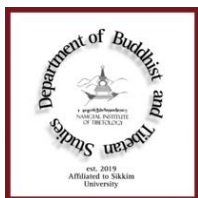


HIMALAYAN BUDDHIST TRADITIONS: HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICES

PROCEEDINGS OF THE ONE-DAY NATIONAL SEMINAR
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BUDDHIST & TIBETAN
STUDIES, NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY (NIT),
GANGTOK, 2024



EDITORS

KUNZANG NAMGYAL SHANGDERPA
NORBU GURUNG
TENZING LONGSEL BARPHUNGPA

NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY, GANGTOK

2024

Editorial Board:

Anup Gurung

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Tashi Pintso Lepcha

Tsewang G. Bhutia

Editors:

Kunzang Namgyal Shangderpa

Norbu Gurung

Tenzing Longsel Barphungpa

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NAMGYAL INSTITUTE OF TIBETOLOGY

Deorali, Gangtok, Sikkim - 737102, India

Tel : +91 - (03592) 281525

+91 - (03592) 280822

E-mail: director@nitsikkim@gmail.com

Website: www.namgyalinstitutesikkim.org

FOREWORD

The Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT) has spearheaded research into Buddhism, Sikkim Studies and Tibetology since its inception in 1958. Over the past nearly 70 years, we have established a great tradition of research, exemplified by the Institute's flagship publication, *the Bulletin of Tibetology*. The Institute continues to support research and regularly produces documentaries, papers, photo exhibitions, etc.

It gives me immense joy that the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies (BTS), NIT, affiliated with Sikkim University, has decided to publish the proceedings of the excellent national seminar they had conducted on *Himalayan Buddhist Traditions: History, Philosophy and Practices*, on March 8th, 2024. The seminar was well organized and the paper presenters, from various institutes and far-flung corners of the country, were articulate, lucid and knowledgeable.

The publication of the proceedings of the seminar is of vital importance as the papers would serve as a valuable resource for future research. Such works help in the creation of new knowledge, thereby contributing to a better understanding of our culture and heritage. These proceedings will contribute greatly to the field of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies and will assuredly become essential reading for anyone carrying out research in this field.

As Director of the Institute, it fills me with pride that the fledgling Department of BTS, started only five years ago, took on such a momentous task and completed it with aplomb. I wish the Department the best and hope to see more publications coming out from the Department in the future.



(Dr. Passang D. Phempu)

DIRECTOR

Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

Namgyal Institute of Tibetology

EDITOR'S NOTE

The first National Seminar organised by the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT), on *Himalayan Buddhist Traditions: History, Philosophy and Practices*, at NIT on the 8th of March 2024, was held with a view to encourage scholarship in the fields of Himalayan Buddhist Studies and Buddhism in general. From the various papers submitted and presented, the editorial board has selected eight for publishing.

In the first article, *Buddhist Ethics and Ecology*, Wangyal Lama Tamang, University of North Bengal, portrays Buddhism as a lifestyle promoting harmony among all beings and the environment. It links inner greed to environmental harm and emphasizes ecological conservation highlighting the Buddhist concept of dependent origination.

The second article, *Buddhism and Peace: Are the foundations of the values of Good, Peace, and Compassion Merely psychological orientations or conditioned Cognitive processes?* by Chunku Bhutia, S.G.C. Burtuk, discusses the concept of compassion in Buddhism. She emphasizes the need to distinguish between religion and philosophy in the context of Buddhism and discusses cognitive compassion training.

In the third article, *From the Sidelines: How Buddhism Perceives Marginal Existence*, Medha Sinha from Jadavpur University closely examines one of the most crucial challenges to Buddhism today, i.e., the question of how Buddhist wisdom can help marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities and others.

In the fourth article, *Reflecting the Mask Culture of Sikkim Himalaya*, Passang Tshering Lepcha & Sanghamitra Choudhary, Bodoland University, delve into the integral role of masks in Sikkimese culture, seeking to understand Sikkim's mask culture through secondary data analysis.

In the fifth article, *The Minimal Lifestyle of Monks and Nuns in the Vinaya Piṭaka*, Pema Choden Sherpa studies the minimal lifestyle of monks and nuns as outlined in the Vinaya Pitaka. She discusses the ordination processes for monks and nuns, their rigorous daily regime and the positive environmental impact of this lifestyle.

The sixth paper has co-authors Ratnadeep Sinha and Prof. Sanghamitra Choudhary, Bodoland University, exploring the psychology and deep meaning behind Buddhist art in their article *An Expression of Peace through Buddhist Art: A Study of Thangka Paintings*.

In the seventh article, *Finding “I”: Anattā and the Embodied-Enactive Self*, Rituparna Roy of Jadavpur University studies the intersection of Buddhist psychology and cognitive science, an important and interesting field of research.

The eighth article, *Exploring the Interplay between Sowa Rigpa and Buddhism*, by Tashi Namgyal, who is pursuing his studies from BSRMS in the Faculty of Sowa Rigpa, NIT, explores the interplay between Sowa Rigpa and Buddhism. He emphasises the basis of Sowa Rigpa, which lies in Buddhist philosophy and also sheds light on its evolution over the past two millennia.

The papers presented at the conference, including the ones published here, provide a comprehensive exploration of Buddhism’s influence across various domains. They delve into the integration of Tibetan medicine with Buddhism and its role in enlightenment, the application of Buddhist principles in conflict resolution and modern societal problems, environmental conservation, the challenges of incorporating Buddhist philosophy in academics, the significance of Buddhist rituals and practices in history and philosophy, and the emphasis on compassion in Buddhism. Thus, each paper provides a unique insight into different aspects of Buddhism, underlining the transformative power of Buddhist principles in various domains of life.

KUNZANG NAMGYAL SHANGDERPA
NORBU GURUNG
TENZING LONGSEL BARPHUNGPA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The seminar was a success, and for this we extend our gratitude to a great many people for their guidance and support. First and foremost, we would like to thank Shri Lakshman Acharya, Hon'ble Governor of Sikkim, for taking the time out of his busy schedule to grace our seminar with his presence as Chief Guest. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Ven. Sonam Lama, Hon'ble Minister, R.D.D. & Ecclesiastical Dept., Govt. of Sikkim for gracing our seminar as the Guest of Honour.

From the moment the idea for this seminar was first conceived till the final publishing of the proceedings, the director, Dr. Passang D. Phempu, has always given us the encouragement and advice we needed. For this we are very thankful to the director. We would also like to herewith extend our gratitude to the Administrative Officer Mrs. Angee Denzongpa for her patience and energy without which the seminar would have never seen the light of day.

For providing the necessary funds and other resources we owe thanks to the Vice-Chancellor and Administrative staff at Sikkim University.

We thank Professor S. K. Das for accepting our invitation to deliver the keynote address, and Khenpo Gyaltsen Tamang and Mr. Pema Wangchuk for accepting our invite of Guest Speaker. The Head of Department and faculty of the Department of History, Sikkim University, have helped us organize the seminar and we are very grateful for their help. Thank you also to the Nodal Officer Sikkim University Dr. Sangmu Thendup who was always available to help us make the seminar a success.

We would like to acknowledge the Chairpersons during the parallel sessions of the seminar, Dr. Anna Balikci Denjongpa, Senior Research Co-Ordinator, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology; Dr. Jigme Wangchuk, Sikkim Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies; Venerable Khenpo Gyaltsen Tamang; Dr. Sangmu Thendup, Sikkim University; and Dr. Jigme Losel, Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. The NIT

staff, the faculty of the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies and the faculty of Sowa Rigpa did much of the work organizing the seminar, looking after the speakers, coordinating with the caterers, hotel, etc. and generally doing any work that comes up. We would like to acknowledge their contribution in making sure the seminar was conducted smoothly. In this they were very well supported by the students of the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies who deserve a lot of credit.

KUNZANG NAMGYAL SHANGDERPA

NORBU GURUNG

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INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies is a follow up of the announcement made by the then Chief Minister of Sikkim, on the auspicious occasion of the 80th birthday celebration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on July 6, 2015 to establish a Buddhist University. After extensive meetings and consultations with relevant state government departments and associated organizations, the decision was taken to establish the Buddhist University under the auspices of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (NIT). Additionally, a bill was successfully passed in the Sikkim State Assembly to formalize this initiative.

In 2019, the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies was established under the affiliation of Sikkim Central University. The department aims to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive Buddhist University in the coming years.

The Department offers a two-year Postgraduate Degree Program.

- It plays an important role in preserving the ancient Nalanda system of education, which existed long before the modern universities of the Western world.
- The treatises of the great Nalanda Masters are an integral part of the curriculum of the course, and they are invaluable sources of wisdom. Now, students from various backgrounds have the opportunity to study Buddhist philosophy at the university level, using English as the medium of instruction—a language widely understood worldwide.

The two-year M.A. in Buddhist and Tibetan studies has been designed to provide learners with a comprehensive and interdisciplinary journey into the heart of Buddhist and Tibetan thought, fostering a deep engagement with their historical, philosophical, and cultural aspects. Guided by the principles of holistic education, the program's foundation rests upon eight attributes, each resonating with distinct facets of intellectual and personal growth. These attributes encompass disciplinary

knowledge and understanding, critical thinking, philosophical inquiry, value inculcation, communication skills, lifelong learning, multicultural competence and research prowess. The post graduates of this course are expected to emerge not only as custodians of these traditions but also as catalysts for their continued evolution in a dynamic global context.

The One-Day National Seminar on Himalayan Buddhist Traditions: History, Philosophy and Practices was a significant event that brought together scholars, researchers, and enthusiasts from across the country. The seminar was jointly organized by the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, and M.A. Buddhist Studies, Sikkim University on the 8th of March, 2024. It was the first national seminar organized by the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies.

The event was graced by the presence of Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya, the Hon'ble Governor of Sikkim, who also holds the esteemed position of the President of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. His Excellency was given a warm traditional welcome by the Director of the Institute, Dr. Passang D. Phempu, the Head of the Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, Dr. Tsewang G. Bhutia, and all the officers and staff members of the Institute.

In his speech, the Hon'ble Governor highlighted the profound teachings of Lord Buddha, emphasizing their relevance in the daily lives of the people of Sikkim. He pointed out examples of exceptional conduct and self-discipline. The Governor highlighted Sikkim's dedication in cultivating a peaceful and harmonious society, mirroring the core teachings of Buddha. Drawing from his interaction with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the Governor reminisced about a moment when His Holiness, in his blessing, repeatedly invoked the word 'peace'. Motivated by this, the Governor expressed a firm belief that the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, would transform into a global hub dedicated to spreading the principles of peace. The Governor's forward-thinking perspective sees NIT as a conduit for promoting worldwide harmony, in line with the timeless principles espoused by Buddha himself.

The seminar was enriched by the keynote address delivered by Professor Sanjib Kumar Das, the Head of the Department of Indo-Tibetan Studies, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. His insightful talk set the tone for the day's discussions and deliberations. He portrayed Buddhism not merely as a religion but as a science of the mind. He underscored the continuity of seminars since ancient times and highlighted the importance of continuing Buddha's teachings of non-violence and nirvana.

The event also had the privilege of having Mr. Pema Wangchuk, a Senior Journalist, and Venerable Khenpo Gyaltsen Tamang, the Head of Rigdzin Sherab Choeling Gonpa, Darjeeling, as the Guest-speakers. Their speeches added depth to the understanding of Himalayan Buddhist Traditions. The guest list was a blend of dignitaries from various departments of the Government of Sikkim, officers, faculty members, and students from the Sikkim University, Khangchendzonga State University, and Sikkim Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies. The presence of such a diverse group of attendees made the seminar a melting pot of ideas and perspectives.

The seminar received an overwhelmingly positive response from researchers and scholars from across the Himalayas and the country. The talks were chaired by Dr. Anna Balikci, Senior Research Co-Ordinator, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology; Dr. Jigme Wangchuk, Sikkim Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies; Venerable Khenpo Gyaltsen Tamang; Dr. Sangmu Thendup, Sikkim University; and Dr. Jigme Losel, Department of Buddhist and Tibetan Studies, Namgyal Institute of Tibetology. Their guidance and expertise ensured the smooth conduct of the seminar.

In conclusion, the One-Day National Seminar on Himalayan Buddhist Traditions: History, Philosophy, and Practices was a grand success. It served as a platform for the exchange of ideas and fostered a deeper understanding of Himalayan Buddhist traditions. The event left a lasting impression on all attendees and contributed significantly to the field of Buddhist and Tibetan studies.

Seminar Proceedings

Hall 1

Tashi Namgyal explored the interplay between Sowa Rigpa and Buddhism. He stated that the Tibetan medicinal system is a holistic treatment system that balances mind and body. It uses techniques like pulse reading, bodily fluid analysis, and behavioural and dietary examinations, and includes treatments involving natural materials and physical therapies. The system, which traces back to the Bon religious tenets over 2,500 years old, has evolved over centuries, integrating Ayurveda, Chinese medicine, Persian, and indigenous Tibetan knowledge. Diagnosis involves visual diagnosis, diagnosis by touch, and diagnosis by questioning, deeply integrated with Buddhist principles. Sowa Rigpa, closely tied to Buddhist philosophy and teachings, has been preserved and developed in monastic institutions.

Question/Answer session

Q. How does practice of Sowa Rigpa help in enlightenment?
(Khenpo Jigme Wangchuk)

A. Paramita and goal of Bodhicitta is always kept in mind and also the practice of Tantra Yoga.

Q. What is the origin of Sowa Rigpa? If Sowa Rigpa is part of Buddhist Science, who, when and where has it been mentioned?
(Dr. S.K. Das)

A. The 4 Tantras as mentioned in the talk are important for studying Sowa Rigpa. Also, in one of the Sutras, Sowa Rigpa is mentioned.

Q. Highlight the role of Sangay Menlha without which Sowa Rigpa is incomplete?

A. Sowa Rigpa itself is a part of Buddhist science and is not separate, wherein the Buddha Menlha's role assumes paramount importance.

Dipen Thapa's study on integrating Umaylam Buddhist Principles for Conflict Resolution and Peace. He stated that Umaylam, proposed by the 14th Dalai Lama, is a middle-ground approach for conflict resolution, integrating Buddhist principles. It addresses the shortcomings of conventional techniques, which often neglect psychological and spiritual factors. Umaylam was adopted by the Tibetan Government in Exile in 1997, seeking self-rule within the People's Republic of China's framework. The approach is based on Buddhist principles like non-violence (Ahimsa), kindness (Metta), and righteous conduct (Sila). A survey conducted in Darjeeling Hills showed a generational divide in the acceptance of Umaylam, with younger Tibetans favouring freedom and older ones favouring Umaylam. The necessity of integrating the Middle Way approach in conflict resolution was emphasised.

Question/Answer session

Q. Can Umaylam provide only a temporary solution?
(Audience)

A. Regarding Tibetan freedom and self-determination, the same template may/may not be applied to other conflict resolutions.

Q. If Umaylam is the middle-way approach, then how come Ahimsa is taken as a middle-way? (Dr. S.K. Das)

A. Ahimsa is avoiding the two extremes.

Q. As per the survey, if the younger generation is inclined towards freedom, how can they believe in Umaylam? (Audience)

A. Yes, they are inclined to freedom, but there is a positive feeling that one day, they will start solidifying their support for Umaylam, seeing the changing geopolitical dynamics. Dr. S.K. Das also added that H.H. The 14th Dalai Lama had propagated a different, more political, not philosophical, approach.

Dr. Chunku Bhutia discussed the concept of compassion in Buddhism, noting that it can have different connotations depending on the context. While Buddhism is often seen as a religion of peace, this view needs to be balanced with the reality of human behavior, as seen in countries with large Buddhist populations that have controversial human rights records. The speaker emphasized the need to distinguish between religion and philosophy in the context of Buddhism. Compassion, according to the speaker, is socially conditioned into us from birth. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted our capacity for compassion. However, human history also shows a propensity for violence. The speaker cited the example of Marpa and Milarepa to illustrate the concept of compassion in Buddhism and also discusses cognitive compassion training.

Question/Answer session

Q. What is compassion? (Khenpo Jigme Wangchuk)

A. Compassion is feeling or act of giving without expecting in return.

Q. Why do you say you don't have same compassion for a rapist as others, compassion can also be low level and great? (Khenpo T Gyatso)

A. Compassion towards rapist is conditional compassion wherein one feels that the rapist has accumulated negative karma due to his actions.

The talk by **Acharya Wangyal Lama emphasizes the relevance of Buddhist ethics in addressing ecological challenges**. Buddhism, beyond being a religion, is portrayed as a lifestyle advocating for the peaceful coexistence of all sentient beings and the environment. It draws a correlation between inner and outer pollution, suggesting that inner greed leads to environmental degradation. The Jataka tale of four harmonious friends illustrates the importance of ecological conservation. The talk also highlights the impact of small needs, like toothpicks and chopsticks, on

deforestation. The Covid-19 pandemic is seen as a reminder of nature's power and the need for balance. The talk concludes with the call for conservation, not just of beings, but also the environment, referencing the theory of evolution and the Buddhist concept of dependent origination.

Question/Answer session

Q. Are nature worshippers practices more clean than the Buddhist? (Sowa Rigpa Staff)

A. Yes, initially it is, but later on it is unsustainable.

Acharya Pema Wangyal's talk highlighted the differences between Sutrayana and Vajrayana. He emphasized the need for peaceful coexistence and the link between inner desires and environmental degradation. Sutrayana and Vajrayana, while having the same goal, differ in their approaches and challenges. Sutrayana has fewer methods than Vajrayana, which places importance on a Guru and instructions. The talk underscored the relevance of these principles in addressing ecological challenges

Question/Answer session

Q. Is there wong empowerment in Sutrayana also? (Ani la)

A. Oral transmission in Sutrayana is different than wong empowerment which is permission not there in Sutrayana.

Mr. Tsering Yolmo's talk focused on the relevance and challenges of Buddhist philosophy in academics and its practices. He highlighted Buddhism's rich heritage and academic tradition, as seen in ancient Buddhist universities like Nalanda and Takshashila. Despite differences in thoughts among various Buddhist masters, the guiding principle taught by Buddha Sakyamuni remains the same. The speaker also discussed the Aristotelian concept of Reductio Absurdum and the importance of healthy debating in Buddhism. He mentioned the significant roles of various Buddhist figures in spreading Buddhist philosophy in academia. Lastly, he outlined where Buddhist philosophy fits in

academia, including the study of humanity, social sciences, psychology, and peace and conflict studies.

Dr. Yogesh Raj's talk focused on the role of Buddhist Vajrayana rituals and Karyas in history and philosophy. He discussed two main approaches: the classical approach, which emphasizes the concept of transcendence, and the critical approach, which supports the idea of transition. He highlighted the connection between music and rituals, and their ability to help us transcend from one sphere to another. He also discussed the evolution of the Ganachakra ritual from the 8th to 15th century A.D., and how music and rituals have shaped each other over a thousand years. The talk concluded on the note that the interaction between rituals and music cannot be explained by modern philosophical theories.

Question/Answer Session

Q. Does the subject refer to Charyapad or Charyageet? (Dr SK Das)

A. It's Charyageet.

Mr Tashi Namgyal discussed the interplay between Sowa Rigpa, a Tibetan medicinal system, and Buddhism. He highlighted the holistic nature of Sowa Rigpa, its evolution, and its deep integration with Buddhist principles. In the Q&A session, he explained how the practice of Sowa Rigpa aids in enlightenment, the origins of Sowa Rigpa, and the crucial role of Sangye Menlha in Sowa Rigpa.

Mr Dipen Thapa presented a study on integrating Umaylam Buddhist Principles for Conflict Resolution and Peace. He explained Umaylam as a middle-ground approach for conflict resolution, integrating Buddhist principles. The Q&A session revolved around the applicability of Umaylam, the role of Ahimsa in Umaylam, and the generational divide in the acceptance of Umaylam.

Dr. Chunku Bhutia discussed the concept of compassion in Buddhism. He emphasized the need to distinguish between religion

and philosophy in the context of Buddhism and discussed cognitive compassion training. The Q&A session focused on the definition of compassion and the concept of conditional compassion.

Acharya Pema Wangyal Lama's talk portrays Buddhism as a lifestyle promoting harmony among all beings and the environment. It links inner greed to environmental harm, emphasizes ecological conservation, and highlights the impact of small needs on deforestation. The Covid-19 pandemic is seen as a reminder of nature's power. The talk concludes with a call for holistic conservation, referencing evolution and Buddhist philosophy. The Q&A session discusses the sustainability of nature worshippers' practices compared to Buddhists.

Acharya Pema Wongyal highlighted the differences between Sutrayana and Vajrayana. He emphasized the need for peaceful coexistence and the link between inner desires and environmental degradation. The Q&A session discussed the concept of wong empowerment in sutrayana.

Mr. Tsering Yolmo focused on the relevance and challenges of Buddhist philosophy in academics and its practices. He highlighted Buddhism's rich heritage and academic tradition, and where Buddhist philosophy fits in academia.

Dr. Yogesh Raj focused on the role of Buddhist Vajrayana rituals and Karyas in history and philosophy. He discussed the classical and critical approaches, the connection between music and rituals, and the evolution of the Ganachakra ritual. The Q&A session clarified the subject of the talk as Charyageet.

The discussions revolved around the holistic nature, evolution, and integration of a Tibetan medicinal system with Buddhism, including its role in enlightenment. A study presented a Buddhist principle as a middle-ground approach for conflict resolution, discussing its applicability, the role of non-violence, and generational acceptance. The concept of compassion in Buddhism was emphasized, distinguishing between religion and philosophy, and discussing cognitive compassion training. Differences between

two forms of Buddhism were highlighted, discussing peaceful coexistence, environmental degradation, and empowerment. The relevance and challenges of Buddhist philosophy in academics and its practices were discussed, highlighting Buddhism's rich heritage and academic tradition. Lastly, the role of Buddhist rituals and practices in history and philosophy was discussed, focusing on classical and critical approaches, the connection between music and rituals, and the evolution of a specific ritual. The subject of the talk was clarified as a specific form of song.

HALL 2

The Talk by Mr Brahma, Mr Narzary, and Mr Lepcha explores the significant role of Buddhism in Sikkim's culture and its historical influence on society. It highlighted the cultural differences between rituals and scholarly ideas, using secondary sources for research. The study emphasized the importance of lay followers and details various rituals involving water, food, and incense. It cited Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachings on gathering merit through prostration, incense, and lighting butter lamps.

Mr Aman Tamang's study on Tamangs' death rituals revealed that the deceased's body is placed in a lotus position, with hot water used to fold the legs, respecting the last wish of the deceased. The study highlights the importance of maternal uncles and sons-in-law, and mentions the '4 elders' in wedding rituals. It also discusses 'Sakabtse', a practice of giving money, usually coins, for everything to avoid accumulating karma.

Mr Ratnadeep Sinha's talk explored the expression of peace through Buddhist art, specifically Thangka Paintings. He emphasized that "art is heavenly" and traced the historical origin of Thangka style to Ajanta and Magao caves in China. Sinha discussed the link between art and inner peace, with a focus on Mandala art and its psychological effects. He underscored that the theme of Mandala art is peace through painting. Thangka, meaning Flat/Plain – Image, involved a process of painting that includes fabric, measurement, sketching, coloring, and outlining.

Mr S Chakraborty and Rahman's study explored the representation of Buddhist philosophies in Assamese cinema, it focused on four films by Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwal. The talk critiqued Assamese filmmakers and discusses the deep philosophical meanings in cinema. It highlighted the artistic, intellectual, and philosophical significance of these films. The outcomes of the study include the three marks of existence (suffering, impermanence, and non-self), dependent origination, and Nirvana. During the question-and-answer session, it was confirmed that the study does indeed affirm the relationship between Neo-realism and Buddhism.

Mr Rinzing Gyatso Bhutia's study explored the objectivity in Buddhist Philosophy and Quantum Mechanics. It emphasized the need for objectivity, citing the Sutra of Dense Array, and defined Quantum Mechanics as a fundamental theory describing the behavior of matter and energy at atomic levels. The study discussed Quantum Decoherence, referencing the observer effect and Schrodinger's Cat, and quoted Arya Nagarjuna on achieving Nirvana. It highlighted the benefits of understanding emptiness and the similarities between the two fields.

Ms Pema Choden Sherpa's study delved into the minimal lifestyle of monks and nuns as outlined in the Vinaya Pitaka. It discussed the ordination process, with monks and nuns required to follow 227 and 311 precepts respectively, while novice monks follow only 10. The study highlighted four basic prerequisites: food obtained through alms and consumed once a day before noon, permissible use of medicines, recycling of old clothes, and temporary dwellings in public spaces. It also discussed the environmental impact of this lifestyle.

Mr Lobzang Samdup's study examines the impact of the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism in Nubra Valley, Ladakh. It discussed the establishment of Disket Gonpa by Tsongkapa's disciple and the influx of students from various regions. The study highlighted the founding of Samtanling Monastery in the 19th century and the visits by numerous scholars and lamas, including the Dalai Lama. The study concluded on the note that the

integration of Buddhism and science should be a blend of two distinct sides, not an amalgamation.

Ms Rituparna Roy's study explored the intersection of Buddhist psychology and cognitive science. It discussed the Buddhist concept of 'no-self' and the five aggregates model of the mind, emphasizing the role of embodied activity in cognition. The study highlighted the common rejection of dualistic psychology as a convergence point between phenomenology and Buddhist thinking. It concluded on the note that the meeting point of the two disciplines is the belief in universalization, which is attainable by all sentient beings.

