

**Be United or Divided: The Significance of the Buddhist Practical Principles to strengthen
the Reconciliation Process for Better and Stable Sri Lanka**

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Sri Lanka has been experienced a brutal war and struggle for over 30 years. During this period, the war caused hardships for the population, environment and the economy of the country were seriously damaged. The number of civilians has been lost their lives whereas many were displaced. Several occasions, the Sri Lankan government attempted to take them a lasting negotiated settlement with the international mediation, the LTTE violated the cease-fire agreement over thousand times. Finally, the Sri Lankan military defeated terrorism (the LTTE-Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) instrumentally in May 2009, bringing the civil war to an end. Now, we are living in the post war period where we can see explosive regional tensions of ethnic and religious character in Sri Lanka as Buddhists, Tamils, Muslims and Christians. According to the Buddhist perspective, it suggests that the loving-kindness to be possible we must be able to look at another human being as another human being, irrespective of caste, creed, race, colour, class or faith. Instead of understanding the causality of violence and conflict, common opinion relies on the instrumentality of it to vanquish unjust violence, for Buddhist principles. Buddhism strongly believes that the ignorance of the other cultures and nationalities creates a narrow, distorted view of life and the world. Therefore, Buddhism recommends to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations. The prime concern of this study is to focus on the Buddhist practical principles to strengthen the reconciliation process for better and stable Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Buddhism, Reconciliation, Mutual Understanding, Post war period, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Though the majority are the Sinhala Buddhists in Sri Lanka, they live with other communities (Hinduism, Christianity and Islam) harmoniously. For this reason, it seems that the society in which we are living today is pluralistic. A society where Buddhism is well flourished there would easily be mutual self interest with other cultures and religions. It is because of non-violence and mutual respect in Buddhism. On the other hand, it is quite natural that arising the issues between majority and minority based on religious and cultural claims. The answers for these issues should be searched very carefully because the entire Sri Lankan nation has been brought up under this great

civilization. Those who are living in this country could be recognized under one label as Sri Lankans not based on religion or nationality. Now, we are in a very crucial stage of the Sri Lankan history. We obviously remember that the war caused hardships for every one during the last three decades. It is the time for reconciliation which is one of the most difficult tasks that ever met by the Sri Lankan education and government. We have people whose attitudes have been politically and religiously corrupted and misrepresented though they are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. We just believe that the entire Sri Lanka belongs to the Sinhala Buddhist community only. This is the concept of the Sinhala Buddhist hegemony. But we cannot forget about that other faiths and nationalities have also been living in this country for a long time. Therefore, we should open the gates towards reconciliation and accountability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology utilized in this paper was to read and analyze the primary Buddhist teachings specially the *Araṇavibhanga*, *Abhayarajakumāra*, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, *Vāseṭṭha*, *Aṃbaṭṭha*, *Chakkavattisīhanāda*, *Kūṭadanta*, *Mahāparinibbāna*, *Sakhapañha*, *Kalahavivāda*, *Paṭhamasaṅgāma*, *mettasutta-s* relating to the subject area and other selected secondary texts monographs and articles to generate pragmatic results that remain to the Buddhist teachings while giving a greater insight into some historical aspects. Therefore, this is a library-based research.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

A struggle between power for territorial dominance was led to a brutal war. The struggle now is for reconciliation domination. Therefore, today's biggest challenge is reconciliation process. How can the Buddhist practical principles be used for this process without any international mediation in order to strengthen reconciliation in the post war period of Sri Lanka?

DISCUSSION

Clearly, Buddhism was the most social of religions the applications and expounded in a long series of discourses.¹

The conflicts and wars that occur in society are observed in Buddhism as an unavoidable part of *samsāric* misery. The Buddha speaks of unrest in the form of quarrels (*kalaha*), disputes

¹ Kosambi, D. D, 1992, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Reprint, p. 106

(*viggaha*), and contentions (*vivāda*) at different levels of social interaction. The *Madhupiṇḍikasutta* begins with the sensory process and identifies *papañca* (mental proliferation) as the most noteworthy psychological cause for social conflicts. The *Mahādukkhakkhandhasutta* draws attention how conflicts take place due to sensuality. The Buddha speaks of conflicts in the form of quarrels (*kalaha*), disputes (*viggaha*), and contentions (*vivāda*) at different levels of social interaction. They occur between nations or states as large-scale wars when one head of state dispute with another (*rājānopi rājūhi vivādentī*).² They also occur between religious, ethnic groups within the same nation. They occur also between members of the same family. The root cause for conflict is sensuality. The *Mahādukkhakkhandhasutta* draws attention how conflicts take place due to sensuality.

