

CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction - I (a) Concept of the Brahmavihāras :

In Buddhism 'Brahmavihāras' have been mentioned and explained originally in the list of forty Kammaṭṭhānas (Skt.Karmasthāna) i.e , "occasion or ground for (contemplating) kamma, Kamma-subject, a technical term referring to the instruments of meditation, especially objects used by meditation to realize impermanence" (Pāli English Dictionary).¹ It means Brahmavihāras are subjects of meditation. They are four in number as follows :²

(i) **Mettā** (loving kindness) : Contemplation of loving kindness and goodwill or universal benevolence towards all sentient beings, praying : " May all beings be happy."

¹) Rhys Davids and Stede, p. 193

²) Mahāsī Sayadaw, Purpose of practising Kammatthana Meditation, Rangoon,1980, pp.10-11; B.N.Chaudhury, Dictionary of Buddhist Doctrinal and Technical Terms, Kolkata, 2005, pp.329-331.

(ii) **Karuṇā** (compassion or Pīty) : Contemplation of compassion, i.e, Pīty for and sympathy for those who are suffering praying in mind that "May all beings be free from misery and sufferings."

(iii) **Muditā** (sympathetic joy) : Contemplation of feeling rejoicing with others in their happiness and prosperity praying in mind that they "May continue to be happy and prosperous as at present without diminution"

(iv) **Upekkhā** (mental equilibrium) : Contemplation on remaining indifferent with a feeling of equanimity to the state of condition of all beings, bearing an impartial attitude that things happen according to one's own kamma that has been committed.

Why they are called Brahmavihāras? They are called Brahmavihāras as they make the minds of the adepts pure like those of the Brahmakāyikā gods and after death they are reborn in the highest plane of existence.³ How to practice Brahmavihāra? The Brahmavihāras are practiced in the following ways :

³ Visuddhimagga, p.320

(a) **Mettā-bhāvanā** : The adept desirous of practicing Mettā-bhāvanā should take his seat in a secluded place after he has finished his meal and realize the evils of hateful mind (**dosacitta**) and merits of forbearance (**khantī**), for by Mettā-bhāvanā, hatred is removed and forbearance developed.

The first step in Mettā-bhāvanā is to select the person upon whom the adept is to cast a friendly eye, but at the same time keeping his mind free from attachment (**rāga**) and such other feelings. After pointing out the various difficulties in selecting the person, it is suggested that Mettā-bhāvanā should be first exercised in connection with one's own self, i.e. wish for one's own good and then wish for the good of his spiritual precept or (**upajjhāya**) and then of the next person close to him. In this way he is to extend his range, including ultimately his enemies, after having completely destroyed his inimical feeling (**paṭigha**), if any.

He is to extend his scope from the inmates of his own monastery (**vihāra**) to those of another and so on, to nine to ten

monasteries, and then to the inhabitants of a village, town and so forth up to a Cakkavāla.⁴

The next step for him is, to break down the line of demarcation (**sīmā-sambheda**) between any two persons. i.e. his feeling of love towards himself, his friends, his enemies or neutrals should be absolutely without any distinction. As for instance, if a man wants to kill his enemy, he must not say that the life of the enemy be spared and that of the man be taken instead; it will not be then **sīmā-asambheda**. To him there should be no distinction between a man and his enemy, and it is this state of mind that Mettā-bhāvanā is expected to produce.

As soon as **Sīmā-asambheda** is developed he has the necessary nimitta, upacāra and appanā and he soon acquired the four Jhānas.⁵

(b) **Karuṇā-bhāvanā** (practice of compassion) : Here also the adept is to choose a suitable object of compassion, e.g. an indigent person begging for alms or a criminal when being taken

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Visuddhimagga, p , 307

to the place of execution and so forth. Gradually, he is to extend his range for compassion, including ultimately his enemies, after removing hatred (**paṭigha**) , if any. Like Mettā-bhāvanā, he is to practice **sīmā-asambheda** and develop nimitta, upacāra, appanā and the Jhānas,

(c) **Muditā-bhāvanā** (practice of appreciating other's success, other's good, other's happiness). Here the adept is to have a feeling of joy at another's happiness . The best way to start is with a close friend (**atipiya-sahāyako**) of the adept and then with other persons, who may be selected one after another and ultimately his enemy. The remaining process is the same as that of Mettā-bhāvanā

