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Foreword

The Aṭṭhakavagga is one of the five sections comprising the Suttanipāta which belongs to the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Pali Canon. It is one of the most significant texts, representative of the teachings of early Buddhism. Its antiquity is evident from the fact that of the five sections of the Suttanipāta, the Aṭṭhakavagga and the Pārāyanavagga are mentioned by their titles or quoted, both in other texts of the Pali canon and in Sanskrit Buddhist texts. Also, an old commentary on these two sections has been included in the canon under the title of Niddesa.

The Aṭṭhakavagga deals briefly with a number of specific themes in Buddhist philosophy. We have attempted in the present work to elucidate those themes by the use of modern terminology so that they would be intelligible to those who are researching into the wisdom of a bygone age.

The Philosophy of the Aṭṭhakavagga

From a philosophical point of view, the Aṭṭhakavagga of the Suttanipāta is one of the most significant collections in the Buddhist literary tradition. There is little doubt about its antiquity, and references to its early existence are found in the Pali, Buddhist Sanskrit and the Chinese Buddhist traditions. [1] The Aṭṭhakavagga is rich in philosophical content although its sayings are brief and require clarification and interpretation to grasp their full significance.

The verses of the Aṭṭhakavagga present ideas pregnant with philosophical meanings and the very manner in which these ideas have been presented could easily lead to a wide variety of interpretations. The Theravādins have preserved their traditional interpretation of the Aṭṭhakavagga in the Mahāniddesa. The doctrinal importance of the Aṭṭhakavagga in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition is seen from the fact that the Niddesa itself has been included among their canonical works. The extent to which the meaning of the key terms used in the Aṭṭhakavagga has been analysed in the Niddesa, preserving their original meaning and significance, could be subjected to critical investigation. Many deviations from the original meanings seem to have occurred in the later exegetical analyses. The

exclusive dependence, therefore, on the Niddesa alone is not adequate in reading the meanings of the Aṭṭhakavagga Suttas. The key terms must be examined in the context of their usage in the Aṭṭhakavagga and compared with other usages in the canonical literature to grasp their actual philosophical significance. The Niddesa, however, is of utmost importance in reading the philosophical meanings of the Aṭṭhakavagga verses with due regard to the Theravāda tradition.

The fundamental doctrines of early Buddhism are found in the Aṭṭhakavagga in their non-scholastic, unsystematised form. Early Buddhism preaches a path to liberation, and that liberation (*vimutti*) is conceived to be the ultimate goal of beings who pursue the way of life prescribed in Buddhism. Buddhism regards the life of ordinary mortals as one of unending conflict. *Dukkha* is the key word used in the Buddhist literature to denote the perpetual conflict which pervades all aspects of worldly life. Buddhism traces the causes of this conflict to a psychological origin and concludes that attachment, greed and unending thirst resulting from the lack of clear vision and penetration into the truths regarding realities of existence are the primary causes of all social and individual conflicts. The Aṭṭhakavagga clearly states the Buddhist theory of psychological and social conflict and traces the causes of this conflict to attachment and ignorance. The way of life recommended in the Aṭṭhakavagga for the attainment of the highest perfection, which is conceived to be the supreme

goal of beings, is a life of detachment. It criticises the attempts of the rational metaphysicians in the quest of philosophical truth and traces the psychological origins of their divergent philosophical conclusions. The Aṭṭhakavagga emphasises the futility of indulgence in highly controversial metaphysical speculations for the spiritual edification of human beings. It questions the efficacy of human reason in the pursuit of objectivity and truth. Many questions of philosophical interest are raised in discussing the competence of reason in the comprehension of truth and reality. Many Buddhist views on epistemological questions are presented in these discussions. The nature of human judgments, their objectivity and subjectivity, their validity and criteria are topics on which the Buddha has expressed his opinions in the Aṭṭhakavagga.

The early Buddhist attitude towards objects of sense pleasure is clearly stated in the Aṭṭhakavagga. The first Sutta of the Aṭṭhakavagga (Kāmasutta) is a clear instance of stating in brief the way in which the early Buddhists viewed the pleasures of the senses. The Kāmasutta shows that the Buddha did not deny the objects of pleasure. What the Buddha denied was that they are totally pleasurable in the sense that they are permanent bases of human pleasure. The Aṭṭhakavagga clarifies the Buddhist standpoint that *assāda* (pleasure) cannot be permanent due not only to the very nature of its object but also to the nature of the subject. Pleasure and pain are a result of causally conditioned

perceptual processes. Only *vedanā* (sensations) can be pleasurable, painful or neutral. The aggregate of sensations is one of the five constituent aggregates of the individual. The Buddhist analysis of the individual repeatedly reveals that not one of these aggregates has a permanent unchanging existence. Sensations are conceived to be passing mental phenomena with no permanent or lasting nature. The Kāmasutta says that the person who delights in sense pleasures undoubtedly becomes happy when his yearning for pleasures is gratified (Sn 766). Here the Buddha does not deny the reality of the existence of pleasures or pleasurable objects. *Assāda* (pleasure) is part of the real world. The Buddha has often pointed out in his psychological analyses of the sensory processes that there are objects pleasing and delightful to the senses (M I 85).

