
The Buddhist Moral View and its Ecological Implications

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Buddhism, as a religion, does not give prime importance to the performance of rites and rituals. The Buddhist Saranam Gachchami' does not mean to submit before the Lord precept 'Buddham Buddha for attaining the grace or compassion of Lord. There is no scope for any prasada or anugraha of the Lord. The Buddhist message is clearly to boost up the sense of Bodhisattava.

Though originally Buddhism developed as a consistent viewpoint concerning practical morality, later on, its different forms have given rise to metaphysical speculations resulting therein diverse forms of philosophical doctrines, like Vaibhāṣika's direct realism (ahya-pratyakṣavada), Sautantrika's indirect realism (anumanavada), idealism/ phenomenalism (vijñānavada), and Madhyamika's voidism (samymada). The doctrine of sanyavada has been interpreted in terms of absolutism¹ as well as subjected to non speculative analysis. Furthermore, the original form of Buddhist moral disciplinary set up, while bound to be too much radical and rigoristic, a natural shift is found to have been introduced into the texture of Buddhism by initiating some form of tantrism into its fold, resulting therein the different point of views like Vajrayana, Kalacakrayana and Sahajayana². All those different point of views, however, concede to the original salient features of Buddhism in one way or the other. Buddhism, that is found in countries other than India like Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, etc., have their respective local elements through which they have tried to look into the Buddhist message. Hence, in Buddhism, it seems, is not one single point of view, but is a concept circling around which there are a number of ramifications and forms of development, and all of them contain some 'family resemblance', to borrow the Wittgensteinian expression.

Like the usual classical Indian darsanika background, Buddhism had its origin from certain deep-rooted practical issues, viz. the problem of sorrows and sufferings. Like other Indian darsanika views, Buddhism has also this issue on the forefront and emphatic for the elevation of sorrows and sufferings³. The solution, that it offers, is not so much physical but rather

¹TRVMurti, The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of Madhyamika System, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2003.

²GC. Nayak, Madhyamika Samyata: A Reappraisal, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 2001.

³Ibid.

psychological in nature. The psychological imbalance is the root cause of suffering and once it is set right, the physical pain, it is held, can very much be redressed on account of psychological sense of determination (sankalpa) and conviction.

Nirvana, in one of the dominant phases of Buddhism, does not stand for any spiritual transcendence. It has not advocated for any metaphysical transcendental state of ultimate reality. Nirvana means the total extinction, and thereby, there is a cessation of all sorrows and sufferings. As long as there is Vasana or craving, trsna or longing, there is the scope for anxiety, which gives rise to mental tension and imbalance and causing thereby untold sufferings⁴. Therefore, the control of desire (kamana) is the proper means for the healing of pains and sufferings and that can be possible by the inculcation of morality, both in the individual and in the society.

Buddhism, at its early phase, became quite attractive for the people at large. It could remain as a strong and positive appeal against the traditionally established form of rites and ritualism founded on some form of abstractionism and transcendentalism⁵. With the establishment of Buddhist Council at a later phase of Buddhism, attempts were made to offer a systematic theoretical foundation of early moral preaching and, thereby, different views at the practical as well as theoretical fronts were made possible. Hinayana and Mahayana were the outcome of this move. So also, at the doctrinal setup, Theravada, Sarcastivada, Vijanavada and Sanyada were formulated.

Thus, in this way, Buddhist points of view lost its early practical message and was reduced to some form of sterile and speculative thought constructions. The strict and rigid formation of code of conduct, which was set up because of divergent theoretical speculative options, has caused negative impact on the normal social foundation. In the name of spiritual elevation, certain transcendental, trans-empirical speculations were entertained which were contrary to the original positive and empirical set up.

It is, perhaps, at this critical juncture that Sanyavada made a breakthrough in pointing out the significant note that there is no difference between nirvanaa and samsara, indicating thereby that nirvana, the ultimate goal in Buddhism, is not transcendental in the esoteric sense of sterile nominal excellence, but it is very much earthly, worldly and phenomenal in essence. It seems to

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

be a revival of the old, original Buddhist message that dukha nivṛtti (cessation of suffering) is purely of practical concern⁶.

The other move was suggested by the Vajraymist, Kalacakrayanist and also the Sahajayanist, which can be regarded as a come back to the natural, positive framework. Dukha-nidana is possible not by getting rid of sensual pleasure (sukha), but by having it as far as possible. Therefore, kṣānta is not ignored, but is rather accepted within the bounds of practical as well as empirical necessity. Thus, at this phase, Buddhism concedes considerably to the popular demand and expectations. However, its impact has remained for a short while. Because, while recognising the legitimacy of kama for the attainment of happiness and peace, the Buddhist point of view, at this stage, was converted into abstract form of tantric esotericism. The original non-theistic message of Buddhism, founded on moral and practical discipline, lost sight and in its place, tantric abstractionism and theistic spiritualism of esoteric origin was emphasised, causing thereby much damage to Buddhism at the practical front⁷.

