A Study of Buddhist Sources on the Concept of Friendship

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ABSTRACT

Friendship is an intimate bond that people have towards each other. It is a major segment in the process of an individual's secondary socialization. Therefore, friendship is a highly influential and a complex human attitude. Religions, philosophies, and social disciplines have discussed friendship and its value in different ways. In basic religious teachings; friendship has been consistently valued. Each discipline points out friendship and its impact within the relevant subject areas. The objective of this research paper is to identify the relevant sources of Buddhist teachings in relation to friendship. Thus, primary and secondary sources belonging to Buddhist Pali literature were studied in order to realize this objective. Qualitative research methodology was used to analyze the data obtained through the study. Buddhist sutra literature is the main source that includes information about friendship. According to Buddhism, a friend is not just someone of the same age. All friends, regardless of age, are friends. It emphasizes that friendship not only affects the socialization of a person but also his or her spiritual development as well. Although friendship is categorized as 'Good Friends' (Kalyānamitra) and 'Bad Friends' (Pāapamitra), they are classified according to their attitudes and behaviors. Those who guide others to obtain spiritual development and support moral existence are called noble friends (Kalyānamitra). Those who have the opposite nature are evil friends (Pāapamitra). They are also classified differently according to 'Sigalovada Sutta'. Therefore, Buddhism shows that friendship is a very complex human relationship. It is not an interpretation based on race, religion, age, or tribe. It also shows that friendship in 'Anguttara Nikaya' is based on very serious sacrifices. Betrayal of a friend is also shown as a serious offence. It further shows that friendship is a responsible bond. As a whole, Buddhism simply explains friendship and emphasizes advanced friendliness with the concept of 'metta'. It is a state that goes beyond simple profit motives. Wishing goodness by being affectionate to all those known and unknown, is an advanced spiritual friendliness. Accordingly, Buddhism recognizes friendship as a common human relationship, regardless of standard social boundaries or time differences. It also shows that it is something that should be maintained with sacrifices rather than with responsibility. It emphasizes that the advancement of both worldly and spiritual aspects is based on friendship. According to Buddhism, friendship is not merely a matter of being on friendly terms; it is a relationship that requires sincere sacrifice. Those who make sacrifices are true friends, whereas one who does not is a fake friend. Among them, a person who offers assistance in both spiritual and worldly matters is a noble or virtuous friend (Kalyāna-mitra), while those who contribute to one's failure in both these aspects are harmful or unwholesome friends (Pāpa-mitra).

Keywords: Noble friendship, Evil friendship, Socialization, Society, Responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are a special category among all the other animals in the world mainly due to their ability to think. If someone does not do so, he will be similar to animals with his behaviour. 'Āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maithunaṁ ca sāmānyam etat paśubhir narāṇām dharmo hi teṣāmadhiko viśeṣo dharmeṇa hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ: Food, sleep, fear and sex are common to man as well as to animals. Man is superior to animals because of the qualities of dharma or morality, justice etc. A man devoid of dharma is like an animal.' The Hitópadésa states that, however, man is a social being. Someone who departs from society and lives a solitary life of asceticism in search of liberation will accept it. But even such a person has to associate with

society at least for needs such as food. Therefore, no matter what race, caste, religion or country a person represents, he has to associate with various social institutions.

Since people are different in terms of attitude, the society that a person may associate with is different. Among them, a person who is pleasant to someone is a friend. Also, building friendships is a very important social relationship. There are different ideologies about what friendship is. However, the friends; one associates with influence the life of a person. A person who associates with sinful friends or wicked friends is also tempted to do immoral deeds. Accordingly, his good qualities deteriorate. The association of good people creates good qualities. Therefore, Buddhism recommends virtuous social relationships for both worldly and spiritual development of an individual.

Social relationships are the basic foundation in socialization. Especially in secondary socialization, schools, peer groups, workplaces, and religious places are influential. Accordingly, individuals are identified as friends in that social environment. The impact of friendship on the background of education, career, religious inclinations, and socio-cultural factors is clear. Furthermore, the social relationships that modern society creates through social media are very complex. They are a broad situation that transcends national boundaries. There are discussions in society about positive and negative aspects of it. However, it is a clear fact that; this is the modern trend in friendships. However, it is important to examine the Buddhist attitude towards friendship from the sources.

