



BUDDHISM'S CONCEPT OF PEACE AND DEMOCRACY HAS IMPORTANCE IN TODAY'S WORLD

Kumara

**Ph.D. Research Scholar, Centre for Mahayana Buddhist Studies,
Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar, Andhra Pradesh, India.**

ABSTRACT

Buddhism has long been hailed as a religion of peace and nonviolence. With its growing vitality in regions around the world, many people today turn to Buddhism for relief and guidance at a time when peace appears to be a distant dream more than ever, with wars in the Middle East and Africa, and terrorist activities expanding into areas where people never expected such a level of violence, such as Bali, London, and New York.

However, there has never been a better time to re-examine Buddhism's position on peace and violence, as well as that of other world religions, in the hope that it can be included in global efforts to create new sets of values regarding the ways people manage conflict and maintain peace through nonviolent means.



KEYWORDS: *Mettā-loving-kindness/ Karunā- compassion/ Muditā- sympathetic joy/ Upekkhā-equanimity*

INTRODUCTION

The importance of Buddhism's concept of peace and democracy in today's world is an attempt to investigate the meaning of peace and democracy in Buddhism, as well as how the Buddha's teachings can assist the world in achieving peace and democracy. Buddhism has traditionally been seen as a peaceful and nonviolent religion. With its growing popularity in many parts of the world, many people are turning to Buddhism for comfort and guidance at a time when peace appears to be a distant dream more than ever, with wars in the Middle East and Africa, and terrorist activities spreading to places where no one expected such violence, such as Bali, London, and New York. However, there has never been a better opportunity to re-examine Buddhism's perspective on peace and violence, as well as that of other world faiths, in the hopes of including it in worldwide efforts to develop new sets of principles for how people handle conflict and sustain peace through nonviolent means.

In light of peace studies, this research aims to provide an overview of the Buddhist idea of peace. It also discusses the Buddhist viewpoint on the origins of violence and methods for preventing and achieving peace. It looks at how Buddhist contributions to peace-making and the promotion of a peaceful culture in today's society might help. Buddhism, which has a lengthy history and has been enriched by generations of individuals from diverse traditions, spans the globe and has branches in many countries and places.

However, a common core of Buddha's teaching and practice is observed in major Buddhist traditions and considered essentials of Buddhism. In this article, the term Buddhism is used to refer to the common core teachings across the current major traditions of Buddhism.

The Concept of Peace in Buddhism

Buddhism is based on the Buddha's realization of natural truth. Buddha's enlightenment enabled him to achieve purity, light, and tranquillity, as well as the removal of all defilements that created pain and disorder in both himself and others. It then led to the establishment of Buddhism, a way of life that is good, pleasant, and peaceful.

Nonviolent activities are acceptable in Buddhism; as the Buddha said, "Nonviolence is the delight of the world." Buddhism does not condone any form of killing or injuring others. As a result, the Five Precepts are given as the Buddhist's foundational guideline. Buddhism also promotes loving compassion and tolerance, which are global peace virtues.

Buddhism understood the value of peace. "There is no happiness higher than calm," Buddhists are told. This religion encourages people to research the concept of peace, stating, "It is peace that everybody must study." Buddhism adamantly promotes peace in a variety of areas, including politics, economics, and education. There has never been a battle in the name of Buddhism throughout history since this religion promotes peace and cooperation. Buddhism is usually regarded as a peaceful religion.

Buddhists believe that the Buddha (meaning "the awakened") awakened to the laws of the universe, which are said to be operating eternally, whether the Buddha discovered them or not. The most fundamental among these laws is the law of karma, or, Buddhist terminology, dependent origination, which explains the genuine condition of things that exist in the universe. In its simplest straightforward form, dependent origination claims that anything (including sentient and insentient beings) can only exist in relation to everything else; if the causes of its existence disappear, then it ceases to exist. Nothing can exist on its own and everything is dependent on other things. All elements, all entities, all phenomena are thus related directly and indirectly to one another in the universe. Any change in this huge interconnected compound of existence would definitely, eventually exerts influence on everything else. Derived from the principle of dependent origination is the Buddhist view of the cosmic world and the human being.

