

# **Taṇha (Craving): A Canonical and Philosophical Analysis of the Root of Suffering in Early Buddhism**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This essay provides a canonical and philosophical interpretation of early Buddhism's view of taṇha (craving) as the primary source of sorrow (dukkha). The study investigates the definition, derivation, and threefold classification of taṇha—kamataṇha, bhavataṇha, and vibhavataṇha, as expressed in the Nikayas, mostly based on the Pali Canon and backed by reputable English and Marathi scholarship. In the teaching of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppada), where taṇha serves as the dynamic causal link between feeling (vedanaa), clinging (upadana), action, and fresh being, it places craving at the centre of the Second Noble Truth and examines its crucial significance.

In terms of philosophy, the paper shows how the examination of taṇha challenges metaphysical absolutism and upholds the Buddhist concepts of impermanence (anicca) and non-self (anatta), defining the Middle Path between annihilationism (ucchedavada) and eternalism (sassatavada). It clarifies Nibbana as freedom from compulsive desire obtained by the Noble Eightfold Path by further examining taṇha-nirodha as the cessation of wanting rather than the destruction of being. The study concludes by highlighting the idea of taṇha's continued significance as a diagnostic and liberating paradigm regarding consumerism, addiction, mental health, and ethical life

## **KEY WORDS**

Taṇha (Craving); Dukkha (Suffering); Paṭiccasamuppada (Dependent Origination); Four Noble Truths; Nibbana; Early Buddhism; Anatta (Non-self); Anicca (Impermanence)

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Early Buddhist thinking placed a strong emphasis on the idea of taṇha (craving) as the main psychological source of pain (dukkha). According to the Buddha's analytical framework, suffering results from recognisable cause conditions rather than being unintentional or imposed by God. Taṇha refers to a persistent "thirst" that binds beings to the cycle of birth and death (saṅsara) by taking the form of attachment to sensual pleasures, continuous life, or even non-being. Therefore, what turns experience into servitude is an obsessive hunger rather than simple desire [1].

Taṇha is specifically recognised as the Second Noble Truth (dukkha-samudaya ariyasacca)—the source of suffering—in the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha's diagnosis is accurate: suffering results from craving, and the only way to eliminate it is to completely stop craving (taṇha-nirodha) [2]. Taṇha is essential to comprehending Buddhist soteriology and ethics because this

doctrinal positioning identifies it as the dynamic energy that connects sensation (vedana) to clinging (upadana), action (kamma), and fresh becoming (bhava) [3].

By placing suffering within a framework of conditionality (paṭiccasamuppada), the idea of taṇha philosophically challenges metaphysical absolutism and belief in a permanent self. In terms of psychology, it provides an in-depth examination of compulsion, desire, and discontent that is relevant to contemporary debates about addiction and mental illness [4]. In terms of ethics, it offers a critical perspective for analysing attachment, consumerism, and accountability in social and personal spheres. Drawing mostly from the Pali Canon and bolstered by reputable English and Marathi scholarship, this dissertation tries a canonical and philosophical analysis of taṇha in early Buddhism. It aims to define and categorise taṇha, investigate its causal function in the emergence of suffering, assess its philosophical implications for impermanence (anicca), non-self (anatta), and assess its relevance for liberation and contemporary life.

**2.0 Pali Canonical Basis of Taṇha:** In early Buddhist thinking, the idea of taṇha (craving) holds a crucial and essential place. A thorough examination of craving as a psychological, ethical, and existential force forms the basis of both the Buddha's diagnosis of human suffering (dukkha) and his recommendation for freedom. Taṇha is frequently cited in the Pali Canon as the primary factor supporting bondage to saṁsara. Its fundamental importance within the Buddhist path is revealed through an analysis of its etymology, canonical formulation, and doctrinal placement.

**2.1 Meaning and Etymology of the Term Taṇha:** The verbal root tugeṣ (Sanskrit) or taṇha/tanh (Pali), which means "to thirst," "to crave," or "to long for," is the source of the Pali term taṇha. According to its etymology, taṇha denotes a strong inner hunger that is satiated by either internal or external objects. The Buddha purposefully uses this metaphor of thirst to highlight how compulsive, hungry, and consuming desire is [5]. According to the Pali Canon, taṇha includes philosophical clinging, existential longings, and subtle psychological attachments in addition to the obvious desire for material possessions. According to the Dhammasaṅgaṇi, taṇha is a type of greed (lobha) that stems from attachment and pleasure: "Tattha katama taṇha? Ya lobho lobhana loluppayana [6]. (*“What is craving? It is greed, covetousness, and clinging.”*) Marathi Buddhist scholars similarly explain taṇha as *“An unfulfilled craving that binds the mind to material things,”* an unquenchable thirst that binds the mind to objects of experience [7]. Thus, taṇha is not a neutral desire but a defiling mental force (kilesa) that perpetuates dissatisfaction and suffering.

**2.2 Scriptural Origin of the Doctrine of Tisso Taṇha:** The doctrine of Tisso Taṇha (threefold craving) is firmly rooted in the early strata of the Pali Canon, particularly within the *Samyutta Nikaya* and *Majjhima Nikaya*. The Buddha classifies craving into three distinct yet interrelated forms: *“Tisso imasmim loke taṇhakamataṇha, bhavataṇha, vibhavataṇha [8].* (*“In this world, there are three kinds of craving: craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence.”*) This

threefold classification represents a comprehensive psychological and philosophical analysis of desire. It extends beyond sensual craving to include deeper existential impulses, namely, the urge to perpetuate being (*bhavataṇha*) and the nihilistic desire for annihilation (*vibhavataṇha*). The Buddha thus avoids reducing craving to mere hedonism and instead situates it within a broader framework of becoming (*bhava*) and non-being.

