

A Critical Study of Sraddhā (*Saddhā in Pāli*) in the Pāli Canon and the Commentaries

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Abstract

The concept of *Saddhā* (*Sraddhā in Sanskrit*) plays an important role in Buddhism. Is is completely different from the concept of faith in other religions. The meaning of this word implies placing confidence, trust, respect, faith and devotion correctly or incorrectly in somebody or something. The word *Saddhā* has been used in a quite a number of senses such as belief, acceptance owing to mere agreement, recognition out of respect without inquiry as well as accepting intelligently after making a critical inquiry. In addition to these main senses the following additional meanings such as loyalty, close friendship, familiarity, respectable honor, adoration, and strongly attached wish can also be mentioned. What is really meant here is that to place trust strongly but not that whether it is right or wrong. From the Buddhist perspective, *Saddhā* is twofold: I. *Ākāravatī Saddhā* (rational faith) and II. *Amūlikā Saddhā* (baseless faith). In early Buddhism, the word *Saddhā* has used in the sense of a wide psychological application. The Suttas like the *Vyagghapajja*, the *Vimamsaka*, the *Sanḅārava*, the *Cullahatthipadopama*, the *Kīṭāgiri*, the *Caṅkī*, the *upanisā*, the *Kasībhāradvāja* are significant for this study. For further studies of *Saddhā*, their commentaries and sub-commentaries could be utilized. In the Abhidhamma, *Saddhā* stands for in various contexts. Therefore, it occupies an exceptional place in the Buddhist way of life. It is mentioned frequently in places like Five Faculties, Five powers, Fifteen kinds of Conduct, Four Attainments, Seven kinds of Noble wealth and thirty-seven Factors of Enlightenment. It is shown that *Saddhā* is primarily necessary to the Noble Eightfold Path from the list of Triple Gem to that of threefold training.

Keywords: *Saddhā*, Confidence, Rational faith & Blind faith, Varieties of *Saddhā*, Proper Understanding of *Saddhā*, Suttās (discourses), Commentaries

Introduction

It appears that the Sanskrit and Hindi word *sraddhā*, the Pali word *saddhā* (and the Sinhala word *Sedehe* - *ieoeye*) all have originated from the same root. The Sanskrit *srat* or *srad* means an indeclinable truth and confidence.

The same concept is expressed through the English word, which came from the Latin word "Credo" means belief and word *Cor* and *Cord*-is the heart. Accordingly *Sraddhā*, which comes from *Srat* plus root \sqrt{Dha} , implies the idea found in the heart. (Concise Dictionary of Kurzgefasstes

Etymologieshes, Wörterbuch Der Altindischen. By M Mayahoter, Vol. III, 386p.)

The word Srddadhana found in the Rigveda gives the meaning of devotion, strong faith and believing. The word Sraddhà can be considered as a noun derived from this word. Some dictionaries have added the concept of loyalty to this word. (Ibid as in the first parenthese) Another dictionary, while giving the meaning of Sraddhà further mentions the following as well: "*trust, faith, belief, confidence, belief in divine revelation, religious faith, sedateness, composure of mind, intimacy, familiarity, respect, reverence, strong or vehement desire and more over the longing of a pregnant woman.*" (Vaman Shivram Apte., *Sanskrit English Dictionary*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers privet limited Delhi, 1993, 564 p & The Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary. By Vaman Shivram Apte, 1985 ed, 929-930.pp)

Yaska, the well-known Brahmin Teacher gave the etymologies of these words in his work known as Nirukti, explained that Sraddhà is thus called because it contains 'Srat', which stands for that which is true. It is also said that as there is a clear understanding of the four ideals that (Purusartha- Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha) Virtue, wealth, Pleasure and Release and the God who presides over such an understanding is called Sraddhà. (The Nirukta of Yaska by R.G. Bhadkamkar; First Edition 1945, 935-936 pp).

According to this etymology, Sraddhà is explained as a concept containing or entailing the truth and also a feeling towards a certain God.

