



RETHINKING DEMOCRACY IN BUDDHISM

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Abstract

Democracy refers to the legal rights and dignity of individuals, which are enforced by the government. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the institutions, patterns, features, and practices of modern democracy, one must delve into the two thousand years of democratic history. In a functioning democracy, the government provides its citizens with the most freedom, opportunities, and a comfortable life. The greatest expansion of democracy in the world has been witnessed in the last quarter of the 20th century. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, democratic governments emerged in many parts of Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, and America. This trend reflected the growing importance of democracy within the contemporary time frame. In order to achieve a sustainable democratic form of government in a particular country, there are certain necessary concepts to consider. In Buddhism, the principle of "*Bahujanhitaya Bahujana sukhaya lokanukampaya*" embodies the idea of 'Dhamma' for the good and happiness of the many, as well as compassion for the world. There is an inseparable affinity between Buddhism and democracy. Many scholars have mentioned in their books and articles that there are similarities between Buddhism and democracy. These concepts are not new; they have existed since ancient times. Through the ideas of Siddhartha Gautama, we can observe a distinct and significant contribution of democracy. His ideas on economic development, the rule of law, deliberative democracy, governmental procedures, social-political status, human rights, and freedom of religion are considered groundbreaking in the development of democracy, leading to a strong democratic system in a country. Siddhartha Gautama established numerous educational institutions, monasteries, and more in the third century B. C. Later, those educational institutions were transformed into universities, and the inns were converted into hospitals. Hence, this article discusses the first part of the paper would like to discuss the origin and some essential concepts of democracy. "From Suffering to Shared Power" highlights the relationship between democratic ideals, Buddhist philosophy, and the goal of creating a more equitable and prosperous society. Lastly, it tests the hypothesis to wrap up. Buddhist philosophical systems provide important moral foundations for democratic government and decision-making.

Keywords: *Democracy, Buddhism, Governance, Eightfold Path, Ethics*

Introduction

Democracy is an unparalleled process of governance which was discovered by the various, different scholars and politicians. It is not only the political part of a government but also the way of life. In a society, it teaches us cooperation, tolerance and sharing of human feelings. To defined democracy, the US

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president Abraham Lincoln told democracy is "Government of the people by the people and for the people." The word *democracy* is derived from the Greek word *Demos*, (the people) and *Kratos* (power or Rule). Democracy means that the government is the authority and the authority is conducted by the people for the interests of public of a country. Democracy appeared in the state of ancient Greece first time. The idea of democracy appeared in the minds of general people when they were tortured by the people of the upper classes in different ways. All the citizens of Athens were assembled to cast their vote on laws by the 5th century BC, which is the begging of direct democracy. In the 6th century BC, the ancient Romans were also united to develop the system of Government which is called 'Republic'. Executive's power was placed in the hands of consuls. A political struggle was formed in Rome between the Patricians and the plebeians (ordinary citizens). The aim of such a political struggle was to establish democracy among the citizens. In the middle age, the parliament of England influenced to establish democracy among the people. In 1628, the petition of rights curtailed the absolute power of the king to establish democracy in the country. The idea of democracy was blossomed with the spirit of the general people attitude to maintain the rules and norms in their social life. In that respect, Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha, was not only a spiritual leader but also a great patron of education and social welfare. In the third century B. C., he established a multitude of educational institutions that served as centres of learning and enlightenment. These institutions, along with monasteries, played a significant role in spreading knowledge and fostering intellectual growth. The teachings of Siddhartha Gautama aim to bring about social harmony and alleviate people's suffering. That is the source of democratic ideas of the Buddhist philosophy. He was the angel of peace. Siddhartha Gautama always pleased with his followers to lead their lives peacefully. He advised his followers to leave the path of 'Himsa' (revenge) so Siddhartha Gautama was the idol of 'ahimsa'. Siddhartha Gautama tried to establish a state of ahimsa where will be no tyrant, no sufferer, and no one will be deprived socially or economically. As Siddhartha Gautama was a worshiper of Buddhism so his attitude was only to establish peace, avoiding Ahimsa. He realised very well that hankering for wealth is the only cause of sorrow. So he advised his people to establish the state of peace by which one man can conquer the heart of other people thought he may be his friend or enemy. Being analysed the motto and principles of Siddhartha Gautama it is found that he tried utmost to establish democracy among the citizens by his principles and advice. He knew well that only democracy can establish peace among the people. In Buddhism "*Bahujanhitaya Bahujana sukhaya lokanukampaya*" means this Dhamma for the good of the mass, for the happiness of the mass and for compassion for the world. There is an inseparable affinity between Buddhism and democracy. The Buddha's vision for education had far-reaching effects on society, as these universities became instrumental in shaping the minds of future generations. Furthermore, Siddhartha Gautama's commitment to social welfare led to the conversion of inns into hospitals. Siddhartha Gautama spread his attitude through Buddhism among the citizens to integrate and united them. Siddhartha Gautama never asked anyone to follow him. But he tried to spread the principle of Buddhism among the general people. Siddhartha Gautama thought that a garden becomes beautiful by the intensive care of the gardener; like that, a religious teacher can spread his religious thoughts and principles among the people by which anyone can be religious, ideal and noble. Because the principle of religion teach people how to remove the narrowness of their mind and how do people become great. In this sense Siddhartha Gautama was no doubt a great religious teacher, monk, founder of Buddhist institutions (commune) and the philosopher of Buddhism.