The Buddha points out that the external world has objects that are capable of producing attraction or repulsion in those who come into contact with them. This is illustrated in the Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya thus: "When he (whose sense organs have reached a fair degree of maturity) has seen a material object (*rūpa*) with the eye, he feels attracted to agreeable material objects (*piyarūpe rūpe sārajjati*) and feels repugnant with regard to disagreeable material objects (*appiyarūpe rūpe byāpajjati*; M I 266)." *Anurodha* (compliance) and *virodha* (antipathy) are natural psychological effects of the way in which the psycho-physical organism and the objects of the external world interact. The specifically Buddhist attitude towards sense

pleasures comes to light in the Kāmasutta when it points out that the objects of pleasure which were capable of producing the gratification which the ordinary mortal yearns for are perishable, and therefore, could themselves turn out to be the bases of human suffering and discontent. An object which at one moment was the basis of a person's utmost delight becomes at the next moment the basis of his utmost grief. The doctrine of *tilakkhaṇa* ('the three fundamental characteristics of phenomena') which form one of the supreme insights of Buddhism, points out that all phenomena, mental and physical, have a fleeting and evanescent existence. Therefore passionate clinging to objects of pleasure results only in the production of incessant psychological conflicts. The Kāmasutta says that one who is steeped in the pleasures of the senses, who generates intense desire, becomes afflicted, like a person who is pierced by an arrow when those pleasures of the senses are lost (Sn 767). When a person mindfully cultivates detachment towards pleasures of the senses he overcomes his bondage to afflictions which are rooted in the activity of his own mind (Sn 771). Thus the Aṭṭhakavagga introduces some of the vital aspects of Buddhist philosophy by expressing the Buddhist attitude towards pleasures of the senses and their evaluation in the Buddhist scheme of practical injunctions. The Kāmasutta shows that the ultimate aim of the Buddhist way of life is not something pertaining to the pleasures of the senses but something attainable only by their renunciation.

The Aṭṭhakavagga exalts the ideal of the *muni* (sage) who renounces sense pleasures. The *viveka* (solitude) that is praised in the Aṭṭhakavagga is more than a mere physical renunciation. *Viveka*, according to the Niddesa is threefold, viz. *kāyaviveka* (physical solitude) meaning the physical renunciation of the comforts of a layman's living, *cittaviveka* (mental solitude) meaning the psychological renunciation attained at different levels of mental development and *upadhiviveka* (psycho-ethical solitude) attained by the destruction of all defilements and the substratum of rebirth (Nidd I 26f.). The life of the *muni* is compared to the lotus which has sprung up in the muddy water but remains unsullied by it, rising above its surface. The life of renunciation which the Aṭṭhakavagga speaks of is not the renunciation of a hermit who runs away from the social life of the world but of the vigilant person who lives in the world without submitting himself to its numerous temptations. The mere act of donning the yellow robes of a hermit and subscribing to a certain pattern of religious ritual is not sufficient to become a *muni*. What is more important is his mental attitude.

The Aṭṭhakavagga philosophy of detachment implies that lasting happiness does not consist in the pursuit of material things. The *muni* ideal does not favour an attitude to life which is basically of a materialistic inclination. Buddhism conceives *sukha* (happiness) as the goal of all human activity. The teachings of Buddhism too do not diverge from this happiness-seeking principle. For the *summum bonum* of

the Buddhists, Nibbāna, is also termed the *paramasukha* (the highest bliss) (Dhp 204). Buddhism agrees with materialistic and common sense views in holding that the attainment of the highest happiness is the goal of human beings although it differs in regard to what a person's highest happiness consists in. According to early Buddhism, as the Aṭṭhakavagga clearly expresses, the highest happiness consists in the realisation of Nibbāna by the renunciation of all pleasures of the senses. The materialists, especially, and the ordinary worldlings, generally, act on the assumption that happiness consists in the gratification of the desire to enjoy sense pleasures. The Buddha differs very radically from them in pointing out that what others call happiness is viewed by the *ariya* (noble ones) as misery (Sn IV 127). The Buddha rejected the view that *sukha* (happiness) is confined to the sense pleasures, and while relegating the pleasures of the five senses (*pañca kāma-guṇa*) to the lowest plane of happiness, pointed out that superior planes of happiness could be discovered in the higher stages of *jhāna* (trance) (SIV 225f.).

One noteworthy feature of the Buddhist philosophy of detachment which often comes to light in the Aṭṭhakavagga is that it consists not merely in the detachment from material things but also detachment from all conceptual constructions. *Rāga* (passion) results from ideas as well as from material things. Attachment to a certain ideology or view may at times even surpass in its intensity the attachment to any material thing. The Aṭṭhakavagga is very

severe in its condemnation of *sandiṭṭhi-rāga* (attachment to one's own view). According to the Aṭṭhakavagga passionate clinging to material objects is only one aspect of clinging, which results in individual and social conflicts. People cling equally, or even more tenaciously, to their views and ideologies (*diṭṭhi*) and also their holy vows (*sīla*) and practises (*vata*).

The Buddhist explanation of the origins of conflict in the individual and social realms is not materialistic in emphasis. According to early Buddhism an analysis of the material conditions of human life would give only a partial explanation of the origins of diverse patterns of conflict. The emphasis of the Aṭṭhakavagga is more on the psychological causes of conflict than on its material causes. Any attempt to explain the numerous types of conflict in terms of the material conditions of human existence alone is contrary to the teachings of early Buddhism. Without falling to the ideological extremes of materialism and idealism, Buddhism has attempted to explain all objects and events of the universe in terms of its empirical principle of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*). For the Buddhist therefore the question whether mind is ultimately real or matter is ultimately real does not arise. Buddhism does not raise the issue in its metaphysical form as "is idealism true or is materialism true." Taking the terms mind and matter as words in our common parlance Buddhism only shifted its emphasis from matter to mind when providing explanations to events connected with human behaviour.

Thus conforming to the emphasis laid in Buddhism on the psychological facts of human life the Aṭṭhakavagga traces the cause of conflict in human society to basic facts about the human mind. The analysis of individual and social conflict made in the Kalahavivāda Sutta of the Suttanipāta is very significant in this connection.

