

# Critical Thinking with Reference to Carelessly Sutta of Aṅguttara Nikāya

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## Abstract

This article is based on a sutta of Trikanipata of the Aṅguttara Nikāya; it can be a great lesson to the laypersons who believe on Buddhist ethics. This article is concentrated on questioning for the promotion of critical thinking in which a fool has questioned, replied, and unable to accept logics and facts of others. It spots light on critical thinking that has been guided by the philosophy of the wise not the fool. A fool person is always careless; hence he creates conflict among other members of the community. Indeed, a good critical thinker is always just, logical, factual and wise who believes on himself and others with his knowledge and experience. At last, critical thinking is objective, judgmental, and balancing which cannot happen in a careless way.

**Keywords:** critical thinking, Buddhism, sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya (AN)

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## Introduction

Critical thinking is the base of Buddhism<sup>1</sup> because the Buddha has given priority for questioning to his disciples. According to the Buddha, their doubts should have been cleared so that they would be free of suspicion on every issue. Laypersons can have taken doubt negatively; infact it has been a principle of critical thinking that makes one more creative, diligent, conscious, pervasive and so on. In a true sense, one can realize that it has been a way of living because it has presented lots of possibilities in our life (de Silva Almeida 2011). Taking doubt means to have the chance of finding possibilities and choosing the best option among them to lead life in a right way.

One can understand that the way of life as well as solution of problem have multiple possibilities that one cannot confine on one way. There are numbers of possibilities that one can think or do differently in comparison to others. People have different attitudes, attributes, characters, thoughts, and purposes which they have been guided while living their life; indeed, the best option would have been chosen to lead life. Sometimes, if failed, they would take lesson from such choice, then, they would choose an alternative way when they have critical mind.

On the other hand, critical thinking has put one in confusion everytime because he has to recognize the right choice; neither it would plunge one in a quagmire of confusion. Either positive or negative, according to Buddhism, one cannot control the incidents that is going to occur in his life; however, any matter that a person has discarded would have been useful for others. Hence critical thinking has developed such mind that one can find different possibilities making their mind always prompt, active, and effective; it has been a significant aspect of Buddhism that our action has been guided by our mind.

Thinking critically is a basic element of life; therefore one should not believe others blindly rather he should have capability to question as there is no established truth in this world. Authoritarian people have negative concept so that they have taken critical thinking negatively; however, it should have presented ideas in a neutral way beyond negativity (Changwong et al. 2018). One needs courage to raise question against established ideas so that his life would be full of options that have made him easy to live. Multiple options would come time and again; however he must have a right choice that can make his life successful.

Hence, critical thinking is other than negation that can characterize one as a bad person who has done everything opposite rather than giving inputs. A critical person listens or reads, finds options, questions logically, then presents solutions as well. A bad person has the habit of disoeying of everything whereas critical person presents different possibilities analytically encouraging others to act accordingly. In negative thinking there is seldom any chance of presenting alternative ideas; they would take suggestions and recommendations negatively.

## Overview of literature

Literature review is a survey of scholarly resource that can help a researcher from different ways. It helps one to pin point the trend of research, or it helps one to clear the problem that one aims to discuss. This article has a purpose to see either difference or similarities between text and context which has been listed in Buddhist *Nikāya* and its relevance in the present context.

Critical thinking is a broad way of thinking because it has reflected the way of life that people have been

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<sup>1</sup> The Buddha questioned about the truth established by Hinduism; mainly he questioned about the spiritual philosophy of Uddaka Ramaputta who believed on single reality that can be gained with *dhana*.

living. It has presented multiple realities that help one to have a right choice among many or that can fit with the context. It has been taken as scientific method that presents logic in an objective way (Zhang 1). Hence one can realize that critical thinking has been guided by ethical reasoning as it has to present the base of argument. It can be done with fair-mind so that right evaluation can happen while reading, writing, and understanding (ibid). Thus critical thinking is a kind of judgment that is necessary for anything as nothing is true or stable in this world. A good critical thinker is open-minded so he has perceived opposing viewpoints to be a judge of the content. Therefore, a critical thinker has presented everything fairly so that others can trust him well (ibid). A genuine critical thinker behaves confidently so that many people trust him; he would be able to manage everything well making the world a better living place. In reality, he can have transcendence value that one can experience after dealing with him and reading his text.

