

Buddha's Dhamma Teachings: Ethical Foundation for Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

Buddha was a pragmatic and humanistic philosopher. He was a great social reformer and he started to preach his *Dhamma* teaching only for the rectification of society and individual. As a reformer, Buddha taught his *Dhamma* teaching as a practical ways for self realization and self development. This paper focuses on Buddha's *Dhamma* teachings on Human Rights. The sublime states of loving-kindness and compassion open the door for human rights in our society. Another importance of Buddha's *Dhamma* teaching is the theory of *Karma* which is the nature of laws. According to this theory, if we will do wholesome deed then we will be awarded and if we will do unwholesome deed then we will be punished. One is the creator of one's own destiny. With this teaching too, Buddha tried to establish human rights. Various other *Dhamma* teachings of Buddha are considered to be related to human Rights, namely, Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Paths and Dependent Origination of *Dhammacakkappavatanasutta*. In my research paper, I would like to elaborate the concept of human rights based on these *suttas*, which are the right to life, property, security, speech and health from *Dhammikasutta* and *Dhammacakkappavatanasutta*, and the right to freedom of belief, thought and expression from *Kalama sutta*. So, I will conclude my paper with the fact, that Buddha made early contributions to human rights as a way of life and this teaching is now much more essential for the betterment of individual and the society.

Keywords: Human Rights, Buddha, Dhamma Teachings, Suttas, Self Realization, Self Development, Individual, Society.

INTRODUCTION

Buddha was a pragmatic and humanistic philosopher and a great social reformer who was appeared in 6th century B.C. Buddha's philosophy based on respect for the dignity and rights of man, his value as a personality, concern for his welfare, his all round development, and the creation of favourable condition for social life. His philosophy is realistic and practical because Buddha told about the problem or suffering of human life and has shown the practical and spiritual path for removing all those problems. Buddha preached loving-kindness and compassion for all life and formulated constructive methods for progress and happiness of all human beings in society. Buddhism is a religion of kindness, humanity and equality. Buddha preached his *Dhamma* teachings to reform of contemporary corrupted society of his time but till now it is applicable to make an egalitarian society. He was the pioneer of egalitarian society. His all *dhamma* teachings were for the reformation of society through rectification of individual. Before achieving the enlightenment Buddha's name was Siddhartha, son of the King of Sakya Kingdom (today Nepal) who renounced family life to achieve the enlightenment and became monk. He practiced spiritual life for six years and then achieved enlightenment or Bodhi and was known as Buddha. Enlightenment is not only the greatest achievement of Gotama Buddha but also it was greatest boon for our society. After the enlightenment he started to preach his *Dhamm* teachings (the teachings of the Buddha; the truth of the way things are) for betterment of individual and society because that time society was highly corrupted by caste system. So at that time his teaching was very much needful for our society and he made contributions to the world that continues today. He taught about the reality of human life, the purpose of human life, the ideal of human life, and the meaning of life and through his ethical and philosophical teachings he has shown a path for practical life and for self realization and self development. He has shown people the art of life by providing very practical ways within personal experience through various levels of life. Some principles apply only to student, some only to householder and some only to retired people, whereas some of his principles apply to all levels of life.

If we observe the teaching of Buddha during his 45 years as a teacher and reformer, we will see that till now Buddha's all *Dhamma* teachings like Four Noble Truths, Eight Fold Paths, Dependent Origination, Theory of Kamma, Four Brahma Vihara (loving kindness, compassion) are very much applicable for making equality and justice and establishing a egalitarian society through human rights. Buddha always tried to remove all kind of discrimination from our society.

According to Buddha our social problems are collective problems but every individual are responsible for this collective problems. Because the formation of society depend on every individual for that self realization and self development both are important condition for establishing human rights in our society. So his dhamma teachings have a great role to make an egalitarian society for equality, justice, social co-operation, disciplines, and conscience in practicing the rules.

