International Journal of Web of Multidisciplinary Studies
(Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Fully Refereed International Journal)
website: http://ijwos.com
Vol.02 No.10.
OPEN ACCESS
E-ISSN : 3049-2424
DOI:

LAW AND KARMA: WHEN LAW AND BUDDHISM MEET IN THE CONCEPT OF JUSTICE

Vo Quang Vinh[1], Dr. Champalal Mandrele [2]

[1] *Ph.D. Research Scholar, Samrat Ashok School of Buddhist Studies, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, India*

[2] *Assistant Professor & HOD, Samrat Ashok School of Buddhist Studies, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut, India*

Article Info

Article History:

Published:29 Oct 2025

Publication Issue:
Volume 2, Issue 10
October-2025

Page Number:
170-184

Corresponding Author:
Vo Quang Vinh

Abstract:

This paper examines the philosophical correlations of karmic law (kamma-niyāma) as outlined in Buddhism with worldly law (justice as state-administered). While karma works through the moral realm, and ethical causation, law sustains and enforces through command and negative sanctions. While both are concerned with the regulation and control of human conduct and the order of society, they diverge with respect to intent, accountability, and punishment. This treatise draws from the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Dīgha Nikāya, and Vinaya Piṭaka, as well as from contemporary legal philosophy of Aristotle, Kant, and Rawls. Buddhism offers a different philosophy of justice. It is no longer merely retributive, but restorative, through wise (paññā) and ethical (sīla-bhāvanā) rehabilitation. The karmic axiom, "It is volition that I call action" (cetanā ahaṃ kammaṃ vadāmi), places justice in the sphere of will, and not in the sphere of external power. It changes the law from a coercive dominion to a self-regulating order, bounded by ethical reason.

The study utilizes comparative jurisprudence and Buddhist ethics to explore the intersections and critiques that karmic justice has with contemporary theories of restorative justice. It also discusses the impact of Buddhist forgiveness (khanti), compassion (karuṇā), and right livelihood (sammā ājīva) on the potential Buddhist doctrine of forgiveness on current challenges and reforms in the practice of law, including criminal justice and rehabilitation, dispute resolution, and the governance of the environment.

The proposed research has to do with a Dhamma-centered approach to justice that combines law with the principle of moral causation, advocating for a movement in justice systems from punishment to transformative justice based on the principle of interdependence (paṭicca-samuppāda). In a time of moral and legal crises throughout the world, the interrelation of law and karma provides a valuable lens for cultivating compassion and restorative justice.

Keywords: Law; Justice; Buddhism; Karma; Kamma-niyāma; Restorative Justice; Ethics; Moral Responsibility; Forgiveness; Paṭicca-samuppāda; Dhamma-based Jurisprudence.

1. Introduction

For all of civilization's history, the pursuit of justice has stood the test of time as the peak moral aspiration of humanity. Codified laws, starting with the Code of Hammurabi and Roman Lex Talionis

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to contemporary constitutions, legal orders strive to achieve justice and equity. Law, however, acts primarily as the external safeguard of societal order and security, and historically, it has always kept the deeper issues of the lack of not only justice, but ethics, inequality, and violence, and with the deepest of issues, injustice, lack it cannot resolve the issue of coercion. From the vast, illegal, and global perspectives of world religions, especially Eastern religions, Buddhism provides the most authentic and deepest perspectives on justice. Buddhism's corresponding ideas on justice and law are related to the most foundational of all Buddhist doctrines, that of paṭicca-samuppāda. Buddhism's legal and moral justice mesh in the laws of kamma. As the Buddha taught, "It is volition that I call action" (Aṅguttara Nikāya VI.63, Bodhi, 2017, 112). Karmically, the law consumes the unwise action, in ignorance avijjā, and with wisdom, paññā, through self-rectification, and most importantly, moral awakening. Moral justice, or sīla-bhāvanā, is the moral opposite of legal justice.The Vinaya Piṭaka exemplifies such a restorative practice frame. When a monk transgresses, he confesses (desanā), performs a restorative action (paṭikamma), and is readmitted into the Saṅgha—an ethical process that heals and does not wound. This is the process modern restorative-justice theory seeks (Braithwaite, 2002, p. 12), and stresses reconciliation, accountability, and reintegration, rather than exclusion. It is clear that, punishment, as the weapon for reform, is an acknowledgment that, justice is the result of moral awareness.

