

Topic: The Positive Influences of Master Nagarjuna's Treatises on Tibetans' Lives

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Abstract:

The topic for my article is 'The Positive Influences of Indian Master Nagarjuna's Treatises on Tibetan Culture' and I have broadly divided this article into two parts, namely: 1. The Treatises' Influence on the Lives of Ordinary People, and 2. The Treatises' Influence on the Lives of Monastic Community. Generally speaking, there are six volumes of Master Nagarjuna's treatises translated into Tibetan language by Tibetan translators, but I am going to write my article mainly based on treatises like, Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way (Mulamadhyamakakarika), Entry into the Middle Way Principle, A Letter to the Friend, The Four Hundred Verses Treatise, and A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life.

The purpose of writing this article is not only to share knowledge, but also to express this ancient Indian Buddhist philosopher's marvellous contributions to the development of Tibetan culture and its effective relevance to the entire humanity even in the 21st century. In addition, the importance of continuous preservation and study on the above-mentioned treatises is also something that seriously needs to be taken care of.

The method to be adopted here would be qualitative method as I am going to refer to treatises composed by this great Indian Master and their commentaries written by Tibetan Buddhist scholars like, Gyal Tsoob Dharma Rinchen, Ngulchu Thokmey Sangpo, and Je Tsongkhapa, the founder of Gelug tradition. These treatises have been used at different Tibetan Buddhist Learning Centres across the world for hundreds of years and they have tremendously given powerful impacts on the way of leading lives and the manner in which the external phenomenon is perceived. In other words, they have rendered a well-balanced space regarding the relationship between the object to be perceived and the perceiver or the person.

Keywords: Positive influences, culture, monastic community, and effective relevance

Introduction

As the inclinations of people are different, in the same way, there are uncommon forms of religions in the world and each of them serves its followers effectively. Historically speaking, for Tibetan Religious Kings, they believed that Buddhism was the most suitable one for them and they put their best endeavour for spreading/transmigrating it in Tibet by sending young brilliant Tibetan children to make their own script which would be compatible with the then using spoken Tibetan language. In addition, many Tibetan young minds were sent to India with corpus of gold by the King himself for translating Buddhist texts into Tibetan and spreading them in Tibet.

Here, I am going to write on the topic titled '*The Positive Influences of Master Nagarjuna's Texts on Tibetan People*' by dividing it into two headings, namely, 1. Influences on Ordinary Tibetan People, and 2. Influences

on the Lives of Monastic Community. Subheadings under these two broad headings would be created for making easy the flow of our articulations fluently.

1. Influences on Ordinary Tibetan People

1.1. The Three Different Kinds of Laziness

Speaking from the perspectives of both our own experience and what we see in society, there are a few setbacks which make us failed in many ways even though we aspire for success. In order to be a successful person, there could be a number of reasons, but in Buddhism, laziness is pervasively cited with three different types and they play effective roles in our day-to-day lives. They are: laziness of uninterested doing something, laziness of self-contempt, and laziness of liking inferior work. These three types of laziness are not only confined within the four walls of spirituality but also immensely related to our mundane activities.

They are the hindrances in succeeding our set goals and eradicating them effectively is a must otherwise failure in our endeavour is imminent. Thus, for encouraging people to root up laziness and bearing fruition with their perseverance, Master Shanti Deva effectively said,

There is nothing which doesn't become easy
Once someone gets used to doing it
Thus, be resilient to bear great harm
By getting used to challenge the small/little harms¹

Though the Master talks about the importance of practising tolerance by implementing it from little and then gradually increasing it and thereby the practitioner can practise great tolerance effectively. But we can change the angle and look at our worldly activities. Normally, putting insufficient efforts in our work is our commonly ingrained habit which leads to unsuccess/failure. Hence, the lesson we can take out from this verse is that spending ample time to be an adept at doing the work is a significant requirement and bearing deserved fruition is assured once he or she is accustomed to doing it.

1.2. Requirement of human perseverance 5

Truly speaking, there is nobody, be it a businessman, politician, academician, leader, or practitioner, who obtains their anticipated results without undergoing certain difficulties. Thus, Master Nagarjuna said,

Liberation depends on individual
And friends can do nothing in it
Do persuade study on the Four Noble Truths
Observing vows, cultivating knowledge, and practising single-pointedness²

Someone might think that it deals with spirituality but if it is looked and dug deeper into it, then the connection between its lesson and the way we lead our life can be viewed. This verse insightfully signifies the attitude of nurturing self-confidence and propels individuals moving forward for acquiring their anticipated results. Seeing many people who have lost their confidence and no more interested in exhibiting their hidden talents is quite common in society and they have stopped trying to elevate their social statues. Thus, for them this stanza serves practically like an impetus which pushes them to put their feet on the right path and getting closer to the long-awaited achievements.