Again, *Bhikhu*-s, kings dispute with kings, warriors with warriors, Brahmins with Brahmins, householders with householders, mother disputes with the son, the son with the mother, the father with the son, the son with the father, brother with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. They dispute, quarrel, and approach each other with hands, clods, sticks, weapons, and even face death or come to deadly unpleasantness. This is the danger of sensuality here, and now, the mass of unpleasantness owing to sensuality.³

As the *Raṭṭhapālasutta* draws the prime cause for war is greed. *Raṭṭhapāla* points out how kings engage in destructive and aggressive wars on account of greed for power. The *Sutta* runs as follows:

A king wins territories on earth through aggression as far as the surrounding ocean. Yet no being contended with that, he desires territories even beyond the shores. the king and many others die and they abandon their bodies with unfilled desire. In the world there certainly is no point of ultimate satisfaction with regard to sense desires.⁴

For the *Kalahavivādasutta* of the *Suttanipāta*, conflicts and arguments are taken place caused by the loved things.

Fights, disputes, wailings, grief, selfishness, measuring, conceit, and slandering, where these are abundant may it be told. With loved things are fights, disputes

² The Suttanipāta, *The Kalahavivādasutta*, p. 169

³ The Majjhimanikāya, *The Mahādukkhakkhandasutta*, p. 85

⁴ The Majjhimanikāya, *The Raṭṭhapālasutta*

wailings, grief, selfishness, measuring, conceit, and slandering abundant, yoked to selfishness are fights and disputes and from disputes arise slandering. To those wandering greedily in the world, how do loved things, arise. How do longings and familiarities arise, for humans to follow up to the next world. From interest arise loved ones to those wondering greedily in the world. Longings and familiarities arise here, and humans follow them to the next world.⁵

The *Vaggaparisasutta* of the *Aṅguttaranikāya* introduces about the two groups that the united and the group in disunity.⁶ The nature of both these groups is as follows:

The features of divided groups

What is the divided gathering? Bhikkhus, in a gathering if the monks quarrel, fight and have a dispute and abide using their mouths as weapons to hurt each other, it is a divided gathering?⁷

The features of united gathering

What is a united gathering? Bhikkhus, in a gathering if the monks are united, pleasing without a dispute, abide seeing each other with loving eyes, it is a united gathering. Bhikkhus, these two are the gatherings and of the two the united gathering is noble.⁸

The *Vepacittisutta* of the *Samyuttanikāya* describes that acting tolerantly on such a conflict situation is a quality of an individual personality. If individuals do not act wisely on such situations conflicts will be going on.⁹

The *Vatthūpamasutta* also draws our attention that conflict starts in the individual's mind forced by unwholesome thoughts. The *Māgandhiyasutta* explains that people engage in conflicts owing to wrong understanding and wrong interpretation. This *sutta* suggests us through right understanding and right interpretation, conflicts could be minimized. The *Vaggaparisasutta* introduces about the two groups that the united and the group in disunity. In the *Kosambisutta*, the Buddha states that these conflicts are caused in the sense of lack of kindness and respect to the others. The Buddha recommends that the monks should establish by bodily, verbally and mentally actions loving kindness towards associates in the holy life openly and secretly. This is

⁵ The Suttanipāta, The *Kalahavivādasutta*, p. 169

⁶ The Aṅguttaranikāya, The *Vaggaparisasutta*, p. 70

⁷ Ibid, 70

⁸ Ibid, 70

⁹ The Samyuttanikāya I, The *Vepacittisutta*, pp. 222, 223

a thing which conduces reverence, unity, friendliness and love for each other. When we make a statement even when true may be either pleasant or unpleasant. Language is a key factor in the reconciliation. The well-known *Mettasutta* in Buddhism reminds that everyone should be happy and healthy. The term *metta* is referred to a mother's love for her only child.

Just as a mother loves her only child even more than her life, do thou extend a boundless love towards all creatures.

Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world-above, below and across; without restrictions, free of hate and free of enmity.

The practice of the Highest Life (*brahma-vihāra*) is said to consist in the cultivation of compassionate feelings towards all beings. Buddhism aims at creating a peaceful society in the sense of the attainment of inner peace and finding the way to peace (*anuttaramsantivarapadampariyesamāno*).¹⁰

For *Abhayarājakumārasutta*, it is sometimes necessary to say what is true but unpleasant when it is useful. The Buddha explains in the *Kosambisutta* some principles which can be used in order to avoid conflicts and war and keep harmony and unity in society.

