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## **Impact of Enlightenment on Buddhism in Twentieth Century**

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### **Abstract**

The Dalai Lama advocates a “secular morality” in a struggle to go beyond sectarian and ethical boundaries appealing to a common human core. Dalai Lama supports the agreement of faiths in their common objective of refining the human situation. Today Buddhist/Hindu scholars like the scholars of other religions have tried their best to make them compatible with incumbent Buddhism in accordance with the today’s democratic values. According to Buddhist scholars, Buddhism and liberal self-rule are not only matching with each other but they have maintained a reasonable balance between each other. According to them, self-rule is strengthened by the moral values where were derived directly from the Buddhist ethical theory, which obtained strong official and practical place which paved the ways for liberal democratic theory.

### **Introduction:**

A paradigm shift was brought about by renaissance and reformation in the man’s way of thinking. Prior to renaissance and reformation, the ideas and thoughts of man were based on revelation. It was the staunch belief of the man that this universe is made by Allah the Almighty and all phenomenon of nature by his command. Man also believed in spirit, angels and the life hereafter which depends on the deeds of man. But after reformation this idea of life changed out rightly, and materialistic approach

## Impact of Enlightenment on Buddhism in Twentieth Century

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was given priority at the expense of spiritualism. Now society sought secular and philosophical foundation and religion became personal matter of the man.

The man did away with the metaphysical basis of knowledge and empiricism was made the foundation of his knowledge. Hereafter was scarified at the altar of these worldly pleasures.

The maximum melodramatic fresh expansions in the Buddhism have been an emerging prevalent actions which risen since the Second World War. In the previous, Buddhist monastics provided educational and ethical leadership to society and the state, but today's secular organizations have taken over these outdated teaching and wellbeing characters. In a worldwide culture with the Enlightenment spirit, new movements are emerging in Buddhism.

In the nineteenth-century, Westerners were gratified when they saw the Japanese and the Chinese, who had rejected Western civilization in its religious version, accepting it in a secularized version in which technology in which technology instead of religion had been place of honour. Toynbee tells us about the penetration of Modernism in Japan and China: "The Meiji Revolution in Japan in the 1860s and Kuomintang Revolution in China in the 1920s both seemed, at the time, to be triumphs for the secularized Western civilization of the Late Modern Age."<sup>1</sup>

### **Modern Religious Movements in Buddhism:**

New Japanese Buddhist movements such as Sōka Gakkai<sup>2</sup> are well known, and several groups have arisen in other Buddhist cultures, such as Fo Kuang Shan (Fo Guangshan) (FKS) in Taiwan. According to religious scholar, Buddhism was founded in 1967 by a heavenly monk named as Shih Hsing-yun (Shi Xingyun). The initial Buddhism preached for working for the welfare of mankind instead of preaching of 'rebirth' after the death of the man.

Another movement began in Sri Lanka in 1958 when A. T. Ariyaratne (1931-), invited his urban, middle-class students at the Buddhist

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup> Sōka Gakkai (Value Creation Society).

Nalanda College in Colombo to serve poor villagers by digging wells teaching healthcare and other worldly affairs rather than self-purification. Further work camps were organized on the basis of a process called *shramadana* (“donating labor”).<sup>3</sup>

In Thailand, the Buddhism has become the authorized religion of the state, but different movements of reformations have ascended as a result of a faith that its ceremonies have become divorced from the mystical needs of the people.

The Buddhadasa (1906-93) applied Buddhist thought outwardly to economic and political issues in what he called “dhammic socialism.”

### **Modern Buddhist Scholars:**

Traditional Academic studies have been challenged in Buddhism today. Zen is famous for its slogan “non-reliance on words and letters” and tells stories of Zen monks who burned Buddhist books and ridiculed scholar monks.

