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Relevance of The Teachings of Tathagat Buddha In Contemporary Times

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Teachings of Buddha are based on his long journey on the unknown path of self-realization – a path which everyone has to search for oneself. One has to lit one's own lamp! Tathagat Buddha began his search for an answer to an eternal question: Why one encounters *dukha* (suffering – physical, mental, moral & social). He abandoned his palace

and sought the company of recluses of his time. His sufferings did not emerge from any scarcity of material resources or physical ailments. In fact, It was the outcome of subtle realization on his part after a chance encounter of sickness, old age, and death – a realization that nothing is permanent in this world. It went so deep into his mind that if someone faces sickness, turned old and become dead then this will also be the fate of every human being irrespective of his status, age and place including his very self. Though Buddha was neither sick, nor old but his encounter with the sufferings of others made him convinced that every human being will pass through all such stages and finally has to face death. Such a realization forced him to renounce his palacial living, King father, beautiful wife, a very small son and to live a mendicant life full of self-invited sufferings. He began his search for the emancipation of sufferings of all sorts outside the palace and in the company of the known renouncers. He did what was told to do to attain the 'truth'. He practiced every formula, yogic exercise and put himself to self-severe physical afflictions to the extent of turning his body frame into a mere skeletal. Living for days just on a single grain. None did work. Finally, it became clear to him that answer to suffering cannot be found outside. It might have occurred to him that how come an answer to sufferings that experienced within could be located in the outer-world? This led him to chart a new journey in search of the 'truth' – a journey within his very self. It also made him realize that on this journey, the best way is the middle way – in between extreme indulgence and total renunciation! But what distinguished Tathagat Buddha from all other practioners of spiritual way of finding truth is his scientific approach to know 'thyself'. He taught us there is *dukha* in life. It has a cause. The cause can be tracked down. And the answer to get rid of that has to be found.

Another insight of the realized truth that he shared with the humanity is that all human beings are same. There is no upper and lower caste. Freedom, equality and social justice are the fundamental foundations for such a journey to launch within by each one of us. Sufferings begin in craving and it never ends at any stage of life. The only exit is to lit one's own lamp within. Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar found the noble way to the emancipation and empowerment of the lower castes in embracing Buddhism, which for him not a religion of rituals but of social justice, freedom and equality. It taught us to struggle for salvation through our own efforts. It did not ask for any mediator between the sufferers and the God. It called upon us to understand what caused our suffering and to find a way out. The way he suggested is: Educate, Agitate, and Organize!

The urgent need for agrarian reforms in India

Since the Government of India's adoption of 'New Economic Policies' of liberalization, privatization, and globalization in 1991, there has been an extraordinary emphasis on 'reforms' in various sectors of the country's economy. Attempts are being made at this time to educate the public that economic growth in the country is necessary for the common good which can only be made possible by pro-corporate/capitalist policies. The rising profits can be passed on to the general public through the 'Trickle Down Theory'. Over the last 32 years, corporate / capitalist ownership of the country's resources has been increasing exponentially, but the "Trickle Down Theory" has failed miserably, resulting in a widening economic gap between rich and poor.

For some time now, the country's rulers and high-ranking officials in various government offices have been making various statements regarding the formulation and implementation of new policies on 'agrarian reforms' and trying

that as we scaled down from the category of large farmers to the category of medium, semi-medium, small, marginal, and landless farmers, their economic condition is deteriorating. With the exception of the large farm category, most of the farmers are indebted to such an extent that they are not even in a position to pay the interest on the debt as

they are being compelled to take fresh loans to keep their stove burning for the sake of only two meals per day. Although agricultural labourers, and rural artisans have far less debt than



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to convey the message that agriculture can be transformed only through these reforms. The kind of 'agricultural reforms' that have been and are being talked about in the country are pro-corporate / capitalist.

There is no doubt that reforms are needed in the agricultural sector. The Covid-19 pandemic has made it clear that people can survive without cars, bungalows, airplanes, expensive phones and other luxury items, but bread is vital to their survival which only the agricultural sector can provide. The reforms that need to be made in the field of agriculture to sustain the existence of human life must include the seven basic necessities of life (bread, clothing, housing, education, healthcare, clean environment and social security) are important to fulfill respectfully, to ensure food security in the country, to take care of groundwater and soil health, and to protect the environment from pollution.

