

The Science of Pratītyasamutpāda

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Abstract

The Term Pratītyasamutpāda is the Sanskrit term (Pali: Paṭiccasamuppāda) was coined in order to represent the Truth realized or actualized by the Buddha after the attainment of Bodhi, where he sees the plethora of causations taking place in both the mental and material spheres that somehow remain hidden from the sight of our naked eyes clouded by Ignorance. The Buddha, with his own effort unfolded the theory of Causation i.e., the theory of Cause and Effect, which was elaborated in the Second Noble Truth. For Buddha, the main objective of his quest was to find out the perfect remedy to put an end to this worldly suffering. Unlike, for a scientist and materialist, the basic question might be varied, depending upon the nature of their academic or scientific streams. Either way both the Buddha and the modern Scientist have one point in common i.e., both are nothing, but the product of the five aggregates called (Pancaskandhas or Nama Rupa) seeking for something higher than them with their objectives somewhat different. The Buddha as we all know focuses more on inner development for which he was looking out for that perfect tool of refinement whereas the Scientist on the contrary, focuses more on the development of outer world. The Buddha has made his own Nama and Rupa (Mind and Body) a medium for his experiment whereas, the Scientists had taken the materialistic world as their medium of experiments. Both are somehow contributing or working in parallel to decode the highest force that is being governed by the Nature. Therefore, both the theory of ancient Buddhist's Law of Dependent origination and the Modern scientific Laws are highly relevant in order to find out the whole Truth about the physical and nonphysical world. In order to understand the whole paradigm of the Causality or the deep underlying currents of causations that occur beneath our body and mind, an attempt has been made in this paper to highlight the science behind the theory of Pratītyasamutpāda as depicted in the philosophy of Buddhism.

Keywords:

Pratītyasamutpāda, dhatu (element) Citta (Consciousness) and Conclusions

Research Methodology:

Mainly Descriptive, Textual or Textual Inter-Disciplinary based on both the Primary & Secondary Sources

I. Introduction

The term Pratītyasamutpāda is usually defined or understood as the Law of Dependent Originations as mentioned by the Buddha found recorded in the Mahavagga which says, 'for seven days at the foot of Bodhi tree, the Lord sat cross-legged in one posture experiencing the Bliss of Nibbana. Then, the Lord during the first watch of night paid attention to the causal uprising in both upright and reverse order over the main cause of suffering which are conditioned and co-conditioned by several elements such as; ignorance, habitual tendencies, consciousness, psycho-physicality, six-sense spheres, awareness,

feeling, craving, grasping, becoming birth, old-age and death.ⁱ Etymologically, the term Pratītyasamutpāda comprises of the two broad terms *Pratitya* and '*Samutpada*'. If we look at the term *Pratitya*, it further broken down into '*prati*' which means *repetition* in general and the root '*ī*' here means '*to go*' or '*to disappear*' and '*itya*' is the participle which usually signifies '*ought to go*'. However, in this case, it is applied in a sense which signifies the *momentary* or *perishable nature of things* or *elements*. The term '*Samutpada*' is further broken out into '*Sam*' which means '*together*', '*ut*' means the *before* and '*Pada*', means '*arising*' or '*producing*'. Thus, the etymological meaning of the term Pratītyasamutpāda means '*the things or elements (Dhamma) that are perishable by nature, come into force or effect (arise or produce) in a repetitious manner*' as explained in the Arthaviniscaya Sutra and its Commentary Nibandhana by N.H.Samtani.ⁱⁱ There are though ample of definitions of the term Pratītyasamutpāda in the Pali Nikayas, Attkatthas and later commentary texts of different Buddhist traditions.

