
The Importance of Buddhism to Heal Trauma in Pahadi's "The Tears of Terror"

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Abstract

This article has tried to analyze Kishor Pahadi's "The Tears of Terror" by applying Buddhism and its principal assets which would help the victims relieve from the pain and suffering or trauma they have got during the ten-year long Maoist insurgency. People during the decade-long conflict were badly inflicted by the fatal consequences from which they could hardly get over. Different measures were taken to help them get over, however, following some meditative aspects of Buddhism, one can get relief from the mental shock which has been imprinted in mind for a long time. This article is not talking about leaving home and going to the monasteries, rather it highlights some meditative aspects of Buddhism which can relieve the victims who is/are narrated in this story.

Keywords: *Buddhism, meditation, peace, People's War, trauma*

Introduction

It has been a long time Buddhism has been practiced to bring peace and solidarity in the world inflicted from wars and conflicts. It has been used and its main philosophy of calmness, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation to resolve the unresolved traumatic pains of the affected people have been taken as an important asset to understand the pain and suffering of the people due to war and conflict in the world. In many parts of the world, the relation of religion to politics has defied simple interpretation. This is certainly true in the case of Buddhism and its role in regard to various pains and suffering due to internal and external conflicts. Buddhism as a religion or philosophy of peace and non-violence, on the vitality in the regions around the world has been understood as a way to peace and relief. Nepal's ten-year long insurgency which took the lives of more than seventeen thousand people and millions of others remained displaced internally and externally has been a fertile area of writing about the testimonies of war-affected people either from the state security personnel or from the rebels. For such traumatized people as mentioned in the narratives written about the insurgency as characters, some important assets of Buddhism would be very good tool to analyze their suffering and solutions, so that they could have got some relief. Kishor Pahadi's "The Tears of Terror" is one such narrative which has been written about the Maoist insurgency which has taken the lives of more than seventeen thousand innocent people. Its main character Chet dai is presented as traumatized and looking for refuge to get relief from the shock he has got from the Maoist cadres. To get relief from this mental shock or trauma, some aspects of trauma would be very good tool to live once again as he used to live previously.

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Buddhism as a tool of analysis

Hence, for prevailed peace and its comprehensive efforts of peacemaking and peacekeeping accredited by conflicts and wars, it is Buddhism which with its worldview characterized by dynamic interdependence and its behavioral codes stressing non-violence and loving-kindness offers rich resources for peacemaking techniques. Here, Theresa Dar-lan Yeh views, “in examining the development in the field of peace studies, the Buddhist worldview is surprisingly in accordance, and hence worthy of further studies in at least three areas: the process-oriented paradigm, peace by peaceful means, and the micro and macro linking in a holistic framework of peace” (104). In today’s world wars, rivalries and hatred are the result of desire, greed and craving.

The craving is the bottom of all troubles of this world. It is the root cause of avarice, anger, hatred, malice, rivalry, jealousy, envy, hypocrisy, deceit, pride, arrogance and ignorance and has ruined individuals and nations. It is present in everyone’s heart, no amount of prayer will remove it, no belief in any doctrine will eradicate it. No outward agency can remove it. It can be removed by one own self-understanding and self- purification, that can only be attained with the help of basic principles of Buddhism.

Above all, the present time prevailing in the world is not satisfactory to all denizen living in any parts of the world. The threats of nuclear war, of civil war, of Muslims’ *jihad* on the western countries and America, ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka, the Maoist rebellion in India and Nepal are some challenges that would not let anyone lessen one’s vigilance as wars with all their cruel and inhuman manifestations are still prevalent in the world. Though the relationship between the nations characterized as "peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, negotiation instead of confrontation, market frontiers rather than war frontiers" (Chau 92). The basic principles like peaceful coexistence can be helpful to have mutual understanding to prevail peace.

Still, the credibility of Buddhism either in Buddhist countries or others have been attained with a belief that “we are preparing for an era of real peace, peace for the whole planet, not only for some regions, but peace for all human beings. All kinds of wars, not only nuclear war, should be banished.” (93). All these manifestations of violence should be done away with forever.

