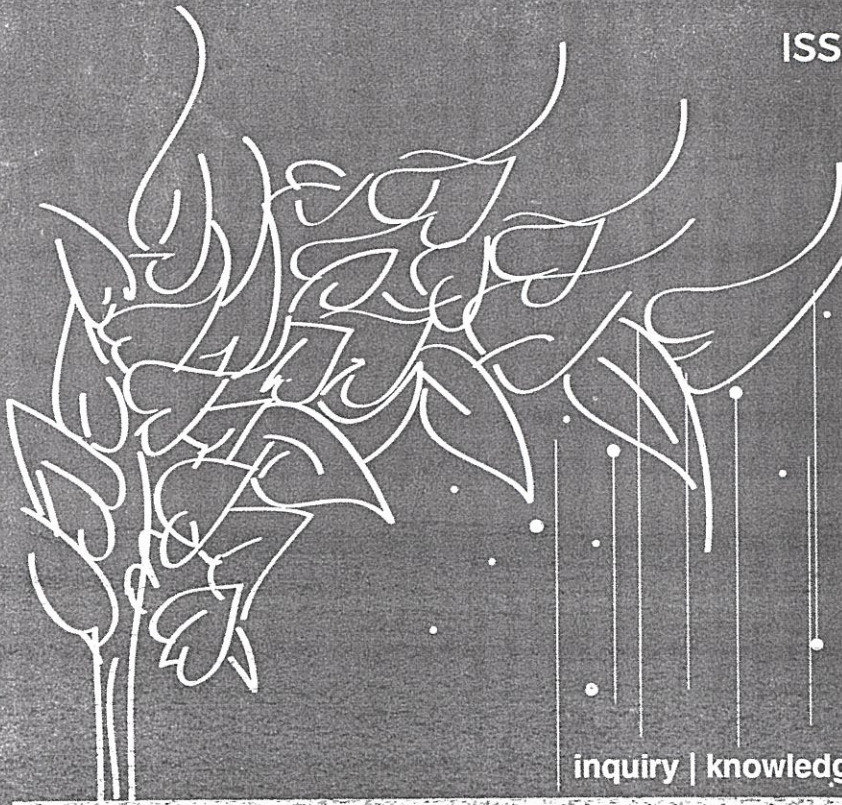


Amr Chapter - 2019-20

ISSN 2581-9577



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Philosophical Traditions of the World

Annual Volume II
(September 2018 - October 2019)

Edited by
Archana Malik-Goure



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Annual Volume II

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Prof. Geeta Ramana on behalf of Dept. of Philosophy, University of Mumbai,
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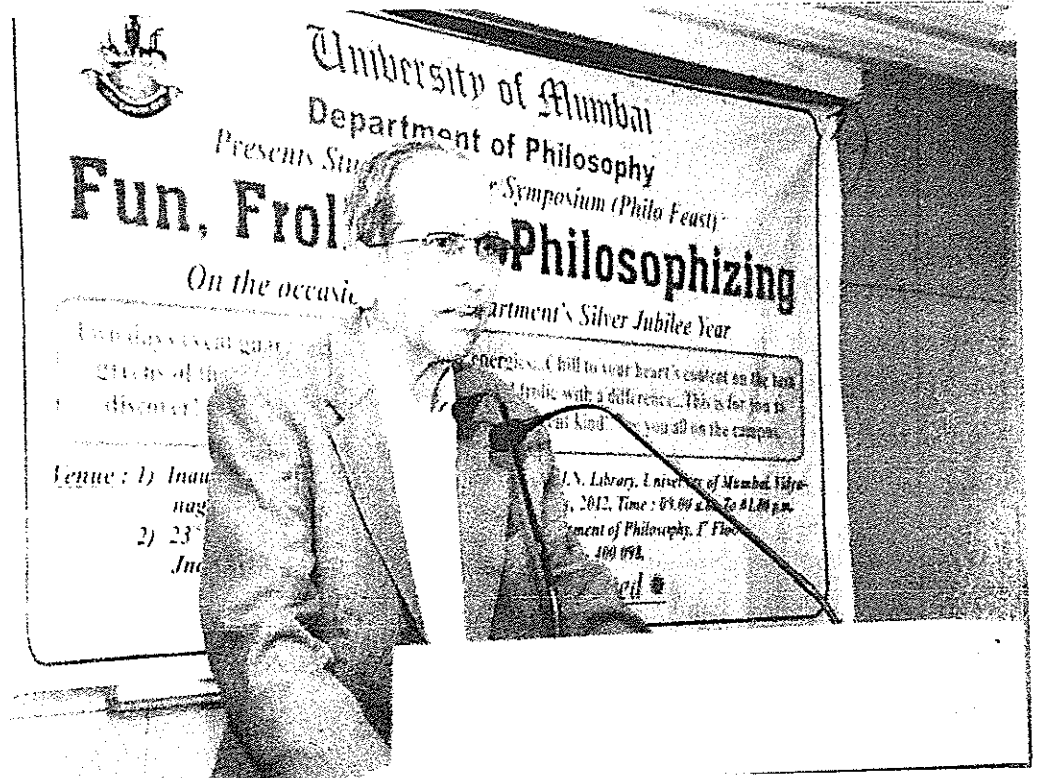
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Journal Volume II
 Dedicated To
 Prof. S.S. Antarkar (1931-2018)
 Founder Member Of
 Dept of Philosophy
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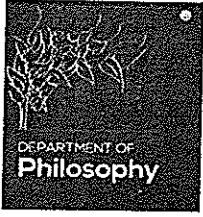
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Philosophical Traditions of the World
Annual Journal from The Department of Philosophy, University of Mumbai

