

The Buddhist View on the Human: A Brief Analysis

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Introduction

The interest among the human to find answers related to living creatures, the structure and the existence of the outer world had begun during the early period of the mankind. Through the process of answering these questions, many different religions and philosophies have emerged across the world. Since the man can surpass all the other living beings in both the aspects of thinking and communication ability, he is considered to be the most superior creature and a brief outline of the Buddhist view on man or individual has been presented below.

The word “Manuṣya”

The word “Manuṣya” (man) has been derived from the Sanskrit word of “Manu” which means the one with the nature of thinking. In the Sanskrit, the suffix “u” from the root “man” is used to produce the sound ‘manu’ and the suffix ‘a’ from the root ‘shi’ which means “to come up” from the suffix ‘manu’ which means born from him, forms the sound “Manuṣya” (Dhammarakkhitha, W., 2012: 129-139 pp). Also, he is called “Manuṣya” because he is superior in thinking compared to other living creatures (Davides, R., 2007: 520 pp). It is evident that the Pali definition of the person or human being is closely related to the Sanskrit definition (Manassa Ussannatāya manussā). According to Vedic literature, the progenitor of man is called “Manu”. Hence ‘Manuja’ is also used for man (Dhammarakkhitha, W., 2012: 129-139 pp). The descendants of ‘Manuja’ born from Manu are called “Manuṣya” or Manuṣa (human beings) (Davides, R., 2007: 520 pp). (Manu no apaccāti manussā). Thus, due to the higher caliber of thinking ability the word “Manuṣya” has been used in the old languages to refer to the human. The term human does not only refer to male, but also to the female and male equally or to distinguish humans from the rest of the living creatures. Often the term child means the son or the daughter (Puttā vattu manussānaṃ) in the Pali canon. There is various

synonym to the term of “Manuṣya” including **Nara, Manuja, Machcha, Porisa, Porisada, Manavo, Poso** etc.

It is said in Buddhism that it is extremely rare and difficult to be a human (Dullabhaṃ ca manussattaṃ) in this endless Saṃsara, which cannot be seen, felt or imagined (Anamataggoyaṃ saṃsāro). In Buddhism the priority had been given to the thinking of the man instead of subjecting him to the difficult and tedious process of exploring the essence of the relative world around him, which is a metaphysical, tangible, God-centric experience. Accordingly, the interpretation of Buddhism is that it is up to the individual human being to achieve the ultimate goal.

‘Satva’ is someone who is attached. ‘Shakta, Satta, Sattva’ mean attachment (Sumanawansa, N., 2008:32-36 pp). It is the basic form of the living creature to attach to the Samsara through lust, hatred and delusions. When Radha Thero asked the Buddha why someone is called as a form of an animal, the Buddha replied “If there is any kind of desire, lust or attachment to a form, that person can be called as a Satva. The Samsara Cakra (Circle of Samsra) of a person is determined by the nature of the meritorious deeds done by himself. Thus, there are five stages of birth (Panca gati) according to the meritorious deeds performed by every living being.

“Katamā ca bhikkhave, kammānaṃ vemattatā?, atthi bhikkave kammaṃ nirayavedaniyaṃ, atthi kammaṃ tiracchānayaṇi vedanīyaṃ, atthi kammaṃ pettivisaya vedanīyaṃ, atthi kammaṃ manussaloka vedanīyaṃ, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave kammānaṃ vemattatāṃ”, (A.N. Nibbedika Sutta).

Deva Loka	Sugathi (heaven)
Manussa Loka	
Petha Loka	
Thirisan Loka	Dugathi (hell)
Niraya	

Based on one’s Kamma, creatures are born into one of these Pañca gati (Five stages). Among the Pañca gati, the human world is the supreme. Creatures and humans are born and die as per their desires. It is due to their desire of lust, worldly life and aspirations. These desires give birth to Bhava or life,

“Yayaṃ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāga sahaḡatā tatratatrābhinandati seyyatīdaṃ kāma taṇhā bhava taṇhā vibhava taṇhā” (D.N., Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta).

The man is a worldly (Bhavagāmī) animal or being. The desire to be born in a specific world is known as Bhavagāmī. The way to avoid becoming Bhavagāmī is to deplete desires without leaving any trace. Similarly, all other creatures (beings) are denoted by sattva or animals, except the noble ones who have reduced their desires. Arhants do not become sattvas because they have no desire or idea to be reborn (Sumanawansa, N., 2008:32-36 pp).

