

# Modern Life and Rudimentary Buddhist Concepts

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## ABSTRACT

Buddhism has been a substantial part of Indian culture for thousands of years. The teachings of Buddhism moved the hearts of masses of people from princes to paupers. Many works of literature (both written and oral) as well as scriptures, paintings and architecture spanning various eras in history depict how people with hearts of stone were changed by the glorious words of Buddha. The core lesson of the "Middle Way" is aimed to elevate the states of people's lives that are ordinarily swamped by grievances and greed over worldly affairs. Even at the present time, both mental and physical violence and pollution have encroached over our lives on all fronts. This after results in an arrogant inflation of Anthropomorphism which makes human beings broadly disregard the right to peaceful co-existence of other life forms. The overwhelming anthropomorphism drives human beings to ruthless and insensitively use the other life forms for their own benefit, or rather, 'profit'. The 'Middle path' of Buddhism preaches to people to be self-aware of their own humble and transient existence in a vast universe. Being respectful towards the existence of nature is an intrinsic part of practicing the 'Middle path'. As the present-day world continues to struggle against a global pandemic which has no end in sight yet, the lives of people have drastically changed. Both mental and physical wellbeing are put in jeopardy at this time. As the 'Middle path' seeks to bring out the 'wellness' life, this paper discusses how the rudimentary concepts of Buddhist teachings are still relevant in uplifting the modern life of the twenty first century.

**Keyword:** - Buddhism, Dharma, Cleanliness, Nature, Respect and Modern life

### Concept of Dharma

The concept of 'Dharma' is different from people to people. There are various meanings of 'Dharma', like Law, Morality, Karma, Religion, Nature and also tradition. In the present time, peoples use the word 'Dharma' for 'Religion'.

The word 'Dharma' is a Sanskrit word, from the root 'Dhar' or 'Dhr', which means 'to hold', 'to uphold', 'sustain' or 'support'. In *Rig-Veda*<sup>1</sup>, we can find the word *Dharma* which means 'What is established', thus, we can say Goutama knew the original concept and used the word 'Dharma' before his enlightenment. The *Pali* and *Prakrit* form of 'Dharma' is 'Dhamma'. In various Indian languages, especially in dialects *Dharma* pronounce as 'Dharm'. The opposite of 'Dharma' is 'Adharma', which means 'Not Dharma', there are lots of ideas of *Adharma*. *Adharma* is something which is against the Nature or unethical.

<sup>1</sup>The *Rig-Veda* hymns were composed and preserved by oral tradition of *Bharata* (India). There are 10,600 verses divided into 10 books. The *Rig-Veda* is the oldest Sanskrit Vedic text.

In Veda *Dharma* is a 'Universal Law'. In *Bhagavad-Gita*, before the battle of *Mahabharata* started, *Arjuna* asked Lord *Krishna*, why he should fight because his relatives, friends and *Gurus* were standing in front of him as his enemies. After hearing this, *Krishna* assured him that, this battle is righteous and he has to fight, because it is his duty or *Dharma* as he is a warrior.

*Karmanyevaadhikaaraste maa phaleshu  
kadaachana; Maa karmaphalahetur bhoor maa  
te sango 'stwakarmani.*<sup>2</sup>

Bhagavad Gita, Chapter II, Verse 47

Actions done with expectation of its rewards bring bondage. If you do not thirst for them, you get purification of heart and ultimately knowledge of the Self.

The word *Karma* means 'Action' and it is commonly believed that every *Karma* has an equal reaction either immediately or in future. There are three types of *Karma*, *Sanchita-Karma*<sup>3</sup>, *Prarabdha-Karma*<sup>4</sup> and *Agami-Karma*<sup>5</sup>. In Buddhism, *Dharma* is the teaching about the universe and a discipline. The three Treasures of Buddhism are, the *Buddha*, the *Dharma* and the *Sanga*. The *Dharma* is the Universe, which is both 'empty' and 'full'. *Karma* is the Action of *Dharma*. *Dharma* described in Buddhist term is the Teachings given by *Buddha*, Duty, Law, etc. The three poisons to *Dharma* are *Moha* (Delusion), *Raga* (Attachment) and *Dvesa* (Aversion). The *Abhi-Dharmapitaka*<sup>6</sup> is the last text of *Tripitaka*<sup>7</sup>. In this text, *Dharma* is described in detail, with many explanations. We may consider these as the basic fundamental theories.