In an age of moral fatigue, polarization, and over-criminalization, the relevance of the Buddhist understanding of justice is clear. By incorporating mettā (loving-kindness), karuṇā (compassion), and upekkhā (equanimity) to a theory of justice, the law could transition from ethically passive control to ethically active education. This study seeks to documentary that transformation—where external worldly law (daṇda-nīti) and internal karmic law (kamma-niyāma) overlap as two forms of justice. One is institutional and the other, moral. It shows that the future of justice does not depend on punishment. Instead, in the more profound understanding. True justice, in the Buddhist sense, is not the enactment of power. It is the result of conscience, leading to liberation (vimutti).

2. The Historical Evolution of Law

As long as written rules exist, there will always be laws. The first laws, such as the Code of Hammurabi, were more ascribed punishments for the breaking of laws. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth", ascribed the punishments, as such, as the rule of the law and the punisher. Justice, back in the days, was mechanical. The philosophers of Ancient Greece were the first to change this. Ethically, the state and the λογισμένον (Logisménon - the rational soul) of a person must work in harmony, according to Plato. Aristotle asserted that justice is to give men that which is properly due of them, including a relative equalization of the multitude. Developing the concept of laws and rules referred to as "jus"

and “lex” became a definitive element of the Roman Empire’s legal systems. The Stoics and later Romans affirmed “jus naturale”, which was the first theory of law that combined natural order, rationality, and the soul. The later Christian moralist and clerics such as Aquinas, in conjunction with the moral laws, devised a law that combined the rational and divine law. Justice, according to Aquinas, was to be a part of the moral order of the sovereign, God.

As modern times have arrived, the conversion of metaphysical perspectives to rational-legal ones has happened too. Hobbes and Locke laid the social contract foundations for law, shifting the moral authority of the law from the divine to collective agreement. For Kant, the moral duty to uphold justice was a categorical imperative of reason that dictated movement from an heteronymous to an autonomous, yet universally binding, order. Following that, Rawls introduced the idea of "justice as fairness", focusing on the distribution of liberty and equality within a democracy. Despite all this, the law has remained, and still is, on the periphery. It is and remains a method of social order, more concerned with the coercive and deterrent regulation of behavior than the fundamental moral transformation of the person from within.

3. Law, and more particularly the social order, is a moral constraint.

Total social disorganization is order's flipside, as is the disorganization of a society's law and order. Sociological law takes the breakdown of social order as its warning. This is what Weber (1946) based his legacy on. The law and, more particularly, the legal system, is an order of society. The expectation of social order is the expectation of order and predictability of the law. This obviates anarchy, disorder, and the law itself. This order of a society of law is desperately attempting to mask the order's immorality. The disorganization of order and society's moral decay is predictably obfuscating. Formally, the decay is a wounded conscience with legalism the order's evil and, more specifically, the evil of justice.

Fuller (1964) states in The Morality of Law that law without moral input results in law’s “inner emptiness," where law can become oppressive while keeping within procedural correctness. The Nuremberg trials demonstrated this shadow in history. Atrocities were committed under law that was sanctioned by the regime, and evil was done without conscience and law. It demonstrated law unmoored from conscience can become morally inert. From the Buddhist point of view, law is the control of action and the purification of intention. Moral accountability is tied to volition (cetanā). Where secular law involves coercion, karmic law is transformative of the inner self. The difference between external conformity and inner insight is the basis of the dissent from formal legality.

