



BUDDHIST TEACHINGS ON NONVIOLENCE AND THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

The Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, is the main reference I have used for my practice of nonviolence, love and compassion. Buddha said the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering. Buddha also showed the way how to get rid of suffering. The Four Noble Truths are the very foundation of Buddhist teaching, which is why they are so important. In fact, it is impossible to practice Buddha Dharma unless you understand the Four Noble Truths and personally experience the truth of these teachings. Everybody hopes for a peaceful and happy life. However, the misery of samsara, or evil, is very real, and man's primary goal is to find a way out of it. When we refer to Buddha's teaching as pessimistic, we must not interpret it as a religion of pessimism. It does not, as some other doctrines do, promise joy on earth or in the world to come. However, it recognizes the possibility of achieving peace in the here and now, where people are the victors of suffering rather than its victims. It certainly emphasizes the dark side of life, but the emphasis merely demonstrates that life, as it is commonly lived, is marred by sorrow and suffering, rather than that these are inalienable features of life. So Gautama Buddha propounded and taught the "Four Noble Truths" to attain the nobility of life. Gautama Buddha showed us how we can move towards peace and non-violence through these four noble truths.

Keywords: - Non-violence, Four Noble Truths, Suffering, Bhavacakra, Eightfold path.

Introduction:

On the full moon day of May in the year 623 B.C., there was born in the Lumbini Park at kapilavasthu near the city of Baranasi (Benares) on the Indian borders of present Nepal a noble prince who was destined to be the greatest religious teacher in the world. With only five followers at the start, it spread to many lands and is now

the religion of over 600 million people. Buddhism made such rapid strides chiefly due to its essential worth and its appeal to the reasoning mind. But other factors aided its progress, the messengers of the Dhamma, the teaching, use of any unjust methods in spreading the Dhamma. The only weapon they wielded was that of universal love and compassion.

The concept of Non-violence in Buddhism is truly a valuable gift to the world. This concept can play a significant role in the process of making the world a peaceful, better and happier place if applied and taken into practice. Today, we are in the era of globalization, where there are several means of communication and transportation available. On the other hand, some countries are burning under the fire of violence day and night thereby seeking shelter for Non-violence. Therefore, the world is in dire need of the applicability of non-violence and it has to be made practicable so that global political and religious crises can be brought to an end to a large extent. Practice non-violence is far easier than being violent in general. Violence in any form creates suffering and unhappiness for both self and others whereas non-violence brings peace and harmonious co-existence. If we want universal brotherhood, mutual understanding, cooperation, communal harmony and global peace, we need to adopt non-violence as our only weapon to peacefully settle down the differences whatever they may be.

Non-violence and Four Noble Truths:

The Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths, the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, is the main reference I have used for my practice of nonviolence, love and compassion. Buddha said the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering. Buddha also showed the way how to get rid of suffering. The Four Noble Truths are the very foundation of Buddhist teaching, which is why they are so important. In fact, it is impossible to practice Buddha Dharma unless you understand the Four Noble Truths and have personally experienced the truth of this teaching. The main problem that Buddhism begins with is the problem of human suffering (*Duhkha*). It is stated that, "For the very first statement which is at the root of all the Buddha's thought is this life is suffering" The misery of the world left a sting on his sensitive nature. Individual instances of suffering to the Buddha were illustrated as a universal problem. According to the Buddha, there is nothing at all but suffering in the world. The Buddha was totally preoccupied with the question of how and why life is doomed to be filled with suffering. Life's path led the Buddha to further experiences that deepened his concern about human suffering. It appears natural that the problem of suffering in human life occupies a major leading role in Buddhism. It can be said that Buddhism is concerned with some problems of human life and aims to find out the means to salvation cordially from these problems.

