

Chapter - VII

SOME PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS AND THEIR PROBABLE SOLUTIONS

It may be argued that what exactly the import of *Dharma* is in Buddhism. It has been admitted by Nāgasena that the Buddhist concept of *Dharma* is 'the best in the world' (M.P. IV/3/1). It may be questioned in what sense the concept of *Dharma* is unique or best in character from other philosophical systems.

In reply, it may be said that the uniqueness in the Buddhist concept of *Dharma* lies on the importance of moral codes. There are no other religions that are based on only morality. Morality is more or less common in all religions, but the source of morality is shown as the realisation of God or Brahman or Absolute Reality. Without having an idea of the Transcendental Being one cannot be said to be moral. Hence, these religions are God-centric or ritual-oriented. In Buddhism no such Transcendental Being is accepted as a Source of morality. They believe that one may obtain morality if they have got right vision (*Samyagdrsti*) through which the

knowledge of the reality as such (*tathata*) is attained. The realisation of the reality of the whole world gives rise to moral strength in one's mind. The Buddhists should know the reality of the world as momentary, void etc. The main essence of the theory of momentariness (*ksanabhangavāda*), theory of voidness (*śūnyavāda*). Four Noble Truth etc. lies on the fact that these theories provide an individual with the idea of the essencelessness (*Śūnyata*) or transitoriness (*anityata*) etc. of all objects. As this world is essenceless and momentary, it cannot give us happiness and hence, full of suffering. This suffering should be overcome through the eradication of the causes of the same. This is the true nature of the whole world. If someone keeps it in his mind and realises this in his heart, he will immediately enjoy the taste of broadness (*brahmavihāra*). Under this circumstance an individual will have moral consciousness. In fact, the enjoyment of the taste of broadness is nothing but the rejoice in the realm of morality. Buddhism survives still today in the world in its own flavour and essence as it does not stand on ritualism. The advent of Buddhism in the Indian soil as a challenge against the Brahmanical religion where ritual has taken a major role. In this sense Buddhism is unique so far as the concept of *Dharma* is concerned. The conflict among men, different races and different religions is mainly centred around the ritualistic part and hence these so called religions are against the human welfare in general. For this reason

the so called religious persons are not hesitant in committing immoral activities. A religious person, truely speaking, cannot be immoral. That morality is the essence of religion has been propounded forcefully in Buddhism only. To them alone activities, if performed for the welfare of most of the people and for the happiness of the most of the people (*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya*), are meaningful and hence they are called religious activities. The Buddhists have taken shelter in Buddha, *Dharma* and *Sangha* as found in the prayers - *Buddham Śaranam Gacchāmi*, *Dharmam Śaranam Gacchāmi* and *Sangham Śaranam Gacchāmi*. To take shelter in *Dharma* makes them united. It is *Dharma* alone through which one is associated with others. This association is called *Sangha*. The importance of such association has been accepted only in Buddhism. If each and every man is not associated, he cannot be aware of other's happiness and misery and cannot mutually exchange service with others. Morality is the thread through which all can be bound. Association (*Sangha*) is the direct result of morality (*dharma*). As per the famous principle - "United we stand and divided we fall", union or association has got a positive effect in the society. The extreme sense of morality can bring all human beings under one banner. Association for a good cause is always desirable in the society. The religion which makes an individual moral, social and integral is undoubtedly 'best of the world' as claimed by Nāgasena.

It may be argued that why the metaphor of chariot is taken into account for advocating the 'No soul Theory'. What is the significance of this simile ? In reply, it may be said that Nagasena has taken the simile of Chariot to prove that though the total object is called chariot, it is difficult to locate where this entity exists. Through the method of negation it is told that wheel is not chariot, upper portion is not chariot, horses are not chariot and so on. In the same way, our hands, legs, eyes etc. are not self. If it is no, where does the entity called soul exist ? As there is so, exact locus of self, it is irrational to accept its existence.

