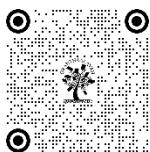


RELEVANCE OF BUDDHISM IN MODERN WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The core message of Buddhism centers around peace and integrity. Buddhism is regarded as a practical religion of peace and non-violence. Non-violence is a way of life free from extremes of passion, such as anger, hostility, pleasure, and pain. The principle of non-violence upholds the ideal of universal peace. We come from the land of Buddha, not from the land of War (Yuddh). "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. In the 21st century, Buddhists have the responsibility to rediscover how their tradition of Ahimsa, love, and compassion can help individuals achieve peace in their own lives and within the global community.

Keywords: Buddhism, Peace, Compassion, Love, Enlightenment.



1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, consumerism and sales drive much of the economic system, with financial institutions primarily focused on profit maximization. This pursuit often leads to the concentration of wealth and exploitation. Britt International's M-Ways model exemplifies this trend. Even if new resources are found over time and current reserves shift, resources remain finite and will ultimately be depleted. Research has indicated that changes in industrial output, food production, and pollution are aligned with predictions of economic and societal collapse, which is expected to occur within the 21st century. The production and distribution of goods are dominated by large organizations that, through various clever strategies, foster an insatiable desire among consumers for more possessions. People often purchase items not out of necessity but due to desire. A consumer society is defined by the belief that owning things is the primary path to happiness, leading to the acceptance of consumption as a means of self-development, self-realization, and self-fulfillmentⁱ.

2. IMPORTANCE OF BUDDHISM

In this profit-driven economic system, the guiding question has shifted from "What is good for humanity?" to "What is beneficial for the system's growth?"ⁱⁱ This globalized profit-oriented framework operates on the notion that egotism, selfishness, and greed are essential for its functioning, and that these traits will eventually lead to harmony and peace. However, Fromm argues that greed and peace are inherently contradictoryⁱⁱⁱ. From a Buddhist perspective, the increased production and consumption of material goods, along with the craving (*taṇhā*) for them, does not necessarily result in greater happiness.

Buddhism is a remarkable expression of our religious tradition—a tradition rooted in peace and harmony. The humanism central to the Buddha's teachings transcended racial and national boundaries. His goal was to cultivate a new kind of free individual, one who could shape their own future through self-reliance, or *attadipa*. However, today, more than ever, we face a spiritual exhaustion and a rise in egoism, both personal and collective, which hinders the realization of a truly united global society. The Buddha has been a powerful influence for peace in the world. His teachings on peace, self-sacrifice, kindness, and charity shaped the lives of countless saints in medieval India. Buddhism is deeply connected with peace, and throughout its long history, there is scarcely any trace of violence, killings, or religious hatred. The only sword Buddhism wields is the sword of wisdom, and its sole enemy is ignorance. The teachings of Buddhism and the principles they embody have taken on renewed importance in today's world. The humanism that defined the Buddha's teachings transcended all racial and national boundaries, becoming a powerful force for peace in the world. Buddhism wields only one sword, the sword of wisdom and recognizes only one enemy i.e. ignorance"^{iv}.

Buddhism highlights that the pursuit of luxury and abundance is a fundamental source of suffering, advocating for restraint, simplicity, and contentment. This lifestyle promotes frugal consumption, a heightened sense of environmental responsibility, a desire to return to more human-scale living and working environments, and an aspiration to realize our higher psychological and spiritual potential. From a Buddhist perspective, enlightened simplicity involves cultivating contentment (*samtuṭṭhi*) with little and avoiding wastefulness through a reduction in desires (*appicchatā*). Avoiding waste is a crucial element of Buddhist enlightened simplicity. The Buddha criticized the fig-tree glutton (*udumbarakhādika*) method, which involves shaking down an indiscriminate amount of fruit from a fig tree to consume just a few. Humanity cannot continue to consume the planet's finite resources at the current rate.

In the 21st century, there is an urgent need for peace in the world to promote harmony, universal brotherhood, love, compassion, forbearance, equanimity, and to cultivate comfort in interpersonal relationships. Buddha's message remains highly relevant today. He sought to elevate not just individuals, but the entire human race, beyond the fear, ignorance, and isolation that hinder their journey through life. Buddha sought to instill in his followers a spirit of service and understanding, grounded in love and compassion. He aimed to detach individuals from worldly desires and elevate their humanistic tendencies through the practice of morality, compassion (*Karuna*), and equality (*Samata*). In today's ever-changing world, Buddhism has much to offer in promoting peace. It presents a revolutionary doctrine of peace through the concept of the commonwealth of Dharma. While the message of peace is woven throughout Buddhism, we can briefly highlight some early Buddhist scriptures and later Mahayana philosophical and literary works that specifically emphasize peace. In addressing such circumstances, Buddha was simply acting as an unwitting instrument of history, and from its very beginning, Buddhism was destined to become one of the most significant socio-religious movements in Indian history^v.

