

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
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Week- 10
Lecture 46: Buddhist Philosophy

Namaskar to all. Today, we are going to discuss Buddhist philosophy. In this week, we are discussing Buddhist philosophy. And in last week, we have discussed a school from, orthodoxian school of thought, that is, Vedanta philosophy. This week, we have taken one school from, Heterodox school of thought, and nāstik, that is, Buddhist philosophy. Last class, I have discussed about how Buddha has argued for self and non-self. So, it only means that Buddhist argued that if you see there is a self like an eternal thing or anything which is eternal or anything which is you believe that it is similar or identical to your body that is self is in a false and wrong view. So, what Buddha said that you have to see it differently and then we also discussed that Madhyam-pratipada that is a middle path and then how Buddha has talked about, rejected the idea of Upanishadic itself. Today, I will be discussing the early Buddhist philosophy, and in early Buddhist philosophy we will be discussing the doctrine of no self. The question arises when Buddha rejected the idea of Upanishadic self or a soul which is eternal or something which is eternal as a soul and as a Brahman, then there is a question arises, then what is self is? I mean, when I am saying that, oh, I am Gyan Prakash, this is X, then the question arises that, who am I? Vedanta philosophy or especially Shankaracharya may answer this question saying that, when you are saying, I mean, I am saying Gyan Prakash, I am a Gyan Prakash, so I is in ultimately, it is an Atman. Ultimately in the sense that, Atman is a real, me and other things in the body and other prānas, other sheaths, these are unreal, not self. So, identity is, me is a self, me is an Atman. Ultimately, it is unreal. Unreal in the sense that there is no dualism. There is no Brahman and soul, two different things. It has become the same. Similarly, Ramanujacharya answered this question that you again self is an Atman. So, when I am saying I, I is what referring to I is, Atman in pure knowledge. So, avidya we are identifying that self with something else but I is this is Atman. Now, if you bring this idea and this question in Buddhist philosophy or more precisely early Buddhism, then these philosophers may answer this question by saying that the self which you are believing as a permanent self or eternal self, that is not there. So, nothing is permanent. Now, I have discussed in last class that, how and what is the difference between saying that self and when you are going to say that there is a no self. No-self means rejecting the complete idea of self and identifying the self with the body. So, there are a problem with this concept. If you hold any two, any extreme positions. So, holding these two extreme positions is not a good idea or not right thing. So, Buddha is mentioned about the middle path. Now, in middle path, Buddha argues that nothing is permanent. Now, nothing is permanent the moment he said theory of momentariness. It only means that he rejects the idea of

Upanishadic self. Now why? As I have discussed Upanishadic self is eternal. That is the definition. So, eternal means there is a no start and no end. So, that is, it is going to be one philosophy may say this is not Brahman, some say that this is a part, a mode of the Brahman and so on. So, there are different way to explain but ultimately, what they are arguing that there is something called self or Atman which is eternal and that is the self, that is I. So, idea, the problem of the personhood means when I am saying hi, this is Gyan Prakash, it only means I am, I is self and then with the other body or with the other sheath of this body. Early Buddhism has a different way to argue and defend. When they are rejecting this not self, I mean they are rejecting this idea of open-self itself, then you have to defend that, you have to argue that, who am I? Personhood, the problem of personhood, that is a very important and significant question. Now, so today I will be discussing that how early Buddhists stopped about self. So, when they are saying there is a no eternal self, then how they are going to define a personhood. Before starting this doctrine of no-self, let us have an idea in very brief about the school of Buddhist philosophy. So, you will have an idea about this school in a very basic level. So, first one is an early Buddhism, we say that the teaching of Buddha and his immediate disciples, that is called early Buddhism. And, now there is an Abhidharma. Abhidharma is the development of rigorous metaphysical and epistemological theory where they have talked about this metaphysical concept and epistemological concept. I see, my personal opinion, I see as all the school of thought is a development of a different concept. However, the Abhidhamma, there are many other schools, for example Theravāda, Vaibhāṣika or Sarvāstivāda. Vaibhāṣika because the text is Mahāvibhāsa and Sarvāstivāda because they are *Sarvam asti*, all exist. Now, the second school and very important school is the Sautantrika. That is another very significant philosophy in Abhidhamma school of thought. And in the other side is Mahayana philosophy. Mahayana philosophy is a philosophical criticism of aspects of Abhidhamma. So, Abhidhamma, what they have talked about, they also have, critically, they have established an alternative explanation of the Buddhist teaching. And in Mahayana, there is Madhyamika and Yogācāra. Yogācāra is in a Buddhist idealism. If you see this sarvāstivāda, that is in a realism. So, Buddhist realism, then you will find here the Buddhist idealism. So, this is what I had said in the last class that in Buddhism you will have a taste of realism as well and idealism as well. So, realism and idealism, they are defending their theory which we will be discussing in the class at a very basic level. But the main idea is I see them as a development of a thought. Now, let us understand what is the doctrine of no-self in early Buddhism. So, for early Buddhism, the self is aggregate of impermanent dharma. Now, so dharma is a concept and in early Buddhist philosophy, philosopher argued that dharma is, take it as an element and this world and this everything in this world and self, everything in this world is made of Dharma, and, Dharma is the smallest part. It is the building blocks. So, in this world, Dharma is real. Real is means the two way of explaining. First is the empirical what we have been discussing. And, second one is ultimate reality. So empirically, only Dhamma is real. And then ultimately for Buddhism, there is no