In the Pali Nikayas, there are many Suttas such as the Mahanidana and Mahapadana Suttas of Digha Nikaya, Sammaditthi and the Ariyapariyesana Sutta of the Majjhimanikayas which mainly contain the discourses based on the Four Noble Truths and the Dependent Originations.ⁱⁱⁱ The Mahanidana Sutta of Digha Nikaya is one of the longest Suttas dealing with the theory of Pratītyasamutpāda specifically and broadly discusses all the element or nidanas except for the first two i.e., Avijja (Ignorance) and Sankhara (Mental Volitions). In many texts, Buddhist scholars were arguing about the reason why the first two elements were not covered or discussed by the Buddha in this Sutta which particularly deals with the content of Causation. However, if one carefully dives through the Mahanidana Sutta, one can clearly see, the Buddha has already covered the first two elements when he begins or briefs the content with his chief secretary Ananda. In the Mahanidana Sutta, where we are seeing the Buddha dwelling at that time in the region of Kuru, and Ananda his chief secretary appears in front of the Buddha calming that he had understood the event of arising things or phenomena of causation' very well and clear. Just when his secretary Ananda claimed of having understood the deeper meaning of causal phenomena, the Buddha sees the gravity of human ignorance and make sure him twice by saying, '*Say not so Ananda, Deep is this doctrine of Pratītyasamutpāda or events as arising from cause and it is through not understanding this doctrine, not penetrating, that this generation has become tangled skein, a matted ball of thread*'.^{iv} This already shows the Buddha's concern for the human ignorance (Avijja) and its resultant fruits (Sankhara which follows afterward. Humans, as we all know are mainly subjected to the results generated from their own activities mainly out of ignorance. When talking about Ignorance and Resultant activities, it partly governed already in the past, partly governing in the present and partly to be governed in the future lives of Human. Therefore, the two elements Avijja (ignorance) and Sankhara (resultant activities) which somehow form the base for our present temporal existence in the outside physical world and when these get conjoined with other nine elements especially the Vinnana (consciousness) and Nama-rupa (Mind and Body), the whole formation and the regulation of life starts progressing or processing actively from the womb of mother till death, which is why the Buddha has said the doctrine of causation is deep and in order to understand its continual seamless sorts of process, one should never claimed in hurry, but rather contemplate carefully and patiently in scientific manner to grasp its deep underlying process and the regulations of all the phenomena including one's own human body and mind.

II. The Theory of Pratītyasamutpāda and Science Behind

In the Context of Buddhist Abhidharma, the term *Dharma* specifically denotes the sense elements or the dhatus such as the six sense organs, six sense objects along with the six types of Consciousness. Thus, making the total of 18 elements or 18 dhatus, this should not be confused with the normal definition of the term Dhamma or Dharma that represents the whole teachings of the Buddha. Since, the term Dhamma has several connotations and many scholars from both the Buddhist and Non-Buddhist fields, tried to elaborate the deeper and the profound meaning of the term Dharma in particular. So, there are ample of definitions available in both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist Schools of Philosophy.

According to the Pali-English dictionary of Rhys Davids, the term '*Dharma*' is a derivative of the verbal root '*ḍhr*' which means '*to withhold, support or bear*'.^v Thus, the literal meaning of the term is the holder or supporter of some essence or aspect. Hence, the Buddha's Dharma also holds some essential aspects to uplift the moral of human from all sides of life. In other words, it upholds the human from the dungeon of his own inner defilements and liberates permanently from their anchorites' karmic dispositions.

O. P. Pathak, in his introductory note on the text of the Dhammapada & Suttanipata, shed some lights on the concept of Dharma. He also defines the word Dharma as the moral principles or the ethical law of the universe that upholds the humanity. However, he further elucidates this concept and put forwards its four different aspects such as;

Dhamma in a sense of one's duty

Dhamma as a moral virtue of non-injury, truthfulness and self-control

Dhamma as self-knowledge through practice of yoga and

Dhamma in a sense of one's devotion^{vi}

Buddhaghosa also formulated this concept in a twofold manner; the first one holds its two distinct aspects, i.e. the Law as taught by the Blessed One and second one refers to the thing or phenomenon or more precisely it refers to the twelve bases or eighteen elements of the sense bases objects as shown in the below figure.^{vii}

<u>Six Sense organs</u>	<u>Six Sense Object</u>	<u>Six types of Consciousness</u>
1. Eye	Sight	Eye Consciousness
2. Ear	Hear	Ear Consciousness
3. Nose	Smell	Nose Consciousness
4. Tongue	taste	Tongue Consciousness
5. Body	Tactual	Tactual Consciousness
6. Mind	All Phenomena	Mind Consciousness