As already indicated before, Buddhism spread in different countries mostly due to royal patronage. In these countries, Buddhism adopted as the background of local, indigenous religions. That is how the preaching of Buddhism, its ethical and moral teachings were assimilated with indigenous cultural patterns, resulting therein a happy and meaningful emergence of novel Buddhism, which is basically tradition-oriented, and at the same time, making a fruitful synthesis with the modern requirements and necessities.

Now, while one carefully goes through the exposition as well as evaluation of the Buddhist point of view as outlined here, and attempts to find the relevance of its moral preaching as well as ecological implications in modern times, some of the following points need to be touched upon.

First of all it is to be noted that not only Buddhism, but also other world-religions advocate for the inculcation of universal virtues like concern for humanity, attainment of peace at the individual as well as universal plane, truth, honesty and so on. The speciality of Buddhism, as indicated before, is that it is primarily practical and moral in outlook, and does not prescribe any specific and rigid theological orthodoxy. It is fundamentally designed to inculcate moral fellow feeling, and never aspires for the attainment of some form of esoteric spiritual excellence. Morality, in that framework, seems to be the key point of emphasis and it never remains as means for any higher spiritual realization. It is the dhamma (dharma) that regarded as the goal. There is no noumenal transcendence is at least in the original.

⁶T.R.V. Marti

⁷Ibid.

The remark that man has become a slave of science needs to be critically dealt with. It is definitely an undue and over statement to criticise science for all the baneful consequences that humanity faces today. The present day so-called religious protagonists' critical attitude against science and scientific development is rather based on the total misconception about the nature and scope of science itself. The view that science is for advancement of knowledge is least controversial. That scientific outlook is free from dogmas and superstition is least questionable. It is only through proper scientific enquires and investigations, tremendous advancement of knowledge in different fields have become possible and the progress made in different walks of life, both of man and animal, can hardly be over estimated.

Yes, despite worth-noting progress and development in different spheres, scientific research has brought out certain bindings, which are harmful for the entire humanity. The horror of atomic war, the cloning technology, disturbing heavily the state of equilibrium; the excessive digging of earthly plane, increased use of petroleum products thereby cause serious problem of pollution. Ruthless cutting of jungles for the purpose of urbanisation, adoption of different scientific mechanisms to have birth control raises serious moral issues. Rapid industrialisation causing the eruption of several new diseases and challenging the peaceful living condition of man, ruthless killing of animals for having newer and newer laboratory experimentation are some of the instances that are often cited as ill-effects of scientific enquiry. Science thus viewed has been destabilizing the very peaceful existence of man on earth.

Even if it is conceded that most of the issues that are raised here are of serious concern from moral as well as humanitarian point of view, even then, it is not, perhaps, legitimate to put all blame on science or scientific enquiry, for all that science is for opening new and novel frontiers of knowledge. It is set for eradicating all dogmas and superstitions. The scientific findings and discoveries can be properly scrutinized, and which are considered good for humanity at large can be retained and adopted, and the evil ones can be ignored or set aside. For that, the properly rational adoptions as well as implementation of scientific findings are, no doubt, indispensable. It is absolutely not correct to blame science for all such improper implementation of scientific findings. The atomic war is encouraged not by science, but by the arrogant men in power, who want to retain empty vanity and self-respect at the cost of colossal genocide that threatens the foundation of humanity itself. The ruthless exploitation of nature for human survival is not necessary. That surely disturbs the ecological balance. But, for that, the decision that no excavation of minerals and other precious materials by way of digging the earth is to be entertained; no industry is to be set up with a view to check the air/noise pollution; no killing of animals is to be made even for medical experimentation, seems to be, again, one sided and rigid. Both the moves, i.e. either full control of nature or full decontrol of nature seems to be radical and it is, in this context, the move for keeping a balance between the two radical ends

seems to be rationally cogent and no genuine scientific enquiry and research is against such move. It is not science, but the irresponsible and unreasonable men who move for some extreme step, and thereby cause harm both to themselves and to the nature. Hence, instead of blaming science, one should be critical about one's own ill bounded decision and its consequences.

Conclusion

Buddhism seems to be well-grounded as far as it directs our attention to keep the balance (samatva) and avoid the extremes, The Buddhist dictum, of 'middle path' (madhyamapratipada) is definitely a striking point in this perspective. Also, its advocacy for interrelatedness of everything through its concept of pratityasamutpāda seems to be quite illuminating. However, one thing should be noted here. All such moves, entertained in Buddhism in general, have definitive sense of plausibility, when they are viewed in terms of moral dimension, which is quite open and independent. The ethical tone cannot confine to a particular group or community or a sect. Its open textured form is accessible to both believers and non-believers. It is not closed to any specific institutionalised form. The very sense that the Buddhist point of view is anti-science is definitely rooted in some form of conceptual muddles and degenerated thinking. It is free and open textured, neither faltered to materialism nor to spiritualism. For, both these moves are radical and far away from humanitarian touch. Buddhism, on the other hand, is truly humanitarian and moral worldview, which provides due regard to other species and the natural phenomena. It, in this sense, can justifiably claim of having universal appeal.

