

A Study of the Social Cohesion and Cultural Diversity in Sri Lanka

ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව හා සංස්කෘතික බහුවිධතාව පිළිබඳ
අධ්‍යයනයක්

Ven. Kudawawe Somananda

සාරසංකේෂය

නූතන ලෝකය තුළ බෙහෙවින් අවධානයට ලක්කෙරෙන විෂයකෂේත්‍රයක් වශයෙන් බහුසංස්කෘතිකවාදය පෙන්වා දිය හැකිය. මෙම විෂයකෂේත්‍රය පිළිබඳව විවිධ උගතුන්, දාර්ශනිකයෝ හා චින්තකයෝ අවධානය යොමු කර ඇත. මානවයාගේ ආරම්භයේ සිට මිනිසා විවිධ ප්‍රදේශයෙන් ප්‍රදේශයට, රටින් රටට සංක්‍රමණය වීම දැකිය හැකිය. එම සංක්‍රමණයන්ගේ ප්‍රතිඵලයක් වශයෙන් විවිධ ජනවර්ග, විවිධ ආගමිකයන් ආදිය සමග සබඳතා පැවැත්වීම මත බහු සංස්කෘතික සමාජ ඉස්මතු විය. ඒ අනුව වර්තමාන ලෝකයේ බහුවාර්ගික, බහුජාතික, බහු භාෂා හා බහු ආගමික ලෙස බෙදී ගිය ජනතාවක් එකට වාසය කරනු ලැබේ. ශ්‍රී ලංකාව ද බහුසංස්කෘතික රටකි. මෙම පර්යේෂණයෙන් ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව හා සංස්කෘතික බහුවිධතාව පිළිබඳ අධ්‍යයනය කෙරේ.

යතුරු පද: ශ්‍රී ලංකාව, සමාජ ඒකාබද්ධතාව, සංස්කෘතික බහුවිධතාව, බහුවාර්ගික හා බහු ආගමික

Introduction

As a small state with a pluralistic nation, Sri Lanka has been historically cherished. Sri Lanka is not only blessed with natural beauty resources but also enriched by its ethno-cultural pluralism. There are historical records of ethnic relations and harmony in Sri Lanka. It is a diverse country, and home to many religions, ethnicities, and languages.

Review of Literature

This research is about a study of the social cohesion and cultural diversity in Sri Lanka. Several previous studies have explored significant areas of social cohesion and cultural diversity in Sri Lanka. Some of these studies discuss multiculturalism and recent trends in Sri Lanka.

Jensen defines social cohesion as all members of a social system respecting common rules respecting each other and tolerating differences (Jensen, 1998). Also, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001) defines social cohesion as the process by which different groups overcome their differences to achieve common goals. Moreover, we should prepare and commit ourselves to creating equal opportunities for all the members living in the society. Also, Ritzen explains that the integration of society is to establish equality in the social system by supporting it with cooperation (Ritzen, 2001). Accordingly, social cohesion means that all members living in a social system respect common rules and tolerate differences. It can also be defined as working with mutual respect.

Research Problem

Accordingly, this research is concerned with studying the relationships between the teachings of Buddhism and international human rights. Accordingly, the following issue is taken into consideration in this research.

1. Is there a significant example of social cohesion and cultural diversity in Sri Lanka?

Aims/Objectives of the Research

The main objectives of this research are to explore the

relationships among multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups in Sri Lanka. Other objectives include examining social cohesion and ethnic harmony.

Research Methodology

This research is based on secondary data collected from literature books, chronicles, declarations, articles, and, seminar proceedings. An analytical method was used to analyze and review data.

Discussion

Social and Cultural Factors

Contemporary society is extremely complex. This complexity is influenced by economic, social, political, and cultural factors. In addition, geographical factors as well as reasons such as immigration and invasions have also affected. Therefore, today's society has different ethnic groups, different languages, different religions, and customs. Sociologists refer to such diverse social systems as multicultural societies. To preserve their identity, the various groups living in multidisciplinary societies maintain their specific customs, languages, religions, faiths, thoughts, traditions, and habits. Because of this, even in one country, its culture can be multifaceted. A society with such cultures is called a multicultural society.

The characteristics of a multicultural society have been well picked up differently. The ability to build an atmosphere necessary to live peacefully with mutual support in such a society. Various sociologists and philosophers have come up with definitions to explain culture. It is clear from their statements that all our activities and thoughts belong to a culture. All of us are shaped according to the lifestyle accepted in society. As individuals, from birth to death, we behave according to a culture

that we have inherited from each other. All the forces found in society belong to a culture. Below are some of them. Religion, language, knowledge, clothes, food, arts, rules, beliefs, customs, ethics, education, politics living areas, etc.