Mr P.T Lepcha's study delves into the integral role of masks in Sikkimese culture, seeking to understand Sikkim's mask culture through secondary data analysis. It highlighted the importance of Khanchendzonga and the ongoing 250-year-old festival for the deity, noting the mountain's significance due to its valuable minerals, salt, precious stones, and medicines. The study observed that masks are prominently worn during festivals and acknowledges government initiatives for the promotion and preservation of traditional arts.

The conference talks enriched the understanding of Buddhism's multifaceted impact. They highlighted Buddhism's role in shaping Sikkim's culture, provided insights into Buddhist psychology, demonstrated the expression of Buddhist principles through art, analyzed the representation of Buddhist philosophies in cinema, explored the parallels between Buddhist Philosophy and Quantum Mechanics, delved into the minimal lifestyle of Buddhist monastics, and highlighted the historical influence of Buddhism in regions like the Nubra Valley, Ladakh. These discussions collectively contributed to a comprehensive understanding of Buddhism's influence on society, culture, psychology, art, media, philosophy, science, and history.

HALL 3

Anurika Khati's talk on "Buddhist Rituals and Philosophy" discussed how rituals, often rooted in religion, aims to transform impurity into purity. She emphasized the role of offerings in these rituals, symbolizing generosity, ego renunciation, and promoting mindfulness and faith in the Three Jewels. Despite challenges, these offerings facilitate purification, transformation, and enlightenment, enriching spiritual paths and recognizing our connection with all beings. Essentially, they provide a framework for understanding life's complexities and guiding us towards enlightenment.

Shristi Lama's talk on "The Application of Buddhist Psychology in Addressing Modern Societal Problems" discussed how Buddhism can offer solutions to modern challenges like mental health issues and poverty. It highlighted the importance of mental purity, mindfulness, and compassion in Buddhism, and how these principles can help uncover our inherent nature through the concept of 'tathagata garba'. The talk concluded that Buddhist psychology provides a comprehensive framework for addressing societal problems, guiding us towards a future of mindfulness, compassion, and sustainability.

Karma Norbu Bhutia's talk on "Mindful Ecology" explored Buddhist perspectives on environmental conservation. It emphasized the interconnectedness of all beings, the concept of Karma, and the impermanence of life to promote non-greed. The talk advocated for compassion and non-violence towards all creatures and the environment. It encouraged mindfulness and awareness to appreciate the beauty and interconnectedness of the environment. The conclusion called for a connection with nature through sustainable development and a holistic approach.

Nima Wongdi Bhutia's talk on "Practicing Buddhism" emphasized the pursuit of inner peace through mindfulness and understanding the Four Noble Truths. It discussed the inherent suffering in life and the path to cessation through the Eightfold Path. The talk underscored the importance of ethical discipline, understanding interdependence, and correcting misconceptions

about self and the world. It encouraged efforts to realize Buddha's teachings and concluded with the goal of eradicating mental defilements to break the cycle of existence.

Karma Lodey's talk on "A Study of Mind in Buddhism" delved into the complexity of the mind and the importance of studying it from a Buddhist perspective. It discussed the Buddhist concepts of suffering, ignorance, and the transformative power of mindfulness. The talk emphasized the significance of interdependence, the role of aspiration, and the need to overcome selfishness. It also explored the concept of 'clear light' as our true nature, obscured by afflictive and cognitive obscurations. The conclusion underscored that Buddhism is essentially the science of mind.

Ngawang Tsedup's talk on "Influence of Buddhism and Contribution of Yogi Shakya Shri Family at Pangti Family" explored the history and influence of Buddhism in Pakistan and India, including its spread from India to Sri Lanka and Tibet. It discussed the establishment of Buddhism in Pangti, Himachal, and the challenges it faced, including destruction by the 11th-century king of Jammu. The talk also highlighted the flourishing of Buddhism during Naropa's time, the arrival of Zanskar monks in the 19th century, and the significant contributions of the Shakya Shri family.

Sanju Doma Tamang's talk on "Re-envision of Nalanda Buddhist Heritage: Conceptualization profile" discussed the 2600-year evolution of Buddhist teachings and the importance of preserving sacred lands. It covered Ashoka's pilgrimage to Buddha's places in the Gangetic plains, the advancement of Buddhist literature, and the destruction and subsequent restoration of these places. The talk emphasized the need for immediate preservation of certain sites and the conceptualization of sacred sites through the Nalanda mission. It also explored the flourishing of Buddhism in Magadh, the concept of Dharmadhatu, and how Buddhism spread by actively adapting to different cultures.

Sapana Rai's talk on "Himalayan Buddhist Art Commercialization of Buddhist Art" explored the evolution of Buddhist art, its values, and its commercialization. It discussed the historical development of Buddhist art, from the Buddha period to the Gandhara and Mathura periods. The talk also addressed the impact of commercialization and tourism on Buddhist art, leading to homogenization and loss of originality. It highlighted the influence of multiculturalism on Buddhist art, as seen in the Khada and Thangka, symbols of Sikkim.

Piyush Kumar's talk on "Utilization of Buddhism in Domestic and Geopolitical Diplomacy" discussed how India and China use Buddhism to influence their foreign policies. It highlighted the role of soft power, such as promoting Indian culture abroad and using Buddhism as a diplomatic tool. The talk also addressed the challenges faced, including the stigmatization of religion in China in the 1950s and the competition between India and China in exerting influence through Buddhism. It concluded with the ongoing journey of Buddhism's revival.

Each talk provides unique insights into different aspects of Buddhism, from its rituals and philosophy to its application in modern societal problems, environmental conservation, and geopolitical diplomacy. They all underscore the transformative power of Buddhist principles in various domains of life.

The conference discussions provided a comprehensive exploration of Buddhism's influence across various domains. They delved into the integration of Tibetan medicine with Buddhism and its role in enlightenment, the application of Buddhist principles in conflict resolution, and the emphasis on compassion in Buddhism. The talks also highlighted the differences between two forms of Buddhism, the challenges of incorporating Buddhist philosophy in academics, and the significance of Buddhist rituals and practices in history and philosophy.

The conference further enriched understanding of Buddhism's multifaceted impact, including its role in shaping Sikkim's culture, its influence on psychology, its expression

through art, and its representation in cinema. The talks also explored the parallels between Buddhist Philosophy and Quantum Mechanics, the lifestyle of Buddhist monastics, and Buddhism's historical influence in regions like the Nubra Valley, Ladakh.

In essence, each talk underscored the transformative power of Buddhist principles in various aspects of life, from rituals and philosophy to modern societal problems, environmental conservation, and geopolitical diplomacy. This collective exploration contributed to a holistic understanding of Buddhism's influence on society, culture, psychology, art, media, philosophy, science, and history.

BUDDHIST ETHICS AND ECOLOGY

Acharya Wangyal Lama Tamang

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is an Ecological philosophy. Buddha's whole life-events were associated with ecological surroundings. Buddha was born under Saal tree at Lumbini garden, attained Buddhahood under Bodhi tree (religious fig), delivered first teaching in Deer Park and entered into Nirvana under Saal tree in Kushinagar. While dwelling in multiple forests like *venuvana*, *jethvana* for meditation, animals like elephant, monkey attended to the tathagata for offering fruits, honey, etc.

Buddhism is more philosophical than religion as it philosophizes the phenomena, the actual way of the world's existence. The Buddha-teaching is the teaching of harmonious world and the harmonious world is none other than sound ecology. In the age of ecological challenges, Buddhist ethics can be very beneficial to normalize the present dire situation. For, Buddhism teaches us to purify the inner pollution rather than outer pollution that we often talk about. The inner greed pollution to consume technological advanced products in bulk for sensual satiation, the competitive pollution among developed, developing and under-developed countries driven by money mindedness to produce insensitively, thus exploiting the limited natural resources. How the self-centeredness of human species leads to the modern anthropocentric society? This is something intriguing for further future research.

EVOLUTION AND BUDDHISM

According to Charles Darwin, Evolution¹ is the transformation that takes place in the natural world of inhabitants (i.e. different species of plant and animal) particularly. Though in general manner the term evolution implies *the evolution of natural selection* which was proposed by both C. Darwin and A.R. Wallace in the 19th century.

¹ Gradual change in the characteristics of a population of animals or plant over successive generation.

In his famous book, “The Origin of Species” he says, all the organic beings which have ever lived on this earth may be descended from some primordial form.” The sense of interconnectedness of the species, having common parental ancestors (Homo Sapiens) million years ago. This can be proved from the fact that each and every species are linked if we investigate through DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid), a genetic material in all living organism.

Many periods like Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian and so on, and events like emerging of the first fish, the first vascular land plants, the first amphibian, the first mammal, first Dinosaurs etc. are discovered.

But different religious faiths have different opinions regarding Evolution.

“*Evolution of human being*” in terms of mutation of physicality as well as intellectuality took place in a very possible complex way. And religion can never be exception in relation to *the evolution of views* produced by Human being. Primarily people were worshipper of nature like sun, sky, earth, moon, etc. This kind of belief is called animism where abiotic substance of the universe is posited as having life and revered accordingly. We then begin seeking the higher power, higher authority which is vested to the higher kings or officials basing on some pre-structured and organised religion-doctrines. According to the record made by the Archaeological Survey on the origination of world religions as per time period, the first religion-rituals were performed when burial ceremony took place during the age of Middle Paleolithic (200000-50,000 BCE)². The global religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism originated in the Era ranging from 2000 BCE – 622 CE³. In fact, the term religion is a new one invented in the modern era for this term is unavailable either in Bible, Quran or Veda and Tripitaka (Henning, 1898). There are mixed theories regarding the origin of religion among 19th century

² Felipe Fernandez Armesto (2003). Ideas that changed the world. ISBN 978-0-7566-3298-4

³ Ravi Anita, The Origin of World Religions (<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities>)

researches such as Edward Burnett Tylor, Herbert Spencer, John Lubbock, Max Muller, Wilhelm Mannhardt. Tylor affirms that the source or germ of religion is *the belief in the spiritual beings*. *The ancestor worship* is the root of every religion is the narrative of H. Spencer (Henning, 1898). Though he also claims later on that the ancestors are ghost-kind thus the *ghost-propitiation*⁴ is the origin of all religion. The *petroglyphs culture* that is, figures being carved on the rock surface were evolved. There are basically two types of images worshipped and revered. One form is of human which is known as *Anthropomorphic* and the other is *Zoomorphic* that is the images related to various animals. Many beliefs evolved over centuries along with the human civilization. The fundamental question of ours that is “Is religion a product of evolution?” entails further queries, whether religion’s evolution takes place along with the human evolution and not later as something by-product. It seems that with the progress of human civilisation, the Religion perspective also upgrades. In this process the concepts of one God and many evolves. The belief system of God’s existence as almighty, omnipresent, creator, protector and so on is called **Theism**⁵. And its opposite is Atheism. Theism can be divided into following categories; **Monotheism: Polytheism. Internal development of religion**

Buddhism due to its Devotion towards Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and worshipping of conventional deities for the welfare of others, happened to be called as one of the major religions of the world. It was during fifth century BC Gautama though a Chattriya by caste attained to wisdom. Buddha Sakya Muni is the present Buddha and the Maitreya is the future-one (Sponberg & Hardacre, 1988, p.36). Similarly, many buddhas came during dark aeons to guide the obscured beings. Due to the simplicity in rituals and practices as compare to hitherto Brahmins and liberal practice of reasoning, Buddhism gained upper hand and

⁴ Henning Charles L., On the origin of religion, published by Wiley on behalf of American Anthropological Association 1898
(<https://www.jstor.org/stable/658576>)

⁵ Theism derives from Greek “*theoi*” denoting “God”.

established revered faith among Indians. During consecutive councils held after *Buddha-Mahaparinirvana*, many sub-sections were evolved among which two are vitals: Theravada and Mahayana (Kimura, R. 1927). They basically differ in the intention of awakening minds as former emphasizes on the self-realization but the later one is altruistic in approach. Both the sects affirm that the world evolved out of our own Karma which is the mind's product. The suffering stated in **Four Noble Truth** is caused by the afflicted mind alone. *Chitta matra*, one of the sub-schools of Mahayana puts "Mind" as fore-runner of all and discussed in a great detail. In the text *AbhidharmaKosha* by *Vasubandhu*, the formation of world and alike: cosmological phenomena are depicted (Vasubandhu, 2011, p. 451). Although the impermanence of relative world based on the five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Sky are something central.

ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION:

The interrelationship between Ecology and Evolution is established. In sound Ecology only, Evolution is possible. The term Ecology is derived from Greek word *Oecology*, the Study of House. *Ecology is the interaction between living organisms and environment* (Odum, 1975). This definition is generally accepted given by Prof. Ernst Haeckel. In the western primary pedagogical system, this subject is categorized under the heading of Life Science and Geography. According to the table from *Dudson et al* 1998, we came to know that kinds of Ecology is actually defined by concept, organism, habitat and application. According to him during 1790s primordially Biology, Natural history, Resource exploitation and human demography serving as a root cause to give development to 1870s Ecosystem, physiological, community, population, landscape, Behavioural etc. In the first chapter "**the Scope of Ecology**" of the book, "Ecology" by *Eugene P. Odum*, mentioned that the Ecology not only concerns with organisms but also with the energy flows and the material cycles on the lands, in the oceans in

the air and in the fresh water, further emphasized that the ecology is the study of the structure and function of nature. **Autecology** and **Synecology** are its classification. **Deep** and **Sallow Ecology**⁶ are the degrees of opinion towards maintaining Ecological world. Ecology-domain is vast as it can be clear from following diagram depicted in the book ‘Ecology and the Environment’ (Adhikari, S 2009).

The law of Evolutionary activities explicitly advocated that evolution took place in a harmonious eco- friendly environment alone. The word **Evolution** is derived from Latin *evolvere* which means “to Develop gradually”. The interrelationship between Ecology and Evolution is like that of sisters. Therefore, to understand Ecology well one must be grounded on the historical foundation of all the phenomena. According to the text “*Astronomy*”⁷ the supernova took place and the formations of solar system evolved. The interesting events of revelation of history of

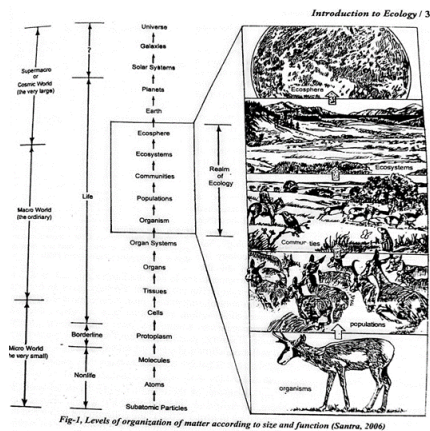


Fig-1. Levels of organization of matter according to size and function (Saxena, 2006)

evolution found the religious platform too like that of *Samudra Manthan* in Vishu Puran and *Eden Garden* in the Genesis account. Ecological aspects influence the tendencies of certain species to evolve accordingly. The static climatic environmental pattern of the

⁶ It was first coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess.

⁷ Fraknoi Andrew, Morrison David, Sidney C. Wolff, *Astronomy*, published by Samurai Media Limited, 2017, ISBN:9789888407316

earth where evolution is possible is called “Holocene”⁸ an entire epoch (*yug*). Here the temperature of the earth remains warm for several centuries, conducive for the multiple living organisms to thrive. Its period is the last 11,700 years.

Ecology, the study of interaction between living organisms and the environment, makes us know the degree of Evolution, the variation by natural selection of uncountable diversities of species. Such interaction is the historical phenomena to evolve new species. The more the interaction the more diversities of species evolve. Ecology and evolution are reciprocal that is the variation in ecology results in Variation in the Evolutionary patterns of species. And the variation is the phenomena that is all pervasive. The notion of *Impermanence* in Buddhism is the substitute term for “*Variation*”. Though the term variation is not even explicitly defined in the Charles Darwin’s book “*On the Origin of Species*” where it is mentioned that the term “*Variation is used by some in a technical sense as implying a modification directly due to the physical conditions of life;*”

BUDDHISM AND ECOLOGY:

It is the natural phenomena for a thing to contain dual characteristics. And that characteristics can only be recognized and actualized when there is a churning of intellectuals as takes place in a debate. When analysed, the things appearing can be proved deceptive as in the case of rope appearing as a snake from a distant during night. Though in conventional world everything is Relative. And so does thing become the object of dualistic perception.

Buddha admonished that his word should also be taken after having done thorough investigation like that of goldsmith to gold. Especially Nalanda Buddhism seems focused on the debate produced wisdom. Nalanda masters such as *Nagarjuna*, *Dignaga*, *Aryadeva*, *Asanga*, *Vasubandhu*, *Dharmakirti*, *Chandrakirti* so on so forth would spend long spans of time to read other schools’ doctrines through *Question and Answer* process so that they could

⁸ David Attenborough- Documentary on youtube.

come up with the new wisdom to enlighten both the opponents, Buddhist and non-Buddhists alike.

“Ecology is the branch of biology” is the narrative of modern-day science whereas the same faculty was already there in existing among ancient societies. Taking Ecology as an entirely science-faculty and independent from that of Buddhist ethical genre sounds to some extent, erroneous. For Ecology-subject has a vast scope and so does the Buddhism. Since Buddhism contemplates on universal harmony of all sentient beings bearing happiness with its sources, and universal compassion of extinguishing all sufferings including its causes. The modern term “Ecology” seems insufficient to represent all the implications that Buddhist indeed think of. For the ethical qualities like love, compassion, harmony and so on are not seemed accustomed there in the occidental Ecological field.

The Debate on *Buddhism and Ecology* throws some pondering questions like:

Buddhism being the path of reclusive lifestyle which calls for self-realization⁹ first can ever serve the society? As modern society is driven by unethical aspects like greed, jealousy, competitiveness and so on.

How Ecology being the branch of biology finds suitable scope in the Theology and Philosophy like Buddhism?

Ecology is a worldly concern whereas Buddhism puts emphasis on how to ferry beyond this mundane world.

Ecology is a vast subject encompassing all the activities of living organisms irrespective of caste, creed and colour. But the population of Buddhists are mostly centred in Asia and its influence towards the global issues like that of Ecology is feeble and so on.

The Debate on Buddhism and Ecology can be a never-ending aspect if we put their characteristics into the further inquiries such as the outer hygienic leads to the inner hygienic regarding purification of one’s previous Karma. The first precept among ten

⁹ Theravada first seeks self-realization and then benefit others.

virtuous karma is not killing of any living being imparts the cultivation of love and compassion which is non-other than the sound features of Ecology. Though the Mahayana Sutra like Vajra Cchedika based on the wisdom aspects of Emptiness establishes that the existence of sentient being is in question as its identity when analysed thoroughly cannot be gotten. If it's so then there is no sin in the action of killing sentient being. The law of Karma be mere ostentatious in Buddhism. Due to its Nihilistic approach, it matches with the *Lokayata Carvaka*¹⁰. The concern of Buddhism being middle way approach, the indifference towards the ecology exploiter and conserver hardly goes parallel with both the deep and swallow Ecology, those discerning the eco- friendly people from the opposite one.

Buddhist ethics highlights the *Vinya-Pitaka* section of Tripitaka having the subject of *Shila* that is self-restraint which is the base of *Samadhi* and *Pragya*. It safeguards from harming oneself and all others sentient beings of Ecological world. While in *Shila-paramita* the wisdom aspect of non-dualistic perception involves, inspiring practitioner to uplift to meditative equipoise of ultimate reality. *Bhavatu sarva mangalam...*

¹⁰ Bhattacharya, Ramkrishna (2011). Studies on the Carvaka/ Lokayata. Anthem Press. ISBN 978-0-85728-433-4

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**BUDDHISM AND PEACE: ARE THE FOUNDATIONS OF
THE VALUES OF GOOD, PEACE, COMPASSION
MERELY PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIENTATIONS OR
CONDITIONED COGNITIVE PROCESSES?**

Chunku Bhutia

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism, a religion romanticized as a ‘way of life’, finds its existence in various countries like India, Bhutan, Cambodia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Burma, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet, and Vietnam. However, it needs to be recognized that there have been several discussions on whether Buddhism is a religion or a philosophy. The most common response to this would be that Buddhism is a religion with a philosophical outlook. In this context, the discussion that forms the basis is “what is religion?” It is in the matrix of such multiple facets of understanding religion and Buddhism per se amalgamated with its core values of peace, impermanence, goodness, and compassion that a deeper analysis of the same needs to be drawn.

**BUDDHISM IS A RELIGION OR A PHILOSOPHY
OR IS IT A PHILOSOPHICAL RELIGION?**

Conceptual Understanding

The genesis of the concept of religion lies in the Latin word ‘religion’, a term equivalent to ‘scrupulousness’, which is contrary to how it is understood in the contemporary era. During ancient times, people referred to religion as ‘nobis religion’, meaning ‘our way of worship’, when different social groups believed and worshipped different gods. However, in the Middle Ages, the term ‘religion/religion’ was used to describe the monastic orders that were formulated by the Christians for the people. Furthermore, an English historian Edward Hebert laid down five “articles” or “elements” which is common to every religion, he referred it to as the ‘Common Notions:’

1. there is a supreme deity,
2. this deity should be worshipped,

3. the most important part of religious practice is the cultivation of virtue,
4. one should seek repentance for wrong-doing, and
5. one is rewarded or punished in this life and the next.

Later, it was in the twentieth century, that the concept of religion was meant to include not only practices that connect people to one or more spirits, but also practices that connect people to “powers” or “forces.” (Schilbrak 2022).

Furthermore, sociologists Emile Durkheim gives a broader view of the concept of religion by limiting it not just to ‘supernatural or mysterious phenomena’ like gods, spirits and ghosts. He instead claims that any religion is constituted of two elements: beliefs and rites. Former referred to the “collective representations / moral ideas, the rules, the teachings and myths” and the latter is the “determined modes of action influenced by the beliefs.”¹¹

Philosophy on the other hand, is a word derived from the Greek word ‘philein sophia’ meaning ‘lover of wisdom.’ Philosophy is concerned with method, or systems of inquiry and investigation. This indicates that philosophy and religion are two different concepts since the former entails logical understanding whereas the latter is understood as a system which is ‘uncritically formulated.’ (Hung 2016)

The above understanding of the concept of religion and philosophy indicates that Buddhism is a blend of both the values of religion and philosophy. On a social and cultural level, Buddhism reflects the characteristics of a religion, and on an individual level it is reflective of the philosophical aspects. (Jakubczak 2017)

In the words of Gautam Buddha, the ‘religious way of life’ involved the- “Keeping away from all evil deeds, cultivation of life by doing good deeds and purification of mind from mental impurities.” This is indicative of the moral and philosophical

¹¹ <https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/18957/1/Unit-19.pdf> accessed on 25 February 2024.

aspects of Buddhism as a religion. However, as mentioned above Buddhism was not merely a religion instead it was a philosophy as well since Gautam Buddha did not promote for a blind folded followers or Buddhists practitioners instead he advised people to analyse and examine the Buddhists teachings. He further was absolutely clear about the understanding that “religion was not a bargain but a noble way of life to gain enlightenment and salvation.”

Furthermore, Buddha clearly advocated in his teachings that mere blind faith would give rise to religious fanatics and that such a narrow view of religion would not lead to the development of an inclusive and accommodating attitude. As such, Buddha propagated for a more rationalistic understanding of Buddhism as a religion through ‘study, discussion, meditation and contemplation.’ (Dhammananda 1994)

Some philosophies that are formulated into the essence of Buddhism are the four noble truths, eight noble paths, and dependent origination. The four noble truths include: (a) Life is full of suffering (*Duhkha*), (b) There is a cause of this suffering (*Duhkha-samudaya*), (c) It is possible to stop suffering (*Duhkha-nirodha*), (d) There is a way to extinguish suffering (*Duhkha-nirodha-marga*).

The eight noble paths include- a) Right views-understanding the Four Noble Truths, especially the nature of all things as imperfect, impermanent, and insubstantial and our self-inflicted suffering as founded in clinging, hate, and ignorance. b) Right resolve/aspiration- having the true desire/determination to free oneself from attachment, hatefulness, and ignorance. c) Right speech- abstaining from lying, gossiping, and hurtful speech generally. Speech is often our ignorance made manifest, and is the most common way in which we harm others. d) Right action/conduct- right conduct includes the ‘Pancha-Sila’, the five vows for desisting from killing, stealing, sensuality, lying and intoxication. e) Right livelihood- making one's living in an honest, non-hurtful way. f) Right effort - taking control of your mind and the contents thereof, making an effort to develop good mental habits. g) Right mindfulness - mindfulness refers to a kind of

meditation (vipassana) involving an acceptance of thoughts and perceptions, a “bare attention” to these events without attachment. h) Right concentration - one who has successfully guided his life in the life of last seven rules and thereby freed himself from all passions and evil thoughts is fit to enter into deeper stages of concentration that gradually take him to the goal of his long and arduous journey – cessation of suffering.

Right concentration involves four stages (i) The 1st stage of concentration is on reasoning and investigation regarding the truths. There is then a joy of pure thinking. (ii) The 2nd stage is unruffled meditation even free from reasoning. There is then a joy of tranquillity. (iii) The 3rd stage of concentration is detachment from even the joy of tranquillity. There is then indifference to even such joy but a feeling of a bodily case still persists. (iv) The 4th and final stage of concentration is detachment from this bodily case too. There are then perfect equanimity and indifference. This is the state of nirvana or perfect wisdom. This is the highest form of Buddhist meditation, and full practice of it is usually restricted to monks and nuns who have progressed considerably along the path. (Aich 2013)

The principle of Dependent Origination is one of Buddhism's most important and unique teachings. In numerous passages of the Pali Canon, it was described by the Buddha as a natural law, a fundamental truth which exists independently of the arising of enlightened beings.

