

# Buddhism and the Two-fold Challenges of the Human Being

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## I. Introductory observations.

Sixth century India was in a state of transition in almost all spheres of life: philosophical, economical, social and religious etc. There were constant wars between rival kingdoms that were vying for supremacy and territorial expansion. The four kingdoms that were rapidly rising to prominence, namely "Magadha", "Kosala", "Vatsa" and "Avanti" were often fighting against each other and also annexing smaller republican provinces. Wars, on the one hand, disrupted and altered the life patterns of the people. There was destruction of life, prosperity and family life. On the other, these wars led to setting up of large towns and cities, which altered the usual calm and peaceful rural life of the people.

Besides, these conditions brought about drastic economic changes, and one such change is clearly seen in the rise of new business class called the "Setthi", usually rendered in to English as Millionaire. This new class formed an important segment of the society. These changes in the society, life patterns etc opened new avenues of employment, creating more complexities in the society. The powerful warrior-clans (the "Kṣatriyas") and the new rich merchant-clans (belonging to the "Vaiśya" group) were now challenging the long-vested authority of the priest-clans (the Brāhmaṇas). The warrior-clans that was wielding political authority tried to use force, and establish their authority through the might of arms. Monarchs often acted ruthlessly and autocratically, disregarding accepted norms of ruler ship. The business clans tried to establish itself by acquiring more and more wealth and in the process they naturally had to resort to all kinds of malpractices and explosions. The first clans (the Brāhmaṇas) was using religious authority to sustain its position in this transitory period, and for this it used the traditional teachings and

duped the people making them believe that it is the "Brāhmaṇas" that ultimately hold the key to success, both in this life and the next life.<sup>1</sup>

In this transitory period there were two main casualties. One was the ordinary folk who were at the mercy of the rich and the powerful, the "Brāhmaṇas", "Kṣatriyas" and "Vaiśyas". The other casualty was the humanitarianism that was clearly seen in the people. The rich, the powerful were trying to maintain their supremacy, acquire still more power and wealth and equip themselves and were thus battling with each other for dominance and prominence. The ordinary folk having neither wealth nor power were struggling for survival. All in trying to achieve their objectives completely disregarded the means they adopted to achieve their goals. All justified the means as long as it proved effective in making them achieve the goals. In these conditions all were becoming more and more self-centered insensitive to others more bent on accumulating and appropriating. All ethics were discarded. Ethics was given only nominal consideration. Humanness was fast becoming an endangered human characteristic. Some tried to justify and support their ways of life and attitude by resorting to traditional teachings. Some others, attempted to present new teachings to suit these utterly complete and materialistic ways of life. So, these changes that took place in all spheres of life in this transitory stage baffled the people and made them lose their way and direction.

Religious teachers of the time attempted to give direction to the people, and make them face these complexities of life created by the rapid changes that were taking place. In doing this they went to extremes. One group

<sup>1</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, Motilal Banarasisidass Delhi, 1997, p 17. ff. Uma Cakravarti,

*Dime of E Budd Munis Mano...*, Delhi, 1996, ch. 11

advocated a materialistic approach. Their view was that people should not worry about what was taking place, but lead a happy –go-lucky life, making the best use of life and enjoying it to the maximum possible. Their stance was that this is the only life, and everything will end at death; hence, there is no need to worry about ethics, morality, virtue, good and bad but enjoy sensual pleasures to the maximum possible, for otherwise one will have to regret about not making the best use of life. The best example of this teaching which the Buddhist texts refer to as (Kāmasukhallikānuyoga) was presented by “Ajita Keśakambali,” the well-known materialist philosopher of the 6th century B.C. in India. Few others such as “Makkhali Gosāla,” “Pakudha Kaccāyana”, “Pūrṇa Kassapa”, all belonging to the what is call the Śramaṇa tradition which was opposed to the Brāhmaṇa tradition, inclined towards materialism, through there were subtle differences in their approaches to the human predicament. Thus while, “Ajita” adopted a happy –go-lucky attitude, “Makkhali” adopted a very fatalistic attitude.<sup>2</sup> The human predicament was so baffling that some teachers like “Sañjaya Bellatṭiputta” left these questions unanswered in an absolute way. Hence, he adopted a skeptical attitude.

The other extreme was developed by the Upanisadic teachers of the Brahmanic traditions and “Jaina Mahāvīra,” also called “Niganṭha Nātaputta”, who proclaimed Jainism. They advocated extreme kind of abstinences (Viramaṇa/samvara) and self-mortifications (Attakilamathānuyoga)<sup>3</sup> and purifications of the self/soul. In between these extreme practice there was a large segment of the population who were given to belief in a creative God,

<sup>2</sup> See “Sāmaññaphala Sutta”, of the *Dīghanikāya*; also G.C. Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, Motilala Banarasisdass, Delhi, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, 1995, chap ix. and A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Munisiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1991, chap: 3.

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enjoyed in the performance of various sacrifices, rites and rituals in order to ensure their well being here and hereafter.

### Sākyamuni Buddha, his disciples and their social services.

#### Buddha

It was in to a this sort of background that the Buddha was born. The Buddha, perhaps, was the first humanitarian missionary. This is clearly seen from the admonition he gave to his first sixty liberated disciples (or Arahants). Addressing them the Buddha is recorded to have admonished them as follows:

“ O monks, go on tour for the good for the happiness of many, out of compassions for the world, for the wellbeing, good and happiness of gods and men. Do not two go by he same route...”<sup>4</sup> (author’s transl).

