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Pre-Canonical Buddhism

Even a cursory examination of the laws of evidence suggests that it is most improbable that we shall ever attain any accurate knowledge of the doctrines actually taught by the Buddha. In such matters we are compelled to argue from analogy, and it is of course notorious that, though we can fix the date of the founder of the Christian religion with far greater accuracy than we can that of the Buddha, there exists the utmost divergence of opinion as to the meaning and purpose of his teaching. Or again, though we have exact historical information about Socrates, the account of his teaching given by Zenophon and Plato is very divergent, and there has prevailed, without any prospect of final settlement, a controversy as to what Socrates actually taught. Plato himself left written records of considerable extent, and yet the criticisms which were obviously directed against him by Aristotle are such as to render it very difficult to explain how they came to be made. It is hardly possible to accuse Aristotle of mere misunderstanding of his great predecessor, and it is impossible to assume that he deliberately misrepresented him. In more modern times we are all familiar with the disputes which have arisen as to the interpretation of the philosophical works of Kant and Hegel.

In these circumstances it seems practically impossible to accept as coming from the Buddha himself any special set of the remarkably varying doctrines which we find current later. It is true that it has been suggested that in the Pāli Canon we have a record actually formed

within perhaps a century after the death of the Buddha.¹ A century of course is a very long time, but it is very doubtful whether we can accept the evidence in favour of the view that the Nikāyas are to be referred to a period about half way between the death of the Buddha and the accession of Asoka, as suggested by the late Professor Rhys Davids. He admitted that the evidence was conclusive that the Nikāyas were put together out of pre-existing material, and that none of them has any claim to represent directly the views of the Buddha. But his opinion as to their date rests on wholly unsatisfactory evidence. He believed the tradition of the commentators that the *Kathāvatthu* was composed by Tissa at the time of the Council alleged to have been held there in the eighteenth year of Asoka's reign.² It is unfortunate that no inscription has yet been found to attest to the truth of this Council, and various explanations, none very convincing, have been adduced to prove that it ever existed. But apart from this no one perhaps will nowadays believe that the *Kathāvatthu* is just what we should expect for a book composed in Asoka's time. It is extremely significant that a profound student and expert in the Pāli literature, Mrs. Rhys Davids,³ now sees in the Piṭakas compilations of a later period, ranging from the reign of Asoka till the last century B.C., and she admits that there was an indefinite amount of editing. It is indeed clear that, whatever view we take of the date of the compilation of the Piṭakas, we have not, and we cannot have, the slightest certainty as to the nature of the Buddha's teaching. All that we can do is to indulge in the legitimate, if somewhat useless, exercise of conjecturing what part of the doctrines which pass later as Buddhist is most likely to have been his own, having regard to the fact that there must have been something striking in his teaching to secure the success which he attained, and which made the Buddhists prosper while many other teachers, of whose existence the Buddhist texts give us assurance, passed completely away. It is not improbable that we may see his decisive service in his teaching of an attractive moral ideal within the

1 *Cambridge History of India*, 1, 191 ff

2 Cf. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 18, 19.

3 *Pathak Commemoration Volume*, p. 58.

capacity of his hearers to understand and carry into practice. We have some idea of the doctrines of his contemporaries; the materialism of Ajita Kesakambali, and the denial of the reality of human activity which marked the views, otherwise divergent, of Pūraṇa Kassapa, Pakudha Kaccāyana and Makkhali Gosāla were little calculated to attract a substantial following, and there seems to be truth in the tradition that the Buddha rejected the extreme asceticism which could, after all, have attractions only for a select few. We may believe, or at least wish to believe, that the Buddha did teach the doctrine which Mrs. Rhys Davids would wish to ascribe to him, of the possibilities of man's becoming something more and more. Unquestionably her method in her researches is sound. If there were traces of such a doctrine in the texts of the Pāli Canon which teach a much less attractive creed, we might well argue that thus we were recovering the truth. The difficulty so far is that, despite much ingenuity, the evidence assembled is so far from convincing that it may be feared that the real teaching of the Buddha has escaped us for good. It is possible also that there were other elements in the Buddha's teaching. He may have asserted a claim to be more than a mere human teacher, and have claimed for his teaching higher authority than its inherent reasonableness.⁴ We cannot on this point prove anything. All that we hear of his super-normal character may be the figment of later tradition.

Quite a different question presents itself, when we give up the unscientific attempt to ascribe any definite doctrine to the Buddha and confine ourselves to the perfectly legitimate question of the development of Buddhist doctrine, without concerning ourselves with the insoluble question how far it can be carried back to the Buddha. Can we trace a definite development of doctrine? Was a system of pluralism developed by the scheme of antithesis into a monism, and then did it pass over into idealism? Is there truth in the doctrine found in the Tibetan sources of three successive Dharmacakrapravartanas? Are Puḍgalanairātmya, Śūnyavāda, and Vijñānavāda three consecutive

4 Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 27 ff.

