

The Theory of 'Dependent Origination' in its Incipient Stage

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It has traditionally been believed that the theory of Dependent Origination is represented typically in the formula of the Twelve Links (*Dvādaśāṅgika pratītyasamutpāda*). But when we investigate into scriptures of early Buddhism as preserved in the Pali Nikāyas and their corresponding Chinese versions, we come across various formulas which embody the idea of Dependent Origination. It is likely that the formula of the Twelve Links was formed in later stages of the development of early Buddhism. In the following we are going to point out some pre-formula statements of the idea of Dependent Origination, as are noticed in early Buddhist scriptures.

I. The Stage Before the Formation of the Theory of Dependent Origination.

Among various scriptures of early Buddhism the *Suttanipāta* is regarded as the oldest one by scholars, and among the various sections of this text the Pārāyana-vagga, the last section, seems to have been composed earliest.¹

In the *Suttanipāta* 'the one who sees *paṭiccasamuppāda*' is praised only once² in the Gāthā sections, but it is not clear what it means. In the *Suttanipāta* there is no mention of the Twelve-Link Dependent Origination, and in the Pārāyana-vagga only the idea in its incipient stage is cursorily mentioned. Early Buddhists in the first stage described the state in which human beings are suffering, as were noticed by them.

'The world is shrouded by ignorance (*avijjā*).

On account of avarice (*veviccha*) and sloth (*pamāda*) it doesn't shine.

I call cravings (*jappā*) defilement (*abhilepana*.)

Suffering (*dukkha*) is the great danger of the world.'²

In this verse the term 'world' (*loka*) means 'human beings' collectively. In this case the relationship among ignorance (*avijjā*), avarice (*veviccha*), sloth (*pamāda*), cravings (*jappā*), defilement (*abhilepana*) and suffering (*dukkha*) is not noticed, nor discussed. However, if we put them in due order, we can get an approximation to some formulas of Dependent Origination. They didn't want to discuss their mutual relations at the earliest stage. This represents the stage before the formation of the theory of Dependent Origination.

The theory of Dependent Origination sets forth to explain how we can conquer ageing, sickness, death etc. of human beings. But Buddhists of the

earliest stage of early Buddhism did not try to demonstrate it theoretically, but set forth their own experience as such:

‘The person, having considered various things in the world, he for whom there is no wavering anywhere in the world, who is calm without the smoke of passions, free from tremor, free from desire, . . . he has crossed over birth and ageing, so I say.’³

To the entreaty by the youth (*māṇava*) Dhotaka: ‘Having compassion on me, teach me the truth of seclusion (from worldly defilements)’, Gotama the Buddha taught:

‘I will explain “peace” (*santi*) to you: if a man, in this visible world, here and now, without relying upon any conventional instruction, has understood it, and behaves himself watchfully, he will overcome entanglements in secular life.’⁴

and continued:

‘Whatever you know watchfully — above, below, across and in the middle — knowing this to be entanglements in the world, you should not thirst for transient mundane existence.’⁵

Here we can locate the relation of founding one upon the other. It might be formulated as follows:

sufferings or defilements <— entanglements in the world (*loke visattikā*) <— Thirsting for transient mundane existence (*bhavābhavāya taṇhā*) <—
[not-knowing (implied, for the other items can be overcome only by knowing watchfully).]

Here we can say that the main framework of later theories of Dependent Origination is ready, or existing latently. (This framework corresponds to:

jarāmaraṇa <— bhava <— upādāna <— taṇhā <— avidyā

according to later phraseology as can be noticed in the prose sections of the *Nikāyas*.)

II. The Theory of Dependent Origination in the Process of Formation.

The theory of Dependent Origination in its earliest phase should be sought for in the earliest portions of the *Suttanipāta*, although we don't preclude other scriptures (especially Gāthā portions) where we can find other forms of the idea in formation. One of the earliest forms of Dependent Origination is set forth in one portion of the Aṭṭhaka-vagga of the *Suttanipāta*. There the theory is not set forth in a systematized way, each link (or item) in the same pattern, as in the case of the Twelve Link Dependent Origination, but rather in a crude, disorderly form, which betrays its primitive character. The passage runs as follows:

'Wherefrom have come out strifes, disputes, lamentations, sorrows, together with envy, arrogance, conceits and slandering? Wherefrom have they come out? Please, explain it.'⁶ 'From dear objects (*piya*) spring up strifes, disputes, lamentations, sorrows, together with envy, arrogance and conceit, together with slandering.

