

A Study of Teacher-pupil Relation in Pāli Literature

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Abstract

The Buddha's doctrines include instructions that would bring benefits to all the beings. This forms an attribute of Dhamma, which is called 'kevala paripunnam' (wholly fulfilled). The Dhamma is totally free from any deficiency or lack of secular or holy benefits. This paper aims to study social conduct in general according to the Pāli literature, but specifically its study will be made on social conduct in teacher and pupil relation. Teacher and pupil relation from Pāli literature will be discussed in four sub-titles. The instruction on Teacher and pupil relation will be based on the canon proper, its commentaries and will surely forth benefits in this world and in the next existences.

Keywords: instruction, canon, commentaries, sub-commentaries, existences.

Introduction

The appearance of Buddha in the human world is, therefore, of great benefit to all the beings, human and celestial, later, are lord Buddha himself proclaimed.

“The appearance of Buddha in the world is meant for the benefit and prosperity of the world, and for the salvation of all the beings”.

The scattering of the doctrines (Dhamma) that the Buddha taught during his 45 years of Buddha hood is likened to flowers blooming together in the forest. The discourses include are wide-ranging topics. The instruction on social relation, education, health, prosperity and so on, the dos and don'ts, the modes of conducts for livelihood and so forth.

This paper aims to study social conduct in general according to the Pāli literature, but specifically its study will be made on social conduct in teacher-pupil relation.

The Duties for the Teacher

A teacher is defined as a person who must be respected while a pupil is one who observes a teacher's instructions and teachings. Lord Buddha set not only duties for a teacher but also those for a pupil. So long as teachers and pupils do not fail to carry out their respective duties, they will be on good terms with each other, which may be one of the causes for the prosperity of the Buddha's Teaching.

According to Buddhism, a teacher needs to perform the following duties:

1. to teach his subjects to the pupils,
2. to teach them good behavior,
3. to teach them without leaving any secrets of the subject,
4. to send them to places that would be suitable to their knowledge and skills and
5. to prevent them from danger

Of course, a teacher must prepare himself to be fully informed about his subject beforehand as the saying goes, '*Attānameva patthamaṃ*' (meaning 'To oneself first'). As a teacher, he must show his heartfelt compassion and loving-kindness for his pupils. He must

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have a willing wish to impart all his knowledge about the required subject to his pupils. Lord Buddha remarked that one should not go to such a teacher who never desires his pupils to know better than himself. Furthermore, a teacher needs to teach his pupils good behavior in whatever they do and wherever they go. For, as a rule, a bad pupil means one who thinks his teacher is not better than himself. Thus, a pupil's misbehavior can damage his teacher's good name. Thus, a teacher must keep his pupils from doing misdeeds and making friends with wretches. Instead, he must encourage them to do good deeds and have company with wise men only.

The Attributes of a True Teacher

A good friend to one always seeks advantageous opportunities for him. In this sense, a true teacher is a good friend. The attributes of such a friend-like teacher are given below.

1. the attribute of being loved by his pupils
2. the attribute of receiving admiration from them
3. the attribute of commanding their respect
4. the attribute of putting up with whatever wrong has been done by his pupils
5. the attribute of being patient
6. the attribute of being able to solve different problems for them
7. the attribute of keeping his pupils from anything unprofitable and leading them to things profitable

A teacher needs to be qualified with these attributes. Besides, a teacher should not hold the notion of '*ācariya muṭṭhi*', by which is meant 'any part of the subject kept hidden in the teacher's hands'. Regarding this, the Buddhist himself set a good example of a true teacher. Just before His Passing-away, He said unto *Thera Ānanda*, "What, *Ānanda*, is the Order expecting from me? I have taught all the *Dhamma* without discriminating the inner or outer teachings. For Buddha, no part of the *Dhamma* is kept esoteric." Here in the phrased 'the inner or outer teachings', it is also suggested that there are some teachers who discriminate their followers or pupils in the inner circle and those in the outer circle. They teach the inner-circle pupils the whole subject on the one hand, and the outer-circle pupils the partial subject on the other hand. When asked by the outer-circle pupils, they never answer their questions completely or correctly. In this way, they 'keep some pupils outside'.

In *Pāḷi*, the word for 'partiality' is '*agati*', whose original meaning implies that it can lead one to the places one should not go to or reach. True teachers must be free of any kind of partiality whatsoever. There are four kinds of partiality –partiality out of love, partiality on account of hatred, partiality due to fear, and partiality due of ignorance. Partiality out of love, *chandāgati*, should not be practiced by teachers, for they should treat their pupils equally and discriminately. Otherwise, his dignity will be damaged. The Buddha once said,

“Chandā dosa bhyā mohā yo dhammam ativattati, nihīyati, nihīyati yaso tassa, kaḷapakkheva candimā”

‘One who breaks the Law due to bias, hatred, fear or ignorance will find that his fame and following are diminishing day by day, in just the same way as the waning moon becomes smaller and smaller.’

The Buddha always taught his *Dhamma*, irregardless of the inside or outside disciples. Unlike Him, some teachers kept some secret knowledge about their subject away from their students until they lie on the deathbed. It was at the last moment of their life that they want to impart that knowledge to their students. The Buddha kept no esoteric knowledge at all. Following the Buddha's example, good teachers should not conceal anything when they teach.

To become a wise man, the following are basically important.

