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A Review Study on Metaphysical Notions in Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

The main metaphysical ideas that have been created within Buddhist philosophy are examined in this overview study, along with their importance in comprehending the nature of existence, reality, and human experience. Buddhism offers a unique philosophical perspective that emphasises the conditioned and changeable character of events while challenging the possibility of permanent and independent things. Important ideas including impermanence (anitya), suffering (duḥkha), non-self (anātman), dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), emptiness (śūnyatā), consciousness (vijñāna), karma, reincarnation, and nirvāṇa are central to the study. Additionally, it examines how these concepts evolved in the main schools of Buddhist philosophy, including Theravāda, Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, and Yogācāra. Particular focus is placed on the Buddhist denial of a permanent self and the connection between dependent origination and emptiness. Using Buddhist texts, philosophical writings, academic literature, and secondary sources, the study employs a review-based technique. The analysis shows that Buddhist metaphysics is not just theoretical but rather intimately related to ethics, meditation, and liberation. All things considered, the study emphasises the philosophical importance of Buddhist metaphysical thought and its ongoing applicability to issues pertaining to reality, identity, causation, awareness, and human existence.

Keywords: *Buddhism, Metaphysics, Anātman, Impermanence, Dependent Origination, Śūnyatā, Consciousness, Karma, Rebirth, Nirvāṇa.*

INTRODUCTION

The main goals of Buddhism are to comprehend the nature of existence, suffering, impermanence, and the potential for emancipation. Buddhist philosophy incorporates a number of significant metaphysical ideas about reality, the self, causation, awareness, existence, and liberation, despite the Buddha's emphasis on practical and ethical transformation rather than theoretical philosophy. Theravāda, Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and Abhidharma lineages are only a few of the Buddhist schools that developed these concepts through the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhism takes a very different metaphysical stance than many Indian philosophical systems. Buddhism emphasises impermanence (anitya), suffering or unsatisfactoriness (duḥkha), and non-self (anātman) and typically rejects the notion of a permanent and autonomous self (ātman). According to the theory of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), things do not have an independent existence because they originate from conditions. This study leads to the idea of emptiness (śūnyatā) in Madhyamaka philosophy, which holds that things have no intrinsic or autonomous character (svabhāva).



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Major Metaphysical Notions in Buddhism

1. The Concept of Impermanence

One of the core ideas of Buddhist philosophy is impermanence. Everything that is conditioned is prone to alteration and ultimate disintegration. People, things, feelings, ideas, and social structures are all transient. Because attachment to changing things leads to pain, it is crucial to acknowledge impermanence. Therefore, understanding the fleeting nature of phenomenal reality is encouraged by Buddhist philosophical study.

2. The Doctrine of Anātman

One of Buddhism's most distinguishing metaphysical concepts is the tenet of anātman, or non-self. Buddhism denies that human experience is caused by a permanent, unchanging soul or self. Form, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are the five aggregates (skandhas) that comprise what is typically thought of as the self. These aggregates are always changing and interacting with each other. As a result, no permanent entity can be recognised as an autonomous self.

3. Dependent Origination

One of the main explanations for the Buddhist conception of reality is dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda). This principle states that conditions and causes determine the emergence of phenomena. Nothing exists entirely on its own or in isolation. Twelve interwoven links are used in the conventional formulation to explain the cycle of suffering, which starts with ignorance and ends with old age and death. Liberation is made possible by eliminating ignorance and other factors that contribute to the cycle.

4. The Concept of Śūnyatā

Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka school methodically developed the idea of Śūnyatā, or emptiness, which became especially important in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Emptiness is more than just complete nothingness. Instead, it suggests that things lack an autonomous and enduring inherent nature. Phenomena lack autonomous svabhāva, yet they do exist conventionally and dependently. Thus, dependent origination and emptiness are strongly related.

5. The Nature of Consciousness

In Buddhist metaphysical analysis, consciousness (vijñāna) plays a significant role. Buddhism typically rejects the idea that awareness is a permanent soul or entity. Rather, awareness is a part of the ever-evolving stream of experience and emerges in response to circumstances. Yogācāra Buddhism focused on consciousness in great depth and created theories on several forms or levels of consciousness, such as storehouse awareness, or ālaya-vijñāna.

