

The Concept of Pratītyasamutpāda in Mahāyāna Buddhism

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Abstract

The teachings of Buddha of this era are very relevant especially for peace and harmony to every sentient beings of the world. It is important for every possible the better life here and hereafter as well. Thus, everyone has to be very heedful to listen it, to contemplate seriously and skilful over them and finally have to meditate them all. So, the body, the mind and speech should be one only in all applicable practice in our day-to-day life as a sensible human. The Pratītyasamutpāda (Interdependent Origination or Depending Arising) is such a rational and relevant thought of Indian Knowledge that must be studied well to lead a good life. The paper discusses many aspects of Pratītyasamutpāda specially from Mahāyāna perspectives.

Keywords: Buddhism, Pratītyasamutpāda, Law of Nature, Cause and Effect, Objective, Classification, Characteristic, Mādhyamika.

Introduction

Buddhism remained one of the very spiritual, logical and cultural identities of India. The Buddhists are following two major schools and their traditions, i.e., Theravāda and Mahāyāna. Both schools are keeping quite a similar faith to the historical Buddha and his fundamental teachings. The followers of both above mentioned schools are spread across the world today. Buddhism discusses about the two very crucial points, i.e., Saṃsāra, the place of all sufferings and another one is Nirvāṇa or Liberation, the world of total peace and happiness. The Pratītyasamutpāda (Interdependent Origination) is one of the fundamental teachings and enlightened paths as expounded by the Buddha more than 2560 years back in the sacred land of saint and sages, India. The teaching theory of Pratītyasamutpāda completely depicts the cessation of saṃsāra and attainment of liberation and Enlightenment. The paper deals with one of the roots and core teachings of Buddhism in general and Mahāyāna perspective in particular. It is based on both primary and secondary sources of the concerned field of knowledge.

Aim of the Study

We are living in a country of productive argumentation for the well beings of all in all. But lack of knowledge in our ancient treasures of wisdom, we are enough confused somewhere in the world today and suffering lots for that. Hence, we must to study and know our ocean of wisdom to dispel the darkness of ignorance, the root of suffering and all rest problems. The aim of the study is to provide as well as to put some drops of the knowledge from ancient ocean of wisdom to all fortunate ones whether the academicians, volunteer and freelancer writers, young scholars, researchers and so on, to understand the theoretical concept of Pratītyasamutpāda in practical daily walks of life around.

For instance, the year 2020 is declared as pandemic period due to Corona Virus or Covid-19. Just ponder over the causes of it. It was not something naturally or an outbreak of causeless. Obviously, some cause was there and also some possible solution was there too. If we make mistake, we have to face the challenge for that something good or worse. So, through this research paper one can understand the importance of law of nature which is the main aim of the study the literature.

Pratītyasamutpāda: Etymology and Meaning

The evolution of the Sanskrit term 'Pratītyasamutpāda' consists of 'Pratītya' means dependent, 'Sam' means perfectly and 'Utpāda' means origination or arising in English rendering. It is essential to identify the nature of depending arising before study its characteristics, functions and benefits. In this process, the Buddha meticulously defines it in follow terms; "If it is asked, what is the depending arising? For instance, thus this exists

so this arises, thus this has been produced so this will be produced; and likewise, ignorance causes formation, the formation cause consciousness, the consciousness causes name and form, the name and form causes six sources, the six sources cause touch, the touch causes feeling, the feeling cause craving, the craving causes grasping, the grasping causes existence, the existence causes birth, the birth causes aging, dying, grief, lamentation, sufferings, mental distress and disturbance will be arisen. And in this way, a massive heap of sufferings alone arises.¹ It precisely means that every impermanent material which arises from certain causes and conditions are depending arising and it has no chance of come into being as inherently and instantaneously.

The Mahāyāna Buddhist master, Ācārya Nāgārjuna says in one of his commentary treatises as; "Not arisen from instinctively, certainty, human, dependent on other, almighty, time, inherently, manoeuvred will, celestial appointee and from useless ordinary cause; but these are depending arising."² The depending arising is also known as antidote to eliminate the erroneous conception of permanent almighty creator by establishing the law of factual cause and condition of any action and material existence. Hence, the Buddha says, "Depending arising to be applied with causal and conditional; and it does not apply to causeless and condition less."³ Exactly the same thing has been asserted in the *Ārya Śālistamba Nāma Mahāyāna Sūtra* and others.