### **Sōka Gakkai International<sup>4</sup>: A Humanistic Buddhism**

Sōka Gakkai is the society which established Buddhist group that lays its bases on Nichiren Buddhism. The society was established in 1930 by Makiguchi, a school-teacher & an educational reformer. Makiguchi was converted to Nichiren Buddhism in 1928. He reformed the society with a detailed academic program including the Nichiren Buddhist values. Reliable with Nichiren Buddhist approach, he acclaimed the Lotus Sutra,<sup>5</sup> the Buddhist holy scripture. He also claimed Nichiren, the 13<sup>th</sup> century monastic who set up a new sect known as Buddhism in Japan, as the personification of the Eternal Buddha.

Kiyoaki Murata says:

*“Makiguchi flanked by his associate, Toda Jōsei, were during the era of World War II (1939-1945) for fulminating at Shinto (Japan’s official faith) which is virtually the war policy of Japan. Makiguchi succumbed to*

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<sup>3</sup> Chappell, David, “The Expanding Community,” in Kevin Trainor, (ed.), Buddhism, (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2004), pp. 214-215.

<sup>4</sup> In Japan new Buddhist movement which is Sōka Gakkai, the Value Creation Society.

<sup>5</sup> Theravada Buddhists Literature.

## Impact of Enlightenment on Buddhism in Twentieth Century

*death in jail. Freed shortly before Japan's defeat in 1945, Toda Jōsei started an active movement of adaptation called shakubuku led to fast growing movement. Shakubuku literally means "break and subdue," but to Sōka Gakkai it meant purifying people's false spiritual views and developing them to reality. In 1960 Ikeda Daisaku rose up to the leader of Sōka Gakkai and membership grew from 765,000 households in Japan to 8 million in 1996. As of the early 2000s there were an approximated 1.3m members of Sōka Gakkai in 185 countries."*<sup>6</sup>

In Humanistic Buddhism, Daisaku Ikeda, the president of Sōka Gakkai International (SGK) has founded an education system in Japan with universities teaching humanistic values rather than any particular form of Buddhism. Ikeda labels his message "a new humanism."<sup>7</sup> Murata says about its political activism:

*"This religious intervention in state is called Kokka Kangyo<sup>8</sup>. Not only did Nichiren himself resort to Kokka Kangyo through his famous treatise called Risshō Ankoku Ron,<sup>9</sup> but so did his successors from time to time. Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu leaders, in criticizing the politics of contemporary Japan, often invoke Risshō Ankoku Ron to exhort themselves and their followers to rectify the present government and politics in Japan."*<sup>10</sup>

In the same vein, the Dalai Lama<sup>11</sup> advocates a "secular morality" in a struggle to go beyond sectarian and ethical boundaries appealing to a

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<sup>6</sup> Murata, Kiyooki, Japan's New Buddhism, An Objective Account of Sōka Gakkai, (Tokyo & New York: Published by John Weatherhill, Inc., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1971), pp. 161-162.

<sup>7</sup> Dumoulin, Heinrich, and Maraldo, John, C., (eds.), Buddhism in the Modern World, (London and New York: Collier Macmillan, 1976), pp. 109-110.

<sup>8</sup> "Kokka Kangyo," means "exhortation to the state."

<sup>9</sup> "Risshō Ankoku Ron," means "treatise on Making the Nation Secure by Establishing True Buddhism."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>11</sup> Dalai Lama: means "Ocean [of Wisdom] Teacher."

common human core. Dalai Lama supports the agreement of faiths in their common objective of refining the human situation.<sup>12</sup>

Today Buddhist/Hindu scholars like the scholars of other religions have tried their best to make them compatible with incumbent Buddhism/Hinduism in accordance with the today's democratic values.

According to Buddhist/Hindu scholars, Buddhism and liberal self-rule are not only matching with each other but they have maintained a reasonable balance between each other. According to them, self-rule is strengthened by the moral values where were derived directly from the Buddhist ethical theory, which obtained strong official and practical place which paved the ways for liberal democratic theory.

Buddhist/Hindu scholars say that the Pali Canon<sup>13</sup> shared detailed information about the life in primitive India, especially in 6<sup>th</sup> century, which is known for the Great Buddha in northeastern part of Old India. According to a study, a leading Pali research scholar in 1903 named Rhys David hinted down in his book titled: Buddhist India<sup>14</sup> in which he revealed the famous sequence of folklores in Buddhist origin – the Canon portrayed about a populated region full of numerous cliques.