Buddhism as such is a beautiful blend of religion and philosophy. The question that arises is that principles on which Buddhism thrives is philosophically immensely rich but the possibility of a Buddhist practitioner or any human being to absolutely practice those principles is a question to be addressed.

THE BUDDHIST VALUE OF COMPASSION IS ORGANICALLY BUILT IN ANY HUMAN, OR IS IT CONDITIONED/CONTEXT-DEPENDENT?

The compassion scientists explain compassion as including:

- 1) an awareness of another's suffering,

- 2) a benevolent emotional response to this suffering, and
- 3) a desire or motivation to help relieve from that suffering.

Interestingly, the compassionate scientists Jennifer Mascaro put forward the theory “*compassion appears to be baked into us by selective pressures that have arisen throughout evolutionary history.*” One such ‘evolutionary pressure’ has been the dependence of a newborn for survival on his/her mother, and this was further extended into the ‘allomaternal care’ and ‘reciprocal altruism’ within a social group.

Further, it is also pertinent to understand that compassion according to the compassion scientist is dependent on several factors like: one's physiological and psychological state, context, experiences, interpersonal factors that shape whether one thinks someone is worthy of one's compassion or not. This indicates that compassion may not be organically present in every individual instead it is dependent on the situation, contexts and similar other factors as mentioned above. In this context one of the American Zen Buddhist teacher Roshi Joan Halifax mentions that compassion is dependent on the non-compassion qualities like emotion regulation, distress tolerance, ethics so on and so forth. (Halifax 2023)

Buddhism as mentioned above thrives on the principle of ‘dependent origination’ which in simple words meant that one needs to connect to the rest of the world as each one of us is dependent on the other. Such understanding and emotions would help in empathising with others suffering and not just ones. A British psychologist Paul Gilbert identifies the possibility of compassion being risky, effortful or socially unpleasant. So, the values like peace and compassion are situational and conditional rather than absolutely organic. Gilbert in his writings highlights that people have the tendency to respond to suffering through either of the three Cs: compassion, callousness and cruelty. Like for instance, during the epidemic Covid-19, the world witnessed a more universal compassionate approach towards fighting the disease but on the other hand, if we look at the history of the world as Karl Marx says- “The history of all hitherto existing human society is the

history of class struggles.” In simple words, the world has witnessed wars, hatred, domestic violence, and exploitation, which is the anti-thesis of compassion. (Gilbert 2021)

The values of compassion are likely to be induced in situations that are conducive to compassion, like, for instance, the feeling of secured attachment, gratitude, appreciation, interdependence, and shared humanity, which will lead to the generation of a compassionate feeling when encountered with suffering. (Mascaro 2022) But does this also indicate the need for a conducive environment for the rise of compassion in oneself? So, when an individual is bound by one self-interest, compassion may not be as possible as expected.

It has also been argued that Buddhism believes compassion is innate to human nature; however, in Western society, it is believed that human nature is “*more cruel than kind.*” In fact, as mentioned above, the world has faced immense wars and atrocities, which confirms such a theory. (Gilbert 2005)

Yet again, it is said that compassion can also be caused by anger, anxiety and sadness, like, for instance, seeing a child in danger and the possibility of an individual's urge to help and save the child is more. Similarly, anger can also induce compassion in certain situations. It has been observed that people who are angry about a particular event or incident tend to be more compassionate towards the people who are the victims of the unfavourable incident rather than the ones who do not get angry or avoid such emotions. (Seppala et.al. 2017)

However, Buddhism considers anger as one of the elements causing suffering in a person. Anger is an emotion that causes pain both the one who is angry and the one on whom the anger is being bestowed. (Leifer 1999) Furthermore, anger in Buddhism is viewed as a “merely unwholesome and afflictive state, all but devoid of moral value” but on the other hand, Buddhism also says that under right conditions anger can be used for good purpose and this if put in the words of His Holiness Dalai Lama states “anger on the path.” Buddhism propagates the notion that anger is bad but with the right

intention and anger with no hatred can have its purified nature like the relationship between master and disciple- “anger from the master is a kind of caring, a sublimely rude/rough compassion (unless of course the master is actually acting out an ego rooted agenda through such anger).” In order to understand Buddhism and compassion a reference has to be made to the “middle path philosophy” of Buddhism wherein it is impressed that an emotion is neither to be repressed nor acting out emotion. In this context, Buddhism paves way for a purified version of anger which requires “mindfully handling of anger.” Besides this Buddhism also talks about a “heart anger” which indicates a condition where openly expresses anger and compassion mindfully co-exist. The essence of such ‘wrathful compassion’ is a “potent, often fiery caring.” (Augustus 2000)

The challenge lying ahead is, if the feeling of compassion can grow in an individual both in “depth and breadth.” In this regard, there exists a program known as “Cognitively Based Compassion Training” which involves “a system of contemplative exercises and reflective practices designed to develop and expand compassion.” This program intends to enhance sustainable compassion for everyone and not just for close acquaintances. (Mascaro 2022)

Besides, this program Buddhism on the other hand, provides for a “compassion meditation” which in Pali language is known as “*metta bhavana*” (*metta* meaning love or kindness or friendliness and *bhavana* means development or cultivation).¹²

The rise of compassion as such does require an environment that is conducive to compassion, and in order to organically develop as a compassionate being, Buddhism believes in consistent practising of such values through meditation and conscious thought processes

¹² <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/text/loving-kindness-meditation> accessed 4th March 2024.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Buddhism and compassion are almost synonymous, but there is no certainty that Buddhist practitioners would be absolutely compassionate beings. It needs to be recognised that compassion, too, is based on context and conditions. However, Buddhism does address this and lays down the philosophies that guide individuals towards leading a moral life and the theory of meditation, to a large extent, guides people towards taming the elements like anger and aggression, which is antithetical to compassion.

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FROM THE SIDELINES: HOW BUDDHISM PERCEIVES MARGINAL EXISTENCE

Medha Sinha

Marginalization occurs when individuals or groups are excluded from the dominant societal structure due to their identity or life experiences. Lately, there has been a growing emphasis on the problems of marginalization, particularly in the fields of social justice and human rights. The diverse and global Buddhist community plays a vital role in fostering increased inclusiveness and understanding in society. However, it is important to approach this discussion carefully, recognizing that different cultures and traditions may have differing perspectives on marginalized groups. Buddhism endorses demonstrating compassion, embracing inclusivity, and easing suffering for every being. However, some groups have experienced being marginalized or excluded in Buddhist communities and cultures at different times in history. In this conversation, we will explore how Buddhism's lessons and rituals can provide support to marginalized groups such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and lower caste communities. We will examine the historical and cultural factors behind these marginalizations, and consider how Buddhism can help promote social justice and encourage a more diverse and inclusive society. Studying Buddhism's perspective on marginalization can offer understanding on compassion, principles of non-violence, causes of suffering, and the importance of creating a society that includes all beings.

WOMEN AND BUDDHISM

Women in Buddhism, similar to other religions, have a diverse and intricate history regarding their status and treatment. Discussions on women in Buddhism cover various angles, such as their theological roles, societal treatment, historical presence, and comparisons across different Buddhist traditions. Similar to other faiths, the encounters of female Buddhists have shown significant diversity. Scholars such as Bernard Faure and Miranda Shaw are in agreement that Buddhist studies is in its infancy in terms of

addressing gender issues. Shaw gave an overview of the situation in 1994: In the case of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism some progress has been made in the areas of. women in early Buddhism, monasticism and Mahayana Buddhism. Two articles have seriously broached the subject of women in Indian tantric Buddhism, while somewhat more attention has been paid to Tibetan nuns and lay yoginis.¹

However, Khandro Rinpoche, a female lama in Tibetan Buddhism, downplays the significance of growing attention to the topic:

“When there is a talk about women and Buddhism, I have noticed that people often regard the topic as something new and different. They believe that women in Buddhism has become an important topic because we live in modern times and so many women are practicing the Dharma now. However, this is not the case. The female sangha has been here for centuries. We are not bringing something new into a 2,500-year-old tradition. The roots are there, and we are simply re-energizing them.”²

Masatoshi Ueki conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the status of women and gender equality in Buddhism, which was grounded in a diachronic textual analysis of Buddhist literature from Early Buddhism to the Lotus Sutra. Ueki employed a nuanced interpretation of the terms 'male' and 'female' beyond mere biological characteristics, instead emphasizing their functional roles within society, which he referred to as the 'male principle' or Yang qualities and 'female principle' or Yin qualities. His investigation culminated in the conclusion that Shakyamuni's teachings make no distinction regarding women's enlightenment, thus asserting gender equality in Buddhism.³

In historical and cultural contexts, however, there have been times when women have not been treated equal to men in the

¹ Miranda Shaw. *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*. 1994. Princeton University Press. p. 4.

² Khandro Rinpoche. Thubten Chodron, Sylvia Boorstein (ed.). *Blossoms of the Dharma: Living as a Buddhist Nun*. 1999. North Atlantic Books. p. 171

³ Ueki Masatoshi. *Gender Equality in Buddhism*. 2001. Peter Lang. p. 191.

Buddhist tradition, particularly with regard to their role in the monastic community and their ability to gain respect and influence within Buddhist institutions. According to Diana Paul, the traditional view of women in Early Buddhism was that they were inferior.⁴ Rita Gross agrees that "a misogynist strain is found in early Indian Buddhism. But the presence of some clearly misogynist doctrines does not mean that the whole of ancient Indian Buddhism was misogynist."⁵ There are statements in Buddhist scripture that appear to be misogynist, such as depicting women as obstructers of men's spiritual progress or the notion that being born female leaves one with less opportunity for spiritual progress. However, in societies where men have always been the authorities and the ones given wider choices, a negative view of women might be seen as simply reflecting the empirical political reality. Furthermore, the religious literature is more likely to be addressed to men. Hence, we find the Buddhist emphasis on renunciation of sensual desires expressed in terms of the male's attachment to women more frequently than we find the reverse.⁶

According to Bernard Faure, "Like most clerical discourses, Buddhism is indeed relentlessly misogynist, but as far as misogynist discourses go, it is one of the most flexible and open to multiplicity and contradiction."⁷ Faure states that the ancient and mediaeval Buddhist texts and traditions, like other religions, were almost always unfavourable or discriminatory against women, in terms of their ability to pursue Noble Eightfold Path, attain Buddhahood and

⁴ Diana Y. Paul; Frances Wilson. "Traditional Views of Women". *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahāyāna Tradition*. 1985. University of California Press.

⁵ Rita M Gross. *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. 1992. State University of New York Press. p. 43

⁶ Linda Woodhead; Christopher H Partridge, Hiroko Kawanami. *Religions in the modern world: traditions and transformations* (Third ed.) 2016. Abingdon, Oxon.

⁷ Bernard Faure. "Introduction". *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*. 2003. Princeton University Press. p. 3.

nirvana.^{8 9} This issue of presumptions about the "female religious experience" is found in Indian texts, in translations into non-Indian languages, and in regional non-Indian commentaries written in East Asian kingdoms such as those in China, Japan and southeast Asia.¹⁰ Yet, like other Indian religions, exceptions and veneration of females is found in Indian Buddhist texts, and female Buddhist deities are likewise described in positive terms and with reverence. Nevertheless, females are seen as polluted with menstruation, sexual intercourse, death and childbirth. Rebirth as a woman is seen in the Buddhist texts as a result of part of past karma, and inferior to that of a man.¹¹

In stories like the renunciation of Nanda, leaving his wife, Janapada Kalyani on the day of wedding, from the Pali Canon, romantic love is generally perceived as part of attachment to samsara, the endless cycle of rebirth.¹² Susan Murcott has pointed out that Early Buddhist attitudes to romantic love and marriage generally reflect the Brahmanic ideals of India at the time... including the recent rise of the renunciate ideal and the associated decline in the status of romantic love and marriage.¹³

According to Peter Harvey "The Buddha's apparent hesitation on this matter is reminiscent of his hesitation on whether to teach at all," something he only does after persuasion from various devas.¹⁴ The ordination of women in Buddhism is and has always been practiced in some Buddhist regions, such as East Asia, is being revived in some countries such as Sri Lanka, and is newly beginning in some Western countries to which Buddhism has recently spread, such as the United States. As Buddhism spreads,

⁸ Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*. pp. 53–54

⁹ Gwilym Beckerlegge *The World Religions Reader*. 2001.Routledge. pp. 365–70

¹⁰ Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*. pp. 67–70

¹¹ Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*. pp. 78–81

¹² Radhika Abeysekera, *Great Male Disciples—Part B / 15*. Nanda

¹³ Susan Murcott. *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therigatha*. 1991.Parallax Press. p. 95.

¹⁴ Peter Harvey. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. 2004.Cambridge University Press. p. 384.

its prevalence in Mahayana countries grows in popularity as well despite the decrease in Theravada Buddhist nuns. As William Nadeau explains in his book *Asian Religions a Cultural Perspective*, "In the Mahayana countries, however, the nuns' order remains strong, particularly in Tibet and in Chinese speaking communities."¹⁵

The status of motherhood in Buddhism has also traditionally reflected the Buddhist perspective that dukkha, or suffering, is a major characteristic of human existence. In her book on the *Therigatha*, a collection of stories of women arhats from the Pali Canon, Susan Murcott states: "Though this chapter is about motherhood, all of the stories and poems share another theme—grief. The mothers of this chapter were motivated to become Buddhist nuns by grief over the death of their children."¹⁶

However, motherhood in Early Buddhism could also be a valued activity in its own right. Queen Maya, the mother of Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, had a certain following, especially in Lumbini, where she gave birth to him.¹⁷ Since Maya died some days after his birth, Gautama Buddha was brought up by a foster mother, his mother's sister Mahapajapati, who also had two children of her own. She became the first Buddhist nun. Both of her children, her son Nanda and her daughter Sundari Nanda joined the Buddhist sangha of monastics. The wife of Gautama Buddha, Yasodhara, was the mother of one son named Rahula, meaning "fetter", who became a Buddhist monk at the age of seven and Yasodhara also eventually became a nun.

In fact, in the Panchama and Chattha Vagga of the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Buddha himself speaks highly of several Bhikkhunis as well as civilian women, deeming them foremost in several fields, the most noteworthy of them being Mahapajapati Gotami, Khema, Uppalavanna, Visakha, Samavati, Kisagotami, and Suppiya, among many more.

¹⁵ Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women*. p. 74

¹⁶ Murcott, *The First Buddhist Women*. p. 74

¹⁷ Carvings, Temple of Mayadevi at Lumbini, Nepal

In Vajrayana Buddhism, in contrast to Theravada traditions, a sexual relationship with a consort is seen in a technical way as being a spiritual practice in anuttarayoga tantra intended to allow the practitioners to attain realisations and attain enlightenment. The union of tantric consorts is depicted in the yab-yum iconography of meditation deities. One of the attractions for women in Vajrayana Buddhism of following the path of a yogini rather than that of a bhikkhuni nun was the opportunity to practise amidst family life with a husband or spiritual consort and possibly have children. Also Yoginis, unlike nuns, were not obliged to shave their hair.

Buddhism's belief in understanding the truth of reality through practising spiritual development has been deemed beneficial to feminist theory, particularly when compared to other religions.¹⁸ These parallels are undergoing evaluation as religious understandings of feminism become increasingly scrutinised in society and popular discourse.¹⁹ Buddhist feminism has emerged as a movement that seeks to improve the religious, legal, and social status of women within Buddhism. It is an aspect of feminist theology which seeks to advance and understand the equality of men and women morally, socially, spiritually, and in leadership from a Buddhist perspective. The Buddhist feminist Rita Gross describes Buddhist feminism as "the radical practice of the co-humanity of women and men."²⁰

Buddhist nun movements in the last few decades have an organising emphasis on crossing racial and ethnic boundaries across language differences, tying opposing cultural viewpoints. One of the conflicting views is the cultural stance between Asian and Western values, with the West focusing on individual goals, fostering unique identity, versus Asian identity in connection to community. Certain Sinha 6 actions look to explore and connect Buddhist nuns, whose creation of a marginalised community in

¹⁸ <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/buddhism/womeninbuddhism>

¹⁹ Jean Byrne. "Why I Am Not a Buddhist Feminist: A Critical Examination of 'Buddhist Feminism.'". *Feminist Theology*. 2 .2013 pp 180–194

²⁰ Rita M.Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*.1992 State University of New York Press. p. 127.

response to opposing the androcentric order of Buddhism isolated them to their respective region and separated them from other places. As nuns were isolated and not interconnected around the world, the Sakyadhita, or "Daughters of the Buddha", was created with one of the goals to connect ordained nuns around the world.²¹

The essence of Western feminism fails to align with the female existence in Asian society as a whole, and therefore, one cannot hope for it to align with a concept so profoundly Asian in nature and origin as Buddhism. Rather, the egalitarian discourse of feminism becomes a part of the greater folds of Buddhism, sometimes in theory, and sometimes in praxis.

In light of the present situations, it might be worth mentioning that the Dalai Lama spoke at a conference on Women in Buddhism at the University of Hamburg in 2007:

... if the majority of world leaders were women, perhaps there would be less danger of war and more cooperation on the basis of global concern. I sympathise with feminists, but they must not merely shout. They must exert efforts to make positive contributions to society.²²

The mix of positive attitudes towards femininity with blatantly negative sentiment has led many writers to characterise early Buddhism's attitude to women as deeply ambivalent, while the modern and postmodern attitude to women, despite being debatable, has become mostly tolerant, if not accepting towards women and femininity in general.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND BUDDHISM

The relationship between Buddhism and sexual orientation varies by tradition and teacher. According to some scholars, early

²¹ Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*. 2004. University of New York

²² "A Summary Report of the 2007 International Congress on the Women's Role in the Sangha: Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Lineages– Part Four: Day Three and Final Comments by His Holiness". StudyBuddhism.com.

Buddhism appears to have placed no special stigma on homosexual relations, since the subject was not mentioned.²³

In the early sutras of Buddhism, "accepted or unaccepted human sexual conduct" for laypersons "is not specifically mentioned."²⁴ "Sexual misconduct" is a broad term, subject to interpretation according to social norms. Early Buddhism appears to have been silent concerning homosexual relations.²⁵

According to the Pāli Canon and Āgamas, it is not specified that same or opposite gender relations have inherently something to do with sexual misconduct,²⁶ and some Theravada monks express that same-gender relations do not violate the rule to avoid sexual misconduct, which would mean not having sex with someone underage, someone betrothed or married and who have taken vows of religious celibacy.²⁷

Within the earliest monastic texts such as the Vinaya, male monks are explicitly forbidden from having sexual relations with

²³ James William Coleman, *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. Oxford University Press 2002, p. 146.

²⁴ *GLBT in World Religions*, Thomas Paine Unitarian Universalist Fellowship". Archived from the original on 2010-11-23.

²⁵ Coleman, *The New Buddhism*. p146

²⁶ "Cunda Kammaraputta Sutta" [To Cunda the Silversmith]. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight. 1997. AN 10.176. Retrieved 2024-03-02 "Abandoning sensual misconduct, he abstains from sensual misconduct. He does not get sexually involved with those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their Dhamma; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another man"

²⁷ Ajahn Punnadhammo. "Same Sex Marriage": "The lay man is told to abstain from sex with "unsuitable partners" defined as girls underage, women betrothed or married and women who have taken vows of religious celibacy. This is clear, sound advice and seems to suggest that sexual misconduct is that which would disrupt existing family or love relationships. This is consonant with the general Buddhist principle that that which causes suffering for oneself or others is unethical behaviour. ("Unskillful behaviour" would be closer to the original.) There is no good reason to assume that homosexual relations which do not violate this principle should be treated differently,' Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacariya (1993). Uposatha Sila: The Eight-Precept Observance. *There are four factors of the third precept (kamesu micchacara)*

any of the four genders: male, female, ubhatovyañjanaka and paṇḍaka. Later, the Buddha allowed the ordination of women, forbade ordination to these other types of people, with exceptions to a few particular types of paṇḍaka.²⁸ The Buddha's proscriptions against certain types of people joining the monastic sangha are often understood to reflect his concern with upholding the public image of the sangha as virtuous; in some cases, this is explicitly stated. Social acceptability was vital for the sangha, as it could not survive without material support from lay society.²⁹

Some modern commentators interpret the word ubhatovyanjañaka as including those who are not physically intersex, but display behavioural and psychological characteristics of both sexes, such as a woman who is attracted to other women.³⁰ 5th-century Buddhist writer Buddhaghosa describes ubhatovyanjanaka as people with the body of one sex but the "power", or gender of the other. Leonard Zwilling argues that in this account Buddhaghosa does not in fact describe "hermaphroditism" but rather bisexuality or homosexuality.³¹ Janet Gyatso pointed out that Zwilling destroys his own argument that pandakas are homosexuals when he writes, "The Vinaya, in fact, goes so far as to

²⁸ Pandakavatthu section of the Mahavagga. 1:61, 68, 69

²⁹ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge University Press, 2000, page 390. Quoting Sponberg 1992, 13–18

³⁰ *Milinda Panha*: 'There are nine kinds of people, Nāgasena, who let out a secret that has been talked over with them, and treasure it not up in their hearts. And who are the nine? The lustful man reveals it in obedience to some lust, the ill-tempered man in consequence of some ill-will, the deluded man under some mistake. The timid man reveals it through fear, and the man greedy for gain to get something out of it. A woman reveals it through "infirmary", an alcoholic in his eagerness for drink, a eunuch (Paṇḍaka) because of their "imperfection", and a child through fickleness.'

³¹ Zwilling, Leonard (1992). "Homosexuality As Seen In Indian Buddhist Texts", in Cabezon, Jose Ignacio, Ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality & Gender*, State University of New York. p. 206.

distinguish sexual activity between normative males from sexual relations between a socially normative male and a paṇḍaka."³²

In other texts, the term paṇḍaka can include those born sexually indeterminate or with no sex, eunuchs, those whose impotence changes every half month, males who gain sexual potency by absorbing other men's semen, or spying on other people having sex. In modern contexts, paṇḍaka is sometimes alleged to include lesbians, gay men, and transgender and intersex people, although in ancient times, a man who sexually penetrated another man or a paṇḍaka was not himself considered a paṇḍaka.³³

Classical Mahayana scholars like Shantideva and Aśvaghoṣa considered non-vaginal sex including sex between men to be sexual misconduct. Shantideva based his views on quotes from the Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra.³⁴

However, most Mahayana teachings assert that all beings who correctly practise the dharma may reach enlightenment, since all possess innate Buddha nature. Enlightenment is considered achievable even in a single life.³⁵

In contrast, later texts, particularly Tibetan Buddhist writings, occasionally value paṇḍaka positively for their "middleness" and balance. The paṇḍaka in these Tibetan works is translated with the term *ma ning* — "genderless" or "without genitals".³⁶ The 13th-century Tibetan monk Gyalwa Yang Gönpa,

³² Janet Gyatso. Karen Derris; Natalie Gummer (eds.). *Defining Buddhism(s): A Reader* (One plus one makes three: Buddhist gender, monasticism, and the law of the non-excluded middle) . 2016. Routledge.

³³ Peter Harvey. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*, 2000. Cambridge press. p.416

³⁴ Cutler/Newland. *The Great Treatise on The Stages of The Path to Enlightenment*. p.220

³⁵ Sree Padma, Anthony W. Barber, *Buddhism in the Krishna River Valley of Andhra*. 2008. pp. 152

Gene Reeves. *The Lotus Sutra: A Contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic*. 2008. Wisdom Publications. p. 5.

³⁶ Nitin Kumar. *Exotic India Art. The Many Forms of Mahakala, Protector of Buddhist Monasteries*. 2005. <https://www.exoticindiaart.com/article/mahakala/>

who was one of the significant figures in the early Drukpa Kagyu sect, writes about *ma ning* as a balanced state between maleness and femaleness. Yang Gönpa describes *ma ning* as "the abiding breath between male exhalation and female inhalation" and "the balanced yogic channel, as opposed to the too tight male channel, and the too loose female one".³⁷

There are different views among Tibetan Buddhist teachers on acceptable expressions of sexuality. Historically, Gampopa (12th century), one of the main early masters of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, followed the Indian Buddhist tradition, starting with the 3rd-century Hinayana texts of Vasubandhu, and stated that oral and anal sex, whether with a man or a woman, are violations of the third precept regarding inappropriate sexual behaviour. Longchenpa, the 13th-century founder of the Nyingma school, citing the 3rd-century Mahayana texts of the Indian master Asanga, elaborated that inappropriate sexual behaviour also includes the hands among inappropriate parts of the body for sexual activity. In the same way, Gelug predecessor Je Tsongkhapa also adheres to such rules in his studies.³⁸

Various contemporary teachers of Tibetan Buddhist lineages, including the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, have offered understanding towards LGBTQ people while noting that same-sex relationships do not necessarily constitute misconduct for lay people. The Dalai Lama has maintained the views of Je Tsongkhapa when he "voiced his support for the full recognition of human rights for all people, regardless of sexual orientation," while noting that from a Buddhist point of view, lesbian and gay sex is "generally considered sexual misconduct."³⁹ In the most recent interview with the Dalai Lama on this topic (March 10, 2014), the Dalai Lama said

³⁷ *The Collected Works (Gsun 'bum)*, Yan-dgon-pa Rgyal-mtshan-dpal (Thimphu: Kunsang Topgey, 1976), volume 2 pp. 454, 457 (cited in Gyatso 2003)

³⁸ *The Great Chariot: A Treatise on the Great Perfection* by Longchenpa (1308–1363), chapter 5.