In this connection another problem can be raised. Why is the simile of chariot taken into account but not others ? The simile of chariot has intentionally been taken into account, because Buddhists were completely aware of this simile of chariot adopted by Samkara, Vaiśeṣika and *Kathoponiṣad*. Samkaracharya has taken recourse to the metaphor of chariot in the context of refuting the Samkhya-view on the origination of the whole world from unconscious *Prakṛti* (*Pradhānakāraṇatāvāda*) in the *Tarkapāda* chapter of the *Bhāṣya*. He said that just an unconscious wooden chariot cannot move forward without the association of the conscious like horse etc, our unconscious body which is nothing but *Prakṛti* cannot have volition unless some conscious principle (i.e. self) is accepted behind it. Hence, unconscious *Prakṛti* cannot be the cause of the origination

of the world. To Samkara conscious being is the cause of the unconscious objects like chariot etc. (*Cetana eva dehāḥ acetanānāṁ rathādīnāṁ pravartaka dr̥stāḥ ... Tathāpi cetanasamyuktasya rathādeḥ acetanasya pravṛttih dr̥stā* - Samkarabhāṣya on Sūtra No. 2/2/2).

In the *Kathoponiṣad* also the metaphor of chariot has been taken into account. In this text our human body is compared to chariot and self inside the body is called Charioter (*rathī*). Our body in the form of chariot can move forward if it is associated with the soul. It has been stated in the *Kathoponiṣad* that one should know the body of an individual as a chariot, the self as a Charioter, intellect as the driver of the Charioter and mind is the controller (*Ātmānāṁ rathināṁ viddhi śārīram rathameva tu/Buddhim tu Sārathim viddhimanaḥ pragrahameva ca*", *Kathoponiṣad* - 1/3/3). The *Vaiśeṣikas* have also accepted self as the cause of the movement of the unconscious chariot (*Praśastapādabhbāṣya - Ātmaprakaraṇa*).

From the above discussion it can be proved that the simile of chariot is not a novel thing in Indian Literature. Nāgasena was completely aware of the story that chariot is often taken as a metaphor to prove that body without self is unconscious and self inside body is the Charioter. In order to show the falsity of the argument Nāgasena has taken the metaphor of chariot. Though chariot is taken as a

metaphor, Nāgasena is desirous to say that chariotness does not exist in any part of the chariot. If it is asked, where does chariot exist? The different parts of the same is not chariot. If it is so, there is no such entity like chariot. In the same way, they have proved that there is no corresponding entity of the word 'Self'. As almost all the Indians are familiar or acquainted with this metaphor, Nāgasena has taken the same to prove the unreality of soul.

It has already been shown that the Buddhist concept of *Dharma* is related to the concept of *Sangha*. In this connection another problem could be raised. Now-a-days individuals belonging a particular *Dharma* make their own association (*Sangha*). In this way there might originate different groups of people and different association (*Sangha*) lending to the disintegrity among men again.

In reply, the Buddhists might say that the Buddhists have preached a religion which may be universally accepted by the people of the whole world and hence it may be called universal religion. '*Dharma*' in Buddhism means right understanding of the reality. Delusion has obstructed us from seeing the true face of people and the reality behind matters and objects. This is resulted in seeing at life and universe in a distorted way. When this nescience is unveiled and our minds are pure, we can attain wisdom within us. With this wisdom one can have a vision with the help of which one can see

people and matters completely and purely. When our hearts are pure, we can see the past, present and future. On seeing the whole clearly we can make our understanding 'right' (*Samyak*). The Buddha's mind is pure without any pollution and sees everything clearly and entirely. Following the noble path of Buddha we can attain purity of mind, to see life and the universe most clearly and become just like the Buddhas. *Dharma* in this sense is related to *Sangha* which should be accepted by the people of the whole world. '*Sangha*' means purity and harmony. Now-a-days everything is polluted. Pollution of mind, views and body persists everywhere. Even the earth and atmosphere are polluted and vitiated. We should be free from all these pollutions and rely on the purity of mind. In our family, country and State we find disintegrity among men, which is the cause of much suffering. In Buddhism we find a solution so that we can live happily and peacefully. If the social members can follow the path of *Dharma* prescribed in Buddhism, they can lead a harmonious relationship among themselves. In this way, all human beings may be brought under one religious banner i.e. Buddhism leading to the formation of *Mahāsangha*. Hence, there is or will be no different groups of Buddhism as taken in true spirit.

