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IMPACT OF BUDDHIST PRAGMATISM ON DHAMMA PRACTITIONERS

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Abstract:

This research paper deliberates on the early Buddhist pragmatism based on Buddha's discourses to lay persons in his 45 years of missionary life. The subject of the courses for common man are acquiring wealth in a fair manner and through right effort, the joy of giving and thereby supporting the needy people, parental responsibilities in upbringing the children in an ethical manner by giving them secular and spiritual education, creating an opportunity to acquire the chosen professional skills and life skills, maintaining healthy and harmonious relationships – interpersonal and marital relationships, resolving dispute without unnecessary argument, development of individual personality, taking well-balanced, fair, equitable and rational decisions, the do's and don'ts of individuals and

mechanism for maintaining enduring peace, happiness and contentment.

For this purpose, the common man who are practicing Buddha, Dhamma in terms five precepts and Vipassana meditation are interviewed and the results are provided by them are articulated in the present article. The essence of Buddhist pragmatism is literal practice of Buddha's teachings and consequential reliefs and benefits derived by the practitioners.

Key words:

Buddhist pragmatism, practicing of five precepts and meditation, peace and happiness, American pragmatism, Dhamma practitioner.

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction:

Buddhism is essentially practical and pragmatic in its orientation as it stresses the importance of practice over theory. Buddha's teachings emphasize learning based on one's observations and perceptions and believe that knowledge is not complete unless it is backed by experience. It teaches us how to lead a virtuous ethical life while facing the inevitable ups and downs of our lives. His teachings propose practical solutions to human problems. The Buddha is essentially a pragmatic empiricist. The Buddha was a unique religious leader who encouraged reasoned, critical assessment of his teaching. This is borne out by his discourse to Kalama's calling for a free vigorous investigation into the truths Buddha himself propounded. This discourse counters dogmatic assertions and blind faith prevalent at the time. Addressing Kalama's Buddha declared:

“Come O Kalamas, do not accept anything on mere hearsay. Do not accept anything by mere tradition. Do not accept anything on account of rumours. Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures. Do not accept anything by mere inference. Do not accept anything by merely considering appearances. Do not accept anything merely because it accords with your preconceived notions. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable. Do not accept

anything that the ascetic is respected by us. But when you know for yourselves, these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise these things when performed and undertaken, and conduce to ruin and sorrow then indeed do you reject them. “When you know for yourselves these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things when performed and undertaken conduce to wellbeing and happiness, then do you live and act according”. (Narada Thero).

The Buddha was a human being. He was born and lived as a human being but he was an extraordinary being who never arrogated to himself divinity. Buddhism provides human beings with a practical and achievable path that leads to the alleviation of suffering or misery human beings experience in their day-to-day life. Buddhism offers a notable advantage in reducing stress and anxiety which are increasingly common issues in our competitive fast-paced high stressed lives.

Buddha’s teachings are so vast and extensive and it has shown a remarkable ability to adapt itself to different circumstances and situations. so that people in all kinds of situations and predicaments can find some kind of solace and consolation by incorporating its basic tenets into their lives. Unlike most Western religions, Buddhism does not expect you to accept the authority of a supernatural being for one’s deliverance. The entire teaching of the Buddha is free from the notion of a Creator God.

Any external supernatural agency plays no part in the moulding of the character of a Buddhist. Happiness and misery are the inevitable results of one’s own actions. Exhorting his disciples at his Pari Nibbana the Buddha made the following declaration which holds true even at present “Be ye islands unto yourselves, be ye a refuge unto yourselves, seek no not for a refuge in others “

An important element in Buddhism is the efficacy of Buddhist methodology, an actual path that leads to the alleviation of suffering or unsatisfactoriness in the world. Buddhism provides us with strategies for navigating daily challenges with equanimity, fortitude, and wisdom. Adherence to Buddhist principles makes a person more resilient, composed and eventually a more fulfilled individual. The law of dependent origination is one of the central teachings of the Buddha. Dependent Origination has been rendered into English in various forms. Some call it “dependence arising”, “causal conditioning”, “causal genesis” and conditioned genesis. In Pali this principle is designated as Paticca Samuppadha.

Dependent Origination is a complex and profound concept, as a teaching it is difficult to clearly comprehend and it is subject to a variety of explanations and interpretations. It is a discourse meant for an intelligent incisive mind. The Buddha once declared “Deep, indeed, Ananda is this Paticca samuppada, and deep does it appear. It is through not understanding, through not penetrating this doctrine, that these beings have become entangled like a matted ball of thread, become like Munjal grass and rushes, unable to pass beyond the woeful states of existence and samsara. The cycle of existence,” (Piyadassi Thero). Therefore, clear comprehension of the concept of dependent origination is crucial to understanding other central concepts in Buddhism such as rebirth, kamma and the trilakana Buddha considered dependent origination to be just as

important as understanding the Four Noble Truths. Nevertheless, the principle of dependent origination has been overshadowed by the Four Noble Truths.

