

The importance of empirical trends in early Buddhism: A comparative study in philosophical empiricism

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Epistemology can be identified as a main sub-field of philosophy. Epistemology deals with the way of receiving knowledge and validity of knowledge. Two main schools which discuss these two and they are school of Rationalism and Empiricism. The truth revealed through the light of rationale can be identified as rationalism. Empiricist emphasizes that only source of knowledge is sensory perception. Thus, they mention that nobody can attain knowledge without being empirical. Empiricism has been discussed in many contexts in western philosophy. Four definitions out of them are more significant. Transcendentalist version takes veridical experience beyond all sensory awareness. Essentialist version restricts experience to the immediate sense impressions. Logical empiricism with its emphasis on logically consistent theories seeks conformation from experience. Radical empiricism admits both perceptual and conceptual elements as inalienable parts of experiences. The term empiricism is derived from the Latin word *Empiricus*, meaning “the experienced,” there is also the tendency to extend the scope of empiricism by including the category of experiences that are neither sensory nor founded upon the sensory. That is the experience that totally transcends sensory experiences. In Sinhala, this word is known as *Anubhutivada*. Here research problem investigate whether is there any empirical trends in early Buddhism. Buddhism is a philosophy which emphasizes the meaning of Nibbana. That is the destruction of all sufferings. Buddhism is not merely empiricism. But empirical features can be seen in early Buddhism. Contemporary attitudes that existed at the time of the Buddha have been included in the *Kālama Sutta* (AN) *Sangarava*, *Sandaka*, *Canki Suttas* (MN). Contemporary ways of knowledge have been divided into three components by Prof. K.N. Jayathilaka. Traditionalism, Rationalism and Empiricism. Dhamma is to be experienced and practiced by himself. (*Sayam abhinna Saccikatva Pavedasi*) Here, *saccikatva* means realization by himself. (*Atthanwa Janeiyatha, Sayameva dhammam Abhinnaya*) In early Buddhism empirical trends are shown on two occasions. The occasion where Dhamma is explained based on empirical discourses. The occasion where displeasure is expressed regarding the way of knowledge on rationale acceptance with its defects. Rationalist pays his all attention to reasoning. Nevertheless, reasoning is not a method to define truth or falseness. It may give rise to correct or incorrect conclusions in rationale approach. This idea is included in *Sandaka Sutta* (MN). The *Kalama Sutta* (AN) gives a comprehensive response to rationalist and traditionalist. Buddhism cannot be considered as a merely philosophical empiricism. Although it is based on the empirical way of knowledge, it emphasizes extra sensory perception based on sensory perception to destroy all evils. Although empirical knowledge is discussed based on verification in western philosophy, early Buddhism widely deals with the same when considering all the factors mentioned above. It can be identified that Buddhism exceeds the boundaries of western philosophy.

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