

# THE CONCEPT OF MATTER IN EARLY BUDDHISM

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In early Buddhism, analysis of matter has been made with an express ethical purpose in view. Buddhist Ethics lays emphasis on getting rid of *taṇhā* which is at the root of our repeated existence and sufferings of all kinds, physical, mental and cosmic. *Taṇhā* is caused by our desire for the various objects of the world. We are attached to the various forms of *rūpa* (matter) and our passionate attachment to them gives rise to *taṇhā*. The irony is that no amount of the enjoyment of the worldly objects can quench our thirst for them. The more we have of them, the more we still desire of them. *Taṇhā*, as a matter of fact, is an ever going dynamo; the more it is constantly fed on by objects of *taṇhā* the more it produces ever increasing *taṇhā*.

Lord Buddha, unlike other theoretical Philosophers, was a practical Philosopher and the *dharma* preached by him contains practical doctrine. Lord Buddha's greatest purpose was to get rid of suffering which are heir to. Suffering, as we have seen, is caused by our attachment to *rūpa* i. e. by our *chandarāga* for it. But we are hardly aware that the *rūpa*, we attach ourselves to, is in a constant state of flux. Though it looks permanent and unchanging, it is merely appearance. The reality is far otherwise. Therefore attachment to *rūpa* would inevitably lead to unrest and sorrow. In the *Samyutta Nikāya* Buddha advises us to give up all kinds of desire and passion in respect of *rūpa*.

Yo, Bhikkave, rupasmim chandarāgo taṃ pajahatha.<sup>1</sup>

*Rūpa* (matter) is not a *saṃyojana* (fetter) in itself, but it is *Samyojanīya* i.e. it creates fetters. So long as we have avid greed and passion in our mind for the various objects of the world, we will always be bound by fetters created by them. Therefore if we want to put an end to suffering, we must destroy the various warps and woofs of our passion for the objects of the world. *Rūpa* is productive of fetters that bind the living being to *Samsārika* existence. *Rūpaṃ saṃyojanīyo dhammo.*<sup>2</sup>

It is chiefly and perhaps solely in this context that the Buddhists have made an analysis of matter. Because *rūpa* is *saṃyojanīya*, so its true nature must be comprehended. Our ignorance of its true nature will make us crave for it, remain attached to it and as a consequence our spiritual progress will be impeded.

There are a number of passages in the Pali canon which describe this aspect of *rūpa*. It is a source of dangers that arise from attachment to it. How do we

get attached to it? Because we are ignorant of its real nature. *Ajānaṃ apassaṃ sārājjaṭi*.<sup>3</sup> In the *Samyutta Nikāya* Lord Buddha says: *Rūpaṃ, Bhikkhave, anabhijānaṃ, aparijānaṃ abhabbo dukkhakkhaya*.<sup>4</sup>

*Rūpa* (matter) is not permanent. Its origination and dissolution are manifested. In the *Samyutta Nikāya*<sup>5</sup> its true nature is described. It is *Paṭiccasamuppanna*, *samkhāta*, *aññathā bhāvi*, *khayadhammā*, *vayadhamma* and also it is *nirodha dhamma*.

In the profoundly religious context, it has been described as *māra*, *roga gaṇḍa salla ogha* and *āditta*. *Suññam*, *tuccha*, *ritta* and *asāra* form another set of characteristics describing *rūpa*. It has been compared to *Phenapinda* (bubble) to bring out its impermanent nature.

Analysis of matter by the Early Buddhists has been done in the above mentioned way so that no one may feel like being attached to *Rūpa* which is short-lived like froth.

The early Buddhists do not so much describe the metaphysical concept of *rūpa* as they describe its that aspect which causes our worldly existence. Human personality is made up of *nāma* (Consciousness) and *rūpa* (matter). The Early Buddhists have described both of them from a pragmatic point of view which is to end our suffering.

The Buddhists like the Vedantins do not regard this external world as non-existent. Nor like the other idealists, do they show that the world is mind-made or a projection of subjective thought as held by Berkely. Throughout the Pali texts it is maintained that matter or *rūpa* does exist independent of one's mind.

This is the position taken by the early Buddhists. They start from the obvious. According to them when an individual comes into being in this world, he comes in contact with this external world which acts on him and to which he reacts. Thus, attachment to those objects of the world which are pleasing to him and repugnance for the objects which do not do so arise in him. As a consequence, he gets inextricably bound by his passions and desires.