The question that is discussed in the Kalahavivāda Sutta concerns the origin of disputes, conflicts, argumentations and disagreements in human society. It also concerns the ills in an individual's life such as grief, lamentation and despair. Disputes inevitably bring about other social evils such as murder, harshness of speech, slander and so forth. The Buddha is asked about the causes of contentions and disputes, grief with lamentation in their train, pride, conceit and slander (Sn 862). A similar question is raised in the Sakkapañha Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya. Despite the desire of beings to live in peace and harmony they are seen to be living in perpetual enmity and hostility. Sakka requests the Buddha to explain the causes for such hostility and enmity (D II 276). Human conflicts manifest themselves in the form of quarrels between individuals even of the same caste and class, and the same family, and in the form of wars between states and so on and so forth (M I 86). The specifically Buddhist contribution to the analysis of the origins of such conflicts is that Buddhism traces them to the psychological nature of human beings, and thus goes beyond a purely materialistic interpretation of such phenomena. The interest in Buddhism in giving such psychological analysis is

determined by the Buddhist concept of mind and mental culture. According to Buddhism the paths which nature has determined for the psychological activity of human beings are not 'undivertible'. The human mind is a dynamic realm in which the possibility for radical reforms is most evident. The Nibbāna of the Buddhists which is attained by the cessation of all conflicts is a result of radical reformulation of a person's mental activities. Thus Buddhism does not favour any analysis which implies that the solution to social and psychological problems lies only in the reformulations and reorganisations brought about in the material sphere alone.

The Kalahavivāda Sutta says that the cause of contentions and disputes and the concomitant social evils is *piyā* (dear things). *Piyā* are said to be rooted in *chanda* (impelling desire). *Chanda* is rooted in *sāta* and *asāta* (the pleasant and the unpleasant). *Sāta* and *asāta* are caused by *phassa* (sensory contact). In the Kalahavivāda Sutta the Buddha is seen delving deeper and deeper into the psychological springs of human action in the explanation of matters connected with individual and social behaviour, realising the uniqueness of the sphere of activity with which he is dealing. Here the origins of human conflict are traced to sense perceptions and the complexity of mental acts that follow from it. According to Buddhism, the material components of the process of sensory activity may remain as they are, yet without the resultant psychological processes such as *chanda*. Material things may not be a hindrance to a person's

happiness when the proper mental attitude is cultivated. Buddhism considers the cultivation of this mental attitude which consists mainly in the development of the mind by *satipaṭṭhāna* (techniques of meditation) as the *ekāyana magga* (the singular means) of attaining the incomparable happiness which overcomes all manner of conflicts.

According to the Aṭṭhakavagga, conflict is also an inevitable result of divergence in human beliefs. The Aṭṭhakavagga testifies to the fact that there existed a multiplicity of philosophical beliefs during the time of the Buddha. Debates were openly held in the midst of large gatherings with the sole intention of proving one's own standpoint as correct and defeating the standpoint of the opponent. The Buddha, as represented in the Pali canonical literature, was a firm critic of metaphysical speculation. He was an empiricist in his approach to philosophical problems and firmly disapproved of any attempts to use purely rational methods in constructing complex systems of philosophy which go beyond the limits of verification and experience. In the Nikāyas, the Buddha has condemned the attempts of other contemporary thinkers to give categorical answers to certain philosophical questions. The Nikāyas mention ten philosophical questions regarding the nature of the individual and the world which the Buddha is said to have left unanswered (M I 426f.; D I 187f.). The answers given by different teachers during the Buddha's time to such questions are described in the Pali Nikāyas as *pacceka-sacca* (individual truths). [2]

It is interesting to inquire into the way in which early Buddhism analysed the origins of *diṭṭhi* (philosophical views). According to the Brahmajāla Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya the diversity of *diṭṭhi* is a natural result of perception and therefore has a psychological origin. The Brahmajāla Sutta enumerates as many as sixty-two divergent philosophical views and traces their origin to *phassa* (sensory contact) (D I 42). The Aṭṭhakavagga throws more light on the analysis made in the Brahmajāla Sutta. In the Cūlaviyūha Sutta of the Aṭṭhakavagga the question is raised as to why different thinkers put forward divergent views about truth, widely disagreeing among themselves without expressing agreement on a single truth. The question is raised as to whether it is due to the existence of a diversity of truth or due to the rationalisations of different thinkers (Sn 885). The answer to this question which follows in the same Sutta is very significant regarding the Buddhist analysis of the origins of disagreement in philosophical circles. It is said that there do not exist many and divers truths in the world apart from *saññā*. People employ reason in constructing various views and make judgments of truth and error (Sn 886). The significance of this reply depends largely on the meaning of the word *saññā*. The analysis given in the Niddesa seems to be of little help in this connection as the emphasis in the Niddesa exegesis is on the ethical import of terms used in the original text. The following is an instance where the word saññā is explained in the Niddesa: *"Saññañ ca diṭṭhiñ ca ye aggahesuṃ te*

ghaṭṭayantā vicaranti loke ti ye saññaṃ gaṇhanti, kāmasaññaṃ byāpādasaññaṃ vihiṃsāsaññaṃ te saññāvasena ghaṭṭenti" (Nidd I 207). Here *saññā* takes an ethical meaning as idea of sense desire, idea of malevolence and idea of injury. Even in the context of the passage quoted from the Niddesa the explanation of the word *saññā* does not seem to be adequate. The word *saññā* occurs in the Aṭṭhakavagga mostly in the sense of ideas of sensory origin.