1. Prevents the conflicts
2. Like each other
3. Mutual respect
4. Coming together
5. Without disagreements
6. Produce unity
7. Together
8. Compassionate bodily/verbal and mental action openly and secretly

On the other hand, good governance would bring immense results in this regard. In Sri Lanka, the ruler is traditionally recognized as a *Boddhisattva* who is said to be possessed the qualities of compassion, equanimity, tolerance and gentleness. It seems that due to political imbalance and corruption in politics, the world has become confusion. Buddhism understands the politics as one of the constraints in society as well. But it does not escape from all the ties of mundane and secular living. The Buddhist canonical scriptures explain how the Buddha had encounters

¹⁰ The *Ariyapariyesanasutta* of the Majjhimanikāya.

with the kings, ministers and rulers. The Buddha offered a number of sound principles relating to the good governance. Therefore, it is expected to revisit the importance of the Buddhist political teachings as a solution for the current political imbalance in the country. Buddhism encourages towards the ethical culmination into the political life. So that Buddhism is totally differentiated from the *Kautilyan* and Machiavellian political thoughts of governance. Buddhism introduces the concept of the Wheel Turning Monarch for good governance with the just and righteous principles (*rājā cakkavattī dhammiko dhammarājā*). Buddhism introduces the concept of the Wheel Turning Monarch for good governance with the just and righteous principles (*rājā cakkavattī dhammiko dhammarājā*). He is understood as the culmination of morality in Buddhism. Such a great personality can create a peaceful and harmonious surrounding (*patirūpadesavāso*). The detailed account of the Wheel Turning Monarch is discussed in the *Cakkavattisihanādasutta*. He rules without resorting to violence and without using weapons of war but becoming victorious solely based on the principles of *Dhamma* (*adaṇḍena asatthena dhammena abhivijjya*). The Wheel Turning Monarch rules the earth to the borders of the ocean by means of righteousness without resorting to the force of arms and violence and establishes a political order for the material or secular welfare of all living beings. There are eight principles that commonly accepted as constituting principles of good governance in the modern world. They are enumerated as follows:

1. Participation
2. Adherence to the rule of law
3. Transparency
4. Responsiveness
5. Consensus Orientation
6. Equity and Inclusiveness
7. Effectiveness and Efficiency
8. Accountability

This monarch after ruling his realm for long time, decided to retire from the kingship handing over authority to his eldest son. The monarch had the seven treasures such as wheel, horse, elephant, woman, gem, ministers. The disappearance of the wheel treasures symbolized the fall of the ruler in respect of his power and authority. This happens due to the fact that negligence of his duties. As reported in this particular *sutta*, after the king handed over authority to his son, within a week, the Wheel Treasure disappeared. The newly appointed king could not continue

his duties and he was disturbed in many ways. He made inquiries to his father. The latter points out to the king that kingship is not a paternal inheritance of his. It is in so far as he fulfills the noble duties of a Wheel Turning Monarch that the wheel treasure remains in place. What are the noble duties of a Wheel Turning Monarch as recorded in the *sutta*.

My son, depending on *Dhamma* itself, honouring *Dhamma*, esteeming *Dhamma*, worshipping *Dhamma*, venerating *Dhamma*, having *Dhamma* as the flag, having *Dhamma* as the banner, having *Dhamma* as the authority, you should provide righteous watch, ward and protection to people in the royal household, the troops, those of the ruling class, and other subjects who are Brahmins, householders of the townships and provinces, to renunciants and Brahmins and to beasts and birds. Let there be not within your territory one who acts in an unethical manner. Whoever in your territory may be poor, grant them wealth. Whoever in your territory are renunciants and Brahmins that refrain from intoxication and heedlessness, established in patience and gentleness - some who discipline themselves, some who call themselves, some who bring themselves to appeasement- go to them from time to time and ask them and question them: 'What sir, is wholesome, what is unwholesome, what is blameworthy, what is blameless, what should be practised, what should not be practised, and my doing what will conduce to my harm and suffering for a long time, and doing what will conduce to my well-being and happiness for a long time?' Having heard from them, whatever is unwholesome, you should especially avoid it, and whatever is wholesome, you should observe and live by it. This, my son, is the noble duty of a Wheel Turner.

