

# Buddhism and Vedanta

## Chapter II

### BUDDHA, A PRAGMATIST

Both Buddhism and Vedanta stress the need to practise self-restraint. Perhaps all religions feel self-restraint is the first step towards religious progress. It is the first step, but it is also a step from which there is no withdrawal. At no point of time can a truly religious man say that he needs no self-restraint unless he is a person to whom self-restraint is not a matter of effort but has become his second nature. Where this is the case, there is no mystery in religion which he cannot unravel. Why did Buddha have so much aversion to metaphysical discussions? It was because he found people talked and talked, they seldom got down to solving the problem before them, the problem of how to end the suffering which was the common misfortune of mankind as a whole. He wanted that people should concentrate on this rather than waste time discussing academic questions. Perhaps he had also found that those who asked him questions about God or soul did so out of idle curiosity, rather than with any serious intent to know the truth, to unravel the mystery of life. Sometimes he scolded the questioner saying that he had better turn his attention to more urgent matters in hand rather than trouble himself about matters not of immediate concern. In this connection, the story of Malukya's encounter with Buddha as narrated by Dr. Oldenberg may be of interest.

"The venerable Malukya comes to the Master and expresses his astonishment that the Master's discourse leaves a series of the very most important and deepest questions unanswered. Is the world eternal or is it limited by bounds of time? Does the Perfect Buddha live on beyond death? Does the Perfect one not live on beyond death? It pleases me not, says the monk, that all this shall remain

unanswered and I do not think it right; therefore I am come to the Master to interrogate him about these doubts. May it please Buddha to answer them if he can. But when one does not understand a matter and does not know it, then a straightforward man says : I do not understand that, I do not know that. ( 'The Creed of Buddha' by Holmes, p. 143).

Buddha was far from pleased with this question. Malukya seemed to suggest that Buddha was not being fair to his disciples. There were questions to which Buddha perhaps did not know the right answers. If he did not know, he should frankly admit it, but it was not right that he should refuse to answer the questions, for that only kept the people guessing. Buddha asked Malukya with a touch of irony if he had ever invited Malukya to be his disciple. Malukya replied he had not. Buddha then pointed out to him how irrelevant the questions he had raised were. The questions related to the nature of the soul and the world. Buddha said,

"If a man were struck by a poisoned arrow, and his friends and relations called in a skilful physician, what if the man said : 'I shall not allow my wound to be treated until I know who the man is by whom I have been wounded, whether he is a noble, a Brahman, a Vaishya, a Sudra'—or if he said : 'I shall not allow my wound to be treated until I know what they call the man who has wounded me, and of what family he is, whether he is tall or small or of middle stature, and how his weapon was made with which he has struck me.' What would the end of the case be ? The man would die of his wound."

#### BUDDHA'S IMPATIENCE WITH METAPHYSICS

But what did Buddha show this impatience ? One reason may be that he knew it was not essential that man should know answers to these questions. It is also possible that he thought that if he said 'yes' or 'no' in reply to these questions, it would only increase the confusion that already prevailed. It would perhaps

