

## 4 The Concept of Equality in the Theravada Buddhist Tradition

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### **Prelude**

The importance of the concept of 'equality' in the modern world emerges against the background of the resurgence of interest in the doctrine of human rights. An added facet of this interest has been the discussion pertaining to the question whether human rights are in fact universal and whether they are relevant to non-Western societies with different cultural and religious traditions.

While this paper will focus attention on the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, we shall be concerned with the following questions:

1. Concepts of equality are coloured by the kind of emphasis given in different historical contexts and this fact is even more visible when they emerge within the framework of religious and ethical systems. What are the kinds of variable which give specific form and shape to Buddhist reflections on equality? What is the kind of world-view which gives meaning and direction to Buddhist thinking on the subject of equality and related concepts? How is the equality concept in the Buddhist tradition 'grounded'? What is the kind of centrality it has in the light of its world-view?
2. While being aware of these specific variables, do we discern a clear profile about Buddhist thinking on the subject? The sermons of the Buddha (first preserved in an oral tradition and written down later) offer diverse contexts of relevant material. What is the total impact when these contexts are put together?
3. Is there a kind of perennial philosophy in these texts which gives us some light to understand the link between these historical contexts and modern times? If discussions on 'equality' today in the West are subject to a kind of ethnocentric bias and if rethinking on the conceptualization of human rights is necessary, what contributions can a forum on equality in the religious and cultural traditions of Asia make to the ongoing debate?

It may not be possible to discuss all these questions in detail, but if some of these questions can be raised and others examined in more detail we should make some progress. A recent study entitled 'Human Rights: A Western Construct with Limited Applicability' makes the following observation:

It is becoming increasingly evident that the Western political philosophy upon which the [UN] Charter and Declaration [of Human Rights] are based provides only one particular interpretation of human rights, and that this Western notion may not be successfully applicable to non-Western areas for several reasons . . . cultural differences whereby philosophic underpinnings defining human nature and the relationship of individuals to others and to society are markedly at variance with Western individualism.<sup>1</sup>

This attempt to study religious traditions of Asia should help us to make some contribution to the problem of cultural and ideological ethnocentrism in the province of the study of human rights.

In this context it would be of great interest to note that Buddhism has a world-view coloured by an ethical and spiritual message; its reflections are not focused on the limited life span of an individual or society but the cycle of existence where concepts of rebirth and *kamma* figure prominently; above the ever-changing socio-political order, there is a cosmic order; the content of human rights, like the right to life and security, emerges through concepts of obligation and duties in the Buddhist context; Buddhism emphasizes the role of the individual for the purpose of attaining liberation but the idea of 'reciprocity' and reciprocal human relations (as found in the paradigmatic *Sigālovāda Sutta*) introduces the framework of mutual obligations; questions of human needs and freedom are examined in the light of a central ideal — the blend of material and spiritual progress. While Buddhism has universal concerns relating to human rights which converge on the Western pursuit, these variables add a special flavour to Buddhist thinking on human rights in general and equality in particular.

The fact that Buddhist reflections on equality, especially those pertaining to caste and women, are grounded in ethico-religious contexts has, however, been misunderstood by some, giving the idea that they have little socio-political relevance. It is true that the vibrant centre of the Buddha's teaching was an ethical and religious message, but paradoxically this makes its relevance for social transformation even greater. The Buddhist concept of equality has a strong moral flavour. Finally, as compassion and benevolence played a great role in

the Buddhist attitude to man's problems, the approach to human rights is basically 'humanistic' rather than 'legalistic'. Thus, as you make an entry into the Buddhist world-view, you discover the ingredients which colour its perspectives on human rights, and in certain senses there is an ethos, a way of looking at things, different from the reigning Western stance.

Now that we have outlined the directions of our thinking, we shall proceed with the detailed examination, which will fall into two parts: a section dealing with Buddhist world-view orientations and reflections on equality, and another dealing with the dimensions of equality like the analysis of the place of caste and women in Buddhist thought. In the concluding section we shall briefly sum up the direction of our discussion and point towards a more constructive pathway.

### **Buddhist world-view orientation and the concept of equality**

Religion can be so deeply integrated into social life, as in ancient India, that it is difficult to isolate it as a distinct phenomenon. In the context of the Buddhist tradition, it is not limited to a ritual, ethical or social aspect but involves a world-view orientation which pervades diverse aspects of life. Before the appearance of Islam, the pre-Buddhistic Hindu tradition and Buddhism presented relatively different world-views, though as non-Western perspectives there were points of convergence between them. When we use the term 'non-Western', it is necessary to understand some of the finer distinctions within its own fold and especially within the Indian tradition itself. Also, due to the strong power of absorption and tolerance found within Hinduism as such, the distinctive Buddhist contribution has been lost to the Western student of human rights immersed in generalizations.

Sramanism and Brahmanism represent the two great religious philosophies of India in ancient times. The sources of early Brahmanism include the *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Āraṇyakas* and the oldest *Upaniṣads*. The non-Vedic origin of the *Upaniṣads* has been a point of great controversy.<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that yoga, Sāṃkhya, early Jainism and some of the extra-ordinary ideas of the *Upaniṣads* had a common sramanic origin.<sup>3</sup> The great doctrines concerning *yoga*, *dhyāna*, *karma*, *ahimsa*, *mokṣa* and *saṃsāra* seem to have been the legacy of *munis* or *sramanas*, 'ascetic sages'. Sakyamuni the great *sramaṇa* disregarded the priestly ritualism, the sacrifices and the system of fixed

castes (*yannas*). Over the years in India, the apparent distinctiveness of these traditions became partly confused due to the strong integrative power of Hinduism, and especially with the emergence of the Vedānta of Śankara certain blends between Sramanism and Brahmanism emerged. The early Buddhist tradition, however, took root in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, and also in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia, and the later traditions of Buddhism took root in Japan, China, Korea, Tibet and Mongolia.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, it is an easier task to discern the impact of Buddhism on modern socio-political thought of these countries than in India due to the integrating power of Hinduism and also its eclectic nature. Some of the great figures in recent Indian history like Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vinobha Bhave, Rabindranath Tagore and Krishnamurthi exhibit the tremendous impact of the personality, philosophy and lifestyle of the Buddha on their thinking. In the words of a recent scholar, referring to the feelings of Indian leaders regarding the decline of Buddhism in India:

They have resented that Buddhism declined in India; they have reaffirmed the Buddhist tradition of religious tolerance; they have criticised the existence of those very customs and institutions in their own tradition which were first criticised by the Buddha and the Buddhists. Caste system, priestly laws, feudal customs, untouchability, social disabilities of women, and the like, all these elements of traditional Brahmanical heritage have been attacked and reformed, at least in theory.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it is said that the constitution of the Indian Republic has been inspired by the Buddha and the 'wheel of righteousness' on the national flag of India is a symbol of the Buddha's message of wisdom and compassion. Thus one who attempts to assess the place of Buddhism in the Indian ideological, cultural and religious heritage will come across cross-cutting points of convergence and divergence. The world-views of Islam and Christianity have been placed as alternative conceptions by those who regard both Hinduism and Buddhism within the 'Old Asian' world perspective. Ninian Smart, who makes an analysis and an 'Inventory of Worldviews' refers to the following major orientations: the Marxist Bloc, the Islamic Crescent, Old Asia, the Latin World, black Africa and the Pacific.<sup>6</sup> To take one important doctrinal strand, the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which all hark back to Abraham and the prophets, do not accept reincarnation. Rebirth or reincarnation form a central component of the Hindu-Buddhist doctrinal axis.

