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FOSTERING UNITY:

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS
FOR GLOBAL HARMONY



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UNITED NATION DAY OF VESAK 2025

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FOREWORD

His Eminence Thích Thiện Nhơn

Chairman of the Executive Council, Vietnam Buddhist Sangha

The volume “*Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony*” marks the first in a series of academic publications in English under Theme 5 of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025 International Conference, convened under the overarching theme “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development.” Held at the Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Minh City from May 6–8, 2025, this historic conference bears dual significance: as a major event for the global Buddhist community and as a tribute to two momentous milestones—the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the 50th anniversary of national reunification—sacred commemorations for the Vietnamese nation and Vietnamese Buddhism alike.

This volume compiles 62 academic papers by Buddhist scholars and practitioners from diverse nations and traditions—ranging from Theravāda and Mahāyāna to Vajrayāna—reflecting a global Buddhist vision grounded in interdisciplinary dialogue. At its heart is a collective aspiration to promote unity, interfaith and intercultural cooperation, and shared responsibility in confronting urgent challenges of our time: ethnic conflict, climate crisis, social inequality, and the erosion of moral consciousness.

Rooted in the core Buddhist principles of mettā, paññā, and paṭiccasamuppāda, the contributors engage with the contemporary world not only through scriptural exegesis but also by extending their insights across disciplines such as sociology, political philosophy, anthropology, environmental justice, interreligious education, global governance, and sustainable development. This scholarly endeavor gives shape to a modern Buddhist discourse that both honors classical wisdom and adapts to the needs of social transformation, thereby affirming Buddhism’s place as a living philosophy of action—from the meditation hall to the halls of the United Nations.

This collection not only reflects the organizational capacity of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha as host of the 2025 UN Day of Vesak, but also stands as a testament to the editorial integrity and dedication of the Editorial Board. With great care and vision, the Board curated, refined, and organized this body

of work with scholarly rigor and heartfelt commitment. Each contribution illustrates how contemporary Buddhism responds to global concerns—from the interfaith initiatives of the United Religions Initiative (URI), to the engaged Buddhism of Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh, to the evolving role of women in the Korean bhikkhunī tradition, and the social applications of *dāna pāramitā* as exemplified in the Vessantara Jātaka.

Of particular note is the interdisciplinary composition of the contributors, comprising scholars in sociology, education, philosophy, environmental studies, and monastics engaged in grassroots practice. This convergence of expertise deepens the intellectual foundation and methodological diversity of the volume, laying fertile ground for future research directions. These include examining the *saṅgha* as a model of ethical community in democratic societies; applying the *bodhisattva* ideal to public policy; designing peace education programs rooted in the *brahmavihāras*; and integrating the doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda* into intercultural communication and conflict transformation.

“Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony” is not only a scholarly volume but also a declaration of engaged Buddhism—where personal liberation walks hand-in-hand with collective awakening for a world of peace, compassion, and sustainability. In an era when globalization offers both opportunities for co-existence and challenges of polarization, the Buddhist voice in this collection emerges as a call to unify *karuṇā* and *paññā*, tradition and innovation, local wisdom and global vision—to co-create a world where all beings are upheld in dignity, justice, and loving-kindness.

This volume stands as a significant academic landmark of the 2025 UN Day of Vesak, showcasing the intellectual depth and organizational leadership of Vietnamese Buddhism on the world stage—at once a point of origin and a refuge of peace and inclusivity for our shared global future.

FOREWORD

By Most Ven. Prof. Dr. Brahmapundit,
President of the International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV)

The United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV), initiated by Thailand and embraced by the global Buddhist community, stands as a profound response to the United Nations Secretary-General's call to commemorate Vesak Day worldwide. This occasion marks the sacred triple events of the Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment, and Mahāparinibbāna—not merely as a global cultural festival, but as a sacred duty of the international Buddhist community to advance peace, compassion, and wisdom in alignment with the noble objectives of the United Nations. As Buddhists, we share a collective responsibility to bring the teachings of the Buddha to bear upon the urgent challenges of our time, from social injustice to climate change.

Thailand, with the gracious support of the Thai Royal Family and the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand, has played an important role in this sacred mission. Spearheaded by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University and supported by the Royal Thai Government, we established the International Council for the Day of Vesak (ICDV) in 2004. This laid the foundation for the inaugural United Nations Day of Vesak in the same year, uniting global Buddhist leaders in vital forums to explore Buddhist principles as solutions to global issues—resonating with the vision and mandate of the United Nations.

Over the course of twenty UNDV celebrations, Thailand has had the honor of hosting fifteen, Sri Lanka one, and Vietnam has proudly hosted four—namely in 2008, 2014, 2019, and 2025. Each of Vietnam's contributions to UNDV has been remarkably successful, exemplifying visionary Buddhist leadership and international solidarity. The Government of Vietnam and the leadership of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have demonstrated unwavering commitment and dedication in organizing these momentous events, showcasing the power of Buddhist unity and collective action for global peace.

The main theme of UNDV 2025, "Solidarity and Tolerance for Human Dignity: Buddhist Wisdom for World Peace and Sustainable Development," reflects the vision of the United Nations and the aspirations of the Government of Vietnam for peace and sustainability in the spirit of the Buddha's teachings. It also honors the Buddha's immense contributions to human history, while commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Republic

of Vietnam and the 50th Anniversary of the country's reunification.

I deeply appreciate and hold in high regard the organizational capabilities, vision, and tremendous devotion demonstrated by the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha in hosting the four UNDV celebrations. These efforts stand as a testament to the highest standards of Buddhist leadership and an enduring commitment to peace and sustainable development.

This is the first volume under the theme “Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony,” which belongs to the fifth thematic collection of the 2025 UNDV International Conference. This collection features five English-language forums with more than 600 scholarly papers and five Vietnamese-language forums with over 350 research contributions. The high-quality submissions from monastics and scholars alike highlight the academic depth, intellectual diversity, and cross-cultural values of the Buddhist world in dialogue with modern global issues.

As we approach UNDV 2025, I warmly welcome the expected participation of above 1,200 international delegates from 80 countries and 5 territories. Furthermore, I commend the cultural dimensions of Vesak 2025, including the Buddhist Art Exhibition, the Vietnamese Buddhist Cultural Festival, and the international Buddhist cultural performances from India, China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

These scholarly, cultural, and spiritual perspectives collectively contribute to the profound success of this sacred Vesak celebration. Together, let us ensure that the 20th United Nations Day of Vesak in Vietnam becomes a beacon of peace, unity, and sustainable development for the entire world.

ABUDDHISTWAYTOFOSTERUNITY ANDHARMONYFORTHEWORLD: PARTICIPATIONINTHEGLOBALINTERFAITH MOVEMENT,SUCHASURI,TOCREATE CULTURESOFPEACE,JUSTICE,ANDHEALING FORTHEEARTHANDALLLIVES

Ven. Dr. Jinwol Lee*

Abstract:

The study presents the contribution of Buddhism to the interfaith movement, especially through its participation in the Universal Interfaith Initiative (URI). The study highlights the core values of Buddhism, such as compassion, wisdom, and interconnectedness, which serve as a foundation for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The study also presents URI as a model for a global interfaith organization that promotes peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living things. The study suggests practical steps for Buddhists to participate in URI and contribute to global harmony. Finally, the study affirms the similarity between the goals of Buddhism and URI in creating a peaceful and prosperous world.

Keywords: *Buddhist contribution, interfaith movement, universal interfaith initiative (URI), compassion and wisdom, global harmony.*

I. INTRODUCTION

I am writing this paper to be presented at a conference for celebrating the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) which was designed and made by the resolution of member nations at UN General Assembly in 1999 for commemorating the sacred day of the Buddha, Sakyamuni's Birth, Enlightenment, and Passing Away together, as in the Theravadan Buddhist tradition.¹ UNDV 2025 has been decided to hold at Vietnam Buddhist University in Ho Chi Ming City, Vietnam, May 6-8, 2025, with the main theme

* Member of ICDV.

¹ www.undv.org/vesak2024

of the conference as “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development”, and sub-themes are:

(1) Cultivating Inner Peace for World Peace. (2) Forgiveness and Mindful Healing: A Path to Reconciliation. (3) Buddhist Compassion in Action: Shared Responsibility for Human Development. (4) Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future. (5) Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony. Those subjects of studies and practice are really needed for people of the present and future of the world. It is supposed to bring attention to those themes that are considered as some of the UN’s missions for these days.² Accordingly, I will seek out some insights and practical ways of Buddhist efforts to contribute to the world and sustainable future, focusing on a sub-theme, the “Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony” that is partially related to the other themes.

In the present world, we see our Global Village often divided by cultural, religious, ideological, and economic differences, the need for unity and collaboration to deal with common global issues, for instance, climate crises, pandemics, and conflicts among ethnic and religious traditions, have never been more pressing, because those problems could not be solved by a certain group or a single party. Buddhists, with their long tradition following the profound teachings of the Buddha Sakyamuni, rely on compassion, mindfulness, non-ego, interconnectedness, and interdependence, offering valuable insights and practices that can contribute significantly to global unity and harmony for the common good.

By participating in global interfaith movements like the United Religions Initiative (URI), Buddhists can play a pivotal role in fostering a more united and harmonious world. Let me first remind Buddha’s teachings related to the subject and then review the URI with its Charter and activities as a model organization for networking and cooperation with Buddhists and non-Buddhists in the world for common destiny as the same human beings. It seems good to consider that working with the URI will be a collaborative effort with various people of diverse religions and spiritual traditions around the world on peace, harmony, and healing Earth and all living beings. I will write about the topic in fact based on my practice and experiences in such fields as well as studies of related academic research in which some information from public documents would be reviewed and suggested to Buddhist colleagues and friends to work together³.

² Several key-words, such as Peace, dignity, equality, sustainable development, are seen on UN Homepage. www.un.org/en/

³ Author, Jinwol, is a Buddhist monk (Bhikkhu) who started monastic life at Haein Chonglim. Young Ho Lee (2002), p. 315.

II. THE SOURCE OF BUDDHISM REGARDING HARMONIOUS WORLD THROUGH COOPERATION WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

Buddhism, founded over 2,500 years ago by Siddhartha Gautama, who became known as the Buddha, is one of the great world religions and spiritual traditions that emphasizes the cessation of suffering through ethical conduct (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*), and profound wisdom (*paññā*). Central to Buddhist teachings are the Middle Path and the Four Noble Truths with the Eightfold Right Path, which provide a framework for understanding the nature of suffering and the way to overcome it.⁴ We can use these teachings as a method or tool to diagnose the situation of the world and get an insight to solve the global problems, including the subject of this discussion. The Buddha also taught reality of existence, including all physical and metaphysical (psychological) phenomena, is “Interdependent arising (*patichcha-samuppada*)” and mutually conditioned.

It is well known verses of *Dhammapada*, belongs to the *Khuddka Nikaya* (Compact Collection) of the sacred Buddhist canonical scriptures, *Tripitaka*, that “To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one’s mind - this is the teachings of the Buddha / Do not make all evil, do all good, and purify one’s mind - this is the teaching of all Buddhas/ Do not what is evil. Do what is good. Keep your mind pure. This is the teachings of Buddha.” (Verse No.183).⁵ From this teaching, we can point out that that the Buddha basically encouraged his followers to avoid all evil but do all good, which is a very inclusive suggestion and open-minded attitude no matter what objects and ideas, as well as no matter what they believe in the world. It was widely known that Buddhism in general and Mahayana tradition in particular, all Buddhists, as *Bodhisattvas*, must concern not only for oneself but also for others, and they should take care of and become beneficial for all sentient beings.

However, Buddhism, with its rich history and profound teachings, has always emphasized the importance of compassion, wisdom, and the interconnectedness of all life. These core principles make Buddhism a natural ally in the interfaith movement, which seeks to bring together diverse religious traditions in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation for the common good in the world. Let us explore the contributions of Buddhism to the interfaith movement and how Buddhist teachings and practices can help to promote global harmony and unity for making a peaceful world.

III. CORE BUDDHIST VALUES SUPPORTING INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

3.1. Compassion and Loving-Kindness

At the heart of Buddhist practice is the cultivation of compassion (*karuna*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*). These values encourage Buddhists and other people to extend their goodwill to all living beings, regardless of religious affiliation. By fostering an attitude of empathy and understanding with others, Buddhism creates a foundation for meaningful interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the

⁴ The Four Noble Truths (*ariya-satta*). Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr. (2014). p. 304 - 305.

⁵ Jinwol Dowon (2021), p. 220; Juan Mascaro (1971), p. 62.

various fields communicating and networking to deal with common tasks and solving the problems together, as well as promoting trust and friendship.

3.2. Impermanence and interconnectedness

Buddhist teachings on impermanence (*anicca*) and the interconnectedness of all life (*pratītyasamutpāda*) highlight the transient and interdependent nature of existence. Recognizing that all beings are interconnected helps Buddhists appreciate the commonalities shared by different religious traditions, fostering a sense of unity and respect. It can make people's unity to enjoy their joy together as well as to share their sadness in their community beyond the differences of religious traditions.

3.3. Non-attachment and open-mindedness

The concept of non-attachment (*upekkha*) in Buddhism encourages practitioners to let go of rigid beliefs and biases. This open-minded and flexible approach is essential for engaging in interfaith dialogue, as it allows individuals to listen to and learn from others without judgment or preconceived notions. It can promote and improve one's way of thinking and attitude to possibilities and approaches to soften the situation in free conditions.

IV. BUDDHIST WAYS TO CONTACT OTHER RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

4.1. Compassionate interfaith dialogue and understanding

Buddha emphasized the importance of dialogue and understanding for all relationships and works of people. In the spirit of open-mindedness, Buddhists are encouraged to engage in interfaith dialogues. These sincere conversations provide opportunities to learn from one another, dispel misconceptions, and find common ground. Interfaith dialogue is a powerful tool for fostering mutual respect and cooperation, enabling people of different faiths to work together for the common good of humanity.⁶ It is good that Buddhists should remind the "Right Speech" of the Eightfold Noble Path when they are engaging a conversation with other people speaking truthfully and kindly in respect and compassion.

4.2. Mindfulness and meditation

Mindfulness and meditation are integral aspects of Buddhist practice that can also be shared across religious traditions. These practices promote inner peace, clarity, and empathy, which are vital for nurturing harmonious relationships. Through mindfulness, individuals can become more aware of their thoughts and actions, fostering a deeper understanding and acceptance of others. Applying mindfulness in everyday interactions helps individuals to be present and attentive, promoting genuine connections with others. In the context of interfaith cooperation, mindfulness enables individuals to listen deeply and respond thoughtfully, creating a space for meaningful and respectful exchanges. This practice can bridge gaps and dissolve prejudices, paving the way for collective efforts towards global harmony.

⁶ Parallax Press (2019), p. 341.

4.3. Attitude of non-violence

It is well known that Non-violence (*ahimsa*) is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism. Buddha's teachings advocate for a life free from harm and violence towards all living beings. This principle is crucial for interfaith cooperation as it calls for resolving conflicts through peaceful means and understanding rather than aggression. By adhering to non-violence, Buddhists can inspire others to adopt similar approaches, contributing to a more harmonious world. The principle of nonviolence extends to promoting peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities. Buddhists are encouraged to actively participate in peace-building initiatives, mediation, and reconciliation efforts. By setting an example of peaceful living, Buddhists can influence other religious traditions to embrace nonviolence, fostering a culture of peace and mutual respect.

4.4. Sense of interconnectedness

Buddhists should always be aware of the concept of dependent origination, which highlights the interconnectedness of all beings. Understanding this interconnectedness fosters a sense of shared responsibility and cooperation among different religious traditions. Recognizing that all beings are interdependent encourages a collaborative approach to addressing global challenges such as poverty, social injustice, and environmental degradation, including climate change.⁷

V. HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

5.1. King Ashoka's efforts

One of the earliest and best examples of Buddhist involvement in interfaith dialogue can be traced back to King Ashoka of India (304 – 232 BCE). Having converted to Buddhism after a bloody, tragic war, Ashoka promoted religious tolerance and dialogue through his edicts, which encouraged respect for all religious traditions and emphasized the importance of harmony and nonviolence. His administration tried to provide social peace, justice, and welfare for people, as much as possible in equality, non-discrimination, and tolerance at his time.⁸

5.2. At the world parliament of religions

In modern times, Buddhism has played a significant role in the interfaith movement, notably through the participation of Buddhist representatives in the Parliament of World Religions (PWR). The first PWR, held in Chicago in 1893, brought together religious leaders from around the world, including prominent Buddhist figures who shared their teachings and contributed to the global conversation on religious harmony. The PWR has been revived since 1993 and continued to the present. The last one was held in Chicago in 2023. Many Buddhists, including Dalai Lama, have been involved in various fields of PWR like peace and harmony as well as global ethics.

⁷ David R. Loy (2018), p. 45 - 46.

⁸ Damien Keown (2003), p. 21.

VI. BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERFAITH MOVEMENT IN MODERN TIME

6.1. Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism

Vietnamese Zen master, the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh, has been a leading advocate for interfaith dialogue through his concept of Engaged Buddhism and Interbeing.⁹ By actively addressing social, political, and environmental issues, Engaged Buddhism encourages collaboration with other religious traditions to promote peace and justice. Thich Nhat Hanh's efforts have included participating in interfaith conferences, fostering dialogue between Christians and Buddhists, and promoting mindfulness and nonviolence across religious boundaries. It is noticeable that he had a close friendship with Martin Luther King Jr, a Christian Pastor and Nobel Peace laureate.

6.2. The Dalai Lama's interfaith initiatives

The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, has been a tireless advocate for interfaith understanding and cooperation. Through his writings, public talks, and meetings with religious leaders from various traditions, he has emphasized the importance of compassion, ethical conduct, mutual respect, and nonviolence. Moreover, he also pointed out the necessity of developing good relations with other faith traditions.¹⁰ His works have helped bridge the gap between Buddhism and other faiths, fostering a spirit of unity and collaboration. Remarkably, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.¹¹ He has been a patron of many interfaith organizations, including PWR.

6.3. Organizations promoting interfaith dialogue

Several Buddhist organizations are dedicated to promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), founded by Sulak Sivaraksa, is one such organization that brings together Buddhists and people of other faiths to address global issues and promote social justice. Another notable organization is the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), which supports interfaith initiatives and fosters collaboration between Buddhist communities and other religious groups.

VII. A GLOBAL INTERFAITH MOVEMENT ON PEACE, JUSTICE, AND HEALING FOR THE EARTH AND ALL LIVES OF THE UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE

Here I will introduce the URI as an exemplary model as a global interfaith movement to create cultures of peace and healing for all living beings as well as the Earth.

7.1. Start and process

It is said that the vision for the URI was sparked by an invitation from the UN to Arch- Bishop of Episcopal Church of California, the Right Rev. William

⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh (1987), p. 85.

¹⁰ His Holiness Dalai Lama (1999), p. 231.

¹¹ www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-peace-prizes/; Alexander Norman (2020), p. 272.

Swing, Founder and President Emeritus of URI, who was invited to host an interfaith service in June 1995 to help commemorate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter in San Francisco 1945. He had a sudden realization that religions have a vocation to be a force for good in the world. He contacted and invited many religious and spiritual leaders around the world, and the most of them eventually joined in a global appreciative process to create a shared vision of the world they wished to inhabit and of a global interfaith organization making the vision a reality. From 1996-2000, people around the world participated in writing URI's Charter, which was signed in June 2000.

7.2. Charter

To understand URI, let us first see its Charter which has the vision and purpose with principle. The URI Charter was written by the collective efforts of about 200 representatives from the major religions and spiritual traditions around world during the global summits in San Francisco, 1996-1999 and signed in Pittsburgh, United State of America, on the 26th of June 2000, the same day of UN Charter signed in 1945.¹² Following is the whole text of URI Charter, which is introduced at URI homepage:

Preamble: "We people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions throughout the world, hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings./ We respect the uniqueness of each tradition and differences of practice or belief./ We value voices that respect others and believe that sharing our values and wisdom can lead us to act for the good of all./ We believe that our religious spiritual lives, rather than dividing us, guide us to build community and respect for one another./ Therefore, as interdependent people rooted in our traditions, we now unite for the benefit of our Earth community./ We unite to build cultures of peace and justice./ We unite to heal and protect the Earth./ We unite to build safe places for conflict resolution, healing, and reconciliation./ We unite to support freedom of religion and spiritual expression, and the rights of all individuals and people as outlined in international law./ We unite in responsible cooperative action to bring the wisdom and values of our religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions to bear on the economic, environmental, political, and social challenges facing our Earth community./ We unite to provide a global opportunity for participation by all people, especially by those whose voices are not often heard./ We unite to celebrate the joy of blessings and the light of wisdom in both movement and stillness./ We unite to use our combined resources only for nonviolent, compassionate action, to awaken to our deepest truths, and to manifest love and justice among all life in our Earth community."

Purpose: The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote

¹² www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter

enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

Principles: (1) URI is a bridge-building organization, not a religion. (2) We respect the sacred wisdom of each religion, spiritual expression, and indigenous tradition. (3) We respect the differences among religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions. (4) We encourage our members to deepen their roots in their tradition. (5) We listen and speak concerning deepen mutual understanding and trust. (6) We give and receive hospitality. (7) We seek and welcome the gift of diversity and model practices that do not discriminate. (8) We practice the equitable participation of women and men in all aspects of the URI. (9) We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence. (10) We act from sound ecological practice to protect and preserve the Earth for both present and future generations. (11) We seek and offer cooperation with other interfaith efforts. (12) We welcome as members all individuals, organizations, and associations who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles. (13) We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that include all the relevant and affected parties. (14) We have the right to organize in any manner, at any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles. (15) Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any. (16) We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles. (17) We have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of our part and to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other parts. (18) We maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct, prudent use of resources, and fair and accurate disclosure of information. (19) We are committed to organizational learning and adaptation. (20) We honor the richness and diversity of all languages and the right and responsibility of participants to translate and interpret the Charter, Articles, Bylaws, and related spirit of the United Religions Initiative. (21) Members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytized.

From the Charter, we can understand that URI is an inclusive global grassroots interfaith network that promotes enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, aims to end religiously motivated violence, and creates cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living beings with the principles of a universal and inclusive ethical spirit.

VIII. VISION AND MISSION¹³

We see that URI envisions a world at peace and harmony where people

¹³ www.uri.org/who-we-are/vision&mission

of different faiths, spiritual paths, and traditions work together for a better future, sustained by engaged and interconnected communities to respect diversity, nonviolent resolution of conflict, and social, political, economic, and environmental justice.

Its mission is to achieve the purpose of the Charter operating through local and global initiatives, known as Cooperation Circles (CC), which engage in various activities of advocacy and community service. It implements the mission through diverse actions that build the capacity of its members of the CC, groups, and organizations, to engage in community action such as conflict resolution and reconciliation, environmental sustainability, education, and various service programs.

IX. GLOBAL PRESENCE¹⁴

Its organizational design emerged from collective vision and values suggested by early participants of URI. It was to build an organization that let loose the creative energy and resourcefulness of the human spirit, based on qualities of inclusion, relationship, and engagement, as well as shared purpose, core principles, self-organizing interdependent parts, and freedom that allows for unlimited diversity of expression. URI is a bridge-building organization that respects the differences among all beliefs and traditions.

X. BASIC SETTING

10.1. Global council of trustees

It is the primary governing body, comprised of at least 24 Trustees. They are grassroots volunteers elected from and by URI Cooperation Circles. Each URI region (as a continent or multi-national) selects 3 Trustees to serve on the Global Council for a 4-year term, providing critical governance and oversight of URI's operations, finances, and mission-related activities. In addition, At-Large Trustees are appointed as needed. Various committees of the GC meet frequently via the internet. Face-to-face meetings for the GC and URI's Global Staff take place every 2-3 years.

10.2. Cooperation Circle (CC)

It is a core group of URI, and each one CC has consisted of at least 3 different traditions with 7 more people while the large group has more than 20,000 members from most of all traditions. It is shown that URI now has 1,205 CCs in 113 countries networking various millions of millions around the world. They meet and work together regularly or occasionally depending on their own situations and issues for the local or regional needs.

10.3. Other groups and partners

There are some supporting groups such as the Global Council Executive Committee and Senior Advisory Council, as well as the Global Support Office. They are managing, supervising, and preparing to support programs, networking, and various situational activities of CCs around the world.

¹⁴ www.uri.org/about#where-we-work

It is known that URI is committed to pursuing partnerships with like-minded organizations that work to build cultures of peace, justice, and healing the Earth and all living beings. Therefore, URI seeks collaboration to bring the collective strength of local, regional, and global organizations to achieve the shared goals of creating cultures of peace amongst religions, spiritual and indigenous traditions throughout the globe. For instance, URI works closely with the UN including UNESCO, UNEP, and ECOSOC with consultative status of NGO, as well as the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, Religions for Peace, Charter for Compassion, Unity Earth, among many.

XI. POSSIBILITY OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN BUDDHISM AND URI

11.1. Common aspiration of Buddhism and URI for peace and justice in the world

Buddhism in general and Mahayana tradition in particular pay attention to the matters and situations of people with all living conditions and environments. Buddhists try to attain enlightenment of nature and reality for wisdom and freedom not only for themselves but also to save people and all kinds of lives by compassion. They emphasize *Dharma* regarding all are interconnected and interdependent including all lives and the Earth, so they are co-arising and co-existing anywhere and anytime. Therefore, all matters of each one and the others are common to take responsibility. Members of URI think and act similarly with the way of Buddhists, as stated in their Charter as interdependent beings to be aware of themselves as one. Therefore, they should respect and care about each other equally for the common good.

11.2. Common concern of social and humanistic purpose and principles

Buddhism has long emphasized the importance of compassion, wisdom, and interdependence. These core principles guide Buddhists in their concern and care for the well-being of all people and the Earth. In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, the teachings of Buddhism offer valuable insights into how we can address the pressing ecological and social challenges of the present world. URI has also expressed concerns about problems to be solved together to build the better future world. Both involve deep empathy for the suffering of others and a commitment to alleviating that suffering. In the context of a global society, compassion extends beyond individual relationships to encompass all beings, regardless of geographical or cultural boundaries. Buddhism and URI also state the importance of caring for the Earth, recognizing that the well-being of all living beings is closely tied to the health of the environment. The principle of "*ahimsa*" or non-harming, extends to all forms of life, and Buddhists are encouraged to live in harmony with nature. The same idea is seen in the URI Charter.

11.3. Moderate living and mindfulness for solving environmental issues

Buddhists often advocate for simple living and mindfulness as ways to reduce our ecological problems. Simple living involves making conscious choices to consume less and live more sustainably. Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and aware of our actions and their consequences. By cultivating mindfulness, individuals can make more deliberate and ethical decisions

about their consumption and lifestyle, reducing harm to the environment. Moreover, throughout history, Buddhists have made significant contributions to environmental conservation and sustainability. Monastic communities, for example, have often served as stewards of natural resources, preserving forests, water sources, and wildlife habitats. In contemporary times, Buddhist leaders and organizations continue to play vital roles in environmental movements. It is noticeable that the Dalai Lama has been a vocal advocate for environmental protection. He has consistently emphasized the need for a compassionate approach to ecological issues, calling for a sense of universal responsibility towards the planet. His teachings on the environment have inspired many to take action in support of sustainability and conservation. We can see the same spirit in URI Principle number 10.

XII. BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO URI AND GLOBAL HARMONY

Buddhists, with their emphasis on compassion, mindfulness, and nonviolence, have much to offer to the interfaith dialogue and cooperative efforts of the URI. Here are some ways in which Buddhism can contribute to global unity networking with the URI.

12.1. Compassion and wisdom

Buddhist teachings on compassion and wisdom encourage individuals to cultivate a deep sense of empathy and care for all beings.¹⁵ By practicing these qualities, Buddhists can help bridge divides and promote understanding among people of different faiths and backgrounds. Mindfulness involves being fully present and aware of the moment. This practice can enhance interfaith dialogues by fostering attentive listening, open-mindedness, and respectful communication. Mindfulness helps individuals approach conversations with a non-judgmental attitude, creating a space for genuine connection and mutual respect.

12.2. Nonviolence and peace

Through various advocating for non-violent approaches to conflict resolution and emphasizing the importance of inner and outer peace, Buddhists can contribute to creating a more harmonious and just world. Participating in URI's peacebuilding initiatives, Buddhists can share their insights and practices to help reduce tensions and promote reconciliation.

XIII. PRACTICAL STEPS FOR BUDDHIST ENGAGEMENT WITH URI

To actively participate in URI and contribute to global unity, Buddhists can take several practical steps:

13.1. Join or form a cooperation circle

Buddhists can check and find out to join existing Cooperation Circles or establish new ones within their communities. These circles provide a platform for interfaith collaboration and action, allowing Buddhists to work alongside people of other faiths.

¹⁵ Jeffery Hopkins (2001), p. 85 - 188.

13.2. Engage in Interfaith Dialogues and Events

Participating in interfaith dialogues, conferences, and events organized by URI can help Buddhists share their perspectives and learn from others. These interactions foster mutual understanding, break down stereotypes, and build relationships based on respect and common values. It is considerable that Buddhist thinkers and practitioners take an initiative to discuss with other religious people for communicating and understanding each other to extend their knowledge and experience beyond the limitation of their own traditions, for instance, Masao Abe, a Zen Buddhist scholar and practitioner who has known well to the western theologians and religious scholars for his active and positive approach in open-minded manner.¹⁶

13.3. Promote education and awareness

Buddhists can contribute to educational initiatives that raise awareness about the importance of interfaith cooperation and the principles of Buddhism. By offering workshops, lectures, and meditation sessions, Buddhists can share their teachings and practices with a broader audience, promoting a culture of peace and compassion. By spreading knowledge about the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of compassionate action, Buddhists aim to inspire positive change at both the individual and collective levels in the global society. Dharma teachings, or the teachings of the Buddha, provide valuable guidance on how to live ethically and harmoniously in the world. These teachings emphasize the cultivation of virtues such as generosity, patience, and diligence, which can help address social and environmental challenges. By integrating Dharma teachings into education programs, Buddhists seek to empower individuals with the wisdom and skills needed to create a more just and sustainable world.

13.4. Support social equality and justice

Buddhists can collaborate with URI on projects that address social and environmental issues, such as poverty, discrimination, and climate change. By working together on these critical challenges, Buddhists and people of other faiths can demonstrate the power of collective action and shared commitment to a better world.

13.5. Public outreach and advocacy

Buddhist leaders and organizations often engage in public outreach and advocacy to raise awareness about critical issues. Through conferences, workshops, publications, and media campaigns, they strive to educate the broader public about the importance of compassion, sustainability, and social justice. By amplifying their voices and collaborating with other faith and secular groups, Buddhists work to build a global movement for positive change. As we look to the future, the teachings of Buddhism offer a hopeful and inspiring vision for addressing the complex challenges facing our global society and the Earth. By embracing the principles of compassion, wisdom, and interdependence, we can cultivate a sense of shared responsibility and take

¹⁶ Donald W. Mitchell (1998), p. 353.

meaningful action to protect and nurture our planet and its inhabitants.

Building a culture of peace, compassion, and healing involves fostering empathy and kindness in our interactions with others. This requires not only individual efforts but also systemic changes to create more equitable and inclusive societies. By promoting policies and practices that prioritize the well-being of all beings, we can create a world where compassion is at the heart of our collective endeavors. Promoting sustainable living involves making choices that align with the principles of environmental stewardship and ethical consumption. This includes supporting renewable energy, reducing waste, and advocating for policies that protect natural resources. By embracing sustainable practices, we can help ensure a healthy and vibrant planet for future generations.

Advancing social justice requires addressing the root causes of inequality and oppression. This involves advocating for human rights, economic fairness, and access to education and healthcare. By working towards a more just and inclusive world, we can create conditions that allow all beings to flourish. In conclusion, the Buddhist concern and care for the global society and the Earth are deeply rooted in the tradition's teachings of compassion, wisdom, and interdependence. By applying these principles to contemporary challenges, Buddhists offer valuable insights and practical solutions for creating a more compassionate, sustainable, and just world working together with other interfaith organizations like URI.

XIV. CONCLUSION

Having reviewed Buddhist aspiration and practice to benefit all sentient beings in making a better world, paralleling with the purpose of UN and URI in terms of peace and harmony for unity in diversity of people around world, we now understand that there are much similarity and common vision with practical mission somewhat overlapped, regarding humanity, peace, justice, and healing for Earth and all living beings. It is noticeable that ICDV and URI work in the ECOSOC of the UN together as the same as the Consultant Status. We see that the Buddhist approach to fostering global unity aligns with the URI. By bringing their teachings on compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence to the interfaith movement, Buddhists can play a vital role in promoting harmony and understanding among diverse communities of the Global Village. Through active participation in URI's initiatives as a leader or partner as networking with collaborating efforts for unity of the world will be achieved in the future. Therefore, Buddhists can create a peaceful and harmonious world where differences are celebrated, and all beings can coexist in peace, harmony, and interbeing as the pronouncing URI for "You are I," in other words, as "I am you," meaning the idea of non-duality in Mahayana Buddhism.

Finally, I would like to extend heartfelt congratulations to people of Vietnam for "the 80th Anniversary of the Foundation" and "the 50th Anniversary of the Reunification" of their country, as well as to all participants for "the 25th Anniversary of the UNDV" events and "the 25th Anniversary of URI" for its launching, as well as "80th Anniversary of UN" establishment. Let us celebrate those anniversaries together in harmony and mutual respect.

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TITLE OF THE ARTICLE: NOBLE INTERFAITH PEACE

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Abstract:

The concept of Noble Interfaith Peace emphasizes fostering mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among diverse religious groups in an increasingly interconnected world. As interfaith conflicts often stem from misunderstandings and stereotypes, promoting dialogue is critical for mitigating tensions, building social cohesion, and contributing to sustainable development. This article explores effective strategies for cultivating interfaith relationships, focusing on education, community engagement, and the role of religious leaders. Educating individuals about different beliefs through integrated religious studies in school curricula enhances awareness and encourages respectful dialogue among students. Community initiatives that unite individuals from various faith backgrounds facilitate shared experiences and collaborative problem-solving, thus dismantling prejudices.

Religious leaders are instrumental in promoting interfaith peace as they can leverage their influence to advocate for messages of compassion, solidarity, and coexistence. By addressing misconceptions publicly, they inspire communities to embrace diversity rather than fear it. Additionally, the article highlights successful interfaith dialogue initiatives around the globe, showcasing how communities overcome their differences to achieve collective goals. These case studies provide valuable insights for regions grappling with religious tensions, demonstrating best practices for fostering peaceful coexistence.

In conclusion, pursuing Noble Interfaith Peace is essential in our pluralistic world. By embracing diversity, initiating dialogue, and fostering collaboration among various faith communities, we can address the root causes of conflict and enhance social stability. Ultimately, the principles of Noble Interfaith Peace serve as a guiding framework for creating a more inclusive, compassionate, and harmonious world for future generations.

Keywords: *interfaith dialogue, religious harmony, peacebuilding strategy, compassion leadership, SDG16 inclusion.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Noble interfaith peace

1.1.1. Fostering unity: collaborative efforts for global harmony

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering unity is both a moral imperative and a practical necessity. The global challenges humanity faces – climate change, pandemics, economic inequality, and social unrest – demand collaborative efforts and a unified approach. By working together across cultures, nations, and ideologies, we can build a more harmonious world that benefits everyone.

1.1.2. The Importance of unity in a fragmented world

Unity serves as the cornerstone of progress and stability. It enables societies to overcome internal divisions, encourages mutual understanding, and builds resilience in the face of adversity. In a world where differences in culture, religion, and politics often create rifts, fostering unity is essential to achieving peace and collective prosperity.

1.1.3. The role of unity in addressing global issues

- **Climate Change:** Environmental crises do not recognize borders. Collaborative efforts through international agreements like the Paris Accord exemplify how unity can drive progress in combating climate change.
- **Pandemics:** The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of a unified response. Sharing vaccines, scientific research, and healthcare resources was vital in mitigating the crisis.
- **Economic Inequality:** Unity among nations can address disparities by creating equitable trade agreements and providing support for developing economies.

1.2. Noble interfaith peace: a path to harmony in a divided world

In a world marked by diversity of cultures, traditions, and beliefs, the concept of noble interfaith peace emerges as a beacon of hope and a call to action. This idea champions the harmonious coexistence of individuals and communities with different religious and spiritual orientations, emphasizing mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration. In an era where sectarianism and intolerance often dominate headlines, the pursuit of noble interfaith peace is not just desirable but imperative for global stability and progress.

1.2.1. The essence of noble interfaith peace

At its core, noble interfaith peace embodies the principles of compassion, humility, and respect. It is grounded in the recognition that despite doctrinal differences, the fundamental teachings of most religions converge on shared values such as love, kindness, justice, and the sanctity of life. This common ethical foundation provides a fertile ground for dialogue and cooperation.

The term “noble” in this context signifies the aspirational nature of interfaith peace. It is not merely an absence of conflict but an active engagement in fostering goodwill, addressing misunderstandings, and working together to

address societal challenges. Noble interfaith peace calls for a higher standard of interaction, where individuals rise above prejudice and embrace a spirit of inclusivity.

1.2.2. Historical perspectives on interfaith cooperation

History offers numerous examples of interfaith collaboration that underscore the potential for harmony. In medieval Spain, the cities of Toledo and Córdoba became centers of learning where Muslims, Christians, and Jews worked together to translate and preserve classical texts. This “Convivencia” period highlights how interfaith collaboration can lead to cultural and intellectual flourishing.

Similarly, Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of Sarva Dharma Sambhava (equality of all religions) during India’s struggle for independence serves as a powerful example of interfaith unity. Gandhi’s inclusive approach demonstrated that people of different faiths could unite for a common cause without compromising their individual beliefs.

Challenges to Noble Interfaith Despite its potential, the journey toward interfaith peace is fraught with challenges. Misunderstandings, stereotypes, and historical grievances often hinder dialogue. The rise of religious extremism and the politicization of faith have further complicated efforts to build bridges between communities.

Moreover, structural inequalities and social injustices contribute to interfaith tensions. Discrimination, economic disparities, and the marginalization of minority groups exacerbate divisions, making it difficult to foster trust and mutual respect. Addressing these root causes is crucial for achieving lasting peace.

1.3. Pathways to building and managing interfaith peace

Achieving noble interfaith peace requires concerted efforts at multiple levels – individual, community, and institutional. Here are detailed strategies for building and managing interfaith peace:

1.3.1. Promoting interfaith dialogue

Dialogue is the cornerstone of interfaith peace. Constructive conversations allow individuals to share their beliefs and experiences, dispel misconceptions, and build empathy. To ensure effectiveness:

- Organize interfaith panels, workshops, and forums where participants can engage in open and respectful discussions.
- Use trained facilitators to guide dialogues and ensure balanced participation.
- Focus on shared values and common goals while acknowledging differences without judgment.

1.3.2. Education and awareness

Education plays a pivotal role in fostering interfaith understanding. To achieve this:

- Incorporate interfaith studies in school curricula, highlighting the history, practices, and values of major world religions.
- Host cultural exchange programs for students to experience and understand different faith traditions.
- Leverage media platforms to showcase success stories of interfaith collaboration and counteract divisive narratives.

1.3.3. Community engagement

Grassroots initiatives that bring people from different faiths together can create meaningful connections. Effective strategies include:

- Launching joint community service projects such as food drives, disaster relief efforts, and neighborhood cleanups.
- Organizing interfaith cultural festivals to celebrate diversity and foster mutual appreciation.
- Creating safe spaces where people can share their stories and experiences across faith lines.

1.3.4. Role of religious leaders

Religious leaders play a pivotal role in fostering interfaith dialogue, serving as bridges between diverse faith communities and promoting mutual understanding and respect. Their influence and authority within their respective traditions position them uniquely to lead and encourage constructive interactions among different religious groups. Religious leaders wield significant influence within their communities. To leverage their role:

- Encourage leaders to publicly advocate for peace, tolerance, and respect for all faiths.
- Facilitate interfaith councils where leaders collaborate on community issues and crises.
- Offer training programs to help leaders develop skills in conflict resolution and interfaith dialogue.

1.3.5. Policy and governance

Governments and international organizations have a crucial role to play in fostering interfaith peace. Policy measures include:

- Enforcing anti-discrimination laws that protect religious minorities and promote equal opportunities.
- Funding initiatives that support interfaith education and community-building projects.
- Collaborating with global organizations like the United Nations to promote peace-building programs.

1.3.6. Encouraging individual contributions

Individuals can make significant contributions to interfaith peace. Practical steps include:

- Learning about other religions through reading, attending events, or

speaking with practitioners.

- Practicing kindness and empathy in everyday interactions, especially with those of different faiths.
- Standing against bigotry and prejudice by calling out discriminatory behaviors and advocating for inclusion.

1.3.7. The role of technology in interfaith peace

Technology can amplify efforts to build interfaith understanding. Online platforms and social media can:

- Host virtual interfaith dialogues and discussions.
- Share educational content about religious diversity.
- Provide tools for collaborative problem-solving across faith communities.

1.4. A vision for the noble interfaith peace

The pursuit of noble interfaith peace is not without challenges, but its rewards are profound. A world where people of all faiths coexist in harmony is one where innovation thrives, conflicts diminish, and humanity progresses. This vision requires unwavering commitment, sustained effort, and an acknowledgment of our shared humanity.

In the words of Rumi, the 13th-century Persian poet, “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” Noble interfaith peace calls us to meet in that field, to transcend divisions, and to build a future rooted in mutual respect and understanding. Only then can we truly achieve a harmonious world for generations to come.¹

1.5. Noble interfaith peace and its significance for Sustainable Development Goal 16

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering peace and understanding among diverse religious communities is paramount. The concept of “Noble Interfaith Peace” embodies this endeavor, aligning closely with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), which aims to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

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1.5.1. Understanding noble interfaith peace

Noble Interfaith Peace refers to the harmonious coexistence and collaborative efforts of different religious traditions working together towards common goals of peace, justice, and societal well-being. This approach emphasizes mutual respect, dialogue, and cooperation among faith

¹ The quote “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” is attributed to the 13th-century Persian poet Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi. This line is part of the poem “A Great Wagon,” which is included in “The Essential Rumi,” translated by Coleman Barks.

communities, recognizing that despite theological differences, shared human values can serve as a foundation for unity and collective action.

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1.5.2. The core of Sustainable Development Goal 16

SDG 16 is integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, focusing on:

- Reducing violence and related death rates.
- Ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against children.
- Promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice.
- Combating organized crime and illicit financial and arms flows.
- Developing effective, accountable, and transparent institutions.
- Ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making.
- Providing legal identity for all, including birth registration.
- Ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms.

1.5.3. The intersection of Noble Interfaith Peace and SDG 16

Interfaith initiatives contribute significantly to the realization of SDG 16 in several ways: Promoting Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

Interfaith dialogues and collaborations break down barriers of misunderstanding and prejudice, fostering communities where diversity is celebrated. By encouraging interactions among different faith groups, these initiatives help build societies that are more inclusive and harmonious. For instance, the United Religions Initiative emphasizes that faith-based peace workers are creatively finding ways to deal with complex problems by using and further developing the resources for peace found in their religious and spiritual traditions.

Initiative Providing access to justice for all

Religious organizations often play pivotal roles in advocating for justice within their communities. Through interfaith cooperation, these groups can pool resources and influence to address injustices, support marginalized populations, and ensure that legal systems are fair and accessible. The collective moral authority of united faith communities can be a powerful force in holding institutions accountable and promoting the rule of law.

