

Ethical Values in Intha Traditional Thought

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Abstract

The ethical standards such as the traditional thought, foolery and daily life styles of Intha who live in Inlay Lake region, NyaungShwe Township of Northern Shan State are based on the admonishment of Buddha. The society of Intha gradually developed in peace with the admonishment of Buddha. The ethical values in traditional thought of Intha, the ethical standards, their assumption and their daily life styles can be seen in the songs which are made by heart. The stories which are hand on hand by Intha described the ethical thought of Intha. The various standards of the ethical values in Intha traditional thought of Intha society are assessed by learning the songs and stories of Intha.

Key Words: ethical values and ethical standards.

Introduction

In making the peace and development of the society, the ethical standards such as right and wrong, good and bad, good moral (thusarite in Pali) and bad moral (dusarite in Pali) and desires and sanity are very important. Those ethical standards are derived from the traditional thoughts and customs of the society. The admonishments of Buddha which play an important role since the Pyu age until now dominated the daily life of the whole society. The daily life of Intha which is involved in Myanmar society is also dominated by the admonishment of Buddha like the shadow. The admonishment of Buddha can be learned from the monk and the civics which are written by the educated people. Those admonishment learned dominate the daily life of Intha and become the traditions and customs. It can make the right choice which is right and which is wrong, met in daily life. It is a great aid in teaching children to make the right choice by the stories of trays seller and soybeans seller. The songs "The examples of Ma Gyi" which is sung mutually by the women and men wig the things which are beautiful outside but not inside (beautiful appearance but full of bad mind). And then, the story of the sons of King, Duke and architect understand if the one who makes the others in danger will meet the danger soon. So, the ethical values of Intha society are very high in standard. In this paper, the ethical values in Intha traditional thought of Intha from the dimension of ethic and philosophy.

Ethical Values

Ethics is the study or discipline which concerns itself with judgments of approval and disapproval, judgments as to the right or wrong, good or bad, virtue or vice, desirability or wisdom of actions, dispositions, ends, objects, or states of affairs.

According to Rokeach, moral values are most closely related to interpersonal communication and include such modes of conduct as being cheerful, helpful, loving and honest with others. Ethical value lies in things and ends that have intrinsic value and it means only so far as they are indispensable to the

attainment of that end or ends. Ethics in a wider sense examines the basis and foundation of all value judgments. There are different values. Some philosophers of valuation prefer to name this broad study of values as ethics. Some of these philosophers even do not recognize any qualitative difference between moral and non-moral, while others recognize a qualitative difference between the moral and non-moral still recognize the necessity of a wider study of the moral and non-moral values and their relations. Ethical judgments are relevant to the question of what constitute evidence for a moral judgment. As we believe the act we do for the well-being and the happiness of others without expecting self-benefit is right, the act which is done for the well-being and happiness of the others at the same time is correct and clear reason that the act was right.

Moral values thus are acknowledged to possess intrinsic value. It is based on an attitude of the whole personality and is judged to be accorded as it fulfills the highest purpose of human life. Moral value belongs to a system of intrinsically valuable things rather than to a single intrinsically valuable thing. The pursuit of the moral ideal which is an organic whole of intrinsically valuable parts that possesses is the highest moral value.

The ancient Greeks conceived ethics to be concerned with good, aesthetics to be concerned with beauty and logic with truth. According to the greatest of the Sophists, "Man is the measure of all things; he decides for himself what is right and what is wrong, and there is no other standard". Whatever the case maybe, what is evident is that morality which guides and controls human behaviour is necessary if human society is to survive and thrive. Whether this was decided upon, when human beings first decided to live in communities is now lost in the mists of human history. But what is agreed upon generally is that morality, moral values and questions of good and bad, right and wrong belongs to the human world. Notions of what is good or bad, right or wrong may differ in some cases but there must be certain codes of conduct for man-in-society which is undeniable. Thus every human community as society has prescribed rules of

moral behaviour and this is also the case with Intha society.

