



## AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONCEPT OF DEITIES IN THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

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### ABSTRACT

*I consider myself quite fortunate to have been born in Thailand, where Buddhism is still practised. The area is abundant with vihāras that hold everlasting emblems such as the Bodhi tree, Mūlagandhakuti, Stūpas, Ūposathāgāra, Sāla, and Ārāma, based on the continuing tradition from the past.*

*The entire environment is filled with the singing of Buddha's melodious words. This is not exclusive to monasteries; it is a frequent feature of structures in cities and rural villages. I consider myself quite fortunate to have been born in Thailand, where Buddhism is still practised. The land is replete with Vihāras that hold eternal emblems such as the Bodhi tree, Mūlagandhakuti, Stūpas, Ūposathāgāra, Sāla, and Ārāma, based on the continuing tradition from the past. The entire area is filled with people singing Buddha's lovely words. This is not exclusive to monasteries; it is widespread in both urban and rural institutions.*

*As the sun rises and we open our eyes, we see rows of monks and novices dressed in yellow robes and clutching alms bowls, moving swiftly and calmly from door to door, accepting alms regardless of caste, creed, or circumstance.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Samsāra, Jāti, Jarā and Maraṇa:*

### INTRODUCTION

Buddhism rejects the idea of the Supreme God as the creator of the Universe, instead believing in gods in many realms beneath different levels of existence. The thirty-one worlds are divided into four planes of reality: mournful (Apāyabhūmi), sensual joyous (Kāmasugatibhūmi), fine material sphere (Rupāvacarabhūmi), and immaterial sphere (Arūpāvacarabhūmi). Beings are born in different planes of existence in diverse forms based on the nature of their Karmas and results. According to the Majjhima and Anguttara Nikāyas, creatures own, inherit, originate from, and rely on their deeds for survival. The activity distinguishes beings as lower or superior.

The English word "god" is the literal translation of the Pali word Deva or Devatā derived from the root "div" which signifies playing or enjoying oneself, "Dibbanti ti deva, pañcahi



kaṅguṇchi kilanti, attano vā Siriyā, jotanti ti attho". It has been associated with gods, celestial creatures, clouds, kings, the sky, and air, among others. In the Kāmāvacara lokas, "Deva" refers to six types of divine creatures, but in the Rūpāvacara lokas, there are two types of divine beings. The term is also used to describe specific sorts of deities that live in trees, mountains, rivers, and rocks. Canonical and non-canonical Pāli literature include descriptions of Sammuti deva, Uppapatti deva, and Visuddhi deva. The gods of the sensual level are known as devas, but the gods of the higher non-sensual worlds are known as Brahmas. There are two categories of Brahma gods: those with form (Aūpa) and those without form (Arūpa). According to Theravāda Buddhism, the universe contains multiple gods.

### THE COSMOS AND ITS INHABITANTS

The fact that life in Buddhism is described as suffering implies that the world is full of misery. Nobody in this world is free of it. Every part of our human existence contains grief. Youth issues in old age, health in disease, and life in death. All unions end with separation and the anguish that comes with it. However, to fully comprehend the situation's complexities and weight, we must magnify it by infinite. We have been transmigrating through the round of life since the beginning of time, encountering the same experiences with incredible frequency: birth, ageing, sickness and death, separation and loss, failure and frustration. We have repeatedly plunged into the level of misery; we have been animals, ghosts, and residents of hell. We have repeatedly encountered sorrow, violence, grief, and despair.

The Buddha states that the number of tears and blood we have shed in our journey through the Universe is bigger than the waters of the ocean, and the bones we have left behind may create a heap higher than the Himalayas Mountains. We have seen this misery before, and as long as the source of our cycling in the Universe is not shut off, we risk encountering it again in the future. We're like a bee buzzing around a closed jar. It may move to the top, bottom, or middle of the jar, but it cannot exit. The Universe (Samsāra) serves as an example, and no matter where we are born, we are always a part of it. The upper section of the jar represents the higher realms of God and man, while the lowest part represents the three unfortunate realms.

In Pāli, Samsāra refers to the cycle of existence, similar to the English word Universe. It is based on life, death, and reincarnation, as well as the cause-and-effect relationship. According to Buddhism, the world is filled with sadness. Nobody in this world is free of it. Every part of our human existence contains grief. Pain is inherent in the very process of living and becoming. Pain is there in the process of birth. It is there in the process of growing up and ageing. It is there in the ubiquitous change that takes place all around us and in all of us. It is there when we fall sick. And it is there when a human being leaves this world. The following are some examples of the Buddha's preaching about the Universe. The Samyutta Nikāya provides an explanation of our existence in the Universe;

