

SOME SOCIO-MORAL ASPECTS OF BUDDHA DHAMMA

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The interpretation of the Vedas in the days of the Buddha gave rise to a great social and a moral revolution without any sort of bloodshed on the part of the Great Reformer and Revolutionary – the Sama Sambuddha. The pattern of an ideal society thrived on the *Chatuvarna* which was considered then and infallible authority depriving humanity the basic sense of freedom. The *Chatuvarna* may be classified as follows:

1. *The Brahmins*
2. *The Kshatriyas*
3. *The Vaishyas*
4. *The Shudras*

The tragic role of this social system was the denial of any sense of equality and a continuity of a social system under the aegis of an eternal law of the Creator God (Brahma).

The Brahmin had all the rights and privileges which he wished to claim. *The Kshatriya* could not claim the same privileges of a Brahmin but certainly had more advantage than a *Vaishya*. *The Vaishya* was limited to a fewer more privileges than a *Shudra*. But alas! *The Shudra* remained at the bottom of the system owning no rights much less privileges. *The Shudra* was compelled to exist as a unit never ever offending the three superior classes in the system.

From an occupational point of view the *Brahmin* was to be privileged to be the Teacher engaged in religious performances; while the *Kshatriya* became the professional soldier and therefore having supremacy of the control of the kingdoms like ‘royalty’. The *Vaishya* kept himself occupied in trade; yet the *Shudra* left with all menial tasks of servitude. These occupations were assigned to different classes were exclusive and anyone of these could not trespass upon the occupation of the other.

Educationally the pattern of *Chatuvarna* permitted the first three classes to be educated, while the *Shudra* was totally denied such education. However, *denial of education had to be shared by all womenfolk in all the four classes.*

There were also four stages of development permissible to male members of the three classes though denied to the women of the three classes and to both male and female groups in the *Shudra* classification:-

1. *Brahmachariya*
-- study and education – self-control.
2. *Grahastashram*
-- living a married life.
3. *Vanaprasta*
-- severing family ties and accepting hermitage
4. *Sannyasa*
-- going forth in search of God (Brahma) and union with him.

The Chatuvarna of the Brahmins was a fixed order and never to be changed. Once a Brahmin always a Brahmin and so on. The status in society depended on the mere accident of birth, based upon a fatalistic Karma theory.

The Buddha

In the circumstances already described anyone who changed this social system would have been regarded as a renegade. The Samma Sambuddha in his great compassion towards humanity chose to bring about this peaceful revolution, to bring conviction to his listeners when he uttered the memorable words:

“Birth makes no Brahman, nor non-Brahman makes;

‘Tis life and doing that mould the Brahman true,

Their lives mould farmers, tradesmen, merchants, serfs,

Their lives mould robbers, soldiers, chaplains, kings.”

The Buddha opened the doors of the Holy Order (Sangha) to both men and women. *Upali*, the barber entered the Holy Order of the Sangha and proved himself above all others versed in the Vinaya (Discipline). It was he who rehearsed the Vinaya at the First Sangha Council. *Sunita*, the scavenger; *Ambapali*, the courtesan; *Subha*, daughter of a smith; *Patacara*, the indecent teenager who became insane; *Angulimala*, the scholarly murderer – *Gapa*, the daughter of a deer-stalker; and *Punna*, the slave girl – were all groomed by the Buddha to prove that the Dhamma of the Buddha was excellent.

The Buddha never failed to drive home conviction into the ears of the listeners, he never made any sort of soft or favourable compromises under any circumstances but chose to call “A Spade – A Spade”.

The Vasala Sutta

Once when the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi at Jetavanarama, one morning he went on his almsround at an hour when the Brahmin Aggika Bharadvaja was making the sacrificial fire in his house. In the course of his house-to-house almsround the Buddha approached the dwelling of the Brahmin, but when the Brahmin saw him at a distance shouted: “*Stop where you are - you shaveling! Stop - you wretched recluse! Stop - where you are - you Vasala (outcaste)!*”

The Buddha with great calm dignity spoke to the Brahmin thus: “*Do you understand who a Vasala is and what outlooks make a Vasala?*”

Brahmin Aggika-Bharadvaja replied: “*Be so good, Gotama, as to explain it for my information*”.

The Blessed One then gave utterance to the ‘Vasalasutta’ Vasala can mean a ‘wastrel’, an outcaste, one lacking in social and moral responsibility. The Buddha in a twenty-seven stanza discourse described under what circumstances human beings could become a ‘Vasala’. A few of these stanzas are reproduced here for the edification of the readers:

Kodhano upanāhī ca pāpamakkhī ca yo naro
Vipannaditthi māyāvi, tam jaññā vasalo iti.
*Be he as an outcaste known, who harbours anger
Bears malicious bitterness, slander, and deceit.*

Yo have inamādaya cujjamāno palāyati
Na hi te inamatthiti, tam jaññā vasalo iti.
*The outcaste when pressed to pay what he owes,
Denies debt, he is owing and absconds.*

Yo attahetu parahetu dhanhehu ca yo naro
Sakkhīputtho musā brūti, tam jaññā vasalo iti.
*The outcaste bears false witness in a suit
To help himself and others, or for cash.*

Yo attham pucchito santo anathamānusāsati
Paticchannena manteti, tam jaññā vasalo iti.
*The outcaste, when asked for counsel, counsels wrong
And clokes his pronouncements in obscurities.*

Yo katvā pāpakam kammam mā mam jaññāti icchatī
Yo paticchannakammanto, tam jaññā vasalo iti.
The outcaste hopes his villainies will not

Be known as his, and secretly proceeds.

