

On *sassatavāda*

—In Comparison with *ucchedavāda*—

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Sassatavāda means a heretical doctrine which states the permanent entity, namely, the eternity of the soul. The present paper is intended to investigate the standpoint of *sassatavāda*, one of heretical teachings, in the Buddhist theory. Indeed Buddhism rejects both *sassatavāda* and *ucchedavāda*, which are at the absolute standpoint. It is, however, doubtful whether *sassatavāda* is simply regarded as one of both extreme arguments. It seems to be important to consider *sassatavāda* especially in comparison with the Buddhist attitude toward *ucchedavāda*, which is located in its opposite position.

In the Pāli texts the word *sassatavāda* often appears in pairs with *ucchedavāda*.¹⁾ We can find it in the context where non-adherence to absolute standpoints is expressed. The word *sassatavāda* is also frequently mentioned in the *Mahāniddesa* and Pāli-abhidharma scriptures (*Dhammasaṅgaṇi* etc.), that is, interpretative literatures, but it is never found in scriptures belonging to the earliest layer of period.

We can also find some passages representing *sassatavāda* through their contexts without the word *sassatavāda*. The Buddha gives no definite answers to the questions whether the world is eternal or not eternal and so on. Two of the statements which the Buddha sets aside on the base of what we call *avyākata* are generally considered as *sassatavāda*: the statement that the world is eternal, and that the soul is distinct from the body.

We shall now discuss the quotation which concretely shows us what *sassatavāda* is. In the *Brahmajāla-sutta* (DN No. 1) various thoughts in the age of the Buddha are classified into sixty-two schools. And of them

there are four theories of *sassatavāda*.²⁾ The core of these theories is given below.

The soul and the world are eternal, produce nothing, are steadfast like a mountain peak, and fixed like a pillar. And these living creatures transmigrate, go through, pass from one state of existence, and spring up into another, but they are for ever and ever.

In the first theory of *sassatavāda* one maintains the eternity of the soul and the world on the ground of one's experience by the recollection of one's life in the past. The second theory and the third have the same meaning with the first one except the difference of the period of one's life in the past. In the fourth theory the eternity of the soul and the world is maintained by reasoning and consideration.

A parallel to the description of *sassatavāda* in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* is found in the *Sampasādanīya-sutta* (DN No. 28).³⁾ There appear the first one of four kinds of *sassatavāda*, the second, and the third which insist on the eternity of the soul and the world by the recollection of one's life in the past. This is the very same with the description of *sassatavāda* in the *Brahmajāla-sutta* except for the insertion of a sentence that says, "I know that the world evolved or dissolved in the past. I know that the world will evolve or dissolve in the future."

What has to be noticed is the fact that Sāriputta says, "Venerable Sir, this is incomparable to any *sassatavāda*," after the mention of three kinds of *sassatavāda*. It seems as if he affirmed the non-Buddhist theory of *sassatavāda*. The question here is the existence of the enlightened one who is superior or equal to the Buddha in the past, at present, and in the future. Sāriputta shows many teachings of the Buddha, including *sassatavāda*. According to Buddhaghosa, although *sassatavāda* is a false theory, the Buddha has understood even such a stupid one. Besides he comments that the Buddhist attitude toward *sassatavāda* is expressed in detail in the *Brahmajāla-sutta*.⁴⁾ That is to say, the standpoint of the Buddha who has fully understood sixty-two theories including *sassatavāda* and transcended them is represented there. From the above observation

Buddhism seems not to have a very hostile feeling against *sassatavāda*. Moreover because of the recollection of the past, it is needless to say that *sassatavāda* is based on the thought of *saṃsāra* (transmigration).

On the other hand, *ucchedavāda*, appearing often in pairs with *sassatavāda* in the Pāli texts, maintains that on the dissolution of the body the soul is annihilated, destroyed, and does not exist after death. This theory completely denies *saṃsāra*, and it recognizes neither presence nor benefit of the following ten matters: alms, sacrifice, offering, fruit of good or evil deeds, this world, the world beyond, mother, father, spontaneously arising beings, and recluses and Brahmans who have attained the highest point, who have disposed rightly, and who make others know what they have perceived, having understood are realized this world and the world beyond by themselves.⁵⁾ How is the Buddhist attitude toward this theory? While *avyākata* is mentioned on an unworldly level of Buddhism aiming for emancipation (*mokṣa*), the thought that the fruit of deeds causes transmigration is accepted on a worldly level. The theory of *ucchedavāda*, denying both *karman* (deed) and *saṃsāra*, may lead to unethical acts. Fearing the destroy of ethics or morals in the worldly life, the Buddhists oppose to *ucchedavāda* by affirming all ten matters as mentioned above.⁶⁾ Such a Buddhist way of thinking is exactly contrary to one of *ucchedavāda*.⁷⁾ Besides this Buddhist attitude to *ucchedavāda* forms a contrast to that to *sassatavāda* as mentioned before. It may be evident that *sassatavāda* affirms *saṃsāra*, and that *ucchedavāda* denies it, but we should not overlook the fact that there is the distinct difference between the Buddhist attitude to the former and that to the latter as regards the interpretation of *saṃsāra*.

It is likely that Buddhism copes with heretical doctrines according to their ways of thinking of *karman* and *saṃsāra*, as observed from the Buddhist attitude to *sassatavāda* and to *ucchedavāda*. *Karman* and *saṃsāra* are the main themes especially in each theory of the six heretics. It is already pointed out the possibility that the order of theories of the six heretics is determined with some intention in several texts belonging

to the Saṃghabhedavastu of the Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya.⁸⁾ We can not deny that the thought of *karman* and *saṃsāra* is deeply concerned with the order of six theories. From the standpoint of Buddhism, which popularly recognizes both *karman* and *saṃsāra*, it seems reasonable to suppose that *ucchedavāda* (the theory of Ajita Kesakambalin in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* in the Pāli texts) recognizing neither *karman* nor *saṃsāra* is located in the lowest position, and that *sassatavāda* (the theory of Pakudha Kaccāyana in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* in the Pāli texts) which denies *karman*, but recognizes *saṃsāra* ranks higher than *ucchedavāda*. The difference of the Buddhist attitude between to *sassatavāda* and to *ucchedavāda* as mentioned above gives a sufficient account of it.

If we compare the Buddhist theory with *sassatavāda* and *ucchedavāda*, we may easily consider that the Buddhists do not adhere to extreme theories such as *sassatavāda* and *ucchedavāda*, but maintain the *Middle way*. It is no problem as a whole to suppose that the Buddhists do not cling to any fixed stands but transcend them as observed in *avyākata*. From the above discussion, however, we can see that Buddhism copes with each of heretical doctrines individually according to their ways of thinking of *karman* and *saṃsāra*, concerning morals in the worldly life.

1) SN Vol. 4, pp. 400-401 etc.

2) DN Vol. 1, pp. 13-16.

3) DN Vol. 3, pp. 108-110.

4) DA Vol. 3, p. 894.

5) MN Vol. 1, p. 401 etc.

6) This is called *atthikavāda* in the *Apaṇṇaka-sutta* (MN No. 60). (MN Vol. 1, p. 404).

7) Michitoshi Manda, "On *ucchedavāda*," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 1994, p. 423 ff.

8) Shingen Takagi, "The Relation of the Six Heretics to Buddhism in the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*," *Buddhism and Its Relation to Other Religions: Essays in Honour of Dr. Shozen Kumoi on His Seventieth Birthday*, Kyoto, 1985, p. 165.

〈Key Words〉 *sassatavāda*, *ucchedavāda*, *karman*, *saṃsāra*

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