A being who is unable to get rid of cravings accumulating merits (Puññābhi saṅkhāra), accumulates sins (Apuññābhi saṅkhāra), and acquires things that do not belong to both merits and sins (Aneññābhi saṅkhāra), is called rebirth or Bhavagāmī. To be born as a human among Bhavagāmī other beings is extremely rare (Dullabhañca manussattaṃ). One day the Buddha has stated to Monks as follows, ‘Dear Monks, do not delay. Enlightenment is rare. Humanity is rare. Priesthood is rare’. The Buddha has preached five (05) rare things in the world emphasizing that those opportunities should be taken advantage immediately.

“Bhikkhave Appamādena sampādetha

Dullabho Buddhappādo lokasmiṃ

Dullabho manussatta paṇilābho

Dullabhā khaṇasampatti dullabhā pabbajjā

Dullabhaṃ Saddhamma savaṇaṃ” , (S.N., Kasībhaṇḍavāja Sutta).

Achieving life among creatures due to the attachment to greed is as difficult as a blind turtle trying to see the sky through a hole.

“Khippataraṃ kho so bhikkave, khāṇo kacchapo amusmiṃ ekacchjiggale yuge gīvaṃ paveseyya ato, dullabhatarāhaṃ, bhikkave manussattaṃ vadāmi”, (M.N., Bālapanḍita Sutta).

Similar to a man dropping a stick with a single hole into the sea, the stick is flowing to the west with the wind blowing from the front, with the wind blows from the west to the east, with the wind blowing from the north go in the south direction, and the wind blowing from the south goes in the north direction, the Buddhism described that the acquisition of human qualities among other living beings is an extremely rare and complicated one, just as a blind turtle that lives in that sea in a hundred years bursts out of the water and lays its neck on that one-hole stick,

“Seyyathāpi bhikkhave puriso ekacchjiggalaṃ yugaṃ mahā samudde pakkhipeyya, tamenam puratthimo vāto pacchimena samhareyya, pacchimo vāto puratthimena samhareyya, uttaro vāto dakkhiṇena samhareyya, dakkhino vāto uttarena samhareyya, tatrassa kāṇakacchapo, so vassatassa vassatassa accayena sakiṃ ummujjeyya”, (M.N., Bālapaṇḍita Sutta).

Among the living creatures, the human being is considered as the creature that can glorify the divine and human world ‘Sadevakasmiṃ lokasmiṃ natthi me paṭipuggalā’, (D.N., Sakkapañña Sutta). Accordingly, Buddhism has used various approaches to explain the nature of the human being. As per the Buddhist view of the individualism, ‘I’ is the context or center of the phenomena called the person. Learning about this ‘I’ is the Buddhist view of the individual. Brahmins and other religions such as Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, which accepted that man is a creation of God, state that the individual is a living unit that functions as a combination of the trinity of body, mind and spirit (Hettiarachchi, D., 2006:689-698).

Buddhism is a religion that rejects the creation of gods and subjectivism about the individual and the relative world around him. The analysis of nominal-form during the Buddha's time reveals the Buddhist view of the human. The nominal – form means the body and the mind. Nominal is the mind and the intangible, invisible immaterial aspect of the individual is called mind. Form is the body. This includes the tangible physical aspect of the person. The human is a combination of mind (mind) and body (body). There was also a theory that recognized the non-existent entity (soul) of body and soul as separate unities. This view is also being excluded in Buddhism (Hettiarachchi, D., 2006:689-698). These two forms cannot and do to exist individually. The Buddha has explained this fact as follows in Naḷakalāpa Sutta, ‘Dear Monks, just as they plant two bundles of reeds together, so is the wisdom of the nominal suffix and the precise suffix of the wisdom’,

‘Seyyathapi āwuso, dve naḷakalāpiyo, aññamaññaṃ nissāya tiṭṭhesu, evameva kho āwuso, nāmarūpapaccayā viññāṇa, viññāṇa paccayā nāmarūpaṃ’, (S.N., Naḷakalāpa Sutta).

