

BUDDHIST IDEAL SOCIETY

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SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: BRAHMANICAL AND BUDDHIST

There are four colour-based castes (*vaṅga* // *vaṅga*)¹ in Brahmanical social stratification. These four castes are (i) *khattiya* // *kṣatriya* or kings, rulers, nobles or warriors, (ii) *brāhmaṇa* (S=P) or the ascetics and the priests, who read and interpret the *Vedic* texts, (iii) *vessa* // *vaiśya* or the traders, merchants, artisans, craftsmen, and agriculturists, and (iv) *sudda* // *śūdra*, the slaves and servants. The *Puruṣa Sūkta* of the *Rig Veda* runs thus:

When they divided the primeval being (*puruṣa*), the *brāhmaṇa* was his mouth, the *kṣatriya* became his arms, the *vaiśya* his thighs and from his feet sprang the *śūdra*.²

It is stated elsewhere in the Buddhist texts that, this fourfold caste is sometimes reduced into three social groups consisting of

¹ According to Gombrich (1992: 163), it literally means “color,” and by extension it means “complexion” and “good look.” The four were assigned the symbolic colour of white, red, yellow and black respectively. The brahmins are said to claim that their *vaṅga* is white while the other is black.

² *Rig. X. 90. Cf. M. II. 128-9; S. IV. 218.*

khattiya, *brāhmaṇa* and *gahapati*.³ A *khattiya* is one whose aim is wealth, quest is wisdom, resolve is power, ideal is domination, and want is territory. A *brāhmaṇa* is one whose aim is wealth, quest is wisdom, resolve is Vedic mastering, ideal is sacrifice and want is fruit of sacrifice. A *gahapati* or householder social group which includes the rest of society is one whose aim is wealth, quest is wisdom, resolve is craft and want is fruit of enterprise.⁴

Under this system of Brahmanical social stratification, the first two are regarded as upper classes, enjoying superiority over the last two, the lower classes, who were prescribed to serve them.⁵ The Brahmin, however, is the highest among four castes,⁶ being served by the other three castes,⁷ claiming descent from the sacrificing priests, distinguished by purity of their birth through seven generations, both on the father’s and mother’s side, and by clear complexion, fine in presence, while *śūdra* is the lowest, for being created out of the feet of the *Prajāpati*. It is further stated in the Buddhist texts⁸ that the *brāhmaṇa* enjoys three types of service by the other castes: (i) a *brāhmaṇa* is served by another

³ It should be noted here that the Buddhist scheme of *khattiya*, *brāhmaṇa*, and *gahapati* is not based on either *vaṅga* or *jāti*. See, Chakravarti (1987): 100.

⁴ A. III. 363.

⁵ *M. II. 128-9; MLS. II. 310*: “Among these four castes, sire, two are pointed to as chief: the nobles and the brahmins, that is to say in the way of addressing them, rising up from one’s seat for them, saluting them with joined palms and rendering them service” . Cf. *SBE. X. 4; III. 183; T.W. Rhys Davids (1910): 10-12.*

⁶ *Rig. X. 90.* The Buddhist texts however place the *khattiya* above the *brāhmaṇa* in ascending order. See, for instance, *D. III. 64; M. II. 311-2, 370, 440.* Commenting the system of classification *khattiya* was placed above *brāhmaṇa* in Buddhist texts, Dumont has rightly remarked that “In theory power is ultimately subordinate to priesthood, whereas in fact reflects priesthood submits to power.” [please check this sentence from its source for its grammatical construction].

⁷ *D. I. 80.*

⁸ *M. II. 441.*

br̥ḍhmaḡa, or a *khattiya*, or a *vessa*, or a *sudda*, (ii) he is served by a *khattiya*, or a *vessa*, or a *sudda*, (iii) a *sudda* can be served by another *sudda*, only. The so-called untouchability (*vasala*) was a later development, having no origin in the *Veda*. Only people of the first three classes, according to their wish, can lead an ideal life, consisting in four stages,⁹ whereas people of *ḡḍdra* class and untouchability class have no admission into the Brahmanical order. They are also excluded from sacrifices. Their possibility of spiritual freedom is, therefore, completely ruled out.

By virtue of one's birth, one's caste is known. Caste system is a fixed hierarchical gradation or social hierarchy. The caste system of society was brought into existence under the name of divine creation, through distinctions of colour, race and connubium (?). Much later it was cleverly interpreted as serving different functions (*karma*) in the society, though Manu does not link castes with professions. The Buddha rejects the unequal caste-based society of Brahmanism, on several grounds: biological, economical, legal, ethical, and spiritual.¹⁰

Biologically, unlike plants and animal kingdom which are different in species (*li ḡga ḡ j ḍtimaya ḡ*), all human beings are of single species, and physically alike.¹¹ Physiological variations in colour, hair and shape are insubstantial and insignificant in human beings compared to those of other creatures. One's sense of pleasure or pain does not differ from that of another, regardless of what social class he / she may belong to. All human beings are born empty-handed, their way of sustaining life and departing from this world at the time of death due to sickness are seen in

⁹ First he becomes a Brahmacharin or a Vedic student, then a married householder (*grihastha*), next a forest hermit (*vanaprastha*) and finally an ascetic (*sanyasin*). See Majumdar (1961):176ff.

¹⁰ For a useful discussion on this topic, see *EB*. V. 37-42.