Pratīyasamutpāda repels all erroneous conception of non-Buddhist schools, to establish the factual causes and conditions of sufferings, wandering of sentient beings in cyclic existence as well as liberation from the sufferings. The Buddha emphatically asserts that the dependent arising is one of the principal doctrines to actualise true nature of the phenomena and enable to see the Buddha. If anyone able to actualise the phenomena of depending arising he or she will comprehend the essence and the fundamental of the Buddha-dharma and see true nature of the Buddha. It is because the destination of Buddha-dharma and supreme happiness can only be achieved through comprehending the depending arising. Hence, precisely such thing has been asserted in a sūtra; "Monks! Whoever sees the depending arising sees the dharma. Whoever sees the dharma sees the Buddha."⁴ Thus, depending arising is both the essence of Buddhavacana and pragmatic path to get rid forever from all sorts of sufferings. Thus, Ācārya Nāgārjuna further says:

*The very depending arising is the Buddha's
One of the dearest doctrines of profound
treasure*

*Those who sees this correctly
Will see the supreme ultimate realizers
Buddha⁵*

Pratīyasamutpāda: The Law of Nature and Cause and Effect

Prior to the advent of the Buddha in the world, the virtual conception or rather misconception in the world is all existential phenomenon arises from the grace and mere will of supernatural Almighty God.

In a simple way, happiness, sufferings, taking birth as a human in human realm, hell and God realm and very fascinating picturesque in different parts of world etc., are mere result of manoeuvring mind the supernatural power. Nonetheless, the Almighty God himself has been believed as a permanent entity. This preposterous claim contradicts the fundamental law of nature as well. Hence, the Buddha completely metamorphosed the whole narrative of birth and arising by introducing an innovative law and perfectly logically proven theory called – Depending Arising.

The Depending arising not only unravels the complicated origination of undesirable sufferings but also firmly establish the law of causes and their effects to pave the ways for accumulating abundant virtuous deeds to achieve happiness, higher realms as well as Enlightenment. However, non-Buddhist schools preposterously claim all sufferings as well as every single entity arising in the world is the result or grace of almighty god. On the contrary, the Buddhist, especially Mādhyamika, concedes all materials and phenomenal entities explicitly arise interpedently from assemblage of certain potential causes and conditions. All non-Buddhist schools as well as some Buddhist philosophers fabricated many wrong notions about the arising and their interpretations of arising existential entities cannot be resisted by untenable logics of Mādhyamika. Thus, Ācārya Candrakīrti says:

*Because the material arises interdependently
All the fabricated notions cannot be resisted
from investigations*

*Thus, this reasoning of the depending arising
Cut off (obliterate) all the webs of erroneous
views⁶*

Nonetheless, non-Buddhist, especially ancient Indian philosophers, illogically and obstinately claims that the permanent supernatural power creates all impermanent entities. Here, too, the ācārya Āryadeva says:

*The entities arise from the permanent
How come it becomes impermanent?
Never the cause and the effect
To be seen with dissimilar characteristics⁷*

The Buddha categorically asserts at many occasions in the sūtras that every single phenomenon has its own precise causes and conditions for their existence effects and nothing arises instantaneously all of a sudden or grace of the supernatural power. Thus, Ācārya Nāgārjuna explicitly states:

*The sufferings created by self,
And others or both
Causeless has been claimed by logicians
But you pronounced it arising dependently⁸*

In terms of its realistic approach to view the universal arising and cessation, the modern scientists, intellectuals as well as academics and sceptics acknowledge the depending arising as perfectly viable mechanism to comprehend the truth of arising and cessation of the universe. The Buddha emphatically ascertains everything arises from our own individual as well as collective course of actions. No one is creator of our happiness, sufferings and the world except our own. In other words, in several scriptures it has been reiterated that we are the creator of our own

happiness and sufferings; therefore, we are the master of our own actions and their effects. Hence, the Buddha says:

The scholar does actualize the phenomena of depending arising

*The extreme view doesn't have dependency
Only casual and conditional phenomena are realized*

