



Was The Buddha a Pessimist ?

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Preface

“Was the Buddha a Pessimist” is a translation and adaptation of the Hindi “*Kyā Buddha Dukkhavādi The?*” first published in Nepal in May 2000. In it, Acharya S. N. Goenka, World Teacher of Vipassana, has explained the reasons for fundamental misunderstandings that have evolved about the Buddha and his teaching and has resolved them with lucid examples. These misunderstandings developed when the Buddha’s teachings were lost to India and most of the world. This was largely due to the disappearance of the applied teaching (the technique of Vipassana). But later even the original words of the Buddha (Pali canonical literature) were less accessible. Thus, misconceptions grew and became firmly entrenched.

Fortunately, this liberating technique was preserved in its pristine purity in Myanmar (Burma) by an unbroken teacher-student tradition. With its revival in India and the world, it is again shedding light on the efficacy of Buddha’s real teaching, and bringing great benefit to the humanity. Further, the entire Pali literature along with the commentaries, sub-commentaries, and sub-sub-commentaries has been published and made available in India and elsewhere around the world. A CD-ROM containing this literature has been produced with various facilities for research.

This publication will be of interest for those who are practicing the applied teaching of the Buddha as well as for those who are well acquainted with the prevailing views of the past.

The translator and editors are solely responsible for any errors in the present edition.

May all beings be happy!

Vipassana Research Institute

*Sabbe sattā sukhī hontu,
sabbe hontu ca khemino;
Sabbe bhadrāni passantu,
mā kiñci dukkhamāgamā.*

*Sukhino vā khemino hontu,
sabbasattā bhavantu sukhitattā.*

Was the Buddha a Pessimist?

For centuries in India, the Buddha and his teachings have been accused as being pessimistic. To some extent, this notion has also spread outside India to those countries where people are not acquainted with his teaching. Many Western philosophers have been influenced by this concept. In India, many eminent scholars and philosophers have fallen prey to this belief and, as a result, the masses have come to accept it as the truth.

During my own school days, my friends and I also accepted this belief that the Buddha was a pessimist. My mentality in those days was such that wherever I read any work by any poet that emphasised suffering, I would see this as an effect of the Buddha's pessimism. In a few instances, I had even composed a few pessimistic poems myself. However, I later decided not to continue to author such works, believing that they would create a harmful atmosphere for individuals and society. I decided that if I wrote anything, it would only concern love for my motherland, social upliftment and happiness.

How I was influenced by this belief

When I look back at my childhood, I find that it is when I first came in contact with Arya Samaj that I was influenced by the belief that the Buddha's teaching is pessimistic. I read Maharshi Dayananda in his famous work Satyarth Prakash where he wrote, "According to the Buddha there is nothing but misery in the entire world—*sarvasya saṃsārasya duḥkhātmakatvaṃ*.... However the truth is that there is happiness as well as misery in the world. It is a falsehood to say that the entire universe is full of misery." This belief, received from Arya Samaj in pre-War Myanmar, became deeply ingrained in my mind and was further