

## Noble Truths versus Dependent Origination

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The controversy regarding the central teaching of the Buddha seems to have not yet been solved with a consensus of opinion. The modern scholars of Buddhist Studies are also divided on this matter. Karunaratne, being one among them, points out Childers, Reischauer, Copleston, Mrs. Rhys Davids, Law, Ayyaswamy, Tucci, Hamilton, Stcherbatsky and Murti were of the opinion that the central teaching of the Buddha is the Dependent Origination (Paticcasamuppāda).<sup>1</sup> I would like to add Kalupahana, who has made an illuminating study of the Buddhist Theory of Causality<sup>2</sup>, to this category. Among those who are supposed to have maintained the position that the Noble Truths (cattāri ariyasaccāni) are the central teaching of the Buddha, without paying any attention to Dependent Origination, are Grimm<sup>3</sup> and Rahula.<sup>4</sup> Story and Gunaratna too belong to this category.<sup>5</sup> Nyanatiloka's observation in this regard is worth citing here: "The Four Noble Truths are the briefest synthesis of the entire teachings of Buddhism, since all those manifold doctrines of the three-fold Canon are, without any exception, included therein. They are: the Truth of Suffering, of the Origin of Suffering, of the Extinction of Suffering, and of the Eightfold Path leading to the Extinction of Suffering".<sup>6</sup> My aim in this paper is to show that this controversy has been going on from the early days of Buddhism up to now, supremacy has been moving from one teaching to the other from time to time.

### The position in the Vinaya and the Suttas

When we gather the information available in the Vinaya and the discourses we find, on the one hand, that the Noble Truths and Dependant Origination enjoy equal status. The Mahāvagga of the Vinaya Pitaka, in its supplementary remarks to the first sermon of the Buddha, informs us that the hermit Siddhārtha became enlightened through the understanding of the Four Noble Truths.<sup>7</sup> The Majjhimanikāya holds the view that He became enlightened through the acquisition of the knowledge of the twelve-fold Dependent Origination.<sup>8</sup> Both the Vinaya and the discourses state that the truth of Causality as well as of the Noble Truths is difficult to comprehend.<sup>9</sup> While the Vinaya asserts that faring on in life is due to the ignorance of Noble Truths<sup>10</sup>, the discourses assign it to the ignorance of the causal law.<sup>11</sup>

There are references, on the other hand, in the discourses to indicate that Dependent Origination seems to have held a superior position over the Noble Truths.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaunaratne, W.S., *The Theory of Causality in Buddhism*, Deepani Printers, Sri Lanka, 1988, foot note 1, p. 63

<sup>2</sup> Kalupahana, D.J., *Causality, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, Honolulu, 1975

<sup>3</sup> Grimm, George, *The Doctrine of Buddhism*, Delhi, 1973

<sup>4</sup> Rahula, Walpola, *What the Buddha Taught*, Bedford, 1967

<sup>5</sup> Story, Francis, *The Four Noble Truths*, Kandy, Sri Lanka, Wheel Publications, Nos. 34/35 & Gunaratna, V.F., *The Significance of the Four Noble Truths*, Wheel Publications, Kandy, Sri Lanka, No. 133

<sup>6</sup> Nyanatiloka, *Buddhist Dictionary*, BPS, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1980

<sup>7</sup> Vinaya (=V) I, 11

<sup>8</sup> Majjhimanikāya (=MN) I, 167-8

<sup>9</sup> V.I, 4-5; MN.I, 167

<sup>10</sup> V.I, 11

<sup>11</sup> Dīghanikāya (=DN) II, 55; Sanyuttanikāya (=SN) II, 92

Dependent Origination, not the Noble Truths, is equated with the Dhamma.<sup>12</sup> In many discourses, the Four Noble Truths are identified as *sāmuikkansikā dhammadesanā*, the culminating point of the Buddha's graduated sermon.<sup>13</sup> The Buddha prefaces it with *dānakathā* (exposition of giving), *silakathā* (exposition of virtue), *saggakathā* (exposition of heavenly worlds), *kāmānam ādinavan* (disadvantage of sensual pleasures), and *nekkhamme ānisansam* (advantage of refraining from sensual pleasures). The *sāmuikkansika dhammadesanā* indicates the brief sermon with all these ingredients ending with an exposition of the Four Noble Truths. This is not in any way an identification of the Noble Truths with the Dhamma. In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* and in the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, Dependent Origination is placed at a position hierarchically higher.<sup>14</sup> The *Mahānidāna Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* eulogizes Dependent Origination as the greatest foundation through which enormous results can be achieved.<sup>15</sup> In the *Samyuttanikāya* it is compared with the ancient path which the Buddha has rediscovered.<sup>16</sup> The *Mahāpadāna Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* and the *Sacca Samyutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya* repeatedly reiterate that the previous Buddhas too became enlightened through Dependent Origination.<sup>17</sup>