There is no non-casual and non-conditional phenomenon⁹

Objectives of Pratītyasamutpāda

The Buddha expounded the teaching of Pratītyasamutpāda not just for the sake of demonstrating innovative path, admiration and record etc. This marvellous path was exhibited solely to mitigate the sufferings of sentient beings as well as to put an end to them for once and for all by abolishing the exact cause and origination; and this has been precisely stated by ācārya Dharmakīrti and others. Moreover, the scriptures also suggest it is also a mechanism for understanding the real causes of the cyclic existence by allaying the ignorance, erroneous conception and indecision of getting into cyclic existence because of grasping the Self 'ātma'. This has been substantiated by Ācārya Vasubandhu by saying, "If it is asked, why this (Pratītyasamutpāda) has been demonstrated? Thus, only massive heap of sufferings arises as such to be demonstrated. Why that demonstration for what else? And some argued that this is for dispelling the ignorance, indecision and erroneous conception, if there are no self then how sentient beings get entrapped into the cyclic existence?"¹⁰ Thus, this pivotal law of depending arising is inextricably attached to the characteristic of the Buddhism.

Nonetheless, the Buddha didn't invent it rather; he wisely discovered to eliminate the sufferings and to cut the continuum of cyclic existence. Ācārya Vasubandhu substantiates by quoting a sūtra, "Monks! Depending arising is not created by me and others. Whether Tathāgata appeared or not but this reality remains the same from the antiquity."¹¹

Pratītyasamutpāda and its Characteristics

The phenomenon of birth and arising take place not from the grace of Almighty God rather it comes into being by assemblage or fulfilment of causes and conditions. The Buddha observed all living beings and non-living arise from assemblage of three fundamental elements namely; a) Arising from the condition of non-manoeuvring, b) Arising from the condition of impermanence and c) Arising condition of potentiality.

Let's understand all these in little comprehensively, all materials things like taking birth of living beings or growing seedlings from a seed are resulted merely assemblage of requisite causes and conditions but not by intentional manoeuvring of almighty or supernatural power. Thus, the Buddha says; this came into being because of the existence of this. Even all material things are not arisen from intention of almighty power, if it is a permanent matter then everything arise at a time, simultaneously, not gradual process. Therefore, all products of causes

and conditions should be impermanent. Viewing this Buddha says; this has risen so it will rise too. Even it is non-manoeuvring conditions as well as impermanent, all fruitions cannot arise from any cause but, rather it requires a potential cause to arise particular fruit. So, the Buddha says; compounded factors or actions (*saṃskāra*) arise from the ignorance (*avidyā*) etc.

Classification of Pratītyasamutpāda

According to sūtras and scriptures, the dependent origination is classified into two broad categories namely; internal depending arising and external depending arising on basis of two worlds—the container world and its inhabitant living beings. As such is mentioned in the sūtra; "that should be observed into two types; the external and the internal"¹². The first deals with analytical explanation of origination of external bodies like mountains, oceans, the sun and the moon and the universe. To more precisely, this talks about the causes and conditions of arising and cessation of non-living things which has been extensively discussed in sūtras like 'Rice Seedling' (*Śālistamba*). The second deals about to identify the causes and conditions of arising and cessation of living beings, i.e., human, animal, hell, heaven and liberation.

Internal Pratītyasamutpāda

The internal depending arising is very important to comprehend the arising and cessation of sentient beings which is explicitly illustrated by Vasubandhu as:

That are dependent arising's

Twelve parts and three sections

The internal dependent origination works like modern computer technology and its network links. Consequently, it has twelve-fold components termed as *Dvādaśanidānāni* in Sanskrit and *Tendrel Yanlag chu nyis* in Tibetan and they are:

1. Ignorance (Skt. *Avidyā*) (Tib. *Ma rig pa*)
2. Connecting Action or Volition (*Saṅkhāra*) (Tib. *Dujed kyi las*)
3. Consciousness (*Vijñāna*) (Tib. *Nam shes*)
4. Name and Form (*Nāmarūpa*) (Tib. *Ming Zuk*)
5. Sources of Perception (*Āyatanam*) (Tib. *Skye che*)
6. Contact (*Sparśa*) (Tib. *Reg pa*)
7. Feeling (*Vedanā*) (Tib. *Tshor ba*)
8. Craving (*Tṛṣṇā*) (Tib. *Sred pa*)
9. Grasping (*Upādāna*) (Tib. *Len pa*)
10. Existence (*Bhava*) (Tib. *Srid pa*)
11. Birth (*Jāti*) (Tib.) *skye ba*
12. Aging and Death (*Jarā maraṇa*) (Tib.) *gashi*

