**Anicca, Dukkha Anatta as taught in Anattalakkhana Sutta**

Impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) and egolessness (anatta) are basic facts of existence. Collectively these three are named in Buddhism as 'Three Signata' (ti-lakkhana) or 'Three Characteristics of Existence'. At the outset it is plausible to see how these three doctrines have been explained in relation to one another in the Anattalakkhanasutta, the second discourse delivered by the Buddha after His Enlightenment. The discourse in question was addressed to the first five disciples. The discourse clearly shows the arguments adduced by the Buddha to establish these three fundamental characteristics of existence.

**Arguments Adduced in the Anattalakkhana-sutta**

Addressing the five monks the Buddha said:

''Body, monks, is not self. Now, were this body self, monks, this body would not tend to sickness, and one might get the chance of saying in regard to the body, 'Let body become thus for me'. But inasmuch, monks, as body is not self, wherefores body tends to sickness, and one does not get the chance of saying in regard to the body, 'Let body become thus for me, let body not become thus for me'. Feeling is not self... .......... and one doesn't get the chance of saying in regard to feeling, 'Let feeling become thus for me, let feeling not become thus for me'. Perception is not self . . . . . . . . . . . . . . ... mental formations are not self. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

consciousness is not self . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .. Inasmuch, monks, as consciousness is not self, therefore consciousness tends to sickness, and one does not get the chance to say in regard to consciousness, 'Let consciousness become thus for me, let consciousness not become thus for me' What do you think about this monks? ls body armament or impermanently ''Impermanent lord's ''But is that which is impermanent sorrowful (dukkha) or happy (sllkhal?'' ''Sorrowful lord's ''But is it fit to consider that which is impermanent, sorrowful, of a nature to change, as 'This is mine, this am I, this is my self '?'' ''it is not, Lord''.

''Is feeling. .. .. . . . . perception.. . ....... mental formations.. .. . ...consciousness permanent or impermanent? ''Impermanent, Lord ''But is that which is impermanent sorrowful or harpy's ''Sorrowful Lord. ''But is it fit to consider that which is impermanent, sorrowful, of a nature to change, as 'This is mine, this am 1, this is my self '?'' ''it is not so, Lord'' ''Wherefore, monks, whatever is body, past, future, present, internal or external, gross or subtle, low or excellent, whether it is far or near. . . . . . . . .. whatever is feeling. . . . . . . . . whatever is perception. . . . . . .. . whatever is mental formation.. .. . .. -all should, by means of right wisdom, be seen, as it really is, thus'. This is not mine, this nm 1 not, this is not my self ' ''Seeing in this way, monk, the instructed disciple of the Ariyans disregards body, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness; disregarding, he is dispassionate; through dispassion he is freed; in freedom knowledge comes to be:

“I am freed” and he knows: Destroyed is birth, there is no more being such such'' Anattalakkhana-sutta, S. iii, 66.

**Empirical Observation of Facts**

The importance of the foregoing discourse for the study of Buddhist doctrine of the basic characteristics of existence is, highly valued for several reasons. The characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-substantiality have been established in the discourse not as a result of any kind of metaphysical inquiry or as an outcome of any mystical intuition. It is a judgement arrived at by observation, investigation and analysis of empirical data. The method followed in achieving the basic facts of existence is inductive as opposed to deductive method of reasoning. On the other hand the three characteristic are inter-related

and inter-woven with one another. So much so one establishes the reality of the other two.

The fact of Impermanence proves the facts of Unsatisfactoriness and Non-substantiality and the fact of Unsatisfactoriness on the other hand establishes the validity of Impermanence and the theory of Non-substantiality. The theory of Non-substantiality or Egolessness verifies the reality of Impermanence and Unsatisfactoriness. Hence. the three basic concepts of Buddhist doctrine, Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness and Non-substantiality have been proved on the mutual support of each individual characteristic. As stated in a different context that which is transient is unsatisfactory (gad aniccam tam dukkham) and that which is unsatisfactory is no-self (yam dukkham |danatta). The theory as a whole, reflects the world-view of Buddhism. The discourse being a dialogue between the Buddha and the group of five monks converted at the outset of the Buddha's mission elucidates the fundamental facts of empiric individuality as plainly as possible, avoiding any kind metaphysical reasoning.

**Etymological and Doctrinal meaning's the term 'anicca'**

The term 'anicca' is an adjective usually used in the sense of a noun 'aniccam' which is the neuter noun used in the language. Both the words are prefixed with negative 'a'. Therefore the word means 'impermanent' or impermanence, used as the antonym of nicca' (na niccanti aniccam). But in the Abhidhamma commentaries the derivation of the word has been traced to root 'i' to go. With the prefix 'an' giving the meanings `cannot be gone to' unapproachable as a permanent everlasting state'. The term has the applied meanings of 'unstability', ' impermanence, and 'inconstancy'. The Visuddhimagga defines it as ' that which is not permanent (nicca) is impermanent (aniccal' (na niccam aniccam- Vis. 525). The commentary on the Dhammmsangini defines it as 'that which having come in to being ceases to be' (hutva abhavatthena-DhsA. iv, 85) The transient character of all things mental or material is an emphatic assertion found throughout the Buddhist doctrine. The correct understanding of it, is a primary condition for right knowledge.

