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Present-Day Social Problem and its Solution by Buddhism

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Introduction

Every one incessantly wishes to become richer and happier. However, in reality, we find permanent situations of wars and miseries caused by poverty of all sorts.

Moreover, considering today's vital theme of the environmental problems, the contamination, which used to be a mere small-scale problem that only a small section of populace had to endure, has become an issue that the world cannot ignore any longer. The contamination of an area has rapidly exploded into global scale, and the issue, which used to be a problem of an area, has become a grave one that the entire World has to bear.

Though we have a problem of deforestation, cutting of trees once was the true necessity for constructing houses, for making instruments, and for getting warmth at the time of cold climate. It used to be considered not necessary to take responsibility for destruction of forest by such cutting of trees. The destruction of ecosystem as a result of such cutting of trees was considered to be negligible.

Further, air pollution produced by the increase of nitrogen oxide and other chemicals in the air by burning has not only raised the temperature of the earth but it has also increased other problems, such as large droughts, acid rains, groundwater contamination, etc. Can we say with certainty that they could have been avoided in the process of the progress of human civilization?

Could human beings throw away the comfortable life for fear of the evil of wastes, forbearing inconveniences? Though scientific civilization brought about environmental pollution, development in chemical industry has also contributed to human society in the domain of eradication of disease and curing of the sick.

It is easy to criticize chemical pollution. However, can we think of forgoing this highly developed society of ours, as bad as it is, and revert back to the ways of the olden days? When considering these things, we notice the importance of our 'Will Power' and the necessity to convert our 'Sense of Values'.

Furthermore, it is pointed out that the instability of politics is caused by social evils like corruption and injustice. Instability in turn is one of the important causes of poverty in the developing countries of Asia, which cannot be solved by a mere development of industries.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to see how Buddhism can solve these problems in this day of environmental crisis. I wish to discuss it in the following.

1. Ideal World observed in Indian Philosophy

In Ṛg Veda, it was considered that physical body of a man was to perish with his death. However, his soul (*anu*, *manas*, *purāṇa*, *ātman*) was considered to be immortal. It was considered that it traveled to the realm of Yama, the ideal world of the moon that made people forget about the heat of the daytime, and that would provide the souls eternal pleasure by being together with their ancestral souls. It was depicted that water, vegetation, food, and drinks were abundant in this ideal world of Yama, thus reflecting a very optimistic world view of the Aryans. In this world view, we can hardly find the idea for positive reformation of actual society. However, in the course of time, there emerged a doubt that there would be no difference between a good person, who strictly followed the Vedic way of life, and an evil person, who did not perform Vedic rites at all, if the evil person could also reach the realm of Yama after his death. Thus, the idea of *rta* (universal law) came to be introduced. The Yama in the heaven was no longer considered to be the god guaranteeing pleasures after death. He came to bear the role as a judge to examine sinners.

2. Ideal Land observed in Early Buddhism

Buddhism, from the beginning, placed an importance on removing poisonous arrows struck in the minds of people, rather than discussing metaphysical problems.¹ This is to say that the environment surrounding us is important as it has some relation to our self recognition. It cannot have any value without having relationship with our self recognition. Moreover, the theory of *pra t̥ityasamutpāda*, which is expressed by the formula "as this exists, that also exists," shows that an individual cannot exist without having any relationship with its surroundings.²

¹ 『中阿含』 (Majjhima Agama, Taisho Tripitaka 1. 840c) 、 『毒箭經』 (Sūtra of Poisoned Arrow, Taisho Tripitaka 1. 917c)

² Such way of thinking was inherited to Sarvāstivādins also. The school said that the external world can be recognized with the unity of indriya (根), the object of indriya (境) and vijñāna (識) . Even

As we know, Gotama Buddha was born as a royal prince of the Sākya. Though it was told that he was living a comfortable life as a royal prince, he dared to abandon the life as a prince. It is said that he led the most fortunate life while having modest food, simple clothing and poor shelter. For Gotama Buddha, it was clear that attaining economic prosperity was not his ideal objective. If he wished to realize an Ideal State or an Ideal Land, it must have been better for him to remain as a royal prince so that he could materialize it through his good rule and governance. However, we can say that the origin of Buddhist view of Ideal Land rests in his abandoning this method.

