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Explanation of Jara Marana : The Buddhist Perspective



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Abstract

Ageing is a stage in life comes when man is too tired of his duties and wants to retire from his tasks. He desires to lead a life of contemplation and meditation. Too much passion or greed at this age can lead to health hazards. Hence it is absolutely necessary to practice self-restraint once again at this phase of life.

Ageing in its final phase, is dying and inevitably leads to death. The Indian spiritual discourses also have a unique way of preparing one for the decaying body. Each individual soul is immortal by nature and continues to exist even after the death of the body.

The Indic perspective, thus, provides not only the art of good living but also good dying, with the result that there are instances of subjective experiences of inner youth despite outer processes of bodily decay.

Here we will discuss on Indian philosophy or Buddhist philosophy where Lord Buddha had explained in detail on ageing. There he defined Birth, suffering and Death. According to Lord Buddha, ageing or jara means a person with sufferings, teeth less, grey hair, wrinkled skin and lastly the last stage of decayed life. Loss of activities of limbs of body is jara or ageing. He defined Death as break, fall, vanish of life – end of all desires and passion in one's last bed.

Touching up on the issues of aging as discussed in Dharmapada and other texts which claim to present Buddha's views. Here we discussed Buddha's ethical precepts regarding the care of the aged.

Keywords: Lord Buddha, Ageing, Jara, Puraṇ, Mahabharat, Life & Death, Vaidic Culture, Dhammapada.

Problems

We are all worried about ageing or jara as because its ultimate end is death which is very painful to everybody. For this reason we do not want to like old age and give importance in our life as we do in young or middle stage of our life. By any means we want to guard this stage but we know that is not possible and avoidable. By nature we all have childhood, young age, middle age and lastly old age. We can not avoid or get rid of it. This is the main problem of life. Lord Buddha also observed it very keenly. He followed, seek and distressed old aged men and felt very sad. He could not bear in his mind and lastly left his kingdom and turned himself a monk.

Introduction

Population ageing is one of the most distinctive demographic events of the world today. In 1950 just over 5% of the world population was aged 65 and over. That population had risen to more than 7% by 2005, and is expected to more than double over the next 45 years to reach 16.1% in 2050.

Why ageing is so important matter it can be stated that in the whole world mortality came down very low and ratio of old person in the society is being increased considerably. In the year 1980 persons aged over 65 was only 4% of total population. In the year 2001 the number of old person was 7 core 7 lacs i.e. 7.5% of population. In 2011 it has gone up to 9 core 6 lacs i.e. 8.2% . In 2013 (tentatively) 13 core 3 lacs i.e. 9.9% (AnandaBazar Patrika 6th November 2012). According to Uno if any country have 7% and above of old aged person the country would be treated as country of old aged person. One of the main reason of this increase is the development and modernization of Medical Science and clinical systems. In all countries of the world above 60 persons are increasing. Thus many countries of the world have been considered as the country of old aged persons. In our country in every minute 23

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persons are crossing 60. Then it could be assumed easily that in future it could go up to a horrible figure. The situation is that sometimes the young generation do not pay their respect or perform their duties to elderly persons now as we saw 50/60 years ago in the families. We know from ancient time it has become our culture to respect to elderly persons considering their contribution to the society. Now the question arises why this person are going to be considered as liability of the family and society as well. It is relay a question to solve out.

Several governments in the developed regions are trying to evolve a strategy for optimal expression of adaptive development in later life, and managing the dynamics between gains and losses as one ages. Japan has relegated some of the responsibility of caring to families and has relied heavily on technology and out sourcing for low skill and labour intensive jobs.

Academic response to the problems on the aged has been considerable. The field of gerontology has rapidly grown as a distinctive inter – disciplinary study involving biology, medicine , behavioral and social sciences. Here we can say discussion on problem of ageing not only effect the present generation but in ancient time in different books[Sastra], there were lot of discussion on ageing. Whatever the present socialists are thinking not about ageing in past years also the same kind of discussion were done.

