

## RELIGION AS A RECONCILE TOOL IN POST WAR SOCIETIES (COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN TWO BUDDHIST CONTEXTS)

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### **Introduction**

Buddhism is a religion well known for its teachings about nonviolence and empathy. Hence, Buddhism can be well utilized in the post war peace building since the *Theravada* Buddhism provides a strong foundation for peaceful coexistence. Both Sri Lanka and Cambodia belongs to a well rooted Buddhists tradition. Cambodia provides a promising initiative for using religion as a tool of post conflict peace building. Post war Sri Lanka is facing the huge challenge of bridging the gaps among the ethnicities since a divided society can only build its shared future out of its divided past by having a well guided reconciliation process. The contribution of Buddhism for the post conflict reconciliation attempts in Sri Lanka yet to be examined.

### **Methodology**

This research was mainly based on the literature of religion and reconciliation. Books, journals and research papers were utilized for obtaining the data from both the Cambodian and Sri Lankan contexts.

### **Findings**

#### **Using Buddhism as a Way of Reconciliation**

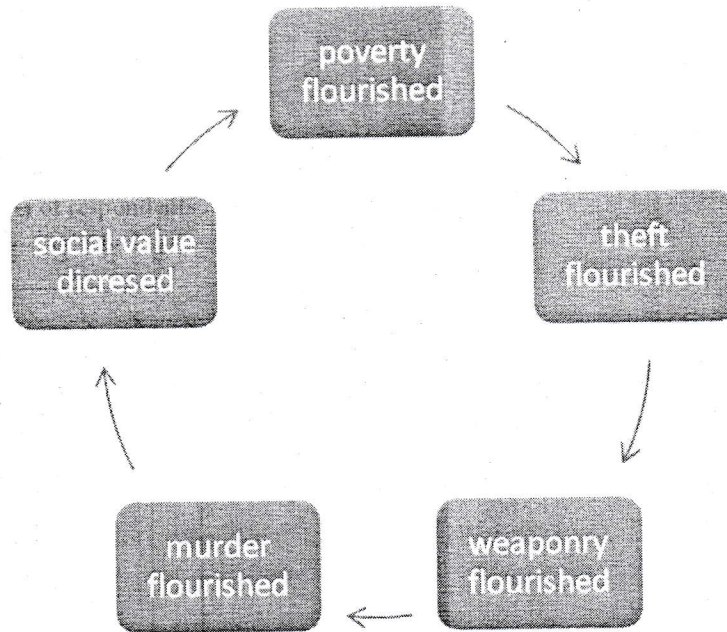
When analyzing the potentiality of using Buddhism as a mechanism of post war peace building I would like to bring three main points. Firstly Buddhism shows the potential of breaking down the vicious circle of violence. Secondly Buddhism promotes forgiveness which can be an essential feature of reconciliation. Thirdly by rejecting the structural violence Buddhism provides space for the restorative justice in the post conflict societies.

Buddhist explanation on violence is very much in line with the Galtung's definition of violence. He identifies two types of violence as visible and invisible violence. Structural violence can also occur in a society if institutions and policies are designed in such a way that barriers result in lack of adequate food, housing, health, safe and just working conditions, education, economic security, clothing, and family relationships. (Galtung, 2005:14).

Buddhist analysis also shows the relationship between structural

violence and direct violence. One of Buddhist dialogues 'Cakkavattisihanada Sutta' well analyzes the linkage between the poverty and the violence. If the income is not distributed reasonably among all the communities, the potential for crimes increase among the poor and as a result, communities encounter various forms of violence. In other words poverty can be a one of main root causes of the conflict. (Collins 1998: 606). In such a context,

traditional ruling structures led by kings use counter violence for suppressing these violent uprising. This will lead to a never ending circle of violence. There is a causal chain between these two phenomenon. When poverty increaseas, theft increases; because theft increases, weaponry is flourished; because weaponry flourishes, murder increases; because murder increases, social value is decreased (Palihawadana,2006).



**Figure 1 :** Relationship between the poverty and the violence in 'Cakkavattisihanada Sutta'  
**Source:** Developed by Author

Then Gultung's suggestions on the transformation of this violent context are in line with the Buddhist suggestions. When healing the wounds created by the war atrocities it needs to

develop empathy among the communities. Buddha suggests that this violent context can be transformed through self reflection. 'Let me kill no-one, let no-one kill me'. . . 'It is

because we have undertaken Bad Deeds that we have for so long been murdering our (own) relatives. Why don't we start doing good? . . . Why don't we abstain from killing?' (*Collins 1998:606-11*). This is the beginning point of transcending the vicious circle of violence.

### **Cambodian Experience of Reconciliation**

*Dhammayietra* (Pilgrimage of Truth) got birth in 1992 under spiritual leadership and the guidance of Rev. Maha Goshananda. *Dhammayietra* movement has aimed at teaching and exemplifying active nonviolence as a way to peace and reconciliation. The first saw hundreds of refugees who had been living in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border return to their homeland as they marched for four weeks from Battambang in the north-west to Phnom Penh in 1992.

*Dhammayietra* program was not being restricted only to the Walks in the conflict zones. Thus it associated with lot of planning and preparation. Maha Ghosanandan utilized a Buddhist concept called *khanti* (forbearance) in these trainings. This concept has been associated with prevention of conflict or violence (*Ahingsa*).

### **Comparison between Sri Lankan and Cambodian Experiences**

With the comparison with Sri Lanka it is a clear fact that Buddhism in Cambodia has played a more useful role in the reconciliation process. Further this peace attempt grabs the international attention (*Poethig, 2002*). But in Sri Lanka internationalization was really lacking since the western peace building concepts were not being

welcomed by the Sinhala nationalism. In contrast to this, Cambodian Buddhist leaders were keen to provide conflict resolution skills and training opportunities for their follower (*Morris, 2000*).

Accommodative nature of the Cambodian Buddhism was another great strength in the peace attempt led by Buddhists leaders. They worked cooperatively with number of NGOs such and other religions. (*Morris, 2000*). In spite of the few of attempts made by organizations such as Congress of Religions, non-accommodative nature of the Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been a huge barrier for having a proper reconciliation process.

For some critiques non accommodative nature of Buddhism caused as a result of Buddhist monastic tradition which has not provided any room for development of a civil society characterizing such virtues as pluralism, universalism (*Seneviratne, 1999*). However with the arrival of UN peace approaches in Cambodia, many Buddhist monks have enthusiastically learned and taught about human rights. But in Sri Lanka reaction for the Western human rights concepts was negative. Buddhist nuns and Buddhist women also had a positive role in the post war reconciliation attempts in Cambodia (*Adams, 2011*). But in Sri Lanka this was almost absent due to the fact that there is not an influential role from the Buddhist women here.

### **Conclusion**

The paper reveals the fact that Theravada Buddhism has a negative view towards violence. Buddhist message can transform violent contexts

into more creative positive actions that are suitable for creating positive peace. The paper suggests that Buddhism can be well utilized for building the war torn society in Sri Lanka. Therefore Buddhist monks and Buddhist activities should play a key role in sustaining the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka as we experienced in Cambodia. In this task greater attention should be paid to broadening the training of Buddhist monks regarding conflict transformation and peace building. Further since there is an insistent need of Buddhism to go beyond the ethnic boundaries, interreligious linkages should be further strengthen. Finally, Buddhist scholars also have an ethical as well as an academic responsibility to interpret the clear meaning of the Buddhist message which promotes the genuine peace in the society.

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