This is, of course, not the place to do an exhaustive analysis of the comparative study of these different world-views, but it must be emphasized that attention must be paid as to how these perspectives influence all aspects of life, including socio-political reflections.

As an example of the relationship of world-views and socio-political thought, let us take something connected to the issues of caste, the concepts of rebirth and *Kamma*. Both Buddhism and Hinduism accept the existence of a moral order. In spite of the differences between the two systems, the concept of *dharma* provides a common non-Western perspective. As Smart observes: 'Although Hinduism often involves belief in one divine being, it shares with Buddhism a sense that the law or *dharma* is not something which is commanded by God, but rather it is a part of the world.'<sup>7</sup> While Hinduism makes the caste system itself controlled by this order, Buddhism does not see any moral or rational basis for caste. The Buddha has, of course, said that among the conditions that determine rebirth in lower castes, the result of previously done actions of an evil nature (*kamma*) is admitted as one of the possible explanations.<sup>8</sup> But the Buddha did not embrace fatalism by saying that mere birth (*jāti*) decided for good a man's position and role in life. Man's conduct in this life is even more important than the result of his past actions.

In actual practice it is possible that people project a sense of fatalism into the *kamma* notion but this is due to wrong understanding. The term *kamma* generally means that one's moral acts will bear fruit in this life as well as the other life. But there are two strands in the *kamma* concept, both of which are important, and they may be referred to as the 'judicial model' and the 'craftsmanship model'. In the Middle Length Sayings it is said that if an individual resorts to killing living creatures, steals, resorts to sexual misconduct, and so on, he will be born in a sorrowful state of existence; the one who practices kindness to animals, one who is merciful, compassionate, restrains himself and guards his senses, is born in a happy state or heavenly world.<sup>9</sup>

But apart from the just dispensation of rewards and punishment, there is also a craftsmanship model of *kamma* which emphasizes the self-creating and self-perfecting (or self-degrading) nature of actions and continued disposition for good or bad. The concept of the deed as an expression of one's character is the one that throws light on the craftsmanship model of *kamma*. On the one hand, action reflects the agent's character, and on the other hand, repeated action increases the disposition to act in the same manner. The greatest blessing of a good action is the tendency to repeat similar deeds.

It is in this light that Buddhism rejects both fatalism and the stagnant structures of caste based on divine sanctions. Men should put aside distinctions related to birth or profession and place supreme emphasis on moral conduct: 'A man is noble or ignoble through conduct, but not through birth.'<sup>10</sup> In emphasizing the importance of moral conduct, rejecting fatalism and theories of determinism and focusing on man's free will, in appealing to man's power of reason (see *Kālāma Sutta*),<sup>11</sup> and basically pointing towards the potentiality for good and bad within everyone, the Buddha upheld a notion of equality within the ethical and spiritual fold.

The Buddhist concept of the cosmic order and its conception of human potentiality, its ethics and its spiritual quest form the basic facets of its world-view orientation. This conception is again stabilized by its methodological perspectives, which emphasize rational examination of any views based on superstition and habit, confrontation with empirical situations and an experiential and humanistic approach to problems. This perspective has generated interesting views about man's social concerns and some of these threads will be put together in the following section.

### **The equality concept in Buddhism**

The core of the Buddha's teaching was an ethical and spiritual message, as his main concern was the sense of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), which lies at the base of the perilous human condition of unrest, anguish and ignorance. Reflections on society and polity emerged as a supplement to this concern. But this does not in any way mean that the Buddha was not concerned about the transformation of society, it only means that his approach to social concerns had a logic of its own, as also the analysis of concepts like freedom, equality and justice.

The Buddha did not say that social change was unnecessary, but that this could not be achieved merely by restructuring social organizations, as along with this a basic transformation of the individual was necessary. Basically, the Buddha saw the strongest links between ethics and society and ethics and politics, and this whole dimension is summed up in the Buddhist conception of justice, which may be rendered by the term *righteousness*, a notion which colours Buddhist thinking on equality. There was also a sense of pragmatism and practicality in the Buddha, who accepted the institution of kingship as

it existed in that society but tried to enhance this seat of power and authority by guiding it on the principles of sound, fair and righteous rule. Above the social and political order was the Buddhist concept of *dharma*, the cosmic order in the universe, and the king had not merely to respect this order but also, as the 'wheel-turning monarch', to see that this order was reflected in his regime. This is the special sense in which the Buddhist concept of justice (righteousness) reverberates within the socio-political scheme and relates in an interesting manner to the Buddhist concept of equality.

As the notion of equality in relation to caste and the position of women has often been discussed in the sermons in religious contexts like the entry into the order and the potential for liberation, there has been a tendency to neglect its socio-political contexts. In the contexts where the Buddha advises kings and ministers we get some interesting interventions.

A king's economic policy should be guided by a sense of 'equity' and this, as Wijesekera points out, can be inferred from 'the parallel qualifications of the righteous king's rule by *dhammena* and *samena* with equally significant emphasis'.<sup>12</sup> 'The latter word, going back to a base "sama", meaning equality, is in its juristic aspect used to indicate impartiality and fair play'. It is said that when levying taxes the king should, apart from imposing taxes to run the state, consider the plight of those who are subject to the taxes. There are even instances where a righteous king, in order to redress the poverty of some, had fresh taxes laid on the wealthy and the wealth distributed among the needy. *Dāna*, or giving to those who need, is a function of the righteous king. The Buddha discouraged greed and acquisition, encouraged moderate savings for the future, condemned both hoarding and waste and recommended charity and liberality. The impelling motive of benevolence was stronger than any concept of distributive justice as such. In the political contexts we know that the Buddha requested the representatives of the Vajjian republic to respect their constitution and hold regular meetings in amity and concord. In general the *cakkavatti* or the universal monarch should govern justly and impartially (*dhammena samena*). It has been mentioned that the three components of righteousness are (i) impartiality, (ii) just requital and (iii) truthfulness. The Buddhist concept of equality works within this framework.<sup>13</sup>

The main strands in the Buddhist equality concept are:

- (i) Rejection of artificial and arbitrary distinctions among human beings, rejection of caste distinctions based on birth and emphasis on character.

