

Vol 4 Issue 3 Sept 2014

ISSN No :2231-5063

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

Golden Research Thoughts Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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GRT THE CONCEPT OF REBIRTH AS EXPOUNDED IN BUDDHISM

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Abstract:--Antarabhava (next life) is the term used in Pali and Sanskrit to denote and intermediary state between death and rebirth. Though there is no definite answer regarding such a state in the Theravada tradition, Mahayana seem to accept this concept.

The paticcasamuppada (Dependent Origination) of 12 links refers to the causal fact of rebirth in the following terms:-

Dependent on morally responsive activity (which runs along memory lanes) (rebirth) consciousness arises. Dependent on (rebirth-) consciousness sentient matter arises (in the mother's womb). Dependent on craving, clinging (to the five personality factors) takes place. Dependent on clinging (to the five personality factors) the process of becoming/ growth (when the fetus is normally ready) birth take place. Thus, Buddhism teaches the man continues to be reborn over and over again in this cyclic causal process called Samsara.

Keywords:Rebirth, punabhava, Antarabhava, incarnation and next lives.

INTRODUCTION

The Buddhist doctrine of liberation (vimutti) derives its meaning and significance primarily from its teaching concerning the inevitability of a cyclic process of suffering arising from certain identifiable causal conditions in a repeated series of birth and death. The words of exultation of the Buddha which he uttered immediately after attaining enlightenment implies that the extinction he was seeking from suffering that had been continuously reproduced in a cyclic process of rebirth into countless lives (Anekajati Samsaram). As stated in the Buddhist scriptures, it was the discovery of the mechanism that brought about such a re-becoming process involving the numerous anxieties and hazards of existence, and the successful dismantling of that mechanism that led the Buddha to utter these words of exultation of the Buddha.

The ultimate goal of Buddhism, and the way of life recommended in order to attain it would lose much not considered as a cardinal tenet of the system. Hence, the doctrine of rebirth has played as a significant role in Buddhism as the concept of God in monotheistic religions.

Rebirth

Many Buddhists tend to accept rebirth as a part of their religious faith. They rely on traditional belief and religious scriptures to reinforce their acceptance of rebirth. Many people are reluctant to accept rebirth because they cannot understand it or because they do not remember their previous birth. Just because they cannot understand or remember, their previous life is not a reasonable argument.

Readers of English-language journals and books in the world have recently been following with interest a controversy that has flared up in one of them, on the issue of whether the Buddha taught rebirth or not. To a Buddhist

it must be a matter of astonishment that such a dispute could arise-not because rebirth is a dogma of Buddhism but because without it Buddhism itself would have no meaning. The Buddha taught the Dhamma for the ending of suffering. If suffering automatically come to an end it is pointless to commit oneself to a rigorous system of self – discipline and purification, such as Buddhism calls for, in order to free oneself from suffering.

Here we have to explain what death is according to Buddhism. We have seen earlier that a being is nothing but a combination of physical and mental forces or energies. What we call death is the total non-functioning of the physical body. Do all these forces and energies stop altogether with the non-functioning of the body? Buddhism says 'No'. Will, volition, desire, thirst to exist, to continue, to become more and more, is a tremendous force that moves whole lives, whole existences, that even moves the whole world. This is the greatest force, the greatest energy in the world. According to Buddhism, this force does not stop with the non-functioning of the body, which is death; but it continues

Now, another question arises; if there is no permanent, unchanging entity or substance like self or Soul (atman), what is it that can re-exist or be reborn after death? Before we go on to life after death, let us consider what this life is, and how it continues now. What we call life, as we have so often repeated, is the combination of the Five Aggregates, a combination of physical and mental energies. These are constantly changing; they do not remain the same for two consecutive moments. Every moment they are born and they die. 'When the Aggregates arise, decay and die, O Bhikkhu, every moment you are born, decay and die.'

Thus, even now during this lifetime, every moment we are born and die, but we continue. If we can understand that in this life we can continue without a permanent, unchanging substance like self or Soul, why cannot we understand that those forces themselves can continue without a Self or a Soul behind them after the non-functioning of the body? In a child all the physical, mental and intellectual faculties are tender and weak, but they have within them the potentiality of producing a full-grown man. Physical and mental energies, which constitute the so-called being, have within themselves the power to take a new form, and grow gradually and gather force to the full.