substance. So, the world is devoid of substances. So, what we have been discussing in this class, in this course, in more precisely in Shankaracharya, for example, they have talked about the different substance. So, one is saying there are Brahman, someone is saying the Brahman, soul, and matter and so on. If you take it in the Western philosophy which we have discussed, someone is arguing about the mind and body, someone is saying something else. So, in early Buddhism or Buddhism, they reject this idea. They say that ultimately nothing is real. So, and this basic philosophy developed an idea of the Nirvāna. So, you can ask, you may ask this question that, okay, fine, if there is nothing ultimately real, then how and what you are going to get upon Nirvāna. This is what in last class, as I have said that once you have exhausted all your inclinations, you have faced all the impressions of your past karmas. Once you are done with all these things, there is a no world. So, existence of world will not be there. So, you take it in this way, there is a problem. Because of this problem, this is you and there is a world. You worked for this problem, now everything is over. Neither world nor you. So, you are, or I am here because there is an impression of karmic force. So, karmic force plays a very important. Now, you may ask one question that if it is true, then what is the starting point. The Indian system, like, for example, the law of karma. As we have discussed that if you are performing set of actions, you also have to face the impression of the action. Now, the question, and again we are arguing that whatever you are getting or going to get because of your past karma. So, you are, what you have done, now next moment I am going to get, maybe what I have done in my life, or previous life. Or future, what I will be going to get, a present action. So basically the action is important. So you have done, all you are going to do, you have to face the impression of the action. Question is, is there any starting point? How we all, we started it? So, suppose there is a God in Vedanta philosophy who created this world first time. This is where you may ask. I mean, it is an obvious question that arises that, okay, what was, if there was any first life, first birth, first time and so on. In Indian philosophy, all of them in one saying that, except Charvaka, that there is no, this is no starting point. They have not talked about any beginning, any start. Now, this is the situation. This is the problem. So they are defining the problem. If you ask the Buddha, Buddha will, as I have given an example, that someone shot my friend while walking on the street. Then my urgent work is to take this person to the hospital, not to check, not to inquire about the type and nature of gun and then firearms. If I am doing that, Buddha will say this person is foolish. Because his urgent work is to take this person to hospital. So, we are in the situation where we are all in suffering. This life is full of suffering. So, urgent work and his work to go for the solution of this problem. The first noble truth, second, third, and finally the fourth noble truth, where they are arguing that you have to achieve that state, you have to work for your problem. Working problem is you have to work so that you will be able to remove everything. Now, they believe that since nothing there is no substance and everything in this world is momentary it is not permanent. Now, about the self and about the world, early Buddhism argued that everything in this world is made of Dharma. Now, the question is, what is Dharma? Dharma