5 Stecherbatsky, *IIIQ.*, X, 739-60.

stages of Buddhist thought,⁵ or are they three distinct developments of ideas current in unsystematic form in early Buddhist circles?⁶

The systems which we have are relatively late in date, and they show very different appreciations of ideas which were no doubt strongly held in early Buddhism. The *anātmavāda* is interpreted in very different ways, and is treated as perfectly consistent with the holding of opinions which might well be deemed an *ātmavāda*. Thus the Sāmmitiyas professed the doctrine of the impredicable *puḍgala*, and the Anattalakkhaṇasutta indicates the possibility of such an interpretation of the *anātman* doctrine, making it a doctrine asserting the principle of *skandhas*, but not a *skandhamātratāvāda*.⁷ That such views should be held indicates that the thinkers who adopted them were not very hostile to the idea of something which might be deemed some kind of soul. The Mahāyāna view, which recognises an originally undefiled and radiant consciousness (*ādiśuddha prabhāsvara ekacitta*) would of course decline to be held to admit an *ātmavāda*, though the similarity of this *citta* to the *ātman* of Brāhmaṇical speculation is decidedly strong. The Yogācārins, accepting the principle of individual store consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), declined to admit the charge of being personalists in doctrine. When we have all these views claiming to be compatible with the doctrine of *anātman*, it seems wholly impossible to ascribe to the Buddha the belief in an infinite number of separate evanescent entities in a state of beginningless commotion but gradually tending to quiescence, and to an ultimate absolute annihilation of all life. It would be justifiable to do so only (1) if we could prove *a priori* that this view explains how the other doctrines came into being as logical developments thence, and (2) if we could establish that this was the sole doctrine current when the Nikāyas were compiled. But in fact no such proof is possible. It is quite impossible to prove that the Mahāyāna *dharmaṇairātmya* is derived as a further step from the *puḍgalanairātmya* of the Hīnayāna. It may be argued⁸ that Nāgārjuna merely applied the Hīnayāna assertion of the unreality of the self to

6 Schayer, *Archiv Orientalni*, VII, 121-32; *OZ.*, XXXVIII, 401-15.

7 Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Stkyā or Buddhist Origins*, pp. 126 ff.

8 Masuda, *Der individualistische Idealismus der Yogācāra-Schule*, pp. 20 ff.

the things of the outer world and thoughts also, but it is a fair rejoinder that to the Hīnayāna also both things and thoughts were unreal; the idea of a chariot is no more real than the chariot itself. We have a distinct doctrine which does not grow out of the Hīnayāna.

Moreover, we have abundant evidence that a very different doctrine was widely current when Buddhism arose, the conception of the Brahman, of the final reality as reality, thought and bliss. Professor Jacobi⁹ has called attention to the interest of those passages in which the elements are presented in an order leading from the more gross to the more refined. We find also that, in addition to those who believed in the orthodox five elements, earth, water, air, fire and ether, the Jains knew of people who added the soul to the series, and we have ample evidence from Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese sources of the existence in Buddhist thought of a doctrine, the Śaḍdhātusūtra, which made personality consists of these five elements and consciousness. The value of this evidence is great, precisely because the series will not fit into the traditional systems. Vasubandhu has to seek to work it in by declaring that the Sūtra merely enumerates the fundamental constituents of the individual (*maulasattvadraya*), so that it passes over the derived material constituents (*bhautikarūpa*) and the derivative mental phenomena (*caitasika*). Moreover he has to assert that *ākāśa* is *rūpadhātu*.¹⁰ On the other hand, Buddhaghosa¹¹ holds that the sixfold division is to be equated to the sixteen *dhātus*, earth, air and fire being equal to the *phoṭṭhabbadhātu*, water and ether to the *dhammadhātu*, and consciousness to the *sattariññādhātu*. This treatment of *dhammadhātu* is most unsatisfactory, for Buddhaghosa himself explains the *dhammadhātu* as comprising twenty elements, three *arūpiṇo dhammā*, 16 *sukhumarūpa* including among them water and ether, and the *asaṅkhata*, while the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* includes as *dhammadhātu* nothing but the *arūpiṇo dhammā*, which is the view of the Sarvāstivādins also. It is plain that the series of six *dhātus* as recorded is older than the scholastics, and what is essential is that it points to a definite gradation in which consciousness emerges as one

⁹ *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der Gottesidee bei den Indern*, pp. 12ff., 41.

¹⁰ *Abhidharmakośā*, I, 49 ff.

¹¹ *Visuddhimagga*, pp 487 f.

of six essential elements, but more subtle than any other. This is clearly an earlier view than the Theravādin as regards not only consciousness but ether. The Theravāda has advanced to the view that ether belongs to derived matter, while the Sarvāstivādins take it out of contingent reality into the sphere of one of their three *asaṃskṛtas*. But the six *dhātu* list suggests that we have a relic of a view which made consciousness the source whence the elements were derived, each less subtle than the preceding.