Four Noble Truths:

The Buddha was deeply engaged with a problem to get rid of the human suffering. According to Hiriyanna, the Buddhist thought regarding the chief characteristic of life is pessimistic. The entire teaching of Buddha, as demonstrated by the implied comparison of life to a disease, is based on a pessimistic viewpoint, indicating monkish influence. Even in this later version of the doctrine, however, evil is not to be taken as the final fact of life. Its pessimism implies that life is full of pain and suffering, but only as it is ordinarily lived because the

doctrine holds out the hope that they can be completely overcome in the stage of nirvana that can be attained right now if one so desires. Everybody hopes for a peaceful and happiness life. However, the misery of samsara, or evil, is very real, and man's primary goal is to find a way out of it. When we refer to Buddha's teaching as pessimistic, we must not interpret it as a religion of pessimism. It does not, as some other doctrines do, promise joy on earth or in the world to come. However, it acknowledges the possibility of achieving peace in the here and now, in which man, rather than being the victim of misery, becomes its victor. It certainly emphasizes the dark side of life, but the emphasis merely demonstrates that life, as it is commonly lived, is marred by sorrow and suffering, rather than that these are inalienable features of life.

First Noble Truth:

Suffering is the first facet of the Four Noble Truths, concerns in Buddhism. Buddhism reveals that suffering is a universal fact in the world. "The universality of *dukkha* means that the human being in his full and comprehensive dimension, in terms of his dynamic relational structures, usually cannot keep up orderly and consistently with the flow of its ontological being. In this sense, suffering or *dukkha* is not limited strictly to the physical or the mental or the psychological. Buddhism focused on the only natural basis for suffering, the ontological basis. It is only in a common ground of discourse on all forms of *dukkha* is possible". It has been mentioned in Buddhism that the condition that makes an individual rise to suffering is the thirst for existence, passion for life, bondage to passion and blind by lust. We indeed live by our passions. We are born in this world with basic desires for life.

The Buddha recognized Four Noble Truths about human existence. "The Four Noble Truths, the Buddha's doctrine's programmatic formulation, begin with an examination of the symptoms of suffering, followed by an investigation into its causes." The Four Noble Truths concern suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the way that leads to the cessation of suffering. The first Noble Truth is the comprehension of suffering. It concerns the nature of suffering and the fundamental feature of all existence. "The first Noble Truth is merely a descriptive analysis of existence. To existence in this world is to suffer". It is the recognition of suffering. There is suffering. This is a basic insight. The insight is simply the acknowledgement that there is this suffering without it making personal. That acknowledgement is an important insight; just looking at mental anguish or physical pain. "Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, to be united to the unloved is suffering, to be separated from the loved is suffering, not to obtain what one desire is suffering; in short, the fivefold clinging to the earth is suffering". Life is connected with and constantly threatened by pain or suffering and is inexorable, sooner or later, ended by death. Buddhism gives more notable concern over the fear of death, which defeats all men. Man is terrorized every moment by death. Broadly speaking, the truth of suffering concerned in Buddhism can be viewed in two forms physical and mental suffering. We usually just react, but with this understanding, we can look at suffering. Hence, suffering should be understood. Here physical suffering is referred to the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death. Mental sufferings are referred to the suffering of separation from our loves ones, suffering of being contact with those whom we dislike or unloved, suffering of the wound of affection, and suffering of frustrated desires. Both the forms of suffering are woven into the fabric of our existence.

It is a fact that our existence is suffering. Birth and death, pain and love are universal realities. They indicate a lack of harmony, a state of discord. Man's misery, his spiritual disease, is rooted in conflict. It is an impermanent and transitory feature of all empirical existence, and escapes from it can and must be found. This shows that at the core of human life lies suffering. Suffering is the common bond we all share. In course of life everybody suffers. All willed activities are suffering, or, since we already know the nature of everything existing to consist in volition: Everything is full of suffering simply by virtue of its nature. Suffering appears only where something appears, and it vanishes only where something vanishes.

The analysis of suffering in Buddhism includes deeper ideas such as imperfection, pain, impermanence, disharmony, discomfort, irritation, or awareness of incompleteness and insufficiency. During the moment of joy and happiness, there is suffering because these moments are all impermanent states and will pass away when conditions change. Therefore, the recognition of suffering encompasses the whole existence, in 'our happiness and sorrow, in every aspect of our lives. However, it should be understood that the truth of suffering does not mean that there is no happiness, enjoyment and pleasure in life. There is, and the Buddha has taught various methods with which we can gain permanent happiness in our life. He said, "All happiness a man can enjoy in life is dependent on the satisfaction of desire. A desire is preceded by the feeling of want which is definitely painful. The removal of this painful feeling is regarded as happiness".