The book by Rhys David developed a linkage between the institutes of primitive India with today's institutional performance in modern era. In fact, the concept of modernization as narrated in the book discussing republican system in primitive India was witnessed among the souls of modern India.<sup>15</sup> The past generations belonging to Buddhist community and

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<sup>12</sup> Goldstein, Melvyn and Kapstein, Matthew, (eds.), Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet: Religious Revival and Cultural Identity, (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> the Tipitaka.

<sup>14</sup> Majumdar, R.C., The History and Culture of the Indian People, The Age of Imperial Unity, (Bombay: 1951), vol. II, pp. 396-411.

<sup>15</sup> Jayaswal, Kashi, Prasad, Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India, (Bangalore: Bangalore Printing & Publishing Co., 1955), Bhandarkar, D.R., Lectures on the Ancient History of India on the Period from 650 to

## Impact of Enlightenment on Buddhism in Twentieth Century

Hindu academicians felt mourned owing to the struggle and enthusiasm of their elders to form republics and made absolute efforts for establishing a balanced approach for republics.<sup>16</sup> Although, the scholarly research work in Sanskrit, and Mahabharata carried out by the pioneers including Pali Canon, Jaina Canon, and Kautilya<sup>17</sup> and Arthasastra was quite impressive and well-productive and it can also be analyzed from the insights and evidences in their work.

Maybe, the Aryan's scholarly work in Anabasis about India can also be traced authentically in Greek accounts, wherein there is a lot of debate about the conquerors of Greek especially the Alexander. Anabasis is an account and credible documents encompassing the eyewitnesses mostly from Alexander's companions,<sup>18</sup> who narrated the region housed by independent communities in India. However, the Nysa case sheds light on interpretation of 'independent and free' communities of India residing on the western borders of today's Pakistan and Afghanistan. This region (falling today) inside Pakistan and Afghanistan was ruled over by Aculphis, then President, having 300 experts and politicians in a council. It is also believed that after the region fell into the hands of Alexander, the President Aculphis developed a linked with Dionysus – god – to seek forgiveness from the king:

*"The Nysaeans have beseeched us, O king! Enjoying the honour and reverence from god Dionysus, to permit us to enjoy freedom; as god Dionysus had provided us freedom and independence since our birth in Indian communities.....established in wake of the efforts carried out by the military men abandoned from the military service. From those eras, we reside in Nysa, which is known for its independence and freedom, and now*

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325 B.C., The Carmichael Lectures, 1918, (Calcutta: 1919), Majumdar, R.C., Corporate Life in Ancient India, (Calcutta: 1969).

<sup>16</sup> J.P. Sharma, Republics in Ancient India, c. 1500 B.C.-500 B.C. (Leiden: 1968), Ghoshal, U.N., A History of Indian Public Life, vol. II, The Pre-Maurya and Maurya Period, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966). For the embarrassment, see Sharma, Republics, pp. 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Kautilya (late 300s bc), also known as Chanakya.

<sup>18</sup> See Oxford Classical Dictionary, under "Arrianus Flavius," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1970), pp. 122-123.

*we ourselves are residing with absolute freedom, having land laws and governing the region with our own laws”<sup>19</sup>*

The Santi Parva chapter given in the Mahabharata revealed the flaws and faults emerged from the excessive penetration and intervention of a large number of people in affairs of the state. The numerous members of a sovereign gana or sangha interacted with each other as members of an assembly. Details of the working of such assemblies can be found both in Brahmanical and Buddhist literature. By the era of Panini<sup>20</sup> (5<sup>th</sup> century BC), the concept and the terminology of decision-making in corporate manner was widely used. Panini reveals the concept of ‘vote’ and outcomes of the voting process – decision of forming government after the popular voting based on the completion of the quorum. Furthermore, the concept of assemblies, separate functioning of different assemblies and their participation in political parties was also widely known in those eras.<sup>21</sup>

