

Buddhist paradigm for global peace and prosperity

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As we acutely feel, all is not well in the contemporary existential scenario and this calls for a paradigm shift in our value-perceptions, in our modes of thinking and in our ways of living. We are passing through a critical period struggling between best possibilities and worst possibilities. At the present juncture humankind is facing a crisis which is manifold and multi-dimensional. Human existence is stationed at a crossroad. It is a time when forces of unity and harmony can triumph, and marvels of science and technology can be used to ameliorate human suffering and ensure quality of life, precisely at this time forces of terror and violence and impulses of lower human nature are advancing menacingly on a global scale. The ratiocinative human mind is confronted with a dilemma as to how to respond to the present scenario. Rationality in which humanity has placed great trust for realization of its ideals of true knowledge and authentic existence appears to have been overtaken by hurricane of unreason

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and blind faith and basal passions. It has therefore become imperative to explore deeper and higher dimensions of human resources by means of which we can successfully work for the victory of the ideals and values which have inspired onward march of civilizations. Moving ahead in twenty first century with rich, diverse and varied heritage humankind is still searching for new paradigms, looking for new insights, novel intuitions and fresh approaches and therefore there is a need for serious 'rethinking' on the part of knowledgeable persons all over the world. There is a wide spread misapprehension about the nature and meaning of Reality and human existence and consequent all round global erosion of values, loss of dignity and authenticity in life, and predominance of disvalues masquerading as true values

Buddhist thought being a systematic and critical reflection on our lived experiences has the avowed task of providing a way out from this labyrinth with its liberating knowledge and wisdom and therefore it is the onus of responsibility on those who are exposed to Buddhist modes of thinking and ways of living to put forth fresh thinking and newer pathways by way of creative interpretations of teachings of the, Buddha and come out with innovative paradigms of value-pursuits to guide the humanity. There is need to address the imminent problems facing the humankind and provide genuine, effective and efficacious solutions failing which the rich and varied Buddhist culture will cease to be relevant to contemporary needs and aspirations.

Against this background it is hoped that Buddhist thought, which is at once both ancient and contemporary, with its rationalistic philosophy of interdependence, reciprocity, and mutual care and share, universal love and compassion, fellowship and participation, can offer an effective and more beneficial alternative to the present day individualistic, materialistic, competitive and consumerist view of life and reality. There are some seminal ideas, ideals and guiding principles contained in Indian thought which may help humanity from its present plight.

Lord Buddha's teachings have been one of the finest expositions of Indian culture which has its roots in pretty ancient Indian tradition. It should be our endeavor to focus on and highlight them taking into consideration the goal of human existence, methods of realizing the

same, and thus provide for new social, economic and political order at local and global levels from Buddhist perspectives.

The wide and variegated philosophical thoughts in India right from the Vedic times have oscillated between substantialist (*atmavada* or *sadvada*) and non-substantialist (*anatmavada* or *asadvada*) viewpoints, their 'turns' and 'about-turns', their transcendence (in *Nasadiya sukta* of the Rgveda) and their reconciliation (*anekantavada* of Jainism). The entire spectrum is a wonderful pageant of subtle and sophisticated, rich and varied culture. The present account deals with the non-substantialist turn in the Buddhist thought and the global ethics which emanates from it.

One of the most significant implications of the non-substantialist view of reality is the acceptance that the cosmos, rather the cosmic process, is an organic totality (*samghata*) of mutually interdependent *onticelements* (*dharmas*) which are in constant flux but get consecrated as changing events and occurrences. It is an exceedingly multifaceted and complicated networking of happenings caused and controlled by karmic forces. It is a highly complex and intricate but planned and purposive networking. It is not a mechanistic conglomeration of preexistent things or entities. Every existence, living and non-living, has a dependent origin and interdependent existence, a borrowed existence, so to say, out of a causal collocation characterized by mutuality and openness, interrelatedness and reciprocity. Nothing has self-existence and self-essence as everything arises out of preceding causal factors (*hetus*) and conditions (*pratyayas*). There are no chance happenings or accidents, no uncaused events or sporadic occurrences. There is a causal concatenation in which there is origin (*samudaya*) and cessation (*nirodha*) in an uninterrupted succession till the process comes to complete halt. This causal chain is cyclic in nature in which there is origination and cessation in an uninterrupted succession till the process comes to a complete halt. In this causal nexus every existence has an assigned nature, place and role in the cosmic set up which can be altered by self-effort. The cosmic process is rooted in *avidya* which is a principle of individuation, limitation, circumscription and ego and consequent suffering. It is the root cause, the primal base, the beginning of effectuation and fructification. It is the ontogenetic matrix of the individual subjective world (*samsara*)

and the objective world (*jagata*). It is bewildering and bewitching, suffocating and engulfing, but it is manageable and removable. It can be managed and eradicated by proper knowledge, strong will and pious conduct. This is the sum and substance of the Four Eternal Truths taught by the Buddha.