This admonition embodies the deep humanitarianism of the Sākyamuni Buddha. Suttas like “Ariyapariyesana”<sup>5</sup> which contains a biographical sketch of the Buddha clearly shows how he first hesitated to preach, thinking that his novel teaching would not be appreciated by the traditional listeners, later on he decided to preach due to his great urge to share with others the blissful feeling he experienced through his enlightenment.

This inner urge in him itself shows what a humanitarian teacher he was. Some try to show that his research for enlightenment was for the purpose of

<sup>4</sup> *Vinayapiṭaka* (Pali Texts Society= PTS) I, p. 21. “ Caratha bhikkhave cārikaṃ bahujaṇahitāya bahujaṇasukhāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ. Mā ekena dve agamittha”

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finding a solution for his problem of "Dukkha". But a careful reading of the early texts clearly shows that his "Noble Quest" (Ariyapariyesana) was not motivated by a narrow personal subjective but by a wider, sublime humanitarian one. The "Ariyapariyesana Sutta" describes how concerned he was about his own predicament and the predicament of others. He found that he was in Dukkha and then he searched for its cause. He did not stop at this. He looked at others and he fully well realized others too like himself were experiencing "Dukkha" because they also were engaged in the "Ignoble Quest" (Ariyapariyesana).<sup>6</sup> In later texts, the *Jātaka*<sup>7</sup> it is described how the Buddha, as the Bodhisattva "Sumedha" during time of Buddha "Dīpaṅkara" gave up his personal liberation which was available to him for the mere asking and instead made a firm resolve to attain Buddha hood to bring about the liberation of others as well.

Just examine the words he used when in his admonition to the first sixty liberated disciples he sent on missionary activity. He asked them to go on tour ("Caratha bhikkhave cārikam".) for the well being (Attha), good (Hita) and happiness (Sukha) of many (Bahujana). This admonition itself shows that the Buddha as an epitome of humanness. This was because he was urged and impelled by compassion towards the whole world (Lokānukampāya). His whole life is one full commentary about his selfless services for the world, specially for the mankind. Reading through the Pāli Suttas one would not fail to see that for full forty-five years he totally dedicated himself to bring solace to the suffering masses by giving them guidance and direction. He did not wait for listeners to come to him. He himself went on foot, treading the rough and rugged terrain. This he did as a routine for forty five years, going from village

to village, town to town, city to city, without ever complaining or showing any fatigue. He worked tirelessly to achieving his humanitarian objectives.

His compassion was so great, his concern for the welfare of his fellow beings was so genuine and sincere that he was ready to face any obstacle, ridicule, blame, criticism, accusation however ill founded they may be. Sometimes he risked his own life, as for instance when confronting the drunk elephant "Nālāgiri"<sup>8</sup> or "Aṅgulimāla"<sup>9</sup> or even "Devadatta"<sup>10</sup> who made several unsuccessful attempts to murder him. Not on any such occasion, did he lose his humanness; never was he ever deterred by these oppositional obstructions. Even to those who worked against him, he was compassionate just as he was compassionate towards his trusted attendant monk, "Ānanda" or towards his only son Ven: "Rāhula".

His humanness made him rise above all kinds of prejudices or biases. This made him serve all alike, without getting involved in any kind of discrimination either on the basis of caste, class, religion or even gender. "Mahāparinibbāna Sutta"<sup>11</sup> records an instance when he declined an invitation for alms by the powerful "Liccavi" princes because he had already come to accept alms at the residence of the famous courtesan "Ambhapālī". "Sutta"<sup>12</sup> mentions how he while he was about pass into Nibbāna, volunteered to listen to and preach to "Subhadda" who had the fortune of becoming his disciple. His concern for this particular individual who came to clarify so

<sup>6</sup> *Majjhimanikāya*, I, p162.

<sup>7</sup> *Jātaka*, I, p 2

<sup>8</sup> G.P, Malalasekara, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Munisiram Manoharlala, Delhi, I, II, p 58.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid II pp22-23

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp 1106-1110

<sup>11</sup> *Dighanikāya*, II, p 96.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 150

matters was such that he dissuade Ven: "Ānanda" who tried to prevent "Subhadda" from approaching him.

It is his concerns for the wellbeing of others that made him easily accessible and approachable by those who wanted guidance. The "Sabhiya Sutta"<sup>13</sup> of the *Suttanipāta* tells that the wandering ascetic "Sabhiya" was highly taken up by this quality of the Buddha, which he did not find in any other teacher when he approached. This dedication to selfless service which he did due to pure humanitarian concerns is also evident from the attitude he adopted as a teacher. He never claimed to be a savior, but described himself as teacher (Satthā), a guide, a path finder( *Maggassa akkhātā*). As a teacher concerned about guiding the disciples away from suffering, he held no teacher's first, (*Ācariya-muṭṭhi*), nor did he teach what is not really relevant to the issue of "Dukkha" and its cessation.<sup>14</sup>

As a teacher of profound humanness he was concerned not only with the final cessation of "Dukkha", but also with the secular well being which naturally aided the final attainment of the goal. Thus, his teaching on secular matters clearly shows his awareness and sensitivity to the day to day problems of the people. His humanness approach to the whole problem of human predicament made him show much concern regarding the secular problem of people that stood in the way to their spiritual development. Suttas such as the "Sigālovada" of the *Dīghanikāya*, "Vyagghapajja", "Pattakamma" of the *Anguttaranikāya*, "Dhammika" "Maṅgala" "Parābhava", "Vasala" all of the *Suttanipāta*, and many others bear evidence to his deep humanitarian concern.