Building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions

Interfaith collaborations model the principles of inclusivity and accountability. By working together, religious groups demonstrate how institutions can function effectively while respecting diverse perspectives. This unity sets a precedent for other societal institutions to follow, encouraging governance structures that are transparent, representative, and responsive to the needs of all citizens.

II. CASE STUDIES ILLUSTRATING THE IMPACT OF INTERFAITH PEACE INITIATIVES

2.1. Nobel Peace Prize recognition

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to individuals from different faith backgrounds highlights the global recognition of interfaith efforts in promoting peace. For example, the joint recognition of Malala Yousafzai, a Muslim, and Kailash Satyarthi, a Hindu, underscores the importance of interfaith collaboration in addressing issues like child education and rights.²

2.2. Interfaith peacebuilding resources

Organizations like the United Religions Initiative have developed comprehensive guides to interfaith peacebuilding, providing frameworks and resources for communities to engage in effective interfaith dialogue and cooperation. These resources are instrumental in guiding faith-based peace workers to creatively address complex societal issues.³

United Religions Initiative

2.3. Challenges and the path forward

Despite the clear benefits, interfaith peace initiatives face challenges, including deep-seated prejudices, political manipulation of religious sentiments, and socio-economic disparities. Overcoming these obstacles requires:

- **Education:** Implementing educational programs that promote religious literacy and empathy from a young age can dismantle stereotypes and build a foundation for mutual respect.
- **Policy Support:** Governments and international bodies must recognize and support interfaith efforts, integrating them into broader strategies for peace and development.
- **Community Engagement:** Grassroots involvement ensures that interfaith initiatives are grounded in the realities of the communities they serve, making interventions more effective and sustainable.

III. CONCLUSION

Noble Interfaith Peace is not merely an idealistic vision but a practical necessity in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16. By fostering dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among diverse religious communities, interfaith initiatives lay the groundwork for peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Embracing and supporting these efforts is essential for sustainable development and the collective well-being of humanity.

3.1. Case study: Interfaith peacebuilding

Between February and May 2004, over 700 people were killed, and 45,000 displaced, in conflicts between Christians and Muslims in and around the

² HuffPost

³ [United Religions Initiative](#)

town of Yelwa in the Shendam local government area of Plateau State.⁴ The crisis in Yelwa sparked violent riots elsewhere in the region, ultimately leading the government to declare a state of emergency in Plateau State in spring 2004.⁵ During the state of emergency, the interim administrator, retired General Chris Alli, launched an ambitious six-month peacemaking initiative, which culminated in the signing of a peace agreement negotiated by Imam Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye in November 2004.

Administrator Alli's peacemaking initiative, known as the Plateau Peace Program, included plans for dialogue among religious and community leaders, a statewide peace conference, and a truth and reconciliation commission.⁶ The peace conference was convened in August 2004 to review the causes of the conflict that had been submitted by the community and propose solutions to the government. The resolutions it produced, however, consisted primarily of policy recommendations for the national and state governments and seemed to favor Christian groups.⁷

During July 2004, the Interfaith Mediation Centre spent at least twelve days working on a variety of peacemaking projects in Plateau State, which took a very different approach. These included a five-day, faith-based workshop for youths in Jos. The workshop drew 100 participants from each of the local government areas of Plateau State and provided training in mediation and reconciliation. Perhaps more significantly, the Interfaith Mediation Centre also convened a three-day interfaith workshop for forty women and fifty community/religious leaders from Yelwa, which addressed both conflict resolution and trauma counseling. As a result of this meeting, participants created an Inter-Faith Group for the Shendam local government area, tasked with sustaining peace in the area by working with both governmental and non-governmental organizations.⁸

In November 2004, Administrator Alli invited Wuye and Ashafa to help address ongoing tensions between Christians and Muslims in Yelwa.⁹ Wuye

⁴ Uthman Abubakar, "Yelwan Shendam—Five Years After," *Daily Trust*, 3 July 2009, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200907030151.html>, accessed November 6, 2013.

⁵ Lami Sadiq, "Yelwa-Shendam—Rising from Ashes, Nine Years After Bloodbath," *Daily Trust*, 7 September 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201309070163.html>, accessed November 6, 2013.

⁶ "Revenge in the Name of Religion: The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States," *Human Rights Watch*, 2005, p. 49–51.

⁷ "Revenge in the Name of Religion: The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States," *Human Rights Watch*, 2005, p. 50–51; According to the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Muslim community rejected the proposals. "Conflict in Plateau State," *United States Institute of Peace: Certificate Course in Interreligious Conflict Resolution*.

⁸ Jibril Daudu, "Muslim--Christian Groups Parley for Peace in Plateau," *Daily Trust*, 7 July 2005, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200507070551.html>, November 2, 2013.

⁹ David R. Smock, "Mediating Between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State, Nigeria," *Peaceworks*, Vol. 17, No. 55 (2006).

and Ashafa brought together leaders from the local Christian and Muslim communities for a five-day meeting, during which they combined Western conflict resolution techniques with religious preaching. Although the meeting was initially confrontational, by the third day, the participants were able to agree on some of the core causes of the conflict, including Christian accusations that Muslim non-indigenes failed to respect local leaders and traditions. In a surprising turn of events, the Muslim leaders not only accepted the accusations of the Christian participants but also agreed that the behavior of local Muslim groups needed to change, made a formal apology, and requested forgiveness.¹⁰

Astonished by the Muslims' actions, the Christians also requested forgiveness for their part in the violent conflict. On the last day of the meeting, participants in the negotiation formulated a peace agreement that recognized and strove to address several of the underlying causes of ongoing conflict. In contrast to the government-oriented perspective of the August peace conference resolutions, the Yelwa Peace Agreement focused on local concerns and made recommendations for actions that could be implemented by local leaders and community members. Among other statements, those who signed the Peace Agreement affirmed the need to refer to His Royal Highness the Long Goemai of Shendam by his formal title and grant him respect, condemned the use of derogatory language to refer to groups and locations, and pledged to avoid using the media to spread incorrect information or inflammatory messages.¹¹ On February 19, 2005, Yelwa held a gathering to celebrate the peace agreement. Several thousand people attended the celebration, including many people who had felt compelled to leave their homes when violence broke out the previous year.¹²

As of September 2013, Yelwa remained peaceful, despite a lack of governmental aid in the years after the crisis and ongoing conflicts in the surrounding areas.¹³ A group of individuals known as the Inter-Faith Peace Committee, which may be the same as or evolved from the Inter-Faith Group formed in 2004, has played a key role in maintaining the peace. Along with organizing ongoing dialogues and events, the Inter-Faith Peace Committee also oversees a peace vigilante group, which includes Muslim and Christian youths from the area who monitor the town to help prevent small crimes and diffuse potential conflicts.¹⁴

¹⁰ David R. Smock, "Mediating Between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State, Nigeria," *Peaceworks*, Vol. 17, No. 55 (2006), p. 18.

¹¹ David R. Smock, "Mediating Between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State, Nigeria," *Peaceworks*, Vol. 17, No. 55 (2006), p. 18 – 19.

¹² David R. Smock, "Mediating Between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State, Nigeria," *Peaceworks*, Vol. 17, No. 55 (2006), p. 20.

¹³ Sadiq, "Yelwa-Shendam—Rising from Ashes," Nasir Imam, "Yelwa: Stock Taking a Year After," *Daily Trust*, 27 June 2005, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200506271343.html>, accessed November 2, 2013; Abubakar, "Yelwan Shendam."

¹⁴ Sadiq, "Yelwa-Shendam—Rising from Ashes."

What is notable about the successful peace-keeping initiatives in Yelwa is the grassroots nature of the work and the local focus. While the government's programs worked with state leaders and representatives from religious umbrella groups, the work of Ashafa and Wuye in 2004 and that of the Inter-Faith Peace Committee more recently focused on local actors and issues. By grounding their work in the religious, psychological, and social needs of the local community, Ashafa and Wuye seem to have created a foundation for the Yelwa community to continue the work of maintaining peace on their own.

3.2. Central African Republic

The Central African Republic Interfaith Peacebuilding Partnership (CIPP) aims to lay the groundwork for sustainable social cohesion in a country experiencing political instability and armed conflict. By bringing together religious leaders and communities, CIPP works towards peace and reconciliation.

3.2.1. Indonesia

In Indonesia, interfaith collaboration projects empower people to build peaceful and equal relationships across religious boundaries. These initiatives work together to prevent violent conflicts and promote justice. Indonesia religious faith

- 279 million inhabitants
- 87% of the population is Muslim
- 10% of the population are Christians Background information

The freedom of religion enshrined in Indonesia's state constitution and the state motto "unity in diversity" propagate pluralism. The majority of Muslims practice a locally influenced, moderate Islam. However, intolerance has increased among the population. Narrow-minded or uneducated views toward other religious groups are evident in social media, sermons, publications, and public and political discourse. The authorities do not make sufficient efforts to protect the rights of minority groups, including Muslim minorities such as the Ahmadiyah. Radicalism also occurs on the part of minorities, such as Christians. In various regions of Indonesia, incidents related to violence, persecution, and oppression of religious minorities occur regularly. In addition, religion is instrumentalized by anti-democratic forces: Ex-militants from the years of Suharto's autocratic rule ally themselves with Islamist groups to assert their political power interests. Even the Christian-Chinese governor of Jakarta was convicted of alleged blasphemy against Allah and deprived of his power. Wahhabi-oriented educational institutions and mosques oppose tolerance and pluralism. Radical groups sprout from them and sometimes resort to terrorist means.

3.2.2. Colombia

The Interfaith Rainforest Initiative in Colombia successfully launched local chapters in areas with high deforestation rates. By training over 500 religious leaders and securing a commitment from Congress to end deforestation, the initiative demonstrates the power of interfaith collaboration in addressing environmental issues.

UNEP - UN Environment Programme

3.2.3. United States

In the United States, the New Jersey Buddhist Vihara and Meditation Center serves as an interfaith hub, bringing together individuals from various religious backgrounds. The center promotes peace, compassion, and inclusivity, reflecting the country's religious diversity.

AP News

These examples illustrate that interfaith peace initiatives can be successful when they involve grassroots participation, address local issues, and foster collaboration among diverse religious communities.

The ranking of countries facing severe religious conflicts

Religious conflicts often significantly impact the stability of governance in many cases, especially in countries with diverse religions and cultures. Differences in beliefs can lead to tensions, divisions, and violence, affecting the political, economic, and social landscape. These conflicts also hinder resource management and national development.

Here are four countries experiencing severe religious conflicts and their impact on governance

3.2.4. Iraq

The problem: Iraq faces severe religious conflicts between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Since gaining independence from Britain in 1958, struggles for political power between these groups have led to widespread unrest.

Impact on governance: This conflict has resulted in the government's inability to control situations in many areas. Governance is hindered by terrorism and clashes between groups, leading to political and economic instability across the country.

3.2.5. Afghanistan

The problem: Conflicts in Afghanistan are deeply intertwined with religious, political, and ethnic issues. For instance, tensions exist between the Taliban, rooted in religious ideology, and groups advocating for a more open society.

Impact on Governance: The lack of a strong government and insecurity stems from religious group conflicts. This has hampered governance efficiency, particularly in infrastructure development, education, and economic progress.

3.2.6. Nigeria

The problem: Religious conflicts in Nigeria are complex, often occurring between the Muslim population in the north and the Christian population in the south. These tensions frequently escalate into violence, attacks, and retaliations, causing widespread unrest.

Impact on governance: This conflict has prevented the Nigerian government from fostering unity and national development. It has also negatively impacted the economy, education, and the provision of necessities to the population.

3.2.7. India

The problem: India's population is religiously diverse, with significant tensions between Hindus and Muslims. At times, these tensions are exacerbated by nationalist groups and politically motivated sentiments, leading to religious riots and violence.

Impact on governance: Religious conflicts in India cause social unrest and divisions, reducing the government's capacity to address societal and economic issues effectively. Significant resources must be allocated to control and manage unrest, which negatively affects national development.

3.3. Conclusion

Religious conflicts not only directly impact governance but also create long-term consequences for social and economic stability. Promoting mutual respect and understanding of differing beliefs is crucial in reducing tensions and fostering peace in these societies. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among governments, civil society, and the general populace.

IV. NOBLE INTERFAITH PEACE: IN THAILAND

Thailand is a country rich in religious and cultural diversity. The majority of the population practices Buddhism. Alongside the flourishing of Buddhism, there is respect for other religions such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism. Additionally, there are about 12 other belief systems practiced by smaller groups, although not officially recognized in the constitution. This diversity creates a landscape of pluralistic beliefs and public culture.

The constitution prohibits discrimination based on religious beliefs and protects religious freedom, provided such practices do not pose a "threat to national security."

4.1. Religious Demographics in Thailand

According to the 2020 census, approximately 94% of Thailand's population adheres to Buddhism, particularly of the Theravada and Mahayana traditions. Buddhism significantly influences daily life, including festivals, religious ceremonies, and social practices. Temples often serve as community centers, offering cultural preservation and educational activities.

Approximately 4% of the population practices Islam, predominantly in the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The presence of Muslim communities contributes to the country's religious diversity and mutual understanding.

Christianity, primarily Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, accounts for about 1% of the population. Christianity plays a notable role in education and social outreach efforts.

Other religions, such as Hinduism and Sikhism, are practiced by smaller groups but contribute to the nation's overall religious diversity.

4.2. Interfaith relations in Thailand

Thailand has a positive record of interfaith harmony, largely due to the country's open and accepting culture. Peace and unity are central to Thai

society, enabling citizens to coexist harmoniously despite differences in beliefs and practices.

Efforts to promote communication and understanding among religions take various forms, such as joint events, cultural festivals, and interfaith dialogues. These activities foster opportunities for people from different religious backgrounds to meet and share experiences.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofit groups in Thailand also focus on promoting peace and coexistence among religious communities. They organize activities that encourage interfaith understanding and equal opportunities for religious and cultural education.

4.3. Key initiatives for interfaith peace

4.3.1. Visit by international leaders

On November 19, the U.S. Vice President paid respects to Somdet Phra Ariyavangsagatayana, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand's Buddhist community, at Wat Ratchabophit. This gesture highlighted the U.S.'s respect for Buddhism.

During the year, the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires hosted an iftar dinner for 32 prominent Muslim community leaders to promote religious freedom, acceptance of differences, and interfaith dialogue.

4.3.2. Educational and social outreach

Embassy officials frequently visited religious sites, met religious leaders, and discussed issues of religious pluralism and tolerance. These interactions aimed to address challenges faced by refugees fleeing religious violence and to promote collaborative efforts for peace.

4.3.3. Youth and community engagement

The U.S. Embassy funded programs in Thailand's southern provinces to promote diversity, equality, and digital literacy. These projects included community-building and youth engagement initiatives to foster inclusive perspectives.

4.4. Challenges to Interfaith Peace

Despite Thailand's strong foundation for interfaith harmony, occasional tensions arise, particularly in the southern provinces where a significant Muslim population resides. Misunderstandings and religious conflicts have sometimes disrupted peace in these areas.

Accurate dissemination of information about different religions is crucial to mitigating these issues. Ensuring the safety of individuals practicing their faith and promoting inter-religious understanding remain critical for Thailand's diverse society.

V. THE CONFLICT IN SOUTHERN THAILAND: A COMPLEX ISSUE

The conflict in Southern Thailand is a multifaceted issue involving historical, religious, political, economic, and social factors. Key aspects of the conflict can be summarized as follows:

5.1. Historical and ethnic identity

- **Relationship Between the Thai State and the Southern Border Provinces:** The three southernmost provinces (Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat) and parts of Songkhla were historically part of the Pattani Malay Kingdom, known for its strong Islamic culture. The incorporation of this region into Siam in the early 20th century led to dissatisfaction among Malay Muslims, who felt a loss of political and cultural autonomy.
- **Distinctive Identity:** The majority of the population in these areas practices Islam and speaks the Malay language (Jawi), which differs from the predominantly Buddhist and Thai-speaking population in other parts of the country. This has fostered a sense of alienation from the central government.

5.2. Economic and Social Inequality

- **Economic Disparities:** Despite the region's rich natural resources, such as rubber and fisheries, the southern border provinces face higher poverty levels than the national average, leading to perceptions of neglect by the central government.
- **Infrastructure and Public Services:** Residents often feel underserved in areas like infrastructure, education, and healthcare, exacerbating the sense of marginalization.

5.3. Religious and cultural issues

- **Religious Tensions:** Although the Thai Constitution guarantees religious freedom, certain laws and policies have caused Malay Muslims to feel that their religious practices are being infringed upon. Examples include restrictions on wearing the hijab in some schools and conflicts over religious ceremonies.
- **Neglect of Local Culture:** The enforcement of Thai as the official language in governance and education has diminished the prominence of the local Malay language and traditional culture.

5.4. Violence and insurgency

- **Separatist Movements:** Some separatist groups seek autonomy or independence for the southern provinces, citing historical injustices and current grievances.
- **Acts of Violence:** Since 2004, there have been ongoing violent incidents, including bombings, shootings, and attacks on state property, significantly impacting lives and livelihoods.
- **Government Crackdowns:** Special laws, such as the Emergency Decree and Martial Law, have been used to counter insurgency. However, these measures are often criticized for limiting civil liberties and fueling further discontent.

5.5. Political Issues and Distrust of the State

- **Distrust in the Bureaucracy:** Some residents view the central government and officials as biased and out of touch with the way of life

of Muslims in the region, believing that the root causes of the conflict are not being addressed.

- **Lack of Community Participation:** Decisions regarding development and administration are often made by the central government, with minimal input from local communities.

5.6. Drug problems and crime

- **Drug Trafficking:** Drug abuse is a significant issue in the southern provinces, intertwined with economic and social problems. Additionally, drug trafficking is believed to fund insurgency activities.

- **Transnational Crime:** The proximity to Malaysia makes the region prone to smuggling of goods, weapons, and drugs across the border.

5.7. Efforts to address the conflict

The Thai government and various organizations have attempted to resolve the conflict through several approaches, including:

- Peace Talks:** Negotiations with dissenting groups to find sustainable solutions.
- Economic Development:** Promoting regional development and creating economic opportunities.
- Interfaith Understanding:** Organizing activities to foster mutual understanding and unity among different religions.
- Education:** Supporting bilingual education (Thai-Malay) and improving access to quality education in the region.

5.8. Conclusion

The conflict in Southern Thailand remains a complex and sensitive issue. Addressing it requires a comprehensive approach that combines historical awareness, economic development, cultural sensitivity, and genuine community engagement.

Strategies to promote interfaith peace

Education and Awareness: Integrate studies on various religions into school curricula to teach the history, traditions, and beliefs of different faiths. Educational materials should aim to foster mutual respect and understanding.

Creating Communication Platforms: Organize interfaith events such as dialogues, cultural exchanges, and festivals. These provide opportunities for individuals from different religious backgrounds to engage and build connections.

Community Participation: Support initiatives by religious education organizations that encourage collaborative efforts, such as joint charity projects among different faith communities.

Public Policy Support: The government can establish clear policies to promote interfaith relations. This includes funding programs aimed at fostering peace and understanding across religious communities.

5.9. Conclusion

Thailand's ability to maintain peaceful coexistence among its religious communities is achievable through the promotion of understanding, mutual respect, and education. Strengthening connections between people of different faiths within Thai society will ensure sustainable harmony and peace in the future.

“A unique feature that stands out.”

One-of-a-kind uniqueness. “Thailand is the only country in the world where the King practices Buddhism while also promoting and supporting other religions that coexist harmoniously within the society.”

The **Constitution of Thailand** explicitly states that the King must adhere to Buddhism. This requirement is outlined in the provisions related to the monarchy, reflecting the cultural and historical significance of Buddhism in Thailand.



Example from the Thai Constitution¹⁵

Explanation of the terms

- **Buddhist:** Indicates that the King must follow and practice the teachings of Buddhism.
- **Upholder of Religions:** Reflects the King's role in supporting and protecting all religions practiced in Thailand.

5.11. Key reasons

- **Historical tradition:** The King's adherence to Buddhism is a continuation of Thailand's longstanding tradition where Buddhism is the central religion of the nation.
- **Symbol of national unity:** Buddhism plays a key role in uniting Thai society, and the King's role as a Buddhist reinforces this connection.

¹⁵ In the current Constitution (2017), **Section 7** states: “The King shall be a Buddhist and Upholder of Religions.”

- **Moral and ethical leadership:** The King serves as a moral exemplar, upholding the Buddhist principles of compassion, generosity, and justice.
- **Support for religious harmony:** While the King must be Buddhist, his constitutional role as “Upholder of Religions” ensures equal support and respect for other religions practiced in the country.

This dual role reflects the balance between tradition and inclusivity, allowing the King to be a symbol of both cultural heritage and religious harmony in Thailand.



VI. THE THAI KING AND HIS ROLE IN SUPPORTING ALL RELIGIONS FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN THAILAND

Thailand is a nation rich in religious, cultural, and traditional diversity. This diversity brings new dimensions to Thai society, fostering openness and resilience through mutual exchange and learning. However, with this diversity comes the necessity of fostering peace and mutual understanding, particularly in the realm of religion.

6.1. Promoting religious respect and harmony

The Thai King plays a crucial role in promoting peace and understanding within Thai society by supporting respect and reconciliation among different religions. This effort has significantly contributed to the peaceful coexistence of the people in the country. The Thai Constitution, since the reign of King Rama IX, emphasizes the maintenance of all religions for the peace and happiness of Thai citizens.

6.2. Publicizing religious principles

Though the King follows Buddhism as per the Palace and Constitution Law, which stipulates that the monarch must adhere to Buddhism, he actively promotes education and the dissemination of principles from all religions. This is achieved through organizing activities that provide opportunities for people from various religions to meet and learn about each other's beliefs and

cultures. Events such as festivals and interfaith activities aimed at fostering peace and understanding are key examples.

6.3. Encouraging interfaith collaboration

One clear approach to fostering interreligious cooperation is by supporting collaborative initiatives among different communities. For instance, during royal celebrations and charitable events, representatives from various religions are invited to participate. This fosters unity and mutual respect in society. Such connections have encouraged both governmental and private sectors to regularly organize activities that strengthen interfaith relationships. Additionally, the government allocates budgets to support different religions.

6.4. Formal support for religions

The King provides official support to all religions recognized in the Thai Constitution, including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism. This support includes promoting accurate knowledge of various religions and encouraging dialogue among religious leaders. Committees and projects focusing on interfaith understanding are established to enhance this initiative's effectiveness.

6.5. Creating a culture of respect

The King has emphasized creating a culture of respect and acceptance for religious differences by supporting the inclusion of religious diversity in educational curricula, from primary to university levels. This enables younger generations to better understand and accept these differences. For example, the King has endorsed Pondok schools, traditional Islamic educational institutions in southern Thailand. These schools have evolved to integrate both religious and secular education and are officially recognized by the Ministry of Education.

6.6. Government support for religion

The Thai government has supported Pondok schools, which are very important for Muslim education. (also spelled Pondok Pesantren in some regions) It is a traditional Islamic boarding school primarily found in Southeast Asia, especially in countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Southern Thailand, and parts of Brunei. The term “pondok” originates from the Malay/Indonesian word for “hut” or “simple shelter,” which historically referred to the accommodations provided to students.

6.7. Key features of Pondok schools

i. Religious Education:

- The primary focus is on Islamic studies, including the Quran, Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Aqidah (creed), and Arabic language.
- Emphasis is placed on traditional Islamic texts and teachings, often following specific schools of thought within Sunni Islam.

ii. Boarding System:

Students (commonly referred to as **santri**) live on the school premises,

fostering a communal lifestyle that encourages discipline, spirituality, and mutual support.

iii. Simple lifestyle:

Historically, Pondok schools operated with simple facilities and modest living conditions, reflecting the spiritual and humble values of Islamic education.

iv. Community and moral development:

Pondok schools are not only centers of learning but also hubs of community development. They instill moral values, discipline, and a strong sense of community responsibility.

v. Expansion to secular subjects:

In modern times, many Pondok schools have integrated secular subjects like mathematics, science, and national languages alongside traditional Islamic studies, creating a more holistic education system.

vi. In Southern Thailand, Pondok schools play a significant role in the Muslim-majority regions, especially in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat provinces.

6.8. Role in society: Support from the Thai government

Pondok schools are deeply rooted in local culture and play an essential role in preserving Islamic traditions. They often act as centers of religious authority and contribute to the spiritual and educational development of their communities.

6.9. The growth of Islamic schools

As of 2018, there were 375 Pondok schools in Thailand, predominantly in the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Songkhla. Their numbers are expected to increase as demand rises.

i. Financial support and compensation: The Ministry of Education provides subsidies to these schools, including salaries for teachers and assistants, though calls have been made for increased compensation to match current economic conditions.

ii. Improving education quality: The government conducts surveys and implements quality improvements in Pondok schools to ensure compliance with educational standards and promote quality learning experiences.

6.10. Responding to religious conflicts

During times of conflict or social challenges, the King has demonstrated leadership in fostering unity. For instance, he often calls for national gatherings during New Year celebrations or religious holidays to highlight the importance of peaceful coexistence.

6.11. Peace communication campaigns

The King also supports campaigns focused on peace and understanding at the national level. These include exhibitions, conferences, and media initiatives aimed at fostering awareness of various religions, reducing tensions, and promoting harmony.

6.12. Collaboration with international organizations

The King has promoted cooperation with international organizations to support peace and coexistence in Southeast Asia and globally. This includes participating in peace-building activities such as summits and human rights initiatives.

6.13. The role of the king in building a peaceful society

The Thai King's role in supporting and promoting peaceful coexistence in Thailand is ongoing. His vision of fostering respect and acceptance of differences underpins a society built on harmony and sustainability.

6.14. Conclusion

The Thai King has consistently emphasized the importance of promoting unity and peaceful coexistence within Thai society. His support transcends religious boundaries, encompassing communication, education, and collaboration across all faiths. These efforts reflect the King's care and determination to create a society filled with love, respect, and understanding – foundations for lasting peace in Thailand.

VII. RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN THAILAND: SITUATIONS AND SOLUTIONS

Thailand is a country rich in religious and cultural diversity. Approximately 94% of the population identifies as Buddhists, while the remainder practices Islam, Christianity, and other religions. However, religious conflicts have occasionally arisen, affecting societal harmony and peace.

7.1. Causes of religious conflicts

One of the primary causes of religious conflict is misunderstandings about the beliefs and rituals of different religions. Misinformation or a lack of accurate knowledge can lead to biases and a lack of mutual understanding among individuals of differing faiths. For example, disagreements over religious interpretations, questions about rituals, or criticism of practices can spark conflicts.

Additionally, political and economic issues often exacerbate religious tensions in Thailand. In certain regions, particularly in the southern border provinces, conflicts stem from differences in religious beliefs, politics, and economic development. These factors contribute to a tense atmosphere that undermines social harmony.

Religious conflicts in Thailand are particularly evident in the southern border provinces, where the majority of the population is Muslim. Tensions occasionally arise between Buddhist and Muslim groups due to misunderstandings about each other's beliefs, cultural differences, and attitudes that hinder the development of positive relationships.

Incidents in the southern provinces, such as violent attacks, assaults on places of worship, and inappropriate actions targeting individuals of different religions, have been recurring issues. These events have significantly impacted the region's peace and stability.

Beyond the southern region, religious conflicts have also occurred in major cities like Bangkok. For instance, debates over the dissemination of religious information, which is not always accurate or clearly explained, can lead to misunderstandings and conflicting interpretations.

7.2. Solutions to religious conflicts

Addressing religious conflicts in Thailand requires multifaceted strategies focused on fostering understanding and respect for diversity. Relevant organizations and agencies can take the following actions:

i. Education and Information Dissemination

Develop educational curricula on religious diversity for schools, from primary to higher education. Educating the younger generation about various religions can reduce misunderstandings and promote mutual respect.

ii. Interfaith Activities

Organize joint activities involving different religions to build relationships and exchange experiences. These could include festivals, discussion forums, or collaborative community service projects, highlighting unity and mutual respect.

iii. Role of Religious Leaders

Religious leaders play a vital role in promoting unity and peaceful coexistence. Through sermons or meetings, they can emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting others' beliefs.

iv. Transparent and accurate communication

Promote open communication about religions, highlighting positive aspects while addressing critiques constructively. Providing accurate and transparent information can foster better understanding and reduce conflicts arising from misinformation.

v. Collaboration between the public and private sectors

Encourage cooperation between government agencies and private organizations to develop programs or campaigns aimed at fostering understanding, peace, and coexistence.

By implementing these strategies, Thailand can address the roots of religious conflicts and work toward a society that values mutual respect and harmony among its diverse communities.

VIII. VESAK DAY 2025: PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PEACE THROUGH THE TEACHINGS OF BUDDHISM

Vesak Day, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, is a moment to reflect on how the teachings of Buddhism can foster lasting peace. In 2025, the focus is on cultivating sustainable peace by applying the Buddha's teachings from the **Tipitaka (Pali Canon)** to address modern challenges.

8.1. The principle of non-violence (*Ahimsa*)¹⁶

¹⁶ Reference in the Tipitaka .The Buddha emphasized non-violence as a cornerstone of

“Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.”

This teaching encourages individuals and nations to resolve conflicts through compassion rather than aggression.

Modern relevance: Promoting dialogue, understanding, and forgiveness aligns with Ahimsa and can help de-escalate conflicts and build trust.

8.2. Right Speech (*Samma Vaca*)¹⁷

Avoiding lies, slander, and harsh words can create an environment conducive to peace and mutual respect.

Modern Relevance: In an era of misinformation, practicing Right Speech can combat divisive rhetoric and foster constructive dialogue.

Compassion (Karuna) and Loving-Kindness (Metta)¹⁸ “Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, so too one should cultivate an unlimited heart about all beings.”

The cultivation of Metta and Karuna leads to a mindset that seeks the well-being of all, transcending boundaries of race, religion, and nationality.

Modern Relevance: These values can inspire humanitarian efforts, encourage empathy, and reduce animosity in diverse communities.

Interdependence and Harmony (Paticca Samuppada)¹⁹

“When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises.”

Understanding this interconnectedness fosters a sense of global responsibility and cooperation.

Modern Relevance: Recognizing the interconnected nature of humanity can guide efforts to address global issues like climate change, inequality, and conflict.

Contentment and Moderation (Santutthi)²⁰

“Contentment is the greatest wealth.”

This principle encourages individuals and societies to adopt sustainable practices and avoid excessive consumption that leads to conflict over resources.

Modern Relevance: Emphasizing contentment can promote ecological balance and reduce the strain on natural resources, contributing to long-term peace.

Resolving Conflict Through Wisdom (Panna)²¹

peace. In the *Dhammapada*, Verse 5.

¹⁷ Reference in the Noble Eightfold Path Right Speech, as outlined in the *Mahāsātipatthana Sutta* (Digha Nikaya 22).

¹⁸ Reference in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta* (*Sutta Nipata* 1.8).

¹⁹ The doctrine of Dependent Origination explains that all phenomena arise interdependently. The *Samyutta Nikaya* (SN 12.2)

²⁰ Reference in the Tipitaka: The Digha Nikaya (DN 2) highlights contentment as a virtue

²¹ Reference in the Tipitaka: The Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta (Digha Nikaya 26) highlights the importance of wise leadership

“A ruler should govern righteously, based on Dhamma, to ensure peace and prosperity for all.”

Wisdom helps in understanding the root causes of disputes and addressing them equitably.

Modern Relevance: Applying wisdom in governance and policymaking can lead to more equitable and peaceful societies.

8.3. Conclusion

The teachings of the Buddha, as preserved in the **Tipitaka**, provide timeless guidance for fostering sustainable peace. By embracing principles like non-violence, compassion, interdependence, and wisdom, individuals and societies can work toward resolving conflicts and building a harmonious global community. On Vesak Day 2025, let us commit to these teachings as pathways to lasting peace.

IX. APPLICATION OF BUDDHIST WISDOM IN BUILDING INTERFAITH RELATIONS

The application of Buddhist wisdom in fostering interfaith relations is an important approach to promoting peace and understanding between people of different religious backgrounds. By incorporating key Buddhist principles, we can build meaningful relationships based on mutual respect, compassion, and shared human values. Below are some key Buddhist teachings and their applications in interfaith engagement:

9.1. *Metta* (Loving-Kindness) and *Karuna* (Compassion)²²

Details:

- The practice of *Metta* (loving-kindness) and *Karuna* (compassion) is central to Buddhism. It involves wishing for others to be happy and alleviating their suffering. These qualities are crucial in building peaceful and harmonious relationships across religious lines.
- **Application:** These principles encourage individuals to show kindness and compassion, which fosters understanding and collaboration between people of different faiths.

9.2. Respect for differences²³

Details:

- Buddhism teaches respect for the uniqueness and diversity of others. Rather than seeing differences as barriers, Buddhism encourages acceptance of the diversity of beliefs and practices.
- **Application:** Embracing religious differences by applying the Buddhist principle of non-attachment (*Anatta*) helps individuals develop a mindset that values diversity and fosters interfaith dialogue.

²² *Metta Sutta (Sutta Nipata 1.8): “Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, so too one should cultivate an unlimited heart with regard to all beings.”*

²³ *Majjhima Nikaya 140 (Cūḷavedalla Sutta) อยู่ใจในพระไตรปิฎก เล่มที่ 3*

- “Those who see the Dhamma see the truth, and those who see the truth see the Dhamma.”

9.3. Mindfulness and meditation²⁴

Details:

- Mindfulness (Sati) and meditation (Bhavana) are integral practices in Buddhism that foster awareness and understanding of oneself and others. These practices help reduce biases and misunderstandings, promoting peaceful coexistence.
- **Application:** Practicing mindfulness and meditation together in interfaith settings can deepen mutual respect and connect individuals on a spiritual level, transcending religious differences.
- “And how, monks, is one established in mindfulness? Here, monks, a monk dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, clearly aware, and mindful...”

9.4. Impartiality (*Upekkha*)²⁵

Details:

- The Buddhist principle of impartiality or *Upekkha* teaches us not to be biased or discriminatory toward others. This principle promotes fairness and equality, which is essential in creating harmonious relationships between individuals of different faiths.
- **Application:** Practicing impartiality helps in creating an environment where people of various faiths are treated equally and with respect, fostering peaceful coexistence.
- “Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify the mind: this is the teaching of the Buddhas.”

9.5. Impermanence (*Anicca*)²⁶

Details:

- Buddhism teaches the impermanence of all things (*Anicca*), including beliefs, ideas, and conflicts. This teaching encourages us to recognize the transient nature of differences and conflicts and to be more open to change and understanding.
- **Application:** By acknowledging that religious differences and disputes are temporary, individuals can move beyond entrenched views and focus on what unites them, such as shared values of peace and compassion.
- “All conditioned things are impermanent – when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering.”

²⁴ *Satipatthana Sutta (Digha Nikaya 22):*

²⁵ *Dhammapada*, Verse 197, *Upekkha* (Impartiality) is a principle discussed in several texts of the Pali Canon, particularly in the *Anguttara Nikaya* (Book of the Gradual Sayings) and other sections of the *Sutrapitaka*.

²⁶ *Majjhima Nikaya 28 (Dhamma-cakka-pavattana Sutta):*

9.6. Conclusion

By applying the core Buddhist teachings such as loving-kindness (Metta), compassion (Karuna), mindfulness, impartiality (Upekkha), and the understanding of impermanence (Anicca), we can foster better relationships between people of different faiths. These teachings help create a foundation for mutual respect and peace, leading to meaningful interfaith dialogues and cooperation that transcends religious boundaries.

The **Four Sublime States of Social Harmony (Sangahavatthu 4)** is another sutta that is useful to support the harmony of interfaith peace. The following provides detailed references:

Sangahavatthu 4: The Four Principles of Benevolence²⁷

The four principles are:

1. **Dana** (Generosity) – Offering help and resources to others.
2. **Piyavaca** (Kind Speech) – Speaking kindly and pleasantly.
3. **Atthacariya** (Beneficial Conduct) – Acting for the welfare of others.
4. **Samanattata** (Impartiality) – Treating others equally.

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The Atthakatha (Commentaries) elaborate on the practical application of Sangahavatthu 4 for laypeople and monastics alike.

²⁷ Primary References in the Tipitaka

INTERFAITH HARMONY: BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES ON ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSITY AND GLOBAL UNITY

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Abstract:

Buddhism's teachings provide a distinctive viewpoint on promoting interfaith cooperation and developing inner peace as a means of achieving global peace. Buddhism, with its foundations in compassion, tolerance, and inclusivity, promotes respect and understanding between many religious traditions. This article explores Buddhism's views on various faiths, emphasizing its acceptance and cohabitation tenets. Examples from the past of Buddhist interaction with other religions are examined, demonstrating how it can heal divisions and promote communication. There is also a discussion of modern applications, showing how Buddhist ideas still motivate interfaith projects and peacemaker activities around the world. The discussion highlights the timeless value of Buddhist teachings in tackling contemporary issues of religious diversity and conflict by linking inner peace to unity among people.

Keywords: *Buddhism, interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance, global harmony, inclusivity, non-violence, Noble Eightfold Path, spiritual equality, compassion, coexistence.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Interfaith dialogue and understanding have become crucial in an increasingly interconnected world. Buddhism offers a model for interacting with many religious traditions because of its non-dogmatic approach and emphasis on inner transformation. Mutual understanding and religious tolerance are essential for creating a peaceful and united world community. Buddhism, one of the main religions in the world, is well known for its tolerance and non-dogmatic view of other faiths. As stated by Ven. Walpola Rahula Thero:

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“The spirit of tolerance and understanding has been from the beginning one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilization. That is why there is not a single example of persecution or the shedding of a drop of blood in converting people to Buddhism or in its propagation during its long history of 2500 years. It spread peacefully all over the continent of Asia. Violence in any form, under any pretext whatsoever, is absolutely against the teaching of the Buddha.”¹

Buddhism, which has its roots in the teachings of compassion, mindfulness, and the end of suffering, places a strong emphasis on developing inner peace as a means of bringing about greater communal harmony. This study aims to emphasise the way non-sectarian Buddhist philosophy can serve as a guide for fostering dialogue and collaboration among various religious traditions. There will be an examination of Pali canonical texts, Buddhist community practices, and contemporary interpretations. This research also studies the Buddhist attitude toward accepting other religions while analysing how this openness contributes to cultivating inner peace and promoting world peace during historical eras. In a world where religious tensions and ideological conflicts are becoming more prevalent, the Buddhist model of interfaith harmony offers valuable insights into spiritual acceptance. That can exceed differences and unite humanity in shared values of compassion and understanding.

II. BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY ON INTERFAITH TOLERANCE

Buddhism is by its nature inclusive. The concept of cohabitation, which is based on the Noble Eightfold Path and the Four Noble Truths, is fundamental to Buddhist philosophy. By encouraging people to overcome attachment and aversion, these ideas help people develop a worldview that is both welcoming and appreciative of diversity. Buddha always counselled people to critically assess teachings and adopt those that result in wholesome ends, the Buddha stressed that truth might be discovered in many ways. Because of this tolerance, Buddhists can interact with people of different faiths without bias or condemnation. The Buddha practiced an invitational approach that is emphasized by the idea of “*Ehipassiko*” or “Come and see”,² which promotes understanding and inquiry over proselytization and cultivates the spirit of inquiry and respect for one another. This approach made a great impact on the development of interfaith tolerance and was also necessary for wraith harmony. It is accepted that the qualities of wisdom (*Prajna*) and compassion (*Karuna*) are essential to Buddhist practice. While knowledge allows Buddhists to identify similarities rather than differences, compassion inspires them to respect and sympathize with the beliefs of others.³ These qualities foster unity

¹ Ven. Walpole Rahula (1959). *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Gordon Fraser, p. 5.

² *Kālāma Sutta*, *Anguttara Nikaya*, 3.6; *Dhammaññu Sutta*, *Samyutta Nikaya* 55.27; It is one of the six qualities of the Dhamma (*Dhamma-guṇa*), often mentioned in the formula describing the Dhamma: “*Svākkhāto Bhagavatā Dhammo, sandiṭṭhiko, akāliko, ehipassiko, opanayiko, paccattarāṃ veditabbo viññūhi.*”

³ Lily de Silva (1986). *One Foot in the World: Buddhist Approaches to Present Day Problems*,

and discourage division. Fundamentally, Buddhism is based on ideas that support peace and harmony. The following fundamental principles that are pertinent to interfaith acceptance are emphasized in the Buddha's teachings:

- (i) Compassion (*Karuna*) and Loving-Kindness (*Metta*):
- (ii) Non-Attachment to Dogma

These concepts travel beyond religious boundaries and inspire Buddhists to treat all living things with compassion and kindness. Additionally, it encourages people to pursue knowledge rather than rigorously following theological views, supporting a flexible approach to truth.

2.1. Buddhist Principles of compassion and loving-kindness - recognition of common humanity

A fundamental principle of Buddhism is that the Buddha's teachings are accessible to everyone. The Buddha highlighted how his teachings (*Dhamma*) are accessible to all people, regardless of caste, gender, or social standing. This was emphasized by the Buddhist notion of interdependence (*Paticca Samuppada*), which inherently encourages inclusivity. When looking at the social environment of the Buddha's time, this point becomes important. Since Śūdra were viewed as untouchable outcasts, it was severely forbidden for them to hear the Vedas, which were thought to contain sacred truths inspired by God. Strict guidelines for caste relations are found in the *Manusmṛti*, an important work in the Brahmanic tradition and a major source of ancient Hindu law. It states unequivocally that anyone who teaches the sacred rule to a Śūdra, who belongs to the lowest caste in the old Varna system, or assigns them a penance, will suffer terrible repercussions. Such an act, the book says, condemns the Śūdra and the instructor to suffer in a particular realm of hell called *Asamvṛta*.⁴ This punishment emphasizes the Brahmanical emphasis on preserving the sanctity and exclusivity of sacred knowledge within the upper castes, reflecting the period's firmly ingrained social hierarchies and prohibitions. Buddhism, on the other hand, did not support prejudice or exclusivity in any way in its teachings. Buddhism put forward various arguments against discrimination on the grounds of castes and maintained the position that a man's superiority or inferiority depended not on birth but on ethical grounds, on the quality of his actions.⁵ The Buddha made sure that his teachings were available to everyone, irrespective of social status, caste, or class, by emphasizing their universality. The Buddha exemplified an egalitarian approach to spiritual enlightenment by freely sharing his teachings with anybody willing to learn, in contrast to some religious traditions that kept specialized or hidden doctrines for a small

Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1986.

⁴ *Manusmṛti*, (The Laws of Manu), Chapter 4, Verse 99, P. Olivelle (2005) *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Lily de Silva (1985) "Buddhist Attitude to other Religions," *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, University of Peradeniya, xi, (1 & 2), 111 - 128.

number of initiates.⁶

Theravada Buddhist *sutras* provide numerous examples that expressively demonstrate this inclusion. The Buddha emphasizes the universal applicability of the *Dhamma* in the *Kālāma sutta*, addressing the *Kālāma* people and advising them to critically analyze teachings rather than accept them solely on tradition or authority.

He advises:

“Do not go by oral tradition, by lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cognition, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence of a speaker, or because you think, ‘This ascetic is our teacher.’ When you know for yourselves, ‘These things are unwholesome, these things are blameworthy, these things are censured by the wise, these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to harm and suffering,’ then you should abandon them.”⁷

In the same vein, the *Vasettha Sutta* welcomes people from all backgrounds into his monastic community by rejecting caste-based divisions and emphasizing that spiritual worth is decided by actions and commitment to the *Dhamma* rather than birth.⁸ He illustrates this with a profound metaphor:

“Just as, Vasettha, the great rivers – Ganga, Yamuna, Aciravati, Sarabhu, and Mahi – when they reach the great ocean, lose their earlier names and identities and are reckoned simply as the great ocean, so too do these four castes – *Khattiyas*, *Brahmanas*, *Vessas*, and *Sudas* – when they go forth from the home life into homelessness in the *Dhamma* and discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata, abandon their earlier names and clans and are reckoned simply as ascetics following the son of the Sakyans.”⁹

As individuals from various walks of life relinquish their previous identities and become equals under the monastic discipline, this description highlights the *Dhamma*’s ability to transform people. It emphasizes the Buddha’s revolutionary resistance to the rigid caste system of his time and his commitment to establishing an inclusive community based on moral conduct and spiritual development.