In 1951, 81 per cent of the country's population depended on agriculture for their livelihood, which was given for 55 per cent of the national income. At present about 50 per cent of the country's population is dependent on agriculture for their livelihood which is being given for about 16 per cent of the national income during 2018-19. Various research studies conducted in the country have revealed the fact

farmers, these two categories are the two poles at the bottom of the ladder of agrarian economy that are more prone to wear and tear, breaking, while being kicked more often. These sections have no other means of production but to sell their labour. The rapid increase in the use of machinery and herbicides out of the package of 'New Agricultural Technology' adopted during the 1960s to curb the country's severe food shortages has led to a huge cut in the days of employment in the agricultural sector for agricultural labourers, and rural artisans. Although the feudal system has been abolished in the country since long, feudal thinking is still prevalent among most of the farmers, with all kinds of bruises falling on these landless agricultural labourers, and rural artisans.

In order to increase the income of the farmers, the MSP has to be made profitable. The benefits of such prices will increase as land ownership increases. Doing so will make the current loss-making agriculture profitable, but in order to increase the income of landless, marginal, small, semi-medium, and medium farmers, they have to be given preferential subsidies / grants in addition to profitable MSPs. To increase the income of these peasant classes, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans by ensuring employment under MGNREGA as well

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How to save India from the wrath of heat waves?



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For the last two weeks, the states of North-West and Central India have been in the grip of severe heat waves. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) had last week issued an orange alert in five states: Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha. On April 29, several districts of Punjab recorded temperature above 42 degree Celsius and Patiala was the hottest with 45.9 degree Celsius while Sirsa district in Haryana reached 46 degree Celsius on the same day. The Indian Meteorological Department has issued a heatwave warning using four colours: green, yellow, orange, and red, to ward off rising temperature. Each colour has its own meaning and comes with a set of protocols. The warnings are updated on a daily basis. Green (when no action required), yellow (watch and stay updated), orange (be prepared) and red (take precautionary measures).

The rise in average temperature in April also broke the previous record of 122 years as in March. The only difference is that the record of temperature rise in the month of April has been broken in the states of North-West and Central India while the temperature of March has broken the record of average temperature of the whole country. In Delhi, April has been the second hottest month in 72 years. The North-Western states of the country recorded a daytime temperature of 3.35 degree Celsius above average and a nighttime temperature of 1.75 degree Celsius above the national average. According to the Indian Meteorological Department, recorded average maximum, average minimum, and mean temperatures in March are above 1.86 degree Celsius, 1.37 degree Celsius, and 1.61 degree Celsius respectively, for India as a whole.

In the month of March this year (2022), the temperature in cities like Dehradun, and Dharamshala in the Western Himalayan region has risen by 7 to 11 degree Celsius. In India, the rise in temperature in March has reduced the yield of wheat crop in the plains by 4.5 quintals per acre, while the production of apple crop in the hilly areas has also declined significantly.

The rise in March temperature in India this year has been due to non-receipt of rains by gusty westerly winds. India received 89 per cent and 83 per cent less rainfall than average in March and April, respectively. Temperature has risen sharply due to lack of humidity in the air as a result of low rainfall in March and April.

The second installment of the sixth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report mentions the decline in crop yields due to rising temperature, especially in the context

of India. According to the report, a 1 to 4 degree Celsius rise in temperature could reduce paddy production by 10 to 30 per cent and maize production by 25 to 70 per cent. The strongest evidence of this is the decline in wheat production due to the rise in temperature in March this year. If the temperature rises so fast then there may be a shortage of food grains in our country. In addition, declining crop yields will reduce the income of farmers which will reduce their purchasing power and may also destabilize the economy of the country. Food shortages will push up food prices and make food out of reach of the poor, leading to an increase in malnutrition and an increase in starvation deaths in India.

India is not the only country

coal reserves for power generation. Our country is still generating 75 per cent of its electricity from coal. Coal releases more greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere than any other source, which raises the temperature locally and globally.

