

# **Critical Psychology in Sri Lanka: The Buddhist perspective**

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## **Abstract**

Sri Lanka has made efforts to teach western scientific psychology in universities for several decades. However, there is no subject such as critical psychology taught in universities of the country. Although efforts are made to interpret the mental processes and behavior of Sri Lankan society using the western theories of psychology, the psychological professional practice has not developed significantly in Sri Lanka. The Buddhist attitude and way of life has been in the mindsets of the Sri Lankan Buddhists for more than two thousand five hundred years. This article would discuss the Buddhist analysis of the mind, the key Buddhist teachings of volitional action, causality and therapeutic aspects. However, Buddhist psychological concepts are yet to be organized as academic curricula for systematic teaching based on its unique characteristics deviating from the mainstream conceptual frameworks.

*Keywords:* Buddhist, Sri Lanka, Buddhist teachings, Buddhist Psychology

## **Background**

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean situated in South Asia. The Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, known as Ceylon up to 1972, is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society with a population of 21 million. The majority (74%) of the Sri Lankan population belong to the Sinhala ethnic group and 69% of them are Buddhists. The other ethnic groups are the Tamils, the Muslims and the Burghers. Ceylon was colonised by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British from 1505 to 1948 and became an independent country in 1948.

Sri Lanka provides free education up to the end of first degree level as university. Primary education is provided in the mother tongue to all students, which is either Sinhalese or Tamil. A bilingual policy of instruction was introduced 1995. Higher education is mainly provided in the mother tongue or in English. The literacy rates of the Sri Lankan population are the highest of South Asia. The education system has been systematic even before the colonial education systems were introduced, mainly by the British rulers. Sri Lanka had a thirty year civil war with the group of terrorists known as 'Tamil Elam tigers', which ended in mid-2009. Sri Lanka was struck by the 2004 Tsunami and was one of the worst affected countries.

Western Psychology is the mainstream psychology included as an academic component of various graduate and postgraduate programs in national universities in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka a psychology degree program is offered only in one national university faculty. However, various branches of Psychology such as Educational Psychology, Counselling Psychology, Child and Adolescence Psychology are offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels,

especially in faculties of Social Sciences, Education and Medicine. Psychology teaching, learning and professionalization operate comparatively at a non-significant level in Sri Lanka. Wijetunge (2008), who is a pioneering educational psychologist in the country, indicates in her concept paper in the first ever psychology conference held in Sri Lanka:

The history of teaching Psychology in Sri Lankan government institutions has been a story of reluctance on the part of policy making bodies to grant legitimacy to Psychology, in spite of an overwhelming demand driven need in the country.

The demand to learn psychology and counselling has been on the increase due to the need to address the psychological impact of the Tsunami and post-war issues. New programs of psychology are being introduced mainly by private organisations in collaboration with foreign universities. Academics on these programs are either non-Sri Lankan or recently qualified Sri Lankan academics. However, there are no indications of a significant increase of professional capacities within the country as the majority of the students who learn in these international colleges migrate to other countries as residents and to seek employment or further education in a foreign country.

Overall the practice of psychology across all sectors is picking up slowly. It seems to be the case that the psychology of people in Sri Lanka is not captured by the mainstream psychology taught as an academic discipline in various academic programs in both government and private organisations. Although counselling psychology programs are fairly popular, counselling practice has not gained the same popularity. Even the school counselling program has not gained ground even though much training and investment has gone into introducing school counsellors to schools by the Ministry of Education.

### **Buddhism and Critical Psychology**

In Sri Lanka there is no academic discipline called critical psychology in the psychology studies offered in higher education programs. While making an attempt to study and apply the mainstream Western psychology my thoughts about 'alternative psychologies' were developing and it was supported when I learned the term 'Critical Psychology' through the literature. I was influenced by the following argument:

...the argument that 'psychology' only began in the 1870s in Leipzig or that 'Critical Psychology' only began in the 1960s in Berlin, for example, are traps that fix and limit us. This is why critical approaches need to keep insisting that the realm of psychology is wider and more deeply historically embedded than this. (Parker, 1999, p. 12)

It was rewarding to know that critical psychologists are active across the world. It provoked me to become stronger in my thinking as a 'critical psychologist' and to prepare this article making an attempt to show how Buddhist teachings, which are not considered mainstream psychology, are influencing the Sri Lankan culture and community in constructing their thoughts and action.