Figure 1. The eighteen elements (dhātu) sense bases

In the context of Abhidharma or higher teachings, the term Dharma or Dhamma is more so applied in a sense of Sense or sensory elements rather than on the mere devotional level. Here, just like Scientists, who studied the elemental compositions of certain substance like for example, Water (H₂O).^{viii} Similarly, all the Philosophers of Buddhism especially from the Buddha and his great disciple venerable Sariputta, Moggallana, Mahākassapa, Bhikkhu Aniruddha, upto the very famous great Acharyas of Nalanda such as; Acharya Vasubandhu, Kumaralabdha, Nagarjuna and Asanga had further deeply and minutely studied and enumerated or enlisted the different levels and types of our Consciousness and various related mental states.^{ix} All these great seers discuss and experiment all the sense or the sense based object, information, or data that they perceived directly (Pratyaksha) or indirectly (Anumana) with the aid of their meditation or self-awareness.

The theory or doctrine of the Buddha was never meant for the metaphysical speculations rather it was more inclined towards understanding or actualizing the ultimate fruit or the Wisdom through empirical evidences or experiential understanding.

The Buddha, Mogaliputta Tissa, Nagarjuna, all of them were more inclined towards achieving the Ultimate fruit rather than putting their theories out into the philosophical World in order to define the Ultimate Reality. Their main intention was never meant to provide the ultimate or metaphysical answers. However, unfortunately with the changing scenario of geo-political, social and philosophical circumstances, whether it is the theory of the Paṭiccasamuppāda of the Buddha or the Acharya Nagarjuna's theory of Sunyata, took a great metaphysical turn in order to prevent the masses from unnecessary divergence or metaphysical speculation.

If we look at the basics of Buddhism, we will find the Four Noble Truths, in each and every Truth; the Buddha is demanding something from his Followers;

The demands in the sense are as follows;

1. The very first truth is *Dukkha (suffering)* has to be understood properly.
2. The second truth is *Dukkha Samudaya (origination of suffering)* has to be abandoned.
3. The third truth is *Dukkha Nirodha (cessation of suffering)* has to be realized.
4. The fourth truth is *Dukkha Nirodhagāmīnī Paṭipadā (path leading to the cessation of suffering)* has to be developed.^x

The Majjhimanikāya, highlights the significance of the Second & the Third Truths that has a direct or immediate connection with our psychology. It also gives a clear psychological validation because both these Truths gave a telescopic view about the causation of all kind of Suffering or Formations in particular.

These two truths are also basically set forth as the Paṭiccasamuppāda as it envelops the whole cycle of Dependent Origination.

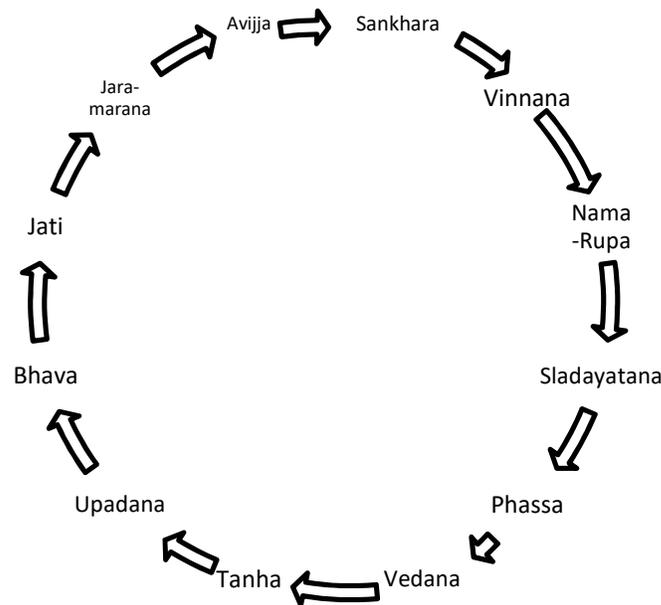


Figure 2. The Cycle of Pratītyasamutpāda

The twelve links originate from the very root called *Avijjā* or *ignorance*. *Avijja* as we all know is a state of not knowing or not having clear knowledge of what is happening within one's body and mind, more specifically, in one's mind as mentioned by S.N. Goenka, the Vipassana Master.