Taking *saññā* in that wider sense it is reasonable to assert that the Aṭṭhakavagga makes very significant observations about the nature of our judgments of truth and error. The first point that it makes is that our judgments are primarily based on *saññā* (the ideas of sensory origin). *Saññā* stands for the purely subjective, and subjective experiences can easily be erroneously described when they are verbally formulated as views, and elevated to the position of objective truths. *Saññā*, according to the Buddhist teaching, is changeable. It is a subjective state in which changes could be brought about by the application of particular modes of training. *Sikkhā ekā saññā uppajjanti sikkhā ekā saññā nirujjhanti* (with training some ideas arise and with training some ideas cease) (D I, 181). The Poṭṭhapāda Sutta discusses how this change is effected by a process of training consisting of jhānic meditation, which gradually reduces *saññā* to subtler and subtler forms until it completely ceases. This is described in the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta as *abhisaññā nirodha*. The Brahmajāla Sutta in discussing the various views held by *samaṇas* and *brahmaṇas* shows clearly that

some of these views were based purely on their subjective experiences. These experiences may be due to certain jhānic exercises that they have undergone, and variations in the nature of experiences are admitted in the Buddhist analysis as pointed out in the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta. The Brahmajāla Sutta says that an ascetic or a Brāhmaṇa by means of ardour, of exertion, of application, of earnestness, of right reflection, attains to such concentration of mind that when his mind is so concentrated he dwells experiencing a finite world. He says thus: "finite is this world with a boundary right round, because I by means of ardour of exertion? dwell experiencing a finite world. By this I know that this world is finite and with a boundary right round." [3] Here is a clear example of how philosophical conclusions were reached by the thinkers of the time. Some of them had an experiential basis for their conclusions and projected their subjective experiences to the objective world and misinterpreted their experience in elevating it to the status of an objective truth. There is evidence in the Brahmajāla Sutta that even some theistic conclusions were based on such subjective experiences. The Buddha did not contest the fact that they actually possessed some experience but only criticised their attempt to grasp that experience as the objective reality. Conviction of thinkers on truth and error was based primarily on such experiential content of the mind as the Mahā Kammavibhaṅga Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya clearly illustrates. This Sutta enumerates four kinds of dogmatic judgments regarding the law of *kamma* and

rebirth made by thinkers who depended on their individual jhānic insight (M III 211). The Buddha says that by jhānic insight one may see a person of bad moral conduct reborn in a woeful state of existence and thereby conclude that there are effects of bad conduct and that everyone who indulges in bad conduct will be reborn in a woeful state of existence. Another person with similar jhānic insight may have an experience contrary to the former as for instance seeing a person of good conduct being born in a woeful state of existence in the next birth, and thereby conclude that there are no effects of good conduct, and that all those who indulge in good conduct are reborn in woeful states of existence. People cling very firmly to their subjective experiences and make judgments about truth and error. The Buddha points out in the Sutta how erroneous co nclusions could be reached by persons who depend exclusively on their limited and subjective experiential content of the mind and attempt to interpret that as the complete truth. Thus, while recognising the validity of the data of extra-sensory perception, the Buddha pointed out that mistaken conclusions could be drawn depending on such data just as mistaken conclusions could be drawn about any matter of fact depending on the data of the five senses.

The dogmatic adherence to views results from the conviction that one‘s knowledge is complete and that the whole truth about the world could be described on the basis of one‘s ideas and experience alone. The Duṭṭhaṭṭhaka Sutta says that the dogmatist himself claims the highest perfection

for his own view and asserts his opinion on the basis of his conviction. What precedes his assertions is the knowledge he has gleaned from his experience. What he asserts conforms to his convictions. [4]

In the Buddha's explanation of philosophical disputes he shows that they result basically from psychological facts. Their origin is to be found in a person's sensory and extra-sensory experiences. The Buddha considers the dogmatism of the thinkers a hindrance to mental peace. He therefore recommends the full and complete understanding of such psychological phenomena as *saññā, phassa* and *ñāṇa*, and without dependence on those phenomena, the attainment of complete detachment and liberation of the mind. The Aṭṭhakavagga says: "Let one cross over the flood by the complete understanding of *saññā*," (*saññaṃ pariññā vitareyya oghaṃ*; Sn 779); "having completely understood sensory contact and unattached" (*phassaṃ pariññāya ananugiddho;* Sn 778); "He does not have excessive dependence even on *ñāṇa*," (*ñāṇe pi so nissayaṃ no karoti*; Sn 800).

The nature of the expression of disagreement in belief by the thinkers at the time of the Buddha is clearly shown in the Aṭṭhakavagga. The Buddha's emphasis is mainly on beliefs of truth-seekers who were preoccupied with the inquiry into what *parama* (ultimate reality) or *sacca* (truth) was and what an individual's *visuddhi* (absolute purity) and *mokkha* (liberation) consisted in. Such enquiries had a relevance mainly to the moral and spiritual aspects of a person's life. The Pasūra Sutta describes the disagreement among

thinkers on such matters thus: “They say that absolute purity is theirs alone. They do not say that there is absolute purity in the teachings of others. Whatever (path or teaching or belief) they depend on, they claim that it is the most excellent and thus separately hold divers individual truths.” [5] The Cūḷaviyūha Sutta says: “Experts make divers assertions, each clinging dogmatically to his own view. They say: “Whoever knows thus has known the truth. Whoever despises this is imperfect.” [6] They make judgments about truth and error, but widely disagree in their judgments. The Cūḷaviyūha Sutta says: “What one asserted to be true and real, others say is meaningless and false. Thus they enter into dispute and debate.” [7] The Mahāviyūha Sutta says: “Each one asserts that one‘s own view is perfect, and that the belief of the other person is inferior. Thus they enter into dispute. They judge their own conclusions to be true.” [8]

The Buddha was highly critical of this intolerance which was displayed by the thinkers of his time. Such intolerance, according to the Buddha, was utterly unwarranted, apart from the fact that from an ethical point of view it was very unbecoming of a morally good person. In the Cūḷaviyūha Sutta the Buddha speaks with sarcasm of such intolerant dogmatists. “If by reason of not approving of another person‘s teaching, one becomes a fool or a beast, then all (these dogmatists) are fools and persons of much inferior wisdom. For they equally strongly cling to dogmatic beliefs.” [9] On the other hand, if by reason of holding to

one's own dogmatic belief, one becomes a person of absolutely pure wisdom, skill and knowledge, then none among them is of inferior wisdom. For they have equally clung to dogmatic beliefs. [10]

In the Aṭṭhakavagga the Buddha puts forward the view that the lack of tolerance in the realm of views leads to many harmful consequences. First it is a hindrance to the furtherance of one's own knowledge as one becomes emotionally involved in the belief that one already holds. One becomes a prey to one's preconceived notions and this leads to intellectual stagnation. Secondly the emotions bring about many consequences which are morally harmful. Emotional attachment to dogmatic views results in absolute disregard for objectivity. It also disrupts the harmony of social relations and brings about results which are socially harmful.