Buddhism originated in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and has a history of 2600 years. Buddhism is not strictly a religion in the sense in which that word is commonly understood, for it is not a system of faith and worship, owing to any allegiance to a supernatural god (Narada, 1997, p. 155). Buddhism comprises of the teachings of the Buddha, which has a unique philosophical standpoint to other philosophies existing at the time of the Buddha. Even to date this fact

remains the same. One of the original Pali terms used to denote for what Buddha taught is *Dhamma*. The Pali language experts indicate that there is no equivalent term that exactly conveys the same meaning as *Dhamma*. Buddhism evolved into several traditions with time due to the richness of its content. Buddhism found its way into many countries and the disciples continue to enter the 'Buddhist Order' to date from all over the world.

Buddhism was introduced to Ceylon in the third century B.C. from India, where it had been established three centuries earlier. Sri Lanka is considered a Buddhist country as the majority of the Sri Lankan population are Buddhists. The form of Buddhism that prevails in Sri Lanka is Theravada as compared to Mahayana that is prevalent in far eastern countries. The culture, education and social dimensions of Ceylon developed dramatically with the introduction of Buddhism. The internal frames of mind and the behavioural norms of the majority of the people in the country are a result of being brought up within a Buddhist cultural environment. The deep roots of the culture established with the introduction of Buddhism have been strong in laying the groundwork of the minds of its people to date.

The teachings of the Buddha have been documented extensively. It was first written down around 80 B.C. in Sri Lanka. The original Pali texts are called the 'Tipitaka', which denotes the three collections of texts, namely, the Collection of Discipline (Vinaya Pitaka), the Collection of Discourses (Sutta Pitaka) and the Collection of Philosophy (the Abhidhamma Pitaka). The original sources of Buddhist teachings are in the Pali language, which is a regional dialect that prevailed in ancient India. Hence, the Tipitaka is also referred to as Pali Canon (Buddhist Dictionary, 1998).

Buddhist teachings have been verified by Buddha and many of his disciples and are verifiable in principle by anyone with the requisite competence (Jayatilleke, 1984). The statements of the teachings of the Buddha are meaningful and are supported by reason and experience. The mindsets of a majority of Sri Lankans have been influenced by Buddhism for over 2500 years. What is particularly significant is that, during this long history, Buddhist theories concerning mind were carried forward. Buddhism is a *practice* oriented religion. Venerable Piyadassi (1972), who was an eminent monk in Sri Lanka, indicated:

To the Buddhist even the question of religion and its origin is not a metaphysical one, but a psychological and intellectual one. To him religion is no mere creed or code of revelation or fear of the unknown, fear of a supernatural being who rewards and punishes the good deeds and ill deeds of his creatures. It is not a theological concern, but rather, a psychological and intellectual concern resulting from the experience... (p. 5)

There are 10,346 Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka. The communities and the monks of temples have maintained healthy interrelations across time. Community members seek refuge in resolving household and community issues in consultation with the Buddhist monks who are knowledgeable in Buddhist teachings. The Buddhist temples have programs to teach the *Dhamma* to all who are interested. On Sundays most Buddhist children attend 'Dhamma schools' conducted by temples to learn the *Dhamma*. Monastic education has been conducted in larger temples from the time of introduction of Buddhism to Sri Lanka to date with ups and downs in its long history. In the contemporary society, Buddhism is taught as an academic subject in the national school curriculum from the first grade across the first eleven years of education leading to General Certificate Examination Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) examination. This course in Buddhism is taught to all Buddhist children in the country by

trained teachers. Students who are interested can pursue Buddhist studies for the final examination in secondary education as well. The knowledge of Buddhism is tested with the recognised public examinations and certificates are awarded in a similar fashion to any other academic subject. All students learn their respective religions as a compulsory subject since Sri Lanka is multi-religious country. Parallel to Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are the other religions taught in school.

Buddhism offers a complete psychological package. Buddhist Psychology is taught as an academic subject for postgraduate studies in universities and other institutions in Sri Lanka. The University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, one of the largest Universities in the country, has a reputation for Buddhist and Pali studies. The Postgraduate Institute of Buddhist and Pali Studies of the University of Kelaniya and the Buddhist and Pali University attract a large international studentship.

Although academic study of Buddhist Psychology is a component of Buddhist studies and studies of psychology, it is doubtful whether the real essence of the teachings are brought to light, as most of the curricula are organised according to a Western psychological curriculum framework. Buddhist Psychology curricula has not been organised as well as the Western curricula for the purposes of teaching. One of the eminent Sri Lankan psychologists who researched on the psychological content of Buddhism is the late Dr Padmal de Silva, of the University of London. He indicated that it is not feasible to attempt to totally integrate the Western and Buddhist systems of psychology, as both are sophisticated systems (de Silva, 1990). Piyadassi (1972, p. 5) highlights the aspects of Buddhism in relation to modern science in the following manner:

Buddhism is more concerned with curative issues than with analysis. Buddhism helps us to get beyond the intellect to the actual experience of life itself. Through meditation the Buddha had discovered the deeper universal maladies of the human heart and mind. The remarkable insight into the workings of the mind makes the Buddha a psychologist and scientist of the highest eminence. Admittedly his way of arriving at these truths of mental life is not that of an experimentalist. ... The Buddha places so much emphasis on mind and mental phenomena because of the crucial role that our inner life occupies in the genesis of human action.