In contrast to secular jurisprudence, which situates justice within the authority of the state, Buddhism locates justice within the natural moral order known as kamma-niyāma—the law of moral causation. The Buddha proclaimed that “it is volition (cetanā) that I call action (kamma); having willed,

one acts through body, speech, or mind" (Aṅguttara Nikāya VI.63; Bodhi, 2017, p. 112). In this statement, moral responsibility is relocated from divine command or legal decree to intentional consciousness itself. Kamma is neither fate nor divine judgment but a process of ethical causality that reflects the interdependence (paṭiccasamuppāda) of all phenomena. Every intentional act carries the seed of consequence (vipāka), producing its fruit in accordance with the quality of the intention rather than the magnitude of the act. The moral order (niyāma-dhamma) does not need an external authority for it to operate. As the Dhammapada states, "Not in the sky, nor in the ocean's depth, nor by entering a mountain cave, is there a place where one can escape the result of an evil deed" (Dhp 127; Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 78). In this case, justice is not only self-executing, but cosmic. Every action takes its ethical 'fruit' because of the natural order of cause and effect. For this reason, rather than being passive and waiting for punishment, the negative unfolding of consequences is meant to 'educate' the wrongdoer. In this sense, the justice sought in Buddhism is educative and restorative, rather than retributive (Harvey, 2000, p. 47).

From a doctrinal point of view, the law of kamma is both descriptive and prescriptive. It describes the moral fabric of existence, and it also prescribes ethical cultivation by showing that every volitional action will result in a consequence. This 'double' nature of the law of kamma brings the enforcement of justice from an external to an internal one. As Gombrich (2009, p. 76) has put it, "the Buddha internalized justice: wrongdoing punishes itself through the very conditions it creates." A wrongdoer is not judged by an external authority; they are simply judged by the inner disturbance that follows ignorance (avijjā) and craving (taṇhā). Punishment in any legal framework serves the purposes of correction and deterrence. In Buddhism, deterrence is the function of the mental state of mindfulness (sati) and the moral reflection (yoniso-manasikāra) that recognizes the connection between unwholesome intention and suffering (dukkha). Correction is approached through the means of repentance (paṭikamma) and insight (vipassanā) that rework the agent instead of simply avenging the act. The emphasis on intention in Buddhism speaks to the fusion of metaphysical law and moral psychology: the consequence of karma is a realization of the moral truth of the act within consciousness.

As laid out in the Abhidhamma, there are five interrelated laws (pañca-niyāmā), (1) Utu-niyāma (physical law), (2) Bīja-niyāma (biological law), (3) Citta-niyāma (psychological law), (4) Kamma-niyāma (moral law), and (5) Dhamma-niyāma (universal law). Of all these, kamma-niyāma is the most important on the ethical front because it interlinks moral agency with the cosmos (Nyanatiloka, 1988, p. 215). It addresses the fact that moral causation and consequence operate within the same framework as and euqal to physical causation. However, while natural law is deterministic,

kamma is not and allows for change through mindfulness and insight. Volitional action is enough to undermine unwholesome karma. This approach harmonizes moral reasoning with "cause and consequence" instead of the contradictory "crime and punishment." One who inflicts harm also creates conditions of suffering for self and others. Only suffering will the person who inflicts harm not have the opportunity to witness the conditions of self suffering created. Only by repentance coupled with ethical reform will the person who inflicts harm witness the conditions of peace. The peace of the conditions that will justify the infliction of harm. The left hand of the Justice Wheel coupled with the path of asceticism will confirm the condition of peace and moral suffering will be transformed.

The moral relief of sin is the phase of positive moral suffering that the law of kamma will resolve. When ignorance and craving cease, the chain of dependent origination will be broken. The suffering being is cause and effect will cease to be mindlessly repeated. Justice, then, is the law of moral sin. The Itivuttaka (22) describes this as the "stilling of all formations and the relinquishment of all attachments" (Bodhi, 2005, p. 34). The result is moral sin will not be adjudicated but will result in awakening (bodhi).

Social applications are based on this principle—in this case, Buddhist approaches to restorative justice and reconciliation. The offender is invited to confess, make reparations, and develop virtue in the offender, and the community abandons revenge for compassion. According to the Vinaya Piṭaka (Cullavagga IX.5), monks who infringe on minor rules must confess to the Saṅgha and reinstatement is achieved through mindful and honest confession, which serves the dual purpose of disciplinary and therapeutic reinstatement (Horner, 1952, p. 412). In this ancient model, punitive isolation clearly is not an issue with Buddhist justice. The sole aim is to assist the community in moral reconciliation.