³⁹ Dalai Lama urges "respect, compassion, and full human rights for all", including gays, by Dennis Conkin, Bay Area Reporter, June 19, 1997.

gay marriage is OK provided it's not in contradiction with the values of one's chosen religion.⁴⁰

Sinha 10 Since the very essence of earliest forms of Buddhism was rooted in the ideals of renunciation, the hostility towards the sexually marginalised people can be understood. Even though later discourses have, to some extent, shown tolerance, acceptance towards LGBTQIA+ individuals in the folds of mainstream Buddhism still remains a distant dream.

DISABILITY AND BUDDHISM

The way Buddhism views disability can be comprehended by looking at the fundamental Buddhist beliefs in suffering, impermanence, and interconnectedness. In Buddhism, suffering is an essential part of human life and is brought about by attachment, desires, and ignorance. Disability, whether it be physical or mental, can be viewed as a type of distress because it may lead to discomfort, difficulty, and social isolation.

Since Buddhism accepts that all beings suffer from change — born, age, we get sick, and die, putting disability into it — every being will become disabled — it is a natural factor of human experience. So if the body is not the self, then the disabled body as is conventionally perceived also is not the self.⁴¹

In the book, *The Words of my Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rinpoche, the author states that the presence of a disability that impedes an understanding of the concept of dharma will prevent a person from being able to practise Buddhism.⁴²

⁴⁰ "Dalai Lama says gay marriage is 'OK' and anti-LGBT bullying is 'wrong' · PinkNews". Pinknews.co.uk. 2024-02-29.

"The Dalai Lama Weighs In On Same Sex Marriage | Dalai Lama Interview | Larry King Now- Ora TV". YouTube. 2024-02-29.

⁴¹ Lynne M. Bejoian." Non Dualistic Paradigms in Disability Studies & Buddhism:Creating Bridges for Theoretical Practice", *Disability studies Quarterly*, Summer 2006, Vol 26, No 3

⁴² Patrul Rinpoche. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher: A Complete Translation of a Classic Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*. 1998.Walnut Creek: Rowman Altamira. pp. 20–22.

Most Buddhists believe that bad karma, which arises from immoral actions, is the cause of disability.⁴³ Buddhists also believe in showing compassion towards people less fortunate than themselves, including towards disabled people, which is believed by Buddhists to help build their own good karma.⁴⁴ This has mixed consequences for people with disabilities living in predominantly Buddhist societies. In societies where Buddhism is the main religion practised, Buddhists with disabilities have reported that other people have condescending attitudes towards them.⁴⁵ The emphasis on compassion has been linked with a reluctance to encourage independence and social participation in people with disabilities.⁴⁶ In Thailand, the World Bank reports that because of Buddhism's teachings on showing compassion towards the weak, people often donate money to beggars with disabilities or charities that help disabled people. The World Bank argues that while this kindness can be admirable, it does not promote equality for people with disabilities.⁴⁷

Thus, although Buddhism does not endorse oppressing the disabled, it definitely creates a strong barrier that keeps the disabled exiled in the liminal spaces, and treats them as subhuman creatures, who are vessels for pity, and a means to an end for the able-bodied people to earn good karma, which is far from showing them the acceptance in the truest sense of the term.

⁴³ Mikel Burley, "Retributive karma and the problem of blaming the victim" (PDF). *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. 2012.74 (2): 149–165. doi:10.1007/s11153-012-9376-z. S2CID 170850794,2024-02-26

⁴⁴ Bhensri Naemiratch; Lenore Manderson. "Pity and pragmatism: understandings of disability in northeast Thailand". *Disability & Society*. 2009. 24 (4): 475–488. doi:10.1080/09687590902879106. S2CID 145215071.

⁴⁵ Matthew J. Schuelka. "The evolving construction and conceptualisation of 'disability' in Bhutan". *Disability & Society*. 2015.30 (6): 820–833. doi:10.1080/09687599.2015.1052043. S2CID 142548752.

⁴⁶ Matthew J. Schuelka, "The evolving construction and conceptualisation of 'disability' in Bhutan". *Disability & Society*. 2015.30 (6): 820–833. doi:10.1080/09687599.2015.1052043. S2CID 142548752.

⁴⁷ "Country Profile on Disability Kingdom of Thailand" (PDF). siteresources.worldbank.org. World Bank. 2002. p. 7.

CASTE DISTINCTION AND BUDDHISM

Buddhist sources contain discussion of the origins and nature of the Indian caste system, as well as some arguments against caste discrimination in both religious and everyday contexts. Hindu and Buddhist scriptures are both preoccupied by the four-varna system, while the distinctions between jati have held more importance in recent history. Further, the caste system was scarcely as pervasive or consistent in the Indian subcontinent as it is idealised to be in scriptural sources, due to varied geography, cultural differences between regions, and changing conditions throughout history.⁴⁸ As Buddhist sources have less ideological investment in the caste system than Brahmanical sources, they may provide historians with a less exaggerated account of the role of caste in the economy and society of ancient India.⁴⁹ Many Buddhist texts suggest that ancient Indian society was effectively operating on much vaguer distinction between "high" and "low" occupations, as opposed to an idealised varna system.

A key difference from the Brahmanical understanding of caste has been observed in early Buddhist literature relating to the Buddhist distinction between the real and the nominal. Two early Buddhist texts, the *Kalpadrūmāvadānamālā* and the *Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna* refer to enforced social distinctions such as the four varnas as *sañjñā(māntra)*, lit. 'nominal designations'. In general, early Buddhist philosophical sources conclude that caste distinctions are mainly imperceptible, and only the result of social conventions, determining nothing about the inner essence of the

⁴⁸ Sirpa Tenhunen; Minna Säävälä. *An Introduction to Changing India: Culture, Politics and Development*. 2012. Anthem Press. pp. 33–34.

⁴⁹ Uma Chakravarti. "Towards a Historical Sociology of Stratification in Ancient India: Evidence From Buddhist Sources". *Economic and Political Weekly*. 1984 https://www.academia.edu/21781975/1984_Towards_a_Historical_Sociology_of_Stratification_in_Ancient_India_Evidence_From_Buddhist_Sources_Economic_and_Political_weekly_Vol_20_No_9

people they refer to.⁵⁰ The Śārdūlakarṇāvadāna illustrates the nominality of the four varnas using the following allegory:⁵¹

Just as sand does not become food simply because a child says so when young children playing on a main road build sand pies and give them names, saying “This one is milk, this one is meat, and this one is curd,” so it is with the four varṇās as you, the Brahmin, describe them.

While Buddhist philosophy tends to deny the four varnas any inherent reality, the social processes behind their development are considered in some texts. For example, the Aggañña Sutta describes the first Kshatriya arising from a primordial, unstratified society due to the need for the community to enact punishment against the original crime of theft. It describes the origin of the other three varnas through similar myths focused on human drama.⁵²

In the Vasala Sutta of the *Sutta Nipāta*, the Buddha is on his alms round and encounters a Brahmin, who calls him an outcast and demands that he does not enter his home. The Buddha responds by reprimanding the Brahmin's understanding of caste and redefining vasala and brāhmaṇa respectively in terms of bad and good Buddhist conduct. He concludes that "not by birth is one an outcast; not by birth is one a brahman. By deed one becomes an outcast, by deed one becomes an brahman."⁵³ The idea that Brahminhood is determined by actions rather than birth appears frequently in Buddhist literature. Though this position rejects the typical birth-based caste hierarchy in favour of a deed-based view of social status, it does not strictly deny the validity of caste distinctions. Its purpose may simply be to defend the central role of karma in

⁵⁰ Vincent Eltschinger, *Caste and Buddhist Philosophy*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2012 pp 1-3

⁵¹ Eltschinger, *Caste and Buddhist Philosophy*. p 4

⁵² Eltschinger, *Caste and Buddhist Philosophy*. pp 6-8

⁵³ “Vasala Sutta: Discourse on Outcasts”. *Sutta Nipāta*

determining one's status, in line with Buddhist doctrine, rather than to advocate for a radical egalitarian restructuring of caste society.⁵⁴

In the Divyāvadāna, the Buddhist king Asoka is questioned by one of his ministers for "bow[ing] down to renunciants who come from all castes." The king responds that "at the time of a wedding, a marriage, one [rightly] considers caste, but not at the time of teaching the Dharma. For the causes of the practice of the Teaching are good qualities; good qualities do not pay attention to caste."⁵⁵ This is both a denial of the relevance of caste after ordination into the sangha, and an affirmation of its validity in the social affair of marriage.⁵⁶ The same position is repeated in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*.⁵⁷ In practice, the majority of the early Sangha came from the upper Brahmin and Kshyatriya castes.⁵⁸

As a culture that emerged as a means to defy, among others, the oppression of the caste system, there have been several times that it has forgotten its own core principles and indulged in several instances of caste discrimination. The emergence of Navayana Buddhism can be considered a direct retaliation against this. Navayana as formulated by B.R. Ambedkar and at the root of Dalit Buddhist movement abandons mainstream traditional Buddhist practices and precepts such as the institution of monk after renunciation, ideas such as karma, rebirth in afterlife, samsara, meditation, nirvana and Four Noble Truths.⁵⁹ Ambedkar's new sect

⁵⁴ Jonathan Silk. "Indian Buddhist Attitudes toward Outcastes". *Indo-Iranian Journal*. 2020. 63 (2): 128–187. doi:10.1163/15728536-06302003. hdl:1887/138378. S2CID 225688259.

⁵⁵ Silk, "Indian Buddhist Attitudes toward Outcastes". p.133

⁵⁶ Silk, "Indian Buddhist Attitudes toward Outcastes". p.135

⁵⁷ Silk, "Indian Buddhist Attitudes toward Outcastes". p.147

⁵⁸ Edmund Weber. "Buddhism: An Atheistic and Anti-Caste Religion?". *Journal of Religious Culture*. 2001

⁵⁹ Damien Keown; Charles S. Prebish. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. 2013. Routledge. p. 25. ISBN 978-1-136-98588-1., Quote: "(...)The Buddhism upon which he settled and about which he wrote in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was, in many respects, unlike any form of Buddhism that had hitherto arisen within the tradition. Gone, for instance, were the doctrines of karma and rebirth, the traditional emphasis on renunciation of the world, the practice of meditation, and the experience of enlightenment. Gone too were any teachings that implied the

of Buddhism rejected these ideas and re-interpreted the Buddha's religion in terms of class struggle and social equality.⁶⁰

Ambedkar called his version of Buddhism Navayana or Neo-Buddhism.⁶¹ His book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* is the holy book of Navayana or Dalit Buddhists.⁶² According to Junghare, for the followers of Navyana, Ambedkar has become a deity and he is worshipped in its practice.⁶³

Even today, as Navayana remains barely acceptable to mainstream Buddhism, one is left to wonder, just how much of the core anti-caste values still remain in Buddhism.

CONCLUSION

Although universal acceptance lies at the heart of Buddhism, more often than not, it stays limited to theory, while in practice, the act of perpetuating the marginalization of the already marginalised remains largely unchanged. While Buddhism, if rightly evolved, has the capacity to bring about unprecedented

existence of a trans-empirical realm (...). Most jarring, perhaps, especially among more traditional Buddhists, was the absence of the Four Noble Truths, which Ambedkar regarded as the invention of wrong-headed monks".

⁶⁰ Eleanor Zelliot. Knut A. Jacobsen (ed.). *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary India*. 2015. Taylor & Francis. pp. 13, 361–370

Damien Keown; Charles S. Prebish. *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*. Routledge. 2013. pp. 24–26.

Anne M. Blackburn. "Religion, Kinship and Buddhism: Ambedkar's Vision of a Moral Community", *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. 1993. 16 (1), 1–22

⁶¹ Christopher S. Queen. *Engaged Buddhism in the West*. 2000. Wisdom Publications. p. 23.

⁶² Christopher Queen. Steven M. Emmanuel (ed.). *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. 2015. John Wiley & Sons. pp. 524–531

⁶³ I.Y. Junghare, "Dr. Ambedkar: The Hero of the Mahars, Ex-Untouchables of India", *Asian Folklore Studies*. 1988. 47 (1), 93–121, "(...) the new literature of the Mahars and their making of the Ambedkar deity for their new religion, Neo-Buddhism. (...) Song five is clearly representative of the Mahar community's respect and devotion for Ambedkar. He has become their God and they worship him as the singer sings: "We worship Bhima, too." (...) In the last song, Dr. Ambedkar is raised from a deity to a supreme deity. He is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient."

egalitarianism the Western society could only dream of, it is often reduced to being a tool employed by the already privileged to cull more privileges, while alienating and silencing those who already dwell in the margins. However, with change of time, and with the evolution of Buddhism in several sects and schools throughout the world, many spiritual leaders and important figures hailing from the community have adopted a somewhat tolerant attitude towards marginal existence, but the realisation of the universal acceptance and egalitarianism that lies in the heart of Buddhism still remains a distant future

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An Insight into the Sikkim Himalayan Mask Culture: An Overview

Passang Tshering Lepcha & Sanghamitra Choudhury

Abstract

Sikkimese people are deeply bonded spiritually to the land and the environment. The magnificent art and culture of Sikkim are manifestations of its culture. The wearing of masks is one of Sikkim's oldest customs. People wear masks carved with images of numerous gods, goddesses, and animals made of wood during religious rites and dances. Furthermore, wooden masks depict serene, mildly angry, or animal expressions. Two enduring examples of Sikkim's magnificent and historic mask culture are the depiction of Mount Kanchenjunga and the state's famous mask dance. During the important ritual festival of Pang Lhabsol, the mountain Goddess Kanchendzonga, also called Dzo-nga, is called upon and worshipped as the protector and goddess of good fortune. This day also sees the breathtakingly gorgeous mask dance known as Pangtoed Chham, or warrior dance, performed by some Sikkim monasteries. This essay attempts to investigate the lesser-known details regarding the mask culture of the Sikkim Himalayas since masks have a spiritual significance for both the people of Sikkim and Mount Kanchendzonga. This is a mostly unnoticed place. This study provides fresh and original perspectives on the mask culture of the Himalayan state of Sikkim.

Keywords: *Dzo-nga, Mount Kanchenjunga, Pang Lhabsol, Pangtoed Chham, Sikkim.*

Introduction

Nestled in the heart of the beautiful Himalayas, Sikkim is a small state in northeast India, Known for its stunning natural beauty, including, cultural diversity, combining transcendence, tranquillity, and tradition. With its calm scenery and unspoiled beauty, this enchanted world, embellished with verdant forests, cascading rivers, an snow-capped peaks, enchants the spirit. Sikkim reveals its colourful cultural mosaic in this haven of peace, where the murmurs of age-old tales mingle peacefully with the sound of mountain breezes. A sanctuary of variety, it honors a rainbow of customs,

from the colourful dances of native people to the lyrical hymns resonating from monastic chambers.

With a total population of only 620,577 according to the 2011 census, it is the state with the lowest population in India. Lepchas and Bhutias, the state's indigenous people, referred to it as *Nye-mae-el-lyang* (Heaven or abode of Gods). The Nepalese referred to it as Sukhim, meaning The New House, and However, the state is known as *Beyul* (A Hidden Land of Ultimate Serenity and Denzong) in Tibetan legend, which denotes a land of rice. (Choudhury, 2016). Sikkim's natural beauty, cultural diversity, and resilient spirit are what make the state so alluring to tourists. Sikkim provides an unforgettable experience, whether you choose to hike through its beautiful woods, explore historic monasteries, or just take in the peace of its mountain panoramas.

Masks, when freed from the cliches that characterize them as hypocritical guises or camouflaged farces, represent the purity of the primeval people who really created these exquisitely beautiful and culturally significant symbols. The mask transcends all established geopolitical lines and is a legacy of this planet. Masks depict the many moods that become etched on our faces as mirrors of the different feelings and mental states that people experience. Experiences of emotions—love, rage, hate, wrath, joy, fear, disgust, and sorrow—transcend caste, creed, and nationality, and masks have been used by man to give form to the universal body language expressing these feelings. Mask are studded in the life and ritual of all monasteries in the Himalayan range encompassing Tibet, Ladakh, Bhutan and Sikkim. Mask dances are the part of the religious and cultural traditions and the holy scripts, which date back to the 8th century A.D. India's close neighbor, Bhutan, has fearful mask of animal spirits, which are codified, with very high aesthetic connotations of color and shape. The Mahayana tradition of Buddhism survives only in this country. Tibetan monks practice the religious Chham dance with great fervor. The Chham dance can take many forms but one of its most popular themes is

commemoration of Padmasambhava.¹³ The mask dance usually consists of two parts: the first honors and play homages to the eight aspects of Padmasambhava. The Min Yak House of Tibet is credited with starting the Namgyal dynasty,¹⁴ according to the Sikkim Gazetteer of 1894. The dynasty's leaders were descended from Tri Srong Den Tsen, the most distinguished of all the Tibetan emperors. Before their dynasty was established in Sikkim, they had ruled over the Chumbi Valley and the Teesta Valley for at least three centuries (Kharel et al., 2013).

An Overview of Sikkim's Mask traditions

For many years, masks have been an essential component of human civilization. Tribal groups value masks for reasons other than beauty. Masks serve a variety of purposes in the religious and social rituals of these aboriginal civilizations, such as those pertaining to funerals, disease healing, and fertility. Some masks even go on stage at happy occasions to play characters in plays or tell stories from old myths. Masks are also useful since they can be used as protective clothing in specific circumstances, such as during combat or bad weather. Tribal cultures have a complex relationship with masks, which emphasizes their strong spiritual and cultural ties.

A mask's primary objective is to conceal human anatomy by concealing the face entirely or just partly. Ever since the dawn of human society, masks have been an accessory worn by people. It originated at several historical sites across the globe. In this regard, other locations could be mentioned: "Caremedu Volp" in France, "Attamire care" in Spain, "Kundusi" in Tanzania, as well as Algeria, Libya, Sweden, Siberia, Canada, Peru, Egypt, and Bhimbetka in India. Among other things, people wear masks for sports, culture, spirituality, and defense. The English word "mask" dates back to the

¹³ The other name for Guru Padmasambhava is Guru Rinpoche. The expansion of Tibetan Buddhism throughout the Himalaya, including Sikkim, is credited to him as a pioneer.

¹⁴ Phuntsog Namgyal established the Namgyal dynasty, also known as Namgyal Chogyal, which ruled Sikkim from 1642 until 1975.

1530s and comes from the Middle French word *masque*, which means to conceal or protect the face. Human-made masks have been utilized in theaters, temples, folk ballads, dancing rituals, and other social situations. Masks they are created from an array of materials, ranging from fabric, clay, bamboo, and cane. (Saikia & Khanikor, 2022). Among the world's most remarkably diverse and intricate theatrical cultures are the Indian dance and dance drama traditions. The most vibrant landscape of dance and dance theater traditions has been created by the breadth of the geographical area, the diversity of natural circumstances, the multitude of races and languages, the intricate social structure, the complex religious beliefs and rituals, and the multiplicity of racial groups. With a large repertoire of myths, stories, and folklore centered around frightening demons, courageous heroes, and revered deities, India boasts an enormous variety of decorative, celebratory, and ceremonial masks (Guin, 2003).

The origins of the masked dance lie in a place where intense mystical and ecstatic experiences have the ability to split a person's consciousness into two halves. In this realm, the human aspect of this consciousness is released and detached, while the spiritual aspect is transformed into a new existence that is based on the physical senses. When someone wears a mask, they give up their own identity and adopt a new one. The dancer speaks and behaves as the spirit that the mask symbolizes. The mask is successful in hiding one's identity. A dancer uses it as a tool to set aside his human face and intensify the illusion. He takes on the face of another. By using its face, the seat of spirit allows another face to be revealed of a mask, allowing another spirit to enter. This second face, with all of its ornamentation and attire, is a dance mask (Kothari, 1980).

The origins of the Buddhist religion in Sikkim can be found in the mid-17th century, when Phuntsog Namgyal was crowned as the nation's monarch and given both temporal and spiritual authority in the role of Dharma raja. It is thought that Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche, visited Tibet and Sikkim in the middle of the eighth century and bestowed blessings upon the regions (Kharel, 2022). Because of this, Guru Rinpoche came upon the secret region of Sikkim on his travels, where he was confronted by numerous evil gods and spirits who tried to divert

and hinder him. Nevertheless, with his might, Guru Rinpoche was able to destroy some and subdue others. Ritual effectiveness is linked to his mythos (Cantwell & Mayer, 2008).

Religious celebrations, including the performance of masked dances called "*cham*," were held on a definite date in the majority of significant Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, regardless of the lineage with which they may be associated (Helffer, 1980). The ritual dances known as Cham, or at least its public versions, are one of the most well-known features of Tibetan Buddhism; however, not all types of Cham are displayed. For the convenience of European onlookers, it is typically conducted outdoors, in a courtyard of a monastery. The event is big, loud, and thrilling. By showing a group of individuals dressed in bizarre and magnificent ways and participating in activities that were practically impossible to comprehend for the early observers, Cham also perpetuates a number of European cliches about the enigmatic East (Samuel & David, 2016). Typically, the 'cham are held during the Tibetan New Year (lo-sar) or the monastery patron's festival. However, they can also be held to commemorate the birth and notable deeds of Padmasambhava, who is known for spreading Buddhism in Tibet, especially in monasteries founded on the non-reformed traditions of the rNying-ma-pa and the bKa'-brgyud-pa (Helffer, 1980).

The advent of Latsun Chhembo's in the middle of the 17th century, from which point on Lamanism developed into a strong hierarchical organization, is when lamanism first gained traction in Sikkim. As Lamanism spread over time and eventually took over as the official religion, countless monasteries were constructed all over the country (Joshi, 2004). Guru Rinpoche, accompanied by Maha Pandita Vimalamitra and other followers, visited Sikkim during the reign of King Thrisong Detsen of Tibet and other disciples and disu the kind thmsong Detsen. At *Tashiding*,¹⁵ the Guru empowered them and taught them the teachings of Lama Gongdue. Several local ghosts were transformed by the Guru into protectors of the sacred

¹⁵ Tashiding is revered as the holiest location by the Buddhists of Sikkim and is thought to be the centre of Beyul. Tashiding is situated more than a 100 kms from the capital city Gangtok, Sikkim.

land and its teachings during that period (Dorje, 1995). The land of Sikkim is blessed. The Tibetan King Trisong Detsan was forewarned by Guru Rinpoche in the eighth century CE that Tibet's sovereignty would soon be subdued. The King then asked the Guru to leave Tibet and look for other locations to maintain the Dharma (Angni & Amrita, 2021). According to numerous scholars, Sikkim was discovered by Guru Padmasambhava and named *Bayul Demojong*¹⁶ which translates to sacred land in the Himalaya.

Sikkim's culture has a long history that has been shaped by various tribes and customs. It was formerly a sovereign nation in the eastern Himalayas before joining India. Sikkim culture has been greatly influenced by the Tibetan invaders and the indigenous Lepcha people. Sikkim culture combines pre-Buddhist beliefs with Tibetan and indigenous influences. The 17th century saw the establishment of the Kingdom of Sikkim under the Namgyal dynasty, which was headed by Buddhist Dharma known as the Chogyals. Sikkim culture is a vibrant and distinctive aspect of Indian culture, characterized by its rituals, folk dances, and traditions.

Monks in Sikkim conduct the magnificent mask dances known as *Chhams* in the courtyards of their Gumpas (monasteries) to commemorate holy days. Though the dances' themes and styles vary, they all show how good ultimately triumphs over evil. Lama dances are not done for amusement purposes; rather, they are an integral aspect of prayer meetings. In addition to illustrating spiritual life, lama dance also showcases martial arts skills. The *Chhams* had their roots in a dancing cult that banished evil spirits and adversaries of humanity. The dancers start their performance slowly in big circular formations while wearing masks of dragons, animals, and birds that are brightly colored. They are dressed in luxurious satin and brocade outfits (*Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre*, n.d.).

¹⁶ Bayul Demojong, which means a land of hidden paradise.

Mask culture of Sikkim and the Kanchendzonga

Khangchendzonga National Park¹⁷ (KNP) is a protected region in the northern Indian state of Sikkim. Its altitudinal range is among the broadest of any protected area globally. A unique diversity of lowlands, steep-sided valleys, and majestic snow-clad mountains, including the third-highest peak in the world, Mt. Khangchendzonga, make up the 178,400 hectares Park, which boasts an amazing vertical sweep of over 7 km (1,220m to 8,586m). In the desolate high altitudes, there are countless lakes and glaciers, such as the 26-kilometer-long Zemu Glacier (Unesco, world heritage convention, n.d.).

In the physical realm of the Sikkimese people, spiritual happenings are unavoidable. Whether it is the subcontinent itself or home construction, space has the qualities of holiness attached to it. This includes mountain peaks, hills, rivers, lakes, caverns, rocks, etc. A vast array of topographical elements have spiritual qualities. Certain things are innate, while others are gained via connecting with a holy person or God (Chakraborty, 2016). Kanchendzonga, the highest peak in Sikkim, is considered a deity by the locals and is the focal point of their heterogeneous ethnic society's socio-religious structure.

The god of the country, Kanchendzonga,¹⁸ is a guardian whose compassionate vigilant ensures harmony and prosperity for the land from peaks and glaciers (Bedi, 1989). Rich oral traditions say that Mount Kanchendzonga is a gold treasure trove, that the summit that is still covered in a cool grey hue is a silver vault, and that other peaks are vaults containing gems, grains, and sacred texts.

¹⁷ Kanchendzonga national park is located in the state of Sikkim and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a National Park cum Biosphere Reserve.