At the macro level, the universe is represented and seen from a Buddhist viewpoint as a network of jewels, an interconnected and interdependent web of nodes, each of which simultaneously reflects all other hundreds of thousands of nodes in the web. All other nodes would simultaneously reflect this specific node. This network is named "the Indra's Net" in the Avatamsaka Sutra. Each node can contain another web-like universe within itself and so forth with an infinite number of webs, i.e., universes. In this vast, endless cosmos, everything is still interrelated even in the most remote sense. According to the Buddhist beliefs, many of us cannot see or be aware of this relatedness as we are confined by all sorts of limitations due to our past experiences and actions. Yet the connections are always there. The principle of dependent origination and the Buddhist view of the universe and the human beings undergird an imperative for people who realize the interdependent nature of their existence and the interconnection among all things — they would develop a strong sense of responsibility for their own behaviours, as well as appreciation and empathy for others. It is from this realization of the true nature of existence that non-harming, compassionate, altruistic action would arise. In the openings of many sutras, the Buddha, the one who awakened to the cosmic reality, is described as naturally expounding four basic mental faculties

Down to the micro level, the human being is viewed as a string of processes governed by the principle of dependent origination. Since everything within a human being (including physicality and thoughts) depends on other things to exist, nothing within this human being is genuinely independent (autonomous). This doctrine of no-self (Pāli: *anatta*; Skt. *anatman*), however, does not rule out the existence of temporary aggregates capable of responding to environmental stimuli, i.e., our body and

mind. Also, it recognizes the diversity among all beings and the uniqueness of each since each being undergoes constant changes while responding and reacting in its own way to all other beings and things around. The ever-changing quality in any beings denotes a vast capacity for change and development possible in either directions, for better or worse. Yet the potentials to transform the status quo are always looming in the horizon.

The principle of dependent origination and the Buddhist view of the universe and the human beings undergird an imperative for people who realize the interdependent nature of their existence and the interconnection among all things — they would develop a strong sense of responsibility for their own behaviours, as well as appreciation and empathy for others. It is from this realization of the true nature of existence that non-harming, compassionate, altruistic action would arise. In the openings of many sutras, the Buddha, the one who awakened to the cosmic reality, is described as naturally expounding four basic mental faculties (*Brahmaviharas*, “Divine Abidings”; also named *appamanacetovimutti*, “immeasurable deliverance of mind”): loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). The Buddha teaches that these four mental faculties, together with the Four Noble Truths, are to be cultivated by all Bhikkhus (Skt. *Bhiksus*) and later all Buddhists through reflecting upon the sentient beings of infinite numbers who are on their way to become a Buddha. Yet the altruistic mental faculties are combined with the wisdom developed along with the gradually deepening reflection. This is the guiding principle of all Buddhist practices—the middle way. Through these mindful actions conducted with moderation can an ideal Buddhist state of existence come true—living in harmony with everything (sentient or non-sentient) in the universe. This Buddhist way of looking at the world comes, in the opinion of Johan Galtung, a Norwegian peace studies pioneer, closest to the one dynamic, complex peace theory he proposes, in which the world is “precisely a process based on diversity in symbiotic (mutually influential) interaction.” In this world of multi-leveled plurality, according to Galtung, peace is not a stable, end state but a more interactive process of a series of changing and balancing acts, an on-going dialectic between our actions and the world.

The Concept of Democracy in the Buddhist Worldview

Because the terms “Buddhism” and “democracy” are so broad, this will limit their application.

The term “Buddhism” here will be limited to only Theravāda Buddhism, that is, to the teaching of the Buddha found in the Tipitaka and clarified by the traditional commentaries of the Theravāda School. To open to Mahayana Buddhism would add more and more later scriptures whose canonical list varies from school to school within the Mahayana tradition. As for the term “democracy”, we must distinguish between a “democratic regime” and the “democratic spirit” in a regime. It is possible to have a democratic regime with an absolutist spirit, and an absolute regime with a democratic spirit, not to mention regimes that use the name “democratic” for purposes of obfuscation. For this chapter to take the term “democracy” for the government or regime would be anachronistic, because in the time of the Buddha, such an idea would have seemed impossible and absurd.

