

The Concept of Family System in Buddhism

Vikash Kumar & Sarvesh Kumar

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ABSTRACT:-

The concept of family system in Buddhism is the basic unit, foundation stone and support of the society. The ancient culture of Hinduism has been very helpful in refining the social principles, for example, all the members of the family like parents, siblings, son-daughter, son-daughter-in-law are not only members of the family, but they are bound by the code of conduct given by the society. Family system, tradition holds its important and unique place in Indian culture. The contribution of this system can never be forgotten in the important role that India has got in the world. The concept of one world one family “Vasudhaiva kutumbakam” was the production of religious mythology among many. The evolution of multiple religions to be it local and worldwide ethical based like that of Buddhism.

Key words:-

Vasudhaiva kutumbakam, Pitrakula, Grihapati, Vinaypitaka, Clan(kula), Family ties, Kulputra (Kulaputta).

Introduction :-

Family is the basic unit, foundation stone and support of the society. The ancient culture of Hinduism has been very helpful in refining the social principles, for example, all the members of the family like parents, siblings, son-daughter, son-daughter-in-law are not only members of the family, but they are bound by the code of conduct given by the society.

There are also followers. According to the oldest family principles, the head of the family is the guardian of the family and he guides the other members of the family with his discretion.

In fact, the primary and subsequent responsibility of family development rests with the head of the family. The upliftment of the community, the society from the community and the nation from the society is possible with the progress of the family. The feeling of universal love and brotherhood between the families gives rise to the feeling of universal brotherhood, which is the main mantra to maintain national unity. Thus, it is clear that family love, cooperation and sense of duty-loyalty give their invaluable contribution in making the child an ideal citizen.¹

'Family is the first school of the child' seems to be true. A child receives practical education of ethics, religion-justice and duties by staying in the family since birth. For the child, living together in an environment full of respect and affection and moving forward on the path of progress with duty and truthfulness is the duty of the family.

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- Research Scholar- AIHC & Arch, BHU, Varanasi
 - Asst. Prof.- AIHC & Arch, BHU, Varanasi
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The first mention of the child's family comes from the Vedic literature. It is known from Rigveda that the society of that time was well organised in which "Pitrakul" was considered as the base pillar of the family. 'Family is the first school of the child' seems to be true. A child receives practical education of ethics, religion-justice and duties by staying in the family since birth. For the child, living together in an environment full of respect and affection and moving forward on the path of progress with duty and truthfulness is the duty of the family.

The first mention of the child's family comes from the Vedic literature. It is known from Rigveda that the society of that time was well organised in which "Pitrakul" was considered as the base pillar of the family.²

The family was addressed by the word "Kul" or "Griha" whose head was called "Kulap".³

Family members included parents, siblings, son-in-law and daughter (unmarried). The head of the family was addressed as 'grihapati'.⁴

It appears from this, that the Vedic era family was revered as a 'joint-family'. While living in the family, parents used to maintain love and harmony with their children and also used to control them.

They were also punished for breaking the rules. We find in Rigveda the mention of Rijrassav being blinded due to harsh punishment given by his father.⁵

"Anuvratah pitu hputromatrabhavatusammeh, jayapatyemadhumativaachanshantivam ." (shloka #574).⁶

It define , a son should act according to his father and be of the same opinion as his mother. The wife should speak sweet and pleasant words to her husband.

" Mabharata bharatrams was armutas was a , Samyanchasavratabhutvavachanvadatbhadraya ." (shloka #575).⁷

That means brother should not be envious of his brother and sister should not be envious of her sister. They should all have a mutual welfare conversation with one thought and deed.

In Buddhist literature:-

There are many mentions of joint families in Pali Tripitaka literature and jatakas in which all the members of the family are mentioned to reside jointly.

