

This alone is True, All else is False: How Dogmatic Religious Views impact on Tolerance and Harmony?

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Introduction

Every man in the world has his own views or perspectives of things. Although there are many aspects that shape man's views, religion also plays significant role in this connection. Religion is a central part of many individuals. Most of people who follow a religion accept its teachings and dogmatically form their belief according to them. When someone is dogmatically attached to his own view, he concludes that his own view is right and others are false. This can lead to inflexibility and intolerance in the face of other believes or views.

People who are dogmatically attached with religious views are called as religious extremists. They are not open minded persons to see beyond what they see. They are bound with increasing the numbers of flock without any examine. As a result, tolerance that is the quality of appreciation and the ability to exercise a fair attitude towards those whose religious opinions is lost.

Buddhism as a philosophy more than a religion critically rejects dogmatic views and it shows right view that is to see right view as right and wrong view as wrong. Here the authority is given to the individual and some points that are helpful to decide the truth are philosophically discussed in Buddhism. From a Buddhist point of view, if there is anything true we should be ready to accept it. It does not matter where it comes from. This is because of a non-dogmatic approach. Therefore, Buddhist critique of view is very important to apply for the present society. It leads to see the truth as true and the wrong as wrong. This paper on the theme of "This alone is True, All else is False" considers how dogmatic religious views impact on the religious tolerance and harmony. In addition, what the critique given in Buddhism as a philosophy for the dogmatic views is to be discussed in a global sense.

For this study early Buddhist discourses of the *SuttaPitaka* such as the *Brahmajālasutta*, the *Alagaddūpamasutta*, *Suttanipāta* and some parts of the

AbhidhammaPitaka are used as primary sources. Additionally some books, journals and articles written on the relevant subject are used as secondary sources.

What is Dogmatic?

In the beginning itself of the article, it is important to understand what dogmatic is. There are some usages such as dogma, dogmatic, dogmatist, dogmatism etc. out of which the term dogma may be considered as primary and the others as usages derived from it. The term 'dogma' is defined in some dictionaries as follows;

- A fixed, especially religious, belief or set of beliefs that people are expected to accept without any doubts.¹
- A principle or principles laid down by an authority and intended to be accepted without question.²

The English term 'dogma' derives from a Greek word which means that which seems to one, opinion or belief.³ The Pali equivalent used to denote dogma is '*diṭṭhi*' which is derived from the Sanskrit root *dr̥s* to mean to see. But it has many meanings used in different contexts in the Buddhist scriptures. Pali English Dictionary suggests the meanings, view, belief, dogma, theory and speculation⁴ to this term. JotiyaDhirasekara in his article on *diṭṭhi* of the encyclopedia of Buddhism mentions that Philosophical standpoint, religious belief, guiding principle, regulative outlook, heretical view, dogma or theory are associated with the term.⁵

According to Buddhism there are two kind of views as wrong view and right view. Generally the term *diṭṭhi* itself denotes the wrong view. But the word *micchādiṭṭhi* is directly used for wrong view. In addition the terms *diṭṭhivāda*, *diṭṭhigata*, *diṭṭhigahaṇa*, *diṭṭhikantāra*, *diṭṭhivisūkam*, *diṭṭhisānyojanam*, *diṭṭhivipphanditam*, *diṭṭhiupādāna* also correspond very closely to *micchādiṭṭhi*.

Dogmatic is the nature of being certain that your beliefs are right and that others should accept them, without paying attention to evidence or other opinions.⁶ Dogmatic may also be explained as proceeding a priori principles accepted as true instead of being founded

¹ Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary Software, Third Edition

² Cathrine Soanes, Compact Oxford English Reference Dictionary, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 242

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogma>

⁴ Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pali English Dictionary*, ed. (London: PTS, 1979), 321

⁵ JotiyaDhirasekara, "diṭṭhi", *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, eds. JotiyaDhirasekara and W.G. Weeraratna, (Sri Lanka: Government of Sri Lanka, 1979), 638.

⁶ <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/dogmatic>

upon experience or induction.⁷ All these definitions imply what dogmatic is and its nature. If someone is dogmatic, it says that he firmly puts forward his opinions as true and he is not ready to accept others' views because of *diṭṭhiparāmāsa* (tenaciously grasping views).

Dogmatic Religious Views

In a religious context and especially within the context of traditional Christian theology the term dogma has been used to mean a body of opinion, formulated or authoritatively stated, a systematized belief or doctrinal system.⁸ When the Buddhism flourished in India in the sixth century BC, India was full of religious reforming activities. Brahmans dominated the society and a number of ascetics were searching for spiritual gains. In the *Brahmajālasutta* the Buddha enumerates sixty two philosophical views along with the grounds on which they were held. All the heretical teachers claimed that each view or theory presented by them are only true and all other theories false.⁹ Different dogmatic views presented by religious leaders and philosophers are mentioned many *suttas*, but here only a few is stated.