Rational of the Study: The rationale behind the study on "Rethinking Democracy in Buddhism" may be to explore the intersection between Buddhist principles and democratic values, examining how Buddhist teachings can inform or influence democratic practices and governance.

Objectives of the Study: The study aims to examine the compatibility of Buddhist philosophy with democratic principles and the potential for integrating Buddhist ethics into modern democratic systems.

Research questions: How do Buddhist teachings on ethics and governance align with democratic values? How can Buddhist practices improve democratic participation and inclusion?

Hypotheses: Answer to the above question help test the following hypotheses:

- a) The Buddhist principles of compassion and non-harm can promote a more ethical and empathetic form of democracy.
- b) Practicing Buddhist mindfulness and self-awareness can improve democratic deliberation and conflict resolution.
- c) Integrating Buddhist values into democratic systems can lead to a more sustainable and harmonious society.

Methodology: The article uses a qualitative meta-analysis approach to explore the relationship between Buddhist philosophy and democratic principles, with the aim of identifying ways to integrate Buddhist ethics into modern democratic systems and build a more equitable, compassionate, and successful society.

Siddhartha Gautama left home, in his childhood to establish that he had no hankering for wealth though he was a prince. He knew well that only self sacrifice can bring peace in his real life. His disciples and followers were greatly attracted by his self sacrifice and morals. Siddhartha Gautama advised that spiritual life is greater than material life. To establish such thought he sacrificed his own life. He always advised his followers not to follow his personality but to follow the path of Buddhism. As a result of it, many general people and his followers were attracted by principles and they also started to lead their lives staying Buddhist commune. The Buddhist monks sacrifice their live and they were interested in Monk-life to follow the advice of Siddhartha Gautama and to maintain *Bramhacharya*. Siddhartha Gautama only aim was to enlighten and the elimination of sorrows and suffering. Buddhism views suffering as the dissatisfaction and unsatisfactoriness inherent in life, including physical pain, emotional turmoil, and existential anxiety. The study explores how democratic principles can address the root causes of suffering, fostering well-being through policies that promote growth and societal harmony. Democracy can empower individuals and communities to shape their own destinies, aligning with Buddhist values of equality, non-violence, and collective responsibility. The title suggests a journey towards a more just, compassionate, and empowering social order, inviting readers to consider how Buddhist philosophy can contribute to making democracy an effective tool for alleviating suffering and promoting well-being. The Eightfold Path is a fundamental concept in Buddhism that outlines the path to achieving enlightenment and liberation from suffering. It consists of eight interconnected practices or steps that are essential for leading a wholesome and fulfilling life. These eight aspects of the path provide guidance on ethical conduct, mental development, and wisdom.

Siddhartha Gautama taught his followers the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is the core framework of Buddhist teachings and describes the moral and practical guidelines for achieving freedom from suffering. Although not explicitly political, each of its eight branches has potential connections to the values and practices of democratic philosophy. Here is a detailed explanation of how each principle relates to democracy:

1. Right view (*sammāditthi*): *Samyak Ditthi* is defined as awareness of the Fourth Noble Truth. The core teachings of Buddhism are considered the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are: *Nirodha* (the end of suffering), *Magaga* (the path to the cessation of suffering), *Samudaya* (the cause of suffering) and *Dukkha*.

Democratic Connection: Promotes critical thinking, questioning authority, and seeking unbiased information that are essential for informed participation in a democratic society.

2. Right intention (*samma- sankappa*): This involves cultivating good intentions such as renunciation, kindness and compassion while giving up harmful desires.

Democratic Connections: Promote the positive intent of establishing democratic values focused on the common good and consistent with public service and collective well-being.

3. Right speech (*sammāvācā*): This passage exhorts readers to speak with kindness and sincerity, to consider the welfare of others, and to refrain from lying, slander, insulting remarks and gossip.

