

Tolerance and Compassion as a Way of Embracing Others

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Abstract—The paper is aimed to show the notion of tolerance and compassion as a way of realizing and embracing the self as well as the others. In this paper, I aim to show that the notion of tolerance which is enrooted in Jaina Anekāntvāda serves as a basis for a peaceful and harmonious society where others are seen and treated with tolerance and acceptance. In contemporary world, people are becoming more hostile and intolerant towards each other's ideologies and religions, the cause of such intolerance lies in asserting any particular ideology or standpoint to be absolutely true. In order to get rid of such dogmatism, we are required to deploy the virtue of tolerance in our lives. We must hold veneration towards others ideologies because by doing so we can contribute in promoting social good. Along with the notion of tolerance, I also aim to address and discuss the virtue of compassion embedded in Buddhism. Tolerance without compassion cannot pave the way for peaceful social order. The cultivation of compassion is essential in Mankind as it purifies the mind from confused emotions and constructive feelings of resentment, ill-will, greed, hatred etc.

In this context, I will take up Jaina's notion of Anekāntvāda and Buddhism's notion of Compassion/Karuna. Anekāntvāda which teaches us the doctrine of tolerance alerts a knower about multifacetedness of reality, it also makes the knower aware of his own limitations in grasping knowledge. It prevents us from falling into dogmatism. It saves us from falling into the trap of egoism. Egoism prevents an individual from respecting others views as much as he respects his own views. This gradually leads him to defend his partial knowledge as absolutely true. Buddhism's doctrine of Compassion on the other hand, advocates compassion as a source of deep purification, inner healing that supports inner freedom of Individual. According to Buddhism, gluttony for mundane things put us into an endless competition with others followed by conflicts and wars. Hence, both compassion and tolerance are inextricably linked with each other in terms of establishing brotherhood among men.

Keywords: Compassion/Karuna, Anekāntvāda, Tolerance, Recognition, Peace, Harmony

1. INTRODUCTION

Individual and society are inseparable, an individual is born in a society, his ideologies, way of living gets fashioned within a society and he enjoys his rights within the bounds of society. Both the individual and society are interdependent on each other for their existence. A society is comprised of individuals who decide to form a friendly association with each other by

way of common interest. "The term society is derived from a French word, *société*, which in turn has its origin in the Latin term *societas*, meaning, "companion, comrade, business partner etc. Essentially the term denotes a group of people who share some mutual concern or interest, a common objective, common characteristics, and often a common culture."¹ To Share a common culture, belief system, religion, art, architecture, historical and cultural background makes a person one with that culture or ethnic group. This in turn, helps the individual to get his social, religious, cultural, and national identity. This identity differentiates an individual from other ethnic, religious, cultural groups. Though inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-national difference are quite common but differences can and do exist among people of the same religion, cultural and ethnic identity. Thus, the aim of my paper is to solve the differences based on caste, creed, religion, cultural, etc., by virtue of tolerance and compassion.

It is important to admit at the outset that by the term tolerance I do not mean an involuntary act of "bearing", "suffering", "putting up with" the adversary. By the word Tolerance I mean a voluntary act of accepting and embracing others individuality and their ideologies. Tolerance when accompanied with compassion makes this task of appreciating and revering others much easier and virtuous.

Tolerance plays a vital role in accepting and appreciating others and their ideologies. The notion of tolerance and multiplicity of stand points is expressed vastly in *Jain Anekāntvāda*. *Jain Anekāntvāda* is a doctrine of multifacetedness of reality. According to this doctrine, truth is one but it is perceived differently by different people and no single view can be taken as absolute for it represents only an aspect of the multi-facet reality. The doctrine of *anekāntvāda* is also known as the doctrine of relativism, for it presupposes that the realization of truth is absolute and expression of truth is relative. The doctrine of *anekāntvāda* also asserts that reality cannot be apprehended by our faculty of senses for whatever is given to senses is merely an appearance of the complex reality. An individual's comprehension of reality or truth is

¹ <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Society>, retrieved on 2016/4/27

dependent upon his ability to grasp it in a certain way. Thus, one standpoint alone cannot be regarded as absolute and in order to understand the true nature of reality, we are required to see it from all perspectives.

The Jaina illustrates the many facets of reality by using the parable of *andhagajanyāyah*, i.e., “blind men and an elephant”. According to the story, each of the six blind men touches a part of an elephant (trunk, leg, head etc.) and claimed to know the true appearance of the elephant. But they could not succeed properly because the elephant as a whole was altogether different from what they felt. The story depicts that plurality is inevitable and different viewpoints represents different aspects of the complex reality. Thus, we must welcome divergent opinions to understand the reality in its totality. Though *anekāntvāda* propose approbation for divergent viewpoints and practices but it does not suggests that vexatious and perverse views and actions are also welcomed.

In contemporary world, people are becoming more intolerant towards others’ religions, cultures, ideologies and practises, and what we need today is to deploy the virtue of tolerance in our lives. We must respect others’ religions and ideologies because by doing so we are promoting good for all. In order to light up the spirit of humanity in all of us, we need to cultivate tolerance and reverence towards others’ ideologies, religions, cultures, etc. Prosperity and progress of a nation depends upon the mutual harmony among its various cultures and societies. To promote humanity and peace among people, traditions, and nations, we need to adopt the virtues of compassion and tolerance. To believe that only one ideology or culture should prevail over other ideologies or culture is to fall into dogmatism. Truth is one but it is conceived differently by different people. Our comprehensions of truth are finite. But this does not imply that truth as absolute cannot be grasped rather it implies that we are all unique and possess different qualities and different level of spiritualism.

