

BUDDHISM AND ITS MESSAGE OF PEACE

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“Buddhism is not just a religion of the past or a mere faith as many have thought, but it is a time-tested scientific religion and philosophy which, in the context of the present world-situation, is more relevant today than ever before for establishing world peace.”¹

ABSTRACT

For us in India, the land of Buddha’s birth, Buddhism is an outstanding representation of our religious tradition--a tradition- of peace and harmony. Humanism, which was a hallmark of Buddha’s teachings crossed all racial and national barriers. The master aimed at the development of a new kind of free man, intent on working out his own future, with reliance on one’s own self, attadipa. But today, more than even before, we’re suffering from an exhaustion of spirit, an increase of egoism, individual and collective, which makes the ideal of a world society difficult to achieve.

Buddha has been a great force for peace in the world. Buddha’s policy of peace, self-sacrifice, kindness and charity moulded the lives of numeros saints in medieval India while in modern India ,too, some great leaders like Gandhi and Nehru have undoubtedly been guided by Buddha’s teachings. The declared foreign policy of India was based on Panchashila, in itself a Buddhist term, which allows for the possibility of peaceful co-existence between people of different ideologies.

Buddhism has an intimate association with peace. In its long history we hardly find any evidence of violence, killings, religious hatred. Buddhism wields only one sword, the sword of wisdom and recognises only one enemy i.e. ignorance.

In the present, no less than in the past, Buddhism implies peace, implying a state of mind(Maitri). The message of Buddhism and the principles on which it rests have assumed a new significance in today’s world. Even peace of which U.N.O. speaks is but an indication that the whole world

¹ Morgan, Kenneth W. (ed.) ‘The Path of the Buddha’, p. 12.

is gradually veering around the belief embodied in the religion of the Buddha.

For us in India, the land of Buddha's birth, Buddhism is an outstanding representative of our religious tradition, a tradition of peace and harmony. Humanism, which was a hallmark of Buddha's teachings crossed all racial and national barriers and became a great force for peace in the world. The Master aimed at the development of a new kind of free man, free from all prejudices, intent on working out his own future with reliance on one's own self, i.e. *attadipa*. But today, more than ever before, we are suffering from "an exhaustion of spirit, an increase of egoism, individual and collective, which makes the ideal of a world society difficult to achieve".²

Buddhism has an intimate association with the concept of peace. In its long history we hardly find any evidence of violence, killings or religious hatred. "Buddhism wields only one sword, the sword of wisdom and recognizes only one enemy i.e. ignorance".³ This is, indeed, the testimony of history.

In India, Buddha's policy of peace, self-sacrifice, kindness and charity not only influenced people in general but also rulers who made it the basis of their state policy. It moulded the lives of many saints in medieval India while in modern period, too, leaders like Gandhi and Nehru were undoubtedly guided by Buddha's teachings. The declared foreign policy of India was based on *Panchashila*, in itself a Buddhist term which allows for the possibility of peaceful co-existence between people of different ideologies.

World peace, today, appears to be a myth, a mirage. However, it is equally true that despite diversity of race, religion, ideology and so forth, people all over the world are near unanimous in their basic wish for peace and happiness. Today, at the threshold of 21st century the world is in dire need of peace which should produce harmony, universal brotherhood, love, compassion, forbearance, equanimity and breed solace in interpersonal relationship. International humanitarianism, non-violence and World peace are a foremost necessity of today.

The problem of peace-whether individual or social-is essentially a problem of mind. It's the positive state of human mind which comprehends joy and happiness which are borne out of selfless love for all sentient beings of the universe. Man hankers after peace because happiness is the ultimate

² S. Radhakrishnan's Foreword to P.V. Bapat (ed.), 2500 years of Buddhism, pp. XIV, XV.

³ op. cit., p. 398.

goal of all living beings, and in the quest for happiness intelligent man finds that it is not available as long as one's mind is not at peace.

In the strife-torn world of today, the message of Buddha holds great relevance. He wanted to lift not only man but the entire human race above and beyond the fear, ignorance and isolation which beset him in his path of life. As for its message of peace, it pervades the whole Buddhist tradition. Buddha realized that peace would come only when Man is happy. He wanted man to get rid of all malice, hatred, indulgence in lower desires and evil thoughts. He wanted to substitute these with good thoughts, worthy desires, feelings of charity and compassion, and an attitude of serenity and composure. Let men purify their thoughts and desires and complete happiness will be theirs. Such a thought-effort will, then, lead to universal peace.