Moral Teachings in Intha Traditional Thought

Inthas, who have been living in Inle region since time immemorial to present, are indigenous people of Myanmar. They are found to lead a life in conformity with Myanmar's cultural traditions, which tells the younger generations how to obey the gentle admonitions or written homilies as guidelines in their way of living. They are many admonitions in verses in Myanmar as (Hsong-Ma-za). A monk them are those by classical monks Venerable Shin Malta Silavamsa, Venerable Maha Ratthasara and Venerable Taring Phil La Sayadaw. These Venerable monks are all Buddhist scholars and their exhortations are all based on Buddhist ethical principles. As stated earlier, the Intha are truly devout Buddhists, so the moral teachings of Buddha have greatly influenced Intha society. They may worship spirits for their daily livelihood, but at heart they are true Buddhists who abide by the Buddha's moral teachings handed down by these monk scholars. So Inthas get their moral views from others. There are popular Hsone-Ma-za or admonitions known as Thar-Shwe-Ou (Son as lovely as Golden Egg), Thar-Shwe 'Young Hsone-Ma-Za, Singalawvada Hsone-Ma-Za, Gihi Vinaya Hsone-Ma-Za, Kyoukkyi Kolone Hsone-Ma-Za, Loka Niti, etc. Inthas accept these collections of admonitions as a guide to good conduct. These Hsone-Ma-za which can be rendered into English version as letters of Admonitions, are usually presented in verses form with simple rhymes at the end of each line to be memorized easily. A few samples are given below:

1. In the world, respect parents and teachers on the same level as the three precious gems, which are the Buddha, Dhama, His Teachings and the Sangha. Inthas believe this whole-heartedly. But they also believe that there must be mutual respect, whether young or old.
2. Every opportunity must be taken to acquire knowledge and wisdom.
3. All written homily or good advice given orally must be borne in the mind. Good advice must not be ignored.
4. Knowledge and Wisdom can be acquired by those who have steadfast diligence.
5. The Law of Kamma is universal and depending on what one has done, you may suffer or benefit from your actions.
6. Gratitude is a virtue and one must always repay a debt of gratitude.
7. One must always be gentle and polite in both manner and speech.
8. One must rein in your anger, greed and conceit.
9. Abstain from drinking intoxicants, which are harmful to your health and reputation.
10. You should be kind and considerate to all living beings.

11. One must not steal.

12. One must not indulge in sexual misconduct.

The tendency of human is always to seek the benefit of self. But as he is part of human society, one must be good to others so that others will be kind to you in turn. This is the essence of the law of Kamma which can be understood in terms of the Law of Reciprocity.

The Intha Conception of Right and Wrong

The Intha conception of right and wrong is reflected in their customs and traditions. Their ethical values of right and wrong, good and bad are found in the folk tales, poems, proverbs and religious books of Inthas, and these moral lessons are passed on from generation to generation.

The following is a folk tale with a good parable which is preserved among the Inthas. The tale runs like this. There were two men who earned their livings by selling two different kinds of goods. One sold Zagaw (a shallow round bamboo tray) and the other, Pepoke, (round flattened piece of soya-bean). They travelled boat carrying the goods from village to village. The Zagaw seller was honest and patient, whereas the Pepoke seller was dishonest, impatient and greedy. One day, on their daily rounds at dusk they came into a village where they had no acquaintances. So they had to put up at a village monastery with the permission of the presiding monk. The monastery was a big clean building with a pagoda in its compound. At the entrance of the compound stood two grand elephant statues made of bricks and mortar. They were proportionate in shape and were as high as the height of a real elephant's waist. One of the statues was donated by the monk's mother and the other by the villagers.

During the first night stop the Zagaw seller, waking up at midnight, and happening to look towards the Pagoda, saw the statue disappear. The statue that vanished was the one donated by the monk's mother. But in the morning it was back in its original place! The man thought it was strange and quite unusual. So during the second night, while the Pepoke seller was sleeping, he went out and sat on the statue, wrapping himself up in a blanket. While sitting there, he felt the elephant statue began to move; it slowly moved up towards the sky. After about ten minutes, it descended slowly. When it landed on the ground, the Zagaw seller saw a vast Field of gems and jewels. He quickly got off the statue and collected the precious stones in his blanket. Then he took his seat again on the statues back. A moment later the statue went up skywards. After about ten minutes it descended and landed near the pagoda. Being honest and kind-hearted Zagaw seller woke up the Pepoke seller and equally shared half of the precious stones with him.

During the third night the Pepoke seller told Zagaw seller that he wanted to go and sit on the elephant statue together with Zagaw seller. So, the two sat on the statue, each covering himself in a blanket. 'File statue, as usual, went up to the sky

slowly. About ten minutes later, it landed in the Field of precious stones. The two gathered the precious stones in their blankets. Zagaw seller took just enough gems for him to carry and took his seat on the statue. The greedy Pepoke seller tried to get the best and as many as he could have wandered too far from the statue. When he looked back at the statue, he saw it had already begun to go up. He then found himself in a place where ferocious giants lived. There he was killed by the man-eating giants. It was the last time the elephant statue went up to the sky. When the Zagaw seller got back to the monastery he told the monk all that had happened, and he donated half of his precious stones to the monk. And with the other remaining half he lived happily ever after.

