

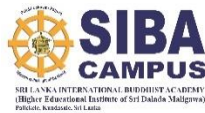
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**Buddhism and Reconciliation: Linking Buddhist Analysis
of Conflict Transformation to the Western Notion of
Post-war Reconciliation**

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Abstract

The Western notion of post war reconciliation suggests an approach which consolidates peace, breaks the cycle of violence by preventing the possibilities of the use of the past as the seed of renewed conflict. It brings about the personal healing of survivors, the reparation of past injustices, the building or rebuilding of non-violent relationships between individuals and communities, and the acceptance by the former parties of the conflict to a common vision and understanding of the past. Since the Buddhism is a well known religion, with nonviolence and empathy, it provides a strong foundation for peaceful coexistence among ethnicities. The paper argues that the western notion of conflict analysis and conflict transformation is in line with the Buddhist analysis of conflict and violence due to three main reasons. Firstly, Buddhism shows the potential of breaking down the vicious circle of violence. Secondly, by rejecting the structural violence, Buddhism provides space for the restorative justice. Thirdly, Buddhism promotes forgiveness, which can be an essential feature of reconciliation in post conflict societies. Hence, Cambodia provides a promising initiative for using Buddhism as a tool of post conflict peace building.

1. Introduction

Buddhism is a religion well known for its teachings about nonviolence and compassion. Hence, Buddhism can be well utilized in the post-war peace building since the Theravāda Buddhism provides a strong foundation for peaceful coexistence. Analyzing the above theme, this paper has been divided into four major parts. In the first part of the paper, it discusses theoretical dimensions on reconciliation. The second part discusses utilization of religion as a tool of post conflict reconciliation. In the third part, it analyses the potentiality of using Buddhism as a mechanism of post-war peace building and reconciliation. In the last part, the paper analyses the Cambodian Experience of Reconciliation.

2. The Concept of Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a broad concept and there is no uniformity among the academics on the definition of reconciliation. Johan Galtung admits defines: “Reconciliation is a theme with deep psychological, sociological, theological, philosophical, and profoundly human roots – and nobody really knows how to successfully achieve it” (*Galtung, 2001: 4*). Simply, reconciliation can be defined as an approach which consolidates peace, and breaks the cycle of violence by preventing the possibilities of the use of the past as the seed of renewed conflict (*Jayathilaka and Rajendran, 2010: 78*). Ledarach argues that reconciliation is the meeting point of four elements, justice, truth, mercy and peace (*Ledarach, 1997*). In his view,

reconciliation is a process of internal peace building by learning from the past and not to carrying conflict into the future. The IDEA handbook defines reconciliation as “a process through which a society moves from a divided past to shared future” (*Bloomfield et al, 2003: 12*). And, reconciliation can generally be viewed as the building and/or restoration of relationships in divided societies (*Smith, 2005: 156*). Lederach views reconciliation as a way of relationship building. In his words, “Reconciliation is the first and last about people and their relationships” (*Ledarach, 2006*). As he says, reconciliation is a process aimed at building and healing the torn fabric of interpersonal and community lives and relationships. Reconciliation is a societal process. It should involve mutual acknowledgment of past suffering. In this way, reconciliation assists for changing of destructive attitudes and behavior into constructive relationships toward sustainable peace (*Brounéus, 2007:6*).

Among the various literatures on reconciliation, this study views it as a step of bringing ‘Positive Peace’. Johan Galtung invented the term ‘peace building’ and it means that achieving positive peace after the conflict. By positive peace, it intends to address the ‘structural violence’. According to him, the visible part of a conflict is just a tip of a huge ice berg. The hidden part is larger than the visible tip. In general, the attention is always paid to the visible part. However, Galtung emphasizes the importance of going beyond the visible surface level, when expecting a long-lasting resolution (*Jayathilaka, 2011:574*). By following the above theoretical facet on structural violence, some theoreticians hold a view that post conflict stage aims to bring structural adjustment for addressing the structural violence. ‘Development’ has been considered as a way of bringing structural adjustments in the post conflict societies. Consequently, peace building aims at durable peace solutions and sustainable development approach in post conflict situation. Immediately after the conflict, the peace building focuses on economic recovery, removal of small arms from the society and rebuilding of governance institutions and launching of reconciliation, releasing of land for agriculture, rebuilding of social capital (*Bloomfield et al, 2003*).

