

Research and Methodology in Buddhist Perspectives

Prof. Kapila Abhayawansa
Vice Rector for Academic Affairs
International Buddhist College

It is an accepted fact that the ultimate aim of research is to arrive at a accurate and factual conclusion over a problematic phenomenon. Students of research in Buddhist studies are well aware of the fact that Buddhism came into existence as a result of a scientifically conducted research by Siddhartha Gautama. It is no doubt that Siddhartha Gautama has entered into the history as the first who conducted a proper research study applying scientific methodology for the first time in the recorded history of mankind. The full report of the research undertaken by Siddhartha Gautama before being the Buddha has been presented by him after being the Buddha to his disciples. The report of this research has been recorded in the Ariyapariyesana Sutta in Majjhimanikaya as well as in the tenth Sutta in the Nidana-samyutta of Samyutta-nikaya. The term Pariyesanā is used to denote the research in the Buddhist terminology. When we go through these discourses carefully it is not difficult for us to find the way how the noble research was done by Siddhartha Gautama in his research process.

First requirement for a successful research is to find out a problem to be solved in the process of the research. Siddhartha Gautama had the problem before him to which no one has paid proper attention so far. The problem was not his personal one. Here it should be mentioned that the problem for research cannot be a personal one alone. Some times problem which is personal would not be a problem to others. The solution to a personal problem does not add anything to the accumulation of human knowledge. It should be a common problem. The solution to the proper research problem is a contribution which enhances the human knowledge. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the research students to select a genuine problem to find out a solution through research process in order to make a contribution to the academic field.

The research problem for Siddhartha Gautama was a common problem encountered by all the living beings. The discourse of Nidana-samyutta put it in the following way: “*Kiccham vatāyam loko apanno jāyati ca mīyati ca cavati ca uppajjati ca. Atha ca pana imassa dukkhassa nissaranam nappajānāti. Kudāssu nāma imassa dukkhassa nissaranam paññāyissati jarāmaranassāti*”.¹

“Alas; this world has fallen upon trouble. There is getting born and growing old, and dying and falling and being reborn. And yet from this suffering an escape is not known, even from decay-and-death. O when shall escape from this suffering, even from decay-and-death, be revealed?

According to this, the problem was how the suffering which includes birth and death can be stopped. Suffering is an empirical experience. Therefore, finding a solution to an empirical problem does not in any way involve in unobservable metaphysic. With this problem he made a strenuous research during six years. He met different scholars in the field to get the advice and when he knew that the achievements obtained under the advisors are not conducive to his aim he abandoned them. And, finally he started to make an empirical observation using inductive reasoning. It is really a logical method which is used specially in

¹ S. Nidāna-samyutta PTS, p.10

modern sciences to arrive at a general conclusion or a theory depending on specific observation. Even in our researches in Buddhist studies we need to exercise our logical thinking through which we can come to more reliable conclusion.

In his research Siddhartha Gautama came to know that the cause of suffering of the present life is none other than the birth. By observing the particular cases in his experience he came to that conclusion. But his aim was not to stop his research at birth. He wanted to find the causal relation of each phenomenon which causes birth. In this purpose he made use of his contemplative reasoning (*Yoniso manasikāra*) until he was able to obtain the right view of the causal emergence of suffering². The whole process of research finally led him to come to the general conclusion which finds expression in the formula “*Asmin sati idam hoti. imassa uppādā idam uppajjati. Asmin asati idam na hoti. Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*”

As a religious Master who engaged in the noble research and who achieved the highest result of it the Buddha has encouraged the people for the research. He was of the opinion that the real knowledge or the factual knowledge of any problematic phenomenon can be achievable only through critical examination or the research. Apart from the noble quest explained above, it appears that many other researches have been done by the Buddha during of his life time and the outcomes of those researches have been presented by him as his teachings; though they are not recognized as the results of the researches of the Buddha in the canon due to the fact that the compilers of the canon have attributed all the teachings of the Buddha to his capacity of omniscience.

It is no doubt that most of the social teachings of the Buddha contain very important conclusions of the field researches in the contemporary society. The social categories which were grouped under the particular nature of each group reveal us the power of the critical examination of the Buddha. The Buddha has presented certain social behavioral patterns according to their inherent characteristics. For example the Buddha talked about four kinds of people in relation to their attitude towards the welfare activities of their own and others. Depending on the matrimonial relations the Buddha presents four kinds of couples of husband and wife. Further, we can find seven kinds of wives in relation to their attitudes towards their husbands. These social behavioral patterns presented by the Buddha inevitably point to the fact that the Buddha had a marvelous and admirable critical knowledge on the contemporary society. This knowledge did not come to him for nothing. They are more likely the result of the researches made personally by the Buddha.

Critical examination is one of the most important requirements in the process of the research. There is none other religion in the world like Buddhism which encourages the people for critical examination. According to Buddhism nothing should be accepted without a proper examination in the field of religion in particular and in any field of study in general. In the *Tevijja-sutta* of *Digha-nikaya* Brahmins who pursue their uncritical way of accepting religious beliefs are compared to a line of blind men who follow one another holding hand without knowing the path properly.³ The place given to critical examination by the Buddha is quite evident from his open invitation to monks in the *Vimansaka-sutta* of *Majjhima-nikaya* to inquire into even himself in order to know whether this is really a Buddha or not.

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See *Nidana-vagga* of *Samyutta-nikaya*, (PTS) p. 10.