(ii) Common human potentialities:

- (a) spirituality and moral transformation;
  - (b) rationality;
  - (c) ability to feel for others' suffering;
  - (d) free will;
  - (e) presence of secular skills.
- (iii) All beings (including animals) are subject to common human predicament, which may be broadly called *dukkha* — unsatisfactoriness. Birth, sickness and death are the great levellers.
- (iv) The great cosmic order which rules all beings, concepts of rebirth and *kamma*.
- (a) The Buddhist concept of rewards and punishment or just requital at the cosmic level (the judicial model).
  - (b) The strength of dispositional activity (the craftsmanship notion).
  - (c) Implementation of the just and righteous rule by the 'wheel-turning monarch'.
- (v) The concept of human dignity and equal respect for all (*samānataṭā*); Buddha's attitude to Ambapali (a moral outcast), Angulimala (a criminal), Rukkas (a social outcast), and the diversity of personality types and the diversity of vocations from which his adherents came.
- (vi) Basic needs and the conditions for self-development.
- (vii) An expression of boundless compassion and benevolence (equality notions fed by a humanistic rather than a legalistic conscience).

Some of these strands of the equality concept have been put together to get a clearer and more comprehensive vision of the discussion on equality in the Buddhist context. There is some overlapping, as in the case of items (i) and (v); there were also other facets which emerged later in the history of this concept. The Asokan empire, for instance, brought to the surface the question of equality in a multi-religious context. There are certain significant variables which made the Buddhist discussion of equality a little different from its Western counterpart. This last point is important and should be briefly discussed before we clarify other dimensions of the equality concept in the next section. The major variable in the equality discussion in Buddhism is the notion of reciprocity, where certain desirable goals are to be attained through the notion of duties and obligations rather



than rights; thus, in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, what is discussed is the way in which man as husband, father and master, and woman as wife, mother and mistress of the house perform diverse functions which are reciprocated. Instead of raising questions of equality in relation to man and woman, we find how they supplement and complement each other. In fact, over the years, other communal and organic relationships going beyond the family have emerged, especially in countries like Sri Lanka, where the temple-centred village communities have emerged. This is an extremely important variable highlighted in recent non-Western presentations of equality.

The *Sigālovāda Sutta* discusses the distribution of duties in six types of relationship: parents and children, pupil and teacher, husband and wife, householder and friend, employer and employee, and householder to a *samana*. From these let us take the husband and wife relationship. A wife should be ministered to by her husband in five ways — by being courteous to her, by not despising her, by being faithful to her, by handing over authority to her and by providing her with necessary adornments; the wife should minister to her husband in five ways — by ordering the household well, by hospitality to their relatives, by fidelity, by taking care of his wealth and by her industry. In the same manner they have functions as mother and father, as neighbour and friend, employer, and so on.<sup>14</sup>

This concept is important when we examine the place of women in Buddhism, and in this context the equality concept loses its sting. The question emerges in relation to the admission of women to the order and the assessment of their potentiality for spiritual transformation. The concept of reciprocity is a certain socio-cultural type well exhibited in traditional Chinese moral life and Confucian discourse about 'rules of proper conduct'. To cite the moral virtues listed in the *Li Chi*:

Kindness on the part of the father, and the filial duty on that of the son; gentleness on the part of the elder brother, and obedience on the younger; righteousness on the part of the husband, and submission on that of the wife; kindness on the part of elders, and deference on that of juniors; with benevolence (*jen*) on the part of the ruler, and loyalty on that of the minister. These ten are the things which men consider to be right.<sup>15</sup>

With reference to the nature of these rules of proper conduct, it has been said that the notion of 'rights' 'does not find a comfortable home in Confucian ethics'.<sup>16</sup> This point is important as this feature has not been well emphasized and placed in a non-Western perspective in some of the very recent discussions of human rights in the Buddhist

tradition. It is necessary that we look at the human rights tradition in the West from the bases of our religious, ethical and cultural perspectives. Even the Buddhist five precepts which embody the content of some of the human rights like the right to life and property are not presented in the form of rights, commandments, injunctions, and so on. They are presented in the form of a promise (or even duty) such that they ensure the basic conditions of harmonious social life and the development of individual character. In the same manner the duties of the universal monarch to his subjects and the obligations of the subjects are discussed in the *suttas*.<sup>17</sup>

### **Normative and factual aspects of the equality concept**

A question which has often been raised in the modern analysis of the equality concept is whether it is grounded in facts or values. While it often takes the form of a principle of procedure, a maxim to guide action and an ideal to be approximated, there is often an appeal to facts, and this is especially so in the appeal to a common human nature. The idea is that behind all differences of talent, merits and social advantage, there is some characteristically human nature in terms of which all men can be considered equal.

The appeal to common humanity is a central facet in the Buddhist analysis of the equality concept, and though the assertion that men are alike in possessing certain truly human traits sounds like a tautology, it is of great importance to equality perspectives fed by strong humanistic overtones, as in Buddhism. It really combines a factual claim regarding traits of human nature and the edifying call of a normative nature to develop these potentialities. Bernard Williams in his essay on 'The Idea of Equality' refers to the 'capacity to feel pain' and the 'capacity to feel affection for others' as important ingredients in the understanding of man's common humanity. 'The assertion that men are alike in the possession of these characteristics is, while indisputable and (it may be) even necessarily true, not trivial. For it is certain that there are political and social arrangements that systematically neglect these characteristics in the case of some groups of men.'<sup>18</sup> Thus, if political and social arrangements neglect moral claims which arise from these characteristics, they are not satisfactory. In a very deep sense, the need to be 'respected as a human person' and the ability to respond to others as human persons provides the most basic moral and psychological foundations for Buddhist reflections on equality.

Though there may be individual differences, there is a basic similarity in the material, psychological and spiritual needs of man; it is both a fact to be respected and a norm to be recommended. If we take the Buddha's rejection of caste distinctions, on the one hand it is recommended as a norm that men should put aside distinctions related to birth and place greater emphasis on conduct; it has also a factual component that, in the just dispensation of rewards and punishments in the cosmic moral order, conduct rather than birth is respected. It is of course a fact of a special kind, different from the general routine empirical facts. Like the ability to feel for the suffering of others, man's rationality, the presence of free will, the potentiality for spiritual and moral transformation all have a factual core which gets blended with normative considerations. They are perhaps 'idealized capacities' of man. Women were considered as equal in having these potentialities, and in the case of compassion, a mother's feelings towards a child is taken as the paradigmatic expression of human compassion.

Egalitarianism, of course, does not always assert equality but rather denies the justice of some inequality in treatment based on irrelevant traits. In this context, the dimensions of equality in relation to race, caste, sex, and so on, are important. Buddhist reflections on caste distinctions and the place of women will be taken for discussion in the next section.

### Summing up

Before we begin our analysis of the dimensions of equality in the Buddhist tradition, it may be useful to sum up our findings regarding the equality concept as such. As far as the Buddhist concept of equality is concerned, it has a strong link with the notion of righteousness (*dhamma*), which may be rendered for the Western student as *justice*, but yet in a narrow sense it is a Buddhist concept of justice or, in a more broader sense, a notion of justice embedded in the Hindu-Buddhist world-view.

The interlocking relations between justice and equality have been a subject of great interest in recent studies of equality in the West. In early Greek thought, for instance, the word *dike* (which came to mean a person's due share) implicitly contained the concept of equality, thus showing an interesting link between justice and equality. In the Buddhist context we have shown the strong link between righteousness and equality in relation to the way a king should govern;

*dhammena* and *samena* are used to describe the qualifications of an ideal king.