There is, of course, other evidence in the Pāli records of the existence of such a view of the primacy of consciousness. The orthodox doctrine repudiates the idea that *citta* should be taken by the unlearned as the soul, since it is in a state of constant arising and passing away in comparison with the relatively enduring character of the body made of the four elements.¹² But the *Visuddhimagga* (p. 554) reveals to us a very different aspect of consciousness as the relatively abiding element which transmigrates, passing from one existence into another just as a man swings himself across a ditch by using a rope tied to a tree, an idea which is certainly to be compared with the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka* simile of the process of reincarnation of the *ātman* to the passage of a caterpillar from one straw to another. We have further the Mahāsāṅghika doctrine of a consciousness, originally pure, defiled by adventitious impurities,¹³ which is well known to Mahāyāna texts, and which, as has been shown, is equally known to the Nīkāyas, where the *Āṅguttara* (i. 10) has *pubbassaram idaṃ cittaṃ taṃ ca kho āgantukehi upakilesehi upakiliṭṭham*. Moreover, there are various canonical passages where we have explanations of Nirvāṇa which echo the ideas of the Upaniṣads regarding the ultimate reality. From these passages we gain, as Mr. Kimura points out,¹⁴ the conception of Nirvāṇa as the eternal reality of cosmic existence which cannot be expressed in positive terms, and must merely be indicated by negations. It is perfectly clear that in the early Buddhist circles the idea of the ultimate reality, as something akin to the Brāhmanical conception of the

12 Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology*, pp. 13 f.

13 Masuda, *Early Indian Buddhism*, p. 30.

14 *Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 96 ff.

absolute, was in circulation. From these early speculations in Buddhist schools we may see a natural development direct to the absolute which is developed in the Mahāyāna, and to the consciousness theory of the Vijñānavāda. These two ideas are not ultimately very deeply opposed; the latter emphasises the absolute as consciousness, the former contents itself with an absolute in relation to which it considers that all empirical things lack reality. The essential point is that it is quite unnecessary to attempt to show that the Mahāyāna and the Vijñānavāda develop from Pluralism.

In the same way it is easy to see that the doctrine of *anityatā* is not the whole doctrine of early Buddhism or one that we need trace to the Buddha himself on the score of its universal acceptance. The fact is that the Pāli Abhidhamma differs from the classification of Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharmakośa* in that it treats as *rūpadharmas* the four *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas*, which the Sarvāstivādins assign to the group of the *rūpacittaviprayuktasaṃskāras*, and thus confines to *rūpa* the characteristics of origination, of maintenance, of growing old, and impermanence (*rūpassa upacayo, rūpassa santati, rūpassa jaratā, rūpassa aniccātā*). There can be no doubt of the fairness of the deduction hence made by Professor Schayer¹⁵ that in pre-canonical Buddhism the elements of *rūpa* alone were considered impermanent. This view is confirmed by the fact that the Mahāsāṅghika, Ekavyavahārika, Lokottaravādin and Kaukuṭika (Kukkuṭika) schools place in the category of eternal non-contingent elements the four realms belonging to the *ārūpyadhātu* together with the two forms of extinction recognised by them. As opposed to *rūpadhātu*, therefore, we have the *dharmadhātu* as the eternal supersensual reality, which like the absolute of the Upaniṣads¹⁶ can be discerned by mind alone, while from another aspect it is the absolute truth, which, beyond the knowledge of the average man, may yet be realised by the *dharmacakṣus* of the omniscient Buddha.¹⁷ It seems that along these lines must be traced the origin of the use of *dharmadhātu* in the Mahāyāna to express the absolute. The same idea explains the Mahāyāna doctrine of the

15 *Archiv Orientalní*, VII, 128.

16 *BAU.*, IV, 4. 19.

17 Geiger, *Pāli Dhamma*, p. 69.

dharmakāya as one of the forms of the Buddha, the other, in the older version before the development of the Trikāya doctrine of the Yogācārins, being the *rūpakāya*, the unreal body with which he descended to earth as Sākyamuni. These two bodies correspond to the *paramārtha* and the *saṃvṛti* forms of knowledge. In the Trikāya doctrine we have the *dharmakāya* corresponding to the *pariniṣpanna* aspect of reality, the *sambhogakāya* corresponding to the *paratantra* aspect, and the *rūpakāya* to the *parikalpita*. Here the further refinement of the Yogācāra over the Mahāyāna is clear.

We have therefore clear evidence of a distinction between *rūpa* and *dharma*, but such a distinction is not given in the scholasticism of either Buddhaghosa or Vasubandhu, in which *dharma* is the generic term for elements, while *rūpa* is a category among *dharma*s. But, as Professor Schayer¹⁸ points out, there is a trace of the old antithesis in the fact that in the enumeration of the twelve *āyatana*s and the eighteen *dhātu*s the *dharmāyatana* and the *dharmadhātu* contain only non-*rūpa* elements: *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *saṃskāras*, *avijñapti*, and *asaṃskṛtas* in Vasubandhu's version, while the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* omits the last two items. It is certainly legitimate here to suppose that the distinction of *dharma* and *rūpa* was originally clearly drawn.

