

BUDDHISM VS ALCOHOLIC

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Abstract

Alcohol is another commonly abused substance. Although alcohol is legal to possess, it too has been linked to crime drunk driving and deaths caused by drunk drivers are growing national problem. The definition of 'Alcohol' in the Pali is 'Majjasara', and the fifth precept deals with abstaining from taking of fermented intoxicants, liquor, and drug. They were prevalent before and during the time of the Buddha. Many kinds of intoxicants are mentioned in the ancient Indian scriptures (Veda), such as Soma, Sura, Meraya, or Majja. Madira and Asava. All of these terms are not synonymous. There are many kinds and prepared from different materials like sugar, flour (Pittha-sara), cooked rice (Odana-sara), flowers, fruits, honey, etc. There are the fulfillments of four conditions, which must be present in the moment of the transgression of the fifth precept. They are (1) presence of intoxicants, liquor, drugs, (Madaniyam); (2) an intention to drink, (Patukamyatacittam); (3) effort to drinking, (Tajjo vayamo); and (4) the act of drinking, (Patiappavesanam). The reason that Buddhism strongly emphasized the importance of Sati or mindfulness at every level of ethical conduct, because intoxicating drinks and drugs causes carelessness and becomes the basis of evil deeds. In other words, intoxication leads to committing various crimes and violate other precepts. The five precepts are the fundamental code of moral conduct that is vital to all the Buddhists and as such it determines the best characteristic of a true Buddhist. To understand, appreciate and follow the five precepts is to find peace of mind, responsible individual, homogenous society, and peaceful world.

Keywords: Buddhism, Alcoholic

1. Introduction

Although, the earliest Buddhism developed in the agricultural society in India yet contemporary issues might offer a good opportunity and challenge for us to reinterpret the Buddha's teaching in the light of new problems and situation. On this regard, health occupies a vital place in life. Whether it is a human or an animal or any other being, everyone wishes to remain healthy and happy in its own way. Human being - more conscious, aware and intelligent - is the most gifted or luckiest one among all the beings. It is rather human only, who can think of its present and plan for future. This has generated a unique quality inhuman to think for his better hygiene and health. It is pertinent to note that health is regarded as the highest gain of life.¹ Health is something that one has to earn in life by exercising one's own effort. An individual has to strive hard to gain it, and once he had got it, he should expend sufficient energy in order to sustain it. This involves the physical, mental as well as the social health of a person.² Health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "A state of complete physical mental, social and spiritual well-being and not merely absence of disease." WHO further states that health is a dynamic concept and that it changes every moment. In this context, "true" health cannot be achieved by any individual in this world. The pendulum of health fluctuates between wellness, illness, disease, and death. One has to strive to maintain this pendulum towards the "wellness" domain, by adopting preventive behaviour and lifestyle.³ Nowadays, the issues directly involved with personal health but that causes major problem and affects both individual and society is alcoholism

Thus, this article humbly makes an analytical appraisal of the notion of alcoholism from the Buddhist perspective. It is primarily focused on the increasing traits of various natures of alcoholism arising in and around the world currently, and the Buddhist notion with its immortal faith in the potentialities of human to rise above all evils and suffering to respond effectively and constructively to the present day challenges of moral chaos and confusion. The article thus makes an analytical survey.

2. Overview of Alcoholism Nowadays

Sociologists point out that though the basic needs of societies, whether primitive or advanced, remain the same, the difference lies in the means to fulfill them. The needs are: (1) a minimum satisfaction or individual needs; (2) perpetuation of the species; (3) internal unity and order; and protection from outside groups. In primitive societies, there were a limited number of primary needs fulfilled by alcohol, which is related to thirst and hunger, medicine and religious ecstasy; all of them have become practically obsolete in the complex contemporary society.

¹ Dhammapada.Verse.204, : "*Arogyaparama labha*"

² Nandasena Ratanapala, *Buddhist Sociology*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1993, p.177.