is, you may take as an element, the smallest element and the building blocks of this world. So, the self is mind, body, complex and all everything, mind, and body, it is not permanent. Now, when Buddha was here, I mean, in his body, so there was a question about the existence and non-existence of the self. So, one person came and he approached Buddha, and asking the question, set of question, in such a way that he can answer in terms of yes and no. But Buddha maintained the silence on the metaphysical questions. Now, the definition or explanation of silence is different in school to school. Now here, silence means that he never said there is a soul, but he never said there is no soul. Now, what Buddha argued that nothing is permanent. Now, nothing is permanent means everything is momentary. So, even he said that Dharma or smallest element or building block, that element is a temporary. Is there a momentary. So, a moment is coming and the same moment is going. If you ask me that, is there any duration for a moment? I mean, how you are going to measure this one moment? So, at that time, they have a different way to measure this on a moment. But, my point is that, saying that, the moment they are coming, appearing, immediately they are dying. Before is dying, perishing, that is producing another moment of Dharma, and, that is why we see as a continuity. But there is no continuity. For example, candle. If you look at the flame, for us it appears as a single flame. Because our sense perception cannot see the reality. So, for us it appears as a single flame, but that is not a single flame, that is a series of flame. So, one moment of flame is appearing or immediately disappearing. Before this disappearance, it is producing another moment of flame, and it goes so fast that we are not able to perceive that. For example, fire band. If there is a fire band, and if it will distort rapidly, so from distance, in even night, it will appear as a ring of fire. But, because in reality, this is a fire band. Now, it is appearing like that because our sense perception cannot see in that reality. So, for us, so this flame is appearing as a single flame. But in reality, this is no single flame, a series of flame. For example, there is a round or let us say a hall or this is any field that is full of dry grass. You leave the fire in one corner and with the help of this dry leaves, you will see that the fire is traveling one corner to another corner. Does it mean that the same fire is traveling? No. This is a series of fire. So, one moment of fire is appearing with the help of this dry grass or leaf and immediately is going, and then producing before is disappearance, producing other moment of flame or fire. Therefore, for us, there is a continuity. We can see that, okay, one thing is traveling from another place. But in reality, this is not the same. This is a series of flame. So, this is how Buddha has argued that everything in this world is made of dharma, and dharma is momentary. It is just in the moment. It is appearing and then in the same moment, it is disappearing. Before its disappearance, it is producing another moment. The theory of dharma is an element in early Buddhism. They argued that in the world, everything is made of this dharma. Sarvāstivāda, as I said in the previous slide, they argued that everything exists. It only means that the dharmas are real. Now, what does it mean is real? Real means it exists outside of our mind. So, that is the reason that Sarvāstivāda is called as a realist. Realist means who believes that this world is real. So,

there is an object and this object is real, made of Dharma. Everything in this world is made of Dharma. So, we are able to see the object because it exists outside of your mind. So for us, this is me and there is an object. and I can see an object. I can see an object means that there is an object, I am looking at this object or I am touching this object and I am getting the information, knowledge. So, it is only possible when we are arguing that, one argues that there is an object which is real, and Sarvāstivāda, school of thought, they argue that Dhammas are real, and it exists where? Outside of mind. This is what the reality is when you are seeing this is the real.