The man was created by a mutual correlation of nominal and form. When these two do not exist, then there is no person. A body without wisdom is similar to a discarded stick (Chuddo apeta viññāno niratthaṃ va kaliṅgaraṃ). Thus, the Buddhist analysis of the human is well known through the analysis of nominal and form.

The theory of ‘Skhandha’ is also to be mentioned while talking about the Buddhist interpretation of the human. According to that, a human is a collection of five parts (masses). As per the Vajira Sutta of the Saṃyuththa Nikaya, it is shown that the union of creatures forms a human, just as the joining of elements makes a car,

‘Yathāhi aṅga sambhāro – hoti saddo ratho iti
Evaṃ khandhesu sattesu – hoti sattoti sammuti’, (S.N., Vajira sutta).

The Buddhism has presented various interpretations such as form, suffering, sense, wisdom etc. Khandha Sutta, Vibhanga Sutta, Khajjanīya Sutta, Bahuvedanīya Sutta and so on suttas highlighted among them.

According to the Dhātu Vibhanga Sutta of the Samyutta Nikaya, the human is created from the combination of six Dhātu, namely Paṭṭhavi Dhātu, Āpo Dhātu, Tejo Dhātu, Vāyo Dhātu, Ākāsa Dhātu and Viññāna Dhātu (Hettiarachchi, D., 2006:689-698). In the nominal analysis, the parts were divided into four parts called Vedanā, Saññā, Saṅkāra, wisdom and the form part is divided into five called Paṭṭhavi, Āpo, Tejo, Vāyo and Ākasa. It can be seen that by dividing the nominals and forms more precisely, a strong emphasis on that there is nothing called soul in it (Kalupahana, 1992: 72). And it is also important to note that the materials as well as the masses have been interpreted as something that has a connection to the human experience (A.N., ṭhāna sutta). The Buddhist view of the human has been explained considering nominal or body as the physical basis and form or mind as the untouchable basis. Through conversation and living closely with someone, one can understand the nature of that person.

1. Saṃvāsenā Bhikkhave sīlaṃ veditabbaṃ

(One should be understand the virtue of someone by living closely)

2. Saṃvoharena Bhikkhave soceyya veditabbaṃ

(One should know the purity of someone by conversing)

3. Āpadāsu Bhikkhave thamo veditabbaṃ

(One should be courages in times of calamity)

4. Sākaccāya Bhikkhave paññā veditabbaṃ

(One should know the wisdom through discussion)

According to the way of conducting one’s life, there are also analyzes of the person who have more inclination towards committing sins and who are not. 1. A person with faults (Yāvajja) 2. A person with more faults (Vajja bahula) 3. A person with less faults (Appavajja) 4.

A person with no faults (Anavajja). Perfectly upright persons are very common among those who have quenched their greed. People who make less mistakes are righteous people. Acts carried out based on the status of the mind determine whether the person will go heaven or hell. Thus, the mental status of a person is one of the main concepts that Buddhism focused on. According to the status of the mind, a person can be categorized into three.

1. A person with a mind like an old forest (impure)

(Arukūpamacitto puggalo)

2. A person with a mind like lightening (fast)

(Vijjūpamacitto puggalo)

3. A person with a mind with a hole (transparent)

(Vajirūpamacitto puggalo), (Wijithathissa, K., 2011: 176-190).

Restrain and purity of the word is more important among the main attributes that determine the thinking and conduct of a virtuous person (Sādu vācāya saṃvaro). According to Pali Niti literature, a person should be pure not only in his mind and body but also in words. Bees like flowers. Their entire lifeline is intertwined with the flowers. Flees like bleeding wounds. Because their existence depends on it. A virtuous person is fond of good virtuous behavior as a bee is fond of flowers. A bad person likes vicious behavior as a flee is fond of blood and pus.

‘Bhamarā pupphamicchanti – Pūtimihchanti makkhikā

Sudanā guṇa micchanti – Dosamicchanti dujjanā’, (Mahinda, 2019: 42)

Conclusion

The living beings or creatures that wander in the endless cycle of samsara are again and again subjected to birth, disease, suffering death. According to Buddhism, the human is a worldly animal. The essence of Buddhism about the person can be understood through the correlation of norms and forms, explanation of the body and analysis of elements. And also, the Buddhism says the thinking and conduct pattern of a person will determine if his next life will be directed towards heaven or hell.

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