Michalon (2001), a Western psychiatrist, discusses the 'psychological sophistication' of Buddhist Psychology and shows how Western psychotherapy could benefit from Buddhist teachings.

As a psychiatrist I discovered the marvel left behind by the Buddha 25 centuries ago. A psychological marvel with surprising analytical, cognitive and spiritual potential, too long obscured in the West by its religious content only. (p. 217)

Understanding Buddhist teachings is the way to understand the psychology of the Buddhists. Buddhist teachings, which mainly concern the concepts of human mind and behaviour, are too extensive to be discussed in this article. Instead, this article briefly introduces the key psychological concepts in the Buddhism. The majority of the literature referred to the compiling of this review article was written by scholars of Buddhism in reference to the primary Buddhist texts written in Pali. This article aims to present the key Buddhist teachings which lay the psychological foundations of the Sri Lankan majority.

## **Buddha: the rarest human being**

In order to understand the concepts of Buddhist psychology, it is essential to know, at least briefly, about the Buddha. Buddha was the rarest of human beings. Buddha was a unique human being who attained Enlightenment. Buddha was not a mythical figure. However, attaining Buddhahood is the most difficult task a person can pursue in this world.

The key aspects described by Anandamaitreya (1993, pp. 1-2) about the Buddha and his teachings are important to understand why Buddhism can be regarded as a complete package of human psychology.

Buddhism is the doctrine expounded by the Buddha. It is not a dogma, nor a revelation made by any supernatural agency. Buddha was neither a god, nor a son of a god, nor an incarnation of a god, nor a prophet sent by such an agency. He was a human being, a prince of the Sakyan clan of the Northern most part of the ancient India. His name was Siddhartha Gautama. He was brought up in luxury as his family was extremely rich and powerful. But he was the rarest type of person.

He was moved about what he saw and grew up with compassion for suffering mortals. When he was 29 years of age he left home to homelessness in search of a teacher who could show him the way to freedom from all suffering. He followed the teachers who claimed to have found perfect release but was not satisfied with the results. At last, with much struggle and experience, he discovered for himself the way by which he attained full Enlightenment (Buddhahood). Thereafter, he was recognised as the 'Buddha, the Enlightened One'.

He realised the reality of existence, why it continues to be so, its nature when it ends, and the way to put an end to this flow. He called these four facts the Four Great Truths.

The Buddha does not claim a monopoly over the truth he expounded. Therefore, he did not hold the view that only what he says is true and the rest is false. What he meant by truth is the true nature of all phenomena, the true nature of the world (Nanayakkara, 2011b). The Buddha spent all his life serving others with the vision and the mission to deliver the message of the Four Noble Truths to as many as possible.

In the context of the modern terminology, the Buddha was also a psychologist. The Buddha encouraged people to think for themselves, to reason and to test for themselves. For the first time in history Buddha gave men the power to think for themselves, raised the worth of mankind, and showed that man can reach to the highest knowledge and supreme Enlightenment by his own efforts. The Order of monks and nuns was established to give an opportunity for those who are willing to devote their lives, not only to their own spiritual and intellectual development, but also to the service of others. Preaching the doctrine has been the main mode of dissemination since the time of the Buddha. Buddha's method of teaching was innovative. In terms of modern methods it can be termed as student centred, constructivist, etc. Even today frequent preaching of the teachings of the Buddha by the Buddhist monks and learned laity is the main mode of dissemination taking place in Sri Lanka.

## **The Buddhist way of life**

Buddhism is 'a way of life'. Buddhist teachings are not confined only to persons who have renounced household life. However, the practices followed by those who have renounced and those who live a household life are obviously different. Buddhist teachings extend to point out the work ethics, household ethics and correct livelihood practices, securing human rights, women's rights, etc. (Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Extract No. 3, 1995). Karunaratne (1988) an eminent Sri Lankan scholar in Buddhism stated:

Religion is a way of life, a perennial philosophy of values which must inform all our actions in thought, word and deed. Religion instils in us the need for renunciation not in terms of running away from society and its evils but in terms of charity, detachment, selflessness, liberality and compassion. Religion tells us that there cannot be lasting happiness and compassion. ... Buddhism in particular seeks to restrain the acquisitive instincts in man and to foster altruistic ideals which benefit the whole society... (p. 20)

