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Relevance of Buddhism in the present Modern World

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Abstract

Buddhism is one of the largest religions in the world. Unlike Christianity and other monotheistic and polytheistic religions, Buddhism does not worship a deity. Nevertheless, Buddhism is a religion according to today's understanding. In Buddhism, the four noble truths are recognized as the first teaching given by the Buddha and are considered one of his most important teachings. A few elements that make Buddhism Relevance, first of these would be the recognition of the responsibility of the individual. the Buddha is one of the most remarkable religious teachers who emancipated man from all bonds – bonds of supernatural ties, a Godhead, a creation, sin Of- any other characteristic inherited from anyone else. So when the Buddha says that each person is his own master, he promulgates a principle whose applicability becomes stronger as the man begins to get more and more confidence in the control of himself and the environment.

Keywords: Nobel, Enlightenment, Intelligence, Wisdom, Behaviour, Noble Eightfold Path

Introduction

Buddhism is a powerful religious, political, social, and cultural force, in India and in many parts of the world today. Buddhists believe that human life is one of suffering and that meditation, spiritual and physical labour, and good behaviour are the ways to achieve enlightenment or nirvana.

Buddhism deals with reality – how we understand reality and how we deconstruct our fantasies and projections about reality. These are things that can be helpful to anyone, without having to accept the more religious aspects of Buddhism such as reincarnation, liberation, and enlightenment.

From inspiring art and literature to shaping politics and personal development, Buddhism has left its mark on the world. Its emphasis on self-awareness, compassion, and social justice has made it a powerful force for positive change.

Buddhism gave India many things, it influenced the society away from social hierarchy and towards equality, it allowed and gave equality to women and Shudras, and challenged the orthodox philosophy of that era. Its teachings stated that one is responsible for his actions and destiny.

Buddhism is one of the largest religions in the world. Unlike Christianity and other monotheistic and polytheistic religions, Buddhism does not worship a deity. Nevertheless, Buddhism is a religion according to today's understanding.

Buddhism of the form found in the West today has been deeply influenced by this modernism. Buddhist modernist traditions are reconstructions and a reformulation with emphasis on rationality, meditation, and compatibility with modern science about body and mind.

The Four Noble Truths

In Buddhism, the four noble truths are recognized as the first teaching given by the Buddha and are considered one of his most important teachings.

They are called “Noble Truths” because, as the Buddha says, they are real, infallible and do not change.

It is because of the complete understanding of these four noble truths, as they really are, that the Buddha is called “Worthy” and “Perfectly Enlightened by Himself”.

Besides, the word “Buddhism” comes from the word “Buddha”, which in turn comes from the word “Buddhi” and “Bodhi”. These words literally mean “intellect”, “intelligence”, “wisdom” or “supreme knowledge”. They refer more specifically to the intelligence and supreme knowledge that a Buddha possesses due to the understanding of the four noble truths. But metaphorically they are usually translated as “enlightenment” or “awakening”, and the word “Buddha” as “enlightened” or “awakened”.

Whether a Buddha appears in the world or not, the four noble truths exist. However, a Buddha is needed to reveal them, bring them to light and teach them to the “deceived” world. As formulated by the Buddha, the four noble truths are central and universal events regardless of time and space. These are:

1. All beings experience pain and misery (dukkha) during their lifetime:
“Birth is pain, old age is pain, sickness is pain, death is pain; sorrow, grief, sorrow, grief, and anxiety is pain. Contact with the unpleasant is pain. Separating from the pleasant is pain. Not getting what one wants is pain. In short, the five assemblies of mind and matter that are subject to attachment are pain”.
2. The origin of pain and misery is due to a specific cause: “It is the desire that leads to rebirth, accompanied by pleasure and passion, seeking pleasure here and there; that is, the desire for pleasures, the desire for existence, the desire for non-existence”.
3. The cessation (nirodha) of pain and misery can be achieved as follows:
“With the complete non-passion and cessation of this very desire, with its abandonment and renunciation, with its liberation and detachment from it”.
4. The method we must follow to stop pain and misery is that of the Noble Eightfold Path.

These truths do not exist in external things such as grass, wood and stones; they do exist though, in our body, which is composed of material elements and mental elements, such as consciousness and perception. As the Buddha says, “In this body with its perception and consciousness I declare the world of pain, the origin, the cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation”.