Within the Buddhist world-view the notion of righteousness manifests itself at a number of levels. First, the moral and cosmic order, which evaluates people in terms of their normal moral conduct rather than their birth, wealth or position, and administers the just dispensation of rewards and punishments, is a great 'leveller'. Second, the wheel-turning monarch is expected to reflect the principles of righteousness in his regime and thus practice the ideals of impartiality and fairness and in general encourage the people to practice these ideas themselves along with other virtues like veracity and benevolence. Third, the individual is expected to follow the principle of righteousness in his daily life and help in the stabilization of a righteous regime and also develop human relationships and group relations on the same principle. In short, the Buddhist concept of justice as 'righteousness' has a strong moral basis instead of mere legal or political overtones. Buddhist equality notions are nurtured within this world-view.

Thus, in the first instance, the strong link between righteousness and equality has to be noticed. Secondly, the Buddhist perspective on equality is basically orientated towards the human person as a free and rational moral agent. Thirdly, treating persons as equals in this respect indicates that we value common human potentialities. Fourthly, the moral imperative to treat others in the same way as one would wish oneself to be treated assumes that we are in certain ways equal. Finally, this perspective is rooted in our deep emotional capacity for benevolence and compassion.

### **Some dimensions of equality in Buddhism**

The preceding examination of the concept of equality was not a historical study regarding the evolution of the equality concept in the Indian tradition; neither was it a descriptive and sociological study. Our primary task was analytical, to lay bare the main strands in the Buddhist equality concept and place it against the specific variables and the world-view orientation which colour reflections on equality in the Buddhist tradition, and, along with this, to explore the possibility of finding a non-Western perspective on human rights. While historical and sociological studies can enrich our deliberations, the kind of ground clearing we attempted by this analysis should have its own legitimate place in a multi-disciplinary forum.

In line with this, we shall examine some of the types of context and the kinds of arguments the Buddha used in criticizing the institution of caste, and this will be done using the available textual material in the sermons of the Buddha.

The Buddha attempted to show in significant contexts that there was no absolute sanction about caste gradations and that there was no need to assume that they have any sacred or divine sanction. For instance, the Buddha once told King Kosala that, in times of a crisis, as in the case of a war, he would be forced to enlist in his army not only men of the warrior caste but also others, provided they were well trained, in spite of the fact that they may be drawn from the *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* or *śūdra* family. Here the Buddha was pointing towards the relative nature of these distinctions in a very clear empirical situation.<sup>19</sup>

A similar argument used to show the relative nature of these distinctions is found in the *Madhura Sutta*, where it is said that if a person is wealthy, irrespective of his caste, he will find that members of other castes will wait upon him and serve him.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to find the Buddha using this kind of argument. He is not saying that wealth *should be* the norm which divides man, but merely that in actual situations, birth and colour (*vanna*) recede to the background in the face of wealth.

In fact this argument regarding wealth as a factor which influences social relations is strengthened by three other arguments: a wicked man (whatever his *vanna*), in accordance with the law of *kamma*, will be born in a bad place and a good man in a state of bliss; a criminal, whatever his *vanna*, will be equally subject to punishment for his crime; also, whatever a man's *vanna*, if he joins the order, he will receive equal respect and honour from people. The second argument is used in terms of the cosmic moral order to which we have referred to earlier; the third is interesting as it refers to the legal context, and the final one to the religious context. It is necessary to keep in mind these diverse arguments as some scholars have overemphasized the religious context regarding admission to the order. This is an important context, but the Buddha had a more comprehensive and complex case against caste.

In the same way that the Buddha was critical of the alleged absoluteness of caste distinctions, he was critical of the fatalism which was often associated with it. It is true that the Buddha admitted that, among the factors which influence a man's birth in a lower caste, previously done bad *kamma* may be one. The Buddha, however, did not embrace fatalism by saying that mere birth decided for good a

man's place and position in life. The Buddha avoids both theories of determinism with a fatalistic flavour and theories of indeterminism which see the emergence of events as accidents. The fatalistic view considers the experiences of a man as the result of previous actions and totally determined by them (*pubbekatahetu*), or if not, determined by some divine plan (*issaranimmanahetu*). According to strict determinism, the present and the future are dependent on the past and therefore unalterable, or every event is predetermined in the light of a divine plan. Free will in the Buddhist context means the ability of a person to control the dynamic forces of the past and present and make the future different from what it would otherwise have been.

Apart from emphasizing the free will concept in relation to the individual, the Buddha also encourages his followers to look at history, the sense of dynamism involved in the evolution of society. This evolutionary concept of society, though presented in the form of a myth in the *Aggañña Sutta*<sup>21</sup> and also developed in the *Cakkavattīsihanāda Sutta*<sup>22</sup> in the form of a legend, presents a model of social change in comparison with the more static picture of the universe which prevailed at the time. Not only does the Buddha say that changes can be seen in a dynamic evolutionary setting but also that, in a larger time-scale in a cyclic setting, Buddhism accepts the fact of change and flux as a part of the nature of things. It is also said that laws are not haphazard. There are laws which pertain to the natural world as well as the psychological and social, and these may be described as 'non-deterministic social correlations'. Ideas, ideologies as well as economic factors influence the paths of social change. In this process of change, the moral factor plays a crucial role, and good and bad are qualities not determined in terms of caste distinctions. 'Now seeing, Vāseṭṭha, that both bad and good qualities, blamed and praised respectively by the wise, are thus distributed among each of the four classes, the wise do not admit those claims which the brahmins put forward.'<sup>23</sup> Scholars feel that, though built up in the form of a fanciful myth, the *Aggañña Sutta* has some interesting insights into social evolution and is 'much nearer the truth' than the Brahmin legend it was intended to replace.

Here again, we see that though matters like equality in relation to the admission to order and the potential for religious development made the stand on caste important in the religious context, the Buddha's vindication of the anti-caste perspective emerged from a wider world-view orientation.

We have seen that the Buddha emphasized the relativity of the caste

distinctions as compared with the belief in divine sanction and sacredness; it was also pointed out that the element of fatalism which came into being with caste beliefs was put aside in favour of human free will, and a dynamic and evolutionary concept of social change was suggested instead of a rigid and static picture of the world. Another interesting aspect of Buddha's discussions on caste is that in certain contexts the Buddha directly appealed to man's rationality. The Buddha says in the *Vāsetṭha Sutta* that, though there are species among plants and animals, among human beings there are no such distinctions. Even if there are minor differences regarding the colour of the hair, skin or shape of the head there are no characteristics indicating differences of species (*lingam jātimayam*) among human beings. Though constructed in the form of an analogical reasoning there is a direct appeal to man's confrontation with visible facts and their implications.

