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Ahimsa: Relevance of Buddha's Teaching of non-violence in the present world

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Abstract

Background: The world is in the grip of numerous conflicts which are among the nations such as Israel-Palestine conflict, North Korea-South Korea rivalry and also conflicts within the nations such as Syrian crisis, secessionist movements such as in Kashmir, North East India. Also terrorism and radicalism is posing a threat to peace and security of the world.

Objectives of Research

1. To analyse role of Buddha's non-violence in promoting world peace.
2. To analyse how far controlling one's desires can solve national and international border disputes.
3. To analyse role of ahimsa in dealing with challenges of Naxalism, separatist movements.
4. To examine the role of Buddha's non-violence in making North-East India a peaceful and a developed region.

Aim: To solve the conflicts of present world by learning from teachings of Gautam Buddha.

Research Methodology

1. Historical Research- It would include study of Buddhist creature to establish facts and impact of Buddhist philosophy during those times.
2. Secondary Sources- It includes Journals, articles, texts on relevance of Buddha's ahimsa.
3. Analytical Method- It would analyse the impacts of Buddhist philosophy in present context.

Result: The teachings of Buddha are still relevant in solving contemporary conflicts as the reason of conflicts still remains limitless desire of individuals and nations.

Keywords: Peace, conflict, non-violence, desires

Introductions

India is a land of birth of Buddhism- a religion which preached peace, harmony, compassion, humanism as some of its core principals. In his concept of Arya Satya (four noble truths) Buddha said life is full of sorrow and people suffer due to desires. If desires are conquered nirvana will be attained. To end human miseries he recommended eight-fold path / ashtangika marga. Gautama Buddha taught that people should avoid excess of both luxury and austerity. He prescribed madhyam marg / middle path.

He laid down the code of conduct with focus on non-stealing, non-lying, not to covet property of others, not to use intoxicants, not to indulge in corrupt practices. In a society where women and untouchables were looked down upon and prohibited from reading vedas Buddha come as a light of hope to enlighten people with his liberal ideas. He attacked caste system and allowed women in his sangha. Through his ideas Buddha aimed to establish a society free from distinctions. His aim was to establish a peaceful, egalitarian, liberal, humanistic, compassionate society.

The conflicts results in hunger, malnutrition, spending resources on defence instead of welfare of citizens, underdeveloped, arms race, economic slowdown.

Buddha's teaching influenced the views of great Indian personalities from Ashoka to Nehru, Gandhi and present leaders and organisations. The policy of Panchsheel which focuses on peaceful coexistence is itself a Buddhist term. Similarly the working of United Nations which stresses peaceful world also has been influenced by Buddhism. In 2015 UN celebrated the Buddhist festival of vesak to highlight the path breaking role played by Buddhist views in world peace.

Since ancient times Buddhism has been a foundation stone for India's peaceful foreign policy. Even in the present times Buddhism is one of the areas of India's soft power and a link with South Asian countries of China, Japan, Nepal a South Korea etc. It thus helps in fulfilling aim of Article 51 of Indian constitution.

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In today's world where terrorism, border issues, Syrian crisis, Palestine-Israel conflict, US-China cold war, egoism, consumerism, conflict for resources leading to their depletion prevail as major challenges Buddha's philosophy of ahimsa can be a guiding light to the path of a peaceful society and stable international order. One must not forget that it was Buddha's teachings which influenced change of Ashoka's policy from bherighosha (war) to dhammaghosha (cultural conquest).

Also Buddha's philosophy of ahimsa can go a long way in dealing with problems of Naxalism, separatist movements especially in North-East India. Buddha's teaching of non-violence can enable fulfillment of objectives laid down in preamble, enjoyment of fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State policy and ensuring liberty, equality, justice, fraternity, integrity and secularism taking India to path of growth and prosperity.

In conflict-stricken darkness in the world Buddha's philosophy of not killing anyone can be a guiding light. UNESCO in the 161st session in 2001 highlighted the role of dialogue to end war and bring peace in the nuclear capable world. It could pave way for a just world by reducing unlimited desires, hatred and ignorance. The non-violence preached by Buddha can play an important role in moving world from conflict to alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. So the text Samyuttanikaya which mentions that politics and peace should be realized without killing, hurting, making sadness only by following law of Dhamma can be a guiding light against national and international conflicts. The teaching of controllers endless desires can pave way for peaceful world as most of the conflicts are a result of conflicting desires of the parties involved. For example the Israel-Palestine conflict is the outcome of desires of both the nations to control the territory. The desire for control of territory and its resources is also the underlying cause of most international and inter state conflicts.

Buddhism is a gospel of peace and non-violence and requires people to live in peace and control negative thoughts such as anger, enmity, pleasure and pain. Buddhist teachings are of the view that hatred, enmity are due to ignorance. Ignorance leads to everyone considering themselves separate from other. This ignorance lead to selfishness and is the mother of evils such as terrorism, separatism, crime, murder.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We have only two choices: to peacefully coexist or to destroy ourselves".

The quotations highlights the evil consequences of separatism and ignorance as conflicts lead to chain reactions thus taking many lives. Buddha was of the opinion that we must condemn crime but not let our anger escalate to aggression and violence. Thus with the help of Buddhist teaching first and foremost step is to ensure inner peace and then to share that peace with other to ensure a peaceful world. In this era of changing power structure at national and international level the need is to stress on Buddha's teachings for enlightenment.

The four noble truths of Buddha namely-

- a. Life is full of sorrow
- b. There are causes of sorrow
- c. This sorrow can be stopped
- d. There is a path leading to cessation of sorrow.

Shows that the reason of conflict is inner conflict among the individuals. This inner conflict results in external conflicts by giving birth to idea of separateness of individual from other.

An individual's mind is conditioned by prejudices which prevails in the society. This hampers individual's capacity to reflect on the truth. These prejudices escalates into conflict in societies and among nations.

Thus peace can be achieved through Ashtangika Marga / Eight-fold path which is a non-violent path.

When a person achieves inner peace and develops compassion and rational thinking he reflects on things without biases. This leads to establishment of peaceful society by following non-violent path of right action, right determination, right observation, right livelihood, right exercise, right memory, right meditation, right speech.

Thus to ensure peaceful world based on non-violence the need is to preach Buddhist teachings through avenues such as World Buddhist Sangha Council, School and University education, Social and Print media.

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