The world would, thus, have a positive trend towards more democracy, avoidance of oppressions and cultural and intellectual coercion and more respect and understanding towards different ways of thinking. It would also have more humanism in politics in the national and international relationship will help strengthen and deepen in each one living in the universe.

Daisaku Ikeda, the president of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), in one seminar coined a new term “inner universalism” a method for searching the inner self to find a universal value within it (47). In it, one would try to find a new meaning within the self. Having known the inner meaning, one would go ahead of all grief, passion, jealousy and hypocrisy. He or she would think more than his or her race or any other identity. In this way, Buddhism is “a method of probing the depth of life, addressing the levels of human life, race, nation, biosphere and earth leading to an understanding of original life force as ultimately fused with the universe itself.” (Kawada 104). This kind of internal search may produce transcendence and then transcendence may return to the inner existence.

The search for universal values in the depths of life corresponds to Buddhist wisdom while transcending of the self to reach out to external existence. This again corresponds to the practice of compassion. Furthermore, Yoichi Kawada argues that Buddhism holds that “wisdom equals compassion” (104), meaning that wisdom itself contains the potential to act with compassion, and compassion needs brilliant wisdom to guide it. In the practice of Buddhism, the universal values of internality and transcendence are brought together while a kind of paradoxical tension is maintained between them.

In this way, Buddhism essentially directs itself to create infinite value in life and society based on the life condition of the greater self, the true self. In other words, Buddha further opines that the ideal human image pictured in the Lotus Sutra is the one who does not turn his back upon reality but rather the one who involves himself positively and actively in the world. Therein lies the intrinsic value of Buddhism.

Here, the quintessence of (Mahayana) Buddhism consistently expounds the dignity of human life, peace, love, brotherhood, non-violence, equality of all sentient beings, and ultimately building of a peaceful society where all denizen forget their previous miseries. Here, traumatic experiences of the past life can live in a reconciliatory ways in accordance with the core Buddhist philosophy.

The central aim of Buddhism is to solve and overcome the problem of suffering. This has been the unchanging purpose of Buddhism since its foundation by Siddhartha Gautama who according to Dalai Lama, “was led to philosophizing by an intense longing for the eradication of suffering” (*The End of Suffering* 2). Gautama Buddha and subsequent Buddhist masters have never been interested in metaphysical or speculative philosophies: their aim has been consistently concerned with overcoming suffering by the means of the eradication of its cause. The central concern of Buddhism is suffering, its origin, its cessation and the way to its cessation and the Four Noble Truths play the central role in showing the means to eliminate suffering and to achieve enlightenment.

The Four Noble Truths are the fundamental elements of all Buddhist teachings and are the core doctrinal framework of every school of Buddhism including Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana. According to Geshe Kelsang Gyatso the Four Noble Truths are “truths of pain, origin [of pain], suppression [of pain] and the way [to suppress pain]” (172). The First Noble Truth states that from Buddhist perspectives, life is nothing but suffering and pain. According to Paul Williams, what the First Noble Truth claims is that “awryness and unsatisfactoriness are inherent features of the universe” (43). The Second Noble Truth presents the cause of suffering. Suffering is caused by craving.

Besides craving, ignorance is recognized as the fundamental cause of suffering. According to Dalai Lama, ignorance means “lack of self-awareness and correct knowledge of the world and human life” (*The End of Suffering* 15). One’s failure to understand the way things really are results in his/her craving, strong attachment and consequently suffering. Thus, the Second Noble Truth is that ignorance and craving are the fundamental causes of suffering.

Further, these two elements give rise to three mental defilements: greed, anger and delusion (Williams 98). Carmen Meinert argues that these three are representative mental afflictions derived from ignorance and craving (23). Accordingly, it can be seen that Buddhist understanding of suffering is psychologically or subjectively-oriented. In other words, Buddhism can be

understood as the codification of the insights about human psychology developed by Gautama Buddha. By knowing the cause of suffering, human beings will be inspired to overcome its cause, which is the main thrust of the Third Noble Truth.

