

## CHAPTER 2

### CULAKAMMA VIBHANGA SUTTA

An obvious phenomenon in the human world that perplexed and baffled many a discerning observer was the disparity or inequality of human beings in their many attributes and dimensions. Theists of all complexions offered a simplistic yet inconclusive explanation by attributing such phenomenon to the unquestioned and absolute wish of the 'God Creator' while materialists attributed it to fortuity.

A young Truth - seeker of the Buddha's day named Subha, a victim of this perplexity approached the Buddha and questioned thus:

"What is the reason, what is the cause, O, Lord, that we find amongst mankind, the short-lived (*appāyuka*), and the long-lived (*dighāyuka*), the diseased (*bahvabādha*), and the healthy (*appābādha*) the ugly (*dubbanna*), and the beautiful (*vannavanta*), the powerless (*appesakka*), the powerful (*mahesakkha*), the poor (*appabhoga*), and the rich (*mahābhoga*), the low-born (*nicakulina*), and the high - born (*uccakulina*), the ignorant (*duppaḍḍa*) and the wise (*paḍḍāvanta*)?"

Buddha's reply was :

"All living beings have actions (*kamma*) as their own, their inheritance their congenital cause, their kinsman, their refuge. It is *Kamma* that differentiates beings into low and high states."

(*Kammassakā mānavā sattā, Kammadāyadā, Kammayoni, Kammabandhu, Kammapatisaranā, Kammam satte vibhajati yadidam hinappanitāyāti*)

The above dialogue and Buddha's detailed explanations of the Kammic factors that caused the human beings to be born amongst mankind either subject to the disabilities or endowed with the positive attributes mentioned in the question form the subject matter of *Culakamma vibhanga Sutta* (Majjhima Nikaya No. 135)

A basic concept of the law of *Kamma* is moral responsibility, the liability of an individual to experience the effect of his past *kamma*,

which would be pleasurable if the *kamma* was wholesome and painful if the *kamma* was unwholesome, the test of wholesomeness being the character of the thought that impelled the action (including thought and speech). One problem that the Buddha had in explaining the law of *kamma* and effect, having rejected the hypothesis of an enduring metaphysical self was to establish the ownership of *Kamma*. Buddha accordingly identified the different ways *kamma* relates to the person. *Culla Kamma Vibhanga Sutta* is an illustration of this exercise.

The aspects of *Kamma* adverted to in Buddha's reply to Subha (quoted above) may be identified as follows:

1. *Kammassakā* - 'Kamma as their own'. This means that the experiencer is author of the *kamma*. Since the human person is only a grouping of aggregates (*khandha*) the ownership is established by relating *Kamma* to one of the Aggregates namely, dispositions (*Sankhāra*)
  2. *Kammadāyādā* - *Kamma* as inheritance means *Kamma* vests the beings with the congenital characteristics
  3. *Kammayoni* - 'kamma as the source - origin' means that *kamma* is one of the factors that determine the nature of the personality the source from which the nature of personality springs.
  4. *Kamma bandhu*- 'kamma as kin' means *kamma* when wholesome can establish a beneficial relationship and bring about welfare of the individual
  5. *Kamma patisarana* - 'kamma as refuge' means that *kamma* protects those who perform good acts and would lead them to Enlightenment and liberation
1. *kammam satte vibhajati yadidam hinappanitaya* - *Kamma* differentiates beings into, high, and, low, states - This is the most important and crucial of the relationships providing a straight forward answer to the query, asserting that it is *kamma* that determines the individual character of

the person differentiating them into 'high' 'and' low' states, happy or miserable, strong or disabled, etc.

Buddha offers the following explanations in reply to the specific queries raised by Subha identifying the wholesome act and the unwholesome act that will cause the person to be born with the 'high' or 'low' quality; as the case may be, if born among mankind:

- 1) A person who destroys life and bears a violent disposition towards living beings when born amongst mankind will be short-lived.
- 2) A person who avoids harming living beings and bears a merciful disposition if born among mankind will be long-lived.
- 3) A person who harms others with fist, cudgel etc when born among mankind will suffer from various diseases.
- 4) A person who avoids harming others when born among mankind will enjoy good health.
- 5) If a person is wrathful, and turbulent, irritated by a trivial word such person when born among mankind will bear an unpleasant appearance.
- 6) If a person is not wrathful and turbulent and not irritated even by a torrent of abuse, when such person is born amongst mankind, will possess physical charm.
- 7) If a person is jealous, such person when born amongst mankind will be powerless.
- 8) If a person is not jealous, such person when born amongst mankind will be powerful.
- 9) If a person is parsimonious, and greedy, when such person is born amongst mankind, will be poor.
- 10) If a person is charitable, when such person is born amongst mankind will be rich.

- 11) If a person is haughty, does not honour those who are worthy of honour, when such person is born amongst mankind will be of low-birth.
- 12) If a person is not haughty, and honours those who are worthy of honour, when such person is born amongst mankind will be of high - birth.
- 13) If a person does not seek advice from the wise regarding what is right and wrong and makes no effort to lead an ethical life, he, as a result of his non-inquiring mind, when born amongst mankind, will be dull witted and ignorant.
- 14) If a person seeks advice from the learned and follows such advice, he, on account of his inquiring mind, when born amongst mankind will be intelligent.

*Culla kamma vibhanga sutta* summarizes Buddha's explanation of the occurrence of variations in personal characteristics (*puggala vemattata*) of human beings at birth which are not adequately explained by science. Genetics and heredity would certainly play a role in the configuration of the nucleus of the foetus. It is the kammic energy that activates the potential germinal compound into full development. *Kamma* accordingly is an indispensable ingredient in the conceptive process of a being. This phenomenon is the maturation of *Kamma* at conception (*patisandhi vipāka*)

## QUESTIONS

1. Write a brief account of the Buddhist Law of Kamma
2. What was Buddha's explanation of the diversity of inborn characteristics of individuals?
3. "Volition, I say monks, is the *Kamma*" (*cetanāham bhikkhave kammam vadāmi*) Explain this statement of the Buddha.
4. Specify the six aspects of *Kamma* mentioned in the *Culla Kamma Vihanga Sutta*.
5. Is *Kamma* the only factor that produces an effect? If not what are the other factors (*niyāma*) ?