**2.3 Analysis of the *Saṃyutta Nikaya (Nidanavagga)* Passage on Threefold Craving :** The most comprehensive canonical interpretation of *taṇha* is found in the *Nidanavagga* of the *Saṃyutta Nikaya*, which explains dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppada*). "Tahi kho, bhikkhave, tissohi taṇhahi satta sa'saranti, loko parikkhittaṅ hoti, satta bandhanti" [9] is the pertinent passage. "Beings wander in sa'sara through these three cravings, monks; they enclose the world, and beings are bound." The cosmological and existential reach of *taṇha* is emphasised in this text. Craving is a universal force that maintains the entire cycle of conditioned existence rather than just a human psychological flaw. According to Marathi views, *taṇha* is a binding energy that entangles beings in repeating life and death [10]. Within the framework of dependent origination, *taṇha* arises conditioned by feeling (*vedana*) and conditions of clinging (*upādāna*), thereby occupying a pivotal position in the causal chain of suffering.

**2.4 *Taṇha* in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* and Its Doctrinal Significance:** The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*—the Buddha's first discourse—provides the most authoritative doctrinal formulation of *taṇha*. Here, craving is explicitly identified as the origin of suffering: "*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ—yayaṃ taṇha ponobhavika nandiragasahagata tatrataṭṭrabhinandini* [11]. This formulation highlights four essential features of *taṇha*:

- It leads to renewed existence (*ponobhavika*),
- It is accompanied by delight and lust (*nandiragasahagata*),
- It seeks gratification "here and there," and
- It manifests as the threefold craving.

Doctrinally, this passage establishes *taṇha* as the dynamic engine of *samsara*. Unlike ignorance (*avijja*), which is a cognitive obscuration, *taṇha* is affective and motivational, directly propelling action (*kamma*) and rebirth [12]

**2.5 *Taṇha* as the Second Noble Truth (*Dukkha-samudaya Ariyasacca*) :** *Taṇha* is the Second Noble Truth (the truth of the origin of suffering) in the context of the Four Noble Truths (*Cattari Ariyasaccani*). The Buddha's diagnosis is accurate: craving is the root cause of suffering. "*Vedanapaccaya taṇha, taṇhapaccaya upadanam, upadanapaccaya bhavo*[13]. ("With feeling as condition arises craving; with craving, clinging; with clinging, becoming.") *Taṇha* serves as the immediate condition that turns experience into bondage, as this causal explanation shows. Marathi

Buddhist scholars stress that philosophical comprehension and ethical transformation are not complete without the elimination of taṇha [14]. Thus, the definition of the end of suffering (dukkhanirodha) is the end of craving: "Taṇhaya asesaviraganirodho nibbana." [15]. "Nibbana is the total disappearance and cessation of craving." Thus, taṇha is the main issue that Buddhist soteriology aims to address, rather than just an object of analysis. The core of the Buddha's liberating path is its abandoning via wisdom, moral discipline, and meditation training.

**3. Classification of Taṇha: The Threefold Craving (*Tisso Taṇha*):** By dividing yearning into three interconnected forms known as *Tisso Taṇha*—longing for sense pleasures (kamataṇha), craving for existence (bhavataṇha), and craving for non-existence (vibhavataṇha)—early Buddhist philosophy provides a sophisticated and methodical examination of craving (taṇha). The Buddha's profound psychological and philosophical understanding of the mechanisms that sustain suffering and rebirth is reflected in this threefold classification, which is expressed frequently in the Pali Canon. The Buddha distinguishes between the various orientations, intensities, and existential consequences of desire rather than regarding it as a single, cohesive phenomenon [16].

The *Samyutta Nikaya* explicitly states: "*Tisso imasmim loke taṇha—kamataṇha, bhavataṇha, vibhavataṇha*"[17]. ("*In this world there are three kinds of craving: craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence, and craving for non-existence.*") Each form of craving represents a distinct mode of attachment, yet all three function together to bind beings to the cycle of *samsara*. The following subsections examine these three forms in detail.

### 3.1 Kamataṇha – Craving for Sense Pleasures

**3.1.1 Pali Definition and Canonical References:** Craving for sense pleasures (kama), which are connected to the five sense faculties, is referred to as kamataṇha. This type of yearning is described as "Kamesu kamacittata, kamasāṅgita, kamasaragata" in the Pali Canon as an excessive attachment to enjoyable sensory experiences [18]. "Attachment to, absorption in, and mental engagement with sensory pleasures" The Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta emphasises the universality and immediacy of kamataṇha in human experience by identifying it as the earliest and most urgent kind of longing that leads to suffering [19].

**3.1.2 Psychological Nature of Sensory Craving:** Psychologically, a pleasurable mood (sukha-vedana) triggers kamataṇha. Dependent origination states that the condition of desiring is "Vedanapaccaya taṇha" [20]. "Craving arises with feeling as a condition." The untrained mind responds with craving, clutching, and repetition-seeking when pleasant sensations are encountered. According to Buddhist psychology, this desire is created by perception (sanna), volitional formations (sankhara), and ignorance (avijja) rather than being innate in the object [21]. According to Marathi scholars, kamataṇha is "mental deception," a psychological trick that leads to unhappiness despite promising bliss [22].

**3.1.3 The Five Sense Objects and Their Role in Desire Formation:** Compose (rupa), sound (sadda), smell (gandha), taste (rasa), and touch (phoṭṭhabba) are the five sense items (panca kamaguṇa) that compose the realm of kamataṇha. The Buddha warns against becoming attached to these things, calling them "Appassada kama, bahudukkha, bahupayasa" [23]. "Sense pleasures cause a great deal of suffering and little satisfaction." Desire develops when craving-driven perception interprets sensory contact (phassa), converting fleeting pleasure into attachment and clutching (upadana) [24].

**3.1.4 Relationship between Kamataṇha and Avijja (Ignorance):** Kamataṇha is closely associated with avijja, non-self (anatta), pain (dukkha), and ignorance of impermanence (anicca). The genuine nature of sensory pleasure is obscured by ignorance, giving the impression that it is enduring and satisfying [25]. "*Avijjapaccaya saṅkhara... vedanapaccaya taṇha*" [26] is how the Saṅyutta Nikaya places craving inside the causal chain that starts with ignorance. Sensory desire won't stop as long as ignorance endures.