We live in a world full of inter-dependence, in order to regulate our lives; we in some or the other way seek help or mutual cooperation from others. But over the past 100 years, the scenario has little changed as we have become more dependent on machines and technology to regulate even the meagre activities of our lives. However, this does not make any difference to our reliance on others for the regulation of our lives. Since, the inter-dependence is a common phenomenon; the conflicts that arise from it are also unavoidable. The world is becoming more hostile and violent than ever shows that the people are not at harmony with each other. The disagreements and differences between individuals, communities, and nations are resulting into massacres. Current example of this can be sought from civil unrest in Iraq and Syria due to major massacres caused by a terrorist group named, ISIS. What the world requires today is an earnest effort from all nations to abolish the peace disturbing activities. But before setting up the task of the abolishment of

violent activities, it is equally important to work on the causes of violence. According to Buddhism, the attainment of peace is vested in the abolishment of the causes of violence. “In Buddhism the causes of violence and conflict are arrayed in to three domains; the external, the internal and the root.² According to Buddhism, inflicting harm or injury either by words, thoughts or deeds on others is the external cause of violence/conflict. “If people want to live an ultimately happy life with no harms toward themselves at all, the Buddha teaches, they should start with avoiding causing harm to others, physically and verbally at the personal level, since people are afraid of physical violence and resent harsh words; and the physical and verbal harm we inflict upon others usually leads to hate and conflicts that, in turn, would bring harm to us and cost our happiness.”³ Hence we should refrain from inflicting harm to others to be at peace with oneself. As it is stated in one Buddhist scripture:

All fear death.

None are unafraid of sticks and knives.

Seeing yourself in others,

Don’t kill don’t harm

(Dhammapada, 18; translated by the author from Taisho 4: 210).

Bad words blaming others.

Arrogant words humiliating others.

From these behaviours

Come hatred and resentment.

... Hence conflicts arise, rendering in people malicious thoughts

(Dhammapada, 8; translated by the author from Taisho 4: 210).⁴

Hence, violence whether verbal or physical destroys the inner peace for it produces a sense of resentment in others and thus creates a fear for life or degradation of respect in assailant’s heart which give rise to the feeling of anxiety or uneasiness. The inner cause of violence, Buddhism contends is people’s inner mind operations. According to Buddhism, though infliction of physical or verbal harm on others and injustice of the society are causes of conflicts/violence, but “these behaviours and structures originate all from the state of human mind, since the violence and injustice are responses toward external stimuli produced by people’s inner mind operation.”⁵ Thus, the causes of external conflicts lay inside our mental

² Theresa Der-lan Yeh, 2006, “The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective, p. 94.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Theresa Der-lan Yeh, 2006, “The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective, pp. 94-95.

⁵ Ibid. P.95.

oppressions within each being. “For example, confronted with the threat of physical and verbal harm, it is natural for us to feel fear, dislike, resentment, anger or hate. Out of this negative caste of mind, we would again resort to a violent response, and hence a conflict arises.”⁶ According to Buddhism, even if we are not confronted with any fear to our life then also conflicts may occur. This kind of conflict arises from two major mental attachments, i.e., attachment to subjective views and attachment to material pleasures. The attachment to one’s opinions refers to insistence on the absoluteness of one’s own views and refusing to acknowledge others’ views would lead to prejudice, intolerance, polarity and hence results in extreme kind of violence. The second cause of violence, i.e. attachment to material pleasures refers to endless longing for material pleasures which would lead in self-indulgence and greed for mundane attachments. The greed for more materialistic enjoyments and pleasures puts individuals, communities and nations into competition with each other to gain more and more followed by conflicts and wars as it is depicted in *Vibhash-Śāstra*;

For the sake of greedy desire, kings and kings are in conflict,

So are monks and monks, people and people, regions and regions, states and states

(The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Taisho 28: 1547).⁷

According to Buddha, the competition for materialist pleasures further results into a lose- lose situation:

If we win, we incur resentment toward ourselves.

If we lose, our self-esteem is hurt (Dhammapada, Taisho 4: 210).⁸

Hence, gluttony for mundane things put us into an endless competition with others followed by conflicts and wars. According to Buddhism, we can overcome such feeling of avarice only through the internal transformation and manifestation of *Karunā* in us. The last and the root cause of violence and conflict Buddhism asserts is *avidyā* or ignorance. According to Buddhism, it is due to the veil of ignorance that “we cannot see the world as it is and see ourselves as such.”⁹ It is because of *avidya* that we cast everything into the domain of “me” and “mine”, once this veil of ignorance is vanished we will be able to see everything beyond the domain of “me” and “mine” and could apprehend things as they are. Hence, Buddhism offers Compassion or *Karunā* as the solution to deal with differences that arise from internal, external, and the root causes of violence.

To value the sanctity of human life on earth we are required to deploy the virtues of tolerance and compassion within us as

they promote peace among societies, cultures and nations. Tolerance without compassion cannot bring harmony in society because it is through compassion that one can understand and be empathetic towards others. Compassion and tolerance together paves the way for peaceful and harmonious society where divergent views are not seen as intolerable but as something that can be modified to achieve a greater knowledge or truth. The virtues of compassion and tolerance are the need of the hour to deal with the hostility, intolerance and to embrace humanity.

REFERENCE

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- [2] Theresa Der-lan Yeh, 2006, “The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective, International Journal of Peace Studies, Volume 11, Number 1, Spring/Summer 2006, pp. 91-97.

⁶ Ibid. P.96.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid. P.97.