In Memoriam
Prof. S.S.Antarkar (1931-2018)

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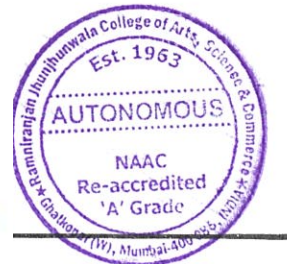
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Philosophy of Maitri in Buddhism and Sufism: *A Comparison*

Amita Valmiki¹

Abstract: *Maitri (Metta) Bhavana* in Buddhism is 'loving kindness to oneself and to others'. The article focuses on the striking similarity between Buddhism and Islamic Sufism with regard to the concept of *Maitri*. Both the traditions emphasize on the ethical concepts of 'oneness', 'compassion', 'loving kindness' and 'befriending to oneself and to others'. Though we do not have exact documentation as to how much these two traditions have influenced each other or borrowed ideas from each other; but Central Asia is the region where both these renowned philosophies flourished almost simultaneously. No doubt as against Buddhism, Sufism is theistic; but the axiomatic ethics of humankind finds common base of loving kindness, that is '*maitri*' in both these traditions. Both these traditions reiterate on 'annihilation of the ego' and consequently the individual develops empathy for others unravelling the human potential to shower immense 'love' to others. Literature from Buddhism and Sufism approves that both these traditions emphasize on ethico-spiritual concept of *Maitri*.

"With a boundless mind one could cherish all living beings, radiating
friendliness over the entire world, above, below and all around without limit."

- *Maitri Sutra*²

"Your heart and my heart are very, very old friends."

- Hafiz (Persian Poet)³

"Always search for your innermost nature in those you are with, as rose oil
imbibes from roses." - Rumi⁴

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² Brother Lawrence: *A Christian Zen Master*. Anamchara Books, NY, 2011, pp. 105.

³ Mellon, Nancy and Ramsden, Ashley. *Body Eloquence: The Power of Myth and Story to Awaken the Body's Energies*. Energy Psychology, California, 2008, pp. 19.

⁴ Helminski, Kabir. (ed.) *The Rumi Collection*. Shambhala Publications, Inc., Massachusetts, 1998, pp. 08.