**3.1.5 Ethical and Existential Consequences of Sensory Indulgence:** In terms of ethics, kamataṇha encourages immoral behaviour (akusala kamma), including avarice, exploitation, and moral transgression. From an existential perspective, it perpetuates rebirth by strengthening the connection to conditioned existence. "*Taṇhaya jayati soko, taṇhaya jayati bhayan*" is a warning in the Dhammapada [27]. "Sorrow and fear arise from craving." Marathi Buddhist scholars draw attention to the societal ramifications of kamataṇha by associating it with conflict, inequality, and consumerism [28].

**3.1.6 Illustrative Examples from Everyday Life and Buddhist Narratives:** The perils of sensory hunger are clearly shown in canonical texts. The monk Nanda's battle with sensual attachment and King Pasenadi's extravagant food consumption serve as examples of how kamataṇha prevents mental clarity and emancipation [29]. The same psychological tendency may be seen in daily life when attachment to riches, beauty, and position reinforces discontent rather than contentment.

## 3.2 Bhavataṇha – Craving for Existence

**3.2.1 Conceptual Meaning of Bhava and Bhavataṇha:** In the cycle of reincarnation, bhava signifies being, becoming, or ongoing being. The desire for perpetual existence, identity, and continuity is known as bhavataṇha. It shows up as the want "to continue," "to be," or "to become" [30].

**3.2.2 Desire for Continuity, Rebirth, and Becoming:** This form of craving expresses itself as longing for rebirth, longevity, or identity preservation. The Buddha includes *bhavataṇha* explicitly in the Second Noble Truth, emphasising its role in generating renewed existence (*ponobhava*) [31].

**3.2.3 Bhavataṇha and Attachment to Karmic Results:** Bhavataṇha encourages good deeds carried out in anticipation of future reward by fostering attachment to karmic outcomes. Despite being morally better than sensual desire, it nevertheless reinforces self-centred becoming, which keeps people in servitude [31].

**3.2.4 Role of Bhavataṇha in Sustaining Saṃsara:** Within dependent origination, craving conditions clinging, which in turn conditions becoming (*bhava*). Thus, *bhavataṇha* plays a central role in sustaining the cycle of rebirth [32].

**3.2.5 Desire for Heavenly Existence and Eternal Life:** Desire for heavenly rebirth or eternal existence exemplifies *bhavataṇha*. The Buddha cautions that even refined aspirations for celestial pleasure remain impermanent and unsatisfactory [33].

**3.2.6 Philosophical Critique of Existence-Centred Craving:** Philosophically, *bhavataṇha* aligns with eternalist views (*saṃsātavada*), which the Buddha rejects. True liberation lies beyond both craving for existence and craving for annihilation [34].

### 3.3 Vibhavataṇha – Craving for Non-Existence

**3.3.1 Meaning and Doctrinal Background of Vibhavataṇha:** *Vibhavataṇha* refers to craving for non-existence or annihilation—the desire for complete cessation of being. It arises from aversion and despair rather than wisdom [35].

**3.3.2 Nihilistic Tendencies and Rejection of Existence:** This craving manifests as rejection of life, existence, and rebirth, often rooted in suffering and frustration. The Buddha identifies this tendency as spiritually unwholesome [36].

**3.3.3 Vibhavataṇha and Ucchedavada (Annihilationism):** *Vibhavataṇha* supports annihilationist views (*ucchedavada*), which deny moral continuity and karmic responsibility. The Buddha firmly rejects such views as erroneous extremes [31].

**3.3.4 Misinterpretation of Liberation as Self-Annihilation:** Early Buddhism clarifies that liberation (*nibbana*) is not self-destruction but the cessation of craving. To equate liberation with annihilation is a profound doctrinal misunderstanding [32].

**3.3.5 Psychological Roots of Despair, Aversion, and Escapism :** Psychologically, *vibhavataṇha* arises from aversion (*paṭigha*), hopelessness, and escapism. It reflects an inability to confront suffering with wisdom [33].

**3.3.6 Buddhist Critique of Non-Existence as a False Solution:** The Buddha critiques non-existence as a false solution to suffering, emphasizing the Middle Path that transcends both eternalism and annihilationism: “*Ete te ubho ante anupagamma majjhimam paṭipadam tathagato abhisambuddho*” [34].

**4. Taṇha and the Chain of Suffering:** The Buddha's explanation of pain (*dukkha*) is fundamentally causal rather than merely descriptive. *Taṇha* (craving), the basic psychological and existential drive that turns lived experience into servitude, is at the centre of this causal theory. *Taṇha* functions as the dynamic connection between affective experience and ongoing entanglement in *saṃsāric* existence within the theory of *paṭiccasamuppada* (dependent origination). The exact position, purpose, and

mechanics of *taṇha* within the chain of suffering as described in the Pali Canon are examined in this section.

**4.1 Taṇha within the Causal Sequence of Suffering:** According to early Buddhist philosophy, suffering results from a conditioned process rather than fate, divine will, or metaphysical necessity. The twelvefold dependent origination phrase, "Avijjapaccaya saṅkhara... vedanapaccaya taṇha, taṇhapaccaya upadana," expresses this process. (Volitional formations with ignorance as a requirement... with emotion as a condition, craving; clutching as a condition, craving[35].

Thus, *Taṇha* appears at a critical point where raw experience (*vedana*) is claimed as "mine," "I," or "my self," rather than at the beginning or the conclusion. The Saṅgitta Nikaya underlines time and again that suffering results from the foolish reaction to emotion in the form of wanting rather than from feeling itself [36]. Marathi Buddhist scholars have underlined that this placement of *taṇha* reflects the Buddha's psychological realism: the root of bondage lies not in perception or sensation per se, but in the *reactive thirst* that follows them[37].