What that distinction was is less easy to say. Professor Schayer insists on the error of contrasting *dharma* and *rūpa* as immaterial spiritual reality and material reality, on the ground that this version introduces into Indian thought a conception familiar since Descartes' contrast between *res extensae* and *res cogitantes*, but foreign to India, a 'European anomaly', for the idea of a non-extensional being is neither universal nor necessary. From the Āraṇyakas to the Vijñānavāda and the Vedānta Indian philosophy has never conceived the soul, consciousness, psychical phenomena, otherwise than spatially. The true view is afforded by examination of the Buddhist doctrine of the three spheres of the cosmos. The first two, the *kāmadhātu* and the *rūpadhātu* are closely connected, the former being merely a lower and less perfect form of the latter. But the *ārūpyadhātu* is very different; it is composed of four *āyatana*s: *ākāśānantya*, *viññānānantya*, *ākīṃcānya*, and

naivasamjñānāsamjñā, whose common characteristic is infinity; in contrast with the elements of earth etc., the *ārūpya* elements are all-pervading and omnipresent. Hence in the *ārūpya* world there are no storeys one above another; hence too the *ārūpyadhātu* is without place (*adesastha, asthāna*) that is without localisation in space, but not without extension. Spirituality and extension are not to be regarded as separated in Hindu thought. In the same way, we should not regard *rūpa* as material, because it covers in the Abhidhamma lists things which cannot by any means be brought under the western notion of matter. The Vaibhāṣikas, though they have a simpler conception of *rūpa* than the Pāli Abhidhamma classification, yet include under it not only the sense-faculties but also the sense-data which from the western point of view belong rather to psychic than to physical phenomena. This argument, it must be pointed out, is not wholly convincing, for that sense-data should be regarded as physical rather than psychic seems perfectly natural from the Buddhist standpoint and the Abhidhamma view that *kāyaviññatti* etc., are *rūpa* is an easy enough extension. It is easy also to understand how *rūpa* came to be used in *rūpakāya* to denote that that is impermanent, whether we call it psychical or physical. But we certainly may admit that the Buddhist view of matter and spirit was not that of Descartes. Yet we need not reject the belief of Deussen that in the higher flights of the thought of the Upaniṣads those thinkers who negated all possible predicates of the absolute were groping to express the idea that the absolute was not in space or time.¹⁹

That early Buddhism recognised the impermanence of things, both physical and psychical, comprehended within the term *rūpa* is clear. But the idea of purely momentary existence was obviously not the first view. The theory of the four general functions (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa* or *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa*) which are manifestations of elements always present in every moment of the stream of life process, *jāti, sthiti, jarā, and anityatā*, held by the Sarvāstivādins is manifestly inconsistent with true momentary existence.²⁰ It was left to the Sautrāntikas to drop

19 Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, II, 521, 522.

20 Schayer, *Ausgewählte Kapitel aus der Prasānnapādā*, pp. 83 ff.

the element of endurance *sthiti*, and thus to evolve the doctrine of momentariness in its mature and least intelligible form. Here we have a clear example of the manner in which a simple fact, the impermanence of physical and psychical things, which presumably was insisted on in the first instance as a means of inviting the attention of the hearers to the importance of that which is permanent, is developed by scholasticism into a metaphysical theory of pronounced difficulty.

In the same way we must expect to find that the *dharma*s of Buddhist speculation have arisen from some much less elaborate idea. In the developed scholasticism it is explained by *svabhāradhāraṇāt*, a thing which supports its own essence. They are ultimate entities which have their own characteristics as their essence, and therefore are quite different from phenomena referred to ultimate substrata. They are not to be understood as things in themselves, whose attributes alone are revealed. Clearly to say that a *dharma* is a quality, not a substance, but the negation of a substance is a misleading use of words. A quality implies in our speech some substance of which it is a quality, and the *dharma*s are themselves the substances while the substances are the qualities. They are essentially simply things, pure reality. The difficulties of this conception are obvious, and the various efforts of the schools to present lists of *dharma*s afford little satisfaction. We have the *asaṃskṛta dharma*s which are transcendental, uncaused, underived; the Theravādins are contented with one, Nirvāṇa, the Sarvāstivādins have three, the Yogācārins, six. Between them and the *saṃskṛta dharma*s there is a gulf fixed, which it is impossible logically to cross. The *saṃskṛta dharma*s themselves present great divergences of view. The earlier and later lists contain elements which are for us neither material nor mental, though the Theravādins classify them under *rūpaskandha*, while the Sarvāstivādins assign them to a group not connected with matter or mind. Thus homogeneity, decay, vitality and birth figure as distinct *dharma*s.²¹ Each *dharma* is ultimate; the sense-organs are composed of atoms, but every *caḥṣurindriyaparamāṇu* is homogeneous, so that all together they cons-