Research Objectives

There are various discussions about friendship. It is not only a relationship between individuals but also an institution with a wide social impact. Therefore, it is a matter of discussion in various fields. Complex discourses can be seen in sociological, anthropological, religious, political and cultural terms. It is a common human social relationship. Nowadays, it has become more complex with the behaviors of people. The main objective of this study is to find out the Buddhist teachings on friendship using relevant sources. The social, cultural and religious values of friendship are also studied. The source is examined to study about the broad value of true friendship in society according to Buddhist teaching.

METHODOLOGY

This research on the Buddhist concept of friendship is a library-based study conducted entirely within a qualitative research framework. Data was gathered by exploring Theravāda Buddhist teachings on friendship, utilizing the Sutta Piṭaka (one of the "Three Baskets" of the Buddha's teachings) as the primary source and related literary works as secondary sources. In the analysis phase, the collected academic material is systematically examined through content analysis, grounded in the principles of qualitative data analysis.

DISCUSSION

Friend

The Oxford Dictionary defines a "friend" in various ways, offering meanings based on social usage such as "a person you know well and like," "a person who supports an organization," or "a person who has the same interests and opinions as yourself. "The Cambridge Dictionary presents a similar perspective, further clarifying the term "friendly" as "behaving in a pleasant, kind way towards someone. There are other words used to refer to a friend. These carry different meanings depending on the context or the nature of the relationship between the individuals. According to Merriam-Webster, there are many such terms in use, including buddy, pal, comrade, mate, and chum. "In Pāli, the terms ‘mitta’ and ‘mittata’ refer to friends and friendship. In Pali, according to Buddhist religious interpretation, ‘kalyānamitta’ is used to refer to people with high qualities of friendship. It is a special teaching in Indian religious literature. Friendship is a relationship based on trust, love, mutual support, understanding and respect for each other.

Good friend

A good friend is someone who desires the progress of his friend, and is endowed with good qualities such as faith, virtue, charity, courage, concentration, and wisdom. His friend's dharma is to help his friend in distress and to rejoice in his friend's happiness. The normal nature of people is to fulfill their desires in any way. This can be seen in the matter of economic resources or anything else. However, the Dhamma shows that one should act for the betterment of others as well as one's own desires. A person can be identified as a good friend by carefully examining the way how others act in their context. There, first of all, one should be compassionate for the sake of friendship. The Buddha has clearly preached how one should exist and the limits that can be recognized by examining others.

Characteristics of Noble (good) Friendship

According to the Buddhist Pāli sources, friendship is a friendly relationship among people. However, Buddhism emphasizes the necessity of it; maintaining a quality friendship. Therefore, it is considered as a social necessity rather than a religious necessity. A two-fold classification such as friend-unfriend, noble (good) friend – ignoble (bad) friend, etc. is constantly emphasized. Therefore, the Buddha points out the things that should or should not be done by those whom we associate with as friends and by our friends.

"Thihi bhikkhuvā aṅgehi samannāgatā mitṭho seviṭhabbo', tatāme tihi duddadaṃ dadāti. Dukkaraṃ karóti dukkhaman khamati"

The 'Aṇguttara Nikāya' mentions three basic qualities that a good friend should possess. They are; he is willing to give what he cannot give, does what he cannot do, endures what he cannot bear for the sake of his friend.

It is generally very difficult to give one's wealth to others. But charity is important for this life and next life in existence. Here, it is especially important that the mind should be flexible enough to give to one's close friends. This further explains that when needs arise, one should help without hesitation. That is the special mental state that should be present in the case of friends more than others. Even if it is a difficult task, it should be done for the sake of the friend. It is appreciated that those who have true close friends have the feeling to consider the goodness of their friend and make special sacrifices. Even if it is difficult to bear everything, they should have the ability to endure certain physical and mental inconveniences on behalf of their friends. This further confirms that friendship is not only about achieving self-interest, but is based on unselfishness. This is a social doctrine that is fast disappearing in the modern economic system. Therefore, it is essential to correctly identify and practice marital friendship in order to build a respectable developed society. No matter how much investment or other activities are based on trust, trust has been destroyed by the competition built into the modern socio-economic system. Therefore, friendship is a great blessing in the face of social difficulties. A good friend always thinks about the security and the betterment of his friend.

