

# Role of Dhamma in Promoting World Peace<sup>\*</sup>

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## Abstract

The thoughts of the Buddha, is ascending the path of knowledge in any situation, practiced as ‘Buddha’s Dhamma’. Dhamma was further adopted by the philosophical leaders and conveyed to the society. Buddha’s Dhamma teaches non-violence (ahimsa) and compassion, which form the foundation of global harmony. The result of Emperor Aśoka’s third edict was that the Dhamma spread not only to India but also to the surrounding regions. Aśoka’s contribution in bringing the Dhamma to Sri Lanka is unforgettable. The place of the Dhamma among the people of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, as well as Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, etc. is unsurpassed. This influence is clearly visible even today.

**Keywords:** The Buddha, Dhamma, Peace, Loving-kindness, and Compassion.

## Introduction

*“Karuṇāṣītalahadayam, paññāpajjotavihatamohatamam;  
Sanarāmaralokagarum, vande sugatam gativimuttam.”*

Majjhimanikāye, Mūlapaṇṇāsa-atthakathā, (Pathamo bhāgo)

Salutations to the Lord Buddha, whose heart is cool with compassion, whose wisdom has destroyed the darkness of the world. He, who preached the ultimate truth of the six, attained unsurpassed knowledge. He travelled throughout India for 45 years to spread that knowledge and created a group of thousands of disciples. At Sarnath, the first turning of the Dhamma wheel began with the five monks. He first preached the four noble truths to them. After that, Purnanalaka and Sabhiya were also immediately

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initiated disciples and Yash, son of Shresthi entered Buddhism along with his companions. In such a short time, the number of disciples reached hundreds. Uruvela Kashyap, Nadi Kashyap and Jata Kashyap entered the Sangha along with hundreds of their disciples. The thoughts of the Tathāgata Buddha, an influential personality who was ascending the path of knowledge in the then situation, soon became popular as 'Buddha's Dhamma'. Many disciples from the six sects of the Buddha's time joined that ideology. Sariputra and Moggallāyana, the greatest disciples, were first followers of Sanjaya and later became pioneers in spreading the Dhamma. The Tathāgata's Dhamma was adopted by the philosophical leaders and conveyed to the society. They were the pillars of the Dhamma.

Sariputra, along with his elder disciple Mahakashyapa, embraced this philosophy and understood the Dhamma. Many were influenced by the Tathāgata's purpose, and the theory of origin and dissolution. Gradually, Ananda, Aniruddha, Nanda, Bhadriya, Upali and Rahula were also attracted to Buddhist philosophy. Within a short time, the Sangha expanded and the Sangha propagated Buddhism in all directions of India. The Tathāgata himself was the guide. He visited many important places like Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī, Srāvastī, Kapilavastu and preached the Dhamma. The touch of wisdom, morality and compassion, which was unheard of before, spread far and wide. During this period, kings like Bimbisāra, Prasenjit and Ajātaśatru welcomed the Dhamma. Also, thousands of devotees became involved in the Dhamma, learning the impermanence of the world.

According to the description in the Tripitaka, from the Jetavana of Prince Jeta, a nobleman like Anāthapindika performed the work of noble donations in Dhamma. After hearing Buddha's teachings on the non-self, the impermanence, and the principle of kamma vipāka, he invited them to come to Srāvastī regularly and established monasteries. The conflict between the Śākyas and the Koliyas, which had led to the renunciation of the home of Tathāgata Siddhartha Gautama, also calmed down. When the Tathāgata went to Kapilavastu for his last visit, Ananda requested the formation of a Bhikkhu Sangha. Later, under the leadership of Mahaprajapati Gautami, the Bhikkhuni Sangha too became active in the propagation of Buddhism. Thus, on the basis of the

Mahāparinibbana Sutta, the Buddha, until his last times in this life, travelled from the provinces of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar i.e. Kosala, Magadha, to the Majjima district, to the border regions, and spread the philosophy of Dhamma to the society.