Some scholars in comparing Indu-Iranian languages with western Indu-European languages maintain that the Latin word Credo and the Indu-Iranian Cretim and the Sanskrit Sraddhà, even though they are not original, t show some similarities in terms of their meaning. (The Sanskrit Language, by

T. Burrow. 14 p.) Thus, it is more plausible to find the etymology of the word in terms of its meaning rather than its linguistic form.

The word Sraddha or Saddha as it appears in these expositions is a noun. It is the usual practice followed by most grammarians to define a noun in terms of its related verb. Thus, it is mentioned that the meaning of the Pali word Saddhà is faith or confidence. (Atthasālini "sadhahatiti saddhā").

The Pali word Saddhà is made out of the prefix sam joined with the root Dhà and the Sanskrit form Sraddhà out of the indeclinable srad combined with Dhà. These words are made out of a participle. Here sam means "properly" or "well" and Dhà means *that which is to be established*.

Therefore, both the Sanskrit form and the Pàli form convey the meaning of that which one establishes properly or one place well. It gives the meaning of placing trust, confidence, respect, faith and devotion correctly or incorrectly in somebody or something.

According to some, there might be a problem as to whether it is possible to place trust correctly or incorrectly in somebody or something. What is meant here is the act of placing trust strongly without specifying if the object of that trust is right or wrong.

Thus, there could be two possibilities in the case of Saddhà (Majjhima Nikaya, Majjhimapannasaka, Canki Sutta K. Nanawimala, Edition, 1959, 280 p.) There is an act of placing trust correctly or placing it incorrectly. Buddhism treats the well-placed trust as rational faith (Akàravati Saddhà) and an incorrectly-placed faith as baseless faith (Amulikà Saddhà). (Majjhima Nikaya, Mulapannasaka, Vimansaka Sutta, K. Nanawimala, Edition, 1960, 319p.)

Some scholars use Shardhà or Sardhà instead of Sraddhà or Saddhà. But it is a wrong usage of terms. The word Adahayi comes directly from the Pali word Saddahati. It means to keep something well in mind. In early Buddhism, the word Saddhà had a

wide psychological application. For a study of this concept, it is important to take into account the explanations given in the Anguttara Nikaya particularly the Vyagghapajja Sutta and its commentary, and Suttas such as the Vimansaka, the Anumana, the sangarava, the Cullahatthipadopama and the Kitagiri in the Majjhima Nikaya and their relevant Commentaries on them, the Mahaparinibbana Sutta in the Digha Nikaya and its Commentary, Suttas such as the Kasibharadvaja, the Upanisa, the Saddha and the Patheyya in the Samyutta Nikaya, the Daliddiya Sutta and its Commentary, the Jaccandha Vagga in the Udana Pali, the Dhammasangani Pali and its Commentary Atthasalini

An examination into the Texts of the Canon and the Commentaries, Sub-commentaries, Glossaries and Compendia shows that the word Saddha has been used in a quite a number of meanings such as belief, acceptance owing to mere agreement, recognition out of respect without inquiry as well as accepting intelligently after making a critical inquiry.

In addition to these main meanings, the following additional nuances such as loyal close friendship, familiarity, respectable honour, adoration, strongly attached wish, can be mentioned as well. The Saddha which is taught in Buddhism is mentioned together with a mental state that brings forth specific inclinations as explained in the Abhidhamma.

There must be some significance to mention this mental state as one of the fifty-two beautiful mental states. In the Abhidhamma, when a mental state arises, it arises together with six common mental states as well as six mental states which occur alternatively. Thus without being confined to one stream of mental state, there are thirteen mental states common to all minds. In addition to these, there are thirteen mental states common to the unwholesome, fourteen and nineteen mental states common to

wholesome minds. Out of all these wholesome states of mind, the first to be mentioned among the beautiful ones is the mental states known as Saddha. (Abhidarmartha Sangraha Purana Sannaya, Somalaka Edition, 1960, 51p)

In the Abhidhamma, the mental state of faith is described as one that can be defiled as well as purified. In the Commentary to the Dhammasangani, there is a detailed explanation about this word. (Atthasalini nama Dhammasanganippakaranattha katha, Hevavitarana press, 1940;124 p.)