This argument has received a good deal of discussion in relation to the very pointed resemblance we find between race prejudice and caste prejudice:

The phenomenon of caste in India, if only due to its uniqueness, is probably to be traced to a multiplicity of factors, some of which are peculiar to the Indian context, but much of caste prejudice probably had its origin in the racial prejudices of the race-conscious fair-skinned Aryans trying to suppress and administer the dark-skinned aborigines. In any case, the analogy between race prejudice and discrimination and the prejudice and discrimination within the hierarchy of castes is so close that the case against the former is applicable to the latter — and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from the intrinsic irrationality of racial and caste-orientated thinking, it had grave practical consequences like the possible denial of political and economic equality, equality before the law and also religious freedom. The study of these practical contexts and the socio-economic role of the caste system over the years in India (or even in Sri Lanka) goes beyond the analytically-orientated theoretical study envisaged in this chapter.

Another facet of the critique of caste in Buddhism is to be found in the references to the psychological foundations of prejudice and the roots of caste and racial conceit. While *suttas* like the *Assalayana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* break through the deluded collective arrogance of caste groups, and while the sermon uses both commonsensical reflections and rational arguments for this purpose, the psychological facets of this issue are important. Though the Buddhist contribution

to the psychological roots of the issue is very significant, it has been a badly neglected subject with the textual-orientated studies of caste in Buddhism. Feelings of 'identity' (as compared with uncritical and compulsive mechanisms of 'identification') have a temporary role from a Buddhist perspective; they can give a sense of direction and coherence, so long as we are aware of the limited goals of seeking a national identity in socio-political contexts, but we should not let this expand into an inflated and uncritical conceit. Like individuals, nations can develop a healthy sense of patriotism or love for the country, but they can also develop damaging narcissistic self-images of a fanatical type and this factor is all the more important in pluralistic contexts where there are different religious, ethnic, linguistic and caste identities.<sup>25</sup> While majority groups can develop uncritical identities, minority groups can be nourished by feelings of inferiority conceits or even equality conceits.

According to the Buddha, self-conceit takes three forms: I am superior to others (*seyyo 'ham asmi-māna*), I am equal to the others (*sādiso 'ham asmi-māna*), I am inferior to others (*hino 'ham asmi-māna*). *Māna* can range from a crude feeling of pride to a subtle feeling of distinctiveness. Pride, vanity and conceit can emerge in interpersonal as well as inter-group situations. It can emerge in relation to one's physical appearance, birth, intelligence, wealth, as well as caste or race (*jātimada*).

### Women, family and the religious quest

Buddhist discussions about the role of women in relation to the notion of equality can often be misplaced, as the contexts in which we raise the question are somewhat different from those of equality notions in relation to caste or race. In the case of the caste concept, the Buddha was critical about it without any equivocation or ambiguity and exposed the pre-Buddhistic rationale for it was untenable. Regarding the position of women in Buddhism, there are two types of context which have to be distinguished. In the case of women, while being critical of any primitive attitudes towards them as the performance of suttee (self-immolation at the husband's funeral pyre), the Buddha was attempting to find out their fitting place amidst the diversity of human relationships, their lifestyles and the contrasting life perspectives of the householder and the recluse. In spite of the great deal of literature available on the subject, an inability to see some of these



simple points against their authentic historical background has given an unnecessary twist to the question. In the Confucian ethos (which has great relevance for Buddhist notions of the family), the idea of 'propriety', elegance, sensitivity in human relationships, especially the dimensions of the 'feminine' as well as 'masculine', take a central place. If we take the *Sigālovāda Sutta* as paradigmatic of the Buddhist concept of reciprocity in human relations, the notion of being 'supplementary' or 'complementary' acquires greater centrality than the concept of equality. The concept of equality did emerge in some form, when the question of the admission of women to the order was raised. As far as the potential and the need for liberation from suffering was concerned there was no dispute. The Buddha preached to both men and women and recognized the spiritual potential of women. The second point on which there has been discussion within the Buddhist tradition, especially within the *Mahāyāna* tradition, is the possibility of women attaining Buddhahood, apart from the realization of sainthood or perfection (*arahat*). A third point that has received some discussion is the relative superiority of the formal place of the monk in contrast to that of the nun.

There is a significant difference of perspective in the goals of the householder who aims at righteous and harmonious living (*dhammacariyā, samacariyā*) and the recluse seeking a more immediate form of liberation and inner peace. The householder attempts to be a well-adjusted and balanced person, who, while he seeks pleasure, exercises a degree of restraint, limits his wants and condemns excessive and illegitimate pleasures. While the life of the recluse (*brahmacariyā*) emphasizes the ideal of celibacy, the life of the householder (*gahapati*) emphasizes the idea of chastity. Chastity is an important virtue, and the sanctity of family life and the ideals of conjugal love are upheld in Buddhism. Though polygamy was a prevailing pattern at the time, monogamy fits with the Buddhist ideal. The woman's place within this family contributing to the spiritual aspects is well recognized in the sermons of the Buddha and the literary works which emerged around the doctrine. She brings stability, care, patience and compassion into the home, but is yet capable of dynamism, activity and even physical exertion. With the passage of time Buddhist women have accepted social and political roles but there need not be any special point of tension in this expanding role.

The inability to grasp the distinction between the lifestyle of the householder and the recluse has resulted in misunderstanding the place of women in Buddhism, and especially the place of women in relation

to man's sexual life, the blessings of a happy married life and the nature of conjugal love and domestic felicity. To cite one example, the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* article discussing women and emancipation in Buddhism comments thus: 'Nor did Buddhism, in spite of its universalism, place a woman on a higher level with man, its highest morality demands entire abstinence from sexual life.'<sup>26</sup> The author of this article fails to realize that, even when women enter the higher life, celibacy is a strict ideal they have to follow. I have discussed Buddhist perspectives on sexuality in detail elsewhere,<sup>27</sup> and do not wish to pursue the subject in detail here.

There are many contexts where the Buddha emphasizes the power of women to attract and excite man, their craft and cunning and their seductive strains which can even match the sensualist in Søren Kierkegaard's *Banquet*.<sup>28</sup> In fact, a Buddhist text comments, 'Inscrutable as the way of a fish in water is the nature of women, those thieves of many devices, with whom truth is hard to find'.<sup>29</sup>

But in spite of all these, the virtues in which they excel and the spiritual heights they attain, as well as the magic power they have in converting a house into a home, are central to a Buddhist perspective on women. It is because the Buddha saw the terrible sense of dissonance and tedium in the life of the pure sensualist (*kāmasukhalikānuṃyoga*) that he recommended the more balanced family life to both men and women who wish to commit themselves to the life of a householder.

Regarding the granting of religious rights to women the Buddha's contribution was historic. But his initial hesitation when Mahaprajapati Gotami made the request, and made the request three times until with the backing of Ānanda a final request was made which the Buddha granted, . . . is a context which has been the centre of much discussion. When Ānanda asked the Buddha whether women were not capable of a contemplative life and treading the path of arahatship, the Buddha replied that they were certainly capable of gaining arahatship. A plausible answer to this situation has been given:

This event described in the Pāli Canon as well as Chinese Agamas reveals that Gautama hesitated to permit admission of women in the Order, not because women could not attain enlightenment, but because he had to deliberate on problems which might arise between the Order of monks and that of nuns, and between the Buddhist Order and the lay society.<sup>30</sup>

The Buddha was both a great sage and a great administrator and he acted with great caution.

