



# Jai Maa Saraswati Gyandayini

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal  
(Peer-reviewed, Open access & indexed, Online Journal)  
Journal home page: [www.jmsjournals.in](http://www.jmsjournals.in), ISSN: 2454-8367



Vol. 07, Issue-IV, April 2022

## COMPASSION & VEGETARIANISM IN BUDDHIST LITERATURE

Dr. Ruchi Srivastava<sup>a,\*</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> Assistant professor, Dept of Ancient History, Archaeology and Culture, Mahila Degree College, Basti Siddhartha University, Kapsilvastu, (India)

### KEYWORDS

Compassion, Vegetarianism,  
Buddhism, Environment, Indian  
Culture

### ABSTRACT

Indian culture is rooted in the ethos of compassion and non-violence, which leads naturally to vegetarianism. Buddhism which has non-violence at its core has always championed vegetarianism. Buddhist literature is replete with commandments and references which promote compassion on all beings and vegetarianism. The literature shows that at that time animal welfare and environment conservation was a key issue and was much cared for both by the kings and general public.

### INTRODUCTION

Buddhism is synonymous to compassion and benevolence. It is a way of life that is full of humanity; a life that is kind, empathetic and in harmony with Mother Nature. Buddhism advocates not killing any being to fulfil our hunger, not to harass anyone to satisfy our ego and not to hurt the nature to meet our needs. This paper endeavours to enlighten the people about the cores of Buddhist values that are Compassion and Vegetarianism.

**Objective:** The objective of the paper is to promote awareness about environment conservation and vegetarianism and to highlight the values of compassion and kindness.

**Original Text:** The ideology of Indian culture has continuously been engaged in contemplation, speculation and exploration. The ethos of this culture is rooted in human values. The men and women who were its facilitators, its leaders and its guides were not ordinary people, they were sages-maharishis, yogis and thinkers.

Everything they saw, they experienced and made the subject of contemplation, contained a paramount spirit. The Buddhist era is known as the age of social and religious new consciousness. *Trividh Dhara* of Indian culture has always been emphasizing on the protection of the environment, and supporting vegetarianism be it Rishabh or Shiv, Ram or Buddha. Their views unanimously resonate "May all be well and may all live happily"<sup>1</sup>

*"Ye kachi panbhutattithi tasa va thavara anvesa,*

*Dina va ye mahanta va majhimma rasmkatnukathula,*

*Dittha va yv aditha ye cha doore vasanti avidure,*

*Bhoota va sambhvesi va sabbe satta bhavint sukhitatta"*

It is said in Samyukt Nikaya<sup>2</sup> that one who does not commit violence through body, mind and speech and does not harass others is non-violent. This definition of non-violent has been described in great details and it is full of humanity and compassion. It is said in Anguttar Nikaya that one should attain three types of purity:

**Physical purity:** Abstinence from animal violence, stealing, lying

**Verbal purity:** Abstinence from falsehood, malignancy, vanity and harshness.

**Mental Purity:** Abstinence from anger, greed, suspicion, laziness etc.<sup>3</sup>

Compassion is the core of the non-violence spirit. Non-violence cannot survive without it. Compassion is a basic instinct to all human beings. Compassion has to be bestowed upon all without any discrimination and distinction: people suffering from worldly sorrows, on flora and fauna, on criminals, on orphans, on old servants; their salvation is the spirit of Compassion. This is non-violent religion.<sup>4</sup> this teaching of Buddha lays more emphasis on the protection of living beings, environmental balance and element of vegetarianism. The path prescribed by Tathagata Buddha is called the 'Madhyam marg' or 'Madhyama pratipada', because it avoids the extremes of human conduct from both the theory and the practical point of view. All the eight parts of the Eightfold Path are helpful in the development of the individual and society. But paramount of them is Right living which

has become absolutely necessary for today's society. Human beings have to adopt some livelihood for the protection of the body, but this livelihood should be good. A livelihood that neither makes any creature suffer nor does it have any scope for violence. Lord Buddha has disapproved the following five forms of livelihoods of that time, being violence oriented<sup>5</sup>-

1. Meat trade, 2. Arms trade, 3. Trade of animals, 4. Trade of alcohol, 5. Trade of poison

In the means of earning a living, the non-violent method has been described as the best. It is manifested from 'Dhammapada'<sup>6</sup> that just as a Bhramana goes to flowers and takes juice from them in the same way monks room in villages and earn their living any burden.

*"Ya bhararo puffam vanngandham ahethayam,  
Phaleti rasmaday evam gaane muni chare"*

The main duty of a Buddhist worshiper is to stay away from the following four types of sinful deeds.


