NON-VIOLENCE: THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF BUDDHA AND ITS IMPACT ON PRESENT SOCIETY

Neeharika Borah, Ex-Student
Centre for Studies in philosophy, Dibrugarh University, Assam

Abstract

Buddhism is not only a religious faith; it is a way of life. “Four Noble-Truths” and “Eight Fold Path” “Law of Karma” are the main teaching of Buddha philosophy which allows people to achieve enlightenment. Buddha was not a metaphysician. He was regarded as an ethical teacher. So he always gives importance on the moral significance of thoughts, actions, and emotions. Non-violence is the key teaching of Buddha philosophy means avoiding both external physical violence and internal violence of spirit. Like Buddhism, other religions like Hinduism and Jainism also emphasis on Ahimsa or Non-violence as an important spiritual doctrine. Now Buddhism becomes most popular in our modern society. Buddhism teaches us how we live our lives and how we live in our society, ethically and morally.

“Ahimsa” is the key virtue of Buddhism. Buddha taught us to love other animal also because animals have equal right to live in this world. It is totally abstaining from harming of any kind of living creature not only by deeds, but by words and in thoughts. Practice of non-Violence helps us to maintain a peaceful life.

Key words: Non-violence, moral virtue, violence, Four Noble truth, Eight fold path, Love, Compassion etc.

Introduction:

“Ahimsa” is the first part of the five percepts (pancha- shila) of Buddhism. “Ahimsa” literally means “no-injury” or “non-killing” any living things. It is totally opposite of “Himsha or violence” which means inflicting pain and injury upon others. Therefore the word “Ahimsa” literally means not inflicting pain or injury upon others. In the “Eight Fold Path”, Buddha teaches us how to act our duty and live our daily life peacefully. Buddha said that violence is negative and it is non-virtuous act. Any kind of action which is initiated by bad intention, intention of greed or hate is going to result in act of violence. He advised people to practice five percepts which help us to attain liberation (Nirvana). Buddha emphasis on five percepts-
1. Abstain from taking life
2. Abstain from false speech
3. Abstain from taking what is not given
4. Abstain from sensuous misconduct
5. Abstain from intoxicants as tending to cloud the mind.

Greed, hatred and delusion are main cause of violence. Hatred, anger is the most difficult mind states which are considered as the heart of violence. Because of these people facing suffering and pain. But Buddha said that human beings have power to overcome all these bad effects. Compassion and loving kindness has immediate, practical sustainable results to alleviate of suffering.

Objectives Of the study:
The main objectives of the study are-
1. To analyze the practice of non-violence in ancient India
2. To analyze the practice of non-violence in daily life.
3. To analyze the non-violence and law of karma.
4. To analyze the significance of non-violence in present society.

Methodology:
The study is based on secondary data collected from various official websites, books, journals. Descriptive method is adopted in this paper.
Practice of non-violence in Ancient India:

In Ancient India different religions like Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism Ahimsa or non-violence is considered as a spiritual virtue. In that time people practiced the principles of non-violence and they adopt non-violence in their thinking, planning and actions. Non-violence is way to achieve the goal of life. When we analysis every religious faith including the other scriptures Ramayana and Mahabharata we find a deep description about non-violence or Ahimsa. Generally Ahimsa means not to harm and kill to other but specifically it means help others and do as much as possible for others. Vedas, Upanishads also gives importance on Ahimsa as an ethical concept. The term“ Ahimsa”is used in Rig veda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, atharva Veda and different religious scriptures. Kautilya Arthashastra declare that Ahimsha is duty for all the four classes (Brahmana, kshatriya, vaishy and shudra) of society. Patanjali Yogasutra also discussed about non-violence and gives a proper way how can we overcome our violent thought through Astanga yoga. In Jaina philosophy also considered that Ahimsa is one of the cardinal virtue and it is first principle of Pancha Mahavrata. In later period Gandhi considered that non-violence has most significant role in the society. Dr. B R Ambedkar also gives lectures about Buddha’s non-violence. He said “Buddha is generally associated with the doctrine of Ahimsa.”