¹¹ *Sn*. 600-11.

the same way.¹² In other words, there is one-ness of mankind, in contradiction to other species (*li ḡga ḡ j ḍtimaya ḡ n'eva, yath ḍ aḡḡḡḡsu j ḍtisū*).¹³

Economically, the Buddha argues that everyone, even a *sudda*, who has wealth, gold, silver and corn could have as his obedient servant another *br̥ḍhmaḡa*, *kḡḡtriya*, *vai ḡya* and *ḡḍdra* to get up earlier than he would, to carry out his wishes, pleasure, and to speak to him affably.¹⁴

Legally speaking, every individual, regardless of his / her social gradation is equal before law. Anyone committing a social evil, he / she is punishable according to the degree of crime. This legal equality or justice is pointed out in the *Madhura Sutta*,¹⁵ which states that anyone, either a noble, or a brahmin, or a merchant, or a worker, etc., who commits killing, burglary, adultery, or cheating would be arrested and punished or fined, or executed or have him exiled, etc. Accordingly, his / her former status of a noble, or brahmin, or a merchant, or a worker, etc., is lost and he / she is simply reckoned as a murderer, robber, adulterer or a cheat.

Ethically and spiritually, the Buddha denied the Brahmanical claim of *br̥ḍhmaḡa*'s superiority over other castes.¹⁶ According to him, the Brahmanical claim that "the *br̥ḍhmaḡa* is superior

¹² Ratnapala (1993): 55.

¹³ *Sn*. 610. *EB*. V. 38-9.

¹⁴ *M*. II. 285.

¹⁵ *M*. II. 88-90.

¹⁶ *D*. I. 86; *D*. II. 242ff; *D*. III. 64; *M*. II. 89, 310ff. In the *Aggaḡḡḡa Sutta* (*D*. III. 72f), the Buddha speaks of the *khattiya* as the great elect who serves as the supreme judge, looking after people's private properties and ensuring them social security, not the *br̥ḍhmaḡa*, while the *sudda* is not seen as serving the *br̥ḍhmaḡa*, *khattiya* and *vessa*, but engages in hunting or trifling pursuits (*D*. III. 74). Jayatilleke (1992: 50) says that "Moral and spiritual development is not a prerogative of people who are specially favoured by their birth, but is open to all, and is within the reach of all."

who are white among the four castes, all other castes are inferior and dark; only the *br̄Dhman̄a* are pure, not non-*br̄Dhman̄a*, and they were born of Brahm̄, formed by Brahm̄, heirs to Brahm̄” is merely an empty claim, and does not have any factual ground or substance.¹⁷ It is considered as a political propaganda for social and economical exploitation in the name of religion and God. He declared that the superiority, if any, is not rested on birth, but rather on ethical and spiritual advancement. According to him, it is irrelevant to talk of advantages and disadvantages arising from birth and social stature.

One’s becoming noble or ignoble lies in one’s ethical conduct.¹⁸ Everyone is equally capable of wholesome and unwholesome behaviour, of ethical advancement and spiritual perfection.¹⁹ The Buddha states that there is no difference between people when they lead a home-left life, restraining from killing, stealing, sexual conduct, lying and intoxicants. All their former designation such as the *khattiya*, *br̄Dhman̄a*, *vessa*, or *sudda* will disappear for them, and they are reckoned simply as the recluse. Due to their ethically good conducts, people of the four castes will pay homage to them, saluting them or rising up before them or offering them basic requisites.²⁰ If they possess five qualities²¹ striving for an ethical perfection, notwithstanding whether they are from *khattiya*, *br̄Dhman̄a*, *vessa* or *sudda*, they can attain freedom.²² All are equally capable of accomplishing the right path,

¹⁷ *M.* II. 89.

¹⁸ *Sn.* p. 336.

¹⁹ *D.* III. 250. Cf. *DB.* I. 102.

²⁰ *M.* II. 88-9.

²¹ *M.* II. 95; 128; *A.* III. 65; *D.* III. 237: These are (i) faith in the Buddha, (ii) being endowed with good health and moderation, (iii) showing oneself as one really is, (iv) dwelling with energy for getting up of unwholesome states, and (v) possessing of wisdom endowed with wisdom.

²² *M.* II. 127-9.

attaining ethical advancement, if they follow the *dhamma* and *vinaya* prescribed by the Buddha.²³

The Buddha’s teachings are strongly against all forms of social inequality. The Buddha gives equal opportunities to all those who are willing to enter his *Saṅgha*, regardless of their castes, creed, race, social status, and sex. For him, not only all human beings have equal rights, but also they should be treated equally. Opportunities for ethical and spiritual development and advancement should be provided equally amongst the mankind. Although coming from low caste family, Up̄li, Nanda, Sati and Sunit̄ became leading disciples of the Buddha due to their advancement in spirituality. Thus in Buddhism the rank of anyone, whether a *bhikkhu* or a layman is not based on birth or caste or social status, but on worth. As a member of Buddhist *saṅgha*, a *bhikkhu* / *bhikkhuni* is not distinct from the rest, like the waters of the rivers flowing into the ocean, becoming one with the ocean. He / she loses all social distinctions when entering the *saṅgha*. Unlike a *br̄Dhman*, who is always a *br̄Dhman* notwithstanding his behaviour, ethics, intellect and spirituality, a *bhikkhu* is called and recognised as a *bhikkhu* if and only if his behaviour and lifestyle is in accordance with *dhamma-vinaya* and well set in moral and spiritual progress, otherwise he is unworthy of remaining a *bhikkhu* in the *saṅgha*.