Democratic Connections: Promotes honest, respectful and non-divisive communication that is essential for healthy public discourse and constructive dialogue in democracies.

4. Right action (sammākammanta): The noble truth called "Pancha-Sila" instructs people in how to avoid immoral behaviour like murder, theft, sensuality, lying, and drunkenness.

Democratic connection: It promotes ethical behaviour, including responsibility for the community, non-violence, and the respect of law, all of which are vital to a stable and just democratic society.

5. Right livelihood (sammā-ājiva): The idea of having a "right livelihood" involves earning a living in an honourable and legitimate way, avoiding extravagant lives, and taking jobs that do not involve harm or violence towards others. The Buddha forbids pursuits like manufacturing weapons and selling alcohol.

Democratic connection: Facilitates honest and ethical endeavours that promote the well-being of society, in line with the democratic concept of fairness and social responsibility.

6. Right effort (sammāvāyāmā): It's the attempt to think most effectively. Avoiding negative thoughts, controlling harmful habits, acquiring positive ideas, and maintaining proper conditions for a respectable life are all part of the process.

Democratic Connection: Facilitates consistent effort positive change that is crucial to effective participation in the civic community and addressing social issues.

7. Right mindfulness (sammāsati): It refers to awareness that includes body awareness, sensations thoughts and internal functions that are related to breathing, these functions are concerned with the way humans are addressed and the welfare of the collective is paramount.

Democratic connection: It promotes the awareness of biases and preconceptions, which leads a more informed and objective participation in public conversations and decision making.

8. Right concentration (sammāsamadhi): Right Concentration is a one-pointed contemplation practice that leads to enlightenment on four levels (Jhana (Dhyana), Arūpadhātu Samadhi, Saññā-Vedana-Anicca Samadhi, Sunkhañña Samadhi) transcending pain and pleasure sensations.

Democratic connection: It promotes focused attention and mental acuity: this enables deep thought and critical reasoning, both of which are essential to informed and responsible participation in democracy (Calcutta university, 2nd 1997-98, p 109-112), (*The Connected Discourses of the Buddha a New Translation of Tbc Samyutta Nikaya*, n.d. P1495,1496).

The Eightfold Path, a central aspect of Buddhist teaching, describes practices that promote ethical conduct and mental development. Each element of the path—Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration—contributes to more informed and responsible citizenship, which is essential to a healthy democracy. For example, Right Speech encourages respectful dialogue, while Right Mindfulness encourages awareness and critical thinking, both of which are vital to democratic participation. By these principles of Buddhism Siddhartha Gautama tried to make a major contribution to the freedom loving to given the Nation democratically as his such principle were for the people so his such principle had a great role in the democracy. Many political thinkers believe that, this mediocrity can be found in Aristotle's thinking of democracy. Buddhism's Eightfold Path, which emphasises individual spiritual freedom, calls for caution and subtlety when interpreted through a democratic perspective. Its application to contemporary political systems necessitates an awareness of cultural settings. Research on rethinking democracy in the Buddhist context is important because it has the potential to make the world a more fair, just, and participatory place for everyone. It provides insightful analysis and substitute models that might enlighten global debates on democracy's future as well as Buddhist societies. Therefore, the research problem of this paper is how can democratic ideals and Buddhist philosophy be harmonized and used in concert to advance a society that is more fair, kind, and prosperous?

This paper is driven by the hypothesis of Buddhist philosophical systems provide important moral foundations for democratic government and decision-making. The primary aim of this study is to identify potential avenues for balancing Buddhist philosophy with democratic principles in order to build a more equitable, compassionate, and successful society for all. This research is crucial for several reasons:

1) Growing global influence of Buddhism: Buddhist communities are rapidly expanding, necessitating examination of their engagement with political systems like democracies.

2) Ethical frameworks for democratic governance: The rise of populism and political polarization underscores the need for values-based approaches, where Buddhist principles offer valuable insights. The research will employ a qualitative meta-analyses methods approach.

