

Dependent Origination in Theravada Buddhism for Understanding of Cause-and-Effect Nature*

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Abstract

The doctrine of paticcasamuppāda or Dependent Origination is one of the most important teachings of Buddhism. It is because of the mystery of birth, old age and death that Buddha arise in the world. There is no realm of existence in which these realities do not exist, and it is the sole purpose of the Buddha's enlightenment to penetrate into their root causes. Perhaps the most profound part of the Buddha's teaching is the description of how this wheel of life, death and rebirth continues rolling on. The doctrine of Paṭiccasamuppāda decribes twelve causes and effects viz., (1) ignorance (2) kamma formations, (3) consciousness, (4) mind and body, (6) six senses, (7) feeling, (8) craving, (9) clinging, (10) becoming (11) birth, (12) old age and death. According to the doctrine, ignorance and craving are the two main sources of suffering. There are two life cycles, the anterior lifecycle and the posterior life cycle. The anterior life cycle begins with ignorance as its main source and ends with feeling, while the posterior life cycle begins with craving and ends with death. In the former life cycle ignorance and kamma formations in the past life leads to rebirth while in the latter life cycle craving and clinging cause rebirth in future. The two life-cycle shows how a man's lifetimes are kinked with one another through cause and effect.

Keywords: Dependent Origination; Theravada Buddhism; cause and effect.

Introduction

The doctrine of Paṭiccasamuppāda or Dependent Origination is very important in Buddhism. The bodhisatta began with dependent origination when he reflected deeply on the nature of existence and attained Enlightenment. He first pondered old age and death as did

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every other bodhisatta when he was about to become the Buddha in his last existence. For it was only after seeing the old, the sick and dead that the bodhisatta saw the ascetic and renounced the world in search of the ageless and the deathless Dhamma. He had seen the evils of life in old age, sickness and death. Every living being wants to avoid these evils of life but there is no end to these evils which follow him in one existence after another. In view of this endless process of life all living beings appear to be in bondage and subject to suffering. Life is in fact an infinite process of births and deaths. Objectives of the studies are to analyze of the Dependent Origination in Theravāda Buddhism and to study the concept of Dependent Origination in Cause and Effect Understanding of the nature.

To analyze of the Dependent Origination in Theravāda Buddhism

In the objective number one, there are five subtitles what are: 1) What is the Dependent Origination, 2) The Dīgha Nikāya, 3) The Saṃyutta Nikāya, 4) The Mahāvagga: 5) The Vibhaṅga:

What is the Dependent Origination?

Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppāda) is Pāli language, a combination of three words, paṭicca means because of and dependent upon, sam means well, and uppāda means arising of effect through cause, so dependent on cause there arises effect, hence it is known as law of dependent origination. In the law of dependent origination there are twelve links which show the process of arising of a sentient being from one phenomenon to another in an endless chain of rebirth (samsara) (U Than Daing, 1995 : 26). The word paṭiccasamuppāda has been translated into various English terms such as dependent origination, dependent arising, interdependent co-arising, conditioned arising, etc. To be correctly translated, means, “The Arising of Result Depending on a Cause”. Yet the most common translation is dependent origination or DO. Dependent origination is most described that everything arises in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions. All things, either mentality or corporeality, are interconnect and arise in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions. All things mutually support each other, nothing standing alone by itself. In order to get to know it better, we need to examine the following significant scriptures respectively: the Dīgha Nikāya, the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the Mahāvagga, the Vibhaṅga, and the Exegetical or Commentarial Works (Sanu Mahatthanadull, 2014 : 22).

The Dīgha Nikāya

To better understand dependent origination, what we should do is to pay good attention to a dialogue between the Lord Buddha and venerable Ānanda. The teaching of paṭiccasamuppāda struck venerable Ānanda with enthusiasm *“Wonderful, lord, and marvelous it is, that whereas this doctrine of events as arising from causes is so deep and looks so deep, to me it seems as clear as clear can be!”*.

Then the Lord Buddha replied: Say not so, *Ānanda, say not so! Deep is this doctrine of events as arising from causes, and it looks deep too. It is through not understanding this doctrine, though not penetrating it, that this generation has become a tangled skein, a matted ball of thread, like to munja-grass and rushes, unable to overpass the doom of the Waste, the Woeful Way, the Downfall, the Constant Round.*

To us, the Lord Buddha could say these words in the same manner since the teaching of Dependent Origination is profound and not to be understood easily. In other words, only the noble one who has omniscient knowledge realizes this nature of Dhamma (Ibid. : 23).