Of the four truths, the first identifies the innate physical and psychological pain or the innate misery, pain and suffering intertwined in the essence of life; the second identifies the origin and cause of the pain; the third recognizes the state in which the pain and its cause cease and are thus absent; and the fourth formulates a course of practice towards this state of pause.

This teaching begins with the analysis of the concept of pain that we all experience and the source of it, i.e., the desire we have within us. Due to our desire and in order to feel safe and secure, we constantly strive to gain experiences and objects that create pleasant emotions. We avoid anything that causes us pain and try to manipulate situations and people around to achieve what we want. In reality, the rest of the unstable world seldom matches what we want, and thus, we are often hurt and frustrated.

If we manage to overcome our desire, we will feel greater harmony with ourselves and the world around us and the pain will be eliminated. The way to achieve this is through the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Relevance of Buddhism in the present Modern World

Why we are talking about the relevance of Buddhism in modern life as opposed to its relevance to life in general. Is there anything special about our modern life? Certainly, there are cell phones and other technology – those phenomena are different in modern life, compared to earlier periods of history. Only fifteen years ago there were no mobile phones – but the human condition in general has been the same throughout time. People have always had arguments with each other. People have been unhappy and frustrated. No one finds close relationship with others very easy. Everyone’s life, in one way or another, is filled with worry; whether we are worried about the economic difficulties of the present age, or we were worried thousands of years ago about a drought causing crop failure. Buddhism has something to offer and is relevant in all times, not just our own time.

Buddhist Science, Buddhist Philosophy and Buddhist Religion

His Holiness the Dalai Lama makes a distinction between Buddhist science, Buddhist philosophy, and Buddhist religion. He says that Buddhist science and Buddhist philosophy have a great deal to offer to everyone. We do not need to look at, or be interested in, Buddhist religion in order to benefit from the teachings and insights that are available in Buddhist science and philosophy.

Buddhist science deals with psychology; it is a very deep analysis of how the mind works, how the emotions work, and how perception works. It also has a great deal to offer in the area of logic, and insights into cosmology. Buddhist philosophy deals with reality – how we understand reality and how we deconstruct our fantasies and projections about reality. These are things that can be helpful to anyone, without having to accept the more religious aspects of Buddhism such as reincarnation, liberation, and enlightenment. Furthermore, meditation is an activity that can be useful to anyone, as a way of training the mind and helping to develop more beneficial attitudes toward life.

The Relevance of Buddhist Psychology and Philosophy

The main goal of both Buddhist psychology and philosophy (as well as the religious aspects of Buddhism) is to eliminate suffering and unhappiness. All of us have a great deal of mental suffering and psychological problems because of emotional difficulties. We have many problems because of being irrational and out of touch with reality. These are things that the Buddhist teachings can help us to overcome. Buddhism as a religion is, of course, talking about overcoming problems in future lifetimes, gaining liberation from rebirth, and becoming an enlightened Buddha. But if we look just in terms of the psychology and philosophy, they can help us to minimize our suffering and problems in this lifetime, too.

The main structure of Buddha’s teachings was what he called the Four Noble Truths. “Noble” is a term that is referring to those beings who have seen reality. These are true facts about life that those who have seen reality understand as being true or know as being true.

True Suffering: Unhappiness, Happiness, and Compulsion

The first true truth is suffering

The first problem is unhappiness. There can be many gradations of unhappiness; even when we are in pleasurable situations, in pleasant company, eating delicious food, we

can still be unhappy. On the other hand, even if we are in pain, we can still be happy without complaining, and without being upset and self-preoccupied; we can still be at peace, accepting our situation and being concerned that we do not upset our family. So unhappiness is the first type of major problem that we all face.

The second type of problem is a little bit unusual, and so most people would not see this as a problem; the second type of suffering is our ordinary happiness. What is the problem with our ordinary happiness? The problem is that it does not last, it is never satisfying, we never have enough, and it changes. We are happy for a while, and then all of a sudden, our mood changes and we are no longer happy – we are suddenly unhappy. If our ordinary happiness were really true ultimate happiness, then the more we had of something that made us happy, the happier we would become. Consider ice cream – in theory, the more ice cream we eat at one time, the happier we should become. But after a certain point we are no longer happy eating that ice cream, and if we continue to eat it, we will become sick. So this ordinary happiness that we strive after is problematic as well.