Strifes and disputes are mixed with envy;
slandering can be found in all sorts of disputes.'⁷

'Being conditioned by what do dear things originate in the world?
(Being conditioned by what) do the covetousness (*lobha*) that prevails in the world originate?

Being conditioned by what do the desires and their fulfilments originate that are (of consequence) for future life of a man (after death)?'

'The dear things and also the covetousness that prevails in the world originate, being conditioned by instinctive will (*chanda*);'⁸

The desires and their fulfilments that are (of consequence) for future life (after death) originate being conditioned by it'.

'Being conditioned by what does instinctive will (*chanda*) in the world originate?

From what have (metaphysical) decisive opinions (*vinicchaya*) originated?

And also, anger, falsehood, doubt, and the teachings set forth by a recluse, from what have they originated?'

'What they call "pleasant"¹⁰ and "unpleasant" in the world — being based upon that, instinctive will (*chanda*) originates.

Having seen decay and origination in material things, a person forms a (metaphysical) decisive opinion (attached to dear things) in the world.'

'Anger, falsehood, and doubt — these things (appear), when there is duality¹¹ (of "pleasant" and "unpleasant" and so on).¹²

A person who has doubts should learn in the path of knowledge.

Having known this (truth), the recluse has set forth the teachings.'

'Being conditioned by what do "pleasant" and "unpleasant" originate?'

By the absence of what (*kasmiṃ asante*) do these not originate? Being conditioned by that we (notice) “decay” and “origination.” Explain me this truth!

“pleasant” (*sāta*) and “unpleasant” (*asāta*) originate being conditioned by touch (*phassa*).

When there is no touch, these (“pleasant” and “unpleasant”) do not originate.

“decay” and “origination” and the condition by which they appear — I explain you this truth.’

Being conditioned by what does touch originate in the world?

Wherefrom have “possessions” (*pariggahā*) arisen?

By the absence of what does “selfishness” (*mamatta*) not exist?

By the cessation of what do “touches” (*phassā*) not touch?

‘Depending upon name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*), touch exists. Possessions (*pariggahāni*)¹³ originate being caused by desire (*icchā*).

When there is no desire, there does not exist selfishness (*mamatta*).

By the cessation of form (*rūpa*) touches (*phassā*) don’t touch.’

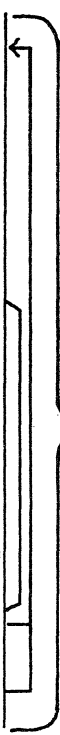
‘At what stage of one’s practice does form cease to exist? Or, how is it that “pleasant” and “unpleasant” disappear? Tell me how they disappear. I should like to know it, Such a thought occurred to me.’

‘Not being with consciousness, nor being with wrong consciousness, not being without consciousness, nor being with consciousness disappeared — to the person who has practised in this way, form (*rūpa*) disappears,

for the discrimination about the phenomenal world (*papañca*) is conditioned by ideation (*saññā*).’

The contents of the above-cited sentences seem to be rather disorderly, being restricted by the poetical form of the text. But they represent the relationships of grounding or conditioning one or several items, by other items, and we can summarize them as are mentioned in the following table:

kalaha, vivāda, parideva, soka, macchara, māna, atimāna, pesuna



samparāyāya āsā, niṭṭha, lobha

(nidāna)

vinicchaya

rūpesu vibhavo bhavo ca

(nidāna)

piya

... (nidāna)

chanda

... (nidāna)

sāta, asāta

... (nidāna)

phassa

... (pañicca)

papañcasamkhā = nāma, rūpa

... (nidāna)

saññā

... (upanissāya)

kodha, mosavajja, kathamkathā, etc.

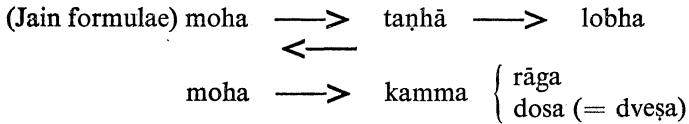
pariggaha, mamatta

... (nidāna)

icchā

It is likely that in this case such words as *nidāna*, *paṭicca*, *upanissāya*, which have been controversial among scholars, meant more or less the same relation.