In Early Buddhism, the congregation of Bhikkhus, i.e., the Saṅgha was the peaceful place for them to unite their minds. For those religious mendicants, their dwellings were the very ideal places where they can remain free from anxiety. In *Suttanipāṭa*, it is mentioned that the ascetic practitioners should live in the place where 'people do not reside', either 'under a tree', 'in a cemetery' or 'caves in the mountains'.³ Certainly, such places may be suitable for ascetic practices, free from worldly noise. For ordinary men, they are nothing but shelters isolated from social life. According to *Vinaya-piṭaka* like *Ssu-fen-lu* (四分律) & others, as religious practices on the outdoors had obstacles of coldness, heat, wind, direct rays of sun, mosquitoes, house flies, etc., austere religious training in *āvāsas* and *vihāras* was permitted. It is proved that the monks could strive further for religious austerities due to such arrangements.⁴

"Sensuous objects are indeed varied, sweet and delightful, and upset the mind by their illusions. Seeing the unhealthy results of sensuous objects, let one live alone like a unicorn's horn."

"Sensuous objects are the cause of calamity, danger, disease, a dart and a fear to me.' Observing this danger resulting from sensuous objects, let one live alone like a unicorn's horn."⁵

It was considered to be ideal that one is free from desires, heat or coldness, hunger and thirst, wind, solar heat, house flies and snakes, and etc.⁶ However, this is the idea occurring from the standpoint of carrying out religious practices. The ultimate ideal is Nirvana, which is free from restrictions like a 'state' or 'land,' or a place, etc. The comfortable place does not necessarily mean the place where we can fulfill sensuous desires.

Mahāyana Buddhism like the Vijñāna-vādins inherited the idea that the external world do not exist without the mind.

³ Suttanipāṭa, No. 966.

⁴ Taisho Tripiṭaka, 22. 786b, 937a. Vinayapiṭaka, vol. 1. p.3.

⁵ H. Saddhatissa trans., The Suttan-Nipāṭa. Curzon Press, (1985: 6).

⁶ Suttanipāṭa, No. 50, 51, 79. Taisho Tripiṭaka, 22. 937a.

Although there was a sad incident of the massacre of the Sākyas in the last years of the Buddha, the incident only goes to show that a nation, a political entity, is essentially destined to doom. Even the Buddha could not deny this very fact. In Early Buddhism, the ideal social form was a democratic Saṅgha. However, it is an important fact that there never was a move to maintain the Saṅgha with the help of political power or military might.

3. The View of Ideal Land observed in Abhidharma Buddhism

In *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, the idea of Common Karman (Gūgo, 共業) is explained. In Karma, there is a personal karman that one has to experience in accordance to the law of retribution, and there is a Common Karman that many living beings have to share the results, such as the mountains, rivers, and the earth.

Common Karman does not base on the relation of individual retribution. Actions of many living beings result in causing the living beings to have mountains, rivers and the earth as common factors. For example, in the world view of the Abhidharma Buddhism, the formation process of the universe is explained in four stages, ignoring the existence of the mighty creator God. It is said that our will based on karmic increasing power creates this universe.

Moreover, the cause called Non-hindering Cause (kāraṇa-hetu, 能作因), which is not a direct cause, but which indirectly provides minute influences, while not becoming hindrances to the arising of certain things, is also mentioned. For example, we have the Himalaya. It seems to be nothing to do with those who live in Japan. However, in reality it provides influences on changes in air currents, and it influences the climate of Japan. In view of this Kāraṇa-hetu (能作因), the environment which surrounds us is related to us in every respect.

The World View of the Abhidharma bears a strong resemblance to that of the Purāṇas. In Purāṇas, the Jambudvīpa, where we live, is divided into seven countries by mountain ranges running from the East to the West. There are orders according to the nature of the countries, from the country of mixture of good and evil, to the country free from old age, illness, anxiety; enjoying prosperity and long-life. The Seventh, Uttarakuru, is the most excellent country. Honey and *Amṛta* are said to flow in rivers. Balmy breeze is said to blow in the air. The ground is said to be made of jewels. Even dusts are said to be pure gold. It is said that husband and wife are born simultaneously, and that they have the same figure and the same character. It is said that they die simultaneously also. A life span is said to be 14,500 years, and people remain happy through out,

without dirt, disease and any sin etc.⁷ Even Abhidharma, the Kulu Country is said to be placed to the north of the Sumeru. It is said to be the most supreme country among the four. The life span there is depicted to be 1000 years.⁸ Such descriptions may reflect the idea of ancient Indian people who imagined the existence of a cool comfortable place, free from burning heat, beyond the Himalaya. However, a place more ideal than that is the heavens of the gods. Thirty three Heavens are said to be located over the Sumeru, and in the air, many heavens including the heaven of Yama, are considered to exist. Although the Vedas and Upaniṣads, etc. considered the heaven of Yama as the Ideal Land, Buddhism did not consider it as the ideal world. It was considered ideal when our spirit are gradually developed and awakened, and when the *traya-lokas* are to be abandoned at the last. In Abhidharma Buddhism, the external factors, even if they are favorable ones, are nothing but impermanent (*anicca*). One may become satisfied with favorable external factors, but one should not make them the object of attachment.