This openness is further demonstrated by the story of Angulimala, which is described in the *Angulimala Sutta* of the *Majjhimanikaya*, in which a feared bandit embraces spiritual awakening under the Buddha’s compassionate

⁶ Ven. Walpola Rahula, (1959). Op.cit, p. 5.

⁷ *Kālāma sutta*, *Aṅguttara Nikaya*, 3.65.

⁸ Asanga Tilakeratne, (2014). “Buddhism and Ethnicity Related Tensions in Sri Lanka: Doctrinal Position and Role of Buddhism Examined,” Presented paper in the International Conference on Twenty-Five Years in Retrospect – Buddhism, Ethnic Conflict and Religious Harmony in South and Southeast Asia, *International Center for Ethnic Studies (ICES)*, Kandy, Sri Lanka.

⁹ *Vasettha Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 98.

tutelage.¹⁰ This narrative describes how Angulimala, a vicious bandit who was once notorious for his violent actions, undergoes a complete life transformation under the Buddha's tutelage. Angulimala is inspired by the Buddha's wisdom and compassion to give up his violent ways and follow the path of spiritual enlightenment, which leads to *Arahantship*.

One of the other important steps towards inclusivity is the ordination of women, which is recorded in the *Cullavagga* of the *Vinaya Pitaka*.¹¹ Despite his initial reluctance, the Buddha recognized women's ability to achieve enlightenment, as evidenced by individuals such as Mahapajapati Gotami, and permitted them to enter the monastic order. By comparing the *Dhamma* to a tool for freedom that is available to everyone, the *Alagaddupama Sutta*¹² uses the tale of the raft to highlight how useful and universal it is.¹³ The commentaries contain stories such as Sunita the sweeper, which highlight the transcendence of social divides. In this story, the Buddha accepts an outcast into the monastic community, which ultimately leads to his attainment of *arahant ship*. Further, confirming that the Buddha's teachings are accessible to all creatures is the universal message of the *Dhammapada*,¹⁴ which promotes avoiding evil, fostering good, and purifying the mind.

The Buddha's deep wisdom and compassion are demonstrated by these instances, which highlight how the *Dhamma* transcends caste, gender, social standing, and past deeds. Rather, it is a road of liberation that is accessible to everyone prepared to walk it with attention and sincerity. Further, Buddha gave his followers complete freedom to study the doctrines of other faiths and schools of thought. As I pointed out above, the *Kālāma Sutta*,¹⁵ which is a significant example of the Buddha's philosophy of freedom in studying and critically analyzing other teachings, is one of the many examples of the *Theravāda* canon that chronicle the Buddha's approach to promoting open-minded inquiry. The Buddha speaks to the people of Kesaputta in the *Kālāma Sutta*, who were perplexed by the divergent doctrines of different spiritual authorities. Even if the teachings originate from renowned teachers, texts, or customs, the Buddha cautions against accepting them at face value. Rather, he promotes a critical assessment process grounded in logic, firsthand knowledge, and the lessons' real-world applications.

He says:

¹⁰ *Angulimala Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 86.

¹¹ *Cullavagga*, *Vinaya Pitaka*, translated by I. B. Horner (1952). *The Book of the Discipline* (Vol. V), Sacred Books of the Buddhists, London: Pali Text Society.

¹² *Alagaddupama Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya*, 22.

¹³ D. Y. Paul, (1981). "Buddhist Attitudes Towards Women's Bodies." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 1: 63 – 71. doi: 10.2307/1390100.

¹⁴ *The Dhammapada: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom* (1985) tra. Acharya Buddhārakkhita, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, verse 183.

¹⁵ *Kālāma Sutta*, *Anguttara Nikāya*, 65.

“Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor rumor, nor upon what is in a scripture, nor upon surmise, nor an axiom, nor specious reasoning, nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over, nor upon another’s seeming ability, nor upon the consideration ‘The monk is our teacher.’”

Instead, he emphasizes accepting and following teachings that lead to the welfare and happiness of oneself and others, as validated by direct experience.

Buddhism holds that the search for truth and usefulness transcends one’s place of origin; as long as the insight is accurate and helpful, it makes no difference where it comes from. The Buddhist idea that the search for truth and usefulness is not limited by origin or source is vividly illustrated by the story of Pukkusati and is reinforced by several examples in the *Pali Suttas*. This perspective emphasizes the universality of wisdom and the openness to receiving teachings from any source, provided they lead to understanding, liberation, or benefit. This openness reflects the Buddha’s respect for individual inquiry and the pursuit of truth beyond dogmatic boundaries, allowing disciples to explore other philosophies and verify the validity of his teachings. It underscores his confidence that his teachings could withstand scrutiny alongside other religious and philosophical ideas.

Furthermore, since Pukkusati was unaware that the Buddha himself was speaking to him, this event amply demonstrates that it makes no difference from whom one receives the truth. Regardless matter where the idea originated, outcomes will come naturally if the lesson is accurate and is carefully applied to one’s verbal, physical, and mental actions. This was further ill-starred in the *Vimamsaka Sutta*.¹⁶ In this discourse, the Buddha encourages practitioners to critically examine their teachers, including himself, to see if their teachings lead to liberation. This highlights the Buddhist approach of evaluating teachings based on their utility and transformative power rather than their source or authority. In the *Canki Sutta*,¹⁷ the Buddha explains that truth is not the monopoly of any single tradition or lineage. He emphasizes that wisdom should be sought with open-minded inquiry, suggesting that a genuine seeker of truth values the message over the messenger. Most of the stories of various Sutras reflect diverse life experiences and paths to enlightenment, showing that wisdom and liberation are accessible to all – regardless of background, gender, or societal status.

Buddhism’s receptivity to knowledge from all sources promotes communication and education across disciplines, cultures, and traditions. The tradition maintains its adaptability and relevance in a variety of circumstances by highlighting the practicality and transformative potential of teachings. Unaffected by origin, identity, or preconception, the quest for truth is a universal human endeavor, as the narrative of Pukkusati¹⁸ and its lessons

¹⁶ *Vimamsaka Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya*, 47.

¹⁷ *Canki Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, 95.

¹⁸ *Dhātuvibhaṅga Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, 140.

provide as timeless reminders. This method encourages inclusivity, curiosity, and humility in the search for knowledge.

Thus, it is clear that the universality and accessibility of the *Dhamma* are emphasized by the Buddhist teachings' demonstrated values of compassion, loving-kindness, and inclusivity. Buddhism provides a route to emancipation founded on moral behavior and self-awareness rather than birth or social advantage by eliminating hierarchical obstacles like caste, gender, and social position. The Buddha emphasized the transforming force of the *Dhamma*, which eliminates distinctions and promotes equality. The Buddha's faith in the timeless value of his teachings and their capacity to stand up to criticism alongside other traditions is strengthened by the emphasis on the open-minded pursuit of truth, regardless of its source. This all-encompassing perspective on truth and insight highlights how flexible and inclusive Buddhism is. It encourages people from all walks of life to pursue enlightenment free from the restrictions of doctrine, creating a climate of respect for one another, curiosity, and cooperation.

2.2. Non-attachment to dogma - non-dogmatic philosophy of Buddhism: a focus on wisdom and liberation

The pragmatic concerns of Buddhism greatly illustrate its approach towards other religions. Instead of rigorously upholding doctrinal ideas, Buddhism encourages a flexible approach to the pursuit of truth or wisdom via human experience. Its approach towards other religions and philosophical ideas is shaped by this pragmatic outlook.

The Buddha's only purpose is to lead humanity to freedom from suffering. His profound concern stemmed solely from his compassion for humanity's need to end all forms of suffering. As a result, he did not address hypothetical questions like the world's beginning, size, and length. Even though these hypothetical concerns were of tremendous philosophical interest at the time, the Buddha tried to set them aside without responding.¹⁹ The Four Noble Truths carefully outlined the Buddha's philosophy's scope:

- i. The truth of the unsatisfactory nature of human existence.
- ii. The truth of the cause of this unsatisfactory condition.
- iii. The truth of the cessation of this unsatisfactory condition.
- iv. The truth of the path leading to the cessation of this unsatisfactory condition.²⁰

Since addressing irrelevant intellectual curiosity would take away from his mission, the Buddha avoided expanding his teachings beyond these fundamental facts. The Buddha chose to ignore and only taught what was practical and true. Specifically, his discussion of the method of teaching, appropriate speech, and selective teaching is referenced in *Majjhima Nikaya*.²¹

¹⁹ Lily de Silva, (2011). *The Buddha and Christ as Religious Teachers*, Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, pp. 24 - 25.

²⁰ *Samyutta Nikaya* v. 418; *Digha Nikaya* i, 189, 191.

²¹ *Majjhima Nikaya*, 1.395.

He outlines three crucial standards by which he decides what to teach:

- i. Truthfulness (*Sacca*): The Buddha only speaks what is true.
- ii. Usefulness (*Attha*): He speaks only what is beneficial and meaningful.
- iii. Timeliness (*Kālaññutā*): He speaks what is timely, avoiding unnecessary or harmful truths that do not lead to well-being.

The Buddha refrains from speaking only for amusement, conjecture, or harm, the text makes clear. His speech is useful and intentional since he only teaches what results in enlightenment and the end of suffering.

The Pali canon *Samyutta Nikāya* provides a lovely summary of this idea: “*Yaṃ taṃ atthasaṃhitam vakkhāmi, na yaṃ anatthasaṃhitam.*” (I speak what is connected with purpose, not what is not connected with purpose.)²²

The teachings of the Buddha are therefore based entirely on guiding beings towards freedom and are informed by a deep sense of pragmatism and compassion. The idea of self-effort in the quest for freedom is fundamental to Buddhism.²³ Buddhas act as guides, showing the way, but it is up to each person to follow it. A story about a guy who wants to cross a river cannot simply pray for the opposing bank to come to him; instead, he must work hard and cross it on his own.²⁴ This illustrates the Buddha’s rejection of depending on divine intervention for salvation.

Buddhism emphasizes a practical, independent method of attaining emancipation, criticizing the effectiveness of prayer and divine mercy. The *Kālāma sutta*, which counsels knowledgeable seekers to evaluate religious claims objectively, eloquently expresses this viewpoint.²⁵ No instruction should be accepted based just on tradition, religion, or the teacher’s reputation; rather, it must be put to the test by one’s own life and proven to provide happiness and freedom. The Buddha applies this critical mindset to his teachings and behavior in the *Vimamsaka sutta*.²⁶ The Buddha asks his followers to watch and assess his actions for indications of illusion, hatred, or greed. They should only conclude that he is intellectually and ethically flawless if they find him to be devoid of these defects – not out of faith, but via reasoned observation.

The Noble Eightfold Path is proclaimed to be the sole route to freedom in several sections of the Pali Canon. A fundamental and highly esteemed idea in the Theravāda tradition, the Noble Eightfold Path is particularly emphasized in the *Dhammapada* and other important *suttas*. The Eightfold Path is emphasized as the ultimate spiritual goal in Theravāda Buddhism’s most revered classic, the *Dhammapada*.²⁷ This route, which includes mental discipline (*samādhi*),

²² *Samyutta Nikāya*, Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.). (2000). *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

²³ Lily de Silva, (2011). Op.cit. (Chapter - Special Techniques for Self-Realisation)

²⁴ *Alagaddūpama Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, 22.

²⁵ *Kālāma Sutta, Anguttara Nikāya*, 65.

²⁶ *Vimamsaka sutta, Majjhima Nikaya*, 47.

²⁷ *Dhammapada*, pp. 32 - 33.

ethical behavior (*sīla*), and wisdom (*paññā*), is presented as the means of achieving *Nibbāna* (liberation) and overcoming suffering (*dukkha*). “Of all paths, the Eightfold Path is the best; of all truths, the Four Noble Truths are the best; of all mental states, detachment is the best; of all humans, the Seeing One (Buddha) is the best.”²⁸

This verse highlights the path’s paramount role in leading followers to enlightenment and purity.

The Buddha affirms the uniqueness of the Noble Eightfold Path in the *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*, highlighting its crucial role in achieving spiritual perfection. “As long as the bhikkhus live rightly, the world will not be bereft of *arahants*,” the Buddha declares, speaking to Subhadda.²⁹ This assertion reaffirms that *Aarahantship* - complete freedom from the cycle of *samsara* - can only be attained by followers of the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha goes on to say that there are no saints or flawless creatures outside of this path.

To highlight the distinctiveness of the Eightfold Path, the *Dhammapada* also uses a powerful metaphor. Using the metaphor of “footprints in the sky,” he states that enlightened persons cannot be discovered outside of the Noble Path, just as footprints cannot be found in the sky.³⁰ This metaphor represents how important it is to adhere to the Buddha’s teachings to truly achieve nirvana. A key component of *Theravāda* teaching, the Noble Eightfold Path, is thoroughly examined in writings like the *Magga-vibhanga Sutta*.³¹ Right View (*Sammā-diṭṭhi*), Right Intention (*Sammā-saṅkappa*), Right Speech (*Sammā-vācā*), Right Action (*Sammā-kammanta*), Right Livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*), Right Effort (*Sammā-vāyāma*), Right Happiness (*Sammā-sati*), and Right Concentration (*Sammā-samādhi*) are the eight components of the path. Progress towards enlightenment and mental purity depend on each of these elements.

Beyond theory, the Noble Eightfold Path integrates wisdom, moral behavior, and mental discipline to offer a useful manual for day-to-day living. Aspects like awareness (*sammā-sati*) and concentration (*sammā-samādhi*) are frequently stressed in modern *Theravāda* practice, reflecting the path’s fundamental significance in modern meditation techniques. Therefore, the Noble Eightfold Path is a thorough manual for leading a harmonious, balanced life that promotes spiritual development, in addition to being a philosophical framework.³²

From these, Buddhist ideologies vary and illustrate Buddhist attitudes towards other religions. Any religion that incorporates elements of the Noble Eightfold Path is genuine and effective. There will be saints and perfected beings in any religion that follows the Eightfold Path, which consists of developing

²⁸ *Dhammapada*, verse 273.

²⁹ *Mahāparinibbāna sutta*, 16.

³⁰ *Dhammapada*, verses 254 – 255.

³¹ *Magga-vibhanga Sutta Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 45.8.

³² Ven. Walpola Rahula, (1995). Op.cit, pp. 5 - 20; Lily de Silva, (1985). “*Buddhist Attitude to other Religions*,” *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, University of Peradeniya, xi, (1& 2), 111 – 128.

moral habits (*sila*), mental discipline (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*). Buddhism thus promotes a philosophy of rigorous inquiry, urging searchers to evaluate Buddhism and even its founder critically in addition to other religions. Its practical and non-dogmatic approach to truth and spiritual practice is embodied in its emphasis on individual effort and openness to analysis.

2.3. Non-violence (*ahimsa*) attitude of Buddhism

Non-violence, a fundamental principle of Buddhism, promotes an atmosphere of respect for one another by extending to both mental and physical behaviors. Buddhism discourages and even avoids arguments because it is a non-dogmatic religion. The *Suttanipata* contains several sutras that eloquently demonstrate Buddhism's opposition to arguments. This disgust originates from the belief that arguments frequently result in attachment, ego, and conflict, all of which impede spiritual development. There are multiple arguments in favor of this position. Since reason was not a sufficient standard of truth, Buddhism gave it only a limited amount of validity. The order of psychological truths and logical probabilities is different. Buddhism posits experiential truths that transcend rationality. Even the flavor of a mango cannot be demonstrated by logical reasoning; imagine the spiritual experience of a sincere truth-seeking meditator. Furthermore, Buddhism came to recognize that debate is a two-edged blade that harms both the victor and the loser spiritually. Since the loser lies depressed and the winner receives jealousy and animosity from the other, it is morally wrong to do so. The psychological attitude of philosophers during Buddha's time was ill. Buddhism places a high value on giving up cravings and attachments, including opinions and debates. The *Suttanipāta's* teachings, especially those found in the *Pasūra Sutta*, *Muni Sutta*, and *Paramatthaka Sutta*,³³ stress the value of detachment, humility, and harmony in interpersonal relationships, including discussions between different religions. The basis for cultivating amicable ties between Buddhism and other faiths is provided by these teachings. As stated in the *Pasūra Sutta*, "Victory breeds enmity; the defeated live in pain. The peaceful live happily, giving up both victory and defeat."³⁴

This passage emphasizes how arguments motivated by pride and attachment can result in animosity and pain rather than comprehension. According to this viewpoint, the Buddhist approach to interfaith discussion would place a higher priority on respect for one another and the sharing of ideas without trying to control or persuade others. By letting go of the need to "win," Buddhists can develop peaceful, mutually beneficial relationships.

The *Muni Sutta* highlights the detachment and dislike of conflict as characteristics of a great sage (*muni*): "The sage does not engage in disputes or cling to opinions. They live unattached, free from craving, like water on a lotus leaf."³⁵

³³ *Suttanipāta: Pasūra Sutta* 4.8; *Muni Sutta* 1.12; and *Paramatthaka Sutta*, 4.5.

³⁴ *Pasūra Sutta*, 4.8.

³⁵ *Muni Sutta*, 1.12.

The Buddhist goal of avoiding needless conflict is reflected in this teaching. This applies to having discussions in interfaith settings with openness and composure as opposed to holding fast to dogmatic beliefs. Such a mindset lowers the likelihood of conflict and promotes understanding amongst people.

The *Paramatthaka Sutta* critiques the attachment to views and doctrines, portraying them as sources of suffering and conflict: “Those attached to their views and opinions roam the world, challenging others. But the wise do not get involved in such disputes, understanding the dangers of attachment.”³⁶

Recognizing that clinging to one’s viewpoint frequently results in division, this teaching promotes courteous interaction with other religions for Buddhists. On the other hand, sensible people try to grasp other people’s perspectives without being constrained by their own. Buddhism discourages arrogance and holds that people impose a lot of restrictions on themselves by being too committed to their own opinions and demeaning those of others. Harmonious connections with persons of different religions are made possible by this openness.

The *Pasūra Sutta* and the *Paramatthaka Sutta* are part of the *Atthaka Vagga*,³⁷ which continuously cautions against arrogance and self-interest in discussions. It places a strong emphasis on detachment, humility, and acknowledging our shared humanity. These ideals are quite similar to those of interfaith harmony, where the emphasis is on fostering relationships based on respect and common ethical principles rather than claiming superiority. Together, these *sutras* stress that arguments, particularly those motivated by ego and attachment, stand in the way of spiritual development. Buddhism provides a positive example for interacting with different religions by eschewing ego-driven arguments and placing an emphasis on humility, understanding, and peace. Buddhists are urged to consider discourse as a chance for cooperation and mutual learning rather than as a competition. This strategy promotes concord and prevents conflict, which helps different religious communities live in peace with one another.

2.4. Living the Dhamma: Prioritizing practice over philosophical debate

During Buddha’s day, there were debtors known as *Vitandavadins* who engaged in eristic behaviours purely to win arguments rather than having a viewpoint of their own to offer.³⁸ According to Pali scriptures, they roam around and use abrasive arguments to disprove other people’s opinions.³⁹ They were infamous for criticizing others while extolling themselves. The Buddha disapproved of these types of attitudes as they were detrimental to wisdom gain and spiritual growth in addition to being pointless. However, there was also a group of individuals known as truth-seekers and were known in the Pali literature as the intelligentsia.⁴⁰

³⁶ *Paramatthaka Sutta*, 4.5.

³⁷ *Suttanipāta*, Chapter 4.

³⁸ K.N. Jayatilleke, (1963), *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London p. 21.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 221; Lily de Silva, (1986) *Op.cit.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 24.

They approached the Buddha with an open mind, and the Buddha greatly valued their positive outlook and inquisitive nature. Despite their disdain for arguments, the Buddha and his followers always supported philosophical discourse and the pursuit of spirituality.⁴¹ They occasionally made a special effort to meet with members of other religious groups, and the suttas document the fruitful dhamma conversations that occurred during these times.⁴²

Additionally, the Buddhist perspective on the *dhamma* forbade participation in philosophical debates. The Buddha considered the *dhamma* to be a tool. He likens the *dhamma* to a raft that can be used as a tool to navigate the *samsara* river.⁴³ Carrying the raft on one's shoulder after crossing over is a dumb idea. The value of the *dhamma* as an instrument is emphasized despite its inherent truth to discourage its use as a philosophy for both offensive and defensive battles, which was a prevalent social institution at the time.

Even though it is inherently true, the *dhamma*'s instrumental utility is highlighted to deter people from using it as a philosophy for both offensive and defensive combat, which was a common social institution at the time. To experience spiritual truths, which he recognized, the Buddha was more concerned with encouraging his followers to practice and live by the *dhamma* than he was with engaging them in philosophical discussions. As though his head were on fire, the Buddha underlined that man must respond swiftly due to his current situation in the world. He must actively devote himself to the job of emancipating himself from worldly sorrow; he cannot afford to waste time on intellectual discussions. This was the practical approach to the *dhamma*, and it undoubtedly influences how Buddhists view other faiths as well. Although he appears to have embraced the challenge when other religionists approached him with questions for debate, Jayatilleke⁴⁴ notes that the evidence from the texts suggests that the Buddha avoided getting involved in arguments with them as much as possible. Generally speaking, he would rather explain his own beliefs than engage in critiquing those of others. Two Brahmins once approached the Buddha and said that Purana Kassapa and Nigantha Nataputta had conflicting opinions regarding the size of the universe. They asked the Buddha which of them was right. Buddha answered as "Let that be aside, I will teach you the *dhamma*."⁴⁵ His response to Subhaddha, who approached him as he lay dying and asked if all of the well-known religious leaders of the day realized the truth, none of them understood, or only some of them did, was similar.⁴⁶

The Buddha's selfless motivation for teaching the teachings is explicitly stated in the *Udumbarikasihanada sutta*,⁴⁷ The Buddha claims that people are

⁴¹ *Digha Nikaya*, 1.163.

⁴² *Dighanikaya*, 1.178; 111.39; *Majjhimanikaya*, 11.29.

⁴³ *Majjhimanikaya*, 1.134, 260.

⁴⁴ K. N. Jayatilleke, (1963). *Op.cit*, p. 407.

⁴⁵ *Aṅguttara Nikaya* iv.429.

⁴⁶ *Digha Nikaya*, 11.150, 151.

⁴⁷ *Digha Nikaya*, iii. 56.

free to follow any teacher they choose and that he does not preach the *dhamma* to increase his following. Furthermore, the Buddha does not preach to stop the listeners from abiding by the regulations of their religious organizations. The Buddha doesn't care if people follow the regulations set forth by their organizations. Moreover, the Buddha does not want the listeners to abandon their chosen means of subsistence. They might carry on with their lifestyles. The Buddha also has no desire to approve of their engagement in actions that their teachers believe to be detrimental. Additionally, the Buddha does not want to discourage students from engaging in activities that their professors believe will be helpful. As directed by their teachers, they may continue to view any action as either good or dangerous. In actuality, there are unwholesome activities that, if not stopped, cause great pain in this life as well as the unknowable future. This is why the Buddha preaches to the populace. The Buddha taught the doctrine to help people give up these unwholesome, ineffective behaviors. Those who do so will become more morally pure, achieve realization, and experience long-lasting bliss.

Therefore, it is evident that the Buddha has no hidden agenda to achieve a huge following by spreading the *dhamma* or to deny other religious instructors a large following. The listeners are free to identify with any religious leader they choose. However, they will be the fortunate recipients of enlightening wisdom and enduring bliss if they give up the immoral behaviors that the Buddha highlights as having serious negative effects. In the *Culasihanada sutta*, the Buddha boldly asserts that only the Buddhist dispensation has the four sorts of saints: *sotapanna* (the stream enterer), *sakadagami* (the once returner), *anagami* (the non-returner), and *arahant* ('the good one').⁴⁸ Furthermore, the sutta states that a follower of a different religious organization can ask what the basis for this claim is. The Buddha clarifies that there is only one ultimate goal, not many, and that only individuals who are completely devoid of negative psychological traits – such as greed, hatred, illusion, desire, addiction (*upadana*), etc. – will be able to achieve this goal. Furthermore, the sutta explains that religious systems are typically separated into two major opposing groups: those who believe in annihilation and those who believe in (eternal) existence. The genesis of these notions, their cessation, the satisfaction that results from them, the negative consequences that accompany them, and the way out of them are all things that neither of these two groups can genuinely comprehend. Those who are unaware of these facets of these viewpoints are not immune to illusion, hatred, or greed, among other things.

They cannot, therefore, be exempt from birth, old age, death, and sorrow. The sutta continues by explaining that there are four different kinds of *upadanas*.⁴⁹ This word connotes involvement, addiction, obsession, clinging, and grasping. There are four types of obsessions: egoistic ideas (*attavadupadana*), habits (*silabbatupadana*), diverse viewpoints (*ditthupadana*), and sensory pleasures

⁴⁸ *Culasihanada sutta Majjhima Nikaya* i. 63.

⁴⁹ *Majjhima Nikaya* 1. 66.

(*kamupadana*). Religious teachers typically assert that they comprehend all types of obsessions, but in reality, they do not recognise all obsessions as such or recognize their underlying causes. The wisdom that results from comprehending its causal genesis is the only way to end suffering. The Buddha boldly asserts – figuratively referred to as “the Lion’s Roar” – that there are no saints of the first, second, third, or fourth degree among other religious systems because no known philosophy of the time had explained the causal origin of men’s psychological obsessions in such clear detail.

Three categories of pious men who have not escaped the grasp of the malevolent Mara are listed in the *Nivapasutta*.⁵⁰ The first group consists of those who freely indulge in sensual pleasures. Those who go to the other extreme of self-mortification are included in the second category. Since they are unable to maintain their lives under such humiliation, they also fall victim to Mara. The third kind indulges in intellectual thoughts yet is cautious enough to enjoy sensual pleasures with appropriate moderation. They engage in pointless speculation about the size and duration of the universe, the characteristics of the soul, and the post-death existence of the freed person. As a result, they are also unable to escape the evil one’s trap.

We can get a decent sense of how Buddhists view other religions’ practices from this classification. Buddhism is classified as belonging to the fourth type mentioned in the *sutta*. Its characteristics include cultivating mental purity and understanding, refraining from engaging in metaphysical speculations, and enjoying sense pleasures in moderation while exercising appropriate care and restraint to keep the body in good health. The usual super-conscious meditative states from one to eight and the destruction of mental defilement are defined as states that are beyond the vision of Mara and his attendant host.

There is an intriguing discussion in the *Mahadukkhakkhandhasutta* that relates to our current subject.⁵¹ An ascetic of another religious sect raises the following question: “The recluse Gotama claims to understand the nature of sense pleasures (*kama*), the nature of the physical form (*rupa*) and the nature of sensations (*vedana*). We also assert the same thing. What distinguishes these two assertions in terms of instruction and teaching, then? According to the Buddha, these three phenomena – sensual pleasures, physical form, and sensations – should be interpreted in three ways:

(a) in light of the joy they provide; (b) in light of the risks they pose; and (c) in light of the escape they provide. Only a Buddha, a disciple of a Buddha, or someone who has heard the explanation from one of them could fully comprehend these facts in accordance with these classifications, according to the Buddha’s assertion.⁵²

⁵⁰ *Majjhima Nikaya* i. 151 - 160.

⁵¹ *Majjhima Nikaya* i. 83 - 90.

⁵² *Majjhima Nikaya*, i. 85.

The Buddha explained sensory pleasures as experiences derived from the five senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch – which are perceived as pleasant and appealing. The satisfaction derived from indulging in these sensory pleasures is the enjoyment they provide.⁵³ However, the Buddha emphasized the risks associated with sensory pleasures. To enjoy these pleasures, one must work hard to accumulate and maintain riches, which frequently results in anxiety, conflict, and harm.⁵⁴ The pursuit of sensuous pleasures frequently leads to social problems, such as wars and crimes, disagreements with loved ones, and failures in the workplace. Additionally, mistreating oneself in the name of pursuing sensory pleasures may cause additional pain in the afterlife.⁵⁵

The Buddha taught that the way to avoid the negative effects of sensory pleasures is to eliminate passion and desire for them, which leads to true liberation. The *sutta* delves further into these principles and offers a comprehensive discussion on the subject. This is a condensed form of the concept: Buddhism holds that a thorough comprehension of some facets of the human experience is necessary in order to completely escape suffering. Buddhism has emphasised and clarified these concepts more than any other religion.⁵⁶ According to the *Maggasamyutta*,⁵⁷ most individuals remain stuck in their misery, while only a select few are able to genuinely conquer it.

The Buddha was questioned in the *Anguttaranikaya*⁵⁸ as to whether his way could save one-third, half, or all of humanity. This was never said by the Buddha. Rather, he clarified, everybody entering must use that door, just like in a palace with a single door. Anybody who attains emancipation, whether in the past, present, or future, must do the same.⁵⁹ The five obstacles must be removed, the four pillars of mindfulness must be practiced, and the seven enlightenment components must be developed. According to the *Saccasamyutta*,⁶⁰ all Buddhas are aware of the Four Noble Truths, and without knowledge of these truths, suffering cannot be eradicated. It's as impossible as attempting to transport water in a leaf-based bowl. However, truth-seekers are not satisfied by 'unsatisfactory religions (*Anassāsika Brahmacariya*). Examples include:

(i) 'Claiming Omniscience', in which a teacher claims to know everything without providing evidence

(ii) 'Based on Revelation', in which the teacher relies only on unreliable divine messages as proof of truth

⁵³ Walpola Rahula, (1959) Op.cit, p. 15 - 17.

⁵⁴ Rupert Gethin (1998). *The Foundations of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 70 - 72.

⁵⁵ Peter Harvey (1990). *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 61 - 62.

⁵⁶ Walpola Rahula, (1959). Op.cit., pp. 15 - 17

⁵⁷ *Samyuttanikaya*, v. 24 and v. 233.

⁵⁸ *Anguttara Nikaya*, v. 195.

⁵⁹ Peter Harvey, (1990). Op.cit., pp. 61 - 62.

⁶⁰ *Samyutta Nikaya*, v. 433.

(iii) ‘Mere Logic and Reasoning’, in which the teacher relies only on intellectual arguments without empirical evidence

(iv) ‘Scepticism’, in which the teacher doubts everything without offering any new information.

The lack of verifiable evidence of omniscience, the unreliability of revelation, the limitations of reasoning in establishing experiential truths, and the inability of skepticism to offer meaningful solutions are the reasons why intelligent people reject these faiths, according to Ananda. As a result, unsatisfying faiths and pseudo-religions are both considered insufficient routes to truth or meaning.

It’s interesting to bring up a quote from the Buddha in the *Suttanipata*⁶¹ after studying the original teachings found in the Pali Canon: “I do not say that all recluses and brahmanas are involved in decay and death.” The Buddha appears to admit that certain religious leaders may be enlightened in this instance. Another set of extremely enlightened beings in Buddhism are called Pacceka Buddhas. These beings reach enlightenment on their own, without hearing the teachings from a Buddha or an arahant. They are self-enlightened and are considered wise individuals, though they exist outside the teachings of a Buddha.

As per the *Sotapattisamyutta*,⁶² a person who possesses the spiritual attributes of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom will not be born in a bad or unfortunate state, even if they do not believe in the Buddha, the *Dhamma* (the teachings), or the Sangha (the community of monks). Thus, Buddhism recognises that other religions may contain enlightened persons, but it places a great emphasis on the necessity of cultivating virtue (*sila*), mental concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) in order to attain nirvana.⁶³ If a religion adheres to the Noble Eightfold Path, it is deemed true; if it deviates from it, it is deemed erroneous. Buddhism respects and evaluates different religions according to their truths, demonstrating tolerance towards them. It promotes candid conversation and careful investigation while avoiding disputes and fights.⁶⁴

2.5. Historical examples of Buddhist inclusivity

Buddhism has proven its ability to coexist and enhance different traditions throughout history and is flexible enough to coexist with various religions in the world. As it extended throughout Asia, it came into contact with and engaged with various religions, including Confucianism, Taoism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Rather than confrontation, syncretism was frequently the defining feature of these interactions. Buddhism spread steadily throughout the world and continues to do so even today, propelled by an inner dynamism that may

⁶¹ *Suttanipata*, 182.

⁶² *Samyutta Nikaya* v. 379.

⁶³ S. Collins, (199, 8). *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁶⁴ P. Harvey, (2000). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

be called the power of the veracity of its teaching and its commitment to non-violence.⁶⁵ Wherever Buddhism spread, it adapted itself to suit the cultural background of the country concerned. This is not because it did not have a new message to offer or a positive contribution to make, but because it had a total vision of reality.⁶⁶ Most of the discussions on the history of Buddhism in South Asian and far beyond were focused on the interaction between Buddhism and other religious traditions, highlighting a tradition of coexistence.

In its birthplace, Buddhism coexisted with Hinduism and Jainism, sharing ideas and practices while maintaining distinct identities. Buddhist philosophers like Nagarjuna engaged in intellectual debates with proponents of other Indian philosophies, enriching the spiritual landscape of the time. Emperor Ashoka, a devout Buddhist in the third century BCE, promoted religious tolerance in his edicts, advocating respect for all religious practices.⁶⁷ This idea was described in the Rock Edict No. XII as follows:

“One should not honour only one’s religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honour others’ religions too. So doing, one helps one’s religion to grow and render service to the religions of others too. In acting otherwise, one degrades one’s religion and also harms other religions. Whosoever honours his religion and condemns other religions does so indeed through devotion to his religion, thinking, ‘I will glorify my religion.’ But on the contrary, in so doing he injures his religion more gravely. So Concord is good. Let all listen, and he willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others.”⁶⁸

When describing the introduction of the image cult into Indian Buddhism, A. K. Coomaraswamy made an important statement: “I believe that this worship had nothing to do with original Buddhism or Jainism that it did not originate with the monk, but with the lay community, when the people in general felt they want of a higher cult than that of their deities and demons, when the religious development of India found *Bhakti* the supreme means of salvation.”⁶⁹

Thus, it says that with the religious development of the people, various practices were adopted into the original religion. In other words, originally Buddhism or Jainism did not reject other religious practices because the community of monks offered to serve the varied religious needs of the society.

We may also pay attention to the statement made by Lamotte regarding the nature of Indian Buddhism. Lamotte says:

⁶⁵ Lily de Silva, (1985). *Op.cit*, pp. 111 - 128.

⁶⁶ K. N. Jayatilleke (1963). *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London, pp. 370 – 418.

⁶⁷ A. L. Basham, (1982). “Asoka and Buddhism – A Reexamination.” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 5 (1): 131 – 143.

⁶⁸ Asoka Rock Edict No. XII (1962) translated by Radhakumud Mookerji, in *Asoka: The Buddhist Emperor of India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

⁶⁹ A. K. Coomaraswamy (1927). “The Origin of the Buddha Image,” *The Art Bulletin*, IX, 297.

Buddhism is not only a mystical philosophy practised by those who expect to attain Nirvana. It was also a religion that went out of the narrow scope of the mind to suit all layers of the widespread population. No doubt based on certain points of the doctrine and cult, the negations were not essentially built with the aspirations of the lay people... The growing success of propaganda was for the effect of transforming Buddhism, which was originally the mystic-philosophical message, to a real religion involving a Goal (more precisely a divinized Buddha), a pantheon, sounds, a mythology, and a cult. This religion did not delay in penetrating the monasteries and to influence, more or less, the scholarly doctors.⁷⁰

Accordingly, on the one hand Buddhism is a mystical philosophy practiced by those who expect to attain *Nirvana*. On the other hand, it was also a religion capable of serving the varied religious needs of all layers of the widespread population.

In the Sri Lankan context, *Mahāvamsa*, *Dīpavamsa*, and other chronicles the interaction between Buddhism and other local beliefs, highlighting a tradition of coexistence. In Sri Lanka, Theravāda Buddhism coexisted with Hindu practices, particularly in the form of shared worship of Hindu deities. Considering the nature of Sinhalese Buddhism, this has been critically inquired into by R. A. L. H. Gunawardana in the sixth chapter of his book *Robe and the Plough*,⁷¹ where he says:

Buddhism offered a path to salvation through personal endeavour, and, originally, it had no cults to cater to the “specific plebeian religious needs” of society at large. Hence, it did not demand that its followers completely reject non-Buddhist cultic practices. Even during the early years of history, Buddhism came to terms with popular cults like the propitiation of *Yakkhas* and *Nāgas* and the worship of Brāhmanical gods. Buddhist texts merely claim that the *Yakkhas*, *Nāgas*, and the *Devas* accepted the supremacy of the Buddha. In Sri Lanka, some of the pre-Buddhist cults had been appended to Buddhism by the beginning of the period under consideration, and this did not necessitate any change in its fundamental principles. In some cases of “Buddhist” rites were introduced to perform the functions of pre-Buddhist practices. On the other hand, the contact with, Saiva and Vaisnava faiths stimulated the development of cultic practices and elaborated ceremonial in Sinhalese Buddhism. Together, these trends represent the development of Sinhalese Buddhism into a comprehensive religious system capable of serving the varied religious needs of society.

In fact, in this description, he clearly shows Theravada Buddhism and various other religious practices that consist of Sinhalese Buddhism. The original Buddhism offered a path to salvation through personal endeavour, and

⁷⁰ E. Lamotte (1958). “*Mahāyāna Buddhism*,” in Heinz Becart and Richard F Gombrich eds. *The World of Buddhism*, London: Thomas and Hudson, pp. 686 - 687.

⁷¹ R. A. L. H. Gunawardana (1979). *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Mediaeval Sri Lanka*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, p. 212.

it did not completely reject pre-Buddhist, other religious and cultic practices and ceremonial activities which served the varied religious needs of the society.

The fact is that the acceptance of other religions by Buddhists was discussed by many scholars on a conceptual basis. Gananath Obeyesekere⁷² attempted to use Redfield's concept for understanding the nature of Buddhism, that is "great tradition" and "little tradition." Here, while the great tradition has been identified with the Theravāda soteriology of the *Pāli* literary tradition, the little tradition has been identified with the ritual transactions with Mahāyāna ideals, other religious traditions, and local traditions. So, the two strands of religion represent Theravāda Buddhism on the one hand and, on the other hand, the verity of Mahāyāna and local rituals and magical practices. However, he points out that these two layers historically link within the single religious culture as one interrelated religious system.⁷³ With the contribution of Richard Gombrich, in 1990, Gananath Obeyesekere further developed this idea in the publication of *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*.⁷⁴ Though they attempted to study modern Sri Lankan religious culture, they also clearly pointed out the way that Buddhism historically assimilated and accepted various beliefs and practices for serving the varied religious needs of the society.⁷⁵

In 1991, John Clifford Holt made a remarkable contribution to classify the assimilation of the Mahāyānic cult - Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist tradition of Sri Lanka. In his book, *Buddha in the Crown*, he applied the terms "*Laukika* and *Lokottara*" for the understanding of this complicated/ complex structure of religious culture: the former means "of this world", while the latter can mean "above" or "beyond this world".⁷⁶ Buddhism is a mystical philosophy practised by those who expect to attain *Nirvāna*. It is *Lōkōttara-oriented*. On the other hand, lay people attempt religio-magical practices seeking salvation and freedom from their sorrow or *dukkha* of this world. That is *laukika*. By explaining this in a theoretical manner, Holt suggests that these two crucial terms represent two overlapping orientations of a single dynamic whole: *laukika* and *lōkōttara*. While the *laukika* side represented the conditioned, temporal, and antecedent

⁷² Gananath Obeyesekere (1963). "The Great Tradition and the Little I the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, XXII, (2, Feb), 139 – 153.

⁷³ Gananath Obeyesekere, (1963). Op.cit. pp. 139-151; Gananath Obeyesekere (1997). "The vicissitudes of the Sinhala-Buddhist identity through time and change," *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*, Volume I, ed. Michael Roberts, Colombo: Marga Institute, pp. 355 – 384.

⁷⁴ Richard F. Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere (1988) *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka*, Princeton: Princeton University press, pp. 65 - 67; +Richard F. Gombrich (1988). *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 65 – 67.

⁷⁵ Sumudu Dharmarathna (2020). "Discontented Categories: Theravāda and Mahāyāna in the History of Sri Lankan Buddhism," *High Technology Letters*, 26, (11), pp. 215 – 230.

⁷⁶ John Clifford Holt (1991). *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Tradition of Sri Lanka*, New York: Oxford University press, pp. 19 – 24.

orientation, the *lōkōttara* represented the unconditioned, eternal, consummate orientation.⁷⁷ However, attention may be paid to the argument regarding the real nature of Buddhism, which spread steadily among the nations and continues. Even today, propelled by an inner dynamism which may be called the power of the veracity of its teaching and its commitment to non-violence.

In the Chinese context, this attitude facilitated meaningful interactions with indigenous philosophies and spiritual practices, particularly Taoism and Confucianism. Rather than seeking to dominate or displace these indigenous traditions, Buddhism engaged in a dynamic process of dialogue and integration. This approach not only facilitated the establishment of Buddhism as a major religious force in China but also enriched the intellectual and spiritual fabric of Chinese civilization.⁷⁸

As stated by Mario Poceski in his book *The Study of Chinese Religions*:

The study of Chinese religion is often approached in terms of the so-called ‘three teachings,’ namely the dominant religious traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Each of these traditions has a long and distinguished history in China; an important part of that history is the interaction with the other two traditions. Confucianism and Taoism both originated in China. Consequently, they are usually depicted as embodying ideas, values, and orientations that are at the core of Chinese social and cultural constructions of reality. In contrast, Buddhism is a Pan-Asian religion that originated in India, although in the course of its long history in China – which spans almost two millennia – it was radically transformed and domesticated. The Chinese adaptation and acculturation of Buddhism was complex and thorough; consequently, in its fully Sinicized Form, Buddhism also came to represent a religion that is quintessentially Chinese. Throughout much of Chinese history the three teachings were perceived as being complementary rather than antithetical to each other.⁷⁹

The harmonious coexistence and mutual influence among Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism stand as a testament to the enduring power of inter-religious dialogue and cultural synthesis. These interactions shaped not only the trajectory of Buddhism in China but also the broader cultural and intellectual landscape of Chinese society.

During the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907 CE), these “Three Teachings” (Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism) were often regarded as complementary systems of thought.⁸⁰ Scholars and emperors alike sought to harmonize these traditions, recognizing their collective contribution to Chinese culture. Neo-

⁷⁷ *ibid*, p. 23.

⁷⁸ Wang Fei, “A study of how Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have influenced each other in Chinese history, and its importance for interfaith dialogue.” <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2502745>

⁷⁹ *ibid*.

⁸⁰ K. Ch'en, (1964). *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Confucianism, which emerged during the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE), incorporated Buddhist metaphysical concepts and meditative practices into its framework, illustrating the profound influence of Buddhist thought. So, the study of the religious history of China can help us to have more ideas and choices to deal with interfaith dialogue in contemporary society and make the peace building much better.

