

Three Distinct Phases of Buddhist Thought and Its Basic Thematic Unity

**Friday, August 25
3:00–5:00 PM**

An online talk by

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ABSTRACT

Buddhist Philosophy has three distinct phases and at the same it has a unity with three basic themes. There are three distinct phases of Buddhist thought: firstly, the realistic phase, secondly, the critical phase and thirdly, the idealistic phase which are represented by the Ābhidharmika, the Mādhyamika, and the Yogācāra – Vijñānavāda traditions respectively. The boundaries between the several phases are not sharply defined, and are, as is to be expected in any continuous tradition, overlapping. One school shades off into another, so that it is difficult to say where one phase ends and another emerges. However, these three phases in the development of Buddhist thought are so evident, and "no one single school of Buddhism can claim to represent the essential unalloyed tradition." In spite of the diversity of doctrinal exegesis, disputes among minor sects, rivalry between the Theravāda and Mahāyāna, and varied phases of thought development, there is a basic thematic unity throughout the career of Buddhist thought. The basic unity which we speak of is translated into certain very central doctrines, which provide the *leitmotiv*, as it were, of the entire range of Buddhist thought. Three such key concepts could be singled out: *Śūnyatā*, *Pratītya-samutpāda* and *Madhyamā Pratīpa* which could be translated as 'emptiness,' 'dependent origination' and 'the middle path/way.' The proposed talk is aimed at unraveling the philosophical trajectory of Buddhism, and not so much of its religious progression and offshoots.

BIO

Dr C. D. Sebastian is a Professor of Philosophy at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, Mumbai. He holds his MA (first rank with two gold medals) and PhD degrees in Indian Philosophy from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi; and he did his Postdoctoral Research at the University of Bristol, UK. He was a DAAD Fellow at the University of Erfurt, Germany, and an Erasmus Mundus (of European Commission) Visiting Scholar at the University of Warsaw, Poland. He was honoured three times with *Excellence in Teaching Award* of IIT Bombay. He is an established scholar and researcher in Indian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy. He has published more than 120 research papers in refereed international journals. Among his many books the most received is *The Cloud of Nothingness* published internationally by Springer Nature. He is a member of Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy (SACP) and also a member of Society for Inter-Cultural Philosophy, Cologne.