Concept of Human Rights

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms and also moral principles for all human beings in the world. Although the term Human Rights entered into Western Philosophy in the 17th century in the works of Grotius and Locke, it was first invoked and practised in America and France creating a new society and political order in 1776 and 1789 respectively. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was accepted by most members of the United Nations in 1948. The declaration speaks of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family. These rights are held to be the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. As Julia Hausermann, Founder and President of Rights and Humanity have stated, "Human Rights are not limited to freedom from torture and physical oppression or the rights to freedom of conscience, thought and belief. Human Rights are those rights essential not just for human security but for human survival and dignity. These thus include the fundamental rights to earn a living, have adequate food, shelter, and other necessities for life as well as the rights to enjoy and participate in spiritual, intellectual, and cultural activities." As Sidney E. Bailey said, "The twin concepts of rights and responsibilities cover almost all aspects of moral and social life. Rights and responsibilities belong together. Minority rights imply majority responsibilities." According to Buddhist ideology, rights and responsibilities are a non-dualistic concept; without the one, the other cannot exist. For understanding the relationship between rights and responsibilities we have to know the importance of self realization and self development. As much as we have rights in society, to that degree we also have responsibilities and we will be able to gain our rights only when we follow our responsibilities. For that Buddha always told about the self realization and self development through his teachings. According to Buddhist doctrine, the Dhamma or natural law exists whether it is applied or not. So if we do not fulfil our duties, then we will lose our rights. If we study the Dhamma thoroughly, we will come to know that it is not only the path to our final liberation, but also the way to fulfil our responsibilities, therefore Human Rights are not merely a Western concept, but are in fact the Dhamma or natural law.

Gotama Buddha who is an eastern thinker preached his teaching as 'Dhamma'. 'Dhamma' can mean "human rights, obligations or responsibilities, and laws of nature". For that Buddha's Dhamma teaching is moral approaches to human rights. 'Dhamma' shares the same features as 'moral rights' in the Western conception of human rights. Dhamma also is natural, universal, equal and inalienable. Gotama Buddha has found his Dhammas from natural laws and he explained his Dhamma teachings to people for 45 years.

Buddha described about the law of cause and effect. The effect of opposing to the law from particular direction will return to the same direction which it was started. Suppose, we overeat the food (cause) the nature will punish us in the form of physical pain (effect). This is natural sanction. This same theory will be applied in the case of human rights. If we will obey the nature of law then the result of obeying will return good consequences and the result of disobeying will provide bad consequences. This is the theory of kamma in Buddhism. So dhamma, laws of nature, theory of kamma and human rights all are equal because all are laws of nature.

The Position of Man or individual in Buddhism

According to the Buddha every man is his own master. After his enlightenment the Buddha preached the four noble truths. Through his teaching he explained the problem of life and the path for removing the problem from life. He taught the Middle Path which is free from the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification or excessive ascetic practices and he explained the middle path from the experiences of his own life because in his previous life he had followed the both. After achieving enlightenment he realised the importance of Middle path. The Middle Path is a noble or spiritual path for acquiring the freedom from human suffering and attaining the enlightenment. He attributed all His realisations, attainments and achievements to human endeavour and practice. The Buddha-dhamma is applicable to all classes of men and women. All human beings like kings and peasants, high castes and low castes, bankers and beggars, holy men and robbers can follow his teaching. It is opened to all men and women who are ready to understand and to follow it. According to Buddha every individual has the potentiality of achieving of *Bodhi* or enlightenment because the Buddha was not also born as a Buddha, after achieving the enlightenment he became Buddha. So if a man try to become Buddha, can become a Buddha. Every man has the potentiality of becoming a Buddha within himself. So if one wants to achieve, then one will achieve. It depends on one's own mind. The Buddha never mentioned himself as a god or superman like founders of other religions. According to Christianity, Christ claimed himself as the Messiah of Christianity and the son of God. One must accept Christ as the Son of God for achieving the salvation which has been offered by Christ. In Islam, Mohammad claimed that he was last prophet sent by God; there is no salvation unless one accepts him as the last prophet. But the Buddha said that

