



Resolving disputes, discords and differences of Pragmatism in early Buddhist literature

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Source: 1) Culahattipadopama Sutta:27: MN I. 2) Pathama Cakkanuvattana Sutta: Raja Vagga: AN V 3) Kisagotamiya Vatthu: Sahasa Vaga Dhammapadatthakatha. 4) Annatarassa Upasakassa Vatthu: Suhka Vagga: Dhammapadatthakatha 5) Putigattatissatthera Vattu: Citta Vagga: Dhammapadatthakatha. 6)Codana Sutta: Agatha Vagga:AN V.7)Abhayarajakumara Sutta:58:MN II 8) Verse:232 9) Hiri Sutta: Cula Vagga: Sutta Nipata 10 &11) Codana Sutta: Aghata Vagga:AN V. 12) Maha Sihanada Sutta:8: DN I. 13) Roga Sutta: Indriya Vagga:AN IV. 14) Accaya Sutta: Bala Vagga:AN III 15) Vajiropama Sutta: Puggala Vagga:AN III 16) Angulimala Sutta:86:MN II 17) Ekaka Vaga: 1:AN I 18)Ekaka Vaga: 2:AN I. 19) Accaya Sutta :Bala Vagga:AN III. 20) Dhammapada Versa: Verse 329. 21) Upali Sutta:56: MN II. 22) Hatthigamaka Uggā Sutta:Gahapati Vagga:AN VIII. 23)Kesi Sutta:Kesi Vagga: AN IV. 24) Dhammapada: Verse 3.

The Buddhas teaching regarding resolving of disputes, discords and differences. In fact these very tools which he uses successfully to resolve issues and differences that cropped up in the times that he lived and taught in the gangetic plain. In *Codana Sutta (1)Culahattipadopama Sutta:27:MN I*) both the Buddha and his chief disciple Sariputta explains use of the five steps which if followed diligently

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would certainly help in resolving issues, disputes amicably, if not would result in serious negative consequences.

- *Right speech at the right moment:* In ***Pathama Cakkavattana Sutta*** it is made very clear that right speech at the right moment is important to solve the disputes and differences between the individuals and the groups (2) ***Pathama Cakkavattana Sutta: Raja Vagga: AN V***). In noble eight fold path the Buddha stresses right speech leads to peace and happiness. The practical approach of the Buddha is better explained in kisa gotami episode. She after meeting several doctors in vain to save her dead son comes to the Buddha hoping he would bring the child back to life and save her only child. She was in such a state of mind full of grief and emotions, the Buddha understood her state of mind, that she is not ready to accept the inevitable truth. So he asked her to bring a few seeds of mustard from a household where no death took place. After going to many houses, she found out the universal truth that death is inescapable reality. A realization came to her and came to terms with her irreplaceable loss. When she came back to him empty handed he understood it is the right time to explain the truth as she is ready to receive the universal truth, accordingly he gave her the right talk at the right moment (3) (kisagotami vatthu).

In another instance the Buddha explained to his disciples the futility of teaching when a person is tired and hungry, teaching a hungry man would not give the desired result as hunger is a formidable illness, so he asked his disciples to arrange a meal first and later he taught four noble truths to a young man from alavi village some distance from savatthi, which he wanted to learn from the Buddha (4) ***Annatarassa Upasakassa Vatthu: Suhka Vagga: Dhammapadatthakatha***).

In a similar instance where the buddha volunteered and treated a sick senior monk putigatha tissa who was afflicted with some kind of skin disease of stinking boils and wounds all over the body. After giving him a decent herbal bath in scented water, made him comfortable and gave him teachings. In this episode also he made it clear that compassion and kindness be the precondition for a person to help a person when he needs the most, mere lip service and avoiding would not help anyone. In the instant case his disciples were avoiding him because of Tissa Thera's nature of illness. So

importance of the pragmatic approach of the Buddha is a life lesson to his disciples (5).

- ***State nothing but the truth and facts only:***

In resolving issues, disputes one should invariably stick to facts of the issue and not deviate or digress in an effort to make it acceptable and avoid finding faults with people whether husband, wife, children, business partners and colleagues etc. (6) *Codana Sutta: Agatha Vagga:AN V*). To maintain amity in relationships one should avoid accusations, finding faults, exaggeration as it would be counterproductive in resolving issues and disputes. On the other hand the disputants would develop resistance instead of settling disputes amicably.