In August 2021, in the first installment of the 6th IPCC Report, it was clearly stated that if greenhouse gas emissions were not reduced rapidly, summers would be longer and winters shorter in the coming decades. Extreme temperatures will rise in many areas and temperature will rise several degrees above average, leading to an increase in the incidence of heat waves. According to a study by the Environmental Protection Agency, if the temperature rises by one degree Celsius, the incidence

study by Leeds University. They are melting fast and their area has shrunk by 40 per cent in these decades. The source of all the rivers in Northern India comes from the snow-capped mountains of the Himalayas. There will be a lot of loss of life and property. With the destruction of crops, there will be a shortage of food grains. Later, due to lack of snow, the water level in the rivers will decrease which will lead to drought conditions. People will be forced to struggle with scarcity of water and food.

Rising temperature has affected India due to rising heatwaves, floods, droughts, and rising sea levels and warming of ocean waters. The risk of displacement of people living in the coastal areas of India will also increase as India has 14 states and union territories located in the coastal areas. The effects of warming will not be limited to the months of March and April and the hot and humid months of May and June. It will hit the lives of every Indian and the economy of the country as first the heat waves, then the drought, the forest fires, the melting of the Himalayan glaciers, the floods, the oceanic disasters, and the like will affect the impoverished population of India. Even the Indian people will face difficulties in meeting the basic necessities of life.

The Government of India should start taking seriously the promises made in the international conferences. Our country is still generating 75 per cent of its electricity from coal, which is more than any other source of energy to produce greenhouse gasses. Therefore, India should start generating electricity from renewable energy sources as soon as possible. Efforts should be made to generate electricity from solar energy as our country has huge reserves of solar energy.

In order to control the rising temperature, we should increase the forest cover and it should be 33 per cent at the national and state levels. Only local trees should be planted in each area as the varieties of trees brought from other places cause various problems such as pine trees grown in hilly areas increase the incidents of forest fires and eucalyptus trees of swamp areas result in the declining groundwater levels in the plains.

According to the third installment of the sixth IPCC report, each country should make necessary adjustments in the means of transport in order to deal with the rise in temperature. If left unchecked, carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector alone could increase upto 50 per cent by 2050. Therefore, car-free infrastructure should be constructed i.e. separate lanes should be constructed on the roads for pedestrians and cyclists. At the same time, in a more populous country like India, the public transport system (buses and trains) should be made so efficient instead of cars that people will automatically start using public transport

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suffering from rising temperatures. Incidents of temperature rise are being reported from different parts of the world. The Arctic and Antarctic poles also recorded warming in March this year. Concordia Station in Antarctica recorded a low of -11.8 degree Celsius, up from 40 degree Celsius this month. The temperature near the North Pole (Arctic) on March 18 was 30 degree Celsius higher than the average. From Dallas through Abilene to Del Rio in the state of Texas (the United States of America), temperature averaged 5 to 9 degree Fahrenheit above normal making it the warmest December in 2021, in more than 130 years. In June 2021, the North-Western regions of Canada and the United States of America were scorched by heat waves. On June 29, British Columbia in Canada recorded the highest temperature in the world at 49.6 degree Celsius.

Surprisingly in the case of India, due to the La Nina phenomenon, the month of March became so hot with the rise in temperature that the spring after winter almost disappeared. During the La Nina phenomenon, the sea surface temperature in the Eastern and Central parts of the Pacific Ocean is colder than average, which makes the winter months in India colder and rainier than usual, but March this year is much different. The opposite was true.

The onset of heatwaves in April also created a power crisis in many states of the country as many thermal plants do not have adequate

of heatwaves can increase 5 times and a 2 degree increase is likely to increase it 14 times. Rising temperature will not only increase the incidents of heatwaves, but will also multiply the incidence of droughts, and wildfires. In 2021, there were several wildfires in the Canadian province of British Columbia and in many parts of Europe after temperature rose above average. Rising temperature in India in April this year has led to forest fires in Dharamshala, Shimla, Mandi, and Solan districts of Himachal Pradesh. Due to the early onset of summer and prolonged absence of rains, 645 wildfires have been reported in the month of April alone, resulting in 4976.63 hectare of forest burning. Most fires occur in areas where pine trees have been planted because the dry leaves and wood of pine trees are more flammable than the dry leaves and wood of other trees. In fact, the pine tree is not a local tree in the area. During British rule, the British cut down a large number of oak and Deodar trees here and planted pine trees to supplement it as they grow faster than the local trees and are more commercially viable. Even then, locals had raised their voices against the British government for planting pine trees.