4. Comparison between Worldly Law and Karmic Law

In contrast to lokiya-dhamma or daṇḍa-nīti, which is forcefully applied and coercively implemented by outsiders, worldly laws are pre-disposed to injustice. This is because laws inherently place injustice as the price for their enforcement, as laws are passed, upheld, and adjudicated over by courts and state punishment, making laws overarching and governmentally sovereign. The impersonally and passively exercised control over the enforcement of justice and the regulation of society is solely rājānubhāva. On the other hand, the operation of kamma-niyāma is internal, which means it depends on a person's internal state and will unfold on its own. It is governed by the principle of causal efficacy, which states, "It is volition that I call action" (Aṅguttara Nikāya VI.63; Bodhi, 2017, p. 112). A system of justice requires a judge, a court, and even witnesses to be present, while the law of kamma requires no such person. It imposes a conscience, and thus a "judge," and the "court" is the mind (citta-bhūmi). The

principle of karma does not need to be enforced because it operates intrinsically. Unwholesome intention (akusala-cetanā) will always bring inevitable suffering (dukkha). In contrast, wholesome intention (kusala-cetanā) is always and implies the reward of happiness (sukha). Hence worldly law is heteronomous, while the law of karma is autonomous. Gombrich (2009, p. 76) adds, "The Buddha internalized justice; wrongdoing punishes itself through the conditions it creates." A worldly judge seeks evidence, but the karmic law discloses itself via experience. The migration of one judge to another gives interesting chances for one's vision of justice, from an imposition of largely punitive to introspection.

The end of value of any law is to sustain orderly and peaceful society and to keep people safe. The law achieves this by preventing crimes and resolving conflicts either by punitive measures, compensating the claimant, or providing a practical closure to a dispute by constructive adjudication. This goal is in harmony with the view of the Arthaśāstra… "punishment alone governs all beings". In contrast, Buddhism sees justice not as a terminal goal, but a means toward liberation (vimutti). The aim of karmic justice is moral cleansing and the attainment of wisdom (paññā).

The experience of suffering, as a consequence of past deeds, is not a mark of divine retribution but serves as moral instruction. The pedagogical purpose of the Sallatha Sutta (SN 36.6) is manifest in the contrast of the uninstructed and the wise person: the former is struck by two arrows, the first causing physical pain and the second mental, while the wise one feels only the first, (Bodhi, 2000, p. 1266). Karmic consequence is corrective, and it should be profoundly understood. Worldly justice aims at external peace (bāhira-santi); karmic justice aims at inner peace (ajjhattika-santi). The legal system may stop violence, but only wisdom can end the root causes of violence: greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha). In this sense, Buddhist justice transforms "law and order" into "law and awakening."

At the ethical level, worldly law is based on the notion of liability and punishment. It often assumes that fear of suffering deters wrongdoing — a psychological foundation known in Western thought as deterrence theory (Bentham, 1789/1988, p. 170). Yet this model operates from dosa (aversion), not mettā (loving-kindness). Buddhist ethics, conversely, seeks to transform rather than to frighten. The Buddha taught that hatred never ceases by hatred but only by love (na hi verena verāni sammantīdha kudācanaṃ; Dhammapada 5; Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 24). Whereas worldly law measures guilt through transgression, karmic law measures it through ignorance. The remedy is therefore not punishment but insight. In the Vinaya Piṭaka, confession (desanā) and restitution (paṭikamma) for offenders emphasizes re-integration as opposed to exclusion. This envisioned

approach approximates contemporary models of restorative justice, which emphasize the repair of harm within the framework of truth and empathy.

Karmic justice, in its philosophical tenor, is non-dual. It does not recognize the presence of a self, either permanently as a victim, or as an offender. Wrongs arise from ignorance that all beings within dependent origination (paṭicca-samuppāda). Thus, the Buddhist approach to the moral dualism disintegrates interdependence — that to wound one is to wound all.

