

The Refuge in Buddhism: a comparative perspective

SUMMARY

of

THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

This study is about capturing the idea and practice of the concept of refuge in the universe of religion with particular reference to Buddhism. The main objective of this study is to analyze and document how and why human beings often seek refuge in religion and what is unique about Buddhism so far as treating human beings as refuge is concern. The proposed study attempts to demonstrate the question of how Buddhism engages itself with human beings as refuge without being forcing him/her to accept beliefs of Buddhism. In other words, the proposed study attempts to capture the discourse and practice of Buddhism towards and theological and sociological category of refuge. This endeavor is undertaken by focusing on comparative method of studying various religions of the world.

In the language and spirit of religion, everybody in this world aspires to achieve tranquility and personal fulfillment desires. At the same time, it is also being proposed that to acquire a satisfied life one may need to conceive authentic principles prescribed by religion. In this sense, all religions attempted guide human beings to realize the purpose of life and being able to live with contentment and accept the limitations imposed by nature and society. The proposed study attempts to capture the role of religion in attracting the human beings by the way of promising better life than the harsh realities that they are subjected to in actual life. This is however is done by comparing different religions with Buddhism.

This study also proposes that Buddhism as religion and thought expounded in 623 BC by the Buddha still has refreshing relevance in the contemporary world in the area of social phenomenon like health, education, economics and politics and several other. This is the reason why Buddhism as social and spiritual discourse attracted the attention world over. This study proposes that how Buddhism in general and the concept of refuge in particular is capable of

influencing phenomenological aspects of human beings in modern era and capable of moulding their attitude and behavior in bringing about social harmony at one level and harmony between human beings and nature at another level.

If we treat the phenomenon of religion as guiding force of humanity, besides several fascinating religions, Buddhism happens to be one of the shining exemplary religions based on human ethics and compassion. The master Buddha was one of the prominent figures from Asia whose fascinating philosophical knowledge overwhelmed the entire South East Asian Countries and some part of the world. His teaching is compiled in three sections in Pali known as Tripitakas. Most of his discourses are based on human ethics and life. One of the eminent ethics he has advocated is that the human being himself is the refuge for his life. Only human can create whether good things or bad things and has to be responsible for what had oneself done. Blessings and happiness can be getting to those who are industrious for achieving that blessing and happiness of life. The proposed study attempts to construct the trajectory of how the spiritual category of self-emancipation transcends to sociological category of emancipation of communities and groups under the guidance of the teachings of the Buddha.

The proposition this study advances is that like many religious masters, the teachings of master Buddha play an important role in influencing human societies in the past, the present and the future on account of their fascinating universality towards emancipation of human beings from misery. His teachings attempted to console mankind's worries along their lifetime and inspired it to make progress to do right things for well-being all. There is no doubt that his teachings back up a universal appeal because they are concerned with problems which created by human beings and lived in fear in their daily life.

One of the centralities of this study is that the teachings of the Buddha in general and on the concept of refuge in particular are have critical relevance in a global society troubled by petty quarrels, hatred, lust, greed, envy and jealousy, unhealthy competition among different levels of human society starting from individuals, communities, races and nations. The noble teachings of the Buddha are one of the remedies for the ills of modern society wherein the concept of love and compassion are replacing by hate and exploitation. This study proposes the fact that the ideas of Buddhism on refuge are in fact a fascinating training process of human mind to achieve the objective of harmony among living species and among human beings.

This study attempts to put forward refuge perspective with regard to Buddhism, taking into account the entire spectrum of encompassing facts learnt from available Buddhist literature. This study proposes that the conceptual and spiritual category of Buddhist perspectives on refuge can be adopted for all and should be applied for one's life as well. Not only this practice creates happiness but also speeds up the spirit of hardworking in right way. In a way this study attempts to bring out one of the less explored spiritual phenomenon i.e. refuge from Buddhist perspective with particular reference to Myanmar. The main objective of this study is to highlight the structural and functional features of the concept of refuge from the perspective of Buddhism however with the method of comparative study of world religions.