“Buddhism and democracy” is possible only if we limit our consideration to the “democratic spirit” as far as it can be found in Buddha’s teachings and practices.

Characteristics of Buddhist Democracy

The final appeal is made by Buddha's words. Buddha did not appoint anyone or any group of people to approve or amend the deeds or the regulations. The oral teaching of Buddha came to an end with His death. No one had the authority to add or remove any of Buddha's words. The Buddha's statements can be interpreted and clarified by students. Buddha's words are like a constitution written entirely by Buddha. He might consult with others to get their thoughts, but He always made the final decision, which no one could modify.

As a result, the Buddhist Sangha's democracy is restricted to the application of the regulations and does not extend to the creation and modification of the regulations, unless the regulation is modest and the community unanimously gives its agreement by silent vote. This means that the Sangha government is absolutist in the formation of the Constitution, but democratic in its application. The *MahaparinibbanaSuttanta* expresses the vision and the reason of Buddha: I have preached the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine in respect of the truths. Ananda, the Tathagata has no such thing as a closed-fist teacher who keeps some things back. Surely, Ananda, should there be any one who harbours the thought, 'It is I who will lead the brotherhood', or 'The order is dependent upon me', that is that he should lay down instructions in any matter concerning the order. Now the Tathagata, Ananda, thinks not that it is he who should lead the brotherhood, or that the order is dependent upon him. Therefore, O Ananda, be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp. Hold fast as a refuge to the truth. Look not for refuge to any one besides yourselves.

It may be, Ananda that in some of you the thought may arise, 'The word of the master is ended, and we have no teacher more.' But it is not thus, Ananda, that you should regard it. The truths and the rules of the Order which I have set forth and laid down for you all, let them, after I am gone, be the Teacher to you.

It is to be noted that the Sangha Constitution or the Vinaya should be distinguished from the Universal and Eternal Dhamma which cannot be determined at will or modified by any convenience or inconvenience. Only the Vinaya can be modified according to their appropriateness to the circumstances. Nevertheless, even here He allowed for modifications with regard only to the minor Vinayas.

All monks have equal rights regardless of family background or personal prestige. In the Indian context of Buddha's time, caste discrimination was taken strongly into account. But Buddha's Vinaya went against the current and this became the strong point of His Sangha Community. People of all castes found equal right of recognition in His Sangha and equal right to the perfect purification or Nibbana status. Read the following passage and imagine a triumphant tone of Buddha in pronouncing it:

Just, O Bhikkhus, as the great rivers that is to say, the Ganga, the Yamuna, the Aciravati, the Sarabhu, and the Mahi when they have fallen into the great ocean, renounce their name and lineage and are there forth reckoned as the great ocean.

Just so, O Bhikkhus, do these four castes the Khatiyas, the Brahmans, the Vessa, and the Suddas, when they have gone forth from the world under the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata, renounce their names and lineage, and enter into the number of the Sakyaputtiya Samanas. Any monk who has been such for a lesser period is to venerate the older one. This means that an outcast monk is to be venerated by a monk from the Brahmin caste, if the former has a longer period of monkhood. Such a practice could not be imagined at that time outside the Buddhist community. A fraternal democracy is recommended. Buddha recommended six conditions for his monastic community. Buddha seems to have known how difficult this was, for in stating this He did not use the categorical imperative, but a persuasive form:

So long as the brethren shall persevere in kindness of action, speech, and thought among the saints, both in public and private so long as they shall divide without partiality, and share in common with the upright and the holy, all such things as they receive in accordance with just provisions of the order, down even to the mere contents of a begging bowl so long as the brethren shall live among the saints in the practice, both in public and in private, of those virtues which are productive of freedom, and praised by the wise; which are untarnished by the desire of future life, or by the belief in the efficacy of outward acts; and which are conducive to high and holy thoughts so long as the brethren shall live among the saints, cherishing, both in public and in private, that noble and saving faith which leads to the complete destruction of the sorrow of him who acts according to it. So long may the brethren be expected not to decline but to prosper so long as these six conditions shall continue to exist

among the brethren, so long as they are instructed in these six conditions, so long may the brethren be expected not to decline, but to prosper.