¹⁸ Mount Khangchendzonga, also known as Mount Ghangchendzonga, is named after the Tibetan words gangs, which mean snow, chen, which means great, mdzod, which means treasure, and lnga, which means five. These five assets are acknowledged to be, salt, gold, and turquoise, Buddhist scriptures, weapons or armaments, medicines, and seeds.

After being initially subjugated by Guru Rinpoche, Kanchendzonga was designated as the keeper of the land and its riches. He was tasked with preventing anyone from visiting Sikkim's holy locations and spiritual treasures unless they were the right person to carry out Guru Rinpoche's intentions. It is stated that Kanchendzonga tested Lahtsun Chenpo upon his arrival from Tibet, and then came to him in the form of a white geese, granting him authority to open the doorway to the beyul. Ancient people think that the Nesol ceremonial text was created in these spots because the mountain god, commonly known as Dzonga, revealed them to them during his welcoming address (Namgyal, 1908).

The 15th day of the first month in the Lunar Calendar is dedicated to worshipping the Guardian deities of the nation, who are led by Lord Khangchendzonga [Gangs-can mdzod- Inga]. In Kabi Longtsok, North Sikkim, the Lepcha chief Thekong Tek and the Minyak prince Khye Bumsa swore a pledge of blood brotherhood, to which the Guardian deity of Khangchendzonga was called as a witness. This event is celebrated as a festival of unification. In front of the sculptures of togetherness in Gangtok, all communities celebrate this holiday with great gusto (Swami, 2006). According to legend, Chador Namgyal, the third ruler of Sikkim, started the celebration of Kanchendzonga after seeing a vision. The magnificent Pangtoed, the Sikkim worrier dance, which was created by Chogyal himself and is typically performed by young people from wealthy families as well as monastery lamas, is a feature of this celebration (Bedi, 1989). A Sikkim-specific event, the *Pang lhabsol* festival takes place in July and August at several monasteries, including Rabangla and Tshuklakhang. Within the monastery, the monks perform mask dances in addition to leading prayers. In the monastery, where Kanchendzonga is worshipped as the Sikkimese people's guardian deity, the Panglhabsol celebration features an amazing dance (*Sikkim Tours*, n.d.). At *Pang Lhabsol*, the mountain god is still called upon and worshiped to in order to keep guarding Sikkim. The celebration falls on the fifteenth day of the seventh month in the Tibetan calendar, which falls in late August or early September. Unique "chaams" are featured in this event, and the third Chogyal Chador Namgyal, who is rumored to have seen the warrior dance in a vision, choreographed the magnificent

Pangtoed (*G.O.S*, n.d.). *Cherim*¹⁹ is a twice-yearly event held in honor of the sacred mountain god of Kanchendzonga. It also symbolizes the devotion of nature, wards off evil spirits, shields crop from hailstorms, and protects men from illness. The majestic Kanchendzonga holds a special place in the ancient traditions of the Lepchas and is a prominent aspect of their religious life (Sharma, 2013). Despite the fact that Dzonga, as a kind guardian, is no longer believed to cause misery to people, maintaining cordial ties with him is valued by both bon and the experts in Buddhist ceremonies. If properly empowered, Dzonga, the head of all supernatural beings on land, can aid in subduing evil spirit (Balikci, 2008). Picture 1 shows the majestic holy Kanchendzonga from Temi Tea Garden, Temi south Sikkim.



¹⁹ Once a year before the monsoon, the 14 households of Linko village collectively perform the chirim ritual in honour of their protective mountain deity Kongchen Chu and his retinue of lesser peaks and sacred lakes. An altar is setup in the forest on a large stone where they propitiated to prevent illness such as fever and dysentery that are common during the rainy season. Each household is represented by the little basket containing offerings from its fields which is hung on a horizontal bamboo pole set above the altar. Each household contributes a chicken which is sacrificed in the course of the ritual and offered on the altar. Excerpts of the chirim are included in ritual journey (Balikci, 2010).

Picture 1. View of Majestic holy Kanchendzonga from Temi Tea Garden, Temi South Sikkim, 3 November 2023. Photo by researchers

Mask culture of Sikkim and Buddhism

Originating in the lower Ganges valley in the fifth century B.C., Buddhism quickly expanded throughout Asia, starting in India and moving all the way to the steppes of Siberia and the Sunda Islands (Prezyluski, 1934). The spiritual practice of Buddhism dates back over 2,500 years to ancient India. Siddhartha Gautama, also referred to as the Buddha—a term meaning "the awakened one"—founded it. Buddhism is based on the teachings of the Buddha and the route to enlightenment, or Nirvana, rather than on the belief in a creator god. Buddhism also had the unique characteristic of rejecting any birth-based claims to supremacy, as did the Brahmins. It rejected all social divisions among humans and proclaimed that an individual's greatness or lowness was determined by their karma, or actions.

In Tibetan, "chams" means "a dance." But its origins as a religious and social phenomena can be found in the creation of India, where performers have long portrayed gods and demons through the use of distinctive masks and costumes. The Tibetans were later introduced to the enigmatic Indian dances (Fedotov, 1986). Dharmapala and meditational deities are the two categories of deities. The deities worshipped differ based on the religion that the monastery adheres to. The patron saint Maha Guru Padma Sambhava, Sakyamuni Buddha, Drolma, Tsepakme, Jampalyang, Chenrezik, Chakna Dorje, Dorje Semba, Tadin, and Sangay Menla are among the notable deities that are yet highly revered in Sikkim. The Nyingmapas consider Guru Rinpoche to be the second Buddha and venerate him greatly (Bhutia, 2013). Dancers in the Cham adorn different Dharmapala²⁰ masks, each representing a different Guardian Deity. There are eight in total. All of the Guardian Deities are depicted with scowling angry expressions, large terrifying eyes and dishevelled hair. But central, and believed to

²⁰ Dharmapāla: a conflicted deity transformed into the defender of Buddhist dharma and defenders of institutionalized tradition.

be most important among them all is the Mahakala (Moothan, n.d.). picture 2 shows the statue of Padma Sambhava.



Picture 2: Offering in front of Maha Guru Padmasabhava during Guru Rinpoche's Trunkar Tshechu (The birth anniversary of Guru Padmasambhava in Ralung monastery West Pendam, East Sikkim). Photo by researchers.

The region of Northeast India is a hub for mask dances. The area is home to immigrants from Nepal, Tibet, Myanmar, and "mainland India." Consequently, as part of their indigenous religious beliefs, the community practices Buddhism from both the Theravada and Mahayana schools, with influences from magico-animism and bonism (Chakraborty, 2023). It is important to approach the experience of witnessing the masked dances in Sikkim with reverence and an open mind. More than just dancing exhibitions, the performances are spiritual rituals that hold immense value for the participants. Consider the monks for their dedication and self-control; they have spent years perfecting their craft and use their movements to channel holy energy. Observe the intricate details on the masks and costumes, which represent the powerful gods and archaic traditions they represent. The chanting of the monks and the steady beats of traditional instruments will take you to a world where heaven and earth meet.

Sikkim is known for its amazing mask dances. In ceremonial and festive contexts, chaams are performed. Despite the variations in form and subject matter, the triumph of good over evil is a common theme among these dances (*G.O.S*, n.d.). One facet of the rich cultural tradition of the Sikkim Himalayas is the vibrant and important mask culture. deeply embedded in antiquated religious customs and rituals. Mask dances have been a part of community celebration, spiritual expression, and storytelling for ages. In Sikkim, mask dances are usually associated with religious festivals, particularly those celebrating Tibetan Buddhism, which is quite popular in the region. These festivities, which include Saga Dawa, Losar Tibetan New Year, and Pang Lhabsol, provide opportunities for disguised performances to take center stage. During these events, Monk and dancers don celebrate costumes and intricately crafted mask representing various deities, demons, animals, and mythological figures.

In Sikkim, mask dances provide a singular and enthralling window into the rich cultural legacy of the area. These performances captivate the senses while offering a profound insight into the people's spiritual beliefs and rituals. You can enter the enchanted realm of the gods when you watch these dances performed at renowned monasteries or at monastic festivals (*TravelSETU*, n.d.). The mask themselves are exquisite works of art, meticulously crafted by skilled artisans using traditional techniques pass down through generations. Carved from wood, painted with vibrant colors, and adorned with symbolic motifs, each mask is imbued with spiritual significance and cultural symbolism. The designs often reflect the region's unique blend of Tibetan, Nepalese, and indigenous influences, creating a visual tapestry that is both captivating and deeply meaningful. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, masks play a crucial role in religious rituals and performances. They are believed to embody the spirits of the deities they represent, serving as vessels for divine energy and enabling performers to channel their power during dances and ceremonies. Through intricate choreography, music, and chanting, mask dancers enact sacred narratives, conveying moral teachings, invoking blessings for the community. In additional to their religious significance, mask dances also deserve a form of culture

preservation and identity. In a rapidly changing world, these age-old traditions serve as a link to the past, connecting contemporary Sikkimese communities with their ancestors and heritage. By keeping these practices alive through generations, communities in the Himalayas ensure that their unique culture legacy endures for future generations to cherish and appreciate.

The festival of *Pang Lhabsol* honors the guardian deity of Mount Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak. The celebration is a lavish event that includes colorful processions, customary dances, and intricate ceremonies. During *Pang Lhabsol*, masked dances are performed that powerfully portray the victory of good over evil (*TravelSETU*, n.d.). However, the mask culture of Sikkim Himalayas is not confined to religious settings alone. Mask are also used in various secular contexts, such as folk performances, social gatherings, and theatrical productions. In these settings, mask serve as a means of entertainment, storytelling and artistic expression, showcasing the creativity and ingenuity of the local artisans. Sikkim Himalayan mask culture is all things considered, a monument to the area's great cultural diversity, creative craftsmanship, and spiritual dedication. Mask dances continue to enthrall audiences with their beauty, symbolism, and timeless relevance in the modern world, whether they are performed in the hallowed confines of monasteries or on the busy streets of village festivals. According to Buddhist belief, people can identify gods in heaven through *Cham*, whom they will meet after death, when our soul in stage of *Bardo*,²¹ Following death, the soul is said to travel about the world for a while before taking on a new form. People can identify god in heaven and assist in choosing the correct path for a new birth through "*Cham*," since we come into contact with numerous gods and spirits at this time. Picture 3 exhibit monk performing kagyed dance in monastery premises.

²¹ The Tibetan term "*bardo*" describes what humans go through during the interim between death and rebirth



Picture 3 (A Sikkimese monk performing mask dance in monastery premises before Losoong, the new year).

Source: https://www.indianetzone.com/82/kagyed_dance.htm

Government Initiatives to protect and promote the mask heritage of Sikkim

There are more motivations behind mask wear at Northeastern events than just aesthetics. The cultural legacy of these communities must be safeguarded. Mask-making is a skilled trade that is passed down from generation to generation, helping to maintain these ancient traditions. They make and wear these masks as a way to honor their ancestors and maintain their cultural legacy (Arya, 2023).

Since Tibet is the birthplace of Mahayana Buddhism, or more specifically Vajrayana, Sikkim's monasteries share many artistic and crafts traditions with Tibet. Frequently, the general public fails to recognize the importance of the monastery art forms and the great amount of skill and labor required to create these magnificent works of art. Although a tormo, mandala, thanka, or ceremonial mask may not seem significant to the layman, the artistic value of these exotic art forms cannot be disregarded or undervalued (Choudhury & Choudhury, 2001).

The arts and crafts play a fundamental role in Sikkimese culture. Analyzing the beginning of Sikkim's handloom and handicraft industries is challenging. However, it may be claimed that since the dawn of human civilization, people have been creating traditions via the application of many methods and techniques, such as weaving. In the past, people in Sikkim used the raw materials that were readily available in the area to weave several types of cotton cloth. The ladies of Sikkim used their looms to produce a variety of garments for their own use. To add color to their woven garments, the weavers also employed natural or vegetable dyes (Sherpa, 2019). The majority of Sikkim's population lives in rural areas and has a long history of producing a variety of useful items. Some of Sikkim's most well-known handicraft items include *thankas* that depict different parts of the state, woolen carpets, canvas wall hangings, and *choksee* tables. The state offers a variety of handicrafts made from bamboo and cane. The most well-known locations in Sikkim for handloom goods and cottage industries are in Melli, Gangtok, and Namchi. The state's female population makes exquisite weavers. Both inside and outside of Sikkim, there is a great demand for the state's handcrafted papers and carpets (*IndiaNetzone*, n.d.). Making masks is a traditional trade in Sikkim. A wooden mask could represent a composed, slightly insane, or odd demeanor. The masks are carved from the robust, lightweight wood of *Abies spectabilis* (D. Don) *mirb*, however the wood must first be seasoned. The wood is divided horizontally to match the dimensions of the masks that will be produced. As such, a curved knife is used to shape a concave and convex component. The mask's surface is smoothed using sandpaper in order to get it ready for synthetic painting. A popular medium for creating lucky signs is wood (Sharma & Borthakur, 2010).

In Sikkim, crafting masks is another age-old skill. People make and wear wooden face masks depicting various gods, goddesses, and animals for religious ceremonies, festivals, and dances. Wooden masks can show expressions that are calm, slightly agitated, or animalistic. They are also utilised as wall hangings

these days. The robust light-wood known as "*Zaru Shing*"²²(Zaru wood), which is mostly found in Sikkim's high altitude regions, is used to carve wooden masks (G.O.S. *Directorate of Handicraft and Handloom*, n.d.).The artistic ability of Sikkim's woodcarvers is evident in their creations. Their ability and dedication to detail are evident in the intricately carved windows, doors, and ornamental components. Inspired by Buddhist iconography and nature, the designs radiate majesty and spirituality (Omatrav, 2023).

In Sikkim's art and craft stores, one can often find masks depicting either anger or serenity. In the monasteries, the lamas perform ceremonial dances known as Chham while wearing these masks. In the past, the lamas were the only ones taught this age-old skill in monasteries. But these days, you can also find a few locals producing these (Somkuwar, n.d.). In 1957, the Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom (D.H.H.) was established as a Technical Institute for Training and Production of Traditional Arts and crafts. When it was first released, it could accommodate 58 trainees. This Institute has grown over the years into a significant center for training and certification in the traditional arts and crafts of the State. Currently, the Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom, which serves as a hub for advancement, creativity, and action, supports Sikkim's traditional arts and crafts. The workforce, physical assets, and infrastructure of D.H.H. have all expanded significantly. Currently, 388 trainees are housed at the organization's 32 branch training facilities, which are dispersed around the State (G.O.S *Directorate of Handicraft and Handloom*, n.d.). The head office is in Gangtok, the capital city of Sikkim state. Multicasts, cane and bamboo crafts, woodcarving, carpet weaving, thanka painting, handmade paper, and soft toys are among the crafts in which it provides tuition. Years, depending on the skill, there is a training phase lasting two to four weeks. The craftspeople then have the choice of working on their own outside or in the manufacturing parts of the centre (Singh, n.d.). Along with funding the program,

²² Zaru shing is a lightweight wood that grows at high altitudes in Sikkim. It is strong and resilient, making it ideal for detailed carving and detail work. This trees are mostly found in the higher altitudes of Sikkim.

the government gives the students stipends. The state government often provides patronage to traditional arts and crafts, encouraging them while upholding the highest standards. The State Government created a traditional art school at 5th Mail, Tadong, to assist students who are interested in traditional art. In April 2012, the state government, through its Ecclesiastical Affairs Department, increased the stipend of students at the traditional arts school from Rs 200 to 700 per month for first-year students, and from Rs 300 to 900 per month for second-year students. The school had previously operated out of a temporary shed within the grounds of Chorten Monastery. On October 27, 2005, the school moved into a new two-story building.

The government of Sikkim is not only preserving traditional arts but also promoting sustainable livelihoods for artisans and enriching the cultural landscape of the state. Sikkim produces a great deal of environmentally friendly art and crafts; sustainability is more than just a trendy phrase here; artists are deeply rooted in their local communities. Most artists know how delicate the Himalayan ecology is, and many have reinforced their sense of duty by raising awareness of environmental issues over time. example of such dedicated artist like Mr. Jorden Lepcha, in recognition of his tireless efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of the Lepcha tribe over the past 25 years by weaving traditional hats known as *Thyaktuks*²³ and crafting bamboo, Shri Jorden Lepcha, of the village of Rubeyam Ram in the Mangan district of Sikkim, was recently awarded the prestigious Padmashri Award, one of India's highest

²³ The Lepcha tribe that inhabits the Dzongu Tribal Reserved Area in Sikkim is the only group to produce the *Sumok thyaktuk*, or Lepcha traditional hat, which is one of the oldest forms of workmanship. The Ru, or cane (*Calamus acanthospathus*), and Po-young, or local bamboo (*Cephalostachyum Capitatum*), are expertly weaved into the hat. Every component of the hat, along with its beautiful design, has a historical importance of its own. Later, when the Chogyal Dynasty ruled Sikkim, the hat served as the headgear for the royal soldiers known as the Sikkim Guard. In the tribe, it is required to wear headgear during worship sessions, marriage ceremonies, and other festivities (Lepcha et.al., 2012).

civilian honours. Picture 4. Shows Jorden Lepcha receiving the most prestigious Padma Shri award.



Picture 4: Padmashri awarded to Mr. Jorden Lepcha by President Droupadi Murmu.

Source: <https://assamtribune.com>



Picture 5 (Sikkimese youth preparing Mask and promoting culture further).

Sources: <https://www.loc.gov>



Picture 6: Popular mask used as modern home interior decor in Gangtok, Sikkim, 7 may 2024. Photo by researchers.

Conclusion

The state's Buddhist population views mask culture as one vibrant, alluring, and increasingly significant facet of Sikkimese culture. Despite an increase in tourists visiting the area, the Sikkimese people continue to place a high spiritual value on wearing masks. In the past, monks taught the indigenous Sikkimese people about their faith and customs through the usage of mask culture. This custom has been carried down unchanged through the decades. Nevertheless, Sikkim wooden masks are becoming more and more popular as modern home interior décor. People usually use the exquisite to provide a unique and exotic touch to offices, bedrooms, and living areas. The masks' elegance and artistic quality. There is still a deep spiritual bond between mask culture and the state of Sikkim. By means of initiatives like the Handicraft and Handloom Institute, the Sikkim government works to preserve and promote the creative and cultural legacy of the area. Travellers from India and other countries are drawn to Sikkim by their artistic marvels, which support the region's cultural heritage and boost tourism.

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1. Passang Tshering Lepcha is a Ph.D. Scholar enrolled in the Dept of Political Science, Bodoland University, Assam, India., Email. id: passangrongkup328@gmail.com
2. Sanghamitra Choudhury is a Professor and Head of the Political Science Department at Bodoland University, Assam, India. Her area of expertise is Peace studies and Area studies besides folklore and Identity issues. She has completed her Post Doctorate in Asian Studies from the University of Oxford, UK. Her email is schoudhury.oxon@gmail.com

THE MINIMAL LIFESTYLE OF MONKS AND NUNS IN THE VINAYA PIṬAKA

Pem Choden Sherpa

INTRODUCTION

A minimal lifestyle means living simply: spending wisely, owning less, and finding value in what we already have (Singh, 2022). A similar kind of lifestyle was followed by Buddhist Monks and nuns as taught by the Buddha. The Buddha himself also followed a minimal lifestyle throughout his life. He taught the monks and nuns as well as lay people that a minimum number of necessities were needed for survival to benefit all sentient beings but he did not support an excessive collection of luxurious materials.

Of the Four noble truths taught by the Buddha, the second noble truth contains the principle of a minimal lifestyle. The first noble truth is that life is *dukkha* (meaning dissatisfaction), while the second noble truth describes the cause of suffering: craving. We suffer because of our desires and attachment to material things. A central aspect of minimalism is the application of this learning. By collecting material things and clinging to them, instead of being as content as we think we will be, we suffer more. This ties in with another important Buddhist worldview: that everything is impermanent. If we become attached to or desire what is transitory (which is true of all our material possessions), we will suffer when such items are lost, stolen, damaged, or broken. The third noble truth in Buddhism states that suffering can be extinguished, while the fourth underlines the path to this cessation of suffering (enlightenment): The Noble Eightfold Path. This path includes the eight limbs or aspects of the Buddhist path to enlightenment. As far as this discussion of minimalism is concerned, the relevant part or aspect of this path is right living or perfect living (Woolfe, 2021).

ORIGIN OF THE MONASTIC COMMUNITY

During the Sixth Century BCE, Buddhism began to flourish in India. At that time people were unhappy with the expensive Vedic rites and rituals. Siddhartha Gautama, the prince introduced a new doctrine to save all sentient beings from sins and rebirth. Gradually

this new movement was supported by the Monks and Nuns and also the lay-followers. The first step to becoming a monk and nun was to abandon the lifestyle followed by the laypeople. The monks and nuns were to leave their families and homes and join the community or *saṅgha*. The first monastic community was established in the Deer Park Isipatana where the Five Bhikkhus were admitted into the community. It can be known that not everyone was allowed to join the community and become a monk or nun. People like criminals, robbers, debtors, slaves, and those suffering from diseases, and also the people who had received punishment for certain crimes were not allowed to enter the community. The reasons for not allowing them were to maintain peace among the members of the community and also not to create problems for the lay supporters. Hence this shows that the community was not open for all who wished to join and become a monk or nun.

ORDINATIONS AND PRECEPTS

There are two types of ordinations to be received by the monks and nuns after entering into the community i.e., the *pabbaggā* (minor) and *upasampadā* (major) ordinations. This ordination is given to the monks and nuns through the Preceptor known as an *upagghāya*. The Preceptor was to conduct the ordination ceremony in front of *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhuni saṅgha*. After receiving both the *pabbaggā* and *upasampadā* ordinations they became fully ordained monks and nuns and were known as *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī*. A monk who had only received *pabbaggā* ordination was called a novice monk or *sāmanera* and a nun was called *sāmanerī*.

After receiving the full ordination, the monks were required to follow 227 precepts and nuns were to follow 311 precepts. A novice monk followed only 10 precepts. The monks and nuns were to live their whole lives following all the precepts.

MINIMAL LIFESTYLE OF MONKS AND NUNS

The Buddhist text *Vinaya Piṭaka* which deals mainly with the rules for monks and nuns illustrates the lifestyle of monks and nuns. After embracing the religious life, naturally, there appears to be a stark difference between the lifestyle of monks and nuns regarding the

common people. In today's capitalist world, we have our mindset that to be happy and satisfied we need more materialistic things and earn more, we need different clothes bigger houses, more money, etc. But, the life of monks and nuns is different and they train their minds in different ways. They were taught to be satisfied with little. The Buddha considered that huge materialistic possessions were not necessary to achieve the final goal of monks and nuns like the attainment of *Arhantship* or to reach the four stages of liberation. So, the monks and nuns were to give more importance to spiritual and moral foundations rather than materialistic possession. They were always to live their life according to the precepts to make their spiritual life successful. Most of the rules were concerned about the discipline in the community and about the four basic requisites i.e., food, clothing, shelter, and medicine.

FOOD

The monks and nuns were to depend upon the lay followers for food as well as other requisites. They were to go for alms round to the houses of the lay people carrying alms bowls in order to get food. The begging bowl was to be kept simple and free from decorations. They were allowed to use only two kinds of bowls that were bowls made of iron and clay (V.P. *Kullavagga* V, 9.1). According, to *Nissaggiyā Pācittiya* rule 21, which comes under the *Pātimokkha* rules it is mentioned that the monks and nuns were not allowed to keep a spare bowl.

They were to remain disciplined while begging, by remaining silent in front of the donor's door and were not to look at the face of the donor nor try to find out whether the donor was a woman or a man. They were to accept any kind of food given by the donor irrespective of quantity and quality and were not allowed to ask for their favorite foods from the donor. This rule was mainly to prevent monks and nuns from becoming greedy for food and not to trouble the lay followers.

The monks and nuns were to take a meal only once a day that was before noon. As per the *Pācittiya* rules they were not allowed to take solid food afternoon and were only permitted to drink water and juice taken out from fruits, sugarcane, etc.

According to the *Pācittiya* rules they were also not allowed to take alcohol.

It can be seen from the above-mentioned rules that the monks and nuns were to remain contented with a small amount of food just to keep their bodies healthy and to focus actively towards the path of renunciation, they were required to eat only once a day.

MEDICINES

The *Mahāvagga* VI states that the *bhikkhus* were allowed to use medicinal foods. The monks during that time considered five types of food: ghee, fresh butter, sesame oil, honey, and molasses as medicines. The other substances used by them as medicines were turmeric, ginger, and other roots as well as Tulsi leaves. All kinds of fruits, salt, root, oil, and ointment were allowed, to be used as well as the utensils necessary for their preparation. The *bhikkhus* were also allowed to use *chunam* for curing skin diseases. It can also be known that the *Bhikkhus* were allowed to use cow urine to treat jaundice. (V.P. *Mahāvagga* VI, 14.7). They also used ashes of burnt rice to treat constipation. All those medicines to cure the sick *bhikkhus* were also given by the lay people. The *bhikkhus* were not allowed to store those medicines for more than seven days. (V.P. *Mahāvagga* VI, 15.10).

Hence it can be deduced that the health of monks and nuns was given importance. For health reasons, monks and nuns were allowed to consume different kinds of herbs, roots, fruit, leaves, etc. which were considered as medicinal and were allowed to be consumed even in the afternoon.

CLOTHING

‘The cloth in Buddhism is known as “*cīvara, kāśāya, kāśāva*” in the Pāli language which can usually be translated as “robe, clothing, wearing, dress” in English’ (Nanda, Paññā; Piyabhani, Phramaha Nantakorn; Mahatthanadull, Sanu, 2018, p. 58). The monastic robes worn by monks and nuns and shaved heads were the symbols of religious life.