Karmic law and worldly law, although contrasting, are also not mutually exclusive. The Buddha recognized the need for worldly governance (rāja-dhamma) for social order, while also championing the need for moral self-discipline (sīla) on the individual level, to achieve personal liberation. A society in equilibrium would need both: the law from the outside in, and self-discipline from within, for law and conscience. Buddhist ethics involves what Harvey (2000, p. 95) refers to as a "two-level morality." On one level, there is the maintenance of order and social integration through justice (sammuti-sacca) and then there is the unconditioned (paramattha-sacca) justice that grants liberation and entails an order that is social and, at times, forcibly maintained. The harmonized dualism of Buddhism gives rise to a powerful, compassionate jurisprudence where conscience reflects the law, and the active pursuit of justice is an awakening.

5. Retribution and Rehabilitation: Two Models of Justice

Most contemporary legal systems and retributive justice operate on the assumption that every wrongdoing should be met with a punishment that is equal and proportionate. It seeks to restore the equilibrium of morals by doing harm that is equivalent to the harm that was done. The principle of lex talionis—"an eye for an eye"—can be found in the Code of Hammurabi and continues to be a bedrock principle of contemporary penal systems. The moral logic of retributive justice is that the punishment serves as a debt repayment to the wronged individual or to society. This model is limited from a Buddhist perspective. The Saṃyutta Nikāya teaches that "one who repays anger with anger makes the fire burn higher" (SN 11.4; Bodhi, 2000, p. 320). Retributive punishment has a tendency to escalate the suffering of the wronged individual. It satisfies the demand for punishment, but the moral wounds of the wronged individual will remain. "Hatred is never appeased by hatred; it is appeased by non-hatred," says the Dhammapada (verse 5) (Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 24).

Legal punishment which is based on anger and fear is likely to only to restrain conduct for some time and is unlikely to change a person's character. As Rahula puts it, Buddhism does not embrace punishment because it does not believe there is a self to punish for wrongs that have been

done (1974, p. 83). The idea of punishment is "paying back," which implies a fixed and moral debtor, while anattā or non-self, is the negation of this dualism. Wrongdoing is not an eternal and permanent stain on a person, it is a mental event which is transient and ephemeral which is based on the ignorance of avijjā and craving, taṇhā. The repayment, therefore, of the evil deed is not in retaliation by punishment, but through understanding and purification.

In contrast to punitive, retributive punishment, the rehabilitative approach to Buddhist justice is centered on the moral and psychological transformation of the person who has done wrong. In this view, the wrongdoer is not the enemy of society, but a morally confused person who has the capability to 'awaken' and change. The Vinaya Piṭaka gives an example of this where monks who breach the discipline of the order are given the instruction to confess, perform the corrective acts, and be welcomed back into the Saṅgha (Horner, 1952, p. 412). The aim of this forgiveness and readmission is the restorative one of purification of intention and the rebuilding of a moral standard or sīla.

There is the possibility for redeeming one's self and for carrying out rehabilitation therapy within the Buddhist understanding of kamma. Even a person with the heaviest of the misdeeds in the past deserves a chance to redirect the course of their moral life; and with the practices of mindfulness, right effort, and repentance, one can do that. A perfect illustration of this is the character from the Angulimala Sutta (MN 86); a serial killer transformed by the compassion of the Buddha, and becoming an arahant, fully liberated from his past by the realization of truth.,. 709). It surely reflects the Buddhist understanding that there isn't a single being that is unrecoverable.

Restorative justice focuses on rehabilitation instead of punishment so that justice is served through reforming offenders rather than through fines. In this form of justice, instead of asking "What punishment is deserved?" the question is "What understanding is necessary?" There is the perception of punishment being replaced with the aim of unbinding the offender and setting them free. This goal is the same as motivational liberation therapy, an approach within modern restorative justice, in which offenders are encouraged to empathize, engage in dialogue, and take responsibility for the imbalance they created.

