

# The Problem of Dharma in Buddhism and the Dharma- Adharma in Sāṃkhya

by

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In this paper we shall consider the problem of dharma first as it is used in Buddhism. Various connotations of dharma (dhamma) are found in Buddhism; for example, (1) rule (Gesetz), law (Recht), norm, etc., (2) teaching (die Lehre), (3) truth (die Wahrheit), the eternal and ultimate truth (die ewige und höchste Wahrheit), ultimate reality (das höchste Sein), ultimate substance (das höchste Wesen), and (4) the empirical object (die empirische Dinge<sup>(1)</sup>). These definitions are generally recognized as a classification of the concept of dharma in Early Buddhism made from a philological standpoint. This approach, however, merely shows the plurality of connotations in the Buddhist concept of dharma (dhamma), and it fails to give an adequate, unified view of this key term.

What does dharma as a central concept in Buddhism mean? What is the definition of dharma in such phrases as “rely upon the dharma,” “take refuge in the dharma,” and so forth? What does dharma denote in such expressions as the dharma which is produced, the dharma which is annihilated, all existing dharma, the created saṃskṛta-dharma, the un-created asaṃskṛta-dharma, all dharma are egoless, etc.? What is the dharma implied in the classic statement, “Those who see dependent origination, see the dharma; those who see the dharma, see the Buddha”?

It is possible to conceive the basic meaning of dharma as teaching or doctrine in the last quotation, but how can we grasp the many impli-

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(1) These are well known by the research of W. Geiger and others.

cations of this concept systematically in their scriptural and literary context and thereby clarify its essential meaning common to them all? Is there not a method whereby we can make explicit the basic meaning of the Buddhist teaching? Here it is necessary to point out that the basic meaning of Buddhism is dependent upon the valuation given by the self or agent which is the ultimate form of subjective existence. That is, the dharma in the statement, "those who see dependent origination, see the dharma; those who see the dharma, see the Buddha," is made meaningful by the self or agent which sees the dharma, realizes the dharma, and grasps the dharma. Since it is invariably connected with man's transformation from a being of illusion to a being of enlightenment, dharma becomes empty of contents apart from the meaning or value attached to it by the subjective existence. But in order to clarify this problem fully, it would seem that a clear understanding of the meaning of adharma (adhamma) in contradistinction to dharma (dhamma) would be necessary. It is believed that unless the definition of adharma in opposition to dharma can be made explicit, the definition of dharma itself would be inadequate.<sup>(2)</sup>

As materials to consider this point, I wish to call attention to the theory of dharma and adharma in the Sāṃkhya. It is characteristic of the Sāṃkhya that dharma and adharma are treated together and that dharma is an aspect of the theory of dharma and adharma (dharmādharmavāda). This is clear from the fact that both dharma and adharma are taught as characteristic of and in relationship to buddhi (the intellectual) which is the so-called agent or the subject.

Buddhi is the determining principle (adhyavasāya). Dharma (virtue), jñāna

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(2) This point is further clarified when the "dharma of dependent origination" is seen in the double aspect of "those who see dependent origination see the dharma" and "those who do not see dependent origination do not see the dharma" and also is seen as the truth (paramārtha-satya) in contrast to the Four Noble Truth which illuminates the principle of illusion and enlightenment.

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(wisdom), virāga (dispassion), and aiśvarya (power) are the sattva-nature of buddhi (form when affected by goodness). Those which oppose this—adharma, ajñāna, avairāgya, anaīśvarya—are the tamas-nature (form when affected by darkness<sup>(3)</sup>).

It is taught that buddhi (mahat) is the principle (tattva<sup>(4)</sup>) which forms the first stage of modification (pariṇāma) of prakṛti (nature) and it is an organ (karaṇa) which has determination as its essential nature. In this case the organ which is buddhi and its essential nature which is determination are not to be divided but to be considered as an unity. Buddhi is inconceivable apart from determination. It is inseparable from its essence and is not a separate entity. Therefore, it is not a permanent, unified self (ātman<sup>(5)</sup>).

