

# THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN LEADERSHIP FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE BUILDING WITH REFERENCE TO BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

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## ABSTRACT

According to the existence of religion in the society it has deferent social and cultural diversities. In this condition, religious tolerance and acceptance of religious pluralism is very important. On the other hand, in present society has been established an idea that religion has been involved and reasonable for inter-communal and international conflicts. This is a strong criticism for religion, because of, purposely religion does not for social conflicts and issues but for peace, harmony, loving kindness, ethical development and finally for the spiritual development of beings. This is the utility of religious existence in human society. But, nowadays does religion play its appropriate functions? This is the problem here to discuss. There are many traditional religions in modern world. But, many of those religions are failure to fulfill its functions for the society especially religions which included to the category of monotheism. On this, some religions could not be able to do its contribution, if it was successful, the society should be ethical and moral than this. Through this research, mainly focused to identify the nature and

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functions of religion and to examine the practical utility of modern religious institutions. Mainly discuss with the reference of world religions how Buddhist philosophical and religious teachings can be applicable for the modern world as a leading religious example? This research is based on qualitative research methodology and findings of this research have explained the main idea of the article as a conflict solution for the present and future wellbeing and sustainability of common society.

## INTRODUCTION

Religion is as one of the most important social institution; its major role is effective to the world. Therefore the functional background of it on the society is very important and it can understand as a leading path of the society with connection to other social institutions. Religion has very important historical institution of human history, each and every religious existence of beliefs and understandings have connected with the human sense in psychologically and societally. On this condition, the major role of religion is effective for society as a leading institution of it. Before the period of the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century, there were ideas related to psychology, sociology, materialism, philosophy, science and so on directions that the existence and the major role of religion will disappear from the society in future because of the developing effects of the science and technology in modern era, but all those predictions of intellectuals are making false, still religion exists on its appropriate situation even in modern era because of the values of its social functions. Through this, we can understand that why does religion need for the human beings and we have to understand its social validities and functions as well. Through this, mainly, have to identify the utilitarian existences and pragmatic needs of religion. According to these understandings, we can discuss the modern religious background and the applicability of new and positive religious movements or traditions as a leading part for the stability of present and future social wellbeing.

With the modernization, religions of faith had been lost their sacred place of the society but it is completely not rejected, indeed modern society needs a practical religion, particularly moral and

spiritual teachings as well as the realistic religious consolations are very basic needs for the society. Buddhism is the philosophy of world and a universal religion for whole beings who can understand the reality in mean. Therefore Buddhism has a leading role as a conflict solution for a sustainable future of society.

Indeed, nowadays religion is also running a race like other social factors. In such a condition, why Buddhism has become a naturally spreading or willingly embrace religion all over the world? Because Christianity and Islam are the largest religions in the world but those theistic religions could not fulfill the spiritual and moral requirements of the society. The specificity of Buddhism is, it does not limited to Buddhist societies like many other religions teach, but for whole world, because Buddha never said that His teaching is only can understand Buddhist, He taught that his enlightened understanding is the proper way of the universe and whole beings, and He has shown the proper way how to win this circle of life in spiritual way. Each and every religion in modern world is trying to increase the number of followers but not for the religious functions. This is the true nature of the existence of world religions in modern world. Through this article particularly focused how Buddhist teachings can be applicable for the modern world as a leading religion as well as a universal understanding.

#### FUNCTIONAL EXISTENCE OF THE RELIGIOSITY OR RELIGIOUSNESS IN THE SOCIETY

On this discussion, first of all, it is better to understand the nature and the perspectives of the common meaning of religion. Religious thoughts in human mind are considered an essential psychological part. Therefore the religion has built or established in human society as systematic existent through different kinds of religions. Under the category of Theism and Atheism, main religions in the world have originated as revelations and philosophical explanations of prophets and religious leaders. Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism and Confucianism etc. are considered systematic and institutional religions in the world. From the history of human beings religious sense and beliefs have connected with together because of its utility for human life. That

we can identify through these definitions of religion. “Religion is a dream, in which our own conceptions and emotions appear to us as separate existences, being out of ourselves.” (*Ludwig Feuebark*)<sup>1</sup>. “Religion is a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.” (*James G. Frazer*)<sup>2</sup>. “Religion is that which grows out of, and gives expression to, experience of the holy in its various aspects” (*Rudolph Otto*)<sup>3</sup>. “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden ... beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community...” (*Emile Durkheim*). The *encyclopedia of religion and ethics* states; ‘Belief is the mental state of assurance or conviction, the attitude of a mind towards its own experiences in which it accepts and endorses them as referring to reality, as having real significance or value.’<sup>4</sup> And the *Encyclopedia of religion* has given definition for the belief and faith as, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”<sup>5</sup> These definitions support to get an idea that what does mean the existence of religion.

