

The Meaning of a Holy Statement of Lord Buddha

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Lord Buddha said 'Whoever sees Dependent Origination, he sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma, he sees Dependent Origination.' It is the aim of this article to explain the meaning of the above Holy Statement of Lord Buddha.

This statement of Lord Buddha is reported by Venerable Sariputta in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pali Tipitaka.

Now, it must be clearly understood that Dependent Origination is fundamental to Lord Buddha's philosophy. Suffering arises dependent on other factors and also ceases dependent on other factors. It is Dependent Origination that makes the extermination of suffering possible. Therefore, it is Dependent Origination that makes Nirvana possible. Thus, Dependent Origination, which meshes well with impermanence which is another key teaching of Lord Buddha, is co-extensive with Dhamma.

The above statement of Lord Buddha, together with another statement of His made in a totally different situation 'Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees me; whoever sees me, sees the Dhamma', are combined in the Mahayana Rice Sapling Sutra where Venerable Sariputta asks the meaning of the combined statement to Bodhisattva Maitreya. I do not fully agree with Bodhisattva Maitreya's answer and do not approve of the proto-Tantric elements in Bodhisattva Maitreya's answer. This Mahayana scripture combines two statements made by Lord Buddha in two different contexts which was one of the devices used by Mahayana scriptures to get Mahayana scriptures accepted. Indeed, many Mahayana scriptures tend to be hybrid texts, combining established teachings with new innovations.

The word Dhamma can have more than just one meaning. When written with a lower-case d, dhamma can also mean any element of the universe, that is, Samsara. Every dhamma in Samsara is Dependently Originated and conditioned. In contrast, Nirvana is unconditioned. The word dhammata means the quality or characteristic of a dhamma. The dhammata of all dhammas is that every dhamma in the universe, Samsara, is Dependently Originated and conditioned. The word dhammata is a neutral word - it does not make any assertion as to whether a dhamma is empty or not. The moment one says that the dhammata of a dhamma is emptiness, as does Mahayana, one is making a definite commitment as regards the dhammata of a dhamma. In fact, if I were to spell out the difference between Theravada and Mahayana in just one sentence, it is that

Theravada accepts only Pudgalanairatmya whereas Mahayana accepts both Pudgalanairatmya and Dharmanairatmya.

I have previously proved in a published article of mine that the soul, as conceived in Hinduism - and that includes the Hindu Bhagavat Gita, is empty. Carrying that discussion to its logical extremity, the emptiness of the soul allows us to make sense of some of the stickier elements of this Hindu text. For example, it is said in the Bhagavat Gita that the soul cannot be cut, burnt, etc. Why? Because the soul is empty. Emptiness cannot be cut, burnt, etc. Thus, to explain some elements of the Bhagavat Gita satisfactorily, we must take recourse to Buddhism. Also, the Bhagavat Gita implies, after giving a line of Hindu Samkhya philosophy, that the soul is not the owner of karma. Why? Because the soul is empty. Emptiness cannot be the owner of anything. The emptiness of the Hindu soul takes it very close to Lord Buddha's teaching of Anatta. The fit of early Hindu texts borrowing Buddhist materials appears even tighter when we find that in the Yoga Sutra, an ostensibly Hindu text written by Patanjali, certain materials are lifted from Lord Buddha's mouth (Lord Buddha talked about the Four Sublime Abodes, which are Metta, Karuna, Mudita and Upekkha, and Patanjali writes exactly the same four, Maitri, Karuna, Mudita and Upeksha in his Yoga Sutra) and much of Lord Buddha's concepts are interspersed throughout the text. Of course, there is Hindu Samkhya influence also in the Yoga Sutra.

Lord Buddha admitted the existence of suffering in the world. In fact, that suffering is Dependently Originated. Lord Buddha famously talked about the twelve links of Dependent Origination starting with ignorance and ending in suffering. But in the same breadth, Lord Buddha also talked about the cessation of ignorance eventuating in the cessation of suffering. To put a man's duty succinctly, Lord Buddha's injunction is simple: Suffering exists, end (Nirodha) it. How? By following the Noble Eightfold Path. Thus, it is the Holy Duty of each man not to accept, fear or succumb to suffering but to end, Nirodha, any suffering that exists and to achieve Nirvana. That is the Sat, meaning True, Dharma or, using the grammatical Sandhi, Saddharma. Saddharma is another name for Buddhism.

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