

Indicate The Democratic Features Of The Quality Of Dhamma In Practice.

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Abstract

Dhamma, or the Buddha's teachings, contains many ethical and philosophical values that can be linked to democratic principles in a social context. Although Buddhism is not a political system, aspects such as equality, individual responsibility, and community participation in Dhamma can reflect democratic features. This article analyzes the relationship between Dhamma and democracy, thereby clarifying the points of intersection between these two systems of thought.

Keyword: *Democracy, Dhamma, Equality, Justice, Participation, Responsibility.*

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I. Introduction

Democracy is a form of government in which all individuals have equal opportunities to participate in the decision-making process¹, based on the principle that power belongs to the people.¹ Meanwhile, Dhamma is the ethical and philosophical system of Buddhism. The Buddha's teachings emphasize liberation through wisdom and morality through introspection through meditation. Although the Buddhist Dhamma does not directly refer to democracy in the political sense, its principles, when applied to social practice, show many similarities with a democratic society.²

II. Equality: The Core Of Dhamma And Democracy

One of the essential principles of democracy is equality, ensuring that every individual has equal rights and opportunities in society.³ According to ancient Indian tradition, most women would not go to school and would have to stay at home to serve their husbands and children. The Harvard study (2017) – “*Experiences and Views of White Americans*” discusses discrimination in hiring and education affecting various racial groups. Like in European countries, there was racial discrimination; white people had all the power, while black people were discriminated against and given menial jobs.⁴ The Buddha's teachings were based on the equality of all beings. According to Buddhist teachings, everyone, regardless of their social class, has the potential to attain enlightenment. The Buddha once declared:

“*There is no caste in the same blood and salty tears.*”⁵ This reflects the philosophy of equality in Buddhism, which aligns with modern democratic thinking, where human rights and development opportunities must be guaranteed to all.

III. Inclusiveness And Compassion

Democracy is not just about voting or political rights but also about recognizing all individuals' worth and equal rights in modern society. Inclusiveness is an essential principle of both democracy and Buddhism. The Dhamma encourages compassion, tolerance, and acceptance of all people regardless of race, gender, or social status.⁶

Buddhism has long accepted the participation of women in religious life, despite initial resistance from social traditions. This can be compared to democratic movements for gender equality throughout human history.⁷

¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 45.

² Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1987), 67.

³ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 89.

⁴ Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, *Experiences and Views of White Americans* (2017), accessed February 27, 2025, <https://content.sph.harvard.edu/wwwhsph/sites/94/2017/11/NPR-RWJF-HSPH-Discrimination-Whites-Final-Report.pdf>.

⁵ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 123.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁷ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, 135.

IV. Responsibility And Transparency

Dhamma not only emphasizes personal morality but also emphasizes each person's responsibility for his or her actions. Zen Master Nhat Hanh, in his book *Wanting Peace and Being Peace*, said: “*We do not need to do great things to change the world. We just need to live each day with compassion and avoid causing harm to anyone.*”⁸ In a democratic society, personal responsibility and transparency are key to maintaining justice and social order.⁹

Buddhism teaches that every action leads to karma, and people are responsible for the consequences of what they do.¹⁰ This can be compared to the principle of responsibility in a democracy, where political leaders are accountable to the public through elections and checks on power.¹¹

V. Resolving Conflict Peacefully

One of the keys to Buddhism is also a core value in modern democracies¹². The principle is non-violence (ahimsa), according to Buddhism, and all conflicts must be resolved through dialogue and understanding with compassion, not violence. The Buddha once said:

“Victory breeds hatred. The defeated live in misery. Happiness, a peaceful life, renounces victory and defeat.”
— Dhammapada, Verse 201.

In democracies, law and political dialogue are used to resolve disputes, similar to how Buddhism encourages dialogue and wisdom instead of force.¹³

VI. Freedom Of Thought And Expression

Democracy encourages freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and public debate. The Dhamma also emphasizes the need for people to seek the truth through reflection and practice.¹⁴ The Buddha did not force others to believe his teachings but encouraged them to verify them for themselves:

*“Do not believe in anything merely because you hear it, but verify it for yourself with your own intelligence.”*¹⁵

This reflects the spirit of openness and freedom of expression, one of the most important elements in a democracy.¹⁶

VII. Conclusion

Buddhist Dhamma is not a political system, but when applied to social practice, its principles show many similarities with democracy. A democracy, equality, individual responsibility, tolerance, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and freedom of thought are common values between the two systems.

Although modern democracy is primarily based on Western political theory, some of its core values can be found in the principles of Buddhist Dhamma. This demonstrates that different civilizations can share universal equality, freedom, responsibility, and liberty principles. In particular, the Buddhist Dhamma is widely applicable. By integrating the values of Dhamma into democratic systems, societies can become more just and move towards more sustainable harmony.

Bibliography

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⁸ Nhat Hanh, Venerable. *Being Peace*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 2020.

⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 78.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, 102.

¹² Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 205

¹³ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁵ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, 93.

¹⁶ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 205.