According to *Mahāvagga* VIII, 1.34, during the first twenty years, the Buddha and his disciples wore a rag robe called *Pamsukūla Cīvara*. The use of such kind of robes was an

economical solution. *Bhikkhus* used to beg for food from the houses of lay people but they did not use to ask for clothes directly. So, they used to wear rag robes. Such kinds of uses of rag clothes also give us the example of the reuse and recycling of old clothes. The ascetics of other religions of that time used to wear clothes made from animal skins, feathers, grass, and tree leaves whereas some remained naked (Nanda, Paññā; Piyabhani, Phramaha Nantakorn; Mahatthanadull, Sanu, 2018, pp. 59-60). However, the Buddha did not allow the monks to remain naked nor to wear clothes made from animal skins and the bark of trees. Buddhist monks at first used to collect rag cloths from roads and cremation grounds which were thrown by other people. They used to collect those clothes and wash them and they made three kinds of robes: inner robe, upper robe, and double outer cloak out of it.

It was only after twenty years after the establishment of the community that the monks were allowed to accept the robes donated by the lay followers. But the monks still used the ragged robe. Until now, some monks practice wearing a rag robe called ‘*paṃsukūla dhūtaṅga*’. ‘*Paṃsukūla dhūtaṅga*’ means one who has a habit of wearing clothes made of rags taken from a dust heap (Nanda, Paññā; Piyabhani, Phramaha Nantakorn; Mahatthanadull, Sanu, 2018, p. 60).

Mahāvagga VIII, mentions that it was Gīvaka Komārabhakkā, a royal doctor who first requested the Buddha to accept the Sīveyaka cloth and make a robe that was of high quality. After that, the Buddha accepted this cloth and also permitted the *bhikkhus* to accept robes and pieces of material given by the lay people for making robes.

After the incident of Gīvaka Komārabhakkā’s request to the Buddha to accept the fine clothes, the rules concerning the monks’ dress were laid down. Once, they accepted these clothes from lay people, they were not allowed to wear them immediately, the clothes were to be cut into several pieces in the patterns of Magadha field and after that, it was to be sewn together to make robes. The reason for doing so was to reduce the commercial price of the fabric to and to make it unique from that of the common people. In that way, they transformed the clothes into robes. For dying the robes, the Buddha allowed six kinds of dyes. Those were dyes from roots,

stems or trunks, bark, leaves, flowers, and fruits (*Mahāvagga* VIII, 10.1).

Further, the monks and nuns were also not allowed to decorate their robes with gold and silver. Such prohibition shows equality among the community of monks and nuns. Besides that, they were not allowed to keep more than three robes at a time. These rules also set an example that they were minimalist.

Adding more about what other materials were forbidden to the monks and nuns shows that they adopted a minimalist lifestyle where neither the monks nor nuns were allowed to wear ornaments. The rules laid down in the *Kullavagga* forbade the use of combs, mirrors, or ointments to monks, as they shaved their heads completely. Monks and nuns were forbidden ever to let their hair grow longer than two inches and they were also not allowed to smoothen their hair (V.P. *Kullavagga* V 2.2. & 2.3). In order to enter into the community of monks and nuns the first thing to do was to shave their head and beard and to wear a monastic robe. These two evident signs of Buddhist monks and nuns i.e., shaved heads and monastic robes help us to understand that they were to remain away from beautification and fashion. The dresses of the monks were to be simple and the monks were to understand that the function of the robe was just to cover the body from heat and cold.

SHOES

In matters of wearing shoes also the monks had to follow the rules. Wooden sandals or mud shoes, were strictly prohibited: their pile would disturb the mind of the monks' and the wood would be in danger of harming small animals. (*Mahāvagga* V, 6.4) As for sandals made of bamboo or palm leaves, they were prohibited because they harmed plants (*Mahāvagga* V, 7.2). The Buddha forbade monks to wear decorated shoes, as well as multi-colored sandals, even when made of a single strand. (*Mahāvagga* V 2.1). Shoes made from animal skins like those of tiger panther, lion, and owl skins were also not to be worn by the monks and nuns.

These rules show that monks and nuns were to remain simple in appearance and far away from fashion even the shoes were to be simple.

DWELLINGS

The monks and nuns did not have particular houses of their own, they used to stay at the foot of a tree or in some public parks and gardens. During that time many people were concerned about the well-being of the Buddha and his followers like monks and nuns. Hence, some gardens were set aside for the Buddha and his disciples. Such, a garden was first given by King Bimbisāra, the Buddha's friend and lay disciple, a few weeks after Buddha's enlightenment (V.P. *Mahāvagga* I, 22.16-22.18).

The Buddha accepted the Veluvana *ârâma* as the first gift of property to the *saṅgha*. The Buddha further stated the *saṅgha*, after receiving the gift: 'I allow you *Bhikkhus*, to receive the donation of an *ârâma* (a park)' (V.P. *Mahāvagga* I, 22.18).

According to Uma Chakravarti, there were very important differences between the gift of *brahmadeya* lands to Brahmanas and the dana of *ârâmas* to the Buddhists monks and nuns. The *brahmadeya* lands were granted to individual *brāhmanas*, who then used them for agricultural purposes and were the personal property of the individual *brahmadeya* holders. The dana to the Buddhists monks and nuns on the other hand was always made to the *saṅgha* (Chakravarti, 1996, p. 57).

Thus, from the beginning, the new community owned some grounds but not dwellings. They used to live in such gardens during the night and the daytime, they travelled from one place to another to preach the doctrine. However later, the Rains Retreat period was established due to the complaints of laypeople, as traveling of monks and nuns during the rainy season was harmful to plants and tiny living creatures. For this reason, the Buddha made the rule that all the monks and nuns were to observe the rainy season retreat for four months. After the establishment of this rule lodgings or *kutī* came to be offered and built for the monks and nuns. However, it does not mean that the monks were allowed to build buildings and houses of their own. These *kutī* were built by the laypeople and were only for temporary use. After the end of the rainy season, the monks and nuns dismantled the cells and huts and resumed traveling.

Later the community residences were built, *Kullavagga* VI, mentions that many rich merchants and kings used to support the Buddha and his community of monks during that time, they donated

lands and build monasteries for the monks and nuns to live. It also became a centre for studying. Monks and nuns were not allowed to build their living places themselves and also did not own the dwellings personally the dwellings in which they were allowed to live were not given to the individuals privately but were open to all.

All the monasteries were constructed in a peaceful atmosphere where it was possible to meditate for the monks and also easily accessible for the common people to meet the Buddha and his disciples. They had the right to live in any place owned by the association if there was a room. They also had the right to use the furniture, but since it was public property, they had to be careful. But it must also be known that no monk or nun was allowed to reserve a dwelling place and live permanently in the monasteries. Only the old monks who were not able to travel were allowed to live in the monasteries and also the monks who had the duty to look for the accommodation of the monks were allowed to live permanently in the monasteries. Other monks had to resume traveling after staying for certain months or days to preach and also to learn themselves.

Therefore, it is clear that even if they have a monastery, monks still do not have a perpetual abode. The monasteries as well as the furniture available in the monasteries were the joint property of all the community of monks or the nun's community and it was not allowed to transfer by the individual monk or a nun. Hence it is evident here that monks and nuns lived a community life without owning any kinds of property or expensive material possessions and monks and nuns' life can be regarded as a minimal lifestyle.

FURNITURE

Kullavagga VI deals with rules regarding the types of equipment that monks and nuns are allowed to use. According to the rules, monks and nuns are forbidden to use large beds or chairs with legs higher than eight inches and must be cut down to a lower height. (V.P. *Kullavagga* VI, 2.5). Similarly hides of animal skins for lodging purposes were also not allowed to be used and also all the luxurious types of blankets and other materials needed for lodging were not allowed, all these materials were to be simple. Hence from

the rules regarding the use of Furniture, we can understand how monks and nuns were to live a simple life.

MONEY

Monks and nuns were allowed to receive material goods like clothes and other necessities but they were not allowed to ask for money or accept money. Later when the number of members in the community increased, it became necessary to find new solutions to meet the basic needs of the community. So, a group of common people was appointed to help the monks with the money known as *Kappiya kāraka*’ (Wijayaratna, 1990, p. 79). *Kappiya Kāraka*’s responsibility was to provide for the monks and nuns according to their needs. The other lay followers left monetary gifts of monks to *Kappiya Kāraka* and he took care of everything. The monks could receive things prepared by *Kappiya Kāraka* with money given by his followers. In this way, the monks had no direct or indirect connection with the money received and it was spent by the *Kappiya kāraka* thus the monks refrained from dealing directly with money.

One day the Buddha preached to the monks and compared the four obstacles in religious life to the four paths of sunlight and darkness of moonlight. Clouds, fog, thick black smoke, and an eclipse threaten the light of the sun and the light of the moon, he said. Likewise, religious life is threatened by four obstacles: alcohol, sex, money, and immorality. One of these four obstacles is enough to scatter and destroy religious life (V.P. *Kullavagga* XII 1.3). The four rules related to this matter are clear: not only shopping, but spending money on clothing, food, and other items was also prohibited. These rules were designed to encourage monks and nuns to live a simple life forever.

Hence, it is evident from the above-mentioned rules about the four basic requisites to be used by the monks and nuns as mentioned in the *Vinaya* text, it can be said that the lifestyle of monks and nuns was minimal. They devoted most of their time and energy in the instruction of the *dhamma* and spiritual training (Payutto, 1994, p. 73). However, this doesn’t mean that they live in isolation permanently sometimes they used to spend time alone and meditate in the forest but not completely isolated beings as they

were the members of the community called *saṅgha*, they had to follow the rules of the community and also had responsibilities, duties, and rights. Though they had connections with society however they were not involved in economic competition. Their dependence on laity constituted a stable bridge between the Community and lay society. Lay people contributed to the Community's support; indeed, they assumed full responsibility for it.

IMPACT OF MINIMAL LIFESTYLE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Apart from maintaining the discipline of monks, these rules were also important in protecting the environment. As the Buddha taught the monks and nuns to be compassionate not only to humans but to all living beings from trees, plants, animals, and all the tiny living creatures. These rules which show how the monks and nuns were to follow environment-friendly manners will be discussed below.

From the *Mahāvagga* III which talks about the residence during the rainy season, we can understand that at first there were no particular dwelling places where the *bhikkhus* could live. They used to live mainly in the forests and public parks. They were always traveling from place to place during summer, winter, and also in rainy seasons to preach the doctrine. Lord Buddha himself was a 'Great Traveller'. Naturally, his disciples followed the example of the Buddha. They used to travel with their Master or with renowned monks such as Sāriputta or Moggallāna, sometimes they also travelled alone or in groups. When they were preaching the doctrine at different places many new followers were attracted to this new doctrine and many new members were admitted into the community. Thus, in this way when they were traveling throughout the year to preach the doctrine, they travelled even during the rainy season. People criticized them, according to the *Mahāvagga* III, 1.2:

“People were annoyed, murmured, and became angry, ‘How can the *Sakyaputtiya Samanas* go on their travels alike during winter, summer, and the rainy season? They crush the green herbs, they hurt vegetable life, they destroy the life of many small living things.

Shall the ascetics who belong to Tittiya schools, whose doctrine is ill-preached, retire during the rainy season and arrange places for themselves to live in? shall the birds make their nests on the summits of the trees, retire during the rainy season, arrange themselves places to live in; and yet the Sakyaputtiya Samanas go on their travels alike during winter, summer, and the rainy season, crushing the green herbs hurting vegetable life, and destroying the life of many small things?” (V.P. *Mahāvagga* III, 1.2).

As a consequence, the Buddha instructed the *bhikkhus* to stay in one place during the rainy season. Each monk had to observe the retreat and was obliged to stay for three to four months in one place, but they were not allowed to settle just anywhere. From the *Mahāvagga* it can be known that monks were to live in the cells which were built by the lay followers or themselves. These cells were made temporarily in the forest, by the side of a river, or at the foot of a mountain near a village or town. After the rainy season, the monks were not allowed to live in those cells, they had to take down their cells and resume traveling. This rule shows how the monks and nuns were to show loving kindness to even small living creatures and plants. By following those rules monks and nuns were able to save many plants and insects from being killed and becoming extinct.

The *Kullavagga* V 13.1, describes the water strainer as the primary requisites for monks. According to *Pacittiya* rules 20 and 62, a water strainer was to be used by the monks and nuns to save the small living creatures in the water from being killed mistakenly. The *Kullavagga*, also mentions other rules to be followed by monks and nuns to protect the living beings.

“He who comes back last from the village, from his round for alms, may eat if there be any food left (from the meal of the other *Bhikkhus*) if he desires to do so. If he does not desire to do so, he should throw away the leavings on the (ground at a place) which is free from grass, or pour them away into the water, in which there are no living things. He should put away the water, footstools, and towels used for washing feet, clean the waste tub and put it away,

put away the drinking water and the water or washing, and sweep the room where the meal was eaten.

'Whosoever sees a pot for drinking water or for washing water, or a chamber utensil empty and void, should put it in its proper place. If he is not able to do so single-handedly, he should call someone else, and they should put it away with their united effort, and silence should not be broken on that account.

This, O *Bhikkhus*, is the rule of conduct which I establish for *Bhikkhus* going their rounds for alms, which they are to observe therein (V.P. *Kullavagga* VIII, 5.3)".

Hence, it was forbidden for a monk to pour water that contains living creatures onto plants or the ground (Tu & Thien, Buddhist Approach to Responsible Consumption and Sustainable Development, 2019, p. 248). For protecting the natural environment, and keeping the environment clean the monks were also forbidden to urinate, defecate, and spit into the water or on green plants. These were the minor training rules to be followed by the monks. These rules show the monks' and nuns' concerns about the natural environment. It can also be understood that Buddha taught his disciples to be environmentally friendly, and he encouraged them to use natural products instead of products that may harm the environment. The monks were to protect and respect all living things, from small animals in the water to large animals in the forest.

In matters relating to personal hygiene also the monks and nuns were required to follow certain rules. In the *Mahāvagga* VI 9.2, it states,

I allow, O *Bhikkhus*, the use of *chunam* as a medicine, by whomsoever has the itch, or boils, or a discharge, or scabs, or whose body is ill-smelling, and to those in health the use of dry dung, and of clay, and of coloring matter. I allow the use, O *Bhikkhus*, of a pestle and mortar. (V.P. *Mahāvagga* VI, 9.2)

It can be understood from the above rules regarding the personal hygiene of the monks and nuns that they were taught to

protect the environment by using natural materials like chunam in times of skin diseases for cleansing their bodies instead of using scented soaps. ‘Although the use of natural resources is encouraged during the time of the Buddha, leather footwear embellished with lion skin, tiger skin, panther skin, otter skin, cat skin, squirrel skin, or flying fox skin is not allowed’ (V.P. *Mahāvagga* V, 2.4). This rule followed by the monks and nuns helped the different kinds of animals from getting extinct and could protect the ecological balance of nature.

Apart from these important rules concerned particularly about the plants and animals, which the monks were following. The overall lifestyle of monks had a positive impact on the Environment. As lord Buddha suggested the monks to be satisfied with less possession in order to sustain the environment and natural resources. But in modern times there is overexploitation of natural resources due to excess ownership of materials by human beings. In order to meet their unlimited desires people, consume excessively and this process has led to environmental degradation. Hence, we find that monks by following the Buddha’s middle path, used to consume moderately only the necessities like food, shelter, clothes, medicines, and also other small items needed in their daily life.

The monks and nuns were also taught to eat mindfully and moderately to protect the environment (Tu & Thien, Buddhist Approach to Responsible Consumption and Sustainable Development, 2019, p. 11). Regarding the consumption of food, in the *Mahāvagga*, the monks and nuns were to eat a meal only once a day. They were also not to ask about their preferences for food to the laypeople. Hence by eating a meal only once a day and consuming moderately the monks followed a minimal and sustainable lifestyle, which was helpful for the lay donors as well as the environment.

The way Buddha specified the monastic wardrobe was also helpful in protecting the environment. He allowed the monks and nuns to own only three robes to protect them from the cold, he knew that robes more than that were not needed. Owning too much of any

materials can be effectively linked with the overexploitation of natural resources. If, for instance, the crop needed to produce clothing is cotton, the factory needs electricity to create thread, to power the looms, and then more resources are needed to transport the cloth to another factory for sewing into garments, and then shipping the garments, often thousands of miles, to be sold. Hence, by owning fewer robes the monks and nuns reduced the net negative impact on the overall ecological balance.

Another important reason which shows the significance of the lifestyle of monks in conserving the environment is that monks were not allowed to own their personal buildings and houses. They lived in monasteries or cells and huts constructed for them by lay devotees. This also helped to protect nature. In modern days due to the extreme construction of bigger houses and buildings the carbon footprint is increasing continuously and causing environmental damage. The *Mahāvagga* mentions that monks were also forbidden from possessing luxurious lodging materials, made from animal skins to save the animals from being killed and that would have caused an imbalance in nature if all the *bhikkhus* were allowed to use animal hides as lodging materials (Tu & Thien, Buddhist Approach to Responsible Consumption and Sustainable Development, 2019, p. 26). All these rules show that monks used to live a disciplined and simple life and lived in harmony with animals and plants. There were many reasons why the Buddhist monks and nuns wanted to conserve the forests. Nature was an important source for providing various resources during that time. We can already get the idea of how Buddha had allowed the monks and nuns to get medicines from nature like from the tree's roots, bark, and leaves. All this shows that nature was important for them in obtaining materials needed for them in daily life. Another reason that the monks and nuns were to protect the environment was that forests were important in practicing meditation (Tu & Thien, Buddhist Approach to Responsible Consumption and Sustainable Development, 2019, p. 246). However, the main reason to protect the environment was for the overall benefit of all sentient beings and to practice non-violence and peace which are the main principles of Buddhist spiritual life.

By practicing peace and non-violence monks and nuns had many advantageous positions in their spiritual life. Though the Buddha preached his doctrine to all the common people as well as monks and nuns, the monks and nuns were the true followers of Buddhist ethical teachings. It can be known that peace was mainly focused by the Buddhist monks and nuns by the action of Ahimsā (non-violence) which was the main ethics to be followed strictly by them in their spiritual journey. This kind of lifestyle also had a positive impact on environmental sustainability. Modern-day lifestyles of high consumerism are causing destruction to the natural environment. The continuous use of the earth's non-renewable resources and too many uses of chemicals have led to the speedy destruction of the natural environment and the extinction of various species. Hence, in comparison to modern lifestyles, the minimalist lifestyle of monks and nuns had a positive impact on the environment. In the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, we can find guidance on how to simplify desires by using fewer resources, even in a modern and commercial society that is led by consumerism and materialism.

CONCLUSION

The lifestyle of the monks and nuns was a communal and free life, free from the responsibilities and worries of buying or renting a house, caring for children and bringing them up, managing the family income, and so forth. They adopted a lifestyle that required relatively few resources and were satisfied with bare necessities like food and drinks adequate for survival and protection from the elements in the form of basic clothing and shelter. Looking into the minimalist lifestyle of monks and nuns could help people in contemporary times learn about how to consume different materials mindfully and not to indulge in fashion and advertisement, which leads to too much hoarding of materials like clothes as well as other items. As there is no proper system for disposing of such collected materials which has led to environmental degradation. As Buddhist monks and nuns were always taught to reflect on the four basic requisites carefully similarly, we the public of present times should also reflect on the possessions that we own and lead a simple life by carefully identifying what we want and what we need. Their lifestyle also teaches us to consume both human and natural

resources responsibly without exploiting them to sustain them for future generations.

GLOSSARY

<i>bhikkhu</i>	- monk
<i>bhikkhunī</i>	- nun
<i>dhutaṅga</i>	- ascetic practice
<i>kappiya-kāraka</i>	- "one who makes suitable": a lay-servant of a monastery, who accepts gifts that monks cannot accept directly on their behalf
<i>nissaggiya pācittiya</i>	- offence requiring confession and forfeiture of what has been improperly obtained
<i>pabbaggā upasampadā</i>	- "Going Forth," the Minor Ordination (cf.
<i>pācittiya</i>	- offence requiring confession
<i>pamsukūla-cīvara</i>	- rag-robles
<i>pārājika</i>	- offense entailing defeat
<i>paribbāgaka</i>	- wandering religious mendicant
<i>parivāsa</i>	- (period of) probation
<i>pātimokkha</i>	- the Disciplinary Code
<i>piṭaka</i>	- Basket (of Scripture)
<i>saṅgha</i>	- the monastic Community
<i>saṅghādisesa</i>	- offence which must be judged by a formal meeting of the Community
<i>sikkhāpadāni</i>	- Precept
<i>upasampadā</i>	- Major Ordination
<i>uposatha</i>	- monastic ceremony taking place every half-month, at which the <i>Pātimokkha</i> is recited
<i>upagghāya</i>	- preceptor
<i>vihāra</i>	- monastery, monastic dwelling
<i>vinaya</i>	-discipline

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AN EXPRESSION OF PEACE THROUGH BUDDHIST ART: A STUDY OF THANGKA PAINTINGS

Ratnadeep Sinha & Sanghamitra Choudhury

INTRODUCTION

Art is one of the creative mediums through which one can visually represent one's thoughts. Tibetan Buddhist art reflects its uniqueness through its intricate details, variety of symbols, and deep spiritual meaning. Thangka painting holds an important position in the Buddhist Community because of its pictorial representation of Gods and Goddess that portrays the life of Buddha and his teachings on the Wheel of Dharma. The art of Thangka paintings is passed on to generations to maintain their authenticity making it an important part of their cultural art (Lazey Doma Bhutia, 2018). Art acts as the backbone of every culture and has substantial potential as a peacebuilding actor in conflict resolution as well as in post-conflict reconciliation. Art exceeds the barriers of verbal communication and plays the role of a strategic actor during the mediation and negotiation process. Art acts as a medium for collective reconciliation and has been instrumental enough for individuals to overcome traumas and attain peace of mind (Chambelland, 2018). The idea of peace has always been associated with Buddhism. Buddhism as a religion has played an important role when it comes to inner peace and world peace. *Ahimsa* (non-violence) is the very first step towards practicing Buddhism. If we study the images and statues of Buddha, it speaks a volume about harmony and peace. Buddhism has always given importance to meditation i.e. *Vipassana* as a way of attaining inner peace. One has to meditate and go deep down in their mind analyzing the little details of suffering. The origin of suffering has to be identified by the practitioner and to find ways to uproot it. Once the inner peace has been experienced by an individual it will reflect to the society and ultimately to the world (Sharma, 2020, p. 133). It has always been interesting to analyze the effect of art on human psychology and its role in developing inner peace in human minds. However, it is to be noted that even social influence also plays an important role

in an individual's mind. One has to understand Buddhist philosophy and the teachings of Buddha to decode the various symbols that are being used in Buddhist art. This paper aims to study the idea of peace in Buddhism and how peace of mind can be attained through thangka paintings. However, it raises a question, how does the thangka painting deliver the idea of peace? Is it the process or the visual outcome that inspires the idea of peace? This paper will aim to understand the process that is involved in making thangka paintings as both the means and ends of it begin with the idea of peace.

WHAT ARE THANGKA PAINTINGS?

Thangka paintings are Tibetan art in the form of scrolls depicting sacred objects. Some paintings involve a combination of embroidery and applique, others include tapestries of handwoven silk or woodblock prints. Tibetans consider thangkas as the embodiment of the enlightened one. Down the ages, thangkas played a crucial role in the formation and transmission of religious sentiments (Bantor, 1993). The literal translation of the word 'thang-ka' in Tibetan would mean 'recorded message' as each thangka conveys a message to the viewers. In making thangka, both organic as well as mineral pigments are used such as cinnabar, saffron, lapis lazuli, and other organic substances. Ancient style art of thangka is handed down from the master to the students that are preserved in esoteric graphs called *tiksays* from one generation to another. It is difficult to trace back the origin of thangkas but it has been noted that its first traces can be found in Nepal during the Angshuvarma's reign in the 7th century (Rai, 2020). Another Buddhist text narrates the story of the origination of the first thangka painting. It mentions that the tradition of thangka painting descends from India. During the Buddha's lifetime, his main patron, Anathapindika's daughter was sent to Sri Lanka to be married to the king thereby establishing a connection with the king of India (at that time, the king of Padma). The king decided to share the painting of Buddha with the king of Sri Lanka. As the artists were asked to draw Buddha, they could not figure out the exact sketch of Buddha because of the rays of light he emanated from his body or the *ushinisha* protrusion marks. It was only when Buddha sat near a

lake the artists saw the reflection and drew the painting of Buddha which is considered to be the first thangka painting or the origin of it (Rinpoche, 2014). Thangka painting is used as an instrument to teach the students by their masters depicting the life of Buddha and other holy figures. Thangkas, especially those that hold mandalas are used for personal meditation or to instruct the monastic students to help them go further in the path of enlightenment. Thangka painters are not just mere artists but a medium through which ancient knowledge is passed where one has to rise above their consciousness to convey the higher truth into this world. Thangkas were generally found in the form of scrolls used by Buddhist monks to carry forward the teachings of Buddha in pictorial form. In India, thangka paintings are practiced in Sikkim, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, Dharmashala, Lahul and Spiti. The tradition of thangka painting is still alive in eastern parts such as Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, parts of China and Russia as well as Mongolia (Rai, 2020).

