

THE VOICE OF THE BUDDHA

By T.L. Vaswani

For centuries countries in Asia, from Burma to Japan were united with India, through Buddha. And India, the birth-place of the Buddha, was to far-off nations a holy land. Buddha born in the year 563 B.C. was for centuries a bond of union between the nations of the East.

Some there be who talk of commerce as the bond of union. They forget that commerce has proved to be a fruitful source of strife and war among the nations. The economic egoism of the West has stirred up, again and again, the nations of Europe and of Asia, one against the other. Economic exploitation breeds wars. Nor can "empire" be a bond of union. "Empire" is but another name for organised exploitation; and imperialism is glorified power-politics; imperialism dreams of world-domination. Neither commerce nor power-politics can be an enduring bond of union among the nations. The bond of culture, of maitri, of enlightenment, alone may unite the nations. And "Buddha" means the "Enlightened One," the "Awakened One," and "One who knows".

Buddha awakened to the truth that the world's piteous need was "peace". At the place which I saw many years ago with wonder-filled eyes and which is rightly named Buddha Gaya, sitting under a fig-tree, suddenly, in the middle of the night, there awakes in him, in the depths of his meditation the knowledge, the enlightenment, the bodhi that the way out of suffering and pain is the "middle way," which is neither asceticism nor indulgence in thirst, - is the supreme declaration of the Buddha. Gautama becomes a Buddha in that supreme hour when he is "emptied of desires" and, in the words of the ancient scripture, "the light in his eyes is as pure as the lotus flower."

The "middle way" is the way of holiness. He voices it in his very first sermon delivered by him at the Gates of Kasi to an audience of five monks: - "Come closer. O Monks, live in holiness and put an end to misery." With this message Buddha travels all over North-East India. He converts King Bimbisara and brahmins and noblemen. For forty five years he takes this message from village to village and on the last day of his earth-life he gives to his beloved disciple, Ananda, the benediction of a message charged with hope and strength, - a message which civilisation needs today if it would be revitalised socially and spiritually for service to humanity. Unto Ananda, Buddha says: - "Complain not! Despair not, Ananda! But strive without craving!"

Say not that Buddhism is pessimism: No! Buddha's message is a message of hope and courage. Strive with desires! Conquer greed. Be a hero in the strife. And who are the real heroes of humanity? They who like Asoka turn from war to peace. When he accepted Buddha, Asoka turned his back on war and sent missionaries of peace far and wide: and Mahinda, Asoka's son, went to Lanka and laid there the foundation of a new civilisation of brotherhood and peace.

Buddha saw that flames, as of a big forest fire, surrounded men and women: they needed nibbana, peace. He realised, too that peace could not come as long as there was hatred in the hearts of men. "Not by hatred can hatred cease... he taught, "but only by refusing to hate."

Will the statesmen of the world listen to the voice of the Buddha? Is it the voice of one who was at once a kshatriya and Rishi. Buddha, born in the warrior-community, became a seer of the secret. "He is the true warrior," he says, "who worries none!" Yet in the name of peace and reconstruction, the statesmen of the West are out to humble and humiliate nations: and the imperialist dreams of power-politics dominate the counsel of the elders who would reconstruct the world in the coming days.

In the world's history, ancient or modern, there has not appeared another who received in his own life-time the reverent homage of millions as did the Buddha. This man, with a begging bowl in his hand, was yet called a chakravarti: he was a true ruler of men: he came to be revered as a "Teacher of men and the gods." Princes deemed it a good privilege to pay homage to him. He was a life of singular purity and singular love. He had the simplicity of a child and the humility of a saint. A prince invited Buddha and carpeted the road with fine, gaudy sheets: Buddha would not walk on them: he kept standing till they were removed. Kings and merchants, shopkeepers and sweepers, cobblers and barbers, thieves and harlots, came under his influence and became his disciples.

For twenty-five centuries has the Buddha borne witness to the wholeness of human life and the brotherhood of humanity. Will the nations that are, in this hour of darkness and chaos, bleeding internally, listen to this seer who claimed that his wisdom was for the healing of the nations?

