

P r e f a c e

The present dissertation, "Buddhism as an Ethic of Self-Perfection" is primarily an interpretative and analytical study. My intention has been to pursue the logic of concepts, not historical exposition.

The literature of Buddhism is vast, and in all humility, I have kept myself confined to what is called Pali Buddhism, or even Theravada I do not profess, nor claim any knowledge of Pali. I have chiefly relied on the excellent translations published by the Pali Text Society. I have retained the Pali form of the Buddhist concepts like Kamma, dhamma, Sandhara, paticca samuppada, vimutti, Nibbana, Sacca, etc., in order to highlight the Buddhist or the Theravada way of looking at the issues.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first one has four chapters dealing with central Buddhist concepts like causality, the three characteristics of Existence, Kamma and Rebirth, Truth and Ethics dealing with the Eightfold Path. These four chapters are somewhat expository, and the exposition is made with reference to classical Pali texts. There is a section called "Opening Remarks" stating the Noble Truths, the most basic of the Buddha's teachings, the first turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

The second part comprises eight Chapters, and constitutes the main thrust of the Thesis. This part is largely interpretative, and an attempt has been made to arrive at the following points through the Chapters V to XII.

A. Buddhism as an ethic of self development may be understood in terms of a two-fold theory of self. At one level there is no self theory, analyzed into five components, while at the other there is the notion of a fluid self, known as bhavanga. Thus the human self is at once momentarily unreal and dynamically continuous.

B. The human situation makes morality possible. Buddhist view is not pessimistic. Even though men are within the dominion of māra, yet they can come out of it by following the eight-fold Path. The human self, being flexible and changing it can be, it can be radically worsened or bettered.

C. The goal of self-development is to attain Nibbana. The five disciplines of sīla, samādhi and paññā are so graded as to lead one at the door of Nibbana. Moral living or sīla is the lowest in the scale, yet it is the basic requirement. The saint transcends the moral order. This is one of the tensions in the Buddhist thought.

D. The ethical cycle is constituted by Kamma and

rebirth. Kamma is the moral causal order, yet it is not strictly deterministic, and its ethical significance is relative, not absolute.

E. Nibbana is transcendent summum bonum. It is super-personal, beyond all the Khandhas. There are problems in characterizing Nibbana. It is both a value and a fact.

F. Kusala and akusala are evaluative terms for judging actions and dispositions. The Buddhist view of moral judgment is teleological. The Buddhist lives and works in the hope of Nibbana. The role of motive in the performance of actions. A comparison may be made between the Hindu, the Christian and the Buddhist theories of moral judgments.

Buddhist ethic consists in linking sila with Nibbana. And here in lies the problem. Sila is individual-oriented, while Nibbana is super-individual, real and permanent. Nibbana is consistent with anatta vada, yet sila is to be practiced at the level of individuality. There can not be Nibbana without sila, though sila is not sufficient to ensure Nibbana. Herein consists the problem and the lure of Buddhism as an ethic of self-perfection.

There is a short concluding note on the effect Buddhist ethic on the culture of Buddhist countries.

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