

中華佛學學報第 6 期 (p391-424) : (民國 82 年), 臺北: 中華佛學研究所, <http://www.chibs.edu.tw>  
Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal, No. 06, (1993)  
Taipei: The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies  
ISSN: 1017-7132

# Attā, Nirattā, and Anattā in the early Buddhist literature

Biswadeb Mukherjee

Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal

p. 391

## Summary

The present article deals with the non-Buddhist concepts of attā and their refutation through the doctrine of anattā. This article is divided into five sections.

Section I discusses Nikāya passages which states which the attā is not existent either in the sphere of the Conditioned or in the realm of the Unconditioned. It is nothing but a figment of imagination.

Section II refers to the different opinions held by scholars as to the proper implications of the term attā. Except for the lone voice of E. Conze who

found similarity between the attā and the Puruṣa of the Sāṃkhya, all other scholars who cared to ponder over this problem, seem to be preoccupied with the relationship that could exist between the attṃ and the Ātman of the Upaniṣads. This may be due to the fact that these two terms-attā and Ātman-are philologically identical. The philological identity led the scholars readily to accept the view that these terms are also philosophically identical without making any further investigation into the exact connotations of these two terms. The need for a more objective study of the problem of equation of attā and Ātman is obvious, and a suitable methodology for such a study has been suggested.

Section III delineates the main features of the thoughts of the Śāśvatavādins, Ekacassatavādins, the ucchedavādins and the followers of the Satkāyadrṣṭi. They were the chief propagators of the attā heresies rejected by the Buddha.

Section IV, Part A contains the criticism of all these heresies meant for the Buddhist monks. The validity of such a criticism mainly rests on the Buddha's claim to superior and higher knowledge of which the heretics know nothing. Part B of the same Section offers us the following two patterns of reasonings which

p. 392

were ultimately meant for the non-Buddhist ascetics and employed for the refutation of the different attā heresies except the Ucchedavāda: i) To reject the opponent's view by showing the internal contradictions, a method which was later followed by Nāgārjuna with great success; ii) To temporarily accept a part of the opponent's view in order to show that the view as such is unacceptable. This may be taken as an instance of skillfulness of means praised so much in the Mahāyāna.

Section V comes to the conclusion that the anattā doctrine was mainly formulated keeping in view the śāśvatavāda and the Ucchedavāda. This is in conformity with some statements in the Buddhist texts that the Buddha preached the anattā doctrine as a middle way between these two extremes. It is also clear that the attā concepts of the Śāśvatavādins and the Ucchedavādins cannot be identical with the Ātman of the Upaniṣads. The Buddhist sages were aware of the fact that the attā rejected by the

buddha is 'ahañkāra-viṣayaḥ' whereas the Upaniṣadic Ātman is 'Buddhānām viṣayaḥ'.

關鍵詞：1.Attā 2.Nirattā 3.Anattā 4.Upaniṣad

p. 393

## I

The doctrine of anattā forms the keynote of the teachings of the Buddha and literally means that the attā is non-existent. The denial of the attā finds expression in the following statement ascribed to the Buddha in the Samyutta Nikyāya: "Sabbam bhikkhave aniccaṃ/sabbam bhikkhave dukkhaṃ/sabbam bhikkhave anattā" [1]. The chapter just preceding the one from which we have quoted the three statements, contains such expressions as "sabbe bhikkhave jarādhammaṃ.....vyādhidhammaṃ.....maraṇadhammaṃ.....saṃkilesadhammaṃ" etc[2]. These statements leave no doubt that in all these cases we have to take the term 'sabba' as indicating the things condition. So we find that 'sabba' is a technical term and stands for the 'samskr̥ta dharma'. This conclusion of ours is confirmed by the definition of 'sabba' as given in the Sabbavaggo of the Salāyatana-saṃyutta [3]: "Kiñ ca bhikkhave sabbaṃ/cakkhu ceva rūpā ca/sotañca saddā ca/ghānañca gandhā ca/jihvā rasā ca/kayo ca phoṭṭhabbā ca/mano ca dhammā ca/idam vuccati bhikkhave sabbaṃ" According to this definition 'sabba' means eye and the forms, the nose and the smells, the ear and the sounds, the tongue and the tastes, the body and the tangible things, the mind and the mental objects. Here the term 'sabba' means twelve āyatana. In a more elaborate way the Buddha explains the same term while giving instructions on the giving up of the 'sabba'. He states that eye, form, eye-contact, eye-consciousness and the different feeling due to eye-contact are to be renounced. Similarly he preaches with references to other sense organs.[4] Thus the term 'sabba' fully covers the category of 'samskr̥ta-dharma' and the statement "sabbam anattā", means the

conditioned is without any soul

p. 394

(soul).

But what about the Unconditioned? Is it also devoid of attā? Walpolo Rahulo thinks that it is, and refers to the three statements from Dhammapadain support of his contention.[5] These statements which are very similar to the passage from the Saṃyutta Nikāya quoted above are as follows:(i) sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā, ii) sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā. iii), sabbe dhammā anattā. Rahulo thinks that while the phrase sabbe saṅkhārā indicates the things conditioned, the phrase sabbe dhammā refers to both the Conditioned and the Unconditioned. But it is difficult to accept this interpretation. We may hold that the word 'sabbe' should have the same meaning as the term 'sabbam'. viz. the conditioned things, and it is unreasonable to assume that the scope of the word 'sabba' while occurring together with the term 'dhamma' is so extended as to include even the opposite meaning, the Unconditioned. Moreover the phrase 'sabbe dhamma' has been used many times in the Buddhist scriptures to mean only the Conditioned. The Karatalaratna, a comparatively late work written by Bhāvaviveka, described śarvadharmāḥ' as being of dependent origin (sarvadharmāḥ ..... pratīyasamutpannāḥ ..... niḥsvabhāvāḥ)[6]. Again in the Culasaccakasutta of theMajjhima Nikaya [7] it is stated: "rūpaṃ bhikkhave aniccaṃ, vedanā aniccā,.....viññānaṃ aniccaṃ, rūpaṃ bhikkhave anattā, vedanā.....saññā.....samkhārā.....viññānam anattā, sabbe samkhārā aniccā, sabbe dhammā anattā ti. "Here both the phrases 'sabbe dhammā' and sabbe samkhārā obviously refer to the five skandhas. That only the conditioned things are meant here become evident when in the same sutta [8] we meet with a discussion on things which are both aniccā and anattā. Nibbāna is not included on this discussion. The Upasivamānapucchāof the Sutta nipāta [9] (1076) states that in case of nibbāna all dharmas are destroyed (sabbesu

p. 395

dhammesu upahatesu). Sabbe dhammā has been explained as skandhas and āyatanas in the Cullaniddesa,[10] making it clear that nibbāna is outside the scope of this phrase. In the Mahāparinibbānasutta [11] Aniruddha explains

buddha's parinibbana as 'vimokkho' of consciousness (pajjotass'eva nibbānam vimokkho cataso). The term 'vimokkho' has been explained by Buddhaghoso in the Sumangalavilasini [12] as freedom from all dharmas (vimokkho'ti kenaci dhemmena anābaraṇa). Thus the testimony of the Suttanipāta and the Mahā parinibbānasutta confirms that the phrase 'sabbe dhammā' does not include nibbāna within its scope.

So the things conditioned were definitely held to be devoid of attā. But was the nirvana, the Unconditioned also bereft of attā? Is the attā non-existent with reference to the Unconditioned also? In the Udāna[13]

nibbāna is described as anattā which is rightly glossed as attā-virahita in Paramatthadīpa 其. Thus the attā is non-existent either as a saṃskṛta-dharma or as an asaṃskṛta-dharma. The attā is nothing but a figment of imagination.