As a social code, Buddhism leads us to peace, understanding and integration. Buddha tried to inculcate in his followers the sense of service and understanding with love and compassion by separating man from passion and elevating humanistic tendency in man with the help of morality, Karuna and Samata.

Peace and integrity is the central theme of Buddhism. It is indispensable for world peace as a way of securing the integral growth and stability. Buddha's chief motto was that not only all members of the Buddhist order but rather all subjects of state must achieve the ethical perfection and moral integrity which only will produce peace both within as well as outside the state.⁴

In the changing world of today, Buddhism has a great deal to contribute in establishing peace. It provides for a revolutionary doctrine of peace by way of a concept of commonwealth of Dharma. Though the message of peace is strewn all over in Buddhism, we may make a passing reference to some of the early Buddhist scriptures as well as later Mahayana philosophical and literary works, which contain specific reference to Peace. Among the earlier works Kimsita Sutra of the Cullavagga states that whosoever practices the Dhamma in accordance with Buddha's teachings and attains the essence of knowledge through meditation is established in peace. The three sutras of the Mahavagga (Sundarikabhadvaja, Magha and Salla), most of the sutras of Atthaka vagga and the complete chapter of the Parayanavagga delineate the Buddhist conception of peace as one's

⁴ 'The concept of peace in Buddhist Literature' in Buddhism and Peace (1991) ed. by Prof. G. Sundara Ramiah, Dr. K. Ravi, Dr. S. D. Joga Ram and published by the Department of Philosophy, Andhra Pradesh University, Viashakapatnam.

individual attainment of complete mental freedom by one's endeavour of renouncing craving, all philosophical doctrines and religious ceremonies. Similarly, later Mahayana works depict the Bodhisattva as a personification of Mahakaruna. Asvaghosha's *vajrasuchi* aptly shows how Mahayana acaryas tried to rise above the distinctions of caste, colour and creed, in accordance with Buddha's teachings, so as to establish peace within the state.

In this paper it is proposed to refer briefly to the concept of Ahimsa or Non-violence enunciated by Buddha which went a long way in promoting the concept of peace. Subsequently we propose to examine as to how this concept of peace is reflected in two very prominent Buddhist works, namely *Saddharmapundarikasutra* or the Lotus of the True Law and *Kalachakra Tantra* or the Wheel of time. However, before we do that it will be worthwhile analysing, briefly, the historical background which paved the way for the rise of Buddhism in the sixth century B. C.

In order to understand the significance of peace in the context of early Buddhism, it is necessary to traverse the historical background of the rise of Buddhism. The age of Buddhism was an age when, as a result of the development of the forces of production, the northern regions of India witnessed the rise of ruthless state powers on the ruins of tribal societies. Trade and war were creating unheard of miseries in the lives of the people while the greed for private property knew no bounds. Nevertheless, the productive forces were not developed enough to provide plenty for all. Rather, the further development of the productive forces which alone could lead to eventual happiness must have then presupposed a more ruthless force of exploitation and all the miseries it entailed. Simultaneously, the Gangetic basin in the sixth century B.C. witnessed the emergence of new classes leading to lot of social tensions, while in the religious sphere arose so many sects of considerable appeal and prominence with their diverse philosophies, 'a bewildering cluster of the frustrated ideas'.

In responding to such a situation, the Buddha was merely acting as an unconscious tool of history, and Buddhism from its very inception, was destined to become perhaps the biggest socio-religious movement in Indian history.⁵

In formulating the theoretical basis of his Dhamma, Buddha looked upon the suffering of his age as a sickness, a disease. The 'arya satyas' which he pronounced were concerned with the tyranny of suffering and formulated at

⁵ Chattopadhyaya, Devi Prasad, *Lokayata*, PPH New Delhi 4th ed. 1978, pp. 466,

a time which witnessed the tyranny of state power and property. In order to bring peace to the afflicted, Buddha raised the concrete material sufferings of his fellow beings to a universal principle of eternal suffering, a kind of ideal or metaphysical suffering. With such an explanation, the actual miseries arising from the new social conditions paled into insignificance. The cause of misery, found in the very craving was for existence. Buddha also came out with a message of deliverance from misery, proclaiming that suffering could be overcome and there was a definite way out for that. He further argued that the real cause of the actual suffering was to be sought somewhere outside the concrete material world, otherwise people would have taken recourse of violence instead. The ultimate cause of all human suffering was traced to 'avidya' or ignorance. The problem was solved simply by removing it from the realm of reality.

