

The Analytical Ethics Of Buddhism

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Introduction

The term 'Ethics' is derived from the Greek word 'Ethikos' signifying moral conduct and behavior, both individually and collectively. In other words, Ethics deals with man's habits and customs, their correctness and propriety. Ethics has been a systematic inquiry into man's behavior and conduct. Here we will discuss the term 'Ethics' in detailed way. Etymology of Ethics, can thinkers for that, it was derived thought Greek word "**ethos**". Ethos is a Greek word meaning "**character**" that is used to describe the guiding beliefs or ideals that characterize a community, nation, or ideology. The Greeks also used this word to refer to the power of music to influence its hearer's emotions, behaviors, and even morals. Early Greek stories of Orpheus exhibit this idea in a compelling way. The word's use in rhetoric is closely based on the Greek terminology used by Aristotle in his concept of the three artistic proofs. About origin, Ethos (plurals: ethe, ethea) is a Greek word originally meaning accustomed placed" (as in "the habitat of horses") "custom, habit", equivalent to Latin mores. Ethos forms the root of ethikos, meaning "moral, showing moral character" Late Latin borrowed it as ethicus, the feminine of which (ethica, for "moral philosophy"), is the origin of the modern English word ethics.' With meaning of Ethos can simply mean the disposition as; character, or fundamental value particular to a specific person, people, culture, or movement.

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1. Ethics examines and determines the criterion of moral judgment, good and bad action, result, values, virtues, goal of human life, etc. An attempt in this paper is made to analyze some Sautraantika ethical doctrines, as found in the Suutras. It is analytical in the sense that it has critically and minutely analyzed ethical concepts and practice.
2. There is a deep rooted misconception prevalent among some modern scholars who consider Buddha's ethics as mere revival of Vedic or Upanisadic ethics as holds S. Radha Krishnan and followed by others. "The only metaphysics that can judge Buddha's ethical discipline is the metaphysics underlying the *Upanishads*." An analysis of *Shutra* analytical ethics goes contrary to this deep rooted misconception which has also been examined in this paper.
3. The Analytical Philosopher (vibhajjavaadin) Buddha revolutionized the traditional metaphysical ethics and ritualistic conduct. The survey of early *Suutras* reveals beyond doubt that he was stern against the contemporary brahmanic as well as non brahmanic (Ajivika, Jainas) Philosophy of moral principles and conduct. Sometime, an illusion is created by similarity of the terms such as *Karma*, *Dharma* etc. The Buddha did use these terms such as *Karma*, *paapa*, *punya*, *maitri*, *Karuaa* etc, but he radically changed their connotations. He did not coin new terms or invented new the framework of existing language. Sometimes, the Buddha is criticized by Brahmins as *Akriyaavaadin* (non-actionalist) for refuting all traditional ethical concept and practice which clearly verify Buddha's critical attitude towards determinism (*niyativada*), theism (iswaravaada), soulism (*aatmavaada*), asceticism, *Purohitavaada* (Priestism), castism (*jaativaada*) etc. as false ethical concepts and practice.
4. The survey of Vedic literature brings into light that some of

the philosophers of the *Vedas*, particularly last chapter of *Yajurveda* suggest a theory of detached Karma. The human virtues such as loving kindness (*maitri*), compassion (*Karu.naa*), non-violence, justice, wisdom etc. are duly mentioned. Some of the ancient Vedic seers were quite aware of importance of *Karma* and moral virtue which were appraised by the Buddha himself. These ancient norms later on, were replaced by fatalism, determinism, ritualism as evinced by ‘*Satapatha Braahma.na.*’ ”The sacrifice is two fold with oblation men satisfy the Gods, with gift the human gods (Brahmins) when qualified convey the worshipper to heavenly world.”[*Sat Brah.* II. 22, 6 and IV. 344].

5. The moral values were long ago recognized by Indian seers but the criterion of moral action was solely derived from scriptural or priestly authority. The Buddha’s revolution turned the head of Authoritarianism down to the feet of Empiricism, Pragmatism and Personal experience. It can be considered to be a Copernicus Revolution in the field of ethics.

6. Now, permit me to deal with fundamental principles of Ethics found in the *Sutras* and followed by the later Sautrantikas. The present author found following nine differential characteristics of the *Sutra* ethics:

- a. Volition as the criterion of an ethical judgement.
- b. Supremacy of Karma.
- c. Freedom of Will.
- d. Human responsibility.
- e. Anti-pessimism.
- f. Humanistic.
- g. Practical.
- h. Psychological
- k. Therapeutical.

7. Volition as criterion of moral judgement: Volition (*cetanaa*) was categorically taught by the Buddha as criterion of moral (*Kusala*) or immoral (*Akusala*) action. He considered action (*Karma*) as the cause of diversities of the world against the traditional view of god as the creator. There is no trace whatsoever of the evidence of volition or *cetanaa* as the criterion of ethical judgement in Pre-Buddha literature which lay stress on testimony or priestly authority as the criterion of moral judgement.

Ethically, there is slight difference between the connotation of the terms 'volition' and 'will'. Volition (*cetanaa*) and will (*cetiyyavaa*) signifies active aspect of volition.