VinayPitaka mentions parents, siblings, son-daughter and son-daughter-in-law living together under a joint family.⁸

With the presence of blood relation among these people, the feeling of mutual love, harmony and sacrifice automatically flourished and blossomed. As a result, they did not hesitate to sacrifice their lives in each other's crisis situations. In the rock and pillar inscriptions of Emperor Asoka, it has been mentioned to wish good wishes towards one's relatives and brothers and sisters.⁹

Grihapati:-

In Buddhist-era families, Grihapati held a paramount position as the head of the household.¹⁰ In Pali literature, the words 'Grihapati'¹¹ and 'Gihin'¹²etc. are mentioned as

synonyms of Grihapati. 'Grihapati' refers to the master of the house who looked after the entire household. The meaning of 'Gihin' was the one who enjoys worldly pleasures, i.e. the one who wears white clothes or the one who wears white clothes.¹³

Richard Fick equates 'grihapati' with 'kutumbika' who lived in villages or cities. Mostly the prominent citizens of the village used to search for the daughter of the villager's family for their son. Similarly, a citizen used to choose a city resident family daughter engaged in business for the marriage of his city resident patriarch.¹⁴

The basic purpose of marrying a girl of the same caste and clan was to maintain purity in the family tradition, equality in thoughts and to maintain one's self-respect in a traditional way.¹⁵

Clan (kula)-

The second synonym of the family was clan "Kul" whose territory was larger than that of the family. Only parents, sons-daughters, sons-daughter-in-law, and some other close relatives were included in the family, but the meaning of "clan" was that lineage-tradition which continues to grow at an uninterrupted pace. Parents always wished for the birth of a son in their family, so that they could increase their total traditions and assets, and along with providing stability to the family, taking care of the responsibility of the family, they could pay homage to the deceased ancestors by offering pinddaan at the funeral ceremony.¹⁶

The word "Kula" mentioned at several places in Pali literature also appears to express the meaning of 'family'

For example, at one place, Mahatma Buddha asks Anathapindika whether alms are given in his family (Kula) or not.¹⁷ At one place in the Sanyukta Nikaya, there is mention of a girl going to her husband's house (patikulam) at a very young age.¹⁸

In both the above examples, the meaning of 'kul' is expressed in the context of family only. The words 'Kulputra', 'Kulpati' and 'Kul Jyestha' prove more helpful in accepting "Kula" as synonymous with family. Lord Buddha often used to address his disciples as Kulputra (Kulaputta).¹⁹

It is clear from that the word 'kulaputra' was used for the junior clan male members of the family. The head of the family was called "Kulpati". That has been explained. His wife, sons, younger brothers and some other blood relatives resided under the 'Vice Chancellor' kulapati.

Family ties(paarivarik sambandh)

After knowing the various synonyms of family described in Pali Tripitaka literature, it seems appropriate to throw light on the mutual relations of family members.

In the family, mother, father, wife, son-son's wife, unmarried daughter, other relatives, Friends-acquaintances, servants, and maid-servants were also involved. The head of the family was called 'Grihapati', 'Kulpati' or 'Kuljethak'. After this, the second male member was 'Kulputra' (Kulaputta). The householder had full control over all these members of the family. All the members of the family behaved with loyalty and respect and obedience to the head of the house. In this series, it would be appropriate to throw light on the family relations practised between the members of the family.

It is clear from the above description that like the Vedic era, in the Buddhist era society also "family" was considered as the base pillar of the society. Parents, sons and daughters (unmarried), sons and daughters-in-law and grandchildren used to provide unity to the family. The "Kulapati" or the "Grihapati" had complete control over all the members while performing the responsibilities of the family under his supervision.

After the death of the Grihapati, his eldest son used to perform his family duties while discharging the responsibility of his father. It is known from the evidence of Pali literature that in addition to grain trade, animal husbandry, commerce and business and art skills, many other means of income were also prevalent through which people used to run their family's livelihood. In these, people often tried to earn money and feed their families by entertaining the general public by hunting, sports-tamasha, nut and puppet play, and dance-singing and playing.

Pali literature also sheds enough light on the social condition of the Buddhist era family. A beautiful description of the pious relationship between the parents and their son, not only the son but the daughter also got respect and affection in the society.

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