³ R.R. Shinde, "Holistic Health: The Buddhist Perspective", in Bhalchandra Mungekar and Aakash Singh Rathore (eds.), *Buddhism and the Contemporary World: An Ambedkarian Perspective*, New Delhi: Bookwell, 2007, pp.212-213.

There has, of course, been another function of alcohol, that of social jollification; a function, which has become of increased importance due to the peculiar demands of the individual in the modern society.⁴ Although the purchase and sale of alcohol are legal today in most U.S. jurisdiction, excessive alcohol consumption is considered a major substance abuse problem. Drinkers report that alcohol reduces tension, diverts worries, enhances pleasure, improves social skills, and transforms experiences for the better. Long-term use has been linked with depression and numerous physical ailments ranging from heart disease to cirrhosis of the liver.⁵

Alcoholism like drug-addiction also causes disillusionment, unhappiness and troubles in family life. An alcoholic finds it difficult to adjust with other people and so are the others uncomfortable with him due to his drinking-habit. The mental faculty of an alcoholic does not function in a normal way with the result he loses self-control and often behaves improperly at times picking up quarrels, accusing, abusing or insulting others or committing acts of aggression and violence. Thus, an alcoholic, while he is drunk is an irresponsible person faltering and pampering in many ways and prone to criminality at any moment. The acts of indecency or assault are usually committed by the persons who are under the influence of liquor or narcotic drugs.

In common parlance, anyone who indulges in excessive drinking is often referred to as an 'alcohol addict,' which is not an accurate expression in view of the various stages or phases one has to pass through to qualify as an addict in the medical sense. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) report, the proportion of alcoholics (addict and non-addict) varies from country to country but does not exceed in any country 5 percent or 6 percent of all users of alcoholic beverages. The ratio addictive to non-addictive alcoholics is unknown. Both addict and non-addict alcoholics attempt to rationalize their excessive drinking. In the case of non-addict alcoholics, the social repercussions are much less marked because of their ability to avoid drunken behaviour whenever the social situation so demands.⁶

Alcohol is another commonly abused substance. Although alcohol is legal to possess, it too has been linked to crime drunk driving and deaths caused by drunk drivers are growing national problem.⁷ Thus, it may be seen that abuse of drugs and alcoholism spells disaster not only for the addict but also to his family and the society as a whole. It affects the individual's health and upsets his family life. That apart, these evils give rise to law and order problems, reduction in economic production and retards human welfare. Some of these drugs alter the senses while others cause depression.⁸

⁴ S.M.A. Qadri, *Criminology: Problems & Perspective*, Fifth Edition, Lucknow: Eastern Book Company, 2005. pp. 471-472.

⁵ Larry J. Siegel, *Criminology*, 10th Edition, Canada: Thomson Wadsworth, 2009, p.417.

⁶ S.M.A. Qadri, *Loc.Cit.*, pp.473-474.

⁷ Larry J. Siegel, *Loc.Cit.*, p.432.

⁸ N.V. Paranjape, *Criminology and Penology*, 13th Edition, Allahabad: Central Law Publications, 2008.p.193.

3. Buddhism View on Alcoholism

For having regarded wisdom as the most important virtue, the Buddha teaches a man to adopt a rational outlook on the world. He explains all phenomena of man and nature not by superstitious beliefs and dogmas but by rational application of the law of causation. The Buddha, therefore, always tells about the cause and effect of things. If one knows about their cause and effect, he also knows the cause and effect of the universe. Let us concentrate the beautiful verse of Venerable Assaji (one of five *Pancavaggiyas*) spoken to Upatissa (Venerable Sariputta) when he was seeking the truth of things thus:

Even if *Dhamma* arise from a cause, Gotama Buddha tells about that cause, and even if *Dhamma* cease for the cause, the *Mahasamana* always tells the cessation of that cause.⁹

