

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BUDDHA AND THEIR REFUTATION

There are quite a few charges that have been laid at the door of Buddhism either by those whose understanding of the great Buddha's message has been both incomplete and unimaginative or by those who have adopted an unsympathetic attitude to the teachings of the Master. The main charges normally directed against Buddhism, especially by a biased Western critic, have been that it is a *pessimistic* religion, that it is *materialistic*, i. e., believing in no abiding spiritual 'Self' in man, and that it is *nihilistic* with no proper end or liberation for man in view after the final cessation of the cycle of becoming.

I propose to consider in this paper, one by one, these charges against Buddhism which have led to creating certain misconceptions both about the personality and the philosophy of so 'Self-saturated' a person as the Buddha, by exposing their unsubstantiality and untenability, by showing how a little sympathetic and proper understanding of the entire problem points to the facts quite contrary to the existing charges. The thick pall of cultivated misunderstanding, hostile attitudes and unimaginative approach surrounding the original and pristine teachings of the Buddha can be dispelled at one stroke if once an imaginative and sympathetic approach is established in place of the former. My endeavour, therefore, shall be to disabuse some of these misreadings of the teachings of Buddha and re-establish their original and *intended* message.

(1) Buddha and Pessimism :

The first misconception about the Buddha is that he was pessimistic in his outlook on life and that Buddhism, therefore, is a religion or a philosophy of pessimism. Because the Buddha emphasized on sorrow and suffering existing in the world, this was at once seized upon as the central tenet of Buddhism and capitalized by the critics of the types mentioned earlier as the focal point of attack both on the Master and his teachings, conveniently forgetting at the same time in order to please their personal preferences and stances, that the same Buddha had also pointed a way, and a very positive one

at that, out of this mire of sorrow and suffering. Actually this has been the charge always laid at the door of the entire oriental philosophy, whereas the truth is that pessimism in Indian philosophy has always been initial rather than final, as has been repeatedly shown by the scholars of Indian philosophy, both Eastern and Western, like Dr. Radhakrishnan, Prof. Hiriyanna, Sir Francis Younghusband, Edward Holmes, Juan Mascaro and others.

If by pessimism is meant looking only to the darker side of life and *not* making any attempt whatsoever to go beyond it, then the Buddha was definitely a pessimist. But that is not the case. The facts prove the other way round. Buddha himself has emphasized on the cessation of suffering and the way leading one out of this suffering to the final bliss of *Nibbāna*. As Edward Holmes puts it so beautifully, "So far was he from being a pessimistic, in the deeper and darker sense of the word, that at the heart of Nature he could see nothing but light."¹ Thus, according to Holmes, to accuse Buddha of pessimism, would amount to confessing one's own lack of imaginative sympathy for and insight into the sufferings of others. Those who can live perennially in the bright light of optimism should be very impossible figures indeed! Living an entirely happy and hedonistic existence incapable of any insight into the melancholy that is at the heart of the world, is indeed a shallow existence. The problem is, can there ever be an outright optimism unconcerned of all pain or, for that matter, an outright pessimism with no inclination whatsoever to look to the sunny side of existence? Both the states are extremes and hence impossible to exist. The one has to take the account of the other without which it may result into a shallow philosophy with no maturer and sane understanding of life. As Prof. Bosanquet writes, "I believe in optimism, but I add that no optimism is worth its salt that does not go all the way with pessimism and arrive at a point beyond it."³ Outright optimism which does not take into account the giant agony that is at the heart of the universe is not only a wicked and selfish way of life, but a superficial one as well. In the words of Schopenhauer such an unreflective sort of optimism, devoid of any imagination, is nothing but a cruel mockery of the suffering humanity. Maturer optimism arrived at through a chastening experience of suffering is more welcome than an uncritical and unreflective one.

