

# Ashwaghosh's *Sundarananda*: Transition from the Physical to the Liberation- Existing Not to Exist

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**Abstract:** *Sundarananda*, the Sanskrit epic on the Buddhist theme of Moksha and Nirvana, has become a trendsetter in the epic writing in Sanskrit and Nepali. Hindu born poet and philosopher, Ashwaghosh has composed this text after his deep-rooted impression on Buddhism. The epic has the narrative on how Buddha's half brother, Nanda has undergone the severe practice for Moksha. He has adopted his family life, he has the close affiliation to the worldly things and he appears to be closely inclined to the material world. Buddha, not as a person, but as a philosophy or a practice, has provided him a pathway to the mode of liberation from the worldly life. At the beginning, Nanda is a common man, but by the end of the epic, he has got transition from the physical to the mode of unworldly realization. The whole epic describes his different steps of transition, dilemma between worldly and unworldly, confusion between love to life and love to beyond, and ultimately gives his successive transformation into the point of physically liberated life on earth. This study examines how he has made a resourceful transition from the physical love to the love beyond. Also, it raises some typical questions on the Buddhist negation of the material world, suffering and the debate on rebirth with the close observation on the relationship between body and mind, and 'being' and 'non-being'. *Sundarananda*, not as a pure Buddhist text in this study, but as a literary creation, has adopted the lessons of Buddhism and at the same time, it has opened the discussion of existing for not to exist. The epic has provided a strong platform to interpret the text as a Buddhist quest for the non-existence through the existence.

**Keywords:** Worldly, Suffering, Liberation, Dharma, Rebirth, Supreme Being

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## 1. Introduction

Born in India as a Brahmin, Ashwaghosh was the greatest poet and philosopher writing and discoursing in Sanskrit even before Kalidash. As a born Hindu, he was having the power to discourse on the mythology of Hinduisam and later he became the follower of Buddhism and began to preach under Mahayana doctrines. He has composed epics in Sanskrit literature and he is one of the trendsetters of writing epics in Sanskrit and later on it has become the trend of writing epics in Nepali literature. He has got popularity writing *Buddha Charita*, and also he has composed *Sundarananda* at the same spirit.

*Buddha Charita*, being the story of Buddha, has got immense popularity, but *Sundarananda*, having the story on how Buddha's half brother came to adopt the principles of his brother, has not got the equal state not because it is weak in epic qualities, but because it is not easily available. The ever

heard and discussed matter in Buddhism is his negation of the worldly pleasures and his search of peace through the bodily liberation. Still the role of the physicality for the transformation to the point of *Tathagata* is always shadowed. Would Siddhartha be Buddha if he had no existence as physical body? This article does not intend to question on Buddhism, but it aims to observe on how the point of liberation- the freedom from suffering and rebirth has become possible not only in Buddha, but also in Nanda- the half brother of Siddhartha through the body.

## 2. *Sundarananda*: Transformation from Worldly to Trans-worldly

Divided into eighteen cantons, *Sundarananda* is a Sanskrit epic composed by an Indian poet and philosopher, Ashwaghosh. The poet has chosen Nanda, the half brother of

Buddha as the central character. Being handsome, he is known as Sundara+ Nanda. In another way, having his wife named Sundari, he is Sundari's Ananda, so he is Sundarananda. Getting along very well with his wife Sundari, the book introduces him as a happy man in the family and with his wife, their pleasing and delighted life having playfulness in love.

Nanda has not even imagined that the day would come to separate him from his beautiful and happy moments of his life with his wife, but as it has happened that Buddha came to his home with a to beg for food. He has realized it his duty to offer something to Buddha and he left his wife, "[1] *kartumī gamiṣyāmi guraupraṇāmami māmahyanujñātumihārhasīti*" (SN. 4. 32) "[2] I would like to go and pay my respects to the Guru. Please permit me, this once" (Cross, 2015, p. 279). He has promised he would be back by the time the cosmetics on her face dries. Nanda has just the idea to fill the begging bowl of Buddha, and he has no imagination on how Buddha would react in a strange manner. He has no slightest idea or plans to follow Buddha's path. But Buddha has used his spiritual power to bring Nanda in his own path that every time Sundarananda would a step forward to place the food in the Buddha's bowl, the Buddha would be back up, and he would become invisible so that Sundarananda couldn't reach the bowl.