Religious beliefs and critical issues are very famous themes in the contemporary society. In this situation generally intellectuals explain some of the systematic religious teachings as the cause for the religious violence in the world. Many followers believe in their religious teachings as the ultimate explanations regarding their religious life than their experimental understandings. If a religious teaching preaches, ‘you should be the missionary or the communicant of your religion,’ then the followers believe that as the ultimate reality or ethical teaching of their life and then they try to achieve their final salvation through that guidance. But many religious followers do not try to understand the social validity of their religious teachings. In this situation they do not try to understand the ethical or pluralistic values or disvalues of those teachings. Then they try to bring their religion into first place in the world and

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1 Various Definitions of Religions - <http://web.pdx.edu/~tothm/religion/Definitions.htm>

2 Various Definitions of Religions - <http://web.pdx.edu/~tothm/religion/Definitions.htm>

3. Various Definitions of Religions - <http://web.pdx.edu/~tothm/religion/Definitions.htm>

4. *Encyclopedia of religion and ethics* vol.II, p. 1981: 459

5. *Encyclopedia of religion* vol.VIII, p. 1987: 250

they try to go to heaven through those missionary activities. This is the base and reasonable background of religious extremism and fundamentalism. And this is the cause for the religious terrorism. According to this religious misguidance so many problems have arisen in the society. The most common attacks and competition in the world are related to the political powers and religious extremism; especially the religious extremism. In this situation people have to understand the functional themes and the pragmatic backgrounds related to the religious existence of the human society. And then we may be able to understand why we need a religion? And why we practice our religion? These questions may be able to solve those criticisms in the society. We cannot reject any religious beliefs in the world but we can realize the errors of the religious teachings and then through that we may be able to correct any misguidance and practices by ourselves. Then there will be a good and harmonious religion that stands for the peace and kindness. On this condition, George Bernard Shaw's (1856-1950) definition is important to understand the uniformity of the various religious beliefs in the world, "There is only one religion, though there are hundreds of versions of it" this idea has elucidated very deep meaning related to the existence of the common sense of religion. The purposes of all the religions are same, which are the development of peace, harmony, loving kindness, compassionate, morality, ethics and so on very practical needs for the society. Through the teachings of various religions related to these pragmatic needs, finally it supports for the development of spirituality of man. In mean, it should be so, because of the need of the success of mundane life of people ultimately, each and every religious follower need the development of spiritual part in their life, this is the ultimate goal which call enlightenment or attain the heaven (the final satisfaction of religious practices).

According to the understanding of the utilitarian existence of the common sense or the meaning of religion, we have to understand, why do we suggest Buddhism as a universally valid and as a suitable religion to lead the modern world? This is very important to discuss and through the discussion, it can be explain the universal characteristics and the common practical utility for the society.

## CONTEMPORARY NATURE OF WORLD RELIGIONS

On the consideration about the modern religiosity or the existence of religions in common society, actually, there is a question to ask, whether have those religions and the leaders of those religions enough understanding about the pragmatic meanings of religions which are the definitions has given in above or not?, Because of the elucidating errors of religion in modern world. Why are there religious terrorism, religious fundamentalism, and religious extremism instead of the holly or spiritual symbol of the society the religion? (Example: ISIS) And how much do people suffer from the issues of religion? (Example: Syria) why does some religious people think to harm or kill other innocent religious leaders and followers? (Examples: in 20<sup>th</sup> January 2019, gun shooters killed two Thai Monks inside of a temple in northern Thailand/ Islamic people are doing harm for the Minority Buddhists in Bangladesh) How can a religiously learnt person be a destroyer of religious places and historically valuable heritages instead of self-religious understandings? (Bahamian Buddha statue in Afghanistan was destructed by Islamic extremists) And can there be a religion to teach that kinds of violence to followers? Unfortunately, all these questions were made according to the practical background of the world religions in modern society and there are many reasonable examples for all these questions. However we have to understand that there are these types of misguiding religious practices in the world as well. When we analysed many of religious victims in the world, high percentage of religious victims of religious struggles in modern world are Buddhists, this is a very sad situation because of the majority of people who are the victims, are practicing non-violence and a greatest universal religious philosophy. I believe that these understandings will effective to gather and organize for world Buddhist communities together with as a single and non-violence strength or power to protect the rights of Buddhists and to lead the world community in correct path.