Both the Noble Truths and Dependent Origination are treated giving a more or less similar space in the *nikāya* literature. Very specifically the theme of the *Nidānavagga Samyutta* is the Dependent Origination while that in the *Sacca Samyutta* is the Four Noble Truths. According to my acquaintance of the discourses, the references to the Noble Truths are more than those to the Dependent Origination in the *Nikāya* literature. However, the importance attached to Dependent Origination in the *Mahāpadāna* and *Mahānidāna Suttas* of the *Dīghanikāya* and the *Sammādiṭṭhi* and *Ariyapariyesana Suttas* of the *Majjhimanikāya* has a more weight than the treatment of the Noble Truths has in the *Nikāyas*.

### **The position in Abhidhamma**

In the texts of the *Abhidhammapitaka*, the Noble Truths and Dependent Origination do not play a major role. The Noble Truths are confined only to the *Saccavibhanga* of the *Vibhanga*<sup>18</sup>, the second book of the *Abhidhammapitaka*, *Saccapaññatti* of the *Puggalapaññatti*<sup>19</sup>, the fourth book of the *Abhidhammapitaka* and *Saccakathā* of the *Kathāvatthu*<sup>20</sup>, the fifth book of the *Abhidhammapitaka*. Dependent Origination is dealt with only in the *Paccayavibhanga* of the *Vibhanga*<sup>21</sup> and in the *Paticcasamuppādakathā* of the *Kathāvatthu*.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the *Abhidhammapitaka* does not extensively deal with the two subjects of Noble Truths and Dependent Origination as the *Suttas* do.

In the *Saccavibhanga*, the Noble Truths are dealt with under three headings: *Sutta-explanation*, *Abhidhamma-explanation* and *Catechetical-explanation*. The *Sutta-explanation* is nothing but a summary of the teachings found in the discourses. As *Nyanatiloka* points out, the *Abhidhamma-explanation* has two formal differences from the *Sutta-explanation*:

<sup>12</sup> MN. I, 190-1; II, 32

<sup>13</sup> V.I, 16, 18; II, 156; DN. I, 110; MN. I, 380; *Anguttaranikāya* II, 186; IV, 197

<sup>14</sup> DN. I, 97; MN. I, 165-167

<sup>15</sup> DN. II, 45ff

<sup>16</sup> SN. II, 6

<sup>17</sup> DN. II, 26ff

<sup>18</sup> *Vibhanga* (=Vbh), 99-112

<sup>19</sup> *Pugganapaññatti*, 2

<sup>20</sup> *Kathāvatthu* (=Katha), 322

<sup>21</sup> Vbh., 158-192

<sup>22</sup> *Katha.*, 319

1. The Truths are called here throughout “the Four Truths” not “Noble Truths”.
2. Their explanation starts with the second truth.<sup>23</sup>

The Catechetical-explanation, among other things, states that Noble Truths can be divided into two as mundane and supra-mundane, truths of suffering and cause of suffering forming the mundane category and the remaining two truths the supra-mundane category. The Saccavibhanga deviates from the approach adopted in the discourses adding an ethical explanation to the truths. The Saccapaññatti of the Puggalapaññatti is confined to the mere mention of the Four Noble Truths. The Saccakathā of the Kathāvatthu has a short exposition on rejection the view that the Pubbaseliyas had to the effect that the Four Noble Truths are not conditioned.

The Vibhanga has a more detailed explanation on Dependent Origination than on the Noble Truths. It is interesting to note that the Vibhanga has understood Dependent Origination as *paccayākāra*, the mode of dependency. It is discussed in the Vibhanga under two headings: Sutta-explanation and Abhidhamma-explanation. There is no catechetical-explanation of Dependent Origination in the Vibhanga. However, the exposition of Dependent Origination in the Vibhanga has various information not found in the discourses. Its relation to the Buddhist theory of Kamma and the Ābhidhammic analysis of consciousness as given in the Dhammasangani, the first book of Abhidhammapitaka, are the new features of the Paccayākāravibhanga which seems to represent the precursor of the Paṭṭhāna, the last book of the Abhidhammapitaka. The Paṭṭiccasamuppādakathā of the Kathāvatthu is again a short exposition where the point of view of the Pubbaseliyas and Mahisāsakas to the effect that Dependent Origination was unconditioned is rejected by the Theravādins.