To his surprise, the Buddha has told him to follow him but not to return back home when he has met him. Nanda has two options: to leave his beautiful wife and her love or to discard his brother's request. Nanda makes attempt to discard his brother's request, "[1] *nandonappravrajīṣyāmyahamityuvāca*" (SN 5. 35). But Buddha has understood the power of physical love in him as Nanda. Both Buddha and Nanda have undergone two aspects of purification upto this moment: "(1) *ātmāśrayohetubalādhikasyabāhyaśrayaḥ pratyaya-gauravasya*" (SN 5. 16) "[2] one with stronger motivation from within, there is self-reliance; in one who assigns weight to conditions, there is outer-dependence" (Cross, 2015, p. 285). The reality is that Siddhartha has left his home palace because of self-motivation, he has got purification and become the Buddha, but his brother, Nanda has felt himself purified in the worldly life, and his way of liberation or purification is conditional and dependent to others. Siddhartha has adopted himself, but Nanda has been forcefully brought in the path.

As a means to convince Nanda, Buddha has taken him to a place where there were hordes of monkeys and has asked him who is more beautiful- one-eyed female monkey or his wife, Sundari- "[1] *kā nandarūpeṇaceṣṭayā casampāśyataś cārutarā matā te /eṣā mṛgī vaika-vipanna-dṛṣṭiḥ savā janoyatragatā taveṣṭiḥ*" (SN 10.16) "[2] Which, Nanda, in beauty and in manner, is the lovelier in your eyes: / This one-eyed monkey, or the person who is the focus of your wishing?" (Cross, 2015, p. 399). Nanda has found it humiliation towards his wife and his love to her, and has felt even depressed even more. But again, Buddha has taken him to the heaven in front of the most beautiful damsel among the beautiful one. Then he has changed his mind. He has made a

decision to follow all the dharma to possess the beauties of the heaven. It is the first turning point in his attitude. Buddha has become to divert Nanda's mind from his wife and Sundari. Once he has forgotten his wife and devoted to achieve the heaven's beauty, he has concentrated on his pure Dharma as instructed by Buddha. But still the passion has guided him. The first transition in his life has taken place seeing the women even more beautiful than the one he has long been supposing to be the most beautiful lady of the world- his wife, Sundari. The definition of love and beauty and the pleasure from beauty has been changed in this point. At the same time, Buddha has felt it a success to make a transition in Nanda's perception.

Nanda's transition has taken place in different steps. He has concentrated himself on how to achieve the pleasures of the heaven with all those beauties. It is not the purpose of Buddha either in Nanda. His plan is to bring him to the state of liberation from the pleasures and pain either the earthly or heavenly. Buddha uses another step of giving him the lessons on why heaven is not the ultimate aim. Through the mouth of Ananda, Buddha says that desire to heaven is not the state of complete freedom. Heaven is Karmic- it is achieved with the help of the Karma we perform on earth. As soon as the impact of karma is finished, he/she has to get back to earth. He has given several examples on how humans have achieved heaven with the help of their good karma, but again they have to come back to the life form on earth or even to Patala. He gets suggestion to abandon the fancy of heaven- "[1] *tadd-hetorbrahmacaryami carajahi hi calami svargami pratirucim*" (SN 11.62) "[2] Devoutly practise abstinence, and abandon your fancy for a precarious heaven" (Cross, 2015, p. 360). But he is still in confusion- "[1] *visasmārapriyāni bhāryāmapsaro-darśanādyathā*" (SN 12. 7), "[2] he forgot about his beloved wife on seeing the *apsaras*" (Cross, 2015, p. 362), but again how can he forget all those *apsaras*. Tathagata (Buddha) has understood this state in him. All this is that Nanda is still under the control of his senses.