The sense of pessimism, as understood in Indian philosophical systems, is not a diseased one looking only to the darker side of life, but one which is full of a divine discontent with what is, with what exists and, to use a Shelleyan phrase, 'it looks before and after and pines for what is not', for the light and bliss of *Nibbāna* and not for the night of nothingness or the eternal ceasing to be. What the Buddha was dissatisfied with, was sad at heart for, was this agony and suffering of all living beings 'this still sad music of humanity' (to use a Wordsworthian phrase), and he with his heart as limitless as the skies, went a step further to share, and not only feel, these sufferings as his own. Buddha, to use a Keatsian phrase, is one of those 'to whom the miseries of the world are miseries, and will not let them rest.' — (Keats : '*Hyperion*'.)

The very effort made by the Buddha to find a way out of suffering and his success in offering the Noble Eight-fold Path to those who want to extricate themselves from the cycle of suffering in order to arrive at the Final Release, are in themselves proofs enough to show that one can, by one's own will, transcend the given condition of sorrow and rising above it, can achieve the bliss that lies beyond all becoming. And this can be achieved by those who are ever vigilant and diligent in their efforts to rise above this vale of suffering, diligence being a quality that negates all lassitude, all desire for sloth and rest, which are the concomitants of an absurd and shallow type of pessimism. Buddha's pessimism, therefore, is no pessimism at all, but a *healthy realism*, a realistic understanding of the miseries of human life where the finger is pointed at the proper cause of all suffering, and a way suggested to be out of it by making the cause cease to be. Once a man is able to achieve this, life, according to Buddha, becomes a song of joy and liberation and an everlasting music of Peace that passeth all understanding. A craving or *tṛṣṇā* for the wrong things that bind us to life, for the desires that burn us and perpetuate our existence are, according to Buddha, the cause of all suffering, and once this craving, this desire for an unauthenticated life has been made extinct, the man suddenly finds himself free from all bondage and begins to feel the joy and freedom of a radiant Being released from the tutelage of all becoming. His parting advice also

to his disciples was to be ever vigilant and work out their salvation with diligence. He wanted his followers to be their own refuge, their own lamp, to seek shelter unto themselves, to be their own light and liberator, and to look within and not without for the slow but certain un-folding of the Universal Self out of the melting of the lower self, the empirical ego of every man composed of the aggregates that are transient, changing, and therefore, unreal. This surely cannot be the message of a pessimist. A person who squarely throws the responsibility on the shoulders of man himself for his own making, who makes the man himself the captain of his soul and the master of his own destiny, who asks every follower to be his own way-farer, can never be dubbed as a pessimist, but is an optimist who has the courage of his conviction and whose way of life assures liberation to every one who is prepared to tread upon it by his own will and efforts. Buddha's language therefore is not the language of a dire pessimist, but far from it, the language of a healthy optimist who has realised the light at the end of the road after traversing the tunnel. His message of a self reliant *karma-mārga* instilling every one with self-confidence and courage, his insight into the mind of man as the man's maker or destroyer, his looking upon every being as a potential Buddha to be, are the weapons in the armoury of an undaunted and serene archer bent upon achieving his goal, and not the wail of a helpless, frustrated pessimist refusing to rise above the stars.

A pessimist is a fatalist as well. Buddha with his message of self-help and diligence and his tireless life in the service of all the suffering ones, ranging from a wounded swan to a mother bereaved of her only child, cannot be regarded as anyone but a calm and courageous man who could see into the life of things and having seen its hollowness, *could achieve a state beyond all sorrow*, all suffering and all initial pessimism. The Buddha with his compassionate heart, his rational mind and a will his own can never be regarded as a pessimist. Buddha's final peace and serenity transcending all understanding is generative of nothing but an optimism which comes of placing the man's destiny in his own hands. To me Buddhism seems to equip a person, at least initially, to be a rational pessimist than an uncritical optimist, leading one finally to a

condition beyond all such dualities, to the one, the Infinite, and the Unconditioned. The Buddha, like the Upaniṣadic sages before him, laid stress on the inner will of man and like them had faith in an eternal moral order of the world, all which is something different from that uncritical optimism which may lull one into a false sense of security. Buddha, and for that matter the entire Indian philosophy, do not stop at merely regarding life as a never-ending tale of sorrow, but give a positive message of hope to everyone of us that we can make our lives sublime and free from all bondage, provided each one of us is prepared to live a life that is full of sound values and not a thoughtless, rootless life full of uncontrollable desires and blind impulses. An authenticated existence which may become a beacon-light for others, a model for millions to follow, a life full of dignity, restraint and moral order, rather than an irresponsible, senseless and dissipated life, is the call of the Buddha to every sane and civilized person, whatever his station in life. It is here that we find Buddha so alarmingly modern in his search for the meaning of a true life in the manner of a concerned existentialist. Like the great existentialists, the Buddha puts the responsibility entirely on the man himself for creating his own hell or heaven. Surely such giants cannot be pessimists, giants who, like Sisyphus, raise their own rocks and negate all gods.

