

## **A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE NATURE OF PERSONALITY, IN THE LIGHT OF BUDDHISM**

**SASMITA KAR**

Assistant Professor, School of Education, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India

### **ABSTRACT**

Buddhism, as a philosophy, was originated and developed in the 6th century B.C. The Yogachara system of Buddhism was developed by Zuan Jang, the 7th Century Chinese scholar, who travelled to India between 629 and 645 and composed an extended commentary on Vasubandhu's (the Buddhist scholar) Thirty Verses. One major attraction of Buddhism to the contemporary world is its therapeutic value, which is derived from its penetrating insights into the human psyche and many of its practices. This led some modern psychologists as well as scholars of Buddhism with training in psychology to interpret Buddhism in the lens of modern psychology. In the words of Epstein, Buddhism is a form of depth psychology and "the Buddha may well have been the original psychoanalyst, or at least, the first to use the mode of analytic inquiry that Freud was later to codify and develop". An attempt has been made in this paper to expound the concept of personality of in Buddhism in comparison to Freud and Jung.

**KEYWORDS:** Buddhist Philosophy, Consciousness, Free Will, Personality

### **INTRODUCTION**

Buddhism is one of the most outstanding philosophical and religious traditions of India. It is a vibrant, living religious tradition which has played and continued to play a significant role in the lives of countless individuals by showing them the path to live in a better way and to evolve their self to the highest extent possible. Buddhism, as a religion was known as Dhamma of the Buddha. The Dharma (Pail; Dharma: Sanskrit) meant the ultimate truth.

By his own example the Buddha showed to mankind that the path and of liberation from the cycle of birth and death and recurrent sufferings is within the reach of everybody and one can attain it by purifying and transforming his consciousness or the 'will to become' to the highest possible state of perfection and purity. This purification & transformation of the 'will to become' alone is the key to salvation and not any grace of God or supernatural agencies. It is due to this life related issues that Buddhism is increasingly being looked on, not just as a religion, but as a system for understanding and promoting personal growth & as such it is seen as offering a much more positive idea of the nature of mental health, and a much richer repertoire of methods for attaining a sense of mental balance, well-being and personal fulfillment.

This paper is a modest attempt to analyze the underlying principle of Buddhism in relation to mind and man in comparison to modern psychology. It deals with the following objectives:

- To analyze the nature and development of personality as described in Buddhism.
- To analyze the nature of personality as described by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

- To give a comparative study of personality of Buddhism with modern psychology i.e. Freud and Jung.

### **Philosophical Design**

This study is based on the philosophical constructs of Buddhism. However, the nature and development of personality of Freud and Jung along with Buddhism were compared on psychological postulations. Buddhism, as a philosophy, was originated and developed in the 6th century B.C. The Yogachara system of Buddhism was developed by Zuan Jang, the 7th Century Chinese scholar, which has described the concept of personality in detail. Hence, the present study was based on historical survey method.

Buddhist nikayas and English translation of Zuan Jang's work by Tao Jiang constituted the primary sources. Primary sources also include the original works of Freud and Jung. Secondary sources include Pali canons and other related literatures on the above three.

### **Concept of Personality According to Buddhism**

Anatta or selflessness is the core and fundamental teaching on which, Buddha's whole philosophy is anchored. The existence of life and suffering, according to the Buddha, is craving which leads to clinging and further actions based on the false notions of self, 'I' and 'Mine'. The Buddha reduces the so called being or self as nothing but an aggregate or process of coming together of the five skandhas (heaps) of rūpa (matter, body or form), vedanā (sensations/feelings), sañña (perceptions), sankhāra (volitions) and viñña (consciousness). These five heaps are in a state of constant flux. However, without realizing the continually changing nature of the heaps, one gets attached to them and consequently when these heaps change, man suffers.

According to the Pali canons, the Buddha's analyses of personality as the sum of five aggregates, nothing is permanent and blissful. The Buddha has expounded his famous theory of anattā in his second discourse to the five bhikkhus in the following way:

The body (rūpa), O bhikkhu, is not self (rūpam bhikkhave anattas) i.e. it is self-less, no self behind it. If, O bhikkhus, there were in this a soul or self, then this body would not be subject to afflictions (ills) & it could be had of body: Let my body be thus; let my body be not thus (Anattalankana Sutta, III, 66).

The idea of self 'I' according to the master is a false conceptual construct of the mind. There are only flows of experiences as continuous streams: experience of form, sensations, perceptions, volitions & consciousness. In the ultimate analysis, consciousness only is experiencing all these. The whole life is a continuous evolving and becoming of the consciousness.

