

The Importance of Research Methodology in Buddhist Philosophy

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Abstract

Sutta Pitaka consists of Buddha's Teachings in the form of stories.

Buddhist Philosophy strongly highlights that the world is ever changing and transient in nature so nothing is permanent and eternal. Along with this, the entire world is soulless. Sorrows are part of human existence and life. All human beings have originated from the planet earth and then they bear children for the continuity of life.

Buddha or Siddhartha Buddha is known as 'Buddha' which means awakened being or enlightened being. Base of Buddhist is the teachings of Buddha.

Always do good and do not waste time and effort on things that lead to harm.

Be aware of your words and deeds.

KEYWORDS : Buddha, Methodology, Philosophy, Bhamma

Introduction

The Buddha taught the famous "Four Noble Truths" and "Eight fold Path, which allows people to achieve enlightenment. Enlightenment (Nirvana, awakening, realization, satori) is the cessation of suffering freedom from conditioned existence (Samsara) the Buddha taught that every action has a consequence things are because of previous conditions. If one practices the four noble truths and the eightfold path, then one will no longer be subject to the cycle of existence Samsara.

Preamble

Every human action to achieve same goal involves a plan of action, which is the initial act of rational thought. Every such plan during its execution requires a series of compatible methods, which are collectively called Methodology. It is a series of response to such questions as 'what', 'how', 'why' and 'when'. In every case conceptual clarity is essential. Let us elaborate it further step by step.

- i. Selection of a problem, issue or purpose, which means there must be a desire to make an enquiry is to a purpose or at least one must conceive an idea about it (Jijnasa) to know what it is.
- ii. To have knowledge about it (Samyagjnana) but one must know 'how' to acquire it.
- iii. On this basis to see a meaning in it or to create a new meaning in it of a higher purpose (artha):

- iv. This meaning discloses a value (purusartha, mulya) which may be either worth pursuing (upadeya) or avoidable (heya) which answers 'why' about the preference for the course of action;
- v. Practical execution is one's behavior(Karma) keeping in view the opportune time i.e. 'when'. Methodically, the whole process involves a series of theoretical and practical methods. This is not the only way of looking at these steps. The same process can be explained in many other ways.

Now let us take an example of an object which appears as a snake in a dark street to me. My first natural response will be to runaway in fear from the spot and then I may decide not to go through that street or I may decide to come back with a stick and torch to kill the snake so that it does not bite anybody. In my second cognition under light it may be the snake again or it may turn out to be a rope in which case it may be an illusion. Thus in my first personal experience the subsequent cognition has cancelled my original experience. Here comes the issue of truth and falsity: snake is falsity and rope is truth. The matter may end there but it can also be that if I become curious to know the reason as to why the same object appeared differently. In a simple analysis, my visual sense appears to be deceptive. But on reflective investigation, if I realize that it is not the nature of the object to appear as what it is not, rather it is my intellectual understanding and judgment which involve conceptual and linguistic acts and habits of structuring my knowledge and the object within mind, the whole blame will shift to the knower himself and other extraneous factors. This develops into a very big issue of sense intellect relationship.

In the Indian history of philosophy, as in its Western counterpart. Various conflicting perspectives have developed without any consensus on any issue of metaphysical, epistemological or linguistic nature. Even then philosophers do not run away from such problems, rather they engaged themselves in them. Very often they will go for meta-level analysis of such conflicting views. On this approach we can discuss three Indian thinkers who make meta level analysis to solve such conflicts.

- i. Firstly Nagarjuna in a sceptic mood dialectically shows the emptiness of all views, which have false ontological commitments.
- ii. Secondly, Jainism offers their synthesis on the ground that each view is partially true, which means there is no absolute truth.
- iii. Thirdly, Advaita of Sankara treats this conflict as a result of relative truth claims and so rises to the highest level of truth, which is the absolute truth. Strangely the Philosophers do not ever stop with these solutions. All these efforts are not only intellectual exercises, but different approaches to universalize the ethical values of compassion, non violence and cosmic harmony respectively.

Again, if there is a goal to achieve in one's life, one has to be methodologically systematic in his approach. If one wants to pluck a mango fruit from a mango tree one must be skilled in climbing the tree. Pluck the desired mango come down skillfully. Systematically take its juice out and prepare a drink. Another example may be one's wish to learn driving which, requires knowing the functioning of the necessary parts like clutch, break, accelerator, steering etc and their integrated functioning. Then good driving depends on the skillful management of the driver. It is like knowing general

rules of cricket game, which is different from the application of technique by an individual player depending on which he succeeds or fails.

