

Moral Elements in the Ethical Code of Buddhism¹

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Abstract: The article attempts to illuminate the ethical perspectives of Buddhism (dividing into four sections) by exploring the true nature of moral elements, which form the foundation of Buddhist philosophy. The ethical concerns of Buddhism give more emphasis on renunciation and a selfless attitude towards constructive and spiritual moral development. All its concerns are related with the problem of human suffering. Only human being's sincere effort can remove human suffering and can attain to a life totally free from all miserable conditions. Human being is enough to become master of all. To understand our action and conduct in every phase of our life is the core element of Buddhist moral principles. Buddhism is a system found wholly characterized by the ethical principle seeking the meaning of life in life itself. It is mainly based on the ethical way of living and prescribes rigorous codes to promote the living of a virtuous life.

Keywords: Buddhist Ethics, Moral law, Karma, Suffering, Four Noble truth, *Panchasila*

Introduction

Buddhism is a system found wholly characterized on the ethical principle seeking the meaning of life in life itself. It is mainly based on the ethical way of living and prescribes

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rigorous codes for its adepts. Buddhism encouraged the adoption of reason in place of faith to answer the problem of life and also emphasized a rational outlook, ruling out human being's subjection and submission to any super human power.² The emergence of Buddhism in India was a social innovation and marks an important event in the history of Indian thought. The tradition preached the new way of life, the way of non-violence, non-absolutism and non-attachment. The Buddhist ethics lies in its practicability based on Love, Sympathy, Charity and *Panchasila* (five precepts).³ The Buddha tried to save the society from wrong guidance of false notions. He laid a great emphasis on humanity and brotherhood. According to him, there is no demarcation among human beings as *Brāhmin* (priest) and out cast in society.⁴ The merit of a human being must be based on the moral acts of the human being herself, not on the basis of her birth. According to the *Vedic* (old Hindu tradition pertaining to *vedas*), the merit system of a human being was based on birth or cast, but Buddhism is against such a view. No one is born as *Brāhmin* and outcast since birth. It is the law of *karma* (action) which decides the destiny of person.

However, Buddhism did not subsist as a separate religion in the age of the Buddha. The Buddha did not renounce *Brāhmanical* religion, referred to the *Brāhmanical* sages and took over several beliefs current among the Hindus of his day. He did not feel or claim that he was forming a new religion of a new era.⁵ Some portion of his teachings, such as the doctrine of karma, rebirth and cosmological theories, were mostly related with and formed part of the tenets of the *Upanishads* (the collection of philosophical texts which form the theoretical basis for the Hindu religion). He was just proclaiming

¹ C. G. Rajurkar, "Emergence of Rational and Abstract Thought in the Jain Tradition", Govind Chandra Pande (ed.), *Jain Thought and Culture*, 110-25, Department of History and Indian Culture, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur 1979 (pp. 16-23).

³ One may find more precise explanation of the term in the subsection "Inquiry into Moral understanding" of this article.

⁴ See the introduction, G. John Samuel, Ār Es Śivaganēśamūrti, M. S. Nagarajan (eds.) *Buddhism in Tamil Nadu. Collected Papers*, Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai 1998.

⁵ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy: Vol 1*, Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1927, p. 362.

only the ideal momentous, pure and essence of religion. It is of course true that he did not accept the authority of the *Vedas* but it is not thoroughly against the principles of Hinduism, not liberated itself totally from the ideas, concepts and philosophy of Hinduism.⁶ *Upadhyaya* maintains that 'Buddhism was a departure from the orthodoxy of the Hindu tradition, though not from the tradition as a whole'.⁷ Mitra gave his opinion that 'It was an offshoot of the more ancient faith of the Hindus, perhaps a schism or a heresy. The Buddha came to fulfill, not to destroy'.⁸ It does not mean a wrong interpretation to conclude that the most significant social and religious reformation movement is Buddhism. Buddhism today ranks as an independent and major world-religion, claiming nearly thirty percent of the total population of the globe as its adherents.⁹ It is the first world religion, which emerged in India and crossed over its frontier possibly due to by virtue of its intrinsic vitality and moral insight. It could attract the attention of the masses and had a wide acceptability. It spread over a vast portion of Asia.¹⁰

Buddhism is an independent system formulated entirely on the ethical values and principles. Gautama Buddha came to find out for himself his own code of life. He pursued various existing methods of Indian religious and philosophical school. Although, the teaching of Buddha has unique difference basically from other major religions of India and world. It has no strict reservation for theism. In other words, Buddha never entertained the idea of God as ruling over the destiny of mankind. He did not take much importance of prayer and worship, but consider the necessity of one's own rights and wisdom.¹¹

⁶ Govind Chandra Pande, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism*, Jainendra Prakash Jain At Shri Jainendra Press, Allahabad 1957.