The life of a Buddhist is shaped through childhood according to Buddhist values. If one decides to become a Buddhist as a lay person there is no initiation ceremony. If one understands the teachings and if one is convinced about the teachings of the Buddha he/she can become a Buddhist (Rahula, 2006). However, Buddhist teachings are not to be blindly followed but to be realised with critical evaluation. Buddha's words documented in the well-known discourse of Kalama Sutta are as follows:

Do not accept anything on mere hearsay. Do not accept anything by mere tradition. Do not accept anything on account of rumours. Do not accept anything just because it accords with your scriptures. Do not accept anything by mere supposition. Do not accept anything by mere inference. Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your preconceived notions. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable. Do not accept anything thinking that the acetic is respected by us.

But when you know for your self – these things are immoral, blameworthy, these things are censured by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to ruin and sorrow – then indeed do you reject them.

When you know for yourself – these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, conduce to well-being and happiness – then do you live and act accordingly. (Narada, 1997, pp. 156-157)

Buddhist teachings have to be understood correctly in order to get the maximum benefit towards self-development. There are many with false beliefs and understandings (Dhammananda, 1993). Buddhist teachings help a man to bring about a total revolution within and change himself, for his own good as well as for the good of others, from what he is to what he ought to be. Ethical perfection advocated by Buddhism has not only a personal but also a social dimension (Nanayakkara, 1995).

Full moon days of each month of the year have special significance to Buddhists. There are a number of significant happenings that had taken place in relation to Buddha and Buddhism on full moon days. In Sri Lanka all the full moon days of the year are public holidays. On these days the Buddhists devote themselves to learn and practice the teachings being affiliated to temples across the country. Although there are no systematic studies where quantification of

the change that has taken place within Buddhists, the trend where a majority of the Buddhists take an effort to shape their lives according to Buddhism is significantly observable.

### **The doctrine of universal reality: The Four Noble Truths**

The discovery of the Buddha on the universal realities of existence is referred to as the Four Noble Truths:

The first is the Noble Truth of the *dukkha*, which is the universality of suffering, meaning that all forms of existence are of necessity subject to suffering. The second is the Noble Truth of the arising or cause of the *dukkha*, which teaches that all suffering is rooted in selfish craving and ignorance. The third truth is the Noble Truth of the cessation of the *dukkha*, and shows how through the extinction of craving and ignorance all suffering will be vanished and liberation from samsara or the continuity of existence will be ceased. The fourth Noble Truth shows the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. It is the Noble Eightfold Path, of the right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. (Nayanathiloka, 1994, p. 3-4)

The entire teaching of Buddha is focused on the problem of *dukkha* and its cessation (*nirodha*). To those who listened to him, he explained in its detail the first Noble Truth, the problem of *dukkha*, the universal fact of life. Piyadassi (1984) elaborates the teaching in the following manner:

Buddhist psychology is centred on the eternal truth of '*dukkha*', the unsatisfactoriness or suffering (as translated in English) of all sentient beings, all empirical existence. The concept, although it includes personal unhappiness, discontent and psychological stress, has a deeper meaning. The problem can be described as an 'existential suffering', which is the suffering of bondage to the cycle of repeated birth and death. (p. 9)

Buddha did not consider *dukkha* as something caused by some superior external agency to enforce a punishment for disobedience to the commandment of that agency. Nor did the Buddha considered *dukkha* as a mere chance happening. Buddha clearly pointed out the psychological origins of suffering. Buddha explained that it as a causal happening. He pointed out that when certain causes are present *dukkha* comes to be and when those causes are absent *dukkha* ceases to be.

The doctrine of the 'Four Noble Truths' is deep and profound. However, the Buddhists are given an understanding of the Four Noble Truths from the early stages of life. This knowledge gives them a basic view of the world and a way of life. It is not incorrect to say that this is the main teaching which influences the Buddhists' outlook to life.

Suffering or causality would not cease by itself. Buddha says that each and every human is born with the potential of stopping the suffering which is causally conditioned and to attain the final freedom, even though the degree of the strength of it would vary among individuals. Buddhism has shown us the path to salvation and it is each individual's responsibility to work out their own emancipation through personal effort. Buddhism directs man to get busy with the task of developing the inner forces and qualities of the mind, while the teachings of the Buddha can only show the way.

This path is a course of training that gradually develops and perfects one's personality, thought, outlooks, attitudes; all that constitute one's total behaviour. The explanation by Kalupahana (1998) on the doctrine of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path indicates the path as the self-regulatory mechanism of volitional action. Buddhists are made aware of the Noble Truths with a large number of examples and the Buddha has emphasised the need to reform one's life from today onwards as if it is the beginning of one's life. Buddhist teachings are meant to improve social order as well as harmoniously ordering an individual's personal life.