<sup>13</sup> *Suttanipāta*, stanza, 510.

<sup>14</sup> See "Cūlamāluṅkiyaputta Sutta", *Majjhimanikāya*, I, p 428.

With compassion guided by wisdom, the Buddha lived a life dedicated totally for the service of mankind and completing this humanitarian mission of his he passed away at the ripe old age of eighty.

## (II) His disciples

Within the forty-five years of his Dhamma-mission the Buddha, as one of the greatest teachers to be born in the world, gathered around him a large number of liberated disciples who on all respects emulated the life of their teacher. The Saṅgha community that started with the admissions and ordination of the groups of five (*Paññcavaggiya*), soon grew in number. With the numerical growth and territorial expansions of the "Sāsana", the number of liberated disciples, too, increased. There was Ven: "Sāriputta" and "Moggallāna" the two chief disciples: "Ānanda" the close attendant monk "Mahākassapa", whom the commentaries describe as the Buddha's counterpart.(*Buddha -paṭibhāga-sāvaka*), "Anuruddha" who had attained mastery over super-normal powers "Kaccāna" a great exponent in detail, the brief discourse given by the Buddha.<sup>15</sup>

The "Etadavagga"<sup>16</sup> of the *Anguttaranikāya* gives the special attainments of these disciples. Just as there were great-male disciples, there were also distinguished female disciples among whom were Venerable "Khemā," "Uppalavannā", "Dhammadinnā", "Pajāpatīgotamī," "Subhā", "Somā", "Vajirā" and so on. The *Thera* and *Theri* provide some interesting information about them.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed study of some of greats/ Śrāvakas see Ñāṇaponika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker, Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed), *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, Wisdom publications, USA 2003.

<sup>16</sup> *Anguttaranikāya*, I 23-26

Just as the Buddha, these disciples too were totally dedicated to the service of others. A very striking example is found in the case of Ven: Punna of “Sunāparanta” region. The “Puṇṇovāda Sutta” of the *Majjhimanikāya*<sup>17</sup> clearly bear evidence to the deep commitment of this sāvaka to engage in missionary activities under most trying conditions, even risking his own life. This is the kind of commitment shown by the disciples of the Buddha, and thus they did emulate the teacher himself. Similarly, “Anāthapiṇḍikovāda Sutta” of the same *Nikāya*<sup>18</sup> bring out clearly the humanness of great disciples like “Sāriputta” and “Ānanda” who visited their lay-patron, the Millionaire “Anāthapiṇḍika” at his death-bed, and advised him to compose in mind, thus bringing him solace and securing his well being in the life-after.

Beginning from the first sixty disciples all have done incomparable service to bring the Dhamma closer to the people, thus providing them a source of light to guide their lives. By their exemplary ways of living these disciples did provide not only role models for others, both the clergy and laity but also provided the laity with ‘fields of merit’ (Puññakkhetta), a common descriptive epithet applied to monks to show how much the laity appreciated and admired their way of life. The disciples were all messengers of peace, goodwill and harmony and hence they are as those who united the disunited (Bhinnānaṃ sandhātā). The great service the disciples have rendered in preserving the teaching for the posterity itself speaks volumes for their deep concern of the good and wellbeing of the people. This service they performed for no personal gain but to hand over the great legacy of the Dhamma for the good, well being and happiness of many.

### III. Arahant and the Bodhisattva ideals.

#### (I) Arahant

All liberated Śrāvakas as of the Buddha are called Arahants. In fact the Buddha himself is an Arahant, the first Arahant in the Buddhist dispensation (Sāsana). Arahantship is the ideal presented for the followers of the Theravada Buddhism, for that is the highest state of spiritual development that could be reach by following the Buddhist path to liberation. This path consists of four stages namely, stream-entrant (Sotāpanna) Once –returner (Sakadāgāmi), Non-returner (Anāgāmi) and Arahant. As the *Vinaya* “Mahāvagga”<sup>19</sup> shows both the Buddha and the disciples went through these stages and became free from all defilements that kept them bound to Samsaric existence.

At the very early times the distinction between the Buddha and the Śrāvakas was mainly limited to distinction between teacher and pupils. However, soon this distinction got widened, and the Buddha came to be considered as a unique being, the Buddhahood, a unique position attainable only by those who firmly resolve to attain it and strive to make that resolve a success by fulfilling specific. Buddha making qualities as “Pāramitā”, which are fixed as ten in number.

The Saṅgha community which was mainly founded on the wandering ascetics sects (Paribbājaka) of the time, did not leave much room for close association with the lay. Though the Buddha did not present the “Muni” ideal as the best ideal for his disciples, he did not however, encourage close encounter between the clergy and the laity. This was specially so till the

<sup>17</sup> *Majjhimanikāya*, III, 267-270

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* pp 258-63

<sup>19</sup> *Vinaya Pitaka*, I, p 20

disciples became liberated or in other words, attained Arahantship. Examples from the Saṅgha community itself show that this was not asocial or anti-social, yet held that lose contact with the lay hindered the successful practice of life in renunciation.