In Abhayarajakumara sutta the Buddha made it clear that even if it is a fact not worth stating, not beneficial and disagreeable he will not state it. He would state things if it is true and beneficial and at the right time. Some truths which serve no purpose or useless will not be stated in the interest of fostering relationships.

(7) *Abhayarajakumara Sutta:58: MN II*

1. *Use gentle language and avoid harsh words:*

In dispute settlements use of gentle language is very important in settling issues. In verse Dhammapada, it is clearly stated that one should watch out against use of intimidating, harsh, annoying, shouting, cowering down words in settling disputes. Temporarily it may silence the disputants but he develops stubbornness and resistance in settling issues and differences. In the verse it is clearly illustrates use of harsh language wouldn't help in settlement of issues and disputes (8) *Verse:232*).

2. *Practical Panacea for fixing disputes*

Criticism should be avoided as it never solves disputes. Instead use of beneficial conciliatory language that focuses on solving disputes. Whenever one intervenes in a dispute he should have a clear understanding of the language that he uses to solve the issue amicably (9) *Hiri Sutta: Cula Vagga: Sutta Nipata*). Care should be taken to avoid criticism while having a conversation with the disputant. Criticism of disputant will make him reject conciliator's comments. So one should have a prior plan to make disputant be receptive to reconciliation and settlement.

i. *Have concern and empathy for the disputant*

Codana Sutta states that the following points to be kept in mind before venturing into resolution of disputes between two or more people.

- Clear understanding of the dispute.
- His attitude to dispute be constructive and sure of positive outcome.
- He who takes lead be sure of practical effects of solutions.
- His talk shall employ such a language which is beneficial that convinces both disputants.

Criticism of either party for the sake of criticism takes nowhere near resolving disputes. This approach harms the dispute settlement as it lacks sincere fellow feeling (10) *Codana Sutta: Aghata Vagga:AN V*). When the disputants detects or senses that the conciliator/leader is not sincere, he may not agree with proposed solutions. So it is necessary that the leader should take precautions and adopt above criteria for effective settlement of disputes for the benefit of both the parties. This will also strengthen social relationships human bonding, peace and happiness.

Exceptions To Methods For Settlements Of Disputes

The early Pali literature shows that these five methods were adopted generally for amicable settlement of disputes between individual, with in the family, between the persons families, social groups etc. though these methods were generally used for disputes settlements but there existed exceptions also. This was brought out in Codana Sutta about the efficaciousness in the conversation between the Buddha and Sari Putta. Sari putta agrees with the Buddha however there are some individuals who by their very nature and conduct do not agree with the 5 methods. Although 5 methods are generally accepted by most of the people with few exceptions needs to be examined how persons who doesn't agree were to be handled in a dispute in which they are involved. (11) *Codana Sutta: Aghata Vagga:AN V*.)

Venerable Sariputta gives the following practical criteria to avoid number of cases for maintaining peace and harmony in interpersonal disputes.

1. Be tactful in avoiding controversial issues.

There were many instances when Buddha encountered persons who posed questions which were speculative, dogmatic, irrational clearly conflicting confrontational and provocative in nature. He desisted such questions as they would lead to unnecessary clash and conflict souring interpersonal relationship. He always took care to keep conflicts to minimum on the other hand encouraged maintaining cordial relationship with people of contrary views and beliefs. In Kasappa Sihanada Sutta Buddha made it clear to naked ascetic Kasappa who held a different belief system, that both would discuss, shared and similar views which are beneficial to both and strengthen social bonds and desist from contentious issues that aroused clash and not agreement. (12) *Maha Sihanada Sutta:8: DN I.*)

There were instances where people came and poured questions that are ever open to debate and touchy in nature. He maintained silence rather than getting into unpleasant arguments which would lead to gloomy repercussions.

This does not mean that the Buddha neither desisted nor discouraged his disciples from debating issues (which are of social importance and social issues) which are unfair outright discriminatory detrimental customs and practices. He argued rationally convincingly against them throughout gangetic plane. Dighanikya contain the Buddhas discourses which deals with many of these issues. In so far as maintaining cordial enduring social relationships is concerned habit of useless harmful arguments are desisted and stopped.