From the Buddhist explanation of the origin of dogmatic beliefs, the ethical and practical conclusion follows that such dogmas should not be clung to. The dogmas are based primarily on the subjective experiences of individuals. In the majority of cases the experiences differ very widely from one another and the experience of any one individual is not at all sufficient to come to a conclusion about objective truth.

The Aṭṭhakavagga also discusses the role that reason plays in the assertions made by dogmatists. The Buddha on many occasions denied the competence of pure reason to

comprehend ultimate reality. The Aṭṭhakavagga says that the diversity of views regarding the nature of ultimate truth is also due to the abuse of reason. Judgments about truth and error were pronounced by the thinkers of the time by employing reason. [11] The Buddha had very definite views on the role of reason in the search for truth. The Brahmajāla Sutta includes among the dogmas which the Buddha rejected those based on pure reason as well. The Brahmajāla Sutta says that out of the four schools of samaṇas and brāhmaṇas who were eternalists and held that the soul and the world are eternal, the fourth consisted of rationalists who depended on pure reason alone. [12]

The observation of the early Buddhists on the role of pure reason in philosophical inquiry is clearly stated in the *Sandaka Sutta*. Pointing out the shortcomings of pure reason, Ānanda says to Sandaka: "Here again, Sandaka, a certain teacher is a rationalist, an investigator; he teaches the doctrine on a system of his own devising, beaten out by reasoning and based on investigation. The teaching of one who is a rationalist, an investigator, is sometimes well reasoned and some times ill-reasoned. It sometimes is true and sometimes is false." [13] The philosophical conclusions arrived at by a process of reasoning are according to the Buddhist view unsatisfactory on two grounds. First, the process of reasoning may consist of flaws in the reasoning and thus lead to ill-reasoned (logically false or invalid) conclusions. Secondly, the fact that someone has come to a well reasoned (logically valid) conclusion, avoiding all flaws

of reasoning, does not guarantee the truth of the conclusion. Although the reasoning process is perfectly flawless, the conclusion may be contrary to fact. For according to the Buddhist theory of knowledge, what is known to be true must be verifiable in experience. Reasoning has a role to play only within the limits of experience.

The Aṭṭhakavagga expresses the early Buddhist view that reason involves itself in deep and interminable conflict when it goes beyond phenomena to seek their ultimate ground. Philosophical conflict results from the search for truths beyond all empirical observation employing human reason outside its legitimate limits.

In coming to conclusions about reality, the views of thinkers are in most cases affected by their emotions. Logic only aids them to rationalise their emotions, their inclinations and propensities, likes and dislikes. The Aṭṭhakavagga says that when a conclusion reached by someone is a rationalisation, it becomes exceedingly difficult for him to give up that conclusion. The Buddha says that a person finds it difficult to give up his own view when he is led by impelling desire and convinced according to his inclination. He would declare in accordance with his conviction. [14] A factor which adds to the failure in the objectivity of rational conclusions is the influence of human emotions on such conclusions. Thinkers, as the Buddha saw, expressed mere rationalisations based largely on their personal likes and dislikes, interests and inclinations in the guise of well reasoned objective conclusions. The Aṭṭhakavagga says that

the passionate clinging to views results from the fact that the views themselves are a product of rationalisation. Emotional factors often influence the judgments of values pronounced by human beings. The Buddha says that when someone sees personal advantage from things seen, heard or cognised, or, from holy vow or practise, one clings passionately to that alone and sees everything else as inferior. [15] The Duṭṭhaṭṭhaka Sutta says that those who enter into verbal conflict regarding philosophical conclusions do so not merely because they believe them to be true; there are persons who are led by their passions and emotions. The Duṭṭhaṭṭhaka Sutta says that when some thinkers make philosophical assertions they do so believing them to be true while others speak merely with malicious intentions. [16]

What incites a person to cling passionately to his own view is more often his consciousness and esteem of the self rather than the consciousness of truth. The dogmatist wishes to safeguard his view at whatever cost because the refutation of his views means to him defeat and self degradation. The Aṭṭhakavagga says that when people cling passionately to their views, emotions which compel them to do so are their pride, conceit and esteem of the self, their notions of equality, inferiority and superiority. Measures such as equality, inferiority and superiority are used with reference to beliefs held by oneself and others. One person judges another, who holds the same view as oneself, as equal in wisdom, while judging others who reject such a view as

men of inferior wisdom. One enthrones oneself in the realm of philosophical beliefs and speaks contemptuously of others. [17] The debaters who entered into conflict basing themselves on different assumptions on the nature of reality were prompted by inner passions such as their desire for praise and fame. [18] Those who debate have in their minds the purely subjective measurements of equality, inferiority and superiority. [19]

The Aṭṭhakavagga discusses the consequences of holding dogmatically to beliefs. According to the Aṭṭhakavagga, truth is not something about which debates can arise. It is only the emotional and dogmatic adherence to views that produce argumentation and debate. The Buddhist view is that involvement in such disputations is a serious impediment to right understanding and hence spiritual development. Complete freedom, in the Buddhist view, results only from detachment. This detachment has to be effected not only from the objects of the five senses but also from those of the mind, the percepts and concepts of the mind. The perceptual and conceptual involvement of the individual is considered in the Buddhist psychology as the process of being overwhelmed by *papañca*. Detachment in this wider sense is necessary because attachment to even one's own view prevents one from understanding things as they are.