In ethics the term "absolute" is applied to those moral concepts the truth and value of which remain unchanged or constant in all circumstances, regardless of time and place. In this sense an absolute concept is one which is accepted as the truth and remains so forever. These moral absolutes right and wrong remain unchanged. For example, lying, cheating, stealing, etc.

The folk tale mentioned above has something to do with moral absolutes. Greed which afflicted the Pepoke seller is an absolute wrong, whereas the honesty of the Zagaw seller is an absolute right. Inthas teach their children moral lessons by telling such arables or folktales.

The Intha Conception of Good and Bad

The Intha customs and traditions also throw light on their conception of good and bad and what values are real or superficial. According to the Intha view of morality, a good action must be motivated by good intent and also yield good results. All individuals must try to live a useful life by his or her intellect and effort. Only then can one become a good man or a good woman.

Ancient Intha's ethics places a great emphasis on 'duty'. All men including monks have social responsibilities. These responsibilities are found in the palm leaf manuscripts of the "Singalavada Sutra" words of admonition at Thalaytaung Monastery in Inle. These manuscripts contain words of admonition on children's duties to their parents, parents' duties to their children and duties that should be done by each towards the other, between teachers and pupils, between husbands and wives, among friends, among Buddhist monks and their disciples and between servants and their masters. Only when these social obligations are fulfilled will there be social harmony.

The Intha ethical views maintain that only morally good actions can produce morally good results. The general welfare for the whole of human society is something that must be done not by a man or a woman alone but by the entire society, each carrying out his or her duty. The Intha's ethical conception of being morally good is reflected in their traditional songs or folk-rhymes known as Teik-tays. (တိုက်တေး)

Teik-tays are the folk-poems sung by the teenagers boys and lasses during their courtships to win the affection of one's lover using polite and cleverly rhymed words, volleyed from both sides in a verbal tug of war.

မကြီးတို့ဥပမာ
 "you young miss, to liken
 သဖန်းလိုအပြင်ရဲ့
 you with fig, a fruit
 အထဲကပိုးပါ
 which has a rosy
 သဖန်းလိုပုံပမာ
 and pretty red rind smooth and bright
 မြင်တာနဲ့ပေါ်ချော
 but hidden inside
 အထဲမှာဝင်လိုကြည့်
 are plenty of worms."
 ပိုးရှိသဘော"

The rebuttal says:
 မကြီးတို့ဥပမာ
 "We, misses should be
 ငှက်ပျောလိုခွံဝါမျိုး
 likened to the ripe yellows banana
 ပိုးမရှိပါ
 with its golden yellow peel
 ငှက်ပျောတို့ပုံပမာ
 Without worms and pulp as smooth as silk
 ခွံဝါလိုကံပါဘိ။
 If one has insight
 အထဲမှာဝင်လိုကြည့်ပိုးပါမရှိ

These rhymes at first glance appear superficial and little more than insults thrown at one another, but a closer study will show that there is a deeper meaning. One must search for the hidden meaning.

The group of boys accuses the young girls of not really being what they appear to be - that they appear to be a rosy and juicy fig outside but are actually worm ridden inside. The girls retort that they are as smooth and golden as a banana both inside and outside.

This shows the way of thinking that a distinction must be made between appearance and reality especially when judging a person, beauty maybe only skin deep and may camouflage an evil heart or mind.

The reply of the girls on the other hand seem to imply that only persons of experience and wisdom can truly know and appreciate which is really good as good. The first moral lesson is that one must be able to distinguish appearance and reality and the second is that one should not jump to wrong conclusions.

Thus, Inthas judge a man not by the looks but by his or her mentality which means what moral is intrinsic.

The Intha in passing moral judgment also maintain that the intent behind an action must also be taken into account. The following tale seems to bear this out.

Once there were three young men. They were studying at a university under a professor. They belonged to families of different status. One was the son of a king, the other was the son of the palace minister and the third was the son of an architect. When they had completed their education, they took leave of the professor and went home. The king's son

ascended the throne on his father's demise. Then he appointed his two friends successors to their respective fathers positions as palace minister and master architect.