*"Monks, this Universe has no discoverable beginning. The first point is not discerned of beings moving and wandering, hampered by ignorance and bound by craving. Suppose, monks, that a man would cut up all of the grass, sticks, branches, and foliage in this Jambudipa and pile them together. After that, he would set them down and say to each one, 'This is my mother, this is my mother's mother. The series of that man's mothers and grandmothers would continue, but the grass, sticks, branches, and foliage in Jambudipa would be depleted and exhausted.*

*For what reason? Because, monks, this Samsāra has no discernible beginning. A initial point is not identified of beings moving and wandering, hampered by ignorance and bound by craving.*

*For so long, monks, you have endured agony, anguish, and calamity, filling the grave. It is sufficient to become disenchanted with all forms, to become disinterested about them, and to be free of them."*

According to the Buddha, the Universe's beginning point is not obvious, just as there is no beginning point for a circle. All creatures have been suffering in Samsāra for an immeasurable length, and will continue to do so until they acquire Nibbāna. The Universe is a never-ending cycle of becoming that includes birth, ageing, and death. Rebirth is not a one-time event that leads to an eternity in the next life. The life process is repeated again and over, the entire pattern spelling itself out again and completely with each new turn: every single birth results in decay and death, and every single death leads to a new birth. Rebirth can be lucky or unfortunate, but it does not prevent the wheel's revolution. The law of impermanence imposes its decree upon the entire domain of sentient life; whatever arises must eventually cease. Even the heavens provide no outlet; life there also ends when the Kamma that brought a heavenly birth is exhausted, to be followed by a re-arising in some other plane, perhaps in the miserable abodes. All beings revolving in Samsāra are of the mundane order. They are impermanent, subject to sorrow and devoid of self-essence. From the most insignificant forms of life up to the highest Brahma worlds, there is to be found the primal nescience and the craving that leads to repeated birth, old age and death.

### THE UNIVERSE'S DEFINITION

In Buddhism, the Universe is commonly referred to as Samsāra, which can be considered Theravada's ontological understanding. Samsāra is a Pali word that combines the parts 'Sam' and 'Sara'. 'Sam' represents the process of returning to one's beginning position, whereas 'Sara' stands for course, going, and wandering. True to its derivative roots, the term Samsāra in Buddhism denotes the cycle of rebirth "Without beginning or end," says the Buddha in Samyutta Nikāya, "this cycle of life and rebirth Universe (Samsāra) is with neither beginning nor end".

According to the Buddhist Dictionary, Samsāra or Universe implies 'round of rebirth or eternal wandering'. It is a name given to the sea of life, which is always heaving up and down, representing the never-ending cycle of being born, growing old, suffering, and dying.

The Milindapan has also described Samsāra as this expression that being born here one dies elsewhere, or being born elsewhere one dies here, being born here one dies here, being born here one dies elsewhere. This is called the Samsāra or Universe. In its ultimate sense, the Universe is the operation of Dependent Origination. The continuous coming into existence of consciousness (Citta), and mental factors (Cetasikas) together with matter (Rūpa) in succession is called Universe. In other words, it is a momentary flux of mind and body, of physical and mental phenomena. More precisely Universe or Samsāra is the unbroken chain of the five-fold Khandha-combinations, which, constantly changing from moment to moment follow continuously one upon the other through inconceivable periods. Of this Universe, a single lifetime constitutes only a tiny and fleeting fraction; hence to be able to comprehend the first noble truth of universal suffering, one must let one's gaze rest upon the Universe upon this frightful chain of rebirths, and not merely upon one single lifetime, which, of course, may be sometimes less painful.

The term Universe (Samsāra) is complex in its meaning and range, as it not only denotes the phenomenal manifestation of the cosmos but also signifies the wandering (Samsāra) process of the existents in terms of their repeated rebirths. The wandering of things as well as

the cosmic manifestation is termed as the process of becoming (bhava). The phenomenal manifestation is considered to be a stream of becoming on account of its three characteristics, namely, arising (Upāda), change or modification of that which has come to be due to arising, and cessation of that which has arisen (Bhanga or Nirodha).

Venerable Narada explains the universe (Samsāra) as follows: “For a being to be reborn here, somewhere a being must die. The birth of a being, which strictly means the arising of the Aggregates (Khandhānṃ Pātubhāvo), or psychophysical phenomena in this present life, corresponds to the death of a being in a past life; just as, in conventional terms, the rising of the sun in one place means the setting of the sun in another place. This enigmatic statement may be better understood by imagining life as a wave and not as a straight line. Birth and death are only two phases of the same process. Birth precedes death, and death, on the other hand, precedes birth. This constant succession of birth and death connection with each life-flux constitutes what is technically known as Samsāra recurrent wandering.”

Arthur Schopenhauer, the Western philosopher, states that life is what eastern religious philosophy calls the Universe; this life of birth, suffering, sickness, lust, craving, old age, death and rebirth. The universe is the world of craving, lust, suffering, death, rebirth, and disease. Indeed, anything that could be considered objectionable in our lives is a part of Samsāra. Deliverance from this Samsāra world is the responsibility of the individual.