(d) **Upekkhā-bhāvanā** (practice of equanimity) : it is generally taken up by an adept who had perfected himself in the previous three Bhāvanās, and acquired the Jhānas. In the Jhānas, too, there are the feelings of pleasure (**Pīti**) and detachment (**virāga**), which being akin to fondness (**anunaya**) and hatred (**paṭigha**) have to be eschewed in Upekkhā-bhāvanā. In practising Upekkhā-bhāvanā it is suggested that the person to be selected for the exercise of the feeling of equanimity should be a

neutral man and then a friend, and then an enemy. Like **Mettā-bhāvanā**, in Upekkhā too, the **sīmā-sambheda** is to be observed, developing ultimately the Jhānas.⁶

The four Brahmavihāra-bhāvanās have been preached by the Buddha along with other **Kammaṭṭhānas** (subjects of meditation) for the development of the Mind-culture and acquiring Jhānas (Absorption) leading to the realization of liberality i.e. Nibbāna. As a result the four Brahmavihāras are connected with **cetovimutti** (freedom of mind) to real **appamāna-cetovimutti** (i.e- freedom of mind through infinitude) e.g. **Mettā-cetovimutti**, **Karuṇā-cetovimutti**, **Muditā-cetovimutti** and **Upekkhā - cetovimutti**.⁷

Introduction : I (b) Their literal meanings and implications :

The word 'Brahmavihāra' has been variously translated and interpreted by different scholars as follows :

⁶ Nalinaksha Dutt, Early Monastic Buddhism, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 174 - 176

⁷ Vide, Dīghanikāya, III, 248, Majjhimanikāya, I, 297 - 298; III, 145; Saṃyuttanikāya, Iv,296

(i) T.W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede : "Sublime or divine state of mind" (P.E.D.494).

(ii) Childers : " Excellent and perfect state" (Dictionary,95)

(iii) F. Rhys Davids : "Sublime Occupations"

("Psychology",103).

(iv) H.C Warren : " Sublime states" ("Buddhism", 291).

(v) Lord Chalmers : "Excellent states" (Majjhima Trans. II, 40)

(vi) T.W.Rhys Davids:" The highest condition"

('Buddhism', 148).

(vii) M.Williams : "Pious conduct, perfect state" (Skt.

Dicy.,740).

(viii) Nārada Mahā Thera : 'Modes of sublime conduct,

sublime states or divine abodes' (The Buddha and His

Teaching, 364)

(ix) Nyānatiloka : "Sublime or Divine Abodes, boundless

states" (Buddhist Dictionary, 37.

The term does not imply any reference to the neuter Brahman of the Upanishads or the masculine Brahma, the deva of Hinduism. The word Brahma, derived from $\sqrt{\text{brh}}$ (meaning to increase) here means "excellent, perfect", as in other words like Brahma-Jāla (the perfect net), Brahma-vāda (most excellent speech), etc. Har Dayal suggests the interpretation as "Perfect or Excellent States".⁸

The four Brahmavihāras are also known as appamaññāyo (Skt.apramāṇāni) meaning "infinitudes", "infinite feelings", "measureless meditations".

Har Dayal is of opinion that the Brahma-vihāras seem to have been borrowed by the Buddhists from another school of philosophers. In support of his statement he refers to the Makhādeva - sutta of the Majjhimanikāya (Majjhima, II, 82), where it is hinted that the Brahma-vihāras did not constitute Buddha's original contribution to Indian religious thought.⁹

Mrs. Rhys Davids is of the opinion that the Brahma-vihāras were taught by an 'important preacher', whom she calls

⁸ Har Dayal , The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist sanskrit Literature, P.226

⁹ Har Dayal, op. cit, p.226

"the unknown co-founder of Buddhism".¹⁰ The Brahmavihāras are also found in the same order in the Yoga-sūtras.¹¹ The first three are also mentioned in Vyāsa's commentary on Yoga-sūtras¹². This shows that the Brahmavihāras belonged to the common tradition of the Indian religious world.¹³

The growth of this fourfold formula of Brahmavihāras are found in the Buddhist Sanskrit literature, sometimes in a group of four, sometimes in a group of three and sometimes singly. In many passages, only Mettā (maitrī) is mentioned. At other places, only mettā and Karuṇā and muditā mentioned together . But is more puzzling to find only Mettā, karuṇā and muditā mentioned in several passages (cf. Mahavastu, II, 362). Vyāsa, in his commentary on the Yoga-sūtra (III.23), refuses to recognize Upekkhā as a Bhāvanā (practice for meditation) . It differs also in its aim and spirit from the other three meditations.