One may find a contradiction between rehabilitation and retribution, but they are just two sides of the same coin. Each of the two frameworks engages the same questions of moral value: how should a society deal with the wrongdoing that occurs within it? Retribution, punishment, and the anticipation of some authority are all depressing, while rehabilitation offers a far more pleasant perspective anchored in compassion, the will to heal, and the expectation of one's potential.

As a part of the Buddhist ethical system, anger and compassion are exclusive emotional states (cetasikas). From the Abhidhamma, dosa is unwholesome (akusala), contributes to further bondage and the unwholesome (akusala) state of anger, and karuṇā, compassion, is the state of the pure (kusala) element of liberation (Nyanaponika, 1998, p. 112). Thus, the ethical rehabilitation ends the cycle of vengeance, which is why it is regarded as the more noble act. Furthermore, the karmic process serves to ensure retribution by natural consequence. There is, therefore, no reason for society to add the element of hatred to what kamma will rectify. Human law should, instead, reflect the wisdom of the Dhamma and guide offenders towards understanding instead of despair. The Buddha states in the Udāna (5.5) "One who conquers himself is greater than one who conquers a thousand men in battle" (Bodhi, 2005, p. 52). Hence, true justice lies in self-conquest and not in coercive control.

A fully integrated Dhammic system of justice holds empathy, understanding, and compassion alongside accountability. •Wrongdoers need to acknowledge the consequences of their actions, but they must also be given the chance to redeem themselves. •For this reason, compassionately correcting wrongs, or "dayā-daṇḍa," is something more evolved and enlightened Buddhist jurisprudence strives for. •As is well known from Buddhist history, Kings Aśoka and Mongkut embodied this remarkable and virtuous duality, promoting moral education alongside the laws they imposed to ensure order. This is the reason modern legal reform encourages the most virtuous practice teachings. A justice system based on the Dhamma would replace punitive prisons with restoration. Offenders, as moral agents who have lost their mindful agency, would be given the opportunity to study and work on cause and effect, mindful cultivation, and ethical agency reconstruction. Suffering imposed would be redefined so that justice would be suffering understood and transcended.

6. Restorative Justice and Buddhist Ethics

In contrast to traditional justice systems which concentrate only on sanctioning wrongdoers and rehabilitating them, as well as on the disruption of the law, restorative justice shifts the focus towards the restoration of the social and moral order that has been interpersonally violated or adversely affected by wrongdoers and their offenses. The moral vision that restorative justice aims to achieve in the order of law and punishment correlates closely to Buddhist ethics, that seeks to achieve justice in the form of moral change (citta-parivatta), or the transformation of the mind. In Buddhism, justice is characterized and achieved by the reconciliation and the restoration of social order and harmony (sāmaggi) within the individual and interpersonally. When wrongdoing occurs, the revolutionary discouragement of moral order and law (sīla-saṃvara) is coupled with a violation and discouragement of a social and relational order law. The reconciliation and social order and justice is achieved through

a courageous moral transformation of understanding, truth, remorse, and forgiveness, as expressed by the Buddha in the Dhammapada (verse 223) as: "Conquer anger with non-anger; conquer evil with good; conquer the miser with giving; and the liar with truth." (Buddharakkhita, 1985, p. 91).

Buddhist ethics also require gatherings of right speech and right view with regard to restorative justice. The absence of these elements results in a failure of reconciliation. The offender has to recognize moral causation while the victim must change their bitterness into compassion. In this sense, restorative justice entails moral education and results in peace for both parties.

As explained in the Vinaya Pitaka, the Buddhist monastic code represents one of the first institutional models of restorative justice. In the monastic community, for instance, wrongdoers are invited to confess, perform a restorative act, and thereafter be readmitted to the community. The purpose does not entail the offender's degradation, but rather the purification of the entire community. In the spirit of compassion towards the offender, the community must recognize the wrong committed, and the repentance that the offender is trying to make. This system espouses the principles of restorative justice and demonstrates the importance of moral self-correction. The Buddhist view of offenders rests on their moral capability and the desire to enact change for repentance, and not the imposition of external punishment. This is a profound spiritual belief: all moral agents have the capacity to reawaken, change, and self-correct through remorse.