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And he says, "I belong to no religion. My religion is love. Every heart is my temple."⁵

Maitri in Buddhism asks for seeking happiness for others. The individual suffers from pain and misery if concentrates on one's own happiness. As said in *Maitri Bhavana in Buddhism*, "*Maitri bhavana* or cultivation of a mind of unconditional love and benevolence for all sentient beings constitutes an important spiritual practice in Buddhism which ultimately culminates in identification of oneself with all beings."⁶ The concept of *Maitri* in Buddhism keeps a holistic attitude in mind where the dominant aspect is not anthropocentrism but is 'eco-centrism'. *Maitri* develops the attitude of partaking in the life of all living creatures and developing empathy for all. Therefore one needs to develop the attitude of benevolence, concern and caring for all without exception. As V. S. Bhaskar notes, "Love, in the sense of *maitri*, is the most powerful force in the world; but it is a neutral force. Whether one's love be directed towards concrete persons and matters, or whether it be directed towards abstract conceptions and ideals, if it causes one to feel hatred towards some other object, of a dissimilar kind, it is of a limited extent, and therefore, not true love but only a species of attachment. Likewise, if peace, which is a form of love, isn't universal it is not peace at all."⁷ In a way, in Buddhist literature it is said that the way mother protects her child at the cost of her own life, in similar fashion one should yield a loving heart to all creatures in the world; and that is nothing but '*maitri*'. When Plato gives four cardinal virtues, namely temperance, courage, justice and wisdom for nourishing a just and ideal society and to be fair to oneself; Buddhism has a different take on it. *Maitri* in fact for the Buddhist provides basis on which three major virtues thrive, namely compassion (*karuna*), empathy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekha*). These three states are part and parcel of *Maitri Bhavana*. They distil the individual's mind and remove all that is negative, malevolent and violent

⁵ Hughes, Aaron W. *Muslim Identities: An Introduction to Islam*. Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 172.

⁶ Kundu, M. N. (ed.) *Maitri Bhavana in Buddhism*. TOI, 2012.

⁷ V. S. Bhaskar. *Faith and Philosophy*. Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2009, pp. 218.

(emotions). This develops the capacity to offer joy and happiness to others. Often *Maitri* (or *Metta* in Pali) is considered as "love" (as *Bhakti*, the term coined from 'Bhaj' meaning 'to serve'; ultimately meant 'to love'.) Therefore again, understanding, empathizing and actually seeing through by partaking in the life of other individuals leads to blissful state. This is *Maitri*.

As Thich Nhat Hanh says, "We all have the seeds of love in us. We can develop this wonderful source of energy, nurturing the unconditional love that does not expect anything in return. When we understand someone deeply, even someone who has done us harm, we cannot resist loving him or her." (Hanh, 1999, p. 172)⁸ But one thing is to be noted here, if *maitri* exhorts us of loving kindness to others, it is also to be noted that one has to have loving kindness to oneself first. The individual, who cannot empathize oneself, cannot show that love for others. Pema Chodron (b. 1936), an American Tibetan Buddhist nun, has given the message that '*maitri*' means 'to be' and 'to accept yourself as you are'. In her words, ".....loving-kindness - *maitri* - toward ourselves doesn't mean getting rid of anything. *Maitri* means that we can still be crazy after all these years.The point is not to try to change ourselves.....It's about be-friending who we are already."⁹ Therefore, *maitri* is something like - one of the postulates of Kant in his *Categorical Imperative* states, '.....that we should never act in such a way that we treat humanity, whether in ourselves or in others, as a means only but always as an end in itself.'¹⁰ Isn't this feeling reflected in *Maitri Bhavana*! Accepting oneself and others as it is; and showing loving kindness towards oneself first axiomatically leads to *maitri bhavana* towards others.

Coming to *Maitri* or Loving Kindness in Islamic Sufism, one finds the long association of almost for a millennium between Buddhism and Islam, the dialogue and debate between these two religions in Central Asia is well known. Unfortunately scholars and thinkers in the past were more interested in evidencing the differences between cultures and traditions of different parts of

⁸ Robinson-Morris, David W. *Ubuntu and Buddhism in Higher Education: An Ontological (Re)Thinking*. Routledge, 2018, pp. 72.

⁹ Chodron, Pema. *Awakening Loving-Kindness*. Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1996, pp. 03.

¹⁰ Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2004.

