

# Buddhist Concept of Peace in Theory and Practice

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## Introduction

From a subjective and objective point of view well being of humanity is the basic need of human society. In a fast changing world different social institutions and organizations have emerged in order to maintain the well-being or the harmonious existence of human beings and much contribution has been done in the maintenance and the promotion of well-being of humanity. However, the modern era with its rapid development is confronted with many challenges such as environmental pollution, serious health issues, population growth, scarcity of food & shelter and specially the direct man-made issues related to the peace and co-existence of humanity. As a result, physical, social, mental and spiritual well being has been greatly affected and damaged. Buddhist teachings emphasize that peace is dependent on the physical, social, mental and spiritual well-being of individuals

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living in any society<sup>1</sup>. Thus, it signifies a state of harmony and friendship, calmness and quietness and also the freedom from war and violence.

This foundation has been greatly affected in the recent times and consequently materialistic overview is generated in the social consciousness of human beings on environment, society and its fellow beings. The man-made catastrophes of various facets and kinds have emerged among which the warfare is the most dreadful of all<sup>2</sup>. It people are made to unwillingly involved in warfare at various levels such as fighting between two rivalry groups, among different ethnic groups living in different territories or the devastating warfare between two countries. It seems that the warfare used by the materially powerful nations in the name of bringing about peace in the countries which are said to be under the rule of despotic and authoritative regimes as the final resort to maintain peace and harmony has become a common phenomenon in the recent years<sup>3</sup>.

A human face has been attributed to warfare by the application of the terms such as "humanitarian effort", "diplomatic involvement", "peace keeping forces", "economic sanctions" etc. which finally end in the use of forces to bring about peace<sup>4</sup>. Although they have been capable of avoiding warfare between nations and countries to a certain extent in the past with the cost of human lives but have been unable to remedy or provide the solutions to the underlying key issues of two nations, countries or civil wars in the countries<sup>5</sup>.

Hence, in the achievement of harmony and peace most important is the identification and verification of the fundamental issues with impartiality, justice and honesty that lead to the warfare between

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1. Narada Thera, *The Dhammapada*, Colombo, 1972, p.177

2. Elizabeth J. Hariss., *Violence and Disruption in Society*, Wheel Publication Society, Kandy, 1994, p.2

3. Patrick M. Regan Aysegul Aydin, "Diplomacy and Other Forms of Intervention in Civil Wars" <<http://sobek.colorado.edu/~aydin/webpage/duration.pdf>>

4. Ibid

5. Ibid

the nations or countries which is the Buddhist standpoint<sup>6</sup>. In the modern world, warfare takes place from many aspects. For instance, now it is not a much common phenomenon that two countries are directly involved in warfare although there are broken diplomatic relationships and cold-war. They have been able to avoid such which is the only fact that humanity can be proud of in this civilized world. However, the situations within some countries are not satisfactory especially in some Asian and Middle East countries where there is devastating warfare between the divided groups who have the underhand support by the powerful<sup>7</sup>.

### **Stark Reality and Bitter Truth**

What is significant is that warfare is detrimental and threatening to the core-existence of human beings and even after generations it is difficult to heal the wounds of war which is popularly known as post-war conflicts and issues<sup>8</sup>. In the modern era most unfortunate situation is that in the name of achieving peace and providing the people better existence countries have been invaded but the result is that decades have passed but still day by day people are paying at the cost of their lives and nothing has been established in those countries other than more violence and devastation<sup>9</sup>. Such situations have been well provided the ground for arms-trade, drug trade, formations of extremist and terrorist groups etc<sup>10</sup>. The so called public administration said to be established in those countries is nothing but an utter failure<sup>11</sup>. This is the stark reality and bitter truth.

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6. Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Extract No.3, Department of Buddhist Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1995, pp,4-8

7. Patrick M. Regan Aysegul Aydin, "Diplomacy and Other Forms of Intervention in Civil Wars" <<http://sobek.colorado.edu/~aydin/webpage/duration.pdf>>

8. Economic Review, People's Bank Printing Service Dept. June/July 2011, pp,4,5

9. Revolution, civil war and imperialist intervention Statement on Syria by Marea Socialista ,>1. IV Online magazine>IV464 - September 2013>Wednesday 18 September 2013

10. Seumas Milne, The Guardian, Tuesday 5, June, 2012

11. Ibid, "The military intervention of the United States will only add to this

Another alarming situation is that this is slowly being moved into other countries under the good name of post war remedial measures, protection of human rights, proliferation of the use of arms and chemical weapons etc. From a historical point of view, it is obvious that human beings have travelled an upward journey but it seems that the affluent nations try to turn back this progress towards a backward journey of humanity which would be result of mass destruction.