Buddhism does not oppose wealth and prosperity, provided they are earned and utilized in alignment with ethical principles. The real challenge lies in the human inclination toward craving (*taṇhā*), as identified by the Buddha. From a Buddhist perspective, an ideal society would prioritize the happiness and welfare of the greatest number of people, encapsulated in the motto "*bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya*"^{vi}. In this approach to social and economic development, the main criterion for policy formulation should be the overall well-being of society's members, meaning that production must be geared towards meeting the genuine needs of the people rather than the opposite. Buddhism is regarded as a practical religion of peace and non-violence. Non-violence is a way of life free from extremes of passion, such as anger, hostility, pleasure, and pain. The principle of non-violence upholds the ideal of universal peace. In the 21st century, Buddhists have the responsibility to rediscover how their tradition of Ahimsa, love, and compassion can help individuals achieve peace in their own lives and within the global community.

Buddhism is one of the four major religions in the world today and it can be understood through three primary categories: philosophy, science, and religion. The term "Buddha" is derived from the Sanskrit word for enlightenment. Buddha's teachings continue to benefit people in the modern world and will remain relevant for many centuries to come,

particularly in the realms of ethics, politics, and social relations. The current system operates on the belief that fulfilling humanity's material needs will lead to peace and happiness, but this is a misguided notion. While it is true that, as animals, these needs must be met, mere satisfaction of instinctual desires is insufficient for true happiness. Human happiness relies on fulfilling needs and passions that are uniquely human. From a Buddhist perspective, economic and moral issues are inseparable; simply addressing economic needs without fostering spiritual growth will never result in genuine contentment among people.

In search for enlightenment, Buddha left his home and comfortable life to live among the common people. He was deeply moved by the realities of mortality, morbidity, and disability. Buddha experienced profound remorse after witnessing four significant sights: an old man, a sick person, a corpse, and an ascetic. These encounters brought about a major transformation in his life. The story of Buddha's life reveals his deep concern for the issues that affect all ordinary human beings—such as the fear of death, the tragedy of aging and disability, and the devastating effects of disease on life. Humanity is a central theme in Buddha's journey, inspiring us to adopt similar values in our own lives. Throughout his life, he prioritized reasoning over blind faith. In India, Buddha's principles of peace, self-sacrifice, kindness, and charity not only impacted the general populace but also inspired rulers to adopt these values as the foundation of their state policies. Many kings and emperors were inspired by Buddhist thought, with Emperor Ashoka, who ruled India in the 3rd century BCE, being perhaps the most renowned. Evidence suggests that Ashoka transformed his moral and political priorities by embracing the nonviolent teachings of Buddha. He chose to adopt the role of a moral teacher rather than that of a strict ruler. Buddha strongly valued open dialogue with others, regardless of their belief systems. His views on mortality and ethics enabled him to engage in these conversations with clarity and logical consistency.

In a world shattered by the forces of tyranny, oppression, greed, lust, and hatred, Buddha's message of peace, non-violence (ahimsa), compassion, goodwill, and harmony, along with his focus on moral values, proved timely and resonated deeply with the masses. Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama said, "The 20th century was a century of war and violence, now we all need to work to see that the 21st century is of peace and dialogue. A society driven by greed loses the ability to perceive things in their entirety, leading to a lack of understanding about when enough is truly enough. The belief that we can achieve peace on Earth through the relentless pursuit of wealth, without considering spiritual and moral issues, is an unrealistic, unscientific, and irrational hope^{vii}."Without a revolution in fairness, the world will find itself in chronic conflict over dwindling resources, making it impossible to achieve the cooperation needed to address issues like pollution and overpopulation^{viii}. In this context, Buddhism advocates for the equitable distribution of basic necessities, emphasizing that no one should suffer from deprivation, as it is a fundamental cause of social conflict. Today, more than ever, we are experiencing a "spiritual exhaustion and a rise in egoism, both individual and collective, which hinders the realization of a global society^{ix}."

3. TEACHING OF BUDDHA

Now, focusing on Buddha's worldly insights that continue to hold relevance today, I will highlight four key areas: (1) the importance of enlightenment, communication, and public reasoning; (2) the role of human values in fostering good governance and ethical public politics; (3) the need to move beyond contractarian approaches to political and moral reasoning, such as those rooted in the "social contract" tradition, which are still prevalent in modern political and moral theory; and (4) the necessity of adopting a global, rather than narrow or parochial, perspective on the demands of fairness and justice. The significance of communication and public dialogue in today's world cannot be overstated. For example, the wide-ranging social impact of the recent economic crisis calls for greater global discussion. In fostering the rich historical tradition of communication and interactive public reasoning, it is essential to recognize and value the contributions of Buddha's teachings and the Buddhist tradition. He shifted his moral and political priorities, adopting the nonviolent teachings of Gautama Buddha. Over time, he disbanded his army, worked to free slaves and indentured labourers, and transitioned from being a strict emperor to embracing the role of a moral teacher. Buddhism unites people through intellectual and cultural exchanges, driven by a non-sectarian view of humanity. It spread from India to far-reaching regions via various routes—some by sea, others over land. This expansion of Buddhism can be seen as a form of missionary activity, similar to the spread of Christianity. The Four Noble Truths embody the core of Buddha's teachings. These are the key principles that Buddha realized during his meditation under the Bodhi tree:

1. The truth of suffering (Dukkha)
2. The truth of the origin of suffering (Samudāya)
3. The truth of the cessation of suffering (Nirodha)
4. The truth of the path to the cessation of suffering (Magga)

Buddha is often likened to a physician. In the first two Noble Truths, he diagnoses the problem(suffering) and identifies its cause. The third Noble Truth reveals that there is a cure. The fourth Noble Truth, where Buddha outlines the Eightfold Path, serves as the prescription, the way to achieve freedom from suffering. The Fourth Noble Truth, known as Magga, presents the Buddha's remedy for ending suffering. It outlines a set of guiding principles called the Eightfold Path, also known as the Middle Way. This path steers clear of both self-indulgence and extreme asceticism, as the Buddha found neither approach useful in his quest for enlightenment.

The Wheel of Dharma, symbolizing the Eightfold Path, represents the eight divisions. These stages are not meant to be followed in a specific sequence; instead, they complement and strengthen one another.

1. Right Understanding - Sammā ditthi
2. Right Intention - Sammā sañkappa
3. Right Speech - Sammā vācā
4. Right Action - Sammā kammanta
5. Right Livelihood - Sammā ājīva
6. Right Effort - Sammā vāyāma
7. Right Mindfulness - Sammā sati
8. Right Concentration - Sammā samādhi

The eight stages can be categorized into three groups: Wisdom (right understanding and intention), Ethical Conduct (right speech, action, and livelihood), and Meditation (right effort, mindfulness, and concentration). Buddha depicted the Eightfold Path as a vehicle for attaining enlightenment, comparing it to a raft used to cross a river.

To achieve sustainable development, what we need most is to streamline and downsize. Large-scale technologies are dehumanizing and morally problematic because they become impersonal and unresponsive, rendering individuals functionally ineffective, dispossessed, voiceless, powerless, excluded, and alienated^x. From a Buddhist perspective, we must establish a new relationship between people and nature, based on cooperation rather than exploitation or domination. The Buddha taught that hatred cannot be overcome by more hatred. For the Buddha, the only way to resolve conflict is for one party to cease its actions. Loving-kindness, the cornerstone of Buddhism, was not viewed by Buddha as merely a basic ethical principle. Instead, he analyzed the concept of loving-kindness as a profound aspect of life. The Buddha also taught Karuna, or compassion. Compassion is often more easily evoked; when we observe someone in distress, our hearts instinctively reach out to them, prompting us to rush to their aid. Another crucial aspect of Buddha's teachings is Bhavana, or meditation. Bhavana refers to the training of the mind, and etymologically, it signifies development—a deeper enhancement of the mind. The Buddha believed that everything arises from the mind. This idea is reflected in the opening line of the first verse of the Dhammapada. A pure mind, a trained mind, a well-developed mind—one that can be controlled at will and does not dwell on thoughts that lead to tension and boredom—remains alert, continually evolving, discovering itself, and uncovering the secrets and realities of life. This is humanity's greatest treasure. In today's scientifically and technologically advanced global village, despite the many conveniences that make life easier and more enjoyable, people often find themselves physically and mentally unsatisfied and lacking a sense of security. Buddhism remains applicable today and holds a significant place in modern life due to its timeless relevance, which is rooted in a set of enduring values.

5. CONCLUSION

Buddha's insights on several critically important issues remain relevant today. This includes his emphasis on public reasoning, the value of education and communication, the need for inclusive values, the responsibility that comes with power, and the significance of intellectual universalism. Buddha's revolutionary ideas can still enhance our understanding of the world and its challenges. One does not need to be a Buddhist, doctrinaire, or religious to be informed, inspired, and enlightened—even after 2,500 years—by the wisdom and reasoning of this remarkable human being.

Buddha's teachings on overcoming evil greatly contributed to humanity's pursuit of peace. His message had a profound impact on both individuals and society, fostering unity and social harmony. By ending social conflict, it revived the spirit of solidarity. Buddha's noble mission not only transformed India but also influenced Southeast and Far East nations, helping to establish justice, political and socio-economic stability, fraternity, peace, and social harmony^{xi}.

The message of Buddhism and its foundational principles have gained new relevance in today's world. Even the concept of peace advocated by the United Nations reflects a growing alignment with the beliefs represented in the teachings of Buddha^{xii}.

Buddhism has a significant role to play in our lives, and we, from the land of Buddha's birth, have a crucial part in this. It is our responsibility to share our thoughts, knowledge, and experiences with as many people as possible, ensuring that Buddha's message continues to reach every corner of the world.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest between them.

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