The post-conflict situation is considered as one of the important stages where the peace building activities are carried out. Nicole Ball (*1996*) has mentioned that the post conflict society’s healing of social wounds created by war and giving a chance for coexistence are the most important steps. In his view, during a war, the growing trend of the conflict wastefully exploits resources and reduces the long term potential for development. While reducing the potential of a country, it reduces the cooperation among people. Ball highlights the importance of national reconciliation as a priority of peace building tasks. More positive relationship-building will hopefully develop with time, but just the “negative peace” of an absence of overt violence between the previously warring communities may well be enough to hope for. It is also the minimally fertile ground in which the fragile reconciliation process, having been planted, must now be nurtured and maintained.

There are a number of examples from contemporary conflicts, where war has ended but peace has not been secured. In Norbert Ropers words “giving up the

reconstruction might also be interpreted as giving up the right to return to resettle and to rebuild the homes and livelihood for all those affected by war” (*Ramsbotham et al. 2005:376*). Here it is said that there is a stage of withdrawing from the post-war reconstruction which helps to distinguish that from post-war peace building. That process is generally called ‘intervention reconstruction and withdrawal’. *Ramsbotham et al. (2005)* offers a post-war reconstruction/ withdrawal matrix which is a combination of reconstruction and reconciliation approaches. This is composed of different phases such as security, law and order, government, and economy and society respectively.

Reconciliation is formed with four dimensions as follow;

- Accepting the status quo → ending violence
- Correlating accounts → overcoming polarization
- Bridging opposites → managing contradictions
- Reconstructing relations → celebrating differences

Justice is the core of reconciliation (*Rigby, 2001*). There are three kinds of justice which help to legitimize rule of law in the society again. Those are called to be public justice, rectifactory justice and distributive justice. Neither the concept of peace nor that of justice is as monolithic as often made out (*Ramsbotham et al. 236*). According to some analysts story telling is an essential element of the reconciliation since it really works in inter-ethnic conflicts (*Bloomfield et al, 2003*). This helps people who were part of the conflict in voicing their experience and healing from the past conflict which culminates in a better future. Hence, storytelling is a democratic, interdependent, grassroots practice which leads social cohesion for which external parties should not intervene in order to stop such storytelling. Further, it promotes cross cultural understanding and builds peaceful communities (*Lederach, 2005*).

2.1 Religion and Reconciliation

Among the different views of the meaning of reconciliation, some of definitions clearly hold religious connotations (*Brounéus, 2007*). Academics, who identify forgiveness as the basic element of the reconciliation view religion as a fruitful tool for having a good reconciliation process. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa was based on idea of forgiveness which was originated from Christian Philosophy (*Bloomfield et al ,2003*). Reconciliation between God and humanity through Jesus is a fundamental theme in the Christianity (*Brounéus, 2007*).

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC’s chair tried to promote the forgiveness in reconciliation processes on the religious basis. According to him, Christianity can be well utilized for the post-war peace building with a reconcile approach since the forgiveness is a core value of it. In 1999 he published a paper titled ‘*No future without forgiveness*’ by analyzing the connection between religious beliefs and

reconciliation. For him culture of forgiveness is extensively rooted in the most of religious beliefs. He brings the example of the notion of 'Ubuntu' in the African culture. Tutu says that a person with the African world-view of *Ubuntu* is open and available to others as the religion provides space for everyone. As Tutu says, "A self-sufficient human being is subhuman. I have gifts that you do not have, so consequently, I am unique--you have gifts that I do not have, so you are unique. God has made us so that we will need each other. We are made for a delicate network of interdependence" (*Battle and Tutu, 2009:35*). For Lederach religious leaders play a pivotal role in the post-war peace building since they can act as the "critical yeast" in the peace process. In the term of critical yeast he refers to key actors in the civil society who can work as mediators for helping to establish informal meetings between political opponents. For him academics, trade unionists, business community and religious leaders have this ability and the capacity of mobilizing the masses into the peace (*Lederach, 2005:36*).

2.2 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 structural violence Buddhism provides space for the restorative justice in the post conflict societies.

Buddhist explanation of violence is very much in line with the Galtung's definition of violence. He identifies two types of violence as visible and invisible violence. A deep structure that is based on asymmetry of power between different segments of society with denial of the basic needs of some groups leads to structural violence, including discrimination and exploitation. The social fault-lines, much like geologic fault-lines, are where violence occurs most readily. Violent deep structures include slavery, colonialism, and patriarch. One of major characteristics of the structural violence is the denial of the Basic Human Needs (BHN) of certain groups. Survival, Well-being, Freedom and Identity are the basic human needs and no one can exist without these. Therefore these are fundamental and non-negotiable (*Galtung, 2005:10-15*). 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. People affected by structural violence tend to live a life of oppression, exclusion, exploitation, marginalization, collective humiliation, stigmatization, repression, inequities, and lack of opportunities (*Galtung, 2005:14*).

