

Importance on Buddhist concept of Limits of Knowledge

R.P. Dilshan Manoj Rajapaksha

Junior Fellow, Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya

dilshanmanojrajapaksha@gmail.com

Limits is an important concept in epistemology which is a branch of philosophy. Limits in question in this context may be practical, natural, logical or even moral. Philosophers of both East and the West have been interested in the phenomenon of limits associated with human knowledge. A classic case of awareness of limits is skepticism which in its most extreme form claims that knowledge in form or manner is impossible.

Although Buddhism does not advocate any ideology of skepticism, it is clear that the teaching of the Buddha has allocated some room for the limits of knowledge. The Buddha, for instance, has referred to what 'cannot be thought (acinteyyo) and what should not be thought (na cintetabbo). The first category seems to indicate some form of inability associated with human cognitive capacity whereas the second seems to refer to what may be called a moral limit to what may be thought. Limits of thought and limits of language are intimately connected, and what is not thought may not be said and known.

This paper proposes to examine the idea of limits associated with knowledge from the light of the teachings of the Buddha. In this discussion the purpose-orientedness of knowledge in the teaching of the Buddha is taken as a key feature of the Buddhist attitude to knowledge. It is questionable whether or not Buddhism encourages its followers to be engaged in pursuit of knowledge just for its own sake. The position defended in the paper is that although Buddhism seems to accept the idea of limits associated with human epistemic capacity, it holds that human beings can gain full knowledge that which leads one to terminate one's suffering.

Key Words: limits, knowledge, Buddhism, Scepticism, capacity