

Anatta: A Buddhist Remedy to the Problem of Associating Eternal Self to Non-Eternal Body

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Abstract : In Anātmalaksana Sutra, Buddha talks about the importance of anattā (no-self). This notion of no-self is a critical response towards the Brahmanical tradition of classical India in which self has been taken to be eternal. Though self is taken to be eternal, 'I' refer to Person who is the self as determined by non-eternal body. Buddha raises questions regarding the possibility of the association between eternal self and non-eternal body. According to him, such an association is not possible. Thus, instead of an eternal self and its association with the non-eternal body, he speaks about association among five different non-eternal parts (skandhas). He holds that 'I' refers to Person, but this Person is not eternal self as determined by the non-eternal body. It is the combination of five different skandhas each of which is non-eternal. So according to Buddha, there is no eternal self which in association with non-eternal body is referred to as 'I,' but 'I' is a convenient designator which designates the combination of five non-eternal skandhas. If 'I' is taken to refer the combination of five non-eternal skandhas, then the problematic of the association between eternal self (attā) and non-eternal body will not be there. The realization that 'I' does not refer to any eternal self as determined by non-eternal body, but instead refer to the combination of five non-eternal skandhas leads to the cessation of suffering (dukkha). The root of suffering lies in craving for something or the other. Thus, as soon as one realizes that the person is not constituted of any eternal self but is constituted of non-eternal skandhas, his desire to acquire and possess will be stopped. Thus, in the whole conceptual framework of Buddhist philosophy, anattā occupies a pivotal role the realization of which is admitted to be the cause of the cessation of suffering. In the present paper, an effort will be made to analyse this notion of anattā to show how the realization of the truth that person is a combination of five skandhas each of which is non-eternal helps an individual to get rid of the bondage. If eternal self is to be admitted, then there always remains the problem of connecting the eternal self with the non-eternal body, because this connection only gives rise to the notion of person in such framework.

Keywords : anatta, atta, dukkha, skandha

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