Steps of the Noble Eightfold Path indicate that it is a psychological path for attainment of the high ideal of self purification. These eight items cover three salient aspects of an individual's activities which are physical, verbal and mental activities. Through successful practice of the Noble Eightfold Path the final goal of terminating the *samsaric* existence can be realised. Nanayakkara (2011a, p. 28) shows how Buddha explained purification of the mind by the adherence to the Noble Eightfold Path. Buddha suggested that following the Noble Eightfold Path is like a 'waterless bath' (*anodaka sināna*) where one could plunge into for an internal purification or an internal bath (*anterena sināna*).

### **The Buddhist concept of man and the emphasis on the mental activity**

The Buddha described man as a psycho-physical combination of aggregates (*kandha*) which continues to be in a flux. Buddhism recognises man as a combination of ever changing physical and mental factors which are known as five aggregates referred to as *pancakanddha*. While one aggregate is physical the other four are psychological. The psychological component is classified into feelings (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*), volitional formations (*sankhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*) and referred to as '*nāma*' in the Pali language. The physical component is the material form or the function of identification referred to as '*rūpa*'. This is an aggregate of matter. Taking both mental and physical aggregates, the personality concept is referred to as '*nāmarūpa*'. The impermanence of all components of personality is one of the main arguments towards the non-existence of psychic self or a soul. They are a set of functions which cannot be reduced to elements (Kalupahana, 1987). A 'being', 'individual', or 'person' is nothing but a changing combination of physical and mental phenomena. A belief in an ego entity is merely an illusion (Nayanatiloka, 1994).

The main emphasis in Buddhism is on the mind. Buddhism stands unique among philosophies with the emphasis on the mind, because Buddhism is not a theistic doctrine. Therefore a belief in a 'saviour' or any external agency through the grace of which one could experience the ultimate freedom is absent. Buddhism has no concept of an entity called the mind. In a canonical discourse called 'Mahātanhāsankya sutta' the Buddha clearly stated that the mind also arises due to causes and conditions and is hence impermanent. The Buddhist analysis of the mind presents mental factors systematically in one of the collections of Buddhist canonical texts, which are collectively referred to as 'Abhidhamma'. These texts are exegetical works about early Buddhist teachings. The Buddhist doctrine is not aimed at mere academic pursuit, but to be practiced and to realised by one-self.

The concept of mind is more complex than an analysis in terms of cognitive, emotive and conative processes (Wijesekera, 1962, p. 8). The Encyclopaedia of Buddhism is reliable as eminent scholars who are versatile in Pali and Sanskrit compiled these volumes. There are several terms to refer to the English term 'mind' in the Pali language: *citta*, *mano*, and *viññāṇa* are the more frequently used terms. The term *citta* is a generic term in Buddhism and is used 'as a unitary term used as a collective noun to comprehend a wide and complex nexus

of mental states in a flux. Buddha's teachings on *citta* yields us the results of the first empirical investigation recorded in the history of human thought into the nature of mind' (Karunaratne 1988, pp. 94-95). The author extends on *citta* the following aspects. *Citta* is subjected to threefold classification represented by the distinction between the affective (or *vedanā*), cognitive (or *saññā*) and conative or volition (or *cetanā*). *Citta* plays a central role in the moral and intellectual behaviour of the individual.

Most of the terminology used in Pali does not have direct English equivalents. However, over the years authors have used certain English terms to denote the meanings of Buddhist concepts of Psychology. However, whether mind takes the form of *citta*, *mano* or *viññāṇa*, it is always in a process of both arising and ceasing to be. All of these aspects of mind have the characteristic of being impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and devoid of substance (*anattā*) (Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Vol. VII, p. 2). Saratchandra (1994) indicates that the majority of these meanings are not generally incorrect, but that they are not sufficiently specific and do not bring out actual meanings.

A complete description of perceptual processes is given in Buddhist doctrine. The mental life of an individual consists of sense impressions, sensations, perceptions, and volitions. According to Nayanathiloka (1998), the feeling aggregate has three dimensions: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. There are six kinds of feeling experiences passing through the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and mind. Similarly, perceptions also have six dimensions: perception of forms, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily contacts and mental objects. Volitional formations are all compounded and conditioned things: there are many and different shades of meaning depend on the context. Consciousness also aggregates into six types: it is divided into six kinds correlating to the six senses, e.g., eye consciousness, ear consciousness, etc.