The Third Noble Truth states that suffering can be eliminated. What the Third Noble Truth expresses is that suffering or affliction is not everlasting; rather, it stems from one's temporary craving and ignorance. While the Third Noble Truth clarifies that the cause of suffering can be eliminated, one question remains to be addressed: How can one attain the eradication of the cause of suffering? The answer is the Fourth Noble Truth. The Fourth Noble Truth provides one with the way to address suffering and restore mental health or tranquility, which is generally called the Noble Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is: right view or understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Apart from them, there are three essentials of Buddhism for attaining liberation from suffering: ethical conduct, mental discipline and wisdom. They are embodied in the Fourth Noble Truth, that is, the Eightfold Path as Bhante Yogavacara Rahula argues;

Right view or understanding and right thought are categorized into wisdom while right speech, right action and right livelihood are in ethical conduct. Accordingly, mental discipline indicates right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The eightfold path categorized into three pillars embraces everything we do and aims at the achievement of eradication of suffering, as a result of which we can enjoy an authentic way of being in the world. (145)

What should be emphasized is that these three essentials are interdependent and interconnected with each other: without one, the other two cannot be actualized.

The Four Noble Truths can be understood as the core of Buddhism that teaches people the potentials of suffering in order to enable them to realize the truth about suffering. They lead all to eradicate it and what is stressed as the core of Buddhist teachings is that suffering is not beyond human reach or beyond solution. With the help of a holistic approach represented by the three pillars of Buddhist discipline like ethical conduct, mental discipline and wisdom, suffering can be eradicated by human beings themselves.

Applying Buddhism in “The Tears of Terror”

The trauma of Chet dai, the principal character in Kishor Pahadi's “The Tears of Terror” is very different and heart touching because he happens to see the Maoists rebels in everyone he sees and meets. It is because once the Maoist rebels in the command of comrade Agni saw him “on the chautara talking merrily with the soldiers of the Durga battalion” (Pahadi 147) and supposed him spying against them. On the charge of being spied against the rebels, he was kidnapped and taken little away from his home. He was “so terrified that he could not muster the courage to deny their false accusation against him” (147). He was badly beaten until “he fainted dead away” (147). When he comes to his senses, he “found himself in the hospital bed. There were some stitches in his cheeks. The leg was broken. His body was aching all over with severe pain. He at least came to know that he was not killed and was still alive” (147). After two and half month time, when he comes to the town for the follow-up of his treatment, at a tea stall he sees three young boys of

different backgrounds and supposes them the rebel Agni and others who are following him. They are carrying bag on their back and asking for toilet. But he supposes they have bombs in their bags and “want to plant the bombs there” (146). He could not drink tea and take other snacks, but leaves for the bus park to go back to his village. After getting off the bus, with his limping steps, he tries to walk fast, but seeing someone walking a bit far ahead of him and then standing to light a cigarette, he gets startled and thinks, “That man might be the one who had called him out of his house two and a half months ago. Like the face of the boy who had grabbed his hair, the face also terrified him” (149). But, luckily, the stranger turns out to be his own student who, seeing him throws his cigarette and greets him. He even could not be happy rather his “eyes welled with tears of terror” (Ibid) and remains staring at him. His mentality in such condition is traumatized and unable to decide what was happening to him and who the people around him are doing.

The condition of Chet dai is rather different from what has happened to other people who normally get abducted and terrified after the traumatic events. The abduction of Chet dai by the Maoist rebels on charge of talking with the army at Chautara hauled him in so much as he lost his mental obsession that in every stranger he would see the face of the rebels. Then, he begins fleeing away not from the rebels but from his own fear ‘inner fear’ that cannot be overcome. Having found some boys looking for toilet, he supposes them the rebels fixing bombs there. Even he cannot identify his own student and tries to escape from him assuming him the same rebel who had kidnapped him once. One finds him losing his mental balance due to the traumatic experience he had once gone through. The suffering and trauma of Chet dai has been experienced as the consequences of war, abuse, illness, and crime (Wright 1). This has disenfranchised him from other people, driven him into emotional isolation, and made him appear as less than sane in the eyes of others, be it the victim or the perpetrator.