The core of Buddhism, i.e. The Noble Eightfold Path appears to have been formulated to bring happiness and peace not only to the individuals but to society at large. The first step, i.e. **Proper vision** helps man in quenching the desire (root cause of all sorrow) and leads to the path of peace. The second step i.e. **Proper Aims**, deters one from coveting wealth and power at the expense of others or indulge in senses and luxury and through proper design equips man to love others and increase their happiness. The third step, **Proper speech** (truthful, conducive to eternal friendship, endearing and measured) exhorts one to avoid misuse of tongue lest it may lead to violence and killings. The fourth step, i.e. **Proper Action** advises one not to indulge in actions such as killing, theft, adultery etc. leading to disaster but rather do such positive deeds as would lead to the benefit of others. Similarly, other steps in the Eight fold path also exhort us to remove evils from our mind, generate good thoughts to produce harmony and happiness in the society.

Buddha not only prescribed a code of conduct for both the lay-followers and the monks but even ventured to pronounce new duties for the absolute monarch, which project 'a startling modern view of political economy'. Beside other things, it advises the ruler to tackle banditry and strife and other social evils like poverty and unemployment by proper means, utilise surplus accumulation for the public works and thus ensure peace and harmony in the kingdom.

The doctrine of Buddha was eminently fitted to the needs of a rapidly evolving society. The Buddha's attitude to the injustices of the caste-system made a fervent appeal to the people. Of the contemporary prophets,

Buddha alone “could offer to the people of his times the illusion of liberty, equality & fraternity, which, as the inevitable result of the laws of social advance, were being trampled and undermined in reality.”⁶

The age of the Buddha saw the most momentous social upheavals in the Gangetic valley - the transition from tribe to state, the changed composition of the army (without tribal basis) a new set of institutions (mortgage, interest, usury) and emerging merchant classes with concomitant social vices characteristic of commercialism. Amidst the tension generated by these what was required was some sort of substitute for the lost tribal value of liberty, equality fraternity. It was Buddha which provided a substitute and became extremely popular.

In different suttas, Buddha talks about the insatiable greed of the rich. The new realities which he saw were appalling to him. The same greed of riches and power characterize the political history of the age. Numerous cases of patricide as recorded in the history of Magadha and Kosala were manifestations of the new values that followed the rise of state power and collapse of tribal morality. In a world torn to pieces by the new forces of tyranny, oppression and greed, of lust and hatred, Buddha’s message of peace, ahimsa, compassion, amity and harmony and his emphasis on the moral values proved timely and had tremendous appeal for the masses.

Ahimsa or Non-Violence

Buddhism is a gospel of peace and non-violence. Non-violence is a way of life devoid of all extremes of passion like anger, enmity, pleasure and pain. True peace emanates from non-violence which is a rational and mighty force. The practice of non-violence is life-affirming which contributes to human unity, progress and peace. Non-violence teaches one to live in harmony with others and with oneself. It requires adherence to high standards of truth and self-control.

Buddhism is considered to be a practical religion of peace and non-violence. The four Brahma-viharas, viz. Frindliness, Compassion, joy and equanimity which are ingredients of Right Mindfulness tend to promote global welfare. Further, the Bodhisattva ideal based on unselfish and sacrificing spirit, the compassionate and benevolent attitude of the Buddha towards the whole mankind, and the principles of Ahimsa or Non-violence, forbearance and humanitarian outlook all tend to promote peace.

No one can afford to overlook the non-violent strategy and social policy instituted by the Buddha. The Buddhist samgha is a true army of non-

⁶ Koshambi, B. D. - An Introduction to the study of Indian History, pp. 139.

violence. Buddha probably realized that one individual taming one's mind was not enough but effort was to be made to tame the minds of millions of men. Hence, he decided to create an army of men wearing orange robes and with shaven heads- an army of non-violent warriors whose battle was to conquer the self.

