

# Relevance of the Buddhist Theory of Dependent Origination in the Contemporary World

Chaitali Ghosh<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Ashok Kumar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Asian International University, Imphal West, Manipur, India  
State Aided College Teacher in Philosophy, Raniganj Girls' College, Raniganj.  
Corresponding Author Email: [chaitali.babansona\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:chaitali.babansona[at]gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Philosophy, Asian International University, Imphal West, Manipur, India

**Abstract:** *The theory of dependent origination occupies a central place in the Buddhist philosophical thought. This theory imparts the idea that everything exists because of something else and if the cause vanishes the results does not follow. Actually, the doctrine of dependent origination talks about a middle way. It does not support the idea that everything exists forever and nothing exists at all. This theory assumes immense importance in Buddhist philosophy and other teachings of Buddha is seen to be grounded on the idea of dependent origination. Buddhist concept of four noble truths, the doctrine of karma, the doctrine of impermanence, the doctrine of no-self is based on the fundamental idea of dependent origination. This theory assumes importance not only as a philosophical concept but also it has astounding importance to realise the intricate social, political, environmental and ethical dimensions of the contemporary world. This article attempts to explore how this doctrine can be interpreted to explain different complex dynamics of the present-day society. This paper tries to demonstrate that the theory of dependent origination is relevant to explore political and socio-economic issues of the contemporary world.*

**Keywords:** Dependent Origination, Buddhist Philosophy, Twelvedfold links. Globalisation, Environmentalism

## 1. Introduction

Buddhist theory of dependent origination (**Pratītyasamutpāda**) states that no event occurs independently. This theory affirms that everything is being governed by other factors (Payutto, 1994, Bucknell, 1999). According to Buddhists thought, perpetual change is the outcome of karma—the intentional action of an individual—which manifests through the interplay of direct causes (*hetu*) and indirect causes (*pratyaya*).

This theory thus conveys the notion that everything exists because of something else and if the cause does not exist the results does not follow (Aitken, 2024). A common analogy for this interrelationship is of five sticks standing straight and tilting against each other; if one is taken away, the others fall. The doctrine thus goes against the idea of independent existence as preached by other Indian philosophical schools like Nyaya or Vedanta (Ghosh and Kumar, 2026).

Practically, the Buddhist theory of dependent origination presents a middle path between the idea of eternal existence and the notion of nihilism. Instead of assuming that everything exists permanently and nothing exists at all, this doctrine imparts the notion that all event arises and ceases in consideration to certain cause and conditions. This theory has been regarded as dharma in Buddhist philosophy. Even Lord Buddha, himself described this theory as equivalent to dharma. Buddhists believe that realisation of the concept of dependent origination is equivalent to the realisation of dharma and vice-versa (Paudel, 2020).

The idea of dependent origination occupies a central position in the Buddhist philosophy. It serves as the foundation for many other Buddhist doctrines. Eventually, the Buddhist concept of four noble truths, the doctrine of karma, the doctrine of impermanence, the doctrine of no-self is based on

the fundamental idea of dependent origination (Ghosh and Kumar, 2026). Because of the astounding importance of the theory of dependent origination in the Buddhist philosophical tradition it has been sometimes referred to as the crown jewel of Buddhist philosophy (Bhattacharya, 1982).

This article attempts to explore that this doctrine of dependent origination does not only assume immense significance in Buddhist teachings it is equally relevant in the contemporary world. The interconnection between economic systems, ecological processes, social institutions and human psychology are increasingly recognised in the modern society and the theory of dependent origination provides a useful framework for understating the complexities of human life in the contemporary world.