4. Mahāyāna Buddhism and Pure Land (Ideal Land)

The idea of "buddha-kṣetra-pariśuddhi" (浄仏国土), which appears in Mahayana Buddhism, tends to be received as a view which has been consistent since the days of Early Buddhism. However, it appears neither in the Early Buddhism, nor in the Abhidharma Buddhism. "Buddha-kṣetra-pariśuddhi" (浄仏国土) means Pure Land. It means 'to make pure the Land of the Buddha,' or it means 'Pure Land of the Buddha.' Although we find the usage of the word 'Buddha-kṣetra' in Early Buddhism, it denotes only the Śākyamuni's Buddha-land. And there is no idea of 'purifying' it. However, when Mahāyāna Buddhism comes to accept the idea of Buddhas in Ten Directions of the present, the idea of purifying the Buddha-land emerged. Why the Buddha-kṣetras has to be purified? According to Larger Prajñāpāramita Sūtra (大品般若經), it is mentioned that Bodhisattva way of life is to purify all beings in the Buddha-kṣetra and to purify the dirt of desires of all creatures there.⁹ Same idea can also be seen in Akṣobya Buddha Kṣetra Sūtra (Ashuku Bukkoku Kyō 阿閼佉国經) and Daśa Bhūmi Sūtra (十地經). In Mahāyāna Buddhism, concrete depiction of Pure Land came to be described clearly. In the famous Sukhāvati-vyūha (無量寿經), the Pure Land Sukhāvati is depicted as a vast land that never changes and perishes. It is delicately beautiful and it is said that the ground there is composed of natural seven precious metals. The land is totally flat. We can find neither mountains nor seas there. There are no worlds of hells, of *pretas*, and of beats. There are no seasons like spring, summer, fall and winter. It is neither hot nor cold. The temperature is always

⁷ Taiken Kimura, Selected Works of Kimura Taiken (『木村泰賢全集』) Vol. 5, pp. 299ff.

⁸ Taisho Tripiṭaka, 1. 135b.

⁹ 『摩訶般若經』 Taisho Tripiṭaka, 8. 259c.

stable, and cheerful breeze blows. Lotus Flowers of Jewel bloom all over. Although there are wonderful meals there, no one eats them, as people get satisfaction in their mind, on wishing to eat. Moreover, it is said that a wonderful music is played, and that women do not exist there.¹⁰ The idea that there is no woman in the Pure Land is not denying womanhood as such. The Mahāyānists elaborated the same idea as is observed in the Early Buddhism when it says, "When the mind is stabilized and the wisdom has arisen, to be women does not cause any hindrance at all for those who observe the right truth."¹¹

Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra recommends the positive conversion of this Sāhā-world into the Pure Land, while desiring less and knowing contentment just like a "flower of Lotus in the water, not being tainted by mundane thoughts." The Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra also suggests that 'while people of the world consider this world is burning or when they are in illusions, we should consider our Pure Land is peaceful and filled with heavenly people and men. There are mountains of treasures and beautiful trees which bear flowers and fruits in the gardens, and the temple buildings, and there are many ways of enjoying them. High up in the sky, gods play musical instruments. Rain of flowers of Mandara is being sprinkled over those who wish to attain the Bodhi.'¹² Thus, ideal Buddha Kṣetra is depicted. The teaching of the Lotus Sūtra encourages putting our efforts to convert our Sāhā-world filled with pains into the ideal Buddha-Kṣetra, not escaping from it. That is to say that the Pure Land does not exist in the place where we escape ourselves from our reality. It is this very Sāhā-world that we have to convert into the Pure Land through our efforts.

Conclusion

Now, if we observe modern society, religion is often regarded as a suspicious thing by which people earn money, while talking about other worldly things that do not exist. Especially, in Japan, when some religious organization cause problem and when it is criticized as anti-social organization, like the case of Aum Shinri Kyō which attempted massacre in order to achieve his purpose in Japan, people tends to consider religion as a dangerous thing. The world 'religion' itself provokes suspicion.

Moreover, in the racial war involving religion as observed in Serbia in the former Yugoslavia, religions, which ought to provide rescue and relief to human beings regardless of race, have become the targets of hatred, distinguishing the difference of religions and races. The Buddha or Jesus Christ never considered

¹⁰ 『無量寿経』 Taisho Tripiṭaka, 12. 270a.