(2) Buddha and Materialism (the Anattā doctrine or the Denial of the Self) :

I now come to the most crucial and controversial point in the entire range of Buddhist philosophy, the problem of Self and the denial of its existence in man by the Buddha, as interpreted by some critics like Jennings, H. C. Warren, Rhys Davids, J. Thomas and others because of the double interpretation that these scholars have given to the word ' *Anattā* ' of the Pali canons to suit their own inclinations.

It is a well-known fact that the Buddha always preferred to remain silent about the final and absolute metaphysical questions to talking about them, lest any misreading of an answer to any such question should result into confusing the already confused minds of the people living in an age when more than eighty different schools of thought existed raising hair-splitting argu-

ments about such questions, a solution to which is always either partial or incomplete, and which can finally be realized by oneself through one's own inner experience, rather than through explanations offered at a mere phenomenal level. Truth has profundities which can be realized by one's deeper self than by one's empirical self or ego. Silence about the Supreme or the Absolute does not mean its denial or negation. What is in fact is denied by the Buddha is the self comprising the 'mind-body' organism, consisting of the five compounds or *skandhās* viz., the body with all its physical components, and the ego-consciousness composed of feeling, impressions, cognition, conation etc. Man thus becomes a bundle of changing psychoses, but this is not to be identified with his real Self or '*Attā*'.

In '*Mahāvagga*' we repeatedly come across the utterances like 'this is not mine', 'I am not this', 'this is not my Self', with reference to each one of the *skandhas* or the components mentioned above. In '*Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*' the two words '*attā*' and '*anattā*' are used together as when the Buddha says, '*Rūpaṃ bhikkhū anattā*' (Body, O monks, is not the Self), or '*rūpaṃ ca hiḍḍaṃ bhikkhū Attā abhaviṣṣa*' (if the body, O monks, were self), etc. This itself should be proof enough to indicate the fact that for the Buddha the Self was something different from these aggregates which constitute our '*Nāma-Rūpa*' or '*Mind-Body*' organism. What the Buddha thus does is not to deny the self as such, but to refute the wrong view that tended to identify it with the changing flux of the *skandhas* or the unreal aggregates. As Prof. Chowdhury has so aptly expressed it, "If we say - 'this is not gold', 'that is not gold', we do not mean 'there is no gold'".³ When the Buddha says, 'I am not this', 'this is not mine', 'this is not my Self', it automatically invites the counter questions, 'Who am I?', 'What is mine?' and 'What is my self?' When all the passions that haunt us, the desires that kindle and burn us, the thousand thoughts that run across our mind making several criss-cross patterns, and the impressions that hover around us are all allayed and eliminated, when this compound of all transient aggregates is realised as ephemeral and unreal; and in short, when all the lower egos or selves are made to dissolve, there is bound to remain something behind which now emerges to the fore and of

which we can justly and positively say, ' This am I ', ' This is mine ', or ' This is my Self '.

The whole trouble about this central concept regarding the existence or the non-existence of the Self in Buddhism has been, as mentioned earlier, due to the wrong meaning attached to the word ' *Attā* ' by the scholars like Rhys Davids and H. C. Warren. These western scholars and some eastern Pali commentators both have done an irreparable harm to the real message of Buddha by their misinterpretation of a single word which has completely tarnished the image of Buddha as an upholder of a godless and a soulless philosophy of life. As Prof. Chowdhury says, " There is no parallel in the history of philosophy to this confusion based on the misunderstanding of a single word (*Anattā*) that gave a turn to the teaching of a religion which was not intended by its founder. The word ' *Anattā* ' has been used in violation of its intention " ⁴