The new turn that Dependent Origination took in the Vibhanga culminated in the Paṭṭhāna. Even though the Paṭṭhāna does not have a direct discussion on the twelve-fold Dependent Origination, what permeated the entire text is the theory that was first formulated in the discourses in the name of Dependent Origination. Nyanatiloka points out: “This gigantic and most important work of the Abhidhammapitaka deals with the conditionality and dependent nature of all the many fold corporeal and mental phenomena of existence, which in their combinations are known by the conventional names of “I”, “person”, “world”, etc., but which in the ultimate sense are only just this passing phenomena, nothing more. Hence, this work provides a most complete and detailed elucidation of the Paṭṭiccasamuppāda, or Dependent Origination, though here the phenomena, are not arranged according to the twelve links of the Paṭṭiccasamuppāda”.<sup>24</sup>

The position assigned to the Paṭṭhāna and thereby to Dependent Origination among the Theravāda Canonical texts and the Buddhist teachings is well emphasized in the following account of the Atthasālinī, the commentary on the Dhammasangani: “Not even on a single day during the interval of twenty-one days were rays emitted from the Buddha’s body. During the fourth week He sat in a jewel house in the north-west direction. The jewel house here does not mean a house made of the seven jewels but the place where He contemplated the Seven Books. And while He contemplated the contents of Dhammasangani, His body did not emit rays; and similarly with the contemplation of the next five books. But when, coming to the great book, Paṭṭhāna, He began to contemplate the twenty-four universal causal relations of condition, of presentation, and so on, His omniscience certainly found its opportunity therein. For as the great fish Timiratipingala finds room only in great ocean so, the Buddha’s omniscience truly finds room only in the Paṭṭhāna. Rays of six colors issued from the Buddha’s body, as He was

<sup>23</sup> Nyanatiloka, Guide through the Abhidhammapitaka, 3rd Edition, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1971, p. 30

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.114

contemplating the subtle and abstruse law by His omniscience which had found such opportunity”.<sup>25</sup>

It is therefore quite obvious that Dependent Origination overtook the Noble Truths in the Abhidhammapāṭaka. This is, willingly or unwillingly, directly or indirectly, what has been accepted in the Theravāda tradition. The exalted position of the Abhidhamma in the Theravāda tradition seems to have raised Dependent Origination over the Noble Truths.

### **The position in the Paṭisambhidāmagga and the Visuddhimagga**

The Paṭisambhidāmagga, one of the fifteen texts of Khuddakanikāya, the authorship of which is assigned to Ven. Sāriputta<sup>26</sup>, has an exposition in its second chapter on the Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are analyzed here on the basis of ‘*thata*’ (objectivity), *avitatha* (necessity), *anaññatha* (invariability) and *lakkaṇa* (characteristic). Again, as in the Vibhanga, the ethical considerations of Four Noble Truths are also taken into consideration. Finally, the term ‘*sacca*’ (truth) is defined to have three meanings as ‘*esanā*’ (search), *pariggaha* (seizing on) and *paṭivedha* (understanding). To elaborate the meaning of ‘*esanā*’, a brief explanation of the twelve-fold Dependent Origination is given. Accordingly, the Paṭisambhidāmagga links the Noble Truth with Dependent Origination.

The Paṭisambhidāmagga discusses the Dependent Origination in its first chapter where seventy-three knowledges of the Buddha are identified. The title assigned to the knowledge of the Dependent Origination in the Paṭisambhidāmagga is Dhammatṭhitiñāṇa. The Paṭisambhidāmagga is of vital importance for three reasons in the study of the Dependent Origination. Firstly, it explains how one factor gives rise to another of the twelve links. In other words, the relations that exist between any two factors are identified as nine-fold. They are *uppāda* (birth), *pavatta* (existence), *nimitta* (sign), *āyūhana* (pursuit), *saññoga* (combination), *palibodha* (impediment), *samudaya* (arising), *hetu* (cause) and *paccaya* (condition). These relations are not pointed out in the discourses. Secondly, the Paṭisambhidāmagga states that, though one factor gives rise to another, both should be understood as paṭiccasamuppanna, things that arise dependently. The understanding of this relationship between any two factors is called *dhammatṭhitiñāṇa*. Thirdly, the Paṭisambhidāmagga comes forward, for the first time, with the tritemporal interpretation of the Dependent Origination. Accordingly, the Dependent Origination has four summaries (*sankhepa*), three times (*tayo addhā*), twenty modes (*vīsati ākārā*) and three junctions (*tisandhi*). This is what the Visuddhimagga has taken over for further analysis.