Guyhamassa āvikaroti – They reveal their own secrets to you (trusting you).

Guyhassa pariguyhati – They keep your secrets safe.

Āpadāsu na jahati – They do not abandon you in face of trouble.

Khīṇena nātimaññati – They do not look down on you when you are ruined.

Due to the diversity and secrecy that exist in the social environment, man is constantly subjected to physical and mental stress. Then it becomes a great comfort to reveal mental tensions in words. In such a situation, a friend comes to the rescue. The space to express ideas openly without hiding is in the friendship of a friend. It also confirms the belief that one's statement will not be harmful to oneself again. Accordingly, the duty and responsibility of not doing or not doing anything that causes harm to one's friend in any way should be confirmed through friendship.

In Jātaka literature, it has been pointed out that an enemy can be identified by sixteen characteristics that can be seen with the eyes and heard with the ears, and also a friend by another sixteen characteristics. Taken as a whole, it is emphasized that a good friend is someone who, through true friendship, avoids humiliation in front of others and wishes for the advancement of one's own soul. One who works for degradation in any way is a treacherous traitor.

The Singālaka Sutta divides the positive qualities of a noble friend into several parts, in particular, the sincere human qualities that are evident in the person are considered. 'Cattaro me Gahapati putta mitta suhada weditabba: Upakaro mitto suhado weditabbo samaí sukha dukkho mitto suhado weditabbo., atthakkai mitto suhado weditabbo anukampako mitto suhado weditabbo.' Upakaraka, Samana sukha-dukkha. Atthakkhai, Anukampaka are the four kinds of noble friends introduced by the Buddha.

The Buddha has made this classification considering the contemporary social situation and common human nature. A helpful friend protects a friend who is afraid or has become weaken. He protects his wealth makes donations when needed. A true friend never reveals another's secrets, always maintains privacy of the friend, reveals only what has to be revealed; further helps another in face of troubles and stands up for a friend even at the cost of one's life are the practices of equal happiness and suffering. Nurturing a friend with the practice of the Dhamma for the betterment of this world and the next is the virtue of the Atthakkhai. Praising a friend and being happy when he is prosperous, and willing to protect him when he is down and when he is criticized, are some of the unique qualities of a compassionate friend. Thus, the Buddha pointed out the nature of a virtuous friend. It is clear from the above that good friendship is the basis for the investment of resources by an individual and for the security of the assets invested, no matter how much it costs.

Noble friendship (kalyāṇa-mittatā) is beneficial for both the laity and the clergy. The Buddha emphasized that whether associating with a layperson or a monastic, one should seek out those who possess noble, virtuous qualities; such association leads to true well-being. The Buddha identified such seven noble qualities:

Piyo ca garu bhāvanīyo, vattā ca vacanakkhamo

Gambhīrañca kathaṃ kattā, no ca ṭhāne niyojaye

Attractive nature (Piyo), Worthy of respect (Garu), Worthy of high esteem (Bhāvanīyo), A good listener (Vattā), Trustworthy in speech (Vacanakkhamo), Capable of profound discourse (Gambhīrañca kathaṃ kattā), and does not engage in unsuitable activities (No catṭhāne niyojaye), these qualities characterize an amiable and a noble individual. The values highlighted here do not depend merely on status or authority; they are qualities that can and should be manifested by anyone, regardless of their position. The social character formed through these qualities becomes a blessing to those who associate with such a person. The Sigālaka Sutta outlines five ways in which one should support the noble friends one associates with, in accordance with the Dhamma.

