

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF ETHICAL ISSUES OF PEACE IN MODERN SOCIETY BASED ON BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES

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ABSTRACT

This article is to study the concepts and theories of ethical issues of peace in modern society, and to study the ethical issues of peace in Buddhist scripture, and to analyze the ethical issues of peace in modern society based on Buddhist scripture. A social issue is a problem that influences many citizens within a society. It is a group of common problem in present-day society and one that many people strive to solve. On the other hand, man's deep desire is to live in peace and happiness. Peace is the ultimate goal that man wants to achieve. All religions, scientists, sociologists, philosophers in the world, in every field, work hard just to find a peaceful answer for themselves and for society. However, poverty, war, terrorism, natural disasters or conflicts in the family, in the community, in society are happening daily all over the world. According to Buddhist understanding, the only way to create inner peace is to practice meditation. By the practice of meditation, one realizes peace and happiness inside.

Introduction

Social issues are the source of a conflicting opinion on the grounds of what is perceived as morally correct or incorrect personal life or interpersonal social life decisions. Social issues are distinguished from economic issues; however, some issues have both social and economic aspects. There are also issues that do not fall into either category, such as warfare. There can be disagreements about what social issues are worth solving, or which should take precedence. Different individuals and different societies have different perceptions. There are a variety of methods people use to combat social issues.

Each field has a different approach to the problem, however from a Buddhist perspective, whenever our minds have peace, the external world will also be at peace. Inner peace is the key: If you have inner peace, the external problems do not affect your deep sense of peace and tranquility. In that state of mind, you can deal with situations with calmness and reason, whilst maintaining your inner happiness. That is very important. Without this inner peace, no matter how comfortable your life is material, you may still be worried, disturbed, or unhappy because of circumstances.

According to Buddhism, mindfulness is a source of Peace and Happiness. It means being aware of what is happening inside the body of the meditator and also the outside environment. It guides us to contemplate the internal body and the external body. This way is necessary for inner peace. It helps us to experience the teachings of the Buddha in a clearer and deeper way. It will give us happiness and peace, freedom of suffering.

The Complexity of Ethical Issues

The problem with ethical issues, such as whether capital punishment should be allowed or the morality of euthanasia, is that there generally is no single accepted answer. These ethical issues are hotly debated because the answer often comes down to personal opinion or philosophy. Ethics can give more than one answer, and sometimes that answer is not universally correct.

Dividing into Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are often at the center of the debate when it comes to social issues. Ethical guidelines can come from personal philosophy, religion and government. These issues also carry serious weight and consequences, which in turn adds more fuel to the debate. Abortion, for example, is a hotly debated topic. On one side of the argument, people believe that a fetus is a person with rights, regardless of how many weeks it has been since it's been

conceived. On the other hand, groups believe that a fetus is not a person until it has reached a certain number of weeks of development. Just as in the case when discussing capital punishment, when it comes to matters of life and death, the moral and ethical guidelines can become blurred depending on one's belief system, upbringing, education, or personal philosophy.

Personal issues

Personal issues are those that individuals deal with themselves and within a small range of their peers and relationships. On the other hand, social issues involve values cherished by widespread society. However, when a large enough sector of society is affected by an issue, it becomes a social issue. Returning to the unemployment issue, while one person losing their job is a personal and not a social issue, 18 million people losing their job is likely to generate a variety of social issues.

Social stratification

Social stratification is a kind of social differentiation whereby members of society are grouped into socioeconomic strata, based upon their occupation and income, wealth and social status, or derived power (social and political). As such, stratification is the relative social position of persons within a social group, category, geographic region, or social unit. In modern Western societies, social stratification is typically defined in terms of three social classes: the upper class, the middle class, and the lower class; in turn, each class can be subdivided into the upper-stratum, the middle-stratum, and the lower stratum. Moreover, a social stratum can be formed upon the basis of kinship, clan, tribe, or caste, or all four.

The categorization of people by social stratum occurs most clearly in complex state-based, polycentric, or feudal societies, the latter being based upon socio-economic relations among classes of nobility and classes of peasants. Historically, whether or not hunter-gatherer, tribal, and band societies can be defined as socially stratified, or if social stratification otherwise began with agriculture and large-scale means of social exchange, remains a debated matter in the social sciences. Determining the structures of social stratification arises from inequalities of status among persons, therefore, the degree of social inequality determines a person's social stratum. Generally, the greater the social complexity of a society, the more social stratification exists, by way of social differentiation.