Now, let us understand what is then a human personality. How they have talked about if they are rejecting the idea of self then what is human personality is? So early Buddhism it is said that it can be divided into five different elements. First, is Rūpa and second is Vedanā. So, Rūpa is a matter, a form. Vedanā is feeling sensation. Feeling means when we are coming in contact with an object. So, there is no feeling, there is no sensation. Third is Sañña is a perception, when you are perceiving an object. So, in early Buddhism, the process of perception, they have explained in very detail that we need seventeen moments to complete one perception. And there is any problem in the seventeenth moment or you are completing this perception before seventeen moments, you will not be getting a right information. For example, from the top of this building you saw someone that there is another friend or you say my friend is coming and after some time when this person is in a very close to this building you are saying oh, he is not my friend so these are only possible or that an object is looks blur, it is not clear. So, it is only possible when your perception this process is not completing before seventeen moments, then it will if this kind of information you will get. Sankhāra or volition activities, this is a very important Dhamma in this school, and basically, the Sankhāra is to give names and all to the concept, to the object, and, it also is responsible for the future Dhamma. And finally, this is a consciousness, the Viññaṇa Dhamma. Now, in early Buddhist philosophy, none of the Dhamma is permanent, no dhamma is eternal. So, all the dhamma is momentary. So, in early Buddhist philosophy, this five dharma is human personality. So, when I am saying this is me, it only means that it is just a bundle of the five elements, aggregates of this five skandha. So, first one is the form. and the last four is Nama. So, matter and mind, body and mind, rūpa and nama, form and name. This is what there are two and then in nama, there is a four. This division is only for explanation purpose. For this purpose, we can say that this is rūpa, this is nama, this is form, this is nama, and so on. But in Buddhism, this is an intermingle and interwoven, these five aggregates. So it is difficult to talk about that this is body and this is mind. However, early Buddhist argues that the human personality if you divide this human personality, personhood, in these five elements, there will be no remainder. So, this human personhood is a bundle of these five skandhas. This bundle idea is also we have discussed in when we are discussing about the David Hume, where he explained the self and concluded by saying that self is not more than bundle of perception. So, this bundle idea you may refer from this early Buddhist philosophy. Now, let us

understand how about just we have discussed about the skandha, the five skandha. It also, and while discussing later on, they have early Buddhist philosophy talks about the āyatana and dhātu. However, we are not going to discuss that because we are just trying to understand and know self in a very basic level. So, there is a text called Milindapañha, and, this is a very important text and interesting text as well. And this text is in a dialogue form, where there is a dialogue between the Milind and the Nāgasena. So, Milind is a person who is well known, I mean he has studied the Vedic system and everything. So, he is a very knowledgeable person, and Nāgasena is Buddhist monk. and both of them is interacting on the different topics. So one of the topic is self. What is self? So King Milind is asking a question and Nāgasena is answering the question. So, he asked that what is self and so on. Now, this is a very important text and there is dialogues. And in this dialogue, Nāgasena explains this self, what is self is all about, and then he said that self is not more than the five aggregates. So, when you believe that something is eternal, something is self and that is eternal, that is the wrong notion. And then he gave an example of the chariot. So what is a chariot? So, you may take it in the different example of like bicycle or any other car, any object for example. What that object is? What is bicycle? What is chariot? And Nāgasena argued that the chariot is not more than its parts. So, if the parts, if you arrange in particular way, certain way, there will be a chariot. There will be a bicycle. But in reality, only these parts are real. The whole is unreal. So, for example, this is a pen, or any object you may take, what other Buddhist will argue that this object is suppose is made of this many different parts the first part, the second part, third part, and even the inside there four five. So, the idea is this object if you are mentioning this as in a pencil or in a pen, this is made of different parts So if this pencil, for example, this is a pencil, the pencil is not more than just parts. So, if it is parts, if you arrange in the certain way, you will get this object. If there is no parts, if you are arranging this parts in certain way, you will get chariot, you will get bicycle, bicycle parts. What early Buddhist is arguing that these parts are real and this whole is in a mental concept. You are creating this that this is me, this is you and so on. So, when I am saying this is Gyan, so Gyan is my name, just in a concept, mental concept. But in reality, I am not more than the five skandhas, not more than the five Dhammas. All Dhammas are impermanent, it is not eternal. So, my personality and me, when I am saying I, it is just a bundle of five skandhas and all the skandhas are momentary. So, identity in early Buddhist philosophy is the five skandhas and the human personality is not more than the five skandhas. So, this is how the early Buddhist has argued. If you take the same example, in Shankaracharya, Shankaracharya will say that the parts which is appearing is unreal. Ultimately it is just an object. So whole is real and parts are unreal. So, if you take it a bicycle for Shankaracharya, the whole is real and parts are appearance which is unreal. Buddhism will say that whole is a mental concept. So, you have arranged the parts, then there is a concept called chariot and we are saying, oh look, this is chariot. But chariot is not more than its parts. So, parts are real, not the whole. So, in human, what we are just made of these five aggregates and aggregates are real, not the human personality.