The research scholars in Hinduism share that Pali Canon revealed the true picture of democratic bodies functioning in primitive India and the same revelations were found in Panini. This picture was revealed in first three parts of Canon, including:

1. Maha-parinibbana-suttanta,
2. Mahavagga,
3. Kullavagga<sup>22</sup>

According to the scholarly work, a clear picture carrying revelations, instructions and teachings of Buddhism for establishing brotherhood emerged and commonly known as Sangha. In fact, those teachings carried the proper voting procedure and mechanism which was functional in earlier

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<sup>19</sup> Majumdar, R.C., (ed.), The Classical Accounts of India, (Calcutta: 1960), p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Indian scholar Panini around 600 B. C.

<sup>21</sup> Agrawala, Panini, pp. 433-435.

<sup>22</sup> The Maha-parinibbana-suttanta: Buddhist Suttas vol. I, trans. T.W. Rhys Davids, Sacred Books of the East series, vol. XI, (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 1-136. Mahavagga, Kullavagga, and Pattimokkha: Vinaya Texts, trans. T.W. Rhys Davids and H. Oldenberg, Sacred Books of the East, (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), vol. XIII, pp. 17, 20, see also: Vajirayanavaroros, Somdet, Vinayamukha, (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University Press, 1988), vol. III, pp. 1-11.

part of the Buddhist era with addition to emergence and formation of democratic ideology. According to Ghoshal,

*“As per the first chapter of Maha-parinibbana-suttanta, the rules of the primitive Buddhist sangha followed the principles which were found in political sanghas or ganas. The main organizational virtue in Buddhist sangha enjoyed maximum participation of all monks who used to observe all ritual and disciplinary practices. Accordingly, the details of assemblies, procedures of forming assemblies, quorums of assemblies, rights and obligations of members of the assemblies were given in the Mahavagga and the Kullavagga.”*<sup>23</sup>

According to Mahavagga, “business could only be managed lawfully in a complete legislature, by a vote of the full house. If, for instance, an applicant intended the upasampada consecration, the query (ñatti) was put forward to the sangha by an experienced and the knowledgeable member of the house, and as per practice, all the other members used to ask 3 times to designate opposition. If there was no vote against the voting, there was a pact with the ñatti (announcement). The verdict was confirmed by the announcement of the judgment of the sangha.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Sangha: A Democratic Institution**

The institution the Buddha was the Sangha or reclusive society that worked on huge self-rule course. Within the community, folks were considered as equal, regardless their societal class or the castes were. Separate liberty, illustrated by the main theme of freedom, was the starting emphasis of the entire community thus was obtained by humanizing the mind in deliberation. Therefore, the Sangha used to serve as a role model for entire social parity, distributing of resources and self-rule process.

Buddhist scholar says that no set up of the governance is absolutely perfect, however, the self-rule seems to be the nearest to the Buddhism. It is too the sole unchanging base from where a massive political mechanism can

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<sup>23</sup> Ghoshal, A History of Indian Public Life, vol. II, p. 195.

<sup>24</sup> Mahavagga 1.28, Sacred Books of the East, vol. XIII, pp. 169-170.



be established. As the Buddhist scholars, it is our comforts that those of us who relish self-rule should eagerly participate in it.<sup>25</sup>

According to a study, there was a clear connectivity between principles of Licchavis also known as Vajjians and his Sangha as per Buddha wisdom and the rulers of Buddhist Sangha also followed those principles to establish democratic rule and publics.<sup>26</sup> According to the concluding remarks of Majumdar, the teachings, principles, techniques and structures given in Buddhist sangha were truly reflected in overall political culture and governance of popular political assembly.<sup>27</sup>

Likewise, the scholars also believed that complete participation in public affairs of a state by the members of the assemblies should truly be reflected the in the form of the political ideology of Sangha-Ganga. The study also revealed that there was a strong commitment of Buddha towards the republicanism and widely shown in Buddhist scriptures as per the revelations in the Maha-parinibbana-suttanta.<sup>28</sup> A story is famous in the Buddhist scriptures. The king of Maghada named as Hare Ajatasastru desired to demolish the state of Vajjian (also known as Licchavis)<sup>29</sup> by sending a minister, named as Vassakara the Brahman, to the Great Buddha by seeking his advice. Instead of asking a direct question, he asked as, “Will this attack would have a success? Similarly, the Buddha also replied indirectly to his disciple namely Ananda, as:

“Do you know Ananda and heard? The Vajjians (the state of Licchavis) enjoy the governing structures of public assemblies?”

