

A STUDY OF ROLE OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN MORAL ETHICS

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There are two aspects of Buddhist teachings that encouraged the development of scientific thinking. First was its rationality, which encouraged thinking and discourse, rather than the unquestioning acceptance of tradition. The second aspect was the emphasis on causality in Buddhism. The overall education provided in Buddhist societies was more open and less ritualized than Brahmanic teachings. Buddhist education was meant for the growth of the personality and to explore the qualities of 'Man' inside a man. The debating of the śāstras and exchange of the ideas among the scholars were accepted as the basis of academic excellence.

After mahāparivāna of the Buddha, a hierarchy of eminent teachers came into existence in the monastic order. Thereafter several lineages of teachers evolved in the Buddhist education up to the early Christian era. Buddhist education developed in two distinct methods namely *pariyatti* and *paṭipatti*. *Pariyatti* is that aspect of Buddhism which includes the theoretical knowledge of Buddhism, acquired by studying scriptures and understanding the philosophy and tenets by reading the śāstras. The experimental knowledge is gained only by treading upon the path as laid down in the texts, technically called *paṭipatti*. Practical knowledge or meditational practices, rising up to the acquisition of supernatural powers include strict observance of morality and other penances

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and practices (*dhutaṅgas*). Buddhism, like other studies of modern sciences, has laid stress on both, the theoretical and practical understanding and knowledge, and at time, the practical knowledge or *paṭipatti* is more stressed than mere understanding the theory or *pariyatti*. Certain common subjects like logic (*pramāṇasāstra*), epistemology including *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras and the Vinaya rules were enlisted in the Curriculum. On account of their respective ideologies and distinction of interpretation regarding the fundamental teachings of the Buddha, the Theravadin Buddhists could not always agree with the Mahayana Buddhists. But the basic ideal of Buddhist education was not ignored. Buddhist educational centres of learning or Mahāvihāra aimed at the growth of the personality and the development of dynamism at the individual level as well as that in the society.

The Buddhists strongly believe in the *Kammic* law. Hence they consider their lives as pre-destined by their own deeds. What you reap is what you had sown. The human mind and body are merely transient tools, embodiments of one's own merit. Thus in order to harvest more Buddhism, human life is depicted (almost invariably) as extremely short, full of sufferings and uncertainty. Yet it is so precious that it is suggested that one should make the most of and the best of it through the practice of virtues. In this context, it may be noted that longevity of life has never been esteemed as the goal of life, instead a strong volition and an opportunity to lead a virtuous life is considered the life's real value.

It is stated that Buddhism is a religion of reverence for life, especially human life. But at the same time, it is also clear that this is neither the final goal nor the absolute goal. A saying of the Buddha clearly explains this point —

na attahetu na parassa hetu, na puttamicche na dhanam na raṭṭham.

na iccheyya adhammena samiddhimattano, sa sīlavā paññavā dhammiko siyā¹.

1. *Khuddakanikāya* Vol. I Dhammapada (Ed.) Bhikkhu J. Kassapa, Nalanda Publication Board, Nalanda, 1959, p. 25. Verse no. 84.

Righteousness (dhamma) has been recognized in the Buddhist Scriptures as an appropriate point of reference. It is the authority of righteousness, which the Buddhists, by and large, have taken as 'morality', that is to say, the way things are and the way things should be. It may be noted here that according to many religious leaders this very principle happens to be the primordial principle that exists in nature, that existed in the past and that shall exist in future. The contribution of the Buddha lies in the fact that he discovered it, revealed it and consequently taught it to his worthy disciples. To talk in terms of the present day, sciences and disciplines of knowledge, the same principle is regarded as ethics as a branch of learning.

Buddhism also implies profound respect for tolerance for all religions and in this way it implies an inclusive and impartial attitude which includes non-believers. The teachings of the Buddha contained in the *Mahāparibbānasutta* of *Dīghanikāya* is often cited as an example of Buddhist inclusiveness. It says that the Buddha before his parinibbāna has advised his disciples that they should always keep in their mind that any religious system which advocates the efficacy of the Eight-fold path is the only useful religious system which employs that the criterion for assessing other religious belief. Subhadda asked the Buddha that "what he should think regarding various religious teachers, all of whom claim to have special insight"? While answering this question Lord Buddha said "In whatever doctrine and discipline, Subhadda, the Noble Eight-fold path is not found, there the Samaṇa (i.e. the Arahāt) is not found either.... And in whatever doctrine and discipline, Subhadda, the Eight-fold Path is found there is found the Samaṇa also.... Now in this doctrine and discipline (i.e. Buddhism), Subhadda, the Noble Eight-fold is found, and here alone, Subhadda is the Samaṇa. The system of others are empty with respect to the perfect knowledge of samaṇa-s. And in this one, Subhadda, may the bhikkhu-s live rightly so that the world is not empty of Arhat-s."² These statements

2. "yasmim̐ kho, subhadda, dhammavinaye ariyo at̐ṭhaṅgiko maggo na upalabbhati, samaṇopi tattha na upalabbhati. dutiyopi tattha samaṇo na upalabbhati. tatiyopi tattha samaṇo na upalabbhati. catutthopi tattha samaṇo na upalabbhati. yasmiṅca kho, subhadda, dhammavinaye ariyo at̐ṭhaṅgiko maggo upalabbhati, samaṇopi tattha upalabbhati, dutiyopi tattha samaṇo upalabbhati, tatiyopi tattha samaṇo upalabbhati, catutthopi tattha samaṇo upalabbhati. imasmim̐ kho, subhadda, dhammavinaye ariyo at̐ṭhaṅgiko maggo upalabbhati,

show the fine example of religious inclusivism.

Mahāparinibbāna Sutta of the *Dīgha-nikāya* contains a sermon of the Buddha on the *Satta Aparihaniya Dhamma* or the Seven Non-maleficent Rules (*satta aparihāniya dhammā*). It is recorded in the aforesaid *Sutta* or Discourse delivered by the Buddha at Gijjhakuta Pabbata in Rajagaha, the capital of Magadha, one of the world super powers during those days, to Vassakara, the Mahamatta or the Prime Minister of King Ajātasattu in the very presence of Bhikkhu Ānanda, the Upaṭṭhāka or the Personal Attendant or Associate of the Buddha. The occasion was when Vassakara had approached the Buddha under the royal instruction from the king himself for consultation regarding the king's plan of attaching the Vajji-s. The Buddha delivered the famous Discourse on the aforesaid Seven Points after he had drawn the attention of Venerable Ānanda towards those questions in such a way that the questions themselves assumed the form of answers. After putting those seven questions and receiving affirmation from Ānanda regarding their practice by the Vajji-s, the Buddha also related the event, which had occurred some years ago when he (the Buddha) on his visit to Vesali and delivered the same Discourse on those Seven Points to Vajji-s. The fact is that those seven points are so important and crucial to the existence and maintenance of any state that if practiced in letter and spirit by any state that state cannot be overpowered by any state or country³.

Moral guidance is given routinely before the curricular lessons in the form of procedure of intention and behaviour. Students are reminded of what intentions and behaviours they should avoid and what they should cultivate in pursuit of Dharma in general and for the lesson in particular. The length and style vary from teacher to teacher but the students are always reminded to generate *bodhicitta* and frequently to reflect on the four points of mind,

idheva, subhadda, samaṇo, idha dutiyo samaṇo, idha tatiyo samaṇo, idha catuttho samaṇo, suññā parappavādā samaṇebhi aññehi ime ca, subhadda, bhikkhū sammā vihareyyuṃ, asuñño loko arahantehi assāti- Dīghanikāya, Vol. II, Bhikkhu Jagadish Kassapa, Nalanda Edition, pp. 116-117.

3. “*ekamidāhaṃ, brāhmaṇa, samayaṃ vesāliyaṃ viharāmi sārāndade cetiye. tatrāhaṃ vajjīnaṃ ime satta aparihāniye dhamme desesiṃ. yāvakaivaṇca, brāhmaṇa, ime satta aparihāniyā dhammā vajjisu ṭhassanti, imesu ca sattasu aparihāniyesu dhammesu vajjī sandississanti, vuddhiyeva, brāhmaṇa, vajjīnaṃ pāṭikaṅkhā, no parihāni*”*ti- Dīghanikāya, Vol. II, (Ed.) Bhikkhu Jagadish Kassapa, Nalanda Edition, pp. 60-61.*