The next step he has come under is the practice to forget the sense pleasure. Buddha suggests him that the object itself is not the problem, but it is our sense perception. Human perception is just an illusion of the reality, but not the reality itself. He has given lessons on how to control the desire of the body and senses, for example, food is necessary to live, but food must not be the passion and the devotion. Control in the desire is only possible through the complete mindfulness- "[3] the body can obstruct the experience of awakening, preventing one from seeing things as they really are" (Wilson, 2004, p. 64)- the state of consciousness even in the sleep, "[1] *nidrāmi nāveṣṭumarhasi*" (SN 14. 31) "[2] should not let sleep enshroud you" (Cross, 2015, p. 383). This leads one to the mode of high concentration, - the transition from body to the mind. Nanda has been taught to concentrate on the mindfulness, to be aware of the aim- the aim beyond the bodily desire, and free of people, free of noise and solitude for mind.

Concentration is not an easy task. Controlling the desire,

and transferring the senses into the mind is based on practice. It is the process of separating the heart and mind. Detachment of the mind from the heart is only possible through the knowledge. Ignorance leads to the relational attachment and to the bodily desire to objects- “[1] *kojanaḥ sva-janaḥ kovā mohātsaktojanajanaḥ*” (SN 15. 31), “[2] Who are our own people, and who are other people? It is through ignorance that people attach to people” (Cross, 2015, p. 395). There is no relation as such in real; relation is the result of our love. Everyone is living being equal to everyone else and “[1] *nakaschitkasyachitpriya*” (SN 15.35)- nobody is the beloved of anybody. So, sense of love or closeness is always an illusion- the ignorance. And then what is body? It is just the cause of the suffering if guided by the desires and if not overcome by the knowledge. As long as the birth continues, as long as the life ends with the possibility of rebirth, the suffering ever exists. Meditation only can overcome the mode of birth and rebirth. Following this lesson, Nanda has undergone four stages of meditation, and he has realized himself highest of the higher state where there is no desire, no sense of love and no passion. It, as he has realized, is the perfect state of pleasure to him- love to nothing and pleasure out of nothing. He has come to the point of ultimate and everlasting pleasure.

Hence, beginning from the picture of beautiful city, Kapilvastu and how it has come to the place of the king Suddhodhana, the epic presents the state of harmony in the loving relation between Nanda and his wife. Separation of Nanda from his wife has taken the first step of his transformation. Slowly, he has undergone into the depth of the Buddhist preaching, he has practiced a lot. Time and again, he has mourned for his love to his wife. Again he has the devotion to possess *apsaras* physically and ultimately, Nanda has appeared with the complete transformed feeling from the physical man to the man with nothingness as worldly and physical desire- even the higher stage of heaven from the earth. Whether Nanda has achieved Moksha or Nirvana or not is still an unsolved query by the end of the epic. His has realized himself transformed from worldly pleasures to the pleasure beyond worldly sensation, beyond worldly feelings and beyond his body- trans-worldly feeling.

### 3. Buddhist Concern of Body and Mind: Suffering Leading to Liberation in Nanda

Is the mind separate from the body or it is the part of the body? Buddhist philosophy focuses on the importance of meditation; it is a mode of the activation of mind. The whole Buddhist philosophy focuses on how to get rid of the bodily desires and how to concentrate on the meditation- the mental process. This process inherently makes the distinction between body and mind. But it creates a trouble on the point of departure however Siddhartha's separation with 'the Buddha' is believed to be the separation between the body and the mind. What is needed, in this context, is that either

mind is primary or the body is primary is not of important issue, but what is man/person? Man is “[4] a continuum of conditioned mental and physical phenomena lacking an underlying essence or self” (Edelglass and Garfield, 2009, p. 261). This range is dependent on “aggregates (*skandhas*), which fall into five categories: material form, feeling, perception, volitional forces, and consciousness” (ibid, p. 261). The person, then, is regarded as a stream of processes that are interdependent with each other and also with other phenomena. In this regard, body- the material form is inter-reliant with the consciousness- consciousness.

