

A Study of the Ethical Value as Reflected in the Kosala Saṃyutta

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study the Ethical Value as reflected in the *Kosala Saṃyutta* in Buddhism. The *Kosala Saṃyutta* belongs to the *Sagāthā Vagga, Saṃyutta Nikāya*. It is related to the King *Pasenadi* of *Kosala*. The King met Buddha on account of his queen *Mallikā*. Buddha had preached him twenty five *suttas* in the *sagāthā vagga Saṃyutta Nikāya*. They contain doctrinal and ethical value. They give the knowledge how one can get happiness in the art of living. In fact, the *suttas* in the *Kosala Saṃyutta* are the ethics bodily, verbally and mentally to be practiced in daily life for the welfare of all in the human society.

Keywords: Ethic, Reflection, *Kosala Saṃyutta*.

Introduction

This article “A study of the Ethical value as reflected in the *Kosala Saṃyutta*” aims to expose the analytical comprehension on the doctrinal and ethical value as reflected in the *Kosala Saṃyutta, Sagāthāvagga Saṃyutta Nikāya*. The objectives are to mention the structure of the *Kosala Saṃyutta*; what are the ethics that can be applied in the human society; the doctrinal value of the *Kosala Saṃyutta*; the theme of the *Kosala Saṃyutta*; the impact of *kamma* as mentioned in the *Kosala Saṃyutta*; application of the *Kosala Saṃyutta*; advantages of the ethical practices as explained in the *Kosala Saṃyutta* to get happiness in this very life and the last goal *Nibbāna*.

Theme of the Kosala Saṃyutta

The *Kosala Saṃyutta* of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*, consists of fifty-six *Saṃyuttas* each one of which referring some definite name or object, deals with various points of the doctrine. It is, therefore, not a subject wise division but only a weak attempt at such a one. This is especially the case with the first *vagga*. It comprises the *Saṃyuttas* and is called *Sagāthāvagga*, that is “the section with the song stanzas (*gāthā*). Such *gāthā* or stanzas appear here and there in all sections. Just like in the other *Nikāyas* but they are so numerous in the first. *Vagga* and many of the *suttas* consist entirely of verses only. Thus the *Kosala Saṃyutta* consists of 25 *suttas*, each one love and cares for oneself, he must avoid doing ten kinds of evil deeds (*duccarita*). One should have self-control in deeds words and mind. One must be free from suffering such as greed, hatred and delusion. It is one’s mindfulness that can benefit him both in the present and the future life. They also describe the law of *kamma*, obligation and responsibilities of the children to their parents and classification of true friends etc.

Concept of suttas in the Kosala Saṃyutta

In the *Kosala Saṃyutta*, the concept of the *suttas* are explained. The *Dahara sutta* explains why one should not look down upon the four kinds of entity, the royal descendent, the snake the fine and the monks although. They seem to lack of power or experience due to their young and small size. *Piya sutta* explains how good deeds and bad deeds one has done in the last life will always follow him in his endless journey in the endless cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*) like a shadow. According to ones *kamma* or deeds, one can enjoy wealth or get

into trouble. It is advisable that one should do meritorious deeds to enjoy a good life if he really loves himself. The *sattajaṭila sutta* narrates on the king *Pasenadī* of *Kosala* who thinks very high of ascetics, recluses and hermit alike. He has great respect for these people with their austere way of life regardless of their genuine virtue. In his opinion, they all are *Arahats*. Therefore the *Buddha* gives him some guidelines on how to assess one's personalities. This sutta describes ways and means of assessing personal characteristics. The *Appamāda sutta* highlights the fact that the only thing that can produce great benefits both in the present and future life in the mindfulness (*Appamāda*) in everything we do. The *Attarakkhita sutta* elaborates the meaning of "Self-protection" protection against enemies does not necessarily mean having numerous guards to escort one, such warriors from infantry, cavalry and elephant troops. Instead, having self control in mind, words and deeds is the best protection. So also the *Mallikā sutta* express if anyone is dearer to one than one own "self", there is "No one". The *Loka sutta* and the *Puggala sutta* detail that greed, hatred and delusion make for trouble and suffering in the world. In this light are interests leading to the welfare and happiness of mankind (*bahujanahita* and *bahujanasukha*) arising from the individuals' own needs (*attahita*) and from his sense of duty and obligation towards all sentient beings (*parahita*). There needs are justified as long as such happiness are not based on greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*), the three unhealthy mainsprings of motivation which are common among the worldlings. The *Yañña sutta* defines that animal sacrifice never produces good results. This consists of ten kinds of evil deeds (*ducarita*). So this must be avoided. The *Doṇapāka sutta* narrates about king *Pasenadī*, uncomfortable and short of breath after heavy meal; and profited by the lesson and became healthy.

Ethical value of the *Kosala Saṃyutta*

Then ethical value as explained in the *Kosala Saṃyutta* demonstrates this reciprocity between morals and manners. It is thus the very foundation of both moral and social life. The ethical value of *Kosala Saṃyutta* in relation to time may be a dimension of future, a hope. But emphasis was and still is placed on ethic of the *Kosala Saṃyutta* because it is expected that its practice would benefit each individual and hold human society together and lead it towards progress, both spiritually and socially. It is to note that at no point in his Teachings did the Buddha neglect the social aspect of human life. He did not forbid accumulation of wealth through fair and just means.