The principle of Non-violence projects an ideal of universal peace. The Buddhists, in the 21st century, have a responsibility to rediscover how their tradition of Ahimsa, love and compassion can help individuals realize peace, not only in their own life but also in the world community.

SaddharmapundarikaSutra or the Lotus of the True Law

The Buddhist ideal of peace is beautifully illustrated in Saddharmapundarikasutra or the Lotus of the True Law, one of the most important of all Mahayan scriptures, setting forth the doctrine of the One Vehicle and the eternal Buddha. The sutra teaches an ethical path which is the way of the Bodhisattva – a life of creative altruism leading to ultimate peace.

The Lotus, with its countless teachings, embodies an ideology of peace. The best foundation for world peace is universal responsibility towards equitable distribution of natural resources and thorough concern for future generations which can make the world one, a pure and peaceful land. The Lotus-sutra is absolutely nothing excluded from this teaching-mind, body, individual, society, mountain, river, tree, grass, bird, fish, animal or seed – everything will be saved. The breadth and boundlessness of the Lotus Sutra is overwhelming. It is, undoubtedly, a profound teaching on peace.

The 'Lotus' tells the story of Devadatta (Chapter XII), a disciple and also a cousin of Buddha, who subsequently defied the Buddha and broke away from Buddha's community of disciples. He indulged in the crimes of murder, slandering the Dhamma, causing dissensions among Buddha's disciples and even attempting to kill Buddha on various occasions. Comparing the evil deeds of Devadatta with that of Buddha who endured them, we learn many valuable lessons.⁷ The story conveys a range of overt expressions of both violence and non-violence and one can easily make out as to which one is more powerful.

The spirit of the Lotus does not aim solely at the salvation of individuals or awakening them to the truth but ultimately aims at changing the whole society. This is symbolized by the words "to purify the Buddha land" which

⁷ Nikkyo Niwano : "A Buddhist Approach to Peace", 1982, p. 17

appear frequently in the 'Lotus'. The Lotus sutra asserts that in order for man to become truly happy, in addition to individual enlightenment and happiness in one's individual life, it is in to purify the nation (society), thus going a step further. Chapter XI of the 'Lotus' "Beholding the precious stupa" exhorts a person to make efforts not to escape from actuality but rather to positively wrestle with it and strive to purify it. Another important lesson one derives from the Chapter is that the person who intends to make this world peaceful should directly touch the sufferings of the ordinary people in actual society. One can't serve others by idealism alone but must grapple with actual problems.

"The divine power of the Tathagata" (Chapter XXI), a symbolic recapitulation of the ideas of the 'Lotus' explains that Buddha reveals divine power and shows various mysteries of miraculous phenomenon all of which symbolize the truth that everyone is one. The phenomenon "One Buddhaland" occurring here means the formation of a world-federation which we must try to translate into action.

The Lotus Sutra describes the actions of people working for the peace of humanity in terms of bodhisattvas of various kinds. Among them, the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (Chapter XX) provides a model of non-violent dialogue. He believes in and respects human dignity to the maximum extent. In essence, what Sakyamuni was trying to achieve by appearing in this world was the optimum way of life for both the self and others. Similarly, "Bodhisattvas from the Earth" (Chapter XV) appear as those who will disseminate the spirit of the Lotus sutra in the future. It is predicted that they'll appear together with the philosophy of respect for the dignity of life in the evil age of five impurities, the Latter day of the Law.

In our terms, the bodhisattvas appearing in the Lotus-sutra can be seen as representing ordinary people striving to create a culture of peace.⁸ The heart of their endeavours is respect for the dignity of life. Their principal tool is non-violent, compassionate dialogue, and each one of them manifests his or her distinctive characteristics while working for the achievement of this goal.

Chapter II of the Sutra—"Expedient Means"—clearly states that Buddhas appear in this world for the purpose of revealing to sentient beings the universal life (Buddha-nature) in each one of them. Their aim is to open and show living beings wisdom, awaken them to it, and cause them to

⁸ 'World Peace and the Lotus Sutra' a Paper presented by Daisaku Ikeda at the 37th International Conference of Asian and North African Studies (ICANAS 37), Moscow 2004.

become one with it. This glorifies the dignity of life and helps sentient beings to be as good as they are capable of being. Again, it is held that whereas ignorance evokes evil energy creating schisms, good energy becomes manifest by the true nature of all phenomenon and the Buddha's nature becomes compassion, trust, wisdom, courage and justice. And when all things, including humanity, reveal the good nature and are united in solidarity, the essential dignity of life based on the law of dependent origination, is made manifest. It is only under such circumstances that we may strive to create a culture of peace, characterized by non-violence, compassion, trust and hope.