The higher importance of Saddha is ascribed from the relatively higher frequency it is mentioned in various Texts. Undoubtedly, it occupies an exceptional place in the Buddhist way of life. It is mentioned often in places like Five Faculties (panca indriya), Five powers (panca bala), Fifteen kinds of Conduct (carana), Four Attainments (catu sampada), Seven kinds of Noble wealth (cattari ariya Dhana) and thirty-seven Factors of Enlightenment (chattinsa bodhipakkhiya Dhamma).

From the list of Triple Gem to that of threefold training, Saddha is a mandatory step to the Noble Eightfold Path. In the Commentary to the Dhammasangani, Saddha is explained as confidence in oneself or mere assurance. (Saddahanti, Etaya Sayan va Saddahati Saddahana Mattameva va Esati Saddha” –do-) Scholars who try to explain this articulate the opinion that faith is a matter of belief.

It is also a result of moral action or confidence. Therefore, all these instances prove that the word Saddha is used to mean different concepts such as confidence, faith, belief, devotion, love and respect. (Pali Shabda Koshaya, by Gunapala Weerasekara,1968,398p. Pali Sinhala Akaradiya by Polwatte Buddhadatta Thera,1960,446p. Sankshipta Sankrutha Sinhala, Shabda Koshaya by K.Punnananda, Thera,290 p)

According to Buddhism, the blind belief that one has without paying attention to evidences is not Saddha. What is Saddha according to Buddhism is the acceptance of a belief after proper reflection. (Yonisomanisikara) Thus, a belief in God, Brahma, almighty being, power demon, everlasting soul can be considered as Saddha if it is made after proper inquiry.

For this reason, Buddhism considers baseless any belief which is not grounded on experience. Whatever form of practice is followed, devotion or belief as found in many religions is not recognized in Buddhism. (University of Ceylon Review vol-1, No.1 (April 1943), 74p.)

Belief or devotion is required when there is no understanding. If something is understood, then there will be no question of devotion or belief whatsoever. For instance, if somebody says that there is a gem in his hand, and if the other person is not in a position to see it, he will have to accept it in as a belief or as a part of devotion. If the person were to show the gem after opening the fist, then there will be no question of devotion or belief.

This happens because he will be able to see the gem for himself. The foundation of many religions is devotion. But Buddhism gives the first place not to the seeing with the physical eyes but seeing with the mind. So, belief or devotion is not given any place.

The Saddha found in Buddhism is not similar to devotion or belief in other religions. It is said that in popular Buddhism as well as the ordinary usage of saddha gives a certain form of devotion towards the Triple Gem of the Buddha Dhamma and the Sangha. (What the Buddha Taught, By Walpola Rahula, 1962 First Edition-8 p.). According to commentaries, Saddha is the belief in the virtues of Triple Gem and the efficacy of moral causation. (Saddhati kammaphala Saddhaya Ratanattaya Saddhaya ca" Udanattha katha, Hewavitarana Press, 1920, 69 p.)

If a person does not have a belief regarding something, he will not be in a position to know it correctly. Therefore, belief or trust is important. The Discourse on the Lesser Foot-print in the Majjhima Nikaya explains what a person has to do to believe in the Triple Gem.

When a person sees a large foot-print of an elephant he should not jump to the conclusion that it is a foot-print of a large elephant. He should keep track of the foot-prints and search for the elephant. The method in science also to come a conclusion after experiment observation and trial. The teaching found in the kalama Sutta of the Tika Nipata in the Anguttara Nikaya is a good case in point.

Therefore, it is much better to say that scientific methodology is found in Buddhism rather than saying that Buddhism is scientific. The origin of modern physical science is not as old as that of Buddhism.

The Buddha Dhamma and the Sangha are holy objects of belief. Therefore they have to be accepted. Such worthy objects of thought go hand in hand with other mental states. They generate belief. Such beliefs are called Saddha. Such thoughts will create belief in the Triple Gem and thus prevent the arising of lust, hatred and ignorance.