This stanza states that everything arises and ceases due to a combination of causes. The thing itself cannot be eliminated unless its causes have been eliminated first. When the Wanderer Sariputta heard this stanza, “The Dhamma-vision arose to him that whatever is of the nature of arising is also of the nature of ceasing.” Therefore, to know Dhamma is nothing other than knowing nature and the law of nature, being a discoverer of nature. After having realized the truth of Dhamma, the Buddha disclosed it to the public.¹⁰

Obliviously, there is nothing accidental in Buddhist Perspective. The issues of the law of causation and effecting as dealt with the causations of alcoholism in Buddhist perspective. So far as the original causations of alcoholism mentioned and explained in the Tipitaka are concerned, we find it at various places and in different contexts.

Thus, in this regard, the definition of ‘Alcohol’ in the Pali is ‘Majjasara’¹¹, and the fifth precept deals with abstaining from taking of fermented intoxicants, liquor, and drug. They were prevalent before and during the time of the Buddha. Many kinds of intoxicants are mentioned in the ancient Indian scriptures (Veda), such as Soma, Sura, Meraya, or Majja. Madira and Asava.¹² All of these terms are not synonymous.¹³ There are many kinds and prepared from different materials like sugar, flour (Pittha-sara), cooked rice (Odana-sara), flowers, fruits, honey, etc.¹⁴ Each one of the drinks differs from the others in the degree of intoxication: some are more potent

⁹ Vinaya Pitaka.I.40; (See Mahavagga.I.23.5): “*Ye dhamma hetuppabhava tesam hetum tathagato aha tesam ca yo nirodho evam vadi mahasamano’ti.*”

¹⁰ Phramaha Somwang Kawsufong, *A Critical study of the Ethics of Early Buddhism*, Vanarasi: Ph.D. Thesis Department of Philosophy and Religion, Banaras Hindu University, 1998, pp.47-48.

¹¹ A.P.Buddhadatta, Mahathera, A.P., *English - Pali Dictionary*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, Reprinted, 1997, p.13.

¹² Suchintra Onkom. *Creating Sustainable World Peace*, Bangkok: Sahadhammika, 2003, p.35.

¹³ Suraj Narain Sharma, *Buddhist Social and Moral Education*, Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2011, p.107.

¹⁴ H.S. Shukla, “Panca Sila”, in Mahesh Tiwary (ed.), *Perspective on Buddhist Ethics*, Delhi: Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi, 1989, p.85.

intoxicants, others are milder. However, the use of all kinds of intoxicants and drug was prohibited by the Buddha and the most religious teachers.

The reason that Buddhism strongly emphasized the importance of Sati or mindfulness at every level of ethical conduct, because intoxicating drinks and drugs causes carelessness and becomes the basis of evil deeds. In other words, intoxication leads to committing various crimes and violate other precepts. As the Buddha says:

The householder who delights in the Dhamma should not indulge in intoxicating drink, nor cause to drink, nor allow others to drink, knowing that it has intoxication at its end.¹⁵ Because of intoxication fools commit evil deeds, and make other intoxicated people commit them. One should avoid this on the basis of demerit, intoxication, and folly, and beloved of fools.¹⁶

It also requires the fulfillment of four conditions, which must be present in the moment of the transgression of the fifth precept. They are (1) Presence of intoxicants, liquor, drugs, (Madaniyam); (2) An intention to drink, (Patukamyatacittam); (3) Effort to drinking, (Tajjo vayamo); and (4) The act of drinking, (Patiappavesanam).