It is interesting to notice that in Jain canonical literature¹⁴ we find explanations of the idea similar to the Buddhist Dependent Origination as is found in the above-cited passage.



It is likely that this Buddhist idea also developed from among the spiritual atmosphere of recluses including Jain and Ājīvika ascetics.

When we examine the above-mentioned table, we can draw out some conclusions:

(1) Some of the Twelve Links of later days are mentioned here. But most of them are mentioned under different names, and their explanations are disorderly, not systematized. This means that they represent the stage prior to the formation of the Twelve Link theory. Some correspondences can be pointed out.

Terms in the above-cited passage

Terms in the ordinary, traditional
Twelve Link theory

kalaha, vivāda, etc.

piya

chanda

sāta, asāta

phassa

nāmañ ca rūpañ ca

[*jāti, jarāmaraṇa*] *bhava*

upādāna

taṇhā

vedanā

phassa

saḷāyatana

nāmarūpa

In the Twelve Link theory the transient aspects of human existence are comprehended as 'birth' (*jāti*) and 'ageing and death' (*jarāmaraṇa*). This gives us the impression of being contemplative and resignative, fit for monastic life. On the other hand, to comprehend our human existence as 'strifes, disputes, lamentations, sorrows, envy, arrogance, conceits and slandering' is quite based upon human actuality. Wording is alive. We can feel body smell of human beings. It means that Buddhism originally started from reflection upon actual human existence.

(2) In the above-mentioned order of grounding, the concept of 'name and form' which Buddhists inherited from Upaniṣads¹⁵ is grounded on 'ideation' (*saññā*). But there was another move of replacing 'ideation' with 'cognition' (*viññāṇa*). In another poem it is said as follows:

'By the cessation of cognition Name and Form disappear completely.'
'nāmañ ca rūpañ ca asesam uparujjhati, viññāṇassa nirodhena.'¹⁶

This represents one step of approach to the Twelve Link theory.

(3) Among the items in the theory of Dependent Origination cited above Ignorance (*avijjā*) is not mentioned as an independent principle. But in another passage there is the following phrase:

'Without knowing one makes attachment' (*aviditvā upādhiṃ karoti*).¹⁷

Here we can find the move in its embryonic stage to put Ignorance as an independent principle.

On the other hand, 'deliverance by knowledge' (*aññāvimokkha*) and 'splitting up of Ignorance' (*avijjāya pabhedanaṃ*) also are discussed, without any relation to the theory of Dependent Origination.¹⁸

Although Buddhism had a sort of intellectualistic tendency from the beginning, it was in a little later stage of development that Buddhists came to be conscious of Ignorance as the fundamental principle of mundane human existence as is clearly represented in the Twelve Link theory.

(4) The author of the above-mentioned passage already used the formula: 'When there is A, there is B. When there does not exist A, there does not exist B.'¹⁹ This is a generalized form of the formula which was implied in other passages of the scriptures.²⁰ This formula developed, and finally the well-known phrase: *imasmīṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imass' uppādā idaṃ uppajjati, imasmīṃ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati* came to be formulated. This formula is most frequently set forth in connection with the Twelve Link theory²¹, but there are other cases also which are not necessarily so²². Anyhow, the above-cited theory of Dependent Origination represents the idea of the earliest stage.

NOTES

- 1 We can sort out the older and newer portions in each corpus of the Pali scriptures. The earlier portions of the Pali scriptures have been classified in several groups by scholars according to their chronological order. According to recent studies the Pārāyana-vagga of the *Suttanipāta* seems to be the oldest one. Hajime Nakamura: A Critical Survey of Early Buddhism (I), *Bukkyō Kenkyū* (Buddhist Studies), No. 3, Hamamatsu: Japan: August 1973, pp. 68-88 (in English).
- 2 *Suttanipāta*, 1033.
- 3 *Suttanipāta*, 1048.
- 4 *Suttanipāta*, 1065 f. Cf. *ibid.*, 1052 f.
- 5 The word *bhavābhava* should be interpreted as a reduplication of *bhava*, in the same way as *calācala* is a reduplication of *cala*. Cf. Monier-Williams: *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *calācala*; Vidhusekhara Bhattacharyya: *The Āgama-śāstra*, p. 46; Hajime Nakamura: *Vedānta Tetsugaku no Hatten* (The Development of Vedānta Philosophy) (Tokyo: Iwanami Press, 1955), p. 362.
- 6 *Suttanipāta*, p. 862-874. This passage corresponds to the Chinese version of the *Arthapada-sūtra*, vol. I (Taisho Tripitaka, vol. IV., p. 180cf.).
- 7 *vivādajātesu* . . . Fausbøll translated this word as: 'there is slander in the disputes arisen.' If the meaning is as he translated, the text must be: *vivādesu jātesu* or *jātavivā-*