In analyzing the problem of suffering in Buddhism, it comes to the point of birth. As birth has already taken place, there can be no suffering without it. The elation of birth is flawed by subsequent ill health and in many cases by premature death. In course of time and condition change, a person is liable to old age, sickness and death. Birth is the source of all other sufferings. Birth cannot be dissociated from other occurrences of physical suffering such as old age, sickness and death. However, "Every moment man is threatened by the depth of death, although he is generally not conscious of it". There is no at least a possibility of escaping from death. Death is conditioned by the very law of nature. Old age, sickness and death are the terrible powers of destruction which hover over life. So, life is suffering, existence is pain. Happiness is an ephemeral and transient phenomenon; it is not stable and enduring. It cannot endure because it is usually made possible by the contact of our sense organs with external objects, which contact it, transient. In other words, what changes the pleasures of life into suffering is their impermanence, their emptiness and insubstantiality. Human suffering includes both physical and mental pain. The recognition of the suffering that is the first Noble Truth reveals the pessimistic characteristic of Buddhist ethics.

Second Noble Truth:

The second Noble Truth is concerned with the cause of suffering. The dictum that everything has a cause and results and its effect is the basis of this Noble Truth. Everything is conditional; the existence of everything depends on some conditions. As the existence of every event depends on some conditions, there must be something behind the suffering, which causes it to exist. Going to define the cause of suffering, "The Buddha realized that all life is subject to suffering because in some way it has been estranged from reality, and the only way to overcome it is to remove this estrangement. According to him, the root of this estrangement lies in the sense of 'I-ness' which every human being has". The passionate sense of self is the basis of suffering. It makes a person blind to the reality of others. The cause of suffering is the attachment of the mind to worldly objects or

desires. A chain of causes of suffering is elaborated in the chain of causation with the theory of Dependent Origination. The theory of Dependent Origination is commonly supposed to explain the causes of suffering. The desire to live is the sole cause of suffering and egoism, and this is all due to ignorance. As long as the desire to live continues subject to suffering; so as the termination of suffering is not possible. If the craving for passion, existence, birth, rebirth and pleasure is the source of evil, the removal of evil can occur through the extinction of craving. In this context, Radhakrishna mentioned that “Ignorance is the main cause out of which false desire springs. When knowledge is attained, suffering is at an end. Ignorance and false desire are the theoretical and the practical sides of the one fact. The empty abstract form of false will is ignorance; the concrete realization of ignorance is false will”. Again he says, “The rise of ignorance marks rapture with life, a violation of its organic integrity. It shows itself in an exaggerated individualism, self-isolation, and rebellion against the harmony of the world. Ignorance is destroyed by intuition, desire by ethical striving”. It is clear that suffering is linked to ignorance. Indeed one might almost equate ignorance and suffering; for in the Buddhist view the one is never found without the other. The ignorance is fundamentally ignorance of the constitution of the universe, and less formidably expressed, ignorance of the basic truth that there is no phenomena which is permanent. Nothing abides. Impermanence, in the Buddhist view, inheres in all existence. Ignorant of that truth, his proclivities (habitual thirst for objects and experiences) nurtured accordingly, a man lives out of harmony with his fellows and his world. He suffers.

Every activity is motivated by desire. To satisfy desire, animals prey upon one another, and human beings fight, kill, cheat, lie, and performed various forms of unwholesome deeds. Therefore, “It has been said repeatedly that the cause of suffering is thirst for existence, passions or desires for life, bondage to the passions, blinded by lust, entangled in the garments of desires, flooded by desires, clinging to existence”. Craving is the root cause of human suffering, which is a powerful mental attitude present in all forms of life. It is the creative power of all suffering. It is this craving that leads to repeated births in cycle of existence. “Suffering is a result not of chance but specifiable causes”. Craving is the desire to pull apart from the rest of life and seek fulfillment through those bottled up segments of being, we call ourselves. The desire for life, the desire to continue and to accumulate more and more give rise to unhappiness and suffering. When the sense of ‘I-ness’ disappears, idea of ‘mine’ and ‘self-centredness also disappear; there would be no suffering. Sympathy with all sentient beings follows and develops the idea of non-violence. The extremes of ‘I am’, the arrogance of ‘I have to extend the Me’ underlines terrorism and violence. This noble truth concerning the causes of suffering moves towards the positivistic approach of life.