III. INTERFAITH DIALOGUE AND CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS

Buddhist leaders have been influential in interfaith efforts in the modern era. Religious leaders like the Dalai Lama promote interfaith tolerance and respect by highlighting universal human ideals like compassion and the pursuit of happiness.⁸¹ Buddhist inclusion is put into practice by groups like the World Fellowship of Buddhists and interfaith conferences in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. These forums provide chances for religious communities to work together on issues such as poverty, conflict, and climate change.⁸²

The United Nations Day of Tolerance (UNDT) plays a significant role in fostering religious harmony and respect around the world. Celebrated every year, it offers a platform to emphasize how important it is to understand, accept, and value other religions' practices and beliefs. The UNDT promotes interfaith discussion, cultural exchange programs, and educational efforts to oppose religious intolerance and eradicate prejudice. The day brings together religious leaders and followers to promote collaboration on shared values, including justice, compassion, and peace.⁸³

Through the teachings of Buddhism, the "United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV)" has achieved significant strides in promoting interfaith understanding and tackling global issues. Serving as a worldwide forum, it unites representatives of various religions, customs, and cultures to foster tolerance, understanding, and cooperation between people of different backgrounds while highlighting Buddhist principles like compassion, mindfulness, and harmony. The UNDV encourages leaders of different religions to use universal values like tolerance, nonviolence, and respect for human dignity to settle contemporary disputes and advance peace through its yearly conferences. Through a Buddhist viewpoint, it tackles urgent world challenges, including poverty, inequality, and climate change, while promoting sustainability and environmental stewardship. By including young people in interfaith discussions, the UNDV emphasizes their part in building a peaceful future and incorporates Buddhist ideals and mindfulness into contemporary educational systems to promote emotional intelligence and tolerance. Vesak celebrations encourage cross-cultural interaction and break down boundaries

⁸¹ Dalai Lama XIV & Robert Kiely (1998). *The Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus*, MS: Wisdom Publication.

⁸² "Culture of peace: High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace", <https://www.un.org/en/ga/62/plenary/peaceculturehld/bkg.shtml>

⁸³ "International Day of Tolerance", <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/international-day-tolerance-16-november>

while showcasing the spiritual and cultural diversity of Buddhism. By including spiritual viewpoints, the UNDV also influences international frameworks for development and peacebuilding, inspiring inclusive and compassionate legislation. In the end, the UNDV creates a bridge between spiritual traditions and contemporary realities, promoting international cooperation and unity while providing humane and long-lasting answers to pressing problems. In addition to encouraging unity, this global initiative fortifies the groundwork for long-term peace and stability in all countries. These programs address common global issues and draw attention to the universal principles that bind all people together via interfaith discussion and cooperative efforts.

IV. DIFFICULTIES OF INTERFAITH DISCUSSION AND MODERN USES

Interfaith conversation, which entails bringing people and organizations from various religious traditions together for discussion and cooperation, has grown in importance in our interconnected and multicultural society.⁸⁴ Although it has a great deal of potential to promote cooperation, tolerance, and understanding, a number of obstacles prevent it from doing so. Among these difficulties are the exclusivity claims made by certain religious systems about redemption or ultimate truth, which might put belief defense ahead of comprehending others. By encouraging mistrust and deterring polite engagement, ingrained biases and presumptions about various religions also obstruct productive interactions. Additionally, political agendas may appropriate ecumenical endeavors, compromising their legitimacy and making religious communities distrustful of them.⁸⁵ Interfaith conversations are frequently skewed by the under-representation of marginalized communities, which leaves important issues neglected. Cultural and theological misunderstandings that stem from disparities in religious beliefs and practices usually cause strife and limit the scope of discussion. Furthermore, a lack of grassroots participation limits interfaith activities to leadership positions, which lessens their influence on day-to-day encounters. Another issue is a lack of resources, since planning large-scale projects requires significant financial and administrative assistance. Finally, attempts to foster interfaith understanding are hampered by resistance to change within some religious communities. Improving the results of interfaith dialogues and encouraging genuine cooperation need acknowledging these challenges and incorporating contemporary tactics.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ B. Bodhi, (2014). "War and Peace. A Buddhist Perspective." *Inquiring Mind* 30 (2). Spring. https://www.inquiringmind.com/article/3002_5_bhodi-war-and-peace-a-buddhistperspective/

⁸⁵ P. D. Premasiri, (2006). "A 'Righteous War' in Buddhism?" In *Buddhism, Conflict and Violence in Modern Sri Lanka*, edited by M. Deegalle, 78–85. London: Routledge; Premasiri, P. D. (2014). "Buddhist Ethical Principles for Post-Conflict Reconciliation with Reference to Thirty Years of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka," Presented paper in the *International Conference on Twenty-Five Years in Retrospect – Buddhism, Ethnic Conflict and Religious Harmony in South and Southeast Asia*, International Center for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Kandy, Sri Lanka.

⁸⁶ Heine Steve & Masao Abe (1995). *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

V. BUDDHISM-BASED SUGGESTIONS TO ENHANCE INTERFAITH COMMUNICATION

Buddhism provides insightful advice and useful strategies for encouraging interfaith cooperation and communication.⁸⁷ These recommendations, which are based on the ideas of understanding, compassion, and mindfulness, offer a framework for creating deep connections between people of different religious backgrounds.⁸⁸ Promoting religious literacy is essential because education dispels misconceptions and prejudices by conquering ignorance (*avijjā*). Implementing Buddhist-inspired meditation practices to improve empathy and creating interfaith curricula in schools that highlight common ethical values are examples of practical steps. Respect and inclusion for under-represented groups in interfaith forums are guaranteed by inclusivity, a fundamental Buddhist tenet shown by the Buddha's rejection of caste and gender discrimination. Participation at the grassroots level supports community-based endeavors, such as joint humanitarian endeavors, and is consistent with Buddhism's emphasis on individual and group practices for the good of society. Reflecting the Buddhist ideal of equanimity (*upekkhā*), neutral platforms offer objective forums for productive discussion.⁸⁹

Cooperative activities or projects, like environmental preservation, focusing on common goals like compassion (*karuṇā*), peace (*santī*), and interconnectivity (*paticca samuppāda*) helps bridge doctrinal differences. Virtual meditation sessions, digital resource sharing, and interfaith storytelling through social media are made possible by adapting modern technologies to interfaith communication in accordance with the Buddhist ideal of skilful methods (*upāya*). Buddhist dispute resolution techniques, which are based on communication and comprehension, are useful models for handling disputes across different religions. Educating religious leaders in mindfulness, compassion, and empathy might improve interfaith cooperation even more. Buddhism believes that consistent work is necessary for significant change.

⁸⁷ P.D. Premasiri, (2003). "The Place for a Righteous War in Buddhism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volum 10, <http://www.buddhistethics.org/> Asanga Tilakaratne, (2021). "Redosing Suffering during Conflict: The interface between Buddhism and International Humanitarian Law," https://independent.academia.edu/AsangaTilakaratnehttps://www.academia.edu/83151724/Reducing_Suffering_During_Conflict_The_Interface_Between_Buddhism_And_International_Humanitarian_Law

⁸⁸ T. J. Bartholomeusz, (1999). "In Defense of Dharma: Just-War Ideology in Buddhist Sri Lanka." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 6: 1–16. <https://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhisethics/files/2010/04/bartho991.pdf>

⁸⁹ Bawa Simmin (2024). "The Pathway to Peace and Harmony: A Buddhist Perspective." *Shodh Sari-An International Multidisciplinary Journal* 03(03), pp. 363-368; Tilakerathne, Asangha (2014). "Buddhism and Ethnicity Related Tensions in Sri Lanka: Doctrinal Position and Role of Buddhism Examined," Presented paper in the International Conference on Twenty-Five Years in Retrospect – Buddhism, Ethnic Conflict and Religious Harmony in South and Southeast Asia, International Center for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Creating long-term alliances as opposed to one-time gatherings guarantees ongoing communication and cooperation. Furthermore, via concerted interfaith efforts, the Buddhist emphasis on reducing suffering (*dukkha*) logically extends to tackling global issues like poverty and climate change. Communities may promote greater understanding, collaboration, and peace by embracing these ideas, which will help create a more peaceful and caring world community.

VI. CONCLUSION

The emphasis of Buddhism on acceptance, compassion, and inner transformation provides a robust framework for promoting interfaith harmony and global peace. By embracing the diversity of religious traditions and cultivating inner peace, individuals and communities can contribute to a more harmonious and peaceful world. The Buddhist attitude toward other religions is not merely an abstract ideal but a practical pathway to resolving the conflicts and divisions of our time. This approach encourages mutual understanding and respect, fostering an environment where dialogue can thrive despite differences. Through the practice of mindfulness and the recognition of shared human values, Buddhism offers tools to bridge gaps and build lasting connections across diverse religious and cultural landscapes.

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PLURALISM AS AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: AN INQUIRY INTO BUDDHIST PROPOSAL FOR PLURAL SOCIETY

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Abstract:

In the contemporary world, Buddhism has emerged as the leading voice for embracing pluralism. It is true that by rejecting the concept of eternal soul, revealed scripture, authority, and God, Buddhism distinguished itself from other religions, but it has to be investigated how far this distinction goes. Is it distinct from others only as another religion that has different rites, rituals, and myths, or is it different from other religions in its nature, perspective, and philosophy? There are thinkers like Richard P. Hayes who claimed that Buddhism is neither pluralist nor embraces pluralism as it believes that is only one ultimate goal and that goal is to achieve *nirvana* in this way; it rejects the possibility of plural human ends, but this conclusion has been drawn in haste. Other groups of thinkers believe that Buddhism has a clear insight into plural faiths, cultures, and traditions. Even if it is believed that Buddhism has proposed only one ultimate goal for human life, it cannot be neglected that it has offered that there may be different ways to achieve the goal, and it is a clear-cut recognition of the Plurality. Again, it has instructions for the relation between individuals, between individuals and society, and these instructions may be translated for relation among communities.

The paper is an attempt to explore the concept of social justice and Buddhism for a plural society (a society with multiple religions, values, ways of life, and different philosophical perspectives).

Keywords: *Pluralism, justice, religion, tolerance, multiculturalism.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism has become a leading voice for pluralism in the contemporary world. It is important for two reasons. (1) Most of the Western models for embracing pluralism are now questioned everywhere. (2) Plurality (the existence of different faiths, lifestyles, values, and traditions) is a fact of reality, so no one can neglect or reject it. So, there is a need for a new framework for acknowledging plurality so that it can survive, be the least vulnerable to conflicts, and have an atmosphere to flourish.

It was in the second half of the twentieth century when plurality got recognition by the world community, and most of the Western world acknowledged pluralism and for implementing pluralism accepted the policy of multiculturalism (after the Second World War demand for a fairer system had increased. The human rights movement and civil rights movements opened the debates on this issue. Canada started multiculturalism as an official national policy in 1971, Australia in 1973, and most of the countries of the European Union in [?]. Multiculturalism was adopted as a policy, and in general, it is defined as a policy for managing the cultural identity of ethnic groups and opening space for mutual respect and tolerance for cultural differences within a nation. Two models of multiculturalism were (the Mosaic Model was adopted by Canada where the melting pot is associated with the United States of America) popular: (1) Melting Pot Model also known as pluralistic multiculturalism emphasizes the assimilation of cultures with the receiving culture, and (2) Mosaic Model that aims at preserving the distinction between culture and their identity. John Rawls writes in his book *Political Liberalism*: “How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?”¹.

The answer is the policy of pluralism. But both the above-mentioned models of pluralism, though adopted to promote cooperation and togetherness among its members, have encouraged separatism, radicalism, and the revival of old-fashioned irrational traditions contrary to human respect. The policy of multiculturalism encouraged cultural identity over national and human identity. The solution has become worse than the problem, as in the name of multiculturalism, separatism, fundamentalism, and radicalism got the space for revival. This is the reason most European countries explicitly denounced the policies of multiculturalism, and some, though not reject the policy of multiculturalism, limiting its scope and application. The reason for the failure of both models was clear as they tried to create an artificial system to accommodate plurality based on the policy of toleration and noninterference without taking into consideration the unity and brotherhood among members of the society. Buddhism has a different perspective. Tolerance and noninterference are not valuable in themselves; it is valuable for avoiding conflicts, but they do not and cannot create a bond and feeling of togetherness among human beings.

¹ Rawls, John (1993).

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The approach of Buddhism is very important for pluralism because it tries to provide an alternative framework for pluralism, but with this voice of concern, several criticisms, as mentioned below, are raised against the Buddhist Proposal. The criticisms are raised on two bases, One challenges the very consistency of the Buddhist approach. It claims that Buddhism is inconsistent with Pluralism and if is inconsistent with Pluralism, then its effort and approach toward pluralism loses its merit, Richard P. Hayes in his article "Gotama Buddha and Religious Pluralism" tried to prove that Buddhism cannot be a pluralist and he makes second claims that Buddhism does not permits and support pluralism. So, it is important to investigate Buddhism in this regard. But before investigating Buddhism, I would like to mention what pluralism means because every difference cannot be considered valuable. Pluralism as a process refers to ways of recognizing diversity as differences in values, beliefs, and lifestyles, but it is not only recognition but also opening the space for dialogue and enhancing human dignity and respect. It is also to be noted that it is not the case that all types of differences should be recognized, but only those for which people have reason to believe as valuable for them. It is a basic principle of Amartya Sen's capability approach that people should be respected for what they have reasons to value.

Here, it must be emphasized that the diversity and differences that have reasonable ground should be recognized, and in this way, it eliminates the irrational, radical, prejudiced practices that are trying to revive the shade of pluralism. It is the recognition and affirmation of the diversity within a political body that permits the peaceful co-existence of different interests, convictions, and lifestyles. So it becomes clear that: (1) Pluralism is not merely diversity but reasonable diversity; (2) It is not the promotion of relativism but engagement and dialogue; (3) It is not just tolerance but an understanding of mutual love and respect across the lines of difference. In light of this description and explanation of pluralism, an analysis would be critically made.

2.1. Methodology

The analytic method has been adopted to study all the research material consulted for this paper. Rawls' Political Liberalism has been consulted to study the essential conditions for society as cooperation. Richard P. Hayes's article 'Gotama Buddha and Religious Pluralism' has been critically analyzed. The extensive study of *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Sutta Nipāta*, and *Āṅguttara Nikāya* has been done to counter the charges. Apart from these primary sources some other books Rawls John: *Political Liberalism*, Frauwallner Erich: *The Philosophy of Buddhism*, Kalupahana David J: *A History of Buddhist Philosophy Continuities and Discontinuities*, Klostermaier Klaus K: *A Short Introduction Buddhism*, Mookerjee Satkari: *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*, Mungerkar Balchandra and Rathore Akash Singh ed. *Buddhism and the Contemporary World* also have been consulted.

2.2. Discussion

At first, it would be analyzed "Is Buddhism consistent with pluralism?"

because Richard in his article *Gotama Buddha and Religious Pluralism* claimed that Buddhism is against pluralism. It is claimed for three reasons: (1) It is a religion; (2) It believes that there is only one goal in life that is *Nibbāna*; (3) It does not believe that there are many ways to achieve *Nibbāna*.

These questions are very crucial and must be answered because it is believed that religion cannot accept pluralism because every religion builds up on certain metaphysical assumptions, and these are claimed to be the ultimate truth. Religion not only prescribes certain values and goals of human life but also gives an explanation for the nature of life and the world and claims them to be treated as the ultimate truth, and in this way, it ends the way for pluralism. So it is believed that religion cannot be pluralist (as Islam believes, what the Koran says is the ultimate truth; Hindus believe that the Vedas tell the ultimate truth; and for Christianity, the Bible is the truth). So Buddhism also cannot be pluralist. The scholars of the philosophy of religion believe that religious pluralism is a relatively new ideology, and very few major religious traditions have exposed the notion that more than one claim to ultimate reality could be valid as most of the historical religions are based on an explicit rejection of the denigration of another religious tradition.

Buddhism is different from other organized religions: (1) in the sense that it does not believe in God or any supreme authority that determines the nature and reality of metaphysical truths, and (2) Buddha even did not answer these philosophical questions that are about the nature of this world, soul, and life after death.

Different explanations have been given by scholars for these *avyākata*. *Avyākata* is a Sanskrit word that means not developed or not explained, and so this is used to refer to the questions Buddha refused to answer.² Some scholars have tried to relate the silence on these issues to absolutism because they believed that the *Madhyamaka* system has truly explained Buddha's thoughts.³ He was convinced that it could not be explained through the categories of language so Buddha did not answer, and some others tried to give a positivist explanation that Buddha has accepted only those existence which can be experienced through senses and this *avyākata* could not be experienced by sense experience but in *Dīgha Nikāya* Buddha himself answered why he did not answer these *avyakrta*.

"It does not align with one's belief; it does not align with *dhamma* (i.e., *lokuttara dhamma*); it is not even the beginning of the Noble practice. It is not conducive to the development of disillusionment with the five *khandas*. It is not conducive to the cessation of *dukkha*. It is not conducive to the extinction of defilements. It is not conducive to the attainment of *Magga* insight. It is not conducive to the realization of the Four Noble Truths. It is not conducive to *Nibbāna*. Therefore, I do not make a declaration."⁴

² *Paṭṭhapāda Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*: 423; Klostermaier, Klaus K., 2006.

³ Murti, T. R. V., 2003.

⁴ *Paṭṭhapāda Sutta*, *Dīgha Nikāya*: 420.

He preached the Four Noble Truths: what is *dukkha*, the cause of *dukkha*, the cessation of *dukkha*, and the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha* because:

These align with one's benefit. They align with *dhamma*. They are the beginning of the Noble Practice. They are conducive to the development of disillusionment with the five *skandhas*. They are conducive to the abandonment of attachment. They are conducive to the cessation of *dukkha*. They are conducive to the extinction of defilement. They are conducive to the attainment of *magga insight*. They are conducive to the realization of the Four Noble Truths. They are conducive to the realization of *Nibbāna*.⁵

So, it is clear that Buddha was deeply concerned about the cessation of *dukkha* and the realization of *Nibbāna*. He preached for the moral behavior of human beings and has not preached for ultimate truth on the nature of the world and soul. So, like other religions, it is not inconsistent with pluralism.

The second objection raised against the Buddhist approach to pluralism is that the Buddha claimed there is only one ultimate goal, which is *nibbāna*, characterized as an unending freedom from *dukkha*. So, if it rejects that there can be any other ultimate goal except *Nibbāna*, how can it embrace pluralism?

The realization of *nibbāna* is indeed the ultimate aim of Buddhism, and in this reference, it appears to be against the essence of pluralism. However, from the Pāli Canon, it becomes clear that *Nibbāna* is the extinction of *dukkha*, free from decaying and perishing because it is an absence, but if Buddhism is not Pluralist in recognizing the ultimate goal of life or if it does not consider that there can be goals of life other than *Nibbāna*. How can it appreciate pluralism, which recognizes that there may be different values and different ways of life that should not only be recognized but also should be respected? Here, it can be said that though it is true that Buddhism has considered *Nibbāna* as the only ultimate good, the *Nibbāna* is the absence or cessation of *Dukkha*. It also can be said, *Nibbāna* as cessation of *Dukkha* is a goal that is the goal of every human life.

Even those whose goal is to achieve material values, or the spiritualists who aim to value spirit, do not deny the value of cessation of *dukkha* (as *dukkha* is a Pali word usually translated as suffering, pain, distress), and in this sense, everyone has a desire for the cessation for *dukkha*. And even if Buddhism considers *Nibbāna* as the ultimate goal, it recognizes that there are many ways to achieve this goal, and the pluralist instinct can be fulfilled.

It is claimed by Hayek claims that though Buddhism believes that there may be different ways to achieve *Nibbāna*, they are very limited.⁶ However, pluralism does not claim that every way leads to the achievement of a goal; it only admits that there may be diverse ways to achieve the goal. Buddha himself preached in diverse ways to suit his audience. "He explains simple injunction in diverse ways adopting his thoughts and words to the need and stages of

⁵ *Paṭṭhapāda Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*: 420.

⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta*: 373.

development of his audience.”⁷

The exhortations given by the Buddha for the guidance of *sāmaṇera Rāhula* (a novice monk) are examples of how *dharmma* would be adapted to suit the needs and capacity of listeners. The first exhortation was given to Rāhula, the Buddha’s son, at the age of seven when he became *sāmaṇera*, a novice in the *Ambalatthika Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya* that dealt with truthfulness and mindfulness, which form indeed the foundation for building character and for the development of the facilities of the mind. The second exhortation is given to Rāhula in the *Mahā Rāhulovāda Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* when he was eighteen years old and contained chiefly instructions on meditation, starting with mindfulness of respiration and leading on to insight meditation. The third discourse was given to Rāhula in the *Rāhulovāda Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* when he was in his 21st year, after completing a full year as a *bhikkhu*, and dealt with the three characteristics of all conditioned existence: Impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality.⁸

There are other examples to show that Buddha opted for different methods to teach different people. “In the *Siṅgāla Sutta*, although his effort was directed towards the same ultimate goal, his approach and method were different to suit the occasion.”⁹ “In the *Siṅgāla Sutta*, the Buddha adapted his teaching in such a way that the young householder at once saw in the discourse lessons of direct practical application, capable of immediate and fruitful use.”¹⁰

These excerpts are sufficient to show that Buddhism is not opposed to pluralism. The second objection claimed that Buddhism does not support pluralism. All the above examples are not sufficient to prove that Buddhism promotes and supports pluralism. So, Buddhist scholars must find stories, examples, theories, and implications that support pluralism. In Buddhism, we find at least three theories that are in support of pluralism. One is causal theory, second is pragmatic theory, and third is moral theory.

The causal theory of Buddhism that supports pluralism is the doctrine of *paṭicca-samuppāda*. It is explained as the doctrine of dependent origination (*Mahānidāna Sutta* 95 *Dīgha Nikāya*), and dependence assumes the existence of more than one, and in this way, pluralism is an implication of *paṭicca-samuppāda*. Contrary to pluralism, it is monism that claims that there exists only one supreme being and all other existences are merely reflections or parts of that supreme existence whereas *paṭicca-samuppāda* rejects the existence of eternal or permanent existence. It is an exposition of the cause of Phenomena. It says if such and such cause is present, such and such an effect will inevitably follow. If the cause is absent, the effect will not arise. Even the existence of human beings is the complex of five *skandhā*. The nature of

⁷ Lay U Ko (1987): 62.

⁸ Lay U Ko (1987): 630.

⁹ Lay U Ko (1987): 631.

¹⁰ Lay U Ko (1987): 630.

existence and reality is very important for human beings, and “Most of the people hold some kind of view regarding the nature of existence and reality.”¹¹ Some believe that there is an eternal self and this eternal self takes birth and rebirth and the process continues, while other believes that after the death of the body, there remains nothing. Buddhism regards both these views as false views because “any sentient being is not an individual entity, but merely a term for a complex of mental and physical phenomena. This complex of mental and physical phenomena is always in flux, always changing, always arising and disappearing.”¹² It implies multiple existences that are in flux, neither the existence of eternal substance nor the complete annihilation. So, in this regard, Buddhism is pluralist.

Buddha not only acknowledged the existence of different opinions and faiths, but he also advised his followers to have the patience to listen to the views that are different to them, even if they malign or insult your faith, and this is one of the most important features for the contemporary world.

The pragmatic theory in Buddhism that supports pluralism is beautifully explained in *Cūlavīyūha Sutta*. “Standing rigidly to his views and depending on his criteria, he enters into dispute in the world. Desisting from all theories, the wise one does not enter the dispute in the world.”¹³

The essence of Pluralism is the rational discourse among different opinions. It is very important for the contemporary world because most of the conflicts occur because of this difference of opinion, and the western liberal model to avoid the conflict is noninterference and toleration, but it does not have any positive approach to ease the tension. *Paramatṭhaka Sutta* of *Sutta Nipāta* mentions: “The person abiding by a certain dogmatic view considering it is the highest in the world, claims this is the most excellent and disparages others views different from that as inferior, as a result he is not free from disputes.”¹⁴

One of the best ways to deal with differences of opinion was explained by Buddha: that it is sincere and careful listening. It is on the one hand opens your mind and encourages tolerance for different views and on the other hand it also strengthens our view as we examine our view and construct rational arguments in our support. Buddha said: “If others should malign the Buddha the *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha* you must not feel resentment, nor displeasure, nor anger on that account you should explain (to them) what is false as false and saying it is not so.”¹⁵

Not only is it said by Buddha to listen carefully to others who have different opinions, but he also dwelt in discussions with other saints of his time. We have evidence that Buddha had discussions with at least eight religious leaders who

¹¹ Min U Myo (1987): 556.

¹² Min U Myo (1987): 556.

¹³ *Sutta Nipāta*: 894.

¹⁴ *Sutta Nipāta*: 796.

¹⁵ *Brahmajāla Sutta*, 5, *Dīgha Nikāya*.

had their groups of followers. Those are Pūraṇa Kassapa, Makkhali Gosāla, Ajita Kesakambala, Pakudha Kaccāyana, Sañcaya Belaṭṭhaputta, and the Jain teacher Nātaputta.

Questioning is very important for rational discourse, and Buddha encouraged raising questions even on the established truth. In *Sabhiya Sutta*, it is said: “It is amazing, it is surprising, other recluses and Brahmins did not even permit me to raise the question, but the ascetic Gotma has at last permitted me to raise them. He was glad, elated, and encouraged, and so he questioned the Buddha.”¹⁶ Another feature of Buddhism that is important for pluralism is its moral theory. Buddha’s approach towards other faiths was not based on simple toleration and noninterference but on his *karuṇā* for the suffering of all human beings. Schopenhauer, the German philosopher who was influenced by Buddhist philosophy, condemned that morality can be derived from reason.¹⁷ He said that morality cannot be derived from reason, but it can be founded on compassion and *mettā*. *Mettā* should not be understood as friendship; it means loving kindness, friendliness, and compassion, relating oneself to others, and it abolishes the distinction between oneself and others. Most of the conflicts arise because of the feeling of otherness, but the practice of *karuṇā* (compassion) enlarges one’s self to the extent where it includes otherness. One can transcend oneself and can feel the pain and sorrow of others and can subvert his egoist nature. Tolerance is a rational behavior towards different faiths and beliefs, but mere toleration cannot build a bond among them but compassion unites them without hurting their faith or belief.

III. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that the charges leveled against the Buddhist approach towards pluralism are not justified. Buddhism has the potential to provide an alternative framework for pluralism, and it must take the leadership in this regard. It has an insight in its philosophy to recognize the diversity and create a bond among them without hurting their faith and beliefs because it clearly admits the existence of different faiths and beliefs and also admits that there are different ways to achieve enlightenment. This perspective is very important for the contemporary world, as it not only acknowledges the existence of other faiths but also tries to create a bond of friendliness among all the members of the society. Pluralism and inclusion as social values are indeed modern concepts, but these terms are used to address human issues, and human issues have existed in every society. So, taking the insights from the Buddha’s words, an attempt has been made to explore how they can be applied to a pluralistic society.

¹⁶ *Sutta Nipāta*: 512.

¹⁷ *On the Basis of Morality* (2015).

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BUDDHIST APPROACHES TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GLOBAL UNITY AND HARMONY IN A DIVERSE WORLD

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Abstract:

Interfaith dialogue has come to be recognized as an important aspect in bringing conflicting religious groups on the globe closer to each other in the increasingly interconnected and diverse world. Buddhist interfaith dialogue, in particular, is examined in this paper as one among several ways in which enlightening principles and teachings of Buddhism can contribute toward mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among different shared religious traditions. By investigating identified approaches, including compassion (*karuṇā*), loving kindness (*mettā*), non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), and interconnectedness (*paticcasamuppāda*), the study shows how some considerations from Buddhist philosophy can provide effective strategies for enriching dialogue, conflict transformation, and ideological reconciliation. Historical and present examples of Buddhist interfaith initiatives are used in the paper to examine and identify methods of collaboration, empathy, and commonalities between different faith communities. It explores the different forms of challenges that face interfaith dialogue: for example, fundamentalism exists within religion and culture, and it offers Buddhism as a solution to transgressing these hindrances when it poses a threat to setting a bridge. All in all, this paper reiterates how Buddhist wisdom is poised to contribute significantly on a global scale in furthering the quests of world peace through unity and fostering harmonious relationships across religions and cultures that are feasible.

Keywords: *Dialogue, existence, harmony, peace, religion.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Global unity and harmony are the idea of people of different backgrounds coming together to promote peace and tranquility for all of humanity. It can also refer to the United Nations' vision of a world where people and nations work together to create a better future.¹ Interconnectedness brought humans, ideas, and traditions close to one another into the unprecedented global phenomenon of globalization and cultural exchange. The advances in technology, transportation, and communication facilities have united societies with one another by facilitating cross-cultural interactions on an unimaginable scale. This interconnectedness holds out the impetus of progress and innovation. On the other hand, it exposes itself to various challenges there are conflicts of culture and religion that threaten peace and unity. The aggravating factors, such as economic ones, environmental crises, and political democracy, usually merge with religious and cultural differences to form complex issues and deep-seated divisions.

Inter-religious dialogue is applicable in contextually challenging times and is, perhaps, one of the most significant platforms for joint understanding, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence between diverse religious communities. Hans Küng, a prominent theologian, emphasized the importance of inter-religious dialogue as a foundation for global peace, stating, "There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions."² It is a forum for understanding, settling disputes, and potentially bringing variegated faith communities into a much closer relationship. Dialogue between faiths is not just about having a theoretical understanding of differences; it is a more active process of being in a search for similarities, celebrating together what has been shared, and inviting respect for differences. This is possible to serve as a venue towards joint action in such areas as social justice, human rights, or even environmental sustainability.

Buddhism is a very informative religion that is valuable for interfaith dialogue in the best ways of promoting global unification and helping by promoting harmony within this diversified world, with its most fundamental emphasis on compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence. Being one of the oldest spiritual traditions around the world, it has brought with it a great deal of history to talk about other belief systems.³ Its teachings are relatively beyond religious principles and can be very suitable in interfaith interaction. The well-established principles of ethical conduct, self-awareness, and suffering alleviation give a very good basis for a place wherein meaningful dialogue and collaboration flourish.

¹ Interfaith dialogue has gained recognition as a crucial means of fostering understanding and cooperation among diverse religious groups, particularly in a globalized world where interconnectedness and cultural diversity are increasingly evident. Swidler (2015), p. 1 - 14.

² Küng (1991), p. 102.

³ Abu-Nimer (2001), p. 685 - 704.

Buddhism's contributions to interfaith dialogue are not limited only to theory but find expression in historical and modern practices. Historically, Buddhist traditions have been demonstrated to have interacted with other faiths in places as diverse as India, China, and Southeast Asia. It is indeed an incredibly adaptable and open system.⁴ In contemporary times, Buddhist leaders such as the Dalai Lama⁵ and Thich Nhat Hanh⁶ have participated in many global interfaith initiatives for peace, understanding, and cooperation. The efforts comment on how Buddhist principles are capable of addressing some of the most serious challenges that modern life presents with increased disputes from cultural and religious differences.⁷

In this context, interfaith dialogue becomes particularly meaningful within Buddhist approaches, as this is a time when diversity has both introduced enrichment and given rise to tensions. Many religions fail to resolve their misunderstandings and prejudices, which therefore fuel clashes in many scenarios across the globe due to extreme violence, discrimination, and social fragmentation.⁸ However, each of these challenges, global warming, global health crises, and globalization, has shown that one must use collective action and collaboration beyond religion and culture. In this setting, Buddhism's teaching on the Dependent Origination and the Universal Suffering provides critical insights for promoting empathy and solidarity.

Moreover, applications in reality of Buddhist principles such as mindfulness meditation and compassionate action could provide very useful tools for promoting quality interfaith dialogue. These practices develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathetic listening, enabling those involved to engage in their discussions with an openness and understanding of the other person's presence. Furthermore, personal reflection of individuals on biases and assumptions would create a more inclusive and respectful environment for dialogue.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Interfaith dialogue refers to constructive, cooperative, and respectful engagement between individuals and communities of different religious traditions aimed at fostering mutual understanding, reducing conflict, and promoting collaboration for shared goals.⁹ Interfaith dialogue is a pursuit that promotes understanding and respect between followers of different religions. It is not just a means of defusing tensions but also an open door to things such as

⁴ McMahan (2012), p. 45 – 67.

⁵ Dalai Lama (2001), p. 120 – 135.

⁶ Hanh (1999), p. 80 – 95.

⁷ Buddhist teachings have often been cited as offering solutions to contemporary challenges, particularly in addressing cultural and religious conflicts. Dalai Lama. 2011, p. 45 – 58.

⁸ Buddhism's emphasis on dialogue and understanding in a diverse world has been explored in the context of global religious tensions. Hanh (2001), p. 75 – 90.

⁹ Rahula (1974), p. 68.

common values, ethics, and goals for which peaceful coexistence is possible.¹⁰ In today's incredibly intricate societies, most religious misunderstandings or prejudices have only catalyzed further division, thereby resulting in social and political turmoil. Through open and respectful dialogue, interfaith dialogue has the potential to turn armed conflicts into opportunities for growth and cooperation.

Interfaith dialogue seeks to find the ground where those differences can coexist: every tradition has its own identity, and it does not ignore that.¹¹ It encourages humility in a participant's approach to such discussions, knowing that any one of them doesn't have all the answers to life's questions. Rather, that dialogue is a shared quest to understand existence and the issues that face humankind better. Successful interfaith dialog should be grounded in empathy, mutual respect, and commitment to shared humanity. Buddhism provides this framework in teachings that can be universally applied to everyone and that have significant transforming qualities. This whole framework is based on Dependent Origination (*Paticcasamuppāda*) in Buddhism, meaning that all beings are connected.¹² This kind of understanding encourages people to engage themselves and take some responsibility with each other beyond touching differences but to see common humanity interwoven.

The Buddhist ethics offer guidance in interfaith life and action through veracity, Non-harming (*Ahimsā*), and other moral principles. These values encourage participants to engage in honest, kind, and open-minded quests for understanding. Thus, through the practice of open receptivity, interfaith conversations have the potential to transcend misunderstandings and build genuine connections among a wide variety of communities. Buddhism equips ethical frameworks along with practical mechanisms to promote quality inter-faith interactions.¹³ Mindfulness meditation teaches self-awareness and emotional mastery so individuals can discuss civilly with equanimity.¹⁴ Compassionate action, which is integral to Buddhism, enjoins practitioners to put others' welfare first, thus creating an atmosphere of trust within the internal community.

Most of the interfaith dialogues that incorporated Buddhist features concern societal rather than personal issues. Issues such as social justice, environmental sustainability, and health worldwide were touched on in interfaith dialogue, and collective wisdom and resources of the different traditions might be harnessed to build a more equitable and harmonious world.¹⁵ Buddhism provides a unifying vision for such endeavors, since in general, the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*) is the common goal they all strive

¹⁰ Diana (1993), p. 45.

¹¹ Leonard (2014), p. 27.

¹² *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020), p. 1 – 3 (S. II. 1, or SN 12.1).

¹³ Damien (2005), p. 84 - 85.

¹⁴ Zinn (1994), p. 68.

¹⁵ *Dīgha Nikāya* (2020), p. 58 – 79 (D. III. 58, or DN 26).

to achieve and necessarily reminds the practitioners of their common mission toward the minimization of suffering for the greater good.

Have continually known, and the intersection of issues of nongovernmental and secular organizations' identity can still be found uploaded about interfaith Buddhism and meaningful interfaith dialogue. They usually concern societal rather than personal issues, examples being social justice, environmental sustainability, and health worldwide, and it was in these that the collective wisdom and resources of the different traditions might be harnessed to build a more equitable and harmonious world. Buddhism provides a unifying vision for such endeavors, since in general, the alleviation of suffering (*dukkha*) is the common goal they all strive to achieve and necessarily reminds the practitioners of their common mission toward the minimization of suffering for the greater good.¹⁶ Buddhism, through its eternal and addressed herbs, offers an enriching dimension to interreligious discussions along the lines of the realization of nearness, relationship, and possibility. By holding empathy, respect, and collaboration, interfaith dialogues based on Buddhist tenets could change estrangements into pathways for unity and understanding, thus crafting a solid base for a more harmonious and interlaced global community.

III. BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The contributions that Buddhism makes for further interfaith dialogue are from theory as well as history and present practices. Practically, the Buddhist communities have interfaced with other communities sharing their various faiths in areas, for example, India, China, and Southeast Asia, creating a cultural and religious mix. For example, in China, Buddhist scholars embraced Daoist and Confucian learning during the time of the Tang Dynasty and contributed richly to philosophy and spirituality. Their historical examples emphasize the adaptability and openness of Buddhism toward dialogue.

In The Divine Net Sutta (*Brahmajālasutta*),¹⁷ the Buddha advises against being "bound by views and dogmas" and emphasizes practicing "according to Dhamma," wherein everything is alive to the extent that direct experiencing and application of the Buddha's teachings preside over any attempts at rigid, unexamined belief. This concept reiterates that attachment to fixed views, particularly where the metaphysical is concerned, serves as an obstacle to spiritual progress and factionalizes. The Buddha then ascribes merit to holding wisdom, good behaviors, and mental cultivation in practical aspects rather than mere dogmas. Religion has to do with tolerating all diversities with their practices, thereby creating an enabling environment for peaceful living with strong ethical values instead of fighting over doctrinal differences.¹⁸ In this sense,

¹⁶ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 184 – 186 (S. V. 420, or SN 56.11).

¹⁷ Bhikkhu Sujato, *Brahmajāla Sutta: The Supreme Net*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/dn1/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=sidenotes&highlight=false&script=latin>.

¹⁸ For a discussion on religion promoting tolerance, diversity, and ethical values for peaceful coexistence. Karen Armstrong (2009), p. 285.

having an open heart and mind toward engaging in dialogue counts as fostering personal spiritual practice and ethical living over doctrinal methodology, thereby contributing to general harmony and understanding globally.¹⁹

In The Discourse on Love (*mettasutta*),²⁰ one can read this: the essence of Buddhist universal compassion: as a mother who has but one son would protect him with her life, so let one cultivate boundless love (*mettā*) for all living beings.²¹ Such a teaching may feel somewhat prohibitive in extending love and compassion towards all life forms regardless of any discrimination in their distinction of race, religion, nationality, and even social status. Buddhism itself is one religion promoting unity through its philosophies about the interdependence of all life, for they all suffer and can experience happiness. With *mettā* practices, people get along and contribute accordingly to their spiritual development, and from such, shared well-being is achieved for them. Cultivating that type of universal compassion could very much remedy division or conflict, that is, the creation of empathy, understanding, and cooperation among various communities. Embracing this kind of unconditional love does well with Buddhist teachings to promote oneness in the world since people would be moving outside of themselves and egoism to welfare activities for all beings, the universal value for peace and unity in a diverse world.

Thus, the spiritual teaching in Buddhism, “Hate never ceases through hatred in this world; by non-hatred alone is it ceased. This is an eternal law,”²² embodies profound wisdom for dealing with personal and collective conflicts. Hatred is an emotional response to pain or injustice. It further incites hatred, throwing a person or group more deeply into suffering and division. When one retaliates against an individual or community with anger and hostility, they only further entrench the cycle of violence and negativity-escalating divisiveness. Buddhism approaches the solutions as follows: “As a truth, peace without war is non-hatred the end of hatred through non-hatred by a yoga frame of mind, sympathetic and forgiving.”²³ Non-hatred does not mean passivity or acceptance of wrongdoings. It is a response that is wise and kind and means to heal instead of harm.

¹⁹ *Na so imassa dhammavinayassa dhammanudhammapaṭipanno vihareyyā*”ti, *Dīgha Nikāya* (2020): 1 – 45 (D. I. 1, or DN 1).

²⁰ Bhikkhu Sujato, *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta: The Discourse on Loving-Kindness*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/snp1.8/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=sidenotes&highlight=false&script=latin>.

²¹ *Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe, Evampi sabbabhūtesu mānaṣaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ*. Ibid.

²² *Na hi verena verāni sammantīdha kudācanaṃ averena ca sammanti esa dhammo sanantano*. Bhikkhu Sujato, *Dhammapada: Verse 5*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/dhp5/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=sidenotes&highlight=false&script=latin>.

²³ *Averena ca sammanti*. Ibid.

This teaching asks one to change one's perspective, to see not vengeance or retribution, but shared humanity with other people, even with those who might seem to be enemies. In truth, the great battle lies in conquering one's negative emotions and responding to latter injustices with a steady and compassionate heart. By not hating, a person can unfasten the bonds of animosity and reconciliation to prepare the way for collective peace and harmony. This is an eternal law that, under the principle of peace, holds that peace is not the absence of conflict but action, with mindfulness and compassion, in the presence of conflict. In this way, each individual becomes part of the global movement toward healing, unity, and sustainable peace on the realization that love, indeed creates the space for peace where hatred has been.

The Buddhist figures in contemporary society are increasingly taking inspiration from previous Buddhist teachers, such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, and living according to the core principles of compassion, wisdom, and mindfulness to face the critical issues in the world today. Thus, these people organize interfaith dialogues and peace-building programs and participate in the international scope of activities that show how Buddhist teachings can give valuable answers to world concerns. Promoting inter-religious forums for this purpose would cause mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation amongst the different religious communities in society, thus paving the way to usher value-based grounds for peace and harmony.²⁴ Non-violence (*Ahiṃsā*) becomes evident through many actions, tireless campaigns for peace as a way out of violence, and the elevation of social justice. They seek to humanize a discussion on suffering in terms of not only human deprivation but also suffering among animals and the environment and its conditions. The Dalai Lama speaks about the need for taking care of the environment and views sustainability and the protection of the planet as essential elements of lifestyles imbued with compassion.²⁵ Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on mindfulness and the interconnectedness of all beings further stimulate an acknowledgment of the environment through awareness of the consequences that humans experience on the environment, thus creating a more sustainable living style.²⁶

Further, these Buddhist leaders point out that taking Buddhist values will be relevant in addressing the issues of poverty and inequalities, along with human rights violations. The very mention of social justice and equality with the alleviation of suffering closely resembles the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths²⁷ and the Eightfold Path²⁸ as a foundation for individual as well as collective transformation. In a world that seems increasingly fragmented by all political, economic, and social divisions, such leadership reminds humanity of the collective power within compassion and mindfulness, relying on the

²⁴ Swidler (2014), p. 112.

²⁵ Dalai Lama (1995), p. 89.

²⁶ Hanh (2008), p. 53.

²⁷ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020): 184 – 186 (S. V. 420, or SN 56.11).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

healing and unity of humankind. Contemporary Buddhist leaders, therefore, infuse reality into the texts of their predecessors while making it clear that timeless wisdom in Buddhism continues to provide great relevance in the face of the modern complexities of the world. They act as beacon lights of hope, showing that through compassion, mindfulness, and ethical living, individuals and societies can meet to fuse into a much fairer, more peaceful, and sustainable world. Their works exemplify the ever-powerful ability of Buddhist teachings to inspire positive changes in modern society.

IV. UNDERSTANDING BUDDHISM'S CORE VALUES

As one of the ancient and lived spiritual traditions in the world, Buddhism is rooted in values that are well above cultures and religions, hence have scored within the four great noble truths on suffering universality (*dukkha*)²⁹ and on the cessation towards which the path is being paved; the cultivation of compassion (*karuṇā*)³⁰ and loving-kindness (*mettā*),³¹ both embodiments of selfless concern for other beings; the principle of Co-dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*),³² which is applied to understand the basic interdependence of all beings and phenomena; and the ardent commitment to non-violence (*ahiṃsā*),³³ which stands in deep ethical relevance.