The relevance of Buddhist perspective of refuge is that unlike many religions of world, Buddhism focus upon the phenomenological world of human beings and attempt to bring about transcendental change in the ideas and practices of human action and experience. This kind of interventions by spiritual systems acquired prominence world over on account of march of civilizations and increase of complexity of human affairs. Regarding the role of Buddhism in effecting the phenomenology of a human beings, an author passed the following comment: "To a

Buddhist, Buddhism is not a religion in the sense in which that word is commonly understood; but to him or to her Buddhism is a practical method of life – to show how to live rightly there by, happily and peacefully in spite of the unrest that is prevailing in the world.”

It is generally believed that in the ancient world, the teachings of the Buddha unleashed a revolution in the way human mind think and operate. He has created a vast universe of ethics and laid down a path for humanity to follows in order to achieve harmonious life in human society. His teachings were compiled into Three Baskets or Three Sections known as ‘Tri-Pitka’ in term of Pali. Most of the discourses on record are especially based on Human ethics. The universe of Buddhist ethics was based upon the foundation of *Bahujana Sukhaya and Bahujana Hitaya* (happiness to many and welfare to many).

The Buddha as a teacher has consoled the mankind’s worries along their lifetime in doing right things and right livelihood with the age of time, the law of righteousness, the universal law, the law of cause and effect (Dhamma Niyama) by proclaiming the message that man is the master of his own destiny. Buddhism as a spiritual value system proposes method to remove the fear of suffering, decay and death which haunt every untrained mind. It is also popularly being said that Buddhism proposes a way of life which is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. The teachings of the Buddha thus possess universal appeal can be followed by entire humanity. The proposed study is thus aims at capturing the trajectory of refuge preached and practiced by Buddhism and its comparison other established religions of the world.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The modern world has brought about several advances in terms of science and technology. This unprecedented material progress has also brought about misery between human beings, among nations and between human world and non-human world. This crisis explicitly manifested in the

form of conflicts among nations, trade wars, ecological crisis, global terrorism, poverty, inequalities and several other problems that are threatening the beings of human society. It is in this context that the teachings of the Buddha had critical relevance to reformulate the ethical values of humanity and prepare it for more harmonious life. The proposed study is an attempt to explore the socio-ethical path proposed by Buddhism with particular reference to the Buddhist way of refuge life.

Academic subjects which are part of social science and humanities recognize the importance of religion as a phenomenon having deep impact on the physiology of people, their behavior and formation of social process. Religions thus became an important source for exploring and ushering changes in society. It has been proposed by some studies that all religions propose a method of becoming refuge of its teachings and way of life. As it is clear from the teachings of the Buddha, Buddhism does not ask for blind faith from its adherents. Here, mere belief is dethroned and is substituted by the confidence based on knowledge, which in Pali, is known as 'Saddha'. The confidence placed a disciple or a follower on the Buddha is like that of a sick person by a noted physician or a student by his teacher. A Buddhist seeks taking refuge in the Buddha thanks to his find-out towards the path of the deliverance from all sufferings in life guided by Lord Buddha.

The apparent fact is that a Buddhist does not seek refuge in the Buddha when happened to being in times of trouble with the hope that he will be saved by His (i.e. Buddha's own) personal purification. In fact, it is an explicit fact that the Buddha never gives such guarantee to anyone. He makes it clear that it is not within power of the Buddha to wash away the impurities of others. According to Buddhism one could neither purify nor defile other. The Buddha as a teacher instructs us but we ourselves are directly responsible for our purification. Even though a

Buddhist seeks refuge in the Buddha, he/she generally not expected to surrender to any authority. Nor does a Buddhist sacrifice his freedom of thought by becoming a follower of the Buddha. He can exercise his own free will and develop his knowledge even to the extent of becoming a Buddha himself.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK OF THE STUDY

The proposed study is essentially an attempt to capture the concept of refuge in major religions of world with particular reference to Buddhism. However, it has been done from the perspective of spiritual and theological perspective. This task has been performed with the comparative method of studying religions. At the same time, this study mainly focus on the concept of refuge enunciated in the teachings of Buddha preserved in Pali literature and its relevance in the contemporary times in general and Myanmar in particular.