Critical thinker is just opposite of dogmatic person who can develop creativity after practicing, learning, and exchanging ideas with others. Such person inspires others to act rather than believing on some established rules or logics. He would share wisdom, compassion, and emancipation to others; hence their effort would enhance others to the height of imagination or thinking (Thua, iv). In Buddhism, students should not accept ideas of teachers blindly rather he can question against his ideas whether they are right or wrong. A critical learner would know by discussing, debating and challenging his teachers. He would not wait for teacher's blessing rather he has questioned about the validity (ibid). Therefore, a critical thinker would try to know, understand, practice and realize the matter rather than being blind.

Marfu'i et al. emphasize on self-regulation as a main component of critical thinking because it helps one to control oneself before making decisions. It has been taken as a thought process that helps in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation and self-regulation for decision-making process (Marfu'i et al. 2018). A genuine critical thinker can go through the process to investigate the matter to prove his excellence. The Mahayana tradition of Buddhism has initiated the concept of critical thinking; because it has challenged the Theravada Pali Canon in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; it has presented Buddhism as philosophy rather than religion (Samuel 561). The Buddha himself has challenged if science disproves Buddhist philosophy, Buddhism has to be changed. Hence one can understand the importance of critical thinking in Buddhism as the main aspect of its philosophy.

### Methodology

This article uses hermeneutics method as it has been the procedure of interpretation of old text into new context (Vogt 2012). One of the *suttas* has been chosen from the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that has put greater value for those who have been interested in critical thinking. The name of the *sutta* is *carelessly* (AN: 3: 5) which the author has identified as the first ever *sutta* from the beginning of the text related to critical thinking. The Buddha has addressed such person as 'fool' in the matter of questioning carelessly. As a rule, the *sutta* has presented negative and positive logics simultaneously following the style of the *Nikāya*. This article indicates critical thinking because the incumbent asks, replies and dis/approves question to be clear. One of the bases of critical thinking is also questioning habit (AN: 4: 195) so that the author has given preference to this *sutta*. As Buddhism has been the storehouse of knowledge, this *sutta* represents a profound meaning which can be contextualized with hermeneutics method.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

*Aṅguttara Nikāya* has been taken as a prime document of all the *Nikāyas* (*Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, *Khuddaka Nikāya*, *Aṅguttara Nikāya*). *Among all the Nikāyas, this Nikāya consists more suttas related to laypersons so that it would be better to relate its philosophy in daily life chores of human beings. People have been living in suffering; however they want to come out of suffering taking help of different means. Buddhism is one of the aspects which has been acceptable by majority of people at present context to help to rescue one from such suffering.*

*This article takes a sutta from the Aṅguttara Nikāya which has been enlisted in the third part (Tikanipāta) of the Nikāya. The Buddha addresses Bhikkhus according to the context; however, it can be applied in laymen's life to teach a fool. As a rule, it mentions negative qualities first then positive qualities*

<sup>1</sup> *or the ways of improvement. The sutta goes like this:*

*"Bhikkhus, one who possesses three qualities should be known as a fool. What three? (1) He formulates a question carelessly; (2) he replies to a question carelessly; (3) when another person replies to a question carefully, with well-rounded and coherent words and phrases, he does not approve of it. One who possesses these three qualities should be known as a fool.*

*"One who possesses three qualities should be known as a wise person. What three? (1) He formulates a*

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<sup>1</sup> Buddhism has always presented its suttas mentioning negative cause at first, then it gives solution of the problem. So it has always been in dual form.