## 2. Conceptual Foundation of Dependent Origination

The doctrine of dependent origination occupies a central place in Buddhist philosophical teachings. It conveys the notion that that all things in this universe are the outcome of a chain of interconnected causes and conditions. Nothing in this world exists as an independent identity which actually contradicts the idea of independent existence as preached by other Indian philosophical traditions. Early Buddhist school firmly believes that sufferings of the human beings mainly arise through the twelvedfold links which can be presented as

avidya→Samskara→Vijnana→Namarupa→saḍāyatana→sp arśa→vedanā→trishna→upādanā→bhava→jati→jarāmaran a (Ghosh and Kumar, 2026). This link thus shows that human suffering emerges not from an isolated cause but from a complex chain of interconnected causes and conditions. Among all these links, ignorance (Avidya) is the main cause of all sufferings(dukkha).

Volume 15 Issue 6, June 2026

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

[www.ijsr.net](http://www.ijsr.net)

### 3. Relevance of Dependent Origination in the contemporary globalisation

Globalisation refers to the integration of national economy with the international economy through trade, FDI, Capital flows, migration and the spread of technology. In short globalisation actually implies the integration of countries through trade, commerce, value chains, communication networks etc. In fact, Globalisation is a multidimensional entity encompassing economic, cultural, informational and political dimensions (Sinha et al, 2026). Thus, Globalisation has enhanced the interconnectedness of nations across economic, social, and cultural fronts. Due to this interconnections events in one part of the world create lives not only in the home country but also in other countries of the world. Covid 19 pandemic which emerged as an overwhelming threat to the human existence all over the world is a striking example of global interdependence. This global health emergency has triggered off a democratic feeling of universal suffering across class, gender, caste, creed, race and nation across the national boundaries (Sarkar et.al, 2022). Such occurrence implies the fact that nothing happens in isolation as preached in the Buddhist theory of dependent origination. This theory urges policymakers across the globe to recognise the impact of their actions on the mankind over the globe. This Buddhist idea throws challenges to narrow nationalism and paves the way to promote global cooperation. The realisation of this interdependence may help building international cooperation in the fight against pandemics, poverty and climate change as well.

### 4. Dependent origination and Environment Consciousness

Environmental degradation is one of the most pressing challenges of the contemporary world. People are anxious about the self-destructing nature of economic growth. Continuation of economic activities giving due consideration to the health of this planet led to the formulation of the concept of sustainable development as appeared in the Brundtland's report published in 1987(Sarkar, 2012). Sustainable development seeks to meet the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. This concept of environment friendly development activities is closely identical to the Buddhist notion of dependent origination. The theory of dependent origination suggests that man and nature are not separated rather they are the part of an interconnected ecological system. Environmental degradation occurs because human actions create a complex network of cause and conditions. The destruction of forests influences rainfall patterns, biodiversity, soil quality, and human livelihoods. Actually, Buddhist philosophical view is in strict opposition to the nature of economic activities which cares little about nature.

Modern thinkers assert that the theory of dependent origination supports an ecological world view based on interdependence rather than domination. It encourages sustainable consumption, responsible environmentalism and respect for all forms of life. This theory may help people and

the policy makers to realise that human well beings not only depend on the availability of life sustaining articles, but also on the environmental health. Thus, dependent origination provides an ethical foundation for environmental conservation and ecological sustainability.

### 5. Relevance of Dependent Origination from Ethical Considerations

People on this planet are facing multiple challenges in recent times. Corruption, violence, social injustice are increasing rapidly. In this situation dependent origination may provide a basis for ethical responsibility by asserting that human sufferings(dukkha) are simply the outcome of their own actions. Since man are social being the action of one individual affect not only the actor but also creates repercussions within the society where he lives. While harmful actions create negative consequences, compassionate actions contribute to collective wellbeing. This realisation of interconnectedness may guide people and refrain them from doing harm on others and may shape their moral conduct. In this way the idea of dependent origination helps to promote responsiveness. When people realise that doing intentional harm to others is equivalent to harming oneself, they can try to lead a life in accordance with compassion, friendship, purity and try to maintain self-control (Ghosh and Kumar, 2026). This realisation claims immense importance in the present-day world where violence and dominance are posing significant threats to human existence in this planet.