In the completion of these four conditions, the fifth precept is transgressed. The transgression produced a grave offense in every circumstance with no exception¹⁷ because the taking of intoxicants and drugs cause carelessness. The Buddha accords a high value on carefulness. As the Buddha says in the Dhammapada:

Conscientiousness (is) the state of deathlessness; negligence (is) the state of death. The conscientious do not die; those who are negligent (are) like the dead.¹⁸

In this sense, Appamada (heedfulness or carefulness) is used as a synonym of mindfulness. Therefore, mindfulness is regarded as a virtue necessary for observing of the fifth precept. It is a good quality to be developed in the mind so that it facilitates the practice of the abstention from taking intoxicants. If a person places a high value on mindfulness, it will be difficult for him to destroy it by drinking liquors or taking drugs. In this context, the Sigalovada Sutta,¹⁹ the Buddha reveals six dangers of intoxicating drinks and taking drugs. They are:- (1) actual loss of wealth; (2) an increase in quarrels; (3) spread of diseases; (4) loss of good character; (5) indecent exposure; and (6) impaired intelligence.

¹⁵ Suttanipata Atthakatha (Paramatthajotika).69-70.

¹⁶ Suttanipata Atthakatha (Paramatthajotika).22.

¹⁷ Suttanipata Atthakatha (Paramatthajotika).20.

¹⁸ Dhammapada.Verse.21.:“Appamado amatapadam; pamado maccuno padam; appamatta na miyanti; ye pamatta yatha mata”, K.T.S. Sarao (tr.), *The Dhammapada: A translator's Guide*, New Delhi: Mushiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2009, p. 28.

¹⁹ Digha Nikaya.III.182.

When any intoxication liquor has been taken with the intention that it shall be drunk and something is actually done to procure the liquor, and it has passed down the throat, the precept is broken that forbids the use of toddy and other intoxicating drinks.²⁰ Buddhism sees that alcohol or intoxicants connect to Pamada (heedlessness), from which those who are Buddhists should abstain. The way that one of the Buddhists five precepts suggest that religious people must abstain from intoxicant agrees to the concept of Pamada (heedlessness) mentioned many times in the Tipitaka. For laymen, drinking makes heedless, for Bhikkhus primarily heedless and secondly concerning the unfaithful by those who do not have faith in the religion and less faithful by those who have faith.²¹

In this context, the Appamada (conscientiousness or heedfulness) is the synonym of Sati (mindfulness). Therefore, Sati is regarded as a good value compulsory for the observance of the fifth precept. For the social value of Sati, Ven. P.A. Payutto has brought out the quotation from the Sedaka Sutta,²² the Buddha's words describing the value of Sati (mindfulness) bring out the profound concept of Sati in practical terms, of its nature and values of that of Appamada (heedfulness). The passage helps to further clarify our understanding of both of these Dhammas, and, at the same time, to demonstrate the Buddhist attitude towards life in its social dimension. It testifies that Buddhadhamma sees the internal life of the individual as intimately related to the external life of the society and holds that the values in the two realms are inseparably connected that they correspond, and are, in fact, identical²³

On this point, Ven. Phramaha Narong Cherdungnoen had summarised the perspective and the benefit of Sati (mindfulness) as concerned with Satipatthana practice in the main points as following:- (a) Physical development, such as health, sport, medical cure, mindful death, etc.; (b) social development, such as avoiding bad behaviour, activeness in social work; (c) mental development, such as training oneself and others, self-control, unshakable mind in sport-contests, etc.; (d) intellectual development, such as instruction of general courses, clear understanding on the teaching of the Buddha in scriptures, freedom from defilements and fetters, realization of truth, seeing the way of Nibbana, etc.

Thus, it can be summarized as the Satipatthana practice is the foundation of the Enlightenment.²⁴ The precepts given by the Buddha focusing on an individual should be maintained for personal development and social harmony. It enables to eradicate problems, maintain peace among nations ultimately making the world as a better place to live.

²⁰ Manmatha Nath Shastri, *The History of Buddhism (Together with the Life and Teachings of Buddha)*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2003, p.170.

²¹ Chawarote Wallayamaytee, *Vice Management: Buddhist Perspective*, Bangkok: Centre for Buddhist Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 2010, p.(III).

²² Samyutta Nikaya. V.758-762.