*question carefully; (2) he replies to a question carefully; (3) when another person replies to a question carefully, with well-rounded and coherent words and phrases, he approves of it. One who possesses these three qualities should be known as a wise person. "Therefore. . . It is in this way that you should train yourselves."(AN: 3:5)*

One can start debate mentioning the qualities of a fool and a wise person who have represented just opposite attributes. A fool represents negative qualities whereas a wise represents positive qualities. The Teachings of the Buddha centers around questioning in this *sutta* which has been divided into three parts. It mentions three negative qualities of a fool followed by three positive qualities of a wise person. The fool and wise formulates a question carelessly and vice-versa; replies the question carelessly and vice-versa; and the fool has not approved the answer though he has been explained well and vice-versa. It has been going to explain separately below in different topics.

### **Formation of a question**

When we concentrate on a critical thinker, he could question about any facts or logics presented by others (Marfu'i 2018). This kind of habit would not be taken negatively; rather it has been full of suggestions or recommendations. Those who have raised question carelessly has been the first condition of the *sutta* that mentions a fool first and the wise next. A fool is always negative due to his pride so that he forms question carelessly. When a question is formed carelessly, that can't have positive answer; so the answer of the question puts one in confusion. A good critical thinker would not be careless rather he has read, analyzed, explained and evaluated such item so that one cannot blame him as a careless person. A wise person would question carefully using his knowledge and attribute so that conflict wouldn't arise at all.

A bad critical thinker, i.e. fool in the *sutta*, leads one to negativity; it indicates adverse personality of such person who has been really stupid. He has done everything recklessly so that it has negative consequences only. Certainly, a fool person would formulate a question carelessly; or he has the motive to denigrate others creating confusion. It has been common habit of a bad critical thinker. He has aimed to degrade others at any cost; rather he questions for the sake of question only. Thus, he cannot be a critical thinker due to his disparaging habit for others.

A critical thinker not only raises the issue but also tries to settle the matter with his extensive knowledge and experience. On the other hand, the fool has no intention to settle the matter, neither has he accepted the truth. He has made others irritated with his questions so that there won't be any solution of those problems. The Buddha also did not react to such person when questioned to him (AN: 10: 95); rather he remained silent when he understood that the question was useless. In this way, useless question has not contributed in the formation of knowledge rather it has increased the conflict between and among people.

### **Responding a question**

The second proposition is about replying which can be taken as one of the conditions of critical thinking. A critical thinker would reply the questions arising while going through the text or context. However, the answer is careless; it also reflects the quality of a person who is full of negative qualities. The Buddha called such person as a 'fool' who cannot meet the criteria of a critical thinker due to his careless habit. Either it reflects his interest of not involving in such debate or he has tried to test others whether they would be able to answer according to his aspiration. The habit of taking anything carelessly has been an evident of a dictator not a critical thinker. He does not spend anytime to think, ponder and develop logic at all rather he has just responded for the sake of response. It has been the result of ignorant habit that puts him back so that he wouldn't have been respected by anyone. His response to the question is either baseless or it has been ridiculous.

This kind of person is unfit for critical thinking as he has no knowledge of judgment or proper understanding of the matter. Critical thinking needs much careful attention because it has been a reflection of scholarly personality that should have been fulfilled in course of time. However, a bad person cannot separate right to wrong so that he can not be a critic who would work with conscience. He would not believe on conscience as well rather he has given preference to lies, tricks, and mendacity so that his life would be in suffering. A criticizer should have extensive knowledge so that his answer would be seriously formed related to the question according to the context. In this way, he can be serious while answering the queries whether it would be right or wrong.

Buddhism has suggested one to understand the context before answering or speaking against anything (AN: 4: 31). It has made us realize multiplicity of the world and context; when something is rejected or accepted depends on the context. Since there is no established truth in this world, we cannot claim that something is true and others false. In this way, a wise person would answer anything carefully taking the context which has been an essential quality of a critical thinker. He has first analyzed the context, understands the reality, evaluates them with his knowledge and experience and then answer the question in a reliable way. It doesn't matter whether something is right or wrong, rather we can take it in relative sense from the perspective of an experienter. One

can understand it from the side of the local dwellers whether something works well or not as per the context.