Accordingly, the culture of every society plays an important role in the survival of that society. Culture is changing and developing in society over time. Culture also varies according to the society in which a person lives. Due to this, different societies have their cultural characteristics.

1. People of different races, different religious beliefs, and speaking different languages living together.
2. The existence of customs, ethics, and evaluation systems peculiar to each culture which has arisen due to the above diversity.
3. Local diversity can be seen even in one population.
4. At present, the countries of the world as nations go beyond their borders and mix with different nations to build multicultural societies.
5. Due to globalization, the development of communication technology, and the development of tourism, the world has become one global village and cultural fusion is happening very fast.

People who speak different languages, follow different religions, and follow different customs live together in a multicultural society. Multicultural societies can be identified in many countries of today's world. Sri Lanka is a perfect example of an uncomplicated multicultural society.

Respect for political, social, economic, and cultural identity is essential for good governance, social justice, and the

protection of the rights of all. It can be pointed out that it is very important to pay attention to the following points.

- Respect each other's political identity
- Belief in a preferred religion
- Following customs
- Conducting various events
- Settling in a preferred area
- Learning and using different languages
- Travel Freely
- Respect for other cultures

Respecting political, social, economic, and cultural identity in all the above matters is necessary for the well-being of a multicultural society. By implementing good governance in a multicultural society, the following facts can be achieved.

- Trust is established between races and different people groups
- Understanding between each other expands
- The participation of all races and people groups in governance activities is growing
- Learn to respect each other
- Works in harmony regardless of religious and cultural diversity

It is easy to achieve success by working harmoniously in a multicultural society. Peace and security should be equal for all the people of the country. For all to live happily together, and to build a united and strong country, all must act as one.

The human world is always complex due to its diversity. Compared with the past, many parts of the world have now become unsuitable places for a peaceful life as it is always in turmoil. People around the world are different in their nationality, religion, culture, language, and beliefs. But the point is to realize whether diversity can cause conflicts among people. Diversity alone does not create conflicts but extremism can misguide people towards there.

Country Context in Sri Lanka and General Remarks in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's diverse social fabric is made of different ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups. Out of a total population of 20.3 million, the broad social structure of Sri Lanka is made up of various ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic groups. Out of a total population of 20.3 million, 70.2% is Buddhist, 12.6% Hindu, 9.7% Muslim, and 7.4% Roman Catholic and other Christian (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). Sri Lankan society consists of four major religions in the world. Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic country and its ethnic composition is as follows.

The Sinhalese are the main ethnic group of Sri Lanka, constituting 74.9% of the population. They speak Sinhala an Indo-Aryan language. The Tamils are the second major ethnic group in Sri Lanka, constituting 15.37% of the population including Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils. The Muslims in Sri Lanka constitute 9.7% of the country's population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). They belong to three different ethnic-social backgrounds: the Sri Lankan Moors, the Indian Moors, and the Malays. The others include the Memons and the Bohras (Imtiyaz & Saleem, 2015, PP. 187-189; Razick, Long & Salleh, 2015, P. 65).

Like every society, Sri Lankan society is based on different layers such as class, status, caste, region, and gender. Although Sri Lanka is mainly a Buddhist country, the society is complex. Throughout history, religion can be described as one of its pluralistic social characteristics. Sri Lankan society is multi-religious with Hindu and Muslim minority religious groups and a Buddhist majority. Christianity was also introduced to Sri Lanka with the arrival of Western colonialists (Yusoff & Sarjoon, 2019, P. 213; FORB, 2021, P.6). This is evidenced by the plurality based on ethnic and religious identities in Sri Lanka's demography today.

Religion as a common individual factor can be seen to exist with diversity in the context of Sri Lankan multi-religious society. In Sri Lanka, it can be seen the Sinhala Buddhist community is based on Buddhism, the Tamil community is based on Hinduism and the Muslim community is based on Islam. Christianity spread as a separate religion from Buddhist Hinduism through a fusion of Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups. In this way, the religious face of the Sri Lankan social context with religious diversity can be identified. Thus, the religious facet of the Sri Lankan social context represents a multi-religious background. Based on (the) religious teachings and philosophies contained in religions, it is possible to identify how one religion differs from another. In that way, there is a tendency to have religious conflicts in practice when several different religions are established in one society and believe separately.

In a multi-religious social context, the way of thinking called co-existence or religious harmony is a very important factor in practical terms. It is in such a background that multi-religious beliefs and faiths are likely to be established in Sri Lanka with religious autonomy (freedom). For that, religious tolerance in the Buddhist religious society has been key. In

such a background, other religions should also respect religious pluralism. Also, they are expected religious harmony by maintaining their religious activities in a way that does not affect the religious rights of others.