Nāgasena has beautifully pointed out the contradiction between two prescriptions - "Doing no injury to any one and being full of love and kindness and 'punish him who deserves punishment',

favour him who is worthy of it." (M.P. IV/3/35). If someone is advised to be loving and non injurious to others, he may not be advised for giving punishment to the deserved persons and for favouring someone worthy of it. On account of this there is a contradiction.

The above-mentioned contradiction may be removed by way of giving a fresh interpretation of the prescriptions. The first prescription is accepted by all the Buddhas. That is, generally all the people should be loving and non-injurious to others. In a special case the second prescription is given. That is, under special circumstances the wicked heart is to be subdued and good heart is to be cultivated. Herein lies the law of *Karma*. If someone is wicked, he should get punishment. But if there is someone having good-heart, he should be given a favour. Actually the attitude towards a man depends on his heart or actions (*Karma*). If a man having wicked heart is transformed to a man having noble heart, he will be guided by the first prescription and becomes non-injurious and loving to others.

It may further be argued that how wicked heart be transformed into a good one. I believe that in Buddhism there are some means through which one, however wicked may be, may get the taste of freedom after the removal of nescience from him. What are the accepted means of this? Actually an individual is essentially free

from evil qualities. Due to his ignorance some complications arise in his mind. These complications are the products of nescience. If the cause i.e. nescience is removed, the wickedness existing in one will automatically be removed. The standard prescribed methods are necessary for the removal of internal evil qualities. This nescience is removed through the right understanding alone, which follows from the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths i.e. understanding of the things as they really are. One should know wholesome *Kamma* and unwholesome *Kamma* which may be described as merits and demerits. By understanding *Kamma* an individual will learn to avoid evil and do good, thereby creating favourable outcomes in his life. A man with complete Right understanding is one who is free from ignorance and by the nature of the enlightenment removes the roots of evil from his mind and becomes liberated.

There are three aspects of Right thought. First, a man should maintain an attitude of detachment from worldly pleasures rather than being selfishly attached to them. Secondly, he should maintain loving kindness, goodwill and benevolence in his mind, which is opposed to cruelty, ill-will and aversion. Thirdly, he should act with thoughts of harmlessness or compassion to all beings. This Right understanding will lead us to good, moral conduct. There are three factors under moral conduct - Right Speech, Right action and Right Livelihood included in the list Eight-fold path. Right speech involves

respect for truth and respect for the welfare of others, which entails to avoid lying, harsh speech etc. Right action entails respect for life, property and personal relationship. Right Livelihood is a factor under moral conduct referring to how we earn our living in society. That is, we should earn a living without violating these principles of moral conduct.

Right effort, Right mindfulness and Right Concentration, when practised, enable a person to strengthen and gain control over the mind, thereby ensuring that his actions will continue to be good and that his mind is being prepared to realise the Truth, which will open the door to Freedom - to Enlightenment.

If an individual can go through these prescribed paths, he will be transformed to good moral man being free from the state of wickedness.

As love and kindness to all beings as the primary objective of Buddhism, there is no scope for discrimination among men.

If it is so then why is it said that a deserving person should be punished ? In reply, it can be said again that the prescription of punishment to the deserving persons is desirable in Buddhism for two reasons. First, Buddha has to show his kindness and loving attitude to the evil-doers by way of giving them punishment. If

punishment is not given to them, they will never long for Right understanding and thereby for having good moral life. Buddha is in favour of their punishment *not* because he does not love them but because he has loving attitude to them. Punishment can make them understand that they are in wrong track and there are ways of leaving this wrong track and going to a right one. Out of sympathy and compassion towards the evil-doers Nāgasena, following *Mahākaruṇika* Buddha, has prescribed punishment for them and hence the Buddhists are not inconsistent in this respect. Moreover, punishment should be given to the observing persons to honour the status of truth, which is fundamental in Buddhism. To act according to the truth is the main objective in Buddhism.