### **Buddhist teachings on intentional behaviour and morality**

Buddhists teachings on behaviour extend to teachings of cause and effect of volitional action which is causal to suffering of man. The term '*kamma*' (or volitional action) in Buddhism means volitional action or action carried out with a particular intention (*cetanā*). In Buddhism *kamma* refers to one's behaviour and its psychological foundations, i.e. volitional action. The decisive factor in moral action is the intent which motivates action. It is the intention that determines the moral character of an action. Volition could be good or bad and as a result action could be wholesome or unwholesome.

According to Buddhism there are six categories of volition associated with six roots: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and the mind. These volitional actions may be 'morally good' (or *kusala*), morally evil (or *akusala*) or morally neutral (*avyākata*) (Kalupahana, 1998). All Buddhists are made aware of the importance of moderating the stimulation of these roots. The Buddhist doctrine of *kamma* emphasizes the importance of the human individual without encouraging individualism (Kalupahana, 1988). The *kamma* theory indicates that morally good and evil actions lead to consequences (or *vipāka*). The general principle is that all morally good actions lead to pleasant consequences, while all morally evil actions lead to unpleasant consequences. If interpreted scientifically, the theory of volitional action can be stated as the law of cause and effect. Some people ask, 'If good begets good and bad begets bad, why should many good people suffer and some wicked people prosper in this world?' The Buddhist view is that this causality cannot be reduced to talk about a simple, linear or direct relationship between action and consequences. The Buddhist doctrine of *kamma* indicates a broad correlation between actions (or *kamma*) and consequences. The endless play of action

and reaction is the cause and effect which continues and brings about rebirth. Hence, the *kamma* doctrine does not say one should continue to perform good *kamma* for the sake of rewards and continued *samsāric* existence. It is *kamma* that conditions rebirth. This is a significant fact of which all Buddhists are aware.

The Buddhist theory of *kamma* encompasses a broader framework for understanding the span of efficacy of actions which moulds the life of an individual. *Kamma* theory extends to explain the influence of actions of the past lives. According to Tilakaratne (2005) the extent to which various laws affect us psychologically is within our control. Human beings, according to Buddhism, are not slaves of *kamma* but masters of it. The choice to engage in wholesome or unwholesome deeds is our decision. Buddha rejected all types of determinism and total indeterminism to claim that people act according to their 'will' and are therefore responsible for what they do.

Buddhist practice is based on morality or virtue. Cultivation of morality is one of the first lessons as a Buddhist. The teachings recommend abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, verbal misconduct and intoxicating drinks. The Buddhist laity are advised not to engage in the following five types of trade: trade of armament, slaves, meat, intoxicants and poison. Not only in the choice of good livelihood but also advises as to how to protect and spend righteously earned wealth are given in Buddhist teachings. Being a practising Buddhist is to change one's motivation from greed, hatred, and ignorance to selflessness, compassion and understanding.

According to Buddhism the evil dispositions are manifested through the activity of the mind, body and word. The evils manifested in bodily behaviour are: 1. Killing, associated with various forms of violent behaviour involving bodily injury to other living beings; 2. Stealing, involving the violations of the property rights of another to satisfy one's own greed and selfish instincts; and 3. Unchastity, involving the indulgence in sensual pleasures specifically relating to one's sexual life. The evils manifested in verbal behaviour are: 1. False speech; 2. Harsh or unpleasant speech expression of anger and ill will; 3. Slandorous speech intended at the creation of dissention and conflict between people; and 4. Gossip or frivolous talk which serves no meaningful or useful purpose. The evils manifested in mental activity are: 1. Thoughts of intense greed; 2. Thoughts of ill will; and 3. Wrong or mistaken beliefs harmful to one's moral life. These constitute the standard list of ten evils (*akusala*) given in the Buddhist primary sources.

All Buddhists from childhood are trained to promise to themselves to follow five moral rules which are commonly referred to as five precepts. They are as follows:

1. I take upon myself the vow of abstaining from causing hurt to living beings.
2. I take upon myself the vow of abstaining from taking what is not given by its owner.
3. I take upon myself the vow of abstaining from wrong conduct in the satisfaction of sensual desires.
4. I take upon myself the vow of abstaining from falsehood.
5. I take upon myself the vow of abstaining consumption of things that cause confusion and heedlessness.

Psychologically these rules form part of a person's self-discipline. The moral precepts are meant to get rid of negative forms of behaviour and replace them with compassionate action (Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Vol. VI, p. 148). A person volunteers to declare his willingness to observe the five precepts. With this the person opts to lay the moral foundation for his

spiritual development. When one undertakes to observe the five precepts one makes a promise to oneself and not making a promise to any external agency. This shows how Buddhism rejects the existence of an external supreme agency, God or Soul or Fate.