This study is mainly a theological based history of Buddhism with particular reference to the concept of refuge. In order to construct the historical trajectory of the concept of refuge from theological, sociological, philosophical and phenomenological perspective, a conceptual framework of multiple voices of refuge has been evolved. This conceptual framework is mainly inspired by socio-theological hermeneutic approach developed by Wilhelm Dilthey which enables us to capture the social meanings of religious language coupled with the concept of archeology of knowledge by Mitchell Foucault which proposes that the structure of knowledge on any concept travels through time and acquire several new meanings than that of original meaning. So the combination of socio-theological hermeneutics with archeology of knowledge we have formulated a framework of ‘multiple narratives’ on refuge from the past to present in the domain of religion. This task was achieved by using the method of comparative study of religions.

This study proposes that the domain of refuge which happens to be one of the foundational doctrines of Buddhism did not receive serious academic attention. By using the conceptual framework of multiple narratives analysis the proposed study attempts to construct the epistemic structure on the concept of refuge from socio-theological and historical perspective. In short, this study attempts to construct discourse and practice on the concept of refuge in Buddhism from historical perspective.

The proposed study aims to trace historical, popular religions of the world and their conceptions of offering refuge to human beings. This study attempts to explore major religions of world and compare them with Buddhism at one level and compare with different sets of Buddhism at another level. Recording the Buddha's teachings was perhaps the most important inheritance left to us by the Buddha's followers of monks and nuns. The Tripitaka (its name in Sanskrit) or Tipitaka (in Pali) are a large frame of the Buddha's teachings that were recorded after the Buddha's passing away. It was at the First Buddhist Council that the Buddha's teachings were first evoked and committed to memory. The Tripitaka (also known as the Pali Canon) is composed of the Vinaya, Sutras and Abhidhamma (or Abhidharma). These form the foundations for what are considered some of the most important Buddhist scriptures. There is no single book that can be pointed to as a Buddhist bible, rather there are volumes of teachings that are attributed to the Buddha, and we would need a whole bookcase to house them all. Fortunately, there is no requirement for a Buddhist practitioner to read the whole Pali Canon, and Buddhist literature is not limited to the Pali Canon alone, but they possess some of the most fundamental teachings required for a basic Buddhist education (namely, The Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path).

The texts of the Tripitaka consisting of teachings of the Buddha are organized into three major sections — the Vinaya-pitaka, containing the rules of communal life for monks and nuns; the Sutra-pitaka, a collection of sermons of the Buddha and senior disciples; and the Abhidharma-pitaka, which contains interpretations and analyses of Buddhist concepts. In Pali, these are the Vinaya-pitaka, the Sutta-pitaka, and the Abhidhamma. The proposed study focuses on Buddhism in accordance with scriptures of Buddha and its commentaries and sub-communities and their views on the concept of refuge.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The main objective of this study is to construct a historical trajectory of the concept of refuge in Buddhism, however from comparative perspective with major religions of world with particular reference to Myanmar. The study has been structured with the following objective at the helm:

- To capture the concept of refuge in the major religions of world.
- To explore the theological and historical roots of the concept of refuge in Pali texts of Buddhism.
- To decipher the phenomenological meaning of the concept of refuge from Buddhist perspective.
- To track the evolutionary trajectory of the concept of Buddhism and its historical journey in the history of Buddhism.
- To explore the spiritual and social dimension of the concept of refuge.
- To encourage the ones to get profound understanding and practice the code of right moral conduct and behavior in order to avoid a false religion and refuge.
- To follow and practice a way of applying the true ethics of a religion and refuge.
- To explore the concept of refuge in different Buddhist traditions in Asia.

- To analyze the Burmese concept of Buddhist refuge as an idea and practice.

