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INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN – A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE



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ABSTRACT:

The family is the fundamental and basic unit in the global county. It needs peace and happiness which everywhere in a family aspires. To develop and maintain peace and happiness all member of a family have to discharge their duties / responsibilities and also exercise their rights for both parents and children to live in a state of harmony. The Buddha recognizing this need for interpersonal relationship has the way to follow and practice for them in his various discourse mentioned in the sutta literature.

KEYWORDS

fundamental and basic unit , global county , interpersonal relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

Respect and love towards one's parents is strongly emphasized in Buddhism. It is not surprising that the high esteem in which it is held is based on a conscience of moral which establishes the relationship between parents and children; nor is it surprising that this high esteem, consisting in the recognition of the supreme position occupied by the parents, is prevalent in Buddhist families. The Buddha praised such a family as follows: "Monks those families where parents are worshipped by children at home are accounted to include Brahma (sabrahmakani)... the divinities of the old (sapubbadevatani),... the teachers of old (sapubbacariyani),... those who deserve offering (sahuneyyakani). Monks, 'Brahma', 'the divinities of old', 'the teachers of old', and 'those who deserve offering' are the terms to denote 'mother and father'. Why so? The reason is that parents do much for their children" they give life to them, nourish and bring them up and introduce them to the world." The passage quoted above brings out two interesting points: the exulted condition of the former, the justification of their supremacy by their rights derived from the good things they have done to their children.

A mother look after a child with extreme tenderness and already from the beginning of her pregnancy an intimate relationship arises between them. Before or after her son's (or daughter's) birth, she cares for him/her, feeds him/her with all good things and regards him/her as her treasure. Parents nourish, comfort and look after him/her with all benevolence and educate him/her in all profitable ways. Whatever they have, they keep it for him, and constantly worry about him during all periods of his life. Since the parents are also endowed with other countless virtues, their names rightly appeal to their child. Therefore, the parents who are entitled to a very high position on account of these virtues should be highly regarded, respected and properly treated by the child. The mother is kind and compassionate toward her children, feeds them at her own breast, nurses and fosters them with extreme care. She is their refuge, bestows good things in them, and she is even regarded as the way to heaven. Parents might have injured, or knocked down, or punished their children yet they often did so with a view to their children's future welfare. Sometimes, even when the children commit some offence against their parents, the latter's hearts are still full of love and affection to them, since parents are recognized to be devoted only to their children's welfare (ekantahita). Moreover, parents would even sacrifice their lives for the sake of their children.

Parents are regarded as ' the ahuneyya fire', which means" 'the venerable fire' in the sense that good children honour, venerate and worship their parents in the same manner as a Brahmin honours, venerates and worships the 'Fire-God'. " This venerable fire, namely parents', the Buddha suggested, "is to be rightly attended to for happiness by esteeming, revering, venerating and worshipping them'. On the contrary, one who neglects one's own parents and even does wrong them cannot expect any blessing in life but the doom of ruin and hell. Thus, by wrong conduct towards his parents, a sinful, foolish man is declared to live an uprooted live, to be blamed and censured extremely by the wise, and to create extreme demerit. Moreover, one who has taken the life of his own parents or of an arahat, who has spilt the Buddha's blood intentionally and has disunited the order of monks, is said to suffer the unavoidable results of his evil action and go to hell.

It is interesting to note here that there are two categories of children mention on Buddhism, namely children by virtue of dhamma and those by birth. In the first sense, the Buddha regarded his disciples as his own children in that they were born of his mouth, born of his teaching and created by his

teachings; and they were therefore his spiritual heirs and not secular heirs. In the second category, which is also understood in moral terms, there are three levels of children:

(1) The more-advanced-born child (atijata), who leads a life opposed to that of his parents, who do not take for their guide the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, who do not observe the five basic principles of moral conduct and are of an immoral, evil nature.

(2) The parents-follow-born (anujata), who leads his life in accordance with that of his parents, who take for their guide the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, observe the five basic principles of moral conduct and are endowed with a virtuous, good nature.