### **Theory of Dependant Origination: Principle of causality**

*Patticcasamuppāda*, the theory of ‘dependent origination’ or the principle of causality is the most profound teaching among the Buddha’s teachings. It is the theory that explains the causal relationship of the origination and cessation of suffering. The bases for phenomena to arise are dependent on conditions. Whatever comes into being originates through conditions, stands with the support of the conditions, and ceases when the conditions cease. The principle of *patticcasamuppāda* is considered to explain the reality of the world’s occurrences in full, as it is a phenomenon that would have existed whether the Enlightened ones had been present or not. No other formula has been presented thus far to explain the richness of the causation (Kalupahana, 1991).

The principle of *patticcasamuppāda* is ‘that when all necessary causes and conditions meet, the corresponding effect is produced’ (Tilakeratne, 1998). The general formula is as follows:

When this is present, that comes to be,  
On the arising of this, that arises.  
When this does not exist, that does not exist,  
On the cessation of this, that ceases.

This is the general formula of causality. Buddhism explains all functions of phenomena on the basis of this general formula of causality which has a universal application. Furthermore, dependent arising beyond general conditionality and the kind of specific conditionality that explains the arising and cessation of phenomena dependent on specific conditions are also explained (Bodhi, 1995). Accordingly, the twelve factor formula depicting the pattern of arising of ‘*dukkha*’ is the understood as follows:

[O]n ignorance depends dispositions, on dispositions depends consciousness, on consciousness depends psychophysical personality, on psycho-physical personality depend six gateways, on six gateways depends contact, on contact depends feelings, on feeling depends craving, on craving depends grasping, on grasping depends becoming, on becoming depends birth, on birth depends lamentation, suffering,....

This twelve-factor formula is the most well-known application of this principle. If these conditions are removed the phenomena concerned cease to be, or cease to arise. This theory became revolutionary as it refutes the deterministic views of causation (Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, Vol. IV). If this order is reversed by an individual the chain would break. This is possible because man has free will to change the direction of the causally conditioned procedure (Wijebandara, 2011).

Buddha clearly said that all phenomena occur on the basis of a causal pattern and this causal pattern is the natural causal pattern; and he merely claimed to have discovered it. These phenomena are linked to each other and cannot be separated. Through the application of this theory it is possible to see the true nature of everything, that is, the impermanency of everything. But man’s wish is for everything to be permanent. When a man realises the true nature of phenomena he will no longer crave for happiness through attachment to

impermanent objects. Although many have knowledge of this law of causality it is hardly applied to matters of life.

### **The therapeutic nature of Buddhism**

Buddha said that there are two kinds of illnesses, physical and mental illnesses. Buddhist teachings educate individuals to safeguard their mental health, to counsel the affected and to develop their mental capacities. Buddhism has clear relevance to psychological health and well-being. This takes two forms: therapy for psychological problems, and the prevention of psychological disorders (de Silva, 1993).

In studying Buddhist mindfulness strategies de Silva (2000) indicates that they represent a therapeutic model which treats the person as his/her agent of change, rather than as the recipient of externally imposed interventions. Nanayakkara (2011a, p. 30) elaborates the significance of Buddhist psychological therapy, highlighting the emphasis on internal purification of the mind in contrast to seeking purification from an external power. The prescription for purification is the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. The practice aims at flushing out all unwholesome factors within an individual and restoring the balance of all personality traits and characteristics. This brings about a moral balance of one's physical, verbal, and mental behavior, leading to a fine balancing of emotions and intellect.

Among Buddhists, mindfulness of breathing is a simpler type of popular mind culture. This form of exercise of breathing is trained from school age. Some Buddhists try to practice mindfulness exercises daily as a routine, as a practice on the full moon day of each month or resorting into a retreat periodically. This practice helps one to gain good mental and physical health and to get relief from stress. Currently both Buddhists and non-Buddhists tend to adopt this technique.

According to de Silva (1990, 1993) Buddhist techniques of counseling are very much similar to many of the cognitive and behavioral techniques that have been developed in recent decades in Western psychology and psychiatry. The Buddhist therapeutic strategies resemble contents of a modern therapy manual when listed using modern terminology. These include: systematic use of rewards and punishment; fear reduction by graded exposure; modeling; self-monitoring; stimulus control; overt and covert aversion; use of family members for implementing a behavior-change program; and specific techniques, including distraction and over-exposure, for unwanted intrusive cognitions.