As pointed out in the *Cakkavattisihanādasutta*, the main consequences of mal-distribution of resources are the major causes for poverty. Mal-distribution of goods and services is likely to create economic inequalities, resulting in the division of the world into rich and poor, the haves or have-nots. As part of the state policy, the rulers are expected to alleviate poverty by making planned gifts of money to put people on their feet and enable them to make a start in life on their own. This could be implemented in the war affected areas. This *sutta* concludes the following ethical aspects of the ruler.

- ❖ He rules without resorting to violence and without weapons of war but becoming victorious solely based on the teachings of the *Dhamma*.
- ❖ Affirmation of safety of lives human beings and other beings.
- ❖ Assertion of economics stability

- ❖ Getting advices from the wises and intellectuals.
- ❖ He is ready to give up his power in proper time.

What is Prof. *K. N. Jayatilleke* says in this regard is extremely important. For him while any form of government would be good to the extent to which it follows the principles of the Buddhist political *Dhamma*.

In *the Mahāparinibbānasutta*, the Buddha speaks highly of the *Vajjian* state which followed on a body of elders not in a single individual. He points out to seven principles they firmly upheld resulting in establishing the strength and stability of the state. These principles were the most democratic procedure they adopted in making vital decisions relating to state policy and administrative matters.

1. They have congregated frequently.
2. Having frequently congregated in unison adequately discussed matters relating to state administration arriving at decisions on a consensual basis.
3. Respecting to the cultural value systems and their own tradition.
4. Respecting the elders and listening their words.
5. Giving protection for womenfolk including married and unmarried.
6. Treating the temples inside and outside and maintenance them.
7. Giving enough facilities for the religious leaders and respecting them.

On the other hand, the *Adhammikasutta* of the *Anguttaranikāya* discusses the corrupt governance brings bad consequences not only on the entire social institution but also on natural process. If the king is ethical, the whole country rests happily. Buddhism suggests that the corrupted governance brings bad consequences not for the entire social institution but for natural process. The good kings avoid the four prejudices of action that involved the violation of the principles of equity and justice in the activity of governance leading to serious violation of the rights of the citizens. The four courses of action described in the Buddhist tradition came to be known as *agati-gamana*.

1. Involved acting from partiality or bias (*Chanda*)
2. Acting from hatred or some form of prejudice (*dosa*)
3. Acting from a fear of personal disadvantage for performing the just and right action (*bhaya*)

4. Acting from ignorance about the real facts relating to the relevant situation
(*moha*)

Buddhism introduces Four Grounds of Benevolence (*sangahavattu*) and Ten Principles of Good Governance (*dasarājadhamma*) further with regard to good governance.

1. Generosity
2. Loving speech
3. Benevolent behaviour
4. Equitable treatment

Persons engage in performing the function of performance promote reconciliation if they too adhere to those principles in the performance of their functions. The following ten grounds are also very important in this context.

1. Charity or generosity
2. Ethical conduct in one's personal life and public life
3. Sacrifice of one's valued possessions for the well-being of others
4. Uprightness involving refraining from deception, making of false promises, forms of pretension, and upholding transparency in one's conduct of political affairs
5. Softness or tenderness involving sympathetic concern for others, being approachable and abstaining from rough and cruel behaviour
6. Austerity in the sense of striving and committing oneself energetically for the well-being of others giving up the urge for undue luxuries for oneself
7. Being free from revengeful behaviour not harboring grudges against anyone
8. Non-injury not causing physical or mental hurt to others abusing one's power and authority
9. Forbearance which really is a virtue in a person who holds a position of strength because a person in a weak position cannot possibly do anything else than being patient.
10. Non-confrontation which involves the political virtue of having a reconciliatory attitude in situations of conflict.

All religions assert survival, moral judgments and responsibility of the world. They all preach a good life that is characterized as common. But many religions could not think beyond certain cultural and social contexts. Religious intolerance carried in the name of religion is completely denial in Buddhism. Buddhism respects the other faiths. In the reconciliation, religious tolerance is also another key factor. If anybody is religiously misguided, the things could be more dangerous. Therefore, religious accuracy should be realized carefully. The spirit of tolerance should be applied for today's Sri Lanka. When we move towards the Buddhist attitudes on religious tolerance, the words of *Bhikkhu Bodhi*, are extremely important. It reads as follows:

For Buddhism, religious tolerance is not achieved by reducing all religious to a common denominator, not by explaining away formidable differences in thought and practice as accidents of historical development. From the Buddhist point of view, to make tolerance contingent upon white washing discrepancies would not be genuine tolerance at all; for such an approach can tolerate differences only by diluting them so completely that they no longer make a difference. True tolerance in religion involves the capacity to admit differences as real and fundamental, even as profound and unbridgeable, yet at the same time to respect the rights of those who follow a religion different from one's own (or no religion at all to continue to do so without resentment, disadvantage or hindrance.¹¹

Buddhist tolerance springs from the recognition that the dispositive and spiritual needs of human beings are too vastly diverse to be encompassed by any single teaching, and thus that these needs will naturally find expression in a wide variety of religious forms....¹²

The Buddhist king Asoka of 3rd century B. C. E. in India provides us with the ideal example of a ruler who tried to implement the Buddhist principles of good governance in his empire. The two edicts issued by the great king *Asoka* shed much light on how harmony and concord between different religions can be well set up. *Asoka's* Edict XII sounds the Buddha's own position regarding religious tolerance and harmony. One of the most remarkable examples of Asoka's tolerance of all religious faiths and his promotion of the essentials of the moral teachings can be found in his Rock Edict XII. It reads below:

¹¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi., 1993. *Tolerance and Diversity*, News Letter, BPS, p. 2

¹² *Ibid*, p. 2

King Priyadarsin, beloved of the gods, honours men of all sect, ascetics and householders and honours with gift and manifold honour. But the beloved of the gods does not think so much of gift and honour as what? As that there should be a growth of the essential among all sects. The growth of essentials, however, is of various kinds. But the root of it is restraint of speech, how? Namely, there should not be honour to one's own sect or condemnation of another's sect without any occasion. Or it may be a little on this and that occasion. On the contrary, others' sects should be honoured on this and that occasion. By so doing one promotes one's own sect, and benefits another's sect. By doing otherwise one injures one's own sect and also harms another's sect. For one who honours one's own sect and condemns another's' sect, all through attachment to one's own sect, -why?- in order that one may illuminate one's own sect in reality by so doing injures, more assuredly, one's own sect. Concourse is therefore commendable, -why?- in order that they may hear (further) one another's *dhamma*. For this is the desire of the Beloved of the gods-What? That all sects shall be well-informed and conducive of good.

He states his ambition in his *Kalinga* Rock Edict II.

All men are my offspring. Just as for my offspring I desire that they may be united with all welfare and happiness of this world and of the next, precisely do I desire it for all men.

Except the above Buddhist doctrinal applications, the following suggestions are crucial to implement in a successful way. The Sinhala Buddhists are the majority of the country. The religious leadership especially for Buddhist monks can initiate this process because they are represented the highest rank of the country. They are respected by every religious and ethnic group. But the Sri Lankan Buddhist community has not enough Tamil speakers to bring this message. Language, therefore, has become main barrier in order to bring this message to people. Teaching Tamil language to young Buddhist monks is a timely need. On the other hand, no any educational institution would be built based on religion and race. The government should take this into consideration. Introducing the causes for all schools such as representing the whole religious and cultural teachings must be implemented. Comparative religions should be taught at the school premises not one's own religion. Then, younger generation of the country would understand the Buddhist heritage as the heritage of the entire nation. Then, it becomes the Sri Lankan heritage. Education is the key factor to fostering global-minded individuals.

Political mediation would be destroyed the entire process. The Buddhist meditation is another practical application for this process. It can be taught for those who are mentally disappointed. The Buddhist reconciliation process contains the following key aspects.

- ❖ Non-violence
- ❖ Respect for Diversity
- ❖ Dialogue
- ❖ Listening
- ❖ Education for All
- ❖ Democracy
- ❖ Free flow of Information
- ❖ Conflict Transformation
- ❖ Equality of men and Women
- ❖ Dignity of Life
- ❖ Peace and Human Security
- ❖ Love of Earth

CONCLUSION

Thus, according to the Buddhist principles all people of the country, irrespective of their religion, language, caste or race, have equal rights and deserve equal opportunities for development as members of a single social order which embrace a common humanity. In these long discourses, the Buddhist principles proclaim the equality of man as a member of human society. Buddhism rejects human barriers of classes, caste, race, tribe and discrimination of man and woman. This philosophy accepts on the biological differentiation of masculine and feminine diversity. Therefore, the Buddhist applications can be utilized to change a culture of violence into a culture of peace. Buddhism always deals with the notion of good or wholesome.

A basic tenet of a healthy democracy is open dialogue and transparency

Peter Fenn

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