## II

p. 396

To know the reason behind the denial of attā we have first to be clear about the exact implication of the term attā. Scholars differ as to the precise sense in which this term has been used. But before their views were discussed it is necessary to point out that the prākṛt word attā is the same as ātman in Sanskrit. This philological identification has led to philosophical misunderstanding among the scholars. Some scholars automatically take attā to be the Ātman of the Upaniṣads. They think that the philosophical implications of these two terms attā and ātman-are identical and consequently the doctrine of anattā came to mean for them the refutation of the Upaniṣadic Ātman. The scholars belonging to this

p. 397

group have unflinching faith in the Buddha as the unique preacher of the True Law, and as such harbour no weakness for the honoured traditions of the Upaniṣads. the view of Walpolo Sri Rahulo, an worthy representative of

this group, will be presented later. On the other hand those scholars who hold both the Buddha and the Upaniṣads in high esteem do not subscribe to this view. Let us take note of the opinion of Radhakrishnan [14] who belongs to this second group of scholars. According to him the Buddha clearly tells us what the soul (attā) is not, though he does not give us any clear account of what it is. It is, however, wrong to think that there is no soul according to the Buddha. In support of his opinion Radhakrishnan [15] refers to the dialogue between the wondering ascetic Vacchagotta which, according to him, shows that something there is, though it is not the empirical self. In another place [16] he refers to this empirical self and states that it is the false view that clamours for the perpetual continuation of this small self, which the Buddha refutes. This, [17] according to Radhakrishnan, also agrees with the statement of the Buddha that the self is neither the same nor different from the skandhas. He further states [18]: "It is also clear that the reduction of the self to a number of skandhas is not ultimate. If the self is merely an impermanent compounded of body and mind ..... then when it disappears then there is nothing which is delivered ..... Freedom becomes extinction. But Nirvāṇa is timeless existence and so the Buddha admit the reality of a timeless self."

Radhakrishnan appears to be of the opinion that the term 'attā' which he translates as self has been used in two different senses. One meaning of attā is the small self or empirical self which the Buddha rejects through the doctrine of anattā. The other implication of the term attā is the true self which is same as nirvāṇa and is accepted by the Buddha. It is the identity of this true self with other things that the Buddha rejects.

We may now discuss the opinion of Rahulo who represents the other group

p. 398

of scholars. While explaining the doctrine of anattā Rahulo [19] refers to the different concepts of ātman, even the concept of Brahman-Ātman of the Upaniṣads and holds that the Buddha was unique in rejecting all such doctrines through the doctrine of anattā. "The idea of an abiding, immortal substance in man or outside, whether it is called Ātman, I, soul, self, or ego, is considered only a false belief, a mental projection. This is the Buddhist doctrine of anattā [20]. So it appears that by the doctrine of anattā the Buddha was denying attā " which was accepted by every other

philosophico-religious system". Rahulo seems to suggest in not so ambiguous term that even the Brahman-Ātman concept of the Upaniṣads stands hereby negated.

It is clear that the concept of the Upaniṣadic Ātman acts as a powerful background in influencing the formulations of both the above-mentioned views. Conze,[21] on the other hand, propounds a different theory which is not connected with the Upaniṣadic Ātman in any way. He is not sure what notions of an ātman were deined by the Buddha, but he believes that these notions are of two kinds, e.g. i) the ideas implied in the use of 'I' and 'mine', and ii) the philosophical opinion of the Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika. The basic formula absence of a self is confined to the five skandhas, and nothing is said either way about its existence quite apart from them. The Buddha never taught that the self is not, only that it cannot be apprehended.

It is obvious that the solution of this knotty problem hinges on the proper understanding of the nature of attā that was rejected by the Buddha. It is really strange that none of the scholars who suggested the equation of attā either with the Upaniṣadic Brahman-Ātman or with some other non-buddhist concepts ever tried to clearly enunciate what this attā is. Any such suggestion without first defining the concept of attā is bound to be methodologically unscientific and unconvincing.

To arrive at a more objective conclusion the following approach may be suggested. On the one hand we should study those materials from the Nikāya and

p. 399

Āgama which are more or less descriptive in nature, Such materials provide us with legends and other informantions about the attā philosophy dominant in the region where the Buddha was preaching his anattā doctrine, and so engaged his attention. The reason for doing so is the justifiable surmise that the attā concept or concepts, the negation of which forms the core of buddhism, should find some mention in this descriptive type of scripture. On the other hand we should carefully scrutinise another type of material contained in the Buddhist scripture which is more critical and philosophical in nature, and acquaints us with detailed argumengs justifying the rejection of the attā philosophy. Out of such study will also emerge the attā concept or

concepts which the Buddha was rejecting. The study of these two types of materials will enable us to form a complete idea of the different attā concepts the Buddha discarded as false views. It is only then we would be in a position to reliably know whether the Upaniṣadic concept of Ātman-Brahman was rejected or not.

The major non-buddhist concepts of attā criticised in the Nikāyas and Āgamas may be broadly divided into four main categories dealing with a) Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi, b), Śāśvatavāda, c) Ekaccassatavāda, and d) ucchedavāda. We will discuss these heresies in the order given here.

### III

a) Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi: In the Saṃyutta Nikāya [22] we come across the following description of a false view which later came to be known as Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi: "Those recluses and Brahmanas who while seeing in various ways see the attā (soul), they actually see the five aggregates of attachment or any of them. Which five? In this connection, monks, an uneducated ordinary person ..... envisages matter as a soul, or a soul possessing matter, or matter in a soul, or a soul in matter. Or he envisages, feeling, perception, the formative forces, or consciousness as a soul, possessed by a soul, in a soul, or soul in them. Envisaging thus he gets a thought "I am" ..... Being ignorant he thinks this, or "I am this" or "I shall be" "I shall not be" or I shall be material "or" I shall be having perception "or" I shall be

p. 400

without perception (a-samjñin)" or "I shall have neither perception nor non-perception. But one who is educated, abandons ignorance and gets knowledge ..... and does not have any of these thoughts."

The passage quoted above shows that the attā in which these recluses and Brāhmaṇas believed could be in four different ways connected with the five skandhas and this connection is constant. The existence of an attā without any reference to the skandhas was unthinkable. This association of the soul with the skandhas gave rise to certain ego-centric thoughts in which both these elements-the soul and the skandhas-are present, e.g. "I am this" "I shall be material" etc.

Here we have a succinct description of a false view that draws our attention to its two main features: 1) attā refers to an individual soul whose essence consists of an awareness of 'I'[22a]; 2) attā is invariably connected with the skandhas. Its existence is always conceived in association with skandhas. This heresy, as already noted, came to be known as satkāyadr̥ṣṭi (Pali: Sakkāyadiṭṭhi). The term satkāya refers to the five aggregates of attachment (pañcupādānakkhandhā)[23] and Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi to a false view that fails to see the skandhas merely as skandhas, but always views them through the prism of an attā. The most subtle form of satkāyadr̥ṣṭi is discernible in the feeling "I am" which lingers in anybody who is spiritually below the status of an arhat. He may no longer consciously believe in

p. 401

it, he may even intellectually refute it, but he is not yet free from the vestige of this pernicious heresy.[24]

We may refer to passage in the Kośa literature that helps us to understand more clearly the different modes of relationship existing between the soul and the five skandhas (Conze, p.33). This passage, like the Saṃyutta Nikāya account, distinguishes between the twenty bases of grasping at the notion of soul. One regards (1-5) the soul as the five skandhas, as the flame of a lamp is identical with its visual appearance; (6-10) the soul as having or possessing the five skandhas, like the shadow of a thing; (11-15) the skandhas in the soul, as the scent in a flower; (16-20) the soul in the skandhas, as the gem in the casket.[25]

p. 402

This account of the Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi acquaints us with the most basic form of attā heresy. Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi merely postulates a relationship between the soul and the five skandhas. It neither advocates the eternity of the soul nor holds the soul to be co-terminous with the body. Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi is neither Śāśvatavāda nor Uchedavāda. But the following statement recorded in the Saṃyutta Nikāya [26] imā kho gahapati ditthiyo sakkāyaditthiya sati honti-shows that the satkāya dr̥ṣṭi is the root cause of all other heresies, including the Śāśvatavāda and the Uchedavāda. A person believing in a

soul and having desire for existence (bhava-trṣṇā) willingly believes that the soul survives the body and accepts the false view of its permanent existence (bhava-dṛṣṭi). On the other hand, a person thirsting for non-existence (vibhava-trṣṇā), willingly believes that death is the ultimate end of every thing, and comes to believe in the false view of non-existence (Vibhavadṛṣṭi) the annihilation of soul after death (Ucchedavāda).[27]

b) Śāśvatavāda: The account of the Śāśvatavāda as given in the Brahma-jālasutta[28] may be abridged as follows:-

There are recluses and Brahmanas who accept the philosophy of eternalism (sassatavāda) and proclaim that both the soul and the world are eternal. And why they do so? Some recluse and Brahmana by means of exertion and proper mental attention attains to such a concentration of mind that they are able to recall to mind many hundreds of thousands of past births. And they think: "There

p. 403

I was born of such a name (evaṃ-nāmo), of such a lineage and caste (evaṃ-gotto, evaṃ-vaṇṇo).[29] My food was such (evaṃ-āhāro) . I was the experiencer of such pleasures and pains (evaṃ-sukha-dukkha-paṭisaṃvedī) and had such a span of life (evaṃ-āyu-pariyanto). Falling from there I was born here." [30] Thus they remember their past existences in full detail. And each of them says to himself: "sassato attā ca loko ca vañjho kutaṭṭho esikaṭṭhāyīṭhito, te ca sattā sandhāvanti saṃsaranti cavanti upapajjanti, atthi tveva sassata-saman ti." [31] T.W.Rhys Davids translates as follows: "The soul is eternal; and the world giving birth to nothing new, is steadfast as a mountain-peak, as a pillar firmly fixed; and that though these living creatures transmigrate and pass away, fall from one state of existence and spring up in another, yet they are (atthi) for ever and ever." [32]

Though this translation tallies with the traditional Buddhist explanation, it is difficult to accept it, as it raises some problems. From the legend we have seen that the living beings in this world could only remember the details of their past lives here. And an awareness of an unchangeable 'I' (cf. I was born with such a name etc.) links all these past lives together and gives rise to the notion of an eternal soul (attā). The same soul was thought to be born again and again as different individuals. The attā and sattā are not identical. The

skandhas are admitted to be different in each of these births, though the attā characterised by the awareness of an'I' remains unchanged.