¹⁰ Gotama the Man (London, 1928), 180

¹¹ I. 33, 38

¹² III, 23, 148.

¹³ Har Dayal, Op. Cit. p. 226

In course of time, these social virtues i.e. Brahmavihāras were appreciated in an increasing degree. The Mahayanist writers even reckon mahā-karuṇā among a perfect Buddha's attributes. It is considered as important as the balas (powers), vesārajjas (self-confidence) and the āvenika-dhammas (exceptional dhammas). The Mahāvastu Avadāna exalts the Brahma-vihāras to such an extent that it promises Nirvāṇa and the summum bonum to the person who practises them. This was a daring innovation, as the old Pāli writers regarded them only as the means of securing rebirth in the heaven of Brahma.¹⁴

All the Brahma-vihāras were thus emphasized and inculcated with greater zeal, and karuṇā was chosen as the most important among them.

**Introduction : I (c) : Their utility in tending to elevate
man into superman**

The Brahmavihāras have got two aspects in elevating man into superman - one is (a) conventional and the other is (b) spiritual.

¹⁴ Mahāvastu, III, 421.

(a) Conventionally the four Brahmavihāras consist in the cultivation of four feelings according to a certain method , viz. **Mettā** (loving-kindness), **karuṇā** (compassion) **Muditā** (sympathetic joy) and **Upekkhā** (equanimity).

Ven'ble Nārada Mahāthera has very nicely and accurately analyzed the nature and characteristics of human beings. He says : "Latent in him are both saintly characteristics and criminal tendencies.... How they originated we know not. We only know that they are dormant in man in varying degrees." A man does not know how much vices he has accumulated throughout his innumerable births which are lying dormant in him. At the same time he does not know how much virtues he has accumulated through many births which are also lying dormant in him. So, a man who wishes to sublimate himself and serve humanity both by example and by precept, has to endeavour his best to remove the latent vices and to cultivate the dormant virtues.

It is strange that the vices latent in man seem to be almost natural and spontaneous. It is equally strange that every vice possesses its opposite sterling virtue, which does not however appear to be so normal and automatic, though still within the range of all.

(i) One powerful destructive vice in man is anger (**dosa**). The sweet virtue that subdues this evil force and sublimes man is **Mettā** (loving-kindness).

(ii) Another forceful vice is cruelty that is responsible for many horrors and atrocities prevalent in the world. The sweet virtues that subdues this evil force and sublimes man is **Karuṇā** (compassion).

(iii) Jealousy (**issā**) is another vice that poisons one's system and leads to unhealthy rivalries and dangerous competitions. The most effective remedy for this poisonous drug is **Muditā** (sympathetic or appreciative joy). i.e. to be happy at other's good and welfare and appreciate their happiness.

(iv) There are two other universal characteristics that upset the mental equilibrium of man. They are attachment to the pleasurable and aversion to the non-pleasurable. These two opposite forces can be eliminated by developing **Upekkhā** (equanimity).

The four Brahmavihāras or sweet and sterling virtues tend to elevate man. They make one divine in this life itself . They can transform man into a superman. If all try to cultivate them, irrespective of creed, color, race or sex, the earth can be

transformed into a paradise where all can live in perfect peace and harmony as ideal citizens of one world.

(b) Spiritually the four Brahmavihāras are a series of virtues and the Buddhist meditational practices designed to cultivate those virtues.

Cultivation of the Brahmavihāras has the power to cause the practitioner to be reborn in the realm of the 'Brahma' (Brahmaloka).