6. Karma and Rebirth

Buddhist philosophy places a strong emphasis on karma and rebirth. Karma is a general term for deliberate action and its results. Theories based on the transmigration of a permanent soul are not the same as Buddhist interpretations of rebirth. Since Buddhism rejects the idea of an eternal self, continuity between



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various existences is interpreted in terms of causal relationships rather than the transfer of an immutable soul from one body to another. As a result, significant ontological issues pertaining to individual identity and causal continuity are raised by the connection between karma, consciousness, and reincarnation.

7. The Two Truths

The Madhyamaka tradition makes a distinction between ultimate truth (paramārtha-satya) and conventional truth (saṃvṛti-satya). The everyday world of language, concepts, distinctions, and practical activities are all part of conventional truth. The understanding that phenomena are devoid of intrinsic existence is referred to as ultimate truth. It is incorrect to think of the two truths as entirely distinct realities. Instead, they stand for two perspectives on the same interdependent reality.

8. Nirvāṇa

The ultimate aim of Buddhist religious and philosophical practice is nirvāṇa. It is linked to the end of suffering, ignorance, and longing. The metaphysical state of nirvāṇa is commonly considered as freedom from the cycle of birth and death (saṃsāra), but different Buddhist schools have different explanations. The Buddhist road to nirvāṇa is characterised by wisdom, meditation, and ethical discipline.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gokhale, Pradeep. (2024) The research delves into the core topics surrounding the concept of death as addressed in Mahāyāna and Theravāda (Pāli Buddhism). In what way is death seen as a manifestation of duḥkha (Sanskrit) or dukkha (Pāli)? According to the research, 'unsatisfactory' is the correct adjective to use here, not 'pain' or 'suffering,' because the term duḥkha/dukkha is originally employed as an adjective. Second, when the Buddha spoke of death, he did not mean physical death but rather the feeling of being dead or contemplating one's own mortality. As a goal, the Buddha also mentioned non-death. In this context, deathlessness does not mean embracing an everlasting truth, but rather cultivating an appropriate outlook on death through practices like meditation on impurity (aśubhabhāvanā) and contemplation of death (maraṇānussati). Tathāgata should also aim to end the cycle of rebirths and deaths if it is the ultimate purpose of the arhat (Sanskrit) or arahant (Pāli). Then the question arises: how can the existence of Tathāgata after death be explained as an unanswerable (avyākṛta)? The study suggests that this is due to Tathāgata's vast, infinite, and unfathomable character. Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna have fundamentally different perspectives on death, which is also addressed in the research. Last but not least, it addresses the subject of whether, under some circumstances, it is allowed in Buddhism to end one's own life.

Stella, Aldo & Divino, Federico. (2023) Mostly theoretical in nature, the current work aims to achieve two different goals. It aims to critically analyze the metaphysical meaning that Anaximander's philosophy expresses in the framework of the emerging Western philosophical tradition, first and foremost. Furthermore, it seeks to explore how the idea of the "void" as a fundamental component of real existence was more clearly explained by contemporary Buddhist philosophy, which coincided with Anaximander's time. This explanation did not rely on formal logical reasoning or structured arguments, but rather on aphoristic language.



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Thinley Dorji (2022) All Buddhists, including those from Bhutan, view human life as sacred and unique, and they all understand that getting older, getting sick, and dying are natural parts of being human. Yet, discussions about death and dying can bring up troubling feelings, and people frequently refuse to acknowledge the role that technological medicalization plays in bringing about these feelings, even when it offers great hope. There is a belief that advanced medical techniques, including cardiac resuscitation, can alter the course of death. But other people refuse to accept the finite nature of life and instead relentlessly seek out medical procedures in the hopes of maintaining and extending it. Due to a lack of education and awareness of the cultural and social factors influencing end-of-life care and the promotion of a dignified death in Bhutan, healthcare providers encounter moral and ethical quandaries on a regular basis. Against the background of quickly shifting societal norms and expectations, we explore these moral challenges associated with delivering high-quality end-of-life care and a dignified death.