raise more questions and however much he might try to explain and clear their doubts, people would get caught in the maze of metaphysical subtleties. The knowledge Malukya was seeking was not essential. Buddha had already said enough on the subject of whether the world was permanent or not and whether there was such a thing as a soul and if that soul survived after a man's death. This is why Buddha, with a degree of finality, said to Malukya, "Therefore, Malukyaputta, whatsoever has not been revealed by me, let that remain unrevealed, what has been revealed, let it be revealed." (The Creed of Buddha, p. 144). It must be understood that there are certain truths which the human mind can never fully comprehend. Even if a man can comprehend them, he cannot communicate his knowledge or understanding to others. The truths are so vast, so profound that when asked about them one can do no better than remain silent. To drive this point home, nun Khema asked King Pasendai of Kosala, 'O great king, hast thou an accountant, or a mint-master, or a treasurer who could measure the water in the great ocean, who could say: there are therein so many measures of water or so many hundreds or thousands or hundreds of thousands of measures of water?' The king replied, 'no'. 'And why not? The great ocean is deep, immeasurable, unfathomable. So also, O great king, if the existence of the Perfect one be measured by the predicates of corporeal form; these predicates of the corporeal form are abolished in the Perfect one, their root is severed, they are hewn away like a palm tree and laid aside, so that they cannot germinate again in the future.' There is no frame of reference, no Nama and Rupa (name and form), by which what happens when the Perfect one passes away can be described. It is like a river falling into the ocean when it loses its separate identity - Yatha nadyah syandamanah samudre astam gachhanti name-rupe Vihaya. Munda 3.2.8. The phenomenon can be guessed, but certainly not described. Buddha wanted that his disciples should first practise Astamarga and somehow or other overcome their attachment to sense enjoyment. If they did, they would then be able to enter the world of transcendental experience where Truth would automatically

reveal itself to them. It was this kind of direct experience that could dispel all doubts and not merely scholarship. Scholarship is also a kind of enjoyment which like Buddha Vedanta also discourages. Vivekachudamani says that scholars debate endlessly and display great skill while they argue, but all this may be good grist to the mill of those who are seeking enjoyment but, if they are seeking liberation it can never take them nearer to their goal. Scholarship is no knowledge, no way of removing avidya (ignorance). Only direct and personal experience can remove ignorance. This is why 'seeing is believing'. So long as there is ignorance, trouble will continue. Practice of Asta-marga (self-restraint) induces the state of mind in which the transcendental experience becomes possible. Both Vedanta and Buddhism hold that there is no escape from suffering so long as ignorance lasts. So all efforts must be directed towards removal of ignorance. To underscore this, Buddha once said that if you wanted to build a *Kutagara* (peaked house), all rafters should then point upwards and meet at a common point. He said all troubles originate from ignorance *avijjamulaka*. Because of this ignorance, man is deluded into thinking what is unreal as real. Thinking the unreal as real he feels drawn towards it and soon gets attached to it. The state of bondage to which both Buddhism and Vedanta again and again refer and from which man is urged to extricate himself is this state of attachment to sense-pleasure which is perishable and therefore unreal.

## BUDDHA MISUNDERSTOOD

But Buddha's silence on questions of God, soul, etc. has been misunderstood, misinterpreted. Perhaps even when he was alive people had never completely stopped debating about them. However much he might have wished to avoid philosophical wranglings, these always continued and perhaps intensified when he passed away. As doubts persisted about the real import of what Buddha had taught, elders of the Buddhist Order called a council at Rajagriha in 483 B. C. immediately after Buddha's passing away. 500 monks attended it. Mahakasyapa presided and

Ananda recited the Dhamma. There must have been much acrimonious debate at this council but one has no record of it. Whatever might have happened, the doubts were never completely set at rest. That people should misunderstand and have doubts about what exactly Buddha taught is natural, seeing that no written records were available. As more and more doubts arose, a second Buddhist council was held at Vesali in 383 B. C. i. e., one hundred years after the first. 700 monks attended the council. The council lasted for eighteen months which must be an indication that the debates were hot and exciting. It is said that a section of monks called Mahasanghikas were condemned as corrupt. On the other hand, Mahasanghikas who numbered 10,000 held a parallel council and condemned the orthodox Theravadis. They claimed that they represented the true Buddha spirit. A split among the followers of Buddha seemed inevitable and it took place. What were the issues over which the split took place it is difficult to tell. One group constituted what is known as *Mahayana* (the great vessel) and the other group Hinayana (the small vessel). The lines of distinction between the two groups are not very clear except that Mahayana is more broad-based and admits all and sundry to its ranks, its literature is in Sanskrit and it looks upon Bodhisatva as its ideal, that is to say, a Mahayani is not satisfied with his own salvation but works for the salvation of others also. Hinayana, on the other hand, is more orthodox and insists that one should work for one's own salvation only. Its literature is all in Pali. Mahayanis are also known as Northern Buddhists and Hinayanis as Southern Buddhists.