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the world. But today, the dialogue between cultures is the need of the hour. In the globalized scenario it seems like a basic necessity that we have a positive discourse and *dialogical communication* (in Swiss-German philosopher Karl Jaspers' terminology) that can provide solution as a quick-fix to crises faced by human kind in contemporary times. It is found that two completely seemingly opposite religions have the archetypal similarity in matter of ethics. One such ideal example can be cited of concept of *Maitri* in Buddhism and Islamic Sufism. Both these religions have spoken about the finitude of human existence, especially Sufism that developed within the Islamic fold. To what extent the influence had been is not ascertained but how the two major world living religions belonging almost in the same era and space not influence each other? In fact India has seen the wide spectrum of diversified religions and within each religion diversified sects and sub-sects; that not borrowing idea from each other seems to be impossibility. Talking of Hinduism, more specifically the bhakti movement, followed by Buddhist concept of *maitri* and then by Islamic Sufism – the medieval era saw the flow of the philosophy of 'loving kindness', the *maitri bhavana* in almost all these diversified religions. The same type of attributes one finds of *Maitri Bhavana* in Sufism. According to Fakhruddin Traqi "the 13th century Persian Sufi, defines friendship with God as a relationship where God's love precedes the spiritual traveller's love for God. Put another way, God is the Friend because He instilled in us the experience of love and loving kindness. One can interpret this to mean that from Sufi point of view a friend is love and friendliness."¹¹

Rumi (1207-1273), in his *Masnavi* speaks not of theoretical but practical aspect of Sufism. As against Buddhism, Sufism is completely theistic, so friendship between God and Human beings comes first; from which we learn further of friends among likeminded people. But the overall outlook of *Maitri Bhavana* is the same – that is – concern, care, compassion and love for all.

The Sufi concept of *Maitri* with God has led to the experience of "oneness". And like Buddhism, keeping the eco-centric attitude, the Sufi idea of *Maitri* does not

¹¹ Nurbaksh, Alireza on 'Friendship' in Sufi – Journal of *Mystical Philosophy and Practice*, 2018.

see oneself different from others. The theosophical Sufi like Umar al-Suhrawardi (c. 1155-1191), Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240), Ibn al-Farid (1181-1234) and many more kept a complete pantheistic approach in their philosophy and life; where God is considered an object and human being a mirror. The concept of 'oneness' therefore becomes prominent. (Though, they were criticized for this.) But this approach leads to universal care and compassion; that which is the essence of Buddhist philosophy of *Metta*.

The 'self' or the 'ego' is annihilated in the process and gradually the individual develops empathy for others. This empathy expands to 'absolute oneness' where being separate from others is completely razed off. Rumi writes,

*"I went to my Beloved's House
And knocked on His Door.
God said, 'Who is it?'
I said, 'It is I.'
God shut the door hard in my face.
I went ahead and began my life long journey
Toward the total annihilation of 'I' and Self.
After years of annihilating my own Self into non-existence,
I finally reached the exalted state of non-being.
I went back to my Beloved and knocked.
God said, 'Who is it?'
I said: 'It is You.'
God opened His Door wide for me."¹²*

In the 147 letters of Rumi preserved by his son Sultan Walad, shows the *Metta* feeling that Rumi had for people, especially the needy. As explained by Coleman Barks, "His (Rumi's) life is grounded simultaneously in the daily necessities and in ecstatic creativity. His kindness is everywhere apparent in these letters. He is so practical and attentive to what needs to happen, what could make a situation more fluid, more kind for those involved. He is always trying to remove

¹² Rumi, Jalal-al-din. (Trans. - Jawid Mojaddedi). The Masnavi. Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 188.

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whatever blocks the flow of love, money for loans, education, the ease of friendship within a community, a household, a family.”¹³

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) in his *Bidayatul Hidayah (The Beginning of Guidance)* mentions five attributes to be found in a friend - Intelligence, Good Character, Righteousness, Absence of Greed, and Truthfulness.¹⁴ These remind one of Eight Fold Path of Buddhism.

As such between Sufi and Buddhist philosophy there are many similarities. (The difference is an atheistic approach in Buddhism and theism is predominant in Islamic Sufism.) One finds that the axiological aspect, the concept of love and compassion, the *Metta Bhavana*, shines bright in both - Buddhism and Sufism. Even historically there has been give and take of philosophical ideology between these two. According to Dr. Alexander Berzin, “Throughout the region (Turkistan), there are many indications of cultural borrowing between Buddhism and Islam. For instance, Kazakh Sufis not only believe in rebirth, but also identify reincarnations of past Sufi masters like the Tibetan and Mongol Buddhists do of their teachers. The Sufis build shrines as graves for their masters, circumambulate them and light butter lamps, stupas of deceased masters. Sufi meditation includes recitation of the Islamic equivalent of mantras, often combined with breathing cycle, as well as visualization of the Prophet and spiritual masters.”¹⁵


