

The Theory of 'Dependent Origination in its Incipient Stage¹

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It has traditionally been believed that the theory of Dependent Origination is represented typically in the formula of the Twelve Links (*Dvādasāhḡika praṭīyasamutpāda*). But when we investigate into scriptures of early Buddhism as preserved in the Pali Nikāyas and their corresponding Chinese versions, we come across various formulas which embody the idea of Dependent Origination. It is likely that the formula of the Twelve Links was formed in later stages of the development of early Buddhism. In the following we are going to point out some pre-formula statements of the idea of Dependent Origination, as are noticed in early Buddhist scriptures.

I. The Stage Before the Formation of the Theory of Dependent Origination.

Among various scriptures of early Buddhism the *Suttanipāta* is regarded as the oldest one by scholars, and among the various sections of this text the Pārāyana-vagga, the last section, seems to have been composed earliest.¹

In the *Suttanipāta* 'the one who sees *paṭiccasamuppāda*' is praised only once² in the Gāthā sections, but it is not clear what it means. In the *Suttanipāta* there is no mention of the Twelve-Link Dependent Origination, and in the Pārāyana-vagga only the idea in its incipient stage is cursorily mentioned. Early Buddhists in the first stage described the state in which human beings are suffering, as were noticed by them.

'The world is shrouded by ignorance (*avijjā*).

On account of avarice (*veviccha*) and sloth (*pamāda*) it doesn't shine.

I call cravings (*jappā*) defilement (*abhilepana*.)

Suffering (*dukkha*) is the great danger of the world.'²

In this verse the term 'world' (*loka*) means 'human beings' collectively. In this case the relationship among ignorance (*avijjā*), avarice (*veviccha*), sloth (*pamāda*), cravings (*jappā*), defilement (*abhilepana*) and suffering (*dukkha*) is not noticed, nor discussed. However, if we put them in due order, we can get an approximation to some formulas of Dependent Origination. They didn't want to discuss their mutual relations at the earliest stage. This represents the stage before the formation of the theory of Dependent Origination.

The theory of Dependent Origination sets forth to explain how we can conquer ageing, sickness, death etc. of human beings. But Buddhists of the [166] earliest stage of early Buddhism did not try to demonstrate it theoretically, but set forth their own experience as such:

'The person, having considered various things in the world,
he for whom there is no wavering anywhere in the world,
who is calm without the smoke of passions, free from tremor, free from
desire, . . .
he has crossed over birth and ageing, so I say.'³

To the entreaty by the youth (*māṇava*) Dhotaka: 'Having compassion on me, teach me the truth of seclusion (from worldly defilements)', Gotama the Buddha taught:

I will explain "peace" (*santi*) to you:
if a man, in this visible world, here and now,
without relying upon any conventional instruction,
has understood it, and behaves himself watchfully,
he will overcome entanglements in secular life.'⁴

¹ From *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula*, Gordon Fraser, London, 1980, 165-172.

and continued:

‘Whatever you know watchfully — above, below, across
and in the middle — knowing this to be entanglements in the world,
you should not thirst for transient mundane existence.’⁵

Here we can locate the relation of founding one upon the other. It might be formulated as follows:

sufferings or defilements <— entanglements in the
world (*loke visattikā*) <— Thirsting for transient mundane
existence (*bhavābhavāya taṇhā*) <—
[not-knowing (implied, for the other items can be overcome only by knowing
watchfully).]

Here we can say that the main framework of later theories of Dependent Origination is ready, or existing latently. (This framework corresponds to:

Jarāmarāṇa <— bhava <— upādāna <— taṇhā <— avidyā

according to later phraseology as can be noticed in the prose sections of the *Nikāyas*.) [167]

II. The Theory of Dependent Origination in the Process of Formation.

The theory of Dependent Origination in its earliest phase should be sought for in the earliest portions of the *Suttanipāta*, although we don't preclude other scriptures (especially Gāthā portions) where we can find other forms of the idea in formation. One of the earliest forms of Dependent Origination is set forth in one portion of the Aṭṭhaka-vagga of the *Suttanipāta*. There the theory is not set forth in a systematized way, each link (or item) in the same pattern, as in the case of the Twelve Link Dependent Origination, but rather in a crude, disorderly form, which betrays its primitive character. The passage runs as follows:²

862. ‘Wherefrom have come out strifes, disputes, lamentations, sorrows, together with envy, arrogance, conceits and slandering? Wherefrom have they come out? Please, explain it.’⁶

863. From dear objects (*piya*) spring up strifes, disputes, lamentations, sorrows, together with envy, arrogance and conceit, together with slandering. Strifes and disputes are mixed with envy; slandering can be found in all sorts of disputes.’⁷

864 ‘Being conditioned by what do dear things originate in the world? (Being conditioned by what) do the covetousness (*lobha*) that prevails in the world originate? Being conditioned by what do the desires and their fulfilments originate that are (of consequence) for future life of a man (after death)?’