Here the meditator is instructed to radiate out to all beings in all directions the mental states of :

- (i) Loving - kindness or benevolence (**Mettā**).
- (ii) Compassion (**Karuṇā**).
- (iii) sympathetic joy (**Muditā**) and
- (iv) equanimity (**Upekkhā**).

These virtues are also highly regarded by Buddhists as powerful antidotes to these negative mental states, like avarice, anger, pride and so on.

The Brahma-vihāra practices are explained in detail in the Visuddhimagga written in the 5th century A.D. by the great Pāli scholar and commentator **Buddhaghosa**.¹⁵

The Brahma-vihāra in Early Buddhism :

In the Subha-sutta of the Majjhimanikāya¹⁶ Buddha is asked the way to communion with Brahma. Buddha replies that he personally knows the world of Brahma and the way to it, and explains the meditative methods for reaching it by using an analogy of the resonance of the conch-shell:

Buddha says : a Bhikkhu suffuses the world in the four directions with a mind of benevolence Mettā, above and below, and all around the whole world from all sides, completely, with a benevolent, all-embracing, great, boundless, peaceful and friendly mind just as a powerful conch-blower makes himself heard with no great effort, in all four cardinal directions, in like manner there is no limit to the unfolding of this cetovimutti through benevolence (**Mettā**). This is a way to communion with Brahma.

¹⁵ Visuddhimagga, chapter IX

¹⁶ Sutta No. 99

The Buddha then says that in the similar way the Bhikkhu must follow this process up with an equal suffusion of the entire world with mental projections of compassion(**Karuṇā**), sympathetic joy (**Muditā**) and equanimity (**Upekkhā**) regarding all beings with an eye of equality. These are the ways to communion with Brahma.

Reference is also made to the further path leading to the Brahma-world. In the Tevijja Sutta of the Dīghanikāya Sutta No.13 it is said that the path to Brahma-world is through the development of Jhānas pertaining to the five material spheres. The Jhānas are achieved and developed through the practice of the four Brahmavihāras are the first Jhāna, second Jhāna, Third Jhāna and the fourth Jhāna. Through the achievement of these Jhānas, different Brahma-worlds can be reached. It is said that the attainment of the First Jhāna leads to the Brahma-worlds called Brahma-pārisajja and Brahma-purohita. The attainment of the second Jhāna leads to the Brahma-worlds called Parittābha, Appamāṇābha and Ābhassara.

The attainment of the Third Jhāna leads to the Brahma-worlds called Parittasubha, Appamānasubha and Subhakiṇṇa.

The attainment of the Fourth Jhāna leads to Vehapphala and Asaññasatta-Brahma-lokas. The Anāgāmins lead to Avihā, Ātappa, Sudassi and Akaniṭṭha-Brahma-loka. This shows that Buddhism too has a parallel concept of the attainment of companionship with Brahma. But this, however, does not mean that Buddhism, like Brahmanism, admits the possibility of eternal companionship with Brahma.

What is meant by these Jhānic attainments is the experiencing of a very high level of mental development through the Jhānic process.

Companionship with Brahman or taking birth in the Brahma-worlds, as mentioned above, is not the ultimate goal of Buddhism.

Brahma-sahavyatā (union with Brahma) -vs- Nibbāna (ultimate goal of Buddhism) :

According to Buddhism, mere cultivation of the brahma-vihāras will lead to rebirth in the world of Brahma, and will not cause the permanent abandonment of defilements or freedom from rebirth. For even the deities of the Brahmaloikas are subject to aging and death, and renewed birth with all its attendant

suffering.¹⁷ It is only through cultivation of Buddha's path (i.e.the Noble Eightfold Path) which induces realization of Nibbāna that one can ultimately achieve freedom from rebirth and suffering.

It is a fact that all individuals were not capable of assimilating Buddha's instructions on suffering and escape from it. The cultivation of the sublime attitudes are, no doubt, helpful, but not of the highest import. So, the individuals who have cultivated only the sublime attitudes are not worthy of saying that they have totally escaped themselves from the suffering of the repeated existences.

An example cited:

Once the **Dhammasenāpati Sāriputta** taught the brahmin **Dhanañjāni** to cultivate the sublime attitudes in order to be reborn in the world of Brahma.