The architect had a very beautiful wife with a refined and pleasing manner of speaking. The palace minister covertly felt in love with her. He wanted her to be his wife. So, he planned to kill the architect. He went to the king and said, "Your majesty, you should seek the help of spirit mediums to know where your king father's abode is after his death. The king ordered a medium session under the supervision of the palace minister. The mediums, having been bribed by the minister, said: "The king father is now in the Realm of Devas. But he is in need of a mansion to live in. The king must send an architect up there to build it". So the king told the architect to go to the Realm and build the mansion.

The architect said to the king, "Your majesty, it will take about a year to have such a celestial mansion to completely build. Kindly grant me about a week to make necessary preparations here on earth before I go up there" The king granted his wish.

So the architect and his wife dug a tunnel between his house and a vacant plot of land near it. The entrance to the tunnel was then closed with a stone slab. He said to the king, "Your majesty, the place of my departure for the Realm is a vacant plot of land near my house. A big fire will be kindled there and I will jump into it to start my journey upwards. There will be scented wood burning and music will be playing to celebrate my departure. As the smoke goes up, I will go up together with it." The king decided to watch the event. All the spectators including the king and his ministers were to watch the event from a distance of about 30 yards. The fire was to be made about a foot and a half from the entrance to the tunnel. When all the spectators were gathered, the wife of the architect lighted a fire, and sweet music began to play. The architect came walking with poise and composure in front of the spectators, bowed his head in respect to the king and jumped into the big fire. In fact he pretended to do so. He had simply slipped away into the tunnel but no one saw him doing so because of the big flames. Once inside, he put the stone slab back in its place and managed to get inside his house through the tunnel. His wife was seen shaking up the fire and the people thought she was doing so to make the flames bigger. In fact she was doing so to hide the sight of her husband entering the tunnel. The man spent a whole year in the secret room of his house.

The palace minister was very happy. He said to the king, "The architect has gone up to the Realm on horseback amidst sweet-smelling smokes". But a year later the architect, with a smile on his face, came back and presented himself to the king. He brought with him a plate of gold on which was inscribed: "The mansion has been completely built, but the king's father needs a palace minister to take care of it. Send someone up". The king believed these words to be his father's summons for the palace minister to go to the Realm as a caretaker of the mansion. He said, "You go

up there in the same way as the architect did. You may use the horse if you like or just walk."

The palace minister had-but to obey the king's order. On the seventh day after that, he arranged all the things necessary in just the same way as the architect had and jumped into the fire. When the fire subsided, all that remained of the palace minister were his charred bones. A year later the architect had come back to the palace, but the palace minister never did.

Inthas believe that this folktale teaches them a moral lesson: One who plans to do harm to others, only harms himself. This traditional belief has been passed on from generation to generation up to the present day. The ethical principle they learned that it is not to harm others, and that people of ill - will suffer the consequences.

According to the Inthas' conception of morality, morally good deeds turn out morally good results to them. A good man is one who performs one's duties as a human being to the best of his intellectual and physical abilities.

In their moral views the Inthas hold that the value of an action must be determined not by the result it produces but by the intent that motivates the action. In other words, goodness has an intrinsic value, goodness or badness in man should be judged by the motive behind the action. In this respect it can be compared to the view of Kant which holds that "the only thing unconditionally good is good will." The Intha also believe that good will is an important factor that determines whether an action is moral or not.

This moral view though similar to what is known as formalism in the West in some respects, it is nevertheless not identical. Formalism has good intent as the most important determining factor in moral evaluation; it does not take into account any moral result, good or bad. But to the Intha, good intent is just one of the factors of good morality.

Other equally important fundamental factors must be taken into consideration in judging whether an action is good or bad. For instance, in some cases, it is necessary to take into account both the intent and the result. Inthas believe that goodness or evil has an eternal absolute value, independent of other considerations.

For example in the folktale where king's minister coveted his friend, the architect's wife gives the reader a moral message that integrity is the best principle and that wickedness does not pay. This folktale of the palace minister seems also to show that man is by greedy, ignorant, selfish, conceited, and wicked nature. This is how Inthas see man as he is by nature. This, however, does not necessarily mean that their view of human nature is totally pessimistic for they believe that the evil nature of man can be corrected or changed to become good by man's own effort. In fact, they believe, man can become even a Buddha, the Enlightened One, if they exert sufficient effort. So their views of human nature, though seeming to be pessimistic, have elements of optimism.

Inthas, the lake dwellers of Inle are regarded as the most intelligent of all living beings. They believe that

they, as individuals or as members of human society, can live a life conforming to moral standards by thinking in terms of harmonious relationship with their social environment. This harmonious relationship depends on a balanced practice of doing benefit for self and that of others as well.