The first restorative 'justice' within the Buddhist paradigm takes into account the virtues of mettā, karuṇā, and khanti as reconciliatory pillars.

- Mettā positivity transforms hostility to goodwill. In the practice of mettā-bhāvanā, one wishes happiness and goodwill for even the ones who have hurt them.
- Karuṇā is compassion, the feeling of anger and suffering of people and thus empathy: of para-dukkha-dukkhitā.
- Khanti, or patient endurance, calms the storm of rage and gives time for insight to mature.

Harvey (2000, p. 87) has perceptively pointed out that compassion for a Buddhist, includes suffering with others. This is the direct counter to retribution. Healing and reconciliation from a place of despair is a virtuous practice, and so is the reconciliation from a place of forgiveness. Justice becomes an act of healing through wisdom (paññā) and moral equilibrium (sīla)

7. Case Studies: Buddhist Perspectives in Modern Legal Reforms

Postcolonial Sri Lanka is an outstanding instance in illustrating how Buddhist values influence contemporary justice and developmental practices. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement

("Awakening of All through the Sharing of Labor") is the first community movement which integrated Buddhist values of mettā, karuṇā, and sīla, and was founded in 1958 by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne.

At the village level, community elders and offenders, and victims take part in moral reflection and reconciliation during meetings of shramadana shanti sabhas (peace councils). This approach resembles the more service-oriented adjustments of the Vinaya system in which persons were compelled to admit their disobedience and were then rehabilitated. Justice involves the full moral restoration of a community, capturing the restorative essence in Buddhism. "a no-poverty, no-affluence society based on compassion, cooperation, and self-reliance" was envisioned by Ariyaratne (1985, p. 72). Influenced by Sarvodaya, modern Sri Lankan legal scholars have sought to reconceptualize mediation and peacebuilding activities at the local level (Gunasekara, 2016, p. 118). The application of Buddhist principles to restorative law shows that Dhamma-rooted justice is possible alongside civil law. This will add legitimacy and humanity to post-conflict societies.

The most explicit and direct integration of Buddhist ethics into current forms of governance is the Bhutanese development paradigm of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Within the values of GNH, which is underpinned Bhutan's 2008 Constitution, compassion, mindfulness, and interdependence, are the key founding national policy principles. Anchored by Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, Bhutanese Buddhism principles of rāja-dhamma and the sukha of hita (collective happiness) entwined with the legal ethos. GNH means 'Gross National Happiness'. GNH means 'Gross National Happiness'. GNH translates the four pillars: Good Governance, Sustainable Development, Cultural Preservation, and Environmental Conservation, and "all of which is Dhamma" (Karma Ura, 2015, p. 23). GNH is also psychologically and ethically healthy and opposed to aspinal justice and progress inimical to the GPD and GNH. The Bhutanese Penal Code also states that "offenders must restore community harmony and mindfulness of the causes of suffering" (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2004, §15). Legal philosophy in Bhutan is an instance of Buddhist karmic ethics harmonized with the law of the land. The principle of kamma-niyāma illustrates the idea that any action (be it individual or governmental) has ramifications that impacts the happiness of the community. Therefore, law becomes a means of restoring spiritual balance and social harmony rather than a tool of punishment.

From the perspective of monastic legal traditions, Myanmar (Burma) has a different model. Buddhist monastic codes (Vinaya) have shaped both monastic and civil law in Burma from the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1850) and continues to the present. The monastic Sangha Nayaka Council still addresses and settles disputes in the monastic community from restorative frameworks: confession (desanā), probation (mānatta), and reinstatement (abbhāna).

