real and ultimate fact, and is material quality also known in the sense of real and ultimate fact?

P. Yes."\(^{88}\)

The Puggalavādins' view in this regard is not accepted by the Theravādins. The latter rejected the very idea of permanent character assigned to the self and the material qualities by the Puggalavādins, who also hold the view that the soul migrates from this world to another\(^ {89}\) and further believe that the concept of soul is derived from corporeal and psychical qualities.\(^ {90}\) All these hypotheses of the Puggalavādins regarding the real and abiding self are rejected by the Theravādins who establish the unreality of the self and the worldly phenomena in terms of cause and effect. Hence nothing can be regarded as a real and ultimate existence, as what we may call a soul.

\(^{88}\)Ibid., p. 14.

\(^{89}\)Ibid., pp. 26-31.

\(^{90}\)Ibid., p. 33.
The *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, which is a profound development of the Sutta doctrine does not lag behind in explaining and in ultimately rejecting the reality of the self. In section *Kamavacara-āṭṭhamācittāni* of the *Dhammasaṅgani*, the skandhas, the spheres (*Āyatānani*) and the elements (*Dhātuyo*) are discussed in the context of states of consciousness. The skandhas are regarded as four in number (instead of the usual five):

"The skandhas of feeling, perception, synergies and consciousness."\(^{91}\)

Further, the doctrine of the unreality of the self is expounded in the context of these skandhas by rejecting the erroneous view of 'Satkāyadrṣṭi' or the 'theory of Individuality'.\(^{92}\)

The *Abhidhammattha-Saṅgaha* (*Compendium of Philosophy*) recognises the importance of the three marks for the exercise of insight besides the sevenfold category of 'Purity' and the three contemplations:


Klesānca doṣānca dhiyā Vipaṣyān,
Ātmānamasyā viśayam ca buddhāvā,
"I. The sevenfold category of 'Purity', to wit:

1. Purity of morals.
2. Purity of mind.
3. Purity of views.
4. Purity of escaping from doubt.
5. Purity of vision in discerning what is Path and what is not.
6. Purity of intellectual vision which is knowledge of progress.
7. Purity of vision which is knowledge (possessed by those in the Four Paths).

II. There are also Three Marks:

1. The Mark of Impermanence.
2. The Mark of Ill.
3. The Mark of No-Soul."

As in other texts, so also here we find the idea of impermanence and suffering directly connected to the idea of the unreality of the self. All existences are transitory, essenceless, and full of sorrow.

Whatever is sorrowful is devoid of self. It is by the realisation of this truth that one achieves true insight and is not deluded by profane things.

It is hoped that above references to some of the basic texts of early Buddhism will bring out Buddha's attitude to the problem. At the time of Buddha, Indian philosophical speculations had not achieved their complete fruition. The Buddha, therefore, could be said to be convinced only by the Upanisads. T.W. Rhys Davids remarks:

"... Buddhism was the child, the product of Hinduism."94

However, the Upanisads cannot be said to deny the reality of the self, but the belief in the impermanence and momentariness of things and of the unreality of the self can safely be regarded as the central problem of Upanīṣadic philosophy.95 There was, of course, a difference of opinion regarding the interpretation of the Upanīṣadic passages concerning the above problems, but such controversies are post-Buddhist, i.e. they came long after Buddhist philosophy had disappeared from Indian soil. At the time of the origin of Buddhism various theories (e.g. animism, polytheism, dualism and pantheism) which believed in the permanent reality of the self, were prevailing in India.96 But amidst all these ideas Buddhism ventured to deny the reality of the self. T.W. Rhys Davids aptly remarks:

"The distinguished characteristic of Buddhism was that it started on a new line, that it


95 Cf. "... it is certain that Buddhism has acquired as an inheritance from Brahmanism, not merely a series of its most important dogmas, but, what is not less significant to the historian, the bent of its religious thought and feeling, which is more easily comprehended than expressed in words." H. Oldenberg, *Buddha, His Doctrine, His Order*, Eng. tr. W. Holy (Calcutta, 1927), p. 52.

looked at deepest questions men have to solve from an entirely different standpoint. It swept away from the field of its vision the whole of the great soul-theory which had hitherto so completely filled and dominated the minds of the superstitious and of the thoughtful alike."

Mrs. Rhys Davids regards the Upaniṣadic and Buddhist theory of self as identical and is of the opinion that the Buddha did not in fact teach the no-soul theory at all, but that it was a later interpretation of the monks. Coomaraswamy, Horner, Radhakrishnan and Murti interpreting the Buddhist dialogues are of the opinion that the Buddha distinguished between the lower

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97 Ibid., pp. 28-29.