The above translation from Rhys Davids of the stock description of Śāśvatavāda is not in agreement with the implications of the Śāśvatavāda legend. In this translation not only the two verbs of motion ( sandhāvanti and saṃsaranti) indicating repeated deaths and rebirths and so underlining changes are connected with the sattā but also the verb of existence (atthi) indicating permanency becomes associated with the same sattā. If we accept this translation we have to admit that the Śāśvatavādins thought the concept of eternity to be compatible with the

p. 404

notion of change. The soul's eternality was not at variance with its identity with the changeable skandhas. But there is no reason to believe that the Śāśvatavādins were so unrealistic as to support such an unreasonable view. We have seen that according to the Śāśvatavāda the eternal soul characterised by a sense of 'I' was different from the changing individuals. Moreover, other religious groups contemporary of the Śāśvatavāda were also not supporters of such a view. The ucchedavādins [33] took the soul to be identical with the skandhas, and consistent with this view they held that the soul is destroyed together with the body. The Ekaccasassatavādins [34] believed the Mahābrahmā to be eternal as they did not appear to have known that the Mahābrahmā was also identical with the skandhas, created, and subject to death. All the religious groups including the Śāśvatavādins thus seem to have held the view that the soul to be eternal must have an existence independent of the skandhas. So the translation making the sattā eternal cannot be accepted. The only other possibility is to take 'atthi' in the sense of a singular number and to connect it with 'attā'. Then we get the following translation: "The soul is eternal; and the world giving birth to nothing new, is steadfast as a mountain-peak, as pillar firmly fixed; and these living beings move on and on, transmigrate, fall from one state of existence, rise up in another, but (the soul) exists for eternity."

For our purpose it is, however, important to know how the buddhists would understand this philosophy. From our discussion of the Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi it is clear that according to the Buddhist's interpretation of the false view the soul must be either identical with or closely related to the Skandhas. This relation

is such that the existence of a soul apart from the skandhas is unthinkable. The changes which the skandhas undergo even during one's lifetime are obvious. Moreover the acceptance of the repeated deaths and rebirths shows that the skandhas do not remain unchanged. In short, according to the buddhist interpretation, the Śāśvatavādins admitted the changeable nature of the skandhas, accepted the close relationship existing between the soul and the skandhas, and yet held the soul to be eternal (sassato). This also seems to be the opinion of Buddhaghosa [35] as

p. 405

expressed in the Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, But, as already shown, Buddhist presentation of the eternalism is not the same as the original philosophy of the Śāśvatavādins. The Śāśvatavādins themselves regarded 'attā' to be independent of body and mind, i.e. of the skandhas, to use the Buddhist terminology. This seems to be reason why the Śāśvatavādins themselves did not relate the soul to any of the skandhas in the stock description of their own philosophy. Even the logicians and thinkers (takkī, vīmaṅsī)[36] among them have nothing to say about the relationship existing between the soul and the skandhas.

Whatever may be the case, it is of no consequence for our present study that the Buddhist presentation of the attā of the Śāśvatavādins does not tally with the original concept. What really matters is the idea the Buddhists had of such a concept. For when they reject a concept of an eternal soul, they do so in the light of their own understanding of it. So it is important to take note of their idea of the attā concept which may be described as follows: The attā is an eternally existent individual soul which is either identical with the skandhas or so closely attains liberation nor gets annihilated.

c) Ekaccasassatavāda: A concept of attā different from that of the eternalists has been recorded in the Brahmajālasutta of the Dīgha-Nikāya.[37] This is the concept of an eternal soul unique to the Mahābrahmā as held by the followers of the Ekaccasassatavāda. The Buddha in order to explain the origin of the Ekaccasassatavāda relates the following legend about the past lives of the upholders of this philosophy:

When the world system dissolves the beings are reborn in the Ābhassara world. They are made of mind. Now the world system begins to come into

existence and an empty Brahm-vimāna (Brahma-palace) appears. One of the beings at the end of merits or span of life falls from the Ābhassara world and is reborn in the Brahma-palace. There he lives, made of mind (manomayo), feeding on joy (pīti-bhakkho), radiating light. Etc. and thus does remain there for a

p. 406

long time. And he feels lonely and longs for companions. Just then some beings die in the Ābhassara world and are born in the Brahma-palace. They are just like the being who was first born. As these beings were born after he desired for company, he thought himself to be Brahmā Mahābrahmā, Creator, Father of all that are and are to be. And the other beings also thought that they have been created by Mahābrahmā. Their lives are of shorter duration than that of Mahābrahmā. They die in the Brahma-palace and are reborn here in this world. Here one of them leads a religious life and can remember his past existence in the Brahma-palace, but not beyond that. He thinks of Mahābrahmā as creator permanent, fixed, eternal, of a nature which is not subject to transformation (nicco, dhuvo, sassato, aviparināmadhammo) while he regards himself and other beings as created by Mahābrahmā, impermanent, not fixed, eternal, and having the nature of dying (ancicā, addhuvā, appayukā, cavanadhammā).

The last part of the above account seems to be a stock description which formed a part of the original philosophy of the Ekaccasassatavādins. According to their philosophy only the uncreated is eternal while the created is impermanent. Only Mahābrahmā is eternal and the other beings are impermanent. The information that Mahābrahmā was made of mind were most probably not included in their philosophy, for it is not mentioned in the utterance of him who remembers his past existence. Otherwise we have to assume that according to the Ekaccasassatavādins mind can be both created and uncreated. So it appears that this extra bit of information has been added in accordance with the Buddhist dogma. Thus as per the understandings of the Buddhists, the followers of the Ekaccasassatvāda believed in an eternal soul only in case of mahābrahmā and this soul was made of mind, uncreated and immortal.

Two other groups of the Ekaccasassatavādins [38] believed in many eternal individual souls. But the eternity is not absolute in these cases; it may be lost

either due to the lack of self-control or due to envy. The fourth group of the Ekaccasassatavādins [39] were comprised of the logicians and the thinkers who concluded by reasoning that there are two souls, one impermanent and the other

p. 407

permanent. The soul consisting of ear, nose tongue and body is impermanent, not fixed, not eternal and having the changeable nature. But the soul which is thought or mind or consciousness (cittan ti va mano ti va viññānan ti va) is permanent, eternal etc.

d) Ucchedavāda: the seven groups of Ucchedavādins [40] identified an individual soul variously with physical body, or sensual desire, or mind, or infinite space, or infinite consciousness, or nothingness, or neither perception nor not perception. The first group believed in one soul made of gross matter while the other groups believed in more than one souls. And all these groups upheld the doctrine that the soul is annihilated with the destruction of the body. It appears that even before the Buddhists the Ucchedavādins denied the belief in an eternal individual soul (attā) which was identical with one of the skandhas. Therefore this philosophy came to be known as the doctrine of nirattā.

So far we have discussed the Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi, Śāśvatavāda, Ekaccasassatavāda and the Ucchedavāda, and these are the only dominant heresies regarding attā and relevant to our study that have been recorded in the Āgamas and Nikāyas. [41] Presumably these were the four main type of heresies that attracted the attention of the Buddha and the early Buddhists. It is obvious that the attā concepts discussed in the Ucchedavāda and Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi can in no way be connected with the problem of attā's identity with the Upaniṣadic Ātman. It is only the Śāśvatavāda and Ekaccasassatavāda concept that deserves to be considered in this connection.