His stance was that one should first liberate one self and then attempts to liberate others. The *Dhammapada*<sup>20</sup> puts this idea clearly when it says:

*“ One should not harm one’s wellbeing for the sake of wellbeing another however great it may be ”.*

This should not be interpreted in a narrow sense as meaning that one should only be concerned about oneself and disregard the well being of others. Here well being refers to spiritual success or liberation. To bring about other liberation or spiritual emancipation (Vimutti) one has to first liberate oneself. It is like the case of a doctor treating patients. Before prescribing medicine for others one has to qualify one self as a doctor. If not the doctor would be a “quack”. And the innocent patients would be helpless victims. Using a very simple simile the Buddha, in the “Sallekha Sutta”<sup>21</sup> says that one who himself is sunk in the mud cannot pull out another who also in sunk in the mud.

Very often this stance Theravada Buddhism has been wrongly interpreted as being a very selfish one. In really is not so. What it says is that it is one who is liberated that can show the way to others to liberation. It does not mean that one should not engage in serving others in doing socially

<sup>20</sup> *Dhammapada*, Stanza no, 166, “Attadattham paratthena bahunā pi na hāpaye.”

<sup>21</sup> *Majjhimanikāya*, I p 45

beneficial activities. Such an interpretation goes quite contrary to the simple ethical teachings of Buddhism. Buddhism teaches that all one’s actions should be directed to the well being of oneself as well as of others. What is meant by saying that one’s actions should be also for the good and well being of others?. Does not this mean that one should be always concerned about others and act in a way that is for the benefit of others as well?.

That Arahant ideal is a selfish one is a view that is based on superficial interpretation of early Buddhist teachings. This is not the place to discuss this issue in detail. Hence, it suffices to say that, as seen from the life story of the Buddha as well as of his early eminent disciples, that their main focus after own attainment of liberation, was to show the others the way liberation and to share the bliss of freedom with as many as possible. This was the admonition given by the Buddha when he dispatched the sixty missionaries on Dhamma-tour. This was what the Buddha himself did all his life, even when he was breathing his last and explaining the Dhamma to “Subhadda,” his last disciple.

## II. Bodhisattva ideal

However due to various reasons and circumstances Theravada ideal of Śrāvakahood came to be considered as “low” ideal with very much limited capabilities of helping others. Not that there is no any truth in this assertion. When compared to the Buddha his Śrāvakas are in a lower position in all aspects, except their final attainment of liberation, which is realization of Nibbāna / Nirvāṇa. The Buddha’s wisdom (Prajña) and compassion (Karuṇā) are both much wider in scope and more effective in application. Theravada Buddhism itself believes that the Buddhahood is unique; appearance of a Buddha in the world is a rare event, and that Buddhahood is to be attained by making a special firm resolve (Prajñadhāna) for that purpose and by cultivating



special qualities such as ten perfection (Dasa pāramitā) for very long periods of time etc. Therefore, the Bodhisattva career special when compared to the Śrāvaka career; it's much higher and difficult to be followed. Hence Theravadins opted for this "lower" (Hīna) career as the Mahayanists say.

The Mahayanists present the "higher" or "greater" (Mahā) ideal for their followers. This is the Buddha ideal while they hold that the Buddha-nature is found in all, all followers of Buddha's teaching should attempt to awaken this Buddha-nature within themselves and finally attain Buddhahood. For this one has to follow the Bodhisattvas career (Bodhisattvacaryā). Because of these objectives this teaching is called Mahāyāna, Buddhayāna or Bodhisattvayāna. Though there is Buddha-nature in all deeply imbedded in them, it has to be awakened and aroused. Hence, the Mahayanists hold that the Bodhisattva career begins with the arousal of thought of enlightenment (Bodhicittotpāda). According to Theravadins this is what ascetic "Sumedha" did when he met Buddha "Dīpaṅkara". While the Theravadins hold this to be an ideal for those who desire to be Buddhas, the Mahayanists make this wide open to all as the one and only great ideal to be followed by all<sup>23</sup> Thus, the Bodhisattva ideal is truly a fine blend of both the Śrāvaka and Bodhisattva practices put forwarded by Theravadins with special focus on certain aspects that one found less emphasized in Theravāda. One such feature is what is called "Upāya-kausalīya"<sup>24</sup>. This is found mentioned in Theravāda Buddhism as "Upāya kosalla" but not highlighted as a special feature of the Buddha. Sākyamuni Buddha uses his skilful means in helping the suffering people. There are many example illustrating this in Pāli texts. For examples incidents

<sup>22</sup> *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, Government of Sri Lanka, vol, III, pp435-444.

<sup>23</sup> "The Aupamyā Parivarta" of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* makes this very clear.

<sup>24</sup> Michel Pye, *Skillful Means A concept in Mahayana Buddhism*. Duckworth, 1978.

related with "Kisāgotami", "Aṅgulimāla", "Nanda"<sup>25</sup> and so on illustrate clearly the effective use of "skilful means" by the Buddha in dealing with people who came to him for help.

However it is in Mahayana that this concept really developed and turned into a special 'Perfection' (Pāramitā). It is really this "Upāyakauśalya" that is at the basis of the distinction between Śrāvakas and Bodhisattvas. It is the cultivation of "Upāya-kausalīya" that changed the course of the career of a disciple from the Śrāvaka level to that of a Mahāyāna Bodhisattva. It is the cultivation of this quality that made bodhisattvas become beings interested in altruism, which simply means the selfless concern for the well being of others in other words show of deep humanitarian concern. In Mahāyāna Bodhisattva career this concern supersedes the concern for the self-wellbeing. Hence, altruism becomes the motivating factor of a Bodhisattva. He tries to save himself through saving others. He postpone his own well being, and strives to bring about the wellbeing of others. This brings to climax the humanitarianism emphasized in Buddhism.