¹ Darma, Rinchen. Two Commentaries on Shantideva's Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, Ser-Jhe Tehor Khensur Kangyur Labrang, Norbu Graphics, New Delhi, 2022, p. 337

² Master Nagarjuna, A Letter to King Satvahana, Organizing Committee of 33rd Kalachakra Initiation, Leh-Lakakh, , 2014, p 83

1.3. Benefits of refraining from immoral things

Killing makes shorter your life expectancy
Harming invites many unfavourable results
Stealing causes to lose one's belongings
Sexual misconduct results in facing enemies³

Since Buddhism accepts the concept of Law of Causality, this concept is deeply rooted in the culture of Buddhist people and it not only benefits the practitioners but also tremendously serves the entire humanity. To our common knowledge, merely daily worshiping and prayers neither do work for our individual happiness nor do for the world peace to a greater extend. For them, it demands ethical contributions from human beings and if we were able to succeed in it, having individual happiness and world peace becomes an inevitable consequence.

If you harm others, it not only harms them but it gives rise to a sense of repentance later which destroys your mental peace, the highest requirement. Taking someone's things by applying immoral tricks lets lose his or her belongings and thereby you have to face its negative consequence somewhere down the line in your life. And indulging in sexual misconduct hampers your relationship with your life partner and it also increases the number of your enemies. In short, if you refrain you from committing unwholesome deeds like, harming, stealing, and sexual misconduct, they effectively bring both individual mental peace and harmony in society at large.

2. Influences on the Monastic Community

2.1. Creating a Conducive Environment

In Buddhism there are three trainings, namely: The Training of Morality, the Training of Concentration, and the Training of Wisdom. They are so interconnected that the first one acts the cause for the origination of the subsequent one. From this perspective, what we can see is that the Training of Morality performs the source for the Training of Concentration and the Training of Concentration does the origin of the Training of Wisdom. Thus, the Training of Morality is indispensable when it comes to either getting birth in the world or heaven or obtaining liberation, spiritually the highest destination for the Buddhist practitioners.

The 10 Wholesome Deeds are dividedly into three categories, namely bodily, speech, and mental deeds. For bodily category, it has the abandonment of taking life, stealing, and indulging in sexual misconduct. For speech, it has the abandonment of lying, splitting, using harsh words, and gossing. Abandonment of wanting other's belongings, harming, and generating wrong views are the types of mental divisions.

2.2. Positive Attitude to Looking at Our Life

Becoming sick, Dying, Suffering, Separating,
Likewise, the Karma are all no other than my creation⁴

One of the typical features of Buddhism is the Law of Causality/Karma and believing in it and practising it not only helps someone spiritually but also serves the society for having a harmonious place. In addition, it has tremendous power to render a courage to face any critical situation. Actually, we live in the 21st century and thanks to the science and technology development, we can almost avail whatever requirements are needed. But hundreds of people commit suicide and they disappointedly waste their precious human lives. If we really delve into the root cause of their tragedy, I can decisively say that they prefer it out of sheer desperation.

³ Master Nagarjuna, The Clear Essence of Precious Garland, Gelug Sampradaya, Satnam Printers, Varanasi, 2010, p. 19

⁴ Master Nagarjuna, A Letter to King Satvahana, Organizing Committee of 33rd Kalachakra Initiation, Leh-Lakakh, , 2014, p. 74

In such situation, the concept of Law of Causality extremely comes to the table and it eases away the excruciating pain. Because, it works double roles namely, refraining someone from indulging into negative actions and at the same time, it also gives a powerful strength in terms of receiving the situation. A few salient attributes have been given to the Law of Causality and one of them is ‘not getting wasted once an action is accumulated’. Thus, Buddhists think that facing the consequences of his or her actions is for sure and the earlier undergoing it ends his or her karmic share sooner!

2.3. Importance of Dependent Origination

Someone who sees the root of all the unfortunate things
In the Sansara is the ignorance
Has stated Dependent Origination
For eliminating them⁵

Je Rinpoche, the pioneer of Gelug Tradition, was not only a great learned practitioner, but was also a renowned Buddhist philosopher. He composed a poetic writing entitled ‘Eulogy of Dependent Origination’ and it, actually, is a poetical praise for the Lord Buddha. In this very writing, he has explicitly expressed the reason why the Lord Buddha preached Dependent Origination in his teachings. Owing to relativity, the possibility of eradicating all the unwanted things is undoubtedly can be established.

There is no any thing
Which is not relatively created
Thus, there is no any thing
Which is not empty⁶

Master Nagarjuna presented emptiness with the help of Dependent Origination by saying everything is emptiness as all the phenomena are in the state of dependence upon other cause and conditions. But in our day-to-day life,

The doer depends on the action
The action only occurs in dependence of the doer
And there is no any means
Other than the doer for occurring the action⁷

When we look at the way how an action takes place, the state of not being able to occur any action by itself is can be seen. It needs many efficient factors but we hardly understand it. In the above cited verse Master Nagarjuna not only reasonably but also powerfully said that the action only takes place with the help of its doer. Therefore, once the concept of this idea apprehended, it leads us closer to the state of understanding relativity or Dependent Origination.

