
Contemporary Relevance of Buddha Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION:

India has given to the world, religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Religion has helped considerably to create and sustain the higher values of human conduct and character.

The Buddha religion (or Buddhism) is an age-old religion of India. It occupies a place of immense eminence because of its impact on Indian thought and culture. *Panca-Sila* is an invaluable gift of this religion. It is an important, fully developed and well-established religious and cultural systems, purely indigenous to India.

Buddhism is a righteous path purely dedicated to the attainment of world peace. The fundamental principle of Buddhism is to bring about peace and harmony in the world. The first stanza *Dhammapada* teaches us that all unrest, all conflicts and all disturbances are first born in the mind. War and conflicts are nothing but external manifestations of greed, hatred, ill will, violence and ignorance in the minds of men. If there is no peace within, there cannot be peace without.

Buddhism, is not, strictly speaking a system of philosophy but a way of life.

THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO OUR NATION:

Presently in India and elsewhere in the world, selfishness and violence have become the order of the day. There is scant respect or even no respect for human life. Terrorism is spreading its ugliness. It is starting to note that the terrorists' age group ranges from sixteen to thirty years, the best part of an individual's life.

The reason is quite obvious. The modern youth in India as also elsewhere, even in midst of different pressure groups and are subject to diverse opinions. These pressure groups may be in the political, economical or in any other place.

Moral degradation exists everywhere. With increased efficiency of modern mass communications, we have become much more aware of man's inhumanity to man on a scale unheard of hitherto. Individuals tend to forget or completely ignore their obligations and duties to the society in which they live. Business organizations, in their ruthless scramble for profits and material gain, are pursuing their efforts without any sense of decency.

The sad state of affairs prevails today because man has chosen to take the wrong path in developing modern civilization. Man has defined materialism in the mistaken belief that materialism alone can bring happiness. This is a fallacy. Man has gone wrong because he has wilfully chosen to ignore the invaluable advice given by our spiritual leaders over the centuries.

Today the people are caught in the horns of dilemma, unable to decide which is right and which is wrong, thus making a split personality. When he cannot understand properly, naturally he cannot understand others. The result is only isolated individuals. When individuals are isolated units, they care only for their own welfare, by exploiting them in

whatever way they can. Presently the religious passions of common man are taken for personal advantage. In the name of religion, emotions are running riot, dividing mankind into many sectors, each group vying with other for supremacy. These emotions which are on the destructive side need to be harnessed and utilized constructively. Towards this end, awareness in regard to the basic identity not only of human beings but of the entire creation needs to be aroused. Each one has to realize one's true relationship with Reality viz., Divinity.

As in the past, presently also, India is facing a stiff challenge in the form of western culture and western civilization. The modern western culture seems to believe that life force is a blind, amoral and aimless energy 'the elan vital'. Because of this and also due to faulty education, sophistry and pedantry, most of us are ignorant of our rich culture. As Nani Palkiwala aptly puts it, "we are like asses carrying loads of gold without knowing what the load contains yearning for western pseudo styles" ⁽¹⁾

Now a days, the modern youth develop a cynical, nihilistic, immoral and anti social attitudes in them and get themselves entangled in savage and bold clashes. They also develop a negative tendency, negative thought and negative approach to everything resulting in Juvenile delinquency, indiscipline and restlessness, which ultimately find an outlet in negative and destructive actions.

Presently, India is in a sad state of affairs. People go after material, wealth only in order to enjoy. Dharma is totally neglected. People are ready to do anything to get money. So presently what we have in India is only money culture. Since people are prepared to indulge in violence to get money, the culture in India can be described as Violence or Gun Culture. ⁽²⁾

REASONS FOR CONFLICTS:

The following are the reasons for conflicts.

The major reason for conflicts is said to be the exposure to violence through media, the difference of opinion on the basis of language, colour, caste, region, culture and economy. The most common reason is emotional violence. It also includes mental conflicts due to frustration and Neurotic disorders.

Values or aspirations or ideals which every one of us aim at realizing in one's life time in and through the society. In this scheme of values, certain value aims at the promotion of one's own well being. The values are quite selfish. There are certain other values which aim at promotion of well being of others. These values are called **Human Values**. Truth-speaking, non-violence, helping others are some of the human values.

HOW TO BRING ABOUT THE PEACE?