What is noteworthy is that this selfless service to the humankind is not limited to the uplift of their spiritual well being. As "Pabbajjā" did not so strictly involve alienation from all kinds of worldly matters, this altruism of Bodhisattva found a role to play in secular uplift of others. So, they were in a position to openly combine their Bodhisattva career with social service activities. Unlike in Theravāda, it was not held necessary to save oneself first, and save others, whether with regard to spiritual freedom or secular freedom. With emphasis laid on altruism the Bodhisattva ideal inclined towards social

<sup>25</sup> Regarding these personage see Malalasekera's *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*. see under respective names.

service and this became an important aspect of Bodhisattva life. This development made Bodhisattva career one that is devoted more for the welfare of others for their secular and social uplift. Such changes justified close association between clergy and the laity, bringing about better understanding and harmonious relationships between the clergy and the laity. This provided an environment more conducive for the clergy to help the laity, not only with regard to spiritual matters but also with regard to secular matters.

Perhaps, taking the clue from Mahayanists the present Theravāda monks, at least some have ventured to engage in social service activities, more actively and in divers ways. This indeed is a good sign and one which will consolidate the interdependent relationship between the clergy and the laity. It has to be remembered that in popular Theravāda Buddhism, the immediate goal of the devotees in success in this life and next life, took place during the Buddha's time with the approval of the Buddha himself. This is clearly seen from Suttas such as the "Vyaggapajja"<sup>26</sup>. In the "Sigalovāda Sutta"<sup>27</sup> also the object of realizing success in both lives (Ubhayaloka-vijaya) is what is emphasized. The Mahāyāna makes this the main focus, providing the opportunity for Bodhisattvas to come to the help of the needy and help them materially as well as in spiritual guidance.

It is this shift of emphasis from self wellbeing first, to others' well being first that made Mahāyāna Bodhisattva ideal more appealing and socially more dynamic. Thus, the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva ideal gave a vibrant social relevance to the Buddha's humanitarian social philosophy, for it provided the

<sup>26</sup> *Aṅguttaranikāya*, II, p. 281.

<sup>27</sup> *Dīghanikāya*, III, p 183.

Bodhisattvas the opportunity to actively put into action the socially beneficial activities.

#### IV. Social Value of the Fundamentals of Buddhism

Besides the Buddha's charismatic personality, one other factor that immediately contributed to the rapid establishment and spread of Buddhism is the novelty and socially dynamic quality of the Buddha's teaching. Buddhism is clearly the result of constructive criticism and response to then existing main traditions. These traditions were mainly two fold: Śramaṇa and Brāhmaṇa. Both these are the almost of same antiquity; the Śramaṇa tradition having its germs in Mohendojaro-Harappa culture and the Brāhmaṇa tradition, clearly a liner development of the Vedic culture and religion. Brāhmaṇa tradition which started on a theistic basis, on the one hand, developed into a monistic system with scarifies(Yajña) as the main feature of religion and, hence, coming to be called as the Way of sacrifice (Yajña-mārga). It subsequently branched off into a monistic teaching on a metaphysical line, developing the concepts of Ātman-Brāhman-that is the individual and universal (Soul) on which revolved the Upanisadic philosophy. This monism rejected external sacrifice involving killing of animals and offerings of other kind, turned into a kind of introspections stressing internal sacrifice by way sense restraint brought about by depriving senses of enjoyment of their objects and directing attention to the development of a kind mystic meditative practice. This meditative practice is believed to lead to wisdom (Jñāna) revealing the undifferentiated Ātman-Brahman unity.<sup>28</sup> The former

<sup>28</sup> M. Hiriyanna. *Outline of Indian Philosophy*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994, p. 52.

religiously and latter philosophically were the most influential forces at the time of the rise of Buddhism.

Śramaṇa tradition which constituted of all religion and philosophical forces that opposed to Brāhmaṇa tradition represented a mixture of materialism, determinism, fatalism, skepticism, etc. The six teachers are representative of this Śramaṇa tradition. One feature common to both traditions was the belief is an entity, an essence called ātman, jīva and by such other names. One tradition hold that this essence or substance is eternal and hence the system came to be known as Externalism (Sassatavāda). The other upheld an essence that gets destroyed or annihilated at death and, hence called Annihilationism. (Ucchedavāda). The former put forward self-mortification (Attakilamathānuyoga) as the means of cleansing the soul and attaining liberation. The latter advocated indulgence in enjoyment of sense pleasure (Kāmasukhallikānuyoga) as the best way of overcoming suffering.

The Buddha rejected both these as extreme (Anta) philosophies and paths and presented a totally new path, transcending the above mentioned two paths. This he did in his first discourse itself which is called the "Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta".<sup>29</sup> As this path avoided the two extremes, it is called the Middle Path (Majjhimā paṭipadā), and as it constituted of eight factors that turned an ordinary follower (Puthujjana) into a noble (Ariya) it is called the Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya-aṭṭhaṅgikamagga). Life lived following this path is called Noble Life(Brahmacariya).

Novelty of the Buddha's teaching is mainly because of his adoption of an empirical and realistic view about the world. This view naturally made him reject both theism and monism. It also made him discard that everything happens due to combination of the above two or due to chance. Instead, he discovered that everything is caused through dependent origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda). It is on this understanding that he founded his world view, in which man is at the centre and that everything is constantly changing due to causes and conditions.

This new world view gave a new significance to man and his humanitarian values. It made the Buddha realize that it is not some mysterious power that operates behind all events of life. He saw man as the creator, the creator of good and bad, happiness and sorrow, well being and ill being. This was totally a novel view, with man at the centre creating his own world, depending on his actions. Everything is changeable and changing. Man has the power to operate events either for his good or for his bad.