The hesitation or deliberation was quite natural on his part as the leader of a great number of disciples. We should not interpret this event as showing discrimination against women by Gautama because he never as much as hinted that a woman had not the same chance as a man to become an arahat, or that she was in any way unfit by her nature to attain nirvana.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding the claim that a woman cannot attain Buddhahood as woman in any particular life, this is recorded in the *sutta* literature, and only the Mahāyānists have tried to give a modified interpretation of this claim. In the *Bahudhātukasutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* five types of impossibility are cited for a woman: to become a Buddha, Universal Monarch, Mara, Indra or Brahma, while they are within the powers of a man.<sup>32</sup> A similar reference is found in the *Anguttara-nikāya*.<sup>33</sup> Some Mahāyānist scholars consider this as a later addition, which came up probably in the first century BC. We do not hope to pursue this question but merely place these comments on record. Some of the Mahāyānists however infer that according to their interpretations a female can be an aspirant to Buddhahood. What the Theravāda sources indicate is that, in the life in which a person attains Buddhahood, that person has to be a man.

Regarding the moral and spiritual excellence of women, there is a well-documented tradition of references. A considerable section of the poetic utterances of women who attained various grades of spiritual state are found in the *Therīgāthā*. Records of the attainment of arahatship as well as insights into nirvana are found here. Another source for reference is the *Bhikkuni saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya* and a third is the stories of the Apadāna. Some of the nuns, Shukla, Kundala-Keshi, Bhadra-Kapilani and Dharmadatta, were well-known speakers who gave sermons to large groups. There are many celebrated sections of the *sutta* dealing with the wisdom and moral excellences as well as the predicament of women seeking solace from the Buddha — Queen Mallika, Kheṃa of great wisdom, Kisagotami, Patacara, Ambapali, and so on.<sup>34</sup>

In general, if we take the historical context into account, the profile of woman in the *suttas* is an inspiring as well as a balanced image compared with the image of women in the wild excesses of the Western feminist movement today.

### **The political and economic contexts of the equality concept**

Questions pertaining to equality in the political contexts of today are very different from the simpler issues of the time of the Buddha.

Kingship was the established institution of the time, and it was the king who directed the political, economic and administrative structure of the country. Instead of attempting to reject the institution, the Buddha tried to humanize and elevate its moral stature. The notion that the king should govern with the approval and the consent of the people was the axiom to be followed and a significant phrase used to describe the king was *mahāsammata*: the king is so entitled as he has been selected by the people. He is also expected to govern according to the principles of the *dhamma* and to ensure that the moral and cosmic order of the universe was reflected in his regime, and thus the universal monarch was called the 'wheel-turning monarch'. The king has to maintain stability, peace and ensure the happiness and prosperity of the people. The ideal king in Buddhism is referred to as *dhammika dhammāraja* (righteous lord of righteousness). He rules the people with justice and equity.

There were ten royal virtues which guided the king: generosity; moral conduct; self-sacrifice; honesty and integrity; gentleness and politeness; austerity and simplicity; freedom from hatred and ill will; practice of non-violence; patience; and non-opposition to public welfare.

The people's voice should be effective when the king does not follow these principles, and heredity is not the sole criterion of the genuine successor to kingship. In the simple political framework during the time of the Buddha, concepts of political equality did not have the kind of strong thrust they have today.

Compared with the more simple perspective on politics, Buddhist thoughts on the economic activities of man have a more perennial appeal. We are living in a world which has escalated a crisis of a kind and a world which is evolving its own methodology to intervene in the situation of dilemma it has created.

The Buddha, of course, believes that it is easier to follow a diagnostic path at the outset than to intervene in a situation of dilemma one cannot control. But the question that arises is: all of us are talking in a moving train and how can a Buddhist blueprint for a confused world be ever implemented? For whatever it is worth, the message has been spelled out from time to time.<sup>35</sup> The socio-economic context in which the Buddha preached was far simpler than ours. He certainly considered poverty and starvation as a kind of crime and a celebrated Jātaka tells how he refused to preach to a hungry man (till he was fed and looked after by his disciples). But during the days of the Buddha the craving for material goods was not so great, people were content with what they had, their wants were fewer and the wealth and income

disparities were not as great as they are today. There was less tension, less competition, the population was small and there were no problems with the environment. The Buddha gave simple rules to guide economic activities, which are discussed in a number of *suttas*. For instance, in the *Vyggghapajja Sutta* the Buddha outlines three factors which contribute to economic stability and general well-being — production of wealth through skilled and earnest endeavour, its protection, and savings, living within one's means. A guide for simple and contented living could emerge from the innumerable sermons on the subject. The Buddha's principles of economics were not 'neutral' regarding the ends for which people live, an ethical dimension pervaded all aspects of life. This is why after a gap of 2,500 years Schumacher remarked: 'The important question is not our competence regards means but our realism and wisdom regards ends.'

In the economic sphere, the central problem for the Buddha was the satisfaction of man's basic needs which is a necessary prerequisite for his intellectual, moral and spiritual development. By advocating the 'ethic of self-restraint' he showed the way for both the householder and the recluse to lead a simple life. He constructed a balanced lifestyle for them which recommended a modest degree of saving but condemned wastage as well as hoarding and miserliness.

Though there was no integrated concept of distributive justice as such, the idea that the needy should be helped and that wealth should be given to the have-nots was accepted even by the kings. A retiring monarch advises his son in this manner: 'Dear son, and who so ever in thy kingdom are the "have-nots", to them let wealth be given.'<sup>36</sup> A king's economic policy was to be guided by principles of equity. A strong sense of benevolence made the people practice charity and the distribution of goods and wealth (*dāna*) is recommended by the Buddha in place of the sacrifice (*yajña*) recommended in the Brahmanic doctrines.

### **Concluding thoughts**

It has been our aim to make a modest contribution to the discussion of the notion of equality in the Asian religious and cultural traditions, and with this end in view, we have clarified some theoretical strands in the Buddhist perspectives on equality. Studies of this sort could contribute to a deeper, closer and authentic understanding of Asian traditions and encourage students of human rights to undertake

in-depth studies of the Eastern and Asian world-view orientations which influence ethico-religious as well as socio-political reflections. The interest in non-Western perspectives on human rights should be encouraged.

It may be premature and even pretentious to suggest any practical line of action. We live in a complex world, and, to cite an example, the question of economic inequality which we considered as our concluding item for discussion is today a gigantic puzzle — it is a vicious circle of food shortages, population growth, inflation, unemployment, overconsumption, social pollution and ideological conflict. However, UNESCO is recommending practical and viable programmes with a strong ethical mission, furthering respect for justice, the rule of law, and the dignity of man without distinctions of race, caste, sex and religion. They function at two levels: they intervene in conflict situations and try to disentangle dilemmas, but they also recommend long-range programmes with a diagnostic focus to change the attitudes of man. If there is a Buddhist contribution to human rights at the practical level, it should be the furtherance of the latter function.<sup>37</sup>

The cross-cultural study of world-views breaks through the temperamental addiction to closed systems, it encourages people to open up their understanding and imagination to probing diverse religious and cultural perspectives and helps them to isolate and preserve all that is of lasting value.<sup>38</sup>

## **Appendix**

Today, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is considered as 'a common standard of achievement for all people and all nations'. But yet in traditional societies the centrality of human rights varied, and this is seen to be especially true if we study closely the religious and cultural bases of traditional Asian society. Often the life-giving foundations of some of the traditional forms of religion and morality have a slightly different focus, when compared with our concerns for justice, right and wrong and rights which have been given legal and constitutional formulation today.