The immediate problem before the Early Buddhists was how to annihilate passions and desires. It was, therefore, very necessary for them to understand the real nature of *rūpa* which acts on human beings and causes interminable grief.

According to Buddhist Philosophy, human personality is composed of five *Khandas* in their dynamic relationship with one another. They are *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *samkhāra*, and *viññāṇa*. The last four are mind and the first one is matter. How the two entirely opposite elements are related has been graphically described by Buddhaghosa. He gives the illustration of a lame man going on the Path on the shoulders of a blind man. None of them can do without the help of other. Both depend on each other.

Such a human personality naturally reacts to the external world with the six sense organs he is endowed with. The dynamic contact between the sense

organs and their objects gives rise to myriads of complex sensations which cause fetters that bind an individual to the wheel of existence unmistakably characterised by suffering.

The summum bonum, according to Buddhist Philosophy, is *nibbāna* which means the extinction of all passions and desires. It has been time and again pointed out that whatever is in a state of constant flux can hardly afford any lasting happiness. *Rūpa* has been defined in the following words :

Ruppatīti kho, Bhikkhave, tasmā rūpam ti vuccati.  
 kena ruppati ? sīten pi ruppati, unhen pi ruppati,  
 jigaechāya pi ruppati, daṃsa makasa vātātapa sirinsapa  
 samphassena pi ruppati !

T. W. Rhys Davids explains the most important word *ruppati* in this passage as “to be vexed, oppressed, hurt, molested”. According to the *Vibhanga Aṭṭhakathā*, it is *kuppati*, *ṭṭhiyati* and *bhijjati*. Although *ruppati* refers to a psychological disturbance, it also refers to the physical change that an object undergoes. The whole purpose is to show the changeable and transmutable nature of *rūpa*. There is nothing like the metaphysical entity called matter. But any given material is analysable into *rūpadhammas*, which have been regarded as the ultimate reducible factors that make up the physical world. A *rūpa dhamma* does not have any independent existence. It always exists inseparably with a set of other *dhammas*. It is for this reason that the *mahābhūtas* are called *sahajāta*.

According to Buddhist Philosophy, there are twenty eight types of *rūpas*, four of them are primary and the rest twenty four are secondary.

*Paṭhavī*, *āpo*, *tejo* and *vāyo* are primary elements and they are called *mahābhūtas*. *Paṭhavī dhātu* is characterised by *Kakkhalatā* and *kharigatā*. One may say that *kakkhalatā* is itself *Paṭhavī*. So is the case with *āpo dhātu* which is defined as *rūpassa bandhanattā* i. e. viscosity and cohesion that bind the matter together. There are two other characteristics of water, *paggharana* i. e. flowing and *nissandabhāva* i. e. state of streaming.

In the *Nikāyas*, the *mahābhūtas* are defined in simple and general terms and they are illustrated with reference to the constituents of body. Hair of the head and body, nails, teeth, flesh and skin etc. are examples of *paṭhavī dhātu*, because they are hard and rigid. Blood, bile, cough and phlegm are examples of *āpodhātu*. Heat in the body is an example of *Tejo dhātu* and inhalings and exhalings and other kinds of winds are examples of *vāyo dhātu* which is airy.

Such definitions of the *mahābhūtas* may be called popular. It is only in the *Abhidhamma* that abstract and detailed definitions of these *mahābhūtas* are given. According to the *Nikāyas* what is *kakkhala* is *paṭhavī*, whereas according to the *Abhidhammika* definition *kakkhalatā* itself is *paṭhavī*. Not only *kakkhalatā* but *kharatva* and *gurutva* also are said to be *paṭhavī*. It is also defined as that which spreads up,

*paṭtharatīti paṭhavī*. Buddhaghosa says that *paṭhavī dhātu* acts as a foundation in so far as the other three elements are established on it.

*Āpo dhātu* is *rūpassa handhanattā* i. e. it is that which binds the *rūpa kalāpas* together. It is represented by the fact of *sineha* or viscosity. How are the particles of iron or for that matter the particles of stone closely bound together? It is the function of *āpo dhātu* to bind all the particles together. Two other characteristics of *āpo dhātu* are flowing and streaming. These account for the fact that *vāyo dhātu* and *tejo dhātu* also have *āpo dhātu* in them, because they spread and flow. According to the Vaiśeṣika philosophy, *āpo* has two characteristics i. e. Liquidity and viscosity, *Āpo dravaḥ snigdhaḥ* but unlike the Vaiśeṣikas, the Buddhists do not recognize the dichotomy between substance and quality.