⁷ Kashi Nath Upadhyaya, *Early Buddhism and The Bhagavadgita*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1971, p. 107.

⁸ R. C. Mitra, *The Decline of Buddhism*, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, Birbhum 1954, pp. 150-155.

⁹ J. P. Suda, *Religions in India: A Study of their Essential Unity*, Sterling Publisher Ltd, New Delhi 1978.

¹⁰ Purushottam Vishvanath Bapat (ed.), *2500 Years of Buddhism*, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi 1956.

¹¹ Padhi Bibhu, Padhi Minakshi, *Indian Philosophy and Religion*, D. K. Print World P Ltd, New Delhi 1998.

There is no transcendental God, who is almighty and creator of the whole universe. It does not mean that there is no God, according to Gautama Buddha. He also never concludes that there is God. He never made an explicit argument on the matter of the existence of God. He is of the firm belief that a human being is a creator and is the master of all and s/he only can fortune her/his destiny.¹²

Buddhism, in its original form or inceptive concept and fundamental ideas, is a practical religion of pure ethical discipline. No ritualistic acts find any place in it as it believes in no personal revelation of God. It is out and out a human-centered religion, totally humanistic in its outlook, approach and aim. It concerns itself with human life as it stands here and now, and puts forth ways and means so as to tide over the present problems of conditioned existence. In its essence, therefore, Buddhism gives us a way of life intended not for persons belonging to any particular caste or nationality but universally for all. It firmly believes that by following the eightfold path every human being for herself/himself can transcend her/his present miserable condition and attain to a life which is completely free from all kinds of suffering. Every human can be a light unto herself/himself (*Ātma Dipo Bhava*), a saviour of herself/himself. The Human's sincere efforts can transcend the miserable state of human life, which everybody meets. Human is not to seek the grace of any power superior to her/him. Every individual is capable enough (self-sufficient) to transcend and realize the very purpose of life as well as to promote the living of a virtuous life. Human being's *nirvāna* (liberation) according to Buddhism does not set on prayer and worship but in her/his own right of effort and wisdom. Human beings have the potentiality for changing and directing their behavior towards a desirable ideal.

Moral Outlook

In Buddhism, all its concern is related with problem of human being. The philosophical analysis considers human being as the central problem. Metaphysical guesswork pertaining

¹² Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Comparative Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1983.

to problems not related to human activities and the attainment of Enlightenment – such as whether the world is finite or infinite, whether soul and body are identical or different from each other, or whether a perfect person exist after his death is discouraged. According to Buddhist assumption, all metaphysical views lies beyond rational analysis and all these are only partial apprehensions of the whole truth. To grasp the truth, in Buddhist philosophy all supposition and conjecture are mainly support only on rational psychoanalysis in order to construct clear limitation rationality. The teaching of Buddha is based solely upon human's knowledge of the nature of things, upon provable truth. It is worthwhile to mention that its original lies in its ethical characteristic of understanding the special consideration of the moral law that pervades the whole world. In Buddhism, moral problems are basically human problems. The moral law is its own foundation. It is only to establish a path, which a human can lead to ideal state. The very being of human consists in her/his karma and her/his karma remains untouched by death and continues to live. Understanding, commitment and observance of moral principle in every phase of one's life are the necessary elements in Buddhist teaching.