It was the Ven. Buddhaghosa who elevated Dependent Origination to its apex level. The most extensive treatment which excels with depth and profundity in the classical Pāli literature on Dependent Origination is the Paññābhūminidessa of his Visuddhimagga. The title that Buddhaghosa has selected suggests that Dependent Origination is the ground of intuitive wisdom. He has combined the expositions in the Vibhanga, Paṭṭhāna and Paṭisambhidāmagga together developing the chapter on Dependent Origination of the Visuddhimagga to a masterpiece interspersing the vast information preserved in the tradition and his analytical knowledge of the Pāli Canon and ancillary literature. Before he embarks on his exposition, Buddhaghosa confesses as follows “Being desirous now of expounding the teaching of conditionality I am like one submerged in the ocean, unable to find a foothold. But there are two consideration that instill hope and confidence in me, namely the fact that the Buddha’s teaching is adorned

<sup>25</sup> Atthasālinī, 13-14

<sup>26</sup> Paṭisambhidāmagga Aṭṭhakathā I, 1, 9; III, 703

with a variety of modes of exposition and the fact that the tradition of the ancient teachers is available in unbroken continuity for the purpose of reference and consultation. Because of these two considerations I have courageously taken the difficult task of elucidating the teaching on Paṭiccasamuppāda”.<sup>27</sup>

The Paññābhūminiddesa is the seventeenth chapter of the Visuddhimagga. The sixteenth chapter, the Indriyasaccaniddesa deals with the topics of faculties (indriya) and Noble Truths (sacca). This shows that Buddhaghosa begins his exploration of the Dependent Origination with a full understanding of the role that the Noble Truths play in Buddhist Philosophy. In explaining and analyzing the Noble Truths, it seems, Buddhaghosa did not face any problem or difficulty. Therefore, his confession regarding the inability in the case of Dependent Origination shows how deep and difficult was the causal theory of Buddhism in relation to the Noble Truths.

As mentioned before, the Paṭṭhāna marks the highest position of the development of the Buddhist theory of causality in the Pāli Canon. The analysis of causal co-relations in the Paṭṭhāna is theoretically based on Dependent Origination quite often discussed in the discourses. It was stated above that the relationship between any two factors of the twelve-fold formula was never paid attention to in the discourses. The first attempt in this regard was done in the Paṭisambhidāmagga. Seeing that it was not satisfactory, Buddhaghosa investigated into the relationships that exist between any two factors of the twelve-fold formula by applying the Paṭṭhāna methodology. Buddhaghosa there revealed whether the relationship between any two factors is cause and effect, antecedent and subsequent, logical, temporal or psychological. This is the greatest contribution of Buddhaghosa to the Buddhist Philosophy. Karunaratne observes: “The Paṭṭhāna of the Abhidhamma deals with conditions and relations in remorseless detail and runs to hundreds of pages recording and registering all manner of subtle and minute bearing of one Dhamma over another. The ethical interest that marks the discussion of Paṭiccasamuppāda is altogether absent in this voluminous work. Although, there is a historical and causal connection between this theory of the *paccayas* and the formula of the paṭiccasamuppāda yet the two emerged in two different backgrounds. While the formula dominated the Nikāyas, the theory of the *paccayas* came to dominate the Abhidhamma; and the two were considered separately until the time of Buddhaghosa. Thus we see that it was Buddhaghosa who for the first time in the history of Theravāda Buddhism brought the two forms of the causal doctrine in its exposition in the Visuddhimagga.”<sup>28</sup>

It is not out of place, I think, to write a brief comment on Karunaratne’s evaluation of Buddhaghosa’s contribution to the doctrine of Dependent Origination. According to Karunaratne, it was Buddhaghosa who introduced the conception of paṭiccasamuppāda as the wheel of becoming (*bavacakkra*), the division of the paṭiccasamuppāda into three periods as past, present and future and the amalgamation of the theory of *paccayas* with the theory of paṭiccasamuppāda.<sup>29</sup> Karunaratne is partly mistaken here, since the credit to the first two concepts, the wheel of becoming and tritemporal interpretation should go to the Paṭisambhidāmagga. As mentioned before, the twelve links of Dependent Origination are divided into three phases for the first time in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, on the basis of the cause and effect operative in the past, present and future. Accordingly, the past causes are ‘*avijjā, sankhāra, tanhā, upādāna* and *bhava*’. Their present results are ‘*viññāṇa, nāmarūpa, āyatana, phassa* and *vedanā*’. The first five again operate as the present causes, the future results of which are the second