### ***Siddhartha Goutama***

*Siddhartha* was the son of queen *Maya* and king *Suddhodana* who was the king of *Śākya* clan of *Kapilavastu*. *Suddhodana* arranged all kinds of comforts and luxuries and provided him with the best education. He was very much serious and thoughtful from the childhood. When *Siddhartha* turned nineteen, he got married with princess *Yasodhara*<sup>8</sup>, and they had a son called *Rahula*<sup>9</sup>. While going out from his palace he saw a decrepit old man, a very sick person, a dead person and a monk. The decrepit old man, expresses the decay inherent in all life, the sick man expresses the suffering inherent in existence, the dead person expresses the transience of human life, and the monk expresses the spiritual life that is beyond the materialistic life. He realised that everyone has to face these stages of life, and felt sad. Therefore, at the age of twenty-nine, *Siddhartha* left his family and kingdom to search for the truth. This is known as '*Mahabhiniskramana*' or 'the great renunciation'.

<sup>2</sup> Bhagavad Gita, Sri Swami Sivananda, Pp. 25

<sup>3</sup> Accumulated *Karma* or in other words Arrows in the Quiver.

<sup>4</sup> Present *Karma* or in other words Arrows in Flight.

<sup>5</sup> Current *Karma* for next birth or in other words Arrows in Hand.

<sup>6</sup> Philosophical and Psychological analysis and interpretation of Buddhist doctrine.

<sup>7</sup> *Tripitaka* is the traditional term for Buddhist scriptures. The three *Pitakas* are, *Suttapitaka*, *Vinayapitaka*, *Abhidharmapitaka*.

<sup>8</sup> *Yasodhara* was the daughter of King *Dandapani* and *Amita*. *Amita* was sister of king *Suddhodana*. *Yasodhara* was also born on same day in the month of '*Vaisakha*' as prince *Siddhartha*.

<sup>9</sup> *Rahula* was the first novice monk. *Buddha* taught him about truth, self-reflection, and not-self.

*Siddhartha* become a disciple of a famous sage *Arada Kalapa*<sup>10</sup>. He gave him the knowledge of *Vedas*, *Sastra*, *Upanisad* and also taught him the *dhyanic* meditation. *Siddhartha* stayed there for two years but he was not satisfied and left the place and reached a forest near *Uruvela*<sup>11</sup>. He realized that, practicing austerities is not the way to enlightenment, so he decided to beg some food from nearby villages and get back his strength. A village girl called *Sujata*<sup>12</sup> fed *Siddhartha* *Payasa* or *Payaya* (milk-rice), and in this way he ended his six years of fasting. *Siddhartha* stayed there and spent time alone, and he decided that he will stay there until he received all the answers he wanted, and sat under a *Peepal* tree<sup>13</sup> to start meditation. During this time, *Mara*<sup>14</sup> tried to tempt *Siddhartha* but failed. *Mara* sent his daughters to distract *Siddhartha*, but he swept them away. We can also say that, *Mara* is not only a figure but it is a representation of inner temptation, like ego, which creates obstacles in the path of enlightenment. One night, he finally got *nirvana*<sup>15</sup> and become the Buddha at the age of thirty-five. From that time, that *Peepal* tree was known as *Bodhi* tree. On that day, *Siddhartha* wakened to his realization of the four noble truths,

- ❖ Existence is suffering and suffering is unavoidable.
- ❖ Suffering is caused by desire.
- ❖ Elimination of desire will bring suffering to an end.
- ❖ There is a means to eliminate desire and thus suffering.