he is a guide to show us the path or magga for achieving the enlightenment. Buddha never said that he was a superman and who is able to give us salvation (Nirvana). But Buddha always has given the importance on Man's position. According to Buddhism Man is supreme. Man is his own master, and there is no higher being or power that sits in judgment over his destiny. The Buddha spoke of individual responsibility, self realization and self development. He encouraged and stimulated each person to develop him or herself for achieving one's own emancipation. Every human being has the power to liberate himself or herself from all bondages through his own personal effort and intelligence. Thus, Buddhism offers full human rights, justices and responsibilities.

“You should work for your own liberation, for the Tathagatas only show the way”¹

According to Buddhism, all men are equal in that they are all subject to the same law of nature. All are subject to birth, old age and death. The law of Karma is binding on everyone. Everyone reaps what he sows and the world keeps going on after the Karma activities contributed to by everyone.

Man is the best of trainable or educable beings. He has the potentiality of self-perfection by which a life of freedom and happiness can be realized. In order to attain this perfection, man has to develop himself physically, morally, psycho-spiritually and intellectually. Right development of oneself leads naturally to self-perfection. This is the law of the Dharma of which the law of Karma in turn forms a part and where from the latter is derived. By this law, it entails that every individual should be let free, if not provided with the opportunity, to develop himself so that his potentiality can unfold itself and work its way towards perfection. Ideally, all conditions, both social and natural, should be made favourable to and all kinds of help should be provided for the self-development of every individual. As Buddhism fundamentally believes in the potentiality of self-development of man and sets the perfection of freedom, and happiness as the goal to be achieved by every individual, freedom of self-development and the encouragement of opportunities for it have become a foundation of the Buddhist ethics. This is to say, in other words; that every individual has the right to self-development. Hence, the Buddha's repeated teachings on the refutation of the caste system of the Hindus, and his stress on the equality of men of all classes before the law of Karma and, ultimately, under the law of the Dharma. The Buddha's standpoint is that good life is open to everyone and the highest truth is the common treasure claimable by everybody; there can be no restriction because of castes or classes. So that every human being has the right to self-development and freedom and happiness both are vital conditions of the ethics which is based on the law of the Dharma. So according to Dhamma when man sincerely will do what is right then the process will bring a corresponding result. This means that one should act out of wholesome motivation. If he is to struggle, he should do it for the sake of the Dharma, that is, for the good and for the righteous, out of love and compassion, not for personal gains or from any selfish motives, not out of greed or hatred. Only in this way man can attain to his righteous goal, achieving freedom without frustrating the freedom of his fellow-beings and winning happiness without inflicting more suffering on the world. So man is his own master of his own destiny. If man wants to achieve human rights, man can achieve through his own moral action.

Buddhism and Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights promotes Universal respect for all human beings and the observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. The purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are development of freedom, equality, dignity, justice, rights and the spirit of brotherhood in the world. All these concepts of human rights are already existed in Buddhist principle. The ideal of Human Rights has emerged from Buddha's philosophical and ethical teachings. According to the Buddhist view human beings are born with complete freedom and responsibility. All beings are subject only to non-deterministic causal laws and not being the creations of a Creator. So man is a creator of his own destinies.

The Dhamma taught by the Buddha has various implications and meanings. It includes the philosophical and ethical doctrines which consider moral principles, rights and duties. Buddha's teachings offered individuals the opportunity to acquire status in society regardless of caste, class or gender without discrimination between householders or ordained monks. If we study the Buddha Dhamma thoroughly we see that the Dhamma means the universal law which is applicable to all mankind. It should be noted that Buddha introduced human rights as Dhamma thousands of years ago. According to the Buddha human rights and dhamma both are the law of nature for those human rights is Dhamma and dhamma is human

¹ Dhammapada Verse, 276

rights. Buddha termed his teachings concerning the art of life as Dhamma. Western scholars termed the art of life as human rights. So, Dhamma is human rights and human rights are Dhamma.