As much as we delve deep within our being, we find nothing else excepting these streams of forms, sensations, perceptions, volitions & consciousness. What is called self or 'I' at this moment is this moment of consciousness. With every moment my consciousness changes, 'I' also changes along with it. The 'I' that now is, is not the identical 'I' that was yesterday, not even the same as was the previous moment (Wethimuny, p.168).

Consciousness too is a 'becoming' a becoming aware. It is not something, that is. It is a becoming. It becomes. And it is that particular process of becoming which carries with itself the knowledge of its becoming..... it is a living experience of becoming or of grasping, or of nutrition; it is the going on of the life process in which the knowledge that is

so goes, goes on along with it (Wethimuny, pp.167-168).

The early Buddhist model of consciousness consists of five senses (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile) and the mind, whose object is mental. The Yogachara theory of consciousness developed by Zuan Zang in the 7<sup>th</sup> century splits the mind into two consciousnesses; monovijnana and manas. Monovijnana is called sense-centred consciousness; and it works in conjunction with the five senses. The role of monovijnana is to direct the attention of perceptions of these objects. Manas is fine and subtle in its activities.” (Xuan Zang. 1973).

Again, according to Yogacara Buddhism each conscious moment has to be aware of itself so that memory or recollection of that moment can be possible. In other words, aside from the aspects of the perceiving and the perceived, there has to be an awareness of this perception of the perceived so that this perception can be recollected.

In Buddhism what we call self of the human being is nothing but a conglomerate of the five aggregates brought together and functioning together according to causes and conditions. This functioning together as a flow of life is basically ‘becoming’ or evolving of consciousness (vinnana) according to the Law of Karma.

There is no unchanging consciousness but only a continuous flow of mental thoughts. The apparent continuity of flow is mistaken for an unchanging consciousness, soul or ātmā.

Xuan Zang, the founder Chinese Yogacharya Buddhism, holds the view that there are ultimately two kinds of beings, dharma and atman, which corresponds to the two realms of existence, external and internal. Dharma refers to the external and atman the eternal. Atman and dharma correlate to no reality beyond the realm of mind. Instead, our sense of atman and dharma is nothing but the result of the transformation of consciousness. (Xuan Zang, 10). This view of atman and dharma as the results of the transformation of consciousness associates Buddhism (Yogachara system) with metaphysical idealism which holds the ultimate reality to be mental or spiritual, or mind-dependent.

Transformation of consciousness means that consciousness itself is transformed into two aspects, nimittabhaga and darsanabhaga. These two aspects originate by depending upon the self corroboratory aspect (Sevasamrittibhaga). If this bhaga did not exist, there would be no recollection of the mind and its concomitant mental action of the mind and its concomitant mental activities (Citta-caittas), just as there is no memory of situations that have never been experienced. (Xuan Zang, 140)

Simply, according to Xuan Zang, each conscious moment has to be aware of itself so that memory of recollection of that moment can be possible. In other words, aside from the aspects of the perceiving and the perceived, there has to be an awareness of this perception of the perceived so that this perception can be recollected, otherwise each perceptive moment would be self contained. (Tao Jiang, p. 54). This statement clearly holds the view that reality cannot be ascertained independent of consciousness.

The manifestation of consciousness at each moment is simultaneously a threefold process-retribution process, self cogitation process & self cognitive process of objects other than the self. The three processes are intermingled with each other at each moment.

At the moment the perceived is apprehended, it is not grasped as external. The sense of externality only arises as a result of the discriminatory function of monovijnana, the sixth consciousness, which transforms a precept into the image aspect of monovijnana i.e. nimittabhaga. Consciousness itself is capable of creating the sense of externality. In a dream

state, even though the five senses stop functioning, the continued activities of monovijñana still create the sense of externality. It is clear from the above that it is monovijñana that creates the sense of externality & that the sense of externality of objects should be grasped as real & external objects independent of consciousness.

The consciousness, according to Buddhism, is the basis for the growth, development and expansion of body-mind complex. It is also dependent on the other four skandhas-form, sensations, volitions and perceptions in its becoming and evolution. Man is here considered a psycho-physical unit whose 'psyche' is not a changeless but a dynamic continuum that is always in flux and not limited to one span of life. The karmic force of each individual binds the psycho-physical elements together. In Buddhism, the consciousness has craving as its base because impelled by cravings & the attendant clinging it evolves & further 'becomes'. Consciousness, in fact, determines one's behavior.

This is described in Twelve-Limed wheel of Causation and Becoming or the theory of dependent origination as depicted in the Mahānidāna Sutta (the great Discourse on Causes).