The Buddha has often expressed his experience of enlightenment in one of two ways, either in terms of having understood the Four Noble Truths or in terms of having understood the nature of the dependent origination. But it is stated real insight into dependent origination arises with maturity. *Pattica samuppada* exemplifies the process of birth and death and it is not a theory of the ultimate origin of life. It deals with the cause of rebirth and suffering but it does not show the evolution or the origin of the universe. (Venerable K.Sri Dhammananda) It must be noted, that the dependent origination only explains the process of how *dukkha* arises, but does not give the means by which *dukkha* could be eliminated. For the purpose of eliminating *dukkha*, a person has to follow the Noble Eightfold Path until he understands the Four Noble Truths.

Of all the components of the dependent origination, *avijja* is of fundamental importance. *Avijja* is the fundamental ignorance within oneself, a cloud of delusion which is extremely deep and all-pervasive. It is the ignorance that produces the *kamma* that leads to all the conditions for the birth and *samsaric* process. Dependent on the existence of those conditions, or *samskaras*, *vinnana* arises. The first three factors -*avijja*, *sankara* and *vinnana*- are not dependent on physical existence. They are most certainly mental states. (Ajaan Pannavaddho)

Dependent origination is an account of the sequence of causes that condition the arising of suffering and in reverse order, the cessation of suffering. In other words, it is a principle of conditionality, relativity, and interdependence which is of universal applicability.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

David Scott and William James (2000) pursued far-ranging enquiries in America across the fields of psychology, philosophy and religious studies between 1890 and 1910. Historical and comparative overlaps emerge between James and Buddhism from these pursuits. This article first sets out James' own nineteenth-century American context. There follows James' own more explicit references to Buddhism, which particularly focused on the meaning of the term 'religion' and on specific elements of Buddhist teachings. In turn comes a substantive comparative look at certain themes in both James and Buddhism, namely, 'consciousness', 'integration' and 'criteria of truth claims'. The common functionalist tendencies in James and Buddhism are highlighted. Finally, the article attempts a wider look at the interaction between American thought and Buddhism during the twentieth century. This interaction is exemplified by John Dewey, Charles Hartshorne, Daisetz Suzuki, Kitaro Nishida and David Kalupahana, and also across the fields of psychology, pragmatism and process philosophy. In all of these areas James emerges as a significant figure for studying American thought and Buddhism.

Wayne Ren-Cheng (2016) connotes that Pragmatism is not a modern phenomenon. It is a multi-layered philosophical concept with Charles Sandford Pierce and William James as its roots, and the growth of the Neo-pragmatist ideas of Richard Rorty as its branch into contemporary thought and action. There is the realization that pragmatism did not begin with Pierce's labeling it, that other philosophers and teachers practiced it before it was named. Big names like Socrates, Aristotle

and Hume . . . and Siddhartha engaged the pragmatic method. It was a method of thought without a label.

Kalayanamitta Sutta (SN, Vol. 1): In this discourse, Lord Buddha expounds that a person who wants to succeed in any walk of life particularly in acquiring wealth must learn business techniques and **acquiring necessary skills**. One should not be content with **moderate success** on the other hand he should aim for **highest achievement**. One should put **right effort** that leads him to highest achievement. The Buddha's teaching in this regard is path breaking, **pragmatic and humanistic** in its approach and content for that he taught **attitudinal change and thinking**. His first approach is to **remove psychological barriers**. Second is cultivation of **right attitude** to overcome self-imposed limitation and move forward to **remove social limiting norms** to be successful in whatever work or enterprise that one undertakes.

Dighajanu Sutta: (AN Vol. VIII)

Buddha says that a person who has already achieved a certain level of prosperity and success, he needs **to plan his expenditure, investment and savings for sustainable living**, maintaining a certain living standard if he spends more than his income soon he ends up squandering his hard earned wealth by the sweat of his brow with rightful efforts. He needs to strike a **balance between his income and expenditure** like a scale with two trays hanging from the two ends of a beam after being should be balanced, by being aware of over expenditure or living beyond one's means would drain out his wealth. At the same time if a man spends very little and being stingy not enjoying his wealth is like starving in the midst of plenty. If a stingy man dies in estate his wealth will be confiscated to the government. So The Buddha advises Dighajanu a kolian citizen to have a plan that would apportion his income into four portions;

- a. *One portion for expenditure.*
- b. *Two portions on investment.*
- c. *One portion to be kept apart as savings for contingencies.*