As there is no permanent, unchanging substance, nothing passes from one moment to the next. So quite obviously, nothing permanent or unchanging can pass on to the next. It is a series that continues unbroken, but changes every moment. The series is, really speaking, nothing but movement. It is like a flame that burns through the night: it is not the same flame nor is it another. A child grows up to be a man of sixty. Certainly, the man of sixty is not the same as the child of sixty years ago, nor is he another person. Similarly, a person who dies here and is reborn elsewhere is neither the same person, nor another.

It is the continuity of the same series. The difference between death and birth is only a thought-moment: the last thought-moment in this life, which, in fact, is the continuity of the same series. During this life itself, too, one thought-moment conditions the next thought-moment. Moreover, over-powered by many mental hindrances, previous outshone by

HOW REBIRTH TAKES PLACE

Every birth is conditioned by a past good or bad kamma (action) which predominates. Our forms are only the outward manifestation of the invisible kammic force, and this force carries with it all our characteristics, which usually lie latent, but may rise to the surface at unexpected moments. The death of a person is merely the temporary end of a temporary phenomenon, the present form perishing and another taking its place in accordance with the thought that was most powerful at the death moment. One unit of consciousness perishes only to give birth to another, persistently flowing on like a river. When a person is about to die, no renewed physical function recurs as from the seventeenth thought moment reckoned backwards from the point of death. The material qualities of the body, which are produced by kamma, temperature, mind, and nutriment from food, arise no more, this critical stage being comparable to the flickering of a lamp just before it becomes extinguished.

Now to this dying man one of three things appear very vividly before his mind's eye, namely, kamma, (a kamma that is to produce rebirth-linking in the next existence) kamma nimitta (a sign of kamma, that is, a form, etc., that had been apprehended previously at the time of the performing the kamma or something that was instrumental in performing the kamma) or gati nimitta (a sign of destiny, that is to be obtained and experienced in the immediately following existence). By kamma is meant some action of his, whether good or bad; and if it is his weighty kamma,

which is one of the four kinds of kamma, or action, that condition the future birth, such weighty kamma will certainly produce results in this life or the next.

Weighty kamma can be good or bad; such a thing killing, which is bad, especially so in the case of the most serious crimes involving matricide, patricide, the murder of an Arahanta or the mere wounding even of a Buddha. If a dying man has no such weighty kamma as the object of his dying thought he may take an action, kamma, done immediately prior to the death moment; this is known as Asnna, death proximate kamma. Owing to the great part it plays in determining the future birth, much importance is attached to the type of object of the final dying thought moment; and the custom of reminding the dying man of his good deeds, and making him do good deeds on his death-bed, still prevail in Burma and other Buddhist countries.

Moreover, Buddhism teaches that there are (31) state of existence on which beings are reborn, according to their kamma, when they die to this, their present human state, and, among these (31) states of existence, there are (4) miserable planes of existence called the “ lower Worlds” of misery. There are:

- 1.The animal world (tirachana- yoni);
- 2.The ghost- worlds (peta- yoni);
- 3.The Demon- world (Asura- yoni); and
- 4.The Hells, (Niraya), lit, 'the Downward path', or the nether world,

usually translate as “ hell”. These (4) state are also referred to as the “Downfall.” According to the Buddhist Doctrine of impermanence (Anicca), the dominate all life and all things, the hells too, like the heavens, are not eternal. In other word, one does not live and suffer in hell forever. That might be a consolation to some of us. When the wholesome or unwholesome kamma, that is to say, when the cumulative retributive resultant of effects, of the good and the bad we have done in the past from time to time, which caused the respective birth onto one or the other state is exhausted, there necessarily will follow death and rebirth again onto another state, according to, as I said, one's past stored-up good and bad kamma.

And then, one can be reborn at the happy states (sugati) concerning with their kamma good or bad. There are six Deva realms and together with the human plane of existence, we have what: are called the (7) happy States. There is nothing to be said about the human plane of existence, except to add that whatever condition into which one may be born, - whether rich or poor, high or low, ugly or pretty, influential or uninfluential, intelligent, or unintelligent as it is in other region-birth here on the human plane too, is due to one's own past good and bad actions. Conclusion This force, called craving, desire, volition, thirst to live, does not end with the non-functioning of the body but continues to manifest itself in another form, which the co-operation of existing cosmic energies, producing re-existence which is called rebirth. As long as there is thirst in the man to be and become, the cycle of continuity (samsara) goes on. It can stop only when its driving force, this 'thirst', is cut off through wisdom, which sees Reality, Truth, and Nirvana.

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