"Brahmacariya", the Noble Life is the key to this. Leading a noble life means leading an enlightened, ethically perfect life, that is a life that is full of humanitarian qualities which are conducive to one's well being as well as to the well being of others. This to be done by establishing oneself in virtue (Sīla), cultivating one's mind and developing concentration (Samādhi) and bringing into climax wisdom (Paññā). The cultivation of this threefold training (Ti-sikkhā) greatly help to develop the human personality and one's humanitarian qualities. A life led according to "Brahmacariya" will gradually erase of one's selfishness, self-centeredness, desire to possess and appropriate. It will make one become concerned about others, to adopt a deep humanitarian attitude towards others.

<sup>29</sup> *Maṅgala Sutta*, I, p 10. *Paṭiccasamuppāda Sutta*, V, 100.

When considered from the perspective of this world view in which there is no God or any such powerful external agency that influences man's life, but in which man himself acts as the creator of his happiness etc, one will understand that one's predicament, in whatever form it raises its head, is of one's own making. All those predicaments subside in proportion to the development of one's humanness. The equation is simple: "*More inhuman one is, more is his suffering*". There is a correlation between suffering and inhumanness. The "Mahākammavibhaṅga Sutta"<sup>30</sup> also provides evidence to show that this is the Buddhist position. The correlation between ethical degradation and the increase in conflicts and problem in life is evidenced also by the "Aggañña Sutta" of the *Dīghanikāya*<sup>31</sup>

The Buddha epitomizes the sublimation of human qualities: wisdom, compassion, virtue, friendliness, sympathetic joy, equality and so on. When one is cultivating humanitarian qualities it is natural to find the non-humanitarian qualities, the opposite of those mentioned before, in a person get gradually reduced. This enables him to overcome all biases, prejudices, discriminatory attitudes arising from conceit and superiority, complexes etc. He begins to observe that the other beings are not different from himself, basically not different at least as human beings. This is a primary step in humanitarianism. This enables one to understand that various petty divisions, class, caste, creed, etc, are just divisive forces that are created by one's own self. This will make him see the basic oneness of himself and others. In other words, the humankind is not devisable into different species.

<sup>30</sup> *Majjhimanikāya*, III, p207-215.

<sup>31</sup> *Dīghanikāya*, III, p 80

The Buddha saw this clearly and he very emphatically, logically and eloquently advocated this view regarding oneness of mankind. The "Vāsetṭha Sutta"<sup>32</sup> is a very forceful presentation of this fundamental humanitarian perspective. If one could recognize this underline sameness of the humankind, irrespective of various divisions and categorization the man himself imposes on it there begins his humanitarian attitude and approach towards all others of his kind. Then it would not be difficult for him to see that the petty differences such as caste and class are only fixed by man himself, from time to time, according to changing circumstances and needs of the society. The "Aggañña Sutta" discarding the revealed Brahmanic doctrine which hold that the castes theory (Varṇa-dharma) is a divine creation, explains it as a social evolution due to changing causes and conditions in the society. Thus, all discriminative acts based on the caste doctrine gets nullified when looked at from this more empirical, logical and sociological explanation presented in Buddhism. Though Buddhism admits sex difference, it does not accept that gender should be made a basis for discrimination.

This was and is very important wherever there prevails male domination on gender basis. The Buddha never held that man is superior to women on the gender basis. While admitting their sex difference, he strongly upheld that they both have the potential for development and that they are equally capable. The "Dhītā Sutta" of the "Kosala Saṃyutta"<sup>33</sup> very clearly presents the Buddha's attitude on this. Explaining to King "Pasenadi Kosala," who was deeply disturbed because of the birth of a daughter to his queen the baselessness of the belief that women are inferior to men, Buddha says:

<sup>32</sup> *Majjhimanikāya*, II, p 96.

<sup>33</sup> *Saṃyuttanikāya*, I, p 86.

*“A woman, O Lord of the people  
 May turn out to be better than a man;  
 She may be wise revering her mother-in-law,  
 The son to whom she gives birth  
 May become a hero, O lord of the land.  
 The son of such a blessed woman  
 May even rule the realm”*  
 (Transl; Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p 179).

Because of the humanitarian attitude adopted by the Buddha towards the women-folk oppressed by Brahmanic social philosophy, women were encouraged to find their freedom and identity. The “*Therīgāthā*” provides very strong evidence to prove how effective this humanitarian of the Buddha had been in bringing about women’s liberation from male domination. “Somā” Theri’s sharp rebuke given to Māra, who taunted her citing her gender as a cause of her inferiority, is equally forceful and also illustrative of the influence the Buddha’s humanitarian teachings had on women. Ridiculing Māra, who taunted her saying that her attempt to attain liberation which Māra thought was reserved for men alone Soma their says:

*“ What does womanhood matter at all,  
 When the mind is concentrated well,  
 When knowledge flows on steadily,  
 As one seen correctly into Dhamma”*  
*“ One to whom it might occur, ‘ I am a women ’ or ‘ I am a man ’  
 Or ‘ I am anything at all,*

*Is fit for Māra to address”*.<sup>34</sup>  
 (Transl. Bhikkhu Bodhi p 223).