### **Ideological Change & Identification of Fundamental Issues**

It is the Buddhist standpoint that without being addressed the underlying elements of human issues; no peace is possible on earth<sup>12</sup>. When such situations are concerned maintenance of a good relation among the different ethnic groups and religious, cultural, political, economic, social unity among diversity is only possible with an ideological change<sup>13</sup>. The ideological change signifies respect for cultural political, ethnic differences in other countries and within countries. Another important fact is that instead of agitating minority groups of their rights, injustice, demarcation etc., remedial measures should be taken by enlightening their capacity and significant contribution that can be done in the different fields and how they should engage in affairs of a country<sup>14</sup>. The modern concept of global village is important in this regard although it has been used for other purposes.

The other important thing is the governing authorities should be broad minded and it is in whom that such change should be strongly implanted by the implementation of good constitutions which do not give any room anyone to take arbitrary, extremist decisions

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tragedy with a very large dose of barbarism and the definite probability of a regional explosion with incalculable consequences”.

12. Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Extract No.3, Department of Buddhist Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1995, p,10

13. Tenckner, Robert Chalmers V., Majjhimanikaya,, Vol,ii, The Pali Text society , Oxford, 1991, pp,86,87,88

14. Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Extract No.3, Department of Buddhist Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1995, pp,18,19,20

against anyone<sup>15</sup>. One of the threatening issues that the modern world is facing is the religious, cultural, political and economic extremism practiced by certain regimes, ethnic groups and affluent nations in the world. This has led to implant the ideas of separation, conflicts, use of violence among the ordinary people which is a threat to co-existence and harmony among people. It is an obvious fact that the use of warfare has become the norm of day to bring about peace where already at least there exists some peace in countries.

### **Essence of Peace in Buddhist Perspective**

If a country has internal issues regarding the human rights violations and the civil war like situations other nations can make the necessary ground for an ideological change from the highest to the lowest which is the Buddhist standpoint<sup>16</sup>. Buddhism vehemently condemns the biased, one-sided, dishonest diplomatic interventions that lead to more violence, social disorder where others take advantages out of such catastrophic situations at the cost of mass scale human lives<sup>17</sup>. It is the Buddhist standpoint that after making a devastation desert, one cannot call it peace because peace signifies while in excitement differences cultural, economic, social, political differences, if no disharmony is found it is peace<sup>18</sup>. Hence, essence of harmony and peace is nothing but various kinds of differences. The common interpretation given that peace is achieved by the victor over the vanquished is alien to Buddhism because it has categorically stated that no one is victorious after warfare<sup>19</sup>. The underlying psychology is that hatred is never appeased by hatred<sup>20</sup>. Humanity have witnessed

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15. Karunarathne W.S., *Buddhist Essays*, Samaranayaka Publication, Colombo, 1993,

16. Malalasekara, G.P, *Presidential Address 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Sessions of Buddhist Congress*, Dia's Printing Works, Ratnapura, 1952,

17. Elizabeth J. Hariss., *Violence and Disruption in Society*, Wheel Publication Society, Kandy, 1994, pp,13,14,15

18. Karunarathne W.S., *Buddhist Essays*, Samaranayaka Publication, Colombo, 1993, pp,24,25,26

19. Narada Thera, *The Dhammapada*, Colombo, 1972,

20. *Ibid*

in the modern times that after being implanted hatred and violence in the name of so called peace by the affluent nations, peace and harmonious living has only become a utopia in some countries.

Establishment of equality among people at different levels is possible with the ideological change<sup>21</sup>. Equality does not signify that everyone should have an equal position and portion of everything which is impossible at all. Equality signifies the attitudinal change of those who are in power, authority and economically well established<sup>22</sup>. There is no meaning in the discourses given to ordinary people of the significance of peace, harmony and equality when the powerful affluent have hidden motives and hidden agenda

Today what is visible is the internal war-fair in countries created by the powerful and affluent in the name of peace. Although it is a justifiable fact that under some regimes there are issues of human rights violations, freedom of expression etc., but right mechanism has not been applied to deal with such issues, instead of whole economic cultural, political and social structure of those countries have been severely damaged in the name of peace.