Avijjā is also defined by Buddhadasa Kirthisinghe as, 'not lack of knowledge of anything in particular, but rather a condition for being lack of awareness about the true nature of the world and of man.'^{xi} Here we can see that our ignorance is the root cause of suffering, i.e., not clearly knowing One and all related phenomena, but at the same time, it also acts as causal condition for the rise of *Sankhara*, the second element also called as the mental volitions.

Now, the question is, are there any other causes that rent this state of ignorance? We can see that there are some latent causes for this ignorance also, which we called cankers or *āsavas*.^{xii} Their role is like that of latent magma lying dormant at the very core of our subconscious vessels. These cankers are of various nature that are formed due to deep clinging and craving to the things and person unknowingly in the past lives, that maybe collected unconsciously in our sub-conscious mind. These cankers keep surfacing on the mind of practitioner in his present lifetime. So, a mind that is equip with wisdom finds a great opportunity to get free from such past life cankers by dealing them in an appropriate manner whereas; a mind that lacks wisdom or in other words, fills with ignorance got further entrapped by those cankers.

So, the point here is we do not always know exactly, what the cause of our actions and what its effect would be or might be. Therefore, we react very little knowingly, but most of the time, we unknowingly react towards many things, situation or emotions in our normal daily lives which is why, most often times, we fail to read the undercurrent or underlying sort of reactions displayed by our Mind & Body (matter).

Now, if we look at the above figure, the cycle represents the core functions of our mind and matter, which can be applicable to understand the outwards situation or the phenomena of the World. In most of the Buddhist Sutta, this cycle is simply depicted in both clockwise and anticlockwise manner, to show the beginning of suffering (clockwise) and in anticlockwise, to show the way to culminate the further production of suffering.

Now, for a moment, if we delete the anticlockwise part and focus on the clockwise part, we could be seeing a normal flow of both cause and conditions, where all these elements are somehow contributing or acting as both cause and effect. However, if we take a very deep and closer look on the third element, i.e. the Vinnana or the Consciousness, the consciousness is neither the cause nor the effect, but a condition here. In fact, it is the chief exponent or the element of all conditions.

It is because of the fact that all the elements are basically resided in the consciousness or Vinnana. For instance, the first element Avijja (Ignorance), 2nd element Sankhara (mental volition) both reside in the Vinnana or consciousness so on. Even in the Nama-Rupa, Consciousness has a vital role to play because it the consciousness basically which regulates or activates every element here and if we talk about the twelve elements of Pratityasamutpada, the whole elements subside in the Vinnana.

Thus, the Abhidharma or the higher teachings of Buddhism lay more emphasis on the Vinnana or consciousness and its various aspects. It contains more scientific aspects that are happening within our mind & body of a human being and very less devotional or ritualistic aspects.

Even, if we look at the second element of Paṭiccasamuppāda, i.e. the Sankhara, the mental Formations. The Majjhimanikayas clearly defines it as a Force or a Factor (Volitional Action) which has a significant role in human lives as it acts as a Store House of the result of our actions as well as our reaction or responds to the outside situations. Here, if a person is Conscious which is the third element of the Paṭiccasamuppāda, can regulate the Sankhara to a great extent because Sankhara is basically another part or an aspect of Consciousness itself.

Thus, a condition is clearly visible here;

I. A person has consciousness, but that does not mean he/she is conscious or Self-Aware of his actions (physical, verbal or mental actions) at the moment or the given moment. Therefore, all the 12 elements of Pratityasamutpada are somehow blindly regulated by the person.

II. In the second case, if the person is fully conscious, of all his physical, verbal and mental actions, then he could stop right way the blind regulation or execution of his own Praṭītyasamutpāda, happening within his whole Nama Rupa (mind and body).

Here, majority of the elements lie in the Mind, but it is the Consciousness that holds all the major power to overturn this whole effect and to enlighten the Avijjā.

Thus, if a person is aware or conscious, he/she can right at that point stop the further activation of the remaining cycle of the whole Praṭītyasamutpāda. If he remains fully conscious, he could regulate all the elements of the Paṭiccasamuppāda such as; the Phassa (contact), Vedana (feeling), Tanha (Craving), Upadana (Clinging), and the Bhava (Becoming) & Jati (Rebirth) and even stop the cycle for a moment, he could maintain his or her state of awareness within.