Accordingly, ignorance (avijjā) has been described as the fundamental factor behind cravings causing dukkha and the rebirth, the root of saṃsāra.

- Dependent on ignorance (avijjā) arise volitions/karmic formations (sankhārā/samskāra)
- Dependent on volitions in past life arises rebirth consciousness (viññana/vijñāna)
- Dependent on rebirth consciousness arise mind-body complex (nāma-rūpa)
- Dependent on mind-body complex arise the six senses (salāyatana) viz the five sense organs & the mind
- Dependent on the six senses arise sense-contact (phassa sparsa)
- Dependent on the sense-contact arise feeling (vedanā)
- Dependent on the feeling arises craving (Tanhā/Trsnā)
- Dependent on the craving arise clinging (upādāna)
- Dependent on clinging arises becoming (Bhava)
- Dependent on becoming & karmic formations in becoming arise rebirth (Jāti).
- Dependent on birth arise old age, death (Jarā-marana)
- (Samutta Nikaya).

This theory of Causation and Becoming (Bhavacakka) states that the evolution of being or life is cyclical, with no beginning & no end. The rebirth consciousness, according to Buddha is nothing but a manifestation of the 'blind will energy' i.e. "the blind will to be born, to live and to become." All actions, according to Buddhism, are impelled by the will in the consciousness. These actions leave their imprints on the aggregate of consciousness in the form of new seeds which in due time will sprout and give fruit (vipakas). This law of karma continues leading the modified consciousness to act accordingly. This is the becoming or evolving of consciousness, the becoming or unfolding of life.

Driven by its karmic forces this subtle energy descends into the mother's womb & develops into the body-mind

organism. The mind-body organism evolves in to the six organs of cognition, i.e. the five senses & the mind. Out of its contact with the external world the senses give rise to sensation or feelings. These sensations or feelings are classified as pleasant, unpleasant and neutral (indifferent). If the sensation is pleasant it leads to the craving for such pleasure-inducing objects. One develops dislike and hatred for unpleasant sensations and if the sensation is neutral one develops uncertainty & delusion. The Freudian Psychology also holds the view that a tendency to attachment lies in pleasant feeling, a tendency to hatred lies latent in painful feeling and tendency to ignorance lies latent in neutral feeling (Padamsri De Silva, p.58). The pleasant feelings have the tendency to arouse the inherent latent potency to sensuous greed (Kāma rāgānusaya) and the unpleasant or painful feelings the latent tendency to anger and hatred (patighānusaya).

Out of these feeling arise three types of insatiable cravings: Kāmatanhā, Bhāvatanhā and Vibhava-tanhā. Driven by craving and clinging, the so-called 'I' or self, engages in karna-producing volitional activities. The karmic formations (sankhara) in the aggregate of consciousness drive the wheel of Becoming or the wheel of life. There are meritorious, demeritorious & neutral karma formations which have the potentiality to bring the next birth. The rebirth consciousness is the 'blind will to become' as determined by ignorance (avijja) and karmic formations (sankhāras) in the previous life.)

In the Twelve-Limbed wheel of Causation & Becoming the consciousness has craving as its base. The consciousness is constituted of the three inherited latent tendencies-self preservation, self-gratification and self-aggrandizement. These basic impulses, with feeling as a condition, give rise to craving. These latent tendencies have been acquired and accumulated over innumerable previous births & inherited and that lie deep within as unconscious forces. These determine one's behavior.

### **Being as Consciousness: Concept of Personality by Freud**

The concept of consciousness as describes in Yogachara Buddhism closely resembles to the modern psychological theory of Sigmund Freud & others who have put forth the scientific theories of 'libido' and instincts driving the human personality. In his interpretation of Dreams', Freud has stratified the mind into the unconscious, preconscious and conscious. Most of the human activities are guided by his unconscious wishes and dream is a fulfillment of man's unrecognized wish. In another work 'The Ego and the Id' the mind is structured into id, ego and superego. Here the id is described as the dark inaccessible part of our personality and can be described only as a contrast to the ego (Freud, 1964). In contrast to the ego, the id is chaotic, instinctual and pleasure seeking.

The superego is an agency in the mind that observes, judges, and punished the ego (Freud, 1964, 74, The Ego and the Id). It is the internalization of parental authority acquired later in life. The tension between the superego and the ego gives rise to the conscious. (Freud, 1964, 76). The role of the superego is to help the ego grapple with the conflict between the id and the external world by internalizing inhibiting parental authority into a moral agent within the individual mind.