Total transformation of the attitude of the individual alone is the remedy. The selfish and the materialistic attitude which is responsible for all the ills of the individual, the degradation of values and consequently of actions must be substituted by the spiritual attitude. And Buddha Philosophy is the only instrument which can bring about this transformation. In addition to Epics or Ithihasas, Puranas also have played a significant role in shaping of Indian Culture.

BUDDHA – THE STABILISER:

Indian culture is said to have had its origin in Vedas whose date is fixed as 4000 B.C. ⁽³⁾ It is well known that the Vedic people were worshippers of nature. This worship of the various forms of nature as Gods technically termed polytheism, got developed into Henotheism, then monotheism and finally culminated in monism.. In other words, what originally started as mere sacrifices finally blossomed into sublime philosophy, at lone point of time, on account of an extreme emphasis upon rituals and sacrifices, Vedic culture got destabilized. In the earlier periods, rituals, which were originally simple and ostentatious, to secure the favour of natural forces here and hereafter, became so much complicated with the march of time that they began to increasingly involve animal and human sacrifices. They obscenity, vulgarity and abuse of sex also became part and parcel of the rituals. All these contributed to the de stability of Vedic culture.

BIRTH OF BUDDHISM AND ITS NOT-VEDIC TEMPERAMENT:

It was to stem this tide of de-stability of Vedic culture that a person of stature of Buddha was required, who could not only react and rise in revolt against these evil practices committed under guise of sacred Vedas, but also give a sense of direction to Vedic culture. Usually, Buddha is associated only with revolt against the Vedas and hence branded as ‘ *anti – vedic* ‘.

THE SENSE OF DIRECTIONS:

Even though Buddha was against the malpractices perpetrated in the name of Vedas, his intention not to demolish the vedic culture. On the contrary, his intention was to put the vedic culture back on rails. Towards this end, the instead of resorting to destruction, gave a positive direction to the vedic culture by exhorting the people to strive for the eradication of suffering and attain ‘Nirvana’. Actually it was to go give a positive and practical orientation that he tried to desist people from indulging in verbal juggleries and futile metaphysical speculation in regard to the existence of god, soul etc. Once again it was his refusal to talk about metaphysical entities like God, soul, immortality etc. that he was mistaken to be an atheist.

THE EFFECTS OF THE INFLUENCES OF BUDDHISM OF THE THEN VEDIC CULTURE-AN ANALYSIS:

Buddhism have considerably influenced Indian culture in many ways. It has improved the Indian culture bringing a new dimension to the concept of social welfare.

Positive effects:

The ways prescribed by Buddhism for the world welfare (Logha Sangaraha) show that and stressed moral, more than the ritual aspect which led to an emphasis on the practice of human values.

It then required a Buddha to lend stability by weeding it from all obnoxious ritualistic practices. Among the many, who successfully bought the vehicle to its present destination, **Buddha** was one such.

Buddha needs no introduction. He is a well-known Philosopher. He lived in 6th century B.C. He was not only a philosopher but also a religious, cultural and social reformer. His aim was **welfare of all** irrespective of caste, creed, sex and colour.

It is in this context that Dr.T.M.P. Mahadevan observes that the stability that Indian culture has been gaining was not through politicians, soldiers and statesman but” **messengers of spirit**”⁽⁴⁾ who, time and again, emphasized the basic fundamental non-difference of all creation, though in different ways and terminologies.

In the long line of such messengers of Spirit came Buddha, who by his philosophy rejuvenated Indian culture, when it was on the verge of collapse.

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF BUDDHA’S PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS:

The paper described how Buddha Philosophy can play an active and vital role to ensure peace in the world. Religion and Philosophy have great significance and value for human life. It gives meaning and purpose to our life. It is a binding force which can bring peace, love, fellow-feeling in the world and can save the world from the disasters. It is only Religion and Philosophy which can solve all the national, international, individual, social and moral, economic house and political problems. In this way, the teachings of Buddha (**A house on a rock foundation**) which are Hetradox schools of philosophy are relevant to the contemporary society.