All *saṅgha* members are equally well treated and served with four requisites according to their seniority and standing in the *saṅgha*, regardless of their former social footings.²⁴ His holy *saṅgha* was formed on the basis of moral stature of individuals. All members have equal rights and duties in the *saṅgha*. Notwithstanding whatever their former distinctions might have been, when desirous of leading a life of celibacy, four birds of

²³ *M.* II. 181-4.

²⁴ *Cv.* p. 255-6.

different *vaḥas* coming from four directions, are equally admitted to the *saṅgha*, becoming all 'white' like the great rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Aciravatī, Sarabhā and Mahā losing their identity in the ocean. Similarly, people of four castes lose their former caste (*vevāḥiyanti*) and are known as the recluses of the Sōkyā tradition.²⁵

In contrast with Brahmanical structure of caste-based society, the Buddhist model of society is of assembly (*parisā*),²⁶ which is based on inner qualities of individuals, influenced by biological, physical, psychological and karmic factors.²⁷ There are two main kinds of assemblies, namely, the householder assembly (*gahapati-parisā*)²⁸ and the home-left assembly (*pabbajjī-parisā*). The former consists of two assemblies, of laymen (*upsaka-parisā*) and laywomen (*upsikā-parisā*), and they can play at least one role among these social groups, viz., the rulers, the citizens, parents, children, teachers, pupils, friends, companions, employers, or employees. The latter includes two main assemblies, viz., (i) almsman or monk (*bhikkhu // bhikkhu*), (ii) almswoman or nun (*bhikkhunī // bhikkhunī*), plus the following three, (iii) novice monk (*sōmaḥera // sōmaḥera*), (iv) female novice (*sōmaḥerī // sōmaḥerī*) and (v) probationer

²⁵ Vin. II. 239; A. IV. 202.

²⁶ Literally means company, association, or assembly. For different connotations of this term, see Saddhatissa (1970): 117-8. There are eight assemblies known at D. II. 85, 109, viz., *khattiya*, *brāhmaṇa*, *gahapati*, *samaṇa*, *cātumaḥārāja*, *tāvatisā* gods mara and the *brahma* gods. The Buddhist concept of society is not confined only to mankind, but also includes all living beings (*sabbabhūta*), viz, animals and other lower creatures.

²⁷ Ratnapala (1993): 49-62.

²⁸ For a useful and comprehensive treatment on this term, see Chakravarti (1987): 65-93; Wagle (1995): 167-98.

(*sikkhamānā // bhikkhavaṇṇa*).²⁹

Bhikkhu literally means one who begs his food (*bhikkhatī bhikkhu*) or he who wears rag-ropes (*bhinnapaṭṭhādhara'ti bhikkhu*). At the term denoted, a *bhikkhu*³⁰ or *bhikkhunī* leads a life of few material requisites, depending on others for the simple requirements of his life. One of the reasons for this dependence is that higher life can not be lived among household cares. He does not desire for material comforts. He strives for perfection, ethical and spiritual.

Ethically, *bhikkhu* means one who breaks off all his evil motivations and deeds (*bhīdati pāpake akusale dhamme'ti bhikkhu*). This definition may refer to those who have completed the holy life (*brahmacariya*), attaining sainthood (*arahat*), who is also called the *asekha*. Even so is the case of a *bhikkhunī*. In this sense, a *bhikkhu* is a noble disciple (*sattasekha*), who has attained the first three paths and their fruitions, and the path of the *arahant*, (1) The one realizing the path of Stream-entering (*sotāpatti-magga*), (2) The one realizing the fruition of Stream-entering (*sotāpatti-phala*) also called the stream-winner or the Stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*), (3) The one realizing the path of Once-return (*sakadāgāmi-magga*), (4) The one realizing the fruition of Once-return (*sakadāgāmi-phala*) also called the once-returner (*sakadāgāmin*), (5) The one realizing the path of Non-return (*anāgāmi-magga*), (6) The one realizing the fruition of Non-return (*anāgāmi-phala*) also called the non-returner

²⁹ A. II. 132. It should be noted here that the term *gahapati* is used in general meaning to denote those who lead a household life, including both men and women, married or unmarried, while the term *upsaka* denotes a devoted layman, who actively engages in Buddhist practices and affairs.

³⁰ The practice of begging is observed in Buddhist tradition dating back to the previous Buddhas. This is seen as the practice of all Buddhas of the past, present and future.

(*anḌgḌmin*), (7) The one realizing the path of Holiness (*arahatta-magga*).³¹ Those who have attained the fruition of sainthood (*arahatta-phala*) are called *asekha*, for no more ethical and spiritual practices are required. Thus the order of *bhikkhu* / *bhikkhun* * in spiritual terms consists of four pair constituting eight groups of noble individuals endowed with moral and spiritual qualities.

Thus, the Buddhist structure of classless society consisting of four assemblies, (*cḌtur-parisḌ*), viz., *bhikkhu-parisḌ*, *bhikkhun* *-*parisḌ*, *upḌsaka-parisḌ* and *upḌsikḌ-parisḌ*, is not only different from but also can be regarded as a substitution of the Brahmanical stratification of four caste-based society, namely, *khattiya-vaḌḌa*, *brḌhmaḌḌa-vaḌḌa*, *vessa-vaḌḌa*, and *sudda-vaḌḌa*. With this new social set up, the Buddha is considered as the first giving birth to a new structure of social order, in which any superiority or inferiority in social status due to birth, colour, creed, and sex, are rooted out, whereas moral status of individuals becomes criterion to value a person. Another feature of this moral society is that the priestly class (*brḌhamaḌḌa*) who acted as agents in the name of God or gods and held out hope to the people of forgiveness of their sin in exchange of bloody sacrifices and gifts, is completely eliminated. In other words, social and economic exploitation in the name of religion is put to an end, giving rise to moral and spiritual advancement on the basis of personal righteous efforts and striving.³²

³¹ A. IV. 292; GS. IV. 193; *Taḅng* III. 672.