The most obvious way in which the physical affects the mental is through the process of perceiving objects. Perception has the link with senses. If guided by the senses, the meditation does not become concentrative. Buddhist philosophy provides the idea of varieties of meditations with the focus to body too. On such condition, the meditation takes the mode of mindfulness of the body- “[3] mindfulness of breathing; mindfulness of modes of manner, such as standing and sitting; and mindfulness of routine activities, such as walking, eating, and resting” (Wilson, 2004, p. 63). The body, as Wilson observes in Buddhist concept, is divided into “its four material elements: earth or solidity, water or fluidity, fire or heat, and air or movement. Such analytic exercises are particularly helpful for overcoming the illusion of an enduring “self” (atman; Pali, *attan*)” (ibid, p. 63), and Ashwaghos also provides the same theme, “[1] *apāṃ dravatvaṃ kaṭhinatvamurvyā vāyoś calatvaṃ dhruvamauṣṇyamagneḥ*” (SN 16. 12), “[2] The fluidity of water, the solidity of earth, the motion of wind, and the constant heat of fire / Are innate in them” (Cross, 2015, p. 404), But he supposes this division and nature of body not as the medium to get the point of meditation, but as, “[1] *yathā sva-bhāvo hi tathā sva-bhāvoduḥkhaṃ śarīrasyacacetasaś ca*” (SN 16. 12). “[2] ...also it is in the nature of both the body and the mind to suffer” (Cross, 2015, p. 404). The nature of life is determined as the nature of the elements- suffering is the nature of body as solidity is the nature of earth.

The body becomes the central cause of suffering, “[1] *kaye sati vyadhi-jaradī*” (SN. 16.13) “[2] where there is body, there is suffering” (Cross, 2015, p. 404). The logic behind it is that the body is the central cause of disease, sickness, aging and death, “[3] Buddhist discourse holds all bodies to be impermanent and subject to disease, such hagiographies suggest there is nothing so effective as a female body to make this basic truth concrete” (Wilson, 2004, p. 64). Buddhism inherently regards the body, for humans, as the prime cause of suffering and so does Ashwaghosh, “[1] *yaḥ sambhavaś cāśyasamucchrayasyamṛtyoś carogasyacasambhavaḥ saḥ*” (SN 16.8) “[2] he who begets such an outgrowth is the begetter of death and of disease” (Cross, 2015, p. 403). The birth itself is the point of the suffering; one who begets is the begetter of the hunger, passion, desire, anger and other human emotional states in life till the death. And if not properly understood this vast eternal chain of birth and rebirth, every life ensures another

life with the death and again there is the chain of suffering.

Then, the Buddhist discourse raises the question on whether the body of human being is always bad, is always suffering? Or can it be the medium to get liberation of the suffering? As Wilson observes, Buddhism does not completely negate the body because it has the essential philosophy that “[3] when used instrumentally as a locus of meditation and insight, the body has immense value, more precious than a wish- fulfilling jewel” (Wilson, 2004, p. 65). Ashwaghosh shows similar pattern of the human body not always as the suffering, neither it is the god, nor of the any matter, “[1] *naiveśvaronaprakṛtirnakālonāpīsvabhāvōnavidhiryadṛcchā*” (SN 16.17), “[2] The cause is certainly not in God, nor in primordial matter, nor in time; nor either in the intrinsic existence of a thing, nor in predestination or self-will” (Cross, 2015, p. 404), but it is the human fault, the fault in understanding. Body in such context can be the means to find the ultimate goal for liberation. Having its importance, body posture is essential for meditation in Buddhism, “[5] particular sitting cross-legged in the traditional lotus posture, the act of meditation is, in a manner of speaking, the actualization of the goal of meditation: to become like the Buddha” (Gomez, 2004, p. 520). On such case, the patterning of the body plays a role for better concentration as Nanda performs the bodily discipline for the mental integration, “[1] *yatratastravivikietubaddhvā paryāṅkamuttamam/ rjūmkāyāṁ samādhāyasmṛtyābhimukhayānvitah*” (SN 15.1), “[2] In whatever place of solitude you are, cross the legs in the supreme manner / And align the body so that it tends straight upward; thus attended by awareness that is directed” (Cross, 2015, p. 388). The mental state of the *Sadhak* and the level of meditative concentration depend on the integrated body posture and bodily discipline.