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<sup>27</sup> Visuddhimagga, 522-523

<sup>28</sup> Karunaratne, p. 42

<sup>29</sup> Karunaratne, p. 82

five. In dividing twelve links as such, the Paṭisambhidāmagga uses the terms *purimabhava* (past existence), *idhūpapattibhava* (present existence) and *āyatim upapattibhava* (future existence). This shows that the concept of wheel of existence was known, at least at its germinal form, to the Paṭisambhidāmagga. Therefore, Karunaratne is correct only when he states that Buddhaghosa is the first person who amalgamated the theory of *paccayas* with the theory of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

### **The position in the Nettippakaraṇa**

Historically, the Nettippakaraṇa is anterior to the Visuddhimagga. Since the exposition of Dependent Origination in the Visuddhimagga seems to have been a continuation of that in the Paṭisambhidāmagga, I have placed these two texts together. Otherwise, our attention should be drawn to the Nettippakaraṇa before the Visuddhimagga.

It is well known that Netti is the first serious attempt in the Theravāda tradition to interpret the Dhamma by applying an organized methodology. It has introduced sixteen modes (*hārā*) in analyzing the phrasing and five guidelines (*ṇayā*) in analyzing the meanings of the Pāli Canon. Our attention is paid here to the modes in which the Noble Truths and Dependent Origination are dealt with. The first of the sixteen modes of the Netti is *desanā*. *Desanā*, the collective term which embraces all the teachings of the Buddha, is taken here to indicate the Four Noble Truths. The Netti asks: “What does this teaching of the Dhamma teach?” The Netti itself answers: “The Four Truths: suffering, origin, cessation and the path. Disappointment and fruit are suffering, gratification is origin, escape is cessation, means and injunction are the path.” These are the Four Truths according to the teaching mode.<sup>30</sup> The Four Noble Truths seem to be the essence of the Buddha’s teaching according to the *desanāhāra* in the Netti. However, the Netti enumerates the Four Noble Truths as only one of the sixteen modes necessary to understand the entire Buddhist Philosophy. It is quite obvious that the Netti too considers Dependent Origination plays a greater role in the teaching of the Buddha, since at least six modes refer to it as the central concept of Buddhism. They are: *yuttihāra* (mode of conveying), *padaṭṭhānahāra* (mode of footing), *lakkaṇahāra* (mode of characteristics), *āvattahāra* (mode of conversion), *parikkhārahāra* (mode of requisites) and *samāropanahāra* (mode of coordination). Among them, the most important is the mode of conveying.

The mode of conveying discusses how a statement of Dhamma is justified as authoritative. The Netti draws our attention here to the teaching of Four Great Authorities (*cattāro mahāpadesā*) emphasized by the Buddha at least at two places in the Pāli Canon.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, the authority and the authenticity of a statement attributed to the Buddha Himself, the community of monks, some members of the Sangha in a particular area or to an educated monk should be taken as the word of the Buddha only when it can be placed beside the Sutta and compares with the Vinaya. It is out of place here to go into the details and controversies that the Theravāda tradition has maintained to ascertain the meanings of the words Sutta and Vinaya in the context of Four Great Authority. What is important here to our discussion is that the Netti has introduced a new dimension to the criteria as *dhammatā*, the essential nature of the phenomena. The Netti defines the Sutta in this context as Four Noble Truths, Vinaya as the discipline of lust, hatred and delusion and *dhammatā* as Dependent Origination.<sup>32</sup> The importance of

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<sup>30</sup> Netti (=N.), 8

<sup>31</sup> DN. II, 123ff; AN. II, 167f

<sup>32</sup> N., 21, 22

Dependent Origination was thus felt to change the criteria that the Buddha Himself has suggested to check the authenticity of the proper statement of the Dhamma.