A detailed study of the ethical value as explained in the *Kosala Saṃyutta* will show how its practical application has been a valuable contribution towards preserving human society and cultural identity throughout its history. Due to the Teachings of the *Kosala Saṃyutta* morals and manners were given added force. To speak the truth and refrain from harsh language; to be generous and hospitable; to be fearful and shameful of indecent behaviour; to take care of our personality, all these and more are social and moral norms due to the ethical value of *Kosala Saṃyutta* that has guided human society since ancient times.

Life of human being would have been inconceivably evil and the society today would have been destroyed ages ago. A society that survives and flourishes does so, because it believes in universally accepted ethical values such as the respect for life respect for the property of another, respect for truth and respect for the dignity of man. No society in the world, not ever the most primitive would deny such perennial truths in some form or the other with the exception of societies such as *Nāzī* Germany which earned the scorn and ostracism of the world at large for violating the above truths. And the ethic of *Kosala Saṃyutta*, with its special connotations has been the backbone of human society through the history. Not everyone has live or can live up to it that is only to be expected, but no person

will ever deny that ethic of *Kosala Samyutta* is a goal to be sought in life although how each interprets into or understands it may vary. It cannot be denied that there are some who only care for ethic of the *Kosala Samyutta* or what they think amounts to “ethic of the *Kosala Samyutta*” such as being able to done, one should have self-control in deeds, words and mind, but that is human weakness and an ignorance of what ethic of the *Kosala Samyutta* really stands for.

So, human society today in ethical value of the *Kosala Samyutta* as in ancient time social conventions may have changed over time, but the ethical value of the *Kosala Samyutta* lives on and still guides both social conventions, moral and ethic and shall continue to do so as long as it to works and continues to benefit each individual and human society itself.

Human society and ethics

Human society and ethics since ancient times has placed a high premium on moral conduct as well as on traditional and manners. It is considered necessary for a person to behave morally by telling the truth, refraining from setaling as well as abiding by social conventions of polite speech, correct modes of dress and table manners. Customs differ from morals but there is a close relationship. Customs may be of two kinds, those called manners which are mere conventions that are followed because they have been done before. But even in this case they may be beneficial in the sense that they contribute in no small way to the smooth running of a society. A decent mode of dress may have direct or indirect impact on forms of behavior that are deemed acceptable in society. Even in the west this is true; there are proper forms of dress for all occasions, time and place. Polite forms of speech certainly contribute to good human relations. Then there are customs which are called morals, but these are customary patterns of behavior based on something deeper. Manners may change over time or because certain conditions and circumstances of society have changed but that is not true of moral customs or customary morality. In moral life it is customary for people to respect the lives and promises that have been made. But these are not just social conventions or manners. If there were a community or society which could easily agree to introduce their opposites, which would then lead to the collapse of society and put an end to human life. So they are not mere customs or manners or things that are done because our ancestors laid down the rules. They represent the way we must live if we are to have a human life at all. So, such acts are good and right not because they were established as rules since ancient times but because of their very nature. They are good in themselves and remain good even if few people obey them.

Different forms of ethics

“Ethics” is another area of human behaviour that characterizes human society but is distinguished from moral. Ethics are different from morals; they are regarded as social conventions that differ from society to society. Some forms of ethics are superficial, such as which fork to use with what dish. Such social etiquette alone is not adequate for the welfare of society. For instance polite speech is essential for good relations with others and it goes a long way towards success in what one does. In other cases swearing at people and dressing indecently may be considered bad ethics and such behavior may not be regarded as immoral in certain societies. But it may have moral impact. If one uses harsh language it will certainly enrage others and this could lead to exchanges of angry words and may end up with in extreme cases physical attack and bodily harm or even to killing one another which is certainly immoral behaviour. If one wears indecent clothing it could lead to sexual

misconduct. So there is a different form of ethics in the human society. Generally speaking in human society good morals go along with good ethics. If people are taught that being ethically is a way of showing consideration for others they will soon learn to behave in moral and upright ethic. Morals also act as a guide to ethics. Good ethics without morality would be superficial and would not contribute to lasting good relations in a society. Only good ethics founded upon moral values are prerequisite for a harmonious society. So to have and cultivate good value ethic, to have good morals are needed. These are different forms of ethics that should be practised.

Ethical Value of *Kosala Samyutta* in the Human Society

It is to mention the application of the *Kosala Samyutta* in daily life. A culture endures principally because its cultural and moral foundations are strong and secure. It is an undesirable fact that what is known as Myanmar culture, from its very inception has flourished and endured till today in the face of the many vicissitudes that it has faced like all surviving cultures do in the course of development. In the case of Myanmar it has faced and overcome invading armies and encroaching cultures. It has come under the influence of external cultural forces but these forces have not yet been able to consume and destroy what is typically Myanmar. In fact it has just been the reverse. Myanmar has instead absorbed all that it liked and considered good, of outside influences and adapted them to suit its geographical conditions and the character and temperament of its people. It has rejected what it did not want and in the process of Myanmar has evolved into a culture distinct and different from other cultures in Asia and the region. It exists with a culture (and national) identity of its own.