Ananda replied as “Lord! I have heard”.

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<sup>25</sup> Sivaraksa, Sulak, I Speak but No One Listens, (Bangkok, Cled Thai Publishing House, 1981), p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Maha-parinibbana-suttanta, Sacred Books of the East, vol. IX, pp. 6-7, Changkwanayoon, Preecha, The Political Thought in Theravada Buddhist Pitaka, (Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University Press, 1993), pp. 240-243, Sivaraksa, Sulak, I Speak but No One Listens, (Bangkok: Cled Thai Publishing House, 1981), pp. 51-113.

<sup>27</sup> Majumdar, R. C., Corporate Life, pp. 233-234, A. K. Majumdar, Concise History of Ancient History: Political Theory, Administration, and Economic Life, (New Delhi: 1980), vol. II, pp. 137.

<sup>28</sup> The Maha-parinibbana-suttanta

<sup>29</sup> The Pali Canon. see Sharma, Republics, pp. 81-84, 93-97.

## Impact of Enlightenment on Buddhism in Twentieth Century

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The Great Buddha further shared as “Till the date, Ananda! The Vajjians continue having such frequent and organized public assemblies; they would not be destroyed rather they would enjoy a healthy and prosper future.....” In reply to the series of queries put forward by Ananda, the Great Buddha narrated the requirements and characteristics of the Vajjian prosperity:

*“Till the date, Ananda, the Vajjians hold public assemblies, so long, they accomplish their duties and obligations, so long, they do not abrogate the established norms, so long they do not infringe the public rights, so long, they decide public matters with justice and equity, so long, respect and honour their elders Vajjians and enjoy their support, so long, the girls and women are respected and honoured in all set rituals and they are not forced for any anti-social tasks, so long, they enjoy the blessing of the shrines, so long they block the paths of invaders inwardly and outwardly, they would continue enjoying prosperity and better future for their future generations and they would never decline”*

Afterwards, the Great Buddha addressed directly the ministers the Brahman, and stated as:

“O Brahman! During my stay at Vesali Temple in Sarandada, I have preached the Vajjians the elements of prosperity and public welfare, therefore, the Vajjians would remain at their place until or unless they abandon those practices, otherwise, they would continue prospering in their lives.”

### **Rule of Law**

The attitude of Buddhism toward democratic system can have the essence of Buddhism in general manner and practically observed by the Sangha. The mandatory element for a self-rule system is rule of law.

Winston believes “Buddhism, is the philosophy which definitely endorses the practice.”<sup>30</sup> The Buddha told Ananda, his chief disciple, that if he [Buddha] died then the Dhamma-Vinaya should be revered as their

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<sup>30</sup> . King, Winston, L., In the Hope of Nibbana: An Essay on Theravada Buddhist Ethics, (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1964), pp. 188-201.

mentor.<sup>31</sup> So, Buddha never assigned any person to become the chieftain of the Sangha, but Dhamma or the legal code would be their teacher and the leader as well. Once a [noble] Brahmin questioned Ananda that did Buddha, after his Parinibbana, ever appoint any noble [monk] to head the religious community? Ananda replied in negative. The Brahmin then questioned whether the Buddha ever asked Sangha to even ‘elect’ a noble or monk to be the leader and head the religious community. Ananda again replied as ‘No’.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the goal is open and everyone should achieve his/ her goal without any specific person or monk heading the community.