³² Sharma (1994): 58. Ratnapala (1993: 57) has rightly pointed out that "Caste prejudices, discrimination and attitudes are social in origin, having nothing to do with creation or a god. The brahmins purposely cultivated such prejudices and attitudes in order to derive material advantages for them. Rigidity of caste was maintained by them with such an ulterior purpose in mind."

FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL HARMONY

Harmony, cohesion and integration are seen in Buddhism as great values for social development. There are several social principles which contribute to the strength of social order and harmony. Among those principles, seven foundations for social prosperity as given to Vajjian republic (*Vajj* *-*aparihḌniyadhamma*) are well known: (i) to hold regular and frequent assemblies, (ii) to meet together in harmony, disperse in harmony and carry out business in harmony, (iii) not authorise what has not been authorised but proceed according to what has been authorised but abide by the original principles, (iv) Honour, respect, revere and salute the elders, and consider them worthy of listening to, (v) Women and girls are not forced and abducted to live with them, (with whom?) (vi) to honour, respect, revere and salute the religious shrines at home and abroad, and do not neglect those righteous ceremonies held before them, (vii) To provide proper protection and support for *Arahats*, so that such *Arahats* may come in future to live there while those already there may live in comfort.³³

The first principle may be taken as ensuring the collective decision-making as it is an important factor in democratic political institution, when examining it from the way in which the king or ruler was elected. As we know in the Buddhist structure of kingship, king or ruler is the great elect (*mahḌsammata*), who is elected by the rest of society on the grounds of his great personality and physical fitness, for the sake of maintaining social order, harmony and peace.³⁴ The frequent meetings, thus, exercise the state's functions and duties in maintaining national security and economic progress. As a bilateral relationship between the public opinions and decision-makers, frequent

³³ D. II. 73; A. IV. 15.

³⁴ D. II. 84-88.

meetings would improve welfare policy and development program, and therefore become necessary for social progress and development. Frequent meetings are important in government and civil body, as they provide provides chance to bringing members of an organisation together, for understanding one another, learning form one another and helping one another, and thus strengthen the unity in community and society.

The second principle refers the manner in which the meetings should be conducted. That is intended to eliminate individualism in organisation or society, and to nourish the spirit of concord, unity, and harmony in working, carrying on as well as breaking up business. This tends to put an end to a hostile and competitive attitude while encouraging co-operation, mutual help in order to arrive material and ethical progress for all members of an organisation. While the first principle is emphatic on decision-making and the implementation of decisions on the basis of democratic constituent, the second helps strengthen the force of togetherness and unity for the progress and development of a community. In this institution, all opinions of members are equally respected and examined in order to arrive at the most appropriate policy for development as well as the most adequate solution for any problems, which may arise. Thus, mutual understanding, knowledge sharing, and opinion toleration will enrich, while conflicts of opinion and strategy, if any, would be solved harmoniously.

The third principle is seen to preserve and develop righteous customs and traditions and obeying the law, for the benefits of others, and society as a whole. What is important here is not customs, traditions and law, but rather the righteous ones. In other words, those customs, practices and traditions not in accordance with benefits, well being and happiness of society should not be authorised or followed, but should be banned. Only

those good customs, practices, traditions and laws should be put into practice. The formulation of new law, if necessary, should also be considered thoroughly from its possible application as well as its values, so that it will not hurt the feelings of people, ensure no harm to their development. Law is thus seen as a necessary institution for enforcing justice, order and protecting social well being.

The fourth principle represents the cultural pattern of behaviour between two generations, the young and the elder, in the educational and intellectual manners. In recognising and respecting good traditional values from the older generation, the young get a chance to inherit the good, and develop themselves for the betterment. In this bilateral relationship, the young generation should pay respect to the elders and learn form them culture and wisdom to perfect themselves, while the elder should give due attention, love and care to the young, guiding and educating them by their exemplary lives, in the righteous and ethical direction. This principle would narrow the generation gap, on the one hand, and contribute to the unity of conservative and radical groups on the other.

The fifth principle comes into existence to protect the weaker groups, as the fair sex is seen as physically weak and therefore usually is harassed by the strong sex. This principle provides conditions in which no women or young girl will be made to marry forcibly. Thus, the institution of arranged marriage is discouraged as it is seen against the freedom of choice of women. As a safeguard of women, this principle ensures women's rights as equal to those of men, in society. Exploitation, harassment, aggravation, and abuse by any means or force against women will, thus, be punished in order to protect women and girls from mistreatment, on the one hand, and to control social evils, on the other. In other words, it is the responsibility of the ruler to eliminate mistreatment of women, otherwise, it would

lead to social and political decline.

The sixth principle is meant to protect religion, and encourage its social, ethical and fruitful activities, for the ethical and spiritual progress of the masses. Thus encouraging religious freedom is seen as an important means to preserve and maintain the moral fabric of the society. Taking consideration of religion from the educational, social and spiritual points of view, there would be no unnecessary conflicts between politics and religion, on the one hand, and the state will get proper assistance from religion to educate its people and prevent them from wrong doing. Thus safeguarding and promoting appropriate religious activities is seen as bringing about social progress.

