

Study of Ecology on the basis of Buddhism and Virtue Ethics

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ABSTRACT

Environmental ethics caters to the nature and anthropocentrism that Buddhists usually follow. The basic ideals of spiritualism and human ecology are concerned with the moral development of the individual. As a matter of fact Buddhism deals with the cosmological laws and theories of the human nature. Hence it can be said that Buddhism is interrelated to the virtues and ethics as well as the interim ecological balance of mankind. Buddhism and its ethical roots can be traced down to the ancient times. Buddhists have always been inclined towards the various principles of ecology and Dharma. The ethical virtues of Buddhism involve the eight fold path which delivers the good over the bad aspects of people as well as their morale upliftment. The Buddhist ethics determine the involvement with the ecologist ideologies and human ecology. Thereby it is concluded that the basic principles of Buddhism act as a strong support for the development of ecosystem and virtue ethics. The propagation of the various aspects of *ahimsa*, *advesa*, *dana*, *amoha* and many other moral virtues is the main ecological aim regarding humanism, which the Buddhists preach on a large scale.

Key Words : Anthropocentrism, Cosmological laws, Virtue ethics, Ecological ideologies

INTRODUCTION

Ecology stands for the bond between living organisms and their surroundings. On a general basis ecology opposes violence and develops a society from all the perspectives. It is very much prominent that violence and non violence are inter connected which implies that the whole planet goes through the violent forces as well as the non violent one. A key feature of all the human beings is their capability of being both violent as well as non violent in different situations.

According to the Buddhist orthodoxy and orthopraxy the social as well as ecological state of mind of the individual and the society are both linked to each other by some way or the other. Environmental ethics – ‘the green belief’ which signifies the way we alter with nature. Hence environmental virtue ethics is mainly concerned with preserving the common belief. As a matter of question Buddhist principles has always been a constant area of contradiction. However no concrete negative

opposition has been posed against the ethics of Buddhist principles. The aspects of *Karma*, *Ahimsa*, *Advesa*, *Dana*, *Amoha* are the main pillars of the Buddhist principles and notable Buddhist personalities and monks have spread their ideas and ideals based on these aspects.

In the words of Dalai Lama, “When a person is angry and curse the other person, it is the same as the person himself is drinking poison and wishing the other persons death.” Hence from many such valuable Buddhist messages, teachings, and ideologies it can be very well concluded that the cosmic order of the environment is the basic feature of *Samsara*. Thus any tampering with the order is regarded to be harmful for the living beings. The American Buddhist and writer on Ecology Stephanie Kaza herself accept “At this point it is unclear whether ecological practises are primarily motivated by Buddhist tradition or by American environmentalism.” There are certain factors of Buddhist moral teachings that may help in developing the environmental philosophy. A tinge of western tradition

can eventually be beneficial for the development of virtue ethics and giving a sketch of the foundation of ecology in Buddhism.

Anthropocentrism and Buddhist Ecology:

The basic nature of anthropocentrism is human centric. Bryan Norton's work "Environmental ethics and weak anthropocentrism" the pursuit of personal liberation should involve moral and mental guidance. The theory of self training is the main criterion of anthropocentrism. Each and every living being should let go of their self ego in order to achieve enlightenment. It is similar to the teachings of Buddha. Hence both anthropocentrism and Buddhism in a way complement each other.

The eco centric nature of Buddhism creates a stark opposition to the concept of anthropocentrism. As a matter of fact the importance of life in Buddhism doesn't create a strong impact on anthropocentrism. For e.g. in the words of Buddha "A *Bikkhu* who has received ordination ought to not intentionally destroy the life of any living being down to a worm or an ant". In addition to living animals the Buddhist monks also showed great concern for plants, for e.g. in the *Brahmajala Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* it is clearly stated that the Buddhist should restrict from hurting all kinds of living beings. On the other hand anthropocentrism mainly focuses on the present circumstances of the being and not on its individuality. On an account of Norton's view on anthropocentrism, Buddhism can be analysed as a model for changing, criticizing and releasing unrecognizable preferences and hence is termed to be weakly anthropocentric.

