

Perspective of Buddhist Doctrines on Mental health & wellbeing

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“The mind is Everything, what you think you become”

Buddha

“Appo Deepo Bhava” - be a light unto yourself—

Abstract: The aim of philosophical approaches is to ultimately lead man to find the meaning of his life and existence. And it is true to its core in the case of the philosophy of Buddhism. Since, it is based mainly on the teachings of its profounder “The Buddha” or the Enlightened one. Buddhism is often regarded as the most psychological religion in its approach. In fact, the origin of Buddhism was the quest to understand pain and suffering and to end that pain, suffering and miseries of life, and to go beyond, to attend Nirvana, a perfect state of happiness. This research paper attempts to review the role of Buddhist doctrines to mental health and wellbeing. The present study also identifies the core principles or approaches of these Buddhist doctrines for holistic development of the human being. It is a qualitative study using qualitative method by collecting data from secondary sources. This study is solely based on secondary data. The information was gathered from various related books and journals etc. The research paper also reveals that there are mass implications of Buddhist doctrines-based Approaches to quality life of people in the perspective of mental health and wellbeing. Besides, Buddhist doctrines have been interpreted into various approaches which offer comprehensive framework for understanding and improving mental health, emphasising the interconnectedness of mind, body and environment. These Doctrines based approaches integrates various practices and procedures that promote mental wellbeing through mindfulness, meditation and compassionate outlook on life.

Keywords: Buddhist doctrines, approaches, mental health and wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is not what we call a 'top- down religion' one in which a deity reveals religious and spiritual truth to humanity. It is a 'bottom-up religion'¹ created by humans as an attempt to express spiritual concepts. Therefore, it is one of the major religions of the world with over 520 million followers. Buddhist philosophy and doctrines based on the teachings of Gautam Buddha give meaningful insights about reality and human existence. Buddha was primarily an ethical teacher rather than a philosopher. His central concern was to show man the way out of suffering and not one of constructing a philosophical theory. Hence, Buddhism is often regarded as the most psychological religion in its approach. The origin of Buddhism was a search for an answer to the problem of *Dukha* (affliction), the existential suffering that comes from sickness, old age and death. This search led Siddhartha Gautama, who was to become the Buddha and the founder of the faith, into a spiritual journey². As a result of this journey that Siddhartha eventually received his transformative experience, his enlightenment. The insight which came from the Buddha's enlightenment underpins Buddhist approach to mental health. The insights that constitute the Buddha's first teachings offer a basis which has been elaborated and re-formulated in many ways but remains the central presentation of the Buddhist position. Detailed interpretation of these primary teachings has fascinated Buddhist scholars through the centuries, but their centrality remains undoubted. Unlike many religions, it starts by examining the nature of human experience rather than inspiring belief in a supernatural being. Buddhist doctrines approach to mental health offers valuable insight into achieving

¹ pg 26 ,MPYE-005, World Religions,IGNOU

² Pg 1 , A Buddhist perspective on mental health , Caroline Brazier.

wellbeing through mindfulness, self-awareness and compassionate living. By focussing on internal processes rather than external circumstances, individuals can cultivate resilience, reduce suffering, and foster appropriate profound sense of peace within themselves. This holistic perspective not only aids personal growth but also promotes healthy relationship with other and the environment.

Conceptual understanding of Buddhist Doctrines and Mental health and wellbeing:

The Buddha was least interested in metaphysical discourses or dogmas. He was concerned about ethical living applicable to all sections of people such as kings, Princess, Brahmans, people of low cast, masters, servants, monks, ordinary people, etc. He taught about the nobility of a religion. And the four noble truths are the essence of the Buddha's teachings. Let us understand the essence of the conceptual doctrines of Buddhism Philosophy.