Burmese kings systematically adjudicated legal cases as Dhammarāja and righteous rulers. The authority of the Dhammarāja rested on the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Sutta (DN 26) where the Buddha advised the kings on governance with dāna (generosity), sīla (morality), and ahiṃsā (non-violence). King Mindon (r. 1853–1878) was noted for his reformative rather than punitive approach to punishment and endorsed the absolute cessation of cruel punitive measures (Charney, 2006, p. 214). Buddhist NGOs and monastic universities in contemporary Myanmar have encouraged the implementation of "Dhamma-based civic education" in the hopes of crime moral rehabilitation. For instance, the Dhamma Youth Centers in Mandalay offers restorative justice by teaching juvenile offenders meditation (vipassanā) and moral reasoning as meditation and reasoning tools which greatly alters behavior (Thanissaro, 2018, p. 41). These examples showcase Buddhist criminology which seeks the transformation of one's consciousness as the primary response goal, fore teaching the goal of justice.

From these case studies, law derives its legitimacy from the moral consonance of Dhamma and not from coercion. Be it the grassroots level reconciliation in Sri Lanka, the constitutional happiness in Bhutan, monastic governance in Myanmar, social emancipation in India, or moral education in Vietnam, all instances reflect the shifting focus of law from punitive measures to a route pedagogy with justice as the scam. These examples Dhamma-based jurisprudence reaffirm the legal reasoning to compassion from punishing and punitive reasoning. As noted in the Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta (DN 26), "the kingdom prospers, and none oppress another" (Walshe, 1995, p. 408). As such, the movement towards interweaving the principles of Buddhism into contemporary legal practices signals the opposite of a retreat from secularism, rather, a step toward ethical universalism. Bearing testament to this monument to completion, the influence of Buddhism on contemporary developments in law shows the old truth: justice may be compassionless, yet it must contain compassion. When societies embraced the Dhamma as their moral framework, they moved beyond punitive systems to systems of justice as reconciliation, wisdom, and liberation (vimutti).

8. Towards a Dhamma-Based Philosophy of Justice

Legal studies have shown a progressively widening gap between law and morality. Legal positivism, which emerged during the Enlightenment, views the law's legitimacy as the mere will of the sovereign and the moral worth of the law as irrelevant. While positivism offers an orderly legal system, it is emotionally and psychologically detached from the pain and suffering that the absence of justice brings. The Dhamma, Buddhist moral philosophy, proposes a different way. The moral order of law, which regulates the individual and upholds social order, can, and must, anchor the law. For Buddhism,

Dhamma also includes the cosmic order of things. Righteousness (sammā-dhamma), the Dhamma, also unites ethical causation (kamma-niyāma) and the order of society (sangha-samaggī). Hence a Dhamma philosophy of justice would seek to bridge the two opposing poles of positive law (lex) and moral law (ethos) for the well-being of individuals. As the Itivuttaka (22) states, 'Dhamma protects those who live by Dhamma' (dhammo have rakkhati dhammacāriṃ; Bodhi, 2005, p. 34). This understanding changes the perspective on the function of law. It recognizes that law is not merely a mechanism of control and that is a moral path (magga) that leads beings to ethical development and, ultimately, liberation (vimutti). When justice is focused on the Dhamma, it is no longer a response to a wrongdoing. It is the active and positive cultivation of wisdom (paññā) and compassion (karuṇā) and the exercising of the other mental faculty of mindfulness (sati).

Final Reflection: The Future of Dhamma-Based Jurisprudence

The conditions of the world, with its violent conflicts, stark inequities, and the deteriorating ecosystem, call for drama-based jurisprudence. Legally codified systems based on pure retribution will become unsustainable, both morally and socially. What is required is a restorative approach to the teaching of law, a jurisprudence that perceives law as a moral relation of cause and effect, and compassion as the primary instrument of correction. This study attests that when Dhamma guides it, justice is an awakening (bodhi-sādhana) and an instrument of law. It equally harmonizes the spiritual with the worldly, the external with the internal, the legal with the moral, and the ethical with the moral. Justice, illuminated by the wisdom of the Buddha, is not the righting of wrongs but the realization of truth (sacca). Therefore, law and karma aim not to oppose one another but to complement each other, each illuminating the other in the universal pursuit of liberation (vimutti). When the law of men is inspired by the law of Dhamma, justice is more than judgment; it becomes visible compassion in the very structure of society.

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