Both Sufi and Buddhist philosophy take an individual on the spiritual path through inner methods. According to Yousef Daoud there is a striking similarity between the Sufi and the Buddhist “Way”. He says in his book *The Rose and the Lotus: Sufism and Buddhism*, “Buddhists describe their path as the “dharma”. Shakyamuni Buddha’s “four noble truths” conclude with the idea that there is a way that leads out of suffering, which introduces the “eightfold path”. Sufis speak of the “path” (tariqat). In Taoism, Tao, at its root means simply “the Way”,

¹³ Barks, Coleman. *Rumi: Soul Fury. Rumi and Shams Tabriz on Friendship*. Harper Collins, 2014, in Introduction.

¹⁴ IslamicEvents.SG, 2014.

¹⁵ Berzin, Alexander. *History of Buddhism in West Turkistan*. Berzin Archives, studybuddhism.com.

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but the term also began to refer as well to the divine Source. Many institutionalized religions have shied away from using such terms to describe what they offer their adherents. Jesus offered his followers what he specifically called "the Way"....."¹⁶

To conclude, let us have a look at some of the quotes those which have similarities with regard to the concept of *Maitri* in Buddhism and Sufism.

Samyukta Nikaya says, "We will develop and cultivate the liberation of mind by loving kindness, make it our vehicle, make it our basis, stabilize it, exercise ourselves in it, and fully perfect it."¹⁷

Farid al-Din Attar says, "Let love lead your soul. Make it a place to retire to, a kind of monastery cave, a retreat for the deepest core of your being."¹⁸

Buddha says, "*See the false as false,*

The true as true.

Look into your heart.

Follow your nature."¹⁹

Rumi says, "Remember the entrance to the sanctuary is inside you."²⁰

Buddha says, "Radiate boundless love towards the entire world above below and across unhindered without ill will without enmity."²¹

Rabia of Basra says, "Live with dignity, women, live with dignity men. Few things will enhance our beauty as much."²²

Buddhist prayer on *Metta*:

"Even as a mother protects with her life

¹⁶ Daoud, Yousef. *The Rose and the Lotus: Sufism and Buddhism*. Xlibris Corporation, 2009, pp. 52.

¹⁷ *Samyukta Nikaya*, trans. Bhikku Bodhi; Online: 2012.

¹⁸ Islamic Quotes, inspirationfeed.com, 2018.


¹⁹ Durst, G. Michael. *Being the Cause*. Responsible Life Foundation, 2019, pp. 230.

²⁰ Wiesner, Druse and Sparrowe, Linda. *Conceiving with Love*. Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2019, pp. 167.

²¹ Thera, Piyadassi. Trans. Karaniya Metta Sutta: The Discourse on Loving-Kindness. Sn. 1.8, PTS: Sn 143-152, 1999.

²² *How to Live Your Apology-Free Life*. daveursillo.com, 2019.

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Her child, her only child,
So with boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will."²³

Sharon Salzberg says, "To reteach a thing its loveliness is the nature of metta. Through loving kindness everyone and everything can flower again from within."²⁴

Shams e Tabrizi says,

"When everyone is trying to be something, be nothing.

Range with emptiness."²⁵

In the end I would like to quote Rumi who says, "Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all barriers within yourself that you have built against it."²⁶

The concept of *Maitri* in Buddhism and Sufism comprises of love, compassion, kindness, generosity, peace and harmony. These are dire necessities of contemporary times.

His Holiness Dalai Lama says, "Generosity is the most natural outward expression of an inner attitude of compassion and loving-kindness."²⁷

²³ McCormick, Ryuei Michael. *Loving Kindness and Nichiren Buddhism*. The Four Divine Abodes, 2003.

²⁴ O'Brien, Barbara. *The Buddhist Practice of Loving Kindness (Metta)*. ThoughtCo., 2019.

²⁵ Shams Tabrizi Quotes and Sayings. www.inspiringquotes.us, 2019.


²⁶ The Indian Express and Inspirational Quotes.

²⁷ HH Dalai Lama, @DalaiLama, 2012.

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