Reality is dynamic. To be real is to act. To act is to produce. Thus to be real is to be causally efficient. Every cause has to effectuate. Cause and effect constitute a causal concatenation. There are two levels of experiencing reality, in its transcendental form which is unitary and non-manifest, and in its empirical form which is multiple and manifest. The manifested reality is through and through pluralistic. All this plurality originates from, is embedded in and sustained by one all-unifying principle, which is known as *Dharmakaya* of which cognate terms are *Buddhabhava* and *Buddhaksetra*. Both these forms are real and significant and they are one in ultimate analysis. As Nagarjuna has put it, *vyavahara* and *paramartha* are not antagonistic. Without attaining the worldly knowledge the ultimate truth cannot be realized. Both *samsara* and *nirvana* are non-different.

According to Buddhist thought the richness and complexity of reality cannot be apprehended in terms of logic of exclusive 'either-or'. The dichotomous approach is not conducive to comprehend its diversity and dynamism, openness and infinite expansion, perfect and yet ever-growing nature. As Prof. D.T.Suzuki in his 'Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism' has rightly opined, it requires a holistic and integral approach, which is all-inclusive and all-comprehending. It takes into account the reality in its non-manifest unitary nature as well as in its manifested diversified form. This organic view accommodates all opposites as distinct. It is not negative and exclusive and therefore it defies the logic of dichotomies. It accepts pure experience of self-awareness at the transcendental level and a relational logic of complex interactions at the empirical level. One is depth level and the other is surface level. One is the level of the whole and the other is the level of parts within the whole. The one is in many and the many is in one. The basic idea is that one and many are not incompatible but mutually reinforcing, as they are two facets of the same reality. The Avatamsaka Sutra (The Flower Ornament Scripture) gives the analogy of Jewel-net in which each jewel reflects

the rest of the jewels all at once and all appearing at once in one jewel. If you are in one jewel you are in all directions because in one jewel there are all the jewels. Hua-yen Buddhism of China is based on this scripture and highlights this point. As Hua-yen Buddhism puts it:

In one is all, in many is one,
One is identical to all, many is identical to one.

The central Buddhist doctrine of *Pratityasamutpada* represents this fact of interconnection, interdependence and inter-penetration of all phenomena and the 'implicate order' prevailing in the cosmos. The *Dharmakaya* is the universal field all-pervasive, all-accommodating, all-unifying and all-penetrating. There is nothing apart from It and outside It. But within It there is infinite multiplicity all intertwined like flowers in a garland.

As stated above the cosmos is a vast and subtle inter-netting of multiple interrelated and interdependent existences which are in a constant flux. It has physical, mental and spiritual dimensions. There is determinism at the physical level but freedom and spontaneity at the spiritual level. The mental realm is partly determined and partly free. The human being is an organic unity of psycho-physical processes animated by spiritual element.

Human existence is multi-dimensional, multi-layered and multi-relational. Human identity therefore cannot be determined by any one of these facets. It is the totality and intricate unity of all these with subtle and fine inter-netting and interdependence. Here comes the social dimension which is highly complex, intricate and complicated network of relations. Society provides the ground and sustenance for human existence and also the basic structure and materials for human development. There is community or corporate living among all human beings and therefore there has to be cooperative partnership and supportive mutualism in community life. This is the implication of '*Sangham saranam gacchami*.' But it has to be regulated co-existence and for this laws (dharma) and enforcing authority are needed. A distinction between 'an authority' and 'in authority' can be drawn. Dharma is 'an authority' and the enforcers of dharma are 'in authority'. 'An authority' has to be superior and paramount to 'in

authority'. This is the implication of '*Dhammam saranam gacchami*'.