In Buddhism, the freedom of human beings begins at the time of birth itself. Therefore, Buddhism recognized that human equality and freedom will be raised from rights and responsibilities. It will be achieved by human beings through the self-realization and self development. The Buddha said; "Oneself is one's own refuge; what other refuge can there be "Purity and impurity depend on oneself. No one can purify another." ²

According to Buddhism inequality does not depend on heredity, environment, nature and nurture, but it is depend on the law of *kamma*. Actually it is the result of our own inherited past actions and as well as our present works. So we are responsible for our own happiness and misery. We are the creator of our own heaven and hell. We are the architects of our own fate. As the Buddha said, "Every living being has kamma as its owner, its inheritance, its origin, its kinsman, its refuge. Kamma also differentiates beings into low and high states." ³

It is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18) that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Buddhism from its very inception, commenced with recognition of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The freedom of thought allowed by the Buddha is unheard of elsewhere in the history of religions. The right of the freedom of religions and tolerance was allowed by the Buddha. The Buddha advised his followers to respect all other religious orders. Upali, for instance, a prominent, wealthy householder and well-known lay disciple of Nigantha Nathaputta (One of six eminent teachers, contemporary with the Buddha), was convinced after discussing them that the views of the Buddha were right and those of his teacher were wrong, So he begged the Buddha to accept him as one of his lay disciples (Upasaka). But the Buddha asked him to reconsider it, not to be in a hurry, for 'considering carefully is good for well-known men like you'. When Upali expressed his desire again, the Buddha requested him to continue to respect and support his old religious teachers as he was used to.

In the third century BC, the Buddhist Emperor Asoka, the Great, honoured and supported all other religions in his vast empire, the following this noble example of tolerance and understanding he had carved on rock one of his Edicts, the original of which one may read even today. The Emperor declared; " the one who doesn't honour others religions, does not honour his own; the one who does honour others, honours his own" ⁴.

Nowadays, we are working with other faiths, learning to live together with neighbours in harmony, so we should apply this spirit of sympathetic understanding and tolerance. This spirit of tolerance and understanding has been from the beginning one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilization.

Buddha's four Noble Truths for human rights

The Four Noble Truths is the first teaching of Buddha after achieving the enlightenment. We have known about this teaching from *Dhammacakkappavattana sutta*. Buddha spent his 6 years to find out the way for removing the problems or sufferings from human life. Finally he achieved the true knowledge of reality. He teaches that, "*It is the case that real problems must be solved through real solutions. Practical problems should be solved by practical solutions*". The practical methods of Buddha are contained in the Four Noble Truths. These are:

1. The truth of *dukkha* (suffering) or all existence is full of suffering (This should be understood)
2. The truth of the origin of *dukkha* or all suffering has a cause (This should be abandoned)
3. The truth of the cessation of *dukkha* or suffering can be made to come to an end (This should be realized)
4. The truth of the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha* or there is a way (eight fold path) to end suffering (These should be practiced)

In the Four Noble Truths, the noble truth of suffering and the noble truth of the origin of suffering speak of the present condition of the human being, namely that we are mired in suffering and that our suffering arises from our attachment in a

² Dhammapada Verse 160-165

³ Walpola Rahula, What the Buddha Taught, 1985;

⁴ Hammalawa Saddhatissa, Facets of Buddhism, 1991

world filled with mutable and ungraspable things. These truths are essential but not sufficient to command any ethical movement. It is the third and fourth noble truths, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering, that paint a picture of how human life *ought* to be and point out the way that takes us from where we are to where we ought to be. It is within the latter of two truths. Where one is concerned with human emancipation and another is our capacity to walk the path of emancipation and both are associated with the dignity of the human person and the value of rights.

The Eightfold Noble Path of Buddhism is the guideline by which one can live a life that leads to enlightenment. These eight stages are: 1) Right Views; 2) Right Intention; 3) Right Speech; 4) Right Conduct or action; 5) Right Livelihood; 6) Right Effort; 7) Right Mindfulness; 8) Right Concentration.