**4.2 Analysis of the Formula: *Vedanapaccaya Taṇha*:** The formula "*vedanapaccaya taṇha*" constitutes one of the most profound insights of Buddhist psychology. It establishes feeling (*vedana*) as the proximate condition for craving, irrespective of whether the feeling is pleasant, painful, or neutral. "Sukhaya vedanaya rago anuṣeti, dukkhaya vedanaya paṭigho anuṣeti, adukkhamasukhaya vedanaya avijja anuṣeti," according to the Saṅgitta Nikaya. (Lust is the underlying pleasurable sensation; aversion is the underlying painful feeling; ignorance is the underlying neutral feeling.) [38]. This paragraph demonstrates that cravings are not solely motivated by pleasure. When misinterpreted, even neutral and unpleasant emotions can lead to craving, which can manifest as resistance, dull attachment, or a yearning for escape. *Taṇha* is therefore a structural propensity of the untrained mind and cannot be reduced to hedonism. Walpola Rahula notes that this realisation foreshadows contemporary affective psychology by acknowledging that suffering is caused by emotional responses rather than stimuli. In a similar vein, Marathi explanations emphasise that *taṇha* brings distortion and bondage, but *vedana* is ethically neutral [39].

**4.3 Relationship between Feeling (*Vedana*), Craving (*Taṇha*), and Clinging (*Upadana*):** The progressive deepening of attachment is described by the standard sequence *vedana* → *taṇha* → *upadana*. Craving is appropriative, clinging is identificatory, and feeling is transient and impersonal. "*Yauge vedeti taṇhayati; yaññ taṇhayati taṇ upadiyati*," says the Buddha. (What one craves, one clings to; what one feels, one craves.)[40]. The solidification of desire into beliefs, customs, sensual obsession, and self-doctrine (*attavada*) is symbolised by *upadana* [41]. With *taṇha*, emotion forms the foundation for existential commitment; without it, it would just emerge and end. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, *taṇha* is the pivotal moment at which transient experience becomes the

appearance of continuity and possession [42]. This shift, according to Marathi Buddhist scholars, is the point at which experience turns into servitude [43].

**4.4 Taṇha as the Dynamic Link between Experience and Bondage:** Taṇha serves as a mediator between existential continuity and sensory-cognitive experiences. By creating kammic momentum (kamma-bhava), it closes the gap between transient experience and protracted suffering. "*Taṇhaya tveva asesaviraganirodha upadananirodho*," the Nidanavagga explains. (Clinging stops when the craving completely disappears and ceases.) [44]. This argument emphasises that emancipation necessitates the elimination of desire rather than the repression of experience. Taṇha sustains saṅsara by pushing the mind towards appropriation, projection, and repetition. From a philosophical standpoint, taṇha represents the mistake of reification, viewing experiences as individuals and processes as substances [45]. According to Marathi thinkers, taṇha transforms contingency into destiny and impermanence into perceived permanence [46].

**4.5 Desire Formation's Psychological Mechanisms :** Psychologically, perception (sanna), affect (vedana), volition (cetana), and ignorance (avijja) interact intricately to produce taṇha. The untrained mind uses distorted perception to understand emotion, attributing long-lasting delight to fleeting experiences. "*Assadanupassī viharati...*" nandī taṇha pavaddhati is the Buddha's concise description of this mechanism. (Dwelling on satisfaction... joy and desire grow) [47]. Anusaya, or habitual tendencies, are strengthened by repeated indulgence, making cravings more automatic. This explains why taṇha endures even after its detrimental effects are acknowledged. This approach is compared to current models of addiction and obsessive behaviour by contemporary Buddhist psychologists [48]. According to Marathi interpretations, desire-driven identity development, status competitiveness, and consumerism all contribute to the social maintenance of taṇha [49]. Ultimately, the Buddha's analysis reveals taṇha not as a moral flaw alone, but as a systemic cognitive-affective distortion. Its cessation requires insight (vipassana), ethical restraint (sila), and mental discipline (samadhi), culminating in wisdom (panna).

**5. Taṇha in the Doctrine of Paṭiccasamuppada (Dependent Origination):** The Buddha's most comprehensive explanation for how suffering arises, persists, and ends is found in the theory of paṭiccasamuppada (dependent origination). The Buddha described suffering as a conditioned process controlled by causal regularity rather than as a metaphysical fate or heavenly decision. Taṇha (craving) plays a crucial role in this dynamic structure, acting as the existential and psychological pivot that turns thought into servitude and sustains rebirth. The role of taṇha in dependent origination is critically examined in this section, with an emphasis on its doctrinal, philosophical, and ethical relevance.

**5.1 Overview of the Twelfold Chain of Dependent Origination:** The classical formulation of dependent origination is presented as a twelfold causal sequence, most systematically expounded

in the Nidanavagga of the *Samyutta Nikaya*. The Buddha declares: “*Avijjapaccaya saṅkhara, saṅkharapaccaya vinnanaṃ, vinnanaṃpaccaya namarupaṃ, namarupapaccaya saḷayatanam, saḷayatanapaccaya phasso, phassapaccaya vedana, vedanapaccaya taṇha, taṇhapaccaya upadanam, upadanapaccaya bhavo, bhavapaccaya jati, jatipaccaya jaramaranaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha-domanassupayasa sambhavanti*’ [50]. According to this concept, pain (dukkha) is not a static state but rather a processual continuum. Every link begins when certain conditions are met and ends when those conditions are met. Crucially, this sequence demonstrates the Buddha's comprehensive understanding of the human experience by integrating existential, ethical, emotive, and cognitive aspects. Marathi Buddhist scholars highlight that paṭiccasamuppada should be understood as functional conditionality, in which several conditions reinforce each other, rather than linear determinism [51].