1. Panatipat (violence)
2. Adinnadan (stealing)
3. Kamesu Michchhachar (Misconduct related to women)
4. Musavad (Telling untrue)

The order of food must have come soon after the advent of Humans. Humans have adopted a healthy life on the basis of their knowledge and thoughts as well as experience. Compassion being an inherent virtue, naturally, humans in order to keep human values alive adopted vegetarianism. During this period, the lesson of non-violence and tolerance towards animals was taught (in Buddhist literature while encouraging vegetarianism, monks have been instructed not to accept non-vegetarian food).<sup>8</sup> In Majjhima Nikaya,<sup>9</sup> the farmer is said to make a living from animal husbandry. Four-footed elephant, horse, camel, cow, bull and donkey etc., are indicated to be raised.<sup>10</sup> The king used to talk of animal husbandry and scientific breeding of animals for the increase of his fund.<sup>11</sup> Lord Buddha accepted the importance of cow and its benefits and declared it as a benevolent animal for the human groups. It provides food, strength, happiness and health, hence described as mother cow and was prohibited to be slaughtered under any circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Many types of diets have been prescribed in the texts of the Buddha era, all of them are vegetarian, fruit or edible food items. Soup and odan (rice) are mentioned in the Mahavagga. It was considered a type of delicious food.<sup>13</sup> Monks were taught to receive sunlight in appropriate quantity during the time of charika.<sup>14</sup> The monks were allowed to have five types of food. In which three types of rice (odan) food prepared with flour and sattu have been counted.<sup>15</sup> Dal-Bhaat (Rice and Lentils) has been termed as a gross diet.<sup>16</sup>

There is evidence of Kumar Putta Chand, seeking sweet rice and sweet flatbread to a meal prepared in a timely manner.<sup>17</sup> Liquid food is considered more important and nourishing than solid food. It is considered to be digestible, invigorating and energetic. It is manifested in Jatakas to support for the method of eating liquid food in people suffering from stomach disease.<sup>18</sup> Referring to the tradition of vegetarianism, it has been said that

\* Corresponding author

E-mail: [ruchifairy.2012@gmail.com](mailto:ruchifairy.2012@gmail.com) (Dr. Ruchi Srivastava).

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2342-7683>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53724/jmsg/v7n4.05>

Received 17<sup>th</sup> April 2022; Accepted 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022; Available online 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022

2454-8367 /© 2022 The Authors. Published by Jai Maa Saraswati Gyandayini e-Journal (Publisher: Welfare Universe). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License



eating green herbs and drinking cold water gives great relief to the body.<sup>19</sup> For vegetarians Samva, Nivan, dakul (kodo), Kat (ektrina), Acham (Mand), tuberous fruits obtained from the forest etc were considered suitable.<sup>20</sup>

Austerity and economy of food was also given due importance. In one of the commandments of Lord Buddha it has been prescribed that if there is more production of fruits in a particular place, then in that place fruits should be given priority as a diet. This order of Buddha undoubtedly had economic importance.<sup>21</sup>

So we can sum up that if man becomes vegetarian then earth will not corrode, water will not get polluted, fire/fuel material will not end, smoke lines will not freeze in air and the flora and fauna will remain alive. Further, everyone should adopt compassion and kindness which are inherent values to being a human and core of the preaching of Lord Buddha.

#### References:

1. Suttaniput mettassutta 4-5
2. Ahimsak sutta,2, cited in Jinendra Jain(edi), Jain Vidya aur Bauddhadhyayan ke vividha ayam, p.92-95, Radha Publication,New Delhi; 2004
3. Angutara Nikaya, Tiknipat

4. Jinendra Jain, Ibid, p.100
5. Dighnikaya, II, P.233
6. Dhamapada, 49
7. Dighnikaya, 8.1.4
8. Mahavagga, 6.9.21, 'Na bhikkhave ajparivekkhitva masam pariatatvam; ya paribhujjey apatti dukkatssa ti'
9. Majhimnikay, II 48.2.4.4, Suttanipat 3.9.211
10. Parajik, p.64
11. Jatak, I, p.240
12. Sutta Nipat, 2.7.776-77
13. Mahavagga, 1.18.64, 'Samam sup pi odan pi vijapetva bhujati'
14. Krishna Kant Trivedi, Palli Sahitya Mein Prachalit Samaj, p.187, Kishor Vidya Niketan, Varansi, 1987
15. Ibid, p.188
16. Majhim Nikay, I 36.3.27 Olarikam aharam aharsani odanam kummasam
17. Mahaparinibbansutta , p.18 'Chandokumarputto tassa rattiya panotam khadaniy bhojaniyam patiyadpitatva'
18. Mahavagga, 6.616
19. Dhignikaya, I, 5.5.33
20. Majham Nikay, I, 12.6.15
21. Mahavagga, 6.26.46
22. Majham Nikaya, I , 4.4.24

\*\*\*\*\*