

Pleasure Principle: Comparative Study of Freudian and Buddhist Psychology

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Introduction

Sigmund Freud, the founder of Psychoanalysis, introduced numerous theories and concepts on the nature and the process of human mind, analyzing the clinical data of his patients over the years. In his great works, he identified the mind in three levels; consciousness, unconsciousness and pre-consciousness. Later, he moderated his theory of personality under three structures; Id, Ego and Super Ego. The concept of “Pleasure Principle” was a term used by Freud in explaining the nature of Id, the unconscious level of the mind. The Id is totally driven by the Pleasure Principle, according to the Freud.

Prof. Padmasiri De Silva has made comprehensive analysis of Freud’s theories and Buddhist Philosophy in his *Buddhist and Freudian Psychology* and he had made an effort to distinguish the concept of Pleasure Principle in Freudian psychology and Buddhist philosophy (1973: 76-85). Recently, he stated that he has been influenced by the Freudian model of the unconscious in looking at the unconscious in Buddhism; however he had now suggested to change that idea (2014: 34-35). In this study, it is expected to give more deep illustrations on pleasure principle which can be identified in Buddhist philosophy, and make comparative analysis with Freudian psychology.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are to explore the Pleasure Principle analyzed in Buddhist Psychology and to compare it with Freudian Psychoanalytic concepts.

Research Methodology

This is a library-based theoretical study conducted under qualitative research method. *Teravāda* canonical texts, Freud’s psychoanalytic theoretical sources, academic writings and e-sources were used for data collection. Findings were discussed and analyzed, comparing two theoretical approaches; Buddhist and Freudian.

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Research Question

How is the concept of Pleasure Principle analyzed in Buddhist teaching?

Is it different from Freudian Psychology?

Findings & Research Discussion

According to Freud, “the Id is made up of innate biological instincts and urges. It is self-serving, irrational, impulsive and totally unconscious. The Id operates on the Pleasure Principle which seeks to freely express pleasure seeking urges of all kinds” (Coon, 2005: 388). Libido is the psychic energy that flows the life instinct (Eros) and death instinct (Thanatos) of the Id. Also, that term is used to indicate the presence of sexual longing on man, and broadly to describe pleasure striving force/ Pleasure Principle; procuring pleasure and avoiding pain (De Silva, 1992: 84).

Studying the teachings of the Buddha, it is identified that the human life, as well as whole the *sansāric* life is driven by the “*tanhā*”, very much similar to the concept of Pleasure Principle of Freud. As described in the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* of Bhadanta Anuruddhācariya, the primary drive of beings (*satta*) in the ‘Consciousness pertaining to the Sensuous-Sphere (*Kāmāvacaram*)’, out of four consciousness spheres, is sensual pleasure and so that they are directed to fulfil their Pleasure Principle. “*Kāma* is either subjective sensual craving or sensuous objects such as forms, sound, odour, taste, and contact” (Narada, 1987: 25). The general trend of beings living in the eleven types of sentient existence (*kāma loka*), namely, the four states of misery (*Apāya*), human realm (*Manussa loka*) and the six celestial realms (*Sagga*), is to satisfy their Pleasure Principle.

Kāmabhava, *Tanhā*, *Kāmacchanda*, *Kāmarāga*, *Kāmāsawa*, *Rāgānusaya*, *Loba*, *Rāga* are some of the key words describe the nature of Pleasure Principle in Buddhism. Beings that are directed for satisfying their sensual desires are in the *kāmabhava*. The major psychological factor that beings lead for satisfying sensual pleasure is called *tanhā* and it is a thirst (*pipāsā*) for all in the *kāmabhava*. *Kāmacchanda* (sensual desire) and four other factors called *nivaraṇa* (hindrances) are common and major defilements in beings on the *kāmāvacara* sphere/ *kāmabhava*. *Kāmarāga* is a term used for lust, and *rāga* is in the same meaning. *Rāgānusaya* shows a part of

latent mind and the seven latent factors including *rāgānusaya* influence the conscious actions (physical, verbal and mental) of beings.

Tanhā operates in three different ways; self-gratification (*kāma tanhā*), self-preservation (*bhawa tanhā*) and annihilation/ avoidance desire (*vibhawa tanhā*) (Samyukta nikaya 5-2, Dhammacakkapawattana sutta) – Also used as thirst for sense pleasure, existence and becoming, non-existence (Rahula, 1978: 29). For self-gratification, beings seek subjective pleasure (*kilesa kāma*) and objective pleasure (*watthu kāma*). For self-preservation, specially, humans expect four conditions; wealth (*lābo*), fame (*yaso*), long life (*diḥhamāyum*) and better next life (*sugatim saggam*) (Anguttara nikaya, pattakamma sutta). Annihilation/ avoidance desire is connected with *dosa* or *paṭigha* (hatred) and it would harm against the self (*attantapa*) or others (*parantapa*).

According to the Freud's theories, the Pleasure Principle totally processes with the unconscious level of the mind whereas the Pleasure Principle depicted in Buddhism is not such an unconscious force, and operates in the subliminal level of the mind. Even though, Prof. Padamasiri De Silva earlier suggested the *anusaya* as unconscious mental factors similar to Freud's Id concept (1973), later he replaced it with the term 'subliminal'. Further, he sees them as more like 'sleeping or dormant passion' (2014: 34-35). However, they (*rāgānusaya* etc.) are identified as actively influencing on conscious level actions, lying in an inner or subliminal level of the mind. Further, the thrust for pleasure is a general mental condition of all beings living in the eleven Sensuous-Spheres.

Many similarities also can be seen between two approaches. According to Freud, the entire physical activity is regulated by the Pleasure including procuring pleasure and avoiding pain and it is a fundamental purpose apparent in human mind (De Silva, 1992: 84). It is very much similar to the concept of *tanhā* (*kāma tanhā*, *bhawa tanhā* and *vibhawa tanhā*) and human nature of *sukha kāma* and *dukkha paṭikkula* in Buddhism. *Jīvitū kāma* and *amaritū kāma* in Buddhism is similar to the life instinct of Freudian psychology. The both approaches agree with the idea of sensual pleasure is a fundamental mental condition of every one including newborn child (i.e.: Id, Libido, Pleasure Principle in Freudian, and *tanhā*, *kāmarāgānusaya* in Buddhism (Majjhima nikaya-2, Mahāmālunkya sutta).

Research Conclusions

Pleasure Principle analyzed in Buddhism and Freudian Psychology is a very broad concept. According to the both approaches, it is a major and foremost mental condition that regulate human actions. In Buddhism, that concept of Pleasure Principle is not limited to the human and common for all beings living in eleven Sensuous-Spheres. Buddhism identifies it as an actively influencing subliminal level mental condition while Freud identifies it as a force from the Id, the unconscious level of the mind. Comparatively, many similarities and differences can be seen between two explanations on the concept of Pleasure Principle.

Keywords: Pleasure Principle, Freudian Psychology, Buddhist Psychology, Tanhā

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