Human life in the worldly state is incomplete and imperfect and points beyond itself. It has a goal to achieve, a purpose to fulfill and an end to realize. It aims at the eradication of sorrows and sufferings in the *samsarika* (mundane) life. This is the longing intensely cherished by every human being. The release of human beings from the travails and travesties of worldly life is not effected by mere wish. Nor it is an idle prayer or ideal apprehension through abstract speculation. It is a realization through properly planned, executed and accomplished endeavor. It requires a rigorous discipline of knowledge, will and conduct and the fruits of conduct in mutual sharing, mutual cooperation and mutual collective enterprises. This is the implication of the vow, "*Sangham saranam gacchami*". It is self-fulfillment through corporate living and partaking. It demands harmonious organization and skillful management of end, means and modalities (*upaya kausala*). It implies just and equitable sharing of fruits without selfish considerations which is possible only through equanimity of mind (*samadhi*) and feeling of selfsameness (*paratma samata* and *paratma parivartana*). This is ego-less-ness (*anatmabhava*). This is the practice of '*brahma viharas*' which are universal friendship (*maitri*), universal compassion (*karuna*), rejoicing at the happiness of others (*mudita*) and indifference to one's selfish concerns (*upeksa*).

With these ontological premises one can work out an *anatmavadi* system of ethics and socio-political economics which is globally applicable as this analysis is universal for the entire human race. An ethical system purports to provide the norms to regulate human conduct in relation to other human beings, their social organizations, other living beings and the natural environment. This is because all are dynamically interrelated and interdependent and functioning of one affects the rest. However the human being is at the center stage of ethical considerations as it is the most evolved being having freedom and spontaneity, creativity and manipulating capacity. It has the prerogative to exercise freewill and thus feels responsible for one's conduct. Freedom necessitates norm-prescription, a code of conduct and a system of ethics. It presupposes a karmic principle, a regulating principle which is not necessarily mechanistic. In Buddhist thought

it is a conscious and purposive principle (*Cetana Kammo Bhikkavo vadami*), declared Lord Buddha. Norm-prescription implies norm-violation as well as norm-adherence and consequent retribution in terms of rewards and punishment.

Buddhism lays great emphasis on proper knowledge and good conduct. Knowledge always leads to good conduct. *Prajna* and *karuna* are the two facets of the same *bodhi*-situation. *Prajna* without *karuna* is lame and *karuna* without *prajna* is blind. Knowledge without conduct is futile and useless. A person having knowledge without practice is compared to a donkey who carries burden of sandal wood without knowing its value or utility. As the donkey bears the burden of sandal wood but has no share in the wealth of his load, similarly a person without practice merely bears the burden of his knowledge. He can not enjoy spiritual progress which is the real fruit of knowledge. Instead he indulges in evanescent and fleeting worldly affairs which invariably end up in pain and suffering and a feeling of vanity of life.

Knowledge pertains to real and it can be approached in infinite ways. This is perspectivism; this is *prapanca* (subjective networking) at the level of thought and language. But every perspective is false from the ultimate point of view and therefore there should be no dogmatism of any sort regarding any perspective. One who is seeking the highest truth should get out of the labyrinth of thought and language. This type of understanding leads to mutual trust and co-existence and above all to non-violence which is the highest virtue in Indian ethics. This the experience of *sunyata* or *nissvabhavata* (essencelessness) of all *prapanca*.

The concept of *Dharma* has been the unique contribution of Indian thought and its Buddhist analysis has been deep and subtle. It has both constitutive and regulative aspects. It is a rich and complex concept and its ethical implications need to be worked out separately. Similarly the concept of *Dharmakaya* is highly pregnant from ethical point of view. It is not a cold and lifeless metaphysical principle an inexhaustible fountainhead of love and compassion. One can have a glimpse of it from the following account in the Avatamsaka Sutra quoted by Suzuki (pp.233-4) :-

“With one great loving heart
the thirsty desires of all beings he quencheth with coolness
refreshing;
With compassion of all doth he think
Which like space knows no bounds;
Over the world’s all creation
With no thought of particularity he revieweth,
With a great heart compassionate and loving,
All sentient beings by him are embraced;
With means (upaya) which are pure, free from stains and all
excellent,
He doth save and deliver all creatures innumerable,
All creations caressed by him universally;
Yet free from attachment his heart is.
As his compassion is great and infinite,
Bliss unearthly on every being he confereth,
And himself showeth all over the universe;
He’ll not rest till all Buddhahood truly attains.”