Babbitt, S. E. (2022), Philosophy of existence lies at the heart of early Theravada Buddhism. Not all practitioners identify as Buddhist. The art of living, a path to recognizing one's own potential, is vipassana meditation, which they practice. Death and freedom are concepts that are conceptualized in this way. This book is centered around these concepts. To our day-to-day existence as individuals, they are important. On a worldwide scale, they are significant for promoting justice. Regarding the nature of reality, they are significant. Common assumptions about the Buddha's moral stance are incorrect. He viewed the moral order as an inevitable and unchangeable consequence of right and wrong deeds. As an example, losing one's own attractiveness is a result of expressing or even contemplating rage. Every deed, whether good or terrible, has an effect on us and stays with us. This indicates that, at its core, morality is an existential question. The Buddha taught that all living things are responsible for the consequences of their actions, that they are born out of and bound to their deeds, and that they find safety in their deeds. Their lives will reflect the nature of their actions. Many people feel alone and alone, and some say that social media is to blame. Still others stress the need of being in harmony with nature and its predators. A lot of people like it. Having a connection with nature, however, is not something that can be forced. Choosing it is as easy as picking up a runner and heading out the door. Just as one's body need regular exercise, so too does one's intellect. Developing a mental connection to nature is a taught skill.

Siderits, Mark (2022) When it comes to the research of Indian Buddhist metaphysics, this chapter serves as a broad introduction to the work. By situating the creation of Buddhist philosophical theory within the context of the greater Buddhist soteriological quest, it explains why metaphysical theorizing may end up playing such an essential role in Buddhist practice. There are two prominent non-Buddhist systems, namely Sāṃkhya and Nyāya, which served as objections to the central Buddhist thesis of non-self. This article presents an overview of the metaphysical descriptions of these two systems. There are also brief summaries of the major Buddhist schools in India, as well as some of the most important figures in the history of Buddhism, beginning with Gautama (the Buddha) and continuing through Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and Dharmakīrti, which culminates in Ratnakīrti. Another topic that is discussed is the reasons that people choose to investigate philosophical traditions that are not their own.

Venkatesh S (2020) The purpose of this research is to examine the doctrines of life and death in Theravāda Buddhism with the following three goals in mind: (1) to learn more about life in Theravāda Buddhism; (2) to learn more about death in Theravāda Buddhism; and (3) to critique both life and death. The



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researcher has thoroughly examined, researched, and gathered all relevant materials from the Buddhist scriptures (Tipitaka) and its commentaries (Aṭṭhagāthā), as well as other books authored by respected members of Buddhist communities. According to the study's findings, Buddhism places a premium on human life, particularly when it comes to the possibility of reaching a high level of moral development. Numerous facets of life are discussed in Buddhism. These are the many forms of life, how they come to be, what makes them unique, where they lead, how to live practically, what happens after death, and the ultimate form of life. One may say that death is the shadow of rebirth, since it is a regular fact of life in Buddhism. The various forms of death that are described in Buddhism can be boiled down to two main categories: (1) Kāla-Maraṇa, which refers to death at the end of one's own age, and (2) Akāla-Maraṇa, which implies death during one's own age. In addition, by cultivating the mindfulness of death (Maraṇasati), one might utilize death as a tool for personal development.

More specifically, Buddhism provides a framework for contemplating and working with death in order to bring it into one's everyday life. One can learn that the Buddha's teachings were brought to Earth to help people overcome the challenges they encounter every day by studying Buddhism or its history. Developing one's own character is fundamental to Buddhism since it leads to enlightenment and the rejection of evil. This is to say, after criticizing, that what really exists is the teachings of Buddhism. Within the Four Noble Truths (Ariyasacca), Buddhism discusses four facets of reality: suffering (Dukkha), its source (Samudaya), its end (Nirodha), and the way to put an end to it (Magga). By stressing the impermanence of all things, including life and death, Buddhism offers forth a path to nirvana, the highest possible state of existence.

Lin, Q. (2022) Western Buddhist scholars generally concur that Buddhism has a philosophical legacy that is similar to Western ones in many ways, but many also assert that Buddhism has an empirical or practical component that Western philosophies—particularly the analytical school—do not. Scholars are also concerned that the teachings and practices of early Buddhism as they are portrayed in the Pali suttas are based on an underlying metaphysical framework. To date, however, Buddhist scholarship has not made a clear distinction between teachings derived from experience and practice and intellectual conjectures. The concept of "domain" (visaya-visaya), which includes both an experiential domain and a linguistic framework—that is, a term is only valid inside its own domain and fails to refer outside it—is examined in this study in relation to early Buddhist writings. As a result, it is quite similar to Rudolf Carnap's concepts of "internal" and "external" inquiries about linguistic frameworks, as well as his contention that metaphysical questions that are viewed as external are pointless and unanswerable. More specifically, early Buddhism may have adopted a stance akin to Carnap's rejection of metaphysics, as seen by the Buddha's failure to openly address the "unanswered" problems. Furthermore, textual evidence indicates that concepts like dependent origination and impermanence, which can seem "metaphysical" to readers in the present era, are actually empirical in the context of the early suttas.