Similarly, other aspects of body have the impact on mind to conform the ideal state of a Tathagata:

[5]... eyes neither open nor closed, and aimed at the tip of the nose; body erect, without slouching or becoming too stiff; mindfulness turned inward; shoulders level; head [erect] without bending [the neck] forward, backward, [or wavering] to either side, the nose in line with the navel; teeth and lips [only] lightly closed, the tongue resting on the gums of the upper teeth; breath in audible, neither heavy nor too rapid, breathing in and out slowly and effortlessly. (Gomez, 2004, p. 520)

In this sense human body has become the object of meditation because Nanda has not felt liberated till he has not been able to have different steps of meditation. Meditation is the stage of complete mindfulness without any bodily desires but in the perfect posturing of the body for perfect concentration, “[6] Mindfulness also figures in the noble eightfold path, at the seventh place, just before meditative concentration (samadhi)” (Bronkhorst, 2004, p. 541). This position agrees with the account found in the standard description of the path to liberation, where “[6] mindfulness is a precondition for and an accompaniment of the four stages of dhyana” (ibid, p. 541). The condition of mindfulness shows the integrity of the senses to the mind and complete

awareness.

This connectivity of Buddhist notion of body and mind has a link with the tradition of cognitive science, which considers the mind as an abstract kind of entity. Obviously, the mental state of thoughts, being abstract in nature, is detached from the world of matter, being concrete in nature, at certain level, but it does not mean that body is completely detached from the mind. The mental aspect also functions with the body perception, but the degree of guidance from the body senses is the matter on the achievement of the state of meditation. By their nature, the mind or the soul is somehow different from the body, but not with any pure dogmatic reasons.

Human knowledge in the bodily form, *samsara* in Buddhist naming, is driven by karma, or by desire. Nanda, having no knowledge about the Karma concept, is inclined to the heavy bodily desires. When he has seen the picture of heaven, however it could have been surrealistic, he has started to think about his karma, defined as dharma in the SN, and then he has risen above the perception of karma. The initial volitional actions have led him to desires, which in turn cause suffering, similar to our whole experience. Karmic idea has separated him from his individuality, as he knows it is the outcome of conditions, even though it can be influenced by our intentions. This intentionality, if not overcome, embeds in a material world again.

If *samsara* or the world is a suffering, as Buddhism supposes, it is not either just material or just mental. This is central to the mind/body problem; it is the problem of the connection of the mind and body. Only focus to the body is also a problem, and too much concentration on the mind is also a problem. The body helps to set a back to the mental strength; mindfulness for the meditation and the complete liberation becomes possible. Though Nanda is not in the condition of abandoning the family life at the initial level, he has entered into the *sadhana* forcefully. Slowly he has achieved the state of the sense of the liberation making a controlled and disciplined balance between his body and mind to overcome his desire and the volitions till the last. His attachment with the love, desire and passion is a pleasure in worldly definition, but a suffering in Buddhist principle, and his departure to the level of liberation- bodily liberation to the extreme of spiritual pleasure, in Buddhist term, is again a pain in worldly definition. So, the concern of body and mind has a connection with the suffering and liberation in Nanda’s realization- a transformation from experience to realization. Because Buddhism supposes body or *samsara* as the source of suffering, and the mind as the source of freedom, Nanda’s change from his body to the state of mind is the transition from suffering to liberation.