According to Buddhist teacher S. N. Goenka, the precepts are the minimum requirements for right conduct or action, which is fourth of the eight elements of the Noble Eightfold Path, which in turn is enshrined within the fourth noble truth, the way to the cessation of suffering. For Goenkaji, impure acts such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and so on, are problematic not merely because they harm other people but because they express, reinforce, and propagate the very lust, hatred, and delusion that keep us within the cycle of suffering. He writes, “*Sila* [moral conduct], then, is necessary not only for the good of society but for the good of each of its members, and not only for the worldly good of a person but also for his progress on the path of Dharma”.

What we see here is that for one’s spiritual path it is essential not only to *have* rights, but to *respect* another’s rights. For instance, by respecting the right to life of a person with whom I am in enmity, I restrain myself from the act of murder that would reinforce and propagate my own hatred and self-attachment. Furthermore, by respecting the right to personal property of another person, I restrain myself from the impure act of stealing that would reinforce my own materialism and covetousness. Rights can be seen as institutional means for upholding certain general forms of right conduct.

Therefore, we have two separate foundations for the notion of human rights within Buddhism. First, having and respecting rights is important for one’s own spiritual welfare. Second, rights are a means for extending one’s compassion to others.

The main cause of human problems and suffering, according to Buddhism, is the ignorance of human mind itself in which greed, anger and delusion are latent as mental dispositions, because of these one cannot understand right or wrong and then accumulates unwholesome actions. If the mind is pure and influenced by loving kindness, compassion and wisdom, one’s actions become pure and wholesome. But it is truth that the human mind is not always filled with loving kindness, compassion and wisdom, whether one likes it or not, the mind always has reacted according to its mental dispositions. As the Buddha fully aware of this situation, said:

“Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one’s mind--this is the teaching of the Buddhas”⁵.

This is the most basic problem with which the Buddha was concerned. The Buddha explained further the reason for the human situation and the violation of human rights, justice and dignity as being rooted in attachment (*Upadana*). There are four kinds of attachments: attachment to sensual objects, to ideas or view, to rites and rituals and to self or personality. For removing these attachments and purifying the mind he laid down three kinds of training: *sila* (Moral behaviour), *Samadhi* (Mental discipline) and *Panna* (wisdom or purification of the mind).

Human Suffering is the State of the Absence of Human Rights. In the absence of human rights (*dhamma*), people suffer due to violence, hatred and ignorance, technologies and various kinds of development and movements. The suffering of people should be identified and understood as the biggest problem of all.

Buddha sought to learn the causes of suffering, focusing on the relationships between the causes and their effects. According to Buddha, human suffering is caused by human themselves. And the main cause of this suffering is that humans bind strongly to greed, hatred and ignorance. According to observations and surveys conducted by Buddha, he asserts that every problem has its root causes; these (causes) produced the correspondent effect or result. He also strongly believed that the main cause of every problem is ignorance (*Avidya*). So when we are suffering that means there will be causes behind that. According to Buddha everything in this world are interdependent for that he preached the doctrine of Dependent Origination. In the concept of interdependent origination, it is clearly stated as follows:

⁵ Buddhism, Dhammapada 183

“When that exists, this comes to be;
On the arising of that, this arises.
When that does not exist, this does not come to be;
On the cessation of that, this ceases”⁶.

The fourth truth, the paths, is where the problem is solved (effect) and the objective of applying the Paths is the end of the human suffering. Wherever there is conflict and war, there is also the solution. When the causes of human suffering, greed, hatred, are controlled, then the state of peace and happiness will exist.

You should note that the very biggest problem for Buddha was how to eliminate human suffering, which exists in many forms of life, and interfered in all lifestyles and at all, stages of life. The Buddha himself applied this in practices and achieved the goal, Nibbana, which completely eliminated all forms of his problem (suffering).

