

Buddhist self (*ātman, attan*) compared with other Indian
Religio-Philosophical Systems
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It has been a dominant tradition in Indian religio-philosophical systems to seek after and ponder on an eternal Self or selves (*ātman*), from the Old Upaniṣads down to modern theoretical and even poetical works. On the other hand, Buddhism ignores and denies not only an eternal Self but also each one's experiencing self and teaches us never to have even a notion of self (*attan*) as well as a thought of mine.

According to Early Buddhist Canon, our physical and mental elements are analyzed into two categories, i.e. (1) the six organs of sense (*āyatana*), i.e. eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind (*manas*) together with the six objects, i.e. colour, sound, odour, taste, tangible things, and idea (*dhamma*); and (2) five aggregates (*khandhā*), i.e. colour, feeling, concept, physical and mental latent forces, and cognition. It is taught to look upon any of these elements to be impermanent (*anicca*), painful (*dukkha*), and not the self (*anattan*). In Pāli Canon it runs thus:

What is impermanent is painful, what is painful is not the self; anything that is not the self is to be looked upon actually with due intellect in this way that 'this is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.' (n'etaṃ mama, n' eso 'ham asmi, na me so attā. ti evaṃ etaṃ yathā-bhūtaṃ samma-ppaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ. S.IV. pp.1¹²⁻¹⁶).

We can easily understand that I am not any of these elements and that none of these elements is my self, because any of these elements is only part of my organs of sense, perceived objects or physical and mental elements. But it is not easy to understand that any of these elements is not mine, because it is rather contradictory to say that my eye is not mine, my ear is not mine, etc. In order to answer this difficult problem, conclusively speaking, there must be two ways: (a) the above passage is Buddha's teaching in spite of being contradictory to our daily experience, and (b) as our existence as well as our organs of sense, perceived objects, and physical and mental elements are impermanent and even momentary, and then every moment our existence together with our organs of sense, and physical and mental elements is changing and then different, so, for instance, we cannot say that my eye that has seen the colour of my body is mine now, or the colour that has been seen is mine now, etc.