²³ Quoted in Phramaha Narong Cherdungnoen, *A study of Sati (Mindfulness) in Buddhism: Theory and Practice in Thai Tradition*, Delhi: Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi, 1993, p.343.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 348-349.

Therefore, the Buddha prohibited all kinds of intoxicants not only for the members of the monastic Order but also for lay devotees. If a monk or a nun drinks Sura or any other alcohol, he or she commits an offense of Pacittiya.²⁵ Thus, abstention from taking intoxicants is essential for all. The Buddha concludes as:-

Who slays a living being, speaks falsely, takes whatever in the world in not given, and goes to another's wife, and whichever man enjoys drinking alcoholic beverages, he digs out his own graves just here in this world.

So, it is very undoubtedly that the fifth precept in the Buddhist teaching is initiated to put the mind on a proper footing or to maintain a balanced state of mind.

4. Five Precepts: Prevention of Alcoholism and Maintenance of Social Harmony Follows the Buddhist Principle

In Buddhism, the term Pancasila generally refers to the fundamental moral principle of the laity. According to the Buddhist tradition, a person is suitable to be called a Buddhist only when he outwardly processes and formally undertakes to observe the Pancasila or five precepts. For who are not yet firm in these noble qualities, however, it is recommended that at least moral restraint through body and speech should first be developed by observing the five precepts, which are among the first factors of the ten principles for Dhammacariya (virtuous living). The five precepts are;

- (1). Abstaining from killing; not taking life or doing bodily harm.
- (2). Abstaining from taking what is not given: not stealing, pilfering or filching; not violation [others] properties.
- (3). Abstaining from sexual misconduct; not violating the loved or cherished ones of others, thereby destroying their honor and dignity and confusing their family lines.
- (4). Abstaining from lying: not telling lies or using deceptive speech; not violating other people or their interests through speech.
- (5). Abstaining from alcohol and intoxicants; not taking wines, liquor, intoxicants or addictive, which are causes for heedlessness and drunkenness, and lead to damage and blunders such as accidents due to lack of mindfulness. An intoxicant person at least threatens the sense of security and well-being of fellow community members.²⁶

Every person who observes the Five Precepts strictly will get good result in this life and next life according to the Buddha's words in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta²⁷ :-

²⁵ Vinaya Pitiaka.IV.108-110; Bhikkhu Patimokkha Pacittiya No. 51 of Surapana Vagga; "Suramerayapane Pacittiyam"

²⁶ Anguttara Nikaya.III.203; 275: Quoted in Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A.Payutto), *A Constitution for Living, A Constitution for Living, (Thai Version)*. Bangkok: Sahadhammika Co., Ltd, 2002, p.19.

²⁷ Digha Nikaya.II.86.

Fivefold, householders are the gain of the virtuous person through the practice of virtue. In the first place the virtuous person, strong in virtue, acquires great wealth through his industry; in the next place, the good reports of him are spread abroad; thirdly, whatever society he enters, whether the noble, Brahmanas, heads of house, or members of the order, he enters confident and self-possessed; fourthly, he dies without anxiety; and lastly, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he is reborn into some happy state of heaven. This, householders, is the fivefold gain of the virtuous person.