the impermanence of life, the flaws of saṃsāra and infallibility of karma. The ethical problems must be considered in the light of law of dependent origination, causal relation and law of *Kamma*. Moral behaviour in Buddhist system is a means towards a religious end. Accordingly, all moral acts are understood either to be *kusala kamma* or *akusala kamma*. Everything in the phenomenal world is relative. Human behaviour, therefore, is to be judged not on an absolute scale of good and evil but rather on a relative scale of *kusala* and *akusala*. *Kusala*, of course, is understood in regard to the ascent of the path of the Buddha out of this world of suffering. Buddha also says that mind is the forerunner of all actions (*mano pubbaṅgamā dhammā*⁴) and it is the consciousness by which all variations are done- ‘*sabbāni pi hi etāni vicittāni citteneva katāni*’ or ‘*cittaṃ ti vicittaṃ*’.⁵ Further, it is said that consciousness is the really action and it is the source of all actions. Buddha says that ‘O monks, I say volition as action.’⁶ In answering to a question of king Milinda, Ācārya Nāgasena says that mindfulness (*sati*), which plays a great role in the artistic design and art of painting, arises in the mind and by the external factors. If the mindfulness does not arise from the external factors, then learning of artist from the others will be useless.⁷

In the view of causal process, deeds and doer appear as reciprocally conditioned, and a notion is affirmed that is central to the Buddha’s teaching of karma: what we do not only matters, it molds us. The interplay between *karma* and *kāya* therefore presents a mutual relationship between our behavior and the psycho-physical structure. Again, behavior is not the sole determiner of experience, other events condition it also. The effect of a deed upon a person, furthermore, depends upon the person’s character as shaped by other deeds. The Buddha points out that the same kind of act performed by different people can yield diverse results

4. *Dhammapada*, verse no. 1.

5. *Aṭṭhasālini*, op citt., pp. 162- 164.

6. “*Cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi*”- *Samyuttanikāya*, Vol. III, p. 415.

7. ‘*Yadi natthi mahārāja, kaṭumikā sati, natthi kiñci sippikānaṃ kammāyatanehi vāvijjāṭṭhānehi vā kaṇīyaṃ*

niratthakā ācariyaṃ’- *Milindapañho* (Ed.) Swāmi, Dwarikādāsa, Bauddha Bhārati, Varanasi, 1998 , p. 98.

and those different behaviours can produce similar results. He repeatedly emphasized that the effects of the past can be modified by present action. As stressed, it is integral to the teaching of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* that the *Saṅkhāras* themselves can be altered; therefore, change in human motivation can destroy the harmful effects of action (*kammakkhaya*). Bhikkhu Nyanasobhano opines: “In this world of dependency and interrelationship, there must always be a sound foundation to one’s efforts, so Buddhists believe that keeping moral precepts is a practical necessity for one’s own well-being and progress, quite apart from altruistic motives.”⁸

Buddhism had also a vision to enhance secular ethics, which is based on a holistic humanitarian. Texts such as *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, composed by Ācārya Śāntideva are embodiments of such a practical ethical philosophy and this text presents a rich treasure of reasons and methods by which one has to cultivate a healthy state of mind. This text has the main source for cultivation of *Karuṇā* and *Bodhicitta*-the awakening of mind and wisdom. The *bodhicitta* is the seed of Buddhahood. According to the tradition, *bodhicitta* is said to have two aspects, or rather to exist on two levels. First, one speaks of ultimate *bodhicitta*, referring to the direct cognizance of the true status of phenomena. This is the wisdom of emptiness: an immediate, non-dual insight that transcends conceptualization. Second. There is relative *bodhicitta*, by which is meant the aspiration to attain the highest good, or Buddhahood, for the sake of all, together with all the practical steps necessary to achieve this goal. The connection between two *bodhicittas*- the wisdom of emptiness on the one hand, the will to deliver beings from suffering on the other- is not perhaps immediately clear. But within the Buddhist perspective, as Śāntideva gradually reveals, ultimate and relative *bodhicitta* are two interdependent aspects of the same thing. The true realization of the emptiness is impossible without the practice of perfect compassion, while no compassion can ever be perfect without the realization of the wisdom of emptiness.⁹

8. *A Buddhist View of Abortion* by Bhikkhu Nyanasobhano, Bodhi Leaves No. 117, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1989, pp. 2-3.

9. Shantideva: *The Way of the Bodhisattva (A Translation of the Bodhicaryāvatāra)*, Shambhala, South Asia Edition, 2012, p. 03.