#### 4. Existing Not to Exist: Mythological Debate on the Creation

Buddhist philosophy provides the concept of ‘the wheel of life’ in which life and death recycle one after another in an endless process. Each individual survives and faces *samsara*

he/she is destined to. Life includes so many other conditions of life and sufferings such love, passion, family affairs, job, duties, responsibilities and the relational ties, “[7] The cumulative moral quality of a person’s karma determines the quality of each successive life” (Cuevas, 2004, p. 713). It also has the belief that rebirth is as certain as the death is certain and death is certain as the birth is. The suffering intermingles in the chain of birth and death and its repetition. It means, Buddhism accepts the concept of existence and re-existence of life as the precondition of ignorance and suffering if not checked with knowledge- the knowledge of birth-death-rebirth. Buddhism focuses on the concept of Nirvana as the only condition to get rid of this chain of birth and death and suffering. Also, karma is the cause of births & rebirths, pain & pleasure. Then moksha is the supreme goal of worshipper in all the religion as moksha is the greatest good. Release from birth & rebirths or knowing your own true self.

Focusing on the existence of body Hindu philosophical, especially Vedantic and Upanishadic belief is, “[8] The human body has a transmigratory history, in which the subtle body reincarnates in a succession of gross bodies” (Holdrege, 1998, p. 348). It includes the concept of moksha and also the bodily existence. Upanishads also deal with the notion of Nirvana in the term of Moksha and accept the idea of the birth-life- death chain. The goal of life as conceived in the Upanishads is to overcome this inherited ignorance, by attaining full enlightenment or *jyana*. The enlightened state is called moksha. It is the position of attaining one’s true selfhood in Brahma. This concept relates moksha as infinite peace, freedom from sorrow, and eternal bliss. End of desire is the central point for the end of sorrow. Realization of the *atma* destroys sorrow. Moksha is merging of the individual soul in Brahma. It indicates moksha means knowing your own true self. This concept is better explained in Upanishads but the central theme of Vedas is soul+brahma is one. One (individual soul)+one (Brahma)= one or Brahma+Atma=Brahma. This notion accepts the life as the source to get the sense of the unity with ultimate Brahma, hence the existence of life for attaining ultimate goal. Moksha, in Upanishads, is freedom from burden. Ignorance- *avidhya* is burden and knowledge- *vidya* is moksha or liberation, but this knowledge is the knowledge of the self or *atma* and the knowledge of *param-atma*.

Similar to Upanishads, Gita talks about moksha as unity with the supreme self, as Krishna says, “[9] *sarvadharmānparitajyamamekamsharanamvraja/ahamtwam sarvapaapebhyomokshyasyami ma sucha*” (Gita 18.66). “[9] Abandoning all forms of rites and duties, take refuge in me alone. I shall free you from all sins. (Therefore) do not grieve” (Gambhirananda, 2018, p. 756). This very point of the attachment with the Brahma is the highest point of moksha. Also it proposes the idea, “[10] the doctrine of karma and rebirth wrested man’s destiny from the gods and placed it squarely in his one hand” (Reat, 1977, p. 164). This notion also accepts the existence of life with karmic value with the search of moksha, which is free from all the worldly

sins.

Hence, moksha is shown as *nirvana* in Buddhism. In Upanishad & Vedas moksha means know your true self but according to Buddhism nirvana means “going out” i.e. to mean complete nothingness. Similarly, Gita focuses on refuse the life and everything over god or the creator. All these philosophies talk about the supremacy of the self, supremacy of the god, Moksha and importance of liberation from rebirth. Another point is that, all of these philosophies accept the fact that moksha is practiced in life or life is the source of moksha- life leading to lifelessness. Inherently these philosophies focus on the existence of life, but this life has to be devoted in search of the non-existence.