21: McGovern. *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 104 ff.

titude but one factor. The *dharma* therefore is quite different from a composite thing like the human body, which contains the four *mahābhūtas*, and the sense-organ-atoms and the sense-object-atoms, for the doctrine treats sense-objects as material in the same measure as the sense-organs. The lists of *dharmas* therefore come to be efforts, confused and unsatisfactory, to define ultimate entities which however are admittedly very deep and mysterious. Nothing in reality, it seems, was gained in clearness of understanding by denying that *dharmas* were substances; regarded as qualities which were the only reality they remained wholly unintelligible just as much as substances.

The purely arbitrary character of the whole construction became aggravated when the doctrine of atoms was taken over, presumably from the Vaiśeṣika school. The adaptation was late, for the early Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma does not accept it, and it appears only in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and in works later than that. Evidently it gained popularity rapidly, for the *Abhidharmahrdaya*, translated into Chinese in the 3rd century, contains the theory in a developed form, and it is prominent in Vasubandhu and accepted by the earlier Yogācārins, though it was rejected by Dignāga as inconsistent with idealism. The Sarvāstivādins admit fourteen kinds of atoms, five for the sense-organs, five for the sense-objects, and four for the *mahābhūtas*. But in a sense the *mahābhūta* atoms are primary, for each of the atoms of the sense-organs and objects originates owing to atoms of the *mahābhūtas*; and is sustained by them, each atom having with it one atom of each of the *mahābhūtas*. The atoms of the latter, however, are not permanent; like all else, they pass through the cycle of origination, continuance, decay, and destruction on which follows a like process. It is however only by grouping of the atoms that are formed the molecules of which the material universe consists.²² All this speculation is without scientific basis and is naturally unedifying, leading merely to verbal ingenuity.

What lies at the basis of these doctrines? If we are to accept the view of Professor Przyłuski²³ we are to suppose that the first disciples of Śākyamuni had little taste for pure speculation. The existence of the

22 McGovern, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp 125 ff.

23 *Journal of Theological Studies*, XXXV, 346 ff.

Questions of Milinda suggests that the spirit of the sons of the Sākya was sharpened by contact with Greek rhetoricians. But the Buddhist philosophy was essentially original. They seem to have started from a system analogous to Pythagorean arithmology. At first they believed in the reality of numbers, a belief which led them to deny all substances. Everything is in an incessant flux; only the number of elements is constant. In this way appearances go on existing; in this way the illusion of a personal ego endures. There is no essential difference between spirit and matter. The mind and the objects of the senses are formed of elements joined by the law of numbers, a fixed number of which is necessary to form a material of a psychic molecule. A group of these aggregates gives the illusion of an ego and of a sensible thing; but nothing is permanent. All the component parts are dissolved and re-composed again incessantly. There is neither an immortal soul, nor a personality, nor a mind. The very Buddhas are not excepted; their being is illusive, temporal, and unreal.

The sketch of Buddhist views is most interesting, but the prominence given to the idea of number seems not to be borne out by our texts. No doubt there are various indications of the importance attached to numbers, and the numerical enumerations of the Pāli texts attest the fascination, numbers exerted on early thought. But that the philosophy was really based on anything like the Pythagorean arithmology must remain a speculation which, on the whole, seems to have little to commend it.

Another view²⁴ presents itself in the claim that the *dharmas* are infra-atomic dynamic unities of forces or elements whose interdependence according to causal laws constitutes the illusive objects of our phenomenal life. It is suggested that we may seek for their prototypes in the Sāṃkhya system, which before Buddhism held the idea of *anātman*. It is true that the Hindus regard Sāṃkhya and Buddhism as sharply contrasted. But this is because in the Sāṃkhya all is eternal, since it represents the permutations of unchanging matter; though the manifestations are constantly changing (*nityapariṇāmin*), they remain one in their material cause (*kāraṇāvasthāyām*). In Buddhism, on the