When the King of cakkavatti's gem is put into the muddy water, the muddy water turns to be clear. When the mind is grounded in Saddha, defilements are suppressed and the mind becomes pleasant. (Atthasalini nama Dhammasanganippakaranattha katha, Hewavitarana press, 1940; 124 p.)

This shows that it is the Saddha that purifies the human mind. Thus Saddha brings about a qualitative change in the mind of the individual. So it becomes an ethical criterion as well. When Saddha is looked into through the lens of the Pali Cannon, it is clear that it is a wealth that brings about happiness for an individual in this life as well as in the life to come. The understanding of a person who has realized the nature of the world begins

with Saddha (Saddahatiti Tathagassa Bodhin” Angutara Nikaya Sattaka Nipataya Uggā Sutta, Vittata Dhana Sutta, and Atthaka Nipataya Vyagga Pajja Sutta)

Even that acceptance is to be made after proper inquiry. So says the Buddha. (Thus the belief in the Enlightenment of the Buddha is the belief in the teaching of the Buddha. The Enlightenment is nothing but the Dhamma, where there is a complete practice. For such a person, there will be a correct acceptance of the Community of disciples following the virtues of the teaching that has understood the Buddha and the Dhamma. Here, the Community of the Sangha does not mean the imposition of some selected individuals but a group of disciples who are dedicated to follow what is taught in the Dhamma. (Saddhassati Kammaphala Saddhaya Samannagatassa” Petavatthu Atthakatha Hewavitarana Press ,89 p.).

As the belief in the moral causation is part of Saddha. It means even that teaching includes moral causation. Thus the teaching in the Canon includes the Dhamma as well. But there is a point worthy of investigation here i.e. is it a proper to accept all that is put as the teaching of the Buddha in a Canon as well as other Buddhist texts.

In other words, in some places the teaching of disciples has been introduced as the teaching of the Buddha. Among them there is a large part of statements coming from later Buddhist writers who have not attained Arahant hood (Sainthood). These matters have to be looked into carefully. To this category, belong the Vimanavatthu, the Petavatthu, the Jataka, the Apadana and the Cariyapitaka. Some scholars include even later Texts of the Abhidhamma Pitaka to this category. Discourses like the Mahaparinibbana Sutta in the Canon also are added similarly.

The controversial ideas about these matters can be resolved from the points that can be collected in the Canon itself. In the Suttas

like the kalama, the Vimansaka and the Canki the Buddha himself advised us not to accept anything out of faith. At the same time, he told us the very teaching he taught us must be compared and contrasted with his bodily and verbal behavior for acceptance and endorsement. The Vimansaka Sutta teaches us how to do it at the maximum level. The great authorities in the Vinaya texts as well as those mentioned in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta indicate how to find out who is wrong and what is wrong. (*Idha Bhikkhave Bikkhu Evam Vadeiya, Sammukha Metam Avso Bhagavato Sutam Sammukha Patiggahitam Ayam Dhammo Ayam Vinayo Idam Satthu Sasananti Tassa Bhikkhave Bhikkhuno Bhasitam Neva Abhinanditabbam Nappatikkositabbam...*) (Digha Nikaya Maha Parinibbana Sutta, Somalaka Edition, 1954,261p. and Anguttara Nikaya Catukka Nipata Mahapadesa Sutta.)

The acceptance of the virtues of the Triple Gem is given as an instance of Saddhā. (Anguttara Nikaya Pancaka Nipata , Buddha Jayanti, Edition, 60 p.) Thus in this context, taking refuge in the Triple Gem becomes important. Its main objective is to enter into the path leading to Nibbana. It should also be mentioned that there are some places where acceptance on uncritical Saddhā is also found expression in several places in the Canon. In statements like *I go to the Buddha out of faith.* (Majjhima Nikaya, Majjhimapannasaka, Canki Sutta K. Nanawimala, Edition,1959, 280 p); it is clearly seeing that the primary place has been given to faith rather than to inquiry. But on inquiry, we notice that in such places these expressions have been placed with regard to highly advanced people seeking a method of liberation. Expressions such as "*I have joined the Order recently, only the Buddha knows well*" must have been expressed with the idea of directing those people to the Blessed One. Those people may not have been in need of unnecessary

details. These expressions cannot be considered as uncritical statements.