In course of our discussion we have noted the following characteristics of an eternal soul as envisaged by the followers of the Śāśvatavāda and Ekaccasassatavāda. The first group of Ekaccasassatavāda believed that only the

p. 408

soul of Mahābrahmā, who is uncreated, is eternal. But the Śāśvatavāda and the other groups of Ekaccasassatavāda recognise numerous, eternal, individual souls who are either identical with the skandhas or so closely related to them as to be dependent on them for their very existence. The second and third groups of the Ekaccasassatavādins, however, are of the opinion that the eternity is not absolute, for the beings die if they indulge in sensual pleasures or are afflicted with jealousy. The first type of Ekaccasassatavāda explicitly states that the souls, including that of the Mahābrahmā, are made of mind. This view seems to have been accepted by the second and third groups of the Ekaccasassatavādins who made the eternity of the individual souls dependent on the purity of mind. According to the fourth group of the Ekaccasassatavādins which consists of the logicians and the thinkers, the individual soul is identical with citta or manas or vijñāna. Thus we find that the Ekaccasassatavāda concept of soul belonged to the sphere of mind and at least in most cases could not rise beyond the Rūpaloka. Moreover the eternal souls are confined within space and time and are characterised by the subject-object split.

The Upaniṣadic Ātman, on the other hand, is not an individual soul. The Ātman is the supreme reality, the only Being that is beyond speech, beyond the reach of mind and the notion of space. And such an Ātman can by no stretch of imagination be equated with any of the skandhas. In short, the sassato attā of the Buddhist scriptures and the Ātman of the Upanisads are two diametrically opposing points of view.

So long we have discussed scriptural materials which are more or less descriptive in nature. Now we pay attention to a more critical type of āgama-Nikāya passages which acquaint us with the reasons for the rejection of different types of attā heresies, and thereby provide us with some extra details regarding these heresies.

## IV

We have seen that four kinds of relationship between the attā and the skandhas were recognised. Out of these only one type of relationship viz. that of identity between the attā and the skandhas, finds prominent mention in the Nikāyas and the āgamas. This appears to have been the dominant

heresy at the

p. 409

time of the Buddha. Only in a few cases the early buddhist canon takes note of other types of relationship, viz. attā has skandhaka or attā is not a particular type of skandhaka. Again the nature and contents of such a criticism of attā heresy vary depending on the type of persons for whom it was meant. The discourses which are held for the benefit of the Buddhist monks are quite different from those meant for non-Buddhist ascetics.

With these preliminary remarks we will proceed to arrange the relevant materials according to the type of heresies criticised and the type of persons addressed.

### **A: Criticism of heresies meant for the Buddhist monks**

i) Rejection of Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi: The saṃyutta passage referred to above is a plain form of instruction discarding the heresy of Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi. the Buddha points out that some recluses and Brahmans by erroneous observations of the skandhas give rise to the false notion of a soul, but those who are wise never make this mistake. Here the talk is about the mere existence of a soul with reference to the skandhas, and not the eternity or impermanence of soul. It is apparent that the Buddha is rejecting the Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi. The Buddha does not find it necessary to offer any extra argument in favour of his view, as he addresses his own disciples who have absolute faith in his wisdom.

ii) Criticism of Śāśvatavāda: In the account of the Brahmajālasutta which we have already discussed, the Buddha gives critical description of the heresy of Śāśvatavāda in the form of a legend. He points out that some recluses and Brahmanas believe in eternal individual soul for they can remember their past lives in this world. The sutta implies that the memory of the past lives is genuine though the interpretation of such experiences is wrong. In this passage no logical argument is advanced justifying the rejection of this heresy. It will, however, be clear later from our discussion of another passage from the same sutta that the Buddha rejects this view on the basis of his more extensive knowledge and higher knowledge.

iii) Criticism of Ekaccasassatavāda: Like the legend about the Śāśvatavāda, the legend concerning the Ekaccasassatavāda in the Brahmajālasutta implicitly contains the criticism of the concept of an eternal soul. The legend states that

p. 410

the beings who died in the Brahmā world were born in this world. While in this world they could remember their past birth in the Brahma-vimāna, but had no knowledge of their still earlier birth in the ābhassara world, nor could they know that Mahābrahmā is also subject to death. This legend suggests that the incomplete experience coupled with imperfect knowledge led these beings to interpret wrongly their genuine spiritual experiences.

Consequently they came to believe in the false notion of an eternal Mahābrahmā who is made of mind. So the Buddha is here criticising Ekaccasassatavāda on the basis of his more extensive knowledge.

iv) Criticism of heresies in general: There is no legend criticising the Ucchedavāda. This is because the Ucchedavāda tradition most probably did not record any legend justifying this philosophy. The Ucchedavāda philosophy only recognised the present life and denied the existence of any life before birth and after death. So there was no scope for the development of any such legend.

In the Brahmajālasutta, however, we come across a general criticism of all the false views noted in this sutta.[\[42\]](#) Here the criticism is based on the more extensive knowledge and higher knowledge of the Buddha. The passage in question states that the Buddha knows of all these false views and also knows of into what sort of future existences fall those who grasp at and become attached to such views. Knowing this and knowing (other) higher things (tañ ca Tathāgato pajānāti, tato ca uttarītam pajānāti ) the Tathāgata does not get involved, he knows about extinction; and having truly known the rising and passing away of sensations (vedanānam samudayañ ca atthamagamañ ca), their taste, danger, their not being the refuge, Tathāgata, due to the non-attachment, is free (vimutto).

These are those other things, profound, difficult, to understand..... not to be grasped at by mere logic, which Tathāgata having himself realised and seen face to face, has set forth."

The higher knowledge which is profound and beyond logic is different from the knowledge of future existences and past lives of the beings. The phrase-"knowing this and knowing(other) higher things"-clearly shows that two different types of knowledge are referred to. The higher knowledge refers to the

p. 411

rising and passing away of vadanā (sensation or feeling), i.e. the knowledge of the paṭiccasamuppāda which only the Buddha possessed. That the statement regarding 'vedanā' refers to the truth of the dependent origination is confirmed by another passage of the same sutta (D. 1.3.71). All the false views are rejected because they are contradicted by the law of dependent origination. Of all the links of the Paṭiccasamuppāda, Vedanā is specially mentioned, for the awareness of 'I' is directly dependent on vedanā.

In corroboration of the conclusion reached above we may take note of another sutta where the rejection of a false view on the basis of paṭiccasamuppāda is explicitly mentioned.

V) Rejection of the Ekaccasassatavāda: The Buddha in his instruction to his disciple Kevaṭṭaputto Sāti is rejecting the Ekaccasassatvāda on the basis of paṭiccasamuppāda. [43] Sāti gave out that it is the self-same vijñāna that passes from one existence to another. Here Sāti is speaking in favour of Śāśvatavāda. This statement is elaborated in the Papañcasudani [44] to bring out its full significance: 'That which speaks, experiences now here now there, the fruits of his good and evil actions is that consciousness (vijñāna) that I am speaking about.' The same vijñāna is enjoying the fruits of his actions. This is the same as preaching Śāśvatavāda as it will be clear from a passage of the Sabbāsavasutta of the Majjhima Nikāya and a passage from the Saṃyutta Nikāya. The Majjhima passage runs thus [45]: Atha va pana assa evam diṭṭhi hoti: yo me ayam attā vado vedeyya tatra tatra kalyanapapakanam vipākam patisaṃvedeti so kho pana me ayam attā nicco dhuvo sassato aviparinamodhammo sassatisamam tath'eva thassati' 'Or a wrong view occurs to him thus: the soul of mine that speaks, experiences now here and now there the fruits of his good and evil actions is indeed that soul of mine that is permanent, stable, not subject to change, that will stand firm for eternity.' The Saṃyutta passage [46] states: One and the same person both acts and

p. 412

experiences (the results). This Kassapa which you called at first 'suffering self-wrought' amounts to the Eternalist theory.[47]

It is also to be noted that Sāti is identifying the eternal soul with the vijñāna only. This reminds us of the view of the logicians among the Ekaccasassatavādins who held that indriya etc. are impermanent while the citta (thought), or manas (mind), or vijñāna (consciousness) is eternal. So the eternalism which Sāti is preaching actually amounts to the Ekaccasassatavāda of the logicians. To reject this view the Buddha refers to the law of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda). The Buddha condemned the view of Sāti and corrected him by pointing out that vijñāna can only originate through cause and conditions (aññatra paccayā na'tthi viññānassa sambhavo ti) [48] and so cannot be eternal.