As the years went by, more splits took place. It is said that there were altogether thirty schools of Buddhism in later days. These divisions, it should be noted, were all over philosophical questions. The fundamentals of what Buddha had taught were never in dispute. They formed the common ground among them all. Soon a whole system of Buddhist philosophy developed. It will be recalled that Buddha had refused to be drawn into any discussion about god, soul or the ultimate reality, all synonyms of the same thing. Paradoxically, in spite of or just because of his reluctance to discuss

metaphysics. his followers spent much time debating metaphysics. This was perhaps inevitable, for man cannot help wanting to know the truth behind this riddle of the phenomenal world. A typical example of how this matter troubles man is Nachiketa of the Katha Upanisad. He went to the abode of death seeking an answer to the question of what was there beyond death. Did something linger after death or was death the end of everything ? What, in other words, was the ultimate reality? Was there such a thing as the soul or the self ? The world, as we see it, is constantly changing, always in a state of flux, 'a stream of becoming', is there something behind it which never changes, which is permanent, eternal ? This is a question that has been troubling man through the ages. Much depends upon the answer to the question. The question is so vital that even Ananda did not like the idea that Buddha should refuse to throw any light over this question. So he once asked Buddha why he refused to answer this question. Buddha said that if he said that there was such a thing as a soul or self, people would then think that the body was the soul. They were already too attached to it. They would become *Deha-atmavadins* (identifying the self with the body). It is such people who think sense-pleasure is the only pleasure. It is among such people that hedonists, materialists and sensualists are to be found. No civilization can survive when people ignore the higher aims of life, whose only concern is the pursuit of the pleasure of the senses. Buddha appeared at a time when there were too many people in India who took the phenomenal world for granted. They seemed to forget that the phenomenal world, however attractive it might be, was only ephemeral. It is only to caution such people that Buddha harped on the theory of *dukha* (suffering) and *Anityata* (impermanence). What Buddha wanted was the kind of attitude that Nachiketa displayed during his encounter with Death. Death tried to dissuade Nachiketa from pressing him for an answer to the question whether anything survived after death, if there was a soul or not and if what it was like. Death tempted Nachiketa in many ways: he offered him gold, women, even the office of a god. Nachiketa would have none of these, the only thing he wanted was the transcendental knowledge of the self. It is only with

people like Nachiketa, i.e., people who have their minds fixed on the supreme goal of life and who, under no circumstances, would deviate from it, that you can discuss the intricate question of whether there is a self or not. If he discussed this with other people, they would not understand, this being too subtle for them. This is why he also said to Ananda that if he said that there was no Atma (self), people would then think that he was preaching nihilism (uchchedavada). The Hindu tradition is to teach a disciple according to his capacity. You cannot offer the great philosophy of the self to all and sundry; you can give it to only those who, like Nachiketa, are able to overcome the temptation of the phenomenal world and concentrate on the self which is 'subtler than the subtlest'.

What passes as Buddhist philosophy is mainly over this question of the ultimate reality. Three replies are possible to this question : There is no reality ; there is reality but that reality is only mental ; there is reality and it is both mental and external.

There is a school of philosophers who hold that there is no reality but only void. They are known as Sunyavadins or Nihilists. Another school of philosophers believe that there is a reality but it exists only in the mind. They are known as Yoga-charas or Vijnanavadins or subjective idealists. Yet another school, known as Sarvastitva-Vadins believe that reality is both subjective and objective, internal and external. These Sarvastitva-Vadins known also as Realists, are divided into two groups, Vaibhasikas and Sautantrikas. According to Vaibhasikas Reality can be directly perceived ( this is why their theory is called Vahya-pratyaksa-vada ) while, according to Sautantrikas, Reality can only be inferred ( this is why their theory is known as Vahya-anumeya-vada ).

