

Sexual Misconduct (*Kāmesumicchācāra*) and the Philosophical Implications of Sexual Deviance in Buddhist Literature and Contemporary Buddhist Sexual Ethics

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Abstract

This qualitative research focuses on the Buddhist ethical concept of 'sexual misconduct' (kāmesumicchācāra) and the philosophical implications of sexual deviance in Buddhist literature and on contemporary Buddhist sexual ethics. Sexual malpractices have mutely eroded ethics and created social ills. Their roots can be found in traditionalism, social values, behavioral aims and love irresponsiveness. Buddhism blames none of these roots but recommends that all people refrain from hostile metaphysical acts with glacial aftershocks.

Key words: Sexual Misconduct (*kāmesumicchācāra*), Sexual Deviance,
The Third Precept in Buddhism,
The Desire for Sexual Affairs' (tasmi sevanacittaṅ),
The Roots of Demoralization' (*akusala mūla*).

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International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture February 2014, vol. 22, pp. 145-61.
2014 International Association for Buddhist Thought & Culture

The day of submission: 2013.11.13 / Completion of review: 2013.12.27 / Final decision for acceptance: 2014.1.27

I. Introduction

The surge of ‘sexual misconduct’ (*kāmesumicchācāra*) and sexual deviance in our society today are a sarcastic challenge to many great global philosophers. Though sexual misconduct and deviance are often cloaked in the banner of personal private rights, they are destructive, socially and psychologically, to those involved. People driven by animal desire justify their lovers, sometimes known as ‘gigs,’ as a need for companionship but in reality the lovers serve sexual lust. Being a minor wife or mistress was considered immoral even in ancient times but it is usually done for financial benefit (GCJWW, 2008). Either the husband or the wife might have “gigs.” Some men also have ‘minor husbands’ for amusement. Even worse, some deviants engage in paraphilia and swinging, and claim it is for natural gratification. Such misconduct and deviance are socially and spiritually perilous and result in marriage separations and broken homes—the roots of most social-ills.

An ABAC Poll found that 74.9% couples were unfaithful. Marital infidelity and deviance have become public issues that should be holistically examined according to their history, complexity and dimensional depth (ABAC Poll 2005). The Statistic Brain Research Institute found that 74% of men would commit infidelity if they never got caught whereas 68% of women would. Fifty-seven percent of men admitted they committed infidelity in any relationship they had whereas 54% of women did (Statistic Brain 2013). Prawase Wasī said:

Sexual misconduct and deviance are the social problems, which have nowadays reached crisis point leading to broken homes, in which a husband might either acquire a second wife, and a wife acquire a second husband, or else entirely abandons his/her present family for another person. (Wasī 1997, 13)

Sexual misconduct and sexual deviance like paraphilia are ancient issues. They existed in the Lord Buddha’s time. Thailand enacted a monogamy law in early 1933. This law outlawed polygamy but some Thais still approve of it. Sexual misconduct and sexual deviance are deep-rooted in the traditions and

values which influence the Thai personality. Polygamists approve of extreme patriarchy such as can be found in the classical epic poems of Khun Chāng-Khun Phæn (The Guild and The General), and Nāng Tād (The Slave Damsel). Sexual misconduct and sexual deviance were uncharted but narrated in writings and art through generations. The researcher believes that their causes would have predominantly stemmed from traditionalism. Such malpractices could gratify some selfish deviants, blind to the titan after shocks of their behavior.

II. The Concept of Sexual Misconduct (*Kāmesumicchācāra*) and Its Ethical Criteria in View of Buddhist Ethics

A. Terminology of Sexual Misconduct (*Kāmesumicchācāra*)

Thaweesak Yannapratheep (1991, 49) defines *kāmesumicchācāra* as adultery driven by material and lustful sex. It is the malpractice reprimanded by the wise. Sexual misconduct in Buddhist philosophy includes the enactment connoting the wrongdoing in sex (Mahāmakutrājvidayālaya Foundation 1991, 30). Ven. Saddhatissa defines it as “the obsession in shape, taste, smell, sound and illegal and unethical sexual misconduct” (Saddhatissa 1965, 106).

B. Elements of Sexual Misconduct (*Kāmesumicchācāra*)

Keys of misconduct are persons, their desires and their consent. First there are prohibited women for men. These are married women with spouses, either registered or non-registered. (Widowed or completely divorced or separated women are not included.) These also include imprisoned married woman. Other types of prohibited women are girls under parental guardianship, women under the protection of any religious sects like nuns and female novices, and women protected by law. ‘Prohibited men for women’ (*agamanīyavatthu*) are of two types: married men and men prohibited by religious sects.

