

The Buddhist Principles for Effective Religious Conflict Resolution: An Analytical Study Based on Early Buddhist Texts

Tri Saputra Medhācitto¹, Rev. Divulapelesse Wimalananda²

Introduction

Conflicts remain as classical problems faced by people in society. Conflict can occur in physical or verbal form, and can arise due to many reasons. Among various types of conflict, religious conflicts have been common throughout history. Religious conflicts can occur because of the attachment towards a certain system of belief, the lack of understanding, intolerance, discrimination, and soon. In many cases, religious conflicts became stronger because of political dynamics, economic inequalities, and manipulation of religious identities by political elites for political purposes. Currently, many countries are experiencing this kind of situation. Religious conflicts have caused many people to lose their peaceful lives, led to social disharmony and caused social and economic problems. The conflicts can cause a war among the people of the countries. Conflicts are inevitable as long as the causes of conflicts are not eliminated. Therefore, conflicts must be resolved by eliminating their causes. The Buddha's discourses contain many evidences how the Buddha's attitude towards conflicts and how the conflicts are to be eliminated. By analysing the Buddha's teaching, this research aims to present the Buddhist principles for effective religious conflict resolution based on early Buddhist texts.

Methodology

This research adopts qualitative research methodology with library approach. This research is carried out by collecting data from primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to early Buddhist texts such as Pali Canon, commentaries and sub-commentaries. Secondary sources refer to academic articles, journals and book written by contemporary scholars. With this method, this research critically examines the Buddhist principles that can be adopted for religious conflict resolution in effective way according to Buddha's teaching.

1. Lecturer of STAB Syailendra, Semarang, Indonesia. Email: trisaputramedhacitto@syailendra.ac.id

2. Senior Lecturer of Department of Buddhist and Pali Studies, Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, Email: di.wimal@gmail.com

Findings and Discussion

In the Pali Canon, the terms referring to conflicts are *kalaha* (quarrel), *viggaha* (dispute), *vivāda* (contention), *jaṭa* (entangle), *raṇa* (battle) and *vāda* (argument). These kinds of conflicts lead to a mass of suffering. It is stated that in quarrels, brawls, & disputes, people attack one another with fists or clods or with sticks or knives so that they incur death or deadly pain (M. I. 186). The Buddha always encourages his disciples to avoid conflict and live in harmony. Loving-kindness is the foundation of living harmony (A. III. 288). The Buddha says that hatred should be overcome by non-hatred (Dhp. 5); anger should be overcome by non-anger; and evil should be overcome by non-evil (Dhp. 223). There is no place in the Buddha's teaching that hatred is allowable. Even the Buddha clearly states in the *Kakacūpama Sutta* that if the bandits were savagely severed, limb by limb, with a double-handled saw, whoever generates hatred or ill will at heart, is not practising the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha emphasizes generating loving kindness to everyone in whatever situation (M. I. 129). The Buddha himself is praised for his lovingkindness and compassion. He is described as a reconciler of those who are in conflict and an encourager of those who are already united, rejoicing in peace, loving peace, delighting in peace, he speaks in praise of peace. Abandoning killing, the sage Gotama lives refraining from killing, he is without a stick or sword, and he lives with care, compassion, and sympathy for others (D. I. 3).

From the Buddhist perspective, conflict can be categorized into two kinds, namely physical and psychological conflicts. Physical conflicts are the visible conflicts between two or more person in society, while psychological conflicts are the conflicts within one's own mind caused by defilements. The Buddha understood that psychological conflicts are serious problems since they are also the cause of physical conflicts. It is understood that defilements within oneself cause physical and psychological conflicts to emerge.

According to *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta*, because of sensual pleasures, conflicts emerge among the people at different level such as among kings (*rājānopi rājūhi vivādentī*), religious groups (*brāhmaṇāpi brāhmaṇehi vivadanti*), among villagers (*gapahatīpi gahapatīhi vivadanti*) and within the same family (*mātāpi puttana vivadati*) (M. I. 186). In search of sensual pleasure, one may harm another. Even, before the conflict emerges in society, craving for sensual pleasure has caused psychological conflict within oneself. Therefore, in this case, the Buddha understood that by eliminating the craving for sensual pleasure, one who is endowed with a controlled sense, will not tend to conflict, quarrel, or any other harmful action.

Sakkapañha Sutta reports the discussion between the Buddha and the god Sakka. The discussion begins with the question raised by god Sakka on why the people although wish to live free from hostility, violence, rivalry and ill will, nevertheless they live in hostility, violence, rivalry and ill will. The Buddha explains that because fettered by envy and stinginess (*issāmacchariyasamyojanā*), devas, human beings, asuras, nagas, gandhabbas, or whatever other many kinds of beings emerge in conflicts, live in hostility, violence, rivalry and ill will (D. II. 276). The Buddha sees that envy (*issā*) and stinginess (*macchariya*) lead to the arising of conflicts. One who is oppressed by envy feels displeased with other's gain and prosperity. He feels distressed and gets annoyed when he sees or hears other's gain. This leads one to take any action to harm others to destroy other's prosperity. One who is oppressed by stinginess is loath to share his gain or fortune with someone else. Conflicts in society could emerge because of these persons who are fettered by envy and stinginess. Therefore, these fetters should be eliminated to minimize the conflicts.

Disharmony among people could arise because of the lack of understanding of each other. The Buddha explains in Kosambiya Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya some principles to avoid conflicts and to live in harmony in society. The principles lead to harmony (*sāraṇīyo*), like each other (*piyakaraṇo*), mutual respect (*garukaraṇo*), togetherness (*saṅgahāya*), without disagreements (*avivādāya*), unity (*sāmaggiyā*), and together (*ekibhāvāya*). To create this harmonious life, people have to engage in friendly physical action, friendly talk, and friendly mentality to each other (M. I. 322).

Besides the internal factors for the arising conflicts, the Buddha also understood that there are some external factors that lead to the arising conflicts. In the Aggañña sutta, it is stated that the problem of poverty and bad governance could lead to the emergence of social conflicts (D. II. 1). The bad social, economic and political conditions could cause the people to conflict. In this case, Buddhism encourages the principles that bring the development of economic, good governance, and stability of the country.

Conclusion

Conflicts are inevitable in this world as long as the root of conflicts is not eliminated. The Buddha understands that most conflicts are rooted in unwholesome mental or defilements which lead the people to act in harmful ways. People emerge in conflicts and attacking each other because of their psychological problems. Therefore, the Buddha's teaching on how to eliminate the defilements is applicable to minimize conflicts. When people are not oppressed by sensual desire, wrong views, envy and stinginess, they can live in harmony in society

without conflicts. Friendly talks, actions and mental are also considered as a good foundation to live in harmony in society.

Keywords: Buddhist Principles, Conflict, Early Buddhist Texts, Resolution

References

Bodhi Bhikkhu. (2012). *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publication.

Buddharakkhita, Ācarya. (2007). *The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.

Medhacitto, T. S. (2019). *Solusi dari Beberapa Masalah Sosial dalam Kajian Sosiologi Buddhis*. Semarang: CV. Bintang Kreasi.

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Bodhi. (2009). *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publication.

Walshe, Maurice. (2012). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. Boston: Wisdom Publication.