Immediately following, **Dhanañjāni** cultivates the attitudes and dies, to be reborn in the world of Brahma. When the news came to Buddha, he was not happy with **Sāriputta** and asked him : "**Sāriputta**, why did you stop there when there was

¹⁷ Aṅguttara, IV, 104

something more to be done?" Sāriputta explained that he established the brahmin in the world of Brahma, because the brahmins were committed to that world.¹⁸

The example cited above shows the intention of the Buddha. Buddha's question indicates that a teacher of religious practice cannot rest content with accommodating his student's interest. The teacher has to press a student to the full extent of his capacity at any given time. Since achieving rebirth in the world of Brahma is inferior to gaining insight (**paññā**), if a student is ready for the latter, then it is the teacher's prime responsibility to transmit these teachings to him.

When individuals also who possess profound insight cultivate the sublime attitudes, they are cultivated in a proper context. Actually the sublime attitude can be cultivated before or after one cultivates insight. What is important to remember is that these attitudes are not the whole practice, or the most important practice, on the Buddhist path. They rather complement the teachings on sympathy, conduct and insight.

Buddha stated that there is a distinct difference between the cultivation of the sublime attitudes by a world ling and by a

¹⁸Majjhima, II, 195-196

knowledgeable disciple of the noble ones. When a world ling cultivates the sublime attitudes, he is reborn in the Brahma Worlds after his death, but after the expiration of his lifetime there, he is reborn either as a human being or a hellish being or a hungry ghost or an animal.¹⁹

Any "knowledgeable disciple of the noble ones" who cultivates the sublime attitudes may also be reborn in the world of Brahma after death, but continue to practice the Path there may become a Worthy One (**Arahā**) in every likelihood. When that life is finished, they are no longer reborn but gain the security of immortal **Nibbāna**.²⁰

Thus proper cultivation of the Brahma-vihāras can make a man a superman -- **A Sotāpanna**, **A Sakadāgāmi**, an **Anāgāmi** and **Arahā** (Worthy One).

¹⁹ Aṅguttara, 11 , 129.

²⁰ The "Knowledgeable disciple of the noble ones" (sutavato ariya-savakassa, Aṅguttara, II, 128-129) is identified as a Sotāpaṇṇa, the first Ariyapuggala or higher (i.e. Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi etc.)

A Sotāpaṇṇa's realization is such that he is no longer believes in a permanent personality, no longer clings to empty rites, and no longer is bothered by religious doubt (Visuddhimagga, XXII, 64). In addition, because of his realization, he has forever abandoned the propensity to certain types rebirth. He will never again be born as a hellish being, a hungry ghost or as an animal. In contrast to normal intentions , which an individual to a good or bad fate, the intention that accrue at the time of Nibbāna is realized deconditions the mind so that it becomes free of certain fates.

**Introduction : I (d) : Eleven advantages (ānisaṃsā) resulting
from the Cetovimutti of the Brahma-vihāras :**

Eleven advantages²¹ result from the development of mind (cetovimutti) of four Brahma-vihāras through any one of the mental absorptions (Jhānas). He who practises them :

- (1) sleeps in comfort (**Sukhaṃ supati**)
- (2) wakes up in comfort (**Sukhaṃ paṭivujjhati**)
- (3) dreams no evil dreams (**Na pāpakaṃ supinaṃ
passati**)
- (4) is dear to human beings (**Manussānaṃ piyo hoti**)
- (5) is dear to non -human beings (**Amanussānaṃ piyo
hoti**)
- (6) deities guard him (**Devatā rakkhanti**)
- (7) fire, weapons and poison do not affect him(**Nassa aggi
vā visam vā satthaṃ vā kamati**)

²¹ Aṅguttara, V, 342; Visuddhimagga, 258ff

- (8) his mind is easily concentrated (**Tuvaṭaṃ Cittaṃ samādhīyati**)
- (9) his face always remains serene (**Mukhavaṇṇo vipasīdati**)
- (10) he dies unconfused (**Asammulho kālam karoti**)
- (11) if he penetrates no higher stage, he reappears in the Brahma-worlds after death (**Uttari-appaṭivijjhanto Brahmaloḷkūpaḡo hoti**).