1. to live in suitable place,
2. to be in association with wise men,
3. to be well-spoken and well-mannered,
4. to have done some merit in his past existences that can be the cause for wisdom

A teacher who wants the welfare of his pupil should send the pupil to other teachers and places which will be suitable to his qualifications. Keeping the pupil near the only teacher is not effective for improvement in learning. According to the *Vasala Sutta*, the Buddha disliked one who praises oneself and despises others and called him a wretched. Thus, a true teacher should not confine the learning of his student to him alone, but send him to a suitable place and a better teacher. If so, he will be eligible to become a good teacher. Furthermore, a teacher should provide his pupil with necessary aids, financial or personal.

The Buddha is the tamer of the untamed to become tamed and of the tamed to become better tamed. In taming the sentient beings, He sometimes had to use the rough methods as well as the fine methods. He said to *Kesī* the horse tamer. '*Kesī*, I tame the sentient beings sometimes softly, sometimes roughly and sometimes by a combination of soft and rough means.' The discourse suggests that to become good teachers, we must remind ourselves of the justification of using any means to bring our students' benefits.

There are two kinds of students: those who realize and feel the love of the teacher and those who do not. The former kind can be tamed by soft means but the latter kind may call for a rough method. But as for the teacher, he must give his goodwill to priority whichever method he uses. As regards this, the *Abhayarājakumā Sutta* is noteworthy.

The Buddha scolded *Devadatta* by using bitter remarks such as "*Devadatta*, you are heading for the Hell and sure to suffer there for the whole world." When Prince *Abhaya* asked the Buddha why He used such words to hurt the feeling of *Devadatta*, the Buddha explained by giving an example, "well, Prince, how would you respond if you carelessly or accidentally had a broken pot or a piece of wood go into your son's mouth and if the were hurt a lot?" The prince replied, "I would have to open wide or tear his mouth to draw out the potsherd or the piece of wood, no matter whether he were bleeding or hurting a lot. I would do it not because I would want to hurt him but because I would feel sympathy and pity for him." The Buddha then said, "I too tame the sentient beings by using rough means sometimes and this is not because I went to hurt them but because I have compassion on them." This *sutta* evidently suggests that a good teacher teaches his student for the latter's own sake-it does not matter to him whether his student likes it or not.

The Duties for the Pupil

Lord Buddha prescribed the duties not only for teachers but also for pupils. A pupil or a follower has the duties given below in ministering to his teacher.

1. to rise up in the teacher's presence
2. to wait upon the teacher
3. to listen to all the teacher's statements with respectful attention
4. to perform the duties necessary for the teacher's personal comfort and
5. to carefully attend to the teacher's instruction

A clever and civilized follower should rise up to welcome his teacher on his coming home, help him carry his luggage, give him a seat to take, and bring something to drink to quench his thirst and weariness. As stated above, teachers being respectable persons, a good follower should do his duties in ministering his teacher very well so that the latter will love and adore the former. Furthermore, a close relationship with one's teacher means a close relationship with the subject one is learning from him. When you go to your teacher only, you need to know something about a subject, then when and how can you learn entire subject.

Teachers are also among the first benefactors to the pupils (pubbakāri), and therefore, a respectful and obedient pupil can be a person who acknowledges the teacher's gratitude and repays it. The characteristics of a good follower includes such dutiful services as bringing the face-cleansing water at the teacher's rising in the morning, the drinking-water after meals, taking leave before setting out a journey, washing the teacher's dresses, looking after the teacher when sick, and so on. Moreover, respectful learning is obligatory: for chatter-boxes who talk during lectures and speeches. But naughty boys who behave improperly and disrespectfully in the teacher's presence are rude not only to their teacher but also to their subject.

The Qualities of a Good Pupil

A good pupil must be qualified with the beatitude of 'sovacassatā,' that is, the blessing of obeying readily the advice given by elders and learned persons without any complaint or argument. When scolded by his teacher, he never feels angry nor mocks him. He is always humble before his teacher, holding the Buddhist doctrine of 'gārava-nivāta' (respect cum humility). He must regard a teacher as the person who shows him the treasure. The *Dhammapada* says that a good follower is never angry with the person who admonishes him just in the same way as a poor man is never angry with the person who shows him the treasure even if that person beats and curses him.

*“Yathā hi duggata manusso ‘Kumam ganhāhī’ ti tajjetvāpi pothetvāpi
nidhim dassante kopam na karoti, pamudito eva hoti, evameva evarūpe
puggale asāruppam vā khalitam vā disvā ācikkhante kopo na kātabbo,
tuṭṭheneva bhavitabbaṃ”*

The following *Jātaka* story (the Bodhisatt's birth-story) illustrates a bad consequence of disobeying a teacher.

Once upon a time, the Buddha-to-be was a trader. He went on a business trip together with his five hundred followers. On entering a dangerous forest on the way, the Buddha-to-be reminded his followers of the forest. He said, 'This forest is full of poisonous fruit trees. So don't eat any fruit here without letting me know and see the fruit.' Some of the followers did not pay heed to the Buddha-to-be's word so they ate whatever fruit they saw and lost their lives.

The moral lesson of the story is clear: one who listens to his teacher's or leader's advice is protected by the teacher in return and he is free of harm or danger. Thus, to become a good, polite, dutiful student or follower, one should always remember this moral.

Conclusion

In this paper, the attitudes and duties that teacher and pupils must bear respectively have been discussed with the intent that there will be many respectable teacher and civilized pupils. The Buddha's doctrines that were taught throughout the forty-five years of his Buddha hood secure the worldly and supramundane benefits for human world.

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