## APPLICABILITY OF BUDDHISM TO LEADING THE SOCIETY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The existence of world religions display differences each other because of their explanations have different approaches on

world, beings and desires of human beings, many of theistic and atheistic religions have limited to their own limitations and they explain the world and other phenomenal existences of the world in different ways, therefore those explanations have diversities like we discussed earlier. The origin of religions in the world is purposely for wellbeing of humans. Here discusses that how Buddhism and Buddhist teachings can be applicable to the modern society as an exemplary and practical religious philosophy.

Buddhism as one of historical religious tradition in the world its applicability for the society is very practical indeed Buddha has given explanations regarding world and beings of the universe, has not limited to people who follow Buddhism. It is common for whole world. Therefore the enlightened preaching and explanations of Buddha is considered explanation of the nature of beings and universe. Therefore Buddhist teachings are not only for Buddhist communities but also common society. Peace, harmony, loving kindness, spiritual development and wellbeing of the society are not only modern requirements but also basic needs for the world, then, Buddha says how these basic needs go away from the society or individuals. Buddhist approach on world is basically has connected with the human mind. Human mentality is the reasonable factor for everything. If people practice good deeds then people can achieve good results on the other hand if people practice bad deeds, results also effective to individuals as same. Therefore the understanding of the life purposes and validities are very important for individuals. Therefore the understanding about bad mental characteristics or defilements such as grudge, ill will, anger, hatred, jealousy, miser, non-satisfaction and so on defilements are naturally conduct human beings into non-righteous way of life, through the understanding of the nature of these defilements and human nature, individuals can make them correct. It is effect to well beings of individuals as well as common society.

When there is love, love for life, love for nature, then there will be no hatred no evil and no war. As Buddha preached on so many occasions, hatred begets hatred and the best antidote for hatred is *Mettā* (friendship) love. That we can understand clearly following this teaching in Dhammapada. 'In this world, hatred can never be

appeased by hatred. Hatred can only be appeased by love. This is the Eternal Law' (*Nahi verena verāni – sammantīdha kudācanam, Averenaca sammanti – ēsa dhammo sanantano*). Another well-known gāthā in Dhammapada teaches, 'as long as people hang on to resentment, saying, he insulted me, he hit me and so on, and then their hatred will never come to an end' (*Akkocchi mam avadhi mam – ajini mam ahasi me, Ye tam upanayhanti – veram tesam na sammati*). This is a good example for us to consider that Buddhism and the Buddha's teachings could still be used to cultivate peace in the world to save humanity. First of all individually people need to cultivate peace in internal perceptions then individually as well as a community that is applicable for the society.

If people can abstain from harmful thoughts by themselves; that is the step where we can start being friendly or having *Mettā* within ourselves and in the world. Usually Buddhist followers also transfer merit to others in their daily life, they wish; May the rains rain in due time! May the harvests be bountiful! May the world be satisfied! May the king be righteous! Let this be for my relatives! Let my relatives be happy (*Devo vassatu kālena – sassa sampatti hetu ca, Dhīko bhavatu loko ca – rājā bhavatu dhammikho, Idamme ñatinam hotu – sukhītā hontu ñātayo*). Through these Buddhist teachings community can reduce violence everywhere and substantially reduce corruptions and bribery. Violence, corruption and bribery are naturally arise in human mind then we have to identify how can cure or dispense these defilements on positive way.

Five precepts in Buddhism creates peaceful individual to the world. They are the basic ethics (not the highest) observed by the Buddhists in their day to day life. Observing these precepts, anybody can start the way to the ultimate reality and deeper philosophical stages in the Buddhism. This is the beginning of the ethical life. We can understand them as follows.

*Abstaining from killing* - Everybody loves their life very much and they do not take it away. As you like your life, the others also do. So, we should live and let to live them. Do not get involve in any kind of violence to harm other's life.

*Abstaining from stealing* - This precept simply emphasizes on



staying away from the practice of stealing. If something does not belong to you or is not given to you, it is not yours and you do not have the right to use it without permission.

*Abstaining from the sexual misconduct* - This precept can be arguable and it can be identified with different cultures. Therefore, it can be described differently. This cannot be argued as an unethical or unsuitable fact for any type of society. However, this precept is an advice to avoid unethical sexual relationships and nurture an attitude aimed towards the gender quality.