2.4 Significance of Emptiness

After hearing the thing (emptiness)
Which eliminates all the sufferings⁸

If we truly contemplate upon the cause that forcibly propel us to undergo all sorts of problems in our life, even though we have all external modern facilities, then there is something lacking within us. Something

⁵ Je Rinpoche, Choes sPyod Rab gSal, Sera Jey Library, 2011, p. 259

⁶ Kyon, Master Sangay. Buddhapalita, The Commentary on Mulamadhyamaka, Ser Jhe Library, Indraprastha Press, New Delhi, 2009, p. 375

⁷ Ibid p. 141

⁸ Master Nagarjuna, Precious Garland, Gelug Sampradaya, Satnam Printers, Varanasi, 2011, p. 34

which lacks within us is the understanding of emptiness. In order to substantiate this statement, I will quote an efficacious verse stated by Master Shantideva,

Though we have the will to avoid suffering

We completely run after it

Even though happiness is aspired for

Ignorance destroys our happiness like an enemy.⁹ Basically, while we all aspire for happiness but what we practically do is running after suffering, and the cause that forcibly force us to go for it is nothing but ignorance. Thus, once we can challenge the ignorance, we would be able to get rid of all those unwanted problems. Now, if we examine what is the real cause that can uproot the ignorance, the optimum cause is the generation of emptiness within us.

From the attitude of self-grasping

All the sentient beings are born

For the beings having this attitude

The Buddha stated emptiness only for their goodness¹⁰

Generally, Buddhism gives extremely high value to wisdom as it is the intellectual power which effectively stand with ignorance, the root cause of incessant rebirth in the Cyclic existence. Due to ignorance, the notion of self-grasping instigate/rouse within us and under its encompassing power, we unknowingly accumulate varied and negative actions. These accumulated negative actions serve as a rope to tie us within the Cyclic existence and never allows us getting liberated from it. Once we are able to realize emptiness or the reality of all the phenomena, it enlightens us on the real existence of all the phenomena and it, in turn, weed out the notion of self-grasping, the root cause of continuous rebirth in the samsara. Thus, Master Nagarjuna efficaciously said that the Lord Buddha had exclusively posited the theory of emptiness for wipe out the intrinsic thought of self-grasping.

2.4.1 Presentation of Selflessness of

Even though both the self-grasping of things and person are devoid of their inherent existence, these two notions are strongly existing there. Speaking on it from the philosophical perspective, our mind is habitually inflicted with these two different self-graspings. In order to substantiate the point expressing devoid of intrinsically existent thing, Master Nagarjuna unquestionably stated,

Though with the help of a mirror

An image of something can be viewed

In reality the thing

Even a slight of it is nowhere to be seen¹¹

In the treatise entitled 'Precious Garland of Middle Way' by Master Nagarjuna, he beautifully presented an image appeared in the mirror as an analogy for proposing the concept of intrinsically existing of form. It is very pertinent and real that when we look into a mirror, the image of our face clearly appears on it, but if we start searching for it by touching, nothing is present there to be touched. This method of depicting the absence of an inherent self-grasping is an absolutely abt.

In the same way, the self-grasping

Appears in dependence of the aggregates

⁹ Study Buddhism <https://studybuddhism.com>

¹⁰ Master Nagarjuna, The Clear Essence of Precious Garland, Gelug Sampradaya, Satnam Printers, Varanasi, 2010, p 26

¹¹ Ibid p. 29

In reality, like the image of our face
That is nowhere to be seen¹²

In the previous cited verse, the image can be appeared only when the required factors like, the face, the mirror, and the light are all present. Furthermore, if we move further and attempt to touch the image, a concrete and definite point can not be found since the image is merely the reflection of the face itself. Likewise, the self-grasping is no more to be seen and it is merely designated upon the accumulation of the aggregates. But unfortunately, we are so deeply mingled with this false notion that we normally believe as if it is there intrinsically.

Conclusion

The fact is that the ultimate nature of our mind is clean and clear, but due to the environment, it becomes dirty and it commits unwholesome deeds. Owing to the environment, we can not control our mind and it let us suffer incessant problems. If we can not control our mind aptly, it leads us to perform immoral actions which put us into worse condition. But, unfortunately, most of us do not get some proper mind trainings and the problem we have occurs repeatedly in our life.

The best method of taming our mind is the lessons being mentioned in the treatise composed by Great Indian masters like, Master Nagarjuna, Master Shantideva, and Master Chandrakriti etc. They composed their invaluable texts based on their meditatively enlightened experience which practically helps us in opening the eyes of our wisdom. For example, the real entity of external phenomena and the way we perceive them is very beneficial for us if we study it well, and put it into our day-to-day life.

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