Furthermore, these are classified into three parts. These twelve-fold depending arising is primarily devised to illustrate the causes and conditions of taking birth in the cyclic existence as well as to attain liberation by ceasing the causes and conditions. This crucial path leads to ascertain the formidable law of the cause and effect in order to restrain from committing all non-virtues deeds. And Ācārya Vasubandhu empathetically stated such as:

Two each for previous and next

Eight to the middle for a complete person

First two, the ignorance and the volition or impression are of previous life, last two the birth and the aging and death are of next life and the remaining eight of present life are to be completed in three phases. It takes at least three life times for a complete person of the desire realm who was not born as emanation to complete the twelve-fold depending arising; According to ācārya Vasubandhu, these particular three parts are categorised special to repel the confusion where and how this present life comes from, what is the nature of this life and where and why this life will go to next. Besides this classification, the same twelve-fold peripherals are also to be divided into three parts on the ground of their natures; afflictions, actions and the bases. Thus, Ācārya Vasubandhu says:

Three parts are afflictions and two are actions

Seven are base and likewise results

From the twelve peripherals of depending arising, the three namely; ignorance, desire and attachment are by their nature or have the characteristics of afflictions and the two others; the volition or impression and the existence are actions and remaining seven are not only the base but also, they are fruition. Furthermore, the twelve-fold peripherals of depending arising are also classified into the causes and the effects. The previously cited three ignorance and two actions are causes. And the rest are the effects. Nevertheless, Ācārya Nāgārjuna seems to have defined three categories in a slightly different way. He empathetically asserts the seven peripherals as suffering instead of base as interpreted by Vasubandhu but, there is no major difference because all seven bases are ultimately suffering. Thus, Ācārya Nāgārjuna says:

And all are subsumed into three;

Affliction, action and suffering

These three sections are the primary causes to arise one another. The three afflictions the unruly mind causes to arise two actions. The two actions inflict all unwarranted sufferings. Even seven sufferings cause to arise two afflictions. In this way, living beings have to wander in the cyclic existence until the exhaustion of actions. Thus, Ācārya Nāgārjuna says:

The two arise from all three

The seven arise from the two and from the seven too;

Arise three and the wheel of cyclic existence

That revolves again and again

In the response to the incomprehension over whether the soul or the aggregate body transmit into the next life. Ācārya Vasubandhu seems to suggest merely aggregated body does transmit into the afterlife and absolutely negates the continuum of soul or self to transmit into next life and he empathetically asserts:

No self but merely aggregates body

However, Ācārya Nāgārjuna has illustrated it differently from the perspective of Mādhyamika and explicitly claims that the transmission of life or continuum of life arises from the emptiness and that is to say from the aforesaid five causal phenomena that

devoid of self (me and mine) arise the seven suffering as well as fruition phenomena that are devoid of self (me and my belongs). Thus, he explicitly says:

From the phenomenon of emptiness itself

Only phenomenon of emptiness arises

External Pratītyasamutpāda

The second, external depending arising elucidates the causes and conditions of arising as well as cessation of all external bodies like seedling, home, trees, high mountains, long rivers, biodiversity, the sun and the moon and so forth. They all come into being relying solely on their respective causes and conditions; for instance, growing seedlings. The seed (paddy) has the primary role of cause and potential to grow a bud/ shoot, then to a leaf, fruit and so on. In this process of sprouting other indispensable conditions, specifically six matters; viz. soil, water, fire, wind, space and time, have collective contribution to bud/ shoot the seedling too. Both the cause and conditions are absolutely necessary to get the effect or fruit. The seed alone can't ascertain to sprout seedling unless it is fulfilled with the all vital conditions. Thus, every single existential entity in the universe arises solely interdependently but not at all instantaneously.