The Sangha, which strictly followed the rules of the Vinaya Pitaka, remained limited and the Sangha functioned in various forms by adopting flexibility in the rules. At the same time, major divisions of the Sangha such as Sthaviravāda and Sarvāstivāda emerged. Sarvāstivāda, or Mahayana, became very popular in North India by the 4th - 5th century BC. Along with the original doctrine of the Buddha, learned disciples analysed the Buddha's Dhamma and elaborated various doctrines. By two hundred years, this thought had reached its peak of social influence in society at its highest level. Society was burdened with social inequality, i.e. inequality between men and women that turned into practical equality after learning Buddha's teachings. Wisdom, morality, and compassion were evident in the society. At that time, unskilful principles such as sacrificial offerings, animal cruelty, etc. were put aside, and friendly peace was created in society.

By the time of Emperor Aśoka (274-232 BC), the influence of Buddhism in India had reached its peak. Democracy had been established in the political situation. In terms of the propagation of Buddhism, Aśoka's Third Buddhist Council was held at Pāṭaliputra.<sup>1</sup> Its importance is extremely influential and worthy. In terms of the development of Dhamma, Aśoka built 84,000 stupās. Its basis was the Sutta Desanā. Aśoka built thousands of monasteries in a systematic manner by building pillars. According to the Third Buddhist Council, there is evidence of the spread of Dhamma outside India.

Bhikkhus were sent to Kashmir, Gandhara, Aparantha, Vanavasi Pradesh, Maharashtra, Greek Kingdom, Himavanta and Suvarṇabhūmi to propagate the Dhamma. He sent his daughter and son Mahendra Sthavira to Tamraparni, i.e. the island of Sri Lanka. Moggaliputta Tissa went to the Yavana country and explained the Dhamma to the Greeks. There are references that the Greeks were influenced by the Dhamma. The popularity of the Dhamma among the common people is evident from the various caves of Bharhut Stupa, the Sāncī Stupa, pillar inscriptions, and wall inscriptions, which are invaluable works of Dhamma propagation during the Aśoka era.

Emperor Kanishka's reign was also important for the propagation of Buddhism. Although he was originally Iranian, he later accepted the Dhamma. His empire extended to Kabul, Gandhara, Sindh, north-western India, Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh. He contributed to the spread of the Sarvāstivāda sect by organizing the Fourth Buddhist Council. Along with this, Buddhism received royal patronage during the Gupta period. The work of spreading Buddhist culture through the artistic splendour of places like Mathura, Sarnath, Nalanda, Ajanta etc. was done during this period. The description of the journey of the Chinese traveler Fa Hian to India shows the glory of Buddhism and culture during the Gupta period. At this time, the number of monks had reached thousands and various sects were in a good position in the field of propagation of the Dhamma. Even in the Harśa Empire, the status of the Hinayana and Mahayana sects was good. Nalanda, Vallabhi were special centers of knowledge of Buddhism. Chinese travellers have recorded that Buddhism had reached its highest level by about the 12th century.

### **Buddhism abroad**

The result of Emperor Aśoka's third edict was that the Dhamma spread not only to India but also to the surrounding regions. Aśoka's contribution in bringing the Dhamma to Sri Lanka is unforgettable. The place of the Dhamma among the people of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, as well as Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, etc. is unsurpassed. This influence is clearly visible even today.

### **Spread of Buddhism in Sri Lanka**

India and Sri Lanka have had cultural ties since ancient times. The reign of King Vattagamini (29-17 BCE) is very important in the history of Sinhala and Buddhism. He preserved Buddhism by compiling the Tripitaka literature. Although the Nikāyas expanded here, over time, divisions such as the Mahānikāya and the Abhayagirinikāya arose and the Dhamma was divided into various sects. Although there were many branches of the Nikāya, the thoughts of the Buddha on Dhamma were popular among the people. He gave life to the Dhamma until the 18th century. Today, Buddhist

thoughts are considered to be the leading national form in Sri Lanka. It's culture, language, art, etc. have been influenced by Buddha's teachings and Buddhist thought.

### **Dhamma in Myanmar**

Buddhism existed in Burma from the 5th to the 6th century AD. Buddha's words such as 'Ye Dhamma Hetuppbhāva' are found engraved on a gold leaf found at Maungan near Srikshestra. The tradition of Sthavira was popular in this place. King Anuruddha of this place had acquired the Tripitaka. Monk Bhante Dhammacheti (1472-79 AD) accepted the Sangha as the propagator of the Dhamma and planned to establish many stupās. At that time, since the country was divided into many states, some officials started committing atrocities. The people rebelled against this and accepted the principles of peace and friendship of the Dhamma and promoted the Dhamma. Bhante Dhammacheti had to endure a lot of hardships during this time. He protected the original Tripitaka by giving importance to the robe i.e. 'civar', garment worn by Buddhist monks.