Even though they work at the core of an individual's transformation, they apply broadly to society and even the world, for example, to the dialogue between religions. In an age marked by all the diversity of religions and the occasional tension among them, the Buddhist principles prescribe a paradigm for learning to understand, unite, and coexist peacefully with representatives of the other traditions. The values can form the basis for any effective and meaningful interfaith engagement because they address the fact that human beings face common challenges, that they need compassionate interaction, that they are by nature interdependent, and that they need to commit themselves to non-harming.³⁴ Where personal transformation is at issue, the core values extend their reach into broader applications in the societal and then the global; among such is making interfaith dialogue. In this age where all the religions meet without conflict, there is still an environment that will bear negative outcomes. These Buddhist principles provide a model for learning to understand, unite, and coexist peacefully with representatives of the other traditions. They may even provide a basis for a very important and meaningful interfaith engagement

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Bhikkhu Sujato, *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta: The Discourse on Loving-Kindness*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/snp1.8/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=sidenotes&highlight=false&script=latin>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² *Imasmiṃ sati, idaṃ hoti; imassuppādā, idaṃ uppajjati. Imasmiṃ asati, idaṃ na hoti; imassa nirodhā, idaṃ nirujjhati. Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020), p. 545 – 550 (S. II. 1, or SN 12.1).

³³ *Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi. Dīgha Nikāya* (2020), p. 67 – 68 (D. I. 4, or DN 2).

³⁴ *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020), p. 421 – 423 (S. V. 352, or SN 46.51).

since they address the fact that human beings face common challenges, that they need compassionate interaction, that they are by nature interdependent, and that they need to commit themselves to non-harming.³⁵

This article discusses how the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism can be used as ethical and practical tools for interreligious communication. It raises issues relevant to the Four Noble Truths regarding the misery experienced in common by all humankind, explores the role of compassion and loving-kindness in the promotion of mutual understanding, evaluates the principle of interconnectedness in unifying people, and provides illustrations of non-violence as a guideline concerning ethical dialogue. All these considerations show that their core values can bring wisdom from the past into the future of interreligious relations, the enhancement of coexistence and mutual respect, and the harmony of co-creativity.

V. THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The very foundation of Buddhist philosophy is the Four Noble Truths: the four principles that elucidate the universal experience of suffering (*dukkha*) and the path leading to the cessation thereof. The extract of The Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma (*Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*)³⁶ holds a mirror to the First Noble Truth, *the Noble Truth of Suffering* (*Dukkha Ariya Sacca*), in which suffering is found to be all-pervasive in human existence. “*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ: jātipi dukkhā, jarāpi dukkhā, byādhipi dukkho, maraṇampi dukkhaṃ, appiyehi sampayogo dukkho, piyehi vippayogo dukkho, yampicchaṃ na labhati tampi dukkhaṃ — saṃkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā.*”³⁷ The Buddha mentions the four essential aspects of life that cause suffering- birth, aging, illness, and death- as inevitable experiences in the cycle of existence (*samsāra*). The Buddha, however, goes beyond physical suffering, dealing with emotional and psychological pain: the pain of being with what is unpleasant, the sorrow of being separated from what one desires, and the frustration of not getting desires fulfilled. In its ultimate context, he ascribes suffering to the five aggregates of clinging (*Pañcupādānakkhandhā*):

(1) Form (*rūpa*), (2) feeling (*vedanā*), (3) perception (*saññā*), (4) mental formations (*saṅkhārā*), (4) consciousness (*viññāṇa*).

These comprise the basis of one’s wrong attachment to a sense of self.³⁸ Thus, when an individual has learned these truths, he is likely to face all

³⁵ *Dīgha Nikāya* (2020): 67 – 68 (D. I. 4, or DN 2)

³⁶ Bhikkhu Sujato, *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn56.11/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=sidenotes&highlight=false&script=latin>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Rūpaṃ anattā, vedanā anattā, saññā anattā, saṅkhārā anattā, viññāṇaṃ anatta. Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2020): 45 – 48 (S. III. 47, or SN 22.48).

realities of life clearly and wisely so that he can find the way to liberation.³⁹ Not a pronouncement of doom, and yet an invitation to see the roots of misery and likely ways of getting beyond it on the path of the Blessed One: “*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhasamudayaṃ ariyasaccaṃ: yāyaṃ taṇhā ponobbhavikā nandirāgasahagatā tatratatrābhinandinī, seyyathidaṃ: kāmataṇhā, bhavataṇhā, vibhavataṇhā.*”⁴⁰

The Second Noble Truth, named as The Noble Truth of the Origin of Suffering (*Dukkhasamudaya Ariyasacca*), contained in the *sutta* named as The Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma (*Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*) identifies Craving (*Taṇhā*) as the root cause of suffering (*Dukkha*). It is accorded the weight as being craving that is continually arising (*Ponobbhavikā*). It binds beings in an endless chain of existence (*Samsāra*). Arises, accompanied by delight and attachment (*Nandirāgasahagatā*), as the mind clings to pleasurable experiences and seeks fulfillment in impermanent phenomena. Here, the Buddha categorizes craving into three distinct forms:

(1) Craving for Sensual Pleasures (*Kāmataṇhā*), (2) Craving for Continued Existence or Becoming (*Bhavataṇhā*), (3) Craving for Nonexistence or Annihilation (*Vibhavataṇhā*).⁴¹

Each of them leads to dissatisfaction, be it attachment to transitory sensory pleasures, the desire for eternal life, or a wish to escape the experience of suffering by annihilation.

The crux of the matter in identifying craving as the source of suffering is that it gives a deep psychological understanding relating to the human nature of suffering, and this forms the basis for the cessation of suffering through craving eradication, which is presented further in the Third Noble Truth. The same understanding would bring necessity into attention, detachment, and wisdom on the path of liberation: “*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhaṃ ariyasaccaṃ: yo tassāyeva taṇhāya asesavirāganirodho cāgo paṭinissaggo mutti anālayo.*”⁴²

The (*Dukkhanirodha Ariyasacca*) or Third Noble Truth, The Cessation of Suffering and is the last in a series of proclamations, including the two preceding, found in the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta*, “*Dukkha Nirodha*”⁴³, which might translate loosely in meaning as the end of suffering; this suffering is rooted in craving; periodic and total giving up or shedding was not referred to but rather a pathway through which such might have come to dispassion on the part of bringing about total relinquishment from craving; therefore, so

³⁹ .. Ibid: “*Ñāṇaṃ udapādi: ‘akuppā me vimutti, ayamantimā jāti, natthi dāni punabbhavo’.*”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bhikkhu Sujato, *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn56.11/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=sidenotes&highlight=false&script=latin>.

⁴³ Ibid.

understood, suffering ceases.⁴⁴ The Buddha goes on to compare or declare this in terms that describe the progress toward inner freedom:

(1) *Cāgo*, renunciation, means simply giving things up; (2) *Paṭinissaggo*, letting go, signifies release from clinging mental and material; (3) *Mutti*, or liberated from bondage, signifies the freedom brought about by overcoming craving; (4) *Anālayo*, or nonattachment, expresses that state wherein the mind ceases clinging to anything at all in the world.⁴⁵

The truth shows that the nonexistence of pain is not necessarily counted as an extinction of suffering but rather brought about by attaining *Nibbāna*, that is profound freedom and deep peace, which evinces a practical resolution to relinquish craving and embrace the detachment that frees one from the cycle of birth and death or *Samsāra*:⁴⁶ “*Idaṃ kho pana, bhikkhave, dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā ariyasaccaṃ: ayameva ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo, seyyathidaṃ: sammādiṭṭhi, sammāsaṅkappo, sammāvācā, sammākammanto, sammā-ājīvo, sammāvāyāmo, sammāsati, sammāsamādhi.*”⁴⁷

The Fourth Noble Truth, named as The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*Dukkhanirodhagāminī Paṭipadā Ariyasaccaṃ*) is the truth in relation to the path leading to the cessation of suffering. This path is called the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariyo Aṭṭhaṅgiko Maggo*): the actual path to ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom. The eight 8 interconnected factors are:

(1) Right View (*Sammādiṭṭhi*), understanding the Four Noble Truths; (2) Right Intention (*Sammāsaṅkappa*) that refers to renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness; (3) Right Speech (*Sammāvācā*): abstaining from false, harmful, or idle speech; (4) Right Action (*Sammākammanta*): an encouragement to ethical conduct through non-violence and respect for others; (5) Right Livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*): which promotes earning a living in ways that do not harm others; (6) Right Effort (*Sammāvāyāma*) are terms that help to cultivate wholesome states of mind and abandon unwholesome ones; (7) Right Mindfulness (*Sammāsati*) maintains awareness of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena; (8) Right Concentration (*Sammāsamādhi*), which leads deep mental focus and absorption in meditation.⁴⁸

In total, these comprise the whole framework to eliminate suffering, attaining liberation (*Nibbāna*). This teaching further shows the Buddha’s emphasis on a balanced, realistic approach to spiritual growth requiring inner transformation and outward ethical behavior.

⁴⁴ Bodhi (2005), p. 327 – 330.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bodhi (1984), p. 29 – 33.

⁴⁷ Bhikkhu Sujato, *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta: The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dhamma*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/sn56.11/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=sidebyside&reference=none¬es=sidenotes&highlight=false&script=latin>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The universality of suffering creates quite a deep common ground for interfaith dialogue. It leads to a kind of sympathy and compassion for understanding that all people undergo suffering regardless of faith tradition, thus paving the way for interaction beyond personal experience. For instance, grief from loss, the whole burden of inequality, or searching for meaning can be said to be phenomena that are common to all followers of religions.⁴⁹ According to this common experience, walls can be breached, and understandings can be created.

In addition, the Second Noble Truth indicates that the attachment of dogmas and strong belief systems also perpetuates conflict between religions. By applying the wisdom of the Eightfold Path, particularly in terms of the Right View and the Right Speech, interfaith dialogue can be conducted in open-mindedness and respectful communication. This eventually helps participants move beyond attachments that divide them and toward constructive dialogue.⁵⁰

This is an interfaith understanding based on a certain kind of suffering: for instance, the work of the Interfaith Youth Core and other similar agencies bringing together young people of different faiths to join efforts in addressing common social issues such as alleviating poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation.⁵¹ This act of uniting people of different faiths is directed towards acts of healing such suffering instead of discussing their theology, thus reinforcing an understanding of humanity through all these different faith traditions.

Sympathetic strands of interfaith conversations on complicated subjects, such as peacebuilding, are held together by their collective recognition of a truly resonant and painful suffering induced by violence and conflict. Post-war reconciliation initiatives in countries such as Sri Lanka integrate Buddhist principles with Christian and Hindu tenets to Encourage mutual understanding through the common wound from which communities are left bleeding.⁵² The Four Noble Truths function as an overarching framework in this regard. Now that suffering has been determined to be a shared experience along with the possible root causes and the joint fight against it, such dialogues may take place across the varied faiths, providing people with real trajectories for making such dialogues significant beyond the religious differences towards durable harmony.

VI. HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF BUDDHIST INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

6.1. Ancient and medieval Buddhism

The past history of Buddhism has shown itself to be interrelated with other faiths or religions. Buddhism has been primarily adaptive and all-embracing, rooted in the context of religious diversity brought forth by the ancient South

⁴⁹ Bodhi (1996), p. 15 – 18.

⁵⁰ Bodhi (1984), p. 45 – 50.

⁵¹ The work of the Interfaith Youth Core in fostering interfaith understanding and collaboration to address social issues like poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation. Patel. (2012), p. 85 – 92.

⁵² Gowen (2016), p. 112 – 118.

Asian milieu. Its teachings were promulgated in the 5th-6th centuries BCE and would soon feature eternally with other great traditional practices, like Hinduism, Jainism, and local spiritual forms, such as a Mudra and Yoga.⁵³ Common cultural and philosophical traits exist among the traditions, such as karma, rebirth, and liberation, as well as differences in their understanding and practice. The Buddhist teaching of Non-self (*Anatta*), the rejection of caste, and the Middle Path (*Majjhimā Paṭipadā*) allowed the religion to profile a stance that countered the outstanding tenets of the time. Indeed, the Buddha used to hold discussions with followers of all those other religious practices and had his kind of reasoning and practical teaching to encourage dialogue rather than the dogmatic mode of confrontation.

During the period of the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka (3rd century BCE)⁵⁴, interfaith dialogue acquired new dimensions. The Ashoka's patronage of Buddhism led to its dissemination beyond South Asia, promoting mutual understanding and tolerance among different religions. The edicts of Ashoka advocate respect for all sects, emphasizing the need for harmonious coexistence in a multi-religious society. Buddhist missionaries at this period moved across Central Asia and Greece to Southeast Asia, where they brought in interfaith contact with other religions and cultures.⁵⁵

In the medieval period, Buddhist scholars like *Nāgārjuna* and *Vasubandhu* engaged in interfaith dialogue by writing philosophical treatises that dealt extensively with the schools of thought in Hinduism and Jainism.⁵⁶ The rise of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in different areas further brought relationship with such stance, and primarily this opened up along the Silk Road to China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet.⁵⁷ Contact with Confucianism and Daoism and later with Islam all made their marks on Buddhist practice and teaching; such events exhibit the ability of Buddhism to incorporate elements from another tradition while still retaining its own intrinsic identity.

Established by their early and medieval canopy interactions, Buddhism is a religion that flourishes on dialogue and intellectual exchange. It taught understanding and mutual respect, conceiving the common human problems so that it could incorporate the others and allow them to flourish with it, thus leaving behind a legacy of interfaith engagement that continues to echo in the contemporary endeavors toward global unity and harmony.

6.2. Interactions with Hinduism

The historical course of interaction between Buddhism and Hinduism has always been traced in the ancient Indian cultural and geographical settings

⁵³ Harvey (2013), p. 42 – 47.

⁵⁴ Romila (2012), p. 250 – 260.

⁵⁵ Gombrich (2006), p. 72 – 75.

⁵⁶ The Buddhist scholars like *Nāgārjuna* and *Vasubandhu* contributed to interfaith dialogue in the medieval period by engaging with Hindu and Jain philosophical schools in their treatises, fostering a deeper understanding across traditions. Williams (2009), p. 112 – 118.

⁵⁷ Harvey (2013), p. 166 – 170.

while bringing the intertwined strands of another spirituality into proximity, thereby influencing and reshaping one another.⁵⁸ The early Buddhism as a reformative movement within the confines of Vedic space set itself up as both a critique and an alternative to Brahmanical orthodoxy. The teachings of Buddha raise active challenges to the authority of the Vedas, questioning the efficacy of their rituals and the hierarchization of castes in the absolute liberation or *Moksha/ Nibbāna*. For the Buddha, the justification of sacrificial rites, which forms the heart of Vedic practice, was rooted in ethical non-violence (*Ahimsā*), and external ritual would not be efficacious in addressing the profound causes of suffering; it would only make the suffering worse.

On the one hand, Buddhism has criticized several fundamental aspects of the Vedic worldview. The Buddhist tradition absorbed and redefined some major concepts popularized by the Brahmanical tradition.⁵⁹ Such as Karma and rebirth were closely connected to the Brahmanical tradition, so they were redefined under a Buddhist framework. The focus for Buddhism was to universalize Karma, emphasizing intent and ethical action as determining future outcomes, while the Vedic tradition repeatedly placed this link between Karma, functions and duties of a specific caste, and the cosmic order. Likewise, interpreting rebirth, Buddhism dissociates it from caste and ritual purity while bringing the focus into overcoming the entire existence cycle, that is, *Samsāra* by the acquisition of wisdom, ethics, and mental discipline.

Philosophically and spiritually, it went beyond mere critique and reinterpretation. While the Upanishad texts were composed around the same time as early Buddhism, they exhibit thematic similarities in their investigations of ultimate reality, the self, and liberation.⁶⁰ Alongside Buddhist tenets such as non-self (*Anatta*) and the Middle Path (*Majjhimā Paṭipadā*), these texts form a rich dialogue surpassing sectarian boundaries. Over the period, such exchanges evolved a common fund of shared concepts and attitudes and reinforced the spirit of intellectual and spiritual collaboration that characterized the Indian society.⁶¹

Then we have Mahāyāna, which later adapted a lot from Hindu Bhakti, like the worship of the Enlightenment Beings or aspiring Buddhas (*Bodhisattvas*), which resembled the worship of the deities of Hinduism. The further development of Tantric Buddhism bears this relationship: it made itself acculturated by importing some ritualistic aspects and symbolic importation from Hindu Tantra, adopting them but on a different doctrinal basis. The concept of Buddha Nature, which is found in Mahāyāna texts, also resonates with the Upanishadic notion of Brahman and thus bears the metaphysical

⁵⁸ Gombrich (2006), p. 45 – 48.

⁵⁹ Harvey (2013), p. 32 – 35.

⁶⁰ The thematic parallels between the Upanishads and early Buddhist teachings, particularly in their exploration of ultimate reality, the self, and liberation, despite differing doctrinal frameworks. Olivelle (1996), p. 12 – 15.

⁶¹ Gombrich (2006), p. 52 – 55.

convergence of the two systems.⁶²

This religious interaction was a dynamic one, involving mutuality and mutual adaptation and coexistence. Thus, Buddhism's engagement with Hinduism was not static but rather made adjustments as both traditions responded to social conditions, cultural mores, and philosophic currents.⁶³ In effect, such interplay enriched the spiritual fabric of South Asia and laid down the inherited legacy of shared inquiry and mutual respect that continues to inspire contemporary interfaith dialogue.

6.3. Dialogue with Jainism

The Buddha and the Mahāvīra, important figures in Jainism, both lived at the same point of time and thus became a backdrop to the intellectual exchange that could characterize ancient India's spiritual scenario. Their philosophy was in continuing the context of intense philosophical inquiry and emerging renunciant movements, laying a challenge to Vedic orthodoxy-halls.⁶⁴ The doctrines of both, though much closer on certain basic points like that of moral life, renouncement, and the final freedom, differed distinctly on method and metaphysics, thus putting the ground for dialogue in a spirit of philosophical rigor rather than conflict.

Indeed, one of the most marked areas of convergence was their common dedication to *Ahiṃsā*, an aspect that was central to the ethical frameworks of both creeds. For Mahāvīra and the Jains, *Ahiṃsā* was practiced in all its rigor and detail, prescribing the most minute precautions against all harm, even to the smallest organisms. The Buddha, on the other hand, went beyond this; he included ahimsa as an element of a more extensive ethical system that promoted balance in living without extremes. In this sense, it showed the broader concerns of the Middle Way (*Majjhima Paṭipadā*) of the Buddha, which he thought was easier and more practical for monks and laity alike, unlike the strict ascetic practices of Jainism, which demanded a lot of renunciation and self-discipline.⁶⁵

Such dialogues and debates were likely well-known and common since their geographical fields overlapped as well as their social criticisms. These conversations would be a matter of philosophical inquiry, stressing lucidity and reason over and above dogmatic antagonisms. Ancient texts, for instance, of Jain provenance, such as the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga*, would often turn towards Indian Buddhism with a critical veneer, while numerous Buddhist texts would contain references to Jain practices as indicating mutual awareness and intellectual engagement.⁶⁶

⁶² Harvey (2013), p. 196 – 202.

⁶³ Gombrich (2006), p. 63 – 66.

⁶⁴ *Atthi, bhante, samaṇo vā brāhmaṇo vā, ye keci samanabrāhmaṇā dīṭṭhividitāsevitamata-nuvattihīnappaṇṇā; taṃ sabbaṃ ajiḥhaviṃ, yathābhūtaṃ abhisambuddhaṃ. Dīgha Nikāya* (2020), p. 47–86 (D. I. 47, or DN 2)

⁶⁵ *Majjhima Nikāya* (2020), p. 6–10 (M. I. 4, or MN 6).

⁶⁶ Highlighting critical perspectives on Indian Buddhism from a Jain provenance. Similarly, *Dīgha Nikāya* (2020), p. 47 – 86 (D. I. 4, or DN 2), *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, contains references

6.4. Interaction with other traditions

This facilitated the new religion's integration with the animistic rites and indigenous cults that were present in every area where Buddhism touched. It allowed for adaptation to new cultural contexts as Buddhism met those rites. Adaptability was not confined to indigenous traditions; it extended to meeting foreign influences, such as those Greek philosophical and artistic traditions that went with invasion by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BCE.

One thing that has been perhaps the most astounding was the development of the Greco-Buddhist artistic culture in the Gandhāra region under the Indo-Greek and later Kushan rulers.⁶⁷ The developmental phase of this culture has an unusual feature: Hellenistic artistic techniques meet Buddhist themes. This created a cultural synthesis that did not only impress on Buddhist iconography and architecture but also created pages in its own history. The Greek sculptural realism and anatomical precision, with the naturalistic drapery usually associated with it, helped to yield some of the earliest anthropomorphic depictions of the Buddha when these features were combined with Buddhist motifs. Many of the sculptures have flowing robes and serene expressions, while wavy hair reflects that tradition of Hellenistic Greece but embodies Buddhist spiritual ideals.

The architecture of this particular era also represents the amalgamation of traditions. The stupas of Gandhāra bore a series of columns, cornices, and ornamental motifs inspired by Greek architecture, thereby constituting a unique architectural style that is representative of the interrelation of both the Eastern and the Western.⁶⁸ Beyond the purely artistic and architectural activities, this interaction inspired philosophical discourses since it developed the reception of ideas- from Greek ethics, metaphysics, and cosmology to Buddhist concepts that enrich both.

As one example of how culturally open Buddhism is, the Greco-Buddhist syncretism of Gandhāra would also show its ability to transcend both geography and culture. Buddhism assimilated many notes from foreign influences into its art forms and practice-making it capable of enriching its tradition and contributing markedly to the cross-cultural heritage of the ancient world toward a continuing spirit of interconnectedness today.

6.5. Buddhism and Christianity

Modern dialogues between Buddhists and Christians are meaningful in theological and ethical terms, marking an effort toward interfaith understanding and cooperation.⁶⁹ Theologically, it demands discussion in the context of some fundamental differences, mainly the personal God of Christianity and the non-

to Jain practices, illustrating mutual awareness and intellectual engagement between the two traditions. *Sūtrakṛtāṅga Sūtra* (2020), p. 45 – 50.

⁶⁷ Behrendt (2004), p. 25 – 30.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Schroeder (2017), p. 45 – 50.

theistic frame of Buddhism. Thereafter, the same ideals like compassion, love, and the will to rid humankind of suffering become bridges between the traditions. Discussions go on to explore how these manifest in doctrine and practice and engender mutual respect and appreciation of each other's spiritual insights.

In ethical terms, the important global issues addressed in interfaith dialogue are climate change, poverty, social inequality, and human rights. Both religions advocate for nonviolence, simplicity, and environmental stewardship. They would greatly add value to collaborative work. Such convergence in ethics must lead to a strong enough agenda for the sake of collective ventures into the accomplishment of justice, peace, and sustainability on the global level.⁷⁰

Besides theological and ethical discussions, the practice of practical integrations plays a critical role in modern interfaith engagement.⁷¹ For example, mindfulness and contemplative practices rooted in Buddhism have gained prominence in recent years within the context of a Christian environment. These practices are applied to reconciliation, mental health, and spiritual renewal programs, providing an avenue for personal transformation and collective healing.

The dialogues could contribute to the enrichment of both individual and collective understanding of one's own faith tradition and that of others into mobilizing the worlds so it may work towards a more harmonious and just world. The focus on shared values and real collaboration would inevitably overshadow doctrinal differences in such dialogues, underscoring the universal human strivings instead for peace, dignity, and relatability.⁷² These ongoing efforts are indicative of an enduring commitment to the furtherance of an increasingly rich and integrated future for the world concerning global harmony.

6.6. Early encounters

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European Christian missionaries, especially the Jesuits, came into contact with the Buddhist communities of Asia. Most of these contacts were debate forums, during which the missionaries criticized Buddhist doctrines such as rebirth and the absence of a Creator God while the Buddhists defended their practices.⁷³ The Jesuit missionaries to Japan at first tried to make common cause with the Buddhist teachings they were confronting, but when those challenged local customs, resistance occurred. The Jesuits in China, Matteo Ricci among them, were less combative; they found harmony between Buddhism and Confucian thought.⁷⁴ In Sri Lanka, the debates had an element of colonial politics as missionaries sought to exercise religious power, if not political, over the population.

⁷⁰ King (2009), p. 112 – 118.

⁷¹ Williams (2009), p. 45 – 47.

⁷² Cornille (2013), p. 85 – 92.

⁷³ *Natthi dāni lokasmim, jāto parinibbuto tathāgato. Samyutta Nikāya* (2020), p. 845–850 (S. III. 120, or SN 22.86).

⁷⁴ Mungello (1989), p. 45 – 50.

Though generally a battle, these meetings also planted a seed for cultural and philosophical exchanges, setting the stage for future interfaith dialogue and comparative studies of religion.

6.7. Buddhism and Islam

Religion has acted upon the historical relationships Christians had with the Muslims that were viewed as an individual particular contributor to their conflicts into the modern day. Mosques have been used by Muslim traders and rulers to engage in interaction with Buddhist areas from invading; hence, early sources date these contacts back to the seventh century AD.⁷⁵ There were translations of Buddhist texts by Muslim scholars, which were accounts that attracted mutual interactions more with the Abbasid Caliphate. They were part of a complex of social environments where Buddhists and Muslims cohabited, dependent on trade and culturally derived ways of living without precluding small insurrections that might happen.

In the modern world, efforts usually have focused on dialogue and cooperation in resolving common experiences with poverty, environmental issues, and social justice. Interfaith initiatives promoted the common ethos of compassion, peace, and coexistence that can foster more mutual understanding between the two faiths. The same is witnessed by the growing forms of these relations, suggesting the possibility of collaboration and global interfaith harmony.

6.8. Interconnectedness and dependent origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*)

The Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) is the principle that is most central to the Buddha's understanding of reality, given that it possesses tremendous insight into the interconnectedness of all things. The principle demonstrates that nothing exists in isolation, but rather that all phenomena arise dependent upon causes and conditions: that there is no such thing as independent existence. An example of this interdependent nature of existence is found in the famous saying, "When this exists, that arises; when this ceases, that ceases"⁷⁶, which emphasizes the fact that there is no severability of events, experiences, and conditions.

Everything is connected - thoughts, actions, our environment, all are part of an intricate mesh of interrelations.⁷⁷ One individual is not separate and alone; rather, they form part of greater networks of inter-being and conditions.⁷⁸ This idea leads one to understand that it is related that the wellbeing of one is tied closely to the well-being of others. The far-reaching consequences manifest when people act compassionately and mindfully. The good benefits the

⁷⁵ Wink (1990), p. 112 – 118.

⁷⁶ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020), p. 579 – 582 (S. II. 25, or SN 12.21): "*Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati; imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati*".

⁷⁷ *Vinaya Mahāvagga* (2020), p. 40 – 42 (V.1.40): "*Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā tesaṃ yo nirodho, evaṃvādī mahāsamaṇo*".

⁷⁸ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020), p. 579 – 582 (S. II. 25, or SN 12.21): "*Imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati; imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati*".

collectivity, while the harmful ripples through the entire connected integrity.⁷⁹

This understanding of the Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) moves it from the individualistic blame of individualism to the collective responsibility of community and society. When we realize that one's suffering and happiness are tied to that of another, there is inspiration to act in such a way as to promote harmony, cooperation, and mutual support.⁸⁰ This teaching has also emphasized totality in solving the world's problems around shared action based on knowing interdependence.

Besides, this is also awareness about Dependent Origination's (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*) path to the cessation of suffering (*Dukka Ariya Sacca*). If one understands the causal linkages that lead to suffering, the eradication of roots will be achieved, relieving freedom from suffering, i.e., removing ignorance, craving, and attachment into wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline. As the understanding of interdependence and ostracizes accursed causes, so shall one's life progressively be turned to a more harmonious and compassionate existence for everyone. In essence, *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is that which acts not only as a metaphysical doctrine but also as a practical charter towards social harmony and global unity, to convince everyone of their interconnectedness and encourage collaborative effort towards flourishing for all.

6.9. Historical encounters

The spread of Islam into Buddhist regions such as Central Asia and South Asia has had complex interactions between the two religions, and now the loss of Nālandā University due to Turkic invaders is used as one of the cases of historical relations between Islam and Buddhism.⁸¹ However, this framing ignores times of coexistence and cultural exchange, such as the Persian translations of Buddhist texts that occurred during the Abbasid Caliphate, which promoted the passage of Buddhist philosophy into the Islamic world.⁸²

6.10. Contemporary dialogues

In the last couple of years, Buddhist-Muslim dialogues have become popular. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) has teamed up with Muslim leaders to fight the issues related to riots, refugees, and climate change.⁸³ Other relevant activities included the Buddhist-Muslim

⁷⁹ *Dhammapada* (2020), p. 183 – 165: “*Attanāva kataṃ pāpaṃ, attanā saṅkilissati; attanā akataṃ pāpaṃ, attanāva visujjhati. Suddhī asuddhi paccattaṃ, n'añño aññaṃ visodhaye*”, trans. by Bhikkhu Sujato, accessed on [January 22, 2025], available at: <https://suttacentral.net/dhp/en/sujato>

⁸⁰ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2020), p. 541 – 543 (S. II. 25, or SN 12.20).

⁸¹ Eaton (1993), p. 112 – 116.

⁸² Cultural exchanges between Buddhism and Islam, including the translation of Buddhist texts into Persian during the Abbasid Caliphate, which facilitated the transmission of Buddhist philosophy into the Islamic intellectual tradition. Arnold (1931), p. 231 – 235.

⁸³ International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), *Building Bridges: Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue in the Contemporary World*, accessed on [January 22, 2025], available at: <https://>

Dialogue activities, which took place in 2016 in Myanmar, promoting a mutual understanding between the two communities.⁸⁴ Modern Buddhist leaders have played pivotal roles in advancing interfaith dialogue, emphasizing the shared values of compassion, peace, and mutual respect.

VII. THE DALAI LAMA

Interreligious harmony among the followers of various religions is most celebrated in the area of global worship by the Dalai Lama.⁸⁵ However, it must be understood that this harmony stems from a very deep commitment to the Buddhist principles of compassion and wisdom. Thus, over the decades, he has kept up communications with the leaders of many more traditions, discussing ways to achieve mutual respect and understanding as the dual pillars for peaceful coexistence. His notion of a universal ethic of compassion transcends doctrine divides, marking borders that present similar human values rather than those of other persons.

The Dalai Lama's active involvement in such events as the Parliament of the World Religions clearly shows his belief concerning the role interreligious dialogue plays in solving global issues. Still, at such gatherings, he calls for the provision of strength to end human rights abuses, violence, and environmental degradation. He states that indeed, people could draw upon all those major religions to motivate the qualities of love, charity, and peace for a perfect world.

His very discussions with high-profile individuals such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu⁸⁶ serve as the sweetest examples of interfaith camaraderie. Between them-their deep friendship and even humor and an instinctive, zealous commitment to justice and compassion - have been a beacon to audiences around the world. Moreover, the need for interreligious collaboration is continuously emphasized by writings and public addresses of the Dalai Lama, especially now that the world is becoming a village. He advises young people as well as leaders to have an open and inclusive mind towards religion while at the same time respecting diversity in the collective well-being. Through words and action, the Dalai Lama portrays a kind of spiritual leadership that is potentially transformative in bridging divides, building trust, and inspiring humanity to work toward a more peaceful and compassionate future.

VIII. THICH NHAT HANH

The term "Engaged Buddhism" here means that Buddhist commitments

www.inebnetwork.org.

⁸⁴ International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), *Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue Activities in Myanmar (2016), Promoting Mutual Understanding*, accessed on [January 22, 2025], available at: <https://www.inebnetwork.org>.

⁸⁵ Dalai Lama (1998), p. 212 – 215.

⁸⁶ A Nobel laureate, was a key figure in South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, advocating for forgiveness, justice, and interfaith harmony as tools for healing and unity. Desmond Tutu (1999), p. 87 – 90.

are directed toward social action, political activism, and interfaith initiatives.⁸⁷ From Thich Nhat Hanh's⁸⁸ perspective, a practice will not be a mere part of facing worldly problems but a tool for transforming them through compassion and mindfulness.

That was the heart and soul of his community, the Plum Village, which regularly conducts interfaith retreats. There, individuals from various religious and spiritual traditions will come together to assimilate mindfulness practices and explore possible pathways towards peacebuilding and mutual understanding. They are to be encouraged in their relationships with their traditions with the invitation for commonality.

It is through his writings that Thich Nhat Hanh expresses his commitment to interfaith dialogue.⁸⁹ Such writings as *Living Buddha, Living Christ* are deep explorations into the spiritual parallels and values between Buddhism and Christianity in the common qualities they represent: compassion, forgiveness, and inner peace. Thich Nhat Hanh supplements such Buddhist teachings of Jesus Christ and the Buddha, letting the readers savor the rich wisdom found on both traditions.

Thus, his technique moves beyond theory to application, breathing, walking as meditation, and listening in sympathy. With these tools of Buddhism, he generalizes for all human beings, not for any one particular faith, towards common well-being from each point in isolation. Thich Nhat Hanh's legacy is really the legacy of interfaith practice as powerfully transformative in building a more compassionate and harmonious world. It inspires people and communities to look beyond differences and work toward the greater good.

Bhikkhu Bodhi, Sulak Sivaraksa, and Daisaku Ikeda have significantly contributed a great deal towards interfaith dialogue through their works on world issues. Bhikkhu Bodhi attends to interfaith coalitions for climate action where he emphasizes ethical values, such as compassion and interconnectedness, among earthlings to deal with environmental challenges,⁹⁰ while Sulak Sivaraksa integrates Buddhism with activism in social justice issues and forming platforms for interfaith conversation on matters dealing with poverty, human rights, and sustainability.⁹¹ Ikeda, president of Soka Gakkai International, promotes peace through inter-faith dialogue by engaging with leaders from various traditions and advocating for education, cultural respect, and global harmony.⁹² All these efforts mark the efforts of Buddhist values in understanding and finding prudent solutions to contemporary problems.

⁸⁷ Christopher (2000), p. 15 – 18.

⁸⁸ Thich Nhat Hanh (1991), p. 57 – 63.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Interfaith Moral Action on Climate Change," in *Buddhist Global Relief: Annual Report 2020*, accessed on [January 28, 2025], available at: <https://www.buddhist-globalrelief.org>.

⁹¹ Sivaraksa (2009), p. 45 – 48.

⁹² Ikeda (2001), p. 112 – 115.

IX. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS IN THE APPLICATION OF THE BUDDHIST KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

The application of Buddhist teachings and wisdom in contemporary society faces several challenges and limitations. These hurdles stem from cultural and doctrinal differences, misinterpretations of Buddhist practices, and resistance from orthodox factions within the tradition. Each of these challenges complicates the integration of Buddhist knowledge systems into modern contexts, hindering their broader acceptance and effectiveness. In this essay, we explore these challenges and propose ways to address them.

9.1. Cultural and doctrinal differences

While Buddhism was founded in India, it has spread into every corner of the world and has taken new forms based on various cultures and social accommodations along the way. As a result, Buddhist traditions have come to differ widely - culturally, interpretively, and doctrinally - across such regions as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, Tibet, and China. These cultural discrepancies or doctrinal ones make it very difficult to apply Buddhist teachings uniformly.

In the Western world, for instance, Buddhism is often viewed as an atheistic focus on meditation and mindfulness, while almost completely ignoring some of the most elementary parts, such as ethics or morality precepts and deeper philosophical doctrines like emptiness (*śūnyatā*)⁹³ or dependent origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*). A selective interpretation like this tends to disregard the holistic nature of the Buddhist path, which speaks of the integration of wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline.

Also, cultural adaptations of Buddhism could eventually result in disjointedness in doctrinal purity. An example of this would be the Buddhist practices in Japan, which have been assimilated by indigenous influences of the Shinto religion;⁹⁴ these practices may very well differ from those in Theravāda Buddhist countries, whose rituals are more strictly within the ambit of the Pāli Canon. Such an approach has led to indeterminate understanding that discourages a unified approach to modern-day challenges with respect to Buddhist thought, especially when seeking to apply it in cross-disciplinary contexts such as mental health or environmental sustainability.

9.2. Misinterpretations of Buddhist practices

Applying Buddhist teachings poses a common challenge to modern issues: misinterpretation or oversimplification regarding practice.⁹⁵ Certainly, one such example is meditation, which is most commonly touted by Western societies as a secular and therapeutic practice for stress release, leaving out the

⁹³ A cornerstone of Mahāyāna philosophy, emphasizing its role in understanding the nature of reality and overcoming attachments to false perceptions. Conze (1962), p. 147 – 152.

⁹⁴ A Japan's indigenous religion, examining its practices, beliefs, and the integration of nature worship, kami (spiritual deities), and its historical evolution, particularly in relation to Buddhism and other cultural influences. Picken (1994), p. 23 – 30.

⁹⁵ Sallie (2019), p. 45 – 48.

heavy emphasis on spiritual development and the part of meditation along the path to enlightenment. This thin but significant line leaves Buddhism bereft of much of its transformative potential with respect to cultivating truly ethical conduct, wisdom, and compassion.

Similar ideas like “Non-self” (*Anatta*) and “Impermanence” (*Anicca*) can be grasped in ways that diminish their internal philosophical implications. In this case, the non-self is usually understood as a nihilistic denial of self; it is better viewed as the recognition of the fact that what we conventionally call “Self” is a dynamic process without a permanent essence.⁹⁶ Misunderstanding such core teachings would diminish their effect in dealing with contemporary issues such as mental health, social justice, and interreligious dialogue, all of which call for a nuanced understanding of human nature.

Another area susceptible to misinterpretation is the Buddhist ethical framework. Once again, Buddhist teachings on detachment and renunciation can often be interpreted as advocating for asceticism or detachment from the world. Nevertheless, these are, in fact, teachings on nonattachment and a focused worldview as opposed to detachment. Such misinterpretations lead to distortion in Buddhist practices and render them increasingly irrelevant in the modern world, where active and informed responses are needed to deal with issues like climate change, political conflict, and economic inequality.

9.3. Resistance from orthodox factions

Resistance against the application of Buddhism in modern social and political issues can be met from orthodox sections of this tradition who would adhere to traditional interpretations of Buddhism and might be skeptical about contemporary adaptations or innovations.⁹⁷ Resistance from these factions is rooted in the preservation of doctrinal purity, maintenance of religious authority, and protection of sanctity perceived around the tradition.⁹⁸

One aspect of awareness in resistance is the role of women in Buddhism. Most Buddhist communities are moving toward gender equality, though many orthodox sects still cling to conservative, patriarchal structures that exclude women from leadership and from realizing their full spiritual potential. This resistance is a major hindrance to the realization of gender equity within Buddhist spaces and curtails the tradition’s ability to engage fully with contemporary feminist movements.

When Buddhism takes to contemporary political or social issues such as human rights, environmental activism, or economic justice, orthodox factions often denounce it as incompatible with traditional Buddhist values. They find such engagement as overly political and undermining the spiritual core of the great tradition.⁹⁹ In fact, in some Buddhist teachings of compassion,

⁹⁶ *Sabbe dhammā anattā. Dhammapada* (2020), p. 279 (*Dhp* 279).

⁹⁷ Harvey (2000), p. 239 – 242.

⁹⁸ Keown (2005), p. 112 – 115.

⁹⁹ Keown (2005), p. 115 – 118.

interconnectedness, and non-harm, which ring so true with contemporary struggles, this resistance could actually act as a barrier to the practical application of Buddhism in resolving global crises.

The resistance also extends to the attempts to incorporate Buddhist teachings into such cross-disciplinary fields as psychology, social work, and public health. While there exist those who accept this convergence among Buddhist scholars and practitioners, others do so in the belief that any Buddhist tradition could go into the norm of Western adaptations in therapy or education, a condition that goes into distortion in the end because what is actually achieved ends up used as mere instruments for personal purposes or even secular purposes.¹⁰⁰

To address the narrowing challenges and the stifle, the first step is to promote a better or more inclusive contextual understanding of Buddhism as cultures differ in their own tradition, and as the interpretations of schools also differ. The various traditions of Buddhism would then be brought about by bringing in academics and intercultural dialogues, looking for commonalities, and deepening appreciation for the diversity within the tradition; by doing this, the gap between the scholarly study of Buddhism and the actual practice of Buddhism within modern contexts, too, would be narrowed.¹⁰¹

The next step will be towards an accurate, adequate understanding of Buddhist practices.¹⁰² Such integration would focus on meditation, ethics, and wisdom that Buddhism teaches rather than breaking Buddhism down into a series of separated practices. For example, it might be useful to join in instruction on virtue and compassion, which forms part of Buddhist thought, into mindfulness practices to facilitate one's understanding of self and others, rather than just stress relief; or, similarly, to describe the basic doctrines such as non-self and impermanence, which would either avoid misunderstanding or deepen understanding in accurate Buddhist terms.

Finally, such engagements with orthodoxies must take place in a manner that is both respectful and reflective. Preservation of traditional teachings remains imperative; splendidly so, however, is the truth that Buddhism is not a static tradition but has, historically, modified itself to adapt to the needs of change.¹⁰³ It is this possibility of eventually opening towards dialogue and new interpretations and applications of great teachings that would help create a more dynamic, responsive Buddhist community that could very well take up the contemporary challenges.

The hurdles and limitations regarding the application of Buddhist cognitive systems are complex and emerge due to diverse cultural and doctrinal

¹⁰⁰ Loy (2003), p. 45 – 47.

¹⁰¹ Paul (2009), p. 45.

¹⁰² *Majjhima Nikāya*, (2020), p. 905–10 (M. III. 71, or MN 116): “*Yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti idaṃ dukkhaṃ, idaṃ dukkhasamudayo, idaṃ dukkhanirodho, idaṃ dukkhanirodhagāmini paṭipadā*”.

¹⁰³ *Majjhima Nikāya* (2020), p. 905–10 (M. III. 71, or MN 116).

interpretations, misconstructions of Buddhist practice, and opposition from orthodox sects.¹⁰⁴ However, advancing a more cogent and fine understanding of Buddhism, communicating suitably with orthodox sects, and accentuating the holistic view of Buddhist teachings could help remedy that. It related Buddhism to the problems of the contemporary world - for whatever problems it is able to solve during this so-called modernity - from mental health to gender equality, from environmental sustainability to social justice-while maintaining its deep philosophical and ethical roots.

X. WHAT THE BUDDHA TOLD ABOUT GLOBAL UNITY AND HARMONY

As they teach the interconnectedness of all beings, the Buddha's teachings thereby advocate the point that everything we do-something thought or utterance-also affects others, not merely oneself. This calls for a collective deep sense of responsibility and mindfulness towards our interaction with the universe itself, thus strengthening the idea of compassion and empathy. Because blood is thick than water, teachings of the Buddha would assure shared humanity between all humans, notwithstanding one's differences in culture, nationality, and religion, towards unity in diversity.¹⁰⁵

Besides, the ethical concept of the Five Precepts (*Pañcasīla*) that include,

(1) Refraining from Killing - (*Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*). (2) Refraining from Stealing - (*Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*). (3) Refraining from sexual misconduct - (*Kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*). (4) Refraining from Lying - (*Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*). (5) Refraining from intoxicants - (*Surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi*).¹⁰⁶

Lead to a lifestyle of morality that enhances personal peace and fosters harmony within society. These moral principles inspire trust, reduce conflict, and create a conducive environment for peaceful coexistence, thereby promoting the overall well-being of society.

In the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga*) of the Buddha, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood are other parts. It will result in an ambience where individuals respect each other and celebrate their differences rather than fear them. Compassion makes Loving-kindness (*Mettā*) or Compassion (*Karuṇā*) the very basis on which relationships exist between persons and nations, which can help in offering reconciliation in times of challenge and cooperation.¹⁰⁷

Thus, through the global incorporation of these teachings, a base would be built for the sustainable peace pegged on mutual respect, understanding, and shared responsibility in order to guide humanity into a more peaceful and harmonious future.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Dīgha Nikāya* (2020), p. 67 – 68 (D. I. 4, or DN 2).