What I want to say is that there may be as many methods as there are areas of enquiry, such as natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, religion and spirituality. Researcher has to choose one right mode of enquiry, i.e. he has to follow a system of right steps to arrive at the goal he has aimed at which may be philological a priori, empirical synthetic, comparative or phenomenological, but in every case one has to start with the given and follow the principles of reasoning to be consistent and coherent in order to develop the main theme and accomplish successfully the investigation into the nature of truth, which may be absolute relative, one, many, progressive, empirical transcendental, spiritual and so on. It is to be noted here that there are multiple forms of rationality, which differs from one mode of enquiry to another.

Moreover, plurality of view, not to talk of things, is ubiquitous and this creates unending disputes. Then there is plurality of attempts to resolve them. These attempts may be at empirical level as well as at meta level.

Then again disputes. Thus there is an ongoing process of disputes and resolutions, which together shape an ever developing intellectual tradition.

In this process different methods also evolve in light of new problems and evidences. This is what happens in philosophical tradition as well. But above all, there are immediate practical concerns, which of course require theoretical clarity but relevant practical solutions.

The parable of arrow narrated by the Buddha makes a strong message to avoid irrelevant and self stultifying enquiry and focus on the immediate practical concerns.

In this case, the victim himself is not bothered about his own welfare, for the reason that he is obsessed with false social, cultural and religious priorities at his own cost.

The Buddha suggests the cleansing of the mind of such conditioning factors of the sufferer and awaken him to take appropriate course of action to make the latter free from suffering. For the Buddha, the ultimate solution is the path of the dhamma. Not that the word dhamma has various meanings, such as quality (guna) cause or condition (hetu), non-substantiality (Nissata) discourse or preaching (desana) and text (pariyatu) [Kalupahana, 60]

Further, the Buddha, the Awakened One, equates himself with the moral principles, which is the primary meaning of dhamma.

In the same vein, he does not consider himself as God, or Semi-god, or even an ordinary human being; rather he proclaims himself as an Awakened one (Buddha). That is why he asks monks to see him as an embodiment of the dhamma i.e. he who perceives the dhamma, he perceives me.

(Samyuttanikaya, III, P.N. 120)

Thus dhamma becomes the general framework of entire Buddhism and so in every discussion - methodological or doctrinal – it must be kept in mind as the guiding principle.

Buddhist Canons and Philology – It is fact that the Buddha himself did not record his own discourses. They were compiled, categorized and systematized by his disciples over a long period in Pali language, i.e. the local dialect. Till date these are considered to be the original and authentic Buddhist canons, most of which are now critically edited and translated by a dedicated team of the Pali Text Society.

Buddha in this situation it was not possible to identify the original texts or meaning of the contents of these texts or meaning of the contents of these texts.

However, a rich and diversified Buddhist literature came into existence along with the multiple schools of thought, namely ‘Theravada’, ‘Sarvastivada–Vaibhasika’, ‘Sautrantika’. ‘Madhyamiki’ many of them were translated into various foreign languages like Sinhalese, Burmese, Thai, Tibetan Chinese, etc.

Now, if one is desirous of reading and understanding the meaning of the contents of a Buddhist text. For example, he must have its well edited version by a competent philologist whose primary task is to check and correct its grammatical and semantic structures with variants of reading wherever required is order to maintain the consistent flow of the ideas and arguments. Sometimes it so happens that there are two opposite readings suggested in the same sentence in such a situation, the philologist chooses the most appropriate one which fits in with that sentences so that an acceptable meaning is derived.

I have one such example in the reading of Candrakirti commentary on the second chapter of Nagarjuna’s Mulamadhyamakakarika, wherein two opposite reading are available.

Methodical integration of discourse and discipline

A question raised by a reader as to how to decide that a particular view or discourse quoted by some monk or for that matter some Buddhist scholar in the name of the Buddha is genuine. It is a known fact that Buddha never declared himself as an authority or possessing an absolute truth. He offered his own discourses to be critically examined and if found true, he asked the person to follow it. He sets four hermeneutic principles as the criteria of the dhamma, which are the principles of interaction of Awakening, Discourses, moral actions and practice.

Conclusion

This paper presents Buddhist as a Path theory in which the adherent practices mindfulness in order to see the world as it is the world as presented in a human situation is an interdependently originating process to which one can bring meaning but in which meaning is not inherent. The conceptualizing process by which one concretizes reality is the foundation on which human frustrations and disease arise.

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