**5.2 Position of Taṇha within the Causal Structure:** Taṇha is positioned eighth in the twelvefold chain, coming after feeling (vedana) and before clinging (upadana). Because it defines craving as the crucial point at which experience is appropriated and prolonged, its placement has doctrinal significance. “*Vedanapaccaya taṇha; taṇhapaccaya upadanañ*” is a clear statement made by the Buddha [52]. (Craving with sensation as condition; clinging with craving as condition.) Thus, Taṇha signifies the change from passive experience to active appropriation. Taṇha introduces attachment, projection, and possessiveness; feeling is ethically ambiguous in and of itself. Taṇha is described by Bhikkhu Bodhi as the “energising force” that advances the cycle [53]. This notion is emphasised by Marathi interpretations, which define taṇha as the connection that turns experience into servitude [54].

**5.3 Avijja (Ignorance) as the Root Condition for Taṇha :** Although taṇha plays a central role in sustaining suffering, the Buddha repeatedly identifies avijja (ignorance) as its deepest root. Ignorance refers not to mere lack of information but to misapprehension of reality, especially the failure to perceive impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*). The *Samyutta Nikaya* affirms: “*Avijjagatassa bhikkhave assutavato puthujjanassa vedanaya taṇha sambhavati.*” (For the uninstructed worldling, overcome by ignorance, craving arises dependent on feeling)[55]. Because of ignorance, sensory and mental phenomena appear as sources of lasting satisfaction and identity. This distorted cognition conditions craving, which in turn reinforces ignorance, a mutually sustaining cycle. Marathi Buddhist scholars emphasize that *avijja* is not temporally prior alone but structurally operative at every moment craving arises.<sup>7</sup> Thus, *taṇha* cannot be eradicated merely by ethical restraint; it requires penetrative wisdom (*panna*).

**5.4 Taṇha as the Turning Point between Cognition and Rebirth:** The understanding of taṇha as the link between psychological processes and rebirth (*punabbhava*) is one of the most characteristic aspects of early Buddhist philosophy. Taṇha starts the existential momentum that leads to fresh

becoming (bhava), whereas the prior connections of dependent origination explain cognitive and perceptual processes. "*Yayaṇ taṇha ponobbhavika nandīragasahagata tatratatrabhinandini*," declares the Buddha [56]. (This desire results in a revitalised existence, surrounded with lust and delight, delighting here, now there.) This remark emphasises that rebirth is created inwardly via longing rather than being imposed from the outside. Taṇha maintains the continuance of saṁsāra by converting fleeting experience into karmic accumulation. According to Steven Collins, this realisation preserves moral responsibility while dissolving the metaphysical self [57]. Marathi scholars similarly observe that rebirth in Buddhism is processual continuity without a permanent soul [58].

**5.5 Dependent Origination as a Non-Theistic Explanation of Suffering :** The theistic and metaphysical interpretations that were common in ancient India are drastically different from Paṭiccasamuppāda. The ideas that pain is caused by God (issaranimmaṇa), fate (niyati), or a primal self (atta) were categorically rejected by the Buddha. Rather, he declared: "*Imassuppāda idaṅ uppajjati; imasmiṅ sati idaṅ hoti*." (That arises when this exists; that arises when this arises) [59]. According to this definition, misery is realistically reversible, ethically understandable, and conditionally arisen. According to this theory, Taṇha is a conditioned mental predisposition that can be changed rather than sin or a cosmic defect. Marathi expositors emphasise that this causal explanation upholds human agency and establishes the potential for emancipation via practice and awareness [60].

**5.6 Interdependence, Conditionality, and Impermanence:** Three essential aspects of existence are revealed by the idea of dependent origination: impermanence, interdependence, and conditionality (idappaccayata). It is demonstrated that Taṇha itself is conditioned, emerging from ignorance and emotion and ending with their cessation. "*Taṇhanirodha bhavanirodho*," declares the Buddha. (Becoming stops when the craving stops.) [61]. This realisation undermines the idea that yearning is an innate or timeless feature of human nature. Rather, it confirms that taṇha is eliminable because it is provisional and dependently arisen. Marathi Buddhist philosophers emphasise that acknowledging the conditioned character of craving empowers ethical and meditative development while undermining fatalism [62]. Therefore, paṭiccasamuppāda serves as a liberative hermeneutic that aims to end suffering in addition to being a theory of causality.

**6. Philosophical Significance of Paṭiccasamuppāda:** The core of early Buddhist philosophy is the idea of dependent origination, or paṭiccasamuppāda. It is a thorough explanatory framework that supports Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and soteriology rather than just a theory of cause. The Buddha offered a radical alternative to both theistic determinism and metaphysical absolutism by articulating a picture of reality based on conditionality, impermanence, and relational

existence through dependent origination. The philosophical importance of paṭiccasamuppada and its fundamental function in Buddhist thinking are critically examined in this section.

**6.1 Causality as the Foundation of Buddhist Philosophy:** At its core, paṭiccasamuppada establishes *causality (idappaccayata)* as the fundamental principle governing existence. The Buddha succinctly formulated this causal logic as: *“Imasmim sati idaṃ hoti; imassuppada idaṃ uppajjati; imasmim asati idaṃ na hoti; imassa nirodha idaṃ nirujjhanti”*[63]. *(When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises; when this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.)*

Any idea of uncaused beings or first origins is rejected by this concept. Rather, reality is viewed as a dynamic web of circumstances in which various causes influence the emergence, persistence, and cessation of occurrences. Buddhist causality is therefore contextual and useful rather than mechanical or fatalistic. According to Marathi Buddhist scholars, this causal view emphasises how Buddhist philosophy substitutes empirical study of reality for theoretical metaphysics [64]. As a result, Paṭiccasamuppada serves as the epistemic basis for all other Buddhist teachings.