In the *Sāmaññaphalasutta* each are given as the view of certain six teachers:

- View 1: The view of nihilism (*nāthikadiṭṭhi*)- Ajita Kesakambali
- View 2: The view of non-doing (*akiriyadiṭṭhi*) - Purāṇa Kassapa
- View 3: The view of non-causality (*ahetudiṭṭhi*)- Makkhali Gosāla
- View 4: The view of Pakudha Kaccāyana
- View 5: The view of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta
- View 6: The view of Saṅghaya Bellaṭṭhiputta

Ten kinds of views present by contemporary philosophers are mentioned in the *Aggivaḥchagottasutta* as follows;

- The world is eternal
- The world is non eternal
- The world is finite
- The world is not finite

⁷ P.D. Premasiri, "Dogmatism", *Encyclopedia of Buddhism Vol.IV*, eds, Jotiya Dhirasekara and W.G. Weeraratna, (Sri Lanka: Government of Sri Lanka, 1979), 655.

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ "Idamevasaccaṃmoghamannaṃ" - This statement is found in many suttas such as the *Poṭṭhapādasutta* (D), the *Apāṇṇakasutta* (M), and the *Ādittapariyāyasutta* (S).

- The soul and the body are the same
- The soul is one thing and the body another
- After death a Tathāgata exists
- After death a Tathāgata does not exist
- After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist
- After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist¹⁰

In the *Brahmajālasutta*, 62 kinds of wrong views which hold by particular Brahmanās and Sramanās are mentioned in detail. Indeed, the term *micchādiṭṭhi* does not occur at all in the *Brahmajālasutta*. The *sutta* uses the term ‘basis for views’ (*diṭṭhihāna*), to refer to the 62 views which it considers. Apart from these, many dogmatic views raised by different religious parties are found in the Buddhist scriptures. All of them are classified under following two groups.

- The ‘eternalist-view’ (*sassatavāda*), which holds that the self and the world are eternal.
- The ‘annihilationist-view’ (*ucchedavāda*), which holds that the self and the world will cease.

It is very clear that contemporary to the Buddha, there have been many religious views which can be introduced as dogmatic. The Buddha’s teachings cannot be categorized in any of these views.

How Dogmatic Religious Views impact on Tolerance and Harmony?

Many *suttas* demonstrate how dogmatic religious views impact on tolerance and harmony. The notion of ‘view’ or ‘opinion’ (*diṭṭhi*) is, therefore, considered as an obstacle to ‘seeing things as they are’ (*yathābhūta dassana*) which is a central concept in Buddhist thought. Facts mentioned in different *suttas* regarding with the bad effects of dogmatic views are illustrated here.

According to the *Paramatthakasutta* of the *Suttanipāta*, a person who entertains a dogmatic view takes his own view as the most perfect and disparages the views of others.

¹⁰Majjhima Nikāya 1, PTS, 483.

When dwelling on views as 'supreme', a person makes them the utmost thing in the world and from that, calls all others inferior and so he is not free from disputes.¹¹

The Buddha speaks of the ills of praising one's own religious view despising the views of others in the *Cūḷaviyūha* and the *MahāvīyūhaSuttas* of the *Suttanipāta*; "Standing (firm) in his decision, measuring (others against) himself, he enters into further dispute in the world. (But) the person who has left all decisions behind does not cause trouble in the world."¹²

From the Buddhist point of view, dogmatic attachment to ideologies is exponentially more detrimental and fraught with more danger than our inordinate attachment to material things. Inter religious and intra-religious wars, wrongly referred to as holy wars, are case in point.¹³ Religious fundamentalism has become a massive problem in the society. This is because of dogmatic religious views. Some religious parties who are dogmatically attached to their views make efforts to spread their views in inappropriate ways.

The *UdumbarikaSutta* of the *DīghaNikāya* is a notable place where we find the Buddha's intention in preaching his doctrine. As mentioned there, the Buddha explains some philosophical things to wanderer Nigrodha. At the end of the Sutta the Buddha said; "Nigrodha, you may think the ascetic Gotama (Buddha) says in order to get disciples. But you should not regard it like that. Let him who is your teacher remain your teacher. Or you may think 'He wants us to abandon our rules'. But you should not regard it like that. Let your rules remain as they are. Or you may think 'he wants us to abandon our way of life'. Let your way of life remain as it was. Or you may think 'he wants to establish us in the doing of things that according to our teaching are wrong, and are so considered among us'. But you should not regard it like that. Let these things you consider wrong continue to be considered. Or you may think 'he wants to draw us away from things that according to our teaching are good and are so considered among us'. But you should not regard it like that. Let whatever you consider right continue to be so continued. Nigrodha, I do not speak for any of these reasons. There are Nigrodha, unwholesome things that have not been abandoned, tainted, and conducive to rebirth. Fearful, productive of painful results in the future, associated with birth,

¹¹<http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.4.05.than.html>

¹² Norman K.R., *The Group of Discourses*, trans. (London: PTS, 1994), 147.