1

**Impermanence: the Nature of all Component Things**

When we confine ourselves to the first of the three characteristics, we see that Impermanence or transient nature o' f all phenomena finds expression in the canon in numerous contexts. For instance we come across in the Mahaparinibbana-sutta:

''Impermanent are all component things,

They arise and cease, that is their nature,

They come into being and pass away,

Release from them is bliss supreme.''

The discernment of the transient nature of all compounded things as they really are (yathabhuta), is taught as the path to purity. It is said in the Dhammapada: ''Transient are all component things; when this with wisdom, one discerns, then one is disgusted with unsatisfactoriness; this is the path to purity.

(Dhp.277)

It is to be noted, the Pali word used for component things is 'sankhara', which has different meanings. It is used in the present context to mean what is compounded, conditioned and causally arisen. According to Buddhist analysis every phenomenon of our experience is causally conditioned. Nibbana alone is beyond causal nexus. For further annotations on the word 'sankhara' refer to Buddhist Dictionary by Ven. Nyanatiloka.

In the canon very striking similes have been drawn to bring out the ephemeral nature of the five aggregates of empiric individuality: corporeality (rupa), sensation (vedana), perception (sanna), mental formations (sankhara) and consciousness (vinnana). The Buddha compares corporeality to a lump of foam, feeling to a bubble, perception to a mirage, mental formation to a plantain tank (which is pithless) and consciousness to an illusion and says: ''What essence, monks, could there be in a lump of foam, in a bubble, in a mirage, in a plantain trunk, in an illusion's Continuing the Buddha explains: ''Whatever corporeality there be; whether past, present, or future; internal or external; gross or subtle; low or lofty; far or near; that corporeality, the monk sees, meditates upon, examines with systematic attention, he the seeing, meditating upon, and examining with systematic attention, would find it empty, he would find it unsubstantial and without essence. What essence, monks, could there be in corporeality?''. In the same vein, He refers to the remaining four aggregates and Asks: ''What essence, monks, could there be in feeling, in perception, in mental formations, and in . consciousness?'' (S. iii 140)

Therefore in Buddhism the sum total of the teaching of Impermanence is that all component things that have conditioned existence are a process and not a group of abiding entities, but the change occurs in such a rapid succession, one does not perceive their arising (udaya) and breaking up (vaya). Therefore one tends to regard mind and body as static entities. It has been shown that people accustomed to think of their own mind and body and the external world as wholes or discrete entities. So long as one fails to see things as processes in motion, one will not understand transient nature of all phenomena. When one sees things as they really are, one revises that life is a mere flux conditioned by internal and external causes. As everything is fleeting no where one finds happiness but unsatisfactoriness. It is to be noted that always the three characteristics are mutually inclusive and the proof of one proves the other two. Knowledge of Insight (vipassana-nana) is attained by realising the Three Signata.

**ls Consciousness Soul?**

Consciousness has been taken to mean soul or ego by the Upanishadic philosophers. This view was upheld by some of the disciples during the time of the Buddha. As recorded in the Mahatanhasankhaya-sutta of the Majjhima-nikaya, a monk called Sati misunderstood the teaching of the Buddha and held the view that consciousness is a permanent entity that passes from one existence to another. His concept of consciousness (vinnana) is similar to nirasraya vijnana' discussed in the Upanishads. In this instance the Buddha stated categorically that ( there is no arising of consciousness without relative conditions (annatra paccaya natthi vinnanassa sambhavo- M. I, 256). In another context too, the consideration of consciousness as a permanent entity has been criticised by the Buddha. For He states: ''It were better O monks; if the ignorant and untaught manyfold regards the body, which decomposed of the four elements as self, rather than the mind. And why do I say so? Because it is evident, O monks, that this body which is composed of four elements lasts one year, lasts two years, lasts three years, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty years, lasts for forty years, lasts fifty years, hundred years and even longer. But that which is called the mind, intellect, consciousness keeps up an incessant round by day and by night of perishing as one thing, and springing up as another'' (-S.ii, p.96).

The Buddha's last word to the monks was also a reminder of the truth of

impermanence: ''Indeed, 0 monks, I declare to you, decay is inherent in all component things.

Strive for perfection through heedfulness'' (D. ii, 144)

**Recommended Reading**

\* Wijesekara O. H. De. A.- The Three Signata, Anicca, Dukkha, Anatta,

Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.

(This booklet gives a brief but an authoritative account of the three characteristics)

\* The Basic Facts of Existence, collected Essays, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy.

(Essay written by Ven. Bhikkhu Nanajiviko is an approach to the topic of impermanence from the standpoint of modem Western philosophy)

\* Ven. Narada - The Buddha and His Teaching, pp.543-551.