Therefore, the main element of all the twelve elements of Pratīyasamutpāda is the Consciousness, although every element does play a crucial role of both cause and effect and are deeply interlinked with each other on a certain level of Mind, in a very subtle manner depending upon the nature or the taste of one's action that arises on certain time period or occasion.

Thus, in the Sutta, the Pratīyasamutpāda is simply stated as;

‘Ko hetu, ko Paccaya’

‘What is Cause, so is Effect’

However, if we dive into the higher teachings of Abhidharma, twenty-four majors Hetupaccaya (causal relations) were found mentioned, out of which the Hetu itself is one of them. The term ‘hetu’ here means root or root cause, however, in the words of Narada Mahathera, it is defined as ‘that by means of which an effect comes to be’ Or ‘that by means of which an effect is established’.^{xiii} Thus, hetu is like the primary cause and Paccaya is like the secondary or subsidiary causes and the relation between the two is called as Hetupaccaya, the Causal relations or the causal Conditions. For instance;

If the person A is Suffering because of Starvation or poverty. The poverty is the Hetu or Root Cause here and Paccaya is like his family background situations and various societal or environmental factors.

Thus, on the basis of various situations and circumstances, here in the Pali Abhidhamma, our human consciousness is also of various types. So now, on the basis of our action, our consciousness is classified into 89 types and on the basis of the higher stages of Attainment, it is classified into 121 types such as Sotapanna, Sakadagami and so on, along with their particular fruit.^{xiv}

Thus, when focus on the consciousness theory of the Buddha and all great masters of Nalanda, especially the nine-fold theory of Acharya Vasubandhu in his text like Vijnapatimatratasiddhi which was further delve on by Janjiro Takakusu, in his text ‘*The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*’, which the Human mind or consciousness into five different components as stated below;

1. The 1st to 5th levels of our Consciousness include the general Five Types of Consciousness based on the Five senses such as; the Visual, Auditory, Olfactory, Gustatory and Tactual Consciousness.

2. The 6th level is the Sense-Centre Consciousness (Manovijnana)

3. The 7th level is the Thought-Centre Consciousness (Manas)

4. The 8th Level includes the Ideation Store (Alayavijnana) &

5. The 9th level includes the Taintless Consciousness (Tathata)^{xv}

To put it more clearly, let us try to reframe and understand all these mind and mental elements with an of a Table given below,

<u>CONSCIOUSNESS</u>		
<u>LEVEL</u>	<u>TYPES</u>	<u>FUNCTIONS</u>
First Five Consciousness	Visual, Auditory, Odour, Taste and Touch Consciousness.	This Centre collects information or sense data
Sixth Consciousness	Mind Consciousness	This creates Form or Concept out of the information stored by the Sense Doors
Seventh Consciousness	Thought Consciousness	This centre thinks and creates wills and reason on a self-centred basis.
Eight Consciousness	Ideation Consciousness	This centre stores different kind of seeds; good, bad, neutral and also helps in maintenance of energy and gradually procession of Seeds and its particular results
Ninth Consciousness	Thusness Consciousness	This Centre of Consciousness activates only after the complete consummation of both good and bad and even neutral seeds.

Table 1. Human Mind (Consciousness) as depicted in Buddhism (Source: Janjiro Takakusu,1949)

By going through the Table no.1, if we review the first three elements of the cycle of Prañīyasamutpāda, we will see two particular cases;

Case No.1: Ignorance gives rise to Mental Formation or Volitions (If a person is not fully active or in the fuller state of Conscious). Now, here Conscious means one has to see or remain aware of all the levels of the Consciousness mentioned above in the Table. A very challenging and daunting task though, to be aware of all these different aspects of our Consciousness, but that is the only way out to prevent oneself from the formations of new Sankhara, which later tends to become the cause of new form of suffering.

Case No.2: If a person is fully conscious, then the First Five level of Consciousness will collect the wisdom or become the Wisdom instead of becoming new seed or Sankhara (karmic results) which means the tendency for a person's behaving out of ignorance has somehow overcome which stop the formation of new mental volitions. So, here we can very clearly see that with full maintenance of awareness in human mind or consciousness, the ignorant activities and its related resultant products can be converted or replaced into wisdom. Likewise, all the levels of consciousness then started functioning differently with proper state of mental awareness which yield different fruits of wisdom as shown in the below table.