From the extensive and comprehensive review of literature in two parts namely: Review of Literature concerning Pragmatism as given by the three accomplished American Philosopher's – Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey who developed the concept of pragmatism in the late 19th and 20th Century and other authorities who expressed perspectives on the important facets of Pragmatism was meticulously deliberated and arrived. In the part B of the review of literature, based on the topic, the early Buddhist literature especially the canonical suttas (discourses of Lord Buddha) and the vast and useful commentaries provided established authorities on Buddhism like Buddha Gosa, Ven. Anagarika Dhammapala, Ven. Bhiku Bodhi, Ven. Shri. K. Dhammananda, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Acharya S.N. Goenka and Acharya Bhuddarakitta Bhanthe have perused on the subjects relating to Suttas such as acquisition of wealth and contributing towards well-being of society, individual education and skill acquisition and development, establishing gender equity, establishing cordial human and marital relationships, conflict resolutions and management, development of individual personality, going away from speculative views and developing rationalistic, humanistic and pragmatic views., bringing about individual

happiness and well-being through self-development, critical thinking, problem solving, converting self-efficacies into realities.

2.4 Methodology

Type of research methods used.

The present research programme resorted to descriptive, qualitative and case method approaches. The details are as follows:

➤ **Descriptive Study:** The research programme utilized descriptive method of research in that attributes of variables such as pragmatism, general pragmatism and Buddhist pragmatism are initially identified, listed and their impact on human well-being happiness, establishment of cordial relationships, peaceful co-existence in the community and in the society, the practice required for development of holistic personality, following fairness, judiciousness and rationalistic approach to the given problem and acquisition of new evidences to change the way of attaining human materialistic and spiritual goals. The study describes the traits of the practitioners of morality, concentration and wisdom as given by Lord Buddha.

➤ Qualitative Research

Impact of the practice of Buddha's teaching on elimination of mental defilements of the practitioners form the core of Buddhist pragmatism. It is not just knowing but doing. The actual practice liberates the individual from latent negative tendencies (Anusayas) and defilements (Asavas). Behind every action there is an intention as discovered by the Buddha. It is the intention that decides the consequences – wholesome and unwholesome. Therefore right understanding and practicing of Buddha - Dhamma teachings is Buddhist pragmatism. An attempt has also been made to understand the American pragmatism and its link to the original 6th century B. C Buddhist pragmatism.

Practicing Pancha Sila, practicing Anna Panna (Mindfulness meditation), Metta Meditation (Loving kindness meditation), Samatha (Concentration Meditation), and Vipassana (Insight Meditation) by the Dhamma practitioners and monks and nuns and the outcomes therein are qualitative in nature eg. their feelings, perception, health condition, the joy and satisfaction, contentment in day to day living, reducing stress, strain, anxiety and mental illnesses such as depression, tension, suicidal tendencies, schizophrenia, motor disorder, physical disorder and the like are qualitative in nature, it is difficult to quantify. Therefore, the study relies on qualitative analysis.

2.5 Independent, Mediating and Dependent Variables

CHART 2.1

INDEPENDENT, MEDIATING AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES

SL No.	Independent Variable (Causes)	Mediating Variable (MV) (Means)	Dependent Variable (Effect)
1	American Pragmatism (Late 19 th and Early 20 th Century)	<u>Action Based on</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Rationalism • Humanism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earning and Sharing Wealth for Individuals, Family and Society well – being
2	Buddhist Pragmatism (6 th Century BC till the exits of Dhammasokha 3 rd Century BC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realism • Evidence • Greed free • Aversion Free • Delusion Free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking away from social truths based on dogmas • Conversion of full potentialities into activities • Skill acquisition and development • Elimination of gender bias • Establishing cordial human and marital relationship • Conflict resolution & management • Social success • Development of personality • Ensuring peace and happiness • Balanced fair, rational decision making

(Source: American Literature and Early Buddhist Literature)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Dhamma practitioners under the study expressed that by the practice of Buddha's five precepts, Anna panna (mindfulness of breathing meditation) and Vipassana meditation, they derived the benefits of reduced anxiety, stress and agitation, worry and so forth. They gained in terms of good health, happiness and peace.

Conclusion :

It is an established fact that the practice of Buddha's teachings is pragmatism. The continuous practice of five precepts and meditation relieves the practitioners from unwanted accumulation of negativities and tensions. The modern society is undergoing lot of sufferings on account of not knowing of the four noble truths and noble eight fold path. The only remedy for present day turmoil is understanding and practicing of Buddha's Dhamma in terms of moral discipline and developing the mind and consequential purification to lead a peaceful and contented life.

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