2. Certain characteristics of conduct are unalterable.

Society consists of persons, social groups he or she should live in that society, some individual's whos conduct likely to cause some inconvenience to normal people. In Roga Sutta (13) *Roga Sutta: Indriya Vagga:AN IV*) AN 14 the Buddha says persons of behavioral peculiarities do exist, such person do not admit abnormality and refuse to accept suggestions to rectify behavioral defects in them. (14) *Accaya Sutta: Bala Vagga:AN III*. This would disappoint people who have noticed and suggested necessary corrections in the behavioral patterns of that person. The budhha also states that some persons possess natural character exhibiting anger, illwill and aggression for any suggestions to correct themselves (15) *Vajjiropama Sutta: Puggala Vagga:AN III*). In such a circumstance one has to adjust himself to such person as they are

unalterable, some continue to cause annoyance but doesn't pose any harm can be tolerated accepting the reality of the situation. *(16) Angulimala Sutta:86:MN II*).

The Buddha also states that it is mature sign of a person to adjust himself live with such disagreeable person. This would lessen irksome experience in interpersonal relationship. It is difficult to change others as per our wishes instead it is easy for us to change our own thoughts and actions to adjust to persons with a disagreeable behaviour. This conscious attempt to remain calm and tolerant would make mentally strong accept the reality of living with such person tolerable, this is true of all interpersonal relationships and also of husband and wife relationship.

3. Allow sufficient time for corrections (change for the better) and improvement.

The Buddha urged his followers to have faith in human beings and his potential to change from the worst to the better. Every one makes mistakes sometimes serious mistakes affecting interpersonal relationships. He must be given sufficient time to correcting himself instead of condemning and treating him as a bad guy incapable of maintaining a healthy relationship. Forgiveness is the mantra the Buddha advocates in the teaching, most appropriate example is that of Venerable Angulimala, a bandit was transformed and became an Arahant.

The Buddha had great faith in the human potential and latent power to transform a criminal to a saint provided he or she should be given an opportunity and time to change from bad to good *(17) Ekaka Vaga: 1:AN I*). When this is true of a criminal transforming into a saint, it is more to relevant to our day to day life, cases such as extra marital affairs either by husband or wife causing broken marriages leading to broken relationships. These wrong doings happens as ordinary humans are vulnerable to sensual pleasures. In Ekaka Vagga (AN) the Buddha clearly states that how humans are attracted to opposite sex due to powerful natural instinctive attraction. *(18)Ekaka Vaga: 2:AN I*). Though it is an instinctive natural urge, over ages by development of institutional marriage, norms have been evolved to restrain

instinctive urges and tendencies. Some people do indulge in transgressions such people be forgiven and adequate time be given to realize the mistakes committed, correct themselves then leave with dignity and honor in the society. (19) *Accaya Sutta :Bala Vagga:AN III.*)

Amicable way of parting.

Analysis found in every method there's nothing like perfect solutions for settlement of disputes. Methods and criteria which are recommended in early Pali literature does not eliminate disputes but help in reducing them in relationships regardless of honest attempt, disputes remain unsolved. What does the Pali Suttas say regarding miserable and undesirable relationships, some issues are being identified for termination of interpersonal relationships. Pursuing unrestrained wrong conduct, risks emerging from relationships, recognizing the uselessness of carrying on with it under these circumstances making a right choice to end relationships by the affected person is clearly brought out in Pali Literature (20) *Dhammapada Versa: Verse 329*). While arriving at a decision for ending relationship a person affected should take all care to avoid hurried, one-sided, inflexible decision instead it should be rather judicious, moral, reasonable and sensible one. Separation should be beneficial to both not adverse to oneself and beneficial to other. Separation be effected if it is in accordance with this criteria being met.(21) *Upali Sutta:56:MN II*).

The Upali Sutta clearly enunciates the criteria for separation. Upali was a respectable prominent citizen, who was a known follower of Mahaveera, was once sent by his master to defeat the Buddha in an argument. Nevertheless, after hearing the Buddha's teaching Upali found that he is nobler than his master. He expressed his wish to become disciple of the Buddha. However the Buddha asked Upali to analyze and assess his decision. After Upali confirmed that his decision is based thorough understanding he was permitted to leave Mahaveera and to become Buddhas disciple. It was made clear by the Buddha to Upali that only after prudential analysis a decision be arrived at.