Ashwaghosh’s *Sundarananda* proposes the Buddhist concept of existence of present life in search of future non-existing. Nanda has felt, “[1] *kṣayamī gatamī janmanirastajanmansaddharma-caryāmuṣito ’smisamyak /kṛtsnamī kṛtamī me kṛta-kāryakāryamī lokeṣubhūto ’sminaloka-dharmā*” (SN 18.10), “[2] Rebirth is over, O Refuter of Rebirth! I am dwelling as one with observance of true dharma. / What was for me to do, O Doer of the Necessary! is totally done. I am present in the world without being of the world” (Cross, 2015, p. 439). He has come to realize that rebirth begins with ignorance, and ignorance gives rise to volition, which gives rise to consciousness. Further consciousness gives rise to a body (name and form), which gives rise to the six senses. The six senses lead to contact, which leads to sensations, which lead to desire. Desire gives rise to clinging, which leads to becoming. Becoming leads to birth, be to the old age and death again the birth. Birth in this case is the creation of a set of predispositions that will structure one’s volition in the next cycle. With all this understanding he is in the world, he exists, but his existence is not to exist- not to have rebirth and it is the complete stop from the suffering with the supreme level of liberation- “[7] When this exists, that exists; from this arising, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not exist; from this ceasing, that ceases” (Cuevas, 2004, p. 713).

This condition of the existence in search of non-existence necessarily generates the debate on the continuity of the creation. What will be the position of the continuity of human creation if all human beings adopt the prime concern of all the mythological percepts of moksha? Buddhist philosophy does not speak about the creation of the earth and does not believe on the single creator, or it does not mention any scientific explanations for the earth’s existence. This is partly due to the fact that Buddhists do not believe in any God who has created the world. Most other religions consider there to be a designer of the universe who was involved in the process of creation. It has the notion that there is the life, and world follows a cycle of decay, death and rebirth. On the other hand, Hindu philosophy has the belief that the creation takes place from *Brahmaand*, so was it at the beginning. Such mythological lessons of creation; silence or any particular creator try to explain the existence of the being or the present creation, but the silence about the point if all men/women follow the mythological lessons and move to the point of *moksha* or nirvana, the creation, in the long run of

many generations, the human creation might go to an end. The motive of such preaching is that everyone intends to get rid of the sufferings, the burden of life-death and rebirth, leaves all the desires and passions, focuses just on the dharma and the unity of the self (*atma*) with supreme being (*Parama-atma*) and ultimately everyone is liberated. How the world would be like- all liberated, all perfect humans, all free of passion, all with no desire, all with no possibility of rebirth and all in the state of Moksha.

Sundarananda ends with Nanda's accomplishment, "[1] *atītyakāntāramavāpta-sādhanah su-daiśikasyevakṛtami mahāvāṇik*" (SN 18. 50) "[2] Like a great trader, having crossed a wasteland and got the goods, who affirms the work of a good guide" (Cross, 2015, p. 447). He is a successful practitioner; a good *sadhak* to attain the goal compared to a trader crossed a wasteland with the goods. This comparison of his condition further leads to the types of men categorized into three levels as lowest, middle and superior man on the basis of their concentration- the lowest man works for an object, the middle man works for this world and for the world to come and the superior one tends towards nonparticipation from positive action. The highest of the higher is the one who realizes the supreme dharma with no trouble about himself/herself. (SN 18. 55/56) This division has preoccupied the concept that man should practice to reach from lowest level to the supreme level for Moksha. Again it raises the issue that the man/woman at the lowest level focuses on the physical existence at present, the second level manages the balance between this world and the world to come and the supreme level is the level of neither this world nor another world. The frequent practice must begin from existence level- the lowest level and to non-existing level- the supreme level.

## 5. Buddhist Doubt and Nanda's Transition from 'Being' to 'Non-being'

'Doubt', in Buddhist tradition, is a hindrance to the spiritual development or "[11] a catalyst for contemplative insight" (Buswell, 2004, p. 237) as it refers to some state of skepticism in the spiritual cultivation of Buddhist thinking. However, later Buddhism has supposed the doubt, with positive inquiry, leads to the conclusion in the reasoning and understanding of the self for the transition from 'being' to 'non-being'. The state of being is the state of reality in which "[12] reality is mind independent" (Siderits, 2016, p. 13) and as a result, the state of 'non-being' also represents as the reality because of the nature of reality as mind independent.