The moral element that enters in the ethical code of Buddhism is the analysis and understanding of human action and her/his conduct. Nothing, according to Buddhism, happens except from the operation of karma. Whatever happens is the effect of an anterior cause and what one reaps is nothing but the harvest of what one has previously sown. This is the main principle of Buddhist ethics and is rightly characterized as an autonomic system of morality. It has encouraged human to virtuous actions, dissuaded her/him from vice and helped, more than any other system of ethics, to realize that human is the master of her/his acts. The very being of human remains only in her/his karma and the karma vestiges undamaged by death and continues to live without any influence from external worldly disturbance. Generally, karma is meant for one's 'action' or 'deed'. As considered in the theory of karma, good conduct gives good results, while bad conduct gives evil results. It is true that in Buddhism there is no centre of reality or unchanging principle in the flux of life and the whirl of the world, but it does not mean that

it does not follow that there is nothing real in the world at all except the agitation of forces. There is no abiding substance in the world, but only change and becoming. In such a state the supreme reality is the law of change, and that is causality. The universe is governed by causality. There is no chaotic anarchy or capricious interference. Here the word 'causality' has a moral sense. In order to save the moral cause, Gautama Buddha use to employ the idea of karma. Therefore, in Buddhism the law of karma is the law of causation. It is the quality of an act which determines its consequences. Buddhism evaluates the karmic quality of an action in terms of moral and ethical criteria. Bad karma that leads to bad consequences takes place due to association of greed, aversion, and delusion. On the other hand, good karma that leads to good consequences results from the deeds that associated with generosity, loving or kindness, and wisdom. Good acts enhance in man a tendency of doing similar good action and bad acts generate a tendency towards continuing evil action of a similar nature.

The karma committed with or without previous intention will come to fruition. The individual is the result of a multitude of causes carried over from his past existences, and intimately related to all other causes in the world. The interconnection between one individual and the whole universe is stressed in the Buddhist doctrine of karma. This much of the doctrine of karma has been believed by all Buddhist, through all the centuries.¹¹

The assertion in Buddhist theory of rebirth claims that individuals have the fruits of some karmas may manifest them in future lives but not the transmigration of soul. Various Indian religious systems in general believe the doctrine of transmigration of soul or rebirth, believing that every soul repeats an endless series of worldly existences. After one dies, s/he is born again. The belief in the transmigration of the soul, after the death of the body, into other bodies, either of human beings or beasts or gods had already, before the rise of Buddhism, become a universal conception associated with the doctrine of karma. Though, Buddha discarded this theory of the presence of a soul within the human body, a soul which could have a separate and eternal existence. He, instead, established a new identity between the individuals in the chain

of existence, by the new assertion that made two beings to be the same being was not soul, but karma. He taught the persistence of the force of karma for more than one existence. The connection of cause and effect between persons in the present life and persons in the past lives was not a physical one between different individuals, but rather a moral one. According to Buddhism, the karma is a moral cause.

According to Buddhist ethics, it is necessary for us to refrain from all kinds of evil actions. To withdraw from evil action, it is our moral responsibility to purify the mind. The purification of mind means the proper conditioning of the mind, so that evil thoughts get less frequent until they cease to arise. To hold responsible for it, the crucial constraint is the development of wisdom that need to be carried out a stage beyond that of the trances of the tranquility-meditation and becomes the aim of the insight-meditation. Within the practice of the meditation, Buddha searched for the causes of things and Buddha came to understand the nature of cause-effect relationship known as the law of Dependent Origination while searching for the causes of things. It asserts that the past life conditions the present life and so as the future life will be conditioned by the present life.

Buddhism can be considered as a system of thought, a religious discipline of humanism and a way of life which is reasonable and practical. Buddha traveled all over India for forty-five years and gathered many followers including kings, noblemen, Brahmins and even hermits. Much of Buddha's activity was concerned with the instruction of his disciples and organization of the order. His ethical virtue and path have a rational outlook. The Buddhist ethics is concerned with greater important of the spirit of love than good works. It further insists to nurture a boundless love towards all beings. Respect for the living being is an integral part of the morality. We can win the heart of any being, even of animals, by virtue of love and compassion. Human is not divine, but has to become divine. This divine status is something to be built up by good thoughts, words and deeds. Each religion selects some one aspect of it and makes it the centre to which other are referred. Buddha emphasized the ethical aspect. The world is an expression of law but this law is an ethical law.