Pratītyasamutpāda: Mādhyamika Perspective

Although, all Buddhist sects unanimously adhere the depending arising as basic ethos and key path to eliminate the sufferings. Nonetheless, the Mādhyamika took it to the next level by more profound and extensive investigations and comprehension. Thus, the Mādhyamika sees law of Pratītyasamutpāda not only encompasses impermanent material things but the non-material as well. So, Tibetan scholar Gorampa Sonam Singay defines the depending arising from the perspective of Mādhyamika in following terms; "The objects which are not come into being as an independent inherent body; rather, they are just imposition as a such on the fact of appearing to the perceivers' mind are called all depending arising"¹³. According to Mādhyamika school, every phenomenon, material and non-material, falls under the purview of emptiness in ultimate reality if it is meticulously examined or the high realized ārya sees phenomena not standing on its relative nature, permanent independent entity, as perceived by common people. Mādhyamika do not find any permanent entity besides dependent and conditionals while investigate them employing argumentations and logics.

Pratītyasamutpāda: Understanding through Eight Analogies

It is indeed a very tricky to realize the emptiness or selflessness but very easy to say everything is empty. However, the life transmission into next has been elucidated by the Buddha in the *Āyusṣattiyathākāra Paripṛcchā Sūtra* through drawing eight analogies namely; Chanting, Lamp, Mirror, Seal, Burning Glass, Seed, Sour and Echoing Sound. The same analogies have been employed by Ācārya Nāgārjuna to delineate the exceptional fact of life transmission from the viewpoint of Mādhyamika School. Thus, he says:

*Chanting, lamp, mirror and seal
Burning glass, fruit, sour and sound
Transmission of aggregated body too
Are untransformed, the scholars should
know it¹⁴*

These analogies seem to have proven the transmission of life into the next without self. The simple explanation of Pratītyasamutpāda can be comprehended from these analogies as: while a student learns chanting from the teacher, his chanting does not transform to the student; if it was transformed to the student, the teacher would become speechless. On other hand, the student's ability of chanting comes not other than the teacher otherwise it becomes causeless. Likewise, the last breathing of death is also the same.

Ācārya Nāgārjuna empathetically claims even a single fraction of material body and mind do not transform into the next life. If it was so, the life would become permanent. However, the next life is impossible without depending none other than this life, otherwise, it would become causeless. If the fruition is causeless and condition-less, then everything will become haphazard even an elephant can be born from a lion. As it's an incontrovertible fact that the teacher causes to learn the student chanting. Thus, neither the ability of student chanting can be accepted as exactly the same nor it can be pronounced as different. In other words, if the cause and the effect is minutely examined the arising itself cannot be traced. And this is the ultimate nature of the phenomena and it is also known as emptiness and middle path etc. Correspondingly, other analogies; viz. lamp, mirror, seal, burning glass, seed, souring fruit and sound equally illustrate the dynamic relationship or dependency of the cause and the effect.

On the contrary, if the ignorance of grasping the phenomena as inherently existent or permanent entity are repelled by getting accustomed with the true nature of phenomena – emptiness. Then naturally there will be no attachments and aggressions. If there is no aggression, there will be no action or impression. In this way, there will be no causes to arise in the cyclic existence, rather attain the liberation.

Conclusion

To put it in a nutshell, the study indicates the depending arising is an incontrovertible mechanism discovered by the Buddha to establish the origination of sufferings and happiness. In other words, it paves the way to identify the causes of cyclic existence and liberation as well. Besides this, it also systematically demonstrates the ways to cease the chain of cyclic existence and its relentless sufferings. In larger context, it illustrates how every existent phenomenal entity comes into beings on the virtue of relying on other essential causes and conditions. In short, the whole phenomenon in the universe is depending origination. It also negates the two extremes – inherently existed and nihilism i.e., to consider everything is arisen inherently or created by supernatural power almighty god and other hand everything comes into being naturally and

instantaneously without any certain cause and condition. Hence, every single phenomenon dependent on amalgam of cause and condition. Therefore, the ancient Buddhist argumentations and modern scientific experiments seem to have explicitly proved that nothing is causeless and condition-less.

Like the Four Noble Truths, the Interdependent Origination is a very important and a very profound teaching of the Buddha. It keeps significant role in the discipline of Buddhist studies. By understanding this teaching at least one can realize the importance of self and other in true terms and cooperate each other to reduce the mutual and general problems of the human world. It is the relevance of such teachings and its practice for the welfare of all sentient beings.

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