Sub Topics:
01: Democracy and Society
02: Buddhism and Democracy
03: Emergence of Democratic ideals
04: Tenets and Facets of Democratic Society
05: Democracy and Civil Society
06: Bhikku Sanga as microcosm of Democracy
07: Caste System and Democracy
08: Globalization and Democracy
09: Buddhism for a Just World
10: Buddhism and Reconstruction of Society
11: Conflict and Democratic Engagement
12: Democratic Government and Democratic Society

Call for Papers
As you are a well known scholar in the field we cordially extend the invitation to present your research paper on any of the sub-themes listed above or on any aspect of your choice related to the theme of the Conference. We look forward for your participation and you are requested to confirm your participation by sending the Title and Abstract in about 250 words (in MS Word format) in English on or before 21st September, 2015 and the full paper on or before 20th October, 2015 to satyapalpd@gmail.com. This will help us in the preparation of academic schedule in advance, printing proceedings and to communicate to all scholars at the earliest. Kindly mark the sub-theme code immediately after the title of the paper.

Travel and Accommodation:
Participants are advised to make their arrangements for travel. Moderate accommodation will be provided at out station delegates along with local hospitality to all delegates.

Oral Presentation:
Each selected research paper can be orally presented within 15 minutes including short discussion. Presentation room will be provided with LCD projector for power point presentation.

Registration Fee:
Paper Presenters: Rs. 500/-
Delegates : Rs. 300/-

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Yours in Metta,
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International Conference on
“Buddhism and Establishment of Democratic Society - The Way Forward”

Organised by
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15th-16th November 2015
Visakhapatnam
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P. D. Satya Pal
Conference Director & Organising Secretary
Theme of the Conference

Modern democracy is based on the principle that all human beings are essentially equal and have equal right to life, liberty, and happiness. Etymologically, Democracy is derived from the Greek words, demos (people) and kratēein (to rule) indicating a form of government in which the people have and exercise political power and a democrat is thus one who advocates or upholds such a form of government. Because the conceptions about democracy were discussed in early Greece, many people held the misconception that democracy started in Greece. Great thinkers of the Western world—Socrates, Plato and Aristotle discussed democracy but rejected it as an unsuitable form of government. The Athenian democracy comprised only half of its people who were free. Ideas about modern representational democracy spread in Western Europe and when we look at the laws that were made by the “free” citizens of the 17th century, we can understand that the community of those who could vote did not include half of the population who were women, or those who lacked the prerequisite of land ownership. In the 19th and 20th centuries we see lot of democracies developing in Europe augmenting the protection of the minority interests from the tyranny that could be imposed by the majority.

In the Orient, India had history of early form of democracy developed under the influence of Buddhism. In an introduction to the book Legacy of India, Lord Zetland, former Viceroy of India, states “And it may come as a surprise to many to learn that in assemblies of Buddhists in India, two thousand or more years ago, are to be found rudiments of our own parliamentary system as practised today.” Democracy in its holistic sense, for the first time was acknowledged by Buddha that human beings are entitled to dignity, that all members of the human family have an equal and inalienable right to liberty, not just in terms of political freedom, but also at the fundamental level of freedom from fear and want. Buddha envisaged a democratic society as a foundation for a vibrant political democracy.

The similarity between Buddhism and democracy can be perceived in the teachings of the Buddha. Buddha conceded equality to all human beings—a cardinal principle in a democratic society. His advocacy of tolerance, the idea of discussion, extraordinary freedom of choice, equality, non-violence, and impermanence—every one of these ideas went against the customs of his time. As for democracy as a procedure of decision making, we find again in the Buddhist tradition a certain recognition of the need for consensus. Buddha introduced the secret ballot system in the Buddhist monastic order to arrive at major decisions affecting the lives of individual monks on collective discourse. They were revolutionary concepts introduced by the Buddha 2500 years ago. They were major intellectual innovations—all democratic in content and intent.

The basic principle of a democracy is the freedom and dignity of the individual with equality before the law. No individual can be called free unless she is able to pursue her calling unhampered by barriers of caste, class, gender or special privilege. In a deeper sense no individual is truly free until one can without fear or pressure from authoritarian coercion, unfold one’s innate potentialities and perfect oneself by shaping one’s own destiny. Therefore to take the term “democracy” for the government or regime would be anachronistic, because it is possible to have a democratic regime with an absolutist spirit and an absolute regime with a democratic spirit, not to mention regimes that use the name “democratic” for purposes of obfuscation. Hence, we must distinguish between a “democratic government” and the “democratic society” in a regime. Nowadays, democracy is held in high esteem but one should not be enchanted by the mere word “democracy”.

As rightly observed by Ambedkar, a “democracy is more than a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living. The roots of democracy are to be searched in the social relationship, in the terms of associated life between the people who form a society”.

The society in India does not consist of individuals. It consists of an innumerable collection of castes which are exclusive in their life and have no common experience to share and have no bond of sympathy. The existence of Caste System is a standing denial of existence of those ideals of society and therefore of democracy. For an associated living, Social and Economic facets of Democracy become the tissue and fibre of political democracy.

World over, global economic developments have forced us to deal with the redefinition of “community.” If there is a “melting pot” which destroys the very essence of the ethnic heritage, then there is the question of how the resulting community can serve the needs of individuals and groups. In any sane and free society, it is always more desirable to find ways for people with differing values to coexist than to promote continual strife between them. The pro-choice position can do this, whereas the anti-choice position does not.

Cultivating a democratic Community in the contemporary world examines how Buddhist civic religion and western materialism cross-pollinate in the making of an interdependent mutuality of two seemingly dichotomous worldviews. The construction of such a community involves an intercultural engagement and moving from corporatocracy to democracy. It is through the holistic democratic principles of Buddhism a proper reconstruction of society is possible. The practice of compassion is not just a symptom of unrealistic idealism, but the most effective way to pursue the best interests of others as well our own. The more we—as nations or as individuals—depend upon others, the more it is in our own best interests to ensure their well-being. Mindfulness and reflection combined with activism is essential if our efforts in the world are to be meaningful.

The Two-day International Conference during 15th - 16th November 2015 aims to initiate a thorough academic discussion on various facets of Establishing Democratic Society and the role of Buddhism in that endeavour. This Conference also aims to juxtapose several Buddhist alternatives in operationalizing this goal. The theme is presented in the following sub-themes: