BRAHMANISM AND BUDDHISM

—Nalinaksha Dutt

In this paper my object is to make a critical study of the valuable paper of Mr. B. Ghosh on "Upanishadic terms in Buddhism" published in the Bulletin of Theology, Vol VI, No. 1. The subject is very wide and so the present paper propone to deal with three such terms. These are:

1. Brahman and Brahma
2. Atman and Brahman
3. Pudgalavada

At the outset, I should state that both the Upanishads and the Buddhist literature were products of the same country, using the same vocabulary, Pali being a modified form of Sanskrit, and Pali literature also was replaced later by Sanskrit by the Sarvastivadins and the Mahayanaists. Re. Brahman and Brahma.

The word "Brahman" means "pure, sacred" as in e.g. the word Brahmanararya or Brahmanaraya. The word "Brahma" is frequently used in the Buddhist texts, e.g., Brahmaavyasa, Brahmacariyasastra, Brahma Siddhanta, sraddha, karnandha, mudra and upaksha) and so forth. Brahmacaraka has also been used as a synonym of Arhantamahakala, as the wheel of law leads to purity. From the word Brahman is derived Brahmaa, which word is found in the Taattiriya Sastras (vi.6.1.4.), Kathaka Yajnita (vii.4.2.) and in many other texts, meaning "descendant of a Roli (servitor), requiring purity and learning like the Vedic Brah.

A Brahman must have preeminence in knowledge and not mere descent. Sutakrama Jabilak was the son of a slave-girl and so his parevage was not known. He frankly told his master to Bholi Gautama Harshamata (Cha. Upa., iv. 4) and so he was accepted as a Brahmin pupil by the sage.

In the 6th and 5th centuries B.C. when Prince Siddhartha Gautama was born, Brahmanism had deteriorated into Yajnavalkya-Dharma attaching importance to birth only and not to purity or learning. The society was divided into four high-born castes as Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra, which included even Ganyas and other backward classes as also the untouchables. Worship of gods lost its sanctity and ended in animal sacrifices in the name of gods and goddesses.
The term “Brahmana” of the Upanishads was accepted by the Buddhists. In the undermentioned stanzas of the Dhammapada, the use of the word Brahman is illustrated:

न यदाहि न गोयलेन न अवघोहित शाहणो ||
ब्रह्मण भवेन च परमेन च हो सुखी शी च ग्रामणो ||

(Not by matted hair not by lineage not by caste, does one become a Brahman. He is a Brahman in whom there are truth and righteousness. He is blessed).

कृप्या गोरी वि ग्रामणो सम्पतिभिः सवमति वि पुर्वति ||

(Because he has put aside (bhikṣuḷaṃ) evil, he is called a Brahman; because he lives in serenity is called a Samana).

स्वत्व विरम्य भासोति कार्तिक्यम् अनात्मवं ||
सम् असुपति असुषुभं अः ब्रम्ही समानं ||

(Him I call a Brahman who is meditative, free from passions, settled, whose work is accomplished, who is free from taints and who has attained the highest goal).

कुमारास्मि यो वेदि सम्पतिपातेन व पघति ||
अवो वातिक्यं एशी विद्वामास्यन्त तृषिः भूपी ||
वर्षनस्यस्तस्य सर्वं ब्रह्मी ग्रामणं ||

(Him I call a Brahmin, who knows his former existences, who perceives heaven and hell, has reached the end of existences, is a sage whose knowledge is perfect and has accomplished all that is to be accomplished).

Brahmana both in the Upanishadic thought and Buddhism is accepted as a term for a saint, one who has attained final sanctification. The Brahman is one who casts off belief in happy worldly existences, the basis of desire (karma). Not by ritual and sacrifices, not by isolation and trance but by self concentration and exercise of Maitri and Karuna does one transcend desire and become a Brahman, who knows the highest truth (parasattha says). Buddha says “not off the stream of existence with energy (virya).

Re. Atman and Brahman.

The background of Buddhism is the same as that of Brahmanism, viz., Brahman the Impersonal but not, of course, the Volanic Para-
toatman, the existence of which is denied in Buddhism. A few extracts are being quoted from the Upanishads in support of this contention of ours.

Bhādāraṇya Upaniṣad (iv.4.2):—

सर त्यथा कब्जे त्यहे तत्त्वम ।
भव मयापूर्वी भवति जल बुद्धि समाप्तिः ॥

(When all desires, which entered into one’s heart, are eschewed, there ens the mortal become immortal and he attains Brahman.)

Mundaka Upaniṣad (iii.2.8.):—

यथा गात्र विद्विद्रात्मा सहस्रं जनमम ।
विभागतं तत्त्वम ।

(Shiva, who is beyond the conceit of being and nonbeing, is the most accomplished deity. He has no beginning and no end. He is therefore the ultimate reality.)