Rising temperature with prolonged summer season and changing trends of heatwaves in India will cause rapid melting of glaciers in the Himalayas, which are already melting 10 times higher than average over the past few decades, according to a

My Fellow-BootanMandian – Seth Thakur Dass Suman

I did not know Seth Thakur Dass very well till my return to my native place Bootan Mandi in Jalandhar on my retirement from diplomatic career. Before I left Jalandhar for Delhi in March, 1970, I had heard of the leather business family of Narain Dass and his clan belonging to Jalowal Abadi, an extension of Bootan Mandi. Later, on occasional visits on home-leave, I came to know that one of the scions of Narain Dass's family, Ram Aasra made good in politics and remained a Municipal Councilor for a couple of successive terms. On his demise, his wife Surinder Kaur took the gauntlet and filled the gap. She is now the Senior Deputy Mayor of Jalandhar and rightly so. Narain Dass was doing well along with his elder son Mehnga Ram who was addressed as Gora Mehnga as one of the brothers/cousins of Narain Dass, Mehnga Ram who was also in the same business from the same premises, was of little dark complexion and was called Kala Mehnga. With a view to shoulder the business of father Narain Dass, Thakur Dass who was serving in the BSF took voluntary retirement and joined the family business of leather in their company Narain Dass Menga Ram sometime in 1977-78, I understand. Here starts the phase of phenomenal success of the family under the nomenclature of Modern Group of Companies.

They came, arrived and reached and fortified their position and status as sons of the soil with sheer business acumen and grit. While concentrating on leather business, they spread their operations from Bootan Mandi to the new facili-

ties at the Leather Complex in Jalandhar with technologically upgraded tanneries and show making units at Jalowal Abadi, their native place. The worthy sons of Seth Thakur Dass – Goldy, Ravi and Balwinder, after their College education, joined the family business and also diversified their operations. I was told that they did well



in real estate business not only for making quick bucks but also adding to their fortunes in agricultural land in and around nearby villages and also urban real estate by way of shopping malls and residential villas in posh localities of Jalandhar. I gathered some of these details only recently when I visited and met Goldy Suman to condole the sudden death of Seth Thakur Dass some two months ago.

On my return to Bootan Mandi and in pursuit of my social and community activism, I met Seth Thakur Dass occasionally and found him a calm and quiet man with unpretentious dignity. He was genuinely in-

involved in community matters with a view to seek the welfare of the needy and weaker sections of the society. Seth Sahib also remained the President of Guru Ravidass Educational and Charitable Trust of Bootan Mandi for couple of consecutive terms and as such contributed considerably towards the development of Guru Ravi-



dass Dham, a nerve centre of community activities in the region. I was told that at the nearby Jalowal Abadi too, Seth Thakur Dass and their extended family were actively involved in the development and running the Government school and Guru Ravidass Gurudawara and also helping the poor of the locality.

As I said that I did not know Seth Thakur Dass as it should be till his demise a couple of months ago. I joined the family at Seth ji's 'Antim Ardas' at Guru Ravidass Dham, a ceremony which impressed me further. It was a huge and well hosted congregation participated by the different

shades and hues of political, social and economic life of the area. Speaker after speaker spoke very high of Seth Thakur Dass and paid glowing tributes

to the worthy son of the soil led by MP Santokh Singh, MLA Sushil Rinku, Former MP and Minister Mohinder Singh Kaypee, Former MLA and CPS Avinash Chander, Dr. Ram Lal Jassi in the presence of high-ups in the business, bureaucratic and spiritual circles viz. IAS Bhagwati Prasad, IAS Santosh Sandhu and CEO's representing big business houses in leather and real estate sector. Sudden departure of Seth Thakur Dass has left a wide gap which would be difficult to fill. This I write as a humble tribute to the departed soul and a gesture of standing with the bereaved family as a fellow BootanMandian.