Third Noble Truth:

The third Noble Truth is concerned with the cessation of suffering. To be freed from suffering, is to be removed the causes of suffering. Buddhism aims at the cessation of suffering. For the removal of suffering, it is essential to follow a strict morality through constant endeavour, spiritual discipline and righteous living. It is a natural result that the removal of the conditions that cause the existence of suffering would cease the suffering. The third Noble Truth is a simple deduction from the previous two Noble Truths. As it is mentioned in the second Noble Truth that craving is the cause of suffering, it follows that the cessation of suffering must lie in the eradication of craving. As a result, the path of righteousness is essentially a discipline to extinguish craving,

which is the root of all suffering. It is a method of self-deliverance practiced in accordance with the law of karma, which states that good and evil deeds have corresponding and unavoidable effects. If one can overcome the egoistic desire for separate existence, one would free oneself from suffering of every kind. If one wishes to escape suffering and if the desire is the cause of suffering, the removal of desire is one's goal. One must overcome the attachment of the mind to worldly objects or desires. This is to formulate the solution negatively. The positive formulation is one must attain to *nirvana*, which is the perfect state of existence. *Nirvana* is the absence, the detection, of suffering. It involves the eradication of ignorance through the attainment of wisdom. For Buddhism, *nirvana* is the unity of the individual self with the universal self, and that this unity is actually experienced by the aspirant who, having attained that state in the life, in consequence begins to love all living creatures. As Prof. N J Vyas writes, "For Buddha, it is a radical and enlightened state of existence which is beyond any theorizing and investigation. For here there is a complex extinction of desire and hence results a total emancipation from the cycle of birth and death. This ecstatic state of highest meditation is imbued with saturating compassion for all being. Thus, all human behaviour must be subdued and guided by this latent and genuine self. One should be earnest in performing the duties in accordance with this true self". The designations considered equivalent to *nirvana* means anything at all to identify the goal of Buddhism as annihilation of suffering and violence. *Nirvana* is the state of final liberation and peace.

Four Noble Truths:

The fourth Noble Truth is concerned with the way that leads to the cessation of suffering. It is the Middle Path, which avoids extreme views about the way of life. It is the teaching of the Buddha for deliverance through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. It has been precisely mentioned that "Deliverance from pain and evil was his one concern and he neither found the time nor need to unravel metaphysical subtleties". It is the way of life consisting of eight factors – right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. By following the way to this path, it will bring an end to suffering. It is an ethical and spiritual approach to reaching a state free from all kinds of suffering. Embracing every aspect of life, this Noble Truth serves as the most excellent feasible code for leading perfect wisdom, perfect goodness and perfect equanimity and *nirvana* attained. The fourth Noble Truth constitutes the way to attain *nirvana*, a state of complete relief from suffering. It involves wisdom, morality and mental culture. The Noble Eightfold Path constitutes the entire Buddhist scheme of ethical and spiritual training. It was this Path that the Buddha expounded to his followers in order that they might experience enlightenment.

The Buddhist teaching is based on the four Noble truths. Suffering is not the expression of the world-tiredness of an aged civilization. It is the fundamental thesis of a world-embracing thought because there exists no equally universal experience. Not all sentient beings are thinking beings, and not all thinking reaches the stage in which this faculty conceives its own nature and importance; but all sentient beings endure suffering because all are subject to old age, decay and death. It is this experience that forms the connecting link between beings that otherwise might have little in common; it is the bridge that unites the human and the animal kingdom. It is the foundation of universal brotherhood. The idea one should recognize oneself in the pain of others is also expressed. All being are afraid of pain, all being are afraid of death. Recognizing oneself in others, one should neither kill nor cause to kill. The feeling of love, compassion and friendliness has been given special favour in

Buddhism. The Middle Path theory of Buddhism in this sense has made a more realistic approach to life. For those who are in distress, as the first noble truth points out, compassion is needed to be cultivated. Thus, the positive aspect of non-violence in terms of compassion, sympathy, and friendliness occurs to a very high degree in Buddhism.

