

From Dukkha to Nirvana: A Systematic Study of the Four Noble Truths

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Abstract

The research paper strives to bring out the basic concept of the teachings of Mahatma Buddha, basically of four truths. This paper will follow the Scriptures of Buddhism as well as the main writings of researchers of Buddhist philosophy. It can be said that these four points are base of Buddhist philosophy. Central point of these truths is suffering, that is the main concept in Buddha philosophy; defines the human lives and their problems. According to these Four Noble Truths, suffering in the world is an effect, but its root is its cause. Rather than the effect of suffering, the Buddha has laid more emphasis on its causes. These Four Noble Truths include suffering, the cause of suffering, the path leading to the end of suffering, and the end of suffering. From these four teachings, knowledge of the basic teachings of the Buddha emerges.

Keywords: Buddhism, Philosophy, Suffering, Noble Truths.

Introduction

Until the time of the Buddha, society was bound by superstitions. Buddhism talks based on logic and science, which led to the decline of superstitions. The Buddha taught all mankind to put aside superstitious desires and expectations and gave message to think logically. The foundation/basis of the teachings of Buddhism are the Four Noble Truths, which the Buddha, after attaining enlightenment, gave to five monks in his first sermon at Isipatana (modern Sarnath) near Varanasi. The main purpose of these basic teachings was to make all mankind aware of suffering, eliminate the causes of suffering and adopt the path of truth and end suffering. These four Noble Truths are suffering, the cause of suffering, the path leading to the end of suffering and the end of suffering. From these four teachings, the knowledge of the basic teachings of the Buddha is obtained. "The first three of these Truths contain philosophy of the teaching; the last, the morality of the teaching as seen through the spectacles of this philosophy." (Paul Daulke: 1978; 20) These four truths are:

1. There is suffering
2. There is the cause of suffering
3. There is the cessation of suffering
4. There is the path leading to suffering

1. There is Suffering (First Noble Truth)

“The first truth is that of *dukkha*, which means unsatisfactoriness of life, although it is often translated as pain or suffering.” (L.Ariyawansa Nayaka Thera: 1981; 205) “It is true that the Pali word *dukkha* (or Sanskrit *dukkha*) in ordinary usage means ‘suffering’, pain, sorrow or misery, as opposed to the word *sukha* meaning happiness, comfort, or ease. But the term *dukkha* in the First Noble Truth, which represents the Buddha’s view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connotes enormously wider senses. It is admitted that the term *dukkha* in the First Noble Truth contains, quite obviously, the ordinary meaning of suffering, but in addition it also includes deeper ideas such as imperfection, impermanence, emptiness, insubstantiality.” (Walpola:1974;17) It can be said that the word *dukkha* is not only for pain but it is also meant of incompleteness, non-existence and emptiness.

According to Mahatma Buddha, suffering is not an emotional or cognitive state of mind. Suffering is necessarily pervasive in every sensation, action and experience of the living being. Suffering does not end even with death because death is not the end of life. This is the end of one stage of the being, from which a new stage begins. The basic basis of the existence of the being is the five aggregates of suffering. (Buddhacharya:1952;117) Birth, aging, illness, death, mourning, crying, worrying, being disturbed, not having one's desires fulfilled, getting something without one's choice-all these are suffering. This suffering is the first noble truth of Buddhist philosophy. Generally, the five aggregates are suffering. The five aggregates: name-form (*rupa*), feelings (*sensation*), contact, *samskara* and consciousness (*vijnana*). We can say that all the states of conscious life are related to suffering and base of suffering.

Form, Earth, water, air, fire are the five *rupa* aggregate. Under the form factor, the five senses - eye, nose, ear, tongue, skin and their related objects-visible objects, audible sounds, odorous, palatable, tactile - all come under it. Under the sensation factor, the sensation of pleasure, sensation of pain and aversion come under it. Whatever pleasure or pain is experienced in contact with an object or someone's thoughts, that is the sensation factor. *Sangya*: When the six senses eye, ear, nose, tongue, skin and mind come in contact with form, sound, odor, taste, touch and thought respectively, then it is called *Sangya*. In general terms, we can say that the thing that is identified by the *Samskara* marked on the forehead is *Sangya*. *Samskara*: The mark of pain and *Sangya* on the forehead is known as that *Samskara*. Knowledge: Consciousness or mind is addressed in the form of knowledge. There are also six types of knowledge based on the six senses and their related subjects. These five aggregates create the living being, therefore there is no self or soul. These five aggregates are always changing; the living being made of them cannot be eternal. Mahatma Buddha has called these five constituent aggregates as suffering. (Dirghanikaya:2010;196)