The third type of problematic situation is our compulsive existence. Compulsive means that we have no control over our minds or our behavior. For instance, compulsively singing some silly song in our head – we cannot get it to stop. Or compulsively having very negative thoughts, compulsively worrying, compulsively talking all the time, and compulsively acting in negative ways. Actually, this whole aspect of compulsion is what karma is referring to in Buddhism; karma forces us, without any control, into repeated behaviours. And even if it is compulsive so-called “good behavior,” such as trying to be perfect all the time, we are never satisfied – the compulsion to be perfect in fact is very, very stressful; it is not pleasant at all.

So whether it is destructive or constructive, compulsive behavior is not at all wonderful. It is very problematic, especially when we compulsively act, speak, and think with anger, greed, attachment or jealousy. Some people are obsessed with jealous thoughts about their partner – they are very paranoid and suspicious. This is a very unpleasant example of compulsive behavior. It would be wonderful if we could overcome this compulsive aspect of thinking, speaking, and acting.

Controlling

The third Noble Truth that the Buddha saw is that it is actually possible to get rid of all these problems. It is possible to achieve a true stopping of them so that they never recur again. It is not just a matter of going to sleep and not experiencing my problems while I am asleep, because when I wake up my problems are back again. We do not want that kind of temporary solution.

Regarding problems what Buddhism says is that it is possible to get rid of all of these problems forever, because the fundamental nature of our mind is pure. So then we need to understand what that means. When we talk about mind in Buddhism, we are not talking about some sort of machine sitting in our head that does the thinking. We are talking about all mental activity. Our mental activity goes on and on and on. And mental activity includes emotions and perceptions, not just thinking. Buddhism teaches that basic mental activity does not necessarily need to be mixed with confusion. It does not need to be mixed with disturbing emotions, like anger and so on – that is not part of its nature.

Now, it might seem as though we are always angry or always confused. Many people have the experience of hearing a song going through their head over and over and over again. It seems as though it will never stop. Upon waking up in the morning, it starts again. It is silly, but it is also compulsive. However, the song is not part of the actual essential nature of one’s mental activity. If it were, it would have been there from the moment of birth, all the way up until the present moment. But mental activity does not exist in this impossible way; it is not true that my mind always has this silly song playing in it. That is impossible. I could counter this song going on in my head.

How Buddhism Change Our Thinking

That is the relevance of Buddhism not only in modern life, but in all life. We try to pay attention to our emotions, our attitudes, and the projections we are making, which are the bases for the attitudes. We analyze the compulsiveness of our thinking, speaking, and acting. That compulsiveness is brought on by the projections we are making, and we try to apply deconstruction methods to see more clearly the reality of what is going on. In this way, Buddhist science and philosophy are relevant in daily life to minimize the suffering that we cause ourselves. As we experience the up and downs of being happy and then being unhappy in our daily life, we try not to be like a thirsty person. When we are happy, we enjoy it while we have it, because it will not last. But we do not make a big deal out of it – we just enjoy it for what it is. And if we are unhappy, we remember that everyone is unhappy sometimes – it is quite normal. We just continue doing whatever it is that we need to do, and in this way, we go through life without inflating the importance of anything that happens. In other words, we refrain from inflating situations with our own projections. In that way, life becomes very joyous, because when we are not totally preoccupied with “me” and what I want, then we can see the joy in all the everyday, little things of life.

Buddhism and relevance

First let us look at what Buddhism is (relevance of Buddhism in the modern world / Buddhism and relevance) – It may mean many things to many people. To some, it can be just the life of Buddha. To another, Buddhism would mean the massive doctrine as recorded in the Buddhist literature, which indeed is voluminous and contains several thousand pages recording the words of the Buddha. And in it is described as a very lofty, abstruse, complex, and learned philosophy of life. Then based on whatever the Buddha taught, whatever the practices current at the time of the Buddha, there has grown a very rich culture, a culture which has extended to all ‘parts of Asia for over 2500 years, and to which people from various walks of life with various backgrounds from all these countries have made a lasting contribution. A large number of sects or schools or philosophical systems have evolved and all of them, quite rightly, go under the name of Buddhism. Then comes another definition of Buddhism and that is the kind of ritual that has grown around the doctrine of the Buddha as a result of his teachings and the way of life preached by him, becoming a religion.

