

# An Insight from Early Buddhist Philosophy into Justice and Peace

## Introduction

Justice and peace are two relative concepts and have a very practical significance. Human society is always dependent on justice and peace, and they are very much related to almost every facet of human existence. In the absence of justice, it is extremely difficult to maintain law and order in society, and this shows that justice has more dominance over the other. These two cognate terms have various connotations and signify their utmost importance for the harmonious existence of human society. The term peace in a broad sense signifies the state of freedom from war or violence and a state of harmony and friendship where there is absence (or prevention of conflict, warfare, disorder and agitation in human society<sup>1</sup>. According to this connotation, it is comprehensible that it has a psychological, social, economic and political significance. Peace makes its origin in human mind and develops in society. The seed of peace when planted in the field of human mind grows into its maturity in the pond of human society. For its growth and development, there should be a harmonious social atmosphere, especially in which justice is enjoyed by everyone equally. This shows that peace is to be achieved through peaceful means, and in that endeavour, justice also becomes a key element. Justice and peace are not merely abstract concepts; they signify a practical living phenomenon of human society and life.

According to Buddhism, justice, signifies the first virtue of social

institutions and is a required element to maintain equality in human society<sup>2</sup>. Justice establishes the equality in human society or effective political order that serves the true interests of all. Whereas peace is considered, it is first generated in mind and lays a strong foundation for the continuous maintenance of interpersonal relationships<sup>3</sup>. It creates prosperity in matters of social, political and economic welfare and denotes a friendly disposition among the human beings towards each other, and a life of unity among diversity is the result of peace<sup>4</sup>. This shows that peace does not denote necessarily mere absence of war, but the presence of cultural and economic understanding and unity among diversity. It is a positive state of human mind and society where there is absence of destructive, aggressive, harmful elements of mind and human society.

Thus, these two concepts become very important ideals in politics. For instance, good governance always signifies justice and peace<sup>5</sup>. Justice and peace have been understood in Buddhist teachings nothing but harmony in social relationships and the fulfilment of human needs required for the happy existence of all beings<sup>6</sup>. Justice and peace could be maintained only when there is recognition for the human aspirations (mental needs) and the equal distribution of national wealth (material needs) by the state among the members of society.

## Role of State in the Maintenance of Justice and Peace

Buddhism has recognised basic human needs such as subsistence,

**Dr. Rajitha P. Kumara**

*Senior Lecturer,  
Department of Pali and  
Buddhist Studies,  
University of Kelaniya.*

economic stability, education, protection, social-interaction, mental and physical health, human dignity and social status, loving kindness and compassion, spirituality, etc. as the mental and physical needs of human beings. Basically, these human needs can be classified as physical, mental and spiritual as well. According to Buddhist political, social and economic philosophy, these needs have to be fulfilled if justice and peace are to be established and maintained in human society.

When we observe the evolution of human society, it is obvious in its dynamic process of evolution; the necessities of people also grew at a very rapid speed. For instance, according to the *Agganna sutta*, the fundamental human needs are reproduction, existence and protection<sup>7</sup>. All other needs are related to the above three kinds of human needs. When these basic human needs are fulfilled, justice and peace could be secured and maintained. A system of good governance was established in human society, basically for the maintenance of justice and peace as well as the fulfilment of the above-mentioned basic human needs. As governments are formed by the people based on principles of good ruling, it is the responsibility of any government to create a harmonious atmosphere in which justice and peace are enjoyed by people equally<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, it is obvious that maintenance of social justice and