- desu*. I think that in this case the ending word: *-jāta* is a peculiarly Buddhistic term, meaning 'all items which are to be included in one class or species.' This usage was preserved even up to later days. E. g. *adhvajāta* in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*.
- 8 A. K. Warder takes the essential meaning of *chanda* for will. (*Introduction to Pali*, London: Luzac, 1963, p. 396).
- 9 In some Pali scriptures an ideal recluse is called either a Brahmin or a samana, there being no distinction. (*samaṇena samitapāpena brāhmaṇena bāhitapāpena, bhikkhunā bhinnakilesamūlena, sabbākusalamūla-bandha-pamuttēna* (*Mahāniddeśa*).
- 10 *sāta* (pleasant). According to the Pali-English Dictionary of PTS., the use of this word is rather rare, but it is comparatively used frequently in the *Suttanipāta* (vv. 773; 867; 869; 870). Its Sanskrit equivalent *sāta*, meaning 'pleasant' or 'pleasure' is not used in ordinary Sanskrit literature in general. But in Jain canonical literature written in Ardhamāgadhī the word is used. According to Ratnachandra's *An Illustrated Ardhamāgadhī Dictionary* (vol. IV, 1932, p. 713) the noun *sātā* (f.) means: The feeling of happiness produced by the experience of feeling — producing karmic molecules at their rise (*Pannavaṇā; Sūyag*, I, 1, 2, 30). In short, it means 'pleasant feeling'. Therefore this term was common to both Jainism and early Buddhism. The *Suttanipāta*, especially its last two sections, betray features common to Jainism.
- 11 *te pi kodhādayo dhammā sātāsātadvaye sante eva pahonti uppajjanti*. (Comm.).
- 12 Here we can locate the Mahāyāna philosophy of Non-Duality (*advayatā*) in its incipient stage. It was not strange that Nāgārjuna and other teachers found the basis of their philosophical thought in the idea of Dependent Origination.
- 13 *pariggahāni*. (v. 872) This form is masculine plural nominative, a trait of the influence of ancient Māgadhī. (Heinrich Lüders: *Philologica Indica*, S.288 f.).
- 14 *Uttajjhayaṇā*, XXXII, 1-12. Once I published a comparison of this Jain passage with *Suttanipāta*, v. 865 f. Now I have no access to this Jain work, staying in America as a temporary visitor, I leave detailed comparison to others. To translate the passage into Japanese and then into English is dangerous.
- 15 *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* VI, 3, 2; 3; VIII, 14; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad*, I, 4, 7; I, 6, 3; *Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad*, I, 1, 9; III, 2, 8; *Praśna-Upaniṣad*, VI, 5.
- 16 *nāmañ ca rūpañ ca asesam uparujjhatī, viññāṇassa nirodhena*. (*Suttanipāta*, 1037).
- 17 *Suttanipāta*, 728.
- 18 *Suttanipāta*, 1105 f.
- 19 *kasmim asante na bhavanti h' ete*. (*Suttanipāta*, 869).
- 20 *kasmim loko samuppanno? . . . kissa loko upādaya? . . . Suttanipāta*, 168-169.
- 21 *Samyutta-Nikāya*, vol. II, Nidana-samyutta (e.g. vol. II, p. 28). The Chinese version of the *Ekottarāgamasūtra* (Taisho Tripitaka, vol. II, p. 776a). In the *Mahātaṇhāsankhayasutta* (*Majjhima-Nikāya*, vol. I, pp. 262-264) this traditional formula is divided in two sections.
- 22 *Cūlasakuludāyī-sutta* (*Majjhima-Nikāya*, vol. II, p. 32).