Social disorganization

In sociology, the social disorganization theory is a theory developed by the Chicago School, related to ecological theories. The theory directly links crime rates to neighborhood ecological characteristics; a core principle of social disorganization theory that states location matters. In other words, a person's residential location is a substantial factor shaping the likelihood that that person will become involved in illegal activities. The theory suggests that, among determinants of a person's later illegal activity, residential location is as significant as or more significant than the person's individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender, or race).

Larry Gaines and Roger Miller state in their book *Criminal Justice in Action* that "crime is largely a product of unfavorable conditions in certain communities". According to the social disorganization theory, there are ecological factors that lead to high rates of crime in these communities, and these factors linked to constantly elevated levels of "high school dropouts, unemployment, deteriorating infrastructures, and single-parent homes" (Gaines and Miller). The theory is not intended to apply to all types of crime, just street crime at the neighborhood level. The theory has not been used to explain organized crime, corporate crime, or deviant behavior that takes place outside neighborhood settings.

Understanding Peace

The concept of 'peace' has been defined in various ways in the academia. "Perhaps 'peace' is like 'happiness', 'justice', 'health' and other human ideals, something every person and culture claims to desire and venerate, but which few, if any, achieve, at least on an enduring basis. Why are peace, justice and happiness so desirable, but also so intangible and elusive? But perhaps peace is different from happiness, since it seems to require social harmony and political enfranchisement, whereas happiness appears, at least in Western culture, to be largely an individual matter".¹

Peace is commonly understood as absence of hostility. Social peace is often defined as the lack of conflict or violence in a society. After overcoming ten years of political violence, Nepal has defined peace in its own understanding. Resolving "existing class-based, ethnic, regional and gender problems... leads towards long-term peace. Full commitment towards democratic norms and values including competitive multiparty democratic governance, civil liberties, fundamental rights, human rights, full press freedom and the concept of the rule of

¹ Charles Webel and Johan Galtung, *Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*, (USA: Routledge, 2007), 25.

law is the way to social peace".² The above understanding reveals that peace is the linchpin of social harmony, economic equality and political justice. However, the objective of this study is to analyze the link between inner peace and world peace.

Peace begins from within and it spreads everywhere. This is the core understanding of Buddhist meditation. Buddhist meditation is probably older than Buddhism itself. Buddha has said that he discovered meditation as a direct way to uproot mental defilements and thus experience inner peace.

“Through inner peace, genuine world peace can be achieved. In this quest, the importance of individual responsibility is quite clear; an atmosphere of peace must first be created within ourselves, then gradually expanded to include our families, our communities, and ultimately the whole planet”.³ It is in the mind that peace, love, hatred, harmony or violence start. The mind is like a garden, as one sows so he or she will reap. An Indian spiritual master, Sri Chinmoy, has talked about how eastern spirituality contributes to the vision of world peace. Chinmoy argues, “Peace is first an individual achievement. Then it grows into a collective achievement. Finally, it becomes a universal achievement.”⁴

Peace is something people make with their adversaries, not with their friends. Here, peace is understood as something between a person and his enemies. This is mostly the Western way of understanding peace. The Eastern understanding is, peace begins within and it reflects outwards. In “International Journal of Peace Studies,” Theresa presents the Buddhist vision of peace in the light of peace studies. The author has stated, “Buddhism has long been celebrated as a religion of peace and non-violence.”⁵ The author further states, “The true value of non-violence, compassion, and altruism advocated by Buddhism would also inspire all people on the path of peace.” Theresa has applied Buddha’s key principle of understanding life and the Boonsri, Kasem. “Buddhavamsa”, The Royal Institute’s Thai world, namely the teachings of Dependent Origination. Understanding this concept would help people see things as they are and, consequently, they abstain from violence.

² Comprehensive Peace Accord Signed between Nepal Government and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) 22 November 2006.

³ Dalai Lama, *Address in San Jose, Costa Rica*, (Newsletter: Buddhist Peace Fellowship, 1989), 4.

⁴ Walter Dorn, “Lotus on the Lake: How Eastern Spirituality Contributes to the Vision of World Peace,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 11 (2001): 156-166.

⁵ Derlan Y. Theresa, “The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 11 (2006): 1.

Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Thich Nath Hanh, who is actively working for maintaining social peace, says, “The peace we seek cannot be our personal possession. We need to find inner peace, which makes it possible for us to become one with those who suffer and to do something to help our brothers and sisters.”⁶

The Buddhist approach from inner peace to outer peace has yet to be explored in its overall dimensions in academic research. It is worth exploring from where peace emerges and how this happens inside a person and how it ultimately reflects to the outer world. In the west, this concept is emerging in the writings of a few authors. “A philosophical theory of ‘outer’ peace and a depth psychological comprehension of ‘inner’ peacefulness seem as desirable today as they did thousands of years ago.” The modern peace and conflict studies identifies structural mechanisms responsible for violent and nonviolent behaviors in a society. Social differentiation and inequality in the variety of concerns play a significant role in violent and nonviolent behaviors. “Peace is a linchpin of social harmony, economic equity and political justice, but peace is also constantly ruptured by wars and other forms of violent conflict. Like happiness, peace remains so near ...and yet, like enduring love, so far...”.

Buddhist Inner Peace

According to Buddha,⁷ the “only way” to attain inner peace is the practice of samatha and vipassana (tranquility and insight) meditation. “This is the only way for the purification (of the minds) of beings, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the cessation of physical and mental pain, for attainment of the Noble paths, and for the realization of Nibbana. That (only way) is the four satipatthanas.”

On other occasions, Buddha says, “Two things are conducive to knowledge: Tranquility and insight. If tranquility is developed, what profit does it bring? The mind is developed. If the mind is developed, what profit it brings? All lust is abandoned.”⁸ As the mind becomes free from cravings, an inner purification takes place. This purification of mind is the very ground for a state of peacefulness.

⁶ Thich N. Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding*, (California: Parallax Press, 1998).

⁷ Jotika and Dhamminada, *Mahasatipatthana Sutta*, (Burma Migadvun Monastery, 1986).

⁸ Nyanaponika Thera and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: An Anthology of Suttas from the Anguttar Nikaya*, (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2000).

Buddha has used peace and Nibbana synonymously. He says, in Dhammapada (285), “Cut off your affection in the manner a man plucks with his hand an autumn lotus. Cultivate only the path to peace, Nibbana, as made known by the Exalted One.”⁹

In Metta Sutta, Buddha indicates peace and Nibbana are the states of awakening. “If a person who fully knows the real advantages that can be accrued, [is] desirous of achieving and realizing the peaceful and blissful Nibbana, [he] must invariably indulge himself in the practice of sila (morality), Samadhi (concentration), and panna (insight wisdom). He must be capable of taking up this practice.”¹⁰

Buddha worked for peace until his last breath. A famous saying of Buddha from Vinayapitaka, Mahavagga represents Buddha’s concern for peace. “caratha bhikkhavē cārikām bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya lōkānukampāya, go forth, oh Bhikkhus, on your wandering for the good of many, for the happiness of many, in compassion for the world.”

The engagement in mindfulness capacitates the practitioner to develop the ability for moment to-moment awareness of the internal states of mind such as feelings, emotions, thoughts, and attitudes. Instead of being controlled by habitual behavioral patterns, emotions and thoughts, the practitioner can turn the contents of his or her consciousness, thoughts, feelings and reaction into objects of reflection and analysis. The resulting state is inner peace and tranquility.

There are considerable number of articles in the academia exploring the dimensions of Buddhist inner peace. “The dynamics of peace arise from interior self-transformation, which is, transcending the fixed ego-self and freeing the self for others, to realize and enact compassion.” This article examines interdependence between inner peace and outer peace. Explaining Buddhist inner peace, Tanabe writes, “Inner peace means an awakening to an ultimate inseparability between our own well-being and happiness and that of others, which inspires us to make an effort to gratify the basic needs of all and promote our freedom and justice and that of others equally”.

In the canonical text of *vipassanā*, Buddha clearly indicates the root cause of suffering. “And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering? It is this craving that occurs again and again and is bound up with pleasure and lust and finds delight, now here,

⁹ Bhikkhu Thanissaro, *Dhammapada*, (CA. Metta Forest Monastery, 1998).

¹⁰ Mahasi Sayadaw, *Brahmabihara Dhamma Part III*, (Yangon: The Metta Sutta Paritta, 1985), 89.

now there. That is, the craving for sensual pleasures, the craving for repeated rebirth and the craving for annihilation.”¹¹

Vipassanā meditation and peace

In Buddhist studies, it is established as unquestionable fact that peace follows meditation, as surely as night follows day. An extended study will be presented in the following to explain in detail and clarify the ways to peace through meditation. The classical understanding of meditation may be equally important as the modern understanding of the fact. The scientific and sociological research approving the classical thoughts on meditation will also be equally important. This study attempts to present these three dimensions. How vipassanā meditation is applicable in maintaining the social peace is the focus of the research.