Buddhist analysis also shows the relationship between structural violence and direct violence. One of Buddhist dialogues, the '*Cakkavattisihanāda-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. Even though rulers

provided rightful shelter, protection and defense, if a ruler failed to provide financial assistance to the poor they tend to commit violence (*Collins 1998: 606*). In such a context, traditional ruling structures led by the 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 phenomena. When poverty increases, theft increases; because theft increases, weaponry flourishes; because weaponry flourishes, murder increases; because murder increases, social values are decreased (*Palihawadana, 2006*).

This *sutta* says the decreasing of social values lead to a miserable and inhuman society.

“When people will see each other as animals; sharp swords will appear in their hands and they will murder each other, each thinking this is an animal.” (*Collins 1998: 607*) According to Galtung structural and cultural violence lead to dehumanization and can create an inhuman situation. Various atrocities in war occur as a result of this dehumanization (*Galtung, 2005*).

Galtung’s suggestions on the transformation of this violent context are in line with the Buddhist suggestions. In one hand, violence created by war and the impact of the war atrocities should be addressed in the post-war stage. On the other hand, structural violence should be overcome by bringing necessary structural adjustments. When healing the wounds created by war atrocities, it is necessary to develop empathy among the communities. The Buddha suggests this violent context can be transformed through self-reflection. ‘Let me kill no-one, let no-one kill me’ (*Collins 1998: 606–11*). ‘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. According to Galtung, it is vital to bring structural adjustments in the post conflict stages for protecting the basic human needs of the certain groups (*Galtung, 2005*). According to the Buddhist analysis also it is important to bring social justice in the society for achieving the positive peace. As an example, income of the country should be distributed fairly among all the communities (*Palihawadana, 2006*).

Therefore, reconciliation aims to break a cycle of violence and ameliorates peaceful co-existence. In the ‘Protracted social conflicts’, there are few chances to see it as a ‘Constructive Way’. Protracted conflicts always take place in a ‘Destructive Way’, destroying the whole society. Thus, the economic cost, human cost, physical cost and mental cost of war is incalculable. Therefore, when the war finishes, the post war environment creates a challenging space for reconciliation to be initiated. Desmond Tutu remarked “There is no shortcut or simple prescription for healing wounds and divisions of society in the aftermath of sustained violence.” (*Bloomfield et al, 2003:02*). Conflict ravaged societies are full with challenges, opportunities, threats and weaknesses. Thus, if the issues are not addressed properly definitely there is chance of re-escalation of violence. So, the reconciliation process is the biggest factor to prevent such renewal of violence. It builds the road from ‘Negative

peace' to 'Positive peace'. Root causes of conflict must be addressed maximally in this stage. By analyzing causes, which lead to violence, and transforming violent contexts into non-violent social realities, Buddhism too shows the potentiality of breaking down the vicious circle of violence.

Moreover, Buddhism provides a vast space for forgiveness. The Buddha has viewed victory in war as a breeding ground for the hatred. Hence the *Dhammapada* demonstrates that Buddhism has a sound basis in denouncing violence and its condemnation of violence. According to the *Dhammapada*, the relationship between violence and human reactions in the face of suffering can be viewed in different ways. Firstly, all sentient beings fear being the objects of violence. When any form of violent act is directed towards human beings, they become frightened. Secondly, all living beings are scared of death. Thirdly, all living beings value their own lives. Fourthly, when one is faced with violence, one has to reflect that one's situation is similar to that of others because of the fact that as human beings we want our own lives to be secure. Finally, the motivation to avoid violence and protect the lives of others comes from the conviction that one's life is also 'sacred' or precious (*Palihawadana, 2006*). Further, the Buddha emphasized the fact that hate never yet dispelled hate. Therefore, there is no crime like hatred. "The slayer gets a slayer (in his turn), the conqueror gets a conqueror . . . Thus by evolution of *kamma*, he who plunders is plundered" (*Palihawadana, 2006:68*). Forgiveness is the only way which has the potentiality of ending hate. "Those who attempt to conquer hatred by hatred are like warriors who take weapons to overcome others who bear arms. This does not end hatred, but gives it room to grow (*Treasury of Truth, Verse 5*).