peace to a greater extent lies in the fulfilment of basic human needs by the governing bodies. Among them, economic stability and equal distribution of national wealth are of prime importance. Individual as well as society depends on the economic realities, and it is a dominant factor in deciding the nature and social level of one's life. Some of the discourses such as *Kutadanta*, *Agganna* and *Mahasuddassana*, etc. focus much attention on the economic conditions of individuals, and advice is given for the fulfilment of economic realities by the state<sup>9</sup>. Specially, the rotation of wealth around one sector of society or individual leads to many problematic situations of a society. This makes the emergence of inequality, theft and plunder, class-division and class-struggle in society and also widens the disparity among different sections of society<sup>10</sup>. It is an obstacle for the harmonious relationships among the people, and the maintenance of justice and peace. In the *Pali* discourses, the hoarding of wealth by a certain section of society has been termed as *sannidikara*<sup>11</sup> which makes clear disparity among the sections of society that crumbles the social structure. Maintenance of justice and peace is dependent on the equal distribution of national wealth in society. All should have an equal access to national wealth, and it is the responsibility of a State to create opportunities for every citizen to enjoy equal economic benefits. It is mentioned that the supply of capital and the infra-structure facilities are of paramount importance for the harmonious existence of society<sup>12</sup>. In the discourses, much emphasis is given on cultivation, agriculture, government service, business ventures and employment. Buddhism has given an equal importance to all the sections of

society, and there is no special mention on any privileged class in society. If equal opportunities could be extended to every section of society, social discrepancies that lead to the break down of law (justice) and order (peace) in society could be prevented<sup>13</sup>. When a certain section of society becomes the centre of focus, there generates inequality among the individuals and the emergence of conflicting situations becomes unavoidable. Some economic theories attempt to make use of poor economic conditions of the underprivileged and use it as a means for the creation of social conflicts and thereby attempt to find solutions for the achievement of long-lasting peace and social justice. Buddhism rejects such destructive means and emphasises the appeasement of the divided sections of society by building a harmonious and cordial relationship among the conflicting sections of society<sup>14</sup>. Buddhism does not support the employment of conflicting situations in society for the materialisation of the ideal of socialism, communism or capitalism. Instead of aggravating the existing conflicts among the sections of society, Buddhism tries to create harmonious relationships among the individuals of society.

According to Buddhism, one of the intrinsic natures of human mind is the endeavour to make life a happy existence, and it is a basic psychological drive that makes human beings distinguishable from other species<sup>15</sup>. It is an obvious fact that existence is relative and lays the foundation for a network of social relationships. That is why a good system of governance is necessary. A good system of governance could maintain protection against physical, social, financial, political, occupational, emotional and spiritual requirements of human beings and the dangers from natural and man-

made disasters. Therefore, it is the responsibility of good governance to control recognised hazards of life. When there is threat to justice and peace in human society, remedial measures have to be implemented immediately<sup>16</sup>.

### **Moral Foundation of Justice and Peace**

Individual as a social being is a part of society, and inevitably, there develops various kinds of social relationships with other members of society. Just as the relevant governments accountable for the maintenance of hazard-free society, members of society also have a big responsibility in the fulfilment of the needs of each other<sup>17</sup>. Individual behaviour is the deciding element of justice, peace, unity, harmony and integrity of a society. Every human being wishes for the support from other human beings for the fulfilment of their needs<sup>18</sup>. Expectations and aspirations of people are psychological drives that take humans an upward journey of their life<sup>19</sup>. Expectations and individual behaviour in society form the basis of social relationships. Thus, the maintenance of order in human relationships is of prime importance in preserving justice and peace. It is necessary to be responsive to the needs and expectations of others and to have a regard and respect for them. As the other members of society are not mere physical objects, one should have a sense of respect towards their basic human needs. This sort of responsible social behaviour is known in Buddhism as *samacariya*<sup>20</sup>, a kind of behaviour supportive for the harmonious existence of social relationships. Society is living phenomena in which life of all members is dependent on each other. To control detrimental elements of society (*visamacariya*<sup>21</sup>) there should

be a good system of law (justice) and order (peace) above everything<sup>22</sup>. On the other hand, every individual too has a big role to play in society. That is why Buddhism emphasises the significance of a good social relationship in the fulfilment of each others' needs.