In this regard Bond observes: “The Netti’s treatment of this passage is itself an interesting piece of interpretation, for it has subtly shifted the intent of the Four Mahāpadesa. As we have seen, in its original contexts, the Four Mahāpadesas seem to have been a formula for evaluating the authenticity of sayings attributed to the Buddha. In the Netti, however, there is no mention of declaring a passage to be the word of the Buddha when it is shown to be in accord with Sutta and Vinaya, the whole point of the formula originally. The Netti does not employ the formula to establish the authenticity or authority of the teachings, but has rephrased the basic rule of the Mahāpadesa Sutta and adopted it as the criterion for acceptable interpretations. By defining Sutta, Vinaya and dhammatā in this way the Netti establishes an outline of the Dhamma to serve as the norm for correct interpretation.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Conclusion**

A careful scrutiny of the available data in the Pāli literature reveals that the Noble Truths represent the Buddha’s understanding of reality of man and his environment while Dependent Origination represents the way through which He understood the reality. In other words, the Noble Truths have an epistemological significance while the Dependent Origination has a theoretical and methodological significance. This dual significance of the Dependent Origination is implied in the discourses too. The first sermon of the Buddha as accepted by the Vinaya tradition is coupled with records that the hermit Siddhartha became enlightened through the Middle Path that he followed rejecting the two extremes of sense indulgence and self-mortification.<sup>34</sup> Since, these two extremes are social applications of the theoretical foundations of nihilism and eternalism respectively, it is logical to believe that the Middle Path too has a theoretical foundation. It is nothing but Dependent Origination because its intrinsic characteristic is avoiding extremes. The hermit Siddhartha discovered the Middle Path through the dialectic thinking inherent in Dependent Origination. This is amply proved by the Buddha’s revelation in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta. He directly and unhesitatingly divulges that He became enlightened with the understanding of the twelve-fold formula of Dependent Origination.<sup>35</sup>

As mentioned before, the Mahāpadāna Sutta and Saccasamyutta repeatedly say that the previous Buddhas too became enlightened with the penetrative knowledge of the factors of Dependent Origination. In this regard there is an important discourse in the Samyuttanikāya.<sup>36</sup> As one of the suttas reveal, the problem that the hermit Siddhartha faced was the non-availability of a path to cross over this world overwhelmed by birth, decay, death, arising and ceasing. He was pondering over the way out. Accordingly, He examined the cause that would give rise to decay and death. In this investigation He found that as long as the birth exists, decay and death too exist. He realized the decay and death come to being due to birth. In this way the hermit Siddhartha proceeded along the dependent-theory of origination with the understanding that finally it leads to enlightenment. As this particular discourse further reveals: the way to the understanding of Four Noble Truths is Dependent Origination. The Buddha has further said that He made use of the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path for the realization of arising and ceasing of each cause and effect of Dependent Origination.

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<sup>33</sup> Bond, George D., *The Word of the Buddha*, Gunasena, Sri Lanka, 1982, p. 81

<sup>34</sup> V. I, 10

<sup>35</sup> MN. I, 165-167

<sup>36</sup> SN. II, 104-105

Buddhaghosa's elevation of Dependent Origination seems to have generally seeped into the entire commentarial literature. The *Jātakanidāna*, the earliest complete biography of the Buddha in Pāli tradition, deviating from the consensus of opinion of the discourses, informs us that the hermit Siddhartha became enlightened with the attainment of the retro-cognitive knowledge in the first watch, clairvoyance in the second watch, the knowledge of Dependent Origination in the third watch and all-knowing knowledge in the morning watch<sup>37</sup> of the night of enlightenment. There are two points of vital importance here. First is that all important knowledge of the destruction of defiling impulses, which is unique in the process of enlightenment, according to the Canonical discourses, is replaced with the knowledge of Dependent Origination and omniscience, not known to the discourses. The second is that the commentator seems to have found a link between the knowledge of Dependent Origination and omniscience. The causal order was also known as *dhammadhātu*, the element of dhamma<sup>38</sup>, which is thoroughly comprehended by the Buddha. The person who has the *dhammadhātu* has the ability and competency to gather information inaccessible to others.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, it would have been considered as an essential requirement of the all-knowing knowledge.

The conclusion that can be arrived at in the light of the facts mentioned above is that the Theravāda tradition, though reluctantly and silently, has given in to the supremacy of Dependent Origination over all other teachings of early Buddhism. This can be one of the side effects of the development of Abhidhamma in Theravāda tradition.

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<sup>37</sup> *Jātaka* I, 75-75

<sup>38</sup> MN. I, 396

<sup>39</sup> DN. II, 9-10