865 ‘The dear things and also the covetousness that prevails in the world originate, being conditioned by instinctive will (*chanda*);⁸ The desires and their fulfilments that are (of consequence) for future life (after death) originate being conditioned by it’.

‘866 Being conditioned by what does instinctive will (*chanda*) in the world originate? From what have (metaphysical) decisive opinions (*vinicchaya*) originated? And also, anger, falsehood, doubt, and the teachings set forth by a recluse,⁹ from what have they originated?’

867 ‘What they call “pleasant”¹⁰ and “unpleasant” in the world — being based upon that, instinctive will (*chanda*) originates. Having seen decay and origination in material things, a person forms a (metaphysical) decisive opinion (attached to dear things) in the world.’

868 Anger, falsehood, and doubt — these things (appear), when there is duality¹¹ (of “pleasant” and “unpleasant” and so on).¹² A person who has doubts should learn in the path of knowledge. Having known this (truth), the recluse has set forth the teachings.’

² The verse numbers have been added by Sāgaramati [Note: verses 875, 876, & 877 are missing here. Yet in the PTS 1913 ed. of the Sutta Nipāta they are all present].

³ ‘g’ added here as missing from text.

'869 Being conditioned by what do "pleasant" and "unpleasant" originate? [168] By the absence of what (*kasmim asante*) do these not originate? Being conditioned by that we (notice) "decay" and "origination." Explain me this truth!

870 "Pleasant" (*sātā*) and "unpleasant" (*asātā*) originate being conditioned by touch (*phassa*). When there is no touch, these ("pleasant" and "unpleasant") do not originate.

"decay" and "origination" and the condition by which they appear — I explain you this truth.'

871 Being conditioned by what does touch originate in the world? Wherefrom have "possessions" (*pariggahā*) arisen? By the absence of what does "selfishness" (*mamatta*) not exist? By the cessation of what do "touches" (*phassā*) not touch?

872 'Depending upon name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*), touch exists. Possession (*pariggahāni*)¹³ originate being caused by desire (*icchā*). When there is no desire, there does not exist selfishness (*mamatta*). By the cessation of form (*rūpa*) touches (*phassā*) don't touch.

873 'At what stage of one's practice does form cease to exist? Or, how is it that "pleasant" and "unpleasant" disappear? Tell me how they disappear. I should like to know it, . . . Such a thought occurred to me.'

874 'Not being with consciousness, nor being with wrong consciousness, not being without consciousness, nor being with consciousness disappeared — to the person who has practised in this way, form (*rūpa*) disappears, for the discrimination about the phenomenal world (*papañca*) is conditioned by ideation (*saññā*).'

NOTES

1 We can sort out the older and newer portions in each corpus of the Pali scriptures. The earlier portions of the Pali scriptures have been classified in several groups by scholars according to their chronological order. According to recent studies the Pārāyanavagga of the *Suttanipāta* seems to be the oldest one. Hajime Nakamura: A Critical Survey of Early Buddhism (I), *Bukkyō Kenkyū* (Buddhist Studies), No. 3, Hamamatsu: Japan: August 1973, pp. 68-88 (in English).

2 *Suttanipāta*, 1033.

3 *Suttanipāta*, 1048.

4 *Suttanipāta*, 1065 f. Cf. *ibid.*, 1052 f.

5 The word *bhavābhava* should be interpreted as a reduplication of *bhava*, in the same way as *calācala* is a reduplication of *cala*. Cf. Monier-Williams: *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, s.v. *calācala*; Vidhusekhara Bhattacharyya: *The Āgama-sāstra*, p. 46; Hajime Nakamura: *Vedānta Tetsugaku no Hatten* (The Development of Vedānta Philosophy) (Tokyo: Iwanami Press, 1955), p. 362.

6 *Suttanipāta*, p. 862-874. This passage corresponds to the Chinese version of the *Arthapada-sūtra*, vol. I Taisho Tripitaka, vol. IV., p. 180cf.).

7 *vivādajātesu* . . . Fausbøll translated this word as: 'there is slander in the disputes arisen.' If the meaning is as he translated, the text must be: *vivādesu jātesu or jātavivā*-[172] *desu*. I think that in this case the ending word: *-jāta* is a peculiarly Buddhistic term, meaning 'all items which are to be included in one class or species.' This usage was preserved even up to later days. E. g. *adhvajāta* in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*.

8 A. K. Warder takes the essential meaning of *chanda* for will. (*Introduction to Pali*, London: Luzac, 1963, p. 396).

9 In some Pali scriptures an ideal recluse is called either a Brahmin or a samaṇa, there being no distinction, (*samaṇera samitapāpena brāhmanena bāhitapāpena, bhikkhunā bhinnakilesamūlena, sabbākusalamūla-bandha-pamuttana*) (*Mahāniddeśa*).