The creation of thangka paintings involves an extensive and detailed process that the artisans have to carry out. It is a time-consuming process because it is considered a sacred art. The cloth or canvas that is to be used for painting is strung on a bamboo frame. It is then stressed over a wooden frame to make it perfectly smooth for painting. Before the commencement of the procedure, the cloth goes through a lengthy process of cleansing. Later, the surface is coated with a base pigment, gesso (animal glue), and chalk. The next step involves the rubbing of the surface to make it smooth for the application of further steps. The next step involves the outlining of the deity with the help of a pencil or charcoal. The artist must follow the exact iconographic grids while drawing. Each symbol in thangka has meaning therefore the artisan has to be specific about the drawings (Rishabh Rawat, 2021). Adding the right color is as crucial as the drawing because each color has a different meaning and only the use of the right color can show the true character in the painting. Fine and minute brushes are used to paint and outline the minute details of the thangka painting. The artist blends in the colors to create more depth in the painting. Because of its long process and intricate patterns, it takes a long time to complete a thangka extending from a month to a year. The colors that are being

used in thangka painting are made using vegetables and minerals (Yuna, 2021). Thangka paintings hold a religious significance in Buddhism. Hence, the purification step is given the core importance that includes certain rituals and prayers (Goel, 2021). As the origin of thangkas is closely related to religious values that uplift one's consciousness one has to be ready to inculcate religious values and practices in their lives.

BUDDHIST IDEA OF PEACE

The concept of 'peace' has been identified in various ways in academics. The idea of peace perhaps revolves around happiness, justice, health, and other human ideals. It is something that every person venerates and desires to have on an enduring basis. Peace is generally understood as the absence of hostility (Sharma, 2020). According to Buddha, the main cause of suffering is desire and ignorance and if one can get over it by understanding the Four Noble Truths and analyzing the Eight Fold Paths it becomes easy for one to attain peace of mind. The word 'Peace' or *Shanti*, does not only mean mere absence of war or hostility. It is *Shantisukha* that means peace is accompanied by happiness as well. If we apply the idea of peace to a nation it does not only mean that conflict is absent. It should also mean that the citizens are in the state of mind to develop their own social and economic well-being to live a happy life. Therefore, peace and happiness must go together. There cannot be true peace without happiness. Buddha taught about self-restraint, self-control, and tolerance which is also applicable in international politics to maintain peaceful and diplomatic relations among the nations. In the contemporary period, no nation can exist on its own and has become interdependent. Hence, the teachings of Buddha such as self-restraint and self-control have become necessary (Phanit, 2023). Buddha has talked about the universal law that was discovered that existed eternally. He gave importance to the universal law of Karma. According to him, "Anything can exist in relation to everything else" That means if the causes of its existence disappear, then it will no longer exist. At the macro level, Buddha sees the universe as a network of jewels that are interconnected and interdependent making it a web of nodes where one reflects all the other hundreds of nodes. This is what he called 'Indra's Net'.

However, each node contains another web of the universe and so forth with an infinite number of webs making it a universe. Buddha saw human beings as strings of processes who are governed by the principle of dependent origin. Every human being depends on other things and hence no one is completely independent. The Buddhist has a holistic view of peace. The Buddhist view of peace in worldview is a collective product that centers around the idea of dependent origination which highlights the mutual influence of all the elements present in situations (Yeh, 2006).

PEACE THROUGH THANGKA PAINTING

Art has a huge impact on mood and happiness. In a study conducted by researchers at Arcadia University in Glenside, Pennsylvania it was found that drawing reduced negative mood (Rai, 2020). As Pablo Picasso has famously said, “Art washes from the soul the dust of everyday life.” Humans rely on several creative ways to obtain peace, heal themselves, and analyze life. The relationship between art and inner peace dates back many years. Art can transcend the physical boundaries of language and communicate directly to our emotions. Art in any form be it painting or sculpting, the act of diving in art has profound effects on our mental health and emotional well-being. Art promotes peace through mindfulness. When an individual engages himself in a piece of art, one has to be solely absorbed in that moment, letting himself experience the depth and beauty of the work. In this process, we develop a sense of mindfulness that helps us reduce stress and anxieties lifting our minds to a greater sense of clarity and inner peace (Raj, 2024).

Thangka paintings require an extreme level of concentration, observation of details, and knowledge of Buddhism. A peaceful environment is instrumental to meditation and is necessary to create a masterpiece for a thangka painter. The making of a thangka painting requires the painter to be patient, relaxed, and focused. The process of thangka involves a ritualistic process that provides a calming effect to both the painter as well as the viewer. They concentrate on every detail of the Thangka art and meticulously capture the images and patterns. Buddhist monks have personal thangkas that consist of deities to which they devote their

minds for meditative purposes (Rai, 2020). However, the innate ability of an individual also plays an important role in imbibing the art of thangka painting. Thangka paintings include various imagery, symbols, and mandalas. Mandalas are circular designs that represent the interconnectedness of all things and the universe. This involves intricate designs that the artist has to draw. It is highly symbolic and is used in meditation practices as a tool to develop concentration and in the process merge with the divine energy³. These paintings have the power to cleanse the atmosphere inside a place. If we are stressed and disheartened or going through mixed feelings, these paintings help us heal. It has the potential to bless the heart and mind of the practitioner. Mandala thangka paintings are those artworks that evoke healing and spiritual development. These paintings have the power to destroy negative energy and bring in positive energy⁴. Thangka paintings are not just aesthetic Tibetan works of art, but they are also important aids in the practice of Buddhism. Offering and repairing thangka is considered to be an act of merit accumulation. Thangkas are placed on the wall, pillars, halls shrines, and temples as an object of visualization and worship (Sun Jia, 2021). Tibetan thangka paintings are beautiful and powerful mediative art. It acts as a bridge toward the divine and spiritual world that transforms the mind and helps in spiritual growth.

CONCLUSION

Thangka paintings revolve around the philosophy and teachings of Buddhism. Every component in Buddhist paintings plays a crucial role in transforming the painting into a medium to enlighten and convey a spiritual message to its viewers. Colors play an important role that helps in the meditation process with each color holding a different meaning. If we see the idea of peace in Buddhism it is not just the mere absence of war. It transcends beyond the political definition of peace. It deals with the human psyche and the factors that are responsible for the restless mind and suffering. Buddha has

³ Retrieved from the Atrang, The Art of Enlightenment: Exploring Tibetan Thangka Painting, April 10, 2023

⁴ Retrieved from Lucky Thangka, www.luckythangka.com

understood peace in both individualistic and collective ways. The idea of peace in Buddhism is a holistic phenomenon and is interconnected with each other just like the nodes of the universe. However, Buddha did not undermine the other factors that affect our peace of mind. Inner peace is important for an individual to develop outer peace and both are interrelated to each other. If we go back to the questions of this paper, we can see that art has a major role in developing peace of mind. Thangka painting acts as a major tool in delivering the idea of peace. Since it requires spiritual connection and an elaborate process to paint, one has to have the peace of mind to do thangka painting. The painter has to be calm before and during the process of thangka painting. And continuing this process will eventually help them achieve peace of mind. It is evident from the above discussion that the idea of thangka painting revolves around the concept of peace. Since the thangka painting holds spiritual meaning, it acts as a healer to the viewers as well. In recent times, thangkas have been used as a means to initiate meditation, especially for beginners to focus their energy and help them concentrate.

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FINDING “I”: ANATTĀ AND THE EMBODIED- ENACTIVE SELF

Rituparna Roy

You think you know how the world works? You think that this material universe is all there is? What is real? What mysteries lie beyond the reach of your senses? At the root of existence, mind and matter meet. Thoughts shape reality. This universe is only one of an infinite number. Worlds without end. Some benevolent and life giving. Others filled with malice and hunger. Dark places where powers older than time lie ravenous... and waiting. Who are you in this vast Multiverse, Mr. Strange?¹

You might be wondering why I have quoted Ancient One from the Marvel Comics-based 2016 American superhero film "Doctor Strange"? well, I believe this is the question that we all have speculated about at some point in life. Finding oneself seems the most difficult quest one can pursue because it always feels that we know ourselves so intimately and yet with a closer look it seems utterly enigmatic. Science and religion are typically viewed as antagonists to one another, and most discussions between them occur as in both sides are in ongoing debate. In this paper, I am inclined to uphold a harmonious approach to science and religion to find the “I”.

Researchers across disciplinary boundaries appear to have invested in contemplating Buddhist traditional teachings from various viewpoints. A greater number of optimists from multiple fields, including philosophy, cognitive science, physics, psychology, neurobiology, and others, are attempting to evaluate its applicability to current worldviews. As a philosophy of mind student, I have often wondered how Buddhist psychology is profoundly compatible with current issues in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science in general. This paper aims to understand selfhood as a criticism against any eternal and dualistic approach to self in the light of the Buddhist doctrine of “no-self” or

¹ Derrickson, S. (director). (2016). Doctor Strange (film). Marvel Studios

anattā²⁴² and the embodied-enactive³ notion of self. I am not the first person who is trying to find out the commonalities between the two and many eminent scholars have already done that or are attempting to draw such parallels. I am only joining them with my understanding regarding both of the fields. It is necessary to state a few disclaimers before moving on to the paper's primary topic. First of all, it's important to keep in mind that when I attempt to draw comparisons, it does not mean that any of the systems have weaknesses or are insufficient or I am attempting to validate one system against the other. Instead, I am aiming to see one discourse through the eyes of the other; they are both complete and sufficient on their own merits.

In Section 1, I will speak about how to interpret the convergence of these domains. More precisely, I would like to emphasize that this is not an instance of merging science and religion, but rather the integration of two distinct conceptions of self and consciousness that were formed over the years. In Section 2, I will explore the Buddhist concept of self through conceptual analysis while also connecting it to the Buddhist understanding of consciousness. The third section will address cognitive science's enactive-embodied approaches. The theoretical parallels between these two systems will be covered in Section 4. Section 5 focuses on the theoretical and practical distinctions between Buddhist psychology and cognitive science. In the final section, I will attempt to reflect on my thoughts on both of the talks as a philosophy student and an ordinary person on her infinite voyage.

THE PRELIMINARIES

Let's get started by making it clear that this integration should not be interpreted as an amalgamation of science and religion, but rather as the blending of the two distinct and over time developed ideas of self and consciousness before delving into an inquiry of the

² Edelglass, W., & Garfield, J. L. (Eds.). (2009). *Buddhist philosophy: Essential readings*. Oxford University Press.

³ Clark, A. (2008). Pressing the Flesh: A Tension in the Study of the Embodied, Embedded Mind? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 76(1), 37–59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40041151m>

connection between Buddhism and cognitive science. Teachings from Master Buddha were transmitted orally to succeeding generations through dialogue and ultimately developed as imprinted scriptures. Master Buddha was not in the traditional sense a metaphysician, but rather an ethical master and reformer. His ultimate objective was to free individuals from the agony of existence. However, it became obvious by following his path and teachings that even his ethical system incorporated significant philosophical ideas about the nature of the world and mankind. Anagarika Dharmapala, a scholar of Buddhism, presented Buddhism to the American audience in 1893. According to him⁴, Buddhism is a scientific religion that is in harmony with geology, astrology, radioactivity, and reality. It is free from theology, priestcraft, rituals, ceremonies, dogmas, heavens, and hells. It is a living religious tradition that continues to develop concerning the changing world within which it exists. Interactions with Hindu religious traditions drove the development of Indian Buddhism, whilst Daoist and Confucian thought systems played a major role in East Asian developments. In addition, communication among various schools of Buddhism encouraged the formation of progressively nuanced and explicated perspectives of Buddhism. As a student of philosophy, I also cannot view Buddhism as a religion rather I see it as an art of living and a code of conduct for a just life and preparation for ultimate salvation. The theories and teachings of Buddhism need to be addressed by contemporary perspectives if we want to consider it as a living tradition that may still have an impact on people's lives today. An increasing number of highly esteemed researchers are taking the newfound confidence in Buddhism's applicability to cognitive science very seriously. This article explores the philosophical foundations of this enthusiasm. But we need to remember that the purpose of comparing Buddhist psychology with cognitive science is not to submit to the supremacy of science, but to engage in an open discussion where Buddhist teachings about the mind's workings,

⁴ McMahan, D. L. "Modernity and the Early Discourse of Scientific Buddhism." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 72, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 897–933. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfh083>.

which might be grounded in phenomenology, may interact with cognitive science. On the other hand, it also must not be aimed at proving the authority of Buddhist doctrine over science. It must be interpreted in a harmonious way that can assess the relevance of traditional Buddhist teachings in the modern era and some new outlooks that are fundamentally distinct from those that cognitive science has already explored. This paper particularly looks at how Buddhism and cognitive science came to adopt the “self” as a philosophical centrepiece, as well as whether or not the embodied and active conception of classical cognitivism is consistent with it.

BUDDHIST NOTION OF SELF

The greatest overlap between Buddhism and cognitive science might stem from their obvious commonalities in the notion of “self”. Before going deep to find out the similarities we need to have a basic understanding of both of the disciplines. Buddhism undermines the notion of the existence of self. Buddha preached a concept termed *anattā* (Pāli), which is generally translated as “no-self,”⁵ which implies that the thought of having an eternal, independent self is a delusion, that is often misunderstood as a theory rejecting the reality of the self, is rather a method for achieving non-attachment by accepting that everything is transient and momentary. According to Buddhist philosophy, events arise as a result of an interlinked sequence of causes and effects. In Buddhism, dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is a fundamental concept. Each entity, occurrence, or function will be evaluated from a Buddhist perspective, with a focus on the dynamic patterns of interplay that cause it to arise, engage with the world around it, and eventually drift completely. The Buddhist account of the self must be interpreted within the context of this ontological commitment. The self is thought to be a construct rather than an essential being, originating solely as a result of intricate arrangements of various physical and psychological processes, or in amalgamation. This is not compatible with our everyday

⁵ I am not very comfortable with this translation because, in my opinion, it is unable to grasp the very essence of *anattā*. However, I have followed the general translation only as I do not yet know what could be the exact English term for it.

experiences. Things get more baffling if we try to contemplate that if am I not who I am, who has been experiencing things right now? But on a closer understanding of Buddhist psychology, it would be understood that it is not confusing at all. This is not an indication that the concept of the self is fictitious in any manner whatsoever. It seems more aligned with perceiving ourselves as an array of functions that work together to establish an exclusive pattern. The concept is that the self can be viewed as constituting an arrangement of processes or components that are actively connected, as opposed to being comprehended as a substance or a form of abstraction. For the majority of individuals, their immediate physical and, perhaps more importantly, mental instances determine their sense of self. It appears intuitively evident that I am the mind, and the mind is me. Cultivating a continuous sense of self is unquestionably important for subjective selfhood; nonetheless, Buddhist psychology shows that preserving a feeling of personal continuity and self-identity leads to constant unhappiness and interpersonal conflicts. Buddhist psychology's ultimate goal is a flourishing existence, which calls for an all-encompassing outlook on the self. Buddhism disregards the premise that there is a stable, enduring self, and though they accept suffering is caused primarily by lust, enmity, and illusions about what has been experienced and witnessed, but it is an inevitable part of life. Hence, asserting that eradicating human suffering and anguish would require freeing ourselves from our attachments to various objects, ideas, and cravings.

Buddhism has developed into a philosophically coherent approach to alleviating human suffering that has been adapted to various societies. However, its fundamental assumptions are firmly based on psychology, experience, philosophy of mind, and the relationship between pain and experience. The Buddhist theory of mind, which continues to evolve, is based on the teachings of the Buddha himself. Various unique perspectives have emerged from these attempts to understand the mind in a way that is compatible with the core Buddhist doctrine of non-self. Buddha defined the phrase 'I am conscious of something' as 'something is present to me'. As a result, awareness refers to the phenomena rather than the subject. Reality is defined as the presence of phenomena. It is

neither the subject's nor the object's presence. In other words, it only exists because something is present. One can think about consciousness (viññāna) as the presence of a phenomenon, which consists of nāma and rūpa. Nāmarūpa and viññāna together constitute the phenomenon in an individual. This very phenomenon supports consciousness and all consciousness is necessarily consciousness of something. It is inconceivable to comprehend consciousness on its own fully; instead, it must be defined as Name-and-Form-and Consciousness (nāma-rūpa viññāna). As the subject, consciousness always provokes in terms of name and form. The form, the meaning of the name, and its implications are interdependent. Alternatively put, nāma is the mentality that signifies sensation (vedanā), perception (Saññā), intention (cetanā), contact (passa), and attention (manasikāra). Rūpa, on the other hand, signifies substance or matter. Sensations are not necessary for matter to exist in the world; instead, consciousness is required for the various representations of the material world to exist. They are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are entwined. According to early Buddhist thought, consciousness developed about several unique occurrences. The existence of "I," who questions and doubts self-certainty, is acknowledged by Buddhism devotees, despite their constant inquiry into and doubting of the individual self. Buddha presents the middle way, which is neither a doctrine of no self nor a self, for this reason. As stated in the Laṅkāvatārasūtra,

The ultimate truth transcends the antithesis of self and not-self.⁶

The most important lesson imparted by Buddhism is the concept of the middle way, which highlights the notion of meta-self, or the "inquiring spirit," rather than any self or no self.

Buddhist psychology and teachings revolve around the core concept of non-self (anattā), which comprises existence and experience along with impermanence (anicca) and suffering (dukkha). Different Buddhist schools, however, hold varying views regarding anattā. Within the context of Theravāda Buddhism, anattā

⁶ Suzuki, D.T. (1952). *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. Beacon Press. P 51

mainly refers to the pudgalanairatmya or the doctrine of "no-self," which holds that no individual possesses an eternal, unchanging self. In contrast, the unique individual is made up of five ever-changing aggregates, known as skandhas (khandhas). On the other hand, in the context of Mahāyāna Buddhism, anattā mainly refers to the concept of "emptiness" (suññatā), which holds that no stable, eternal entity exists within any given phenomenon. Stated differently, nothing can exist in the framework of material reality. Anattā has always presented as an uphill battle and debatable thesis.

The notion of non-self, underlines a mind-body pattern comprised of occurrences and operations, including an individual's mental states, that can happen simultaneously or sequentially and are typically connected to the experience of a self. There is no recognition of the self as a distinct and eternal entity in the aforementioned design, which adheres to the laws of causality and conditions of nature. Buddhism holds that ignorance and distortions of reality, as well as a sense of ongoing suffering or dissatisfaction, are reinforced by craving, attachment, or aversion to any aspect of the self-pattern (one's sense of mine-ness or the sense of self as a permanent entity). It is considered an illusion to assume that one is both eternal and causally distinct from other individuals and the world at large. Buddhist psychology and teachings refer to this type of delusion as Sakkāya Diṭṭhi⁷ or "Wrong View" of "Me" and "Mine". This "wrong view" can be remedied by methodical psychological conditioning adopting meditation techniques that lead to mindful enlightenment. Buddhist psychology asserts that the functions of the mind-body (nāma-rūpa) pattern and the self-pattern as a whole are defined by emptiness (suññatā), or the lack of intrinsic existence, which is intimately associated with the idea of no- -self. Buddhist psychology does acknowledge that in everyday human experience, the mind-body pattern and its constituent processes can be erroneously connected with a self to which we adhere in an attachment. This is because such processes and the

⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, ed. (2000). *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*. Pariyatti Publishing.

pattern are interpreted as existing "without self", that is, as lacking an agent or subject who regulates all of the components.

FIVE AGGREGATES AND THEIR RELATION TO THE SELF

A valuable theoretical tool that may lead to exciting new avenues of potential mental exploration is the five-aggregate model of the mind, which provides a first-person account of subjective conscious experience. It is claimed that the five aggregates collectively constitute the fundamental elements of the "self"⁸. The first aggregate is material form, which includes the physical body and outside matter. Feelings, perception, volition, and sensory consciousness are the other four aggregates. In Buddhist psychology, each of the components of the self-pattern is connected to the five aggregates. The following categories of experiences can be associated with the five aggregates, which are five sets of mind-body phenomena that are identified with (1) physical and sensory experiences in various modalities (rūpa); (2) feeling (vedanā); (3) representations of knowledge (saññā e.g., categories, mental images); (4) thoughts and mental states (saṅkhāra e.g., emotions, motives, intentions); and (5) consciousness (vijjāna), defined as the awareness of a being and distinction of its elements and features. This framework depicts perceptions as being aware of an object's attributes, feelings as the subjective affective consequences of an experience, and volition as the reactive or purposeful aspect of the mind. Behavior that is physical, verbal, or psychological can all be considered manifestations of volition. When we talk about sensory consciousness, we mean being aware of something, which can include experiencing a sensory stimulus or being aware of a thought. Perception, volition, and feelings are the other three aggregates that can arise from sensory consciousness. Assuming reciprocal or circular causality, Buddhist psychology views these aggregate processes as impacting the mind-body system, the whole pattern, and each other in turn.

⁸ Bodhi, B. (Ed.). (1995). *The middle length discourses of the Buddha: A new translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (B. Nanamoli, Trans.). Boston, MA: Wisdom. P 27.

BEING AS CONSCIOUSNESS

The Yogācāra school of Buddhism provides a very comprehensive and in-depth analysis of mind, awareness, and psychology that is specific to humans⁸. This school is acknowledged by its doctrine of vijñāptimātra (Consciousness only). Yogācāra Buddhism has been one of the main Mahāyāna Buddhist schools. The Yogācāra School of Buddhism methodically established an idealistic theory. The Yogācāra reduces the external object to mere cognitions. They do not acknowledge the reality of them. The Laṅkāvatārasūtra affirms that external things are devoid of genuine existence. They are unreal and illusory, resembling dreams, blurs, paranoia, etc. It is an outgrowth of our consciousness. Vasubandhu believes that consciousness is what constitutes the true reality. According to the Chinese Yogācārin Xuan Zang, Yogācārins conceive of consciousness as ‘vijñāpti’ and this Sanskrit term ‘vijñāpti’ accurately stands for the act that reasons someone to know something distinctly. The most crucial development of this school is the ālaya-vijñāna (storehouse consciousness), developed by Vasubandhu. The ālaya-vijñāna is the core concept of the Yogācāra school and could be used to understand our cognition. This consciousness is the ground of all consciousness but cannot itself be known. It is both all of conscious experience and all of the essentials that influence or are influenced by that experience. The mind, which is the source of creation, and has no origin, existence, or demise as a subject or an object, is the ālaya-vijñāna. In this context, Dasgupta remarked,

“as the ocean dances on in waves so the ālaya-vijñāna is also dancing as it were in its diverse operations⁹.”

The only reason things seem as subject and object is illusion. All seeming manifestations of being and not being are deceptive. Nothing exists outside of consciousness or the mind because consciousness is creative. While consciousness is creative, this does not imply that it can produce actual things that are real. The world is constantly changing, and nothing is static. Every situation is

⁹ Dasgupta, S. N. 1969. *History of Indian philosophy*. Allahabad. P 43.

fleeting. Thus, there is no inherent nature in the physical objects. All things depend on relationships, which are solely a product of the mind, to exist. They reject the idea that there is an ever-present reality. Everyone is by default momentary in their eyes. They claimed that nothing exists beyond this fleeting consciousness, no soul, no matter. A graphical illustration of the soul can be found in the Yogācāra literature. Asaṅga denounces the soul, claiming it to be an illusion that is neither independent of itself nor dependent. Nothing comparable to the soul or ego as the only constant substratum is present in the world. Asaṅga detests the empirical ego, or the sense of "I and me," not the Absolute self. All the individual souls arrive and integrate into the Absolute self, which is like an endless ocean. The concept of a soul is really a fabrication of illusion. Ātman does not exist in reality. There is nothing beyond our consciousness. Self is nothing more than consciousness and ego combined. We merely differentiate the self-luminous consciousness into the subject and the object, the self, and the world, due to ignorance. Since consciousness is merely an expression of illusory existence, nothing objectively exists. The subjective consciousness ceases to exist simultaneously with the destruction of this erroneous notion. In the transcendental state, which is the very essence of everything, simply the pure consciousness or the pinnacle of reality remains. According to Dīñnāga, physical objects are dependent on the mind for their existence. These extraterrestrial things are how consciousness is organized. When internalized through introspection, such organization or coordination appears as an external object. Our imagination creates such connections, which serve as the guiding principles of understanding illustrating how empirical facts are related to one another. Since all relationships lack self-existence, they are all contingent upon the other. Both subjects and objects are internal and non-dual. Dharmakīrti reduces the external objects to sense data. No one can perceive or deduce physical objects other than from these sense data, which are merely sensations. An individual never perceives a thing as an external object. We only use our sense organs to comprehend things like tastes, smells, colours, and temperatures. The mind itself cannot detect external objects, and neither can sense organs. When their true essence is revealed to us, they evaporate into oblivion, leaving

only their cognitions behind. Yogācāra defines cognition as being self-luminous. It reveals itself and has self-awareness. No real distinction between the subject and the object exists within cognition. Given that cognition is one, it cannot be split apart. Our perception of the outside world is merely an expression of our cognition, which is itself an alteration of consciousness in general. Since we can witness that all creations are mental as a consequence of their existence, there is only our mind. Because human experience never accurately captures the true essence of things, the empirical understanding of the world as a whole which is derived from the five senses, is not accurate knowledge. The empirical reality is therefore not acknowledged as the real universe. The empirical universe is solely a manifestation of our consciousness as a consequence of existence.