### 6. Dependent Origination: Socio-Political Relevance

Conflicts owing to class, religion, ethnicity is on the rise in the contemporary world. Religious violences claim a heavy toll of human life every year across the globe. Rigid identities based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, class, or ideology are creating many social evils now a days. Dependent origination challenges essentialist views of identity by emphasizing that identities are created through changing conditions. This realisation may help reducing social polarization and encourage dialogue and discussion among confronting groups. When people recognize that beliefs and behaviours result from particular circumstances, they may become more open to divergent opinions.

The doctrine of dependent origination also touches structural causes of social problems. Abject Poverty, huge inequality, and increasing discrimination which characterises the situation of the modern world are not only due to individual failures but outcomes of interconnected social, economic, and political conditions. Consequently, effective solutions require systemic changes rather than solely individual interventions. Thus, the Buddhist notion of dependent origination promotes socially engaged approaches to addressing injustice and inequality. The concept of dependent origination interpreted in terms of emptiness by Nagarjuna also provide support for this idea that the problem of inequality and injustice which characterises the present society are grounded on certain causes and conditions. These problems do not have any independent existence rather work through causes and effects. Thus, the notion of dependent origination may claim immense

importance to understand the socio-political issues of the present-day world.

## 7. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis thus makes it amply clear that the doctrine of dependent origination is not only a philosophical thought but it has immense practical implications. The idea that every event is the resultant of certain cause and conditions helps people to realise the ethical, social political, and other issues of life in a systematic manner. The notion that human sufferings are actually the outcome of some interconnected links and there are ways by which these sufferings can be avoided may help people to act ethically and responsibly. Buddhist Philosophy teaches us that there is interconnection between man and nature. So, destruction of natural balance in the name of progress may jeopardise the sustainable living conditions of the human race. The feeling of this interconnection may help us to be cautious about major environmental challenges like pollution, climate change etc. The notion of interdependence which the theory of dependent origination seeks to establish may also be utilised to issues relating to mental health, social, religious and ethnic conflicts, of the contemporary world.

Recognition of the conditional nature of existence help individuals to develop greater compassion, wisdom, and ethical responsibility. Societies can also benefit from policies which admit the interdependent dimensions of human and ecological well-being. In an increasingly interconnected world, dependent origination provides a timeless philosophical framework for understanding reality and promoting sustainable and harmonious living.

## References

- [1] Aitken, A. (2024). Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu on the principle of sufficient reason. *Asian Journal of Philosophy*, 3(1), 19.
- [2] Bhattacharya, B. (1982). The dependent origination in Buddhism.
- [3] Bucknell R. (1999). Conditioned arising evolves: Variation and change in textual accounts of the Paṭicca-samuppāda doctrine. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 22(2): 311–342.
- [4] Ghosh, C & Kumar, A (2026). Non-Violence through the Lens of the Buddhist Theory of Dependent Origination: A Philosophical Enquiry. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 15(3): 443-445.
- [5] Sinha, M., Roy, S., SJ, D. S., & Sarkar, S. (2026). FDI, Informational Globalisation and Global Value Chain: Lessons from G20 Economies. *The Indian Economic Journal*, 00194662261425165.
- [6] Sarkar, S., Rakshit, D., & Ray, R. (2022). A Socio-Cultural Approach to Poverty and Pandemic in India Against the Global Backdrop. *Stochastic Modelling and Applications*, 26(3), 1333-1341.
- [7] Sarkar, S. (Autumn 2011-Spring 2012). A note on roots of sustainable development in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore. *Impressions of eternity*, 3-4, 125-129
- [8] Payutto, P. A. (1994). Dependent origination. *Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation*.

- [9] Paudel, Y. R. (2020). The Doctrine of Dependent Origination in Buddhist Philosophy and its Practicality. *GMMC Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 9, 108-129.