Approach to Human Suffering

The main problem of Buddhism begins with the observation that all is suffering and existence is pain. We are suffering in many respects in life. Always and everywhere through the long history of Buddhism, the fact of suffering has been stressed. Trying to find out the causes of suffering in human life and how to get rid of the suffering had become the rise of Buddhism as an autonomous ethical system. Its main strength lies on its priority for the eventual removal of suffering in human life crossing the worldly experience, ignorance and desire to the course of transcendental wisdom, which is liberated from bondage and suffering. The Buddha was convinced that suffering overbalanced pleasure in human life so much so that it would be better never to have been born. The inquiry of Buddha into the cause of worldly suffering has become a means to find out the reason of suffering and real cause of human suffering.

The craving, i.e., *Trsnā* for personal gratification has been the root cause of sorrow in the world, and that the only way to finish sorrow is to quench all selfish desires. Buddha resolved to find a way out of suffering. Taking the bull by the horns, Buddha was prepared to deal with a riddle of existence without running away from it. His first priority is to recognize the fact of suffering and the elimination of suffering for good. The Buddha recognizes this and consequently pointed out the futility of speculating about the origin and nature of the universe precisely because, all human beings have been struck down by arrow of suffering. Human beings are guided by the disposition that can transform themselves into wishes and desires of the extreme sort, bringing them into conflict with the very constitution of the universe, namely, arising and ceasing (dependent arising); in the case of the human universe, this constitution represent birth, old age, sickness, and death. Birth has already occurred and the question of suffering would not have arisen without it. So as birth is suffering death is also suffering.¹³ For the Buddha the problem of suffering refers to the point

¹³ David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1994, p. 87.

of birth. The Buddhist approach to the problem of human suffering is purely practical. It acknowledges the burning fact of reality that man is in the grip of constant suffering. And it also diagnoses the cause of suffering. The Buddha analysis of the problem of suffering thus took him back to the point of birth. Suppose if a person has born, then according to the principle in terms of which it has occurred, the person is liable to old age, sickness, and death. Therefore the Buddha was unwilling to dissociate birth from other occurrences such as old age, sickness, and death. His perspective did not lead him to believe that birth is the greatest good and death the worst evil. For him, if death were to be viewed as suffering, then birth, without which death could not take place, should be perceived in a similar way.

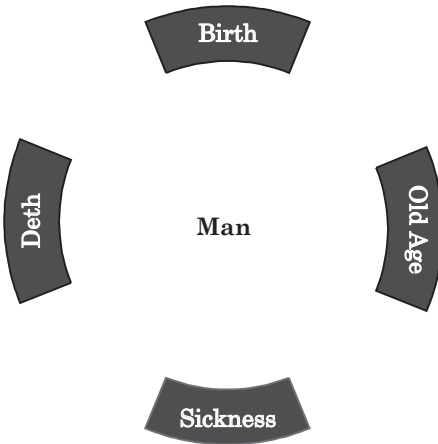


Fig.1: Cycle of Life

This is not to give up hope altogether for its birth has initiated a process that eventually ends in death, every effort should be made to minimize the suffering that a human person experiences between birth and death. Therefore, examining carefully the conditions that render immediate experiences painful and frustrating, the Buddha presents a way out of that suffering. The conditions that make an individual are precisely the conditions that also give rise to suffering. No sooner has an individual arisen, than disease and decay begin to act upon it. Individuality involves limitation,

limitation ends in suffering. All sort of suffering are simply a result of individuality.

Now this is the noble truth concerning suffering. Birth is painful, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful, union with the unpleasant is painful; painful is the separation from the pleasant, and any craving that is unsatisfied, that too is painful. In brief, the five aggregates – body, feeling, perception, will, and reason, which spring from attachment, are painful.¹⁴

Buddhism is described as being a means to way out of suffering, discovering the path to free from suffering. Human being is afflicted by various types of suffering and the suffering present in all human existence has been a constant concern of mankind. The fear of death is the most basic experience stressed in Buddhism. Every moment human is endangered by the fear of death, although he is generally not conscious of it. No one can refuse to accept the universal supremacy of death. Death is the natural phenomena of all the living beings. Discovering the path liberation from suffering has been the most universally appealing characteristic of Buddhism. It is one of the characteristics of Buddhism, which enable to survive until the present beyond the boundaries of India, where it originated. In order to get rid of the bondage of suffering, Gautama Buddha propounded and taught the 'Four Noble Truths' (*ārya satya*) to attain nobility of life. The practical approach of leading a peaceful and noble life is distinctly express in his Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are –