According to Mahatma Buddha, suffering is the effect according to which the body and mind suffer. The very concept of this body is suffering; the attainment of life is suffering. Suffering is existed at every step and in every relationship. Personal relationships (separation from the beloved), suffering in material circumstances (old age, illness, death), mental suffering (greed, ignorance), suffering of nature (hot-cold season) and millions of other sufferings in which man is always immersed. According to the teachings of Mahatma Buddha, one has to be aware of the

causes of suffering living in the world. The world is a storehouse of suffering, man experiences suffering all the time in this world. Man desires some thing or the other, if he does not get it, he gets suffering. Even if he gets it, he remains suffering. There is no man in the world who does not suffer due to desires. It can be said that suffering is the truth of life, the pervasiveness of which cannot be denied. There is suffering in every aspect of life. Even when a stage of life ends, suffering does not end because the cycle of birth and death is also a part of suffering.

2. There is the cause of suffering (Second Noble Truth)

Dukkha Samudya means that suffering arises from the cause of action. What arises is action and there must be a cause behind the action. Action is always cause-related. The *Pratitya-Samutpada* cycle itself is the cause of suffering or suffering. From this, the main principle of Buddhism, causality, was born. The origin of suffering is not possible without a cause. The Buddha has said that due to ignorance (*avidya*), there is *samskara*, due to *samskara*, consciousness, due to consciousness, name and form, due to name and form, sensation, due to sensation, contact, due to contact, pain is the cause of craving, due to craving, *Vedana*, due to *Vedana*, *bhava*, due to *bhava*, birth, old age with birth, death with old age, mourning, crying, beating, suffering, mental anxiety and trouble arise. From all this, the suffering aggregate arises. (*Anguttara Nikaya*:1957; 182)

- From past lives
 - Ignorance (*avidya*)
 - *Samskara*
- Relating to present existence
 - Consciousness (*Vijnana*)
 - Name and Form (*Nama-rupa*)
 - Six doors of sense-organs (*sadayatana*)
 - Contact (*Indriya-Vastu-Sampark*)
 - Sensations as a result of this contact (*Vedana*)
 - Cravings for pleasures of senses (*Trsna*)
 - Grasping of clinging to *trsna*
 - Desire to be born (*bhava*) on account of (*Trsna*)
- Pertaining to future birth
 - Birth (*jati*)
 - *Jara-Marana* (Old age and death)

According to this second great truth, the cause of suffering is craving. The delusions born in the mind of a person always stimulate him towards the fulfillment of desires. Due to which a person gets trapped in the illusionary trap of suffering. Life itself is such a melody or a pleasant roundness towards which a person is attracted and accepts suffering. Sufferings are like a tangle around man, due to which man, entangled in them, keeps flowing in the flood of sufferings. These sufferings are like soil which are within the power of man to eliminate. Mahatma Buddha has explained the cause of suffering on the basis of the principle of *Pratitya-Samutpada*.

It is because of craving (*trnsa*) that a living being is reborn again and again. Lust means sensual pleasure; lust means the desire to remain in this world and the next world. Lust is the desire for the destruction of others. It is because of these cravings that a person is trapped in the cycle of existence and suffers sufferings. Their origin is in the darkness of ignorance. Greed, attachment are the partners in this origin. A person who is under the control of the senses creates cravings.

According to the *Majjhima Nikaya*, it is for the sake of lust that kings quarrel with other kings, Kshatriyas with Kshatriyas, Brahmins with Brahmins, Vaishyas with Vaishyas, mother with son, son with mother, father with son, son with father, brother with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. All these, due to arguments or conflicts, attack each other with hands and weapons. Some of them attain death and some attain death-like suffering. (Majjhima Nikaya:1964;55) It can be said that craving (*trnsa*) gives birth to all kinds of evil and is also the cause of rebirth. This is the main and philosophical aspect of the Second Noble Truth. The Second Noble Truth is completely based on cause and effect.

The body is a collection of five aggregates; these do not always remain one essence. They are born and perished all the time. When the body is no longer able to function but has not lost its strength, it takes on another form, which is called a new body.

3. There is the cessation of suffering (Third Noble Truth)

The cycle of the world is going on due to this chain of causes and effects; it is also called the cycle of existence. The real goal is to be free from this cycle of existence or chain of causes and effects.