Peter K. Y. Woo, discussing 'A Metaphysical Approach to Human Rights from a Chinese Point of View' makes the following observations:

In view of the acceptance of universal unity and harmony, the issue of individual rights among men did not take the shape of a problem, nor did

any form of struggling for rights become recognized as a legitimate activity. The role of the ideal of unity awoke the compassionate feelings and the desire for cooperation, rather than the consciousness that the individual needs to be protected.<sup>39</sup>

Sentiments of this sort as voiced by Woo have been occasionally presented in discussions of human rights. But it is rare that a Western scholar penetrates his own culture to discern the shadows of a metaphor of human relationships which is not based on a 'rights-centred morality'. Today many contexts of political and social tensions are presented through the framework of human rights. But we also need a framework which emphasizes not merely competing rights but also conflicting responsibilities.<sup>40</sup> The morality of rights differs from the morality of responsibility; it emphasizes separation rather than connection. But today we need not merely an ethic of rights but also an ethic of care. Such a perspective has been presented in a very interesting study by Gilligan, in her work, *In a Different Voice*:

In this conception, the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights and requires for its resolution a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract. This conception of morality as care centres moral development around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as fairness ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules.<sup>41</sup>

Gilligan has raised a voice of protest against those who exaggerate the duality between man and woman and thus highlight the dichotomies between the capacity for formal reasoning and autonomous thinking, on the one hand, and the overriding concern with care, love and human relationship, on the other hand — such stereotypic dualities between man and woman appear to point towards a conception of adulthood without a sense of balance and harmony. This perspective may be expanded to engulf wider social and political phenomena which envisage a more comprehensive image of man.

Gilligan discusses her point in relation to an ethical dilemma and possibilities of resolving a situation of conflict which betray a larger tension between two perspectives on morality. A person called Heinz was to decide whether or not he should steal a drug, which he cannot afford to buy, in order to save the life of his wife. Jake, a boy of eleven years, sees the problem in clear logical terms as a conflict between the values of property and the values of life and upholds the priority of life over property. When the same problem is put to an eleven-year-old

girl, Amy, it evokes a different type of response: 'Well, I don't think so, I think there might be other ways besides stealing it, like if he should borrow the money or make a loan or something, but he really shouldn't steal the drug — but his wife shouldn't die either.' When a counter-question is asked of Amy as to why the drug should not be stolen, she does not reflect on the value of property or the importance of law, but the effect of the theft on the relationship between Heinz and his wife. The construction of the moral problem in this context as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than rights presents an interesting way of looking at such issues.

Gilligan says that

The morality of rights is predicated on equality and centered on the understanding of fairness, while the ethic of responsibility relies on the concept of equity, the recognition of differences in need. While the ethic of rights is a manifestation of equal respect, balancing the claims of other and self, the ethic of responsibility rests on an understanding that gives rise to compassion and care. Thus the counterpoint of identity and intimacy that marks the time between childhood and adulthood is articulated through different moralities whose complementarity is the discovery of maturity.<sup>42</sup>

This point of view has been abstracted in the light of her researches into 'images of relationships' between man and woman. Her researches into the feminine psyche place the tension between the ethic of rights and the ethic of care in a new light.

What we wish to emphasize in this brief note is to bring out the idea that, instead of making a one-track concentration on rights, it is necessary to discern other complementary values and ideals which partly generate a tension and partly make our human experience more comprehensive by the integration and reconciliation of conflicting visions regarding man and society. Though the work cited emerged as a contribution to the nature of the feminine psyche, in a deeper psychological sense the duality of these qualities is found in human beings and their complementarity is crucial. It is more than a question of mere gender, but of the nourishment and regeneration of certain human qualities which have been preserved in the evolution of the human race and of qualities which we need without excess and in balance and harmony. In a narrow sense, this duality is derived as a 'metaphor' from the biology and the evolution of man, but this distinction has finer ramifications in social-political life.



- cates that a certain asexuality is evident in the changing of the body. However she appears only to refer to the changing of the female to the male body and not vice versa. This implies that the male body is either the norm, or the superior spiritual form, which is indicative of inequality.
55. E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History* (London: Routledge, 1949), p. 107. J. Dhirasekara, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Ministry of Higher Education Research Publication Series, 1982), has pointed out that this hesitation of the Buddha was because he was aware of the laxity in the behaviour of male and female mendicants of the time. It is also possible that the Buddha preferred not to contribute to changing women's social position by taking her away from her more usual role, within the household.
  56. I.B. Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism* (London: Routledge and Sons Ltd., 1930) p. 119, has indicated that most of the sayings which have been attributed to the Buddha were edited by monks, and that it is not unlikely that they might have attempted to minimize the importance of women in their writings. However, the mentioned passages as they appear to us today remain without alteration, and have not been denied by later texts, so their validity in Theravāda Buddhism cannot be overlooked. The Buddhist attitude to nuns is comparable to the Digambara attitude, where nuns are technically of a lower rank than monks; but in the latter case, it is because nuns (unlike monks) cannot enter into ascetic nudity. However in the Śvetāmbara and Sthānakavāsi, which are Jain sects, nuns and monks take the same vows and are considered as spiritual equals. See P. Jaini, *The Jaina Path of Purification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 246.
  57. It has to be noted that in rural Buddhist India, women were often found working, and that it was only women of a certain social class and background who did not work. This is probably more on account of economic necessity than specifically of Buddhist religious influence. In urban and noble families which were economically self sufficient, the women usually worked within the home carrying out administrative as well as domestic duties, as is in keeping with the Buddhist texts that have come down to us today.
  58. *The Bhagavad-gītā*, tr. S. Radhakrishnan, p. 14.
  59. 'For those who take refuge in Me, O Partha (Arjuna) though they are lowly born, women, Vaisyas as well as Sudras, they also attain to the highest goal' (ibid. IX.32).
  60. Ibid., II.47.
  61. Ibid., V.18-19.
  62. Ibid., VI.9.
  63. Ibid., IX.23.
  64. Ibid., XI.52.
  65. K. Subramaniam, *The Mahābhārata* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1980), p. 44.
  66. Ibid., LIX.111-13.
  67. Ibid., LXXXX1.5.