A similar assessment was also applied to many individual relationships. In the Buddhas lifetime itself married persons left their spouses and children joined monastic order to lead a spiritual life. These individuals were allowed into monastic order after ensuring adequate social and economic security to wife, children and other dependents (22) *Hatthigamaka Ugga Sutta:Gahapati Vagga:AN VIII.*). Individuals should not and cannot leave their dependents to fend for themselves. In Kesi Sutta it is stated that former friends, partners and associates be treated with dignity and respect without malice, revenge, grudge once the relationship has ended, leave them aside when you find them non-cooperative and unfriendly even if they have caused suffering in relationship (23)*Kesi Sutta:Kesi Vagga: AN IV.*). One should stop chasing animosity and vengeance even if one has been cheated and ill-treated by the other person. In case if one is held on the wrong doing done to another in the past he will never find peace, taking suitable timely action recommended against abuse, still chasing of animosity and vengeance would worsen the pain that has already emanated from unhappy relationships. By thinking on snapped relationships life becomes unhappy and wretched by learning to forgive and forget one can live in peace and harmony in life.

After careful reading of the essay on the subject, the methods and the techniques taught by the Buddha in resolving disputes, discords and differences strikes me as though that he is speaking to lay people in the 21st century. Surprisingly his audience in ancient India had many issues and disputes that are similar to our own times. Therefore the techniques that he taught to laypeople in resolving issues appears to be very practical and modern. The kisagotami episode explains choosing right time to speak the truth is a classic example in resolving issues of discord. When kisagotami was in deep grief and emotions, he chooses to be careful and avoided telling the truth of inevitability of death. She made herself to realize the truth by asking to bring a few seeds of mustards from a house where no death has taken place. She realized and reconciled to the fact of her dear sons death.

It is also very important to speak the truth based on facts which is necessary for maintaining harmonious working relationships with family members, friends, business associates and companions. Care should be taken not to speak the truth if it causes

harm, then one should restrain himself from stating the facts as it doesn't serve the purpose. He should right choose the right time to speak the truth if circumstances are conducive to place the facts before the people.

In Codana Sutta, the Buddha gives the following points to be kept in mind in settlement of disputes by one who takes the lead to resolves the case amicably. He should take a lead by carefully avoiding criticism and employ beneficial and conciliatory language aiming at peace for resolution of disputes. The five points which are given by the Buddha for resolving disputes are stated below. One should have clear understanding of the case, and should possess constructive outlook for solving the differences. The leader should be sure of practical outcome of solutions that he has in his mind and employ conciliatory language that should evoke confidence and faith in the leader who is in charge of resolving the issue. The leader should avoid criticism of either party as it may obstruct peaceful resolution of the issue. In the Buddha's time and also in subsequent ages these five points were generally applied in solving the disputes. However there are exceptions do exist for instance, in kassapa sihanada sutta the Buddha says that in the interest of maintaining pleasant interpersonal relationships questions of speculative nature, dogmatic, irrational, provocative, conflicting and confrontational issues should be avoided.

Issues of common interest should be discussed than taking up of issues on which they differ. However, there are people who by their disposition, nature, and behaviour are not open to correct their shortcomings. Such people who exhibit negative tendencies of anger malice and aggression should be given adequate time to correct themselves, if they failed even after giving them adequate time, when you see no change in their conduct, the people should not loose mental balance and calm, by cultivating tolerance to the annoying conduct of irreconcilable people. The incident of criminal Angulimala rectifying his conduct he became an Arahant saint as he was given adequate time and to rectify himself. Similarly ,marital disputes in respect of either one the spouse committing extra marital affairs can also be resolved to save the marriage and the family. In extreme cases even after making an honest attempt of

reconciliation fails as the cases may turn out to be miserable and undesirable, in such cases it is better to part ways and terminate the relationship. Here again care should be taken to avoid hasty and one sided decision but should ensure fair, ethical and judicious settlement of disputes amicably.

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