Re. Atman (Soul).

The fundamental difference between Buddhist and the Upaniṣad; thought lies in the conception of soul of an individual (jīvatman). The watchwords of Buddha consisted of dukkha, anicca and anatta. The first word dukkha means that worldly existence is misery because it is impermanent, inconstant (anicca, kshanika) and lastly anatta (i.e., unreal) absence of nitya atman (permanent soul) corresponding to Vedantic jīvatman. A person is a composite of namarupa (mind and matter) sub-divided into five constituents (skandhas). These five constituents are ceaselessly changing, hence kshanika. A baby loses its babyhood when it grows up and becomes a young man. The young man loses his youth, his blood, flesh and bone when he becomes old. The change is effected every moment as our nails grow and need trimming every week or fortnight and so it is said that there is no continuous personal identity (na ca so na ca atma). (Vide Milindapatha, p. 46). This conception is expressed in these stanzas:—

खबे संसारं जनमं व वर्धा वक्रमं पसेति ।

जया हिंद्रियां तुस्के यथा गृहो बिन्दुशिया ॥

खबे संसारं जनमं व वर्धा वक्रमं पसेति ।

भव ।

खबे प्रभा जनमं व वर्धा वक्रमं पसेति ।

भव ।
All things are impermanent (anitya), lacking in self (anatta) or reality and therefore sorrowful (dukkha.)

Pudgalavada

Pudgalavada (Pudgalavastra) is the fundamental doctrine of Vaipulyasra or Sammitiyas, who were also known as the Avatarkas, because they claimed as their patron saint Mahabodhisravas, the direct disciple of Bhagavan Buddha, and a native of Avanti. Besides this fact, the Sammitiyas had many adherents in Avanti. It is striking that at Huen Tung's time, the largest number of monks belonged to the Sammitiya school. In the inscription of Sarivastivädins of the 4th or 3rd century B.C. it is seen that the name of Sarivastivädins was replaced by their name. From the inscription it is evident that this school had its origin prior to this date. Huen Tung states that 15 treatises of this school were translated into Chinese. One of these texts, the Sammitiya-nikaya-s матери, has been translated into English by Professor Vedatta Manas of the Viswaras. This text is the main source of information, apart from the treatises on texts written by Vasumitra, Bhavya and Yuttadipa. The latter two exist in Tibetan translations.

The Pudgalavadin rely on the following statements of Buddha:—

(i) अवधि दुर्गमं जस्विन्त्वान्व विववृधीसि?
there is a person who exerts for his own good.

(ii) नेत्रामर्ने अवधि जस्विन्त्वान्व विववृधीसि?
there appears a person, who exerts for the good and happiness of many out of compassion for the world of beings.

Kapalabhati, 1.

Basing on such words of Buddha, the S. (henceforth abbreviated) for Sammitiyas state that the puggahs of the above-mentioned passages is something positive. It is not something apart from the five constitutions (skandhas) of a being; it is not possible to establish a relation between the puggah and the skandhas, i.e. like the container and the contained. On the other hand, though it possesses all the characteristics of the skandhas, it is not like them caused and conditioned (ahetu appacayena).

In support of their contention the S. rely on the Bharabaza-sutta of the Sammitiya-nikaya (III, p. 33), which is as follows:—

नमो भक्ति, अगरी?
वधुधार्थाधि, वधुधार्थाधि?
 सममें जन?

In. 10
(What is, O Bhikkhu, the carrier (thero) of burden? The person (puggala), which has a name, a lineage is called the carrier of burden.)

In the Tatvecasangiha (p. 130) Samudala quotes its Sanskrit version:

भावहं कामं परमं
सो वसायतत्त्वाय समाह एवं जीतेन एवं भक्ते
एवं नृपद्वरति दशवें एवं दीर्घतित्वानिमो वगवतो भवायतः।

(Note: The Sanskrit version is slightly better. It is not translated as it is easily intelligible.

Another very important argument put forward by the S. is that a person (puggala) in the first stage of sanctification (sotapanna) is called also sattalghataparipada (i.e. will have seven main existences at the most) to attain Nibbana. This implies that Puggala continues. The S. make their position clear by stating they accept atmavada of Buddha but they contend that puggala is not soul but something apart from the skhandhas but having all the characteristics of the skhandhas. It maintains the link between two existences of a being, but there is an end of it in Nibbana.

Samyutta Nikaya III, p. 16:—

भारं हेतु वस्मवक्ष्यं, भारावरो न पुरवते।
भाराविधुतु बुद्धे, पराविकल्पेन त्योग।
निविन्यन्ति येन भारं, बुद्धे भारं अहंसत्.
समुद्भूतो हर्षं अहं, निविन्यस्यपरिनिविन्यस्ति।