Buddha’s law of kamma for human rights

Kamma basically means action which is said to refer to both wholesome (kusala) and unwholesome (akusala) actions. It is also called the law of cause and effect because wholesome action produces good result and unwholesome action leads to serious consequence respectively. According to Buddhist perspective, all actions are not Kamma unless they are accompanied by intention or volition. It means that all volitional actions generate Kamma, so that the Buddha said, in the *Majjhima-nikaya*, "O! Bhikkhu monks, it is volition - cetana that I call *Kamma*, -*cetanaham bhikkhave kammam vadami*, having willed one acts through body - *kaya kamma*, speech - *vaci kamma*, or mind - *mano kamma*.

Any action one performs with pure intention is called wholesome kamma, if the intention is impure, then it is called unwholesome kamma. Kamma, therefore, is not merely the affair of external or visible deeds, but it is the motive or volition involved in thinking, speaking or doing. Any deed devoid of will or intention cannot properly be called kamma. Any kamma one performs intentionally has its result of happiness or sorrow which will follow according to the nature of one's intention as the law of kamma.

The Buddha went further to explain, “*Yadisam vapate bijam tadisan harate phalam; kalyanakari kalyanam papakari ca papakam*”⁷. It amounts to saying that one reaps what one sows; the doer of good receives well, the doer of evil receives evil. However, one who pays for his or her bad kamma no longer becomes an obstacle. In the early history of Buddhism, we can get one of the evidences that Thera Angulimala who becomes an arahat by overcoming all his bad kamma. In the *Dhammapada*, it also states that "whoever by good deeds covers the evil done; such a person illumines his or her world like the moon freed from clouds."⁸

There is an order in the physical world. There is a certain order in the movements and actions of the starry bodies, a certain order by which seasons come and go in regular sequence and by which seeds grow into trees and trees yield fruits and fruits give seed. Buddhists named them as Niyamas, laws which produce an orderly sequence such as Ritu, Bija niyama. Similarly, there is a moral order in human society. How it is produced? How is it maintained? Those who believe in a creator God have no difficulty answering these questions. For them the moral order is maintained by God. He is the creator and the supreme Governor of the world. He is also the author of moral as well as of physical laws. According to the Buddha it is the Kamma niyama and not God which maintains the moral order in the universe. The moral order of the universe may be good or it may be bad, it depends on man and no one else. If man does good actions (kusala-kamma), the moral order is good. If the moral order is bad it is because man does bad actions (akusala-kamma). This is the law of kamma (kamma-niyama). Kamma means man's actions and Vipaka means its result. According to this law the effect of the deed was bound to follow the deed, as surely as night follows day. According to the Buddhist doctrine of causal relations, phenomena or events are not the product of a single cause, but of a multiplicity of causes or conditions. There is no single cause or first cause which conditions any particular effect. The question of the cause of a first event does not arise because a first event did not ever exist.

According to Buddhism, the inequality one sees in the world is due not only to heredity, environment, nature and nurture, but also to the operation of the law of kamma, or in other words, it is result of our own inherited past actions and as well as our present doings. We ourselves are responsible for our own happiness and misery. We create our own heaven and our own hell. We are the architects of our own fate. We ourselves, in short, are our own kamma. As the Buddha said, "Every

⁶ Kalupahana, p. 14

⁷ Samyutta-nikaya1, p 227

⁸ Dhammapada V.127,

living being has kamma as its owner, its inheritance, its origin, its kinsman, its refuge. Kamma also differentiates beings into low and high states."⁹

Conscience is the moral sense of right and wrong and is recognized as such in Buddhism as well. Conscience has a role to play in deciding the moral worth of an action. Buddhism measures the moral worth of an action in terms of its results. Thus one's conscience must be free to take all possible consequences of one's actions into account.