¹¹ Hajime Nakamura, Confessions of Nuns (『尼僧の告白』). Theri-gathā, No. 61.

¹² Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra, Taisho Tripiṭaka, 9. 43a.

the past or the dead as the target of relief and rescue. It is needless to say that religions try to provide shelters for those who live in the present. As religions aspire for the construction of their Ideal Lands or the Ideal Nations, the Ideal Lands have to be built while making the most of the each of the religious thought. However, it may lead to the denial of other religions. An idea of State Religion certainly rests on the very view. However, history also shows that it also brought about dormancy and degeneration in religious persons.

Moreover, if the Ideal Land or the Ideal State is considered to be the place where people's desires are to be fulfilled, for the people of Somalia in Africa, hygienic and sufficient food, house, and peace may be the ideal. However, these are the wishes of the people of an Ideal Land, and such economic sufficiency only forms one of the conditions of the Ideal Land. When we question whether the people of those economically developed countries in Europe and the States, including Japan, are spiritually satisfied or not, we may have to answer 'No'. Of course, we do not disregard such economic factors. As the economic factor is not the sole element of composition for the Ideal Land, people ask for spiritual rescue.

The wisdom of knowing fulfillment and desiring less, as mentioned in Buddhism, is the very basic principle for maintaining health of oneself and for making others happy. And we have to teach and practice the Five *Sīlas* of "not to kill" (the very important *Sīla* in Buddhism which voluntarily admits not to attack others or not to torment others), "not to steal", "not to commit adultery", "not to tell lies", and "not taking psycho-destructing stimulants like drugs." It can be said that the corruptions and injustices in developing countries are caused due to the realistic pursuit of profits by the people. Buddhism explains the retribution covering the three periods of the past, the present and the future. The idea of retribution that teaches us that we have to take responsibilities of our deeds eventually, though they may not appear immediately after the action. It is an important law that should be taught in the society where corruptions and injustices prevail. Against the Buddhist Causal Theory, those other theories, such as the Fatal Theory, which explains everything as the results of previous lives, the Accidental theory, which says good action may not bear favorable results, and the One Cause Theory, which regards all are the decision of God's Will regardless of the efforts and progresses of human beings, are considered to be wrong.

Ethics and morality are worldly things. If no one finds the action, or if immoral deeds are not discovered, you may not be punished. However, the Buddhist view of Retribution for three generations of the past, the present and the future, teaches that we cannot avoid our responsibilities even if our bad deeds are not discovered.

It is to develop the finer characters of human beings. Without spreading this idea, corruptions and injustices will not be eradicated.

The developments in advanced countries are not merely economical one. We have to re-appreciate the fact that there were advancements in the soft-ware level, such as Education and Ethics, which supported such economic developments of advanced countries.

Buddhism has answers to this fundamental problem. Without spreading such Buddhist way of thinking, the real peace in the society will not be realized.

Without a nation, security is not guaranteed, both economically or mentally. There are many deprived people who wish to establish secure nations and societies, such as the Tibetan refugees persecuted by the Communist China, the Palestinian people who are trying to recover their deprived land, and those people who are still fighting for racial independence such as the Azerbaijanis and Croatians. A Nation is a secure social composition. Buddhism asks for other worldly benefits. However, the society and the other world are not separated things. They are closely related each other. It is the way of thinking of Hokke Buddhism.

Without peace in the society, there is no other worldly peace. It is the very theory of *Pratītyasamutpāda* that our self and others are closely related each other.

Probably, there will be no war, and also no police and army that oppress people in the Buddha-kṣetras and the Pure Land. However, if we try to realize the Pure Land in this modern world, it cannot be the Pure Land of a race or a nation. Nation without police and defense cannot exist in reality. Thus, the Buddhist view of *Pratītyasamutpāda*, which says everything inter-relates each other in unlimited manner, is needed there.

Economic developments brought about pollution, and we are obliged to live under the dangers of chemicals and agricultural fertilizers. Trees in forests were cut down, and rivers and seas were polluted. Many victims of drug induced disasters have been reported.

What kind of Buddha-kṣetra or Pure Land should we build right now? Although we surveyed the ideal world views since the days of the Vedas, they do not necessarily correspond to what we pursue as ideal. They were, so to speak, the ideal worlds conceived by those people who lived in each of the disastrous days. Thus, we cannot say that they hold eternal values. Once war breaks out, killing of each other, plundering, and use of violence take place. And with the influences of

false information, the world falls into an endless strife and confusion. Without development of ourselves, which is the most fundamental and eternal subject, we cannot realize the Pure Land. We should suggest the maintenance of the Five Precepts, and we should refrain from killing each other, from plundering, from adultery, from telling lies. We should seek to live together harmoniously, with prudence and a stable mind.