other hand, there is no eternal matter, but momentary *dharmas* appearing in functional interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*). The antithesis is explained, because here as always the history of philosophy evolves by contrasts. Every new departure starts in opposition to reigning ideas, but it creates the new on the basis of the old. The Buddhist produces the new doctrine of *pratītyasamutpāda*, which negatives the *pariṇāma-vāda* of the Sāṃkhya, but it builds up the doctrine of *dharmas* on the basis of the Sāṃkhya *guṇas*. The aim of the *guṇa*-theory, whatever its origin, is to bridge the gulf between mind and matter. A physical phenomenon and a mental one are equally composed out of minutest infra-atomic quanta of three different stuffs or forces, the Intelligence (or nervous stuff), Energy-stuff and Inertia-stuff. The first is predominant in a mental phenomenon, the last in a material one. Energy is being constantly liberated and absorbed; there is therefore no stability, all is instantaneous. But, though being momentary flashes of instantaneous infra-atomic quanta charged with some energy, the *guṇas* and the phenomena composed of them are said to be ubiquitous and eternal (*vibhva, nitya*), for they are eternal in their causal or potential condition as absorbed in an eternal primordial matter. When in this early period of Indian philosophy the *guṇa*-theory was being philosophically founded, it is more than probable that the atomic structure of matter was being discussed. It is probable that at that early period there was a division of opinion. The Jain and some pre-Vaiśeṣika system joined the materialists, and began to assume indivisible atoms, whereas the Sāṃkhyas and some pre-Buddhistic philosophers decided for infinite divisibility. Although later on the Buddhists assume the existence of atoms, they deny their indivisibility. Their atoms, therefore, are not atoms at all, they are *dharmas*, qualities without any stuff. The character of the atoms follows from the nature of the *mahābhūtas*, which, though called earth, water, fire, and air, are really the four forces of repulsion, attraction, heat, and motion. The Buddhists indeed defined matter as merely the phenomenon of resistance. All realisable ideas, the Hīnayāna and Sarvāstivādins at this early date held, were either concrete data of sense (*bāhyāyatana*) or concrete data of invalid consciousness (*abhyantarāyatana*). Both categories, the outward and the inward data, were called *dharmas*, non-substances, absolute

qualities. This designation aimed at bridging over the gulf between matter and mind, not by assuming an equal composition, but by assuming their parallelism, their equal status. This psycho-physical parallelism was natural, because according to the Buddhist theory of causality there is a general parallelism between all elements of existence.

The theory that the *dharmas* are borrowed from the *guṇas* does not appear to rest on anything more solid than this general comparison, which seems sadly lacking in cogency. The assertions regarding the nature of the Sāṃkhya *guṇas* seem to lack any foundation whatever as regards any possible early form of Sāṃkhya, and only an early Sāṃkhya is in point. The names of the *guṇas* are sufficient warning that they do not represent in their early stage anything of the kind stated, and the hypothesis that their purpose is to bridge the gulf between matter and mind seems to be wholly without foundation. To reconstruct Sāṃkhya in a form which the early Sāṃkhya texts wholly ignore²⁵ and to claim that as the source of Buddhism is not a very convincing argument. The point regarding atoms is an interesting note of the new methods of argumentation. We are told that it is more than probable that the atomic structure of matter must have been discussed at the period when the *guṇa*-theory was being philosophically founded. But Professor Jacobi, whose evidence as a convinced adherent of the influence of Sāṃkhya on Buddhism,²⁶ is above suspicion of bias, was convinced that the Sāṃkhya was not atomistic in its early days, and calls attention to the silence of the Pāli Suttas and the denial of atomism by the Vedānta, the Mahāyānists and the Sāṃkhya. This denial, it is said, is aimed at the eternal atoms of the Vaiśeṣika and does not refer to those systems which have a dynamic or semi-dynamic theory of matter. The *tanmātras* are evidently also some kind of atoms, or infra-atoms. Neither of these assertions is supported by any evidence whatever. Atomism is a perfectly definite conception which is quite different from the *tanmātras*. The effort to find in the *guṇas* a real predecessor of the *dharmas* seems to be wholly unsound, except in the

25 Cf. Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda*, II, 548.

26 Cf. Keith, *Sāṃkhya System* (2nd ed.). pp. 23 ff.; *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 140 ff.

generic sense that every earlier philosophical idea has some effect in moulding the concepts of later philosophy.

The concept of *dharma*, it has been justly remarked,²⁷ bears obvious traces of reduction from something more concrete; it is not without anthropomorphic traits such as those which affect the structure of the picture of the *ātman* itself. It has symptoms of an individual being whose concrete character has as far as possible been reduced. But, like mere man, *dharma* has origination, duration, death, and in serving the function of conditioning other *dharmas* it performs its business (*kāritva*). The idea of *dharmas* as purely separate beings is quite irreconcilable with their conditioned character and with the fact that they serve to condition other *dharmas*. The fact that any *dharma* conditions another is a direct negation of separation; conditioning is manifestly impossible save in a structure. It is impossible to form any intelligible conception of the *dharmas*, as in his own way Vasubandhu admitted. It seems probable enough that those authorities are right who hold that the Buddhists did not distinguish physical and psychical. The *dharmas* may in their ultimate origin have traits of souls deprived of all concrete character; any real assurance²⁸ as to their character seems impossible, and their philosophical importance is historical only.