A logical problem could be raised against the Buddhist so far as their epistemology is concerned. How can the causal efficacy (*arthakriyākārītvā*) of an object be proved if it is taken as momentary (*kṣanika*). The apparent contraction within the system of Buddhism is a major problem of understanding which is removed by Nāgasena in the *Milindapraśna*. Let us discuss the problem and suggest a line of solution from the *Milindapraśna*.

The Buddhists believe that one entity of cognition remains only for a moment and momentary duration is one of the marks of *Svalaksana* (unique character). What may be looked upon as quite

perplexing is the fact that the Buddhists subscribe to the view of momentariness of the reals and at the same time hold on to the theory of extrinsic validity of truth (*parataḥprāmāṇyavāda*); the validity of an individual manifestation of awareness is *not Svataḥ* or intrinsic, but extrinsic (*parataḥ*). The awareness of water is taken to be veridical if it leads us to the successful inclination (*Saphalapravṛttijanakatva*) i.e. appeasement of thirst. Otherwise it would be taken as illusory. Now the problem is that the thesis of *Svalaksana* is somewhat non-congruent with the thesis of successful inclination and unsuccessful inclination. Since the Buddhists believe that an entity of perceptual cognition persists for a moment, they might find it a little odd to establish the case that *Svalaksana* could be argued for on the ground of causal efficacy. This may be the position because the concept of causal efficacy is a relational notion and thus it should span more than one moment. Persistence of an object for more than one moment is not accepted by them since it goes against one of their metaphysical assumption - *Sarvamkṣanikam*. Again one might say that the Buddhists describe *Sat* in terms of its causal efficacy and this would lead one to somewhat related difficulty. The persistence of a perceptual entity cannot be argued for as such since the entity has got causal efficacy or not is not revealed to perception. The truth of an inferred object is determined through causal efficacy as it persists for more than one moment. We are not sure how would the Buddhist

position be justified. We have not come across any argument which can substantiate both the theory of *Svalakṣaṇa* existing for a moment and causal efficacy.

The solution of such problem is found in the *Milindapraśna* in which Nāgasena says - "As regards that which has been accomplished by insight - (the perception, that is) of the impermanence of all beings, of the suffering inherent in individuality and of the non-existence of any soul ("Yat Khalu punarmahārāja tayaḥ prajñayā kṛtamanityamiti vā duḥkhamiti vānātmeti vā tato na sammuhyediti' -2/2/3). To Nāgasena any perceptual cognition presupposes an individual's insight (*prajñā*), which arises from the true understanding of the impermanence of this world, of the first Noble Truth (i.e. suffering) and of the non-existence of the Soul. The right understanding of these gives rise to Right Vision (*Samyagdrṣṭi*) which is otherwise called *Prajñā* or insight. This insight is the result of *Samādhi* on the real nature of the objects. If someone has got such insight, he can visualise the essence of an object i.e. the *Svalakṣaṇa* - character of an object which is momentary - and the causal efficacy of the same within a single moment. The causal efficacy and the *Svalakṣaṇa* character of an entity remaining for a moment may flash to us within a moment due to having insight or *Prajñā*. This is not revealed through our ordinary eye or intellect, but it is revealed through the light of our *Prajñā*.

Hence perceptual cognition cannot be attained by an individual if he is not associated with the said insight. Perception to the Buddhists in general is an intuitive perception or rather insightful perception, but not an ordinary one. If it is taken for granted, the above-mentioned dilemma can easily be removed. Actually this is the only solution from the Buddhist standpoint to solve this. It has been beautifully pointed out by Nāgasena.

The doctrine of *anattā* - nonself, non-egoity would seem to call into question of the primary concerns of Western ethics. The question arises, who is morally responsible ? Who is it that acts ? It appears that Buddhism "admits action without agent, transmigration without a transmigrating soul."