Explanation

Ageing is a very important stage in human life. For last ten years there had been a lot of discussion, exchange of thoughts and planning in respect of social significance of ageing. Now a days we treat the stage of ageing is a curse and social problem. This has also been reflected in different stories of 'Puran'. In the epic of 'Mahabharata' also there are several stories of 'Jajati' where a piecemeal picture of ageing is narrated. 'Jajati' prayed for youth instead of being old. Thousands of years she enjoyed the youth by her son. But lastly she realised that all these material desire should be left out. At last she came to realise the feeling of being old and arrived in a peaceful state of mind. As childhood does not long last youth is also same. Everybody should be aware of it and be ready to accept the natural changes. Ageing ,in its final phase , is dying and inevitably leads to death.

Now nobody can ignore the elderly person. Crossing the different stage of life like childhood youth etc. everybody will attain the stage of being old. In this stage they need social, financial and mental support from the society. In the context of social , political and family matters they deserve the attention of all. Uno had declared the year 1999 as for old aged person.

In the epic of Mahabharata we learnt Jajati wanted youth instead of old but in ancient time average longevity of human life was only 20 years. Even in some areas it came down to 18 years. That is why as there were no enough old aged person nobody bothered for them. But at the same time it

should be mentioned that though in present days social scientists and other welfare organization are working on the issue of increasing longevity of life as well as increase of elderly person in this society in thousands of years ago in VAIDIC culture there was prominent and important place of old aged person in this society.

We can say in Indian society the number of elderly person is increasing we should think deeply over it and a meaningful solution is to be sorted out. The most important thing is to provide them Medical Assistance, Family and Social respect that they can feel that they are not helpless, many of the psychoanalyst now pay their attention to think over on the topic of old aged minds and research work is going on in this aspect.

Buddhism has always looked closely at the suffering of mankind and tried to find a way out. This gets reflected in this huge body of material. In many past year there were lot of writing and discussion on aged persons. In 'Sanhita' and Philosophy there were discussion on it. In the angle of Philosophy beside Buddhist Philosophy no discussion is possible on old age. Therefore we should look in to Buddhist Philosophy on ageing. Lord Buddha could realise 'Jara' or suffering in his eyes and if we could understand his Philosophy to get rid of this sufferings Prince Gautama converted himself to a Monk.

We learn Lord Buddha narrated in details on ageing in his writings. As because in life decease, sufferings and ageing is a must and ageing draws sufferings to death. For all this reason to live peacefully and happily in old age become very difficult and hard. It can be stated that in human life to be ready for becoming old and at the same time to face sufferings the ideal time is the stage of middle age. In this stage everybody could be able to realise that all his duties to the family and society is almost over and be ready to accept becoming old and prepare his mind set to face for that. But the fear of ageing lurks in the minds of many , at same time man's desire to live longer in almost universal. In individual age, many people struggle to retain their mental and physical health. When the they fail, which is very often the case, the become anxious to hide their physical and mental decline, and often take recourse to defense mechanism. As a philosophy Buddhism has always stressed the important of squarely confronting the reality of death. Death along with illness and ageing, is defined in Buddhism as one of the fundamental sufferings that all people must face.

The main aspects of Buddhists Philosophy is suffering cannot be avoided by nearly discussion on the topic. Man can avoid it by building his character. May be his family cannot hold him within the circle Buddha, during his roaming in the city noticed three stages of human life – Jara , Sufferings and Death. In life everything is there. Buddha in his writing had narrated everything in details and started worship or prayer to search out to find way out of this sufferings of life. Buddha got from his spiritual worship is four nos truth where main cream of Buddhists Philosophy

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is stated. There are Sorrow, Sufferings, Prevention of this Suffering, State of overcoming of the disease or sufferings. Out of this four aging is the cause of physical disease and sufferings where so many problems arise for deteriorated physical condition. But according to Buddha from Birth to Death the whole life is painful. Even from mother's womb to Birth the baby suffers till Death. In the old age where one becomes ill the suffering reaches in the highest level. From country to country, cast and creed nobody can avoid it.