Sunya-vadins and Vijnana-vadins belong to the Maha-yana school whereas Sarva-astitva-vadins ( i. e., those who are of the Sautantrika and the Vaibhasika group ) belong to the Hina-yana school. Thus, except Sunyavadins, all the schools of Buddhist

philosophers acknowledge that there is such a thing as Reality. Even Sunya-vadins did not completely deny Reality. They neither denied it nor admitted it. Their position was in between, Madhyama, so they came to be known as Madhyamikas (those of the Middle Path). Some scholars even say that Sunya is not just 'void' or 'nothing', it is something positive but something that cannot be described, beyond thought and speech, almost corresponding to the Brahma of Vedanta.

Buddha did not say anything about Reality, but, somehow or other, Reality has now carved out a place in Buddhist philosophy. One wonders if Buddha ever wanted it.

But what is the position of Vedanta regarding Reality? Does Vedanta admit that there is such a thing as Reality? How does this Reality square with its theory of Anityata (Impermanence) which it shares with Buddhism? If, like Buddhism, it believes that the empirical world with which we deal is an appearance, an illusion (Mayaya Kalpitam Jagat, Mahanirvana, 14. 113, the world is only an illusion;). What is real then? Vedanta agrees that the phenomenal world is unreal, but it says that behind this phenomenal world, the world of appearance, there is the world of reality, the ultimate Reality, which according to Vedanta terminology, is called Brahman or Paramatman. It is on this Brahman that the phenomenal world is projected. It is like cinema pictures being projected on a screen. When we see a film, we see so many things happening before us—people laughing, loving each other, quarrelling, fighting, in varying moods, in varying situations, a Kaleidoscopic view of the fun called life; we see them and feel excited; our reactions vary, depending upon what we see; when we watch the film, we forget that what we are seeing are not real but only pictures. We feel so involved with them that we feel happy when they are happy and unhappy when they are unhappy. We forget, for the time being that they are all imaginary, old pictures, appearances are not real. The only real thing in this case is the screen without which the pictures would not have been possible. Another apt example which Ramakrishna used to



give is that, when you have first the figure 1, when zeros have a meaning, a value, otherwise zeros are only zeros. Similarly, there must be something, something solid, something *real*, on which this world of experience rests. This in Vedanta, is called *Brahman* which literally means the biggest. It is also called *Paramatman*, the soul of souls, the over-soul. This *Brahman* is the support (*Adhithana*), the ground on which the empirical world rests.

Without this *Brahman*, there would have been no world of experience. *Tasya bhasa sarvam idam vibhati* (Katha 2.2.15). This is why Vedanta again and again say, *Brahma satyam jagat mithya* (Mahanirvana 14.113). *Brahma* alone is real, the world is unreal. It is like the magician and his magic, the dreamer and his dreams. *Brahman* is the source as well as the end of everything, (*Sarvajiva* and *Sarva-samstha*, *Sveta Up.* 1.6), it is both the material and efficient cause of this universe. When Vedanta says *Brahma Satyam*, *Brahma* is real, it means that *Brahman* is eternal (*Nitya*). Other things change, but not *Brahman* who is always the same, *Sanatana*, not subject to modifications. He is unconditioned, unique, one without a second, without any attributes, uncreated, without birth, without death, - Supreme, *Nirguna*, *nirvishesha*, *Advaya*, *Svayambhu*, *Swarat*, *Ajara*, *Amara* and so on. You can never say, 'He is this, he is like this', for whatever predicate you may use with reference to him will fall short of him. According to *Udana*, vii 3, 'There is an unborn, an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompounded; were there not, O mendicants, there would be no escape from the world of the born, the originated, the made and the compounded.'