The Saṃyutta Nikāya

Once at Sāvatthi, the Exalted One spoke to Bhikkhus about the arisen phenomena, as appeared in Paccaya Sutta: Whether there is an arising of Tathāgatas or no arising of Tathāgatas, that element still persists, the stableness of the Dhamma, the fixed course of the Dhamma, specific conditionality. A Tathāgatas awakens to this and breaks through to it. Having done so, he explains it, teaches it, proclaims it, establishes it, discloses it, analyses it, elucidates it. This statement can be clearly comprehended whether it is un-penetrated before and after the arising of Tathāgatas, or penetrated when they have arisen, that element (Dependent Origination) still persists. So that we can say such phenomena is, absolutely, not created by the Tathāgatas, except aging-and-death always occurs through birth as its condition. That is to say, a Tathāgatas simply discovers this nature of dhamma and proclaims this, but he does not create or invent it (Ibid. : 24.).

The Mahāvagga:

At the very first page of the book of the discipline (Vinaya Piṭaka), volume IV. , it is mentioned that during the first watch of the night, the Exalted One paid attention [yonisomanasikāra] to dependent origination in direct and reverse order: conditioned by ignorance are the habitual tendencies; conditioned by the habitual tendencies is

consciousness; conditioned by the consciousness is psycho-physicality; conditioned by psycho-physicality are the six (sense-) spheres; conditioned by the six (sense-) is awareness; conditioned by awareness is feeling; conditioned by feeling is craving; conditioned by craving is grasping; conditioned by grasping is becoming; conditioned by becoming is birth¹⁸; conditioned by birth, old age and dying, grief, sorrow and lamentation, suffering, dejection and despair come in to being. Such is the arising of this entire mass of ill.” From the passage, an elucidation of dependent origination, by exhibit the arising of each conditioned factors or by demonstrate the occurrence of suffering (samudaya-vāra), are called “anuloma paṭṭiccasamuppāda” (direct Dependent Origination). In the other hand, the elucidations in opposite direction from what mentioned above, are to be called “paṭiloma paṭṭiccasamuppāda” (reverse Dependent Origination) wherewith they demonstrate the cessation of suffering in each conditioned factor (nirodha-vāra). They, therefore, can be called “Dependent Extinction”. Please observe the following text (Ibid. : 25.):

But from the utter fading away and stopping of this very ignorance (comes) the stopping of habitual tendencies; from the stopping of habitual tendencies the stopping of consciousness; from the stopping of consciousness the stopping of psychophysicality; from the stopping of psycho-physicality the stopping of the six (sense-) spheres; from the stopping of six (sense-) spheres the stopping of awareness; from the stopping of awareness the stopping of feeling; from the stopping of feeling the stopping of craving; from the stopping of craving the stopping of grasping; from the stopping of grasping the stopping of becoming; from the stopping of becoming the stopping of birth; from the stopping of birth, old age and dying, grief, sorrow and lamentation, suffering, dejection and despair are stopped. Such is the stopping of this entire mass of ill.” Herein, the twelve factors (links) of dependent origination have particular Pāli Terms. They can be exhibited from ignorance, the habitual tendencies, to old age and dying (Ibid. : 26).

The Vibhaṅga

The book of analysis (Vibhaṅga), chapter “Analysis of Dependent Origination” (Paṭṭiccasamuppādavibhaṅga), each of Dependent Origination’s factors are described in the following manner:

1. Ignorance (avijjā) means absence of knowledge of the Four Noble Truths.
2. Activities (saṅkhārā) mean activity producing good resultant (puññābhisaṅkhārā), activity producing bad resultant (apuññābhisaṅkhārā), activity producing unshakeable

resultant (*āneñjābhisañkhāra*), bodily activity (*kāya-sañkhāra*), verbal activity (*vacīsañkhāra*), mental activity (*citta-sañkhāra*).

3. Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) means eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, body consciousness, mind consciousness.

4. Mind and matter (*nāmarūpa*), mind means the aggregate of feeling (*vedanākhandha*), aggregate of perception (*saññākhandha*), aggregate of mental concomitants (*sañkhāra-khandha*). Matter means the four great essentials (*mahābhūtarūpa*) and the material qualities derived from the four great essentials (*upādāyarūpa*).

5. The six bases (*saḷāyatana*) mean eye base (*cakkhāyatana*), ear base (*sotāyatana*), nose base (*ghānāyatana*), tongue base (*jivhāyatana*), body base (*kāyāyatana*), mind base (*manāyatana*).

6. Contact (*phassa*) means eye contact (*cakkhusamphassa*), ear contact (*sotasamphassa*), nose contact (*ghānasamphassa*), tongue contact (*jivhāsamphassa*), body contact (*kāya-samphassa*), mind contact (*mano-samphassa*).

7. Feeling (*vedanā*) means feeling born of eye contact (*cakkhusamphassajā-vedanā*), feeling born of ear contact (*sotasamphassajā-vedanā*), feeling born of nose contact (*ghānasamphassajā-vedanā*), feeling born of tongue contact (*jivhāsamphassajā-vedanā*), feeling born of body contact (*kāyasamphassajā-vedanā*), feeling born of mind contact (*manosamphassajā-vedanā*).