- Four noble truths
 - The Eight-fold path of Buddhism.
 - The Doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Pratitya-samutpada*).
 - The Doctrine of Momentariness (*kshanika- vada*).
 - The Doctrine of Karma.
 - The Doctrine of Non soul (anatta)
1. Four Noble Truths: These four noble truths proposed by The Buddha, touched the very existence of humans which leads one to understand the sufferings and the miseries of life. And to go beyond, to attend Nirvana, a perfect state of happiness and bliss. These four noble truths are
 - Life is full of sufferings (*Dukh*),
 - *Suffering has a cause (Dukh Samudaya)*
 - *Cessation of suffering (Dukha Nirodha)*,
 - *Ways to destroy sufferings (Dukha Nirodh Marg.)*³

These Truths are most important teachings of Buddhism. The first of which emphasised the reality of affliction. The noble truth of Dukha, (Affliction) is

this, birth, old age, sickness, death, grief, lamentation, pain, depression, and agitations are Dukha. Dukha is being associated with what you do not like, being separated from what you do like, and not being able to get what you want. Dukkha Samudaya means everything in this cosmos has a cause, and nothing exists and happens without a cause. Buddhism explains suffering through a chain of twelve causes and effects, commonly known as the Doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Pratitya-samutpada*). In final analysis, the root of all miseries is desire. If suffering has a cause, the seeker must destroy this cause to stop suffering. So desire has to be extinguished to stop suffering which is called *dukkha nirodha*, Cessation of Suffering. And the ways to destroy suffering consists of the practice of eightfold virtue. Moreover, in the practice of all these virtues one must avoid extremes and follow the middle path.

2. The Eightfold Path in Buddhism. The Eightfold Path is the practical application of the four Noble Truths. They are closely connected to the four noble Truth as a mean to destroy suffering. These are the components of the Eightfold Path of Buddhism. Right view (*Samyak Drishti*), Right aspiration (*Samyaka-Sankalpa*), Right speech (*Samyak-Vac*), Right conduct (*Samyak-karma*), Right livelihood (*Samyak ajiva*), Right effort (*Samyak vyayama*), Right awareness (*Samyak Smriti*), Right concentration (*Samyak Samadhi*).⁴ The first two of the Eight-fold path, namely right view and right resolved are together called *Pragya* because they are related to Consciousness and knowledge. The third, fourth and fifth, namely Right Speech, Right Conduct and Right Livelihood are collectively known as *Shila*, because they deal with correct and morally right way of living and the last three namely right effort, right awareness and right concentration are collectively known as *Samadhi*, because they deal with meditation and contemplation. From these three pillars- *Pragya*, *Shila*, *Samadhi*.⁵ and the other Buddhist teaching several points can be identified which are significant in Buddhist understanding of mental wellbeing.

³ Pg 30, Indian philosophy, Dr. Sarvpalli Radhakrishnan, Part 1

⁴ Pg 30, MPYE-005, World Religions, IGNOU

⁵ Pg 25, Pallavi Srivastava, Dr Manini Srivastava, The Buddhist perspective of mental Health : Destigmatization and relevance in Psychotherapy.