2. The Role of Democracy in Buddhist philosophy: Democracy means the legal right and dignity to the individual which comes into force by the government. No man is truly free until they can speak freely, can establish his legal right without any hamper. Siddhartha Gautama taught and wanted to implement his advice to the individual considering the sense of democracy. Siddhartha Gautama advised through his “*Ashtangik Marg*” in his Dhamma, to follow the path of *Ashtangik Marg* individually. To implement the actual meaning of democracy, it is admitted that Siddhartha Gautama tried to implement democracy through his speeches and advises. The Siddhartha Gautama's teaching strongly encourages democratic ideas and institutions. This is shown within the Buddhist monk and community. All the disciples of the Buddhist community have the same right to speak, act and think without any religious authority and also respect human dignity and humanity. These are the fundamental principles of democracy. It has made the Sangha the community of monks, they are absolutely democratic institutions. The Sangha Buddhist community upholds democratic values by promoting equality, collective decision-making and active citizen participation, fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility towards social well-being. The modern idea of a voting power is also found in the code of the discipline of the Siddhartha Gautama. And besides, the life of Siddhartha Gautama is a remarkable testimony of a fully developed social consciousness.

The term Sangha definitely indicates a kind of political organisation. Sangha is a system of government formed by the Bhikkhus for the Bhikkhus and of the Bhikkhus. The Siddhartha Gautama admired some of the tribal republics of his time. On one occasion, he said that the Vajj Republic would flourish if people continued: i) Organize (regular and frequently meetings) Meet in harmony, break harmony and conduct business in harmony. iii) Do not authorize what was not authorized, but proceed as authorized by its ancient tradition. ' iv) Honour, respect, reverence and greet the elders among them and consider them worthy of being heard'. v) Not by force to kidnap the wives and daughters of others and force them to live with them ". vi) To honour, respect, revere and greet Vajj temples in the country and abroad, without withdrawing the adequate support given and given vii) Make adequate arrangements for the safety of the arahats so that these Arahats can come and live there in the future, and those who are already there can live comfortably ". The ten wholesome karmas, or virtues that advance both individual and societal well-being, are highlighted in Buddha's teachings. These virtues include generosity, moral behaviour, patience, honesty, resolve, loving-kindness, knowledge, serenity, non-injury, and proper perspective. A more just, compassionate, and prosperous society arises when individuals and groups embrace these ideals. In Buddhist philosophy as well as mention Equality, Justice, confederation in addition to this he also mention that, ten qualities of welfare, like

AJJAVA: This term is likely based on Pali "ajjava," which translates to "straightforwardness." It emphasizes maintaining absolute integrity and honesty in all your actions and conduct.

AKKODHA: This likely comes from Pali "akkodha," meaning "absence of anger" or "non-hostility." It promotes inner peace and freedom from resentment towards others.

AVINHINSA: This is a well-known Pali term for "non-violence" in all its forms, encompassing thought, speech, and action. It emphasizes a deep respect for all living beings.

AVIRODHATA: This could be related to Pali "avirodha" or "non-obstruction." It suggests promoting peace and harmony by seeking consensus and avoiding discord.

DANA: This is a core Buddhist concept meaning "generosity." It encourages practicing detachment from possessions and giving freely to others with an open heart.

KHANTI: This Pali term translates to "patience" or "endurance." It emphasizes developing resilience and composure in the face of challenges.

MAJJAVA: This likely comes from Pali "maddava," meaning "gentleness" or "modesty." It encourages cultivating kindness, politeness, and humility in all interactions.

PARICCAGA: This could be derived from Pali "paricāga," meaning "sacrifice" or "renunciation." It suggests placing the well-being of others above your own and being willing to make personal sacrifices for their benefit.

SILA: This is a fundamental term meaning "morality" or "ethical conduct." It emphasizes upholding strong moral principles and living a life of virtue.

TAPA: This term can hold two interpretations. It could refer to Pali "tapas" meaning "austerity" or "simple living." Alternatively, it could also come from "dhutapa," meaning "approachability" or "accessibility." Either way, it emphasizes living a modest and unpretentious life. Overall, these "ten qualities of welfare" seem to encapsulate key Buddhist values related to ethical conduct, inner peace, kindness, and compassion. They offer a framework for cultivating individual well-being while also contributing to a more harmonious and prosperous society. It's important to note that while these qualities aren't explicitly mentioned as a set of "ten" in most mainstream Buddhist texts; they draw upon various teachings and principles found throughout the tradition. Their specific interpretation and emphasis might vary depending on the school or lineage within Buddhism. It can be seen that the seven conditions of national well-being contain many ideas, such as freedom, fraternity, human rights, culture and ancient customs. At the beginning, frequent public assemblies supported ideas of freedom to discuss, express and criticize state affairs every day (Rahula, 2017).