68. A.A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (London: William Heinemann, 1900), p. 428.
69. J.J. Meyer, *Das Weib im altindischen Epos* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhem Heims, 1915), pp. 307-9.
70. E.W. Hopkins, 'The Status of Women in the epics', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 13, 1887, p. 330.
71. Mahābhārata, I.157.37, as quoted by Hopkins, 'The Status of Women', p. 340.
72. Hopkins, 'The Status of Women', p. 349.
73. Ibid. p. 364.
74. A.L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India* (London: Fortuna, 1977), p. 118.
75. Ibid. p. 121.
76. E.W. Hopkins 'Ancient and Modern Hindu Gilds', *Yale Review*, May and August, 1898, pp. 24-5.
77. Vāśishtha, Dh. S. (XXVIII.2-3), quoted in S.R. Shastri, *Women in 'the Sacred Laws'* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: 1959), p. 46.
78. Manu (IV. 185.) quoted in Shastri, *Women in 'the Sacred Laws'*.
79. J.D.M. Derrett, *Religion, Law and the State in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 169.
80. I.C. Sharma, 'Human Rights and Comprehensive Humanism' in A.S. Rosenbaum, ed., *The Philosophy of Human Rights; International Perspectives*, (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1980). pp. 103-12.

### **The concept of equality in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition**

1. Adamantia Pollis and Peter Schwab, 'Human Rights: A Western Construct with Limited Applicability' in Pollis and Schwab, eds. *Human Rights* (New York, 1979), p. 1.
2. See, L. M. Joshi, *Aspects of Buddhism in Indian History* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1973).
3. Ibid.
4. Buddhist traditions may be divided into three forms: (i) the Theravāda (meaning the teaching of the elders), found in the South-east Asia region, Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, as well as in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia; (ii) The Mahāyāna (meaning the Great Vehicle), found in Nepal, China, Korea and Japan; (iii) the Tantrayāna (the esoteric vehicle), found in Tibet, Mongolia and parts of Siberia.
5. Joshi, *Aspects of Buddhism in Indian History*, p. 8.
6. Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Cross-cultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, (New York, 1983).
7. Ibid.
8. SN, 1, 99.
9. *Majjhima-Nikāya*, Sutta 136
10. SN, 136, 142.
11. See, Soma Thera, tr., *Kālāma Sutta*, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1959).

12. O. H. de A. Wijesekera, *Buddhism and Society*, (Colombo; Bauddha Sahitya Sabha Publication); also see, D III, 59.
13. See S. Tachibana, *The Ethics of Buddhism* (Colombo, 1943).
14. *Digha-Nikāya*, Sutta 31.
15. For an interesting discussion of this point and for the reference to the *Li-chi*, see A.S. Cua, 'Li and Moral Justification: A Study in Li Chi', *Philosophy East and West*, January 1983.
16. *Ibid.*
17. D 1, 89.
18. Bernard Williams, 'The Idea of Equality' in Joel Feinberg, ed., *Moral Concepts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 155.
19. It is interesting to note that in recent studies of caste in India, the concept of social mobility has received considerable attention: 'Historically, the Kshatriya Varna was recruited from a wide variety of castes all of which had one attribute in common, that is, the possession of political power.' 'When a leader of a dominant caste or small chieftan graduated to the position of a raja or king, acquiring in the process the symbolic and other appurtenances of kshatriyahood, he in turn became a source of mobility for individuals and groups living in this domain. A necessary concomitant, if not a pre-condition, of such graduation was Sanskritization, that is, the acceptance of the rites, beliefs, ideas and values of the great tradition of Hinduism as embodied in Sacred Books.' M. N. Srinivasan, 'Mobility in the Caste System' in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds, *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Illinois, 1968), pp. 189-99.
20. See T.W. Rhys Davids, tr., *Dialogues of the Buddha* (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 105.
21. *Digha-Nikaya*, Sutta 27.
22. *Ibid.* Sutta 26.
23. D. III, 83.
24. G.P. Malalasekera and K.N. Jayatilleke, *Buddhism and the Race Question* (Paris: Unesco, 1958), p. 20: Also see, K.N. Jayatilleke, *The Principles of Law in Buddhist Doctrine* (The Hague: 1967). Also, some relevant discussion is found in the unpublished papers submitted by the 'Buddhist Group' for the Human Rights Seminar, held in Colombo at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute in 1981.
25. For a discussion of the Buddhist attitude to religious pluralism, see Padmasiri de Silva, 'Religious Pluralism: A Buddhist Perspective' in John Hick and Hasan Askari, ed., *The Experience of Religious Diversity* (London, in press).
26. James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, (Edinburgh/London: T. and T. Clark, 1937), vol. 5, p. 276.
27. Padmasiri de Silva, *Buddhist and Freudian Psychology* (Colombo, 1973, p. 78).
28. See, Padmasiri de Silva, *Tangles and Webs* (Colombo, 1978, p. 76).
29. Cūlavagga.
30. Kajiyama Yuichi, 'Women in Buddhism', *The Eastern Buddhist*, Autumn, 1982, p. 60.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Majjhima-Nikāya*, Sutta 115.

33. AN, 1, 15.
34. See, I.B. Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism* (London, 1930); I.B. Horner, *Women in Early Buddhist Literature* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1978); Helmuth Hecker, *Buddhist Women at the Time of the Buddha* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1982).
35. See H.N.S. Karunatilleke, *This Confused Society* (Colombo, 1976); E.F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful* (London, 1973); Padmasiri de Silva, 'Basic Needs and the Ethic of Restraint', paper presented to the Conference of World Buddhist Scholars and Leaders in Colombo, in July 1982.
36. D III, 61.
37. For the distinction between the 'dilemmatic' and the 'diagnostic' in the Buddhist context, see Padmasiri de Silva, 'Buddhism and the Tragic Sense of Life', *University of Ceylon Review*, April and October, 1967: 'Why do men get into problematic situations, is a more important question than how can we resolve this particular dilemma.'
38. We have attempted in this paper to explore the specific variables in the Buddhist world-view which colour its perspective on the equality concept and thus emphasize a non-Western vision of man and polity. But in cross-cultural studies we discover interesting points of convergence, too. In this context the recent work of John Rawls on 'Justice' and its implications for equality notions offers a strange sense of topicality to the Buddhist concept of righteousness, especially in its expressions as equity, impartiality and fairness. Rawls gives a key place to the notion of fairness: see John Rawls, 'The Sense of Justice' in Joel Feinberg, ed., *Moral Concepts* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1972).
39. Peter K.Y. Woo, 'A Metaphysical Approach to Human Rights from a Chinese point of view', in Allan Rosenbaum, ed., *The Philosophy of Human Rights: International Perspectives*, (Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1980), p. 115.
40. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (New York, 1983).
41. *Ibid*, p. 19.
42. *Ibid*, pp. 164-5.

### The radical egalitarianism of Mahāyāna Buddhism

1. See Max Weber, *The Religions of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959).
2. See, for instance, Susan B. Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); and Daniel L. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhism in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977).
3. I.B. Horner, ed. and tr., *The Collection of Middle Length Sayings* (Majjhima Nikāya), 3 vols. (London: Luzac and Co. for the Pali Text Society, 1967), vol. 3 pp. 147-52 and 153-62.
4. Specifically, the conditioned process of cognition moves through the five *khandas* or aggregates: (1) the sense organs of hearing, seeing, smelling, touching, and so on, come into contact with phenomenal objects produc-