Vipassanā meditation helps a person attain peace only when he or she practices it in a systematic way. Knowing everything about meditation may not help until and unless the person applies it in practical life. If a person simply reads the recipe for preparing a meal, even if he understands all the terms, he cannot get any flavor or nourishment from it. In the same manner, reading theories or techniques of meditation will not assist a person realize peace. From reading, one can acquire śrutamayī prajñā, i.e., wisdom acquired from outside. This may not help one to attain inner peace. For experiencing the peace of mind, one has to attain cintanamayī prajñā that is, thinking, contemplating and analyzing the wisdom read in books. Finally, one has to attain bhāvanāmayī prajñā, i.e., wisdom acquired by experience. Vipassanā meditation helps the practitioner to attain bhāvanāmayī prajñā, which is the source or origin of experiencing inner peace. Attainment of such wisdom begins with the application of mindfulness, i.e., satipatthana.¹²

All one learns in meditation is not to identify oneself with anything, but to stay aloof and detached from worldly experiences. The benefit from this is constant realization of infinite peace and bliss. The realization of Oneness with everything is like falling in love with everything. It feels like being with one's lover or beloved, in each moment. The practitioner feels intimacy and love with everyone. Nothing other than meditation gives a clearer picture about what is real or significant in life and what is mere illusion. Dhammapada quotes Buddha:

¹¹ Goenka, *Mahasatipatthana*, (USA: Onalaska, Vipassana Research Institute, 2016), 49.

¹² Piyadassi, *Buddhist Meditation*, (Taiwan: The Corporate body of Buddha Education Foundation, 1978), 90.

“A hundred years of life of a heedless person is less worthy than a meditative person's life of one single day.”

Vipassanā meditation may directly or indirectly lead to peace, happiness, social justice and harmony -- a sense of oneness with existence. However, our specific focus is the context of social justice and peace. Here, it is obvious that the one common thread connecting all of it is the practice of meditation. What kinds of hearts and minds are brought into this interconnected work for change? The focus of practice should be on how a person continually intertwines himself or herself with both inner and outer liberation.

When one reads Buddha's sermons, one comes to see that real wealth is not material wealth and real poverty is not just the lack of food, clothing or a house. Real poverty is something else. It is common belief that the purpose of life is to acquire wealth, to own things or achieve higher posts. As Buddha suggests, real wealth is not the possession of property, but the recognition that our deepest need as human beings is to keep developing our natural and acquired power to relate to fellow human beings. Monk Thich Nhat Hanh applied this motto in the course of his whole life: “Peace in oneself, peace in the world.” The richness of the motto and the energy in the words lead the reader to think about the lives of people who they admire. These inspiring words motivate readers to apply them in their own on-going spiritual journey.

Buddha's words remind the meditation practitioner that he or she is not separate from the world. When they bring more peace to their mind and body, there is more peace in the world. Venerable Hanh writes in *The Heart of Understanding*: “When you produce peace and happiness in yourself, you begin to realize peace for the world. With the smile that you produce in yourself, with the consciousness you establish within yourself, you begin to work for peace in the world.” This is an understanding that extends across religious traditions. A rabbi quotes Bible, Psalm, 38:3, “Our sages say: “Seek peace in your own place.” You cannot find peace anywhere save in your own self. In the psalm we read: “There is no peace in my bones because of my sin.”” When a man has made peace with himself, he will be able to make peace with the whole world.

There is no way to peace. Peace is the way. A society may not maintain peace until the ends are not cut off from the means. Ultimately, one cannot reach good ends through evil means, because the means represent the seed and the end represents the tree that grows from it. The tree always carries the quality of the seed. On a level of understanding, peace is defined in terms of what is not present. Peace is defined as the absence of conflict, tension or any kind of disturbance. Similarly, peace in the world is envisioned as the absence of war or violence.

Spiritual understanding of peace is more appealing. Inner peace is the presence of stillness and certainty, an opening of the heart, encompassing reconciliation, goodwill, and justice for all sentient beings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, 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 harmonious existence of human beings and much contribution has been done in the maintenance and the promotion of the 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 especially 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. In Buddhism, Buddhist teachings emphasize that peace is dependent on the physical, social, mental, and spiritual well-being of individuals living in any society. Thus, it signifies a state of harmony and friendship, calmness and quietness, and also freedom from war and violence.

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