1. The truth of suffering, concerning the nature of suffering (*dukkha-ārya satya*).
2. The truth of the cause of suffering, concerning the origin of suffering (*dukkha-samudaya-ārya satya*).
3. The truth of cessation of suffering, concerning the removal of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-ārya satya*).
4. The truth of the ways to the cessation of suffering, concerning the path leading to the removal of suffering (*dukkha-nirodha-gamini pratipat-ārya satya*).

¹⁴ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy: Vol 1*, Allen & Unwin Ltd, London 1927.

The ultimate aim of Buddhism is the achievement of human perfection, which should be the real purpose of life. It is in this sense that life has meaning, and which should inform the most salient aspects of human activity. An individual who has made good progress along the Buddhist path would have reached a high degree of happiness, contentment and freedom from fear and sorrow. Sometimes many people seem material affluence as the goal, but these do not necessarily bring about the happiness which the Buddha sought to promote.

Inquiry Into Moral Understanding

Human being is a creature, destined by her/his effort. Human's conduct and institutions are fashioned by what s/he assumes to be real and important, true and false, right and wrong. Human's conduct and action should make to draw a parallel with the society, where s/he lives, in accordance to her/his relation to it, developing the ethical value of a perfect and peaceful life among the whole society and to attain her/his own inner peace. The contribution of an individual to her/his society is not merely important but also a very necessitive duty. The controlling of human mind to make detection of true or false of his conduct for a more intelligible, meaningful and purposeful life becomes a constructive means to lead a moral code of ethics in Buddhism. This will make possible a human to deal with the numerous problems arising daily in our complex society of conflicts and distressed. 'A purposeful, intelligible, meaningful life is one that is alert and active, ever learning and constantly growing'.¹⁵ Character determines the measure of a human being. To make her/his vision of a purposeful life and the way, which one wants to live that life, s/he should formulate an ideal approach based on her/his personal code of ethics. A personal code of ethics makes moral law of an individual. It is impossible to get rid an individual of the notion of moral law depending on time and space. Moral law workout upon human for being restrained from a drifting state of temptations without proper bearing and consequent anti-social behavior, which

¹⁵ G. P. Malalasekera, "Philosophical Implications of Panchasila", in: Sarika P. Dubey (ed.), *Problem of Indian Philosophy*, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi 1996, p. 94.

may lead a drastic step resulting the society a worst casualty, making all the members more disturb and tense. A strict personal code of ethics and moral law helps in shaping the character of an individual and provide the necessary guidance for the development of her/his character, giving it a motivation and this motivation becomes the determinant of her/his judgment about good and bad. Moral principles not only regulate our conduct but also guides in performing right action. Understanding the essence of moral law, commitment and constant observance of more principles in every phase of life are the necessary elements and expression of character.

Throughout the centuries, searching for the pursuit of happiness has been the human venture, and this happiness has also been the intention of all. Although, happiness experienced by the gratification of human senses is transitory and momentary, like a flash of lightening. They are therefore impermanent. Such kind of happiness is not true happiness. The greater the sensuous pleasure enjoyed, the greater would be the desires for and clinging to same, consequently leads to misery and sorrow. All human efforts will result into vain unless and until we overcome attachment, craving and grasping of materialistic life. In this materialistic life, all things with conditioned are associated with all sort of lusts, wishes, desires and thirst for something and other owing to craving and consequently the result that is inevitable is ill, misery and sorrow.

The aggressive approach to achieve prosperity cannot maintain peace in society. It leads to lots of immoral activities and resulted into violence and conflicts. It also leads to domination and inequality and antagonistic way of behavior among the member of the society. And this will generate uncertainty to the peaceful mode of existence regarding the future of man universally and cause fails to solve disputes and conflicts in a peaceful way.