The last principle is to welcome and value the holy man, who devotes his time and energy for social good. Ensuring security for such morally perfect persons is therefore important for encouraging morality and spiritualism in the society. Their spiritual influence among the people will become a safeguard against social evils, the ending of which is the goal of the state. Thus preserving, respecting and welcoming the morally perfect ones is to keep and maintain moral order of the society.

Ensuring peaceful and harmonious society, these principles also help a community, a nation or a planet to protect itself from being swallowed up or overwhelmed by other communities, other nations or other planets.

As to how a monastic community is organised and maintained, the Buddha laid down seven principles similar in content to those followed by the republic Vajjian, namely, foundations for monastic harmony (*bhikkhu-aparih Oniyadhamma*):

(i) to hold regular and frequent meetings, (ii) to meet together in harmony, disperse in harmony and carry out business

and duties of the *sa ũgha* in harmony, (iii) do not alternate what has been prescribed, do not break up established rules, but train oneself in the prescribed training rules, (iv) to honor, respect, revere and salute the elders, the fathers and leaders of the *sa ũgha* and consider them worthy of listening to, (v) not to fall under the influence of craving, (vi) to delight in forest retreat and (vii) to establish oneself in mindfulness wish this thought, 'let disciplined co-celibates who have not come, come hither, and let those that have already come live in comfort.'³⁵

Here, the first four principles are the same as in the list of *Vajjian* principles, with minor changes: principles are substituted with moral training rules - *s *la* (as in iii), elders with fathers and leaders of *Sa ũgha* (as in iv). The third and the fourth principles are seen as crucial conditions to maintain the unity, conformity, harmony and prosperity in the life and administration of the *sa ũgha*. In the fifth principle, since craving is the motive force of unwholesome tendencies, evil deeds, and social conflicts, keeping oneself free from its influence is seen as an important step to lead a holy life. The seventh principle encourages a mindful life in harmony with fellow monks and this is the foundation of the holy life (*brahmacariya*), while the sixth principle is one of good environment for practice of mindfulness. These seven foundations are designed for bringing the unity, harmony and conformity in the *sa ũgha* on the one hand, and also for making a holy *sa ũgha* on the basis of mindfulness, on the other. Thus mindfulness is the most important factor in creating a community or society where all its members are striving for their freedom or liberation.

Other social principles for ensuring unity among community are known as four foundations of social harmony (*sa ũgaha-vatthu // sa ũgraha-vastu*), namely: (i) generosity (P=S. *d Ona*),

³⁵ D. II. 77; A. IV. 20.

kindly speech (*piya-vḍc ḍ // priyavḍkya*), (iii) helpful action (*attha-cariyḍ // tathḍrthacaryḍ*) and (iv) equal participation (*samḍnattatḍ // samḍnḍthatḍ*).³⁶ Generosity is to spread loving kindness and compassion among the fellow beings, to strengthen the ties of friendship, to make life lovely, to support and protect those who are in economic hardship and crisis. While generosity nourishes the material progress of individual and society, kindly speech, helpful action and equal participation are seen as three important qualities encouraging unity and harmony among community.

Avoiding evil and cultivating good are always seen as intertwined. In the same manner, doing good for oneself is seen also for others and vice versa. How guarding oneself, does one guard others? By practice, by development, by training and by continuous exercise . . . And how guarding others, does one guard oneself? By proper resolve, by non-violence, by having a mind full of loving-kindness and by care.³⁷

It is evident that Buddhism sees inter-being between the life of the individual and the life of society as compatible and inseparable. In other words, Buddhism sees social ethics in accordance with the theory of dependent origination (*paḍicca samuppḍda*): on the arising of individual betterment and perfection arises the social good, and vice versa.

The principle of a Buddhist social harmony is based on mutually social interest or the welfare of oneself and others. The mutual interest and responsibility according to Buddhism starts from every member of the micro unit of the society, namely, family. If society is established on the total numbers of family, the status of the family, healthy or unhealthy, determines the

³⁶ D. III. 152, 232; A. II. 32, 248; A. IV. 218, 363.

³⁷ S. V. 169.

status of the society. The mutual interest can be between parents and children, husband and wife, teacher and pupil, religious person and layman, master and servant or among friends. The concept of society based on mutually social interest is best addressed by the Buddha in the *Discourse on the Advice to Sigḍla*.³⁸

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Crime can be defined as any act against the ethical standards and legal system of the society concerned. In Buddhism, crime is defined as unethical deeds (*dukkaḍa, adhamma, pḍpa, akusala kamma*), motivated either by greed (*lobhaḍ, rḍga or taḍhḍ*), hatred (*dosa, vyḍpḍda or paḍigha*) and ignorance (*moha / avijḍḍ*), and either performed through body (*kḍya kamma*), speech (*vacḍ-kamma*) and thought (*mano-kamma*). Thus, any deed that is unwholesome, unethical, unrighteous, illegal or anti-social in nature can be grouped under criminal acts. Criminal act can be judged from its ethical value, is it conduces to suffering (*dukkha*), resulted either in this very life (*diḍḍhadhamma-vedanḍya-vajja*) or in some future life (*sḍmparḍyika-vajja*).³⁹

According to the Pḍli texts, crimes can be traced to the ethico-psychological and socio-economic origins, such as the wanton greed (*taḍḍhḍ*) of the individual,⁴⁰ and poverty,⁴¹ or even mal-distribution of wealth by the state. Out of these causes, the former is seen as primary cause, for Buddhism considers psychological conditioning as the force producing actions, good and evil.⁴²

³⁸ D. III. 180-93.

³⁹ A. I. 47; M. I. 414ff.