A Bodhisattva is representation of Dharmakaya. He is a kalyanamitra (friend working for welfare) of all beings. His citta and carya are ideals of our emulation. His qualities of sarvasattvanukampa (compassion for all beings) and sarvajivadaya (kindness for all beings) have universal value and perennial significance. The Bodhicaryavatara of Santideva gives an elaborate treatment of the nature, role and function of Bodhisattva in this universe. The Buddhist doctrine of karuna (compassion) calls for a trans-valuation of values through a paradigm shift based on enlightened view of reality and life. It calls for a global ethics of obligations, and not of rights, of responsibility and not of capriciousness, of care and concern and cosmic fraternity. The following verse quoted by Suzuki (p.53) is highly pertinent in this context;

Arouse thy will, supreme and great,
Practice love and sympathy, give joy and protection,
Thy love like unto space,
Be it without discrimination, without limitation.
Merits establish, not for their own sake,
But for charity universal,
Save and deliver all beings,

Let them attain the wisdom of the Great Way.”

The Buddhist ethical code springs from *karuna*. And it touches each and every form of existence. It therefore provides a solid basis for ecological concerns. Instinctive love and respect for and protection of nature and environmental awareness have been deeply rooted in Buddhist tradition as a part of general Indian tradition. Similarly the flow of *karuna* is not to be confined to human beings alone and has to be extended to all creatures. All life is sacred, meaningful and valuable. Indian ethics not only regulates human conduct in relation to one's own self and in relation to other fellow human beings but goes a step further to bring in human conduct in relation to all living beings and natural environment. Every existence has intrinsic worth and it must be given due respect.

Buddhist approach to ethics is not rights-based but obligation-oriented. It involves performance of one's obligations as per one's station in the total cosmic set up. In order that one can perform one's duties properly, skillfully and efficiently one must know one's nature and capabilities as those of others and also what is to be performed, how to be performed, when to be performed, why to be performed etc. But apart from this 'management of action' there is a need for the 'management of result of action'. It may be helpful to note that every purposive action has to be motivated but it has not to be intended. That is to say, the agent should know why the action is to be performed and what shall be its consequence. This apart he should have the will and skill to do so. But he should not be attached to the consequence.

As regards political organization there is no preference for any particular mechanism or theory. The goal of universal well being has to be realized and any suitable means can be adopted for that. Naturally democratic set up is better provided it can be practiced in true spirit. Unfortunately nowhere in the world there has been genuine and true practice of democracy. This means that we have to think of going beyond the present day practice of democracy. We have to evolve a system out of democracy by which the goal of universal well being can be realized. Vedic ideals can provide the needed insights for this. Democracy seasoned with dharma can be called DHARMOCRACY and one can develop improved version of democracy on Vedic principles.

The Indian approach to structure and manage economy at national and global levels can offer an effective and more beneficial alternative to the present day individualistic, materialistic, consumerist, profit-seeking and competitive economy. Indian pattern of economy is essentially characterized by love and compassion, benevolence and altruism, interdependence and interrelation, mutual openness and reciprocity, fellowship and participation, giving and renouncing, caring and sharing. It does provide guiding principles on which economic thought and planning and economic behaviour of individual, society and state can be based. It is an integral and holistic approach which is organic and non-divisive. *Yoga* (supplementation of existing resources) and *ksema* (protection of the present resources and preserving them from depletion) in production and *asteya* (consuming only that much which is absolutely needed ensuring intra-generational justice by fair distribution without depriving others) and *aparigraha* (not to over-consume and deprive the posterity for their legitimate needs and thus ensure inter-generational justice) in consumption are parts of *upayakausala* (skillful economic planning and behaviour). Indian economic thought is based on the doctrine of middle path, avoiding extremes of capitalism and communism, individualism and totalitarianism, poverty and affluence, self-negation and self-indulgence. It calls for consumption without consumerism. It accepts profit without profiteering. Profit is not to be used solely for personal purposes. Buddhist economy emphasizes social component with the ultimate goal of cosmic well being. It repudiates competitive economy and calls for cooperative economy. It emphasizes the culture of 'giving' rather than the culture of 'having'. Thus it offers a new rationality for a paradigm shift from exploitation to service, from hedonistic pleasure to spiritual enhancement.