In a question to understand and elucidate what the happiness is; Gautama Buddha enumerated various wholesome actions which are productive of happiness, which are real blessings. All these blessing fall into categories:

- Performing actions that contribute to the welfare of others by fulfilling to family and society.
- Performing actions that cleanse the mind.

One's own good is inextricable from the good of others. One is able to face suffering to attain happiness not with tension, with barely suppressed craving and aversion, but with complete ease, with a smile that comes from the depths of the mind. In every stage of such situation, pleasant or unpleasant, wanted or unwanted, one has no tension and anxiety, one feels totally secure, secure in the understanding of impermanence. This is the greatest happiness. It is further observed that one can take positive action, which is creative, productive, and beneficial for oneself and for all others by cleansing our mind, not with blind reaction of the mind. Good will, love that seeks the benefit of others without expecting anything in return; compassion for others, sympathetic joy in other's success and good fortune bring near to attain happiness. Giving happiness to others brings happiness to oneself. One should seek to share whatever good one has with others.

In order to overcome the miseries of life and to achieve happiness in life, the mind of the individual should be disciplined and for the purpose Gautama Buddha evolved a genuine code of ethics and morality and suggested to follow certain rules of conduct, which are to be pursued voluntarily by the seeker after harmony and happiness. These rules are formulated as vows and are stated not positively but negatively as abstinence. These are known as Buddhist's *Panchasila* or the Five Precepts and are as follows:

1. Not to kill and refraining from causing hurt to living beings.
2. Not to steal and refraining from taking that is not given.
3. Not to tell lie and refraining from falsehood.
4. Not to live immorally and refraining from wrong conduct for the satisfaction of sense-desires.
5. Not to partake intoxicants and refraining from drinks and drugs and from those things, that cause confusion and heedlessness.

These Five Precepts are the essential minimum needed for moral conduct. The way to implement right speech and right action is to practice these Five Precepts. To follow these principles or rules or precepts the seeker should laid along in the following ways:

1. For the First Precept, the seeker has to practice harmlessness and compassion to all.

2. For the Second Precept, the seeker has to practice charity and generosity.
3. For the Third Precept, the seeker has to practice chastity and self-control.
4. For the Fourth Precept, the seeker has to practice sincerity and honesty.
5. For the Fifth Precept, the seeker has to practice restraint and mindfulness.

It is necessary to understand how the rule of good conduct or the precepts are established in Buddhism, because there are different ways in which moral or ethical codes can be presented. Among the above mentioned Five Precepts, the first three constitutes right action. The Five Precepts deal with the relationship of an individual with others as the rules of good conduct. The individual cannot exist apart from the community and society. The responsibility of the individual for self-improvement and social progressive cannot be separated. This relationship between individual and society, which is of great important responsibility of an individual is strongly stressed in Buddhism and is conceived most easily as rights and duties. The right of living involves the duty to respect the life of others. The sense of right implies the awareness of duty. An action, which is right in a given situation, ought to be done. It is one's duty to do it. The right to possess the means of living involves the duty to respect the possessions of others. The right to enjoy the pleasure of living involves the duty of recognizing that others too have the same right and undue indulgence would, apart from everything else, deprive others of their fair share of the good things in life. The right to search for the highest truth involves the duty of truthfulness. Right have no significance apart of duties; both are two side of the same coin. One's duty should respect the right of other within the framework of social conditions.

All the rules of good conduct imply respect for values founded on an understanding of the principle of equality and reciprocity. In this context, right speech implies respect for truth and respect for the well-being of others. If we use our faculty of speech with these values in mind, then we will be calculating right speech, and through this we will achieve greater harmony in our relationship with others.

Traditionally, we speak of four aspects of right speech namely, the avoidance of – a) lying, b) backbiting or slander, c) harsh speech, and d) idle talk. One should try for one's own good and the good of other to cultivate right speech, respect for the truth and for the welfare of others. Harsh words generally hurt others.