"Venerable. Sir, the source of these teachings is our Blessed One, He is our Leader, we have taken refuge in Him, therefore Sir, let the Blessed One explain the meaning these statements. Having listened to him the monks will retain" (Digha Nikaya Atthakatha Samannaphala Suttavannana, Hewavitarana Press,161 p.)

Even this statement appears to go beyond inquiry and shows the signs of mere faith but sanction have been made for monks to make inquiries though not in line with critical inquiry. These are meant for one's own acceptance. But not to trust them upon others. One who protects truth will not maintain other should accept his faith. (Digha Nikaya Atthakatha Satipatthana Suttavannana, Hewavitarana Press,569 p.)

The first step of becoming a Buddhist as well as becoming as an Upāsaka (Follower) is the taking refuge. This is the first stage that comes to be called as the stage of the Right View. Here, Right View has to be interpreted not as a deep stage but as a general stage. For the Right View mentioned in this context faith becomes fundamental. Thus it comes to be included under rectification of view thus becoming the last meritorious deed. (Majjhima Nikaya, Majjhimapannasaka, Sammaditthi Sutta K. Nanawimala, Edition,1960, 48 p)

One's view regarding the virtues of the Triple Gem comes to be definite right knowledge. Here, faith acts as a basic factor. In this way, Saddhà becomes useful for Right View or Wisdom. It is for this reason that faith without wisdom leads one to become described as blind faith in commentary as well as in the Visuddhimagga. This shows clearly that both faith and wisdom are two items that have to go together.

Commentaries describe much faith and less wisdom as a characteristic of a fool (Majjhima Nikaya, Majjhimapannasaka,

Canki Sutta K. Nanawimala, Edition,1959, 280 p.) It is for this reason that Saddha is a mental state that cannot be isolated from the life of an individual.

It is clear that Saddhà becomes fundamental to Right View. In order to understand what Saddhà is, knowledge of Right View is important. According to the Sammaditthi Sutta in the Majjhima Nikaya, the Noble disciple knows clearly the wholesome deeds and roots of wholesome roots as well as unwholesome deeds and roots of unwholesome deeds. He is endowed with direct knowledge and unshakable Saddhà thus reaching the Truth of Dhamma. (Saddahatiti Saddha" Atthasalini nama Dhammasanganippakaranattha katha, Hevavitarana press, 1940;124 p.) This is known as the Right View introduced as kammassakata.

Even though there is no deep understanding of the Triple Gem in its first stage, such an understanding is established later as a result of listening to the Dhamma and other activities and the Triple Gem becomes the necessary path leading to Nibbana.

Thus taking the Triple Gem as holy objects, Saddha towards it becomes deeper and deeper. This happens because Wisdom contributes to understand the virtues of the Triple Gem. To describe the above mentioned unshakable trust, the Pali word used is Avecca, and its Sanskrit equivalent is Avetya. Both mean the knowing. Therefore, Aveccapasàda is to have a clear understanding of the virtues of Triple Gem and result of moral action. The Saddhà is also the same as Okappana (Characteristic of Trust) Saddha. The higher the knowledge of this, the trust of the person with Right knowledge goes higher. That kind of Saddha is very strong.

According to Buddhism, in order to arise Saddhà, one has to listen to a Dhamma preaching. Then as a result of that, Saddhà first arises towards the preacher himself. Thus having obtained Saddhà, the listener

inclines his mind towards what is preached i.e. the Dhamma and gradually, he leans towards the realization of the preached ideal. In this way, while Buddhism appears to perform a preliminary task, it becomes also a factor for a secondary task. (Majjhima Nikaya, Majjhimanipanna, Canki Sutta K. Nanawimala, Edition,1959). According to

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the Buddhist theory of Causation in terms of graduated course accepted therein, Saddhà acts as a fundamental factor. As Buddhism nowhere explains any phenomenon without recourse to Dependant Origination, Saddhà also has been analyzed likewise as a causal contributory factor.