Second, ‘the desire for sexual affairs’ (*tasmi sevanacittaṅ*) begins with a mind filled with lust. A proverb says, “Just as rain leaks from a bad roof, so lust leaks from an uneducated mind” (Mahāmakutrājavidyalaya Foundation 1987, 13). Third, the most important element is consent, which is active and affirmative by both parties for each encounter and for each affair. Consent is based on choice. It eliminates any justification for the use of force, coercion or resistance during affairs. Therefore, consent is free from all verbal, psychological and physical oppression for the act (Koestner and Sokolow, 2000).

C. Etiology of Sexual Misconduct (*Kāmesumicchācāra*)

There are internal and external causes for sexual misconduct. The former are a lustful mind and obsession with the five sensualities: appearance, sound, smell, taste, and touch, which stimulate sexual lust and prompt one to satisfy one’s sensual desires. Buddhist philosophy has taken the position that sexual misconduct emerges from individual desire but varies according to attachment to the five sensualities (Bodhiyāna Meditation Center, 2013). Human nature also differs on lust, mind and lustful material. Men and women naturally need what he/she lacks as a man needs a woman and vice versa. These needs can develop into lust, sexual misconduct and sexual deviance. Hallie Engel, however, claims that adultery stems from boredom, ego issues, revenge and emotional disconnection (Engel, 2013). Finally, the external causes are the media, networks and printed material, which are displayed and posted every second. However, ‘lust’ (*kāme*) is natural but ‘sexual misconduct’ (*kāmesumicchācāra*) is excessive sex, outside of the natural equilibrium (Payutto 1989, 537).

D. The Moral Principles of Sexual Misconduct (*Kāmesumicchācāra*)

Morality is not mathematical and precise like $(-1) \times (-1) = 1$. On the contrary, evil multiplied by evil will not come out “Not-evil.” ‘No evil’ does

not necessarily mean moral since even a neutral position can be immoral. Buddhist ethics are clear-cut in one sense. Sin is sin when one violates a precept. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes the middle path but in Buddhism there are primary and secondary levels of criteria to distinguish right from wrong, and good from bad. Buddhist ethics on sexual issues are based on the third precept: refraining from sexual misconduct. Buddhism does not condemn sexual conduct except when a person commits marital infidelity. Buddhism views sex as part of human nature or a duty and as a great happiness for married couples.

E. Criteria for Sexual Misconduct (*Kāmesumicchācāra*)

The Buddhist criteria for ‘sexual misconduct’ (*kāmesumicchācāra*) have two levels. The primary level contains wicked intention and situation. ‘Wicked intention’ is any action which is conducted under the influence of ‘greed’ (*lobha*), ‘anger’ (*dosa*) and ‘obsession’ (*moha*) (D. 3, 275). They are ‘the roots of demoralization’ (*akusala mūla*). The secondary level is based on consciously violating laws, traditions and culture.

Buddhist ethics, in fact, aim to purify the mind of greed, anger and obsession, which are the roots of demoralization’ (*akusala mūla*) but there are four conditions for violating the third precept. The first condition is that it must involve a man or a woman having an improper sexual affair. The second is that the sexual affair must be intentional. The third is that the affair actually took place, and the fourth is that there was enjoyment resulting from the organ contact. If all four conditions are met, then the third precept was violated (A. 3, 203).

‘Sexual misconduct’ (*kāmesumicchācāra*) could involve a variety of situations and levels: (1) a married man and a married woman having an affair would commit twofold wrongness since the unfaithful man is violating the wife of his lover’s husband as well as his own wife while the unfaithful woman is violating her lover’s wife and her own husband. (2) A married man and a single mature woman having a sexual affair commit a one-fold wrong

because the unfaithful married man violates his own wife while the single mature woman violates the husband of another woman. (3) A single mature man and a married woman having an affair commit a one-fold wrongness because the single mature man violates the wife of another man while the unfaithful married woman violates her own husband. And (4) a single mature man and a single mature woman having a sexual affair do not violate the third precept.

Deviant sexual affairs also involve a variety of situations and levels: (1) In the case of a married man having a sexual affair with a married man, both commit double wrongness because they violate each other's wives and their own wives. (2) In the case of a married woman having a sexual affair with a married woman, both commit double wrongness because both violate the other's husband and their own. (3) In the case of a married man having a sexual affair with a single man, both commit a one-fold wrongness because the married man violates his wife while the single man violates the other's wife. (4) In the case of a married woman having a sexual affair with a single woman, both commit one-fold wrongness because the former violates her husband while the latter violates the other's husband. (5) In the case of a mature single man who has a sexual affair with a mature single man, neither violate the third precept. And (6) in the case of a mature single woman having a sexual affair with a mature single woman, neither violates the third precept. A single man having sexual affairs with prostitutes does not violate the third precept because the third precept is meant to promote family integrity for married people.