100 S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit., pp. 375, 385.

and the empirical self and the higher and the transcendental self. The latter two thinkers are obviously under the influence of Advaita Vedānta and regard Buddhism only as an off-shoot of Upaniṣadic thought. Vidhushekhar Bhattacharya echoes the opinion of Radhakrishnan and considers that unreality of the empirical self is one of the basic tenets of early Buddhism. Yamakami Sogen's and J.G. Jennings' views are similar to Radhakrishnan's in the sense that they also believe that Buddhism denies the reality of the self as a finite substantial entity but not in the sense of an absolute, ultimate reality of the world. However, the Buddha does not allude to the Upaniṣads in many of the dialogues by name. So the extent of the Upaniṣadic text on Buddha's life and thought can only be a matter of conjecture. In our opinion the parallel between Upaniṣadic thought and early Buddhism has been

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102 Cf. S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit., p. 361. Frauwallner also remarks: "In both cases (Upaniṣads and Buddhism), we come across the same ideas, only in Buddhism they are differently expressed and, so to speak negatively formulated." Quoted by George Grimm in his The Doctrine of the Buddha (First Indian ed., Delhi, 1965), preface p.4.

103 Vidhushekhar Bhattacharya, The Basic Conception of Buddhism (Calcutta, 1934), p. 70.

104 Yamakami Sogen, Systems of Buddhistic Thought (Calcutta, 1912), pp. 16-17, 20.

over-emphasised. Such a trend has made us ignore the basic differences. T.W. Rhys Davids remarks:

"Buddhism stands alone among the religions of India in ignoring the soul. The vigour and originality of this new departure are evident from the complete isolation in which Buddhism stands, in this respect, from all other religious systems then existing in the world."\(^{106}\)

In fact, Buddhism lacks many characteristics of a religion; it is silent in its attitude to God; it denies the reality of the self; its attitude to its description of liberation is vague and ambiguous. Orthodox Hinduism is firm on at least two points: the belief in self is indubitable and there are definite standpoints regarding human liberation.

Further, orthodox Indian philosophy in general, and the Upanisads in particular, are firm in their belief about an 'Eternal Being', but Buddhism does not believe in such a static conception. There is, so to say, an antithesis of ideas between the two kinds of philosophies. Similarly, the idea of Causality in the Upanisads may be said to come closer to Satkāryavāda (which the later Sāmkhya philosophers perfected), whereas Buddhist systems in general, come nearer to the Asatkāryavāda doctrine of

causality. There is a basic difference between the two theories of causation. While the Satkāryavādins believe that the effect pre-exists in the cause, the Asatkāryavādins believe just the opposite i.e. the effect is something new and did not already exist. The Buddhist regards impermanence as the basic characteristic of our experience and, therefore, any belief in fixed cause or effect would be unjustified for him. But the Upaniṣadic conception of Brahman is in a reality that does not change.

Early Buddhism may be said to be even anti-religious in its rejection of Vedic ritualism, and of the caste order of orthodox Hinduism and its denial of the Godhood of the Vedas. Further, the indifference to ethics in the Upaniṣads, or rather the emphasis on the metaphysical rather than the moral in the Upaniṣads resulted naturally in the Buddhist revolt against such intellectualism. For the first time in the history of Indian philosophy we find in Buddhism ethical values asserted overwhelmingly against metaphysical intellectualism.
APPENDIX TO CHAPTER II

A NOTE ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE BUDDHIST THEORY OF THE SELF AND THE DOCTRINE OF NIRVĀṇA

Discussing the nature of the self in early Buddhism, Radhakrishnan remarks:

"Nirvāṇa is not a lapse into a void, but only a negation of the flux and a positive return of the self to itself. The logical conclusion from this would be that something is, though it is not the empirical self."¹

Radhakrishnan's remarks have been made in the context of Buddha's non-committal attitude regarding the nature of the self. Buddha, probably never intended to deny the self completely; he might have only pointed to the various ways in which it cannot be defined and also to the difficulty of any rational explanation of the nature of the self. Echoing Radhakrishnan, Guenther declares:

"Nirvāṇa is the true nature of man" and "the buddha meant the same by Nirvāṇa and Ātman."²

The nature of Nirvāṇa is quite relevant to that of the nature of the self. If Buddhism asserts, on the

¹Radhakrishnan, op. cit., p. 386.

one hand, the necessity for the liberation of the soul, it cannot on the other hand, deny the soul itself. To escape this difficulty some interpreters have suggested that Nirvāṇa is extinction or annihilation. For instance, Frauwellner remarks:

"... The statement has already been made that Buddhism denies the existence of a soul, and that therefore salvation, extinction (Sanskrit: nīrvāṇam, Pāli: nibbānam), is an ending in nothing."^3

But if it is extinction or annihilation, extinction and annihilation of what? Hence the reality of something is inescapable. The paradox here is that on the one hand, the self appears to be fluid and unreal and on the other hand, it is asserted that it is to be liberated. So, whatever attempts have been made to define it in words or phrases like annihilation, extinction, deliverance, emancipation, highest rapture, state of supreme equanimity, the quiescence of cosmic existence etc., they have all been unsatisfactory. The state of Nirvāṇa is ultimately indescribable!

