

BUDDHIST ATTITUDES FOR RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN SRI LANKA

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Introduction

Sri Lanka, the pearl of the Indian Ocean is a beautiful island with a multi-religious and multi-racial society and it is a true paradise on earth. Now, the Sri Lanka society is pluralistic. Four great world religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam exist on this land. Therefore, people of different faiths should be understandable. The Constitution of 1978 of Sri Lanka mentions that the official religion of Sri Lanka is Buddhism. Sri Lanka has a firmly established Buddhist heritage and culture for thousands of years. Though Buddhism is the official religion of Sri Lanka, everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom to accept or reject any form of religion or faith. It is one's own right. But today we see that religious fundamentalism is rising in the Sri Lankan context. The emergence and prevalence of religious fundamentalism in the sake of one's own religion, nation, race and political ideology is quite dangerous for the establishment of peace and harmony in the country. The government and the people of the country must be aware of this. These fundamentalists try to fulfill their wishes by means of destruction of Buddhist heritage and culture and whose main purpose is damaging the Buddhist heritage and culture. This system consists of three aspects. We call it the M-3 system.

1. Military system
2. Money system
3. Missionary system

In such a situation how can we talk about religious harmony and tolerance? This is the case to emerge such religious disharmony in Sri Lanka. This Buddhist culture has been well established in this land for over the

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2600 years and which has taught us non-violence and simplicity and how to deal with the faiths and followers. This point should be understood by the other religionists who live in this country. The majority of Sri Lanka is Sinhalese Buddhists. The Buddhists are liberal people. But no one has any right to harm and destroy the Buddhist cultural heritages in this land.

Methodology

The details for this research paper has been collected from the primary Buddhist teachings and the relevant books and articles written related to the field and social experiences.

Discussion

According to the Sri Lanka great chronicles, the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa*, Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka during the middle of the 3rd century B.C. Since then Sri Lanka became the cradle of the Theravāda Buddhism. Thus Buddhism became the Sri Lankan official religion from the day of its introduction. From that day, the ruler should live within the Buddhist framework that could be applicable universally. The Sinhalese brought a rule that only a Buddhist had the legitimate right to become the king of Sri Lanka. According to the inscriptions the ruler should not be only a Buddhist but also a *Bodhisattva*. The inscription of the King Mahinda IV proclaims that none but the bodhisattvas would be kings of Sri Lanka. Thus the above fact reveals that the ruler should be a *Bodhisattva* and he should possess the qualities of the *Bodhisattva*. The term *Bodhisattva* means a person like compassion, tolerance and gentleness. Buddhist ideal on kingship is such a one. This ideal could be found in the Asokan politic realism where the Buddhist political thought is explained.

Buddhism fashions every aspect of social activities such as the world view by means of its theodicy, modes of behaviors based on Buddhist ethics, ways of thinking, new phase of cultural

elements, art and architecture and literature. It spread throughout the island rapidly not as the state religion but with its straight motivation for the good and wholesome. In the Buddhist thinking, there is no place for dogmas. Buddhism is so psychological and liberal.

What could be the Buddha's responses to other religions? The Buddha highly appreciated other religious leaders those who advocated the moral life and moral foundation. Someone like *Sunetma*, *Mugapakka*, *Aranemi*, *Kuddalāka*, *Hattipāla*, *Jothipāla* and *āraka* were highly cherished by the Buddha because they were free from sensual attachments (*kāmesu vītarāgo*) those who followed their teachings were born in the Heavenly spheres. The terms *samana* and *brāhmaṇa* are the expressions used by the Buddha to refer to all religious teachers and practitioners. What Buddha says in the *Suttanipāta* is very important: "I do not declare that all other samanas and brahmanas are sunk in birth and death. (*nāhaṃ sabbe samaṇa brāhmaṇāse jātijarāya nivutā ti brūmi*)."

Buddhism rejects this kind of dogmatic assertion as "this alone is true, all else is false (*idameva saccaṃ moghamānāṃ*)" that is found in the *Cūlavīyūha* & the *Mahāvīyūha sutta-s* of the *Suttanipāta*. The Buddha speaks of the ills of praising one's own religious view despising the views of others. The Buddha sees the danger of attachment to views and dogmas. This attitude is found in the well-known Buddhist discourse on the parable of the Raft (*kullūpamā*). The Buddha says that the aim of his teachings is not for the purpose of grasping (*gahanatthāya*), but for the purpose of crossing over (*nittharanatthāya*). The danger of attachment to dogmas in any faith will cause for inter religious and inter-religious wars often referred as 'holy wars.' This is quite prevalent today amongst religious extremists. Sometimes they attempt suicide-bombing attacks against their own nation or race. This is the danger of attachment to views and dogmas. Unlike the above from of approach Buddhism tremendously asserts the significance of Pluralism.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the life of the Buddha is visiting the monasteries of other religionists. The Buddha had dialogues with them. Other sects also approached to the Buddha to get their doubts clarified. The *Pāṭikasutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* elucidates that the Buddha had visited many times the Bhaggavagotta monastery of *Susīma* where the Buddha had cleared the doubts of his disciples. The message that is expressed in the *Cūlasakuḍāyisutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* is that other recluses had been enthusiastically waiting for the arrival of the Buddha for their monastery. According to the *Tevijjavacchagotta sutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, the Buddha was most welcomed by them. Today one of the saddest things in the Sri Lankan society is the lack of inter-religious dialogues.

The well-known *Kālāmasutta* is one of the greats Buddhist instances in the world history with regard to freedom of religion. It covers the following:

- The assurance of free inquiry
- Salvation without a savior
- The freedom of expression
- The autonomy of moral judgment
- Free will & responsibility
- Personal verification
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Harmony among Religions

The two edicts issued by the great king Ashoka shed much light on how harmony and concord between different religions can be set up. The Asokan state was a pluralistic one at that time. Asokan's Edict XII sound the Buddha's own position regarding religious tolerance and harmony. One of the most remarkable examples of Asoka's tolerance of all religious faiths and his promotion of the essentials of the moral teachings can be found in his Rock Edict XII.

Conclusion

The words like persecution, heretics, heathens and pagans are carried in the name of religious intolerance. Buddhism respects the other faiths. Buddhists are very fortunate to be Buddhists, non-violence and harmony. From the Buddhist notion we must state that religious intolerance is the greatest enemy of any religion in the world. Buddhism spread throughout the world without a single drop of blood in its name. here I would like to request from all faiths and nations of Sri Lanka that it is our duty, without any form of discrimination, to preserve this Buddhist heritage and culture for the betterment of the world and the generations to come.

Keywords : religious harmony, Buddhist teaching, conflict, Sri Lanka

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