*Abstaining from the false speech* - Avoid lying, if you lie, you will not only harm the other person but also you harm yourself. If someone said false, then, he must have to remember that lie throughout his life time because if he has forgotten that lie and then he becomes a dishonored person and a liar in the society.

*Abstaining from consumption of liquor* - This may also be debatable for different individuals but the fact remains the same that any intoxicant reduces the ability of a person to think and act appropriately so does anger, temper, desire and distrust.<sup>6</sup>

According to the meaningful understanding of five precepts in Buddhism we can identify its simple and meaningful significance for a sustainable society. On the other hand, the meanings of five precepts anybody can clearly understand why we need these precepts. The significance of these precepts can be stated as follows;

Abstain from killing - respect for life

Abstain from stealing - respect for others' property

Abstain from sexual misconduct - respect for others partners

Abstain from lying - respect for honesty

Abstain from intoxicants - respect for a clear mind and mindfulness.

According to Buddhist point of view on good governing of the society ruler must be righteous unless the society which he is ruling cannot be a sustainably or righteously developed. Tenfold virtues of the

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6. Zaheer, Noor., *Believing Panchasila: Outwitting Terror.*, p.17

ruler, further, expresses ethical implication for the welfare of the society. They are 1. Charity (*dāna*), 2. Morality (*sīla*), 3. Altruism (*pariccāga*), 4. Honesty (*ajjava*), 5. Gentleness (*maddava*), 6. Self-controlling (*tapa*), 7. Non-anger (*akkodha*), 8. Non-violence (*avihimsā*), 9. Forbearance (*khanti*), 10. Uprightness (*avirodhatā*)<sup>7</sup> practice of charity is not mere offering four requisites of Sangha but sacrifice one's own pleasure for public welfare is the broader sense here. Charity of knowledge, time, labour, wealth is also included in. Non-anger, non-violence, forbearance and uprightiness provide noteworthy contribution for world peace and harmony.

According to Buddhist point of view, it has rejected five types of businesses. In the present world, the businesses in weapons, businesses in human beings, businesses in meat, businesses in intoxicants and businesses in poison are more popular and profitable. The *vanijja sutta* in *Anguttaranikaya* prohibits all of these five businesses mentioned above.<sup>8</sup> These main teachings of Buddhism are applicable for strong institutions. In modern society there are social conflicts because of these five types of unethical businesses. Nowadays these businesses have become essential needs and understanding for the society, indeed people do not know that these are unethical and do harmful effects of these businesses for the society. Actually with abstaining from these businesses people can make a good and well developed society. Through these approaches from Buddhism, the goal has been selected here can be achieve successfully. The requirement is the applicability and practices of these principals.

On the consideration of some basic and the most important social issues and contemporary natures in modern world, society can applicable the highest explanation in Buddhism the Four Noble Truths as well. First truth is *The Noble Truth of Suffering* (*Dukkha Ariyasacca*) which depends on this so-called being and various aspects of life, is to be carefully analysed and examined. This examination leads to a proper understanding of oneself as one really is. *The Noble Truth of the Origin (cause) of Suffering* (*Dukkhasamudaya*

7. Fausboll, V. ED. The Jataka Together with its Commentary. p. 378.

8. Hardy, E. ED. (1994) (Ed) *Amguttaranikaya III*. p. 232.

*Ariyasacca*) is the second noble truth. The third one is *The Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering (Dukkhanirodha Ariyasacca)* the fourth one or ultimate realization is *The Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (Dukkhanirodhagāminipatipadā Ariyasacca)*. These Four Noble Truths are the highest essence of Buddhism which are not related to the faith but connected with the understanding of the real truth of beings and society. All the problems and social issues can examine under these four noble truths. Therefore the discussion related to the sustainable development of common society, each and every social factors and issues are very clearly we can study through these four types of steps and definitely all the issues can cure and dispense permanently.

## CONCLUSION

With the reference of above mentioned factors related to the main topic, all those factors supportive to understand the modern nature of world religious existences and the practical background of them. Through the questioning about those religious errors and misunderstandings in rational and unbiased ways, everyone can understand that what we have and what we need. Then the next, it has explained the utilitarian values of the religious philosophy of Buddha. From the begging of Five Precepts up to Four Noble truths, all those teachings and philosophically based moral explanations can understand as the most prominent requirements for the modern world. The most essential requirement for the modern world is the spiritually developed people, and the teachings of Buddhism can understand as the most prominent solution for the contemporary issues in modern world.

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