Conclusion

In making the conclusion of Ethical Values in Intha Traditional Thought, firstly, it is assessed the ethival standards of Intha society from the dimension of philosophy. One can know the ethical standards and ethical values in Intha traditional thought that are very high in standard by learning the songs, stories and episodes of Intha society which are made by heart.

We have found that Inthas are influenced by the thoughts found in Buddhist culture and myths which are found in most of Myanmar regions. There are many examples to cite in different sectors like education and literature. One of the very oldest philosophical problems is that of the highest good. As applied to life and conduct, it becomes the problem of the Good life. It is closely related to the Theory of Value. Are values objective or subjective? Do they exist beyond the sphere of human actions? Do we desire things because they are valuable or because we desire them?

Whatever brings pleasure is good and whatever brings pain is bad. The second element is principles of social ethics. Each man’s action ought to promote the greatest happiness to the greatest numbers of person. The Intha do not have such explicit philosophical or ethical views but they do have definite standards of good and bad, right or wrong, what ought to be and what ought not to be, and this has been shown as reflected in their customs and traditions; in their social relations and in their myths and folktales.

The folk tale mentioned in the Intha conception of right and wrong has something to do with moral absolute. Greed which afflicted to Pepoke seller is an absolute wrong, whereas honesty of the Zagaw seller is an absolute right. They show how morally wrong is the Pepoke seller, who was killed by the ferocious giant for his greed. The folk tales of Zagaw seller and Pepoke seller show the principle of Inthas who love the truth and run away from the bad mind. The story about the sons of King, Duke and architect show the assumption of Intha who know that it is the bad thing to make the one in danger and it is not a good habit.

According to the Inthas, conception of morality, morally good deeds turn out morally good results. This view is obviously derived from the law of Kamma of Buddhism.

Another point of interest lies in the Intha love of poetry and song. All rural folks have their rhymes and folk songs throughout the world. In fact Emst Cassirer

pointed out that this custom may have begun in connection with propitiation of the various special gods of agriculture. That is why in the language of certain primitive tribes the same word was used for ‘dance’ and ‘song’, for dancing (and singing) to propitiate these special gods was an integral part of work in ancient times. Wherever its origin may be the Intha also have their own special folk music and song-songs sung by young women while transplanting paddy as pounding rice. Later this custom evolved into poem recitation in front of an audience. It became part of their performing arts. This poem recitation is known as Inle Teik-tays and is more or less a recounting of their ways of living and thinking. “The examples of Ma GI” are songs that show that Intha society doesn’t want the very thin layer of good but full of bad inside. There are too many songs and stories like those in Intha society. Those songs and stories come from the admonishments of Buddha which are learned by Intha daily. So, it can be assessed that the ethical standards of Intha society will be always very high.

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တင်မြိုင်၊ မောင်(အောက်တိုဘာ၊၁၉၇၀) “အင်းလေးတိုက်တေးများ”၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ လင်းကြက်စာအုပ်တိုက်။

တင်ဇ (ရမ်းပြည်)၊ (ဖေဖော်ဝါရီ၊၁၉၆၃) “အင်းလေးဒေသဝေါဟာ”၊ ပြည်ထောင်စု ယဉ်ကျေးမှုစာစောင်၊ တွဲ-၃၊ မှတ်-၉၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ စာပေဗိမာန် ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

မန်းတင်(မတ်၊၁၉၆၁) “အင်းလေးတေးတိုက်ပွဲ”၊ ငွေတာရီမဂ္ဂဇင်း၊ မှတ်-၁၅၆၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ မြဝတီ ပုံနှိပ်တိုက် ။

မြင့်မောင်၊ ဒါရိုက်တာ၊ (၁၉၈၄) “အင်းလေး”၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ စာပေဗိမာန် ပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

ဦးလှ၊ လူထု၊ (နိုဝင်ဘာ၊ ၁၉၆၆) “အင်းလေးပုံပြင်များ (၀၀၀မတွဲ)”၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ကြီးပွားရေးပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

ဦးလှ၊ လူထု၊ (၁၉၆၉) “အင်းလေးပုံပြင်များ (ဒုတိယတွဲ)”၊ ရန်ကုန်၊ ကြီးပွားရေးပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။

(၁၉၆၇-၆၈) “အင်းသားလူမျိုးများအကြောင်း”၊ သျှမ်းယဉ်ကျေးမှုစာစောင်၊ တွဲ-၇၊ မှတ်-၇၊ တောင်ကြီး၊ တောင်ကြီးပုံနှိပ်တိုက်။