Some analysts nevertheless doubt Buddhism's capacity for usefulness in the reconciliation process. "The Bible's concept of justice emphasizes interpersonal reconciliation, and focuses on compassion, mercy and forgiveness. In contrast, in the Buddhist tradition for example, compassion rather than forgiveness is stressed." (*Brounéus, 2007:14*). Further he shows the fact that Buddhist Middle Path contradicts the Christian notion of compassion. The fundamentals of the Buddhist Middle Path are acceptance, tolerance, and above all compassion. He refers a study done by Lambourne in Cambodia. One interviewee has explained that it would not be applicable to Cambodian tradition where, in accordance with Buddhism, "people who have committed crimes will always be held responsible for them – there is no God who will ultimately forgive" (*Lambourne, 2002 in Brounéus, 2007:15*). Further some interviewees in this study suggested that truth commissions are a Christian concept as they are based on "confessing and forgiving" (*Lambourne, 2002 in Brounéus, 2007:15*). However, some of interviewees in the same research argued on the same lines but drew the opposite conclusion, saying that it would be easy for Cambodians to forgive because they believe in "Karma and rebirth". People need not bother about punishing the perpetrators because they will be punished in their next life according to their Karma (*Lambourne, 2002*).

3.3 The Cambodian Experience of Reconciliation

Over the past thirty years, Cambodia experienced a protracted social conflict which resulted in a number of politically violent movements, counter violence from the state and creation of a violent culture in all over the country. Under the Khmer Rouge government led by Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979 Cambodia was recognized by the world as a 'Killing Field'. It is reported that at around 1.7 million were killed by war atrocities, disease and starvation during this time period. Further, out of an estimated population of eight million, five million were displaced (*Fitzgerald, 1997*). Under this regime, Pol Pot tried to abolish utterly the existing culture by destroying all the institutions of state - the education, financial and legal systems - as well as religious and other social institutions. In December 1978 the Vietnamese Army entered Cambodia and, mounted a decisive military campaign against Democratic Kampuchea forces, which resulted in a new Vietnamese-sponsored government being declared in January 1979. However, the conflict still continued during the 1980s among the various groups. The Paris Peace Agreements of October 1991 were meant to end the war in Cambodia. Due to the atrocities done under the regime of Pol Pot, Cambodian Buddhism was hard hit, with the country's 3,600 temples totally shut down, and many members of what had once been a 60,000-strong Buddhist clergy victimized and slain. Maha Ghosananda was one of the key figures among those who were remaining after this genocide (*Poethig, 2002*).

Dhammayietra (The Pilgrimage of Truth) was born in 1992 under the 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 accomplishment of the movement was to allow 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 (*Khemacaro, 1998*). Thereafter *Dhammayietra* movement conducted annual peace walks through armed conflict zones. Maha Ghosananda led the first of the *Dhammayietra* Walks for Peace and Reconciliation in emulation of Lord Buddha, who led his disciples to places of strife and warfare while practicing meditation and preaching detachment from suffering and the way to peace. Maha Ghosananda tried to develop a vision and mission based on the Buddhist philosophy for the reconciliation process for the Cambodia. His vision is well reflected by the following statement made by him

“The suffering of Cambodia has been deep. From this suffering comes great compassion. Great compassion makes a peaceful heart. A peaceful heart makes a peaceful person. A peaceful person makes a peaceful family. A peaceful family makes a peaceful community. A peaceful community makes a peaceful nation. And a peaceful nation makes a peaceful world. May all beings live in happiness and peace” (*Ghosananda, 1992*)

Dhammayietra program was not being restricted only to the Walks in the conflict zones. It was associated with a lot of planning and preparation for various activities. Under the *Dhammayietra* program there were many grass-roots trainings in conflict resolution and nonviolence for many Buddhist monks, nuns and others. Trainings have included theory and practical disciplines of nonviolence and conflict resolution. Rev. Maha Ghosanandan utilized a Buddhist concept called *khanti* (forbearance) in these trainings. This concept has been associated with prevention of conflict or violence (*Ahimsā*). Preparation for the 1996 walk included twelve training workshops in eight provinces for about 600 people. Maha Ghosanda tried to create a bridge of peace for bringing together people who had been separated by war. When a procession led by Maha Ghosananda passed through villages, thousands, of people are said to have followed it (*Fitzgerald, 1997*).

Though the *Dhammayietra* program basically focused on post conflict reconciliation, it also focused on sensitive socio-political issues from time to time. As an example, it brought attention to a wide range of peace threatening issues such as deforestation and the use of land mines. For Maha Ghosananda, the reconciliation process should not be limited to dealing with the direct violence but structural factors also should be addressed. For him there are three gaps that should be taken into consideration such as the material gap, social gap and relationship gap. (*Ghosananda, 1992*) If the reconciliation process is unable to deal with these gaps there is always a threat that violence might happen. "... retaliation, hatred and revenge only continue the cycle of violence and never stop it... Reconciliation does not mean that we surrender rights and conditions, but rather that we use love. Our wisdom and our compassion must walk together. Having one without the other is like walking on one foot; you will fall. Balancing the two you will walk very well, step by step" (*Ghosananda, 1992*).