### Psychological Foundation of Justice and Peace

According to Buddhism, mind is the forerunner of human actions<sup>23</sup>, and the nature of human actions decides the nature of human society. Thus, justice and peace have a strong psychological foundation. One should not be driven by the four extremes of human mind known as insatiability (*chanda*), antagonism (*dosa*), terror (*bhaya*) and delusion (*moha*)<sup>24</sup>. Insatiability is an evil quality that signifies the extreme desire. This could drive a human towards antisocial behaviour which is extremely harmful for justice and peace of a given society. Antagonism or enmity signifies a very strong dislike and unpleasant psychological drive towards society, and it damages harmonious existence of human beings. This can be either a remark or a deed. It manifests as anger, a kind of feeling of displeasure and hostility. Terror or cowardice drives one into doing detrimental things that dismantle the co-existence of human society, a threat to justice and peace. Delusion signifies incapability of understanding the causality of a challenging situation.

The views, thoughts, ideas and concepts are generated in human mind as a result of the contact of objects with the relevant faculties. The final result is the conceptualisation of the objective world<sup>25</sup>. Buddhism has made necessary grounds to correct and rectify our erroneous ideologies, views, thoughts, concepts, etc. that shape human destiny. For instance, Buddhist political and economic philosophy is one of the examples which has a great impact on mental and physical behaviour of an

individual. Foundation of Buddhist principles of good governance is based on the thoughts of benevolence, loving-kindness, truthfulness and generosity, and such qualities generate peace and harmony among fellow human beings.

and understanding should be expressed<sup>29</sup>. One should adhere to the followings in communication: i.e., communication in right time, imparting of right facts, right use of language, use of meaningful facts, inner motive of justice and peace, etc. Moreover, in communication, one should be mindful of the application of pleasing words, pleasant talk,

### Harmful communication and its consequences

Harmful Communication	Consequence
falsehood	deception and favouritism
harsh words	ill-will and inequality
harmful words	disharmony and discrimination
worthless words	injustice and unfairness

### Communication an Essential Channel for Justice and Peace

According to Buddhist teachings communication is an essential channel for the maintenance of justice and peace, and it should have the strong foundation of truthfulness and trustworthiness. Basically, communication has two aspects, i.e., harmful communication and harmless communication. Harmful communication that leads to disintegration of peace and social justice is classified into four aspects<sup>26</sup> as shown below:

Irresponsible communication generates deception, animosity, disharmony and injustice in society. Deception and ill-will are the two psychological impacts of bad communication whereas the disharmony and injustice are the social consequences of bad communication. These types of communication drain away human spirit and energy essential for a harmonious social existence. Hence, positive qualities for the maintenance of a good communication have to be generated<sup>27</sup>. Advice is given with self-interest (*attahetu*) or interest of (*parahetu*) or with the expectation of advantageous (*amisahetu*) falsehood should not be uttered<sup>28</sup>. The words that make harmony, integration, friendship brotherhood

unblemished method, meaningfulness, making obvious facts very clearly drawing of receivers attention, well presentation, receiver's rejoice, etc<sup>30</sup>. Advice is given to totally abstain from falsehood in Buddhism and to promote truthfulness in society. The promotion of truthfulness and the disapproval of falsehood in society lay a good foundation for justice and peace.

### Conclusion

It is obvious that justice and peace have psychological, social, economic and political implications. These two cognate concepts have a relative and practical importance and form the very structure of human society. It is the justice that always could safeguard peace in society. Thus, there is a big responsibility of the governing bodies of a country to maintain justice and peace in society. In the process of the establishment of social justice and achievement of peace, basic human necessities have to be identified and attended in practice and theory. State as well as the each and every member of any society has a big responsibility in the fulfilment of

human needs which lays a good foundation for justice and peace. The motivating force of human society is the various kinds of aspirations and the material needs of its members. However, the quality and nature of justice prevailing in a society is the energising principle and deciding element of peace according to Buddhist teachings.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Scott, Foresman Advanced Dictionary, Thorndike E.L., Clarence L. Barnhart, Scott, Foresman and Company, California, 1979, p.751