Highlighting the importance of moral ethics in education system, the XIV Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso is of the opinion that Universities should undertake more research work and discussion for developing moral ethics in students. In Europe, the Church took care of moral ethics and family value. Now efforts were being made to introduce moral values in education system. Many Universities have introduced some projects as experiment like meditation that gave positive results. Dalai Lama says that “The ethics must be based on secularism, not on religion. Secularism meant respect to all religions.” He further says that we need to employ a secular approach to ethics, secular in the Indian sense of respecting all religious traditions and even the views of non-believers in an unbiased way. The Buddha also states in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* about pertaining to grant of protection to holy and saintly people (obviously of different communities), so that those who have not come to the given territory, yet, might do so and those who have already come might live there in peace¹⁰. The Buddha’s statement in this regard was, “*kinti te, ānanda, sutam, ‘vajjīnaṃ arahantesu dhammikā rakkhāvaraṇagutti susaṃvihitā, kinti anāgatā ca arahanto vijitaṃ āgaccheyyūṃ, āgatā ca arahanto vijite phāsu vihareyyun’*”¹¹ti? “*sutam metam, bhante ‘vajjīnaṃ arahantesu dhammikā rakkhāvaraṇagutti susaṃvihitā kinti anāgatā ca arahanto vijitaṃ āgaccheyyūṃ, āgatā ca arahanto vijite phāsu vihareyyun’*”¹²ti. It means that the people’s representation is expected to protect holy men with whatever objects and items of their use which had been provided to them in the past. It also means that it has been obliquely suggested that a good government and its representation should do whatever is possible, so that such men get interested to visit their territory which in its turn would create such an atmosphere in which people would love to live with

10. *vajjīnaṃ vajjicetiyaṇi abbhantarāni ceva bāhirāni ca, tāni sakkaronti garuṃ karonti mānenti pūjenti, tesaṅca dinnapubbaṃ katapubbaṃ dhammikaṃ balim no parihāpentī*”ti? “*sutam metam, bhante — ‘vajjī yāni tāni vajjīnaṃ vajjicetiyaṇi abbhantarāni ceva bāhirāni ca, tāni sakkaronti garuṃ karonti mānenti pūjenti tesaṅca dinnapubbaṃ katapubbaṃ dhammikaṃ balim no parihāpentī*”ti-*Dīghanikāya*, Vol. II, (Ed.) Bhikkhu Jagadish Kassapa, Nalanda Edition, p. 60.

11. *Dīghanikāya*, Vol. II, (Ed.) Bhikkhu Jagadish Kassapa, Nalanda Edition, p. 60.

12. *Ibid.*

love and affection and respect each other. Secular ethics rooted in scientific findings, common experience and common sense can easily be introduced into the secular education system. If we can do that there is a real prospect of making this 21st century an era of peace and compassion.

Thus, the above discussion presents evidence that Buddhist education can contribute to moral ethics. Buddhist moral ethics may be helpful in this modern world. It will certainly lead for a good and perfect life accompanied by the observation of simple principles of causality, morality and *Kamma*. According to XIV Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, what will really change the world is coming to better understand our emotions and how to manage them on the basis of secular ethics: "I believe we can change our emotions by using our intelligence to raise our awareness. Through an education system which is motivated by compassion, we can expand the sense of well-being of all people, not just for your own circle and eventually bring peace to entire human being on this planet."¹³

For an inclusive education philosophy, M. S. Kurhade says that 'when spirituality will be completely embraced in in our education system, our students not only make a living in this physical world, but also make living a success, and experience every moment of life as new, every day as a day of uplift and blessing and enjoy lasting peace.'¹⁴ XIVth Dalai Lama is of the opinion that our human spirituality is more fundamental than religion. He says that 'We have an underlying human disposition toward love, kindness and affection, irrespective of whether we have a religious framework or not. When we nurture this most fundamental human resource-when we set about cultivating those inner values which we all appreciate in others- then we start to live spirituality.'¹⁵

13. Cf. *Tibetan Bulletin*, Volume 22-Issue 5, September-October 2018 (Ed.) Tenzin Saldon, pub. By Department of Information and International Relations, Central Tibetan Administration, Dharmashala (H.P.), p. 23.

14. 'The Need to Include Spirituality in Education' in the Times of India Newspaper, the Speaking Tree, dated 09.08.2017.

15. Dalai Lama, His Holiness The. 2011. *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*, New Delhi:HarperCollins, p. 17.

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