In the preceding pages we have dealt with such criticisms of the false views regarding attā as were meant for the loyal disciples of the Buddha. For his disciples the unquestionable veracity of these criticisms ultimately rests on their unflinching faith in the claim of the Buddha to the more extensive and higher types of knowledge. It was not necessary for the Buddha to analyse critically the different heresies in order to expose the flaws in them, or to adduce extra reasons to justify their rejection. The approach, however, changes when the discourses are meant for the non-Buddhist ascetics.

### **B : Criticism of heresies meant for non-Buddhist ascetics**

i) Rejection of Śāśvatavāda:[49] The Anattā-lakkhana-sutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya (III XXII, 59)[50] while giving a clear exposition of the anattā doctrine,

p. 413

adduces reasons for the denial of attā in the following manner: From (rūpa) is not soul (attā). If it were, this form could not turn oppressive, and with regard to form it would be possible to achieve the intention that "let my body be thus, let my body be not thus". And so with vedanā, saññā, saṃkhāra, and viññāna. "What do you think is form permanent or

impermenet?""It is impermanent, Oh Lord". "But is the impermanent ill (dukkha) or ease (sukha)?" "It is ill, Oh Lord". "But is it fitting to consider that which is impermanent linked to suffering, doomed to reversal as 'this is mine, I am this, this is my soul'" "No, indeed, Oh Lord". And so for vedanā, saññā ect. Therefore whatever form there is, past or future, inner or outer, gross or subtle, low or exalted, near or far away, would be seen by right wisdom as it really is, i.e. "all this form is not really mine, I am not really this, this is not my soul (attā)." And so vedanā, saññā etc. Seeing this the well-disciplined holy disciple become disgusted with the skandhas."

From a careful study of the passage quoted above the concept of the attā rejected here clearly emerges. The rūpa and other skandhas cannot be attā for they turn oppressive and cannot be changed according to one's liking. So it follows that the attā or the individual soul enjoys complete self-mastery and remains ever happy. Moreover the five skandhas are not attā for they are impermanent and subject to change and suffering. This shows that the attā concept rejected here was believed to be identical with the skandhas, permanent, changeless, happy and characterised by an awareness of an 'I' and 'mine'. So the concept of attā which emerges wholly conforms to the Śāśvatavāda.

Two opposing trends of thought are discernible in this sutta. One represent the viewpoint of the Śāśvatavāda as presented above. The other trend shows the Buddha's acceptance of the notion of I and mine as a basis for further argumentation in order to disprove the soul's identity with the skandhas. The line of reasoning, partly explicit and partly implicit, may be presented thus: the idea of 'I' and 'mine' is the characteristic feature of attā and implies complete self-mastery of oneself. What one refers to as 'I' and 'mine' must be its own master. Moreover the individual soul is permanent. But the body (rūpa) is beyond one's control.

p. 414

It grows, becomes old and ultimately dies without anybody being able to do anything to arrest this process. In short this philosophy upholds the self-mastery and permanency of an individual soul but advocates in the same breath the identity of the soul with the five skandhas which are impermanent and lack self-mastery. Thus it is clear that the viewpoint of the Śāśvatavādins suffers from internal contradiction and cannot be accepted.

It should be noted that the Buddha did not criticise this philosophy on the basis of any Buddhist doctrine. The impermanence of body etc, is a matter of common experience and no higher philosophy is needed to prove it. The Buddha neither referred to the skandhas constituting a being nor to the law of paṭiccasamuppāda in order to deny the existence of a permanent ego-centric entity. Rather he made use of the notion of 'I' which is taken to be the tell-tale sign of an individual soul to refute the Śāśvatavāda. This approach appears to be all the more intriguing as the Buddha is preaching to his own disciples, and not to the non-Buddhist ascetics. And from the dialogue between the Buddha and his disciples it is obvious that his disciples has not turned into supporters of this false view, but had remained faithful to his teachings. Moreover it would be preposterous to hold that the Buddha actually supported the existence of a permanent individual soul, although he denied its identity with the five skandhas. What, then, is the reason for this particular mode of preaching? We can reasonably surmise that he was instructing his disciples how to meet the challenges of such an erroneous view. The inadvisability of trying to discard this false view by referring to the Buddhist doctrine is obvious, for the non-Buddhists cannot be expected to have any faith in the teachings of the Buddha. So the Buddha was teaching his disciples how such false doctrines could be successfully countered even while basing one's arguments on such articles of faith as forming an integral part of the philosophy they were criticising. He was trying to show how the logical implications of one aspect of this false doctrine would render null and void another aspect of the same doctrine. In other words the Buddha was teaching his disciples to expose the contradictions inherent in the doctrines of the Śāśvatavādins in such a way that even the upholders of this philosophy would be forced to admit the justification of the criticism. In the Anattā-lakkhana-sutta the point which the Buddha drives home is that the logical implications of the notion of 'I'

p. 415

which were acceptable to the protagonists of this philosophy, would contradict the other part of the philosophy, viz. the identity of the individual soul with the skandhas. It is also clear that the sutta was ultimately meant for the Śāśvatavādins themselves.

ii) a) The Poṭṭhapadasutta and the rejection of Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi: this sutta starts with a discussion of the arising and the cessation of perception (saññā or

abhisañña) and then follows it up with a judgement about the problem of identity between the soul and perception. We will just have a glimpse of the discussion as it will help us to understand the nature of perception. The Buddha gave a gradual discourse on the higher and higher stages of perception leading to the summit of perception (saññaggam) and then to the cessation of perception (nirodha). Except the final stage, at every other stage a perception of a lower type is replaced by a perception of a higher type. The Buddha showed that a certain type of perception arose due to a certain type of thinking, a certain type of mental training. When the thinking ceased, the perception also ceased. With the cessation of all thoughts, the possibility of the rising of any new perception comes to an end.

Next Poṭṭhapāda raises the question of a soul. "Is perception the soul of a man, Sir, or is perception one thing and soul another?" The Buddha asked, "What, now, Poṭṭhapāda, do you assume a soul?" "I presume a gross soul sir, material, made of four great elements, feeding on solid food". "Yet if your soul were gross, Poṭṭhapāda, material, made of four gross elements feeding on solid food, in that case for you perception would be one thing, soul another. Just let this gross soul be, Poṭṭhapāda, for then a man's perception occurs as one thing, ceases as another thing". Poṭṭhapāda next proposes to assume a mental soul, with perfect faculties, complete in its faculties. The Buddha's objection remains the same: perception would then occur as one thing but cease as another thing. Lastly Poṭṭhapāda proposes an immaterial soul, consisting of perception. The objection of the Buddha is still the same.

The denial of the identity between the soul and perception is based on the following pattern of reasoning. If the soul is material like body, then the soul cannot be identical with perception. For in that case the perception would be rising as one thing and ceasing as another. It means that as long as the perception is in existence, it can be assumed to be soul (as body). But when it ceases to be, it

p. 416

can no longer be equated with the soul, for the living material soul would be still in existence. Hence the statement about the perception as rising as one and ceasing as another. This reasoning also holds good while showing the difference between the perception and soul as mind, for the cessation of a particular perception does not mean the annihilation of mind. But this type

of reasoning is not valid when one assumes the soul to be made of perception. In this case the cessation of perception will automatically mean the annihilation of soul, and consequently the argument that the perception ceases as another is no longer tenable. This part of the discussion appears to be a later mechanical addition.

Whatever may be the case, it is obvious that Poṭṭhapāda is equating attā with a skandhaka. In his query about the identity of the soul with perception as well as in his suggestion that the soul may be made of four gross elements, or of mind, or of perception, Poṭṭhapāda is equating soul with one of the skandhakas. He is not concerned about the eternity of the soul or otherwise. In other words we are dealing here with the Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi, the root cause of all other false views.

In rejecting the Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi the Buddha is not denying the existence of attā on the basis of paṭiccasamuppāda as he did while instructing his own disciples. He is even accepting—for the sake of argument, or we may say as a skillful means—Poṭṭhapāda's point of view regarding the existence of soul or the constitution of soul, and then rejecting the suggested identity by exposing the logical inconsistencies involved in the suggestion. He is showing that the acceptance of the view that the soul is made of mind or four gross elements contradicts the other aspect of the suggestion, viz. soul is identical with perception.

b) Mahānidānasutta and the rejection of a different type of Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi [51]

Mahānidānasutta [52] rejects a new type of Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi which may be formulated as soul possessing feelings. The relevant passage is given below: "Herein, again, Ānanda, to him who affirms: 'Nay, my soul is not feeling, nor is it non-sentient;

p. 417

my soul has feelings, it has the property of sentience'—answer should be made: —'My friend, were feelings of every kind to cease absolutely, then there being, owing to cessation thereof, no feeling whatever, could one then say: —'I myself am'?"