The significance of five precepts can be summarized by the words of Ven. Phra Medhedhammaporn that; “the five Precepts bring good results to both individuals and society. They can help people to create a civilized world where they can live together in peace, harmony and economic prosperity.” According to the Buddhist thought, the basis of all improvement is self-improvement. Thus, an individual must change before society can change. Let there be peace and friendliness in the heart of the individuals first. The society, which consists of individuals, can be peaceful and harmonious only if its members, the individuals, develop a spirit of mutual understanding and tolerance. The Buddhist Pancasila seeks to inculcate among men and women a spirit of restraining, of friendliness and goodwill. The Five Precepts, preached to the world by the Buddhist twenty-five centuries ago, are Akaliko (never out of date). We find them relevant to the present circumstances of the world. Most of the world problems, such as destroying life, uttering lies, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, addiction to intoxicating drinks, wars, national conflicts, corruption, destruction of the environment, etc. can successfully be avoided by observing the principle of the five precepts. Moreover, the spread of AIDS and drug abuse would have been solved if five precepts have been upheld and sincerely practiced in daily life by everyone. In order that the five precepts are observed throughout the world organization like the United Nations and the World Fellowship of Buddhists should persuade and encourage their member nations to uphold the spirit of the five precepts and secure its implementation. If the essence of the five precepts is upheld by people of all religions and social system, then the era of peace and prosperity will usher in the world.²⁸ Every person, consequently, who observes the five precepts, strictly will get a good result in this life and next life according to the Buddha’s words in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta:²⁹

(a) the man of moral virtue gains a great mass of wealth; (b) the good reputation of such a man spread in all direction; (c) wherever he goes in the assembly of any type, he remains fearless and self-confident; (d) he never loses awareness even at the time of his death and (e) after death

²⁸ Phra Medhedhammaporn (Prayoon Mereak), *Buddhist Morality*, Bangkok: Mahaclulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Press, 1994, pp.112-113.

²⁹ Digha Nikaya.II.86.

he is born in the realms of the Devas (heaven) due to the accumulation of the fruition of his moral action.

So, the benefits of the five precepts have been recomposed by the Thai monks acceding to Thai tradition and mentioned in a prayer-book, for easy reading and remembrance. It is as follows:

“Silena sugatim yanti, silena bhogasampada
Silena nibbutim yanti tasma silam visodhaye ti.”³⁰

The five precepts are the fundamental code of moral conduct that is vital to all the Buddhists and as such it determines the best characteristic of a true Buddhist. To understand, appreciate and follow the five precepts is the fine peace of mind, responsible individual, homogenous society and peaceful world without crime. Peace and happiness would enable man to care and share in a pluralistic society. The highest happiness of every sentient being is peace, as the Buddha says in the Dhammapada that “this is no happiness higher than tranquility.”³¹ And The Noble Eightfold Path, the only leading to Nibbana, which is the best happiness,³² will certainly help teachable people to have rightly and will not bring them from involving in the commission of suffering.

5. Conclusion

After presenting the problem of alcoholism in the current social problems, and the Buddhist perspective towards this issue. Obviously, there is nothing accidental in Buddhist Perspective. The issues of the law of causation and affecting as dealt with the causations of alcoholism in Buddhist perspective. So far as the original causations of alcoholism mentioned and explained in the Tipitaka are concerned, we find it at various places and in different contexts. In this regard, the consciousness is the hub of every action. Gotama Buddha exhorts: “Monks, I say that intention is the Kamma.” The consciousness is again related to ethics. The right consciousness leads to right actions and wrong consciousness paves the way for wrong actions. The Buddha further states in the Dhammapada as under: “avoidance of all evil, gathering of merit, purifying one’s own mind- this is the teaching of the Buddhas” The mindfulness is regarded as a virtue necessary for observing of the fifth precept. It is a good quality to be developed in the mind so that it facilitates the practice of the abstention from taking intoxicants. If a person places a high value on mindfulness, it will be difficult for him to destroy it by drinking liquors or taking drugs. For prevention of alcoholism and maintenance of social harmony, the person should follow the five precept of Buddhism. Thus, the five precepts are the fundamental code of moral conduct that is vital to all the Buddhists and as such it determines the best

³⁰ Dhanit Ubho, *The Benefit of Uposathasila*, (Thai Version), Bangkok: Sivabhorn Press, 1984, p.26.

³¹ Dhammapada.Verse.202,: “Natthi santiparam sukham”, K.T.S. Sarao, *Op.Cit.*, p.249.

³² Dhammapada.Verse.203,: “Nibbanam paramam sukham”, K.T.S. Sarao, *Ibid.*, p.250.

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