In an organic approach Indian thought takes into account different layers of human environment and thus talks of different types of ecology. Most important is mental ecology. It cares for cultivation of righteous mind and right cognitions. Entire *vinaya* and *sila* literature deals with this aspect. But it also attaches great importance to material ecology. Human being is essentially 'natural' in the sense that he is an inalienable part of nature, is sustained and nourished by nature and ultimately reaches his culmination and consummation in and through nature. Nature environs human being, provides a

basis for human development as also for excellence. But in spite of all this nature does not exhaust human existence, nor does human existence exhaust nature. Human being is bound by nature and yet can transcend nature. He is aware that he can get liberated from nature but with the help of nature only. Nature can help only if we help nature to help us. Nature is benevolent and merciful, bountiful and enjoyable but it is to be approached with care and consideration, with a spirit of sacrifice and distributive sharing.

There are many other areas where Buddhist thought can help and guide us in rethinking about the view and way of life. It has tremendous potentials for providing paradigm shift in different spheres of value-pursuits and if we care to work that out it can surely offer shelter and solace in modern turbulent times. This requires collective thinking and collective endeavour. Given the knowledge and will it is not difficult to do so. This is the implication of 'Buddham saranam gacchami'.

Gautam, the Buddha, has been one of the most revolutionary and innovative thinkers. He has not only been the beacon light of Asia in the past but his thoughts have the potentiality of providing newer pathways to the entire suffering humanity. His advocacy of pursuit of knowledge and practice of universal compassion, his vision of self-sameness with every one, and zealous longing for eradication of sufferings of others as one's own, cross all barriers race, creed, country and even humanity. His benevolent teachings of cosmic goodwill and universal interdependent co-existence and consequent mutual caring and sharing with universal responsibility, his emphasis on four noble global virtues of friendship, compassion, rejoicing in others well being and selflessness, known as *Brahmaviharas*, i.e., living and working for totality, all these have a significant message for the present day distracted humanity suffering from exhaustion of spirit and languishing in the narrow and rigid confinements of *ego-centricism*, parochialism and disastrous materialistic consumerism.

It must be stated that pursuit of excellence (paramitas) and striving for betterment of life have been perennial human concerns and aspirations. Freedom from imperfection and consequent suffering has been the main motivating factor for all human enterprises. But

this has to be a global vision and a universal realization without any prejudice to any section of the universe. This should be the implication of the Buddha's saying, "Bahujana hitaya bahujana sukhaya" This realization requires propagation and practice of global ethics. The principle of universalizability of ethical norms and their adherence without exception should be understood in this sense. The ideal of globalization should not be confined to material sphere in terms of liberalization of trade and commerce. It has to be given a spiritual orientation. Ethics also has to be spiritualistic aiming at universal well-being based on the enlightened principle of selfsameness of all existence. In modern turbulent times the Buddhist ethics calls for a new value schema which cares for all and tends all.

A time has come for the beginning of a cultural renaissance for which the teachings of the Buddha can play a vital and pivotal role. Buddhism has come into existence as a problem solving exercise both in terms of prevention and of cure. The Buddhist truths are of great relevance and significance in contemporary times and in the new millennium to bring about universal peace, prosperity and well-being. These should be our guiding lights for our ecological thinking and doings. If we have to draw eco-syllabus for eco-education it has to be on Buddhist foundation to be meaningful, efficacious and practical.

In the present times our traditional cultures are getting distorted and are facing the terrible danger of extinction under the perverting influence of the so-called modernization which is divisive, depriving and destructive. For the first time since their inception such a large scale threatening situation has arisen. We have not so far sincerely cared to share a common platform to meet the challenge in a decisive and global way may be due to ignorance, negligence, self-centeredness or bewitchment with modernization etc. A time has come for the initiation of a cultural renaissance, a paradigm shift in our views and ways of life for which the teachings of the Buddha can play a vital and pivotal role. A renewal of cross cultural interactions under this banner will not only help and contribute to mutual understanding, mutual empathy and mutual enrichment; it will also consolidate our common spiritual roots and resources. It will enable us to appreciate the spiritual, holistic and integral perspective as against the divisive and dichotomous world-view.