'No, lord, one could not.'

'Wherefore, Ānanda, it follows that this aspect: -'Nay, my soul is not feel feeling, nor is it non-sentient; my soul has feelings, it has the property of sentience'-does not commend itself'.

Here the Buddha is teaching Ānanda how to refute the heresy of Satakāyadr̥ṣṭi. The view that the soul is not feeling, but possesses feelings shows that the feeling is not intrinsic to attā but external to it. It, therefore, follows that the presence of absence of feeling should not at all affect the basic nature of soul. But, as the Buddha points out, our daily experience shows that in the absence of all feelings there cannot be any I-awareness which is the very essence of attā. So the feeling is not external to soul; soul cannot be regarded as having feelings. The accepted idea that attā essentially means I-awareness goes against the view that attā has feelings.

The attā heresy under discussion is concerned with the relationship existing between the soul and the skandhakas, and so falls under the category of satkāyadr̥ṣṭi.

It is by way of expediency that the Buddha accepts I-awareness as the very core of an assumed attā and thereby shows that the present heresy suffers from internal contradiction. It is also to be noted that the Buddha's instructions, though addressed to Ānanda, is ultimately meant for the non-Buddhist ascetics.

iii) The Mahānidānasutta and the rejection of the Ekaccasassatavāda

The Mahānidānasutta [53] also contains passages rejecting the heresy that the soul is feeling. The relevant part of the sutta runs as follows: -'Herein, Ānanda, to him who affirms' My soul is feeling'-answer should be thus made: -'My friend, feelings is of three kinds. There is happy feeling, painful feeling, and neutral feeling. Of these three feelings, look you, which do you consider your soul is?'

p. 418

'When you feel a happy feeling you do not feel a painful feeling or a neutral feeling, you feel just a happy feeling. And when you feel a painful feeling, you do not feel a happy feeling or a neutral feeling, but just a painful feeling.

And when you feel a neutral feeling, you do not feel a happy feeling or a painful feeling; you feel just a neutral feeling.'

"Moreover, Ānanda, happy feeling is impermanent, conditioned (sañkhata), the result of cause or causes, liable to perish, to pass away, to become extinct, to cease. So too the painful feeling. So too is neutral feeling. If when experiencing a happy feeling one thinks-'this is my soul'-when that same happy feeling ceases, one will also think-'my soul has departed'-So too when the feeling is painful or neutral. Thus he who say-'My soul is feeling'-regards, as his soul something which, in this present life, is impermanent, is blended of happiness and pain, and is liable to begin and end. Wherefore, Ānanda, it follows that this aspect-'My soul in feeling'-does not commend itself."

The passage in question rejects the view that the individual soul is feeling. The daily experience of people shows that the feeling is impermanent, a blending of happiness and pain, and subject to origination and destruction. This characterisation of feeling will be, in the main, also acceptable to the Ekaccasassatavādins, for they as we have already noted, accepted the idea that the created is impermanent. The feeling so characterised is different from soul. The soul thus appears to be permanent, beyond origination and destruction, and experiencing unmixed happiness. It is identical with one of the skandhas.

This concept of attā is, in all its essential features, identical with that held by the logicians among the Ekaccasassatavādins who also believed the individual soul to be eternal, and identical with one of the skandhas belonging to the sphere of mind.

It is to be noted that the Buddha is denying the Ekaccasassatavāda not on the strength of the law of paṭiccasamuppāda or any other Buddhist dogma. It is obviously because his invoking of the higher knowledge would cut no ice with the non-Buddhists. He is, on the other hand, showing that the philosophy under criticism suffers from internal contradiction, and hence untenable. He shows that the Ekaccasassatavāda concept of feeling is diametrically opposed to the Ekaccasassatavāda concept of soul, and so the view that the soul is identical with feeling

is to be discarded.

The Mahānidānasutta passage supports our conclusion that the Buddha also taught his disciples how to defeat the upholders of the attā heresy in debate. Here the Buddha is teaching Ānanda how to refute the view of the Ekaccasassatavādins. In other words his teaching is ultimately meant for the followers of the Ekaccasassatavāda.

iv) The mahānidānasutta rejects an atypical attā heresy: In the Mahānidānasutta [54] we come across a heresy which does not conform to any of the types mentioned before. The relevant passage recording a negative formulation the heresy is given below:-

"Herein, Ānanda, to him who affirms: 'Nay, my soul is not feeling, my soul is not sentient' -answer should thus be given "'My friend, where there is no feeling of anything, can you there say: 'I am?' 'You cannot, Lord,' 'Wherefore, Ānanda, it follows that this aspect: 'Nay, my soul is not feeling, my soul is not sentient'-does not commend itself."

The view that the individual soul is not feeling and sentient is rejected because there cannot be any āreñess of 'I' without feeling and sentience. Hence there cannot be any soul without feeling and sentience. Here the criticism is based on the assumption of 'I-awareness' as the essence of the individual soul. The proposition admits of the existence of an individual soul, asserts the soul's difference from feeling and sentience, and is silent about the question whether the individual soul is eternal or not. This is now type of attā heresy which is neither Śāsvatavāda nor Ucchedavāda. Strictly speaking this negative formulation is not even all illustration of Satkāyārṣṭi, as it denies instead of affirming, the relationship existing between the soul and the skandhas.

Against our contention one may argue that the formulation-attā is not feeling -was merely used to imply that the soul is identical with some other skandha. In this case this implication should be treated as the main proposition, which is different from the given proposition. If this were so, the Buddhist criticism

would have been directed against a proposition asserting the identity of soul with skandhaka and not against the formulation of the soul not being feeling. But as this is not the case, we have to take the given proposition as the main proposition.

Thought the negative formulation states that the individual soul is not the same as feeling, it should not be interpreted to mean that the soul is not connected with any of the five skandhas. For the Saṃyutta Nikāya passage quoted above shows that the negative formulation of this type is also the result of the Satkāyaṛṣṭi.

To sum up, the attā concepts held by the followers of the Śāśvatavāda, Ekaccasassatavāda, Ucchedavāda, and Satkāyaṛṣṭi mainly have been criticised and rejected in the Nikāyas and Āgamas. None of these concepts are identical with the Upaniṣadic Ātman-Brahman.

Except the Ucchedavāda, all other concepts regarding attā have been criticised in two different ways. When the criticisms rejecting the attā heresies were addressed to his own disciples, the Buddha referred to his more extensive knowledge that could see farther into the past and future lives of the beings, and his superior knowledge of the law dependent origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda). But when the criticisms were meant for the non-Buddhist ascetics all references to these two types of knowledge were avoided. The Buddha by way of expediency makes use of a part of the opponent's proposition for the sake of further argumentation, and thereby lays bare the internal contradictions involved in the proposition. This method of reductio ad absurdum which the Buddha introduced, was later applied by Nāgārjuna with great success.

The Ucchedavāda was criticised only on the basis of the Buddha's extensive knowledge and superior knowledge but not on logical grounds, as the Ucchedavāda philosophy does not suffer from any logical inconsistencies.

## V

We have shown that the early Buddhist scripture rejected any notion of attā which was either identical with the skandhas or dependent on them for its very existence. The Buddha specially took great pains to discard the

Śāśvatavādins and the Ucchedavādins who preached the philosophy of attā and nirattā respectively. The Buddhists were aware of this fact and gave expression to it in

p. 421

canonical and non-canonical texts. We will cite a few quotations from the Buddhist texts in support of our view. In the Duṭṭhaṭṭhakasutta (No.8) of the Suttanipāta we read the following verse:[55]

"attam nirattam na hi tassa aṭṭhi adhosi se diṭṭhimidha sabbā"

Here the belief in attā and nirattā are counted among the false views (diṭṭhi) which a follower of the Buddha has given up. Again the following two verses from Lalitavistara [56] and Madhyamikakārikā [57] while confirming the Buddhist rejection of both attā and nirattā give some extra information regarding these heresies:

- i) astināstivīnirumktamātmyanairātmyavarjitaṃ prakṛtyā jātinirdeśam dharmacakram ihocyate.
- ii) astīti śāśvatagrāho nastītyucchedādarśanam tasmādistivanāstīve nāśriyeta vicakṣana.

From the verses quoted above it is evident that the existence of an eternal individual soul (attā) was preached in the philosophy of the Śāśvatavāda and term 'asti' in its vocabulary did not convey the ordinary meaning of mere existence but acquired the special sense of eternal existence. On the other hand the Ucchedavāda which preached the philosophy of nirattā (nairātmya), coined the term 'nasti' to signify simultaneous annihilation of the temporarily existing attā and the physical body. It is in these special senses that the Pali Buddhist texts use these two terms 'asti' and 'nasti' while recording the dialogues between the Buddha and the non-Buddhist ascetics. Any lack of awareness of the special imports of 'asti' and 'nāsti' may result in drawing wrong conclusions from such dialogues.