*Tejo dhātu* means the phenomenon of heat or *uṇhattā*. The Buddhists, unlike the upholders of Vaiśeṣika philosophy, believe that *uṣṇa* and *sīta* really come under *tejo dhātu*. It is true that cold or *sīta* is known by the sense of touch, it is really *tejo dhātu* because cold is really relative absence of heat. This is indeed an ingenious explanation given by the Theravādin.

The Dhammasangani defines *vāyo dhātu* in terms of *thambhitatta* (inflation) and *chambhitatta* (mobility). As distinct from the rest three of *mahābhūtas*, it represents the dynamic aspect.

Thus seen, the *mahābhūtas* are not qualities and attributes of the *bhūta rūpa* i. e. they are qualities not inhering in any substance. In other words the qualities themselves constitute the *mahā bhūtas*.

One of the fundamental features of the *mahābhūtas* is that none of them can exist in isolation. In fact no *mahābhūta* (Primary element) can exist independently of the other three *mahābhūtas*. They are, therefore, called *sahajāta* and *sahabhū*. On further analysis it becomes clear that the *upapatti* (origination), *ṭhiti* (existence) and *bhanga* (dissolution) of one always synchronize with those of the others. The *mahā bhūtas* cannot be separated from one another. In short, they rise together, exist together and are destroyed together. They are, therefore, called *abbinibhoga rūpa*. It means that every instance of matter contains all the four primary elements. Thus all material aggregates are tetrabhaucic. Although the Vedānta philosophy believes in monobhaucic substance, it holds that in each *mahābhūta* there are five *sūkṣame* (subtle) *bhūtas* present.

As against the sāmkhya system of philosophy where *mahābhūtas* are not ultimate constituents of matter (they are believed to evolve immediately from the *tanmātrās* and ultimately from the *prākṛti* which is the uncaused first cause of the world of non-self), the Early Buddhists assign them a comparatively primary position.

Vedānta philosophy, as we have seen holds that *mahābhūtas* are gross which come into being from the *sūkṣama bhūtas*. According to Jain philosophy, not the

four elements but the paramāṇus are the constituents of *puḍgala*. So according to them paramāṇu is given a comparatively primary position. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system of philosophy has postulated four kinds of atoms corresponding to earth, water, air and fire.

Besides the above explained four primary elements (*mahābhūtas*) there are twenty four secondary rūpas. They are called *upādā rūpas* in so far as they depend on the *mahābhūtas*. Five sense organs, four objects of the senses, two faculties of sex, one faulty of life, *āhāra*, *hadaya vatthu* (the physical basis of mental activity), the two modes of self expression (*kāyaviññatī* and *vaci viññatī*), three characteristics like *lahutā*; *mudutā* and *kammaññatā*, four phases of matter like *upacaya*, *santati*, *jaratā* and *aniccatā* and the element of space are the twenty four *upādā rūpas*.

The first five sense organs viz; *cakkhu*, *sota*, *ghāna*, *jivha* and *kāya* are respectively the organs of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. In the Abhidhamma they have been described as *pasāda* which means clearness and brightness. These sense organs are not only receptive, but they also gratify our sensual pleasures. They react as well as gratify. They are very subtle and delicate and they can be known by no other sense organ than by mind which is the subtlest of all. They are composed of subtler matter and their corresponding objects are made of gross ones.

According to the early Buddhists, the relationship between the sense organs and their corresponding objects is that between the subtle and the gross. The Sāmkhya philosophy holds more or less the same view. According to it, the development of matter takes place along two different lines. Where there is predominance of *sattva* that evolves into sense organs and where there is predominance of *tamas* or dead matter that becomes sense objects. But there is a basic difference. As Prof. Stcherbatsky has pointed out the two groups of matter are not conceived as modification of an eternal substance by the Buddhists.

It has been held by most of the systems of Indian thought that the sense organs are something which are very fine and very subtle. The Jains speak of two kinds of *indriyas* viz., *dravya indriyas* (the physical sense organs) and *bhāvendriyas*—their psychical correlates. The Mimāṃsakas mention that “the sense organs consist in the faculty of potency abiding in their sockets.” According to the Vedānta system of philosophy, different sense organs consist of *sāttvic* parts of light, ether, earth, water and air.

From all this, it is clear that sense organs as they are subtle, transparent and translucent, develop sensitivity to external world of objects as a looking glass does to all objects.