The word ' *arattā* ' has been interpreted as meaning ' self-less ' or ' soul-less ' and thus used as an adjective while being rendered into English, whereas the word, being the negative of the noun ' *attā* ' (the Self) is a noun by itself and as such its real meaning should be ' *not self* ' and *not* ' self-less '. A correct grammatical application of the original Pali word (*Anattā*), while using it into English, changes the entire meaning of the word and one begins to see the real message of the Master. Seen in this light, the utterances like ' *rupam anattā* ', should mean ' the matter is not-self ' and not ' as the matter is soul-less '. To yield the latter meaning ' *rūpam anattā* ' should be changed into ' *rūpam anattam* ', *anattam* being an adjective, and *anattā* being a noun. This goes for other terms also like ' *vinnānam anattā* ' (consciousness is not self) etc. ' *An* ' before ' *attā* ', is merely a negative prefix which makes the word ' *an-attā* ', i. e. ' not-self and not ' soul-less '. Thus as Prof. Chowdhury comments, " On grammatical grounds alone the popular interpretation falls to the ground. It is only by mangling grammar that the traditional interpretation can be upheld, but no student of language can support such an interpretation. " ⁵

Buddha thus was not prepared to identify the real Self with the surface self composed of elements under constant flux. The empirical or the phenomenal self of a person is not his real Self. The person is not It and It is not the person, but that does not

negate the Reality of the Person behind all changing, fleeting selves or persons. When the mind of a great sage like the Buddha's, must have suddenly realised the Being that was once realised by the Upaniṣadic sages of old, he, like them, preferred the *Aryan* (noble) silence about the Supreme or, at the most, tried to explain its existence by describing it negatively in statements like 'I am not this, this is no my Self, etc.' Even in the Upaniṣads the ātman is described as *neti, neti* (not this, not this). In his *Ātmaśataka I*, Śaṅkara also declares, 'I am not the body, not the I-sense, nor the vital principle etc. As Prof. Chowdhury so very succinctly puts it, "All descriptions being descriptions of qualities, that which is devoid of qualities can only be denoted by negatives, *but that does not make Reality a negation.*"⁶ It is in this way that we find Buddha's silence or his negative descriptions of the Self being used against him as his very denial of the existence of the Self! The Buddha never did thus deny the reality of the Self, but pointed out how It was wrongly identified with and mistaken for that which is merely an ever-changing stream of consciousness. Since the Buddha did not speak about the Self, it should not be construed as his denial of the Self.

Actually the Buddha, instead of denying the Self, *changed its concept* by refusing to identify it with the accepted sense of the Self in his days. His being the philosophy of Becoming, the Self is not to be taken as something granted and given in advance and therefore to be talked about in a non-chalant manner. It is something that emerges when the surface self or the ego has been completely eliminated and then transcended. Being rises when the cycle of becoming comes a full circle.

Dr. Radhakrishnan's comment on this compels our attention :

"We have to build the self by effort and discipline. The self is something which evolves and grows, something to be achieved and built up by pain and labour, and not something given to be passively accepted and enjoyed. The ego consists of the feelings that burn us, of the passions we brood over, of the desires that we make. These are the things that give life its dramatic character. There is nothing absolute and permanent in them. That is why *we can become something different from what we are.* The reality of

the person is in his creative will. When we deny the clamour of emotions, stay the stream of things, silence the appetites of the body, *we feel the power of self within our own being.*"⁷ While the *Upaniṣads* accept the existence of an eternal Being as granted and admonish the seeker to find it in the innermost core of his being, the *Buddha insists on remaking and refashioning of the entire personality of man in order to grow into the real Self. Man has to become what he is.*

In my humble opinion Buddha's message seems to be one of spiritual emergent evolution where at every stage new qualities and a new person emerge till the person ceases to become, as he has by now realized his real 'person' or 'Being'. It is a process wherein at every stage of purification and spiritual advancement the smaller self or the ego goes on getting itself dissolved on the one hand, with the higher Self rising and asserting itself on the other.