As the ego-centricity and absolute dependence on the Skandakas-the two

p. 422

hallmarks of the concept of attā-can be no means by associated with the Upaniṣadic Ātman-Brahman, it is but natural that the Nikāya criticisms do not contain any reference to the Upaniṣadic concept. The post-canonical early Buddhist texts also never confused attā with the Ātman-Brahman of the Upaniṣads. In the Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā [58] ātman is used together with such terms as jīva, sattva and pudgala. All these terms are put in the same category and are used to denote different aspects of the same ego-centric entity. 'Sacet Bodhisattvasya sattva saṃjñā pravarteta na sa bodhisattva iti vaktavya. Tat kasya hetoh? na sa Subhūte bodhisattvo vaktavyo yasya ātma-saṃjñā pravarteta, sattva-saṃjñā vā jīvasaṃjñā vā pudgala-saṃjñā va pravarteta'. 'If in a Bodhisattva the perception of a being should take place, then he could not be called a Bodhisattva. And why? He is not to be called a Bodhisattva in whom the perception of a soul, or a being, or a living being, or a person would take place'. [59] Similarly in the early Mādhyamika literature we read: 'Ko 'yam ātmā yo 'haṅkāraviśayaḥ', which may be translated as follows: What is this ātman that is the domain of ego? [60] Here ātman (Pali: attā) is characterised by ahaṅkāra. In this context we may refer to the definition of 'upadhi' in sopadhiśeṣanirvāṇam as given by Candrakīrti [61] in the Prasannapadā: tatra upadhiyate asminn ātmasneha ity upadhiḥ, upadhi śabdenātmāprajñapti-nimittāḥ pañcopādānaskandhā ucyante'. Here the concept of ātmā is held to be caused by the five aggregates of attachment. The same idea is expressed by Buddhaghosa [62] while defining 'attabhāva'. 'Attabhāvo vuccanti sarīram. Khandha-pañcakam eva vā, tam upādāya paññatti-matta sabhāvato'. Conze translates: 'Personal existence means the body, or the five Skandhas together, because dependent on them this mere concept comes about'. [63] Thus it is clear that these early Buddhist texts while discussing the concept of attā never thought about the Upaniṣadic Ātman, but remained faithful to the Nikāya

p. 423

characteristics of attā, viz. the ego-centricity and its invariable relationship with the skandhas. This point has been clearly stated by Vasubandhu. In his Viṃśatikā-vṛtti Vasubandhu [64] states: 'Yo bālair dharmānām svabhavo grāhyagrāhakadiḥ parikalpitas tena parikalpitenātmanā teṣām nairātmyam, na tv anabhilāpyenātmanā yo buddhānām viśayaḥ 'It is because of that imaginary ātman which the ignorant people think to be the things' self-being consisting of subject and object etc., that the things are devoid of ātman, not

because of the ineffable Ātman which is the domain of the Buddhas'. The attā rejected by the Bhaddhas is "ahaṅkāra-viṣayaḥ" whereas the ineffable Upaniṣadic Ātman is 'buddhānām viṣayaḥ'.

p. 424

## 初期佛教文獻的 Attā、Nirattā 和 Anattā

穆克紀

中華佛學研究所專任客座教授

### 提要

本文共分五節，討論外道持的 attā(我)觀究竟如何，佛教又如何用 anttā(無我)論來破它。

第一節引《阿含》和《尼柯耶》，肯定在有為界與無為界都沒 attā，它只不過是想像的產品。

第二節介紹近代學者對 attā 一詞函義的種種看法。其中只有 Conze 一人發現，佛教講的 attā 和數論所謂的 puruṣa 有相似處。其他所有思考過此一問題的學者或許由於 attā、ātman 二詞對等，單單關心 attā 與奧義書 ātman 有何關聯，而未經系統的研究，確信二者之間有關係。此一觀念顯然有必要重新評估。本節則提出較客觀、適當的研究方法。

第三節簡要敘述持 attā 見的常論者和持 nirattā 見的斷論者主要思想。

第四節分析佛教如何破 **attā** 的信念。在反駁 **attā** 的基礎上分別擬構出常論者和斷論者所持的論點，並發現佛教用三種推理方式來破 **attā**。尤其破常見及身見者的方式顯示辯論的兩種重要特色：一、以揭發對方說法內在矛盾來駁斥。這個方法後來的大乘佛教用得非常成功。二、先接受對方部分說法，把它當做進一步顯示該說法謬誤的基礎。這或許可以看做大乘教所推崇的 [ 方便 ]。

第五節指出，佛陀提 **anattā** 的中道是針對常論者和斷論者的極端見解。同時證明常論、斷論所謂 **attā**，並非奧義書的 **ātman**。

[1] S.Vol. IV, p.28, XXXV, 43-45 (PTS,London, 1894)

[2] Ibid XXXV, 34-38

[3] Ibid, p.15, XXXV, 23

[4] Katamo ca bhikkhave sabbapahānāyo dhammo/cakkhum bhikkhave pahātabbaṃ/rūpā pahātabbā/cakkhuviññānaṃ pahātabbaṃ/cak-khusamphasso pahātabbo/yam pidaṃ cakkhusamphassopaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkham asukhaṃ vā/tam pi pahātabbaṃ/(Saṃyutta, IV, pp15-16, XXXV, 24(PTS, London, 1894)

[5] Rahulo, What the Buddha taught (Grove Press, INC.New York, 1962) , pp.57-58; Dhammapada, Chapter 20, verses 5-7.

[6] Swāmi Vidyāraṇya, Bauddha Dharma O Darśan, p.16 ( West Bengal State Book Boards, Calcutta, 1984)

[7] Majjhima, Vol, I, p.280 (Nava Nalanda Ed.), p.228 (PTS Ed.); also see, Saṃyutta Vol. III,p.132

[8] Ibid. 282-87 (Nava Nalanda Ed.)

[9] PTS, London, 1913,The group of Discourses II, p.121 (PTS, London, 1992)

[10] Cullaniddesa, (PTS. London, 1988) p.177, also see, The Group of Discourses II p.376

[11] Dīgha, Vol II, p.157. The line "pajjotasseva nibbānaṃ vimokkho cetaso" is translated in Dialogues of the Buddha, Pt. II, p.176, as "Even as a bright flame dies away, so was the last emancipation of his heart'. 'pajjota' is translated as a lamp while 'nibbāna' is taken to be blowing out of a lamp'. On the other hand M.Walche understand 'pajjota' in the sense of the 'Illumined One' and translate the same line as 'By Nibbāna the. Illumined's mind is freed' (Thus Have I Heard, London, 1987; p.271). Both these translations are not fully satisfactory PTS translates 'eva' as 'like' while it would have been better to render it as 'just, surely, indeed'. Walche omits it. As 'pajjotassa nibbāna' is compared with 'vimokkho cetaso', it would be more appropriate to translate as the 'nibbana of the Enlightened One'. So the sentence may be rendered as follows: 'The nibbāna of the Enlightened one is, indeed, the release of mind.'

[12] Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī, Part II, p.595 ( PTS,London, 1971)

[13] P.Steinthal in his edition of the Udāna (PTS, London, 1982) , p.80 adopts the following reading of the relevant verse:

'duddasam anattam nāma, na hi saccam sudassanam patividdhā tanhā jānato, passato n'atthi kiñcanan ti'. In his translation F.L.Woodward reads 'anantam' (infinite) in place of anattam (Verses of Uplift, The Minor Anthologies of the Canon, Pt.II, PTS London, 1985, p.98). I prefer the reading 'anattam' due to the following considerations: Steinthal gives the variant reading 'anattam' given in the commentary (anatan ti pāṭhanti) called Paramattha-dīpanī which was copied in Sinhalese script for the PTS. This transcript which he calls 'C' often gives right information and corrects the incorrect readings of the other manuscripts (see, Steinthal, Udāna, p.VIII). This commentary explains 'anattam' as 'attā-virahitam'. Another manuscript which he calls 'B' as well as the Nava-Nalanda Ed. Of the Udāna follow this reading. There is no reason why the reading 'anattam' should not be accepted. On the other hand it is difficult to agree with Woodward who accepts the reading 'anantam', as it is found only in the Nidānaṭṭhakathā of Dhammapālācariya (Ed. F.L.Woodward, PTS, London, 1977, p.393) . Nidānaṭṭhakathā explains as follows: 'niccasvabhavattā anta-virahitam amaranadhammam anirodham amatam ti attho'. 'As nibbana is permanent by nature, it is without an end,

beyond death and cessation; it is immortal'. It is obvious that this definition of nibbāna also excludes attā.