'……Kulaputtėna uttaradisa disā mittāmaccā paccupatṭhatabba: danena peiyawajjėna atthacariyāya samānattāya avisanwadataya imehi gahapati puttā pañcahi ṭhānehi……' One should support one's friends through five practices: generosity, kind speech, helpful conduct, impartiality, and honesty. These are among the noble qualities of a true friend; indeed, the nature of a virtuous friendship is demonstrated through such actions. A "bad friend" or a "fake friend" is defined as someone whose actions lead to an individual's ruin in both this life and the next. Anyone who contributes to the depletion of one's existing worldly resources or hinders the acquisition of new ones is an untruthful friend. When people are dominated by selfishness, they act solely to fulfill their own desires; such behavior leads to both personal and societal decline.

The Sigālaka Sutta identifies those who appear to be friends but actually cause harm the "evil friends" or "enemies in disguise." They, too, must be recognized through their conduct and behavior. There are four such types of evil friends to be identified:

‘Cattato me gahapati sutta amitta mittapatirupaka weditabba aññadatthuharo amitto mitta patirupako veditabbo, vacīparam amitto mittapatirupako veditabbo, anuppiyabhāṇī amitto mitta patirupako veditabbo, Apāya sahāyo amitto mitta patirupako veditabbo’

According to the above statement there are four bad friends and their own qualities. Such as:

1. The friend who seeks what he can get (Aññadatthuhara). His characteristics are; he wants a lot for very little (appena bahumicchati), what he has done or he does, out of fear (Bhayassa kiccaṃ karoti), he seeks his own ends (Sevati atthakāraṇā).
2. The friend who talks but empty words (Vacīparama) can be known in four ways; He talks in favour of past (atītena paṭisantharati), he talks in favour of future (anāgatena paṭisantharati), he mouths empty phrases of goodwill (niratthakena saṇgaṇhāti) when something needs to be done in the present, he pleads inability owing to some disaster (paccuppannesu kiccesu byasanaṃ dasseti).
3. The friend who merely flatters you (Anuppiyabhāṇi) can be known in four kinds of qualities; he assents to bad actions (pāpakaṃpissa anujānāhti), dissents from good actions (kalyāṇaṃpissa anujānāti), he praises you to your face (sammukhāssa vaṇṇaṃ bhāsati) and he disparages you behind your back (parammukhāssa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsati)
4. The friend who is a fellow-wastrel (apāyasahāya). He shows another four kinds of qualities: he is a companion when you indulge in strong drink (surāmeraya majjappamādaṭṭhānānuyoge sahāyo), when you haunt the streets at unfitting times (Vikāla visikhā cariyānuyoge sahāyo), he is a companion in your frequent affairs (Samajjābhicaraṇe sahāyo) he is a companion when you indulge in gambling (Jūtappamādaṭṭhānānuyoge sahāyo hoti).

Consequently, some individuals who pose as friends seek companionship solely to serve their own interests; there are indeed many such self-serving people. For this reason, Buddhism places great emphasis on scrutinizing a person's thoughts, words, and actions. It highlights that associating with such friends leads to both material and spiritual decline. Sigālaka Sutta identifies bad friends as one of the six "doorways to hell" causes that lead to one's downfall. From a religious perspective, such associations compromise not only one's present life but also future existences, contributing to the erosion of wealth, reputation, and spiritual merit. Similarly, the Mitta Sutta of Aṇguttara Nikāya points out that associating with harmful friends is a primary factor determining whether one progresses or declines on the spiritual path.

The verse from the Pandita Vagga (Chapter on the Wise) of the Dhammapada which advises, "Do not associate with evil companions; do not seek the fellowship of the vile; associate with good friends; seek the fellowship of noble men" teaches that individuals characterized by malevolent traits such as engaging in unwholesome acts, alcohol consumption, and gambling should be identified as bad companions. One must not associate with those who inflict physical harm, violence, or death upon others, or who engage in theft; doing so leads to detriment in both spiritual and worldly spheres. Whether in investment or consumption, exhibiting such behaviors or associating with such individuals inevitably results in the decline across all aspects of life.

The Mittānisamsa Sutta explains the benefits that arise for those who do not betray their noble friends. It teaches that one who never betrays their friends reaps many blessings in both this life and the next.

Pahūtabhatto hoti vippavuttho sakāgharā

Bahūnaṃ upajīvanti yo mittānaṃ na dūbhati

For the person who does not betray friends:

- When away from home, one receives abundant food and drink; many people find their livelihood through association with such a friend.