Buddhism is about solving the problem; the problem of suffering. The moral theory here is not meant to articulate a set of imperatives, nor to establish a calculus of utility through which to assess actions, nor to assign responsibility, praise or blame, but rather to solve a problem. The problem is that life on this earth is pervaded by unwanted suffering. The diagnosis of the cause of the problem sets the agenda for its solution. Suffering depends upon confusion, violence, attraction and aversion; it can be eliminated by eradicating these causing factors. The Noble Eightfold Path identifies not a set of rights or duties, nor a set of virtues, but a set of areas of concern or of dimensions of conduct. The Path indicates the complexity of human moral life and the complexity of the sources of suffering. To lead a life conducive to the solution of the problem of suffering is to pay close heed to many dimensions of conduct. The ultimate goal that matters is to get liberation from suffering, not some particular set of mundane experiences. Suffering is both caused and constituted by fundamental states of character, including pre-eminently egocentric attraction, egocentric aversion and confusion regarding the nature of reality. Hence, the cultivation of virtues that undermine these vices is morally desirable. Suffering is perpetuated by our intentions, acts and consequences. Hence, attention to all of these is necessary for its eradication. Our own happiness and suffering are intimately bound up with that of others. Therefore, we are responsible for others and obligated to take their interests into account. Violence against others or hurting others' sentiments will cause suffering and it also obstructs in attaining *nirvana*.

In Buddhism, all killing is evil; not only is there no just war theory but also the precept against killing extends to all forms of life. It is necessary to employ the practice of *Sila* in order to make other interests into account and to eliminate violence. Strictly speaking, *Sila* means the basis of morality itself, the ability not to exploit oneself or other fellow beings. The elimination of violence is not only direct violence such as killing but also its generation in the mind, the elimination of all five factors involved in killing: life, the perception of life, the thought of murder, carrying it out and the actual death. Violence is also one of the factors that cause to suffering. Violence arises out of greed, hate, anger and ignorance. It is one of the immoral actions committed by a human being. The ideal of Buddhism is *nirvana*, a total liberation from suffering. *Nirvana* is the cessation of all immoral activities. To attain liberation is to be followed the Noble Eightfold Path. *Nirvana* is the destruction of greed, the destruction of hate, and the destruction of ignorance. In order to liberate from violence and oppression, it is the essence of a Buddhist to understand the Four Noble Truths meaningfully and to confront greed, hatred and ignorance, not only at the individual level but in social and structural dimensions also. The Buddhists must develop the Right mindfulness that allows them to deal with the issues of violence that arise out of greed, hard and ignorance. Right mindfulness and Right concentration, indeed bring liberation from the mental suffering caused by greed, hatred and ignorance. The mental suffering thus caused, corrupts the mind and causes people to commit all forms of evil and more violence. Mindfulness can be employed at any moment in life. Mindfulness and concentration bring peace and happiness within the mind and can be shared with others.

Violence is really and basically, a mental act and intentional violence are started within the mind only. Mindfulness is a prevailing weapon against all forms of suffering both within oneself and within the environment. The approach of Buddhism is rational and ethical. It emphasized that each individual has to attain the highest by his own moral effort. Whosoever attains purity *nirvana*, it is the birthright of every human being. The main intention of the Buddha is to purify our hearts and give up violence and propagate compassion and love for all.

Conclusion:

The Four Noble Truths are the most common and the most important in Buddhism. Because these Noble Truths are the mainstay or backbone of all Buddhist philosophy. The practice of Eight Fold Path Pratitysamudpada, Vabaccakra, Panccasila etc. depends on these Noble truths. Also depends on these noble truths for peace and liberation. That is why First of all he preached the Four Noble Truths to five monks. Gautama Buddha saw through his Four Noble Truths how people can live a life of peace and happiness. If I were to essentialist my talk, I would say that if your understanding of the Four Noble Truths arises from deep reflections such as these, then you will gain a profound admiration for the Dharma, which is the true Refuge, and you will also develop a conviction in the possibility of actualizing the Dharma within yourself. My conclusion, therefore, is that these various religions have the potential to develop a good heart. I wanted to begin with these points because when I actually explain the Four Noble Truths, I have to argue the Buddhist way is the best! Also, if you were to ask me what the best religion is for me personally, my answer would be Buddhism, without any hesitation. But that does not mean that Buddhism is best for everyone certainly not. Therefore, during the course of my explanation, when I say that I feel that the Buddhist way is best, you should not misunderstand me.

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