An analysis of the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami from a Buddhist perspective highlights the positive action towards healing the survivors, although the actual proportion of the affected that satisfied the diagnostic criteria of PTSD are unknown. The impermanence of phenomena (*annica*) was the major interpretation for the loss encountered by the tsunami, and it has helped victims to realize the reality (de Silva, 2006).

### **Training of the mind**

Buddhist psychology is not just a scientific inquiry. It has the ultimate objective of cultivating the wholesomeness of mind, cleansing psychological states of all evil by finding the truth. The entire teaching of the Buddha is a lifelong attempt to enunciate various means to the systematic training of the mind. Buddha recognises that this training is capable of being set out in graduated stages to accommodate the needs of individuals. The Buddhist position is

that the all defilements, gross, subtle and latent, get destroyed when seen from the perspective of wisdom. The defiled mind has to go through a systematic means of purification (Karunaratne, 1995, p. 10).

Buddhist psychology, while giving an analysis of human mind, also provides developmental strategies such as self-analysis and meditation. Meditation is the English term used for the Buddhist psychological approach to mental development. Rahula (2006) indicates that the term meditation is a poor substitute for the original term *Bhavana*, which means 'culture', 'to become' or 'development'. Meditation has been misunderstood as an escape from the daily activities of life to assume a posture in a cave or a cell in a monastery; to be away from society and absorbed in some kind of mystic thought. The ways of meditation is given in the discourse titled *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, which means 'The Setting-up of Mindfulness'. Mental Development is twofold:

1. Development of mental concentration or tranquillity.
2. Development of wisdom or clear insight.

When tranquillity is developed, lust can be abandoned. When insight is developed, ignorance is abandoned. Insightful meditation in Buddhism is a method of observing the way in which emotions arise, stay, and pass away at the level of conscious experience. Such watchfulness over the unwholesome emotions leads one to the path of liberation. Wisdom destroys the cognitive basis on which the unwholesome emotions have arisen. Meritorious consciousness leads to virtuous lives. Mental development aims at producing a state of perfect mental health, cleansing the mind. Mindfulness exercises anchor the mind securely in the present. However, Karunadasa (2011) illustrates the complexity of this process:

Sense perception as recorded in the *Madhupindika sutta* shows how an individual comes to be assailed and overwhelmed by his own conceptual proliferations, not only in respect of things belonging to present by in respect of things belonging to the past and future as well. (p. 3)

Meditative training involves the development with regard to all mental and physical processes connected with the activity of a human being. Mindfulness helps to detect the arising of unwholesome emotions such as lust and anger at the initial point of their mental origin. In mindfulness training, if we train ourselves to view the world of existence from a non-egocentric perspective, then we would see that everything is compounded and hence lead to unsatisfactoriness.

Training should be acquired to perceive the world from a non-egocentric point of view. There are forty concentration exercises systematically listed in later literature, specifically in the *Visudhimagga* ('The Path for Purification') leading to the development of higher concentration levels (Nayanatiloka, 2000).

The mental cultural practices are characterised by graded intensities of concentration. The deeper levels of inner calm lead to stages of absorption. These are achieved through full concentration and complete suspension of sensory activity. The final goal of Buddhism consists of the full extinction of defilements and termination of the physio-mental existence with no-more continuation of birth.

## **Buddhism: The psychology of the human revolution towards supreme happiness**

The well-known Buddhist stanza ‘may all beings be well and happy’ incorporates both physical and mental wellbeing. Its conceptualisation of man, which acknowledged a major psychological component, was a major breakthrough. The deepest psychological happiness is the core of Buddhist teachings.

The reality of existence referred to as the Four Noble Truths indicates the psychological basis of continuity of existence, which Buddhists make an attempt to understand. The dependent arising of phenomena based on a range of conditions based on psychological roots explains all the happenings in the universe. Mental activity also arises dependently. Accordingly, the personality of man is conditioned and sustained by the mind. Buddhism denies the belief that there is a permanent ‘self’. Man believes in an illusionary ‘self’, which is a root cause for existential suffering.

Although the deeper meanings of these psychological theories are not easy to understand, most Buddhists gain a basic understanding, which results in a development of an outlook which is unique in human civilization. Although the Buddhist teachings show how to be self-regulative and clear the way for self-purification, resulting in self-realisation, its practice needs high commitment which many Buddhists are not able to achieve.

Buddhism advocates a way of life. The Buddhist ethical theory asserts that there is only one way for the perfection of man and that is by successfully following the path that is divided into three areas of training, namely morality, concentration and wisdom. By following it an individual could develop this potential to the highest degree, enabling him to understand the true nature of things. The Buddhist way of life is an intense process of cleansing one’s thoughts, speech and action. Purity in life helps to generate the psychological background for higher mental development, which is essential for emancipation.

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