- Thieves do not approach; the king offers no harm; all enemies are kept at bay.
- One returns home safely; finds joy in gatherings; and is held in high esteem by kinsmen.
- By honoring others, one receives honor in return; respectful towards others, one becomes worthy of respect oneself; one gains recognition and fame.
- One who honors friends is honored in turn; one attains glory and fame.
- One shines with prosperity like a blazing fire; glows like a deity; and is never forsaken by fortune.
- One abundantly acquires the wealth of cattle, crops, and the blessing of children.
- One gains an abundance of cattle, grain, and offspring.
- A living being who has fallen from a mountain or a tree, or has slipped from a height, finds rescue and support.
- Just as the wind cannot topple a mature banyan tree with a solid heartwood, enemies are unable to weaken such a person.

Teachings such as these illustrate the benefits of noble friendship. Thus, noble friendship serves as a foundation for both worldly and supramundane well-being. It is particularly evident that, in economic terms, sound investment, consumption, and resource conservation in this life depend upon noble friendship.

A person who acts in a way that leads to spiritual decline is a "sinful friend" (pāpa-mitta). Such selfish traits are characteristic of those who merely resemble friends (mitta-paṭirūpaka). Buddhism consistently emphasizes that both worldly and spiritual decline stem from associating with such harmful friends. The Buddha declared that association with noble friends (kalyāṇa-mitta) is an essential component of the entire spiritual path. During a conversation with King Kosala, the Buddha in response to a question from the King cited a reply He had previously given to Venerable Ananda. Venerable Ananda had said, "Lord, having noble friends and noble companions constitutes one part of the spiritual path." Great King, to Venerable Ananda, who spoke thus, I replied: 'Ananda, do not say that; do not say that. Having noble friends and being devoted to noble friends constitutes the entire spiritual path.' This implies that the very spiritual practice taught by Buddhism is grounded in the concept of noble friendship (kalyāṇa-mittatā). It represents the highest affirmation of the value of noble friendship. The quality of one's friendships is crucial, directly corresponding to the extent to which the Dhamma brings blessings to one's life or journey through Saṃsāra. In his article 'What is Friendship?', Uri D. Leibowitz states: "A final feature of friendship to highlight is that friendship is extremely valuable to us and that it is a crucial ingredient in a good life. Almost everyone who had written on friendship from antiquity and up to this day recognized these features of friendship." He cites the views of Western philosophers to support this point; however, the above-mentioned statement makes it clear that the Buddha had already highlighted this idea prior to them. Furthermore, the Buddhist perspective applies not only to worldly life but also to spiritual attainment. The ‘Sappurisānisaṃsa Sutta’ outlines four qualities that flourish through such association: Growth in noble virtue (sīla); growth in noble concentration (samādhi); growth in noble wisdom (paññā); and growth in noble liberation (vimutti). These are the four factors: virtue, concentration, wisdom, and liberation. If one distances oneself from the company of noble individuals (sappurisa), one declines in these very qualities. Thus, as stated, noble friendship underpins the entire spiritual path. It is evident from the points mentioned above that the Buddhist analysis of friendship is very comprehensive.

CONCLUSION

Buddhism recognizes friendship as an essential and indispensable bond within society; it transcends time, age, and geographical boundaries. According to our study, Buddhism does not define friendship merely as

casual cordiality; thus, it is rather specific factors which determine the formation and maintenance of true friendship (Mitta). It is a relationship that requires sincere commitment and sacrifice. Conversely, those who neglect their duties or responsibilities are considered fake friends (Amitta). Buddhism states that such individuals can be identified through their attitudes and behaviors. A person who provides assistance in both spiritual and worldly matters is regarded as a noble friend (Kalyāṇa-mitta); Buddhist sources clearly outline the criteria for this classification. In contrast, those who fail to support one's worldly progress and instead encourage spiritual decline are classified as harmful friends (Pāpa-mitta). The Buddhist sources examined in this study indicate that the distinction between beneficial and harmful friendships are not based on race, caste, religion, or region; rather, these teachings are grounded in universal human emotions and behaviors.

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