We have seen that buddhi forms the first stage of the modification of prakṛti, and this means that buddhi is the effect (vyakta), possessing the three attributes (triguṇa) and inseparable (avivekin), based upon the cause which is prakṛti, possessing the three attributes and inseparable<sup>(6)</sup>. Thus, buddhi is inseparable from triguṇa and inconceivable apart from triguṇa. Trigūṇa then is buddhi, and buddhi is triguṇa.

Triguṇa refers to the three types of guṇa—sattva, rajas, and tamas. They have respectively as their essence: joy, sorrow, and darkness, and as their quality: brightness, creation, and bondage. Their function is to mutually subjugate each other, depend on each other, produce each other, and exist parallel to each other<sup>(7)</sup>. From the fact that buddhi is formed by these triguṇa arises its unique distinction, and at the same time leads to the determination of dharma and adharma in relation to buddhi. In the

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(3) Sāṃkhya-kārikā, 23:

adhyavasāyo buddhir dharmo jñānaṃ virāga aiśvaryam /  
sāttvikam etad-rūpaṃ tāmasam asmād viparyastam //

(4) Kārikā, 22.

(5) Regarding this point, the various commentaries which equate puruṣa with ātman are misleading. (6) Kārikā, 11 and 14. See my work: *The Sāṃkhya System of Philosophy*, 1964, pp. 189, 223 f.

(7) Kārikā, 12 and 13. cf. S. S. (Sāṃkhya-sūtra), 1, 126; Y. S. (Yoga-sūtra), 2, 18.

triguṇa when sattva becomes predominant (utkāṭa) to subjugate (abhibhū) rajas and tamas, then the buddhi of sattva-nature comes into being. In this case there are formed the four types of dharma, jñāna, etc., of buddhi. If tamas becomes predominant to subjugate rajas and sattva, a buddhi of tamas-nature, as opposed to sattva-nature, is formed. Thus there are formed the adharmā, ajñāna, etc., of buddhi.<sup>(8)</sup>

In this way there are eight types of special distinction in buddhi made by means of the two natures of sattva and tamas, and thus it becomes clear that dharma and adharmā are determined by buddhi.

The dharma and adharmā, together with the tamas-nature and sattva-nature of buddhi, play an important role in the development of the theory of modification which helps to understand the saṃsāra of sentient beings. In the Sāṃkhya the subject or agent of saṃsāra is called liṅga. Liṅga (the mergent, subtle astral body) is defined as mahādādisūkṣmaparyantam<sup>(9)</sup> (composed of buddhi and the rest down to primary elements) and without being a receptacle, it undergoes saṃsāra by being perfumed by various types of existence (bhāva) of sattva-nature and tamas-nature.<sup>(9)</sup> Existence (bhāva) is the cause and necessary condition of the saṃsāra of liṅga. This is clear from the fact that existence is explained as a cause (nimitta). It is stated:

Liṅga is formed for the sake of puruṣa, and it manifests itself variously on account of the connection between cause and effect (nimitta-naimittika) and by union with the predominant power of prakṛti.<sup>(10)</sup>

Cause (nimitta) here refers to the existence of buddhi, and effect (naimittika) refers to the result of this existence which is the cause. This

- (8) G. Bh. (Gauḍapāda, Sāṃkhyakārikā-bhāṣya, Ben. S.S., No. 9), p. 26.  
M. V. (Māṭhara, Sāṃkhyakārikā-vṛtti, Chowkh. S. S., No. 296), p. 38.  
V. T. (Vācaspatimiśra, Sāṃkhya-tattvakaumudī, Calc. S. S., No. XV), p. 72. cf. Y. D. (Yukti-dīpikā, Calc. S. S., No. XXIII), p. 112.

(9) Kārikā, 40.

(10) Kārikā, 42:

puruṣārtha-hetukam idaṃ nimitta-naimittika-prasaṅgena /  
prakṛter vibhutva-yogān naṭavad vyavatiṣṭhate liṅgam //

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point is explicitly made in the following statement :

There is elevation (gamanam ūrdhvaṃ) because of dharma, and there is demotion (gamanam adhastāt) because of adharma. There is emancipation (apavarga) because of jñāna, and there is bondage (bandha) when this is opposed.<sup>(11)</sup>

The first part of this quotation means that if sentient beings perform the rightful dharma, then they will without fail gain the result of elevation (birth into paradise) with dharma as the cause. In contrast to this if they perform the unrightful adharma, then they will gain the result of demotion (animal existence) with adharma as the cause.