Now we can say in this context that after suffering from Birth what is the nature of suffering from illness means. As because sufferings is the consequence of ageing in Buddhists Philosophy we see suffering an old age simultaneously. In two books like 'Bishudhi Magga' and 'Majjhim Nikaya' there are some ideas about ageing.

The symptom of ageing is found in different 'Nikaya' books of Buddha. It had been stated in 'Digha Nikaya' book – 'in whatever beings, of whatever group of beings there is ageing, decrepitude, broken teeth, gray hair, wrinkled skin, shrinking with age, decay of sense faculties that Monks is called ageing. [Mahasati patthana Sutta 22.17].

In Buddhist Philosophy in the old age nobody can control his limbs. Nose, throat, eyes, ear, skin – everything becomes in decaying stage and function of these limbs gradually decreases. Persons suffering from illness become helpless. In this stage not only his physical condition but mental set up is also changed. In this stage men become so helpless that in every stage of his day to day life he is to depend on others. The persons who look after patients become frustrated and ask for relief and even the patient himself becomes so depressed that sometimes he wants to kill himself.

As far as feeling for sense is concerned children and old person are all the same. In old age our sense gradually decreases and come to the stage as children have. Like children old aged persons cannot do anything properly. During the course of roaming in the city Prince Gautama observed old aged persons, their weakness, illness, and at last death. He felt from his heart this stage of life and could hear their cries and feel their agony. Later Lord Buddha advised his disciples in this issue which was narrated in his book 'Dhammapad'. 'Dhammapad' is a small part of his 'Tripitak' series of books.

In Dhammapada, Jaravagga, verse 146 Lord Buddha advised-

Ko nu haso kimanando niccama pajjalite sati ?
Andhakarena onaddha padipama na javessatha ?

That means "when this world is burning, how is there joy, how is there laughter? Shrouded by darkness, will you not seek the light?"

In Dhammapada, Jaravagga, verse 147 Lord Buddha advised-

Passa cittakama bimbama arukayama /
Aturama bahu sankappama, yassa natthi dhuvama thiti //

That means "Behold this body – a painted image, a mass of heaped up sores, infirm, full of

hankering – of which nothing is lasting or stable!"

In Dhammapada, verse 148, Lord Buddha says –
Parijinnama idama rupama roganiddhama pavhangurama /
Bhujjati putisandeha maranantama hi jivita //

That means "Fully worn out is this body, a nest of disease, and fragile. This foul mass breaks up, life indeed ends in death."

Relating 'Jara' it has been stated in Dhammapada, that this body is a shelter of all disease. Stability of human body does not last long. From childhood to old age it passes away very quickly towards last stage i.e. the land of death. Pain, illness, disease are part of human life and only death is the ultimate end of all sorts of sufferings. The human body is structure of bones coated with flesh and blood. Inside there are suffering illness disease and lastly death. Therefore nobody should care for this valueless body. The decorated chariot of king also, at one time, becomes old and decayed. Human body is also same. Age cannot be avoided in anyway. Thus Lord Buddha wanted to teach his disciples that ageing is very painful. From king to beggar nobody can avoid this and cannot get rid of it. Lord Buddha realised this and throwing his kingdom he became a monk. He overcame illness suffering of human life and became Buddha.

Lord Buddha realised that not only human being or other animals are suffered by aging, in other cases also age is a factor that decays everything. In case of human being, animals, plants we can see changes due to ageing but other immovable properties also are decaying everyday. That is why in Buddhist Philosophy Lord uttered 'Sarvama Anityama'. That means nothing is stable. We can see the difference in case of human being but in immovable properties we cannot judge it properly. But stone, water, world, sun – all are changing. At one time all will abolish stop. Lord Buddha could realise the changes of immovable properties also. He taught the common people what step should be done in the end of life and how to pass their last life.