The means is called '*Madhyamapratipada*' or the 'Middle Path' (*Chudo*). It is the middle way between the extremes of asceticism and worldly life. It consists of the eightfold path (*Hasshodo*)- the right speech (*Samyancvaca*), the right conduct (*Samyanckammanta*), the right livelihood (*Samyancajiva*), the right effort (*Samyancvayama*), the right mindfulness (*Samyancsati*), the right concentration (*Samyancsamadhi*), the right views (*Samyancditthi*) and the right intention (*Samyancsannkappa*). The word *samyanc* (*Pali: samma*) means right.

In Buddhism, we can see that there are two types of pollution, first is the Mental Pollution and the second one is Physical Pollution. Negative thinking, Anger, Greed, Desire can be considered as Mental Pollutants, where as the result of our Mental Pollution is the world or social pollution which is also called Physical Pollution. In various Pali texts, one can easily find the concept of cleanness of not only the human being but also of the environment. Buddha teaches that, we have to pay attention to ourselves as well as to the environment. The nature plays a very significant

<sup>10</sup> *Arada Kalapa* was the first teacher of *Siddhartha*. He taught *yogic* meditation and other teachings of Hinduism.

<sup>11</sup> *Uruvela* is a village of *Magadha*, in present time *Uruvela* known as Bodh Gaya, in Bihar.

<sup>12</sup> *Sujata* was a milkmaid, who fed *Siddhartha* milk and rice, which called *khirodana* or *payaya* in *Pali*. This incident is commonly found in temple wall paintings and sculptures.

<sup>13</sup> Sacred fig

<sup>14</sup> In Buddhism, *Mara* is demonic celestial king, who associated with death, rebirth and desire. *Tanha* (Thirst), *Arati* (Aversion), and *Raga* (Attachment, Desire, Greed, Passion) are known as three daughters of *Mara*.

<sup>15</sup> *Nirvana* is the state of perfect blessedness, achieved by the abrogation of individual existence and extinction of all desires and passions.

role in Buddha's life. As we all know *Siddhartha* was born at Lumbini Garden under the two *Saal* trees, he got enlightenment under the *Peepal* tree, and deceased in *Kusinagra*<sup>16</sup>, at the age of eighty under the two *Saal* trees.

### Conclusion

There are two types of resources, renewable (Solar energy, Wind energy, Air, Animals etc.) and non-renewable (Coal, Oil, Iron, Uranium etc.). These resources must be preserved for our future generation. Buddhism always asserts that humans must be polite towards nature. The ever-increasing greed makes people become violent, bringing unhappiness and insecurity. Thus, humans must kill the *Mara*. Buddhism teaches human beings the middle path which avoids both the extremes of self-deprivation and self-indulgence. Every person has to fulfill their duties otherwise, they can't get the 'true' happiness of life. Humans destroy nature by polluting every level of the atmosphere and also destroy the plants and animals in the name of developing of the world. It is sad that we always think that, we are the only living beings with rights to control the world, instead of realizing that all the living beings have equal right to live in the world.

"A monk's day begins with cleaning" is a famous saying Japan. A monk of *Komyoji* Temple in Tokyo, named *Shokei Matsumoto* also said, "a clean house leads to a clean mind." *Shokei Matsumoto* is also an author of a book called 'A Monk's Guide to a Clean House and Mind', where he related how cleaning leads them to achieve *Zen*. Monks believe that, cleaning can heal because when we clean the dirt from the floor or surroundings, it becomes symbolic of cleansing the negativity from our mind. In this way, one can not only clean the physical pollution but also the mental pollution.

In conclusion, Buddhism preaches about ethics of nurture and acceptance, where all living beings can cohabitate in a world free of not only physical and outward violence, but also inner and emotional or verbal violence and these are concepts that are still highly relevant even in the fast-paced modern life of twenty-first century.

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<sup>16</sup>*Kusinagra* is situated in Uttar Pradesh, in pre-Buddha period this place known as *Kusavati*, and in post-Buddha period it is known as *Kushunara*.