8. Craving (*taṇhā*) means craving for visible, craving for audible, craving for odorous, craving for sapid, craving for tangible, craving for ideational.

9. Attachment (*upādāna*) means the attachment of desire (*kāmuṇāpādāna*), the attachment of wrong view (*diṭṭhupādāna*), the attachment of wrong habits and practices (*sīlabbatupādāna*), the attachment of soul-theory (*attavādupādāna*).

10. Becoming (*bhava*) by way of twofold division:- 1) action-becoming (*kammabhava*) Action-becoming consisting of activity producing good resultant (*puññābhisañkhāra*), activity producing bad resultant (*āpuññābhisañkhāra*), activity producing unshakeable resultant (*aneñjābhisañkhāra*). 2) resultant-becoming (*upattibhava*) Resultant-becoming consisting of becoming in the plane of desire (*kāma-bhava*), becoming in the plane of form (*rūpa-bhava*), becoming in the formless plane (*arūpa-bhava*), perception-becoming (*saññā-bhava*), non-perception-becoming (*asaññā-bhava*), neither perception nor non-perception-becoming (*nāsaññā-bhava nevasaññā*), single aggregate becoming (*ekavokāra-bhava*), four aggregate becoming (*catuvokāra-bhava*), five aggregate becoming (*pañcavokāra-bhava*).

11. Birth (Jāti) means birth, genesis, entry, full existence, the appearance of the aggregates, the acquiring of the bases.

12. Ageing and death (jarāmaraṇa), aging means ageing, decrepitude, broken teeth, grey hair, wrinkled skin, the dwindling of life, decay of the controlling faculties. Death means decease, passing away, breaking up, disappearance, dying, death, the completion of the life-span, the breaking up of the aggregates, the laying down of the body, the destruction of the controlling faculty of vital principle.

Sorrow (soka) that which to one afflicted by misfortune through relatives or to one afflicted by misfortune through wealth or to one afflicted by misfortune through disease or to one afflicted by misfortune through (corrupted) morality or to one afflicted by misfortune through wrong view or to one possessed of one misfortune or another or to one afflicted by one painful thing or another is sorrow, burning of the mind, mental pain, the arrow of sorrow.

Lamentation (parideva) that which to one afflicted by misfortune through relatives or to one afflicted by misfortune through wealth or to one afflicted by misfortune through disease or to one afflicted by misfortune through (corrupted) morality or to one afflicted by misfortune through wrong view or to one possessed of one misfortune or another or to one afflicted by one painful thing or another is crying, lamentation, the act of crying, the act of lamentation, the state of crying, the state of lamentation, (sorrowful) talk, senseless talk, wailing, sorrowful murmuring, the act of sorrowful murmuring, the state of sorrowful murmuring.

Pain (dukkha) means bodily uneasiness, bodily pain, uneasy painful experience born of bodily contact, uneasy painful feeling born of bodily contact. Grief (domanasa) means mental uneasiness, mental pain, uneasy painful experience born of mental contact, uneasy painful feeling born of mental contact. Despair (upayasa) that which to one afflicted by misfortune through relatives or to one afflicted by misfortune through wealth or to one afflicted by misfortune through disease or to one afflicted by misfortune through (corrupted) morality or to one afflicted by misfortune through wrong view or to one possessed of one misfortune or another or to one afflicted by one painful thing or another is despondency, despair, the state of despondency, the state of despair. Above are the explanations of dependent origination that appeared distinctly in the Pāli canonical text (Ibid. : 30). Ignorance and craving should be understood as the two roots. Ignorance is called the root from the past extending into the present, which reaches its culmination in feeling. Craving is called the root from the present extending into the future, which reaches its culmination in decay and death.

Mahānidānasutta, the Great Discourse on Causation, is found in the Dīghanikāya. The entire sutta is dedicated to an explanation and analysis of dependent arising and (paṭṭiccasamuppāda). This discourse concerned with the relationship between consciousness and mind and matter, and this relationship may be regarded as the heart of dependent arising.

The Buddha, rejecting Ānanda's optimistic claim of having understood the profound of dependent arising says: "This dependently arising is profound, and it appears profoundly, and it is because they do not understand or penetrate this dhamma that this generation is tangled up like a ball of twine, afflicted as with an inflammation and matted like reeds and grasses, unable to go beyond saṃsāra with its misery, unhappy, and state of woe." So, the discourse is concerned in particular with the depth and profundity of dependent arising and its relationship to our entanglement within saṃsāra. Dependent origination is most described that everything arises in dependence upon multiple cause and conditions (Paṭhamakyaw Ashin Thittila (Setthila) : 24).

