BUDDHIST AND TAOIST ETHICS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

ABSTRACT

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Ethics is one of the most important foundations of human society and religion. It really plays a very indispensable role in the social, political, economic and religious life of human beings. The history of mankind reveals that society cannot flourish and people cannot live in harmony without the fundamental ethics. There is no religious system which does not include the moral teachings. No society can be stable without some moral principles. Every religion has laid down rules of conduct for its followers. It is due to the differences in geographical conditions, social background and development of man’s level that the concepts of ethics such as morality, virtue, equality, right, etc., or criteria of social ethics vary from society to society. Nowadays, ethics is applied not only in the sphere of human behaviour and conduct, but also has stretched out its arms to every sphere of natural and social sciences as well.

Two of the most influential beliefs that have shaped Asian history are Buddhism and Taoism. They have been around through thousands of years and have dominated majority of Asian regions, particularly China and India. The teachings of Buddhism and Taoism have become very popular not only in India and in China but also in the other parts of the globe. Despite the differences in organization, language, geography and local customs, both share a profound respect for virtues and honour. The ethical and moral values taught by the Buddha and Lǎo Zǐ are still relevant and fresh for human civilizations as they were at their time of promulgation.

In the light of the above facts, an attempt has been made not only to study the ethical values in Buddhism and Taoism but also to study on Buddhist and Taoist Ethics in comparative light. In a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, it is significant to do the comparative study of the ethical teachings of
different religious traditions of the world which in turn will help to know each other culture and religion.

In this thesis, attempt has been made not to emphasize upon the data-collection or its mere elaboration in a descriptive manner, but to work out a comparative study of the two systems i.e. Buddhism and Taoism. While doing the study on the topic several methods of Social Science research such as analytical method, historical method, critical method and especially comparative method have been utilized.

This is text-based research that aims to go into the depth of the moral world of Buddhism and Taoism. The research is based on primary as well as secondary texts, which provide the ethical features of the tradition in detail. Though a number of works has been done on the issue but the major focus of this study is to examine, interpret, and outline the basic and significant nature of the ethics of the both traditions in term of current moral problems.

Comparative religious ethics of Buddhism and Taoism encompass a number of aims, ranging across enriched cultural moral self-understanding, appreciation of other traditions, enhancement of cross-cultural communication, addressing shared social problems, and systematic theorizing about religion and ethics. This vision combines the methods and theory of comparative ethical inquiry with a practical moral rationale and project. It is self-consciously open to methodological diversity, while at the same time introducing a constructive moral purpose and sustaining motivation for its practitioners. These practitioners, in turn, take on the role of “transformative intellectuals” who self-consciously and critically relate their inquiries to the important tasks of constructive moral practice, making common cause with the aims and tasks of inter-religious moral dialogue between Buddhism and Taoism.