Buddha's Four Sublime States (Brahma-vihara) for human rights

There are four sublime states which are called Brahma-vihara, the literal meaning is living as Brahma. According to Buddhist cosmology Brahma is highest being in the order of beings. As a result of the attainment of meditative absorptions one is reborn into the Brahma realm, who always practises metta-loving kindness, karuna-compassion, mudita-sympathetic joy and upekkha- equanimity. Any one, in this world, who practises these meditations is said to be living as Brahma or sublime living, (Brahma-vihara). The human mind has latent in it both virtuous and evil tendencies. Whenever one accumulates any virtuous deeds, these pure volitional forces lie latent in the mind as perfections (paramita); if one accumulates any evil actions, then impure forces lie latent in the mind as defilements (kilesa). Those who wish to be great, noble and service, who wish to sublimate themselves in order to serve humanity, endeavour their best to remove the latent vices and to cultivate the perfections with persistent effort and enduring patience. The Buddha, therefore, taught these sublime meditations to get rid of the latent impurities and develop love, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, so that one can live happily, peacefully with oneself and with others. The Buddha said, "Hatreds never cease through hatred in this world; through love alone they cease. This is an eternal law."¹⁰ Humanity need today is not hatred or anger, but loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic-joy and equanimity, so that every living being in the world can live happily and harmoniously enjoying fully their rights, social justice and human dignity.

Human Rights based on the Various Suttas of Buddha

At the age of 35, Siddhattha achieved enlightenment and became known as Buddha. He wished to reform the traditional ways of life of his people at this age. People's sufferings meant Buddha's sufferings. In the traditional ways of life, people were classified into many castes; some of them are superior and some are inferior from birth without consideration of achievements. The theory of Chaturvama, preached by the Brahmins, based social status on birth. "One is a Brahmin because he is born of Brahmin parents. One is a Kshatriya because he is born of Kshatriya parents. One is a Vaishya because one is born of Vaishya parents. And one is a Shudra because one is born of Shudra parents"¹¹. The worth of a man, according to the Brahmins, was based on birth and one could never escape this status. For this reason Buddha decided to reform and to educate people about a new conception of life. He called his teachings Dhamma, which meant the way of life and this way of life is now called human rights. There are many chapters (sutta) prescribed by Buddha on the ways of life for householders.

First, Vasalasutta, in this Sutta- Nipata Buddha explained to the Brahmin who is known as the superior class at the time: "*Not by birth is one an outcast; not by birth is one a Brahmin. By deeds one becomes an outcast; by deeds one becomes a Brahmin*".

Based on the statement above, the equality of people is not determined by birth or class, but by actions of people. Everyone is equal in the sense that he or she is the owner of his or her own destiny. The consequence of the actions applies equally to actors who come from any class. Another teaching of Buddha which is known as *Vasetthasutta* of *Sutta-Nipata*, explains that: "*By work one is a husbandman, by work one is an artisan, by work one is a merchant, by work one is a servant*", and "*by work one is a thief, by work one is a soldier, by work one is a sacrifice, by work one is a king*". This statement indicates that the work of person shows the person's social position and status; they are not determined by birth according to Buddha. He further said that "*By work the world exists, by work mankind exists, beings are bound by work as a linchpin of the rolling cart*".

Second Dhammikasutta of the sutta-Nipata carries Buddha's teaching to a person named Dhammika, together with his followers, on what the life of a householder ought to be. The sutta indicated as: "*Let him neither kill, nor cause to be killed any living neither being, nor let him approve of others killing*"¹².

⁹ Walpola Rahula, What the Buddha Taught, 1985

¹⁰ Dhammapada, verse.5

¹¹ Ambedkar B.R., 2006, P. 3

¹² SBE, p.64

The statements show that one should not kill someone else or cause or approve of killing. The statement extends its crucial meaning to even animals. This means that everyone has the right to life. Rohna K. M. Smith writes: “The right to life is undoubtedly the most fundamental to all rights. All other rights add quality to the life in question and depend on the pre-existence of life itself for their operation”. She further notes that life is “the supreme right from which no derogation is permitted even in times of public emergency”¹³. Moreover, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 3) states that ‘Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person’¹⁴.