Unus intersperse (one among equals) democracy is an ideal of the Sangha. Buddha's words: "Think not that it is he who should lead the brotherhood"⁹ show that, though the eldest in years of monkhood is venerated by all the other monks, he is not by any means the leader of the whole community in the administrative affairs. He is only one among equals. To conduct an administrative affair, any monk of any number of years of monkhood may be chosen by the community. He is still one among the equals and has to venerate those monks of his community who have been monks for a longer period.

CONCLUSION

Buddhism is a religion founded on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who lived in what is now Nepal and northeastern India about 25 centuries ago. After experiencing a profound revelation of the nature of life, death, and what provides escape from suffering, he became known as "the Buddha," which means "awakened one" in Sanskrit. Buddhism has long been hailed as a religion of peace and nonviolence. With the wars in the Middle East and Africa, many people today turn to Buddhism for relief and direction, as its vitality grows in countries around the world.

There has never been a better time to re-examine Buddhism's position on peace and violence, as well as that of other world religions, in the hope that it can be included in global efforts to create new sets of values regarding the ways people manage conflict and maintain peace through nonviolent means. Buddhism, which has a long history and has been enriched by generations of people in diverse traditions, extends north and south, with branches in many cultures and areas. However, a core of Buddha's teaching and practice is shared by major Buddhist lineages and is regarded as important to Buddhism.

In the history of humanity, the ideal vision of civilization has been eternal peace. The modern world is gripped by violence and terror. Men are increasingly on the lookout for eternal serenity. It is regrettable that we, as humans, are attempting to end wars by waging more wars. However, violence cannot be stopped with violence. Violence breeds more violence, hatred breeds more hatred, conflicts generate more wars, and bloodshed breeds more bloodsheds. Every creature in the universe wishes for peace. Suffering and misery are not desired by any species. However, in this reality, finding tranquillity is incredibly difficult. Buddhism and the Buddhist approach are the correct road, perfectly practical and accomplished for the goal of 'Peace.'

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- (1) Dīgha Nikāya, Vol.2., Thai Sangha Committee, Bangkok, Mahama kutraj vidyalaya Press, 1595.
- (2) Jātaka, (ed.) by V. Fausboll, 7 vols., (London: Pali Text Society 1877-1897. rpr.1990-1992.)
- (3) Acharya Buddharakkhita. "Lokavagga: The World" (Dhp XIII). The Pali by Access to Insight, 23 April 2015.
- (4) Acharya Buddharakkhita. The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.1985.
- (5) Adams, 1997Adams, D. (Ed.). UNESCO and a culture of peace: Promoting a global movement. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, Culture of Peace Series. 1997.
- (6) Angelika Klein. Concepts and Principles of Democratic Governance and Accountability. Kampala: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftng Uganda Office. 2011.
- (7) Anne-Marie Gardner. Democratic Governance and Non-State Actors. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan. 2011.

-
- (8) Bhikkhu Bodhi. The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya, Boston: Wisdom Publications. 2000.
- (9) Boulding, Kenneth. "Twelve Friendly Quarrels with Johan Galtung." Journal of Peace Research 14(1). 1977.
- (10) Calleja, Joachim James. 'A Kantian Epistemology of Education and Peace: An Examination of Concepts and Values'. Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Bradford University. 1991.



Kumara

**Ph.D. Research Scholar, Centre for Mahayana Buddhist Studies,
Acharya Nagarjuna University, Nagarjuna Nagar, Andhra Pradesh, India.**