**6.2 Rejection of Creator-God Theory and Metaphysical Absolutism:** One of the most extreme effects of dependent origination is the rejection of a creator-god (issaranimmaṇa) as the ultimate source of creation or suffering. The Buddha explicitly rejected the idea that the world was created by chance, fate, or a higher power [65]. *“Issaranimmaṇahetu satta dukkhani paṭisañvedenti—ayaḡ micchadiṭṭhi”* is how he criticises theistic explanations in the Aṅguttara Nikaya. (The misconception that pain is a result of God's creation) [66]. Dependent origination uses immanent causation to explain phenomena, doing away with the necessity for metaphysical absolutes. This denial of religious determinism upholds human agency and moral responsibility. In contrast to both Vedic theism and later metaphysical systems, Marathi scholars observe that this stance established the foundation for Buddhism's logical and non-dogmatic orientation [67].

**6.3 Refutation of a Permanent Self (Anatta):** The Buddhist rejection of a permanent self (atta) has its clearest theological foundation in Paṭiccasamuppada. No constant, autonomous entity may exist within or beneath experience if all phenomena are condition-dependent. *“Yaḡ kinci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃge nirodhadhammaṃ”* is what the Buddha says [68]. (Everything that has the potential to arise also has the potential to end.) The five aggregates (pancakkhandha) that make up what is typically referred to as a "person" are equally covered by this understanding. None of the aggregates can function as a permanent self because they are all conditionally arisen.

According to Steven Collins, dependent origination preserves accountability through causal sequence rather than substantive identity, dismantling selfhood without destroying moral continuity [69]. In a similar vein, Marathi Buddhist scholars stress that non-self refers to relational existence rather than nothingness [70].

**6.4 Doctrinal Basis for Impermanence (Anicca) and Suffering (Dukkha):** In Buddhism, misery (dukkha) and impermanence (anicca) are rationally drawn from dependent origination rather than dogmatically asserted. Since conditions are what give rise to phenomena, they must inevitably change and end when those conditions do. "*Yad anicca a tan dukkhan; yaḡ dukkhan tad anatta,*" says the Buddha [71]. (What is suffering is non-self; what is impermanent is suffering.) Thus, suffering is explained by Paṭiccasamuppada as the inevitable result of conditional existence grasped through yearning rather than as punishment or existential tragedy. By clinging to what is fundamentally unstable, taṅha exacerbates dukkha. According to Marathi readings, this approach makes liberation a logical possibility by turning pain into an object of insight rather than despair [72].

**6.5 A middle ground between annihilationism and eternalism :** One of the most philosophically significant aspects of paṭiccasamuppada is its articulation of the Middle Path (majjhima paṭipada) between two extreme metaphysical views:

- Sassatavada (eternalism): belief in an eternal self or soul
- Ucchedavada (annihilationism): belief that the self is destroyed at death

*The Buddha explicitly rejects both: "Ete te ubho ante anupagamma majjhena tathagato dhammaṃ deseti"* [73]. (*Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata teaches the Dhamma by the Middle.*)

Continuity without identity—a process that endures without a permanent essence—is made possible by dependent origination. This philosophical stance undermines metaphysical permanence while avoiding nihilism. This discovery, which provides a nuanced alternative to both Vedantic eternalism and materialist nihilism, is regarded by Marathi academics as one of Buddhism's most significant contributions to Indian philosophy [74].

**6.6 Epistemological and Ethical Implications of Dependent Origination :** In terms of epistemology, paṭiccasamuppada bases knowledge not on revelation or conjecture but on direct experiencing insight (vipassana). The truth must be seen, not believed (daṭṭhabba). Famously, the Buddha said, "*Yo paṭiccasamuppadañ passati, so dhammaüḡe passati*" [75]. (The Dhamma is visible to those who recognise dependent origination.) This ethical theory forms the conceptual foundation of kamma by establishing a causal link between intention, action, and consequence. Ethical behaviour (sīla), mental discipline (samadhi), and wisdom (panna) serve as transformational circumstances that lead to liberation because suffering is caused by conditions. Dependent origination unites ethics and insight, according to Marathi Buddhist scholars, making liberation a question of moral and cognitive reform rather than supernatural grace [76].

As a result, Paṭiccasamuppada serves as the conceptual foundation of early Buddhism, offering a cogent framework that integrates ethics, liberation, impermanence, causation, and non-self. The doctrine asserts the universality of suffering and the practical potential of its cessation by exposing taṅha as a conditioned and eliminable force inside this causal network. In this way, dependent

origination is not only descriptive but also deeply liberating, turning philosophical understanding into a route to liberation.

**7. The Cessation of Taṇha and the Path to Liberation :** The core of nirvana, according to early Buddhist philosophy, is the cessation of taṇha (craving). Taṇha is recognised as the primary cause of suffering (dukkha-samudaya), but its cessation (taṇha-nirodha) is also portrayed as the achievement of Nibbana, the ultimate spiritual objective. Through ethical, contemplative, and wisdom-based disciplines, the Buddha's teachings offer a methodical and useful way to eradicate craving rather than just diagnosing the human situation. This part explains the Buddhist notion of Nibbana, explores the meaning of taṇha-nirodha, and evaluates the Noble Eightfold Path as a means of emancipation.

**7.1 Meaning of Taṇha-nirodha :** The literal meaning of the term "taṇha-nirodha" is the cessation, extinction, or total disappearance of craving. The Buddha defines the Third Noble Truth as follows in the canonical formulation of the Four Noble Truths: "*Yayañ taṇha ponobhavika nandīragasahagata tatratatrabhinandinī—tassa asesaviraganirodho cago paṭinissaggo mutti analayo*" [77]. (The whole withering away and cessation of that longing, its abandoning, relinquishment, release, and non-attachment, is the sublime truth of the end of suffering.) Taṇha-nirodha refers to the radical uprooting of desire by knowledge rather than its transient repression. Terms like viraga (dispassion), mutti (release), and asesa (without remnant) suggest a deep shift in consciousness rather than just moralistic restraint. Marathi Buddhist academics stress that quitting craving is grounded in cognitive reform rather than repression in wisdom [78].