<u>CONSCIOUSNESS</u>			
<u>LEVEL</u>	<u>TYPES</u>	<u>FUNCTIONS</u>	<u>RESULTS</u> (If Conscious)
First Five Consciousness	Visual, Auditory, Odour, Taste and Touch Consciousness.	This Centre collects information or sense data	General Centre of wisdom
Sixth Consciousness	Mind Consciousness	This creates Form or Concept out of the information stored by the Sense Doors	Wisdom of Good Observation
Seventh Consciousness	Thought Consciousness	This centre thinks and creates wills and reason on a self-centred basis.	Wisdom of Good Equanimity
Eight Consciousness	Ideation Consciousness	This centre stores different kind of seeds; good, bad, neutral and also helps in maintenance of energy and gradually procession of Seeds and its particular results	Wisdom of Magnificent mirror
Ninth Consciousness	Thusness Consciousness	This Centre of Consciousness activates only after the complete consummation of both good and bad and even neutral seeds.	Pure Wisdom or pure Consciousness

Figure 3. Human Mind (Consciousness) as depicted in Buddhism (Source: Janjiro Takakusu,1949)

Thus, according to the general formulation of the Buddha and his former and later disciples, all the elements of Pratītyasamutpāda play a role of both cause and effect simultaneously, but it appears as if

consciousness is the only single element which seems to hold the significant power to either turn or overturn the whole cycle of Pratīyasamutpāda. The main condition lies in the Consciousness; therefore, all the Buddhist masters lay great emphasis on being Aware or Mindfulness all the time, which we usually tried to unheard or overheard it. In addition to that if we scientifically examine and reflect the theory of Causation or the theory of Cause and Effect which is mainly termed as the Hetupratīya in the Buddhist context, Human's action (Karma) and the Consciousness (Vinnana) seem to predominates the whole twelve elements of Pratīyasamutpāda, but Karma as (mentioned by H.S.S. Nissanka in his text Buddhist Psychotherapy) is just one out of five natural Laws and the twenty four modes of conditionality. The five natural Laws are as; Utu Niyama (Natural Law of Climatic Conditioning), Bija Niyama (Natural Law of Biological conditioning), Kamma Niyama (Natural Law of volition or residue of one's action), Citta Niyama (Natural Law of Mind) and the Dhamma Niyama (Natural Law of psychological conditioning) and twenty four modes of conditionality such as root condition (hetu paccaya), object condition (arammana paccaya) predominance condition (adhipati paccaya) and so on which also contribute in the process of human sufferings and its formation behind the scenes. ^{xvi}

III. Conclusions

Therefore, in the context of Buddhism or Buddhist Abhidharma, the theory of Pratīyasamutpāda which somehow subsided under the four major Noble Truths of life, holds a supreme position, not because it opens our mind towards basics Truth or realities of life, but it also possesses excellent methods to uncover the deepest layers of Consciousness. Based on Human consciousness many scientific examination and theories have been laid down by modern scholars in the field of modern science, religion, humanities and social science which shed light on the visible aspects of human mind, but the theory of Pratīyasamutpāda as mentioned in the Buddhism shed light more clearly on the seamless and the subtlest aspects of Human Mind, Consciousness and Human Actions which are so closely bonded with subtle waves of causal conditions. By knowing and gathering real information about this different waves of natural or mind-action based drives of human, we can to some extent, reframe our mind and mental software in a very logical, precise and humane manner. Furthermore, we can make ourselves rise above gradually from the state of devotion to the state of proper examination and contemplation rather than being amused and optically blindly by modern technologies and quick fix fascinating tips and detours. The universe though one, but it has multifarious forms real, ideal, ideal realized and the actual one as mentioned by Janjiro Takakusu and the challenge for modern Human being is to realize the actual one which is pretty challenging in a modern world where its people are inevitably opposed and compete with one another. Thus, with the aid of the theory as depicted by the Buddha and his later disciples, one may help oneself to some extend to come out of mere worldly webs and layers of ignorance's, to find out oneself and sees the truth of one's temporal existence and the formation of causal conditions behind.

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