The Buddhist ideal culture of peace is described in chapter V, "The parable of the Medicinal Herbs" of the Lotus-sutra. It is stated here that in nature grow a great diversity of plants and trees. Receiving the equal blessings of earth and rain, they grow and blossom, each manifesting its own characteristics. This text, in which earth and rain are metaphors for Shakyamuni's impartial teachings and plants represent living beings, skillfully describes the nature of the culture of peace. "In social terms, the parable indicates how diverse cultures can preserve their distinctive natures while co-existing peacefully".⁹

Kalachakra: Wheel of Time

Kalachakra, one of the greatest divisions of Tantric Buddhism, in Sanskrit means "Tantra of the Wheel of Time". Kalachakra is part of an elaborate system. It's a Tantric teaching that Tibetans consider very useful for eliminating or at least reducing war and is full of positive effects. It is reported that in 1953 His Holiness Dalai Lama received the Kalachakra Initiation¹⁰ from Ling Rinpoche. This is one of the most important initiations in the Tantric tradition with special significance for world peace. Subsequently, His Highness has given Kalachakra initiation at different places in India and abroad, with the motive to promote world peace.

However, to achieve genuine world peace, we have first to create inner peace. This is only possible when we reduce our negative thoughts and increase positive attitudes by developing love and compassion, patience and understanding among human beings. Universal humanitarian approach to world problems, then, appears to be the only sound basis for world peace.¹¹

⁹Daisaku Ikeda, op. cit.

¹⁰ Encyclopedia of Buddhism: A Word of Faith, vol. XI, p. 347.

¹¹ 'Vision of Peace', Dalai Lama's address to the Conference on 'Seeking the true meaning of peace' in San Jose Costa Rica, 1989. News Tiber May-August, 1989 p.7.

Kalachakra came to be developed for the welfare and prosperity of all beings and for peace at individual and global level. But as long as we suffer from mental distortions as attachment and anger, peace will be impossible to achieve. Kalachakra helps the initiated to overcome such mental distortions and develop a state of mind to enable him to achieve peace, both within and without. Such a harmony of exterior and interior is said to be possible only through the study of Kalachakra.

Kalachakra initiation is a workshop in a grand scale to make an earnest effort by both the teacher and the disciple to awaken the Buddha nature, the innate goodness, by the combined force of teaching, prayer, blessing, devotion, mantra, yoga and meditation. It is an effort by every participant to try to discover the true and permanent peace for the sake of all others.¹² Kalachakra initiation, the highest form of Tibetan Buddhist Tantric practice leads one to complete enlightenment attaining the Bodhicitta and realization of Shunyata in one's own lifetime.

The only way a lasting peace could be established is by cultivating the enlightened peace in the minds of the people. The kalachakra is considered to be a unique and practical step in this direction. Kalachakra creates right aspiration of a Bodhisattva wishing to become an enlightened being in order to help all other beings. The Kalachakra practice is the Buddhist means of achieving the Bodhicitta and becoming the Buddha in one's own lifetime. The Bodhicitta is the intuitive feeling, unclouded by selfishness, anger or fear. It's a strong desire to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

To conclude, one may say that Buddha's teaching of overcoming evil helped humanity in achieving peace. It had tremendous impact on the general and social being of the society thereby contributing to amity and social harmony. It revived the spirit of social solidarity by putting an end to social conflict. The noble mission of the Buddha helped not only India but also South-eastern and Far-eastern countries to create conditions for justice, political and socio-economic stability, fraternity, peace and social harmony.¹³

The message of Buddhism, and the principles on which it rests have assumed a new significance in today's world. Even peace of which U.N.O. speaks is but an indication that the world is gradually veering around the beliefs embodied in the religion of the Buddha.¹⁴

¹² Tsongkhapa: Tantra in Tibet, Allen & Unwin, London, 1977.

¹³ Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 349

¹⁴ '2500 years of Buddhism', op. cit. p. 414.

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