⁴⁰ D. III. 80ff.

⁴¹ D. III. 58ff.

⁴² *Dhp.* 1-2: “mind is the forerunner of all actions,” while at A. III. 415: “O monks, I declare that intention or one’s free will (*cetanḍ*) is *kamma*.”

It is stated in the *Aggaṅṅa Sutta*,⁴³ the institution of kingship brought into existence along with the institution of punishment was for the interest and protection of private property and family life. The king who was the Great Elect (*mahāsammatā*) served as the judicial authority protecting people's right of private property by imposing law and punishment on the offender, for the sake of family and national security. As poverty leads (resorts) to stealing, deception, lying, violence and disorder, protection of private property by state punishment is, therefore, considered as one of the solutions to eliminate social evils.⁴⁴

Not considering punishment as the ultimate solution to the problem of social evils, the *Cakkavattis*hanāda Sutta*⁴⁵ suggests that punishment imposed on those who are found guilty should be taken into consideration as to the reason why crime has taken place. According to this criterion, only those found guilty out of wanton greed (*taṅhā*) and laziness will be punished, while those having no means for maintaining themselves due to poverty and unemployment, resorting to the same offence will not be punished; instead money shall be granted to them, so that they can earn a living righteously. The *Sutta* reads thus:

When poverty increased in the country, a man resorted to stealing of property belonging to others. He was arrested and brought before the king. The king asked him whether it was true that he took what was not given. He admitted it and when asked why he had committed theft, he replied that he did so because he had nothing to live on. Then the king gave him money instructing him to make a living, supporting his parents, wife and children, carrying on business and making merit by offering gifts to the

⁴³ D. III. 80-98.

⁴⁴ *Dhp.* 310; *J.* II. 309.

⁴⁵ D. III. 58-79.

virtuous religious.⁴⁶

The cure for those committing theft not because of any other reason but because of poverty lie not in punishment but in appropriate assistance by the state. In other words, under the situation like this, punishment will not solve the problem, but rather, proper education and assistance to rehabilitate criminals will help.

However, the *Sutta* further tells us that granting money in this way is not the good solution to absolutely eradicate crime. It may be good for some cases in which the person knows how to use the state's granted money for earning the righteous living afterward. It, on the other hand encourages others to engage the same evil in hope that they will get easy money from the state, even if they are well-to-do people. One striking point here is that mal-distribution of wealth or national resources would entail social disorder and instability. Eventually, knowing that granting money to thief increases further stealing, the king now ordered that the thieves be punished and destroyed.⁴⁷

The *Dhammapada* tells us that the ruler should impose heavy penalties on those who committed adultery, so that no one should commit sexual misconduct with another man's wife.⁴⁸ Thus punishment is seen in this regard as a half-measure solution to prevent further social evils of the same kind in the future, on the one hand, and to maintain social order on the other.

Served as prevention from further crimes, punishment is, thus, seen as not an end in itself in bringing about a definite stop to the complex problem of crime. The

⁴⁶ D. III. 65-6.

⁴⁷ D. III. 66-8.

⁴⁸ *Dhp.* 310.

*Cakkavattis *han @da Sutta*⁴⁹ tells us that when thieves came to know the king imposed punishment on stealing, thieves started arming themselves and even killing those whom they had robbed. Thus, from the increase of thieves, the use of weapon increased, from the increase of use of weapon, life taking increased, and from increase of life taking, social disorder increased.⁵⁰

In the *K @Madanta Sutta*,⁵¹ in a similar situation, the king advisor, who was the Buddha in the past life, representing Buddhist view, offers the most appropriate solution. He advises the king that instead of temporally solving the problem of theft by executions, imprisonment or any other means of repressive type, the state should improve quality of life of the people, by providing equal economic opportunities to all. Grain, fodder and necessary facilities for agriculture should be granted to farmers. Capital or no-interest loan should be granted to the trading section of the society. Adequate wages and salaries should be paid to those in government service, and those in financial distress should be exempted from tax. The king then carried out this advice and, all people can earn an adequate living through righteous occupations, resorting to stealing and killing out of poverty and unemployment disappears accordingly. Thereafter the country prospers and progresses in peaceful and harmonious atmosphere.⁵²

Thus, according to Buddhism, although punishment can not be denounced totally, it is not considered as an effective safeguard against crime and social evils. It is the duty of the state to rehabilitate criminals by providing them proper assistance in

⁴⁹ D. III. 68.

⁵⁰ In the *J @taka* (no. 520), how punitive approach brings about state terrorism is illustrated. Its drawback is to put law in the hands of state officers, who instead use it for maintaining social order, misuse for harassing people.

⁵¹ D. I. 134-6.

⁵² D. I. 136.

earning a righteous living. This includes ethical education,⁵³ praising living in suitable environment (*pa *ir @padesav @sa*),⁵⁴ being associated with the wise friends (*kaly @amitta*)⁵⁵ and encouragement of training oneself in proper conduct (*s *la*) along with improving the quality of life to the people. This ethical and social approach is seen as eradicating permanently all unethical tendencies and their derived crime.

THE IDEAL BUDDHIST SOCIETY

According to Buddhist teachings, an ideal society does not necessary means that all its members are living the same means, striving for the same purposes and objectives, and reaching the same goals.⁵⁶ In Buddhism an ideal society is one in which equality, democracy and human rights are respected, moral and spiritual advancement is encouraged and people are interested in moral life. It is a society which provides aids to those needy, strengthens those who are weak, brings harmony to those who are in disharmony, brings happiness and light to those in suffering and darkness.