Nowadays, the auspicious work of 'Kathiṇa Robe Offering' on Kārtika Pournimā, the full moon night is performed there as a festival. Not only this, the brothers and sisters of the Dhamma there come to Bodh Gaya in India and perform the 'Kathiṇa Robe Offering Ceremony' at the main Mahabodhi Vihara. Even today, they give Robe Offerings to thousands of monks there. This brotherhood, unity, world peace, and friendship of the Dhamma has been uninterrupted for years. They have also preserved and disseminated the Vipassanā knowledge of the Dhamma.

### **Buddhism in the Golden land**

The land of Malaya, Myanmar, up to Java, Sumatra, Borneo islands falls under the ancient Golden Land. According to the Mahāvamsa, as a result of the Third Buddhist Council, Emperor Aśoka sent Bhante Sona to the Golden Land to preach the Dhamma. It is proven from the records found at Sanchi that the preaching of Dhamma had reached its peak in the Golden Land. In the 5th century AD, Gunavarman showed the influence of Buddhism in Javanese culture. Until the 12th century, Buddhism and

culture, art, and architecture occupied crucial part and gained immense importance in this region.

### **Afghanistan and Central Asia**

Afghanistan and India have had relations since prehistoric times. Earlier, this region was known as Gāndhāra. The art and sculpture here were of excellent quality and were glorious. Present day Kandahar and Peshawar, Purushapur were the major cities here. Buddhism had reached Gāndhāra during the time of Buddha. After the Third Buddhist Council, preachers went there and spread their ideas. Recently, an attempt has been made to reduce the influence of Buddhism by destroying the sculptures. However, identity of Buddhist teachings and thoughts in Buddhist nations has been awakened and the goal has been set to create magnificent Buddhist artworks there again. This is an excellent example of how humanistic Buddhist thought still attracts the world today.

The famous city of Bukhara in western Central Asia, as well as the Mongolian people's 'Vihāra', are called "Bukhārā", which is reminiscent of Buddhist thought. In the field of sculpture, various works of art of Buddha are found there. Some Buddhist texts have been found in the ancient Sogdian language. Pali texts were found in Khotan. In the 7th century, the Turkic kingdom disappeared from Khotan and was attracted to China. In the 8th to 10th centuries, Buddhist thought was eradicated from here due to Muslim invasion. However, according to the records of the Chinese traveller Huein Tsang, a festival of Buddha worship was held there. Also, scholars who loved literature and translated the Dhammapada texts and were engaged in the study of Dhamma. Just as Buddhist texts are found in Tibetan and Chinese languages, Uyghur script and Turkish Buddhist literature were created. Sarvāstivāda, or Mahayana School, was influenced in this area.<sup>6</sup> Loving-kindness, compassion, and brotherhood were of special importance to the great Buddhist teachings. The work of making Buddha's compassion known far and wide through sculpture and architecture was done in this region on a large scale. In ancient times, under the patronage of Emperors Harsha, Kanishka, and Aśoka, Buddhism had become a national religion here. In the middle Ages, the Muslim ruled for seven hundred years showed the influence of Islam. Then,

the British rule came for one and a half hundred years. But today, once again, the Loving-kindness and peace of Buddha are becoming an attraction.

### **Dhamma propagation in China**

In the 5th and 6th centuries BC, 'Confucius Moiti' and Lau became the intellectual revolutionaries in China. They established idealism. Chinese literature was developed in the 3rd - 4th centuries BC. Different ideas were influenced here until 9th century AD. When Emperor Wu-Tia expanded his empire, he received a Buddha statue. Since then, Buddhist ideas reached China in the first century AD. The emperors who came after him gave importance to teachers and religious teachers there. Kaśyapa and Shanti Bhikkhu composed some books. At that time, they started translating Buddhist texts into Chinese. Up to the Han dynasty kings, 434 texts were translated into Chinese. In the 4th century AD, Kumarjiva Acarya contributed to Chinese texts. At this time, the medical system of the Buddhist sect reached there for public service. They accepted the importance of monks as protectors of religion and life. In the later period, a tradition of hundreds of monks' associations producing literature had emerged.

