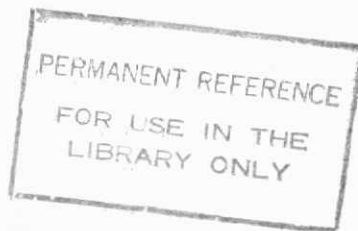


THE NATURE OF JOY IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

BY

D. P. E. PREMAWARDHANA



**436025** ○

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.

1991

## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I show that Buddhism is not a pessimistic religion. This I do by highlighting many of the instances in the Early Buddhist texts and the Commentaries which show that the person who follows the Buddhist Path to Enlightenment experiences joy, bliss and happiness from the point at which he embarks on the path right through to final realization.

It is pointed out that sensuous pleasure which is commonly considered pleasurable is not recommended in Buddhism. The aspirant embarks upon the path when faith is kindled in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Faith gives rise to joy. When he enters the path of meditation there are four jhanas which he attains, each successive one being more pleasurable than the former. When he attains the formless attainments, equanimity and mindfulness become greatly refined leading on to the cessation of perception and feeling and finally to Nibbana. All these states, pleasurable in quality, culminate in Nibbana which is called 'highest bliss'.

It is seen that the Seven Factors of Enlightenment emphasize matters of the heart such as energy, rapture and calm. It is also shown that the appreciation of beauty, giving rise to joy, acts as a catalyst in bringing one to Enlightenment. But the Buddha constantly warns his disciples of the danger in clinging to states of positive experiential content. Hence there is the emergence of equanimity as the important component of the highest attainment, which characterizes an unwavering steadiness which checks the attachment to bliss in the highest attainment.

The experience of joy in the Christian conversion experience has been considered together with the Buddhist experience of joy, to give the dissertation a wider comparative framework. The Christian experience of joy is seen to be reactive to negative emotional experiences such as guilt, anxiety and despair. This shows the Christian experience of joy to be deficient in bringing about a wholesome restructuring of the personality. It is argued that this is due to the lack of systematic training or culturing the mind, in the Christian scheme of salvation.