Everything the Buddha taught is for the pragmatic benefit to all living beings. His main concern is to remove human sickness of suffering, bringing loving-kindness, compassion, for oneself and others.⁵⁷ His teachings to people are for the purification of their thoughts, speech and actions, for destruction of suffering and sorrow, for overcoming of grief, for reaching the path and for the realization of *nirv @a*. He is therefore described as a person who appeared in this world for the welfare, benefit and happiness

⁵³ *Dhp.* 183.

⁵⁴ D. III. 276.

⁵⁵ S. V. 2-30; A. I. 14-8.

⁵⁶ Advocating the principle of dependent origination (*pa *icca samupp @da*), the Buddha does not believe in the concept of absolute of any kinds.

⁵⁷ S. I. 89f; A. III. 39f.

of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good and interest both of gods and human beings.⁵⁸

Following are some important characteristics of an ideal society as featured here and there in the teachings of the Buddha.

A Moral Society. The whole teachings of the Buddha can be best summarised in the following triple ethic: “avoidance of evils, cultivation of good and purification of the mind; this is the teachings of the Buddha(s).”⁵⁹ He encourages all members of society to observe the five ethical principles (*paṇḍita-sīla*) or ten wholesome paths of action (*dasakusalakammāpatha*), and lead a life in accord with the noble eightfold path (*ariya-aṣṭāṅgika magga*), in order to build a moral-based society. It is suggested that every citizen of this society should think and act what is good to himself and others, conducive to welfare, well being and happiness of the whole society and mankind.⁶⁰

A Rational Society. It is said that the Buddha’s teaching is timeless (*akālika*), inviting one to come and see or try and test (*ehi-passika dhamma*), leading onward (*niyyāti*) and to be understood individually by the wise.⁶¹ What the Buddha taught to his disciples now known as the *Tipiṭaka* // *Tripitaka*, is just a few practical and rational things which are profitable, benevolent, useful and relevant to human problems.⁶² He encourages us to exercise our free will (*cetanā*), lead a life of rationality, in order to see things as they really are (*yathābhūta*).⁶³ Human value, will, effort, potentiality, responsibility and dignity lie fully in him.⁶⁴ One is advised to follow his teachings, only after a careful consideration

⁵⁸ M. I. 21; A. II. 147.

⁵⁹ *Dhp.* 183; *D.* II. 49.

⁶⁰ A. II. 95, 179.

⁶¹ M. I. 37.

⁶² S. V. 438.

⁶³ M. I. 21.

⁶⁴ A. III. 337f.

on its nature and values, and seeing it conducive to well-being and happiness.⁶⁵

A Cultural Society. Buddha’s teachings, undoubtedly, are aimed at bringing about development or improvement (*bhāvanā*) of human personality. Buddhism introduces a culture of body and mind (*bhāvitakāya ca bhāvitacitta*) which benefits the individual as well as the whole society to which he or she belongs.⁶⁶ By culture of body (*kāyabhāvanā*) is meant to restrain the sense organs (*indriyasaṅvara*) while by culture of mind (*cittabhāvanā*) is meant to cultivate the mind (*citta*) and its properties (*cetasika*), reaching a state of equanimity (*upekkhā*), where all disturbing emotions, pleasant (*sukhā vedanā*) and unpleasant (*dukkhā vedanā*), and emotional attachments are totally dropped.⁶⁷

A Just Society. Social justice and social welfare are two features of ideal society of Buddhism. It is a society in which all activities including agriculture (*kaśigorakkha*) and industry (*vāṇijjā*) should be just (*dhammika*) through the righteous means (*dhammena*).⁶⁸ All social groups such as parents, children, husband, wife, teacher, pupil, employer, employee, friend, companion, the householder and the religious, perform well their perspective duties.⁶⁹ Even the King or the ruler of the country also trains himself in righteousness with ten royal duties (*dasārājadharmā*),⁷⁰ for bringing about welfare, happiness and peace for his subjects and kingdom. Within this framework of a just society, every member leads a righteous livelihood (*sammā-*

⁶⁵ A. I. 190ff.

⁶⁶ M. I. 240.

⁶⁷ M. III. 298ff. D. T. Suzuki (1953: 340) rightly states that “Buddhism was ... a new philosophy, a new culture.”

⁶⁸ *D.* I. 135ff.

⁶⁹ *D.* III. 80-93.

⁷⁰ *J.* II. 367, 400; *J.* III. 273; *J.* V. 378.

*ḍj *va*) with sincerity, honesty and devoid of all wrong means of living (*micch ḍ- ḍjiva*).⁷¹ Everyone earns a living or makes wealth by his own ability, effort and strength in a lawful and righteous way. In this context, the Buddha states that “righteousness is the best thing for people in this life and the next.”⁷²

An Equal Society. The Buddha advocates an egalitarian society, in which all men are ethically, spiritually and socially equal. He teaches the doctrine of equality between man and man. He establishes democratic administration in the *sa ḍgha*. He denounces castes, and values a person not from his birth, social status, race, colour, or sex, but rather in accord with his moral behaviour.⁷³ His *sa ḍgha* was the first of its kind in history of mankind admitting all members of four castes without any discrimination.⁷⁴

A Humanistic Society. According to Buddhism, man is a combination of psychological and physical components (*n ḍmar ḍpa*) and not a product of the so-called ‘creator of the universe.’⁷⁵ Man is the only creator (*nimmata*) and designer (*katt ḍ*) of his own life and world, under the causal law of action (*kamma*). The Buddha establishes a society where human suffering is reduced to minimum or put to an end (*anto dukkhassa*).⁷⁶ His teachings concern with loving kindness (*mett ḍ*), compassion (*karuḍ ḍ*), generosity (*d ḍna*) and justice

⁷¹ A. III. 111, 208; M. III. 75.