It is the Buddha humanitarian approach to the problems of gender based discrimination that was prevalent then that gave the women the strength to rise against their oppressors, and speak out boldly. Reading through the texts of the Tipiṭaka one can easily see the humanitarian concern the Buddha displayed regarding all aspects, all spheres and all segments of the society. Though he did not go to extremes as some other religious teaching like “Jaina Mahāvira” did, he too advocated no-violence, both physical as well as mental non-violence. He not only advocated abstention from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct that cause in insecurity of life, personal property and family but also strongly emphasized the importance of non-abuse of speech which is deadly harmful to the society. The wounds caused by physical violence may be easily curable but mental and physical wounds caused are difficult to be cured, and at times incurable, and fatal. All kind of violence he denounced. The “*Samaññaphala Sutta*”<sup>35</sup> explains very lucidly the basic humanitarian ethics that one should observe. Just to quote one the first precept it says:

*“ Abandoning the taking of life .....dwells refraining from taking life,  
 without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the  
 welfare of all living beings”*.

The humanitarian concern is quite highlighted by the phrase “*Sabbapānabhūtahitānukampi*” (trembling for the welfare of all living beings).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p 129.

<sup>35</sup> *Dīghanikāya* 1, p 62

It is this deep humanitarian sensitivity that the Buddha attempted make others imbibe. It is only by developing this kind of deep sensitivity to others that it is possible to develop trust, harmony, mutual understanding and cooperation in the society. Thus the Buddha constantly attempted to do with regard to his disciples and equipped by such good qualities they served a good purpose in bringing about unity and trust among those who are disunited. Thus, it is this humanitarian attitudes this the Buddha attempted to inculcate in others. This is very well demonstrated in the “Veludvāreyya Sutta”, where he gives a very pragmatic method for developing humanitarian. Attitudes forwards others. Explaining the desirability of cultivating and observing the basic precepts the Buddha says that one should take oneself as the model (Attūpanāyika) and then consider how relevant it is to practice these precepts. Addressing the people of the village called “Veludvāra” the Buddha said:

*“ What, householders is the Dhamma exposition applicable to one self? here, householder a noble disciple reflects thus: “ I am one who wishes to live who does not wish to die ; I desire happiness and am averse to suffering . if some one were to take my life, that would not be pleasing and agreeable to me, how -if I were to take the life of another of one who wishes to live, who does not wish to die, who desires happiness and is averse to suffering –that would not be pleasing and agreeable to the other either. What is displeasing and disagreeable to me is displeasing and disagreeable to the others too. How can I inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me?. Having reflected thus he himself abstain from destruction of life, exhort others to abstain from the*

*destruction of life, speak in praise of abstinence from the destruction of life..... ”<sup>36</sup>.*

This is said so with regard to all basic precepts. This discourse is very aptly described as the Dhamma exposition applicable to oneself (Attūpanāyika Dhamma-pariyāya). It is not an admonition to cultivate a negative approach and abstain from killing. It is really a positive approach that is attempted to be inculcated. One should abstain, strive to induce others to abstain, and also speak in praise of such abstention. Not only this. Now the general understanding is that precepts should be observed in order to accumulate merit. The Buddhists consider it a very meritorious act to observe the precepts. Undoubtedly it is so and it is quite in keeping with the well known admonition in the “*Dhammapada*” which says, one should abstain from all evil and accumulate what is wholesome.<sup>37</sup> But this Sutta makes it very clear that observance of precepts has a greater personal and social significance. It assures mental peace for oneself and guarantees mental peace of others. It helps to develop concern for others’ well being, and the method presented for this is very effective. Take oneself as the criterion. What a simple, yet an effective method this is. No metaphysics, no theology but a pragmatic approach. The request is just to be concerned about others well being, just as one is concerned about one’s wellbeing. This is the most effective way of putting through this humanitarian view into action. It is seen that Suttas abound in this kind of humanistic teachings aimed at inducing the followers to

<sup>36</sup> See *Saṅyuttanikāya*, V, p 353. (trans, Bhikkhu Bodhi) *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Saṅyuttanikāya*, Wisdom publications, Boston, 2000, p 1797.

<sup>37</sup> *Dhammapada*, Stanza No:183

*“Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ –kusalassa upasampadā  
Saccaṃ sīlo c’ im-et’ adhi gāraṇaṃ”*

develop empathy with others. This ability share the feelings of another is the key to social harmony.

## V. Two fold path to Nibbāna: Monks' path and Laymen's path

There is only one final goal in Buddhism. This is called Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa. It is explained as the ending of suffering and hence described as the Supreme Bliss (Parama-sukha).<sup>38</sup> The path leading to Nibbāna is called the Noble Eight Fold Path. Life lived following this path is called the Noble Life (Brahmacariya). Noble Life and Noble Eightfold Path means the same thing.<sup>39</sup> When going through the texts it becomes quite clear that the Buddha's main mission was to guide those who are willing and capable to this goal-Nibbāna, which is attained for the complete ending of suffering. Hence, the Buddha called on all his early followers to renounce household life and follow the Noble Life.<sup>40</sup> But, as shown before all his followers were not in a position to renounce household life. As already shown many who were quite impressed by the Buddha's teaching, came up to him and requested him to teach them a method by which they could attain happiness in this world and happiness in the next world. Their immediate objectives was a much lesser one than the realization of Nibbāna. This, when compared with the realization of Nibbāna which is a supra-mundane goal was a mundane one. On the face of it, it appears to be not in conformity with the Buddha's mission of leading his followers to the complete ending in Dukkha. The conquest of this world and

the next world (Ubhayalokavijaya), prolonged samsaric existence which means prolonging of suffering.