If there is suffering, then liberation from that suffering can also be achieved. For which the Buddha said that with the cessation of the complete vices of ignorance, there is the cessation of formations, with the cessation of formations comes knowledge, with the cessation of knowledge comes name and form, with the cessation of name and form comes the cessation of desire, with the cessation of desire comes touch, with the cessation of touch comes pain, with the cessation of pain comes craving, with the cessation of craving comes up, with the cessation of up, comes existence, with the cessation of existence comes the cessation of birth, with the cessation of birth comes the cessation of old age, mourning, crying, sorrow, mental anxiety and distress. In this way, all the suffering aggregates are stopped. (Anguttara Nikaya:1957;182) The cessation of these sufferings is the central point of the teachings of Buddhism. According to this this noble truth, only through the renunciation of craving can one get rid of suffering. Desires are born with craving, and when they are not fulfilled, a person becomes a part of suffering. A person has a thirst for desires that will never be fulfilled, and to eliminate this, it is necessary to first be free from craving. There will be suffering in a person's life according to the amount of craving.

The end of craving is the cessation of suffering, the noble truth. This end is called *Nirvana* in the Pali language. To explain *Nirvana*, Mahatma Buddha has taught the true suffering, the community of suffering, and the cessation of suffering. The basis of human suffering is ignorance and conditioning, due to which craving arises in the mind. It has been said to attain *Nirvana* through the path of *Nirvana* through Shila, Samadhi, Prajna (*Ashtanga Path*). This is the inner

experience and realization of every human being. *Nirvana* can be attained at any stage of life; it is not necessary that this power can be attained only at the end of life or at the time of death. *Nirvana* is beyond all duality and relativism. Even *Nirvana* is beyond good-bad, right-wrong, existence-non-existence.

Nirvana is the ultimate goal of Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy. Which is described as the combination of two words – ‘ni’ and ‘vaana’. ‘ni’ means nothing, nothing and ‘vaana’ means suffering, longing etc. Thus, *Nirvana* means liberation from all desires and suffering. According to many scholars, the literal meaning of *Nirvana* is taken from extinction or becoming calm. This calm or becoming calm means the cessation of suffering, vices, craving, ego etc. By overcoming all these vices, man/woman reaches a state where there is no distinction between pain and pleasure, right and wrong, good and bad. According to Rahul Sankrityayana, *Nirvana* means extinguishing - the burning out of a lamp or fire. *Nirvana* does not mean the end of life; it is the cessation of suffering. The extinguishing of a lamp or fire also signifies the cessation of the world or the attainment of truth. The path to *Nirvana* is naturally divided into three parts. In the first stage, the conduct of true or right actions, in the second stage, meditation, and in the third stage, knowledge. This is the stage where there is no desire, no attachment, no love, no place for suffering, no change, no transformation. Thus, *Nirvana* is a true state of inner relief and which is free from change, birth and death. According to Paul Daulke, “Where there is no desire in the heart, there is no attachment either. Where there is no attachment, there is also no parting, no sorrow. Where there is no sorrow, there is also no transiency, no change. And thus, with Nibbana the true condition of eternal rest and changeless, birthless safety is eternally attained.” (1978; 85)

Nirvana is actually the path of freedom and purity, in which man/woman attains liberation from the cycle of birth and death. This supreme bliss attained is the highest truth, the highest vision and the true experience.

4. There is the path leading to suffering (Fourth Noble Truth)

This truth is the path to get freedom from suffering. Only the cessation of craving ends suffering and to be free from these sufferings, the Buddha has taught the Eightfold Path. This Eightfold Path is the path that gives insight, peace, wisdom and knowledge. According to the Buddha, right view, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. (Anguttara Nikaya:1957; 182) This eightfold path is divided into three parts: -

Śhīla, samādhi, prajna.

Śhīla (Morality)

- Right speech (Samyagavak)
- Right Conduct (Samyak-Karmanta)
- Right Living (Samyagajiva)

Samādhi (Concentration)

- Right Effort (Samyagvyayama)
- Right Mindfulness (Samyak-Smrti)

Right Concentration (Samyak-Samadhi)

Prajna (Wisdom)

Right Resolve (Sanyak Samkalpa)

Right View (Samyagdrsti)

Right view means perspective or point of view. This is the first step of the eightfold path for the cessation of suffering. Everything or person should be seen as it really is. According to the Buddha, the knowledge of the truth, the knowledge of the causes of suffering (the origin of suffering), is the true view. (Dirghanikaya:2010; 197) With which the inner darkness of a person begins to transform into light. Bad thoughts that must be abandoned: Physical violence, theft, adultery; Speech: gossip, nonsense, harsh words, myths; Mental: greed, violence towards others, false beliefs. (Majjhima Nikaya:1964;31)

Right resolve is the second step of the *Ashtanga Path*. Right resolution or determination is possible only if there is right knowledge. With a firm resolve, abandon bad thoughts towards others and resolve to follow the path of truth with self-control. Abandon worldly pleasures (fragile), greed, harshness, violence and walk on this path with the resolve of holding good thoughts. The resolution regarding non-action, the resolution not to harm anyone is very important. (Dirghanikaya:2010; 197)