HYPOTHESIS OF STUDY

This study mainly deals with the historical and theological trajectory of the concept of refuge in Buddhist universe. While exploring this universe, the proposed study revolves around the following points represent the hypothetical observations:

- The concept of refuge as spiritual and social category was carefully evolved by the Buddha as a way to handle the crisis of humanity.

- The concept of refuge is a theological and ethical response of Buddhism to the crisis brought about civilization process in ancient India wherein struggle for control over human and nature begun to take shape.

- The concept of refuge evolved by the teachings of the Buddha intends to train the mind of human beings to lead harmonious and happy life in this world.

- The original concept of refuge evolved by the Buddha acquired several new meaning in the due course of time.

- There exists difference of opinion on the concept of refuge among different sets of Buddhism.

- Theravada Buddhism which is the form of Buddhism practiced by people of Myanmar historically evolved a distinctive concept of refuge however with adherence of the teachings of the Buddha.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Methodology in the study of research design assesses the various points of view in studying religion and refuge. The proposed study essentially follows the descriptive and analytical model of history writing. The compiles of existing literature on refuges are being collected and analyzed. The proposed study follows the historical method consisting of empirical and hermeneutic method to document the history of concept of refuge in Buddhism. For so doing depends upon both primary and secondary sources. So far as primary sources are concern, attempt has been made to collect wide range of primary consist of translated versions of Pali Buddhist texts to Burmese and English languages. Such sources are used for exploring the Buddhist perspective of refuge. Besides this, published sources consist of books, articles and commentaries are being used to document the notion of refuge in religion in general and Buddhist in particular.

BRIEF NOTE ON CHAPTERISATION

In order to narrate the Buddhist perspective of Buddhism, the proposed study is divided into six chapters. The following section presents a brief description about the chapter of the proposed study:

CHAPTER-I

This chapter presents thematic and schematic introduction to the proposed study. This chapter deals with introduction of the topic, objectives, hypothesis, methodology, context of study, review of literature and mention of sources and conceptual framework of the thesis. In shot this chapter proposes synoptic view of this study.

CHAPTER-II

The second chapter of this study entitled 'Religion and Refuge' traces the conceptual and hermeneutic meaning of the concept of refuge in religious discourse of major religions of the world. Attempt has also been made to explore how religious world treats the concept of refuge as a means to handle the crisis of humanity and offer solace to the people who take refuge in spiritual world as a means to get out the misery of real world.

CHAPTER-III

The chapter three entitled conceptual meaning of refuge in classical texts of Buddhism' explore, analyze and document concept of refuge as represented in the classical text of Buddhism consist of teachings of Buddha preserved in the form of Pali canon. This chapter has been divided into two sections: section one deals with the factual and philosophical meaning of refuge and the second sections deals with hermeneutic meaning of refuge in the Buddhist philosophy and its evolution in history.

CHAPTER-IV

The fourth chapter of this study entitled concept of refuge: a comparative study of Buddhist and non-Buddhist religions documents how the human beings is treated as refuge in different religions of the world and how such comparison is different with Buddhism. In other words, this chapter also deals with how major religions of word address the issue of refuge in their own way and how such way is different in Buddhism.

CHAPTER-V

The fifth chapter of this study is an attempt to capture the way the concept of refuge is thought and practiced in Myanmar. The main aims of this chapter is to explain what real refuge cultural

is and religious domains of Burmese life are significantly influenced by Buddhism, and how monastic life of Buddhism in Myanmar perceived the concept of refuge and practicing it.

CHAPTER -V1

The sixth chapter of this study entitled conclusion suggests conclusion and certain broad observations that the study attempted to reflect upon. After comparing the concept of refuge in different religions at one level and Buddhism at another level, this study proposed certain generalization regarding the spiritual meaning of refuge.

Having narrated schematic and thematic aspects of the proposed study along with conceptual and philosophical meaning of Buddhist refuge, the next chapter of this study attempts to navigate to explore the conceptual meaning of refuge in the world of religion from historical perspective.