In studying the religious background of the current Sri Lankan society, there is a modern trend of religious conflicts. It is very important to have a religious society with multiple religious customs and beliefs. It is an important factor to protect the harmony and clarity of the social background of a religiously diverse society in a country. There are states where practicing only one religion is legally restricted from practicing and believing in other religions. For example, it is clear when studying the religious background of Arab Muslim Islamic states. It is possible to see the emergence of severe terrorist organizations with a religious face in those societies. Because the problem of non-existence and non-acceptance of a pluralistic religious environment is widespread. It is important to focus on countries such as Malaysia and Singapore with room for a multi-religious environment. Apart from the existing religious traditions of those countries, a free background has been set for modern religious trends that are conducive to social progress. The implementation of religious extremism by religion is a problem that has affected the world and Sri Lankan society in general. A person has a moral right to live in the religion he believes in as a human right of the individual. The person who enjoys that right should put his devotion first and practice his religion. Likewise, others are also devoted to the religion of each person and they should be given room to protect their religious rights. Not only that, to protect those rights, they should have the opportunity to maintain the activities related to their religion.

National Festival and Multicultural Society

Sri Lanka has a history as long as many ancient civilizations, positioned at the crossroads of the East and the West, and being a multicultural society, celebrates a wide variety of festivals, ceremonies, and events. Every year on or about April 13 Sinhalese and Tamil people celebrate the Sinhalese and Tamil New Year Festival, Muslims celebrate Mawlid, fast during the Islamic month of Ramadan, and celebrate at the end of the month with the festival which is (Eid al-Fitr) and (Eid al-Adha) is celebrated on the final month of the Islamic calendar known as Dhu al-Hijjah. Christians celebrate Easter and Christmas. Esala Perahera is a grand festival in the month of Esala held in Sri Lanka. Happening in July or August in Kandy, it has become a unique symbol of Sri Lanka. It is a Buddhist festival consisting of dances and richly decorated elephants. There are fire dances, whip dances, Kandyan dances, and various other cultural dances. The elephants are usually adorned with lavish garments. The festival ends with the traditional 'diya-kepeema'. The elephant is paraded around the city carrying a casket venerated by Buddhists as bearing the Relic of the tooth of the Buddha.

Nallur Kandaswamy Kovil is a significant Hindu temple, located in Nallur, Northern Province, Sri Lanka. The presiding deity is Lord Murugan in the form of the holy 'Vel' in the Sanctum, the primary shrine, and in other forms, namely, Shanmugar, Muthukumaraswami, Valli Kaanthar with consorts Valli and Deivayanai, and Thandayuthapani, sans consorts in secondary shrines in the temple.

The Shrine of Our Lady of Madhu is a Roman Catholic Marian shrine in the Mannar district of Sri Lanka. With a history of over 400 years, this shrine acts as a center for pilgrimage and worship for Sri Lankan Catholics. The church has been a symbol

of unity not just between Tamils and Sinhalese, but also between people of different religions, including Buddhists, Hindus, and Protestants.

There are innovative multi-religious places and spaces. To clarify, multi-religious places are physical localities such as the sacred landscapes of Sri Pada, Kataragama, and Madu Church, all of which are popular multi-religious pilgrimage sites in Sri Lanka. But such places are, for the most part, occasional and seasonal multi-religious or inter-religious places. It is during their respective festival seasons that one finds them teeming with devotees of various ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities. However, it is not limit our interest to the multi-religious discourses found within these popular multi-religious places and wished as well to pay attention to the smaller-scale, inter-religious or multi-religious engagements and interactions found in places of less international renown such as Mayurapathy Sri Bathirakali Amman temple, Sri Manika Pillaiyar Kovil, Sri Venkateshwara Maha Vishnu Moorthy Kovil, and St. Anthony's Church, Kochchikade, located in urban Colombo. We know that many other multi-religious places and spaces beyond the famous ones mentioned above existed in Sri Lanka before the war; they were not new post-war phenomena. However, innovations happen in various ways. Meta-narratives of multi-religious places such as Sri Pada, Kataragama, and Madu Church produce religious spaces shaped by multiple discourses, histories, ideologies, and cultural interpretations. For instance, each of those multi-religious places has different linguistic and ethnic histories and identity formations that oppose or interface with each other.

Historical Background and Social Cohesion

There were historical records of ethnic relations and ethnic harmony in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, it can be seen how the Sinhalese, Dravidian, and Muslim communities lived peacefully in Sri Lanka politically, socially, economically, and culturally. Information is found in history about the civilized traditions that they maintained without causing conflicts between each other's cultures. As Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-cultural country, the policies of coexistence adopted in the past are important for today's society. Because To learn lessons from history for a need to create national reconciliation in the post-war period after a thirty-year ethnic war (Appendix 01). For instance, a book was written by a well-known scholar in Sri Lanka, Lona Dewaraja in 1994, and entitled 'The Muslims of Sri Lanka - One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony 900-1915'(Dewaraja, 1994). This is fieldwork and extensive research. This research points out the cordial relationship between the Sinhalese-majority community and the Muslim minority in the past (Razick, Long & Salleh, 2015, P. 65).