III. An Investigation into the Philosophical Implications of Sexual Deviance in Buddhist Literature and Contemporary Buddhist Sexual Ethics

A. Sexual Deviance in Buddhist Literature

Passages on sexual deviance or orientation or paraphilia in Buddhist

literature can be found in the *Vinaya*. One section of the *Vinaya* deals with ‘disrobing offence’ (*pārājika*) for *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhunī*. Other passages dealing with sexual deviance include the following: the story of Queen Mallikā, bestiality, (Dh. 151); “The Case of the Female Monkey,” bestiality, (Vin. 1, 27); “The Two Cases of Open Sores [in Dead Bodies],” necrophilia, (Vin. 1, 221-22); “The Case of the Molded Image,” sex with inanimate objects, (Vin. 1, 222); and “The Case of the Wooden Doll,” sex with inanimate objects, (Vin. 1, 222). The *Vinaya* also proscribed a range of homoerotic or strictly speaking autoerotic forms of sexual activity such as auto-fellatio as found in “The Case of the Nimble-backed Monk,” (Vin. 1, 221) and auto-sodomy as found in “The Case of the Monk with a Long Penis” (Vin. 1, 221).

1. The examples of bestiality In Buddhist literature are as follows:

i) The Story of Queen Mallikā

One day, Mallikā went into the bathroom to wash her face, hands and feet. Her pet dog also came in; as she was bending to wash her feet, the dog tried to have sex with her, and the queen appeared to be amused and somewhat pleased. The king saw this strange incident through the window from his bedroom. When the queen came in, he said angrily to the queen, “Oh, you wicked woman! What were you doing with that dog in the bathroom? Do not deny what I saw with my own eyes.” The queen replied that she was only washing her face, her hands and her feet, and so was doing nothing wrong. Then she continued, “But, that room is very strange. If anyone went into that room, to one looking from this window there would appear to be two. If you do not believe me, O King, please go into that room and I will look through this window.”

So, the king went into the bathroom. When he came out, Mallikā asked the king why he misbehaved with a she-goat in that room. The king denied it, but the queen insisted that she saw them with her own eyes. The king was puzzled, but being dim-witted, he accepted the queen’s explanation, and concluded that the bath room was, indeed, very strange.... (Dh. 151)

ii) The Case of the Female Monkey

The extreme imagery evoked in the Buddha's denunciation of a monk who was found to have kept and trained a female monkey to have sex with him, denunciation whose core descriptions of hell are repeated in the condemnation of several other forms of clerical sexual misconduct, graphically portrays the kammic consequences that were believed to follow from a monk's violation of his vow of celibacy or *Brahmacariya*. (Vin. 1, 27-29)

2. **Necrophilia is the sexual attraction to corpses, and is found in the story of "The Two Cases of Open Sores [in Dead Bodies]" (Vin. 1, 221-22).**
3. **Sex with inanimate objects is found in the stories of "The Case of the Molded Image" (Vin. 1, 222), and "The Case of the Wooden Doll" (Vin. 1, 222).**
4. **Homoerotic or strictly speaking autoerotic forms of sexual activity include auto-fellatio as in "The Case of the Nimble-backed Monk," (Vin.I.221), and auto-sodomy in "The Case of the Monk with a Long Penis" (Vin.I.221).**

Sexual deviances clearly existed during the Lord Buddha's time as revealed in the ordinances of the *Vinaya*. Any *Bhikkhu* or *Bhikkhunī* who violated those *Vinaya* rules would have faced a 'disrobing offence' (*pārājika*). Rules governed not only the celibacy of monks and the conditions of 'disrobing offence' (*pārājika*) but the Sangha also rejected for the monkhood the 'hermaphrodite' (*ubhatobhayañjanaka*) and the 'eunuch' (*paṇḍaka*), and would expel them if they were discovered after ordination (Jackson, 1993).