Here it is clear that dharma and adharma oppose each other as favorable and unfavorable values centered on the existence of sentient beings and point the way to saṃsāra. This passage, however, does not literally explain what sentient being (bhūta, sattva) is. That which is directly connected with dharma and adharma is called liṅga (sūkṣmaśarīra). It must be especially noted that this liṅga is the liṅga of sentient beings that transmigrate in the three worlds of heavenly beings, human beings, and animal existence. That is, liṅga is the subject or agent of all sentient beings transmigrating in the three worlds. Of course, liṅga is an object that can be perceived only by supranatural beings, such as the yogin, and is beyond the ken of mundane existence.<sup>(12)</sup> Therefore, although we speak of sentient beings transmigrating as liṅga through the three worlds by means of dharma and adharma, it is nothing more than an object of contemplation from the standpoint of mundane sentient beings.

Regardless of the activity pursued, however, there remains only the choice between rightful and unrightful activity for sentient beings. Furthermore, the result of rightful activity and the result of unrightful activity is necessarily bound by what is rightful and unrightful. But it should be especially noted that the law of cause and effect in this case

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(11) Kārikā, 44:

dharmeṇa gamanam ūrdhvaṃ gamanam adhastād bhavaty adharmeṇa /  
jñānena cāpavargo viparyayād iṣyate bandhaḥ //

(12) Kārikā, 43. M. V., p. 60. cf. S. S., 1, 90.

is not limited to just the present life; it also covers past lives and future lives. Thus, if one hopes for a better life in the future worlds, rather than merely desiring the extension of this life or an ageless, eternal life, then one must follow what ought to be done, the rightful activity, in this present life. Truly, the rightful activity is the cause of elevation (birth into paradise). In contrast, if one pursues what ought not to be done, the unrightful activity, then one will undoubtedly descend into demotion in future lives. It seems that dharma and adharma bring about their respective effects and teach this point to sentient beings. If this is taught, dharma and adharma has a great significance for their results, as well as for the welfare of sentient beings.

We have thus seen that dharma and adharma in their necessary relationship to the effects show the universal law of cause and effect covering the activity of sentient beings, as well as the true nature of the worlds into which the sentient beings transmigrate. This, however, merely shows the true nature of transmigration and fails to teach the way of emancipation sought by sentient beings. How can emancipation be gained? It is possible by jñāna.

Emancipation is gained by jñāna; a jñāna which opposes this leads to bondage, the sufferings in transmigration. <sup>(13)</sup> ...

Jñāna here does not refer to knowledge in general, but to true wisdom (tattva-jñāna) taught in the Sāṃkhya. This wisdom is in essence the discriminating wisdom (viveka-jñāna) which clearly grasps the difference between the two principles of pradhāna (prakṛti) and puruṣa. This is a kind of sattva-nature of buddhi which leads to enlightenment, the object of puruṣa, and this enlightenment is possible only by means of viveka-jñāna. Therefore, we may say that viveka-jñāna is the true cause of the object of puruṣa which is enlightenment. The ajñāna which opposes this is not just ordinary ignorance, but the untruthful knowledge (atattva-jñāna) or the indiscriminating knowledge (aviveka-jñāna) which fails to grasp

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(13) Kārikā, 44 and 45.

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the minute difference between pradhāna and puruṣa. Thus, in the Sāṃkhya any jñāna which opposes tattva-jñāna or viveka-jñāna is not the highest form of absolute wisdom, even if it is called jñāna, because it fails to lead to the goal of puruṣa which is enlightenment.<sup>(14)</sup>

Here we see the Sāṃkhya criticism of jñāna in relation to theory of dharma and adharma which clarifies the true nature of transmigration of sentient beings.<sup>(15)</sup>

(14) Kārikā, 23 and 37. cf. Y. S., 2, 28; 4, 31.

(15) This paper is a revised translation of the Japanese original entitled "On dharma·Adharma." I wish to thank Mr. T. Unno for his aid in matters concerning this English translation.

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