¹⁰⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya* (2020), p. 168 – 172 (D. III. 188, or DN 31).

¹⁰⁷ *Dīgha Nikāya* (2020), p. 113 – 16 (D. III. 223, or DN 30).

XI. THE PRACTICE OF LOVING-KINDNESS (*METTĀ*)

Mettā, or the Practice of Loving-kindness, is one of the main ethical practices in Buddhism. For the Buddha, the cultivation of this aspect is the most potent counter to hatred, fear, and division. It means giving elementary love and goodwill to all beings without keeping in mind any personal gains or expectations. In the *Mettāsutta*, the Buddha articulates: “May all beings be happy; may they live with ease.”¹⁰⁸ This is the complete summation of the practice: an all-encompassing wish for well-being and ease for all beings everywhere, regardless of identity, background, or circumstance.¹⁰⁹

The loving-kindness practice is not limited to one’s family, friends, or those easy to love. It is meant to open the heart even to those opposing us and to all beings, human and non-human, from the most general to the most specific. The loss of boundaries of self-centeredness compels the practitioners to move beyond labels and prejudices. It reinforces understanding of the connectedness of all beings, in which the joy or suffering of another is felt to affect one’s happiness and suffering as well.¹¹⁰

True to the words of the Buddha, *Mettā* has meant something to people. It is said, when rightly cultivated, to bring about inner peace and communal harmony, and that it would even ward off the negative effects of anger, hatred, and fear, while perhaps strengthening such qualities as compassion and sympathetic joy in their stead. It will bring people to a collective reality about their behaviors, activating them toward kindness, compassion, and understanding rather than seeing things through judgment and hostility.

For the happiest enlargement, the loving-kindness practice may heal divisions and bring together worlds. It is inviting people to see beyond typically divisive barriers- race, nationality, religion, and ideology - and come to regard all beings with an open heart and mind. By incorporating the practice of *Mettā* into everyday life - through meditation, thought, speech, and action - we are yet again contributing to creating a world based on peace, goodwill, and respect. *Mettā* is the way toward harmony for self and for the group in which we live, where the cultivation of love and goodwill in people’s hearts tends to radiate and dissolve conflicts, thereby opening up grounds for good, peace, and understanding.¹¹¹

11.1. Avoiding division through right speech

The Buddha teaches that a person should practice Right Speech as a precursor to the rest of the stage of the Eightfold Way in asserting that the efficacy of proper communication is pivotal for peace and understanding.

¹⁰⁸ *Sutta Nipāta* (2020): 9 (Sn I.8, or Sn 1.8): “*Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu, sabbe sattā averā hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu*”.

¹⁰⁹ *Sutta Nipāta* (2020), p. 9 (S.N I.8): “*Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā*”.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*: “*Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe; evaṃ’pi sabbabhūtesu mānasāṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ*”.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

One aspect of Right Speech is avoiding hate speech, which will sow discord, misunderstanding, and distance between individuals or groups. Instead, the Buddha encouraged speech that unites and heals.

The instruction is complemented by the *Abbayasutta*, where the Buddha stated: “A speaking unites, not divides; not hurts, but encourages.”¹¹² This teaching tells the obligation of every person to utilize words wisely, keeping in mind their effects on others. Speaking about those divides, insults, or maligns creates animosity and discord; but speaking that encourages, reinforces, and attempts to unite creates understanding, trust, and reconciliation.

The Buddha’s advice on speech does not end with the advice to abstain from harmful words; it preaches speaking to intentionally unite people. Heeding this precept means that speech ought to be truthful, beneficial, and gentle and should consist of pacification. Non-unifying speech involving gossip, lies, and malevolent talk ends up damaging relationships and communities.¹¹³ On the contrary, compassion-inducing, wisdom-based communication becomes the basis for engendering mutual respect and a strong sense of interdependence as taught by the Buddha.

Under the teachings of the Buddha on Right Speech, people can create environments that encourage constructive dialogue instead of destructive channels, indulge differences in openness, and not break relationships but strengthen them.¹¹⁴ This is crucial for an individual’s peace and the whole society as it indeed creates ground for promoting understanding and cooperation. Beyond this, Right Speech, promoting harmonious dialogue, may also be purposed toward making significant contributions toward world peace. In terms of interpersonal, national, or international conflict, the Buddha advises leaders, communities, and individuals to take a communication approach that may heal wounds and unite people instead of driving them deeper into divisions.

11.2. Non-violence and compassion (*ahimsā*)

The principle of Non-violence (*Ahimsā*) establishes the moral foundation for the Buddha’s teaching. It is inextricably linked with his philosophy of compassion, urging every being to act with kindness and consideration. *Ahimsā* goes beyond the mere physical non-injuriousness; it extends to thoughts, words, and actions, making it imperative for the practitioner to develop a state of mind completely devoid of any harmfulness and benevolent in every aspect of life.

In Dhammapada, it teaches that “All tremble at violence; all fear death. Comparing oneself to others, one should neither kill nor cause others to kill,”¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Anguttara Nikāya* (2020), p. 248 – 49 (A. III. 248, or AN 5.198): “Vācaṃ bhikkhave bhāsatha bhikkhūnaṃ vā vācaṃ bhikkhave bhāsatha bhikkhūnaṃ ananulomaṃ...pe...yā sā bhāsitaḥbā”.

¹¹³ *Majjhima Nikāya* (2020), p. 904 – 05 (M. III. 70, or MN 58).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Dhammapada* (2020), p. 279 (Dhp 279): “Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa, sabbe bhāyanti mac-cuno; Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye”.

by the Buddha. This verse attests that none is free from the fear of suffering and death, observing that all sentient beings have common ground in the desire for security and welfare. The Buddha's invitation to empathy is to see the lives of others as equally worthy as one's own. Just as one withdraws from harm and seeks peace for oneself, so should one respect other lives and their well-being and refrain from any actions that inflict suffering or death upon them.

It is the soul-raiser compassion (*Karuṇā*)¹¹⁶, but non-violence shall be like *Ahiṃsā*. Compassion, as taught by the Buddha, is the genuine aspiration to release others from their misery and to do actions that encourage happiness and peace for both oneself and others. Rooted in the mutuality of shared vulnerability, *Ahiṃsā* nourishes a profound respect for life and interconnectedness.

On a practical level, this requirement for individual commitment to non-violence and compassion has far-reaching effects on the whole society. Indeed, it requires from the individual close relations within the family for words and deeds of treating one another with compassion, peace, and mutual respect. On the social side, it requires a commitment to justice and fair treatment against oppression and violence. It will make the global commitment to contributing to conflicts not meant to end in war or harm but to get them settled through dialogue, understanding, and cooperation.

Ahiṃsā and compassion transform individuals and their communities and society as a whole, leading to a harmonious and peaceful world.¹¹⁷ When such principles of life are practiced by individuals in everyday life, they will form a peaceful culture in preference to one that glorifies aggressiveness and love over hate, ending with the realization of the Buddha's dream of a world in which all beings could live without fear and suffering.

11.3. Unity through ethical conduct (*sīla*)

Conduct *Sīla* has been included as a base among the many things taught in Buddhism, which gradually leads to harmony and unity of individuals and communities. It incarnates an adherence to morality for acting with right mindfulness, compassion, and integrity.¹¹⁸ Essentially, *Sīla* goes beyond behavior; it is a lifestyle and culture of humanitarian values, non-harming, benevolence, and reverence for any living being or creature. The Five Precepts refrain from killing and stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the use of intoxicating—that contain in themselves the core of this ethical practice, and a basis for the inner peace and conditioning of trustfulness—when those precepts are practiced collectively.¹¹⁹ A collective experience of *Sīla* tends to become a unifying force, overcoming disputes that might arise between persons. Instead, it would generate respect and cooperation.

¹¹⁶ *Dhammapada* (2020), p. 223.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya* (2020), p. 905 – 10 (*M. III. 71*, or *MN 116*).

¹¹⁹ *Dīgha Nikāya* (2020), p. 147 – 50 (*D. II. 72*, or *DN 31*).

At the societal level, ethical conduct is a key element in promoting justice and accountability, as well as inclusion, in which case the greater good is prioritized over the wants of the singular. It creates the groundwork for peaceful coexistence by addressing things like greed, hatred, and delusion, which lead to discord. In this already very complicated and polarized world, the principles of *Sīla* are most definitely still applicable and provide new meaning to modern problems through stress on principles such as non-violence, honest communication, and action based on compassion.¹²⁰ Cultivating ethical conduct on the part of individuals would improve their own lives and, at the same time, contribute to the well-being of society as a collective for future unity, trust, and peace.

XII. CONCLUSION

The exploration of Buddhist knowledge systems and their application in addressing contemporary challenges highlights both the richness of the tradition and the obstacles to its broader acceptance and integration. This conclusion will summarize the key points discussed, propose future directions for Buddhist engagement in interfaith dialogue, and advocate for collaborative efforts to foster global harmony. Buddhism offers comprehensive teachings on interdependence, compassion, and wisdom that guide it into the resolution of contemporary issues. Unfortunately, such applicability is fraught with obstacles.

Cultural and Doctrinal Diversity are with the knowledge adaptation of Buddhism into different cultures, it has become very wide and fragmented. Regional differences between Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna schools pose challenges in presenting a single Buddhist perspective because of variance in practices and interpretations. Misinterpretation of Practices: Applying the principles of Anatta and Anicca becomes even more difficult in modern society where mental health and ethnicism do not understand these terms that already secularize Buddhist practices like mindfulness. It just does not understand its ethical and spiritual dimensions.

Resistance from Orthodox Factions is a critical orthodox interpretation in organized Buddhist societies' slow innovations and adaptations. Therefore, such resistance may hurt gender equity issues, limit effectiveness in global social issues, and slow the incorporation of Buddhist wisdom through interdisciplinary fields. Whatever the challenges, these founding premises of Buddhism remain extremely relevant in dealing with such issues as the environmental crisis, social justice, and interfaith relations. Acknowledging and addressing these limitations provides more dynamic and impactful applications of Buddhist teachings.

Interfaith dialogue serves as a vital platform for promoting mutual understanding, fostering collaboration, and addressing global challenges. As a tradition rooted in inclusivity and respect, Buddhism has significant potential to contribute to this dialogue. The Buddhist teachings such as *Mettā*, *Karuṇā*,

¹²⁰ *Majjhima Nikāya* (2020), p. 54 – 57 (M. I. 414, or MN 41).

Mudithā, and *Upekkhā* speak of values of universality and appeal to all faith traditions. Having emphasized these principles, Buddhists would have an easy time holding fruitful discussions beyond the borders of doctrinal values in such subjects. For example, the teaching of the Dependent Origination highlights the interconnectedness of all beings, a concept that aligns with many religious teachings advocating for unity and mutual responsibility. Discussion of these ideas in an interfaith forum may serve to deepen a collective understanding and inspire collaboration to resolve global issues.

The focus of Buddhism on ethical living, which is clearly expressed in the Five Precepts and the Eightfold Path, gives a very effective platform to address contemporary moral dilemmas. Inter-faith dialogue will thus be a platform to share the ethics of non-violence and custodianship of the environment or equitable shared economic resources. Buddhist right livelihood teachings will be the place where sustainable development can be interpreted and considered as advocating for economic growth in line with ecological integrity. Likewise, debates on artificial intelligence and bioethics can benefit from Buddhist ethics and thus can help understand the changes that come about in the relationship of humans with technology.

Buddhism's approach to conflict resolution is, in its nature, compassionate and noninjurious. Such a perspective may become a strong tool for interreligious contexts. Mindful listening, dialogue without judgment, and empathy may become powerful means of bridging gaps and resolving tensions between religious communities. Teachings of the *Kāṇḍiyya Bodhi Jātaka*, among other Buddhist stories dealing with peaceful negotiation, serve as clear practical examples showing how wise and compassionate acts can be ways out of animosity. Therefore, it becomes relevant to inform the interreligious dialogues by the teachings of such a narrative for promoting reconciliation and peace-building.

The Five Precepts and the Eightfold Path are the two main components of the ethical framework in Buddhism. These approaches give one insight for facing the progressively critical challenges of morality found today wherein environmental degradation, social inequality, and political violence are rampant issues. They all teach non-violence and truthfulness along with mindful action and right livelihood, which augur well for personal well-being or collective well-being. These teachings apply to everyone under universality in the contemporary interconnected world.

As an important key to global challenges, interfaith dialogue creates avenues for collaboration and understanding within and between cultural and religious boundaries. In such dialogue, it will be possible to identify and assert common ethical values, like respect for life, stewardship for the environment, or economic equity. Buddhism's approach to mindfulness and connectedness introduces something to these discussions reflectively and inclusively, favoring unity over division.

The Buddhist ideas on interrelatedness inspire more holistic approaches toward various issues like climate change, emphasizing profound connections

between all beings and the environment. These values would lead to policies of generosity and fairness to address issues of economic inequality rather than systems that produce wealth but instead advocate for equity and shared prosperity. Buddhist ethics can be integrated into interfaith cooperation for the construction of a common moral framework to address all contemporary burning global issues in terms of compassion, mindfulness, and sustainability. This would lead to achieving one of the Buddhist goals: to relieve suffering while promoting a more harmonious, fair world.

Indeed, Buddhism has a constitutive approach to conflict resolution that is rooted in compassion and non-harm, which might turn out to be strongly transformational in interfaith contexts. Innumerable techniques such as mindful listening, non-judgmental dialogue, and the soliciting of empathetic thoughts may easily bridge divides and resolve tensions among the religious. His famous the *Kalinga Bodhi Jātaka* and many other Buddhist stories about peaceful negotiation provide straightforward illustrations of how wisdom together with compassion can easily possibly surpass hostility. Thus, enshrining such teachings into dialogue initiatives among religions would not only make an immediate contribution to but also support its reconciliation and peace-building efforts.

The ultimate goal of interfaith dialogue and Buddhist engagement is to contribute to global harmony. Achieving this requires collaborative efforts from individuals, communities, and institutions across faith traditions. Faith groups can gather and come together to work on some important global problems like climate change, poverty alleviation, and human rights violations. The connectiveness between Buddhism and ethical action offers a good basis for that kind of alliance. Such as interfaith coalitions working together on Buddhist-inspired ecological reforestation projects or campaigns against hunger and poverty based on common values. The potent records not only reflect the dimensions of such issues but the very crucial strengthening of bridges among so diverse communities.

There is no other factor that could lead to a lack of understanding about things or people's cultures, and failing to respect other traditions is one key barrier in creating interfaith harmony. Such educational initiatives in promoting religious literacy may help fill this gap. Buddhism, which means "Right Understanding" (*Sammādiṭṭhi*), will necessarily aid in forming a culture of empathy and open-mindedness. Having workshops, conferences, and cultural exchange programs may allow the couple to learn from each other as they sit under the same roof and will facilitate the expression of mutual respect and cooperation for one another.

All those voices could be heard through this inclusive dialogue, particularly from marginalized groups like women, indigenous peoples, and minorities. It also brings about a sense of equanimity and non-discrimination in Buddhism, which will enhance efforts to create places of interfaith engagement. It can be, for example, to further enrich important discussions by weaving in all voices within inter-faith forums and presenting holistic answers to complicated

world issues. The voices of women can be those inspired by feminist readings of the Buddhist teachings on women and may make unique contributions to discussions on gender equity, social justice, and peacebuilding.

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COLLABORATION EFFORTS OF FOSTERING UNITY AND GLOBAL HARMONY

Ven. Dhammadhar Thero*

Abstract:

Building strong relationships between employees and employers is a journey that demands consistent effort, empathy, and understanding. When nurtured effectively, these relationships foster a thriving work culture, enhancing employee engagement, productivity, and loyalty. By prioritizing transparent communication, mutual respect, recognition, and growth opportunities, employers can establish a solid foundation for a harmonious and prosperous workplace where both employees and employers flourish together. A united workforce is a powerful force, capable of driving any organization toward success in today's ever-evolving business landscape. Creating unity within a community is vital for fostering a supportive and harmonious environment. When people come together and support one another, they cultivate a sense of togetherness with a profound impact. Meditation allows us to connect with our inner selves, recognize our deep spiritual bond with the world, and appreciate the inherent dignity and worth of every individual. Inner peace and global harmony begin with self-awareness – embrace the power of mindfulness this World Meditation Day. The benefits of meditation are now widely acknowledged by medical science through various global studies.

Keywords: *Employee engagement, workplace harmony, mindfulness, global harmony, meditation benefits.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business landscape, building strong relationships between employees and employers is not just a "nice-to-have" but a necessity for organizational success. A workplace where trust, respect, and open communication thrive fosters a culture of unity and prosperity. This article is written to explore practical strategies and actionable tips to cultivate robust relationships between employees and employers, creating an engaged and motivated workforce.

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Importance of Strong Relations – Building a strong relationship between employers and employees is of paramount importance for the success and sustainability of any organization. This relationship forms the foundation of a positive work environment and contributes to various aspects of organizational growth. **Positive Edges of Building Relation:** Establishing and nurturing a strong relationship between employers and employees brings forth a wide array of benefits that contribute to the overall success and growth of an organization. Some key benefits include:

Employee Engagement: A strong relationship enhances employee engagement. Engaged employees are more committed, motivated, and enthusiastic about their work, which leads to increased productivity and higher job satisfaction. **Retention:** A positive relationship reduces turnover rates. Employees who feel valued and supported are more likely to stay with the organization, reducing recruitment and training costs associated with high turnover. **Productivity:** Strong relationships lead to improved morale and job satisfaction. Happy employees are more focused, efficient, and willing to go the extra mile to achieve organizational goals. **Communication:** An open and trusting relationship encourages transparent communication. Employees feel comfortable sharing ideas, concerns, and feedback, fostering a culture of collaboration and problem-solving. **Innovation:** When employees have a strong relationship with their employers, they are more likely to contribute innovative ideas and suggestions. This can lead to process improvements and creative solutions to challenges. **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Employees who have a positive rapport with their employers are more likely to embrace change and adapt to new initiatives, fostering a culture of agility and flexibility. **Organizational Loyalty:** Employees who share a strong bond with their employers tend to develop a sense of loyalty towards the organization. They are more likely to promote the company's interests and uphold its reputation. **Positive Work Environment:** A healthy employer-employee relationship contributes to a positive work environment. Employees are more likely to feel supported, respected, and included, which creates a sense of belonging. **Conflict Resolution:** In organizations where relationships are strong, conflicts are addressed more constructively. Employees and employers can work together to find solutions, preventing escalated disputes. **Company Culture:** A strong relationship between employers and employees reflects and shapes the company's culture. A positive culture attracts top talent and contributes to a harmonious workplace. **Employee well-being:** When employers show genuine concern for their employees' well-being, it can positively impact their mental and emotional health. A supportive environment promotes work-life balance and reduces stress. **Organizational Performance:** A cohesive employer-employee relationship leads to improved overall organizational performance. When everyone is aligned and motivated, goals are achieved more effectively.

II. THE BEST PRACTICES TO ESTABLISH RELATION

Cultivate transparent communication: Communication lies at the heart of any successful relationship. Foster an environment where open and honest

communication is encouraged at all levels of the organization. Employees should feel comfortable expressing their ideas, concerns, and feedback without fear of judgment or repercussions. Employers, on the other hand, should actively listen to their employees, demonstrating that their voices are valued. (2) Open communication: Foster a culture of open and transparent communication. Encourage employees to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions without fear of retribution. Listen actively and provide regular avenues for feedback. (3) Lead by example: Strong relationships start from the top. Employers should lead by example, embodying the values and behaviours they expect from their employees. Show empathy, demonstrate integrity, and maintain a genuine interest in the well-being of your workforce. When employees witness their leader's commitment to the organization's values, they are more likely to align their actions accordingly. (4) Establish trust and mutual respect: Trust is the bedrock of any healthy relationship. Employers must prioritize building trust by delivering on promises, being consistent in their actions, and supporting their employees' growth and development. Similarly, employees must respect their employer's decisions and demonstrate professionalism in their conduct. (5) Recognize and appreciate efforts: Acknowledging and appreciating employees' contributions is crucial for morale and motivation. Implement a robust recognition program that celebrates employees' achievements, whether big or small. Recognize exceptional performance publicly and privately, showing genuine gratitude for their dedication. (6) Provide growth opportunities: Employees seek growth and development opportunities within their organizations. Offer training programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities that empower employees to expand their skill sets and take on new challenges. A workforce that sees growth potential is more likely to remain committed and loyal to their employer. (7) Promote work-life balance: Striking a balance between work and personal life is essential for employee well-being and productivity. Encourage a healthy work-life balance by offering flexible work arrangements, time off, and wellness initiatives. Show empathy towards employees' commitments and support them in maintaining a healthy equilibrium. (8) Foster a positive work environment: A positive and inclusive work environment lays the foundation for strong relationships. Employers should actively promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring that all employees feel valued and respected. Create opportunities for team-building activities and encourage collaboration among employees. (9) Address conflicts promptly: Conflicts are inevitable in any relationship. The key lies in addressing them promptly and constructively. Encourage employees to communicate and resolve issues early on, either directly or through HR channels. Mediate conflicts with fairness and impartiality, striving for win-win resolutions.

III.EFFECTIVEWAYSTOBRINGPEOPLETOGETHERANDSTRENGTHEN BONDSIN THE WORKING COMMUNITY BY

(1) Encourage inclusivity: Embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity is a crucial step in building unity within a community. Encourage participation from all members, regardless of their background, beliefs, or abilities. By

creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, you can foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among all individuals. (2) Collaborate on projects: Collaborative projects are an excellent way to bring people together and work towards a common goal. Whether it's a community cleanup, a fundraising event, or a volunteer initiative, collaborating on projects can unite individuals in a shared purpose. By working together, community members can build connections and strengthen bonds while making a positive impact. (3) Host community events: Organizing and hosting community events, such as picnics, block parties, or cultural celebrations, provides opportunities for people to come together and connect. These events can foster a sense of togetherness and provide a platform for community members to interact, share experiences, and build relationships. By creating a space for people to come together, you can deepen connections and strengthen community ties. (4) Promote open communication: Effective communication is key to building unity within a community. Encourage open dialogue, active listening, and constructive feedback among community members. By promoting transparent and respectful communication, you can address issues, build understanding, and create a supportive and cohesive community environment. (5) Support and empower others: One of the most impact ways to foster unity is by supporting and empowering others within the community. Whether it's offering a helping hand, providing mentorship, or advocating for those in need, supporting and empowering individuals can create a culture of compassion and solidarity. When community members feel supported and valued, it strengthens the overall unity and collective well-being of the community.

Collaboration between physicians and nurses is essential to healthcare delivery and is associated with high-quality patient care, greater patient satisfaction, and better health outcomes. Hence, doctors and nurses must have a particular set of interprofessional collaboration skills. This descriptive cross-sectional study assessed how medical students in the pre-clinical and clinical years perceived attitudes toward collaboration between physicians and nurses in a hospital setting.¹ The attitudes of the medical students in his study toward physician–nurse collaboration across year levels are lower than other students from other medical colleges. These results imply that students need to be more efficiently provided with the interprofessional education and training that they need to become future collaborative team members in the healthcare industry. Despite the ample integration of teamwork and collaboration content in our MBBS curriculum, there is a need to revisit the curricular content in different courses across all year levels to better implement and assess IPE and incorporate it into teaching and training. The College of Medicine and Nursing must require interprofessional educational courses for medical and nursing students. In

¹ Dahlawi, H. H., Al obaidellah, M. M., Rashid, N. A., Alotaibi, A. A., Al-Mussaied, E. M., Cheung, M. M. M. Abuaish, S., Cordero, M. A. W. *Defining Physician – Nurse Efforts toward Collaboration as Perceived by Medical Students. Healthcare* 2023, 11, p. 1919. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11131919>

addition, hospital administrators need to offer ongoing IPE and collaboration experiences for all interdisciplinary team members because effective health care depends on multidisciplinary collaboration and teamwork.

IV. UNIVERSAL INTERFAITH HARMONY

Vivekananda went to America not as a prospective immigrant but, as we realize now, as an incipient prophet of harmony and peace, enhanced with the radiant, revitalized experience of the truths of major religions embodied in and exemplified irrefutably by his great mentor, Sri Ramakrishna. The young *Narendra* was not a piously submissive *chela*. He was a fiery challenger of faith-based claims to Truth. And he met the one who affirmed the truths of spiritual experience, not quoting texts like a *pāṇḍita* but exemplifying them in every aspect of his life. Above all, let us recall that on the eve of voluntarily and gently stilling his body into the great Void, Sri Ramakrishna gifted all that he garnered and lodged in his body, mind, and spirit to his beloved disciple *Narendra*² and in turn the recipient, relentlessly and readily, enriched the world consciousness with the knowledge and wisdom that are required as unquestionable channels for enlightenment. For every major or minor challenge, secular or sacred, evident in the ethos he faced, he had the unique art of transforming them into channels and choices of immense potential. In a situation where the colonial regime, rooted in the ruthless agenda of a company floated purely for profit and pleasure, Vivekananda bored holes through the hard granite of the allegedly impregnable intentions of that company and eventually of the empire. In a revealing insight, Vivekananda himself told about what his stay in the US resulted in. He confided to John Henry Wright, Professor of Greek studies at Harvard, that 'his stay in America had taught him a great deal. He said he worked on and out of a new way of life: That the practical living in America had brought his old problems before him in a new light.'³ In fact, besides Professor Wright, we learn that 'all of these philosophers' who met Vivekananda 'had earlier come in contact with Classical Vedanta.' Was that 'contact, intellectual understandings, what *Swamiji* himself had, and nothing else of Vedanta? Here comes the difference: 'Sara [Bull] introduced them to a living exemplar, one with whom they could carry on a dialog about modern issues. Vivekananda spoke to them, expressing the ancient philosophy in the current idiom. It is in this context that Vivekananda pointed out the need to 'address the entire spectrum of human experience if it was going to continue as a legitimate force, and evolve and mature.' The kind of ethos Vivekananda faced when he went to the US was one of mixed, if not of a chaotic, perception of India. One can call it the oscillating pendulum between the atheistic Ingersoll and the smug confidence of a young nation evaluating every other nation in terms of its criteria of growth and development.

² John D Caputo, *Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University, 1997, p. 183.

³ Pravrajika Prabhuddhaprana, Saint Sara. Kolkata: Dakshineswar, Sri Sarada Math, 2002, p. 176.

Even today, this tendency continues. Individuals like Perry Anderson, who, like parrots caged in their frame, go on sputtering that India is not a 'nation' at all. Let alone the concept of nation, for India watchers, we do not even have history, only legends and myths. As recently as 2013, Amartya Sen tells us that we have glory – thank God – but, alas, it is uncertain – perhaps if *Nalanda* University alumni start coming out, the glory would become certain. Even as Vivekananda admired the Americans' pragmatism, as Marie Louise Burke has rightly noted, 'he foresaw great turmoil and tumult in the coming age, he anticipated gigantic worldwide problems that would have to be faced and solved, and he knew that men strong to the depths of their being could stand up to these problems and not be overcome.'⁴ The glorious and the gory coexist, engineered by imbalances. Marie Louise Burke, a meticulous scholar who has given us a vast account of *Swamiji's* life in the US, and Perry Anderson from California, who rubbishes the very identity of India as a nation – both embody one of Vivekananda's tenets: 'The very basis of our being is contradiction, everywhere we have to move through the tremendous contradiction, that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep, and vice versa. Nor can this state of things be remedied.'⁵ Concerning this inextricable duality, one can also cite the paradox of Chicago: The city that was the centre of Vivekananda's emergence as a world prophet also has the University of Chicago, which publishes some of the most offensive books on Hinduism, particularly on *Tantra*. But then, the University of Chicago now has a Vivekananda Chair! Therefore, we have to accept all this with Vivekananda's philosophy of practical life: Every challenge is a choice, a channel to harness what is enriching, not enfeebling to our being.

The context now is the enthusiastic, often euphoric, response to Vivekananda. Enthusiasm that goes to the extent of dressing up selected youngsters like so many modern *Vivekanandas*! Of course, some scholars are shy to write about him directly, others feel so overpowered that they bring out studies, individual or anthologies, without little concern for editing. Invariably, the emotions of reverence far outweigh analyses of relevance and its pragmatic potential. In short, we have jesting Pilates as also jeering debaters – debating without understanding. But one very important present-day 'change' is to shed the usual, unexamined load of adherence to the Western – mostly Euro-American – paradigms of human development. Once, we regretted the word and plight of, 'untouchables'.

Now we adopted, some scholars feel, a strange ethic: studies from the hermeneutics of the West are 'untouchables', you cannot even touch them to know whether they exist or are mere 'phantoms of the tell-tale brain' – in

⁴ Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda: Prophet of the Modern Age*. Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2009, p. 27.

⁵ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1 – 8, 1989; 9, 1997, p. 2.97.

the catchy words of neurologist V S Ramachandran's books – constructed as universally valid frames of irrefutable relevance to all cultures and societies. In essence, the hermeneutics is like Caesar, impeccable above any questioning or suspicion. We seem, however, to have woken up to these recurrent assumptions that pass as 'truths.' In his essay in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, 'The Challenges to the Social Sciences in the 21st Century: Some Perspectives from the South', Aditya Mukherjee has noted the paradox that 'when the various disciplines of the human and social sciences, such as history, economics and political science evolved in the 19th and early 20th centuries, much of the present developing world was under colonial rule and European ideological hegemony held sway in most of the world. The human and social sciences in this period remained largely Eurocentric.'⁶ This ended, it seems, with World War I. Going further (and in spite of the 20th century being called 'the American century'), Professor Mukherjee says, 'Human society from the ancient period to the present, thus, continued to be often viewed, understood and interpreted in Euro-centric western ways. The 21st century will have to face this challenge and recover and forefront alternative voices.' More ambitiously, 'Notions of what constitutes identity, development, progress, scientific achievement, secularism, nation, justice, ethics, and aesthetics have to be widened to incorporate the much wider human experience.'

Though Professor Mukherjee does not, understandably, mention religion as such, many of the agendas he hopes to get widened can be found in Vivekananda's life and works. And without any self-conscious apologies, our intellectuals may accept reasons why religion matters and needs in-depth study if it comes from the West. In a workshop on 'Thinking Ethics' in Geneva in 2005, the group concluded that in the areas that engage our serious attention for checks and balances, religion occupies the first place. The other areas are business, the military, science, and the media. More explicitly, in her note on 'Ethics and Consciousness', Christene Wicker says: 'Respect for religious diversity and engagement with people of various faiths will be an essential ethic of the future. Bible classes that might once have been taught as part of a liberal arts education must be replaced with interfaith ethics. This is not to say that the distinctiveness of each faith system ought to be compromised.'⁷

Vivekananda had long ago experienced this vision as a fact. He articulated memorably: 'We must grow according to our nature.' Not GDP growth alone, with or without measurement, but growth in 'harmony and peace'. In short, not *sāhāna*, patiently tolerant, but *samarasya*, the coexistence of the dialectics of contradictions – yet retaining the ability to function.

Human will to conquer – Benoy Kumar Sarkar, the Bengali scholar and one of the most prominent intellectuals of the 1930s who was inspired by what

⁶ Aditya Mukherjee, 'Challenges to the Social Sciences in the 21st Century : Some Perceptions from the South,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 14 September 2013, p. 31.

⁷ *Thinking Ethics: How Ethical Values and Standards Are Changing*, ed. Beth Krsna. Delhi: Viva Books, 2006.

used to be called the ‘Ramakrishna - Vivekananda complex’, observed that ‘It is not Nature, region or geography that in the last analysis determines man’s destiny. It is the human will, man’s energy, that recreates the topography and natural forces, humanizes the earth and spiritualizes the geography.’⁸ Citing this, in his study of ‘Germanism in Colonial Bengal’, Andrew Sartori says that Sarkar ‘would thus explicitly identify the technical and economic creations of the industrial era as directly “spiritual” expressions of the “human will to conquer”’.⁹ This is a perception that Vivekananda inculcated and empowered others with: ‘What we want is progress, development, realization. No theories ever made man higher. No amount of books can help us to become purer. The only power is in realization, and that lies in ourselves and comes from thinking. The glory of man is that he is a thinking being.’⁹ What are the challenges Vivekananda faced and later fashioned into channels of perennial, integrated art of living in harmony? In his early life, he experienced the comfort of a loving family with undoubted affluence. But he tasted the harrowing poverty that human treachery engendered. Relationships with former friends proved futile. Even faith in God floundered. The channel of marrying into a rich family, the restoration of familial comfort, was open but never seized. His outstanding intellect and learning did not help him procure a job. And even when his Master assured him that the Divine Mother could come to his rescue when approached sincerely, what he tried, the very idea of asking never surfaced – instead he asked for *viveka*, *vairagya*, and *bhakti*. The amazing phenomenon that later manifested in him was that of *Shakti*, power, which was so palpable that when Lillian Montgomery, who was not a devotee, heard *Swamiji*’s public speeches in 1900, she expressed: “Swami Vivekananda was so entirely different from anything that we had known in America. I had heard all my life, it seemed to me, of power and repose, and the first time I had seen it was in the presence of Swami Vivekananda. And it all came as such a surprise because I wasn’t prepared for it. Power seemed to emanate from him. It seemed to me that there was an ocean of consciousness back of Swami Vivekananda, and in some way it focused and flowed through his words there was a purity, and an intense power, such a power as I think we have never seen – that I had never seen, and I don’t expect I will ever see it again. It seemed to pour from an infinite source, and it was perfectly calm, perfectly reposed.”

The explication of this ‘power’ is a challenge to consciousness studies, as well as a component of brain research. The Oxford Companion to Consciousness states: ‘Consciousness expansion, or extended awareness, is a rather broad concept, usually referring to certain states of consciousness in which either the self or the space seen around is greatly enhanced or enlarged.

⁸ Benoy Kumar Sarkar, ‘*The Expansion of Spirituality as a Fact of Industrial Civilization*’, *Prabuddha Bharata*, 41/5 (May 1936), p. 413.

⁹ Andrew Sartori, ‘*Beyond Culture-contact and Colonial Discourse: Germanism in Colonial Bengal*’, in *An Intellectual History for India*, ed. Shruti Kapila. New York: Cambridge University, 2010, p. 82.

These states can happen spontaneously in mystical experiences, they can be achieved deliberately through practices such as yoga, prayer, meditation, and sensory deprivation, and they can be induced by taking drugs.' Moreover, 'the ultimate expansion of consciousness can occur in spontaneous mystical states in the form of a complete loss of self and resulting oneness with the universe. In this state there is no individual awareness; rather, one's previously separate self seems to have merged with everything else.' Blackmore cites William James, who pointed out, 'such mystical experiences are difficult or impossible to describe and come with a sense of passivity or surrender in the face of what seems to be true knowledge or insight.' In his massive, meticulous study on Zen and the brain, James H Austin points out that 'paradigm clash' prevents scientists from taking up altered states of consciousness seriously: 'Altered states of consciousness do seem subversive enough to threaten many people's prejudices. Indeed, the few scientists who work in this general area tend to be defensive about their research because much of it still has to gain scientific respectability.' In short, they are consigned to the multi-vocal catch-penny word 'subjective'. Vivekananda's commentary on the Yoga Sutra, especially on his experience of *kundalini*, if carefully put together, should enrich without challenging the current quantum of research – perhaps we may get the complete picture of brain and consciousness.

World Meditation Day 2024: Inner Peace, Global Harmony. Meditation helps us find ourselves, realize the deep spiritual connection we have with the world, and recognize the inherent dignity and worth of each person. Inner Peace and Global Harmony will be our self -Embrace the power of mindfulness this World Meditation Day. Take a moment to connect with your inner peace and find balance in the chaos of life. Global Harmony (GH) is a small, humanitarian foundation with worldwide reach and vision coupled with innovative forms of help for the deprived but yet hopeful. It was established in Solothurn, Switzerland, in January 1989, with a tax-deductible status. The Foundation is non-political, non-denominational, and non-profit-making. India's rise in the world would mean global peace, global stability, and global harmony. As leaders-in-making, you are principal stakeholders in generating this ecosystem.¹⁰

V. TWO THINGS DEFINE YOU: YOUR PATIENCE WHEN YOU HAVE NOTHING AND YOUR ATTITUDE WHEN YOU HAVE EVERYTHING. THUS, YOU ARE LIVE IN THE PRESENT

If you are depressed, you are living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. As part of Ashtang Yoga, meditation complements other forms to deliver sustainable universal health and well-being of humanity. United Nations unanimously declared December 21 as World Meditation Day. The resolution, introduced by Liechtenstein, was co-sponsored by *Bharat* among other nations like Bulgaria, Burundi, the Dominican Republic, Iceland,

¹⁰ Dhankad, J. 2025. vicepresidentofindia. <https://www.instagram.com/vicepresidentofindia/p/DBQ8btfPdDg/>

Luxembourg, Mauritius, Mongolia, Portugal, Slovenia, etc. In his post on X (formerly Twitter), India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Parvathaneni Harish, stated, "India had taken the lead in declaration of 21 June, which marks Summer Solstice, as International Day of Yoga by the UN in 2014. In a decade, it has become a global movement which has led to common people across the globe practising yoga and making it part of their daily lives." Indeed, as the UN declaration acknowledged, "the link between yoga and meditation as complementary approaches to health and well-being". Meditation, indeed, has its roots in the ancient Indian philosophy of Yoga. The writer of *Yoga-Sutras* – one of the most authoritative ancient texts on Yoga- Pantanjali introduced us to ashtang yoga (eight limbs of Yoga) with *dhyana* (meditation) as its seventh step. In *Bharatiya* tradition, the Winter Solstice or "*uttarāyana*" is one of the most auspicious times of the year. As recounted in the Mahabharata, the great Bhishma chose to leave his body on this very day. Declaring the Winter Solstice as World Meditation Day is, therefore, deeply symbolic and fitting.

VI. WHAT IS DHYANA?

Sanskrit word *dhyana* comes from the root word 'dhi', which means to contemplate or ponder over. *Dhyana* can be understood as focused attention. Its roots can be traced to the concept of the four types of speech found in the *Upanishads* – *vaikhari*, *madhyama*, *pashyanti*, and *para*. The latter two are not outward expressions of speech but inner, soulful processes. In the Sankhya philosophy (one of the six *Vaidik* schools), *dhyana* is described as: *Dhyana* is the state where the mind is free from troublesome desires and thoughts. Patanjali defines it as constant and unbroken contemplation. The centrality of *dhyana* in *Bharatiya* spirituality is evident from its presence in even non-Vedic traditions like Jainism and Buddhism. It is no coincidence that sculptures and paintings of ancient masters and sages from these traditions commonly depict them in the *dhyana mudra*, the posture of meditation. Buddhist meditational practices like *shamatha* and *vipashyana* and Jain practices like *preksha* are still prevalent today. From India, the practice of *dhyana* spread to China as "Chán" and later to Japan as "Zen." While the pronunciation evolved, the essence remained unchanged.

VII. MODERN SCIENCE AND DHYANA

Dhyana exists at the intersection of science and spirituality. With the growing global influence of yoga, modern science has turned its attention to meditation. Notable studies such as "mindfulness meditation and brain structure"¹¹ and "effects of meditation on stress"¹² demonstrate that meditation has a clear and measurable positive impact on mental and physical well-being. In today's fast-paced world, where stress and anxiety have become inseparable from modern

¹¹ Hölzel, B. K., Carmody, J., Vangel, M., Congleton, C., Yerramsetti, S. M., Gard, T., et al. (2011). *Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density*. Psychiatry Res. 191, p. 36 – 43. doi: 10.1016/j.psychres.2010.08.006

¹² Laneri D, Schuster V, Dietsche B, Jansen A, Ott U and Sommer J (2016) *Effects of Long-Term Mindfulness Meditation on Brain's White Matter Microstructure and its Aging*. Front. Aging Neurosci, p. 7 - 254. doi: 10.3389/fnagi.2015.00254

lifestyles, yoga and *dhyana* are receiving rightful global recognition. World Health Organization (WHO), in its self-help tools for anxiety management, encourages individuals to “Develop the habit of mindfulness meditation, even if it’s just a few minutes per day.” Practices like meditation offer a profound tool to relieve individuals from stress, enabling a calmer and more balanced state of mind. By cultivating mindfulness and focused attention, meditation reduces anxiety, improves emotional regulation, and creates compassion towards oneself and others. As more individuals embrace these practices, the ripple effect can create a world where people are less reactive, more understanding and empathetic. This shared mental peace can transcend boundaries, helping build a harmonious global family united by values of inner well-being, mutual respect, and collective happiness. Results for the analysis of the two main effects (group difference and age) were corrected for multiple comparisons family-wise error rate (FWE)-corrected. No regions/ voxels from the analysis of group-by-age interaction survived FWE corrections. Given that a regular decline in WM with age is considered to be a normal process in healthy subjects (meditators and controls both consisted of healthy individuals), interaction effects are expected to be much subtler than group’s main effects differences. They observed that apart from the right amygdala, right hippocampus, and right thalamus, which showed an opposite trend in the group-by-age interaction (probably due to their nuclei subdivision), meditators showed a weaker negative slope for FA values compared to non-meditators.¹³

VIII. MEDITATION OVER MILITARY MIGHT

The human desire to conquer the world is as old as civilization itself. *Bharat*, being one of the oldest civilizations, has witnessed its share of conquerors and dictators. Yet, *Bharat* was among the few who transcended this mirage. It is no coincidence that every ancient tradition of *Bharat* – *vaidik*, Buddhist, or *Jain* – regardless of their internal differences, emphasized *dhyana*. In fact, in Jainism and Buddhism, meditation occupies an even more central position. Moreover, the founders of these traditions, like Mahavir and Gautama Buddha, hailed from the *Kshatriya* (warrior) class. Having understood the futility of worldly conquest, they turned inward and realized that true victory lies in mastering the self – conquering one’s *indriyas* (senses and desires). Such a person is called *jitendriya*, and only the truly brave (Mahavir) can achieve it. Gautama Buddha, born in the *Shakya* tribe, mastered the science of meditation and spread it across the world. He was fittingly called *Shakya-Simha* – the Lion of the *Shakyas*. *Bharat*’s outlook toward the external world has always been shaped by its profound understanding of the human mind and soul. The Indian adage “*Yat Pinde Tat Brahmande*” (As is the body, so is the Universe) underscores this philosophy, encouraging introspection as a path to understanding the greater cosmos. *Bharat*’s traditions endured because its people were already pursuing the ultimate victory – mastery over their senses (*indriyas*). Meditation and

¹³ Subhedar, Aniruddh. 2024 *Meditation, Sure Shot Way to Global Harmony*. <https://cihs.org.in/meditation-sure-shot-way-to-global-harmony/> December 16, 2024, p. 103.

Yoga, deeply rooted in India's ancient traditions, have the potential to serve as powerful instruments of soft power on the global stage. Unlike hard power, which relies on military or economic might, soft power influences through culture, philosophy, and values. The universal appeal of yoga and meditation as tools for holistic well-being resonates with people across nations, cultures, and ideologies. India's leadership in initiatives like the International Day of Yoga and now World Meditation Day showcases its ability to offer solutions to modern challenges. These practices not only promote physical and mental health but also inspire inner peace, empathy, and collective mindfulness – values the world deeply needs. By promoting meditation and Yoga in India as well as on a global level positions itself as a cultural and spiritual guide, strengthening its image as a nation that leads through wisdom, healing, and universal well-being.

IX. A GLOBAL ALTERNATIVE

This is not to suggest that the world will suddenly become a utopia free of conflicts and greed. Real politics will continue to exist. However, a significant part of the global community is searching for an alternative path – a path that balances material progress with spiritual wisdom. If nurtured well, this silent revolution through meditation has the potential to lead the world towards a peaceful and prosperous future that humanity has long dreamed of.