- Behavioural conditions, Mental state; Ethical behaviour conditions positive states.
 - The Repetition of habitual patterns of action and view lie at the root of mental states.
 - We feel a compulsion to cling to habitual views and states. Thus, there is a sense in which we can see all mental problems as a form of addiction and the focus of these addictive pattern as being the self.
 - Everyone is in a state of avidya (delusion), so mental ill health is just a more extreme version of states we all suffer from.
3. The Doctrine of Dependent origination (Pratitya-Samutpada): The doctrine of dependent origination is central to Buddhist philosophy and connect it to the second noble truth- 'Suffering has a Cause' (*Dukha Samudaya*) According to Buddhism, everything in this world has a cause. There is a cycle of 12 such causes and corresponding effects which governs the entire life of human beings. It is called Bhavachakra, the cycle of existence. This universal law works automatically without the help of any conscious guide. The twelve links of *Prateetyasamutpada* are; Ignorance (avidya), Predisposition (Samskara), Consciousness (Vigyana), Name and form (Namarupa), sense organs (Sadayatana), contact (Sparsh) feeling or sensation (Vedana), craving (Trishna), attachment or clinging (Upadana), becoming (Bhava), birth (Jati), old age and death (Jaramarana) These twelve links of the doctrine of dependent origination can be divided into 3 classes, namely the past, the future and the present. Ignorance and predisposition are due to the past life consciousness. Name and form, sense organs, contact, feeling, craving and clinging are connected to present life and finally becoming. Birth and old age and death are of future life. The teachings of dependent origination. (Pratitya-Samutpada): And the cycle of conditioning describe the way that all unenlightened people. And for practical purposes, we can say all people are held in a state of delusion, Avidya. Avidya literally means not seeing. And this choice of
- word demonstrates the Buddhist emphasis on perception as a key element in constructing mental states.
4. The Doctrine of Momentariness. It is also known as Kshanikavada, which means everything is momentary, relative, conditional and dependent. It is also known as the doctrine of impermanence (Anityavada). Buddhism teaches that the world and its objects are not permanent but momentary. The universe is constant chain of change, and the basis of the doctrine of Momentariness is the doctrine of the dependent origination. For Buddhist material, world and its objects are not merely impermanent and transient, but they also exist only for a moment. This doctrine is ultimately dissuading people from placing confidence in the world and persuade them to renounce it for the permanent status of Nirvan. It avoids two extremes eternalism and nihilism⁶. Thus, it is a middle path where the world is neither a being nor a non-being
5. The Doctrine of Karma. The law of karma is that every event produces its effects, which in turn become causes for other effects generating the karmic chain. The doctrine of dependent origination links karmic impressions from past existence and rebirth. These two links signify the proposition that the present existence of a man is dependent upon his past existence- the effect of his thoughts, words and actions in the past life. According to the law of karma, our present and the future are neither capricious nor unconditional but are conditioned by our past and present.
6. The Doctrine of non-soul (Anatta): It is another important philosophical notion of Buddhism, which is a consequence of the doctrine of dependent origination then. There is a belief in almost all the cultures and religions that there exist in men an eternal and permanent entity variously known as the 'soul', 'the self' or 'the spirit'. According to Buddhism, one cannot become aware of an unchanging entity called soul, and all one can become aware of when one thinks of oneself or soul is a sensation, an impression, a perception and an image, a feeling

⁶ Pg 361-365, k.Sakhthivel , The Effects of Buddhism's Philosophy on mental health and wellbeing .

or an impulse. Buddha analysis men into five groups (skandhas) namely, Form (Matter), Feeling means- pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. Perceptions means sight, smell, touch, hear, taste. Impulses-hate and greed and Consciousness. Anything a man thinks he is, or he has fall under one of these groups. The self or soul is a simple abbreviation for the aggregate of these skandhas. And not some entity over and above the aggregate. Buddha acknowledges the changing self but reject the unchanging substantial self.

Concept of Mental health & wellbeing

- Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.
- Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes.
- Mental health conditions include mental disorders and psychosocial disabilities as well as other mental states associated with significant distress, impairment in functioning, or risk of self-harm. People with mental health conditions are more likely to experience lower levels of mental well-being, but this is not always or necessarily the case.

All WHO Member States are committed to implementing the “Comprehensive mental health action plan 2013–2030”,⁷ which aims to improve mental health by strengthening effective leadership and governance, providing comprehensive, integrated and responsive community-based care, implementing promotion and prevention strategies, and strengthening information systems, evidence and research. In 2020, WHO’s “Mental health atlas 2020”

analysis of country performance against the action plan showed insufficient advances against the targets of the agreed action plan.

WHO’s “World mental health report: transforming mental health for all” calls on all countries to accelerate implementation of the action plan. It argues that all countries can achieve meaningful progress towards better mental health for their populations by focusing on three “paths to transformation”:

- deepen the value given to mental health by individuals, communities and governments; and matching that value with commitment, engagement and investment by all stakeholders, across all sectors.
- reshape the physical, social and economic characteristics of environments – in homes, schools, workplaces and the wider community – to better protect mental health and prevent mental health conditions; and
- strengthen mental health care so that the full spectrum of mental health needs is met through a community-based network of accessible, affordable and quality services and supports.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the core concepts of Buddhist doctrines.
- To review the role of Buddhist approaches in mental health and wellbeing.
- To find out the lesson from Buddhist teachings for leading healthy and prosperous life.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology deserves a very careful consideration. Methodology and procedures are the important factors in conducting research. Appropriate methodology used in research helps to collect valid and reliable data and analyse information purposively to arrive at correct decision. The study was solely based on secondary data. Also, this research is qualitative research based on qualitative method by collecting data from secondary sources. Hence, the information was gathered from various related books, journals, Internet, newspapers, articles and personal collections.