So, human personality is not more than five skandhas. Nagasena argues that the chariot just is in a suitable arranged parts and is expressed as an identity. For example, if I show you like a very big piece of cloth. Even you cannot see the any corner. The starting point and the end point. So the moment you saw this one, you may like say, oh, this is cloth. But you cannot see even the complete object, but still, you are saying the truth. So, early Buddhist argues that these are the mental concepts. And when we are saying, oh, this is object X, this is Y, this is Z and so on. For example, I am saying, hi, I am this is Gyan Prakash. So, I is just in a bundle of skandha.

Now one very important thing I would like to mention here there is a concept called svabhāva, and svabhāva is an important because when we are discussing about the momentariness, so momentariness and if everything is changing. Changing here it does not mean that there is an X, and there is a Y it is going to change. So, there is no change like this. In first moment, there is an X and the second moment is completely changing and there is a new object called Y. And, if you are going to talk about this kind of change, then we cannot talk about the law of karma, because whatever I am facing, I have not done that action. So, why should I face the impression of action? So, I am changed now. So, that X has performed action. Now I am Y, now I am Z. So, the law of karma will not be able to defend in terms of this kind of change. And that is the reason that it is important to understand the momentariness in early Buddhist philosophy. And here, svabhāva and disposition comes in the picture. So, there is a svabhāva of Dhamma is important. So, for example, this is X. Person is Ram or like Devdutta. So, Devdutta is in the first moment is called X and then Y. So, before the first moment appeared and the moment is like disappearing or dying, before he is like disappearing, he is producing another moment of Y or another moment of Devdutta. Now, all the svabhāva is what is going to where in the Y. When there is a cause and an effect. So, this cause is producing effect, Y. So, all the dispositions is moving where, in Y. So therefore, this is changing but again this is in the same Devdutta. Even in the next moment, and therefore, he is responsible for the past action, and he is supposed to face the impression of the past karma. So, the change is not a complete and absolute change. Change does not mean in that sense the change. Change is changing, when I am saying everything is momentarily changing. It only means that this is not eternal, and then appearance is just for a moment. So, one moment is appearing and the same moment is disappearing. Before disappearance is producing another moment. Now, when producing another moment, this is svabhāva is carrying forward with going to the next moment. Now, next moment is not like an eternal. So, svabhāva is not eternal. You have taken it as a cause and effect. So one thing is producing another thing. But this all things is going where, in the effect. Early Buddhist philosophy does not talk about the ultimate nature because ultimate nature means that the moment this Dharma is appearing, at the same time, the moment it is appearing, it will come with this svabhāva, and then the moment it is disappearing, it will go with this svabhāva. So, there is no ultimate nature here in early Buddhism. Early Buddhist argues that the potency of matter is not different from

the matter itself. When one uses the word *svabhāva*, capacity, then it means that thing or matter has an efficiency to produce its effect, *arthkriyākāritva*. That is a very important point. So, for example, there is a fire. And there is a first moment of fire and then it produces another moment of fire and so on. So, this *svabhāva*, this potency is what is itself is a matter. So, even after ten moments or seven moments, the fire has the same *svabhāva*. It can burn the piece of paper. Therefore, this is a fire and we can talk about the continuity of the person. So, this person can face the impression of the past karma. So, this is not the absolute change. This is how early Buddhism has discussed about the momentariness and about the no-self. And when he argues about the self, early Buddhism argues that self is not more than the five element. So, in any sense, in conclusion, Buddhism, early Buddhism is not argued for or taken in any form the Upanishadic self. So, in early Buddhist idea of mind is not like Buddhist Upanishads idea of self. So, however, this is what early Buddhism has talked about the self. And the next class, I will be discussing next school of thought from the Buddhism, and we are discussing this concept in very basic level, and early Buddhism has a very well in detail, as I have said, that *skandha* and then *āyatana*s and *Dhātu* and so on. So, even to discuss about the epistemological idea. Yeah, so thank you this talk was based on this book *Indian philosophy and introduction to Indian philosophy Buddhism as a philosophy*. Thank you, thank you so much for your kind attention. Thank you