The view that the *sukāryavāda* belongs to the early Sāṃkhya has recently been assailed.²⁹ The idea of causality in the Sāṃkhya is asserted to have developed in a different manner. The oldest idea of cause is that of the hidden being, *prakṛti*, and the oldest theory of a dynamic is the conception of a change in a lasting substance, *vikāra*, seen in the conception of *tattvavikāra*, the twenty five principles. The further development of this theory lay not in the Sāṃkhya school itself but in a philosophical debate which has its roots in the *Ṛgveda* itself. While in the beginning it turned on the being or non-being of the cause, it

27 Liebenthal, *Satkārya in der Darstellung seiner buddhistischen Gegner*, p. 11.

28 Cf. Geiger, *Pāli Dhamma*, pp. 8, 9 with Schayer, *Archiv Orientalní*, VII, 129-130.

29 Liebenthal, *Satkārya*, pp. 150, 151, and 42 ff. There are difficulties but the view deserves consideration.

appears that Vārṣagaṇya provided an answer to the question of the mode of being of the product. His opponents were Hinayāna Buddhists. Since the formulation of Sāṃkhya doctrines in the *Nyāyabhāṣya* agrees with Vārṣagaṇya's opinions, it is to be conjectured that Vārṣagaṇya counted at that period as the typical Sāṃkhya teacher. A new development of the discussion of origins is found in the Śālistambasūtra and in Nāgārjuna. Here the issue is the likeness or unlikeness of the product with its source. The Sāṃkhya is credited with the belief in the origin of like from like. This points to the source of the *satkārya* doctrine, which perhaps is first formulated in the *Sāṃkhyakaumudī*, and which asserts that the product exists in substance (*svabhāvataḥ*), though unseen (*śaktitah*) in the source. The *pariṇāma-vāda*, it is suggested, was not originally part of the Sāṃkhya doctrine. Apart from the *tattvapariṇāma*, it plays in the *Sāṃkhyakaumudī* only a minor rôle in the *guṇapariṇāma* and the *guṇapariṇāma-viśeṣa*. It is clear that if this view is correct, and *satkārya* was not a doctrine of the older Sāṃkhya, it is impossible to accept as correct the doctrine that the Sarvāstivādins adopted their doctrine from the original Sāṃkhya, and the suggestion that the doctrine of momentary universal change originated in the Sāṃkhya system loses any little possibility it had.

It remains to add that the attribution³⁰ to early Buddhism of an extraordinarily important classification of mental phenomena in four groups: feeling, ideas, will, and pure sensation, is misleading. The first obvious criticism is that these four groups are placed side by side with *rūpa*, instead of being opposed as one whole group with four subdivisions to *rūpa*; if they had been clearly felt as mental as distinguished from physical, such a distinction would necessarily have been made, for it is far more fundamental than the distinctions between the four other categories. Secondly, to hold that the early Buddhists distinguished in the modern style between feeling, ideas, will, and pure sensation is to read into what is said modern conceptions, just as the *guṇas* and the *dharmas* are reinterpreted in terms of modern scientific conceptions, which were not and could not be present to the minds of

those who used them. *Vedanā* doubtless is feeling, but how little its character was clearly understood is shown by the doctrine of neutral feeling which, it is said, has knowledge as pleasant, not knowing as painful.³¹ *Saññā* again includes in the Pāli texts cognitive assimilation on occasion of sense and cognitive assimilation by way of naming, or awareness with recognition, expressed in naming. In the view of the Sarvāstivādins and the Yogācārins, on the other hand, the conceptual aspect is more marked. *Saṅkhārā* is not merely volitional cognition (*cetanā*) but includes 51 other factors which are rather co-efficients in any conscious state than pre-eminently active or constructive functionings.³² The nature of Vasubandhu's interest in pure psychology can be judged from his rejection of the effort seen in the *Samyuktāgama* to restrict the category to volitional aspects. The other factors must not be excluded, because, if this were done, the *caitasikas* and the *cittaviprayukta dharmas* would not fall under any of the *skandhas*, and would be independent of suffering and the cause of suffering, and hence could not be cut off and could not be known. Complete analysis alone allows of suffering being brought to an end; hence the other factors must be included in the *skandha*.³³ *Vīññāṇa* again is defined early as that which is aware of difference of sensations e.g., tastes, thus according precisely with *saññā* which in the same text figures as discriminating colours. In the *Majjhima Nikāya* we find *vīññāṇa* as consciousness of what is pleasant, painful and neither; *vedanā* figures in the same functioning and *saññā* with colour sensations, and the dialogue declines to assert any essential difference between the three, despite the fact that they figure as distinct *skandhas*. More generally, *vīññāṇa* appears as awareness, and a friendly critic admits that it is very difficult to understand how the generic term was left to stand as on a footing of equality with the preceding three *skandhas*.³⁴ The suggestion is made that we may explain this lack of proper classification by the absence of a Buddhist logic of division, and by the intensely prac-

31 *Majjhima Nikāya*, I, 303.