Richard H. Jones puts forward that some codes consist of right speech, action and livelihood that can help one develop the mental exercises i.e. right effort, mindfulness, and concentration. In the context of Chet dai, this code can be a cure. Not involving in the socially immoral conducts i.e. killing, stealing, etc. the right path followers can weaken greed and consequently weaken the sense of a self if interests need to be enhanced. The precepts can give concrete recommendations to him to enact this attitude (374). The radical end of Chet dai’s suffering can only be accomplished on his individual basis when he would contemplate his mental stress as a normal act which can be purified following the sacred precepts that Buddha had advanced for the commoners for their happy and peaceful life.

According to Dalai Lama, following the Great Vehicles – Lower Vehicle, Great Vehicle, and the Vehicle of tantra, can provide a person like Chet dai for achieving liberation from suffering and cycle of existence. This method would enable each one to overcome ignorance which is the root cause of spinning in the cycle of existence. Then, one can feel selflessness, which gives rise to a profound understanding that could help eliminate all ignorance and disturbing emotions. He further views that the highest vehicle known as the Tantric Vehicle could comprise not only a technique for heightening human beings’ own realization of emptiness or mind of enlightenment, but also certain techniques for penetrating the vital points of the body (*A Human Approach* 14). In doing so, in the case of Chet dai, he can expedite the process of realization, eliminating ignorance and its imprints. The fear he is fleeing away each moment can be eliminated and he can have soothed himself and peace can have been prevailed to him hereafter.

He should realize the suffering that he is going through is from his own ignorance and undisciplined mind. For that, he has to restrain himself from all negative actions and thoughts that always cause his suffering. He must have to end such causes. Dalai Lama further suggests that in the Four Noble Truths, two sets of causes and effects are found. His suffering is the effect and its origin is the cause (*A Human Approach* 15). In the same way, the cessation of craving more is peace and the path leading to it is the cause of that peace that should prevail to him.

Following Dalai Lama once again in the context of Chet dai, the happiness can be achieved by bringing discipline and transformation within his own mind by purifying his mind. This purification is possible when he is able to eliminate his ignorance – running away from his meaningless fear. The cessation of ignorance is true peace and happiness. That cessation can be achieved only when he is able to realize the nature of phenomena and penetrate the nature of reality (*A Human Approach* 15). For this too, training in wisdom is important. When wisdom is combined with the faculty of his single-pointedness, he will be able to channel all his energy and attention toward a single object or virtue.

Therefore, the training in concentration comes in, and for the training of concentration and wisdom to be successful, a very stable foundation of morality is required and the practice of morality or ethics remains prevalent to him. This, at last, would lead him to the door of ecstasy forever.

Conclusion

People like Chet dai have been victimized from both the state security personnel and the rebels. Now their treatment going to hospitals and meeting doctors would not be possible, but if followed strictly, some important aspects of Buddhism like meditative practice would help them get relief. It has a message for the violent world. It must do more than condemn violence. It must be able to interpret its nature, its roots, and its hold on the world and the possibilities for its transformation. Since the ultimate goal of the spiritual path for the Buddhist is *nirvana*, attitudes towards violence must first be seen in relation to it. *Nirvana* is the ultimate eradication of *dukkha* (suffering). It is a possible goal within this life and, among other things, it involves a complete de-toxification of the mind from greed, hatred and delusion, and revolution in the way the world is perceived, freedom from craving and liberation from the delusion of ego. Attaining this goal, many people have soothed themselves from the prevailing suffering. In principle, the goal set forth by Buddhism has always been, and always will be, the attainment of Nirvana or Nibbana, however these terms are understood. Many people think that Buddha means the Enlightened one that only spread peace and love among the people who are in trauma and sufferings(8). Buddhism has been aware of the necessity and desirability of peace, order, and harmony in this world, as evidenced by the scattered references regarding Gautama Buddha's attitude toward the ongoing conflicts and sufferings of the people.

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