¹³ Y Karunadasa, *Early Buddhist Teachings*, (The University of Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, 2013), 74.

decay and death. It is for the abandonment of these things that I teach Dhamma.¹⁴ This is a statement that says "religion is not for label and it is for practice." Some people understand the philosophy as the view. From the Buddhist point of view it is completely wrong because philosophy is higher than the view.¹⁵ It means that philosophy should not be dogmatic although opinions are dogmatic.

Buddhist Approach on Views

Buddhist approach on views is to be understood in a critical manner. Wrong views are to be corrected or transcended by right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*). Right-view is not realized when one holds the view 'actions have consequences' but when one acts in a certain way, usually explained as practicing the 'ten wholesome courses of action' (*dasakusala-kammamāṅga*)¹⁶. The notion of 'right-view' is most familiar to Buddhists as the first stage of the noble eightfold path. Right view is essentially knowledge of suffering, its arising, cessation and the way to its cessation. The terms *diṭṭhisampanna*, *diṭṭhipaṭivedha*, *diṭṭhivissuddhi*, *diṭṭhisāmaññāgata*, *diṭṭhisuppaṭividda*, *diṭṭhipatta*, *diṭṭhisampadā* are familiarly used with *sammādiṭṭhi*.

How the right view is to be justified? The *Kesaputta Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikāya* is a very important discourse in which 12 factors are mentioned as criteria in accepting something which is religious or philosophical. According to the *sutta*, Kālāmās of Kesaputta came to the Buddha and said, "Lord, there are some Brahmans and contemplatives who come to Kesaputta. They expound and glorify their own doctrines, but as for the doctrines of others, they deprecate them, revile them, show contempt for them, and disparage them. And then other Brahmans and contemplatives come to Kesaputta. They also expound in the same way. They leave us absolutely uncertain and in doubt: Which of these venerable Brahmans and contemplatives are speaking the truth, and which ones are lying? Then the Buddha replied; Kālāmās. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kālāmās, don't go only by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for

¹⁴ Maurice Walshe. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1996), 393-394.

¹⁵ W.S. Karunaratna, *Buddhist Philosophy and Practice*, (Colombo: S. Godage and Brothers, 1987), 19

¹⁶ Paul Fuller, *The Notion of Diṭṭhi*, (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 126

yourselves that, 'These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to harm and to suffering'. Then you should abandon them.'¹⁷

Although the Buddha draws out attention to the importance of right views, he does not endorse dogmatic adherence to views, even if they are right.¹⁸ The aim of the Buddhist path is here seen as the overcoming of all views, even right-view. Views, if held with attachment, are wrong-views. The *MahāTaṇhāsankhayasutta* of the *MajjhimaNikāya* guides not to attach even with right things. This is non attachment approach to views.

As mentioned in the *Alagaddūpamasutta* of the *MajjhimaNikāya*, Dhamma is similar to a raft. Even Dhamma is also not for the purpose of grasping, but for the purpose of crossing over.¹⁹ The Buddha says that 'you, monks who understand the Teaching's similitude to a raft, you should let go even (good) teachings, how much more false ones'.²⁰ Y. Karunadasa clearly illustrates this matter using a Chinese Buddhist saying 'the Dhamma is like a finger to the moon. If we focus our attention only on the finger we cannot see the moon. Nor can we see the moon without looking at the finger, either'.²¹

On the other hand, pluralism is to be understood by all. There are many views and opinions presented by different persons. Buddha also admits that there had been many Buddhas in the past and there will be many Buddhas in the future. Buddhism may be the most pluralistic religion in the world. The Buddhist culture is different from one country to another because Buddhism promotes cultural pluralism.

Conclusion

This article was about dogmatic views which abundantly effects on religious harmony. From the Buddhist point of view, wrong views are introduced as dogmatic. They are to be corrected by right views. The important thing is that right view is also for understanding the wrong views but not for grasping. Ideological constraint is the way of ultimate practice in Buddhism.

¹⁷<http://www.accesstosight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.065.than.html>

¹⁸ Y Karunadasa, 74.

¹⁹ "Kullūpamaṃvobhikkhavedhammaṃdesissāminittharaṇathāya no gahaṇathāya" - MajjhimaNikāya1, PTS, 134.

²⁰ "Kullūpamaṃvobhikkhavedhammaṃdesitaṃājānantehidhammāpivopahātabbā, pagevaadhammā" - ibid

²¹ Y Karunadasa, 160.

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