It is found in the critical reading of chronicles as well as in the broader understanding of the Sinhala Buddhist concept that, Tamils have appeared in various forms in the history of Sri Lanka. To properly identify the relationship between the Sinhalese who have now become common Sri Lankans and the Tamil people of South Indian descent, it needs to be reviewed with a broader vision. It can accurately recreate the relationship between Sinhalese and Tamils before the colonial period.

It is possible that the majority of Sinhala Buddhists had anti-Tamil sentiments towards Tamils during the South Indian period of invasion. However, many peaceful migrants are absorbed into the basic Buddhist plan. Buddhism was

officially introduced to Sri Lanka during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa (250-210 AD,) in the third century BC. The phrases stated in several ancient Brahmin inscriptions such as “demeda gahapathi”, “demeda upasaka”. “demeda samana” and “demeda vanija” clearly mention that there were some Tamil immigrants among those who accepted Buddhism.

Furthermore, in history sometimes the Tamils were friends of Sinhalese. During the conflicts in their country, some kings sought the help of Tamil friends. Others married Tamil queens and established friendships. There was not a single image in these friendly businesses either. These marriages between kings and the common people not only became a historical reality but also provided a recognition of inter-ethnic marriages. Even Tamils were allowed to be kings of the island after the process of Sinhalaization and assimilation into Buddhism. Some of the greatest Sinhalese kings were of non-Tamil origin but of South Indian origin. For example, Nissankamalla (1187-119), VI Buwanekabahu (1469-1477), and Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe (1741-1780) can be mentioned. Sapumal Kumara or VI Bhuvanekabahu was a Great War hero of the Sinhalese and he conquered the Tamil kingdom of Jaffna. By the ninth century AD, the official function of the post known as the Tamil Superintendent of the Royal Council of Ceylon may have been to look after the welfare of the Tamil people. According to inscriptions, the protection of the Temple of the Tooth, the greatest Buddhist relic and symbol of the state heritage, was kept under an army called Velakkara brought from Kerala, South India. The Nikaya Sangraha states that the army of Nissanka Alagakkonara consisted of Sinhala as well as Tamil soldiers not only in ancient times but also in the Middle Ages. Some monks have fled to southern Indian states for protection during certain South Indian Tamil invasions. According to the Upasakajanalankara, there is a person named Cholaganga who sponsored to building of temples for the monks

who left Sri Lanka for Pandya and provided them with all the comfort and pleasure they needed. When looking at the objects and sculptures of almost all the kingdoms that came to power in this country including Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, the South Indian features, especially the Pallava, Chola, and Amaravathi traditions are shown. The service rendered to Buddhism by the South Indian Tamils was immense. Well-known Pali commentators such as Buddhaddatta and Dhammapala were South Indians.

For a considerable period of the long history of Sri Lanka, the diversity of the country has been a small feature that draws attention. This shows that the diversity of this civilization was given a special place (Gunawardana 1990; Paranvitana 1956). Recognition for diversity can also be seen in the field of language. Multilingualism and its proficiency helped the monks and nuns who set out to spread Buddhism in other nations. Classical literature from around the thirteenth century shows that proficiency in six languages was considered ideal. The “supremacy of six languages” has been an ideal for centuries (Gunawardana 1979; 1990). What these six languages are is not always the same, however, Sinhala, Pali, Sanskrit, and Tamil are always on the list. There were Tamil monks in the Vijayaba Pirivena of Sri Rahula Thero of Thotagamuwa in the 15th century and there was also a study of Tamil language literature. Although there has been a tradition of treating various forms of admiration for a long time in the past, there is a tendency to oppose it in the post-colonial period.

Analyzing the historical facts and examining the history built under racist and racist readings can provide a clear picture of the nature of ethnic coexistence in the past instead of the present racial and religious conflicts. Cultural diversity demonstrates to what extent the social system of the past was built in an

environment of mutual respect and understanding. In addition, it can also be seen that the relationship between Sinhala Buddhists and Tamils goes back many centuries from pre-Christian times. Accordingly, the diversity of ancient Sri Lanka was recognized and an understanding of the friendly national and religious tolerance and peace that existed in Sri Lanka before Sri Lanka became a colony can be seen. As a nation, the Sinhalese have followed a policy of promoting peaceful coexistence of all ethnic and religious groups living in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

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