#### BUDDHA'S VIEW ABOUT THE ULTIMATE REALITY

The question is : Did Buddha subscribe to this view? Did he believe that there was any reality, a noumenon, behind this phenomenal world? Most scholars think he did. If he did, if he truly thought that there was something real behind this appearance, why did he not say so? Vedanta, one finds, again and again repeats the falsity of things, the *mithyatva*, the *anityatva*, the impermanence of things but, at the same time, draws attention to the reality of

Brahman. Why does not Buddha do the same things ? Why is he silent about the ultimate reality? Not merely silent, he even shows impatience if anybody persists in asking him about it. It is difficult to say why he does not like to talk about the ultimate reality unless it be that after having indicated how that ultimate reality can be reached, he thinks it unnecessary to launch into a discussion of the nature of that ultimate reality. He tells us what happens if you follow the path he has indicated, how you can attain *Nirvana* the happy state of no more 'becoming', the state of dissolution of the individual self. This exactly is the state which Vedanta looks forward to, which it holds up as being the goal of life. Buddha is rather cryptic about what this state is like, but is there not ample reason for his not saying much about it ? Is it possible for anybody to describe the transition from finitude to infinitude ? It is like a drop of rain falling into the sea. All your fetters of individuality are gone, you are infinite, you are free, *Bhidyate hridaya-granthih, chidyante sarva Samsayah Kshiyante chasya karmani tasmin driste paravare* Mund. 2.2.9. This is *mukti* or *moksha*, liberation, according to Vedanta; in this the individual ceases to exist as individual, the microcosm becomes the macrocosm.

This, in brief, is the anatomy of *moksha* or *nirvana*. Buddha did not go into details, but he gave enough hints to suggest that *nirvana* is not annihilation as some people tend to think. He once said that it was a 'heresay' to describe *nirvana* as annihilation. It is a positive state, a state in which man has full mastery over himself, he is no more troubled by desires, his mind is at complete rest. There is, therefore, no more question of birth and death for him. Buddha urges us to direct all our efforts to reach this state. Once we can get into this state, there will no more be *dukha* (suffering) for us. This state is not just an idea, a theory or a dream; it is a reality, he himself being the best testimony to it. He calls our attention to this reality and also chalks out the path as to how to reach it. He points out the steps we have to climb to get on to the roof, but does not say much as to what we may expect to see when we get on the roof. He shows us how we may escape from the fire in which we are being

consumed, but can we blame him if he has not said what we may experience when the fire has been extinguished? Is it necessary to tell us about the relief, the joy, the happiness that we shall feel when we escape from the fire, when our suffering has come to an end? Vedanta says, all activities, good or bad, cease in this state, your mind is calm and quiet, you rest within yourself; you enjoy infinite peace *Chittasya hi prasadena hanti karma subha-subham. Prasanna-atmani, sthitva sukham avyayam a smute.* Maityyani Up. 6. 34. Buddha, on the other hand, does not spell out the contents of your experience but does it make any difference?

### *Self*

But there is the question of self over which it seems that the viewpoints of Vedanta and Buddhism are like two poles. Buddha preached Anityava ( the impermanence of things ), but, with equal emphasis, he preached also *Anatma vada* ( the doctrine of no-self ). Vedanta believes there are two kinds of self, Jivatma ( the individual self ) and Paratma ( the cosmic self ). They are not separate, they are one and the same ( *Jiva Brahmaiva naparoh.* Mahanirvana 14.113), though they appear separate. Why do they appear separate? Because of *Maya*, cosmic ignorance. Because of this ignorance, the individual selves think they are separate from each other and separate from the cosmic self also. Each individual self has a name ( nama ) and form (rupa) and on the basis of this name and form, they behave as if they are separate entities. They love or hate each other, they form communities or nations, they go to war or agree to live in peace with each other. Not only men and women, but all living beings suffer from this delusion that they are separate, separate from each other and separate from the cosmic Self. Because they feel they are separate from the cosmic Self, because they do not know their identity, because they think they are the body and the mind that they have, because they have many desires which keep them running after *anitya* (perishable) objects, they suffer continuously. Life, with all of them, is nothing but suffering. They have to practise self-restraint (something corresponding to Buddha's eightfold path) and when they have acquired self-mastery, the Self reveals itself to them, *Tasya esa*