Liberating the masses from all kinds of miseries is the ultimate aim of the Buddhism. The contributions of the system of Buddha In National Integration, International understanding, safeguarding human rights, value and peace education give due consideration to common people. It emphasizes the principles of good life and social harmony. All the virtues of Buddhism which help to maintain social harmony and peace like benevolence, charity, magnanimity, sincerity, respectfulness, altruism, diligence, living kindness, goodness etc., In Buddha’s Philosophy, the four noble truths and the eight-fold path of spiritual practice is remarkable contribution of Buddha Philosophy. The doctrine of Karma (**As we sow, so we reap**) is the ethical background of Buddha Philosophy. The doctrine of karma prevents people from bad actions. It is a key concept of Buddha philosophy. None can escape this inevitable law. No doubts, Buddha Philosophy help us to lead a peaceful and tranquil life.

PHILOSOPHICAL LEVEL:

Humanistic Buddhism’s approach to Ethics:

Humanistic Buddhism is Buddhism reinterpreted and redirected towards humanity, present life, and this world.

The doctrines of dependent origination or *Pratitya – sammutpada*, selflessness, and cause and effect. It is very important to note that ultra altruism and social transformation are integral part of Buddhist ethics or practice toward enlightenment. Morality in Buddhism is based on these two doctrines, resulting in a reciprocal dynamics between personal and social transformation as expressed in Buddhist scripture and illustrated in contemporary Buddhist movement such as engaged Buddhism.

Buddhism accepts that there is evil in man, but it teaches that this evil can be eradicated by understanding and determination. Because people especially government leaders and educationists, fail to understand the true nature of life, they do not attempt to teach their young the right values. In this century, education is based on the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest and of course this philosophy tends to lead the young to be aggressive and self-seeking. What we urgently need today is a code of ethics and morality which will guide people not to blindly seek material progress alone but to look for spiritual enlightenment, not just for self aggrandizement but for the common weal.

Buddhism teaches man to live in peace and harmony. The Buddha exhorted His followers not to take His teachings on blind faith but accept them only after close investigation and inquiry as to whether the Teachings are really acceptable according to one's own intelligence and experience. Even though Buddha wanted His followers to absorb the Dhamma, He did not want them to accept it without clarity of mind and complete understanding.

The Buddha wanted all human beings to lead ideal lives- to be kind, compassionate and considerate to one another and to exercise patience, tolerance and understanding in all activities and relationships. He introduced the Bhuddha Dhamma in order to enlighten, emancipate and reform mankind to lead a meaning full life. His Teachings were clear and comprehensive – they covered the existence of human being, from birth to grave. His Teachings, if reduced to the simplest of terms, could be contained in just a few words: **“DO GOOD, SHUN EVIL AND PURIFY THE MIND”** ⁽⁵⁾. These words were true during the Buddha's Time. These words are just as true applicable for the present and the future. Buddhist Teaching are designed to enable men and women to achieve fulfillment and satisfaction in this life through their own sustained efforts and to encourage them to create a social order conducive to the benefit and welfare of all mankind. It develops unselfish moral codes, generosity, concern and a spirit of real discipline for the good and well being of relations, friends and acquaintances.

HUMAN FEELINGS:

Human feelings, such as ego, greed, envy, enmity and hate that prevailed from time immemorial, have remained unchanged even to the present time. The Buddha's enlightenment is such that His spiritual injunctions, particularly the Five Precepts and the Noble Eight-fold path, are prescriptions to eradicate these human weaknesses which cause pain and harm to others. The immortal observation of the Bhuddha that “Hatred can never be eradicated by Hatred but only through love and compassion” ⁶ is a valid statement that has gone unchallenged throughout the ages. Hence, if we follow the Eight-fold Path, it will be the right path that we are taking to achieve peace and tranquility.

CONCLUSION:

The Buddhist ethics involve promoting the peace of both the mind, internal and that community, external.

Presently, we witness how the religious passions of common man are taken for personal advantage. In the name of religion, emotions, are running riots, dividing mankind into many sectors, each group vying with other for supremacy.

In this context, all over the world, there is turmoil, confusion and distress, which are prevalent in the society. These lead to peacelessness, unrest and unhappiness in our life. To put an end to this state there should be need for mental change, an inspiration of divineness in mind, moral and ethical virtues which should integrate as one and by its development, a new culture could change everyone as a complete human being. This kind of culture alone makes the life of people significant.

Hence the need of the hour is **PEACE OF MIND**. It constitutes the purity of Thought, Endurance or Tolerance, Self-control, Self-respect and Meditation. These are all enriched in Buddha Philosophy. It should be taught from the primary school onwards, as these specimens of classical literature reiterate the fundamental values of peace with wisdom.

After all, it is only **‘From small seeds that tall Oaks grow’**

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