The Pāli canons also speak of the higher Self or the *Mahā-attā* and of the lower self or the *appatuma*, thus making a clear distinction between the metaphysical 'I' and the psychological 'me'. When the Buddha speaks in the *Dhammapada* of the Self being the lord of the self (12.160), it is naturally the higher Self that is regarded as the lord of the lower one. Moreover, how would it be possible for us to explain the parting advice of Buddha to his disciples to take refuge in nothing but in their own selves (*attasārana*) and to work out their salvation with diligence, unless it is assumed that it is the Self behind the smaller selves that the Buddha is asking his disciples to take shelter into and work out their salvation for. This has been interpreted as an appeal to be self-reliant. In that case did the Buddha ask to seek shelter unto a self that by itself is transient, fleeting, and therefore impermanent (*anicca*) ? In unmistakable terms, and in text after text, Buddha is exhorting his disciples to return to the Self that emerges after all craving has been completely cooled off by one's own efforts. One has to lead oneself on from the stage of the empirical self to that of the transcendental one that comes to the fore at the end of the process of all becoming. This process of becoming is nothing but the evolution of the Being. Buddha is therefore deliberately silent in describing an experience that is

indescribable (*avākym*) and which, when described, is likely to lead to interpretations which may be both inconclusive in their assertion and disputable in content. As Dr. Radhakrishnan remarks, "Buddha's silence on the absolute indicates that the eternal substance is not in his view available for the explanation of phenomena. Experience is all that is open to our knowledge, and *the unconditional lies beyond experience.*"⁸

The very mention of something that is unconditional and beyond the law of cause and effect implies the existence of an *attā* or a Self that is beyond all conditions and therefore a Reality that is below, behind and beyond all appearances. Buddha, on a certain occasion, while staying at Jetā Grove, is reported to have addressed his disciples as follows :

"There is, brethren, an unborn, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. If there were not, brethren, this that's unborn, not-become, not-made, not-compounded, there could not be made any escape from what is born, become, made, and compounded."⁹ (*Udāna : VIII*).

In the *Majjhima Nikāya* also we come across an interesting dialogue in which the Buddha is found dis-abusing the mind of one Saccaka, a Jain monk, of the heresy that body is the Self, feeling is the Self, etc. Also when the monk Vaccagotta approached the Buddha to find out whether the soul exists or not after the annihilation of the body, the Buddha maintained silence as he did not want to baffle the mind of a layman like Vaccagotta by entering into a futile metaphysical dispute like this which is always inconclusive and ambiguous in its final assertion either way. Had the Buddha said that such a substance like the soul exists, he would have sided himself with the eternalists (*śīśvatvādins*), and had he declared the soul to be totally non-existent, he would have sided with the annihilationists (*Ucchedavādins*). The Buddha in fact steered a middle course between these two extremes of eternalism and nihilism, the former taking for granted the existence of an ever-abiding entity in the form of a soul-substance, and the latter rejecting its existence altogether. Placing himself between these extremes, he conceived the Self as something *to be felt* rather than described in words; as something emerging with every step taken in the direction of soul-expansion in the cycle of becoming.

For him it became a process from the flux of becoming to the emergence of an eternal, unchanging and an unconditioned Self.

The crux of the problem, however, is that the Buddha was never interested in what exists or what does not exist. *For him the main problem was what was real and what was unreal.* The real to the Buddha was not the superficial ego, the individual self which identifies itself now with feeling, and now with sensation, now with the predispositions of the mind and now with the body. Any of these was not the real 'I', the Self that one achieves after all the delusory selves have been dissolved into nothingness. As Edward Holmes observes, "The more carefully one studies the teaching of Buddha, the stronger does one's conviction become that the ultimate category in which he thought was that of the *real* and the *unreal*, not that of the *existent* and the *non-existent*."¹⁰ The existent and the non-existent, according to Holmes are mutually exclusive terms, the real and the unreal being polar opposites always co-existing. The Buddha regarded the entire tenor of outward life as unreal, though not necessarily as non-existent. His entire scheme of life, according to Holmes, was an answer to the question that he must have asked himself, 'Which is the real pole of existence?' The Buddha had actually gone down deep into the very root of this problem and arrived at the profound truth of *Nibbāna* the eternal, the unbecoming, and the blissful being the real pole of existence. In the *Dhammapadam* *Nibbāna* is regarded as the highest happiness (*nibbānam paramam sukham* : 15.204). If *nibbāna* is this state of bliss beyond all description, the peace that passeth all understanding, then again the question arises, 'Who is the enjoyer of this bliss, this peace?' The obvious answer is the Self. For, if there were no Self, none whatsoever to experience this bliss, then the whole question of the spiritual quest, of the annihilation of all desire (*trṣṇā*) and egoistic impulses, of travelling in order to arrive, becomes an exercise in futility, a cry in the wilderness, a journey without an end.