While discussing the nature of worldly phenomena, Buddha reduced reality to discrete psychical elements. This leads to difficulty of explaining morality without

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^3 Quoted by George Grimm in The Doctrine of the Buddha (First Indian ed. Delhi, 1965), p. 2.
personality. If morality is to have any meaning at all, it should be binding on a self, on a personality. Buddhism asserts, on the one hand, the moral ideal to be realised by every individual by following an ethical path, but on the other hand, seems to refute the existence of the self. Further, it asserts on the one hand, the fact of human suffering and on the other, refutes the reality of the subject of suffering. Thus there appears prima facie a contradiction in the Buddhist concepts of suffering, Dhamma, and Nirvāṇa on the one hand, and the refutation of the self on the other.

Perhaps the contradiction can be resolved by regarding suffering, craving, ignorance, and all the links of Pratītyasamutpāda as purely empirical or rooted in karma and regarding Nirvāṇa as transcendental. The

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4 Cf. "Misery only doth exist; none miserable. No doer is there; naught save the deed is found. Nirvāṇa is, but not the man who seeks it. The Path exists, but not the traveller on it." Visuddhimagga, Chap. xvi, Warren, p. 146.

5 Cf. "The Tathāgata sometimes taught that the Ātman exists, and at other times he taught that Ātman does not exist. When he preached that the Ātman exists is to be the receiver of misery or happiness in the successive lives as the reward of its own karma, his object was to save men from falling into the heresy of nihilism (ucchedavāda). When he taught that there is no Ātman in the sense of a creator or perceiver or an absolutely free agent, apart from the conventional name given to the aggregates of the five skandhas, his object was to save men from falling into the heresy of eternalism (Sāsvatavāda). Now, which of these views represents the
ultimate state of liberation, therefore, would be regarded as the annihilation or the extinction of the empirical self. Ananda Coomaraswamy rightly observes that it is the erroneous notion of the 'ego' or the 'I' which is to be annihilated. He remarks:

"The emancipation contemplated in early Buddhism is from māna, the conceit of self-reference, the Sāmkhyan āhaṃkāra."\(^6\)

There are numerous passages in the *Sāmyutta Nikāya* also which emphatically impress upon the individuals the elimination of cravings and destruction of desires. A few are quoted here:

"By wishes is the world held prisoner,
Wishes suppressing gains it liberty,
By wish (for this or that) abandoning,
Lo! every bond is severed utterly."\(^7\)


\(^6\)B.K.S. I, p. 57.

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truth? It is doubtless the doctrine of the denial of Atman.... The two doctrines were preached by Buddha for two very different objects. He taught the existence of Atman when he wanted to impart to his hearers the conventional doctrine; he taught the doctrine of an-Atman when he wanted to impart to them the transcendent doctrine."

Extracts from Nāgārjuna's commentary on the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, quoted by Radhakrishnan, op. cit., p. 389.


\(^7\)B.K.S. I, p. 57.
"That desire and lust, brethren, which is in body, do ye renounce them. So will that body become rejected, cut down at the root, made like the stump of a palm-tree, made something that has ceased to be, so that it cannot grow up again in the future."\(^8\)

"... the destruction of craving is Nibbāna."\(^9\)

D.T. Suzuki also favours a similar view.\(^10\) Possibly, early Buddhism in its anxiety to demonstrate the futility of 'conceit of self-reference' and of the self-deceptive nature of individual desires went so far as to deny the reality of the empirical self. The distinction in Śaṅkhya philosophy between the ego (ahām-kāra) and the self (puruṣa) is not to be found in early Buddhist thought. Although in the twelve links of causation such elements as consciousness (Vijñāna), mind and body (nāma-rūpa), sense-organs (śadāyatana) etc. are distinguished, elimination of selfishness or egoism is a moral ideal of Buddhist ethics (as it is indeed so, with most of the

\(^8\)B.K.S. III, pp. 26-27.


systems of ethics), but suppression of egoism in the moral sphere is not the same thing as metaphysical denial of the reality of the self. It appears, however, that what started as a moral ideal developed into a metaphysical scepticism. Suzuki, therefore, remarks while giving an account of the Mādhyamika definition of Nirvāṇa:

"Theoretically, Nirvāṇa is the disposition of the clouds hovering round the light of Bodhi. Morally, it is the suppression of egoism and awakening of love (karuṇā). Religiously, it is the absolute surrender of the self to the will of the Dharmakāya."