We have already seen that the quest for the ideal worlds were the reflections and depictions of the desires of the people living in different ages. Apart from the underdeveloped countries and agricultural sections of the world, people's desires are fulfilled economically and environmentally in the urban area, though they have to bear serious air pollution problems. However, if we try to realize such desires at global level, we have to face serious environmental destruction and acute economic inequality in some areas of the world. We should not take the physical aspects of Pure Land as a mere physical depiction. The plain land signifies the stability of mind. The blowing of peaceful breeze signifies internal contentment as the result of gentle actions in body, in speech and in the mind of people.

A Buddhist proverb says, "If mind becomes pure and clean, environment also becomes pure and clean; if mind becomes tainted, environment also becomes tainted." It is a problem that we have to carefully face. What is further important is the fact that matters are related to our mind. Finding values in matters is the working of our mind. It is the problem of mind development that enables the efficient usage of limited matters, without monopolizing them, sharing them with each other for mutual prosperity.

However economically and environmentally blessed, we cannot call it the Pure Land. Just by realizing suitable sound spirit, the construction of the Pure Land becomes possible. Knowing contentment, wishing small, and living together according to the teaching of *Pratītyasamutpāda*, are the very values that we have to learn.

At the end, I wish to dispatch a message for creation of a peaceful society.

The Message towards a Peaceful Society

All living beings are searching for freedom and happiness. Identifying one with others, we should not harm others. We should not take away other peoples' freedom.

There is nothing more wonderful than to realize a society that guarantees freedom and happiness to all.

Many races exist on this earth, and the ways of life, religions, and colour of skins also differs. Although thoughts and civilizations progress, when some customs are forced onto others, antipathy and strife arise.

If one insists that only one's principle and religion is right, and if one criticizes and rejects others as wrong, the disputes and distrusts will continue to prevail. It will become impossible to live together. Only days of anxiety and dark future will remain.

Recognizing others' position, and accepting each other, without harming each other, and through helping each other, mutual trust arises and a peaceful society comes into being.

The rich should be sympathetic to the poor and the needy; he should share his fortune with them by returning it to the society. Such society where people can live together brings smiles and richness of mind. Extreme imbalance of wealth and unfairness bring jealousy and hatred, and they make the society to fall into the mode of 'the survival of the fittest,' thus creating more sadness and pains. Once the society falls into the state of the plunder and strife, it is difficult to revive it to its original state of trust, security and ease. The unusual flow of money based on speculative fund manipulations, being absorbed in the pursuit of profits, obstructs normal economic activities, bringing about disparity in society, thus ruining the world economy and causing confusion in the world. Happiness of the entire world is disrupted, and happiness of an individual is not guaranteed also.

Human beings are not the sole living beings in this global society. Many creatures live in 'a net of inter-relationship.' If we pursue only the profits and conveniences, the relationship of coexistence will collapse and natural environment will also be destroyed soon. It is a duty for us human beings to judge from a global viewpoint so that we may be able to make our future offsprings live happily. For the future of our children who have unlimited possibilities, we should preserve our earth environment that enables all to live harmoniously, brightly and happily.

Seas, mountains, forests and rivers provide us with fresh air, clear water and peace of mind. Preserving natural environment is one of the conditions for the happiness of all living beings.

There are no limits to desires and greed. Anger induces a chain of endless disputes. A narrow way of viewing makes us commit mistakes in judging our prospects.

If we know satisfaction, we can protect unnecessary destruction and waste of resources. It will give us a richness of mind.

If we can hold compassion instead of anger, feeling of gratitude, reliance and peacefulness emerge.

The compassionate way of viewing, which enables us to see widely and afar, brings about the wisdom to living peacefully.

Now, the earth and all the living beings on it are suffering, struggling and being exhausted. Even if the flame of desire burns, without recognizing what are the flames, and what the flames are burning, people will continue to suffer endlessly, without a moment of respite.

We should not remain indifferent to the pains or sadness of others. We should feel the sufferings and pains of others as our own sufferings and pains. We should have the mind of compassion. It is a privilege of human beings to be able to share our feelings and sympathize with each other, identifying ourselves with others.

Transcending our opinions, religions and principles; respecting each other and considering the well-being of others, just like we feel dear to our body and family; we should refrain from harming and making sad the families of other races and creatures. With our neighbors, we should actively attempt to embody a society that can guarantee freedom and happiness to all.