Postscript:- Not that I have had some deeper association with Seth Thakur Dass and his family yet I decided to write as my usual trait to appreciate and recognize my fellow BootanMandians who did well in life by their sheer grit and dedication and were self made.

I thought of appending this as postscript to justify my out of the blue pick, as I please.



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How to save India from the wrath of heat waves?

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instead of private vehicles. Instead of electrifying private vehicles, public transport should be electrified.

The Government of India should not rely solely on international initiatives. Our country desperately needs to make every effort at the national level. Temperature in the mountainous regions of the country is rising faster than other regions. Therefore, unnecessary construction in the name of economic development in the hilly

areas of the country should be completely banned. In hilly states like Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh, multipurpose projects on rivers should be allowed only according to the potential capacity of rivers and hilly areas.

Roads and tunnels in mountainous areas should be widened to that extent so as not to have any negative impact on the environment there. Protecting the natural resources of the Western Ghats is crucial to protect South India from

natural disasters.

To that end, we must take the Gadgil Committee's recommendations seriously. To protect the coastal areas of the country, to ensure the protection of natural vegetation and wetlands, to protect the coastal areas and the environment of India, construction regulations and Environmental Impact Assessments in the Coastal Regulation Zones should be strictly enforced by making them nature and people-friendly and not dilute them

to make them corporate-friendly as was done in 2018. Rising surface temperature is no longer a problem of the future. We have been affected by this while the average temperature of the earth has risen by 1.1 degree Celsius. In India, March is hot, April is very hot and May may be probably very very hot. Now, we have no time to think, just urgently need to make efforts at every level, from local to international, to save the planet and its people.



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Goodie Takhar, PhD

The urgent need for agrarian reforms in India

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as increasing the working days of all able workers as per their requirement, wage rate under MGNREGA should be at least equal to minimum wages determined by different governments and implementing other employment-generating schemes/ programmes can make a significant contribution.

To meet the financial needs of all peasant classes, agricultural labourers, and rural artisans, except the large peasantry, interest-free lending has to be provided which will help in reducing the burden of interest on them. To provide employment to farmers, agricultural labourers, and rural small artisans and to increase their income, governments have to provide all possible assistance in setting up cooperative-owned agro-processing industrial units in the villages. Doing so will not only increase employment, but will also benefit these sections through value-addition.

The United Nations, in a 2011 report, found that family farming was the only way to provide food security to the people of the world and prevent global pollution. Cooperative farming by landless women in the Indian state of Kerala has proved that this type of farming can increase agricultural production and net economic profit. There are more than 68,000 landless women's cooperatives operating in Kerala and their production is

1.9 times higher than other agricultural organizations and net economic profit is 5 times.

The Central Government and the State Governments have to make their own contribution in this regard. Initially this can be done on Panchay-



ati / Shamlat lands. One-third of the Panchayati / Shamlat lands should be given to Dalits, one-third to women, and one-third to landless farmers for cooperative farming without charging any rent. In addition, efforts should be made by governments and farmers' organizations to increase cooperative farming among farmers which would reduce production costs, increase production, and increase net economic profits. At the same time,

the governments have to make adequate contributions in the marketing work of the cooperatives.

The Governments should also ensure that quality education, and health facilities are provided to all sections dependent on the agricul-

Russia and Ukraine used to contribute about one-third of the world's wheat, but this war between the two countries has reduced the supply of wheat, which has increased the price of wheat in the world market.

The groundwater level has come down to dangerous levels due to imposing wheat and paddy crops in some states, especially Punjab, to overcome the problem of severe shortage of foodgrains in the country during the 1960s through the policy of MSP and procurement. To get rid of this problem, the Union Government should ensure that MSP of kharif crops other than paddy should be determined reasonably with a certainty of their procurement by the government. In doing so, emphasis must be placed on preventing the continued depletion of groundwater, as well as controlling the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides, and research into natural farming to help protect the environment from pollution.

Agrarian reforms will only be meaningful if they can truly overcome the problems of the agricultural sector. The finances required to do so will be met by adopting a pro-people and nature-friendly economic development model instead of the pro-corporate / capitalist economic development model.



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