Nirvāṇa, therefore, is a state which is attained when all the defilements, obsessions and imperfections of the empirical phenomenal self are made to disappear by self-discipline and position of perfect calm and tranquillity. Buddhism gives a psychological colouring to this view. It regards Vijnāna (consciousness) as most significant and active of all the five aggregates of the self. When

\[11\text{Ibid., p. 369.}\]

\[12\text{Vijnāna itself is regarded as a process of citta, and citta the kernel of personality or empirical self. As in Sāṃkhya yoga, liberation is attained by the cessation of Vijnāna (conscious process of citta), so here the Buddhist theory comes closer to yoga philosophy.}\]

\[13\text{Cf. "After all, something happens to the khandhā when a man attains nibbāna.... We have also}\]
vijñāna itself and the equilibrium between the other skandhas are not disturbed, then one attains Nirvāṇa.  

In Upāśīvāmaṇavapuccha section of the Suttanipāṭa too, there is a discussion between Upāśiva and the Buddha about Nirvāṇa, here Buddha speaks metaphorically:

"'As a flame blown about by the violence of the wind, — O Upāśiva', so said Bhagavat, — 'goes out, cannot be reckoned (as existing), even so a Muni, delivered from name and body, disappears, and cannot be reckoned (as existing)'.  

There are many such and similar other metaphors like, 'cooling of fires', 'cleaning of impurity', 'attainment of bliss', 'drinking of nectar', 'the unfathomableness', 'eternal beatitude', etc. that have very often been used. Of these, the metaphor of Nirvāṇa as putting out the fire is more often used than other metaphors, but all these add to rather than clarify the confusion and ambiguity.

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14 Cf. "The ceasing of becoming is Nibbāna". B.K.S. II, p. 82.

15 V. Faustbøll (tr.), The Suttanipāṭa, S.B.E. Vol. 10, Part II (Reprint, Delhi, 1968), Verse 1073, p. 198.
and the moral ideal remains as inexpressible as ever.

Considered simply without rhetoric, Nirvāṇa as the final goal is attained by the individual who makes efforts to get rid of infatuation, mundane pursuits, sense pleasures, craving etc. It is freedom from emotional attachment and from worldly desires as the latter lead to egoism and craving. Vidushekhar Bhattacharya remarks:

"... by eradicating the notion of 'I' (atman) and 'mine' (ātmiya) the Buddha struck at the very root of 'Kāma', 'desire', rightly described as Māra, 'death', without the extinction of which none can aspire to the realization of Nirvāṇa."

Considered in such a simple manner, Nirvāṇa is just the moral condition which can be attained in this life. It follows, therefore, that if such liberation is not attained in this life the soul would be condemned to rebirth. To escape the contradiction of karma, to facilitate the freedom of the self from attachment to the world leading suffering, Buddha thought of liberation or Nirvāṇa. But unlike the view of orthodox Indian philosophy which affirms the reality of the self (Ātman, jīva or puruṣa), and also thought of the idea of liberation

16 Vidushekhar Bhattacharya, Basic Conception of Buddhism (Calcutta, 1934), p. 95.
(Mokṣa, Mukti), Buddhism only emphasises suffering, the need of escape from, and the ways of escape from this suffering, without saying anything positive about either the self or its liberation. In other words a moral path is mentioned in detail, but the moral agent or the self is not only not positively described but even its reality categorically denied. L. de la Vallée Poussin expresses also his puzzlement at the seeming inner contradiction in Buddhist thought:

"Here we must confess, however, that this identification, 'nirvāṇa = annihilation', is not one of the 'primordial' doctrines of Buddhism. The doctrine of annihilation was not an 'original purpose'; it was a result. That is to say, Śākyamuni (or the Church) did not start with such an idea of deliverance, this idea has been forced upon him (or upon them) because he has been rash enough to deny the existence of a soul."

He, however, thinks that both the rejection of the reality of the self and the doctrine of Nirvāṇa were forced upon Buddha.

It does not follow from this that the philosophy of the Buddha is self-contradictory. Buddha seems to have

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loathed futile metaphysical speculations and perhaps was only drawing to demonstrate the impossibility of solving metaphysical problems. Thus his metaphysical scepticism was born out of his contempt for empty conceptualization which turned a deaf ear to the practical. But whether later Buddhism did not itself involve in such conceptualization later in its development is a matter to be discussed in subsequent chapters.