The same charges are levelled against the Buddhist sage Nāgasena by king Milinda who represents the orthodox Hindu system of the Upanisads. The king asked Nāgasena if there is no ego to be found, who is it then keep the percepts ? Who is that realises the paths, the fruits, and *Nirvāṇa*. A murderer cannot be regarded as murderer, not a priest cannot be regarded as teachers preceptor or ordination.

Several points are notable here. First, Milinda observes that the doctrine of momentariness taken literally would make it impossible to blame a murderer for his heinous crime. The person

who committed the murder would not be the same person standing before the judge. The murderer exists, as it were only in the moment of murdering. The problem is exacerbated by the notion of *anattā*. Not only is the murderer not the same agent who can be held responsible for the deed, there is no agent. If there is no agent who commits the murder ? It would seem that there is a murder, without murderer, but how could this be ? Thirdly, and significantly, the possibility of there being permanent moral laws or principles is questioned. If everything is momentary, influx, changing, then how can moral precept, be considered as permanent ? In the light of these objections, one must wonder about the characterization of the Buddha as a distinguished teacher. *Anattā* seems to deny selves, but if there are no selves, how can there be moral agents ? Momentariness seems to disallow identity, but without identity, how can there be an ethical responsibility ?

The responses of the Buddhist against such condemnation : *Anattā*, as a philosophy of process rather than substance. To understand the doctrines of *anattā*, conditioned origination and momentariness, Buddhism must be viewed as a reaction to the tradition of the *Upaniṣads* which identified the self with the ultimate Reality, *Ātman* with Brahman, *tat tvam asi* - thou art that kenneth inada depicts the Upaniṣadic tradition as "aiming at an ontological absolute of being". Brahman is the ultimate, the absolute, the locus

of all value and the ground of Truth, while the self is illusory contingent, transient and empirical. Brahman is permanent, unchanging eternal.

The doctrine of *Anattā* in its repudiation of the self-ascetic being, entails the rejection of the metaphysics of the *Upaniṣads*. It was not a simple overturn of the *Ātman* concept into multity but a unique overhaul of the understanding of human experience.

Though Hume was led to the same kinds of reflections and doubts about the existence of a substantial self as the Buddha, the consequences were quite different. Hume adopted the Lockeian theory of experience in which the subject was separated from the object. The subject was a passive observer, a disinterested receptacle, a blank slate upon which the external objects made their impressions. Each impression arose from discrete bits of sense datum which comprised the external world. According to D.C. Mathur, mind was nothing but a series of disjointed impressions and ideas, with no real relations between them. There is no permanently subsisting self. Hume gives expression to feelings of melancholy despair and doubt. These feelings are in sharp contrast to the feelings of release, liberation, and Nirvānic peace experienced by the historical Buddha at his discovery of the insight into the nature of things in general and the self in particular. Hume falls prey to this melancholy,

whereas the Buddha does not, because he feels, firstly, that the self has been cut off from the world, from the Real, from Truth, from the ground of Value.

The self is merely a passive copier of sense particulars. When the self as well as reality is looked upon as momentary, as a flux of discrete particulars lacking a causal connection - that is, when the self is understood to be impermanent and lacking in identity - the moral responsibility itself seems impossible. After all, the Buddha does maintain the theory of *Karma* in which one 'sows that which he reaps', but to fully appreciate the continuity of the self and the Buddhist conception of ethical responsibility as entailed by *Karma* one must understand the doctrine of conditioned origination.

Hume, in contrast to the Buddha, was troubled by his insights into the phenomenal nature of the self. He felt that if there were no permanent identity to the self, then moral responsibility would be effaced.

Buddha did not share Hume's automistic metaphysics. He now experiences not in terms of static being, but as a process of becoming in which one moment is conditioned by the preceding one and in turn conditions the next. Experience is a flow-continuity in implicit. It is not something added by the mind, experience is rational. The Buddha's *Theory of Karma*, predicted on the doctrine of conditioned

origination which entails continuity between events in the process of becoming, ensures that not only will one be held responsible for his deeds but that he will receive his just deserts - nothing more, nothing else.