The statement shows us about how to live a simple life by providing the right to one’s own property. Everyone has property as the second right, without which the physical life is more difficult for him or her. This is not only applicable to householders but also to spiritual men. It implies the right to property. Besides Buddhism, the United Nation also stipulates in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 17) that:

- (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Then Buddha told in his sutta that everyone has the right to speak what he or she wants to say, but within right speech. These statements were spoken by Buddha since the first year of his enlightenment in the Noble Eightfold Path, or Middle Way, of Dhammacakkappavatanasutta under right action, right livelihood and right speech. These all are pillars of human rights.

Third, human freedom and freedom of thought of is held up in the Kalama sutta of Anguttara Nikaya, which expressed the conditional and traditional beliefs of people in the time of Buddha. In the name of religion, religious persons claimed their religion as better than others or even the best, and Buddha was very brave to approve the right to belief within personal, critical observation. He revealed ten conditions to accept or to deny any statement to Kalama people who asked him how to judge any statement in a critical way. Those ten conditions are:

1. Do not be led by what you are told
2. Do not be led by whatever has been handed down from past generations.
3. Do not be led by hearsay or common opinion.
4. Do not be led by what the scriptures say
5. Do not be led by mere logic.
6. Do not be led by mere deduction or inference.

7. Do not be led by considering only outward appearance.
8. Do not be led by preconceived notions (and the theory reflected as an approval)
9. Do not be led by what *seems* acceptable; do not be led by what seemingly believable person says.
10. Do not be led by what your teacher tells you

These ten critical observations are sometimes called Buddha’s Charter of Free Inquiry. According to these ten teachings of Buddha, it is up to the individual to consider each thing by them self, in another words, they are the light of themself. The charter provides individuals full rights to thought, to belief, to decide, to choose what the expectation they may have for themselves without this being based on traditions or customs that they belong to. It further extends to common opinion, the scriptures, logical reasoning, deductive patterns or inference, common sense or outward appearance, majority beliefs, because it agrees with their ideas, the speaker seems reliable and, finally, the speaker is their teacher or a respected person. Buddha has provided freedom to his followers either to accept or to reject his teachings based on critical observation and analysis. He rightly encourages his disciples to think thoroughly and critically before accepting his teachings.

Later, when the United Nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on freedom of expression and belief (article 18) it included the passage:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”¹⁵.

¹³ Smith,2012,p. 217

¹⁴ U.N, P. 5

¹⁵ Nation,p. 5

Buddha also told the Equality of Women in his sutta. *Buddha claimed that "Daughter may be better than a Son"* Quoted from the work of K. Sri Dhammananda, the king of Kosala named Pasenadi was very disappointed when he heard that his Queen Mallika had given birth to a daughter. At the time Buddha was also there and said to the king that "A woman child, O lord of man, may prove even a better offspring than a male. For she may grow up wise and virtuous, her husband's mother reverencing true wife, a daughter. The boy that she may bear may do great deeds and rule great realms, yea, such a son of a noble wife becomes his country's guide".¹⁶

CONCLUSION

After evaluating the contribution of the Buddha's Dhamma teachings as moral approaches for establishing human rights in our society I would like to conclude my paper through my opinion. According to Buddha's teachings we are suffering for our own *kamma*. If we will do good deed then we will be awarded and if we will do bad deed then we will be punished. But when we will stay at the sublime state of mind then we will be compassion, loving kindness, joyful and indifferent then we will do wholesome action. And when we will be guided by the noble eight fold path of four noble truths then only we will stay at the divine state of mind because that time our mind will be free from greed, hatred and delusion and our ignorance will be removed. So through the Buddha's Dhamma teachings our self realisation will be arise and self development will be achieved. When self development will be achieved then equality, justice, freedom will be established in our society and individual will be the creator of an egalitarian society where human rights will be the principle motto of society.

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¹⁶ Dhammananda, 1993, p. 228