B. Sexual Deviance in Contemporary Buddhist Sexual Ethics

Sexual deviances, classified since 1952, now number 27 as recorded in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM: DSM 1 in 1952, DSM. 2 in 1968, DSM. 3 in 1980, DSM. 3-R in 1987, DSM. 4 in 1994, DSM. 4-TR in 2000, and DSM. 5 in 2008). These are as follows

(Moser and Kleinplatz 2005; Moser 2010):

coprophilia,	non-normative deviance	sexual orientation
exhibitionism,	partialism,	disturbance
fetishism frotteurism,	pedophilia,	(like homosexuality),
fetishism,	rape,	sexual sadism,
homosexuality,	residual category,	telephone scatologia
klismaphilia,	sadism,	(obscene calls),
masochism,	sexual assault,	transvestic fetishism,
mutilation	sexual masochism,	transvestitism (sic),
necrophilia,		urophilia,
		voyeurism,
		zoophilia,

Homoeroticists, homosexualists and transvestites are referred to in the Pāli Canon of Theravada Buddhism but these terms do not align with homosexuality in contemporary thought since the Canon did not differentiate between cross-gender acts or homosexuality and transvestism. Nevertheless male-male sex is found in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* in the ascetic code of conduct and was prohibited for monks. Exegesis of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* clarifies homoeroticism. Theravada, in fact, denounces sexuality and distrusts sensual enjoyment. Essentially, Buddhism began with a group of celibate monks called the *Sangha*. The *Vinaya* rules were intended for monks and not for the laity. Leonard Zwilling notes,

We should not expect any term with the precise connotation of homosexuality to appear in Buddhist literature. However, homosexual behavior stemming from an apparent disposition to seek sexual gratification through relations with members of one's own sex in preference to the other did not go unnoticed. (Zwilling 1992, 203)

IV. A Discussion of the Concept of Sexual Misconduct (*Kāmesumicchācāra*) and the Philosophical Implications of Sexual Deviance in Buddhist Literature and Contemporary Buddhist Sexual Ethics

A. Discussion of Moral Principles

Morality is not mathematical and precise like $(-1) \times (-1) = 1$. On the contrary, evil multiplied by evil will not come out “Not-evil.” Neutralization is still immoral though it was meant to save lives. Buddhist ethics are clear in that sin is sin when one violates a precept. Buddhist philosophy emphasizes the middle path but to distinguish between right and wrong and good and bad, it has two levels.

Epicurus clearly noted in his Principle Doctrines or Sovran Maxims that natural justice was a pledge of reciprocal benefit to prevent one man from harming or being harmed by another. Barnett argued that residing in a society was by consent not by any rules it made; the condition was that rules had to be subject to the principles of justice and the protection of personal rights and liberty (Barnett 2005, 12). If a person did not necessarily consent to a rule, and the rule rejected personal rights and liberty, then was it worthwhile to raise a principle that one should avoid the misconduct since avoiding it denied the consent of the two persons who wanted it.

Professor Sompran Promta believes that morals are just some parts of metaphysical realities—the General Law of Mental Objects and The General Law of End-based Objects. The former maintains that the mind is a part of the five sets (non-life object, life object, and mind, consequence of a deed, and others beyond these four things) in human body and functions with discipline, fixed rules as other material and human organs. The latter maintains that deeds create later deeds. The principles of scientism and materialism are expressed in The General Law of Physical Objects and The General Law of Biological Objects (Promta 1992, 21-24). Although body and mind are one, the body mostly disobeyed the mind. Carnal cravings usually grew, glowed

and overshadowed the mind in so far as the human need to survive is concerned. Even those who were extensively trained in spirituality still sporadically surrendered to their own cravings.

B. Discussion of the Criteria

‘Sexual misconduct’ (*Kāmesumicchācāra*) would yield ill-effects just like the wheel cycling after the bullock’s steps; if one misbehaved, its ill-effect would certainly follow him or her (Dh. 11). However, Buddhism maintains that a person is not the one who judges whether an action is good or bad, but a good act or bad act of a person is predetermined by nature regarding the order of karma (Promta, 1992, p.31). Sexual conduct is meant for reproduction but also it could be destructive if it was misused.

If an act is influenced by ‘greed’ (*lobha*), ‘anger’ (*dosa*) and ‘obsession’ (*moha*); then it is unrighteous because ‘greed’ (*lobha*) brings selfishness and never-enoughness whereas ‘anger’ (*dosa*) brings senselessly destructive emotions. ‘Obsession’ (*moha*) causes humans to be overly obsessed, particularly, with sexual activity. The Lord Buddha taught, “There is no fire like passion, there is no shark like hatred, there is no snare like folly, there is no torrent like greed” (Müller and Fausböhl 1881, 60). Human beings unable to detach from ‘greed’ (*lobha*) would wander in the ‘rebirth cycle’ (*saṃsara*) associated with suffering. Zeno of Citium (C. 335-264 BCE) asserted, “The avaricious man is like the barren sandy ground of the desert which sucks in all the rain and dew with greediness, but yields no fruitful herbs or plants for the benefit of others.” Thomas Merton said that men were too obsessed with performance rather than imagination and valued not what they were but what they did and what they owned. In fact, their possessions and performance increased their greed. Misery would not exist at all if greed were eliminated.