Importance of early Buddhism lies in the fact that women and men are equal in presence of the Law of self-development.

Early Buddhism removes all obstacle in the path of universal love. It has together made a chariot, and there is no chariot apart from them, similarly the different components of an individual make an individual and that the individual does not exist apart from them.

The most appealing statement of the doctrine of *Anātmavāda* can be found than the above enunciation of the Elder Nāgasena in the whole of Buddhist literature with the exception of Buddhist literature. Thus the *Milindapañha* is a comprehensive exposition not only of Buddhist metaphysics, but also of Buddhist ethics and psychology. As such, it is indispensable for the student of Buddhism. Apart from its importance as a Buddhist text, the *Milindapañha* is also to be valued as a historical document and a literary achievement of great eminence. The *Milindapañha* provides an unsurpassed testimony to Indian prose literature of the first century. In short, the *Milindapañha* occupies a unique position in Indian letter whether looked at from the point of view of metaphysics, or literature or history

or knowledge of geography. It is an indisputable fact that in post canonical literature, no other treatise on Buddhism equals the *Milinda-pañha*.

The dialogues between king Milinda and Nāgasena delivered depending upon the facts in reality, the influence of the eloquent speech in which importance of dignity and the charm of skill in the whole fiction is maintained here.

The 'Questions of Milinda' is undoubtedly the master-piece of Indian prose. It would be, no doubt, difficult to prove that anything from India was better than the corresponding thing produced by our noble selves, or by those whose *Karma* we inherit. But in ancient Indian literature there are only two or three works which can at all compare with it. The palm will probably be eventually given to the "Questions of Milinda" as a work of art.

The historical evolution of thought and of the rise of literature in India will more and more look upon the question as a whole and estimate its right value.

The conversation between the king Milinda and Nāgasena is important from various point of view. Many controversial topics have been discussed and solved. *Milindapañha* is important for the discussion of Buddha and nature and characteristics of Buddhism.

The discussion about the non-existence of Soul, Law of Karma, nature of *Nirvāṇa* and other significant matter increases its glory.

Everywhere the grand style of discussion is very lucid, appealing to the heart and intelligible to all. The abstract platitudinous moralising has been presented in such a manner with illustrations, tales and metaphors etc. that everybody can comprehend its significance easily. The mode of presentation of Buddha's genius and the eight-fold path propagated by him, alongwith the ways and means of attainment of '*Nirvāṇa*' - the ultimate destination is excellent. Such a solemn and delightful subject-matter can be discussed in such a pleasing fashion. Western scholars have adored the unique style of narration of the book '*Milindapanha*' with one voice as it exhibits a rare literary merit and it is characterised by a wonderful clearness and a colloquial ease to discuss an occult topic.

Winternitz opines regarding the "*Milindapañha*" - "well able to bear comparison with the Dialogues of Plato". "It is indeed a masterpiece of ancient Indian prose". Rhys Davids opines regarding the "*Milindapañha*" - "I venture to think that the 'Questions of Milinda' is undoubtedly the masterpiece of Indian prose, and indeed is the best book of its class from a literary point of view, that has been produced in any country". It contains the views of the Buddha set out, as they appeared to his very earliest disciples, in a series of

185 conversational discourses, which will some day come to hold a place in the history of human thought, akin to that held by the '*Dialogues of Plato*'. The western philosophers and scholars are rather astonished in observing the very intimate similarity between the "Dialogues of Plato and the Questions of Milinda". Babor and others are not lagging behind in imagining the influence of Plato on "Milindapañha". Winternitz has rightly observed the fact - "This is however unlikely if only because the '*Milindapañha*' dialogue has so many models in the dialogues of the *Upanisads*, in the ascetic poetry of the *Mahabhārata* and in the *Tripitaka*, that there is no reason for supposing a Greek prototype. Neither does the '*Milindapañha*' show any trace whatsoever of a knowledge of the Greek language or of the Greek world of thought".