The man who could rush to save a wounded swan or to save a lamb from being sacrificed at the court of the King Bimbisara, offering himself for the sacrifice so the king could achieve a better heaven by sacrificing a man than an animal; the man whose heart

was moved to compassion at the mere sight of suffering, could not have been anyone but a profound spiritual figure who must have seen the same stream of life flowing in every sentient creature. Without his realising that it is the same stream of life that binds every one together from one cycle of birth to another, that it is the same stream which runs through all beings and brings all of them finally to the state of perfect consciousness of an Enlightened One, the Buddha would not have gone out into the world with an all-embracing heart to share and feel the miseries of the rest as his own. *He clearly saw all lives as links in the running chain of becoming till he could feel the oneness of all life in the rise and embrace of an all expanding Being.*

The silence of Buddha seems therefore to be the silence of a man who has known the Supreme as expanding everywhere and in every being, and who does not want to talk about it not out of any lack of faith or a wish for denial, but out of a profound reverence for it. It is definitely not the silence of an agnostic or an atheist as affirmed by many. His silence simply means that the Final Reality, the liberated condition, the final grounding in Being, is an experience that cannot be described in terms of ordinary experience or language. Silence alone is an answer to and an affirmation of the Real. In the Upaniṣadic verses also we find the same idea expressed, viz., that the one who knows the Supreme does not talk about It, while the one who does not know It, babbles too much about It. And this brings me to the last and final misconception about Buddha and nihilism, an attempt at removing which should clarify much of the fog enveloping this tricky area of Buddhist metaphysics.

(3) Buddha and Nihilism :

Another prominent misconception held about the Buddha is that he was a nihilist, that for him life was merely a total extinction, a blowing out of the flame, an annihilation of everything on the cessation of the cycle of becoming. This means that the Buddhist Nirvāṇa is a state of total effacement, a mere night of nothingness, an extinction of all craving. This again seems to be, according to some critics, the result of Buddha's silence on a pro-

blem like the final state of life entering the threshold of Nirvāṇa. The critics believe that the Buddha refrained himself from describing positively what is *nibbāṇa* or the Final Release, and that he could merely describe it negatively as cessation of the burning passions of life that bind us to the chain of causation and suffering. But this precisely is an arrested, negative and an incomplete account of the concept of Nirvāṇa, and hence this misconception about the Buddha being an advocate of a nihilistic philosophy.

If the final end of final life is to be regarded as the blowing out of a flame, what about the thin wisp of smoke that still remains after the dying out of the flame? The *Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad* also speaks of the *Paramātman* (the Supreme Self) as the fire the fuel of which has been consumed (IV. 19). The consumed fuel of the fire manifests itself as a flame and the consumed flame in return blows out only to live in the form of smoke which finally merges with the universal space around. In the same manner, one could argue, the Self that has achieved its Being continues to outlive and outlast the dying cycle of becoming. *Cessation is not extinction, but existence on a level different from the one experienced on an empirical level.*