Universe the cycle of birth and death, is sometimes translated as ‘transmigration’ or ‘rebirth’. In this cycle, which is grounded in delusion, sentient beings are governed by good and evil karmic retribution. Depending on the type of karma accumulated during a lifetime, sentient beings are reborn in one of six realms of existence. When good karma prevails, a person may be reborn as a human or heavenly being, whereas a preponderance of adverse karma brings rebirth in hell or as a hungry spirit, an animal, or an asura (Demon). This concept was inherited from pre-Buddhist Indian thought.

## THE UNIVERSE'S NATURE

The universe's most serious flaw is that it is inherently suffering. Suffering exists in each of the six worlds. Buddhism begins with a man, the Enlightened One; it is a religion of humanity, as well as an institution of creative self-cultivation and societal welfare, because the Buddha began his missionary activity with man, his nature, his problems, and the dynamic features of his life. He realized the real problems: hollowness and frustration in man and told the way out, as he says, “It is just suffering and the cessation of the suffering, that I proclaim”. The purpose of understanding that Samsāra’s nature is suffering is to develop the mind of renunciation. It is not that Samsāra is happiness and we teach that it is suffering only to lead disciples to renunciation. The universe’s true nature is suffering, but not seeing this, we believe it is happiness. Such thinking is mistaken. When we understand the Universe’s nature to be misery, we clear away that fault.

It is said that in every brand of suffering one undergoes rebirth in diverse planes of becoming. And there is nothing in the world that arises that is fully pleasant. Everything is mixed with suffering in such a way that for the thoughtful all pleasure appears as menaced with suffering or moving on to it because of impermanence. The nature of the Universe is momentary, impermanent, and insubstantial, it can in no way be considered as real. The only reality that Samsāra denotes is its instantaneousness, in other words, it means that it is as void as a vacuum in a jar. Therefore, that which is impermanent is not worth delighting in, not worth being impressed by, not worth clinging to. Samsāra is a condition. This condition

ordinarily implies something, which is subject to the condition, which can assume fresh conditions from time to time.

The term 'Dukkha' has a wide range of meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Dukkha, appearing in the five Khandhas, is mentioned as a kind of Vedanā, such as pain, hunger, etc. The word 'dukkha' as used in the Four Noble Truths has a wider meaning, including a matter of suffering and extending to happiness that is born of desire (Tanhā). But here 'dukkha', in this present discussion of the nature of the Universe includes both of the characters mentioned above and has a special sense of its own. In its special sense, Dukkhatā points to the deterioration of all conditioned things; and "Whatever is changing is unsatisfactory (Dukkha)"

In the Visuddhimagga, Buddhaghosa identifies eight instances of urgency (Attha Samvega Vatthu): birth (Jāti), decay (Jarā), sickness (Vyādhi), death (Maraṇa), loss (Āpāyadukkha), past suffering (Atīte vaṭṭamūlaka dukkha), and future suffering (Anāgate Vaṭṭ).

This is confirmed by discerning the following three characteristics of Dukkhatā mentioned in the Dukkha Sutta of Samyutta Nikaya;

- (1) Physical suffering, that is, affective suffering due to physical and mental pain (Dukkha-Dukkhatā),
- (2) Suffering due to change or temporal suffering (due to the end of pleasant feeling) (Viparinamadukkhatā) and
- (3) Suffering due to formations or existential suffering, that is, the inherent inadequacy of conditioned existence (Sankharadukkhatā).

The first is physical pain and mental anguish; the second is pleasurable emotion that causes suffering when it stops; and the third is all conditioned phenomena of the three worlds that are afflicted by the rise and fall of events. All types of suffering in life, such as birth, old age, sickness, death, association with unpleasant people and conditions, separation from beloved ones and pleasant conditions, failure to obtain what one desires, grief, lamentation, distress--all such forms of physical and mental suffering that are universally accepted as suffering or pain--are included in dukkha. A good emotion, a happy condition in life, is not permanent or enduring. It will change eventually. When anything changes, it causes pain, suffering, and misery.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that there is suffering in the world is the first issue that almost all Indian philosophical systems address. The world in which we live is one of suffering rather than enjoyment. Usually, a variety of creatures, non-human forces, and worldly objects are the source of suffering.

All of the many kinds of suffering are represented in these three categories. In technical terms, this is known as "Tribidha Dukkha." There is a great desire to get rid of them since they are present at every stage of life. The emergence of philosophical systems can be attributed to the beginning of thinking. Because of this, every system begins with the primary issue of suffering and ends by recommending an eternally blissful state in which there is no more pain.

In addition to eradicating the defilements, the freed individual also prevents things from happening before his purported death, such as the palm tree stump, which cannot continue to exist and is not likely to reappear in the future. This leads us to the conclusion that the extinction of the ontological illusion or the cycle of existence in the universe is the meaning of life in Buddhist philosophy.



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