8. There is an important puzzling question of ethics: whether an intention or consequence (result) should be a criterion of moral judgement ? Intuitionists advocate intention, while Utilitarianists take utility or consequence as the criterion. The Buddha's inclusion of volition or will does not exclude consequence also. Every good volition and will is invariably followed by happy feeling and vice versa. This consequence appears in the form of happiness or unhappiness.

A good intention is an award in itself invariably linked with happy feeling irrespective of consequence But, exhorts the Buddha, there is no escape neither in caves nor in ocean from of results (*phala*) of action, Thus, we find unique reconciliation of volitionalism and Utilitarianism in the *Sutra* Ethics.

9. Supremacy of Action: The Buddha also offers the throne of supremacy to action (*Karma*) which is the creator of variety, diversities and multiplicities of the world against the traditional view of the one single agent or god, or supreme being as the creator. The author cannot resist the desire to put forward Buddha's own word on this question:

“Owner of their own Karma, O young man, are living beings heirs of their Karma, have karma as the wombs from which they spring, having Karma as their refuge. Karma marks of living being, making them become depraved and excellent” (*kammasakaa maa.nava sattaa, kammadaayadaa, kammayoni, kammabandhu kamma.tisara.naa kamma.m satte vibhajati yadida.m hinappa.nitayaaya. Cuulakammavibhaagasutta, M.V.P. 14/511/176*)

He categorically gave highest importance to Karma in following words. “Because of karma the world and people are continued. Just as a wheels of cart are bound with an axil, similarly all being are bound with and controlled by action:

*Kammanaa vattaati loko, kammanaa vattati pajjaa,
Kammanaa nibandhanaa sattaa, rathasaa.niva yaayataa [Sn. 61]*

10. The Buddha declared his unprecedented discovery about four kinds of karma (*cattaari imaani, bhikkhave, kammaani mayaa sayam abhi~n~naaya sacchikatvaa paveditani*) as follows:

The karmas are also divided into bodily action (*kaayakarma*), verbal action (*vaaci-karma*) and mental action (*maanasa karma*).

11. Freedom of Will: Freedom of will is another fundamental principles of the *Suutraethics*. It is the free will or power of choice to perform good and bad deeds, which make ethics possible. In the case where there is no free will or actions are determined, then no question of moral teachings is applicable. The Buddha strongly laid stress on freedom of will and refuted all kinds of determinism (*niyativaada*). The Buddha analyzed three kinds of determinism which lead to non-actionalism (*akriyavaada*) or annihilation (*ucchedavaada*) of all morality. They are the:

- a. Prior-action determinism (*Puurvakarmak.rataniyativaada*);
- b. Godly determinism (*I'svarak.rataniyativaada*) and
- c. Non-causalism (*ahetukayvaada*).

Prior-action determinism is a pre-Buddhist ethical viewpoint claiming that our every present action good or bad is determined by the actions of previous life. Second one advocates that all our actions good or bad are determined by God, and third one proclaims non-causal or accidentalism leading to non-actionalism which is also a fatal blow to all ethical norms. These views cut off the very root of ethics which is grounded on Freedom of Will. The Buddha vehemently refutes all these kinds of determinism. The Buddha exhorts "If one essentially believes in determinism then the resolution that I should not do this and I should do this, I should not perform this act, will not take place when they lose the mindfulness (*sati*) about what is appropriate and what is not, then they will fall into the reasonlessness or into the net of defeat (*niggaha*)," [*Ang. Tik.* 61]. It is another evidence of Buddha's demarcation from traditional determinism and clearly reveals his revolutionary attitude towards the orthodox false ethical views.

12. Other kinds of non-actionalism (*akriyavaada*) was propagated by some six contemporary ethical philosophers: Ajitakesakambhi (materialism, *ucchedavaada*). Puurana Kaassapa (moral scepticism), Pakudha Kaaccaayana (eternalism, *akriyavaada*), Nigantha Nathaputta (prior-karma determinism) and Samjnaya Bela.t.thi (scepticism). The Buddha vehemently refuted all kinds of nonactionalism, scepticism and determinism and taught the law of *karma* and its results in such an analytical way that was not known before.

13. An analysis of *karma* as criterion of ethical judgement in *Kaalaamasutta* of Anguttara-Nikaya brings forward following points:

- a. Approved by your own experience, correct causal relation and correct logical judgement;
- b. To be skeptical about any authority , testimony, majority, sophistry etc. That means no blind faith in traditionalism and orthodoxism.
- c. The deed in order to be righteous must be meritorious.
- d. Such a deed is praised by the wise.
- e. Such a deed if performed in full, conduces to benefit and happiness to himself, to others and to both.

14. Human responsibility: The Buddha also turned the head of divine responsibility to the feet of human responsibility. He exhorted:

“You are the master of your self, there is no any other master. By proper training of your (mind), you obtain the difficult master (*Nibbaana*) [*Attanaa hi attano naatho, ko hi naatho paro si.maa, attaana va sudantena, naatha labathi dullabha.m*]

You have to see your own good and bad deeds not of others (*na paresa.m vilomaani, na perasa.m kataakata.m attanaava avakkheyya, kataani akataani ca*).