The sense objects have been enumerated as four viz., *rūpa* (the visible), *sadda* (sound), *gandha* (smell) and *rasa* (taste). Although there is another sense object called the *phoṭṭabba* (the tangible), it has not been enumerated here because it

consists of three of the four primary elements, water being excluded. The *rūpāyatana* (the sphere of the visible) includes colour like blue, yellow, red, etc. and figures like circular, oval, square, hexagonal etc. The *śaddāyatana* (the sphere of the audible) includes different kinds of sounds of drum, of tabors, of conch shells etc. The *gandhāyatana* (the sphere of the odorous) includes all kinds of odour *śugandha* and *durgandha* and the *rasāyatana* (the sphere of the savoury) includes tastes like bitter, pungent, saline and acrid etc.

It is interesting to note here that the earlier Buddhists have discussed the problem as to how does the sound travel, Does it require a medium to travel ? The answer is in the affirmative.

The two faculties of sex which are responsible for distinguishing the male and the female also come under *upāda rūpa* (secondary matter). According to the Dhammasangani, the *purisindriya* (faculty of masculinity) is responsible for the physical appearance, mark, traits and department that are peculiar to a male. Similarly the *itthindriya* (faculty of femininity) gives rise to the marks and traits of a female.

*Jīvitindriya* (the faculty of life) is also a kind of *upāda rūpa*. Its function is to stabilize and sustain the *kammasamuṭṭhana rūpa* i. e. matter that rises as a result of *kamma*. There is *Jīvitindriya* in a piece of paper so long as it is not friable. The moment it becomes so, it has lost the faculty of life. *Kabalīkara āhāra* is also a form of secondary rūpa. Although it literally means gross food taken in morsels, its Abhidhammika meaning is that aspect of matter which is nutritive i. e. which helps one in growth.

*Hadaya vatthu*, not recognized as a form of *rūpa* even in the Dhammasangani but mentioned in the *Paṭṭhana*, is a post canonical development. It is called the heart basis which is the physical basis of *mano dhātu* (mind) and *mano viññāna dhātu* (mind consciousness).

The two modes of self expression (*viññāti rūpa*) *kāyaviññāti* (bodily expression) and *vacīviññāti* (vocal expression) are also *upāda rūpas*. Because they make the thoughts known or they help in communicating thoughts, they are called *viññāti*. *Kāyaviññāti* is not identical with bodily expression but it refers to the bodily tension that rises in response to a thought moral (*kusala*), immoral (*akusala*) or indeterminate (*avyākata*). In the Dhammasangani, it has been defined as the state of bodily tension or excitement (*kāyassa thambhanā santhanbhanā samthambhitattam*). *Vacīviññāti* means expression or communication through voice of speech or articulate sound. It rises like *Kāyaviññāti* in response to a *kusala*, *akusala* or *avyākata* thought.

The three characteristics of matter viz., *lahutā* (lightness), *mudutā* (softness) and *kammaññatā* (pliability) are qualities of matter in general. This triad of *lahutā*, *mudutā*, and *kammaññatā* represents the healthy and efficient position of a being.

There are also phases of matter which are four in number viz., *rūpassa upacaya* (growth of matter), *rūpassa santati* (continuity of matter), *rūpassa jaratā* (decay of matter) and *rūpassa aniccatā* (impermanence of matter). Obviously these four phases indicate growth of matter, its continuity, its decaying state and its complete annihilation.

These phases of matter clearly point out that there is no justification for our being attached to any object for true happiness. They rise only in order to be annihilated. When they are in a constant state of flux, how can they give true happiness?

The last item of *upāda rūpa* is *ākāsa* (element of space). It is *ākāsa dhātu* which gives room to all material things for movement. It is regarded as a bounded space.

Thus, it is clear that the early Buddhists have defined matter more from the ethical point of view than from the metaphysical point of view. In spite of this bias, however, the metaphysical point of view is also not blurred and indistinct.

### References

1. Sanyutta Nikaya, 2, PP. 375
2. Ibid, 2, PP. 262
3. Ibid, 3, PP. 389
4. Ibid, 2, PP. 262
5. Ibid, 2, PP. 261.

लेखसार

## प्रारंभिक बौद्ध दर्शन में पदार्थ की धारणा

प्रो० अंगराज चौधरी, नवनालन्दा महाविहार

महात्मा बुद्ध एक व्यावहारिक दार्शनिक थे। उन्होंने धर्म के महान् उद्देश्यों में तृष्णाजनित दुःख से छुटकारा पाने की बात कही। यह तृष्णा विभिन्न सांसारिक पदार्थों के प्रति ममत्व के कारण होती है। ये पदार्थ संयोजन नहीं, अपितु संयोजनीय हैं। इन संयोजनीयों से ममत्व हटाने के लिये ही बुद्ध ने उनकी मूल प्रकृति का विवरण दिया है।