<sup>2</sup> Scott, Foresman Advanced Dictionary, Thorndike E.L., Clarence L. Barnhart, Scott, Foresman and Company, California, 1979 p. 558

<sup>3</sup> The Pali-English Dictionary. Rhys Davids. T.W. William Stede. New Delhi. 1997, p. 681

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Kutadanta Sutta, Dighanikaya No 05, Phys Davids T.W. Buddhist Publication Society Kandy, 1984, pp.7,8,9,10

<sup>6</sup> Encyclopaedia of Buddhism Extract- No. 3, Social Dimensions of Buddhism, Ministry of Buddhasasana, Sri Lanka 1995, p.11

<sup>7</sup> Estlin Carpenter J. Dighanikaya, Vol.iii, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1992, pp.189,190,191

<sup>8</sup> Rhys Davids T.W. Estlin Carpenter, Dighanikaya, Vol.i. The Pali Text Society, London, 1975, p.133

<sup>9</sup> Rhys Davids T.W. Estlin Carpenter, Dighanikaya, Vol.ii. The Pali Text Society, London, 1982, pp.173,180

<sup>10</sup> Estlin Carpenter, Dighanikaya, Vol.i. The Pali Text Society, London, 1975, p.133

<sup>11</sup> Rhys Davids T.W. Estlin Carpenter, Dighanikaya, Vol.ii. The Pali Text Society, London, 1982, pp. 89, 90, 91, 92

<sup>12</sup> Encyclopaedia of Buddhism Extract- No. 3, Social Dimensions of Buddhism, Ministry of Buddhasasana, Sri Lanka 1995, pp.10,18, 19, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Encyclopaedia of Buddhism Extract- No. 3, Social Dimensions of Buddhism, Ministry of Buddhasasana, Sri Lanka 1995, pp. 13, 14, 15, 16

<sup>14</sup> Rhys Davids T.W. Estlin Carpenter, Dighanikaya, Vol.ii. The Pali Text Society, London, 1982, pp.173,174,175

<sup>15</sup> Venerable Sri Acariya Buddharakkhita, Dhammapada, Buddha Vacara Trust, Bangalore, 1986, p.52

<sup>16</sup> Estlin Carpenter J. Dighanikaya, vol.iii, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1992, pp.189,190,191

<sup>17</sup> Estlin Carpenter J. Dighanikaya, vol.iii, Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1992, pp.189,190,191

<sup>18</sup> Jayatilaka, K. N. Buddhism and Peace, The Wheel Publication No.41, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 1983, p.8

<sup>19</sup> Venerable Sri Acariya Buddharakkhita, Dhammapada, Buddha Vacara Trust, Bangalore, 1986, p.52

<sup>20</sup> Horner I.B. The Middle Length Sayings, Vol.i. The Pali Text Society, London, 1995, pp.54,55

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Rhys Davids T.W. Estlin Carpenter, Dighanikaya, Vol.ii. The Pali Text Society, London, 1982, pp.80,81

<sup>23</sup> Venerable Sri Acariya Buddharakkhita, Dhammapada, Buddha Vacara Trust, Bangalore, 1986, p.2

<sup>24</sup> Nayanatiloka, Buddhist Dictionary, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taiwan, 1987, p.6

<sup>25</sup> The Pali-English Dictionary. Rhys Davids. T.W. William Stede. New Delhi. 1997, p. 681

<sup>26</sup> Dighanikaya iii, pp.45,48

<sup>27</sup> Bhikkhu Nanamoli, The Exposition of Non-Conflict, The Wheel Publication No.269, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 1979, pp.8,9

<sup>28</sup> Dines Andersen & Helmer Smith, Suttanipata, The Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1990, p.22

<sup>29</sup> Rhys Davids T.W. Estlin Carpenter, Dighanikaya, Vol.i. The Pali Text Society, London, 1975, pp.36,37,38

<sup>30</sup> *pannapana, patthapana, vivarana, vibajana, uttanikatum.*