

The Concept of *Anatta* or Not- Self in Theravada Buddhism

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Anatta or not self is perhaps one of the most central teachings in Buddhism which makes it distinctive and unique in comparison to all other major existing religions in the world. Without a proper understanding and realization of the concept of not- self, it is impossible for one to come to an understanding of the essence of the Buddha's teaching or to progress on the Buddhist path of liberation. However, a quick glance at the currently available Buddhist literature reveals the fact that the not-self doctrine is still the most misunderstood and misinterpreted aspect of the Buddha's teaching among the non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists.

KEYWORDS: *Buddhism, Theravada, Mahayana, Nikaya Buddhism, Stupa*

INTRODUCTION

In Buddhism Anatta or Not-Self is a very significant concept, which makes a distinction it from other religions such as Hinduism and Jainism. The notion of Anatta in Buddhism, its significance to the Eightfold Path and the meditation practices of Buddhism, and its likely beginnings in ancient India prior to the Buddha are all taken into consideration in the discussion that follows. Anatta is the Pali or the simple description of the Sanskrit word, Anatma, denoting Not-Self. It is also every so often named the Non-Self or No Self. Anatta mentions to the non-appearance of Self (*ana + atma*). Additionally, anatta can be used to denote objective reality, what is not the Self, or what is something else entirely. All that exists outside of or other than the Self is represented by anatta.

In Buddhism or in the teachings of the Buddha, no Anatta or Anatma are rooted but in the ascetic traditions of ancient India, such as Hinduism and Jainism. Not only that, but it is not only about Buddhism. Because it was the main focus of his teachings, the Buddha popularized it. Anatta stood for the objective or perceptual part of the existential reality in ancient Indian belief systems, especially those of Hinduism and Jainism. It also symbolized the perceptual, attentive method to freedom as opposed to the inward, witness approach or the withdrawing approach to experiencing the subjective Self (Atma or Atman), which is the way that is outwardly focused or perceptual.

OBJECTIVE REALITY OF ANATTA

The idea of one's self, or the idea that something belongs to oneself or another, is really an illusion that develops as aggregates come together and a personality and its awareness take shape. Consciousness is a product of the interaction of thoughts, feelings, emotions, senses, memory, reason, and intelligence. One could end suffering and achieve peace and tranquility by paying attention to them and comprehending their activities. *Anatta* speaks of the objective or perceptual reality that one might experience through the mind and body in addition to Not-self. It is the truth, which is not the self, is not the self, or has nothing to do with the self. It doesn't matter if the Self is real or not. The Anatta or *Anatta* reality is all that the mind and body encounters, including the environment in which they live. The two main traditions in Indian religions are Atma and *Anatma*. Other names for them include Asti (Is) and Nasti (Is not). Both Jainism and Hinduism are Atmic religions. They hold to the idea that everlasting souls exist, as well as their subjective reality, which is unadulterated, transcendental, self-existent, indefinable, indescribable, invincible, all-knowing, and infinite. Beyond the mind and senses are the souls. Because of this, they are not accessible while awake.

Since the mind is still tamas-covered when a person is sleeping, the soul or the Self cannot be experienced in a deep sleep state. It can only be felt when the mind and senses are completely shut off from the outside world

and engrossed in the contemplation of the Self. The Self cannot be objectively defined since it is subjective; those who study and comprehend can only imagine it in a theoretical or notional sense. Buddhist traditions, in contrast, are not atmic. It disbelieves in the existence of a purely subjective reality that is unrelated to one's perception of the outside world. If it is, it won't help one in their attempt to end their suffering because their pain doesn't come from the mysterious Self but rather from the material world. It is the source of karma and the cause of undeniable suffering.

THE ANATTA SYSTEM

Buddhism and Hinduism employ various approaches to alleviate human suffering as a result of their fundamentally divergent doctrinal views. While Hinduism and Buddhism both rely on Atma reality, Buddhism relies on Anatta reality. As a result, their approaches to training the mind and body and developing discernment in order to achieve liberation fundamentally diverge from one another. In contrast to Hinduism, which supports an inner, contemplative, and restful approach in which the mind and body are withdrawn from objective reality and silenced to experience self-absorption (*Samadhi*), Buddhism relies on the outer, mindfulness systems to see the objects of the mind, the body, and the world with greater clarity and intelligence in order to identify the causes of bondage and suffering. While Buddhism views the Eightfold Path as a practice that starts with admitting objective truth, Hinduism aims to block the mind and body from the sources of suffering. Buddhism adopts the Anatta approach or system in an effort to address and understand these causes. In line with the Buddha's teachings of gentleness, compassion, and nonviolence, it is a confrontational strategy. When one has the proper perception, thinking, and viewpoints, one focusses on what is known rather than what is unknown, and searches for answers within rather than outside of the human experience. The existence of a subjective reality that is apart from beings or goes beyond the mind and senses is not accepted by Buddhists. Its existence is not proven to be the cause of misery, even if it does exist. Existential sorrow is a result of things and their causes, as well as objective reality. It makes sense to look for workable solutions in the present reality of the present moment rather than in some metaphysical idea of an inexplicable state that cannot be experienced by humans while the mind is active and awake. This is because the known is more likely to be the source of existential suffering than the unknown. Therefore, the Buddhists never sleep and are constantly aware of their suffering as well as their ultimate objective of *Nibbana*. They may forego a worldly existence, but they do not flee it.

Anatta is undefined. People develop wants and get tied to the birth-and-death cycle when they are exposed to it through their senses. Anatta is enticing enough to draw one in and hold them there. The creatures are, however, tied to Samsara, or the cycle of births and deaths, in a way that is similar to a honeytrap. People get tethered to the mortal world and bring pain into their life when they cling to the world and its things out of attraction and aversion. They create karma by their deeds driven by desire, which binds them to the birth-and-death cycle. Having gained this knowledge, the Buddha gave the monks advice to study objective reality (*Anatta*) with mindfulness and insight in order to recognize how it gave rise to wants and attachments and resulted in suffering. This was in stark contrast to the philosophy of Hinduism and Jainism, which placed more stress on withdrawing from the world of things and keeping one's attention on oneself in order to experience the wholly subjective and all-knowing condition of the transcendental Self. Buddhism enthusiastically embraces the *Anatta* method without any hesitation and exhorts its adherents to face reality rather than making up stories about it or closing their thoughts and senses to it. It is a very pragmatic, psychoanalytical, and earthy religion that depends on human knowledge (*Buddhi*) rather than supernatural intervention to address the issues and suffering that individuals encounter. It strongly maintains that one cannot end suffering by running away from it or falling asleep; rather, one must raise one's level of awareness so as to be attentive of its causes, awake to them, and able to avoid any mistakes that might lead to them by living rightly according to the Eightfold Path. One may ponder the Self and what it is, but this is intellectual speculation or an elitist approach, neither of which lessen suffering except to give some individuals a smug sense of accomplishment for having participated in higher thought.

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