32 Mrs. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Psychology*, pp. 51, 52.

33 McGovern, *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 87.

34 Mrs. Rhys Davids, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

tical aim of the psychology to negate the danger of the belief in a substantial consciousness. Later Buddhism recognised the illogical form of the division, and accepted *viññāna* as consciousness and ranked the other three as *cāitasika*, mental properties, bound up with *viññāna* or *citta*. The mere order of the *skandhas* shows how unscientific early Buddhism was; Buddhaghosa and Nāgārjuna had to explain *viññāna* immediately after *rūpa* to make any intelligible scheme, and a glance at the quaint reasons given in the *Abhidharmakośa*³⁵ for the traditional order dispels any belief in real anticipation of Bertrand Russell or Bergson, whatever be the value of their systems. The palpable fact is that Buddhism was essentially a *mārga*, and purely scientific psychology is not to be expected therein nor is it to be found. We may use modern philosophy to illustrate ideas which we think we should find in the Buddhist texts, but it must be remembered that modern views are the product of definitely modern scientific advances, and, while they can be superimposed on Buddhist doctrines, they do not express what the Buddhists thought. It does no harm no doubt to reinterpret Buddhism in modern guise, but it should be recognised that historically this is not what Buddhists held.

Nor can it be said that the new interpretation makes the Buddhist standpoint any clearer. It may be difficult to understand the Buddhist doctrine of the world, but it is not fair to ascribe to the Buddha the concept of evanescent entities in beginningless commotion, steering to quiescence and annihilation, because that may be a modern interpretation of the universe. The early Buddhist doctrine of the chain of causality³⁶ need not be ascribed to the Buddha, but it certainly was early current, and it has no relation whatever to the philosophical doctrine suggested as his. What is essential is that it reveals among the early Buddhists thoughts of a type completely different from the theory now ascribed to the Buddha, but thoughts which, unlike that theory, are easily intelligible in their relation to Indian thought both before and after. Nothing is more unhistorical than to read the minds

³⁵ McGovern, *op. cit.*, pp. 93, 94.

³⁶ McGovern, *op. cit.*, pp. 169 ff., La Vallée Poussin, *Théorie des douze causes* (1913); Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 97 ff.

of early Indian thinkers as if they were products of the twentieth century.

In the case of the *guṇas* it is well to remember the actual facts as attested by the actual philosophical literature, and to compare it with the description given of them as "infra-atomic quanta of three different energies whose interplay produces the phenomenal world, both physical and mental."³⁷ The facts, of course, with regard to the *guṇas* are summed up with his usual accuracy by Professor S. N. Dasgupta in his *History of Indian Philosophy*;³⁸ "an important change in the Sāṃkhya doctrine seems to have been introduced by Vijñāna Bhikṣu (16th century A.D.) by his treatment of *guṇas* as types of reals. I have myself accepted this interpretation of Sāṃkhya as the most rational and philosophical one, and have therefore followed it in giving a connected system of the accepted Kapila and the Pātañjala school of Sāṃkhya. But it must be pointed out that originally the notion of *guṇas* was applied to different types of good and bad mental states, and then they were supposed in some mysterious way by mutual increase and decrease to form the objective world on the one hand and the totality of human psychosis on the other." This is undoubtedly a perfectly fair account of the original nature of the *guṇas*, and it completely destroys the attempt to make them into infra-atomic quanta of energies.

Between the Sāṃkhya and Buddhism there are many essential distinctions. Dr. Nalinaksha Dutt³⁹ has justly pointed out that the result of attaching too much importance to the influence of Sāṃkhya on Buddhism has been the misinterpretation of Nirvāṇa as an eternal state of death, a lifeless reality corresponding to the undifferentiated matter (*prakṛti*) of Sāṃkhya. Nirvāṇa then is the same as the five *skandhas* in their original undifferentiated state. Dr. Dutt justly points out that this is unsupported by the canonical as well as the non-canonical texts. Both the Theravādins and the Sarvāstivādins are emphatic in their statement that a being once constituted out of

37 *IHQ.*, X, 749.

38 i. 221, 222.

39 *Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, pp. 163, 164.

the seventy-two elements or five *khandhas* passes through innumerable existences until, by the removal of Avidyā, he enters into the *Asaṃskṛtadhātu* or *Nirvāṇa*, which is an element existing by itself. But in the *Sāṃkhya* the emancipation of any being consists in the realisation of the fact that *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* remain apart, and not by his passing from the constituted to the unconstituted state. In *Sāṃkhya* the emancipated being is one of the innumerable *Puruṣas* while in Buddhism he is after death indistinguishable from *Nirvāṇa*. The agreement between *Sāṃkhya* and early Buddhism lies in the fact that the undifferentiated matter of *Sāṃkhya* corresponds in its differentiated form to the five *khandhas* and not to *Nirvāṇa* as inferred by Prof. Stcherbatsky. If an analogue for *Nirvāṇa* be sought for in *Sāṃkhya*, we may say that it could have been found in *Puruṣa* if the innumerable *Puruṣas* were one *Asaṃskṛtadhātu*.

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