⁷ <https://www.who.int>.

Data was collected according to the requirement of fulfilment of objectives. There has lot of related data in websites, but the most important data was only incorporated here. Gathered experience and knowledge also comprised in this research paper.

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

To understand Buddhism doctrines and their effect on mental health and well being, it is mandatory to know and practice the core principles of Buddhist philosophical doctrines.

- **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Techniques such as mindful meditation, deep breathing in yoga help individuals develop awareness of their thoughts and emotions, allowing them to manage stress, anxiety, and depression effectively. Through these techniques person can understand and get rid of the second noble truth which states, 'suffering has a cause' Studies have shown that these practices can lead to significant improvements in mental health by fostering a sense of inner peace and emotional regulation. Since central to Buddhist practice is meditation, which serves as a primary tool for mental training. In UK we can identify the various mindfulness-based programmes deriving from the work of Kabat Zinn. Also, Japan Naikan has been extensively used in the prison system, similarly, Vipassana meditation retreats run by Buddhist Goenka movement have also proved transformative for prisoners in India.
- **Being Present:** It is to allow yourself to be in a moment as it is occurring. This may sound simple, but it is common for many of us to spend time ruminating on the past or worrying about how our actions may affect our future. by remembering and practicing living in present can help to destroy the cause of suffering which is the third noble truth of Buddha's teaching. A main goal in all Buddhist approaches to mental health is allowing yourself to be present and process a given movement as your experiencing it.
- **Focus on adapting our own behaviour:** Rather than worry about how your environment or other external factors are causing issues in your life, a main concept of Buddhist psychology and

therapeutic practices based on Buddhist principle is to focus how on how your own behaviours, actions and thought process are contributing to your suffering which is actually practising the eightfold path in Buddhism to destroy all kinds of sufferings.

- **Understanding the self:** Buddhism teaches that our perception of self significantly impacts our mental health. Through introspection and self-observation, individuals can identify harmful behaviour and thought patterns contributing to their suffering. This focus on self-awareness and encourages personal responsibility and empowers individuals to change their circumstances.
- **Interconnectedness:** A key tenet of Buddhism is the idea of interconnectedness, recognising that individuals are part of larger whole. This perspective fosters compassion towards others and reduces feelings of isolation, practitioners often described. profound sense of connection with the world around them which can alleviate feelings of loneliness and despair
- **Impermanence and Non-Self:** Understanding the concepts of impermanence and non self can help individuals reduce attachment to negative thoughts and emotions. By recognising that feelings are temporary, practitioners can cultivate resilience in the face of life's challenges.
- **Compassionate Action:** Buddhism emphasizes the importance of compassion- not only towards oneself but also towards others. Engaging in acts of kindness can enhance one's own mental well-being while fostering a supportive community.
 - Buddhist principles have been integrated into various therapeutic approaches ⁸also, such as.
 - **Mindfulness-Based Cognitive therapy (MBCT):** which combines cognitive behavioural techniques with mindfulness strategies to help individuals manage their thoughts more effectively.
 - **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):** focuses on reducing stress through mindfulness practices leading to improve emotional regulations.

⁸ Pg 50, Buddhist approach to mental health and wellbeing, Robbert common.

- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT): Encourages acceptance of thoughts and feelings while committing to personal values and actions that enhance wellbeing.

These core concepts form the basis of various major lessons that the application of Buddhism to mental health can teach us.