Siddhartha Gautama realised and taught the people to learn and to serve the people by their performance. He knew well that no man can be civilised unless he learns and no man can sacrifice his life and he realised, to look after the human and animals. As the legal right to education and treatment are necessary part of human life in democratic country, So Siddhartha Gautama tried to establish democracy by establishing educational institutions and hospitals in the 3rd century B.C. So, it is very clear that Siddhartha Gautama was one of the pioneers to form democratic State. Being scrutinized the performances of Siddhartha Gautama to the society, the following democratic values are found which were established in his period 1) Education for all 2) Treatment for all 3) progressive Society for all 4) Personal liberty and self-reliance 5) Self-sacrifice 6) Productive economic society 7) Systematic cultural society 8) Self respect and obedience to the authority. These values in many respects, Buddhist ideas that incorporate principles and practices such as the rule of law, deliberative democracy, governmental procedures and the social-political status were respected and observed from the period of Siddhartha Gautama in Asia specifically from the period of king Ashok from the 3rd Century BC.

In Japan, Buddhist Civilization is followed. Now the technically backward Buddhists try to implement the advice of Siddhartha Gautama through their standard of living so that they can enjoy the importance of democracy. They realised the instructions of Siddhartha Gautama that one man can be noble depending on his own works. Siddhartha Gautama advice People how to get rid of sorrows and sufferings in life. Buddhism promotes policies that address poverty, aligning democratic principles with Buddhist principles to empower individuals and communities, promoting social justice and well-being. He taught to serve the distressed, help the poor by his all efforts for the interest of mankind, overall to establish a clean democratic society. Siddhartha Gautama raised his voice against the illegal customs and injustice of the society only to form the democratic society. He tried to stand all classes of People in one row where no racism no injustice will found. Siddhartha Gautama was compassionate to all the creatures of the world, he taught to love all the animals, and to serve the animals is to love God. He declared in his loud voice to teach the People and to form the democracy that, "No man is responsible for his work for his birth but he

is responsible for his deeds. To love animals is to love God and hankering for mass wealth is the only cause of his sufferings." The inner and true meaning of his advice denotes democracy undoubtedly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Integrating Buddhist principles into modern democratic frameworks can improve ethical governance, promote social harmony, and encourage active community participation. By drawing on the moral foundations offered by Buddhism, democracies can move toward more equitable and compassionate societies that address both individual and collective needs. The Buddhist Sangha has historically functioned democratically in decision-making and resource allocation. Buddhism's emphasis on karuna and ahimsa mirrors the democratic pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution and protection of individual rights. Buddhism promotes nonviolence and compassion, encourages social harmony, and alleviates suffering. Its principles guide democratic governance, encouraging empathetic leadership and policies that address social injustice. Open discourse, critical thinking, and respect for diverse viewpoints are encouraged in both Buddhist practice and democratic processes. The Buddhist emphasis on ethical conduct and upholding the Dharma can be seen as an echo of the democratic principle of rule of law based on shared values and ethical principles.

Buddhist teachings emphasize individual liberation through self-cultivation, while democracy focuses on collective governance and societal well-being. They advise non-attachment to authority, which may conflict with democratic reliance on elected officials. Certain Buddhist traditions have hierarchical monastic structures, raising questions about democratic equality. The Buddhist concept of karma and merit may conflict with the democratic principle of "one person, one vote," where individual merit doesn't define voting power. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes values like equality, compassion, and ethical conduct, which can contribute to a flourishing democracy, but their manifestation in practice, depends on the specific cultural context and interpretation of Buddhist principles. The Siddhartha Gautama appeared because of democracy at a time when autocracy prevailed in India. Most of the states were feudal, being under a king like the case of the Siddhartha Gautama clan itself. The path that the Siddhartha Gautama and his disciples had shown us was not forgotten. King Ashoka and Mahatma Gandhi, B.R Ambedkar followed the same path and the strength of the nation increased. Although the main Buddhism and democracy have a very close relationship, the doctrine preached by the Siddhartha Gautama is not based on political philosophy, sometimes it is said that the Siddhartha Gautama is a social reformer and that the condemned caste system recognizes the equality of the people. The principle of Siddhartha Gautama is effective until the days to establish a peaceful democratic world. At present democracy is formed and maintained only politically. Nowadays Politicians insist the citizens maintain democracy politically. Buddhism tried to emancipate of the people from the distress course of human life and he believed that emancipation can be possible not only Tapasya but by the cooperative attitude of the people. He also invented the true sense of spirit of democracy through the exercise of his philanthropy path the democratic sprite which Siddhartha Gautama mentioned Samamanabhabapanna for the deprived people and the people of less opportunity to give them possible atmosphere and less they spend smooth social life. Which is an important demand for democracy .the sense of attitude is reflected in the writing of modern European western democratic thinker. That is the idea of "Common Good". In this connection, we may mention the liberating American thinker John Rawls (1971) principle of equal liberty is the basic tune of democracy.

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