Yet, the Buddha being a pragmatist consented and presented a graduated method which finally led to Nibbāna. This is quite in keeping with the Buddhist position that Nibbāna could be realized irrespective of the vocation which one follows, that is whether one is a renouncer (Pabbajita) or a householder (Gihī). In this manner the path was made to be twofold. This twofold path does not denote two different paths. Difference is mainly in the intensity and commitment of the practice. The path of the renouncer (Pabbajita) is quicker more effective and goal assured in this life itself, if followed with total commitment. That of the householder (Gihī) is slower perhaps easier and could be practiced at a lesser level of intensity.

The "Muni Sutta"<sup>41</sup> using a very graphic simile brings out clearly the distinction between the two. It says:

*"Even as a blue-necked peacock that rises into the sky  
never will reach the speed of the swan,  
similarly the householder cannot match the sage (Muni)  
who leads a secluded life contemplating in the forest"* (writer's transl.).

Through the vocation of "Pabbajita" is the one that is highly recommended Buddhism does not say that householders cannot realize Nibbāna. As the "Dhammika Sutta"<sup>42</sup> explains path of the householder has lesser goals as the immediate objectives, namely birth in heavenly worlds.

<sup>38</sup> *Dhammapada*, Stanza, No:204. "Nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ"

<sup>39</sup> *Saṅguttanikāya*, V, 26.

<sup>40</sup> *Vinaya*, I, p12, "Ehi bhikkhu Bhagava āvoca svakkhāto dhammo, cara brahmacariyaṃ, sammā dukkhass anatakiriyāya".

<sup>41</sup> *Suttanipāta*, Stanza, No: 221.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, Stanza No: 397-404.

However, a householder is not precluded from realizing Nibbāna. By properly training in the household life, following the path gradually in whatever commitment and intensity one could, one can ultimately realize the final goal, Nibbāna. The real crux of the Buddha's admonition is that one should follow the path to suit the vocation he leads. The practice of the path even at lesser intensity will be of great benefit, so what is there to say when it is practiced at high intensity and full commitment. Following this path means training to lead an enlightened humanitarian life that will be beneficial for oneself as well as others, and also for the well being of this life and benefit of life-after, for these who wish it to be so.

As a Buddhist the aim is to lead a life which for the benefit of oneself as well as others and this could be done adopting a humanitarian way of life.

## VI. Relevance of humanitarianism for the modern world

The general belief is that the present world is highly civilized greatly advanced and extremely developed when compared with the world that existed two or more millenniums ago. There is some truth in this. But it is not the total truth. Since the time of the Buddha the world has undergone vast changes. Change is an ever recurring phenomenon. The changes that have taken place since the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war are unimaginable. Developments in science and technology have made life comfortable and, at least of some very luxurious. The total effect of those developments has contributed to bring about drastic changes in man's thinking, attitudes, aspiration etc. But have these changes made man a better being than what he was? This is a question that should be seriously given thought to.

Is the man in the present world happier than the man who lived in the less developed world? Has his quota of suffering conflicts, discontentments displeasure decreased? There is no need for a statistical survey to get at the true condition. A casual observation will convince anyone that man is more selfish, utterly bent on consumerism and highly contemplative to reach the top rung of the so-called ladder of success. Not only are they far removed from the goal-(Nibbāna) but severely confused about the lesser goals advocated in Buddhism namely wellbeing in this life and well being in the next life. The present generations have misunderstood the concept of human progress. This Buddhism explains as progress in spiritual and material life of the laity. But unfortunately the man in the present world has 'eye' fixed only on material progress. He is blind with regard to spiritual progress. Hence, he has lost his humanness his humanitarian thinking and attitudes. The cause of this kind of lop-sided progress is well explained in the "Andha Sutta"<sup>43</sup>. This has happened because the man in the present world has got dehumanized, devoid of concern for others, others' well being, His sole concern is his own well being, self aggrandizement, at what ever cost.

Wherever he is stationed in life, his concern is his own well being, happiness and progress. This is specially so with those who wield authority and power: political power. The "Adhammika Sutta"<sup>44</sup> explains well how when men in authority lose humanness gradually discard humanitarian ways of thinking and deeds the whole society get affected from top to bottom. They become exploitative and unconcerned about others. Such human behavior affects nature seasonal pattern which adversely affects the quality and

<sup>43</sup> *Aṅguttaranikāya*, "Tikaṇipāṭa," "Puggalavagga".

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p 74



quantity of food productions. People who sustain themselves on such low quality food become feeble, ill-nourished, sick and short-lived. With this loss of humanness the human being loses everything that makes human life worth living. He loses his spiritual progress and also his material progress.

### Conclusion

The above presented facts make it clear that Buddhism unlike most other religions focuses its attention on man and his predicament in an absolutely new perspective. It places man at the centre and examines his position in the world of his experience. As, it at the very out set discards the belief in some external agencies that controls man, it views his predicament from a view point unheard of before. Adopting a very pragmatic and an empirical approaches it takes an overall view of the challenges the human beings are faced with. Based on this view it presents a new approach the man should adopt in overcoming his predicament. A simplified explanation of this approach makes it clear that man's predicaments are the out come of his defiled nature. This means, in other words, the human being has got dehumanized. The only way he can come out of this predicament is to regain his human nature. The objective of the Buddhist path is to help man finding his lost human nature. This path leads human beings gradually to an enlightened, morally good life. This life makes them cultivate humanitarian qualities which contribute to their well being as well as to the well being of others, in their present life and in their next, finally leading them to complete eradication of all their predicaments.