*atma Vivrnuete tanum Syam.* Kath 1.2.29. This Self is the Self of all, the common denominator, the common in-dwelling spirit *eka eva hi bhutatma bhute bhute vyavasthita*. It is like the one moon appearing many because of its reflections on water, *ekadha vahudha chaiva drisyate Jalachandra-vat*, Panchadashi 15.8. This Self, this Brahman, this Paratma, is the common substratum of all that exists in the world, *Isa vasyam idam sarvam Jagatyam jat, kinch jagat Isa Up. 1.1*. To know that the same self is everywhere, know that the individual self and the cosmic Self are one and the same, to know that the phenomenal world that we see is an illusion (*mithya*), only a superimposition, is true knowledge, and is that knowledge that liberates, *Para-Vidya*. True knowledge is to know that unity of existence, to know that only one exists and not many, *Neha nana asti kinchana*.

But, as we have seen, Buddha has talked about Anatmavada, emphasizing again and again the unreality of the self. The self, according to him, is nothing but a conglomeration of several constituents like Rupa (matter), Vedana (feeling), Samjna (perception), Samskara (impression) and Vijnana (consciousness). It is like a chariot which, as such, is no entity, being only a combination of so-many things—the wheels, the axle, the frame, etc. Buddha enunciated the theory of 'conditioned origination', Pratitya-samutpada, 'that being, this is, if that ceases, this ceases also', according to which nothing that has no independent origin (*Swabhava*) is real. The self, in this sense, does not exist. Here, obviously Buddha is talking about the empirical self. Vedanta will readily agree that independent of the real Self, there is no empirical self, just as there can be no reflection of the moon without a moon. The reflection is unreal but the moon is real. Talking of the chariot, one may ask : who puts its parts together ? who holds them together ? According to Vedanta, the chariot could not have come into being without there being someone behind it. Giving the example of the chariot, Vedanta says that there is a charioteer who controls it. This charioteer is the Self—*Atmanam Rathinam Viddhi*. Comparing the body-mind complex to a chariot, the Kathaupanisad says, 'Know the Self to be the charioteer, the body the chariot, the intellect the driver, the mind the reins, the senses the

horses and the objects the roads.'

*The empirical self*

According to Buddhism, everything is in a state of flux, life is motion, change, we see this motion, this movement and we think we are seeing an object. Human life is only a moment in the cosmic wheel of time which is always moving. It is like the wheel of a moving chariot resting on the ground only for a fraction of a second. According to this idea of flux (Kshanika vada, momentariness), no individual, no object is the same for two seconds together. Referring to an individual if you say, 'Mr. X,' by the time you say it he has ceased to exist. According to this logic, you can never punish the man who commits a crime. The man who committed the crime is gone, there is a new man in his place. By punishing him you are punishing an innocent man. If you push this *Anatmavada* to its logical end, it would then look as if-

'Misery only doth exist, none miserable,  
No doer is there; naught save the deed  
is found

Nirvana is, but not the man who seeks it  
The path exists, but not the traveller on it."

On this basis the law of Karma would mean that there is no receptacle on which the fruits of action are carried along, there are only deed-forms and thought-forms which gather at a particular point, depending upon a certain concentration of circumstances. That is to say, there is no rebirth, no transmigration of a soul, there is only a rebirth of deed-forms and thought-forms. It is like one lamp being lighted by another, a leech travelling from one leaf to another. According to Buddhism, there are two kinds of *nairatmya* (the theory of non-self): *Pudgala-nairatmya* and *dharma-nairatmya*. *Pudgala* is another name for *jiva*. The theory of *Pudgala-nairatmya* is preached only to emphasise *Jiva* as such has no independent existence, it is no *vastusat*, something with a substance of its own. It is only a name used to serve empirical needs.