Interconnection of the two aspects:

In the words of Kaza (1990) "Buddhism focuses on the interaction of mind and nature through the three practises of direct knowing, discriminating awareness and deep compassion". By inculcating these practises a person's bond with the environment gradually develops on the basis of and understanding of the environmental ethics.

The Buddhist often relates the welfare of beings with *Nirvana* (internal awakening into a state of bliss). Environmental ethics is not applicable to the outside world it is very much inner centric in nature which includes our own selves along with the nature and its courses. *Dhamma*, involves the gradual discovery of the mannerisms of environment as a whole.

Commiseration for the variant:

Buddhism has a long rooted connection with life. Each and every organism has its own specific significance. According to the Buddhist ideologies meditation is regarded as the key to a peaceful mental state of mind. Hence it should be practised in such peaceful environment such as forest. Since a long time Buddhist temple, monasteries and other religious buildings have been built in such clam surroundings for the upliftment and intermingling of all the species.

Idea and Activities as a link with our duties:

The key note to Buddhist ethics is the basic importance of the state of mind. "All we are is the result of what we have thought" (Smith, 1958). According to Buddhist principles positivity of the human mind brings positivity in the human actions. The current actions of an individual determine his future results. Suffering is taken as a door way to happiness. "Enlightenment derives from the understanding of this elemental reality" (Saddhatissa, 1970). As Kaza (1990) explains: "The qualities of our thoughts and actions are inextricably linked and have a powerful impact on the environment". *Karuna* is universal in nature and spreads kindness towards all living beings along with the other virtues of *Ahimsa*, *Advesa* and *Amoha*.

Self Reliance:

The concept of self reliance is based on the Four Noble Truths and the search of the Noble Eight Fold Path. It also pursuits and follows the Middle way of detachment and moderation without giving into human greed. The concept of eco crisis in various spheres is not to be blamed. Rather eco crisis should be the outcome of the behaviour of the individuals who act according to the circumstances avoiding greed.

Virtue Ethics as an Integral Part of Ethics:

Regarded as the oldest western system of ethical theories, virtue ethics covers both the aspects of social as well as religious dimensions. 'After Virtue: A Study in the Moral Theory' was an influential volume published in 1981 by Alasdair Macintyre, it brought the importance of virtue ethics back once again. Virtue ethics basically focuses on the agent rather than his actions.

Celia Deane-Drummond a notable author concludes "virtue ethics unlike any other approaches asks us to consider not just the person but the agent himself. It

focuses on us as a person and not according to our actions. The basic premise of virtue ethics is that goodness is fundamental consideration, rather than the rights, duties or obligations”.

Virtue in its true sense stands for reasoning. Hurthouse defines virtue as “a characteristic trait a human being needs to flourish or live well, while in yearly’s words virtue is seen as “a disposition to act desire and feel that involves the exercise of judgement and leads to a recognizable human excellence or instance of human flourishing”.

Interrelation between Aristotelian Virtue Ethics and Buddhist Ethics:

There is a strong similarity between Aristotelian and Buddhist virtue ethics. Both of these ethics may have their own ideologies yet the main aim is the human enlightenment. In the book I of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle answers the question: “What is a good human life?”, the answer according to him is *eudaimonia* which means well being and divinity. In a literal sense *eudaimonia* is a way of living that is favoured by God. According to Keown *Eudaimonia* is the ultimum of human life. Aristotle also emphasises the fact that all humans’ welfare, happiness and prosperity are entirely depended on their own selves and the achievement of *eudaimonia*. A person who projects wealth to be his final end and excludes other human goods basically ends up with nothing. This is what we call a dominant end. According to Aristotle, virtues are states of character which act and respond to different emotions in different ways. In Aristotle’s view generosity is one of the key virtues by which we tend to help someone by ways of giving away our wealth. The Aristotelian view of human enlightenment is very much linked to the views of Buddhist virtues.