Secondly, if *nibbāṇa* or the final release means total extinction, then Buddha cannot be regarded as being liberated till he died. All his claims about the attainment of liberation and wisdom during his life-time, claims which the Pāli canons abound in, would then simply turn into null and void making a myth of all his noble utterances about the *positive* state of *nibbāṇa*. The Buddha, on the contrary, has repeatedly described the state of *nibbāṇa* as one of positive bliss, as a state that is beyond all becoming, all origin and all conditioning. Even the *Upaniṣads* have not been able to evolve a language suitable for describing the indescribable. It seems that the language itself becomes an impotent tool in describing the most profound and apocalyptic experiences and visions of life. What the mind has suddenly realised, the heart has intuitively grasped, cannot perhaps be communicated in the form of human speech which may be understood by all. The visions of eternity, the whispers of immortality or, for that matter, whatever that is Grand according to the great mystical poet Blake, is bound to be obscure to weak men. The expressions of the realisation of the Infinite

may finally be displayed only in the form of gestures as e. g. the serene smile on the face of the Buddha while explaining the inexplicable to an initiate, or his mere offering of a flower, instead of a spoken word, to a disciple to dispel all his doubts and queries. This state of Final Realisation, therefore, is something that cannot but be described in a language that is the language of either gesticulation or negation, for it is the description of One who in the words of Prof. F. Northrop is 'all things, yet nothing and yet not nothing'.¹¹ When the mind suddenly encounters the light that has so long eluded it, when it intuitively grasps the meaning that has exceeded its reach, when it lightningly realises the flash of the Vision denied to the inward eye, it experiences a state that cannot be described or explained in any language but that of negation.

Negative description of a Reality does not negate the Reality's positive existence; it, on the other hand, affirms the existence of such a Reality by establishing the contraries as has been done by Blake and several other mystical poets and prophets. Dr. Radhakrishnan's comment in this connection is worth our attention :

"Buddha's real attitude is probably, that *nirvāṇa* is a state of perfection inconceivable by us, and if we are obliged to offer descriptions of it, it is best to bring out its inconceivability by negative descriptions, its richness of content by positive predicates, *realising all the time that such descriptions are at best approximations only.*"¹²

We can thus see that for the Buddha the cessation of the cycle of becoming is not a negative halt, but a positive leap into something that is eternal, unconditional and unbecoming. If all life were merely a total extinction, then what use is all this struggle, all this effort to liberate oneself from the chain of successive coming-ins and going-outs? As Younghusband would have it, "*Nirvāṇa* is looked upon by Western people as implying a state of Nothingness, extinction, annihilation, whereas *it is in fact a state of somethingness to the nth degree.*"¹³ It is a state beyond all the flux of changing psychoses, a state which may appear to be motionless, but which in reality has the tremendous motion of a top spinning at its highest velocity. This, according to Younghusband, is not the state of nothingness, but of superlative activity. It is definitely that state of pure Being when, in the words of the poet Words-

worth : "We are laid asleep in body, and become a living soul; while with an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy, we see into the life of things " —(*Lines Composed above Tintern Abbey.*)

It is a state when the mind fully realising its final union with the Absolute, finds all the dualities and differences of every shade and variety sunk and dissolved into nothingness, and endows one fully with a vision that there is no distinction whatsoever between the dance and the dancer, the dream and the dreamer, the house and the housebuilder. As the Buddha himself says : " I have gone round in vain the cycles of many lives ever striving to find the builder of the house of life and death. How great is the sorrow of life that must die." But now *I* have seen thee, housebuilder, never more shall thou build this house. The rafters of sins are broken, the ridgepole of ignorance is destroyed. The fever of craving is past; *For my mortal mind is gone to the joy of the immortal nirvāṇa.*"

In *Saṃyukta Nikāya*, the Buddha while explaining the meaning of *nibbāṇa* to the venerable nun Rādhā, speaks of it not merely as extinction of all craving, but as a positive Release, and when further pressed by Rādhā to explain to her the purpose of this Release, the Buddha relies to her that she was stretching the question too far, for it would not be possible *for her* to grasp the full limit of that question, meaning thereby that it was something that only a released soul like his could understand, but could not describe, as it was something that was indescribable, unutterable and inexplicable, simply because it was a *bliss to be felt* than to be explained in mere words. This does not negate the existence of that state of Self where it merely 'Is' beyond all mind-consciousness, imperturbable and tranquil like a lamp where even the winds can find no footing. The Buddha himself explaining this state to a monk, says " There do water, earth and fire, there does air no footing find; there do, long and short and fine, likewise gross, pure and impure, mind and body, cease to be; leaving not a wrack behind, by ceasing of the conscious mind, there do all these cease to be." ¹⁵