Shaun Nichols (2018) An ancient philosophical principle states that one ought to be less worried about the demise of the future self if that self is genuinely distinct from the present self (Parfit, 1984). The connection between Hindu, Western, and three Buddhist groups' perspectives on death and identity is explored in this research. The groups under consideration are the lay Tibetans, the lay Bhutanese, and the



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monastic Tibetans. Across a variety of metrics, monastic Tibetans denied the continuity of self with more vigor than other groups. We hypothesized that practicing self-denial would lead to less anxiety about dying and more altruism. We were quite aback to discover the inverse. No group exhibited a higher level of dread of death than the monastic Tibetan Buddhists. When compared to other groups, monks were the most stingy when it came to offering up a little extra time on this earth in exchange for a little more time on another.

Cheng Fung Kei (2017) Living with a constant fear of dying can have a devastating effect on one's mental health, leading to thoughts of suicide and a general decline in happiness. Religion may alleviate this fear, according to a lot of literature, but whether or not the two go hand in hand is debatable. This case study looks at a Buddhist's outlook on life and death as well as her methods for dealing with fear of dying as they relate to Buddhism. It use interpretative phenomenological analysis to sift through data collected from a variety of primary sources. It has an inter-rater reliability of 93% and uses peer review to make academics more rigorous. The results show that the concept of reincarnation, the law of dependent origination, karma, and the relationship between cause and effect shed light on the phenomenal reality, offering comfort and optimism in the face of mortality. Although there is only one instance that as a whole, the results of this study provide valuable insight for helping professionals who, to better serve their clients, seek out and consider other perspectives on life and the world.

Fink, C. K. (2015) Upādāna, or clinging, is a fundamental idea in early Buddhist philosophy. In order to comprehend the concept's relationship to the non-self-doctrine and Nibbāna's ultimate objective, this article looks at it from both a phenomenological and a metaphysical standpoint. Unenlightened consciousness is consciousness centered on an 'I'. Additionally, it is awareness that is bound up and conditioned by a living entity. From a phenomenological standpoint, clinging creates the "conceit of "I am," or the illusion of self. According to metaphysics, clinging is what connects awareness to a material entity. Nibbāna is "centerless" consciousness when viewed in this manner. It is unconditioned consciousness as seen in the second. Regardless of perspective, Nibbāna is a state of awareness attained by eliminating attachment.

Jan Westerhoff (2013) Many Tibetan monasteries contain paintings of eight Indian Buddhist philosophers who are collectively referred to as the "six ornaments and two supreme ones." These monasteries are located in eastern Tibet. Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, and Dharmakīrti are the six individuals who are referred to as the "six ornaments." In most cases, these paintings are arranged in a cluster around a central depiction of Buddha Śākyamuni. In a clear manner, this iconographic set provides a method for dividing Indian Buddhist philosophical thinking into four distinct intellectual streams. These streams include Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and the epistemological-logical school of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, which is commonly referred to as the Epistemological-logical school. The four schools of thought each represent a philosophical system that is quite complicated and deals with issues pertaining to metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of logic and language, ethics, and other related topics.

Eva K. Masel, Sophie Schur, Herbert H. Watzke (2012) Finding out what a patient needs spiritually is an important aspect of palliative care evaluations. All humans are born into a state of sorrow, says Buddhism. People afflicted with terminal illnesses may benefit from guidance on how to alleviate their



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pain as their condition worsens. Buddhist teachings on compassionate care and the connection between life and death could improve palliative care. Buddhist teachings can help people concentrate their thoughts while they deal with physical symptoms and illnesses, and they can also lead to a deeper knowledge of incurable diseases. Everyone who is sick might benefit from this, not just Buddhists.