**7.2 Nibbana as the Extinction of Craving, Not Annihilation of Being:** A widespread misperception is that nibbana is synonymous with nihilistic extinction or annihilation. Nonetheless, canonical texts consistently clarify that Nibbana is the extinction of desire, anger, and delusion rather than the annihilation of existence or consciousness. The Buddha's succinct description of nibbana is "*Ragakkhayo dosakkhayo mohakkhayo—idaṃ vuccati nibbana...*" [79]. (Nibbana is the destruction of illusion, hatred, and greed.) Nibbana is therefore an ethical and psychological accomplishment rather than a metaphysical denial. It is freedom from compulsive becoming (bhava) rather than the destruction of the self. Walpola Rahula emphasises that Nibbana is not a condition of non-being but rather "perfect freedom of the mind" [80]. Similar to annihilationist interpretations, Marathi interpretations emphasise that *Nirvana signifies the end of attachment rather than existence* [80].

**7.3 The Noble Eightfold Path as the Practical Means to End Taṇha :** The Buddha offers the Noble Eightfold Path (ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga) as the Fourth Noble Truth, which leads to the cessation of taṇha. He states in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: "*Ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo—sammadiṭṭhi — sammāsamaḍhi.*" [82]. (This Noble Eightfold Path: right perspective, right purpose, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.) The Path symbolises the Middle Way that progressively lessens and ultimately eliminates yearning

rather than being strictly austere or decadent. Aspects of taṇha are immediately countered by each of these factors: right mindfulness detects craving without identification, right effort restrains unwholesome wants, and right perspective dismantles ignorance. The Eightfold Path is a synthesis of theory and practice, according to Marathi Buddhist scholars [83].

**7.4 Role of Ethical Discipline (Sīla), Meditation (Samadhi), and Wisdom (Panna) :** Traditionally, the Eightfold Path is divided into three integrated trainings (tisikkha): panna, samadhi, and sila. When combined, they serve as an all-encompassing approach to eradicating taṇha.

- Sila, or ethical discipline, prevents destructive acts driven by greed and want by limiting the external manifestations of craving
- Samadhi, or mental focus, calms the mind and lessens the tension that gives rise to cravings
- Panna (wisdom) uproots craving at its cognitive core by penetrating the genuine essence of phenomena.

The Buddha affirms this progression: “*Sīlaparibhavito samadhi mahapphalo hoti; samadhiparibhavita panna mahapphala hoti*” [84]. (*Meditation cultivated by morality yields great benefit; wisdom cultivated by meditation yields great benefit.*) Marathi sources emphasize that wisdom (*Wisdom*) alone can destroy craving permanently, while morality and meditation prepare the ground for insight [85].

**7.5 Mindfulness and Insight as Tools for Uprooting Craving :** Among the Path's components, mindfulness (sammāsati) is essential for tracking the emergence and cessation of yearning. The Buddha gives practitioners instructions to reflect on emotions and mental processes without attachment in the Satipaṭṭhana Sutta: “*Vedanasu vedananupassī viharati... anissito ca viharati, na ca kinci loke upadiyati*” [86]. (He spends his days not clinging to anything in the world, just watching emotions as feelings.) By immediately perceiving the transient and conditioned nature of desire, the practitioner of Vipassana (insight meditation) dissolves the power of desire. By focusing on existential freedom, this approach surpasses modern psychological approaches of conscious observation, according to recent experts [87]. According to Marathi interpretations, mindfulness can be used to pinpoint the source of cravings [88].

**7.6 Liberation as Freedom from Compulsive Desire:** In Buddhism, liberation (vimutti) is not the attainment of a transcendent state; rather, it is essentially emancipation from obsessive desire. The emancipated individual (arahant) keeps living, acting, and perceiving, but without being compelled by cravings. “*Taṇhaya khayā nibbana...*” [89] is declared in the Dhammapada. (Nibbana is the annihilation of yearning; this is majestic and tranquil.) Instead of retreating from life, such freedom is typified by composure, empathy, and clarity. Liberation is defined by Marathi Buddhist scholars as “*living without attachment*” [90]. Thus, the Buddha's liberating endeavour comes to an end with the cessation of taṇha. Craving is progressively diminished and ultimately eliminated via penetrative

wisdom, ethical discipline, and meditative cultivation. Instead of being annihilation, nibbana appears as the ultimate freedom—a state that transcends fear, compulsion, and discontent. In this way, early Buddhism's route to liberation is a useful philosophy of emancipation based on awareness, accountability, and transformative understanding.

**8. Contemporary Relevance of the Doctrine of Taṇha :** Despite being developed in a pre-modern ascetic setting, the idea of taṇha is extremely applicable to modern society due to its psychological realism and depth of analysis. Beyond historical and cultural bounds, the Buddha's diagnosis of desire as the source of suffering provides a critical perspective through which contemporary consumption patterns, psychological pain, ethical dilemmas, and ecological destruction might be comprehended. The Buddhist explanation of craving offers both practical direction and diagnostic clarity in an era characterised by consumer excess, addictive behaviours, and mental health issues.

**8.1 Taṇha and Modern Consumerism:** The continuous stimulation and satisfaction of desire is the structural driving force behind modern consumer society. Market economies, digital media, and advertising all prosper by fostering discontent and offering gratification through acquisition. The Buddha's depiction of yearning as insatiable, "*Na kahapaṇavassena titti kamesu vijjati; appassada kama bahudukkha bahupayasa,*" is reflected in these phenomena [91]. (Sensual pleasures bring little joy and great suffering; not even a rain of gold coins can deliver satisfaction.) Consumerism turns desire into an economic motor by institutionalising kamataṇha. According to Buddhism, this constant stimulation of craving results in uneasiness, rivalry, and alienation rather than satisfaction. Researchers have noted that contemporary economies rely on the same psychological processes that the Buddha recognised as the root causes of suffering [92]. In a similar vein, Marathi Buddhist scholars criticise consumer society as institutional thirst, contending that unbridled desire threatens both social harmony and personal well-being [93]. Thus, by highlighting the ontological and psychological costs of consumerism, the philosophy of taṇha provides a potent ethical critique.