Frequently realized question on Buddhism is the duality of being and non-being. The whole Buddhist theory is in search of the non-existence, free from life and lifely burdens here and hereafter. With the same, "[13] for the Buddha, emptiness, the unborn, and no self-nature are indicators pointing the student to the flux of reality-in-process that, properly understood, cannot be objectified into solid ontological entities" (Davis, 2010, P. 75). It means, the duality between being and non-being is still the state of

stopping him/her from realizing the highest enlightenment, but appears to the position of process. Buddhist notion of Nirvana- the highest point of enlightenment is not any thing to be grabbed as the state of 'being'. It is the state of ultimate realization or the state of sense.

Are 'being' and 'non-being' dual situations? Do they represent two opposite states? Are they independently separate? In fact, these are two relative terms and states in the way light does not exist in the absence of darkness. If there is no 'being', there is no 'non-being'. Similar is the case with Nirvana and Samsara (non-worldly and worldly) as Suzuki opines, "[14] Nirvana and Samsara are, all things are not two. There is no Nirvana except where is Samsara; there is no Samsara except where is Nirvana; for the condition of existence is not of mutually-exclusive character" (Suzuki, 1999, p. 68). In Buddhist concept, the state of 'being' is the point of accepting the worldly or *Sansaric* existence, and the state of 'non-being' is the state of Nirvana, beyond *Samsara*. Buddha undergoes the same process of Nirvana through *Samsara*, and do happens in the life of Nanda; however the constant flux in his understanding has made him feel disappointed time and again. Nanda's love to the palace, his love to his beautiful wife and his desire to possess all these worldly things is the state of his *Sansaric* inclination.

The point of 'being' and 'non-being' in Buddhism depends on the position of Karma of the living being, "[15] Karma and rebirth beliefs are a central theme in Buddhism" (Harvey, 2018, p. 7) and Karma can lead to the state of ultimate realization of 'non-being' as Buddha had "[15] meditation-based personal knowledge" (ibid, p. 7) to transfer his state of 'being' into 'non-being' through his meditation and "[16] the Buddha claims that he "directly knew", i. e., had immediate cognitive experience, that any form of birth, or more exactly rebirth might have happened as a result of his past actions" (Laumakis, 2008, p. 92) that is what the Karma, the determining factor of the happiness or sadness in life and rebirth or no-rebirth. Nanda, in *Sundarananda*, has also followed the same path of the knowledge through meditation to reach to the ultimate state of liberation from the doubt of 'being' as 'material being'. He has gone through a process from the love to the worldly things to the love to negation of the world. In the long process, even he is tempted towards heaven's nymphs, and this has some point of *Sansaric* affiliation. But slowly, he has undergone the practice of negation and has reached to the point of the sense of 'non-being' however he still exists. As Buddha received the state of 'non-being' when he was still living, the duality of the 'being' and 'non-being' has ended with the unity of both. Nanda, in *Sundarananda*, has received the same state of beyond the duality as the mode of transition.

## 6. Conclusion: Buddhist Negation of the World and Nanda's Persuasive Transition

Buddhism supposes that the world has its eyes closed by

blind unconsciousness. It does not see utmost happiness in different mantles. The blind world tries to make human blind with forceful attachment with desire, passion and suffering leading to the endless continuum of death and rebirth. It hence, holds the idea that all phenomena, including the "self" and the surrounding world, arise out of a network of relationships dependent upon other causes and conditions. The self, therefore, is not to be understood as an essential, independent entity moving from one life to the next, but rather as a manifestation of a complex of causes and conditions, both mental and physical, themselves interdependent and continually in flux. The worldly suffering can only be overcome by the constant practice and *sadhana*.

Having two aspects of the search of the liberation: one through the inner self and another from the forceful change dependent on the condition, Buddha has achieved the liberation from the worldly suffering and the chain of death and rebirth through his inherent will power from within where as Nanda has achieved, by the end of the book, through forceful conditionings, constant preaching and taking the lessons. In both cases, the world, suffering in Buddhist understanding, has been under the negation and the transition has become possible if we can call it liberation, in true sense.

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