Similarly, we see things around us which exist only because

certain other things exist, *Pratityasamutpada*, they have no existence of their own. So these things also are false, *Dharma-nairatmya*. Thus, both subject and object are false. If both subject and object are false, there is no room for desire, the cause for attachment. It is to help man overcome his desires that Buddha propounded this theory of *Pudgala-nairatmya* and *Dharma-nairatmya*. If there is no self, how can there be any desire? It is for the sake of the self that things become dear to an individual—wife, gold, long life, etc. This is the contention of both Vedanta and Buddhism. For instance, in the *Vrhadaranyaka upanisad*, Yajnavalkya says to his wife Maitreyi: '*Atmanastu kamaya sarvam priyam bhavati*.'

### HISTORICAL REASONS

There were perhaps good historical reasons why Buddha asserted *Anatmavada* *Anityatva* or *Pratitya-samutpada* (which he called the Dharma, the Law, governing the world) in the manner he did. All these theories, pointing to the perishable nature of the world, warn us against being entangled in it. This is not pessimism but facing facts as they are. It must be borne in mind that he was rejecting only the phenomenal world. Here, Vedanta is completely at one with him. Vedanta also negates the phenomenal world including God. Buddha's advent was at a time when people had forgotten the purpose of life, when the craze for pleasure had driven them mad and when they turned to religion only to enjoy more pleasure. They seemed to think, as Buddha said 'This is the world and this is the self, and I shall continue to be in the future, permanent, immutable eternal, of a nature that knows no change ... ..' Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy* p. 385. Buddha, out of the fulness of his heart, told them the truth. He took much trouble to impress on them the transitoriness of things. The Self is described by Vedanta as being Existence Absolute, consciousness Absolute and Bliss Absolute. Buddha would take this as the criterion to show that nothing in the phenomenal world answers to this description. The entire phenomenal world is only an appearance (*Prajnaptisat*) and no reality (*Dravyasat*). Everything in this world is made up of five skandhas (aggregates)

viz. *rupa* (form), *vedana* (feeling), *samjna* (perception), *samskara* (impressions) and *vijnana* (consciousness). Referring to this Buddha once said that a discriminating person has an aversion (*nirveda*) for composite things, things made up of skandhas. Such a person is free from attachment (*viraga*). Being free from attachment, he has no more rebirth, he therefore attains *nirvana*.

Somehow or other, the sense of ego (*ahankara*) has to be got rid of. Because Buddha pointed this out he is praised in a hymn as being the only teacher who knew where real trouble lay and his message was only message that can liberate. Candrakīrti in his *Madhyamakavatara* (vi. 123) says : 'A wise yogin denies the existence of the ego (*Satkayadrsti*), for he observes that all his troubles arise from the ego and centre round it.'

Buddha also says that the worlds are only *Citta* or *Vijnana* i. e., consciousness. Does he mean by this that the worlds are only a projection of the mind and have no objective existence? In any case, this probably has led to the rise of the school known as *Yogacaras* or *Vijnana-vadins*, philosophers who hold that external things are made of the same stuff as our dreams. Buddha also said on many occasions that all things were void (*Sunya eva dharmah*). Here is another pronouncement which probably led to the rise of the school of philosophers known as *Madhyamikas*. Many such schools arose whose chief concern was metaphysics, the subject which Buddha so studiously avoided.

#### DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

Although Buddha was silent about the Ultimate Reality. Buddhism, in the course of its evolution has done much speculation about it. The question whether there is an ultimate reality and if there is, if it can be known, has exercised the Buddhist mind much. One school of philosophers, the *Madhyamikas*, hold that there is no reality, mental or non-mental, there is only a void. These philosophers are known as nihilists or *Sunya-vadins*. Another school of philosophers say that there is a reality, but that reality is mental; there is nothing outside the mind. These philosophers are known

as *Yogacharas*, or *Vijnanavadins* or subjective idealists. There is yet another school of philosophers who say that reality is both subjective or objective, internal and external, mental and non-mental. These philosophers are called realists, sometimes also *Sarvastivadins*.