### **Problem in acceptance**

The third proposition is that one does not accept the answer given by others with logics, facts and arguments. He does not approve the answers because he has no knowledge about it; nor does he feel any hesitation of rejection. He has also no habit of listening to others so that he is not ready to accept others' ideas though they are answered well. Such person is fool due to his ignorant habit; he rejects others' ideas without any logic; thus, he cannot be a critical thinker due to his careless habit. Such person would have been ousted from the society as he has not got any recognition from others.

A critical thinker has got recognized with others and their ideas after judgment with his knowledge and experience. He can increase the habit of listening and understanding others' views so that he can have right judgment fitting with the context. It would have been upset by his careless habit as he has short of understanding. A genuine critical thinker would accept others' ideas, studies well, evaluate it and then accept or reject with logics or evidence. He believes on reliable facts as presented by the scholars; hence he would deal with mindfulness avoiding ignorance. A reliable critical thinker never rejects others' views; rather he would have taken positive things and avoid negative things with his conscience (Smith 2020).

When we evaluate the third condition, it is quite serious that a fool would reject any kind of ideas due to his pride. A critical thinker would have been judgmental or he has to avoid prejudice so that his ideas would have been accepted by others. One can understand that critical thinker not only rejects false ideas rather he would have given suggestions well. It has been lacking by the fool; in contrast, the wise accepts it due to the logic presented by others.

### **Findings and conclusion**

The above condition was enlisted in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* as Buddhavacana that presents reality of a fool and a wise. It has been spoken by the Buddha to the *bhikkhus* while delivering his Teachings. In the same way, it is much useful in the life of laypersons if applied properly as it has been the demand of time.

Certainly a fool has various faults while engaging in question and answer due to his careless habit of questioning, answering and accepting logics. This sutta has been mentioned in the *Trikanipta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* which has been taken as the prime text of the *sutta pitaka*. Such context has been highly appreciated in Buddhism as it has risen with the base of critical thinking. The person who is fool would have asked question carelessly, replies carelessly and rejects the answer in any form. On contrary, a wise person would ask question carefully, replies carefully and accepts logics and facts easily.

Similarly, a critical thinker would examine his knowledge, freedom and progress that has provided him a great freedom in his life. He cannot be loyal to the authorities rather he tries to invigorate rationality to be independent (Herd 2020). A critical person would develop strategies, principles, concepts, and insights rather than believing in atomic facts. He would have been guided by evaluation and inference which are prime elements of critical thinking (Marfu'i et al. 103). Buddhism has been guided by cause-effect relation so that these people have believed on self-awareness as main aspect of critical thinking.

Like the Buddha, a critical thinker wants a questionable competitor rather than a passive listener because he has been aware that human mind has been influenced by their culture, society, geography, attitudes, attributes, characters and so on. A passive man is not prone to learn nor does he gets creative power; infact he has just got straightforward ideas with no reaction at all. A creative thinker is an ideal person who can learn creative items, and apply them to his life and shares it to the whole community. It has been inferential that a passive person has been a poison of the society as he has contributed nothing for its development except following directions of others. His life is static, boring, passive, submissive and inactive; as a corollary, the life of a critical thinker is full of dynamism that is more creative and active.

In this way, critical thinking is a rational thinking capacity that one can practice in his life standing beyond biased thinking that has been opposite of prejudice. Some scholars have been doing critical thinking with biased mind so that they developed negative qualities in their life like the 'fool' mentioned in the *sutta*. Hence critical thinking has to be justified that there won't be any bias at all. A critical thinker should have thought and analyzed any matter seriously so that it would get good result. If he has been careless, he cannot get the goal what he has proposed. A person should have conscience to develop patience so that he would have done everything carefully that would result in positivity.

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