Early Buddhism sometimes traces the perpetual conflict in society to *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā* (ideas of perceptual and conceptual obsession). *Papañca-saññā-saṅkhhā* denotes the

psychological reaction of the individual to all his perceptual affections and conceptual accumulations. The *anusaya* (dormant passions of the mind) such as *taṇhā* (craving), *diṭṭhi* (dogmatism) and *māna* (conceit) are concomitant with *papañca*. The Sakkapañha Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya in its analysis of individual and social conflicts and ills traces them to *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā*. The term *papañca-saññā-saṅkhā* is used also in the Kalahavivāda Sutta of the Aṭṭhakavagga in a similar context. There is no doubt that the detachment advocated by the early Buddhists has an evidently psychological emphasis and also that it is itself a practical and ethical conclusion derived from a deep analysis of psychological facts about human beings. For mental peace and calm one needs to be detached from all ideas and concepts and therefore from all dogmatic views.

The doctrine of the Buddha points out that disputes of two kinds can arise in society. Both kinds of disputes have a psychological origin. They are rooted in the dormant passions of the human mind. One originates from passion for pleasurable sensations derived from objects of the material world, the other from the passion for ideas and concepts, philosophical views and ideologies. The *Mahā Dukkhakkhanda Sutta* of the Majjhima Nikāya (M I 86) emphasises the nature of the conflicts arising from the former, and the Aṭṭhakavagga emphasises the nature of the conflicts arising from the latter (*sandiṭṭhi-rāga*).

The Buddha‘s condemnation of dogmatic views as repeatedly found in the Aṭṭhakavagga is due not only to his

insight into the nature of their origin but also due to an understanding of their consequences. The Buddha considered passions, of whatever kind they are, as impediments to the progress towards Nibbāna. The dogmatist urged by his esteem for the self passionately clings to his dogma, and enters into debate with other persons. In this process the weapon he uses is logic and reasoning. In case his opponent, with logic and reasoning surpassing his own, vanquishes him in argument he becomes utterly frustrated. He even becomes enraged. The *Pasura Sutta* shows how dogmatists condemn one another as fools and how they enter into verbal disputations, each desiring one's own fame. [20] Engaged in verbal disputations in the midst of gatherings one becomes vexed in one's quest for praise. In defeat he becomes downcast, and looking for the flaws of others he becomes enraged by the blame (of others). [21] When he is judged to have been defeated in debate he laments and grieves and worries that he has been overcome. [22]

All these consequences follow because people enter into such disputations with preconceived notions, with no regard for objectivity and truth, urged merely by their inner emotions and passions. Any attack on their view is for them an attack on their ego, and when their opinions are really questioned their ego is invariably hurt. It is this psychological truth about the nature of dogmatic adherence to views that is very well analysed in the Aṭṭhakavagga.

Pride and conceit, emotions which prompt people to cling to

the views which they judge to be perfect, were considered by the Buddha as serious impediments to right understanding and hence to spiritual progress. He who is praised in the midst of a gathering for having successfully defended his view may be thrilled with joy and be much elated in mind for having achieved his purpose. The Buddha says that elation itself is the ground of his vexation, for pride and conceit are serious impediments to spiritual progress. [23]

The Buddha repeatedly condemns argumentation and debate purely for the sake of promoting the ego. The ideal of a *muni* (sage) put forward in the Aṭṭhakavagga suggests that the *muni* is free from all obstacles as he does not enter into controversies which have arisen. [24] For the person with spiritual excellence there is no view about the various existences. He has no emotions by which he is urged to grasp various dogmas. [25] According to the Buddha, when the mind is freed from passions, all disputations cease. [26] Those who have loosened the bond of dogmatism and do not have attachment to anything in the world have no speculative views. [27] The noble one who has transcended the limits of mundane existence has no grasping after knowing or seeing. He delights neither in passion nor in dispassion. For him there is nothing here, grasped as the highest. [28] The early Buddhist attitude towards philosophical views was just one aspect of the general philosophy of detachment preached by the Buddha. The Buddha‘s admonition to those intent on purity is to discard

all dogmatic views and also to free oneself of all notions of measurement such as equality, superiority and inferiority. [29] The *muni*, according to the Aṭṭhakavagga, has no clinging to notions of self or ego. He does not depend even on knowledge. He does not take sides in the midst of controversy. He has no dogmatic views. [30]

The *muni* is not attached to things of the world in their gross form as physical things. Nor is he attached to them in their subtler form as sense-data, or ideas of sense (*diṭṭha, sutta, muta*). He is like the lotus untainted by the water in which it has sprung up. [31]

According to the Buddhist analysis the world is perceived by us with the aid of the senses. The different senses convey to us the various data of the physical world and the Aṭṭhakavagga classifies them all under the wide categories *diṭṭha* (seen), *suta* (heard), and *muta* (cognized). Detachment from them results in the discarding of all dogmatic views. It is the *diṭṭha, suta* and *muta* (the perceptual content of our minds) which provide the raw material for our dogmatic views. One who adopts the Buddhist life of *viveka* (solitude) is completely detached from them and therefore does not make use of this raw material to construct the more complex dogmas. [32] The Brāhmaṇa who has transcended all limits has no grasping after storing his mind with such raw material. That is why he does not cling to dogmas. [33]

The same attitude that the Buddha recommends towards dogmatic views is also recommended towards *sīla* (holy

vows) and *vata* (holy practises) adopted by seekers after truth and purity. *Sīla* and *vata* are also impediments to spiritual progress if they are clung to. In the Aṭṭhakavagga the Buddha includes *sīlabbatta* also along with *diṭṭha, suta* and *muta* as things to be discarded to facilitate spiritual progress.