C. Sexual Deviance

Sexual deviance by any acts, in Buddhism, could result in either single

or double wrongness. *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhunī* were subject to ‘disrobing offence’ (*pārājika*) if they were involved in any sexual activities. The Utilitarian School argues that sexual deviance brings pleasures for some though deviants must follow the rule that prohibits hurting others. But Utilitarianism claims that an act is right if and only if it results in as much good as any available alternative while an act is right if and only if it is required by a rule that is itself a member of a set of rules, the acceptance of which would lead to greater good for society than any available alternative. The deviant would then choose an action so that he could gain himself greater sensual pleasure, and that was not wrong. In the meantime, society is justified in coercing the behavior of an individual in order to prevent her or him from injuring others; it is not justified in coercing her or him simply because the behavior is deemed immoral or harmful to herself or himself (Lerner 1961, 78-81). No judge could judge any act of another person as immoral or harmful if the judge was being coerced. So none could judge that the deviant was wrong just from his/her temporal enjoyment deviance and it was uncertain whether it resulted in his/her sensual pleasure or pain. The enjoyment of the deviant matched consequentialism because the act gave him/her greater joy; therefore, the deviant was by principle innocent.

The Deontological School advocates the moral action adhered to rule(s) or obligation(s) or duty because they bound one to one’s duty (Flew 1979, 79; Waller 2005, 23). If deviants then sought personal sensual pleasures and misbehaved, they would break rules. In that case, deviants were absolutely wrong, though they had autonomy and freewill but there is no way to avoid categorical imperative practices. Deontological ethics was contradictory to consequentialism, which is a positive end-based approach, and virtue ethics, which is a decision-making-based approach, and case-by-case and pragmatic ethics which sees future improvement to norms, principles, and moral criteria.

IV. Conclusion

‘Sexual misconduct’ (*kāmesumicchācāra*) and sexual deviance existed in the Lord Buddha’s time. However, ‘lust’ (*kāme*) is natural. But ‘sexual

misconduct' (*kāmesumicchācāra*) involves excessive sexual activities. The surge in modern life of both lust and sexual misconduct has sarcastically challenged many great philosophers. Though misconduct and deviance are often cloaked under the banner of personal liberty and rights, they have been socially and psychologically destructive. Sexual misconduct (*kāmesumicchācāra*) is driven by material desires and lust-obsession with shape, taste, smell, sound and touch, all of which have been reproved by the wise. Sexual deviance, on the other hand, is a sexueroetic embellishment and an alternative to social norms. Desires, with internal and external causes, have led to deviance and misconduct.

Buddhist ethics aim to purify the mind from 'the roots of demoralization' (*akusala mūla*). Having 'intention' (*cetanā*) is key to purifying the mind but it is necessary to recognize the four conditions of violation of the third precept. There are two levels in applying Buddhist moral criteria: the first level includes intention and situation. The second level includes laws, culture, traditions and their applications. Morality is not mathematical and precise like $(-1) \times (-1) = 1$. On the contrary, evil multiplied by evil will not come out "Not-evil." Neutralization can be immoral though it was meant to save lives. Buddhist ethics are clear in that sin is sin when one violates a precept. Sexual misconduct and sexual deviance can result in either single or double wrongness. By their vow of celibacy, *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhunī* are subject to the 'disrobing offence' (*pārājika*) if they are involved in any sexual activities.

Buddhists claim that marital infidelity is wrong if being judged without prejudice and sexual deviance could be wrong. Some deviants could choose to act in a way for the greatest pleasure, in the utilitarian sense, but decline to follow the other side of the utilitarian rule of doing no harm to others. The researcher believes that sexual misconduct and deviance are deep-rooted in traditionalism, social values, behavioral aims and love irresponsiveness even though today people are well educated and trained. Also, sexual activities can also be positive as, for instance, in relationships that lead to marriage, and are virtuous, meaningful and related to the ethical theories of Buddhism. It is, however, important that the Buddhist virtue of detachment is not to be

overlooked since it can save people from worldly suffering in relationships. The poisonous trees always bear the poisonous fruits, so do the sexual misconducts and deviances.

Abbreviations

D	Dghanikya Ptkavagga
A	Anyaguttaranikya
Dh	Dhammapada
Vin	Mahvibhanga

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