Good conduct implies respect for life, respect for property, and respect for personal relationships. Keeping in mind the principles of equality and reciprocity, we ought not to kill or hurt or harm living being. Destroying the lives of other living being will lead to imbalance of the ecosystem, which would create even greater problems in future. The principle of equality holds that all living beings are the same in their basic orientation and outlook. All living being want to be happy, to enjoy life, and to avoid suffering and death. This is just as true of other living beings as it is of us. The ideal of equality entitle every living being to equal treatment under similar conditions. Every living being has the right to live and no one can deprive of this right to live. The principle of equality is the heart of the universality of the Buddha's vision. Understanding the principle of equality, we are encouraged to act in light of the additional awareness of the principle of reciprocity. Reciprocity means that, just as we would not like to be abused, robbed, injured, or killed, so all other living beings are unwilling to have such things happen to them. These principles form the foundation of the rules of good conduct in Buddhism.

The first precept of the above mentioned Five Precepts of Buddhism is Non-violence which we also call *ahimsā*. This is the key-note of Buddhism. In Buddhism all forms of life, whether high or low are equal and one. By non-injury to life or non-killing of life means not to hurt or harm any kind of living being. The cruelty towards others including small creatures and oppression to others is also deemed as violence.

The Buddhist concept of Non-violence is not confined to abstinence from killing human beings, nor is it confined to the observance of the first precept. It is intimately connected with the second precept also. It embraces ethical conduct in all its boundlessness. Non-violence does not mean either non-action or inaction. It has been well said that one could draw up a whole declaration of human right in terms of non-violence; denial of human rights is doing injury to human

nature. The Buddhist statement *ahimsā paramo dharmah*, that non-injury is the highest law, implies that the moral factor is the backbone of all law and that the individual and not the state is the ultimate subject of law. It asserts that the rights of man are grounded in a law superior to the state. It forbids us to commit crime against humanity including such things as the denial of freedom or the exploitation of others. Thus, the law of non-violence is one of the greatest expressions of protecting human rights.¹⁶

The law of non-violence is against war and violence in the society, which has got weight all the time. It demands not only abstaining from injury or hurt but also the practice of friendliness helping every living being on its onward way. Non-violence of Buddhism speaks to obtain the immense philosophy of life, which inculcates in us the noble ideal of love. In this context, hatred is to be conquered by love; harm is to be conquered by good. Non-violence is the highest virtue. It is neither a treaty nor a law made by human beings. It is in itself a natural law. However, human must be taught this natural order. For this, Gautama Buddha made non-violence a fundamental condition for human survival. In Buddhism, the law of non-violence is considered as a universal application, because most people love their own life and do not wish to be injured, harm or killed by others. The feeling of love of self is transferred in thought to other people and thus the love for and protection of life comes to be advocated. Injuring others or causing harm to them can never be considered a noble one. Only he who has compassion towards all the beings is noble one. Gautama Buddha advised to act accordingly for not only a happy monastic life but also for the well-being of the whole society. It is the duty of everybody to move for the well-being of all, not injuring or harming anybody in any situation. This is the way for a happy social life. The path of non-violence leads to social harmony. The Practicing of the first precept of non-violence is the foundation stone of all the Buddhist's moral precepts. The practice of Non-violence transforms an individual morally and comes to know the true feeling of love and attains real happiness, and this happiness in turn leads to *nirvāna* (liberation).

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 100.

Buddhism considers non-violence as an ethical virtue leading to establish harmony within human society. Both the traditions accept it as a core principle of human conduct and cardinal religious virtue. All moral practices such as truthfulness and honesty etc. are included in non-violence. Non-violence represents all the virtues. There is nothing higher than the virtue of Non-violence. It comprehends all the virtue. As it is in Buddhism, non-violence is supported on the rational ground of equalities of all beings. Non-violence is the true path to attain liberation and considered as the highest *dharma* (moral law).

Conclusion

To conclude, there is no denying the fact that Buddhism occupies a very prominent position in moral sphere. It also greatly influenced the Indian ethics to some extent. It continues to have ethical impact. To be specific, the article deals with the ethical notions of Buddhism contained in its interpretation, which are of immense important from the ethical standpoint. The ethical concerns of Buddhism directed at solving the problem of suffering. It takes the relevant virtues to be cultivated for the alleviation of suffering. The conclusion seems to be that the Buddhist tradition tries to make moral element towards moral persuasion relying more on personal efforts. The Buddhist ethics further emphasizes that social esteem and prestige might be attributed to efforts intended to enhance one's moral disposition.

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