⁷² D. III. 83.

⁷³ Sn. 612-20.

⁷⁴ Vin. II. 239; A. IV. 202.

⁷⁵ D. I. 18, M. I. 327.

⁷⁶ S. IV. 384: “Both formerly and now, O Anurḍdha, I declare only suffering and its cessation.” *Pubbe c ḍham Anur ḍdha etarahi ca dukkha cḥeva p ḍcḥapemi dukkhassa ca nirodha ḍ*.

(*dhamma*) among human beings.⁷⁷

An Altruistic Society. The structure of Buddhist ideal society is based on ethical considerations, where all egoistic and selfish thinking, motivation and action are dropped out.⁷⁸ The society that the Buddha wishes to introduce is the society ‘for the good of many and welfare of many’ (*bahujanahit ḍyabahujanasukh ḍya*) in conformity with the Buddhist principle of righteousness (*dhamma*). Buddhism aims at building a society without self-interest. The ideal Buddhist society is one in which there is no conflict between self-interest and the interest of the community. Here interest of the community should be given precedence to self-interest of individuals. It should be noted here that sacrificing of self-interest does not amount to the destruction of one’s autonomy.

Harmonious Society. For a harmonious and prosperous society, the Buddha lays down seven foundations (*Vajj *aparit ḍniyadhamma*) for the lay community,⁷⁹ and another set of seven grounds for the *sa ḍgha*.⁸⁰ He teaches that one should live with his fellow-beings, in a harmonious way, by avoiding disparagement of others while exalting oneself. On the other hand, he is advised to respect, honour and support those who live in confirmation with righteousness (*dhamma*).⁸¹ Herein in whatsoever company all members dwell in harmony, courteous, without quarrels, like milk and water mixed, looking on one another with the eye of affection.⁸²

A Balanced Society. The society which the Buddha favours

⁷⁷ A. III. 39f; S. I. 89ff.

⁷⁸ M. I. 135.

⁷⁹ D. II. 73; A. IV. 15.

⁸⁰ D. II. 77; A. IV. 20.

⁸¹ M. III. 37ff.

⁸² A. I. 70. Cf. M. I. 398; M. III. 156; S. IV. 225; A. I. 70; A. III. 67.

is that which avoids two extreme (*ubho ante anupagamma*) ways of life.⁸³ One extreme is self-mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*) usually practised by ascetics who wrongly believe that enduring physically intense pain leads to emancipation, while the other is excessive indulgence in sensuous pleasure (*kāma-sukhallikānuyoga*) commonly seen among the ordinary people who do not see higher forms of happiness, such as those of meditation levels. Every member of society should lead a life of the middle path (*majjhimā paṭipadā*), consisting eight factors⁸⁴ in order to bring real well-being, happiness and freedom to himself and others. In such an ideal society, one is advised to lead a life of good health, endowed with a good digestion and of a middle kind suitable for striving,⁸⁵ and all kinds of moderation especially in consumption are encouraged, while all forms of extremism are to be avoided.⁸⁶

This is a society in which all the citizens live with right livelihood and in high responsibilities while the rulers or administrators provide economic stability, standard education, justice so that people will be confident, self-reliant, energetic, industrious, honest, moral, generous, tolerant. As to environment, people enjoy association with good company, have a balanced livelihood, maintain good relationship with others and contribute to the well being and happiness of society. Leaders and the masses should use skilful means for their happiness and

⁸³ S. V. 421.

⁸⁴ These are (i) right view (*sammādiṭṭhi* // *samyagdṛṣṭi*), (ii) right thought (*sammāsaṅkappa* // *samyaksaṅkalpa*), (iii) right speech (*sammāvācā* // *samyagvāk*), (iv) right action (*sammākamanta* // *samyakkarmānta*), (v) right livelihood (*sammāpājā* // *samyagpājā*), (vi) right efforts (*sammāvāpāyāma* // *samyagvyāpāyāma*), (vii) right mindfulness (*sammāsatī* // *samyaksmṛti*), and (viii) right concentration (*sammāsamādhi* // *samyaksamādhi*).

⁸⁵ M. II. 95.

⁸⁶ Cf. A. II. 249.

happiness of others in creating a world void of greed, hatred and delusion.

CONCLUSION

This paper is devoted to an analysis of the Buddhist socialization in an ideal society, as revealed in the Buddhist texts. As a social reformer in ethical sense, the Buddha rejected the Brahmanical caste-based system of society as a way of economic exploitation on the part of religious and political groups of society over the masses. Disconnected human social status from one's birth, the Buddha associated it with one's deliberately ethical actions (*kamma*). According to this theory, it is one's moral and spiritual development that makes him virtuous and worthy; and it is one's bad motivation and evil deeds that makes him an outcaste, not by his birth, family background, or social footing. The model of Buddhist ideal society is based on the principles of equality, righteousness and ethics. Social problems and evils are seen as being generated from craving (*tāḥā*) and unfavorable conditions of life. Crimes and punishments are therefore viewed from reformatory perspective, in order to arrive at effective solution, or at least to bring it under control. In addition, principles for social harmony and cohesion are given in this paper to help build a society of self-disciplined, self-reliant people who are responsible for their personal well-being, progress and happiness as well as for those of others.