Yo ve parakulam gantvā bhutvāna sucībhojanam
Āgamam na patipūjeti, tam jaññā vasalo iti.
*The outcaste gladly shares another's feast,
But when his host calls, offers no return.*

Yo cattānam samukkamse param ca mavajānati
Nihīno sena mānena, tam jaññā vasalo iti.
*The outcaste, debased by overbearing arrogance,
Lauds himself, while running down others.*

Rosako kadariyo ca pāpiccho maccharī satho
Ahiriko anottāpi, tam jaññā vasalo iti.
*The outcaste fosters strife, is miserly,
Full of evil aspirations, sly and devoid of conscience.*

The Parābhava Sutta

There is again another instance when the Buddha preached the Parābhava Sutta when questioned by a deity of extraordinary brilliance. The Buddha was undoubtedly a trainer of both gods and men. This discourse has twenty-five stanzas revealing what conditions bring about the degeneration of man:

Yo brāhmanam vā samanam vā
Aññam vāpi vanibbakam
Musāvādena vañceti – tam parābhavato mukham
*He who Brahmin, hermit or other wayfarers
Guides astray – regard this as a failure.*

Itthidhutto surādhutto akkhadhutto ca yo naro
Laddham laddham vinaseti -- tam parābhavato mukham
*The rake who squanders all he gets
Fast as it comes, on women, drink and dice.*

Sehi dārehi santuttho vesiyāsu padissati
Dissati paradāseru - tam parābhavato mukham
*There is the lecher who, not satisfied
With his own wives, is seen about with
Or caught in dalliance with others' wives, whores.*

Appabhogo mahatanho khattiye jāyate kule;
So ca rajjam patthayati - -- tam parābhavato mukham

*Now comes the ambitious man, lacking means
Yet fondly schemes to get himself made king.*

The Kokaliyasutta

An almsman Kokaliya came to the Buddha and accused Venerables Sariputta and Moggallana harbouring evil desires and having fallen a prey to evil desires. The Buddha admonished him to refrain from harbouring such evil thoughts. The almsman left the Buddha caring least for the counsel given him. Soon after this Kokaliya died and was born in a state of suffering. When asked for the duration of this period of suffering he mentioned that it would be an aeon. The Buddha illustrated this in the following manner: “A cartload of twenty measures of sesamum seed empties one single seed at a time every century. The cartload would have been emptied much sooner than the term of One-aeon in this state of suffering. The Kokaliyasutta has twenty two stanzas, some among them being:

Purisassa hi jātassa kuthāri jāyate mukhe
Yāya chindati attānam bālo dubbhasitam banam
*In each man's mouth at birth there grows an axe
Where with fools gash themselves by speaking ill.*

Yo nindiyam pasamsati, tam vā nindati yo pasamsiyo
Vicināti mukhena so kalim, kalina tena sukham na vindati.
*The tongue which lauds the blame worthy or blames
The laudable, never wins felicity.*

Mukhadugga, vibhuta-m-anariya
Bhunahu, papaka, dukkatakari,
Purisanta, kali, avajāta,
Ma bahu bhan ‘idha; nerayiko’ si.
*O foul-mouthed, false, ignoble wretch!
Blackhearted, blighting villain, vile,
Degraded, infamous! Forbear
To vent words here, thou spawn of hell!*

Being a Buddhist

There is no place for mere belief in Buddhism but living up to the task of *Samma Vayama* (right effort) and *Samma Sati* (awareness). Eternal diligence and constant striving alone can steady the mind which is ever in a state of flux. The nature of the mind is dangerously limited within the problems of mental arisings as and when they arise.

The real fact lies that a person is a Buddhist each time there is an effort to maintain a state of 'Mindfulness'. It is not to be forgotten that the mind as it arises, stabilises and immediately collapses. The process goes on unrelentingly.

Being a Buddhist is the state of mind that arises, which is sustained and nurtured towards a wholesome deed or healthy level of speech. Faith (Saddha) is conviction born in accepting Buddha as an Enlightened One. Restraint (Sila) over the sense urges and the ability to take control of them is the Dhamma. The fruit of the Dhamma is Wisdom (Panna).

Buddhism does not prescribe sedatives or anti-biotics but deals with the problems of life in a realistic manner, unafraid to confront any given situation with daring. To understand the nature of things and the ability to harmonise the psycho-physical being is the crisis of a Buddhist. The avoidance of evil by the performance of good is the first step towards being a Buddhist; and later on the development of insight into the nature of all conditionality; and purifying the mind becomes the final stage of the evolution of man to have the capacity to *transcend both the human and divine*.