According to Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, the Absolute reality is pure consciousness or Vijñāptimātratā. The objects of the external world are the self-formations of this pure consciousness, in its manifestations in the form of. The nature of pure consciousness is eternal, unchangeable, beyond all experiences, and even unthinkable. It is also the ground and essence of Ālayavijñāna. The Yogācāra School of Buddhism places a strong emphasis on achieving mental and physical emancipation from suffering. The reality of the external world happens as a result of the transcendental illusion. As a result, ignorance of the true nature of the world leads to misery. The only way to end this pain is to liberate yourself from the duality of subject and object by discovering pure consciousness. It can be achieved to cultivate this consciousness through the practice of meditation. According to them, Nirvana is a state of complete liberation in which the mind reverts to its original purity and consciousness.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF EMBODIED- ENACTIVE APPROACHES OF COGNITIVE SCIENCE

Compute-symbolic, connectionist-dynamic, and embodied-enactive are the three distinct theoretical strands that currently

contribute to cognitive science¹⁰. The computational-symbolic approach studies how the mind integrates information as symbols using basic rules and computations. The computational-symbolic approach is sequential in nature. In contrast to the computational-symbolic approach, the connectionist-dynamic method investigates the mind as a network generating periodic and specified behavioural patterns. They both believe that the mind is an apparatus that produces and adapts representations. The embodied-enactive paradigm, on the other hand, argues that cognition is the result of embodied individual activity. Within the last few years, embodied and enactive ideas have taken precedence in thinking about the mind. There are many different kinds of embodied and enactive accounts of cognition. Nonetheless, these methods centre around a common set of principles. The first¹¹ is a common resolve to reject the methodological individualism underlying classical cognitivism. According to cognitivism, minds are representational in that their contents are believed to impose themselves on only brain-based apparatus. Embedded and active cognition, in contrast to cognitivism, highlights the action-oriented aspect of the mind, employing a greater emphasis on embodied activity than on the functional synthesizing of environmental stimuli. When a subject's physical attributes, beyond their brain, have a substantial causal or physiologically formative contribution to their cognitive processes, that is when cognition is considered to be embodied. Enactivism is an approach that claims that dynamic interactions between a functioning entity and its surrounding environment give rise to cognition. The assertion posits that an organism's environment can be generated or impacted through the active engagement of its somatosensory mechanisms.

“Organisms do not passively receive information from their environments, which they then translate into internal representations. Natural cognitive systems...participate in the

¹⁰ Payne, R.K. (2004). *Cognitive Science: Contributions to an Enlarged Discourse Symposium Proceedings*.

¹¹ Hutto, D. D., & Myin, E. (2013). *Radicalizing enactivism: Basic minds without content*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press

generation of meaning...engaging in transformational and not merely informational interactions: they enact a world.”¹²

Even it is not necessary to propose internal mental representations to explain cognition (or at least the majority of kinds of cognitive activity), according to certain extreme theories of embodied, enactive cognition.

THEORETICAL PARALLELS BETWEEN BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY AND COGNITIVE SCIENCE

As I have mentioned earlier in my paper that self is probably the best example to relate both of the disciplines under one roof. Nowadays, there is widespread rejection¹³ of the idea that the self is a substance that is distinct from the body and the rest of nature (such as the Cartesian ego). As useful alternatives to generally Cartesian perspectives on cognition, could be Buddhism and enactivism. To progress beyond Cartesianism, the enactive approach to cognition and its associated method of neurophenomenology, in fact, clearly and methodically converge with Buddhist thinkers, concepts, and practices. A common rejection of this form of dualistic psychology is one of the areas of union between phenomenology, cognitive science, and Buddhist thinking. A non-dual field of perceiver and perceived is formed by consciousness, which refers to our phenomenological identity as bodies in the universe. Only within the arena shaped by the perceiver and the perceived, or grasper and grasped, as Yogācāra terms it, is the place where consciousness can be interpreted; Yogācāra recognizes this dualistic view as false. Parallel with the embodied-enactive approach, cognitive science has developed an

¹² Ezequiel A Di Paolo; Marieke Rhohde; Hanne De Jaegher (2014). “Horizons for the enactive mind: Values, social interaction, and play.” In John Stewart; Oliver Gapenne; Ezequiel A Di Paolo (eds.). *Enaction: Toward a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science*. MIT Press. pp. 33 ff.

¹³ This section is developed from the chapter Siderits, M., Thompson, E., & Zahavi, D. (Eds.). (2011). “Enacting the Self: Buddhist and Enactivist Approaches to the Emergence of the Self”. *Self, no self? Perspectives from analytical, phenomenological, and Indian traditions*. Oxford University Press.

integrated or non-dual explanation of human cognition, which can aid in avoiding erroneously instantiating dichotomy regarding the body and mind when discussing actions and the consequences that they have.

The concept of no-self is fundamentally a rejection of the permanent and substantive self. Based on this perspective, the expression "self" alludes to much more than merely the empirical person; rather, it refers to the person's significant, essential core—the inner self—whose existence serves as a framework for how the individual is defined. The Buddhist goal is, first and foremost, to establish a much more widespread and deeply ingrained sense of self. The expression "body, speech, and mind" is extensively termed in Buddhist philosophy to describe human's existential wholeness. The aforementioned perspective shares some similarities with the embodied-enactive approach to cognitive science since it focuses on the embodied component of human existence. Buddhism, embodied-enactive cognitive science, and phenomenology are all considered to possess an integrated or holistic perspective according to modern anthropological thought. According to Buddhist psychology, aggregate processes have a direct effect on the mind-body system, the overall pattern, and then each other. This aligns with the dynamic integration found in the self-pattern. Correspondingly, in an embodied/enactive understanding, other people and socio-cultural factors, as well as shifting conditions throughout the entire brain-body-environment system, dynamically influence the self-pattern. The Buddhist narratives reinforce the central premise that neither the self nor the aggregates as a whole can be found in any of these aggregates. When viewed alone, each aggregation is intermittent and ephemeral; then how can we combine them to create something enduring and cohesive? Rather, it is more correctly described as a constantly unfolding process, a pattern of contemporaneous or sequentially occurring phenomena and processes, and a possible link to self-awareness as a witness. An inquiry is concerned with the relationship between various aggregates. One might approach this from a wide range of aspects. For example, they could be structured in a reflexive framework,

nested or descending order, or in a more naturalistic configuration. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch stated,

Consciousness is the last of the aggregates, and it contains all of the others.²⁵

The five aggregates are typically portrayed as independently functioning pieces although they're naturally intertwined. Thompson employs the metaphor of a hand and its fingers. They all rely on one another for optimal functioning, though they are independent: perception requires feeling, feeling wants a physical foundation, and awareness must have both.

By referencing a specific Buddhist theory, especially the Abhidhamma, and coating it to a specific cognitive science concern, particularly the role of memory within the "binding problem," Lancaster²⁶ expands on the overall idea of integrating Buddhism with cognitive science. According to cognitive science, the binding problem is labelled as how information that first gets handled by various discrete segmental systems comes together to generate cohesive representations that are used for perception, memory, and action. According to this paradigm, associated memory models are activated through the process of preliminary sensory analysis, which is perception. One of those models is the self, or the "I," which is prompted in all situations that result in explicit memory that can be recalled consciously. Lancaster proposes that a "self-model" is allied with an object once it has been perceptually identified. Because it essentially tags the encoded memory in connection to the self-model that owns it, he refers to this attachment as the "I"-tag. Thus, "I" labelling is essential for explicit memory since it frames the memory about the active model, making it possible for a recall to befall rapidly. Implicit memory, on the other hand, is defined in this approach as memory devoid of an "I" identification. This is closely connected with the model of

²⁵ Varela, F., Thompson, E., & Rosch, E. (1991). *The embodied mind: Cognitive science and human experience*. MIT Press. P 67.

²⁶ Lancaster, Brian L. (1997). On Stages of Perception: Towards a Synthesis of Cognitive Neuroscience and the Buddhist Abhidhamma Tradition. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 4 (2), 122-142.

perception suggested in the “Abhidhamma”. According to Lancaster, “I”-tagging is comparable to the “slight” (paritta) object in the conscious process of cognition (vīthicitta) described in the Abhidhamma. “I”-tagging arises significantly later in the perception process, only when the impression is determined by other previously stored memories. This shows that the self-model gets strengthened and, in some cases, revised as a consequence of the procedure itself. In this framework, the self appears as an ever-rising, constantly evolving model that continuously alters itself in response to freshly generated sensory information. It is the model that connects the other models and conveys the idea of integrated agency.

DISAGREEMENTS AMONG THESE SYSTEMS

Buddhist views the attachment to such a self as the cause of suffering and offer ethical pathways, meditation, and further practices as countermeasures, along with logical reasoning from philosophy. Because of this, the primary reason is moral and a component of an extensive soteriological framework. Cognitive science, on the other hand, is devoid of both ethical propensity and salvation-oriented measures. Scientific theories stemmed from experimental research and largely constituted a denunciation of the Cartesian self. But that is not problematic for me. Because we need to remember that these systems are developed in different temporal-socio-cultural contexts. A lot of the statements expressed concerning human cognition by phenomenology, cognitive science, and Buddhism are formulated with the assumption that all people, regardless of their time or place of birth, are capable of comprehending it. For instance, complete enlightenment is achievable for all humans, or more generally, for all sentient creatures, according to Buddhist teachings. Cognitive science might offer further tools for evaluating and comprehending such consciousness-related assertions. Pascal Boyer, for example, applies cognitive science to religion and analyses hypotheses about human awareness by embracing the limitations of the theoretical architecture of both discourses.

FINAL REMARK

I often find myself standing in front of the mirror and speaking to myself. But does this imply that reflection or physical body is "I"? In conclusion, I may say that it could be the perceiver but not the "I". To be honest, I'm still not sure who I am. However, I do not consider this ignorance as a negative trait, but rather as the beginning of my quest to discover "I". because what is required at first is the acknowledgment that there is something we do not know and a thirst to find out about the unknown. Everyone, whether religious or scientific, is striving to figure out what "I" means. I believe Buddhism is not a religion, but rather a way of living for overcoming agony, and as a result, it has provided a meaning of "I" that is compatible with life. Cognitive Science, on the other hand, uses empirical methodologies to build the concept of self. The common ground, and possibly the most essential component of both schools, is their belief in universalisation, which is achievable by all sentient creatures. We are all worthy of that realization, and there is no hierarchy. We just need to take the right path. It instils hope in us. The hope is that we eventually discover the "I" that we have been yearning for all along.

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EXPLORING THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SOWA RIGPA AND BUDDHISM

Tashi Namgyal

INTRODUCTION

As a student of Buddhist studies and Sowa-Rigpa, I feel utmost pleasure to present my paper for this august seminar. Buddhist studies has been my passion since my childhood and so, I was destined to follow my dream through Sowa-Rigpa. I found in Sowa-Rigpa the profound meaning of compassion in first hand. The teachings and philosophy I have received has nothing but a huge scope in the field of Sowa-Rigpa. This field of knowledge is embodied with the core essence of Buddhist philosophy, and practices, i.e; to live a happy life in present and future. For a serious practitioner, Sowa-Rigpa can lead you to Buddhahood in one lifetime and generate the great compassion, for ordinary beings, one can find a meaningful life and help keep the world at peace. It is said in the Four Tantra (*rGyud Zhi*), “O friends, be sure to understand! Those who wish to remain healthy and those who wish to cure others’ illness must learn the Quintessential instruction on the Science of Healing; those who wish to live long must learn the Quintessential Instructions on the science of Healing; those who wish to practice Dharma, accumulate wealth and achieve happiness must learn the Quintessential Instructions on the Science of Healing, and those who wish to free themselves from suffering of illness and gain honours from others must learn the Quintessential Instructions on the Science of Healing.”¹

After the inclusion of Sowa-Rigpa under the ministry of AYUSH,² and the resemblance of a similar title (i.e; the Four Tantra³ translated in Sanskrit is ‘Amrita Hridaya Angashta Guya

¹ Root Tantra, Yuthuk Yontan Gonpo, Pg 11, translated version from the Institute of Tibetan Medicine and Astrology, Dharmasala.

² <https://www.ccimindia.org.in/sowa-rigpa/> (The Sowa Rigpa System of Medicine is included in the Central Council of Indian Medicine from the year 2012 as per Gazette Notification No. 2345 dated 16.12.2011)

³ The original title is ‘The Secret Quintessential Instructions on the Eight Branches of The Ambrosia Essence Tantra’.

Upadesha Tantra Nama’) Ashtanga of the Ayurveda, many think it is a part of Ayurveda and it bears non-Buddhist ideologies. In this paper, I will try to rectify the notion of Sowa-Rigpa being just an academic field and is different from Buddhism. The paper will focus mainly from the principles of the ‘Four Tantra’, the most sacred and popular text of Sowa-Rigpa. It will give you a glimpse of how Sowa-Rigpa is an integral part of Buddhism.

CONCEPT OF SOWARIGPA

Sowa Rigpa, also known as Tibetan Medical System (TMS) or Traditional Tibetan medicine Medicine, is a comprehensive system of healing and wellness that is being practiced in Tibet for centuries and other regions of the Himalayas. The literal meaning of Sowa-Rigpa is ‘the Science of Restoration or Revival. It is a part of the five major field of study (pancavidyasthanas), namely Study of language; fine arts and crafts; medicine; logic; and spirituality.⁴ Sowa-Rigpa is one of the five major fields of knowledge,⁵ it is a Tibetan term for ‘Cikitsavidya’. For a Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood, one has to excel in all the five major sciences which were taught in ancient Buddhist universities like Nalanda, Vikramshila and others. The term Sowa-Rigpa in Tibetan literally means the science of restoring or healing.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOWA RIGPA

The development of Sowa-Rigpa can be understood from three stages: 1. primitive oral lineage; 2. the period of Bon; 3. the period of Buddhist emperors. As evolution happened homo-sapiens also learned to survive while studying nature, they closely learned the way of animals, the early physician called it *bchad’byor*⁶. They discovered a method where inspecting the birds, beast, domestic

⁴ Sabda vidya, hetu vidya, cikitsa vidya, silpa-karma sthana vidya, adhyatma vidya.

⁵ There are actually ten sciences where five lesser sciences are included in the five major sciences.

⁶ Wangdu, Sorig Yuthok dgongs rgyan, 147-149, MiRig dPe bsKrun Khang, 1982, Tibet.

animals, and other animals like reptiles, they found benefits of herbs according to particular problems met by them.

Indigenous systematic medicines can be traced back to early Bon accounts, they mention of a Physician named *Dpyadbu KriShes (Chedpu Trishey)* from Zhang Zhung,⁷ he was said to be the son and a marvellous student of Miwo gShenrab, the founder of Bon religion. The birth year of Miwo Shenrab also varies from authors to authors: *gShenSton YeShes Blo Gros* dates him 1857 B.C.; authors like *Khempa Tsewang* believes him as a contemporary of Buddha Shakyamuni; some modern historians believe he was born on the Wood Male Rat year-1917 B.C.; the most popular belief among the Bon religion is that he was born around 18000 years ago;⁸ and few modern Tibetologists like *Karme Samten* concludes him as an influential but a mythological personality. Bon chronicles record numbers of medical text written during his and his son's period: the founder composed 'Five Great Tantra on Therapy', 'Nine Great Sutra', 'Eight branches of Instructions', and 'Twenty-one Thousand Limbs'; his son *Dpyadbu KriShes (Chedpu Trishey)* composed a text on healing muscles and bones called the *Tantra of Daryaken*.

Based on ancient Tibetan medical texts, the text seems to be compiled from various sources including Indian Ayurveda, Chinese medicine, and Greek medicine over centuries. Sowa Rigpa emphasizes the interconnectedness of body, mind, and environment, aiming to restore balance and harmony within the individual to promote well-being and prevent illness. It is recognized for its effectiveness in treating a wide range of health conditions and is still widely practiced. It is respected among Tibetan communities all around the globe.

⁷ The western part of the Greater Tibet, before King Songtsen Gampo conquered them.

⁸ gSorig LorGyus (*history of Sowa-Rigpa*), 18-21, Miriks dPesKrun Khang, 2010, Beijing

HISTORICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN SOWA RIGPA AND BUDDHISM

It is in 7th and 8th century that Buddhism flourished in Tibet and influenced every walk and life of the Tibetan people. During this period, Trisong Deutsen, the 35th Emperor commenced the world's first international seminar on Medicine, and called on the greatest physicians of that time around the world. The best physicians were given rewards and high positions in the court. In this process, many Tibetan physicians learned from them and made notes which were later compiled and published. Scholar, translator and one of the first seven monk of Tibet, Vairocana translated Somaraja from Chinese which was authored by Arya Nagarjuna. Later, *Rinchen Sangpo* translated the *Ashatanga* in the 11th A.D. and many other translators contributed to the development of Sowa-Rigpa. All these resources made the philosophy of Tibetan Medicine so rich, hitherto, it evolved as a major reason to become a perfect practitioner too. "If he has not applied himself to the five sciences, even the supreme saint will never arrive at omniscience. Therefore, he makes effort in those (sciences), in order to criticize and care for others as well as for the sake of his own knowledge."⁹

In Buddhism, the ancient Buddhist masters has laid a formula of three steps to reach its goal. The goal of Buddhism in Mahayana context is to attain enlightenment in order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering. Through these three steps of Sowa-Rigpa, one can validate that both yearns for the same goal; Sowa-Rigpa is an integral part of Buddhism yet unique to the Tibetan. The three steps are called as the ground, the path, and the fruit/result.¹⁰

To establish the Ground or Foundation of Sowa-Rigpa, it is based on healing the body and mind, of which it focuses more on the nature and healing of body (like Vajrayana¹¹) whereas the

⁹ Chapter 11, Investigation of the Dharma • Pg 141, 2004, The Universal Vehicle Discourse Literature {Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra} By Maitreyañātha/Āryāsanga, Co-published with Columbia University's Center for Buddhist Studies and Tibet House US

¹⁰ ཇི་ལམ་འཕྲུལ་ *Zhi, Lam, a'Drs*

¹¹ Vajrayana, turning the body as a pliable vehicle to attain Nirvana quickly.

Sutrayana schools mainly deal with disciplining the mind. Though Buddhism accepts that body is an aggregation of five elements as the Vedic culture, it advocates that only by the force of a consciousness does a body form in a womb, thus, the concept of (Bardo) the intermediate state arises. The *Abhidharmakosabasyam* mentions “and the Bhagwan stated that the six elements are the support of birth (janmanisraya), aging, sickness, and death in the samsaric existence.”¹² The chapter on embryology the ‘Four Tantra’ describes, “the causes of conception are the union of non-defective semen of the father and the ovum of the mother, the consciousness of the being, imprints of past karma with the force of afflictive emotions and the assemblage of the five elements. For instance, it resembles the fire produced by the friction of two woods.”¹³ Moreover, in the last chapter which is the chapter on entrustment of the Four Tantras, it concludes, “beings are made up of four elements, sickness is caused by four elements, the antidotes are also in the nature of four elements, body, sickness, and antidotes are connected by the same nature.” In Addition, *Sowa-Rigpa* also deals with five constituents, i.e.; wood, water, fire, earth, and air, which may sound similar like the Chinese medicine.

The second step, the order of the path refers to the path which will lead to its ultimate goal. The path to the *Sowa-Rigpa* is solely to practice the six *parjna-paramitas* constantly for the benefit of all sentient beings. In all methods and motivation behind practicing this profession is driven by the principles of Buddhist philosophy. As said in the ‘Four Tantra’, for genuine physician, he/he has to follow the three specific functions of a physician, “the specific functions of a physician include the view, meditation, and conduct: a physician should view all things as middle-way and not fall in extremes; meditate on the four immeasurable²⁷; and “the conduct of a physician includes actions that are to be abandoned

¹² Ornament of Abhidharma, Chim Jampalyang, English translation by Ian James Coghlan, chapter 1, Exposition of elements, published by The Library of Tibetan Classics

¹³ Explanatory Tantra, Yuthuk Yontan Gonpo, Pg 46, translated version from the Institute of Tibetan Medicine and Astrology, Dharmasala.

²⁷ Immeasurable love, compassion, joy and equanimity.

and those to be observed. Abandon the ten non-virtuous actions, insanity, nattering, unabashed, sinful actions and evil conduct. The perfections of generosity, ethical discipline, patience, and enthusiasm should be practised systematically.”²⁸

In a nutshell, there are three classifications of physicians: unsurpassed, extraordinary, and ordinary. The Buddhas are the unsurpassed physician because they see the cause and conditions of all sickness²⁹, and antidote for all; the clairvoyant sages are the extraordinary; while the best of all common physicians is the ordinary physician. However, a truthful physician should bear these six qualities, “the six qualities of an eminent physician are being intelligent, being compassionate, being committed, having dexterity, being diligent, and being proficient in social ethics.”³⁰ In the second quality, being compassionate emphasizes physicians to generate both the bodhicitta of aspiration and bodhicitta of engagement. The aspirational Bodhicitta as their preliminary practice, and the engaging bodhicitta as their actual practice. Motivated by Bodhicitta the actual practice consists of taking refuge, meditating on the four Brahmaviharas, engaging in the Six Parmitas, and the higher tantra practices.

The third step is the attainment of the fruits or the result. In Buddhism, the goal of practicing Dharma is to elevate oneself and others from suffering. Thus, after implanting those paths of a physician, the practitioner will achieve the transient and the ultimate fruits. The former being able to live a happy life in this current life while the ultimate result is obviously to reach Buddhahood by transcending from all afflictions and obscurations.

²⁸ Explanatory Tantra, Yuthuk Yontan Gonpo, Pg 298, translated version from the Institute of Tibetan Medicine and Astrology, Dharmasala

²⁹ The afflictions and karma

³⁰ Explanatory Tantra, Yuthuk Yontan Gonpo, Pg 297, translated version from the Institute of Tibetan Medicine and Astrology, Dharmasala.

INTEGRATION OF BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES INTO SOWA RIGPA PRACTICES-

However, it is said that the most influential Sowa-Rigpa text of all was the Four Tantra which was written by *Yuthok Yonten Gonpo* Sr. and later the *Yuthok Yonten Gonpo* Jr. edited and completed the present Text. It can be said that the Sowa-Rigpa according to the Four Tantra, is a branch of Vajrayana tradition, thus it used to be taught to only some eligible pupils. To learn the text, one had to receive the initiations, empowerment, and the teaching. Only then, can the physician reach the level of a true master and benefit all sentient beings. The foundation for both Sowa-Rigpa and Buddhism is the Middle way approach (Madhyamarga), “the view of a physician is to take all medicinal principles and their related approaches on the middle way, thus, avoiding the philosophical extremes of deficient, excess and adverse thoughts and actions. The view which perceives the middle way is the best of all”³¹.

SOWA-RIGPA AS A TANTRA AND RITUALS INCORPORATED WITH IT

The full title of the ‘Four Tantra’ is the ‘Secret Quintessential Instructions on the Eight Branches of the Ambrosia Essence Tantra’. So, from the title itself one can assume a connection between tantra and the text. The mode of tantra is to reach one’s spiritual goal in a short span comparing to the eons of lifetimes yet with tumultuous hardships. Each tantra of the ‘Four Tantra’ has its own unique qualities, manifestation, family of Buddha, and particular afflictions which transcend into primordial wisdoms.

Monks and laymen both indulge in evoking the eight medicine Buddhas who are all manifestation of Buddha Sakyamuni himself in order gain longevity and powers, one does not have to take physician as a profession to practise it. Especially, for Sowa-Rigpa practitioners, a Sadhana called *Yuthok Nyingthik* (Heart Essence of *Yuthok* is meant to be rigorously practiced if he commits to

³¹ Explanatory Tantra, *Yuthok Yontan Gonpo*, Pg 297, translated version from the Institute of Tibetan Medicine and Astrology, Dharmasala.

sacrifice his life for the Dharma. It is considered sometimes as a branch of Nyingmapa Tradition³² too.

MONASTIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PRESERVATION OF SOWA RIGPA KNOWLEDGE

The first Sowa-Rigpa institute was said to be Kongpo Menlung, built in Kongpo, south-west of Tibet, which means valley of medicine. Later, the knowledge was preserved mostly through the father to son teaching tradition. Subsequently, the teacher gave the teachings to few capable selected students; it was highly a patriarchal custom. During the 17th century, Desi Sangye Gyatso, the regent of that time in the court of His Holiness the Great Fifth Dalai lama, constructed Chagpori, a monastery where monks can learn Sowa-Rigpa; he was himself a great physician, a scholar and wrote many commentaries on different topics. Many great monasteries also allowed their monks to study, such is the Palpung Sherabling which has its exile branch in the foothills of Himachal Pradesh. Other than the 'Four Tantra', if we explore through the texts of Sowa-Rigpa, most of them are either written or translated by highly learned monks. It was common that the ancient Tibetan translators were scholars, poets, and yogis at the same time. They learned and passed their knowledge to their sons, and students of which many were monks. The monks were masters in Buddhist philosophy as well in medicine and astrology, and other subjects; so, they wrote commentaries, and journals from their experiences.

SOWA RIGPA'S REVIVAL AND GLOBAL SPREAD

Currently, the most famous institute of all Sowa-Rigpa is the Institute of Tibetan Medicine and astrology which was initiated by the 13th Dalai Lama in Lhasa; it was the first school that allowed both monks and lay person to study equally. After the so called Chinese cultural revolution of 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama with his far-sighted vision re-established the institute in Dharmasala, till date the institute has produced numerous famous chronic disease doctors. Other institutions of Sowa-Rigpa are Chagpori in

³² There four main traditions in Tibetan Buddhism Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug.

Darjeeling; Faculty of Sowa-Rigpa in Saranth, Varanasi; two institutes in Ladakh. Sikkim also got its first Sowa-Rigpa institute in Namgyal Institute of Tibetology under the leadership of the late director Mr. Tashi Densapa.

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