- Focusing on the perception of self: The way in which we perceive ourselves is very impactful on our mental health. In Buddhism psychology, introspection and self observation are vital for identifying any behaviours that are causing issues in our lives and then adapting those behaviours. Analysing and understanding the nature of ourselves is necessary for being able to identify how our own behaviours and mental states are causing our suffering. Through the power of perceiving which behaviours are influencing our suffering, we also gain the ability to change our perception of and reactions to our environment and thus the ability to change any circumstances in our lives.
- The Importance of Taking Personal responsibility for a reaction: As the core concept suggest, we oversee our own actions, which means we are also in charge of how our actions impact are mental health. According to Buddhism psychology, to improve our wellbeing. we first need to take personal responsibility for how we are causing our own suffering.
- The Value of Self-Development and Constantly working to be better: Two of the universal truth in Buddhism state – “everything in life is impermanent and changing” and “there is no eternal, unchanging soul, and ‘self’ is just a collection of changing characteristics or attributes. One of the way these truths can be interpreted is that our ‘self’ is always changing. Or. in other words, that we are constantly going through stages of self development. Focusing on the development of ourselves is key to achieve inner peace and happiness. The success of Buddhist mental health approaches is reliant on our motivation and willingness to adapt to our circumstances, change our mindset and behavioural patterns, and to always be working on bettering ourselves. These practices teach us that

the end of suffering comes from self-development.

- Finding Inner Peace and Utilising That for Healing: A final lesson we can learn from Buddhist approaches to mental health is that true happiness and wellbeing come from finding and sustaining inner peace. Inner peace comes from understanding and accepting your true nature and from achieving a state of mental calmness. The main way to achieve this mental state is through meditation practices such as mindful meditation can be performed in many ways, for example through deep breathing exercises, body scanning exercises, yoga, and more. Buddhist mindful meditation can help us develop the skills we need to relieve suffering from both us and from others. Overtime with repeated use, meditative practices could guide us into a better state of being.
- Buddhism psychology and Buddhism influence therapeutic treatments: for mental health provide fresh take on how we think and talk about mental health, as well as on how our own behaviours and thought processes contribute to our mental health states rather than focusing on suffering itself Buddhism. Provides an alternative viewpoint, one that shows we are fully in control of our own well being. We don’t need to focus all our attention and energy on outside sources of issues to find inner peace. We can release suffering by changing behaviours that cause suffering and throw changing the way we think about.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Government sectors such as schools, universities, public health agencies, guidance counselling centres etc should develop the series of knowledge as well as Buddhist approaches based practical activities such as meditation, discourses volunteering for better mental health and wellbeing of people.
- International organizations with working processes that focus on studying and learning Buddhist doctrines as well as application should urge members within organization to promote holistic well-beings for balanced way of working life.
- Buddhist monks, laity, academics and general interest should be aware of knowledge and

understanding and self-practice the way to live and promote their holistic well-beings. It is for the health risk factor reduction with self-reliance on health. It also leads to capacity⁹ building and ability for social development.

- Must introduce integrated study for balanced way of life according to Buddhism doctrines.
- Can produce a Buddhist manual of living under the concept of mental health wellbeing.
- Study and research the effectiveness of the holistic wellbeing promotion for balanced way of life according to Buddhist psychology.
- To understand the teaching treasures of Buddhist doctrines and its approaches and promote those life learning lessons among people of various culture, cast, creed and societies around the world.
- Organise various programmes for children to old age one to get rid from all kinds of worldly sufferings and can lead happy and prosperous life.
- Develop, promote and offer Personality development courses based on Buddhist psychology from childhood to old age.

CONCLUSION

According to Dhammapada, Buddhism advocates the concept of “*arohaparama labha*” that is, “health is the greatest achievement”. Not only physical health, but Buddha has also been vocal about his take on mental health. So eventually, we can conclude that the logical sequence of Buddhist doctrines in entire philosophy where different ideas are mutually connected and related to enrich our knowledge. The Four Noble Truths are the basis of Buddha’s teachings and from this follow all other notions such as Eightfold Path, which is a daily guide for everyone to lead a virtuous life. The doctrine of *Prateetyasamutpad* is the reasonable description about the cycle of human life. The doctrine of momentariness has profound philosophical implications in the present scenario where people chase the momentary pleasures of the world without realising its impermanence. The doctrine of non-soul or more precisely, the denial of a permanent soul would be a unique notion of Buddhist philosophy. Apart from all these the various theories of the different philosophical schools are direct evidence

to understand the richness of Buddhist philosophy, and how seriously the study on the teaching of Buddha is carried out. Even today, deeper and wider study is done on the various schemes of this philosophy to explore the new horizons of the meaning it contains. Enrich our knowledge of mental health and wellbeing and provides remedies that are beyond temporal boundaries.

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