According to the Buddhist teachings economic, political and social, stability should be reached in accordance with *Dhamma*, the highest morality and the respect for justice in decision-taking and implementation of such decisions<sup>23</sup>. Such should be in the common interest of the people living in a country and outsiders could make valuable contribution without excessive interference into the internal matters of a country. The chaotic and internal conflicts in some countries have proven that direct interference with ulterior motives and hidden goals engenders the country into political mayhem and hotbed for violence<sup>24</sup>. The Buddhist teachings on the Ten Principles of Universal Monarch and the Seven Welfare conditions signify the

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21. Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Extract No.3, Department of Buddhist Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1995, pp,25,26,27

22. Ibid

23. Ibid, pp,4,5

24. Kelly Siegel "UN Intervention in Civil War and Post-Conflict Economic Recovery "Undergraduate Thesis, NYU 2010, pp,2,3,4

economic, social, legal and ethical measures that should be taken to direct a country towards a peaceful and harmonious journey<sup>25</sup>. On the other hand, the discourses such as *Kutadanta*, *Mahasudassana*, *Mdhura*, etc. clearly show measures that should be taken to maintain law and order in a country devastated by poverty and violence. The political, economic and social responsibilities are stressed in numerous discourses in the Pali Canon and the Jataka stories. The significance of the reconciliation among the divided and combatant groups has been stressed in the *Yodhajiva* story of *Samyuttanikaya*<sup>26</sup>.

## Conclusion

According to Buddhist political thought, the steps that should be taken to discourage the combatant groups in a country to maintain a peaceful and harmonious environment should be multi-faceted and dependent nature in theory and practice.

Such lead to the attitudinal change in the people whereas their social consciousness becomes widened and deepened<sup>27</sup>. Thus, the attitudinal change gradually takes place which is the key factor for lasting peace in a country. Thus

- Respect for morality
- Attitudinal change,
- Widening of social consciousness, and
- Establishment of higher ideals

are the key elements found in Buddhist teachings in theory and practice. In the achievement of such goals respect for self-determination, not gaining advantageous in the settlements of disputes, power-sharing not leading to further divisions and conflicts, non-support for the establishment of privileged classes in a country in

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25. Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Extract No.3, Department of Buddhist Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1995, pp,4,5,9

26. Leon Feer, Rhys Davids, M. Samyuttanikaya ,Vol, iv, The pali Text Society, London, 1975, p,308

27. Dhammadassi Thero, naimbala, Buddhism and Modern World, Turbo publicity Service, Sri lanka, 2008, pp,46-49

order to implement hidden agenda etc., are the key issues that are accepted and appreciated in Buddhist teachings<sup>28</sup>. Hence, on the whole Buddhism supports

- Physical well-being (rejection of physical violence to obtain advantageous)
- Social well being (respect for unity in diversity)
- Mental well-being (security in matters of economics, law and order) and
- Spiritual well-being (respect for religious and cultural practices).

These are much emphasized Buddhist foundations of peace and harmony. The highest state of peace signifies the spiritual well being whereas the physical well-being is the basis for such achievement. The physical well-being signifies the state of freedom from illness and violence. On the other hand, mental well-being is another aspect of peace which signifies one's ability for the discernment of right & wrong impartially. Hence, one should avoid all sorts of behavior that are detrimental to the maintenance of a state of calmness and quietness of mind.

Social well-being which signifies the most practical aspect of the Buddhist concept of peace denotes a state of harmony and friendship that should be always maintained in society not allowing any sort of violence or war among the different factions of people. In order to achieve and maintain harmony and friendship, there needs the agreement of intentions, opinions, feelings etc. The spiritual is the highest which directs ordinary people towards the achievement of highest goals. The challenge for peace comes when there is rivalry among people for possessions, treasures, relationships and happiness.

The objective attitude towards peace and harmony is appreciated in the teachings instead of subjective approach which is full of hidden ulterior motives that makes political mayhem and hotbed of violence in a country. The four aspects of peace which is based on objectivity do not give any room to practice any sanctions against a country as it

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28. Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Extract No.3, Department of Buddhist Affairs, Sri Lanka, 1995, pp,1-10

directly affects the basic needs such as food, health, shelter and other issues of a nation. It is reckoned in Buddhist teachings as an immoral and inhuman practice by the uncivilized towards ordinary people in a country.

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