The Māgandhiya Sutta of the Aṭṭhakavagga brings to light a very significant point of Buddhism regarding its teaching on *diṭṭhi* (views), *suti* (revelation), *sīla* (holy vows), and *vata* (holy practises). This Sutta shows that only dogmatic clinging to such things impedes spiritual progress, but not that they have no role to play in the process of spiritual progress. The Buddha says that it is not by *diṭṭhi*, *suti, ñāṇa, sīla,* and *vata* that one attains *visuddhi* (purification). Also it is not by the absence of them. It is by taking them only as a means and not grasping them as ends in themselves that one attains absolute purity.[34] The Alagaddūpama Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya presents the same doctrine by the simile of the raft (*kullūpama*; M I 134f).

In the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddhists, *sammādiṭṭhi* (right view) appears as the first item. A distinction is made in the canonical literature itself between *sammādiṭṭhi* (right view) and *micchādiṭṭhi* (wrong view). So the value of *diṭṭhi* as a means to spiritual progress is not unrecognised. In the same way the Buddha's word has a role to play as *suti*. The Buddhist *sīla* (moral precepts) and *vata* (vows) serve as means to the attainment of the Buddhist goal. The Buddha condemns only the attitude of some thinkers who took them

as ends in themselves.

A question that arises from the statements made in the Aṭṭhakavagga regarding our judgments about truth and error is whether or not early Buddhism had a body of truths to assert. Some of the statements made by the Buddha may give one the impression that he was an agnostic or a sceptic. The Aṭṭhakavagga says that a sage is not prone to enter into controversies about truth and error. The multiplicity of conclusions on the nature of truth and reality in the contemporary philosophical background was undoubtedly very perplexing to any inquirer into them. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that contemporary scepticism was a result of the intellectual confusion caused by a multiplicity of views. [35] The Buddha on inquiry into the diverse views declares that they are mere assertions of individual opinions (*pacceka-sacca*). He denied that mutually contradictory assertions about any matter of fact could be true together. [36] He says that the truth is one (about any matter of fact) and that disagreement is resolved when that truth is known. [37] Thus, unlike the sceptics, he did not deny the validity of knowledge or the 'knowability' of true propositions. He was only critical of the means by which conclusions about truth and error were drawn. The Buddha admitted that there are some questions about reality which could be categorically answered (*ekaṃsa-vyākaraṇīya-pañhā*) while there were others which have to be dismissed altogether due to the very nature of the questions (*ṭhapanīyā pañhā = avyākata*).

According to early Buddhism the lack of unanimity on truth and error may result from an incomplete and partial knowledge of facts. The moment one rushes to a conclusion on the basis of a fragment of experience, one ceases to be intelligent. True and scientific knowledge can be attained only by a systematisation of the data of observation and experiment. According to early Buddhism this is true not only of the data of sensory experience but also of the data of extra-sensory experience (*abhiññā*). Conflict may also result from lack of objectivity due to personal prejudices and preconceived notions. Finally conflict may result from the employment of reason for the solution of questions which are beyond all human experience. The last of them, the Buddha considers, to be a very prominent field in which interminable conflict is bound to perpetuate.

The teachings of the Aṭṭhakavagga probably belong to the earliest stratum of Buddhist thought. There is very little evidence of the doctrines of Buddhism having undergone systematisation and formulation by the time the Aṭṭhakavagga verses were composed. The fundamental teachings of Buddhism are introduced in the Aṭṭhakavagga without the aid of stereotyped formulae which are characteristic of the later stratum of Buddhist literature. It gives ample testimony to the fact that the earliest teachings of Buddhism did not deviate from the path of empiricism and that hardly anything is to be found amongst them which may be termed esoteric.

Notes

1. *University of Ceylon Review*, 1948, The criteria for the analysis of the Suttanipāta by Prof. N. A. Jayawickrama.

2. Sn 824; A II 41; A V 29. The significance of the term is adequately discussed by Professor K. N. Jayatilleke in his *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 354f.

3. *Idha bhikkave ekacco samaṇo vā brāhmano vā ātappam anvāya padhānam anvāya anuyogam anvāya appamādam anvāya sammā manasikāraṃ anvāya tathārūpaṃ cetosamādhiṃ phusati yathā samāhite citte antasaññī lokasmiṃ viharati. So evaṃ āha: Antavā ayaṃ loko parivaṭumo. Taṃ kissa hetu? Ahaṃ hi ātappam anvāya … tathārūpiṃ cetosamādhiṃ phusāmi yathā samāhite citte antasaññī lokasmiṃ viharāmi. Iminā p'āhaṃ etaṃ jānāmi yathā antavā ayaṃ loko parivaṭumo ti* (D I 22)

4. *Sayaṃ samattāni pakubbamāno / yathā hi jāneyya tathā vadeyya* (Sn 781)

5. *Idh'eva suddhiṃ iti vādiyantī / nāññesu dhammesu visuddhim āhu*
yaṃ nissitā tattha subhaṃ vadānā / paccekasaccesu puthū niviṭṭhā (Sn 824)

6. *Sakaṃ sakaṃ diṭṭhi-paribbasānā / viggayha nānā kusalā vadantī*
yo evaṃ jānāti sa vedi dhammaṃ / idaṃ paṭikkosam akevalaṃ so (Sn 878)

7. *Yam āhu saccaṃ tathiyan ti eke / tam āhu aññe pi tucchaṃ musā ti*
evam pi viggayha vivādiyantī … (Sn 883)

8. *Sakaṃ hi dhammaṃ paripuṇṇam āhu / aññassa dhammaṃ pana hīnam āhu*
evam pi *viggayha vivādiyantī /sakaṃ sakaṃ sammutiṃ āhu saccaṃ* (Sn 904).