According to the Three Noble Truths *Nirvana* is said to be the highest end of human life in the eyes of Buddha. In literal sense *Nirvana* means “quenching” or “blowing out”. Quenching signifies satisfying the thirst of human life where as blowing out stands for blowing off the three poisons in form of the fires of *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred) and *moha* (delusion). According to Buddhism once the three fires are blown out an individual is free from the worldly ties. Buddhism mainly concentrates on the Noble Eight Fold path which consists of 1. Right View, 2. Right Resolves, 3. Right Speech, 4. Right Action, 5. Right Livelihood, 6. Right Efforts, 7. Right Mindfulness and 8. Right Meditation. Morality as a basis

of wisdom and meditation is implemented through this path. *Nirvana* is the ultimate goal life according to Buddhist virtue. Same as *eudaimonia*, *Nirvana* should be treated as the final end of all human beings. Henceforth Buddha provides us the answer to the question “what is the highest end for human life?”, the answer being *Nirvana*. Alongside Buddhism also puts great emphasize on cultural and social norms of the society. Therefore on analyzing both Aristotelian and Buddhist virtues, it is evident that both these virtues are interrelated.

The question asked in the Aristotelian virtue ethics has been rightfully answering in the Buddhist virtue ethics. The attainment of *eudaimonia* is thus indirectly equivalent to the attainment of *Nirvana*. The moral character traits of a human being bind him to the worldly ties which confine him to the cycle of life and death. The main aim of both the theories of Aristotelian and Buddhist virtue ethics is to help the individual free himself from the worldly ties by attaining self enlightenment in form of *eudaimonia* and *Nirvana*.

Buddhism and Environmental Virtue Ethics:

Buddhism emphasizes on the environment of the social being to a great extent. All the environmental factors have a deep impact on the Buddhist virtues. A person who is a follower of Buddhism must enhance the environment around him. According to Environmental virtue ethics, first priority that a human should give in regard to ethics should be that of the environment. The normal human activities are very much influenced by his social and environmental surroundings.

Ronal Sandler as an environmental virtue ethicist argues that, “given the richness and complexity of our relationship with nature and diversity, dynamism and interrelation of our environmental problems, it is in appropriate for us to adopt a monistic environmental ethic which simply emphasizes one type of consideration as the basis of moral concern about the natural environment, such as the integrity of eco systems, the intrinsic value of living entities, the interest of sentient beings and so on” in his book ‘Character and Environment’. According to Sandler’s perspective an environmental ethicist should cater to the relevant aspects of the relationship between human beings and nature.

In Buddhist virtue ethics, the supreme good in human life is termed as *Eudaimonia*. Along with it according to the theory based on environmental ethics the virtues should be seen as environmental character trades with

regard to the human and non human entities. Both the virtues of Buddhism and environmental ethics illustrate the specific attributes of non greed, non hearted, non delusion, generosity, non violence and compassion. Sandler also claims that by the cultivation of land virtues which include love, gratitude, stability and integrity should be treated as one of the basic environmental virtues. The Buddhist ethics also cultivates these virtues together with the virtue of sustainability with respect to nature. Hence the environmental ethics is regarded as the best form of Buddhist virtue ethics.

Conclusion:

As a concluding factor virtue ethics is basically rooted in practice and preaching of Buddhism itself. The absolute ideas of Buddhism in terms of its relation with environment as well as other social aspects are deliberately found in virtue ethics. Virtue ethics can therefore be called the basic and the most important ethics. In spite all the conflicts regarding the superiority of the various virtues, Buddhism is the most highlighted in the virtue ethics.

It can be rightly said that virtue ethics mostly deals with the well being of the individual. Yet this particular ethic has its own drawback and it also suffers lack of effective thought process. Optimistically, on the brighter side virtue ethics basically illustrates how virtuous a person should act toward the environment. In the words of Frasz, “the thrust of virtue ethics is to foster new habit of thought and action in the moral agent – not just to get the immediate decision made right, but to re orient all actions henceforth in terms of holistic ecologically based way of thinking.” Therefore the prominence of virtue ethics is well depicted in our day to day life. Virtue ethics is thus

the main doorway of Buddhist ethics.

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