

A Critical Study on the Effective Ways for Promoting Religious Harmony

Ven. Galle Dhamminda¹
W. M. Indika Piyadarshani Somaratne²

Introduction

There are unprecedented discussions about the inter-religious harmony from all around the world. Among the causes for such discussions, hostile and violent activities based on faith remain prominent. As a result, considerable people are suffering from religious based conflicts. As a philosophy of emancipation Buddhism has been the pioneer for creating religious harmony. This paper will discuss about the Buddhist perspective regarding religious harmony specially the steps which recommended reducing religious conflicts.

Research Problem and Methodology

Research problem of this paper is what the effective ways admitted in Buddhism for promoting religious harmony. In this research references have been made to Pali Sutta Piṭaka and descriptive analysis is used as research methodology.

Discussion

Buddhism emerged mainly in religious pluralistic society. Its historical sources indicate no any terms that there were inter-religious competition and one may surprise that Buddha has confronted with sixty-two religious views that prevailed at that time. But Buddha was able to establish and maintain inter religious harmony. It is noteworthy that even though Buddha was a popular religious teacher he refrained from imposing his teaching on the people. In the long history of Buddhism it has never contaminated its record with the use of violence or military force in the spread of its doctrine although there are instances in which it became a victim by other parties.

As religious leaders, social workers and intellectuals, there is a great responsibility to streamline the ethical behavior in particular society. For that task

1. Lecturer (Probationary), Department of Buddhist and Pali Studies, Bhiksu University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura. dhammigalle@gmail.com
2. PhD Candidate, PGIHS, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya. indikasomaratne@gmail.com

to be reality, there are some effective and timely steps can be taken. Those are,

- Having discussions on matters of religious significance
- Understanding harmfulness of the religious dogmatism
- Spreading dhamma in subtle and gentle way

The human right to accept any religious faith was an important right that Buddha emphasized by his own noble example. Even when some persons expressed their willingness to become his disciples Buddha urged them to reconsider their decision. For example, Upali Sutta of Majjhimanikaya, Nighaantanaputta's lay disciple named Upali challenge Buddha to debate. After the discussion with Buddha, Upali became convinced of the correctness of the Buddha and mentioned that he would like to become his disciple. At that time, Buddha causes and reconsiders his decision again and again. Furthermore, Buddha was not keen to make converts to his religion by any forceful means.

The right of a person to critically examine the claims of even a respected teacher as himself was explicitly granted by Buddha to all those who were impressed by his magnificent personality. He extended an open invitation to his disciples to thoroughly investigate his doctrines by closely and critically observing. He warned his disciples against being hostile to criticism and being unduly thrill in praise of one's virtues. According to Brahmajāla sutta of Dīgha Nikāya, there was a hostile reaction, expressed by Suppiya Paribbajaka, one of religious teachers. During a journey Suppiya Paribbajaka who was closely following the Buddha on the same way speaking strongly in dispraise of Buddha, his teaching and his community of disciple, while the pupil of Suppiya were admiring them. At this occasion Buddha's response was astonished because it paves the way for religious harmony. Giving advice, Buddha emphasized the responsibility in such an occasion. If someone speaks in dispraise of Buddha, of the Dhamma or of the Saṅgha, one should unravel what is false and point it out as false, saying for such and such a reason this is false, this is untrue, there is no such thing in us, this is not found among us.'

Even though Buddha did not intend to debate with other religious parties, in some occasions he had to confront critical religious discussions. For example, in Kassapasihanada sutta of the Digha Nikaya, as a religious teacher Buddha corrected the wrong views with the intension of correcting their ethical standpoint. In another occasion, Saccaka, who was a skilled debater, came to debate with the Buddha. Culasaccaka Sutta revealed that how the Buddha explained very calm manner, without expressing any sign of emotion of anger or excitement.

Conclusion

As a philosophy of life, Buddhism always emphasized the need of peace in society so that the society could flourish in wisdom and ultimately conduces to betterment of it. The study highlights important ways to create religious harmony in Buddhism such as having discussions on matters of religious significance, understanding harmfulness of the religious dogmatism and Spreading dhamma in subtle and gentle way. It is clear that Buddhism can have its effective approaches, becomes instrumental in altering social attitudes in the sphere of human relationship.

Keywords: Religious Harmony, Religious Dogmatism, Peace, Human Relationship