Buddhism, the birthplace of which is India came to Myanmar and form root in its soil and in the hearts and minds of its people. The *Theravāda* school of Buddhism likewise originated in India at the first Buddhist council and the Buddhist Texts (the *pitakas*) reached Myanmar. Many of its basic concepts have permeated Myanmar society, influenced Myanmar thought and the Myanmar way of life, yet Buddhism has been given a distinctly Myanmar hallmark. Of these many concepts, the application of the *Kosala Samyutta* has made the greatest impression on Myanmar social and moral thought.

The crucial and final is one however is ----- Is the application of *Kosala Samyutta* which has successfully functioned as the Integrative Imperative that has held Myanmar society together, and the *Kosala Samyutta*, the code of conduct that has guided the Myanmar people and contributed to their moral welfare, still relevant today? How can we apply the living tradition of our moral principles to the developments and problems of our temporary life? How should we try to incorporate whatever is worth while in later thoughts and views as a genuine development, extension, clarification and applications of the *Kosala Samyutta* view of ethics. Since everyone must have a starting point to think clearly and consistently about the moral problems we face daily at every level of our lives, the *Kosala Samyutta* view in general and the *Kosala Samyutta* in particular should be the starting point for the Myanmar.

Man, who is not only a highly intelligent animal but also an ingenuous one—one who has lifted himself out of the darkness of primitive life—has always searched for ways and means to change the world in which he lives for the better. As he changed the world, his way of living with his fellow- beings also changed. New social and moral rules had to be found, and rules had to be amended or made more comprehensive. Today science and Technology have provided the knowledge and means to change the world around us as never before. It has improved our material environment beyond expectations life and society too have

changed in many ways. Social conditions have changed, social norms have also undergone vast changes ever in Myanmar which is still a developing country. These recent and accelerated developments in science and technology have added many major dimensions to human relationships and new ethical issues have a riser. It has raised many thorny ethical problems and concerns that need to be considered and addressed. This has led to general acknowledgements that ethics plays a critical role in this debate, that it can provide the wisdom and guidance such changes require for the good of humanity.

Advantages gained from the *Kosala Saṃyutta*

The question now is ----what are the advantages gained from the *Kosala Saṃyutta* is based? From the Buddhist perspective of the *Kosala Saṃyutta* is a moral code principally based on the law of *Kamma*,

With respect to the Law of *Kamma*,

Kamma, the Venerable *Walpola Rahula* Said:

“Volition good and bad. So *Kamma* may be good or bad relatively. Good *Kamma* (*Kusala*) produces good effects and bad *Kamma* (*Akusala*) products bed effects.

So, every one has the result of one’s action good or bad. This means that what one’s does to others with good or bad intent in the past, results in what they are now and their present actions will also determine their future. On this basis then it would be far-sighted to be considerate in their relations with other beings. This is the moral law that rules the universe for Buddhists and it teaches one that everything is reciprocal. For every action there is a reaction. The law of *Kamma* also underpins the prescriptions of the *Kosala Saṃyutta* for it preaches less greed and sharing with others, for nothing is permanent and when one dies, one can take nothing of one’s wealth and riches; so while one lives in a society as human beings one ought to share what one has with others in need, instead of clinging to the things that one has because if one helps others, others in turn will lend a helping hand in the hour of one’s need. If one harbors good thoughts and kindness, then according to the law of *Kamma* one should be accumulating merit of the future with the law of *Kamma* the Buddha laid stress on such attributes as self reliance, self-control, resolution energy, work and effort. All these attributes are part of the *Kosala Saṃyutta*. The Venerable *Ashin Thiṭṭhla* quotes the Buddha’s *Dhamma* in the anthology “Essential Themes of Buddhist lectures” as follows;

“Evil deeds are done only by yourself, not only your parents, friends, relatives or advisers. So you yourself will have to reap the painful results of these misdeeds.”

One is responsible for whatever one does, good or bad. So the true Buddhist must rely on himself and on his own efforts. He is the only one responsible for his actions.

Conclusion

The *suttas* of the *Kosala Saṃyutta* explains on the action (*kamma*), self (*atta*) and mindfulness (*appamāda*). There are ten unwholesome action (*duccarita*). They are these bodily actions (*Kāya Kamma*), four verbal action (*vacīkamma*) and three mental actions (*mano Kamma*). These ten demerits (*Akusala*) are applied by the one who does not do himself and who does not protect himself. In turn there are ten wholesome actions (*sucarita kusala Kammās*). What are the roots of merits (*Kusala*)? They are non-greedy or unselfishness (*alobha*), non-hatred or loving kindness (*adosa*) and non-delusion or wisdom (*amoha or vijiṇā*). One who knows what is *kusala* and *akusala* is said he has right understanding

(sammādiṭṭhi). Therefore the ethics as reflected in the *Kosala Saṃyutta* are very comprehensive and valuable for all persons to be applied. If they employ these ethics towards one another, they will live happily in coexistence in their society.

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