Whether the Buddha intended it or not, his teachings became a religion, a religion to which people were prepared to hold allegiance and which has its own ritual, organization, and ways or criteria for deciding what is

properly done or what is improperly done. Now that is another kind of Buddhism. If one were to take each of these aspects separately and try to examine the impact of what he would call Buddhism on modern life, it would certainly be an enormous task.

Buddha relevant in the modern world: Dalai Lama

New Delhi: Buddhism has a special role to play in the modern world because, unlike many other religious traditions, Buddhism uniquely propounds the concept of independence which accords closely with the fundamental notions of modern science, Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama said on Sunday.

Elaborating on the importance of Buddhism as tool for promoting peace, he said, "The 20th century was a century of war and violence, now we all need to work to see that the 21st century is of peace and dialogue."

The Tibetan spiritual leader, who along with many of his supporters fled Tibet and took refuge in India when Chinese troops moved in and took control of Lhasa in 1959, addressed a gathering of nearly 900 Buddhist monks and scholars at a four-day Global Buddhist Congregation 2011, which began in the capital Sunday, in a televised message.

"We can think of Buddhism in terms of three main categories - philosophy, science, and religion. The religious part involves principles and practices that are of concern to Buddhism alone, but the Buddhist philosophy of interdependence as well as the Buddha science of mind and human emotions are of great benefit to everyone," said the Dalai Lama, who after coming to India headed a Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh which never won recognition from any country.

The spiritual leader said while "modern science has developed a highly sophisticated understanding of the physical world, including the subtle workings of the body and the brain, Buddhist science, on the other hand, has devoted itself to the first-person understanding of many aspects of emotions - areas that are still new to modern science".

"I believe that a synthesis of these two approaches has great potential to lead to discoveries that will enrich our physical, emotional, and social well-being," the Dalai Lama said.

The spiritual leader said "he was convinced that the most significant obstacle to religious harmony is the lack of contact between different faiths and communities and, consequently, the lack of appreciation of their mutual value".

"However, in today's increasingly complex and interdependent world, we have to acknowledge the existence of other cultures, different ethnic groups and of course other religious faiths. Whether we know it or not - most of us experience this diversity on a daily basis," he said.

"I think the time has now come to communicate freely with one another - those in the Pali tradition engaging in dialogue with those in the Sanskrit tradition," he said.

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have a great deal to offer to everyone. We do not need to look at or be interested in, Buddhist religion in order to benefit from the teachings and insights that are available in Buddhist science and philosophy. Buddhist science deals with psychology; it is a very deep analysis of how the mind

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The Relevance

A few elements that make Buddhism Relevance, first of these would be the recognition of the responsibility of the individual. the Buddha is one of the most remarkable religious teachers who emancipated man from all bonds – bonds of supernatural ties, a Godhead, a creation, sin Of- any other characteristic inherited from anyone else (rather than what you yourself have done). So when the Buddha says that each person is his own master, he promulgates a principle whose applicability becomes stronger as the man begins to get more and more confidence in the control of himself and the environment. So if, today, with scientific and technological development, man feels that he has come to a point where his own intellect makes him superior to anybody else or allows him able to solve any problem that he has, whether physical or ethical or political or whatever, would not the principle that man is the master of himself – that he has to be responsible to himself because whatever he does he inherits – become one of the most important ways of looking at himself?

So this fundamental approach to making man free from all bondages, spiritual and otherwise, is one of those very important doctrines of Buddhism that have contributed to its timelessness. As we advance, as greater progress is made by man, there will be a greater need for him to assert that he is the master of himself. The more he asserts himself to be the master of himself. The main goal of both Buddhist psychology and philosophy (as well as the religious aspects of Buddhism) is to eliminate suffering and unhappiness. All of us have a great deal of mental suffering and psychological problems because of emotional difficulties. We have many problems because of being irrational and out of touch with reality. These are things that the Buddhist teachings can help us to overcome.

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