Right speech means living in the truth of a person. Do not lie, do not do evil, do not speak harsh words. “That men should speak only that which is true. That they should not speak what is false. That they should not speak evil of others. That they should refrain from slander. That they should not use angry and abusive language towards any fellow man. That they should speak kindly and courteously to all. That they should not indulge in point-less, foolish talk, but let their speech be sensible and to be purpose.” (Bikku Silacara: 1973; 71)

Always speak to others with humble words so that the listener also finds them lovable and pleasant. Befriending everyone, behaving with compassion, speaking good words are the main parts of right speech. According to Mahatma Buddha, speak only that which neither hurts you nor hurts others. Speak only loving words which also please others. Words spoken for attaining *Nirvana* and ending suffering are the best. Truth is the nectar of speech and is the eternal religion. Only with this will peace be created in the society and the mind of the person himself will also be pure and peaceful beyond all discrimination.

Right Conduct Follow non-violence while walking on the righteous path according to right actions. Theft, adultery, drugs, gambling and murder are prohibited. Such acts are also prohibited due to which others suffer. Such acts alone create vices like craving, anger, attachment in the mind. We can say that abandoning sinful actions is the right action. Which is necessary for social welfare.

Right livelihood means living a peaceful life rather than a life full of lies and deceit. Such a life that does not cause any harm to any individual and society. “Right livelihood means that one should abstain from making one’s living through a profession that brings harm to others, such as trading in arms and lethal weapons, intoxicating drinks, poisons, killing animals, cheating, etc., and should

live by a profession which is honorable, blameless and innocent of harm to others.” (Walploa:1974;47) The advice of Mahatma Buddha is to adopt a life that becomes a cause of public welfare instead of an obstacle in social life. Because livelihood is a means of self-reliance of a person, family needs as well as service to society. Therefore, only a pure lifestyle is right for man and society. Only a simple life can provide a peaceful atmosphere.

Right Effort (Samyagvyayama) means firmness of mind. Removing bad thoughts from the mind and developing or adopting good thoughts is *Samyagvyayama*. By controlling the mind, one has to do efficient work and become the owner of high thinking with firmness, which gives the mind self-control and contentment. Only such an atmosphere can develop the society.

Right Mindfulness (Samyak Smriti) means being aware of the present. Living in the present with concentration of the mind, not remembering the past and not imagining the future is *Samyak Smriti*. The advice to maintain four types of *Smriti*: *Kayanupassanna*, *Vedananupassanna*, *Chittaanupassanna*, *Dhammaanupassanna*. Upon reaching this stage, I, mine, all disappear. Only a person with such a mindset can have a feeling of equality towards everyone.

Right Concentration (Samyak Samadhi) is the final stage. A seeker who follows all the other rules of the Eightfold Path becomes capable of entering *Samyak Samadhi*. With *Samadhi*, the seeker completely controls the mind and becomes free from all desires and hatreds. Through this method, the seeker tries to gain knowledge. Mainly, *Samadhi* is of two types, form and formless. When the concentration of the mind is on a form or shape, square, complete object, then it is called form *Samadhi*. When concentration is done on a formless object, then it is called formless *Samadhi*. This is the final path to attaining *Nirvana*.

There is no doubt that the Eightfold Path is the path to attaining bliss, very wide and vast. According to the *Dhammapada*, “The eightfold path is the best among the paths, the four noble truths are the best among the truths, the state of renunciation is the best among the states, the wise-eyed (Buddha) is the best among the human beings.” (2004; 129) Similarly, in the *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Buddha has said that by following this path, I have understood the mystery of birth and death, and have also understood the cessation of suffering. (*Samyutta Nikaya*:1954;237-38)

Even before these, great men in different forms all over the world, for the benefit of the world, taught and guided on the path of truth. The uniqueness or uniqueness/specialty in the principles of the Buddha is that instead of worshipping God, he teaches man/woman to merge with his/her inner truth. According to Mahatma Buddha, a being who does not see and understand these four noble truths properly remains in the cycle of birth and death again and again. Only a person who knows the truth of this suffering can get rid of the cycle of birth and death. (*Dirghanikaya*:2010; 126) All humanity should live a morally upright life that has defined in Buddhist philosophy.

Conclusion

It can be said that, Mahatma Buddha has given a unique thought and path to overcome from the sufferings. Suffering is the main point in His philosophy and teachings. To get know about

suffering as what is suffering, what are the reasons of this, how can get rid of this bondage and what is the path for this. These few words of this paper are tried to give detailed information on four noble truths. These four noble truths are basic need for society and human to live peaceful and spiritual life in this modern era also.

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