**8.2 Psychological Parallels between Craving and Addiction :** More and more modern psychology acknowledges that addiction is a compulsive behaviour based on need, reinforcement, and conditioned reaction rather than just a moral failing. This is very similar to the Buddhist interpretation of taṇha as a habitual mental energy that arises from sukha-vedana, or pleasant feeling: "*Vedanapaccaya taṇha*" [94]. (Conditioned by emotion, desire emerges.) This causal pattern is reflected in substance addiction, compulsive consumption, and behavioural addictions (like gambling or digital dependency). The Buddhist definition of taṇha as ponobhavika—that which leads to repeated becoming—is reflected in the desire for control, escalation, and repetition [95]. By breaking the loop of cravings and reactions, mindfulness-based therapies drawn from Buddhist practice are successful in treating addiction, according to contemporary experts [96]. Studies on Marathi

psychology also emphasise the value of Buddhist mindfulness (Sati) in treating dependency and obsessive desire [97].

**8.3 Sustainable Living's Ethical Consequences :** From an ethical standpoint, *taṇha* is the primary source of unsustainable lifestyles and harm to the environment. Natural resource overuse is a reflection of what society wants. Buddhism, on the other hand, emphasises moderation (*appicchata*), contentment (*santutṭhi*), and non-possessiveness. As a virtue, contentment is praised by the Buddha: "*Santutṭhi parama a dhanag* [98]. (The greatest wealth is contentment.) People can lessen harm to themselves, the environment, and future generations by reducing their cravings. By connecting individual desires to global repercussions, scholars contend that Buddhist ethics offers a workable philosophical basis for sustainable living [98]. Craving-control is directly linked to social justice and ecological responsibility in Marathi Buddhist literature [99].

**8.4 Taṇha in Relation to Mental Health and Well-being:** Unfulfilled desires, comparison, and attachment to results can exacerbate mental health crises including anxiety, sadness, and persistent discontent. According to the Buddhist understanding, desire is a recurring cause of discomfort and mental agitation (*uddhacca*). "*Taṇhaya jayatī soko, taṇhaya jayatī bhayañ; taṇhaya vipṇamuttassa natthi soko kuto bhayañ*" [100] is stated in the Dhammapada. (Grief and dread are the results of hunger. When one is liberated from desire, sadness does not exist—where does fear come from? This realisation is in line with modern therapeutic strategies that prioritise awareness, acceptance, and non-attachment. These ideas are immediately incorporated into Buddhist-inspired techniques like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) [101]. Scholars of Marathi mental health also stress that inner stability and emotional resilience are fostered by freedom from obsessive desire [102].

**8.5 Buddhist Perspectives on Handling Desires in Contemporary Society:** Buddhism promotes the enlightened understanding and modification of desire rather than its complete suppression. A balanced approach between indulgence and repression is provided by the Middle Path (*majjhima paṭipada*). "*Yo taṇhañ pajahati dhīro, taṇhasotam jigacchati*," asserts the Buddha [103]. (The desire flood is crossed by the wise one who gives up craving.) People can perceive desire without being controlled by it by using practical techniques like insight (*panna*), mindfulness (*sati*), and ethical discipline (*sīla*). These methods offer a framework for ethical restraint and aware living in contemporary environments characterised by overstimulation and continual choice.

Marathi Buddhist authors emphasise the need of mindfulness-based desire regulation for individual autonomy and societal well-being in modern life [104]. As a result, the theory of *taṇha* provides both intellectual criticism and useful methods for navigating contemporary life. As a crucial tool for comprehending consumerism, addiction, ethical breakdown, and mental anguish, the idea of *taṇha* is still highly relevant today. Early Buddhism provides a timeless framework for dealing with both individual and societal problems by identifying desire as the source of suffering. The Buddha's

understanding of desire and its cessation emerges as a philosophy of restraint, clarity, and release in a period characterised by excess and dissatisfaction—capable of directing contemporary humanity towards inner freedom and sustainable well-being.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the psychological, ethical, and existential source of suffering, *taṇha* (craving) plays a crucial and integrative role in early Buddhist thinking, as this study has shown. A detailed reading of the Pali Canon reveals that *taṇha* is much more than a desire for physical pleasure; it includes a longing for both existence and non-existence, which keeps the cycle of *saṃsāra* going. Craving is revealed as the dynamic power that turns fleeting experience into permanent bondage through its canonical expression in the philosophy of Tisso *Taṇha*, its explicit identification as the Second Noble Truth (*dukkha-samudaya*), and its fundamental function within *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

In terms of philosophy, a relational and conditional explanation of existence replaces ideas of a permanent self, divine causation, or metaphysical absolutism through the examination of *taṇha* within dependent origination. *Taṇha* appears as a conditioned phenomenon that may be eliminated; it originates from ignorance and emotion and ends with wisdom and objectivity. Instead of advocating for the suppression of desire, the Buddha's path advocates for its radical transformation through ethical discipline (*sīla*), meditative cultivation (*samādhi*), and liberating insight (*pañña*). This culminates in *taṇha-nirodha*, which is identified with *Nibbāna* as freedom from compulsive becoming rather than annihilation.

Lastly, the doctrine's continued importance is highlighted by its current applicability. The Buddhist critique of craving provides both ethical advice and diagnostic clarity in tackling contemporary consumerism, addiction, mental anguish, and the ecological disaster. Early Buddhism offers a useful concept of liberation based on accountability, awareness, and insight by exposing *taṇha* as the source of discontent at both the individual and societal levels. Thus, the cessation of *taṇha* serves as both the foundation of Buddhist soteriology and a timeless framework for comprehending and reducing human suffering.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## **Data Availability Statement**

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

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