Now there is an epistemological question : if there is an external reality, how can it be known. One group of Sarvasti-vadins, called *Sautantrikas*, say that the external reality can be known only through inference. Others, called *Vaibhasikas*, hold that the external reality can be perceived directly.

### MADHYAMIKAVADKA

Madhyamikavada is often referred to as Sunyavada, but the former seems to be a more appropriate term. Buddha had used the word *Sunya*, but it is doubtful if he had used it in the sense that we understood the word void. By 'Sunya', Buddha wanted to mean that the phenomenal world was without substance. Nagarjuna who expounded the *Madhyamika* philosophy, says that the real nature of things is indescribable (*Anirvachaniya*) because it is dependent upon other things (*Pratitya-samutpka*). Because it is indescribable, it is called *Sunya*, that which is indeterminate, which cannot be predicted, which can not be categorized. In fact, one can say nothing about it, the only thing one can say about it is that it has a conditioned origination. Because one cannot say it has an absolute reality or an absolute unreality, it may be regarded as somewhere in between *Madhyama*.<sup>1</sup> It is from this peculiar position of this school of philosophy that it has come to be known as *Madhyamikavada*. As no appellation can be used in the case of the ultimate reality, Asva Ghosha (80A.D.) used the word *That* (*Tatha*), his theory being known as the theory of Thatness (*Tathata*). This 'That' is eternal, immutable, without any attributes, just like *Brahman*. In Vedanta, *Brahman* also is referred

1. 'It exists not, for even the Buddha has not seen it ; Nor is it non-existent as it is the essence or basis of this Samsara and beyond,'—translation of a short prayer composed by Karmapa Rangjung Dorji in Tibetan ( Translated by Sri. T. D. Densapa )



to as 'That', That thou art, O Svetaketu (*tat tvam asi O Svetaketu*). Since this 'That' cannot be particularized, it may be called 'Sunya', i.e., without any attributes. According to this theory, Avidya 'perfumes' Sunya as a result of which the world appearance bursts out. This exactly is the stand of Vedanta which says that Brahman by itself is Nirguna (unconditioned, without attributes), but when its power, Maya or Avidya operates, the world-delusion takes place. The goal of life, according to Vedanta is to realize one's identity with this Brahman, the ultimate reality. The goal of life, often called *Mukti* or *Moksha*, is also called *Nirvana*. *Nirvana* is not a negative state, a state of annihilation, but a positive state in which one has a transcendental experience of the ultimate reality. According to Nagarjuna, there are two truths on which Buddha's *Dharma* is based, one is *Samvriti-satya* (empirical truth) and another is *Paramatthasatya* (transcendental truths). Those who are not able to distinguish the two cannot understand Buddha.

Thus, Vedanta and Buddhism agree so far as the goal of life and the means of reaching that goal are concerned. The agreement between them is so much that Gourapada, the first well-known exponent of Vedanta and teacher of Sankara's teacher, is described by some scholars as a Buddhist. Even Sankara, notwithstanding his reputation as being the man responsible for the elimination of the Buddhist influence from India, is charged by his critics as being nothing but a Buddhist in disguise (*Prachhana Bouddha*). Buddhist or no Buddhist, that Sankara held Buddha in the highest esteem is beyond doubt for he said, *Ya aste kalau Yoginam cakravarti, Sa Buddhah prabuddho astu maccittavarti* (I adore Buddha who is the leading Yogi in this *Kali Yuga*). Buddha himself is looked upon by the Hindus as an incarnation of God. The poet-saint Jaydeva said about him, '*Keshava Dhr̥ita-Buddha-sharirn jkya Jngadisha Hare*' (You are Lord Vishnu himself, you have assumed the form of Buddha, glory unto you, O Lord of the universe, O Hari).

But why is it then that Buddhism is extinct from India? It is wrong to say that it is extinct, it is very much present, but

present in the form of Vedanta. Or perhaps, one may put it this way ; They are complementary to each other in the sense that Vedanta is theory, Buddhism practice, Vedanta is philosophy, Buddhism is religion.