Buddha's teaching such as that all who are born have to die (ppajjita nirujjhanti), life is uncertain, death is certain (adhuvama jivita dhuvama maranam) and so forth could be introduced as and when occasion demands and prepare him to face death with equanimity. We can understand the thoughts of Lord Buddha on ageing from this discussion. Ageing means the last lap towards death of decayed man. So it may be called negative in the eyes of common people. But in Indian tradition specially in Buddha religion ageing does not consider as negative outlook of human life. Entering in the deep of social life we can say ageing is not negative aspect. It has some positive approach also in our life. As in cloudy sky there is silky border ageing has also a positive important in our life.

The first positive sight in ageing is that it is short, changing and uncertain. This truth can be revealed in ageing. Nothing is stable in the world. All are changing. From birth to death there are stages what is also uncertain. As stream flows from one

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place to other, does not return back similarly human life also changes. From child to youth, from youth to old every stage is short and uncertain. Decay in every stage of life is unavoidable. This uncertainty can be stated as positive side of ageing. Lord Buddha felt this true.

The importance of ageing is that it gives freedom from the attraction of family life. When one child is born, grows gradually, naturally the baby has attraction on the surrounding he grows. The child becomes young and then middle aged. From the attraction of day to day family life one can get rid of in his old age only. In this stage man can move himself from day to day affairs in family and social matters. He can realise the sufferings of life and feels that all are very temporary and he keeps himself out of all desires once he had. Out of three unwanted aspects of life - illness, old age and death only old age can bring freedom from the attraction of family life.

Lord Buddha said friendship can prevent rivalry. If man can avoid such thing life would become joyful and happy. If we relate this idea of Lord Buddha we this present discussion we should be astonished.

This is not simple and literally about that trilogy of disease, old age and death. Sadly, no one is ever to young to become ill or die. But they say that, whatever age we die, after the heart stops we have few minutes left in which the brain is still active. Now in a timeless realm and uninterrupted by any sound, the consciousness can be rounded out, made whole, according to the life - conscious and unconscious – of that being.

From this discussion we have conclusion that is – Birth and Death are two ends at the same process. Birth helps us to understand life because death is a great leveler. Death has no distinction. All those who are infatuated with wealth, health, power etc, and consider themselves for above the rest are made to lie on the same great earth with the lowly and the humble. Ageing, Illness and Death should create in us an awareness of impermanence (anicca), unsatisfactoriness (dukkha) and egolessness (anatta), which in turn should inspire us to view everything animate and inanimate with a sense of detachment, in spite of our natural tendency for attachment.

When ageing, illness and death are viewed in the Buddhist perspective as realities of life, it should dawn upon us to observe at least the five precepts and fashion our lives according to the Dhamma, so that we could attain the unageing, unailing and undying bliss of 'Nibbana'.

Suggestion

Old age as well as 'Jara' is unavoidable in life. It is a reality. Therefore all effort should be given through world health organization (who), different N.G.O and other welfare organization both is Government level and private level to provide services at least to get some relief at this stage of life. Elderly people deserve it from society and nation.

Findings

From this discussion we noticed that all are decaying and uncertain. Which exists today will not be on tomorrow. Human body is also like that we may have pride, vanity and egoism of our external feature of our body but gradually all will decay. Now a days in all continue the number of old aged persons are growing very fast. Therefore problems are also growing. We all should accept this reality, and gladly embrace this stage of life. We should think and find out the way how to live happily mentally, physically and financially in old age. We are to think and take necessary measures from young age to overcome these problems. We know old age is not only a negative side but it has also a positive aspect. That is why we should not be afraid of jara or old age or death. It is better to think how to utilize this stage of life properly and in a meaningful way.

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