Practice of Non- Violence in daily life:

According to Buddha Non-Violence is totally abstaining from harming of any kind of living creature not only by deeds, but also by words and in thoughts. Non-violence is not easy for everyone. Because Non-Violent action can be performed only that person who has refrained himself from violence intentionally. It is a positive action. Buddha said that if we follow the eight fold path- Right view, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right Mindfulness, Right concentration then automatically we attain the peace of mind. Buddha’s teachings of Non-Violence includes various aspects-
1. Non-injury to all living beings including plants and animals. Like human being each and every animals and plants have equal rights to live in this earth.
2. Love and compassion is necessary towards all living creatures. Love and Compassion gives us ability to understand emotions of every living thing. It is the essence of life. Without these we cannot imagine humanity. We must try to understand the pain of others and how they feel in the painful situation.
3. Buddha encourages loving all living beings and abstains from hunting animals and using animals for entertainment.
4. Ahimsa not only encompasses philosophical attitude toward war and killing, but it directly impacts our daily interactions with family, friends and neighbors.
5. Destructive pattern of thoughts, negative thinking has bad effect for own self and other self also.
6. Violence creates misery and pain. We feel suffering because of our own actions. So every people have the major responsibility to lead others to enlightenment through their thoughts and actions.

Non- violence and law of karma:

“Law of karma” is the fundamental concept of Buddhism. Buddha said that we, every people follow the same birth cycle that is we take birth, grow up, and die. Death is not end of life. It is a continuous process. Death is the beginning of another chapter of life. Buddha explained that our present situation depends on what things we have done in the past. Every moment we create new karma, by what we say, what we do, what we think. If we accumulated virtuous karmic force the result will be happiness, joy and satisfactory. If we accumulated non-virtuous negative actions then we will face misery, pain, frustration etc. According to Buddha Non-Violence means not only physical injury, it means avoid both physical-mental harassment. Truth or Right speech also important to maintaining Non-Violence in our day to day life. In the second Noble Truth (There is a cause of suffering) Buddha said that everything is depends on some causes and conditions. The existence of everything on this world is relative,
limited, and conditional. If we do good deed or work, in the future good things will happen to us. And if we do bad things in our present life, future bad things will happen to us. If we harm or injure other living things then it will contribute to bad karma and bad rebirth. So right action, right thought is the most important path of Non-violence. Without compassion one cannot become enlightened. Buddha taught us that like our friend and well-wisher we must do same behavior and equal treatment for enemies, or others who seek to do us harm.

Significance of Non-Violence in present society:

Ahimsa or non-violence is an important tenet of Buddhism. It is personal practice abstain from violence. Loving kindness and compassion are basic nature of every living being. When we connect our mind with its nature of love and compassion we feel more relaxed, calm and peaceful. Without love, joy, compassion- life becomes empty and incomplete. Buddha taught us to show love and compassion to other in the place of violence. Practice of non-violence is for the sake of others, not for oneself.

Today, non-violence is considered as powerful weapon in our social political life to remove various difficulties from our society. Now, people are facing various problems. Pollution, terrorist attack, bomb blast, religious discrimination is the major problems of our present society. But there are many of indirect violence like, economic disparity, gender discrimination, destruction of environment and ecosystem and so on. Buddha believes that non-violence is a way to save one’s own soul as well as other soul.

The main purpose of Buddha’s non-violence is not for the benefit of self, it is entirely for the benefit of others. Buddha said that life is full of misery and pain. Poverty, disease, old age is regarded as rampant in this world. All these are bad karmic consequences of past action. But he taught us to avoid and overcome all these sufferings through our right action. We cannot impose suffering on others for our own pleasure. Buddha give a valuable message from the story of “Angulimala” how Ahimsa help us to convert a person for better life. The Buddhist followers consider “Angulimala” a symbol of spiritual transformation. Buddha taught us to avoid harmful action and purify our mind”. Non-violence is unique contribution of Buddhism to develop a self-knowledge and save our mother earth.So, Non-violence is considered as spiritual power to remove any kind of evil from our society.

Conclusion:

Ahimsa is considered the highest duty in Buddhism and many other religious traditions. Every sentient being particularly the human beings have the capacity of rational mind, power of critical thinking , power of analyzing and discriminate virtuous and non-virtuous activity. So every human being must try to avoid violence and practice non-violence in daily life. Non-violence is more relevant in today’s time. It is a duty for all human being. It is a spiritual power to destroy every evil and help us to attain liberation or Nirvana.

References:
6. Muller, Max., (1899) Six system of Indian Philosophy; London.