In his campaign, Rev. Mahagoshananda further utilized the concept of '*Santipheap*' (Non-violence and peace). Traditionally, Buddhist understandings of *Santipheap* begin with inner peace, borne of compassion and loving-kindness in the individual mind. Through example and teaching, peace within the individual radiates outward to the family, to the community, to the nation and to the world. Peace is also tied to the individual practice of the five Buddhist precepts against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, wrong speech (including lying), and intoxicants. Breaking the precepts causes conflict. In this way, Rev. Mahagoshananda emphasized that the fact that a peace builder's role might be to conduct education toward the goal of a critical mass of peaceful individuals within society (*Poethig, 2002*).

According to some critiques, the non-accommodative nature of Buddhism, which was caused as a result of the Buddhist monastic tradition, has not provided any room for development of a civil society characterizing such virtues as pluralism and universalism (*Seneviratne, 1999*). However, with the arrival of UN peace approaches in Cambodia, many Buddhist monks have enthusiastically learned and taught about human rights. As an example, Senior Cambodian monk, Ven. Yos Hut Khemacaro, reconciles Western ideas of public participation, democracy and human

rights with compatible ideas found in *Dhamma*. He inclines the western concept of good governance and democracy with the essence of Buddhist teachings. As he says, the Buddha himself advocated democracy within the community of monks, citizen participation in government and opposition to tyranny (*Morris, 2000*). Buddhist nuns and Buddhist women also had a positive role in the post war reconciliation attempts in Cambodia (*Adams, 2011*). Further, in Cambodia, Rev. Maha Ghosananda was an ideal leader since he has had a profound influence upon movements for peace around the globe through his advisory role in such NGOs as the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF), and the Ponleu Khmer, the citizens' advisory council to the Cambodian Constitutional Assembly. Further he has been a leader in inter-religious communication, as evidenced by his attendance at the sixth World Conference on Religion and Peace held in Italy in 1994 (*Poethig, 2002*). The peace work he inspires even resulted in his nomination for the Nobel Prize four times between 1994 and 1997.

The peace process in Cambodia nevertheless faced a number of challenges. Firstly, there was a lack of influential and active Buddhist leaders to encourage and direct Buddhist education. Some Buddhist leaders were seen by the public to be working for a political party and were thought to have a low level of Buddhist education. Some of the key monk leaders suffered from the lack of knowledge of Buddhist philosophy. Even though some Buddhists monks made efforts for the post conflict peace building in Cambodia, some of efforts carried out by the ordinary citizens hadn't a proper knowledge of Buddhism. Further the importance of spiritual education was not being well identified by certain NGOs and funding agencies. The resistance from the government was also identified as another limitation on the peace process. Though some Buddhist monks had great skills in conflict resolution the political situation of the country prevented their entering the field of conflict resolution (*Sotha, 2001*). However, when their peace attempt faced challenges due to the highly-politicized conflict in Cambodia, Buddhist leaders tried to develop a mechanism for handling them. The *Dhammayietra* movement has had to guard peace walks from the presence of government soldiers protecting the walks, which they found attracted shots that killed some walkers in 1994. Thereafter walkers were asked not to wear anything that could be taken to be military clothing, political insignias or political slogans. To avoid politicization, Yos Hut Khemacaro advised them to follow the "Middle Path", the traditional metaphor for the Buddhist way - neither joining the fight nor hiding from it. By mentioning the Middle Path of non-violence and compassion, he provided a model for solving undoubtedly political problems outside the adversarial framework implicit in partisanship. As these ideas arise from traditional Khmer concepts, it was very helpful for Cambodian people to find their own peace instead of feeling that their problems can only be solved by outsiders (*Morris, 2000:52*).

4. Conclusion

This paper highlights the fact that Theravāda Buddhism has a negative view towards violence. Therefore, the vision of a peaceful life portrayed in Buddhism is useful for contemporary Buddhist communities in understanding the nature of human conditioning and in realizing the danger of emotional involvement in conflicts. The Buddhist message can be transform violent contexts into more positive actions that are suitable for creating positive peace. In this way, Buddhism can be a useful tool for the post conflict reconciliation. 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, and interreligious linkages should be further strengthened. Finally, Buddhist scholars also have an ethical as well as an academic responsibility to promote the clear meaning of the Buddhist message, which creates genuine peace in society.

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