9. *Parassa ce dhammam anānujānaṃ / bālo mago hoti nihīnapañño*
sabbe va bālā sunihīnapaññā / sabbev'ime diṭṭhi-paribbasānā (Sn 880)

10. *Sandiṭṭhiyā ce pana vīvadātā / saṃsuddhapaññā kusalā mutīmā*
na tesaṃ koci parihīnapañño / diṭṭhi hi tesaṃ tathā samattā (Sn 881)

11. *Takkañ ca diṭṭhīsu pakappayitvā / saccaṃ musā ti dvayadhammam āhu* (Sn 886)

12. *Catutthe ca bhonto Samara-brāhmaṇā kiṃ āgamma kiṃ ārabbha sassatavādā sassataṃ attānañ ca lokañ ca paññāpenti. Idha bhikkhave ekacco samaṇo vā brahmaṇo vā takkī hoti vīmaṃsī. So takkapariyāhataṃ vīmaṃsānucaritaṃ sayaṃ-patibhānaṃ evam āha: sassato attā ca loko ca.* (D I 16)

13. *Puna ca paraṃ Sandaka idh'ekacco satthā takkī hoti vīmaṃsī. So takkapariyāhataṃ vīmaṃsānucaritaṃ sayaṃ-paṭibhānaṃ dhammaṃ deseti. Takkissa kho pana Sandaka vīmamsīssa sutakkitaṃ pi hoti duttakkitaṃ pi hoti. Tathā pi hoti aññathā pi*

hoti (M I 520)

14. *Sakaṃ hi diṭṭhiṃ kathaṃ accayeyya /chandānunīto ruciyā niviṭṭho*
Sayaṃ samattāni pakubbamāno / yathā hi jāneyya tathā vadeyya (Sn 781)

15. *Yad attani passati ānisaṃsaṃ / diṭṭhe sute sīlavate mute vā tad eva so tattha samuggahāya / nihīnato passati sabbam aññaṃ* (Sn 797)

16. *Vadanti ve duṭṭhamanāpi eke / atho pi ve saccamanā vadantī* (Sn 780)

17. *Atisāradiṭṭhiyā so samatto / mānena matto paripuṇṇamānī sayam eva sāmaṃ manasābhisitto / diṭṭhī hi sā tassa tathā samattā* (Sn 889)

18. *Vadanti te aññasitā kathojjaṃ / pasaṃsakāmā kusalā vadānā* (Sn 825)

19. *Samo visesī uda vā nihīno / yo maññatī so vivadetha tena* (Sn 842)

20. *Te vādakāma parisaṃ vigayha / bālaṃ dahanti mithu aññamaññaṃ*
Vadanti te aññasitā kathojjaṃ / pasaṃsakāmā kusalā vadānā (Sn 825)

21. *Yutto kathāyaṃ parisāya majjhe / pasaṃsam-icchaṃ vinighāti hoti*
apāhatasmiṃ pana maṅkhu hoti / nindāya so kuppati randhamesī (Sn 826)

22. *Yam assa vādaṃ parihīnamāhu / apāhataṃ pañhavimaṃsakāse*
paridevati socati hīnavādo / upaccagā man ti anutthunāti (Sn 828)

23. *Pasaṃsito vā pana tattha hoti / akkhāya vādaṃ parisāya majjhe*
so hassati unnamaticca tena / pappuyya taṃ atthaṃ yathā mano
ahū yā unnati sā'ssa vighātabhūmi / mānātimānaṃ vadate paneso
etam pi disvā na vivādayetha / na hi tena suddhiṃ kusalā vadanti (Sn 829–30)

24. *Vādañca jātaṃ muni no upeti / asmā munī natthikhilo kuhiñcī* (Sn 780)

25. *Dhonassa hi natthi kuhiñ ci loke / pakappitā diṭṭhi bhavābhavesu*
māyañca mānañca pahāya dhono / sa kena gaccheyya anūpayo so (Sn 786)

26. *Upayo hi dhammesu upeti vādaṃ / anūpayaṃ kena kathaṃ vadeyya*
attaṃ nirattaṃ na hi tassa atthi / adhosi so diṭṭhim idheva sabbā (Sn 787)

27. *Na kappayanti na purekkharonti / accantasuddhī ti na te vadanti*
ādānaganthaṃ gathitaṃ visajja / āsaṃ na kubbanti kuhiñci loke (Sn 794)

28. *Sīmātigo brāhmaṇo tassa natthi / ñatvā va disvā va samuggahītaṃ*
na rāgarāgī na virāgaratto / tassīdha natthi param uggahitaṃ
(Sn 795)

29. *Diṭṭhiṃ pi lokasmiṃ na kappayeyya / ñāneṇa vā sīlavatena vā pi*
samo ti attānam anūpaneyya / hīno na maññetha visesī vā pi
(Sn 799)

30. *Attam pahāya anupādiyāno / ñāṇe pi so nissayaṃ no karoti*
sa ve viyattesu na vaggasārī / diṭṭhiṃ pi so na pacceti kiñci
(Sn 800)

31. *Udabindu yathā pi pokkhare / padume vāri yathā na limpati*
evaṃ munī nopalimpati / yadidaṃ diṭṭhasutammutesu vā
(Sn 812)

32. *Tassīdha diṭṭhe va sute mute vā / pakappitā natthi anū pi saññā* (Sn 802)

33. *Sa sabbadhammesu visenibhūto / yaṃ kiñci diṭṭhaṃ va sutaṃ mutaṃ vā* (Sn 793)

34. *Na diṭṭhiyā na sutiyā na ñāṇena / sīlabbaten'āpi na suddhim āha*
adiṭṭhiyā assutiyā aññāṇā / asīlatā abbatā no'pi tena
ete ca nissajja anuggahāya / santo anissāya bhavaṃ na jappe
(Sn 839)

35. Prof. K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* p. 110f.

36. *Na h'eva saccāni bahūni nānā* (Sn 886)

37. *Ekaṃ hi saccaṃ na dutiyaṃ atthi / yasmiṃ pajā no vivade pajānaṃ* (Sn 884

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