Paṭṭiccasamuppāda in cause and effect understanding of the nature

In the objective number two, there are five subtitles what are: 1) The paticcasamuppada method of correlating the cause and the effect, 2) Dependent origination and the Four Noble Truths.

The paticcasamuppada method of correlating the cause and the effect

The paticcasamuppada method of correlating the cause and the effect is generally known as the Law of Dependent Origination. The brief essential statement of the runs like this;

1. Avijjā- paccayā saṅkhāra = Dependent on ignorance arise the rebirth producing volitions or kamma formations.
2. Saṅkhāra- paccayā viññāṇam = dependent on kamma formations (in past life) arises rebirth consciousness (in the present life).
3. Viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpam = Dependent on rebirth consciousness arise the mental and physical phenomena.
4. Nāma-rūpa-paccayā Saḷāyatana = Dependent on the mental and physical phenomena arise the six (sense) bases.
5. Saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso = Dependent on the six sense bases arise contact (between sense base, sense object and consciousness).
6. Phassa-paccaya vedana = Dependent on contact arise feeling.

7. Vedanā-paccayā taṇhā = Dependent on feeling arises craving.
8. Taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ = Dependent on craving arises grasping.
9. Upādāna-paccaya bhavo = Dependent on grasping arises the rebirth producing kamma (kammabahava) and the rebirthprocess (upapatti-bhava).
10. Bhava-paccayā jāti = Dependent on the rebirthproducing kamma (in the present life) arises rebirth (in the future life).
11. jāti-paccayā jarā-maranaṃ-soka-parideva dukkhadomanass-upāyāsā sambhavanti = Dependent on rebirth arise old age, death, worry, lamentation, pain grief and despair.

Thus arises the whole mass of suffering again in the future (Dr. Mehm Tin Mon, 1995 : 296-297).

Dependent origination and the Four Noble Truths

On the basis of the Buddha's own statements, we can see a very close relationship between the Four Noble Truths and dependent originations have in common? The principle that both have in common is the principle of causality - the law of cause and effect, of action and consequence. In one of our earlier lectures, we have mentioned that the Four Noble Truths are divided into two groups. There are the first two suffering and the causes of suffering, and the last two – the end of suffering and the path to the end of suffering. In both of these groups, it is the law of cause and effect that governs the relationship between the two. In other words, suffering is the effect of the cause of suffering; and similarly, the end of suffering is the effect of the path to the end of suffering. Here too in regard to dependent origination, the fundamental principle at work is that of cause and effect. In dependent origination, we have a more detailed description of what actually take place in the causal process (Dr. Hammalawa Saddhātissa, 1989 : 27).

Let us take a few examples that establish the nature of dependent origination. Let us take first an example used by the Buddha himself. The Buddha has said the flame in an oil lamp burns dependent upon the oil and the wick. When the oil and the wick are present, the flame in an oil lamp oil burn. If either of these is absent, the flame will cause to burn. This example illustrates the principle of dependent origination with respect to a flame in an oil lamp. Let us take the example of the sprout. Dependent upon the seed, earth, water, air and sunlight the sprout arises. There are in fact in fact innumerable examples of dependent origination because there is no existing phenomenon that is not the effect of dependent

origination. All these phenomena arise dependent upon a number of causal factors. Very simply, this is the principle of dependent origination.

Particularly, we are interested in the principle of dependent origination as it applies to the problem of suffering and rebirth. We are interested in how dependent origination explains the situation in which we find ourselves here. In this sense, it is important to remember that dependent origination is essentially and primarily a teaching that has to do with the problem of suffering and how to free ourselves from suffering and not a description of the evolution of the universe. Let me briefly list the twelve components or links that make up dependent origination. They are ignorance, mental formation, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and old age and death (Ibid. : 30).

Conclusion

I will conclude the discourse on Dependent Origination with a commentary on Arahant, the chief attribute of the Buddha. The doctrine of Dependent Origination consists of twelve links beginning with ignorance and ending in aging death. It has ignorance and craving as two root-causes, and it has two life-cycle begins with ignorance and ends in feeling, while the posterior life-cycle begins with craving and ends in aging and death. Since anxiety and grief do not occur in the brahmā realm, they do not necessarily stem from birth and as such, are not counted among the links of Dependent Origination. Furthermore, the anterior life-cycle explicitly shows only ignorance and mental formations, but ignorance implies craving and attachment, and mental formations imply becoming. Living beings confined to samsāra gain the opportunity to do good only when they meet a wise teacher is hard to find, so most people are liable to do demeritorious deeds. They therefore have to experience the kammic effects as suffering. So, it is said that they are overtaken by retribution. Once established on the Noble Path, they cannot go to the lower realms, but even the Buddhas and arahants are not spared kammic retribution.

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