How strikingly similar is this condition of the Self gone beyond all

body-mind consciousness to the one described in the *Gītā*: "Then his soul is a lamp whose light is steady, for it burns in a shelter where no winds come." ¹⁶

It (*nibbāna*) thus acquires the same position that is held by the Brahman in the *Upaniṣads* and the *Gītā*, Buddha's categorical assertion of the existence of a Self that is unbecoming, unborn and unconditional as explained in *Udāna* has already been referred to earlier. One can finally say that if the self were merely a bundle of changing aggregates (*skandhās*), if it were merely an impermanent compound of body and mind, then there would be nothing that would get released on the cessation of such a self. Are we then to be lost into the dark night of an unending journey? Do we have to flow perpetually from one eddy to another in the never-ceasing stream of life? The answer is definitely 'no'. It is the surface self that ceases to be and with every step that one takes towards spiritual expansion in the process of becoming, with every effort that one makes to reach nearer the goal of *nibbāna*, one realises the power of the true Self rising within one, and it is this Self which is but another name for all self-lessness, that refuses to be extinct and, extending beyond all conditions, reaches the Bliss that is eternal and unutterable. *Nibbāna* thus becomes a timeless and eternal existence in the lap of the Supreme and not a mere leap into a gaping vacuity. Dr. Radhakrishnan, describing this unconditioned state of the self beyond all chain of cause and effect, says, "..... nirvāṇa is timeless existence, and so Buddha must admit the reality of a timeless Self. There is a being at the back of all life which is unconditioned, above all empirical categories, something which does not give rise to any effect and is not the effect of anything else. *It is the simultaneity which is the support of all succession.*" ¹⁷

I should like to end by saying that it is this very simultaneity that runs through all changes and chances of life, that emerges at last as the Self after the total annihilation of the lower self, together with all its constituents, and fixes Itself as the eternal, the unbecome and the uncompounded. *Buddha's message thus seems to be a radical programme for the emergent evolution of the Self by the effort of the self.* It is the blossoming of human personality into the full bloom of its Being which is nothing but

becoming come to a full circle, the coming of the great 'Be', the movement from becoming to Being, from flux to fixation, from the transient to the eternal, as there cannot be any Being out of nothing.

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Notes

1. Edward Holmes, '*The Creed of Buddha*', (The Bodley Head, London, 1957), p. 183,
2. Bosanquet quoted by Dr. Radhakrishnan in '*Indian Philosophy*', Vol. I, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1956), p. 50.
3. R. P. Chowdhury, 'Interpretation of the *Anattā* Doctrine of Buddhism' : a New Approach, '*The Indian Historical Quarterly*', Vol. XXXI, No. 1, March 1955.
4. *Ibid.* Italics mine.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.* Italics mine.
7. S. Radhakrishnan, '*Gautama the Buddha*', (Hind Kitabs. Bombay, 1946), p. 37. Italics mine.
8. S. Radhakrishnan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 379. Italics mine.
9. '*Some Sayings of the Buddha*', Tr. F. L. Woodward (O. U. P., London, 1945), p. 330.
10. Edward Holmes, *Op. Cit.*, p. 119.
11. Northrap, Frye, '*Fearful Symmetry*', (Beacon Press, U. S. A. A, 1962), p. 431.
12. S. Radhakrishnan, *Op. Cit.*, p. 453. Italics mine.

13. Sir Francis Younghusband, Introduction to '*Some Sayings of the Buddha*'. (Tr.) F. L. Woodward (O. U. P., London, 1945), p. xviii, Italics mine.
14. *The Dhammapada*, 11 : 153.54. (Tr.) Juan Mascaro (Penguin Books Ltd., Middlesex, 1973), pp. 56-57, Italics mine.
15. *Diggha Nikāya*, i. 222. (Tr.) F. L. Woodward, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 321-322.
16. *The Gītā* 6.19. (Tr.), Juan Mascaro.
17. S. Radhakrishnan, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 451-452. Italics mine.