Actually speaking no scriptural evidence is needed to prove that nibbāna is devoid of attā. The concept of attā is such that it is automatically excluded from the domain of nibbāna.

[14] Indian Philosophy, Vol. I, P.386 (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1977)

[15] Ibid. p.386

[16] Ibid. p.388, note 1

[17] Ibid. p.387

[18] Ibid. p.451

[19] Rahulo, What the buddha taught, p.51

[20] Ibid, p.55

[21] The Buddhist Thought in India, pp.38-39 (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1962)

[22] Saṃyutta, Vol.III 46f; Taisho, vol.II, p.11b1ff. A.K. Warder, Indian Buddhism, pp.123ff

[22a] In the Alagaddupamasuttam of the Majjhima Nikāya (PTS), Vol. I, pp.138ff. (Nalanda Ed.), Vol.I, pp.185 ff. We read that the feelings of 'I' and 'mine' are interdependent. And with "I"and "mind"to be really and truly existing, the possibility of this false view would also be there: "That is the world, that is attā. I shall be after death, everlasting, abiding eternal, unchanging and I shall remain as such for eternity". The feeling of 'I'and 'mine' being absent, the possibility of the false view would not be there. So a staunch belief in the reality of 'I' and 'mine' is the fulcrum on which the illusory image of an eternal soul rests.

[23] Satkāya or Sakkāya means pañcupādānakkhandhā or five aggregates of attachment: "Pañca kho ime ..... upādānakkhandhā sakkāyo vutto bhagavatā seyyathidam rupupādānakkhandho, vedanupādānakkhandho, saññupādānakkhandho, viññānupādānakkhandho,

samkhārupādānakkhandho (Cullavedallasutta, Majjhima Nikāya, Vol.I, pp.369-70(nalanda Ed.), p.299 (PTS).

[24] In this connection we may refer to the episode of Khemaka recorded in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, Vol. III, pp.127ff. (PTS Ed.) Some monks ask Khemaka whether he sees in the five aggregates of attachment any self (attā) or anything pertaining to self (attanīya). Khemaka replies in the negative but at the same time admits that he is not yet an arhat. "I am not an arhat free from all impurities, Oh friends, with regard to the five aggregates of attachment. I have a feeling 'I am' but I do not clearly see 'This is I am'". Then Khemaka explains what he calls 'I am' is neither matter, feeling, perception, mental formation (saṅkhāra) nor consciousness nor anything without them. But he has the feeling 'I am' with regard to the five skandhas, though he could not see clearly 'This is I am'. He says it is like the smell of a flower, it is neither the smell of the petals, nor of the colours, nor of the pollens, but the smell of the flower. Khemaka further explains that this feeling 'I am' disappears when one progresses further, just as the chemical smell of a freshly washed cloth disappears when it is kept in a box.

[25] See, E.Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, p.33. It is to be noted that the same comparison of attā with smell of a flower also occurs in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (see, note no.24). We should, however, observe that though Khemaka feels 'I am' he does not treasure this feeling; he wants to get rid of it as something unreal. But to a follower of Śāśvatavāda this feeling indicates something real which is the very essence of his eternal being. The spiritual experience is same in both the cases, though the wisdom needed to interpret the experience correctly is absent in case of the Śāśvatavādins.

[26] Saṃyutta, Vol.IV, p.287

[27] Lamotte, Indian Buddhism, pp.35,48,51. In this connection we may refer to the Sattāsavasutta, Majjhima Nikāya, (Nalanda Ed. Vol.I,pp.12-13), which also states that it is due to ego-centric thoughts (e.g. atthi me atta etc.) that such a wrong view arises: "This is my self, which speaks and feels, which experiences the fruits of good and bad actions now here, now there, this self is permanent, stable, everlasting, unchanging, remaining the same for ever and ever." This false view is given the designation of Śāśvatavāda in the Saṃyutta Nikāya; "That is the self, that is the world (loka) . He takes

rebirth, he is eternal, stable, unchanging - this is the eternalist view-point."  
Cf. S. Part III, pp.98-99; 182

[28] Dīgha Nikāya, Vol. I ( PTS Ed. By T.W.Rhys Davids) London, 1973, pp.13-14; T.W.Rhys Davids, Dialogues of the Buddha, Part I,pp.27-28(PTS, London, 1977)

[29] In the Mahāpadānasutta we have *evam-jāti* in place of *evam-vanno*. Both the terms mean social class or caste. (Dīgha Nikāya, Vol. II.p.8)

[30] Dīgha Nikāya, Vol.I,p.13 (PTS,London, 1975)

[31] Ibid, p.15

[32] Dialogues of the buddha, Part I.p.28(PTS, London, 1977)

[33] Dīgha Nikāya, Vol I, see, p.34; also see, p.12

[34] See, p.10 ff.

[35] Sumaṅgalavilāsinī, Vol.I, p.105(PTS, London, 1968)

[36] Dīgha Nikāya, Vol.I,p.16

[37] Ibid.pp.17-19; Dialogues of the Buddha, Part I, pp.30-32

[38] Dīgha Nikāya, Vol.I, pp.19-21

[39] Ibid, p.21

[40] Ibid, pp.34-35

[41] I have not mentioned the other *attā* heresies described in the Brahmajālasutta, as they are not radically different from what we have discussed in the present article. All these heresies are also based on the *Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi* and so share the characteristics of the *Satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*. These heresies must also be partially similar to the Śāśvatavādins or the Ekaccasassatavādins. I could not trace any other sutta devoted to the rejection of any of these heresies. The Buddhists themselves, it seems, did not think it necessary to discuss these false views separately and elaborately.

[42] Dīgha Nikāya, Vol.I, pp.16-17, 21-22, 24, 28, 29 etc.

[43] M.I, Mahātañhāsaṅkhasutta, pp.256ff. idam viññānaṃ sandhāvanti, saṃsaranti anaññaṃ. Ibid. p.256

[44] Papañcasūdanī, Vol.II, p.305 (PTS, London, 1979)

[45] Majjhims, Vol.I,p.8(PTS, London, 1976)

[46] Saṃyutta Nikāya, Vol.II, p.20

[47] Kindred Sayings, Vol.II, p.16 (PTS, London, 1982)

[48] Majjhima, Vol.I, p.259. It appears that Sāti misunderstood the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth. It is said in the Saṃyutta Nikāya (I, 122; II, 67, 103) that it is only when viññāna obtains a footing on something (ārammana) that there is the possibility of the birth of a being, and not otherwise, and the moment the viññāna ceases (cuti), one is regarded as dead. Also see, Nalinaksha dutt, Early Monastic Buddhism, Vol.I,P.255 (Calcutta, 1941).

[49] Saṃyutta, Vol.II,pp.66-68 (PTS.London, 1960); Vinaya, Vol.I,p.13-14 (PTS,London, 1964)

[50] Dīgha Nikāya, Vol.I, pp.179, 182 ff.;Dialogues of the Buddha, Part I, p.246ff. Also see, A.K.Warder, Indian Buddhism (Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1991) pp.124ff.

[51] For Sanskrit parallels to different attā concepts discussed in the Mahanidānasutta, see,Nidanasam̐yukta, C.B.Tripathi, Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften Zu Berlin, IO, 1962.

[52] Dīgha nikāya, Vol.II, XV.31, p.67(PTS London, 1982), Dialogues of the Buddha Part II, p.64 (Pts, London, 1977)

[53] Dialogues of the Buddha, Part II, pp.63-64; Dīgha Nikāya, Vol. II, XV.28; 29, pp.66-67

[54] Dialogues, Part 11, p.64; Dīgha Nikāya Vol.II, XV.30,p.67

[55] PTS, London, 1913; also see, The Group of Discourses, II(PTS, London, 1992) p.304

[56] Leffman, Lalitavistara, p.426

[57] Mādhyamikakārikā, 15.10

[58] Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā (E.Conze, Rome, IsM.E.O. 1957)p.29

[59] Also see, ibid.pp.66-67

[60] Poussin, Mūla-Madhyamaka-Kārikās, Ch.18,p.340

[61] Conze, ibid. p.94;Poussin, ibid. p.519-520

[62] Visuddhimagga (h.c.Warren, 1950) IX,54

[63] Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā, p.100

[64] Viṃsatikā-vṛtti(Ed. S.Levi, paris. 1925)p.6