Pope, A. (2010). At the age of eight, my mom brought home a batch of freshly baked donuts. As she entered the kitchen, the lightheartedness of her present melted away, replaced by a somber tone and a measured intensity in her movements. She broke the news to me that a local youth I knew had committed suicide by hanging himself after falling ill. He was found by his mother in the closet, with the belt of his robe around his neck. I grabbed a glazed donut from the box, retreated to my mother's den, and sat in stony silence while she rocked because I was so shocked. I just stared into space, overwhelmed by a whirlwind of emotions I couldn't put my finger on. Biting onto the donut had no discernible flavor. That day, I saw firsthand how a magical realm filled with wonder turned into a terrifying wasteland. I couldn't make sense of seeing my ex-playmate dangling from a closet rod. How on earth did he manage to pull that off? How was it that he could have been so unhappy? What was it like to finally meet him? Suddenly, I found myself confronted with life-altering opportunities I had never considered before, opportunities that seemed quite plausible given their proximity to people I knew. My innocent soul was snatched that day, and the usual progression of events in my ordinary, American neighborhood was disrupted in a manner I would never fully understand. I did all I could think of, and then I completely lost track of it. No big deal; I just kept living my life and being a kid. The planting of the seed that would mature into an obsession with death, though, had already place.

Bapat, Shailaja (2007) It has already been said that the area of death is enormous. It covers the entire world system. It is obvious that it would be impossible to describe a comprehensive analysis of the dying process as it pertains to each distinct species. The present thesis is an attempt to shed light on the morbid and mortality-related features of the human condition. From this, it follows that certain comments about the concept of a person in this context (Puggala) are warranted. Defining "person" is a complex issue that calls for an explanation. A complex whole of: Dukkharī Ariyasaccarī (The Noble Truth of Suffering), Nama-Rupa (mind-matter), Dhatu (elements), Attharasadhatu (eighteen elements), Dvadasayatana (sense-fields), Paicakkhandha (five aggregates), etc., is analyzed in various ways in Buddhist philosophy, which is an analytical system. Chapter one explains that among the Four Noble Truths, "Dukkha" is the most important. That 'Dukkha' be known and understood is primary. 'Dukkha' and death were companions of every human being from birth, according to the teachings of the Lord Buddha in Tipitaka. In "Dukkha sacca," he shed light on the universal experiences of birth, deterioration, grief, departure, death, etc. All beings must endure these phases. Obviously, this inquiry is centered on the study of the Buddhist perspective on the hereafter. Therefore, the data from Tipitaka are the main source for this research. To round out the image, the researcher has looked at several other sources, including as Buddhist writings, subject studies, comments on the Tipitaka, and works written in Pali.

CONCLUSION

The current review study shows that a rich and unique corpus of metaphysical ideas on the nature of reality, existence, awareness, and liberation can be found in Buddhist philosophy. Buddhist philosophical traditions created methodical explanations of reality based on experience, causation, and critical analysis,



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despite the Buddha discouraging needless speculation on questions that do not contribute to the cessation of suffering. This philosophical framework is based on the fundamental ideas of impermanence (anitya), non-self (anātman), and dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda).

While pratītyasamutpāda emphasises that all conditioned experiences develop thru causes and conditions, the notion of anātman undermines the idea of a permanent and unchanging self. These concepts were refined by later Buddhist scholars, especially Nāgārjuna and the Madhyamaka tradition, who emphasised the lack of intrinsic and independent existence thru the concept of Śūnyatā, or emptiness. In contrast, the Yogācāra tradition focused more on consciousness and how experience is created.

The study also demonstrates how Buddhist concepts of karma, rebirth, and nirvāṇa offer a crucial link between spiritual practice and metaphysical comprehension. Buddhism connects knowledge of reality with the practical transformation of human existence, in contrast to philosophical systems that view metaphysics mainly as theoretical conjecture. Reducing attachment and ignorance and eventually achieving freedom from suffering are the goals of comprehending impermanence, non-self, and dependent origination.

In conclusion, conditionality, change, and the rejection of permanent essence form the foundation of a cogent philosophical approach represented by Buddhist metaphysical ideas. They continue to contribute to philosophical debates about identity, awareness, cause, reality, and human existence, and their importance goes beyond the historical evolution of Buddhist thinking. Thus, the study comes to the conclusion that Buddhist metaphysics is an essential component of the Buddhist path toward wisdom, ethical reform, and liberation rather than just an abstract theoretical framework.

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