³

See also M. (PTS) II. 170

4. *Vimansaka-sutta*, *Majjhima-nikaya*

“*Vimansakena Bhikkhave Bhikkhunā parassa cetopariyāyamm ajātena tathāgate samannesanā Kātabbā sammāsambuddho vā no vā iti viññānāya*”⁴

In Tatvasangraha of Sāntarakṣita, the Buddha is reported to have said that as if the wise tests the gold by burning, cutting and rubbing (it on a touchstone), so are you to accept my words after examining them and not merely out of respect for me

“*Tāpacchedāt ca nikasāt
swarnamive panditaih
Parīkshya bhikshavo grāhyah
matvaco na tu gauravāt*”⁵

Acceptance of any thing without critical examination does not lead us to the knowledge of the things as they are. Discovering some thing as it is, is the purpose of a research because, it only can be the contribution to the human knowledge. If the research is to discover some thing as it is, we have to make sure of our critical thinking. Critical thinking is none other than the free thinking. Free thinking is possible only when our mind is balance without preconceived dogmas. As long as pre-conceived dogmas are there in our mind, so long as, we cannot keep our mind in a state of balance. In a research we try to get the objective truth which is the truth for all and not the subjective truth. In this respect, mind should not be disturbed by our subjective dogmas. The Buddha is the one who has shown for the first time the subjective elements which disturb the mind in the process of discovering the truth of things as they are. Kalama sutta gives us a list of such dogmatic elements which prevent one from one’s critical and free thinking. Dogmatic elements mentioned in the Kalama-sutta are as follows: Revelation (anussava), legends (itikirā) tradition (paramparā), religious scriptures (pitaka-sampadāna), logical conjecture (Naya-hetu), inference (takka-hetu), analogies, agreement through pondering views, probability, thought, and teacher’s view points. These factor more or less badly affect on the mind of the researcher particularly in the field of religious studies and generally in any field of studies. In order to arrive at an accurate conclusion research should be unbiased and objective. If we have the bias we trend deliberately to conceal the truth or highlight the untruth. Therefore, researcher has to draw each conclusion in the process of the research ensuring his own ability without adhering to his own vested interest.

The personal interests such as likes, dislikes, and inclinations are the result of dogmatic elements shown in the Kalama-sutta. It is the nature of the man that he easily gets attached to dogmas created by dogmatic elements. Therefore, when he finds something which is not compatible with his own view led by impelling desire and convinced to his inclinations he is unable to disclose the truth as it is. Though the truth can be revealed only by the unbiased mind it is very difficult for a person to get rid of his own view points as he is attached to them. This nature of man is nicely described by the Buddha as in the following way:

*Sakam hi ditthim katham accayeyya
Chandānunito ruciyā nivittho
sayam samttāni pakubbamāno
Yathā hi jāneyya tathā vadeyya*⁶

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5 Tatvasangraha (3588); See also Tibetan version of Jñāsamuccayasāra

“How can he who is led by his wishes and possessed by his inclinations overcome his own (false) view? Doing his own doings let him talk according to his understanding”

Student who engages in the research especially in the religious field often faces to the problem of psychological inclinations; if he belongs to the same religious group. Those inclinations compel him to take the decision in favor of his own religion. If he cannot overcome the pressure generated by his psychological inclination toward his own religion then his decisions or the conclusion would not be accepted as objective or factual. Because he tries to conceal the truth expressed by another religion or even by another tradition of same religious group in order to highlight that of his own religion or a tradition of religion. In such a situation, he may certainly arrive at a wrong conclusion criticizing all the others as inferior. This nature of the man is nicely revealed by the Buddha as follows:

*Yadāttani passati ānisamsam
ditthe sute sīlavate mute vā
tadeva so tattha samuggahāya
nihinato passati sabbamaññam*⁷.

(When someone sees personal advantage from things seen, heard or cognized, or, from holy vow or practice, one clings passionately to that alone and sees everything else as inferior.

Critical examination with unbiased manner is always welcome by Buddhism. It needs more new interpretations, descriptions and elucidations. Neyyatha-desanā⁸, (the statements whose meanings have to be drawn out), of the Buddha still required critical examinations and interpretations. Different traditions of Buddhist thought came into existence as the result of the critical examinations and the researchers made by ancient Buddhist scholars such as Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dinnaga, Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti Candakirti and many others. Buddhism is not a mystic religion. It needs not to be put out of sight. When it is made open it gets brighter. Therefore, it is said that *Tathāgatappavetito dhammavinayo vivatova virocaati no paticchanno*⁹

As far as the field of Buddhist studies is concerned, it is really a very vast field which is still open for many researches. It is rich with innumerable Buddhist sources together with different branches of study such as history, culture, thought, archeology, discipline and so on. In addition, Original Buddhism is wrapped up by three Buddhist traditions namely Theravada Buddhism Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana or Tantrayana Buddhism. Comparative researches are still quite possible within these Buddhist traditions. It is a need of the day that we must have the inter-religious dialogues among these Buddhist traditions. It is the nature of today in the global society that every thing is getting closer and not being apart. Religious integrity among the traditions is one of the very important factors for bringing harmony and peace among the followers of the traditions. This can be easily made possible by the research students of the Buddhist studies through making comparative researches among the Buddhist traditions. In this respect what is most necessary and important is that the researcher must get

⁶ Dutthatthaka-sutta in Sutta-nipata. verse. 781

⁷ Sutta-nipata, verse. 797

⁸ A. II. 60

⁹ A. Tika-nipata, Bharandu Vagga, Sutta No.9

rid of from his partiality to any particular kin of tradition. It is true that the subjective inclinations towards religion are very difficult to be removed from our mind as the Buddha has pointed out as shown above. But, so long as we become the slaves to our subjective inclinations we cannot do any contribution to the world.

We have to understand the differences as well as the similarities of the Buddhist traditions. As the genuine researchers we must not have the value judgments as to one is lower or higher than the other over the traditional differences. We must be impartial towards the differences. Impartiality is a condition for a genuine research. Impartial research can bring the unity in diversity.