The ego is closer to the external world than to the internal world, which only follows the pleasure principle. Ego and id are two continuous compartments of a mental entity, predicted by different qualities, the former by conscious and unconscious qualities and the later simply by what is unconscious.

### **Jung's Theory**

Being influenced by Freud, Carl Jung structures the psyche into the realm of consciousness and the unconscious. Psyche centers are considered conscious if they are perceived by the ego, and they are unconscious if not perceived by the

ego. Ego is the centre of the field of consciousness that is well structured and organized, generating the sense of continuity and identity in an individual. There can be no consciousness when there is no one to say: 'I am conscious' (Jung, 1969, 283). Psyche is a conscious-unconscious whole.

According to Jung, the self is true individuality; it is what makes an individual truly individual. It is both immanent and transcendent at the same time in relation to the psyche. As immanence, it is what makes an individual a unique human being in time; as transcendence, it points to the collective dimension of spirituality beyond time. Individuation is the process of realizing the self. (Jung, 1966, 173). It is a process to cultivate a balance amongst psychic functions, depending upon the psychic constitution of an individual, by integrating consciousness with the unconscious. The postulation of the self accounts for the goal of individuation as a process of spiritual transformation (For Jung, three concepts are related to the idea of individuality; ego, persona and self.)

## CONCLUSIONS

According to Xuan Zang (the Buddhist scholar), the self is not a self made identity existing outside of the mental processes of a person but is rather a subliminal continuum that is mistaken as substance or substratum. This notion of Xuan Zang is closely related to Freud (1960, 18) and Jung (1969 b, 280) who state that individuality is closely related to the subliminal mental activities. However, for Xuan Zang, individuality vis-a-vis the self is itself the subliminal consciousness, alayavijnana, but misidentified by manas as substance. For Freud, individuality vis-a-vis the ego is fundamentally different from the subliminal consciousness, the id. For Zang, the self qua substance is the result of misidentification, but for Freud, the ego is the result of modification of the unconscious id due to the decisive influence of the external world. In the genesis of the persona of Jung and id of Freud, the influence of the external world is decisive.

The above three formulations of subliminal consciousness schematize three kinds of persons. From Xuan Zang's Buddhist perspective, a human being is a deluded being and the way out of such a delusion is through meditative practices prescribed by Yogachara Buddhism. The spiritual transformation of self is called 'asraya-paravriti', which is the transformation of the storehouse consciousness in reaching a goal, namely nirvana. For Freud, a human being is essentially a sexual being who is trying to be spiritual in order to survive in society. For Jung a human being is both a sexual and a spiritual being and an ideal personhood is that which embraces the self through the individuation process.

## REFERENCES

- 1) Anattalankana Sutta, Discourses on the Definition of the Self, Mahabhaga, Sumyutta Nikaya, III 41-66.
- 2) Bhikkhu Nanomoli, trans. 2001 The Life of the Buddha according to the Pali Canon. Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions.
- 3) Brown, Brian Edward. 1991. The Buddha Nature: A Study of the Tathagatagarbha and Alayavijhana. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass.
- 4) De Silva, Padmasiri, M. W., 1973. Buddhist and Freudian Psychology, Colombo: Lake House Investments.
- 5) Freud, Sigmund, 1964. New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis, Edited and translated by James Strachey, New York: N. W. Norton.
- 6) Manish Meshram, The Significance of Buddhist Ethics in Modern Education, IMPACT: International Journal of

- Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature (IMPACT: IJRHAL), Volume 1, Issue 4, September 2013, pp. 17-24
- 7) Jacobi, J. 1979. *The Psychology of C. G. Jung*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
  - 8) Jiang Tao- 2010. *Yogacara Buddhism and Modern Psychology*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas.
  - 9) Krishnan, O. N. 2008. *The Bhagavadgita and Buddhism*, New Delhi, UBS Publishers.
  - 10) Rubin, J. 1996. *Psychotherapy and Buddhism: Toward an integration*, New York: Plenum Press.
  - 11) Samuttha Nikaya 11:12:1.
  - 12) Manish Meshram, *Role of Buddhist Education in Ancient India*, IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature (IMPACT: IJRHAL), Volume 1, Issue 3, August 2013, pp. 7-16
  - 13) 1. Schweize, Paul, 1994, "Momentary Consciousness and Buddhist Epistemology," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 22: 81-91.
  - 14) 12. S. Wethimuny, *Buddhism & its Relation to Religion & Science*, p.166/167
  - 15) 13.(Xuan Zang. 1973. *Ch' eng Wei. Shih Lun. Mere Consciousness* translated by Wei Tat. Hong Kong: Ching Wei-Shih Lun Pub Committee.