X. CONCLUSION

In an era of globalization, where military and economic competition continue to shape international policies, turning inward through meditation presents a promising alternative. History has shown that material power, no matter how vast, cannot guarantee lasting peace. On the other hand, self-mastery – the ability to control emotions, perceptions, and desires – is the true key to harmonious coexistence. This is the core message of Bharat's ancient spiritual traditions, where meditation is not just a personal practice but a globally relevant philosophy of life.

Today, as meditation and yoga gain widespread recognition, they are no longer just cultural artifacts but powerful tools for addressing modern challenges such as stress, anxiety, and social unrest. The United Nations' recognition of World Meditation Day is a testament to Bharat's soft power in shaping a future of peace and well-being. This acknowledgment reinforces the deep link between meditation and sustainable health, emphasizing its relevance in a world that increasingly seeks balance and inner stability.

However, this does not mean that the world will instantly be free from injustice or conflict. Yet, if more individuals cultivate meditation and develop inner awareness, the resulting transformation will ripple outward – from personal well-being to societal change – ultimately creating a world that balances material progress with spiritual wisdom. This may not be the only path forward, but it is undoubtedly a solution that humanity must seriously consider

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UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The paper presents Buddhist principles related to unity, peace, and sustainable development. The findings focus on the interplay between human cognition, inner conflict, and the need to overcome barriers to achieving global harmony. The paper highlights concepts such as *paṭicca-samuppāda*, the Five Aggregates, and the Eightfold Path as pathways to a deeper understanding of the nature of existence and how to cultivate compassion and equality. Through the practice of mindfulness and the development of wisdom, the paper asserts that we can overcome the illusions of self and separation to create a more peaceful and sustainable world. Ultimately, the paper proposes that understanding the nature of the mind and cultivating equanimity are key to addressing global challenges and promoting human dignity.

Keywords: *Buddhist principles, human cognition, paṭicca-samuppāda, mindfulness, equanimity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Day of Vesak, which falls annually, offers a unique opportunity for reflection on the teachings of the Buddha and their application to the world's challenges today. This paper addresses the theme for Vesak 2025, "Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development," focusing on the sub-theme, "Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony." The paper draws from Buddhist philosophy, particularly the *Tipiṭaka*, to discuss three key teachings that emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings, the impermanent nature of existence, and the role of the mind in shaping perceptions and actions. It

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discusses the teachings of the Buddha in terms of Right Understanding and the character of human perception, showing that it is in transcending that particular division that the mind makes where unity and peace are born. Realize the inner war - between the real self and the ideal self - leap wisdom, mindfulness, compassion, and ethical conduction toward the creation of a world-based undertaking in achieving peace, sustainability, and dignity of life. Finally, the paper shows the Buddhist insights in the search for practical solutions toward the challenges presented as fragmentation, inequality, and destruction of the natural environment, bringing all into more inclusiveness and harmony.

II. HUMAN NATURE AND THE UNITY

Human perception is one of the major factors in how we relate to one another. The perception of each individual is determined by the interaction of memories, beliefs, culture, gender, and personal experiences. In the contemporary world, these factors mostly lead to radically different perceptions, creating barriers of misunderstanding, division, and conflict.

Buddhism offers a peculiar view of perception, emphasizing that it is conditioned and transient. The Buddha thus taught that human perceptions are not inherently true but are products of the tendencies of the mind to categorize, judge, and cling to preferences. All this leads to likes and dislikes, often with reinforcement of separations between people.

In the *Dhammapada*, verse 1, it is said by the Buddha, “All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think, we become.” This reveals the mighty influence of the mind on our experiences and interactions. Perception is the lens through which we view the world, and if our perceptions are clouded by personal biases or desires, unity becomes elusive. Buddhism emphasizes the practice of Right Understanding, which is the first step in overcoming these perceptual limitations, *sammā-diṭṭhi*. Right Understanding means to see the world for what it is: Impermanent, unsatisfactory, and devoid of a permanent, independently existing self. We begin breaking down the walls that separate us when we understand all beings are at the mercy of the same universal laws of nature: Impermanence, suffering, and interdependence. This realization can bring about a sense of unity as we begin to realize that the distinctions we draw between ourselves and others are not reality but rather the result of our conditioning.

III. THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE IDEAL SELF AND THE REAL SELF

Humans find themselves in an ongoing tug-of-war between the ideal and real self. The ideal self is the self that attempts to project into the world and embody the virtues of compassion, loving kindness, and unity. It holds the images formed from our ideals, cultures, ethics, and morals. On the other hand, the real self is often driven by the desires, aversions, and attachments of the mind. This real self is dominated by immediate wants and dislikes, which often run in opposition to the higher ideals we aim for.

This inner conflict causes *dukkha*, or suffering, whereby the mind is in a continuous dilemma between chasing after what it wants and rejecting what it

does not like. The result is feelings of pleasure and displeasure and a constant round of attachment and aversion. According to Buddhism, craving, or *taṇhā*, is the origin of suffering. The mind clings to desires, producing attachment and aversion, which create a cycle of dissatisfaction. In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*¹, the Buddha explains that craving leads to the formation of attachment, and attachment leads to the ongoing cycle of birth, death, and suffering. This infatuation of the mind with getting all desires fulfilled and not facing discomfort results in the rift between the ideal self aiming at unity and harmony and the real self satisfying itself in selfishness.

The ideal self is goaded by the brain, nurtured by culture, law, ethics, and morality. It's essentially ordered, standard-oriented, and decent to others, all in the virtues of justice and fair play. It recognizes societal harmony as being of utmost importance and works towards the realization of these higher virtues.

The mind, though, is the controller of the real self, which does not care about ethics or laws but only wants to satisfy its wants. The mind is concerned with getting what it wants, and it looks to satisfy immediate wants without concern for later effects. This is where *loba*, *dosa*, and *moha* the three poisons are developed in binding us to ignorance and suffering. *Loba* (desire) arises when the mind seeks pleasurable experiences, clinging to them and fostering division as individuals prioritize their desires over the collective good. *Dosa* (hatred) manifests when the mind rejects unpleasant experiences, creating barriers between people and promoting hostility, which leads to conflict. *Moha* (delusion) occurs when the mind is confused or indifferent to neutral experiences, causing individuals to act without wisdom or clarity, further perpetuating misunderstanding.

The conflict between the ideal self and the real self is closely related to the arising of the Five Hindrances that obstruct the path to spiritual progress and contribute to divisiveness and conflict. They are:

Sensory desire (*kāmacchanda*): This reoccurs from attachment to sensory objects and pleasures, leading to division in that individuals want to possess or control the external phenomena for their satisfaction. (2) Ill-will (*vyāpāda*): This manifests as aversion towards others, putting up barriers, and creating hostility, which will result in prejudice, violence, and alienation. (3) Sloth and torpor (*thīna-middha*): This arises when the mind is overwhelmed by desires or aversions, leading to lethargy and inaction. (4) Restlessness and remorse (*uddhacca-kukkucca*): This occurs when one feels anxious or regretful about past actions, which interferes with the ability to act clearly and with focus. (5) Doubt (*vicikicchā*): This arises when one doubts the path, creating uncertainty and confusion, hindering spiritual development.

As *loba*, *dosa*, and *moha* develop in the mind, the Five Hindrances are also heightened, making it hard to align with the ideal self. The heightened presence of these hindrances makes a person conduct selfish, arrogant, and

¹ SN 36.11.

jealous actions that undermine unity and harmony.

An analogy from daily life can explain this better. Suppose, for example, that the speed limit is 60 km/h, which is a rule that was created for safety and the greater good. The ideal self would always stay within this limit because it truly understands the need for order and safety. On the other hand, the real self is overcome by desire and impatience and wants to drive faster, thus breaking the law and putting others in danger. This is an indication of how the ideal self works within the framework of ethics, standards, and the collective good, while the real self is under the control of unbridled desires that result in disharmony and division.

The philosophy of Buddhism stipulates that unity or world harmony can only occur by understanding the nature of the mind, an interior war that is in conflict between the ideal self and the real self. By understanding that our perceptions and desires are impermanent and conditioned, we may start developing the Right Understanding that eliminates barriers and leads to inclusivity.

The transcendence of the Five Hindrances and the decrease in the power of *loba*, *dosa*, and *moha* enable one to go beyond selfish desires and egocentric views and move closer to the ideal self who would aspire towards the good of all beings. We nurture a world with unity in harmony and foster compassion, loving-kindness, and mutual respect in which collaboration for the common good will be the fundamental guide for every personal and collective action. This is essentially human dignity and a guarantee for the development of a sustainable world in which all beings are to be regarded as connected and worthy of respect and care.

IV. UNITY CONCEPT IN BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY

4.1. Dependent origination and interconnectedness: Understanding the concept of unity in Buddhism

Among the important conceptions to have emerged within the structure of Buddhist thought lies *paṭicca-samuppāda*, or dependent origination, basic instruction regarding dependence through which all phenomena originate. It serves to detail how the conception of interrelationship occurs: All phenomena exist not by themselves but as interrelating and interfacing together in relationships. The Buddha's dependent origination teaching invites us to realize that we, too, are part of the great web of relationships. This realization not only undermines the illusion of separateness but also forms the very basis for unity and harmony in the world. Through this realization, our actions, thoughts, and experiences are interdependent, not independent of everything else. The connection reminds us of collective responsibility and the need for common efforts on the path of peace, concord, and sustainable development.

The Buddha himself made it plain in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*: "When this exists, that comes to be with the arising of this, that arises"². In this statement lies the core of dependent origination: everything comes to be when certain conditions have been met, and nothing is independent. It goes against the belief

² SN 12.35.

in a permanent, separate self and encourages the practitioner to realize that everything is interdependent, thus, actions and events are not independent but depend on a network of conditions.

4.2. Dependent origination and the twelve links: The cycle of interdependence

One of the most detailed explanations, however, happens within the *Samyutta Nikāya*, when the Buddha explains a process called the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. The twelve links in this argument explain the cyclical process of existence and suffering whereby one phenomenon is seen to lead onto the next in an unbroken, though difficult-to-comprehend chain. The chain starts with ignorance (*avijjā*), which conditions volitional formations (*saṅkhāra*), and from there to consciousness (*viññāṇa*), name and form (*nāma-rūpa*), the six sense bases (*salāyatana*), and onward to contact (*phassa*), feeling (*vedanā*), craving (*taṇhā*), clinging (*upādāna*), becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*), and finally, aging and death (*jara-maraṇa*). “With ignorance as condition, the volitional formations are, with the volitional formations as condition, consciousness with consciousness as condition, name-and-form, with name-and-form as condition, the six sense bases with the six sense bases as condition, contact, with contact as condition, feeling, with feeling as condition, craving, with craving as condition, clinging, with clinging as condition, becoming, with becoming as condition, birth, with birth as condition, aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair arise.”³

Yet, in the Buddha’s explanation of this chain, the very *asādā* and *adīna* do not appear as independent, isolated experiences but are the results of an interdependent web of factors, of which the most basic are ignorance, craving, and attachment. The dualities are not themselves independent entities, manifesting as isolated incidents. They are a product of an interplay of internal and external causes, connected to and influencing each other in our perception and experience. The chain also points out that suffering is based on ignorance of the impermanent nature of all phenomena, craving, and clinging to these phenomena. In understanding this chain, there is a break in the rounds of suffering whereby the causes for craving and attachment can be uprooted. Herein lies liberation, and it is an individual as well as a collective affair. As individual develops their sense of their connection with others and observe how their actions impinge on other beings, they make wiser choices that contribute towards the benefit and welfare of others and the world around them.

4.3. The interdependence web: From the external to the internal

We can approach the principle of interconnectedness by looking at a practical aspect of how our senses interact with the world. Buddhist teachings are that the contact of the six senses- which includes the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind- with external factors, such as objects, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, and thoughts bring about pleasant feelings. It follows from this dynamic that we cannot be in a position to experience pleasant feelings

³ SN 12.2.

without a contribution from the external world. Contribution comes from living beings, as well as non-living objects, to bring about a perception.

For instance, consider the symbiotic relationship between human beings and trees. While trees give oxygen by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, human beings provide nitrogen to trees by consuming their parts and releasing them into the soil. In this interdependent cycle, human beings and trees rely on one another for survival; this, therefore, is a natural, interdependent exchange. Understanding this interdependence – where both human beings and trees contribute to each other's existence – leads one to realize that no being is superior or inferior to another. Just as the exchange between human beings and trees sustains both life forms, understanding this interdependence eradicates ego, replacing feelings of superiority and inferiority with mutual respect and recognition of shared existence.

Interconnectedness, according to the concept, is drawn to all beings since, as the Buddha taught, no being is an island. All phenomena, including human experiences of pleasure and pain, are interconnected and result from a variety of causes and conditions. We are molded by our surroundings, but we also contribute to the molding. It challenges the ego-based notion of separateness in the realization that our actions and experiences ripple and interact within a much wider web of humanity than what the single eye may view.

4.4. Interconnectedness in action: Collective responsibility and global unity

According to SN 35.239, the Buddha points out, “All beings are part of a vast web of relationships,” indicating that what one being does has its ripple in the vast network of reality. This interconnectedness calls for collective action and responsibility. When each of us acts with mindfulness and compassion, then we will, together, create a positive collective action in the name of peace and sustainability. Just as ripples from a stone thrown into the center of a pond disturb the entire surface, so, too, does each individual's actions affect the world at large.

Presently, this realization of interconnectedness is much needed at global levels to respond effectively to climate change, social inequalities, and political instability. *Paṭicca-samuppāda*, as a Buddhist teaching, supports our reflection on how these global issues are not isolated events but interconnected occurrences determined by the actions and choices made by all beings. For instance, global warming is not a problem of a distant future affecting only a part of the world but is a present-day worldwide problem, a product of the combined activities of all nations and peoples. The depletion of resources, pollution, and deforestation in one part of the world affect the climate in every part. The resolution of this crisis, therefore, calls for collective effort and shared understanding of our interconnected existence.

The teaching of the Buddha on dependent origination brings us to the realization that our sense of responsibility to one another and the world must be developed as a shared interest. Insofar as the actions of one individual or nation may have far-reaching effects, we are called to be more mindful and

careful in acting. This insight forms a ground for peace and sustainability in the training of minds that feel great responsibility and mutual concern for the well-being of all beings.

V. OVERCOMING SEPARATENESS TO UNIVERSAL UNITY

Being an ego, nationalistic, materialistic person has one important consequence: It invites overcoming such illusion, contributing toward world harmony, and a common sense of global unity. The application of Right View and Right Intention, according to the Noble Eightfold Path, ensures alignment toward acting in common welfare. The right view is seeing the world interrelated, the right intention builds up a mind of compassion and non-harming. These practices, which develop personal peace, also grow a world of cooperation and understanding among cultures, religions, and nations.

We move out of our self-concerned confinement to a larger view of unity and the well-being of all as we develop an awareness of all beings and phenomena being interdependent. It becomes important for the needed change in perspective in handling the problems of our times: climate change, inequality, and conflict are issues that can be resolved through world cooperation. We can build a peaceful, sustainable, harmonious future only by acknowledging our mutual dependence. *Paṭicca-samuppāda* invites us, through the teachings of the Buddha, to look into how our actions, rooted in compassion, mindfulness, and the understanding of interconnectedness, are the locks to a harmonious and sustainable world.

VI. BEYOND THE BINARIES OF PLEASURE AND PAIN

The Buddha's teachings bring insight into attachment to pleasure and aversion from pain as fueling suffering in quite an interesting way. The round of craving and renunciation creates an endless dissatisfaction since it is based upon the same fundamental delusion due to both the pursuit of pleasure and its avoidance being grounded in a belief in the permanence of things. The Buddha shows that it is not events that create suffering, but the mental and emotional response to those events and our attachment to them.

Through the cultivation of mindfulness or *sati*, meditation practices learn to perceive events without the labels of "good" or "bad." We start to realize that these sensations, thoughts, and feelings arise and do not stay, thus characterizing all phenomena as impermanent by observing them arise without attachment. Equanimity, or *upekkhā*, refers to that balanced mental state wherein one can respond to pleasure and pain with clarity, compassion, and wisdom rather than reacting impulsively based on craving or aversion. Equanimity is not blind apathy but is a balance for full participation in life without any extreme emotional jerks. Thus, Buddha's teaching comes as a pragmatic remedy to get over these dualities of pleasures and pains: through mindfulness of both, one will come to realize both are impermanent and, therefore, unable to affect the ego. This is how one attains inward peace and lessens the sense of suffering. Equanimity and Its Place in Social and Global Harmony Besides personal influences, the practice of equanimity overflows into the very structure of

societal peace and global harmony. In a world threatened by conflicts aroused by desires of material wealth, status, and power, and by fears of loss, suffering, or humiliation, equanimity offers a path to transcend the divisive forces. A person who has managed to develop equanimity within himself or herself is less likely to react with hostility, fear, or defensiveness to difficulties but is more likely to respond with understanding, compassion, and mutual solution-finding. Where these qualities form part of the culture, there will be more social cohesion because people will not be prone to extreme fluctuation of emotions or desires. Equanimity makes the dualities of pleasure and pain grounds for political and social conflict lessen, allowing oneness, better collaboration, and collective well-being.

The whole interdependence among beings in global relations shall be easily made apparent by applications of the equanimity principle to such challenges that most of our human world faces at present. Whether it is a question of climate change, poverty, or human rights, the practice of equanimity develops a sense of shared responsibility since the actions of one affect the whole. It follows that societies that value equanimity can come together to address global problems with wisdom and compassion, overcoming their divisions based on nationality, ethnicity, and ideology.

VII. THE FIVE AGGREGATES AND THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF ALL BEINGS

In the explanation of the nature of self and suffering, it gets more complex as explained by the Buddha through the teachings on the five aggregates: Form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. The aggregates explain how various factors interplay in shaping human experiences, none of which is permanent or independent.

Rūpa means form, which consists of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. The body is in a constant state of change. Due to this impermanence, no one is superior or on a pedestal since the body itself is transitory. That brings in humility and equality because everyone is under the same law of nature. (2) *Vedanā* means feeling something arising when we come into contact with something from the outside and are conditioned by our past experiences. These feelings arise momentarily, sometimes as pleasant, sometimes as unpleasant, sometimes as neutral. Here, one can recognize the impermanence of feelings, which begets compassion: All beings experience similar emotional states and hence are joined in their vulnerability. (3) *Saññā*: Perception is the cognitive meaning we give an object of our sensory experience. It is conditioned by past experiences and supported by our craving; hence, mistaken conceptions of permanence arise. Perceiving perception as subjective and temporary, we begin to cultivate humility and discard the need to dominate or control others due to perceived differences. (4) *Saṅkhāra*: Mental formations would explain will forces, carving our actions and reactions. Furthermore, they are impermanent, like the flux in conditioned experiences and desires from the past. It is this impermanence of the mental formations that the personal ego and preference end by embracing all mental formations as part of an interconnected web of fleeting moments. (5) *Viññāṇa*

(Consciousness): Consciousness is the awareness of sensory objects and mental states. It is not an entity but a process conditioned by external and internal factors. It is in the recognition of the impermanent nature of consciousness that we learn to let go of identification with thoughts and memories, cultivating a sense of self that is inclusive rather than divisive.

When we understand that all beings are made up of these impermanent aggregates, we are less likely to grasp at fixed identities or claim our superiority over others. Rather, we realize a sense of shared interdependence and develop compassion for all beings. This understanding brings us closer together and makes us more inclusive, realizing that all beings, regardless of form, feelings, perceptions, mental habits, or consciousness, are subject to the same impermanent processes.

VIII. UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY OF THE DHARMA

The Buddha often used metaphors from nature to convey the universality and inclusiveness of the Dharma. The rain falls on all beings, whether in high or low circumstances, and the Buddha's teachings are likewise open to all. The *Samyutta Nikāya*⁴ reminds us that the Dharma does not discriminate according to social status, race, or other arbitrary distinctions. "Just as the rain falls equally everywhere, on good and bad beings alike, so does the teaching of the Buddha penetrate everywhere to all beings, regardless of position" This metaphor extends to all beings that they too have the potential to benefit from the Buddha's teaching and that none is inherently excluded from the possibility of awakening.

These two metaphors, rain and the ocean-perpetuate the notion that the Dharma is uniform and universal; all beings, everywhere, partake in a connected web of life. It is the purpose of the teachings of the Buddha to point the way beyond duality in oneself, in others, in pleasures, in pains, in a foundation for unity and global peace.

With the understanding of the Five Aggregates, the cultivation of equanimity, and the practice of compassion, we can transcend barriers. We see through the deception of a permanent, isolated self and conjoin with all in a shared humanness that helps in the harmony of the world. The Buddha showed the way to peace within ourselves and in society as a whole through this ageless framework.

IX. EQUANIMITY TO BE DEVELOPED BY MINDFULNESS, THE EIGHTFOLD PATH, AND MEDITATION

In Buddhist teaching, developing mindfulness (*sati*) becomes a pivotal factor in overcoming both pleasure and pain, *asāda* and *adina*. As an essential practice, it makes one get hold of a non-reactant look into the thought-process, emotions, and bodily sensations to avoid being attached to the feelings of pleasure while creating aversion toward those of pain. In developing a balanced and impartial awareness regarding all phenomena, mindfulness brings increased realization of the transient nature of experience. It is equanimity

⁴ SN 45.8.

or the ability to keep composure and peace of mind regardless of external conditions that allows this.⁵

Mindfulness, being a form of meditative awareness, underlines the Buddhist teaching of impermanence and interconnectedness. The practice of observing the arising and passing of *sensations*, thoughts, and feelings, without identification with them, fosters the insight that all experiences, both pleasant and painful, are transient. This non-attachment to the dualities of experience prevents emotional turbulence and the mental afflictions of greed and aversion, key causes of suffering in the Buddhist worldview.⁶

The practitioner reminds himself in mindfulness of the interdependence of all phenomena. The cognitively prepared mental shift now allows him to develop the correct view of *sammā-diṭṭhi*: A deep understanding that all phenomena are impermanent, arise from causes and conditions. According to *Abhidhamma*, the right view is important because it allows one to realize that the dualities of pleasure and pain are universal and inevitable experiences for all beings. The recognition makes a person abolish the selfish desire and the two extremes of attachment and aversion. The mental stability that results encourages anxiety reduction, thereby promoting good emotional health.⁷ The right view not only removes the ego's distortions but cultivates a worldview based on interconnectedness, paving the way for unconditional love, compassion, and wisdom.⁸ This balanced state of mind subsequently guides the individual to engage in virtuous actions aligned with the ethical precepts of Buddhism.

The right view naturally supports the development of the right intention (*sammā-sankappa*), which involves cultivating thoughts and motivations free from greed, hatred, and delusion. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sūta* presents the right intention as a vital condition for spiritual maturity in that it informs ethical choices and interpersonal conduct. Right intention involves the culture of the four *Brahmavihāras*: *mettā*, *karunā*, *muditā*, and *upekkhā*.⁹ These mental attitudes cultivate the heart of compassion and unbiased, thus allowing practitioners to remain equanimous under the most unfavorable circumstances.

The Eightfold Path is a general teaching in Buddhism wherein eight factors interrelate to bring about equanimity. These eight factors fall into three overall domains: Ethical conduct or *sīla*, mental discipline or *samādhi*, and wisdom or *prajñā*. Practicing these eight factors brings about a well-balanced mind wherein mindfulness and meditation, in particular, *vipassanā* or insight meditation, are essential.

9.1. Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*) and its role in cultivating equanimity

The right view is the starting point of the Eightfold Path and involves

⁵ Gunaratana (2002): 34.

⁶ Wallace (2006): 78.

⁷ Thanissaro (1997): 32.

⁸ Bodhi (2011): 234.

⁹ Brahm (2017): 48.

the intellectual understanding of the Four Noble Truths, including the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), its causes, and the cessation of suffering. This understanding aligns with the Buddhist analysis of human psychology, which posits that attachment to transient phenomena – whether pleasurable or painful – leads to suffering.¹⁰ The right view allows the practitioner to understand that everything is impermanent and, thus, attachment to pleasure and aversion to pain must be let go. From this insight, the practitioner gains clarity with which he can perceive life in a nondual way and realize that both pleasure and pain are equally fleeting experiences rather than stable states of being.

9.2. Right Intention (*sammā-sankappa*) and the development of compassion

Building upon the right view, the right intention involves the cultivation of mental attitudes that align with the goal of liberation and the cessation of suffering. These intentions include the renunciation of harmful attachments and the cultivation of the four immeasurable: Loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). In Buddhist practice, these intentions help reduce the psychological causes of suffering and promote emotional stability.¹¹ Right intention gives the very basis that forms mental equanimity since it guides the mind away from self-oriented desires towards the good of all sentient beings.

9.3. Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*), Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*), and Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)

Ethical conduct is another crucial element in the Eightfold Path. Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood make for ethics that assist a practitioner in developing a sense of moral integrity, action that prevents causing suffering to others or self. These ethical principles reduce disturbances in the mind and emotions that come with facilitating social harmony and personal integrity toward interpersonal relationships through heightened mindfulness. Bodhi (2011). These practices lay the foundation for peace and stability of mind by reducing feelings of guilt, shame, and conflict that disrupt equanimity and are requisite for the cultivation of mindfulness and wisdom.

9.4. Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)

Right Effort refers to the continuous cultivation of wholesome states of mind while suppressing unwholesome ones. It encourages a practitioner to direct effort toward wholesome mental qualities, such as positive mindfulness, compassion, and wisdom, while trying to prevent unwholesome states like anger, greed, or ignorance from arising. In this respect, it is an important factor in maintaining continuity and balance, which is indispensable for the growth of equanimity.

Right Mindfulness: Cultivation of appropriate awareness regarding one's body, feelings, thoughts, and mental objects by clear consciousness in an

¹⁰ Rahula (1974): 98.

¹¹ Salzberg (1995): 33.

orderly mind. Mindfulness reveals that every experience is impermanent: Any moment of pleasure is as short-lived as a similar instant of pain. With mindfulness comes the development of insight into the nature of suffering and even into the attachment of things. Mindfulness puts into place a certain equanimity about pleasant and unpleasant feelings.¹²

Right Concentration involves the cultivation of deep concentration, particularly through meditative practices such as *jhāna* (meditative absorption) and *vipassanā* (insight meditation). These forms of meditation allow the practitioner to concentrate the mind, leading to greater mental clarity and equanimity. *Vipassanā*, in particular, helps practitioners directly perceive the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self nature of all phenomena, providing them with profound insight into the causes of suffering and the cessation of craving and aversion.¹³

Equanimity developed with the Eightfold Path: The Eightfold Path takes a more holistic approach toward developing equanimity. Through the integration of the Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, over time, it transforms one's mind into being balanced and at peace. It employs mindfulness and meditation to attain awareness that will help individuals make them see impermanence in all experiences and everything, and it connects all. Equanimity will favor the good of oneself and society, bringing peace to one's soul and harmony to the world. In the end, the Eightfold Path is a general way to overcome dualities and develop equanimity. By taking heed through the practicing of mindfulness, meditation, and ethical conduct, the individual will move beyond suffering to lasting peace within himself and in the world that surrounds him.

X. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Buddhist philosophy provides profound insights into human nature and the unity of all beings, highlighting the significance of perception, inner conflict, and interconnectedness in shaping our experiences and interactions. The teachings of the Buddha emphasize that human perception is conditioned by our memories, beliefs, culture, gender, and personal experiences, which often lead to misunderstanding, division, and conflict. However, Buddhism encourages us to transcend these limitations through Right Understanding, which reveals the impermanent and interdependent nature of all phenomena. By realizing that all beings share the same universal laws of impermanence and suffering, we can break down the walls that separate us and foster a sense of unity and harmony.

The conflict between the ideal self and the real self is a central theme in understanding human suffering. The ideal self, driven by compassion, loving-kindness, and unity, often conflicts with the real self, dominated by desires,

¹² Kornfield (1993): 56.

¹³ Goenka (2003): 98.

aversions, and attachments. This struggle creates *dukkha*, or suffering, which is perpetuated by the mind's cravings and attachments. The Buddha's teachings on the Three Poisons – *loha* (desire), *dosa* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion) – explain how these negative mental states lead to division and conflict, obstructing the path to unity. The Five Hindrances further exacerbate this struggle by obstructing spiritual progress and promoting selfish, egocentric behaviors that undermine collective harmony. Buddhism also introduces the concept of dependent origination, which teaches that all phenomena arise in dependence upon conditions. This interdependence extends beyond individual experiences and includes the relationships between all beings and the environment. Understanding the interconnectedness of all things, as highlighted in the Buddha's teaching, calls for a collective responsibility to create a harmonious and sustainable world. When we recognize that our actions, thoughts, and experiences are interdependent, we begin to see the futility of separateness and the importance of collaboration for the common good.

In practice, the concept of interconnectedness extends to all aspects of life, from the relationship between humans and nature to our interactions with one another. The analogy of the symbiotic relationship between humans and trees illustrates how all beings rely on each other for survival, fostering mutual respect and recognition of shared existence. This realization dissolves the ego-driven belief in separateness and encourages a mindset of inclusivity and compassion. Ultimately, the teachings of Buddhism guide us toward unity by transcending the divisions created by perception, desire, and attachment. By cultivating the Right Understanding and mindfulness, we can reduce the power of the Five Hindrances and move closer to the ideal self, which strives for the welfare of all beings. This shift in consciousness leads to a world where compassion, loving-kindness, and mutual respect are the guiding principles, ensuring a sustainable future built on the foundation of interconnectedness. The collective responsibility of all beings to act with compassion and mindfulness is essential for fostering peace, harmony, and global unity.

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BRIDGING WORLDS: UNITING FRIENDS OF DIVERSE FAITHS AND TRADITIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT, GLOBAL HARMONY, AND WORLD PEACE

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Abstract:

This paper reflects on my journey in both intrareligious and interreligious activities throughout the years, spanning diverse traditions – from Pure Land Buddhism in Hawai'i to Vajrayana Buddhism in Bhutan, Catholicism in the Vatican, Protestantism in Taiwan, to the Muslim faith in England, and Daoism as well as folk religions in Chinese-speaking communities worldwide. Grounded in the Buddhist cosmological concept of “Indra’s Net,” this narrative explores the interconnectedness of all beings and emphasizes the critical role of mutual understanding in fostering global harmony. Using the guiding principles of Zhong Dao (“Middle Way”) and the Bodhisattva Path, this work proposes practical methods to navigate cultural and spiritual diversity while addressing challenges in unity. It aims to offer insights into building a more inclusive and peaceful world through shared spiritual values, dialogue, and compassion.

Keywords: *Fostering unity, global harmony, interfaith dialogue, intrareligious understanding, Indra’s net, zhong dao (middle way), Bodhisattva path, sustainable development, Buddhist philosophy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world, the pursuit of global harmony and world peace requires an inclusive and collaborative approach that transcends cultural and spiritual divides. Central to this vision is the recognition that all beings are interconnected and that uniting individuals – both interreligiously and intrareligiously - can pave the way for mutual understanding, sustainable development, and lasting peace. As a practicing Mahayana Pure

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Land Buddhist, my journey has taken me from Hawai'i to Bhutan, the Vatican, England, Malaysia, and Thailand, each encounter enriching my perspective on how dialogue and shared values can foster inclusivity and harmony.

This paper reflects on these experiences, grounded in the Buddhist philosophical frameworks of *Indra's Net*, which highlights the interdependence of all beings; *Zhong Dao* (the Middle Way), which guides a balanced and mindful approach; and the Bodhisattva Path, which embodies compassion and service. These principles, explored further in the following sections, form the foundation of my interfaith and intrareligious efforts, illustrating how they can inspire a vision of global harmony and world peace.

II. ALOHA AND AMITOFU: BECOMING A BUDDHIST IN HAWAI'I

Although I was born and raised in Taiwan, my Buddhist pilgrimage truly began in Hawai'i, a land rich in languages, cultures, ethnicities, and religions, where I spent seven transformative years of study. It was here that I encountered Venerable Bhiksuni Rui Miao, a kind, compassionate, and open-minded teacher from southern Fujian, China. Her nonsectarian approach to Buddhism and her genuine devotion as a practitioner left an indelible impression on me. I often describe her as “unescapable” because her warmth and authenticity drew me in completely, making it impossible to resist her influence. Venerable Rui Miao had a remarkable ability to make friends with everyone – regardless of their religion, race, or background. Her inclusivity was a living testament to the Buddhist principle of universal compassion and became a profound source of inspiration for me.

Despite coming from Taiwan, a predominantly Buddhist country, I was not initially drawn to Buddhism. Instead, I explored a wide range of religions and remained a skeptic, reluctant to embrace any particular label. However, Venerable Rui Miao made everything so simple and clear. Her guidance helped me understand that “taking refuge” was not about adopting a rigid identity but about becoming a student of the Enlightened One, the Buddha. It was under her mentorship that I took refuge in the Three Jewels, marking the start of a spiritual journey that continues to shape my life to this day.

Hawai'i, with its vibrant tapestry of spiritual traditions, provided a fertile ground for my Buddhist practice to grow. I visited numerous Buddhist temples beyond my teacher's and explored places of worship from other religions, deepening my appreciation for the diversity of human spirituality. Venerable Rui Miao's small temple was a treasure trove of books and cassette tapes from various Buddhist schools, reflecting her inclusive outlook. It was also a place where my journey as a Dharma Chinese language teacher began, as she encouraged me to become the first teacher at the Tzu Chi School in Hawai'i, one of the earliest overseas Tzu Chi Chinese schools. Later, I also took on the role of principal, an experience that further solidified my commitment to Buddhist education and service.

Venerable Rui Miao was more than a mentor in faith; she was also a connector and an advocate for Buddhist women. She introduced me to

Venerable Bhiksuni Lekshe Tsomo, one of the founders of the Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women. Her encouragement to support Western nuns, who lacked the structured support systems available in Chinese Buddhism, resonated deeply with me. When I returned to Taiwan after completing my Ph.D. in 2001, the timing coincided with the 7th Sakyadhita Conference being scheduled in Taiwan in 2002. Without hesitation, I became involved, continuing the work Venerable Rui Miao had inspired in me.

III. SAKYADHITA: BRINGING DAUGHTERS OF THE BUDDHA AND BEYOND TOGETHER

Sakyadhita, a Sanskrit term meaning “daughters of the Buddha,” was coined at the conclusion of its inaugural gathering in 1987. Since then, Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women has convened biennial conferences that serve as a vital platform for fostering dialogue, collaboration, and empowerment among Buddhist women and supporters worldwide. Its mission, rooted in inclusivity and a nonsectarian spirit, seeks to amplify the voices of the historically underrepresented while building bridges across traditions, cultures, and religions.

My journey with Sakyadhita began serendipitously. Upon completing my Ph.D. in 2001, I returned to Taiwan and promised Venerable Bhiksuni Lekshe Tsomo, one of the organization’s co-founders, that I would assist with the preparations for the 7th Sakyadhita Conference, scheduled to take place in Taiwan in July 2002. At the time, I had only a vague understanding of Sakyadhita’s scope and impact. However, what started as a casual offer of help quickly turned into full immersion in the conference’s organization. My bilingual abilities positioned me as a key contributor, taking on responsibilities ranging from press coordination and translation to event management. In an unexpected turn, I was even asked to serve as the Master of Ceremonies for the opening ceremony, a role assigned to me mere hours before the event commenced. These intense yet enriching experiences not only deepened my appreciation for Sakyadhita’s mission but also solidified my lifelong commitment to its work.

The conference itself was a profound demonstration of inclusivity, intersectionality, and cultural sensitivity. At a time when the world was grappling with the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Sakyadhita took a bold step by inviting a female Muslim scholar to offer a prayer for world peace during the opening ceremony. This act of solidarity underscored the organization’s commitment to interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding. Similarly, the inclusion of diverse Buddhist traditions in the program highlighted its dedication to honoring the plurality within Buddhism. For example, the *Heart Sutra* was chanted in multiple languages in alphabetical order, while the *Metta Sutta* was chanted first in deference to the Theravada tradition as the earliest Buddhist school. Each morning meditation session was led by teachers from different traditions, and the evening chanting rotated among various languages, providing a platform for all voices to be heard and respected.

Although Sakyadhita’s primary mission is to empower Buddhist women,

it remains an inclusive organization, welcoming male participants and collaborators. Its focus on elevating the voices of the marginalized, particularly women who have been overlooked in Buddhist history, resonated deeply with me. The organization's nonsectarian ethos and emphasis on interreligious dialogue offered a model for bridging divides and fostering harmony.

My involvement with Sakyadhita has been transformative, leading to ongoing engagement and eventual leadership roles, including serving as Vice President and later President between 2009 and 2013. However, regardless of titles, my commitment has always been aligned with Sakyadhita's mission to *Bridge Worlds* – a theme that, fittingly, was the title of the 7th Sakyadhita Conference, my first. Over the years, my participation in Sakyadhita conferences has not only shaped my understanding of Buddhist inclusivity but also provided a foundation for my broader engagement with the international Buddhist community. Working closely with Venerable Lekshe Tsomo and others, I have traveled to numerous countries to collaborate with Buddhist leaders, identify hosts for future conferences, and promote the ideals of inclusivity, mutual respect, and empowerment. These experiences have reinforced my belief in the transformative potential of collective action and dialogue to foster global harmony and peace.

IV. TEACHING DHARMA CHINESE IN BHUTAN

My pilgrimage continued in Bhutan as the pandemic began to subside, where my husband, Dr. Frank Tien, and I were invited to teach a course on the Chinese language. This opportunity emerged after we participated in the International Vajrayana Conference, where we witnessed Bhutan's deep commitment to preserving its Vajrayana heritage while embracing learning from other traditions. Recognizing the potential for linguistic and cultural bridges to foster mutual understanding, we transformed the course into "Dharma Chinese," designed to support Bhutanese students—many of whom were tour guides—in engaging with Buddhist traditions beyond their own.

This unique course integrated mindfulness, heartfulness, and innovative teaching methodologies to create a holistic learning experience. Mindfulness practices, such as meditation-in-motion and breathing exercises, were incorporated into language lessons to help students develop a calm and focused state conducive to learning. Heartfulness activities, such as group singing and reflective discussions on Buddhist stories, fostered a sense of connection and encouraged students to explore the compassionate and ethical values embedded in their tradition while being open to learning about others.

We utilized materials and examples that highlighted both commonalities and distinctions among Buddhist traditions. For instance, students were introduced to the linguistic roots of key terms, such as "Bodhisattva" and "Nirvana," to better understand their meanings and usage across Chinese and Tibetan contexts. We also employed storytelling and role-playing exercises based on Buddhist narratives to strengthen both language skills and cultural appreciation.

Technology, including AI-assisted language tools, played an important role in making the learning process dynamic and accessible. Students engaged with AI platforms for pronunciation practice, vocabulary building, and conversational simulations, which supplemented in-person activities. These tools enabled students to improve their Chinese proficiency while gaining insights into Buddhist philosophies, illustrating how digital resources can complement traditional methods to create a well-rounded educational experience.

By engaging in these mindful and heartfelt activities, students not only improved their language skills but also developed a deeper appreciation for their Buddhist roots. They expressed that understanding the broader context of Buddhism beyond their Vajrayana tradition enriched their ability to share Bhutan's cultural and spiritual heritage with visitors. Furthermore, the exposure to other perspectives fostered an openness to interreligious and intrareligious dialogue, highlighting the universal values of compassion and interconnection.

The *Dharma Chinese* initiative demonstrated how language education can serve as a powerful tool for fostering inclusivity and mutual respect. Grounded in mindfulness and heartfulness practices (Gunaratana, 2002; Kabat-Zinn, 1994), the program reaffirmed the transformative potential of education in bridging cultural and spiritual divides. By engaging in mindful learning activities and utilizing AI-assisted language tools (Li & Hsieh, 2021), students gained not only linguistic proficiency but also a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of Buddhist traditions beyond their Vajrayana roots (Williams, 2009).

V. DR. "CHANGE" SMILING WITH POPE FRANCIS IN THE VATICAN

The Vatican provided another profound experience of interfaith dialogue. My presentation, 'Smiling to Foster a Culture of Encounter at the Vatican' (Chang, 2024), introduced the Buddhist concept of Indra's Net, emphasizing the interdependence of all beings (Cook, 1977; Loy, 2018). The warm reception of this teaching reinforced the universality of interconnectedness as a foundation for dialogue. Pope Francis's call for encounter and fraternity (Francis, 2020) aligns closely with the Buddhist emphasis on compassion and mutual respect (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1995), illustrating how different faith traditions can find common ground in their ethical principles. Interfaith dialogue, as highlighted by scholars such as Cornille (2013), is a crucial pathway toward understanding and cooperation among diverse religious communities.

An amusing yet meaningful aspect of my invitation was how the first official letter mistakenly addressed me as "Dr. Change," a result of a word processor's auto-correction. While the Vatican later issued a second, corrected invitation, I embraced the humor in this mix-up. After all, "change" is precisely what I strive to bring to the world: a transformation toward harmony and peace. I am deeply committed to being a part of the positive change that can help bridge divides and nurture mutual respect among people of all faiths.

However, my engagement in this dialogue was not confined to my words alone. I did not merely talk about smiling - I practiced it. One of the most

memorable moments of my life was when my joyful smile during a brief interaction with Pope Francis was captured and shared on Vatican News. This image, representing the power of simple human connection, was a testament to how an authentic expression of happiness can transcend all barriers and bring people together. My belief in the transformative power of a smile was reinforced by the positive reception of my talk. It was heartening to know that the audience not only embraced the Buddhist concept of *Indra's Net* but also felt a sense of joy and unity from learning about the interconnectedness that binds us all. This moment reminded me of the profound simplicity of connection through shared smiles and mutual understanding.

This trip to the Vatican was a reaffirmation of my deep commitment to world peace. As a self-employed Dharma ambassador, I have dedicated my life to nurturing dialogues of inclusivity and understanding. Through this experience, I was reminded of the importance of embodying the teachings we share with others. Practicing smiles and demonstrating the deep interconnectedness of all beings is not only a method of communication but also a form of activism—an activism that promotes global harmony and peace.

VI. FROM “LOST SHEEP” TO SISTER IN FAITH: INTERFAITH DIALOGUE WITH TAIWANESE CHRISTIANS

My roots in Taiwan offered a unique perspective on Protestant Christianity. Growing up next to a Presbyterian church, I learned piano, hymns, and Bible stories, admiring the love and compassion symbolized by Jesus Christ. Although my spiritual questions remained unanswered at the time, these early experiences instilled a deep appreciation for Christian values. Childhood friends at the church often referred to me as a “lost sheep,” but I never embraced that label. While I may not have followed the same religious path, my admiration for Jesus Christ has remained steadfast, which is why I continue to carry the English name “Christie,” given to me by a Mormon missionary. My journey has led me to embrace all people, regardless of their faith or beliefs, and I find no conflict in this openness. I believe that fostering mutual respect and friendship transcends religious boundaries, and I wish to remain a genuine Sister in faith, working together with others for goodness and harmony in the world.

It is with this spirit that I was both honored and privileged to serve as a translator and, eventually, the sole Buddhist representative at an international interfaith dialogue hosted by a prominent Presbyterian church in southern Taiwan. This opportunity allowed me to engage deeply with Christian perspectives while presenting Buddhist teachings, re-embracing my Taiwanese Christian Sisters and Brothers, as well as being re-embraced by them. It was a profound experience of mutual respect, understanding, and shared humanity – values that I believe can bridge any divide, building lasting friendships and fostering global harmony. Later, I was also invited by the group to serve as the MC for a study-group session and dialogue, an invitation that truly made me happy. It was a moment of further connection, reflecting my ongoing commitment to interfaith dialogue and shared growth.