No body-else either god, deities, ghosts, other people, society or any other agent or agency is responsible for one’s deed but the doer himself. Even the Buddha is only the teacher who showed the path but you are the one who has to tread on it (*tumhehi kicca.m aatappa.m akkhaataaro tathaagataa*). Such a doctrine of self-help and self-dependence is seldom to be met with in pre-Buddhist ethics.

15. Emphasis on self help ethical principles apparently indicates following important points:

- a. Futility of prayers and oblation.
- b. It is a natural method.
- c. Self effort in mental Enoblement.

d. Counter action vice with virtue.

16. The Buddha found Vedic prayers to gods, for prosperity, for help, for removal of evil (*duriti*) and to bring good with various sacrificial rites related with them as ineffective and useless. One has to rely on his own effort to achieve an end. Buddha's last word to his discipline "be a light to yourself and roam about relying on yourself" remains a very significant in the history of ethics which considers human endeavour as the guiding principles of all moral conduct. Prayers and oblations do not yield much result but certainly human efforts do. The Buddha exhorted that just "as a stone thrown into the water can never be made a float by wishing and praying even so an evil person who had died could not be made to enter heaven by the wishful thinking and praying of other people. Despite such wishing and praying he would definitely enter the world of misery. The Buddha further said: "there are these five things, Gahapati, which are desirable result hard to get in the world. What five? They are longevity, lovely complexion, happiness, honour, and rebirth in the heavenly world. One should neither pray nor merely dream of them. But instead he should endeavour to fulfil the causes which will produce them for him."

It is a fact undeniable that human being depend in some way or other on each other's mutual aid, co-operation, loving, kindness (*mettaa*), compassion (*karu.naa*). etc. are natural phenomena of evolution but one has to seek help from his own efforts. The enlightened teachers only teach the method to achieve the ethical perfection but the efforts are necessarily made by the disciples themselves.

17. The *Dharma* is considered in the *sutras* as natural law of conditional origination (*pratityasamutpaada*) which all the time remain uncontradicted, objective, unalterable truth, whether Buddha teaches it or does not teach it. The Buddha also

emphasized on the continuation of mental improvement in following words:

18. The other differential characteristic of the *sutra* ethics can be summarized as below: Humanistic: It is universally applicable to all human beings irrespective of their caste, creed, sex, nationality etc..

19. Practical: Everyone of its concepts and practice is grounded on practical experience. It can be practiced in all times and places.

20. Psychological: The Buddha's ethical teaching were based on sharp and abstruse analysis of mind (*citta*) and its functioning (*cettasika*); their wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) mental states, are deeply analyzed. Such a psychological ethics is not found in pre-sutra literature.

21 Anti-pessimistic: It is another important feature, of Sautrantika ethics which contradict the present understanding of Buddhistic ethics as pessimistic in the beginning and optimistic in the end. The study of Sustras reveals that the Buddha does speak about Dukkha in the world but not that "everything is Dukkha by nature" (Samkhya concept) as he spoke about happy states in this very world and heavenly happy states too. There are happy and unhappy states in this very life-time. The Samkhya element of pessimism entered into the interpretation of Dukkha in Buddhism which caused the mistake of considering Buddhistic ethics as pessimistic in the beginning and optimistic in the end. As a matter of fact, it is not pessimistic neither in the beginning nor in the end. The practice of ethical laws brings about happiness in the beginning, middle and in the end. (*aadi kalyaana.m, majje kalyaana.m pariyosaana-kalyaana.m*).

22. Therapeutical: The Buddha is called a doctor (*Bhaisajayaguru*) because like a doctor, he taught the nature of

ailment (*dukkha*), its causes (*samudaya*), its treatment (*nirodha*) and method of treatment (*marga*). The diagnosis of various kinds of emotional afflictions (*Kilisas*), perceptual illusions (*Vipallasas*), kinds of personality (*Carita*), analysis of negative immoral forces (*aku'sala*) and their treatment through opposite moral forces and *Dhyana Vipassana*, definitely proves Sutra ethics to be psychotherapeutic.

Conclusion:

The Sutras ethics can be called an anti-dote, Therapy or Reality; Therapy which has realistic anti-dote for all mental disturbances or neurotic symptoms which are faced by all human beings in the course of critical periods. The Sutra ethics not only cures by the method of concentration (*dhyana*), insight (*vipassana*) various kinds of practical meditations, it also provides sure ground for preventive medicine by developing mental moral forces. The further evolution of ethical principles of sutra ethics, psychologically and logically analyzed and debated by later Sautrantikas in *Kathaavathu*, *Abhidharmako's abhaa'sya*, *Praamaanasamuccaya* and *Praama.navaritika* are left aside for future exploration. This short summary of some of the differential characteristics of ethical philosophy found in the Sutras prove that the Buddha launched an ethical revolution to counteract the traditional false ethical concepts and practice and showed mankind a correct ethical method leading to Liberation.

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