बुद्ध धर्म में पदार्थों को 'रूप' शब्द से अभिहित किया जाता है। संयुक्तिकाय में रूप को प्रतीत्य समुत्पन्न, संख्यात, अनित्य, व्यय-क्षय-धर्मी और निरोध धर्मात्मक बताया गया है। इसे मार, रोग, असार, शून्य आदि नामों से भी कहा जाता है। इसकी प्रकृति बलबुले (फेनपिड) के समान अनित्य होती है। रूप की अनित्यता का यह वर्णन उससे ममत्वभाव उत्पन्न न होने देने के लिये ही किया गया है।

बुद्ध न तो वेदान्तियों के समान जगत् को असत् मानते हैं और न ही वे इसे मानसिक प्रक्रिया मानते हैं। वे इसका स्वतंत्र अस्तित्व मानते हैं। इस जगत् में मन और पदार्थ अंधे और लंगड़े के समान

परस्पर संबद्ध हैं। इस संबंध को संपन्न करने में इन्द्रियां भी सहायक होती हैं। बौद्ध दर्शन में चार प्राथमिक और चौबीस द्वितीयक रूप (पदार्थ) माने गये हैं। पृथ्वी, जल, तेज और वायु—ये चार प्राथमिक रूप-महाभूत हैं। पृथ्वी में ककखलता (कठोरता) और खरिगता (गुरुत्व) होती है, जल में विस्कासिता, संसक्ति और प्रवाहशीलता होती है। ऊष्मा तेजोरूप है और गतिशील श्वासोच्छ्वास वायुरूप है। पृथ्वी पर अन्य तीन रूप स्थित रहते हैं। विभिन्न धातुरूपों को बांधने वाला जलधातु है। तेजोरूप और वायुरूप में भी जलधातु के प्रवाह एवं प्रसरण के गुण पाये जाते हैं। ये सभी धातुयें अपने गुणों से अभिन्न रहती हैं। ये सभी मूलभूत रूप सहजात होते हैं और विलगित रूप में नहीं रहते। इन्हें 'अव्विनिभोग रूप' कहते हैं। इस प्रकार जगत के सभी पदार्थ चतुर्महाभूतमय होते हैं। ये महाभूत ही पदार्थ के मूल-भूत तत्व या घटक हैं। न्याय-वंशेषिक पद्धति भी संसार की व्याख्या में इन्हीं चार तत्वों को मौलिक मानती है जबकि जैनदर्शन केवल एक समान परमाणुओं को ही मौलिक मानती है। वेदान्तियों के समान, बौद्धों के ये महाभूत सूक्ष्मभूतों से निर्मित नहीं होते।

इन चार मौलिक महाभूतों से चौबीस द्वितीयक रूप उत्पन्न होते हैं। इन्हें उत्पाद रूप भी कहते हैं। इनमें पाँच इन्द्रियां, चार विषय, दो लिंग, जीवन, आहार, हृदयवस्तु (मन), शरीर, वचन, हल्कापन, कोमलता, नम्यता, उपचय, सन्तति क्षय, अनित्यता तथा आकाश समाहित हैं। पाँच इन्द्रियां शरीर के सूक्ष्म एवं संवेदनशील घटक हैं। रूप (वर्ण और आकृति), शब्द, गंध और रस—ये चार विषय हैं। पुरुष और स्त्री—ये दो लिंग हैं जो जीवों में दो प्रकार के अभिलक्षण उत्पन्न करते हैं। जीवितेन्द्रिय कर्म-समुत्थान का चालक है। आहार विकास-साधन है। हृदयवस्तु मन की द्योतक है। शरीर और वचन अभिव्यक्ति के माध्यम हैं। अन्य सात रूप पदार्थ के विभिन्न गुणों तथा प्रावस्थाओं को निरूपित करते हैं। आकाश सभी रूपों को अवगाहन देता है। बौद्ध इसे सीमित आकाश मानते हैं। इन चौबीस रूपों में केवल हृदयवस्तु ही ऐसा रूप है जो परवर्ती समाहरण है।

इन सभी रूपों के विवरण से स्पष्ट होता है कि इनमें कोई ऐसा विशेष गुण नहीं है जिससे इनके प्रति ममत्वभाव बढे। अतः ममताभावमूलक तृष्णा के निरोध से जीवन को कल्याणकारी बनाना चाहिये।