(3) The base-born child (avajata) whose way of life is characterized as opposite to that of the first type. And according to the Buddha, the wise do not wish to have the third type of child, who would be a burden to the family (and make difficulties in society), but they wish for the first two types, who could brighten the family and society. With regard to the second category of child, namely, the child by birth, who is bound to his parents by moral obligations, we find that the Buddha laid special emphasis on the virtue of the acknowledgement of the good that has been done and the gratefulness for it (katannukatavedita), as one of the qualities ascribed to an ideal man (sappurisa). Regarding the obligatory duties of children towards their parents, the following quotation may further clarify the point: "Monks, I declare that one can never repay (the debt in terms of moral obligations) to two people namely, mother and father. Even if one carries other and doing so would live a hundred years, attain a hundred tears and if they, meanwhile, would even void their excrements upon one...Even if one establishes one's parents in supreme authority, in the absolute supremacy over this entire world... even then one could not repay them. Why so? The reason is that parents do much for their children: they give life to them, nourish and bring them up, and introduce them to the world. But one who converts unbelieving, immoral, stingy and ignorant parents, and establishes them in faith, morality, generosity and wisdom, just by doing so one does repay what is due to one's parents and does more than that".

The above statement reveals to us the Buddha's acceptance of the highly valued position of (good) parents. It also show that he suggested two ways by which one could undertake the task of supporting one's parents, viz. either in the secular, i.e. the material, or in the spiritual way. Yet the latter, which, in my opinion, is specially commended on the part a monk, is recognized as the higher and final way. But even in the material sphere, a lay adherent as well as a monk is encouraged to support his parents. A monk, who has supported his parents won the praise of the Buddha in that he had followed the tradition of the wise. When his mother or father or brother or sister or relatives or some depended of his gets ill, a monk is even allowed to go and see them and render service to them. Moreover, he is allowed to offer clothes and other requisites to his parents in case of great need. In the case of a lay adherent, one is advised to honour, support and serve one's parents in all possible ways in accordance with the filial conduct praised by the wise. A certain person, who even begged for alms and also doing maintained his parents, approached and asked for the Buddha's opinion and the latter replied: "Truly, in doing so, those performest thy duty on the ground that anyone, who even by asking alms in a lawful manner supports one's parents, generates much merit". Once, we learn, the Buddha suggested to an old man, whose sons in concert with their bad wives neglected to support him, to expose their wicked nature by making use of the public opinion at the civil assembly: and thereafter they turned to support him.

In conclusion, we may mention one relevant-perhaps the most relevant-source which gives a clear description of rights and duties in the relationship between parents and children. Here the parents are advised to look after their children in the following ways: by expressing their intimate parental love to their children, by restraining them from doing evil things, by exhorting them to do good things, by educating and training them for their future profession, by arranging a suitable marriage for them in due time, and by transferring the family inheritance to them in due time. Once looked after by their parents, children should look after the former by supporting them, by taking upon themselves all duties incumbent on their parents, by keeping up the lineage and tradition of the family, by making themselves worthy of the family heritage, and by making gifts and performing the prescribed rites after their departure. Finally, children are asked to give their parents all possible assistance to take care of and look after them and provide them with the necessary supplies for maintaining life and to treat them with due honour. Such a behavior would be regarded as an auspicious thing (mangala).

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1. Iti, P. 109f, AN. I, P. 123, II, P. 70
 2. CP. JK. V, P. 330f, VI, P. 376f. Where can be found the mother's similar spirit towards her child.
 3. CP, JK. V, P. 329
 4. Cp. MP., 'p. 109
 5. Cp. JK. I, P. 114; see also the same story in CDH. I, p. 240
 6. CDH. IH, p. 68f.
 7. Cp. AN. IV, p. 45
 8. JK. V, p.: 330
 9. AN. I. p.. 90f. In the same context are added two other persons namely, the Buddha and the arahats.
 10. Cp. AN. m, p. 146f
 11. Cp. Iti., p. 101. Tassa me tumhe putta orasa mukkhato jata-dham-maja dhammanimmita dhammadayada ne a'misadayada..
 12. Ibid., p. 63f
 13. AN. I, p. GI; cp. JK. V, p: 240f
 14. AN. I, p. 61f; cp. BGS. I., p 56
 15. JK. III, p. 270
 16. Vin. I, p. 147ff
 17. Ibid., p-. 297f
 18. Cp. JK. V, p. 331

19.SN.I, p.181

20.Ibid., p. 175ff

21. Cp DN.III, p. 189; cp. DB.III, p. 180.. It is worth noting here that the above duties which the children have towards, their parents correspond exactly to the reasons why parents desire the children to be born in the family.

22.Cp.KP., p. 136ff

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