The main purpose of the Chinese travellers Fa Hian, Huien Tsang and Itsing's travels to India in the 5th to 7th centuries AD was to study Buddhism and spread the Dhamma.<sup>7</sup> After returning from India, they vigorously spread the philosophy of the Dhamma, also, medicine and art practiced the monks here, and worked on translations of Yogācāra, Abhidhamma, Prajñāpāramitā and Mahayana Abhidharma in their regions.<sup>8</sup> Around 60 monks visited India during the medieval period. Many texts from the Tripitaka were translated and some parts were engraved in sculptures. They developed the Vajrayana and translated 18 texts such as 'Manjusri Mūlatantra'. In this, they advocated egalitarianism by keeping the same perspective as 'humanity'. They were influenced by the principles of Buddha such as wisdom, morality and compassion.

### **Buddhism in Tibet**

The Buddhist scriptures that had disappeared in India are still preserved in Tibetan and Bhot languages. The Tibetans invited Acarya Śāntarakṣita and had him address and lecture on various topics. Under his guidance, some Tibetans ordained as

Buddhist monks. The tradition continues even today. In the 9th century AD, Buddhist monks were honoured and glorified even during the reign of kings. In the Lama tradition, the Dalai Lama is still the head of the Dhamma. Due to his work, the Dhamma work of presenting peace and compassion through Buddhism is continuously flowing throughout the world. In his work, Bhikkhuni 'Gyari Dolma' and some of her disciples are working and are active through the India-Tibet Friendship Association. Currently, the Tibetan Dhamma Study Centre at Sarnath is preaching and spreading the Dhamma on a large scale.

### **Dhamma in Nepal and Himachal Pradesh**

Nepal is considered an auspicious place for Buddhism. Records from government excavations indicate that Kapilvastu, the birthplace of Buddha, is currently in Nepal. King Anshuvarma of the 7th century expanded and recognized Buddhism there. Even today, a magnificent stupa exists there and the Dhamma is in good condition. The influence of Buddhist seminaries is strongly felt in the Himalayan plains, including Leh, Ladakh, and the entire area from Dharamshala to Chittagong. Monk training institutes are functioning there for the propagation of the Dhamma. Dhamma, Vinaya, and Kalā Śāstra are being studied extensively and Dhamma thoughts are being exchanged through seminars and discussions.

### **Promotion of national integration**

Tathagata Buddha was the first to give anthropocentric thought to the world. Since this thought, which cultivates humanity and denies divine power by giving humanity to humans, is based on the principles of wisdom, man got priority in developing his independent personality. This was the work of connecting humans. National unity was promoted through the ideological revolution of gender equality and social equality. Every human being is equal on earth. With the justice of 'Na jacchā vasalo hoti...', no one is high or low, but superiority is determined according to one's actions i.e. karma. Therefore, no one should do injustice to anyone, but one person should treat another beings with Loving-kindness, providing peace in the world. The material world is mortal and for every person's life to be happy, the Buddha gave the



message as a guide that all beings should be happy by being restrained, free from craving. He alone will be the saviour of the world.

## Conclusion

These revolutionary ideas from 2500 years ago in Indian history, which are teachings of humanity, are inspiring for the present era. It is in this that the identity of our common man is preserved. By removing the poison of inequality, we can achieve equality. Buddha's Dhamma teaches non-violence (ahimsa) and compassion, which form the foundation of global harmony. The principles of the Middle Path encourage moderation, reducing conflict arising from extremes. Teachings on mindfulness help individuals control anger, hatred and greed that are the main causes of violence. The concept of universal loving-kindness (metta) promotes goodwill among all nations and communities. By emphasizing equality and interdependence, the Dhamma inspires peaceful coexistence and mutual respect worldwide.

The Buddha gave the declaration of the existence of the human that all human beings are equal in brotherhood. Enmity increases enmity, but it should be brought closer through friendship and Loving-kindness. This idea was accepted by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in India after two and a half thousand years. Now, 70 years have passed since that event, the golden year of the Dhamma Revolution, the auspicious year for the ideological enlightenment of Dhamma for all human beings, keeping the flame of knowledge and light burning, only then can the hope of world peace be fulfilled.

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