### **Humanism and Buddhism**

Changkanyoon says:

“Humanistic beliefs are considerably match-able with the self-rule spirit. So, Buddhism definitely is similar to democratic-rule, because this thought endorses humanity. Honestly saying, humanism is a philosophy where rationale approach is accepted where men are equal, women are equal and each member share equal rights, because a man is considered as a ‘animal with logic’ therefore he has ability to learn living with others instead of using force. Democracy, similarly, is the way of governance, where men make compromise. Buddha also did not award power to manage administrative issues when he established the Sangha, but later, when this philosophy attained maturity, the administrative power was awarded. Certain social and religious activities were carried out by the Sangha, as per Vinaya (the practice of following laws and rules by the monks), called Sangha Kamma.<sup>33</sup> The agents of Sangha performed these activities. Apalokana Kamma preached for all the unnecessary tasks which must be done considering them as routine but official obligations.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Dighanikaya Mahavagga, vol. 10, p. 141.

<sup>32</sup> Majjhimanikaya Uparipannasaka, vol. 14, pp. 108–113.

<sup>33</sup> Vajirayanavaroros, Somdet, Vinayamukha, (Bangkok: Mahamakut Buddhist University Press, 1988), vol. III, pp. 1–11.

<sup>34</sup> Changkanyoon, Preecha, The Political Thought in Theravada Buddhist Pitaka, (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 1993), pp. 112–113.

Vajirayanavaroros shared 3 forms of Sangha Kamma: Yatti Kamma, Yatti Dutiya Kamma, and Yatti Catuttha Kamma. Sangha governors were assigned these tasks to perform, but such steps must be recommended by the community of the Monks. Democracy is a way of governance which solves problems and issues. Sangha Kamma says the task of Vivadadhikarana must be performed at any cost, which is like ‘a problem of conflict’. Buddhism says the debate based on logic would lead to logical solution. Therefore, the community of Monks also believes in logical decisions based on detailed deliberations and consensus between the community members. Therefore, the community of nobles which is like an assembly in a democratic rule where vote is given by the citizens of a state to form a political government.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, both Buddhism and democracy respect human logic to solve problems.

### **Equality and justice**

There are two main elements ‘equality’ and ‘justice’ which are mandatory for a peaceful society. Rights and freedom are two main concepts which have an imperative position for a man to live in a social setup. Moreover, ‘humanism’ is another concept which has its own important value to live in a democratic society. Therefore, it can be said that rights and freedom with addition to equality and justice one can practice humanistic ideology.<sup>36</sup>

According to the philosophy of Hinduism, God has created individuals who share common values and take actions based on just decisions. So, Buddhism discusses life being the evolutionary process of pure natural phenomenon. Therefore, this theory is labelled as naturalism, contradictory to a theist theory which says all individuals were produced and shall be reduced into a natural process, and every natural process is quite equal under the Law of Nature (Dhamma Niyama). This is the law of Kamma, as per Buddhism. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a Thai Buddhist researcher examined Dhamma as:

- ❖ The Law of Divine Nature, and

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<sup>35</sup> Vajirayanavaroros, Somdet, Vinayamukha, vol. III, pp. 114-136.

<sup>36</sup> Changkwanyoon, Preecha, The Political Thought in Theravada Buddhist Pitaka, p. 95.

❖ The Duty to follow the Laws of Nature.<sup>37</sup>

According to Buddhadasa, it is wise to deduce a political model from a natural model given by the Law of Nature. He is well-known for his famous political theory named Dhammic Socialism, which, as he said, derives from the Law of Nature.<sup>38</sup>

**Conclusion:**

Buddhist movements (as we have seen above) have adopted secular values of Western Enlightenment. These movements changed the direction of their religion which is Buddhism from God to humanism and from heaven to earth. In Humanistic Buddhism has founded an education and socio-political systems in Japan with humanistic values rather than any particular form of Buddhism.



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<sup>37</sup> Bhikkhu, Buddhadasa, Toward the Truth, Donald K. Swearer, (ed.), (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), pp. 60-61.

<sup>38</sup> Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Dhammic Socialism, Donald K. Swearer, (ed.), (Bangkok: Komol Kheemthong Foundation, 1988), p. 34.