VII. SINGING GREEN TARAMANTRA AND INTRODUCING AMITABHA TO MUSLIMS

Another milestone in my interfaith journey occurred in July 2024 when my husband and I were invited to participate in Europe's largest Muslim gathering, organized by the Ahmadiyya community in England. With nearly 50,000 participants from 214 countries, the event showcased the power of collective faith and the strength of interreligious dialogue. As one of the few Buddhists present – alongside two other Buddhists from Japan, two from Taiwan (who had been able to join before a typhoon delayed others back home), and two from Nepal – I was initially told that we would be attending as observers and would not have the opportunity to give any speeches. The speeches from ambassadors and dignitaries had already been pre-arranged, and I wasn't expecting to be called upon.

However, just the night before the closing ceremony on the third morning, I received a surprise notification that I had been invited to deliver a two-minute goodwill speech. Although hesitant at first – wondering whether my Buddhist chanting might disrupt the harmony of the Muslim event, especially as the Muslim attendees were such accomplished chanters – I chose to move forward. I decided to chant the Green Tara mantra, as Green Tara symbolizes compassion in action, a value I felt deeply aligned with the spirit of the gathering. Coincidentally, I had received the photo of a completed Green Tara *thangka* from a friend's daughter in Nepal that very morning, which felt like a timely sign.

Speaking from the heart, I expressed my gratitude and shared the Buddhist concept of Amitabha Buddha, emphasizing the infinite light and infinite life that unites all beings. I also introduced the way we greet each other in Taiwan – “Amitofo” – as a simple yet profound expression of compassion and connection. To my delight, after I stepped down from the stage, many attendees, especially young people from Germany, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and beyond, came up to greet me with “Amitofo” and expressed interest in learning more about Buddhism. The experience was incredibly rewarding as it provided a platform for meaningful dialogue and fostered mutual understanding among people of diverse faiths. Several young people also asked to take photos with me and expressed a genuine curiosity to know more about the Buddhist path, a heartening reminder of the power of interfaith exchanges to break down barriers and nurture shared curiosity and respect (YouTube, 2024).

VIII. PATROLLING WITH GUAN GONG IN MALAYSIA AND THAILAND

Engagement with Daoism and folk religions has also been a significant aspect of my journey. In September 2024, Dr. Frank Tien and I participated in a multinational pilgrimage honoring Guan Gong (關公, the revered red-faced general celebrated across Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions. This 16-day journey began in Singapore, but we joined the pilgrimage in Malaysia, continuing through Thailand. The experience was both long and enriching, bringing together devotees from various Chinese-speaking communities, including Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Taiwan, and beyond.

Guan Gong, often regarded as a fierce warrior on the battlefield, is now revered as a Dharma guardian in Mahayana Buddhism, symbolizing Buddhism's ability to integrate folk beliefs within the Chinese cultural context. This integration has allowed Buddhism to endure and thrive over time and across regions. The pilgrimage underscored the shared reverence for Guan Gong, not only as a protector of peace but as a figure transcending borders. During our journey, we had the unique opportunity to interact deeply with people from diverse faith traditions – Daoist, Confucianist, folk religious believers, and those simply devoted to Guan Gong. Despite speaking the same language, their viewpoints and beliefs were remarkably diverse, yet there was a unifying thread: the shared belief in harmony, peace, and the protection of all sentient beings.

This journey was not only a tribute to Guan Gong but also a powerful reminder of how spiritual practices and rituals can connect people from all walks of life, offering an opportunity to unite across borders and beliefs in a common mission for peace and global harmony.

IX. INTRARELIGIOUS DIALOGUES

Within the Buddhist world, my role as the international committee chair of the International Lay Buddhist Forum (ILBF) has further deepened my commitment to fostering intrareligious understanding. From conferences in Japan, Indonesia, and Thailand to international gatherings across Southeast Asia and India, I have witnessed the transformative potential of dialogue in bridging doctrinal and cultural differences within Buddhism. These efforts highlight the importance of unity among Buddhist practitioners in addressing global challenges (ILBF Proceedings, 2014, 2016, 2019).

Buddhism, which originated in India over 2600 years ago, has spread across various regions, adapting skillfully to diverse social and cultural contexts. This adaptation is essential for Buddhism's survival and relevance throughout history. However, the differences in regional expressions and practices – often the result of local cultural and social conditions – sometimes create misunderstandings between the various schools or sects of Buddhism. While these differences can enrich the tradition, they can also be a source of division if not approached with understanding and respect.

As the most tolerant and peace-loving of religions, Buddhism exemplifies the potential for harmonious coexistence. But how can world peace be achieved if Buddhists themselves cannot find common ground or communicate effectively with each other? The Buddha's teachings offer the Four Dharma Seals – impermanence, dukkha (suffering), anatta (selflessness), and equanimity. These core principles should guide all Buddhists, irrespective of their school or sect, towards embracing each other in understanding and mutual respect. It was, therefore, quite disheartening to hear that one younger Sister from a newer Buddhist group in Japan felt that intrareligious dialogue was more difficult than interreligious dialogue. I believe this should not be the case. If Buddhists cannot communicate and respect each other, how can we hope to extend that understanding to others?

While interreligious dialogue is crucial, I also believe it is equally important to promote intrareligious dialogue within the Buddhist community. Strengthening this internal unity enables Buddhists to collectively address the challenges of the modern world while preserving the universal essence of the Dharma across different traditions. As practitioners of Buddhism, it is our shared responsibility to foster dialogue that builds bridges not only across faiths but also within our own.

X. PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS

The philosophical frameworks guiding this journey are deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings. Indra's Net, as the *Avatamsaka Sutra* expounds and which most Mahayana Buddhists have embraced, is at the core of all my Dharma work. This cosmological vision, where every being is both a reflection of and reflected by all others, highlights the profound interdependence of all existence (Cook, 1977; Loy, 2018). *Zhong Dao*, the Middle Way, provides a dynamic and balanced approach to navigating diverse perspectives (Gethin, 1998). The Bodhisattva Path, as articulated by Shantideva (1996), emphasizes compassionate service, forming the ethical foundation of my interfaith and intrareligious engagements (Harvey, 2000).

Let me explore these themes in greater depth, drawing on my personal experiences and broader philosophical insights. Through these reflections, I aim to contribute to ongoing dialogues on how spiritual traditions can collaborate to address the pressing challenges of our time, fostering a world rooted in harmony and mutual respect.

XI. INDRA'S NET: A FOUNDATION FOR INTERCONNECTIVITY

The Buddhist concept of Indra's Net, as described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, provides a profound philosophical foundation for understanding interconnectivity. Imagine a vast cosmic net with a multifaceted jewel at each knot. Each jewel reflects every other jewel, symbolizing the interconnectedness of all beings and phenomena. This metaphor underscores the principle that individual actions reverberate across the entire network, highlighting the interdependence that underpins existence (Cleary, 1993).

Indra's Net offers a compelling framework for interfaith and intrareligious dialogues. It encourages recognizing the intrinsic value and interconnected nature of all traditions. In Bhutan, for instance, teaching Dharma Chinese enabled me to witness the reflection of my Buddhist roots in the Vajrayana practices of my students. Similarly, engaging with Catholicism at the Vatican illuminated shared values of compassion and community, resonating deeply with Buddhist ethics. This understanding fosters mutual respect, dissolves barriers, and nurtures collaborative efforts toward global harmony.

The practical application of Indra's Net is evident in my interfaith dialogues. At Europe's largest Muslim gathering, the simple act of introducing Amitabha Buddha and chanting the Green Tara mantra reflected the jewels of my Buddhist practice to a receptive audience. Their enthusiastic responses exemplified the shared aspirations for peace and understanding that transcend

religious boundaries. By embracing the interconnectivity symbolized by Indra's Net, interfaith exchanges can transform into opportunities for mutual enrichment and collective growth.

XII. ZHONG DAO: NAVIGATING THE MIDDLE PATH

Zhong Dao, often translated as the "Middle Way," is a cornerstone of Buddhist philosophy, advocating balance and moderation. The Chinese characters for Zhong Dao (—) encapsulate profound wisdom. The character — (zhong) suggests centrality and equilibrium, while (dao) represents the path or way, emphasizing action and movement. Together, they convey a dynamic process of staying centered amidst life's complexities.

This principle has been instrumental in my engagements with diverse traditions. In interfaith settings, Zhong Dao provides a framework for navigating differing perspectives with mindfulness and empathy. At the Presbyterian church in Taiwan, for example, this approach enabled me to bridge the doctrinal gap between Christianity and Buddhism, fostering meaningful exchanges rooted in mutual respect. Similarly, during the Guan Gong pilgrimage, the Middle Way guided my interactions with participants from various cultural and religious backgrounds, emphasizing common values over differences.

Zhong Dao also has practical implications for addressing global challenges. In a world increasingly polarized by ideological and cultural divides, the Middle Way offers a path toward reconciliation and unity. It encourages seeking common ground while honoring diversity, creating a foundation for sustainable peace and development. By embodying this principle, individuals and communities can contribute to a more harmonious and inclusive world.

XIII. THE BODHISATTVA PATH: COMPASSION IN ACTION

The Bodhisattva Path, a central tenet of Mahayana Buddhism, exemplifies a commitment to compassion and altruism. A Bodhisattva aspires to attain enlightenment not for personal liberation alone but for the benefit of all sentient beings. This selfless dedication resonates deeply with the global need for collective action and shared responsibility in addressing pressing challenges like poverty, climate change, and social inequity.

Shantideva's *Bodhisattva Way of Life* offers a profound guide for embodying this path. His teachings emphasize cultivating a compassionate mindset and taking concrete actions to alleviate suffering. In interfaith dialogues, this principle manifests in the willingness to listen deeply, respect differing beliefs, and find common ground for cooperation. For example, at the Vatican's historic women's conference, I drew upon the Bodhisattva ideal when engaging with Catholic participants, focusing on shared values of compassion and service to humanity. The mutual respect fostered in such exchanges reinforces the interconnectedness celebrated in Indra's Net.

The Bodhisattva Path also finds practical expression in educational

initiatives. The Dharma Chinese course in Bhutan, for instance, was more than a language program; it was an opportunity to bridge cultural and doctrinal divides. By enabling students to understand Buddhist traditions beyond their own, the course embodied the Bodhisattva ideal of fostering wisdom and harmony for the benefit of all.

In intrareligious contexts, the Bodhisattva Path serves as a unifying framework for navigating doctrinal differences within Buddhism. As chair of the International Lay Buddhist Forum (ILBF), I witnessed the transformative power of this principle in fostering unity among diverse Buddhist traditions. Conferences in Japan, Indonesia, and Thailand provided platforms for dialogue and collaboration, emphasizing the shared aspiration of alleviating suffering and promoting peace. By embodying the Bodhisattva Path, these gatherings demonstrated the potential of intrareligious understanding to contribute to global harmony.

XIV. UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY: LESSONS FROM INTERFAITH DIALOGUES

Interfaith dialogue is a powerful tool for building bridges across religious and cultural divides. Each tradition offers unique insights into the human experience, enriching the collective understanding of our shared existence. My journey has revealed that such exchanges are not only about finding commonalities but also about embracing and celebrating differences as opportunities for growth.

For instance, participating in Europe's largest Muslim gathering illuminated the shared spiritual aspirations that transcend religious boundaries. Introducing Amitabha Buddha and chanting the Green Tara mantra to a predominantly Muslim audience was an act of mutual respect and curiosity. Their warm response underscored the potential of interfaith dialogue to dissolve stereotypes and foster genuine connections.

Similarly, engaging with Protestant Christianity in Taiwan deepened my appreciation for the universal values of love, compassion, and community. The dialogues at the Presbyterian church provided a platform to share Buddhist perspectives while learning from Christian teachings, creating a space for mutual enrichment. These experiences affirm that interfaith dialogue is not about compromise but about co-creating a richer tapestry of understanding and cooperation.

The Guan Gong pilgrimage further highlighted the unifying power of shared rituals and cultural heritage. Despite differing religious affiliations, participants came together to honor a common figure revered across Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions. Such experiences demonstrate that unity does not require uniformity; instead, it thrives on the recognition and celebration of diversity.

XV. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN FOSTERING GLOBAL HARMONY

While interfaith and intrareligious dialogues hold immense potential, they

are not without challenges. Misunderstandings, historical grievances, and doctrinal differences can create barriers to meaningful engagement. However, these challenges also present opportunities for growth and transformation.

One of the key challenges is overcoming biases and stereotypes. Engaging with traditions different from one's own requires an open mind and a willingness to question preconceived notions. For example, at the Ahmadiyya Muslim gathering, I encountered questions about Buddhism that reflected common misconceptions. Addressing these questions with patience and clarity not only dispelled misunderstandings but also strengthened mutual respect and curiosity.

Another challenge is navigating power dynamics in interfaith settings. Ensuring that all voices are heard, particularly those from marginalized communities, is essential for creating equitable dialogues. This principle was evident in the ILBF conferences, where efforts were made to include diverse Buddhist voices, particularly lay practitioners and women, in shaping the agenda.

Despite these challenges, the opportunities for fostering global harmony are immense. By drawing on shared values and cultivating empathy, interfaith and intrareligious dialogues can transform conflict into collaboration. The principles of Indra's Net, Zhong Dao, and the Bodhisattva Path offer valuable frameworks for navigating these complexities, emphasizing interconnectedness, balance, and compassion.

XVI. CONCLUSION: TOWARD A WORLD OF PEACE AND INCLUSIVITY

The journey of bridging faiths and traditions is not a linear path but a dynamic process of growth, learning, and mutual enrichment. Rooted in the Buddhist principles of Indra's Net, Zhong Dao, and the Bodhisattva Path, this paper has explored the potential of interfaith and intrareligious dialogues to foster global harmony and sustainable development.

From Hawai'i to Bhutan, the Vatican to Taiwan, England to Malaysia and Thailand, my experiences have illuminated the transformative power of dialogue in bridging cultural and spiritual divides. These encounters reaffirm that unity and inclusivity are not abstract ideals but practical imperatives for addressing the challenges of our interconnected world.

As we navigate an increasingly complex global landscape, the wisdom of ancient traditions offers valuable guidance. By embracing the principles of interconnectedness, balance, and compassion, we can co-create a world that honors diversity while striving for collective well-being. In doing so, we not only fulfill the aspirations of our respective traditions but also contribute to the shared goal of a peaceful, inclusive, and harmonious world.

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COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR GLOBAL HARMONY: HISTORY OF BUDDHISM IN GERMANY

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Abstract:

The paper “History of Buddhism in Germany” presents a comprehensive analysis of the trajectory of Buddhism’s integration into German society, highlighting its transformative impact on interfaith dialogue, cultural adaptation, and global harmony. Beginning with intellectual curiosity during the Enlightenment, Buddhism’s philosophical appeal influenced prominent thinkers like Schopenhauer. Its evolution from an academic interest to an institutionalized practice saw pivotal contributions from German scholars and pioneers such as Max Müller and Paul Dahlke, who bridged the gap between Eastern traditions and Western audiences. Key historical moments include the post-war reconstruction of Buddhist communities, the arrival of Asian teachers, and the establishment of meditation centers. The paper identifies significant themes: “Buddhism as a Framework for Unity,” which underscores its role in fostering interfaith collaboration; “Environmental Sustainability Inspired by Buddhist Teachings,” detailing its engagement in ecological activism; and “Diversity Within German Buddhism,” exploring the coexistence of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions. Prof. Dr. von der Heide emphasizes the unique contributions of immigrant communities and German-born practitioners in shaping a distinct yet authentic Buddhist identity. This study contributes a nuanced understanding of Buddhism’s role in addressing modern challenges like climate change, mental health, and ethical leadership, positioning it as a vital force for compassion and sustainable development globally.

The development of Buddhism in Germany is a story that intertwines cultural exchange, intellectual curiosity, and spiritual transformation. The journey of Buddhism from distant Asian lands to becoming a significant spiritual

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movement in Germany offers valuable insights into global interconnectedness and the adaptability of religious/ spiritual traditions.

With this paper, I will explore the introduction of Buddhism to Germany, its development through the 19th and 20th centuries, and its contemporary expressions in German society.

Keywords: *German Buddhism, cultural integration, interfaith dialogue, environmental activism, Asian influence, mindfulness practice, spiritual diversity.*

I. EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH BUDDHISM

The first encounter between Buddhism and German culture did not happen in Germany itself but in the south of Russia in the second half of the 19th century, when Volga-German settlers met with Kalmyk people who were Buddhists; And subsequently the Russian- German scientist Isaak Jacob Schmidt (1779 - 1847) was writing the first books on Buddhism in German language, that were published in St. Petersburg¹.

The story of Buddhism in Germany itself begins not with spiritual practice but with intellectual curiosity and cultural fascination. The first encounters between Germany and Buddhist thoughts took place during the 18th and 19th centuries, primarily through the works of scholars, philosophers, and travelers. While Buddhism as a lived spiritual tradition would not take root until the 20th century, its early intellectual reception in Germany laid the groundwork for its eventual adoption and development.

1.1. Philosophical engagement (18th – 19th Century)

The Enlightenment era in Europe sparked a newfound interest in world religions, particularly those of the East. German scholars and philosophers were deeply intrigued by non-Christian traditions, seeking alternative perspectives on life, ethics, and spirituality.

One of the most influential figures in this context was Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860). Schopenhauer was among the first Western philosophers to incorporate Buddhist ideas into his philosophical framework. Drawing heavily on translations of Indian and Buddhist texts, he viewed life as an endless cycle of ‘suffering,’ echoing the Buddha’s teachings on *dukkha*. Schopenhauer’s concept of the “will to live” as the source of human suffering resonated deeply with the Buddhist idea of attachment as the root cause of suffering. Schopenhauer’s works, such as *The World as Will and Representation*,² not only introduced Buddhist ideas to German intellectual circles but also inspired subsequent thinkers, including Friedrich Nietzsche and e.g. world-famous composer Richard Wagner. Though Nietzsche was critical of Buddhism, he acknowledged its profound psychological insights, thus further embedding

¹ Hartmut Walravens, 2005, Isaak Jacob Schmidt (1779 - 1847) – Leben und Werk des Pioniers der mongolischen und tibetischen Studien: Eine Dokumentation, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden.

² Artur Schopenhauer, 1819, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig.

Buddhist ideas into Western philosophical discourse.

Parallel to these philosophical engagements, German linguists and Indologists began translating Buddhist texts, opening the door to a deeper understanding of the religion. Max Müller (1823 – 1900), a German comparative philologist and Orientalist based as a professor at Oxford University, played a pivotal role in this process. His monumental series, *Sacred Books of the East*³, published between 1879 and 1910, included translations of key Buddhist scriptures, such as the Dhammapada. These works were instrumental in making Buddhist philosophy accessible to European audiences, including those in Germany.

1.2. Theosophy and early spiritual movements

While academic and philosophical interest in Buddhism grew, the late 19th century saw the emergence of movements that sought to integrate Buddhist ideas into spiritual practice. One such movement was Theosophy, which blended Eastern and Western spiritual traditions.

The Theosophical Society, founded by the Russian-German Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831 - 1891)⁴ and the American Henry Steel Olcott (1832 - 1907)⁵ in 1875, was particularly influential in bringing Buddhist concepts to the West. The society's teachings, which emphasized karma, reincarnation, and meditation, drew heavily from Buddhist philosophy. In Germany, Theosophy gained a substantial following, with German intellectuals and spiritual seekers embracing its syncretic approach.

Theosophy also facilitated direct engagement with Asian teachers. For example, Blavatsky and Olcott, after having travelled to India and Sri Lanka, were formally acknowledged as Buddhists at the Wijayananda Vihara near Galle, where they took the Five Precepts (Śrāvākayāna precepts), symbolizing their commitment to the Buddhist path. Being in contact with the scholar Max Müller, they also compiled the tenets of Buddhism for the education of people in the West. These cross-cultural exchanges helped to demystify Buddhism for German audiences and laid the foundation for its future institutionalization.

1.3. Socio-political context and early encounters with Asia

The late 19th century was also marked by Germany's increased interaction with Asia, both through colonial ventures and academic endeavors. Although Germany had relatively limited colonial involvement in Asia compared to Britain or France, its intellectual and cultural exchanges were significant.

Besides, since 1900, steam shipping allowed more passenger travels to Asia, and then after German travelers and diplomats stationed in countries like India, China, and Japan brought back accounts of Buddhist practices and traditions. These firsthand observations enriched academic studies and piqued

³ Max Müller, 1879-1910, *Sacred Books of the East*, 50 Vols., Oxford University Press, Oxford.

⁴ Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, 1907, *Der Schlüssel zur Theosophie*, Max Altmann, Leipzig.

⁵ Henry Steel Olcott, *A Buddhist Catechism*, 1881, Madras; *Der buddhistische Katechismus*, 1997, Reprint-Verlag, Leipzig.

public interest in Buddhism.

The violin player Anton Walther Florus Gueth (1878 - 1957)⁶ e.g. is the first German to be ordained as the Buddhist monk Nyānatiloka in 1903 in Burma, and Martin Steinke (1882 - 1966) was ordained as a monk in China. He founded the first association of Chan-Buddhism. They were taken as examples for other Germans who followed in their steps, as for the Jewish Siegmund Feniger (1901 - 1994), who became the prominent monk Nyanaponika Maha Thera (1901 - 1994) in Sri Lanka⁷.

One notable example is the work of German explorers such as Albert Grünwedel (1856 - 1935), an Indologist, Archaeologist, and Tibetologist. Grünwedel's expeditions to Central Asia uncovered Buddhist art and manuscripts, which were brought back to Germany and displayed in museums. These artifacts provided tangible evidence of the historical and cultural significance that Buddhism had, sparking further curiosity among Germans. Two of several notable works that he published were e.g. *Buddhist Art in India*⁸ and *Mythology of Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia*⁹, where he could prove as the first scientist the Greek origins of the Buddhist art of Gandhara.

The interest that German educated citizen had in Buddhism is also shown in their interest for selected literature at this time: The later Nobel Prize winner for Literature (1946), Hermann Hesse e.g. set a monument for Buddha when he published in 1922 one of his most successful books *Siddharta*¹⁰ which increased the interest for Buddhism in the West.

1.4. The role of translations in spreading Buddhism

The translation of Buddhist texts into German played a crucial role in the early dissemination of Buddhist ideas. In addition to Max Müller's contributions, the Austrian Karl Eugen Neumann (1865 – 1915), who was deeply influenced by Schopenhauer, deserves special mention. Neumann was one of the first Europeans to translate significant portions of the Pāli Canon, the foundational scriptures of Theravāda Buddhism¹¹. His translations, which emphasized the practical and ethical dimensions of Buddhism, resonated with German readers seeking alternatives to traditional Christian teachings. Neumann's works also inspired early practitioners and provided a foundation for the first German Buddhist societies. His dedication to accurately conveying the Buddha's

⁶ Anton Walther Florus Gueth, 1922, *Dhammapada: Des Buddhas Weg zur Weisheit*, Jhana Verlag, Oy-Mittelberg; and 1926, *Der Weg zur Reinheit (Visuddhimagga)*, Jhana Verlag, Oy-Mittelberg.

⁷ Thera Nyanaponika, 1998, *Abhidhamma Studies: Buddhist Explorations of Consciousness and Time*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville.

⁸ Albert Grünwedel, 1893, *Buddhistische Kunst in Indien*, Handbücher der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin -Vol.; 4, Spemann, Berlin.

⁹ Albert Grünwedel, 1900, *Mythologie des Buddhismus in Tibet und der Mongolei*, F. A. Brockhaus, Leipzig.

¹⁰ Hermann Hesse, 1922, *Siddharta*, S. Fischer, Berlin.

¹¹ Karl Eugen Neumann, 1911, *Die Reden Gotamo Budhas, aus der Sammlung der Bruchstücke Suttanipato des Pali-Kanons*, R. Piper, München.

teachings earned him the title of the “pioneer of German Buddhism.”

1.5. Early Misinterpretations and Romanticization

It is important to acknowledge that early German encounters with Buddhism were not without their flaws. Many Western interpretations romanticized Buddhism as a rational, ethical, and atheistic alternative to Christianity. This perception, while appealing to some, often stripped Buddhism of its rich cultural and ritualistic dimensions. For instance, German intellectuals frequently emphasized the philosophical aspects of Buddhism, such as its teachings on suffering/ compassion and impermanence, while downplaying its devotional practices. Despite these limitations, these early interpretations laid the groundwork for a deeper engagement with Buddhism in the 20th century.

II. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF BUDDHISM IN GERMANY

This initial encounters with Buddhism in Germany were characterized by intellectual curiosity and philosophical engagement. While Buddhism was initially perceived as an academic and philosophical subject, these early efforts set the stage for its eventual institutionalization and practice as a lived spiritual tradition.

The early 20th century marked a turning point for Buddhism in Germany, as it transitioned from being a subject of academic and philosophical inquiry to becoming a formalized religious presence. This phase witnessed the establishment of the first Buddhist organizations, the translation of key texts for practice, and the formation of communities. However, this development was not without challenges, as global conflicts and political ideologies influenced its growth.

2.1. The first Buddhist societies

The institutionalization of Buddhism in Germany began in the early 20th century with the founding of the Deutsche Buddhistische Gesellschaft (German Buddhist Society) in 1924. This society, established in Leipzig, was among the first in Europe dedicated to promoting Buddhist teachings and practices. Its founders were different German intellectuals, philosophers, and spiritual seekers who had been inspired by the early translations of Buddhist texts and their encounters with Asian traditions.

One of the society's prominent figures was the Indologist Karl Seidenstücker (1876 - 1936), a German Buddhist pioneer who played a pivotal role in organizing and spreading awareness about Buddhism in Germany. Seidenstücker authored several introductory texts on Buddhism, providing German readers with accessible explanations of Buddhist teachings and practices¹². His works aimed to demystify Buddhism and present it as a practical philosophy for modern life.

Around the same time, another key figure, Paul Dahlke (1865 - 1928), emerged as a leader in the effort to establish Buddhism as a spiritual path in

¹² Karl Seidenstücker, 1923 - second edition, *Pali Buddhismus in Übersetzungen*, Oskar Schloss, München.

Germany. Dahlke, a physician by profession, was deeply influenced by the teachings of Theravāda Buddhism after he had studied Schopenhauer and visited Sri Lanka several times. And had also been to India, Burma, Thailand, and China to learn more about Buddhism¹³. In Sri Lanka, he was deeply influenced e.g. by Ven. Hikkaduwe Sumangala, Ven. Nyananissara and Ven. Wagiswara. In 1924, he established the Berlin Buddhist House (Buddhistisches Haus), which became one of the first Buddhist centers in Europe. This center served as a hub for study, meditation, and community building, laying the foundation for the later expansion of Buddhist organizations in Germany. The place, which was converted later into the first Buddhist Vihara in continental Europe, still exists and is stationing Buddhist monks mainly from Sri Lanka.

2.2. Challenges during the Nazi Era

The rise of the Nazi regime in the 1930s posed significant challenges for Buddhism in Germany. The Nazis, with their emphasis on racial purity and nationalism, viewed non-Christian religions, including Buddhism, with suspicion. While Buddhism was not explicitly persecuted, its growth was severely hindered during this period.

Some efforts were made to align Buddhism with Nazi ideology in an attempt to gain acceptance. For example, certain individuals attempted to portray Buddhism as a rational, Aryan tradition that emphasized discipline and self-control. However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful and alienated many genuine Buddhist practitioners.

The Nazi era also disrupted the nascent Buddhist institutions in Germany. Many Buddhist societies disbanded, and the Berlin Buddhist House struggled to maintain its activities. Despite these challenges, the Buddhist community persisted, albeit in a limited and often underground capacity.

2.3. Post-war reconstruction of Buddhist communities

The end of World War II marked a new beginning for Buddhism in Germany. The devastation caused by the war led many Germans to seek alternative spiritual paths, and Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion and liberation from suffering, appealed to those searching for meaning in a shattered world. The reconstruction of Buddhist institutions began during the 1950s. The Berlin Buddhist House was restored and reopened, becoming a symbol of resilience and continuity for German Buddhists. New Buddhist societies were established across the country, including the German Buddhist Union (Deutsche Buddhistische Union, DBU), founded in 1955. The DBU aimed to unite the diverse Buddhist traditions emerging in Germany and provide a platform for collaboration and mutual support.

One of the key factors contributing to the growth of Buddhism in post-war Germany was the increasing availability of Buddhist teachings and texts. Returning travelers and expatriates who had studied Buddhism in Asia brought back not only knowledge but also a commitment to establish authentic

¹³ Paul Dahlke, 1920 -Second edition, *Buddhismus als Weltanschauung*, Oskar Schloss, München.

Buddhist practices in Germany.

2.4. The role of Asian teachers and communities

The post-war period also saw the arrival of Asian Buddhist teachers and immigrants, who played a crucial role in revitalizing and diversifying Buddhism in Germany. Among the most influential were Theravāda monks from Sri Lanka and Thailand, having been invited to stay at Buddhist Centres as in Berlin, e.g., who introduced traditional monastic practices to German audiences.

The arrival of Japanese Zen teachers in the West, such as Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, (1870 - 1966), who visited several times Europe after having founded already various Zen Centres in the US, as well as Shunryu Suzuki (1905 - 1971), whose introduction into the Zen practice, became an extremely popular book in Germany¹⁴, and Taisen Deshimaru Roshi (1914 - 1982), who is also called the “Bodhidharma of Modern Times”, brought Zen Buddhism to prominence in Germany. Zen’s emphasis on meditation and mindfulness resonated with the growing interest in Eastern spirituality during the 1960s and 1970s. In the meantime, nearly all important schools of Zen with roots in Japan, Korea, China, and Vietnam are represented in Germany.

Similarly, the Tibetan diaspora following the Tibet incident in 1959 led to the spread of Vajrayāna Buddhism, with teachers like the H. H. the Dalai Lama, H. H. the Sakya Trizin, or H. H. the 16th Karmapa and, e.g., making frequent visits to the West including Germany. Until then, hardly anything was known about Tibetan Buddhism in the world. After the movement of the Dalai Lama and other Tibetan high lamas and meditation masters together with thousands of Tibetans to India and thereafter to the West, the interest for Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism with its specific rituals and comprehensive experiential knowledge grew in the West. Subsequently, great scholars as Jampa Panglung Rinpoche, Dagya Rinpoche, and Dzongsar Ngari Thingo Rinpoche were invited to the German Universities of Munich, Bonn, and Cologne, e.g., to introduce Tibetan culture and art.

It has been Dzongsar Ngari Thingo Rinpoche (1945 - 2008) who introduced H. H. the Dalai Lama to Germany and organised official visits with well-known public personalities, politicians, and high-ranking dignitaries from the church. As a consequence, many centres of all four main Tibetan schools were established in Germany, and interfaith dialogues between Christians and Buddhists have been intensified. Besides, exhibitions on the Tibetan culture, initially organised by Ngari Thingo Rinpoche, who was also a Tibetan art historian who published in German language, became very popular in Germany and grew public interest for Tibetan Buddhism¹⁵.

¹⁴ Shunryu Suzuki, 1970, *Zen Mind – Beginners Mind*, Weatherhill, Tokyo, New York; In German: 1975, *Zen Geist - Anfänger Geist*, Kamphausen, Bielefeld.

¹⁵ G - W. Essen und T. T. Thingo, 1989, *Götter des Himalaya 2 Vols.*, Prestel; und 1991, *Padmasambhava – Leben und Wundertaten des grossen tantrischen Meisters im Spiegel der tibetischen Bildkunst*, München und DuMont, Köln

Asian immigrant communities also contributed to the institutionalization of Buddhism in Germany. Vietnamese and Thai communities, in particular, established temples and cultural centers, which became focal points for both immigrants and native Germans interested in Buddhism. The Vietnamese communities were especially growing in West Germany when the Government allowed a certain number of Vietnamese refugees to settle in Germany due to factors then. After the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, the then East-German Socialist Government had invited contract workers to stay, and in 1989, around 60000 Vietnamese were permanently living in East Germany. Until then, also in West Germany, around 40000 Vietnamese had settled permanently. Since the reunion of East and West Germany in 1990, the German-Vietnamese people formed the biggest Buddhist community with over 100,000 followers, mainly of Mahayana Buddhism, and established 12 Buddhist Pagodas in different parts of Germany.

2.5 Growth of secular and practical Buddhism

Another significant development in the institutionalization of Buddhism during the mid-20th century was the rise of secular and practical approaches to Buddhist teachings. Influenced by figures like Ven. Ayya Khema (Ilse Kussel, married Ledermann 1923 - 1997), a German-born Buddhist nun who had been ordained in Sri Lanka at the Vajirarama Temple by Ven. Narada Mahathera, this movement emphasized meditation and mindfulness as tools for personal growth and well-being. Ayya Khema's establishment of retreat centers and her accessible teachings¹⁶ helped Buddhism appeal to a broader audience, including those who did not identify themselves as religious. In the meantime, several German disciples of Buddhist masters from the East became qualified teachers and translators, not only in the West but also in Asia.

Besides, the incorporation of Buddhist practices into secular contexts, such as psychotherapy and stress reduction, further expanded its reach. German psychologists and therapists began integrating mindfulness techniques into their work, inspired by Buddhist principles of self-awareness and non-attachment.

2.6. Legacy and foundations for future growth

By the late 20th century, the institutional foundations for Buddhism in Germany were firmly established. Buddhist societies, temples, and meditation centers could be found across the country, reflecting the diversity of Buddhist traditions. These institutions provided not only a space for practice but also a platform for education, dialogue, and community building. The institutionalization of Buddhism in Germany had been a gradual but transformative process, marked by the dedication of early pioneers, the resilience of practitioners during challenging times, and the contributions of Asian teachers and immigrant communities.

¹⁶ Ayya Khema, 1987, *Being Nobody, Going Nowhere: Meditations on the Buddhist Path*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville; and 1997, *Who is myself? A guide to Buddhist meditation (commentary on the Potthapāda Sutta)*, Wisdom Publications, Somerville.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF DIVERSE BUDDHIST TRADITIONS

As Buddhism evolved in Germany, it became clear that its diversity was both a strength and a challenge. The various schools of Buddhism – *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* – offered distinct philosophies and practices, each appealing to different groups within Germany. This section explores how these traditions developed and flourished, highlighting their unique contributions to German Buddhism.

3.1. *Theravāda* Buddhism in Germany

Theravāda Buddhism, often referred to as the “Teaching of the Elders,” is rooted in the early teachings of the Buddha and emphasizes meditation, ethical conduct, and monastic life. It was one of the first Buddhist traditions to establish a presence in Germany, primarily through the efforts of scholars and the influence of Asian teachers.

3.2. Early influences

As mentioned before, the works of translators like Karl Eugen Neumann introduced German audiences to the Pāli Canon, the foundational texts of Theravāda Buddhism. These texts resonated with those seeking a systematic and rational spiritual path. In the post-war period, German practitioners who had studied Theravāda Buddhism in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar began to establish meditation centers in Germany.

3.3. Establishment of temples and centers

The arrival of Theravāda monks from Asia significantly shaped the tradition’s growth in Germany. Sri Lankan and Thai monks, in particular, played a pivotal role in introducing traditional practices, such as Vipassanā (insight meditation). Temples such as the Wat Dhammavihara in Hannover and the Sri Ganesha Buddhist Temple in Berlin became focal points for Theravāda practitioners, offering teachings, ceremonies, and retreats.

3.4. Engagement with German society

Theravāda Buddhism gained prominence among Germans interested in mindfulness and meditation. Teachers like Nyānatiloka Mahathera (Anton Walther Florus Gueth 1878 - 1957), as mentioned above - a German-born monk ordained in Sri Lanka - bridged the gap between traditional Theravāda teachings and the needs of Western practitioners. The emphasis on meditation as a tool for self-awareness and personal growth made Theravāda practices particularly appealing in secular contexts, such as psychotherapy and stress management.

3.5. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in Germany

Mahāyāna Buddhism, known as the “Great Vehicle,” encompasses a wide range of traditions, including Zen and Pure Land Buddhism. Its emphasis on compassion, the Bodhisattva ideal, and the interconnectedness of all beings has made it a significant part of German Buddhism.

3.6. Zen Buddhism: A path of mindfulness and discipline

Zen Buddhism, originating in Japan, became highly influential in Germany during the mid-20th century. The minimalist aesthetics and disciplined

meditation practices of Zen resonated with Germans seeking spiritual clarity and simplicity. Zen was introduced to Germany primarily through Japanese teachers such as Taisen Deshimaru, who established Zen centers across Europe. The Sanbo Kyodan lineage and the Rinzai and Soto schools of Zen became particularly popular. Meditation retreats, or sesshin, drew practitioners eager to experience the transformative power of seated meditation (zazen). German teachers also emerged as leaders in the Zen tradition, blending traditional teachings with insights relevant to Western audiences. Figures such as Hugo Lasalle (Hugo Makibi-Enomiya, 1898 - 1990)¹⁷, a Jesuit Zen-master from Westfalia who lived mainly in Hiroshima, where he built the Worldpeace Church and later again in Germany, then Niklaus Brantschen, a Swiss Jesuit and Zen-master, or Pia Gyger, a Swiss psychologist and Zen-master, contributed to the growth of Zen communities in Germany, emphasizing the practical application of Zen principles in daily life.

3.7. Pure land and other *Mahāyāna* traditions

While Zen dominated the *Mahāyāna* landscape, other schools, such as Pure Land Buddhism (followers believe that rebirth in Amitabha's Western Paradise – Sukhavati, known as Pure Land, is ensured for all those who invoke Amitabha's name with devotion), also found a foothold in Germany. Vietnamese and Chinese immigrant communities played a key role in establishing Pure Land temples and promoting practices like chanting and devotional rituals. These traditions enriched the spiritual diversity of German Buddhism and fostered cross-cultural exchange.

3.8. *Vajrayāna* Buddhism: The Tibetan influence

The arrival of Tibetan Buddhism, or *Vajrayāna*, in Germany was a transformative moment in the development of German Buddhism. This esoteric tradition, characterized by elaborate rituals, visualization practices, and the guidance of spiritual teachers (lamas), brought a unique dimension to the Buddhist landscape.

3.9. The Dalai Lama and Tibetan Diaspora

The 1959 Chinese invasion of Tibet and the subsequent diaspora of Tibetan refugees brought *Vajrayāna* Buddhism to the West. The Dalai Lama's frequent visits to Germany and later also of other high Lamas played a crucial role in raising awareness about Tibetan Buddhism and the plight of the Tibetan people. His charisma and message of compassion inspired many Germans to explore *Vajrayāna* teachings.

3.10. Establishment of Tibetan Buddhist centers

Tibetan Buddhist centers proliferated across Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. Organizations like e.g. the Karma Kagyu Lineage and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) established monasteries, retreat centers, and study programs. Prominent centers as the Kamalashila

¹⁷ Hugo Makibi-Enomiya Lasalle, 1960, *Zen, Weg zur Erleuchtung - Hilfe zum Verständnis, Einführung in die Meditation*, Herder, Wien.

Institute and the Tibetisches Zentrum Hamburg were established, which offer teachings and retreats in traditional Vajrayāna practices. One of the unique aspects of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Germany is the emergence of German-born teachers who have been trained under Tibetan lamas. They popularized Tibetan Buddhism among Western audiences, emphasizing meditation and the integration of Vajrayāna principles into daily life.

3.1.1. Contributions to German society

The diversity of Buddhist traditions in Germany has enriched its spiritual and cultural life. From Theravāda's focus on mindfulness to Zen's emphasis on discipline and Tibetan Buddhism's colorful rituals, these traditions have contributed to:

- **Psychological Well-being:** Buddhist meditation techniques are widely used in therapy and stress management.
- **Art and Culture:** The aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of Buddhism have influenced German art, literature, and film.
- **Environmental Awareness:** Many Buddhist groups in Germany advocate for environmental sustainability, inspired by teachings on interconnectedness and compassion for all beings.

One of the defining features of Buddhism in Germany is, moreover, the coexistence and collaboration of diverse traditions while each school maintains its unique identity. For example:

- **Meditation and Mindfulness:** Practices such as mindfulness (*sati*) have transcended traditional boundaries, becoming a unifying thread among Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna practitioners.
- **Interfaith Dialogue:** Buddhist communities in Germany often engage in interfaith initiatives, fostering dialogue not only between Buddhist traditions but also with other religions, such as Christianity and Islam.

IV. CONTEMPORARY BUDDHISM IN GERMANY

Buddhism in modern Germany reflects a dynamic synthesis of tradition and adaptation. While retaining the core teachings and practices of its diverse traditions, contemporary Buddhism has evolved to address the unique spiritual, cultural, and social needs of German society. This section explores the current state of Buddhism in Germany, examining its demographics, contributions to society, and ongoing challenges.

4.1. Demographics and diversity

Buddhism in Germany today is a diverse and growing tradition. It is estimated that around 350,000 people in Germany are confessing Buddhists, with the population split between ethnic Buddhists – primarily immigrants from Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Tibet – and Western converts who have adopted Buddhism as their spiritual path, whose number is growing.

4.2. Ethnic Buddhist communities

Immigrant communities continue to play a significant role in maintaining

traditional Buddhist practices and rituals. Vietnamese Buddhists, who arrived in large numbers as refugees following the Vietnam War, have established temples and cultural centers throughout Germany. For example, the Vien Giac Temple in Hannover, one of the largest Buddhist temples in Europe, serves as a spiritual and cultural hub for the Vietnamese community.

Thai and Sri Lankan Buddhist communities have also contributed significantly, particularly through Theravāda temples that offer meditation classes, traditional ceremonies, and community services. These temples often serve dual purposes, catering to the spiritual needs of their ethnic communities while also welcoming German practitioners.

4.3. German converts to Buddhism

Western converts make up a significant portion of the Buddhist population in Germany. Many are drawn to Buddhism for its emphasis on mindfulness, meditation, and ethical living. Zen and Tibetan Buddhism are particularly popular among German practitioners, who often engage in retreats, study groups, and meditation practices tailored to a modern audience.

4.4. Buddhist institutions and organizations

Contemporary Buddhism in Germany is supported by a wide range of institutions, including temples, meditation centers, academic programs, and national organizations. The German Buddhist Union (Deutsche Buddhistische Union, DBU)¹⁸ continues to serve as the primary umbrella organization for Buddhist groups in Germany. Representing over 60 member organizations, it fosters collaboration among diverse Buddhist traditions, promotes public awareness of Buddhism, and engages in interfaith dialogue. The DBU also advocates for issues such as environmental sustainability and social justice, inspired by Buddhist principles of interconnectedness and compassion.

Besides, Germany is home to numerous Buddhist retreat centers and monasteries that offer meditation programs, workshops, and teachings. Notable examples include:

- **Tibetisches Zentrum Hamburg:** A leading center for Tibetan Buddhist studies and practice.
- **Benediktushof:** A retreat center in Bavaria founded by Zen teacher Willigis Jäger, focusing on mindfulness and meditation.
- **Haus der Stille (House of Silence):** A meditation center in northern Germany next to Lauenburg, offering teachings from various Buddhist traditions.
- **Sakya Kalden Ling- Buddhistisches Zentrum (Buddhist Centre):** A meditation centre in Frankfurt, founded by the Tibetan Sakya Lineage.

These institutions provide opportunities for both beginners and advanced practitioners to deepen their understanding of Buddhist teachings.

The academic study of Buddhism has also flourished in Germany, with universities offering programs in Buddhist studies, philosophy, and Asian

¹⁸ <https://www.buddhismus-deutschland.de>

religions. Institutions like e.g. the University of Hamburg, the Friedrich-Wilhelms University of Bonn, and the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich have established departments specializing in Buddhist texts, history, and philosophy, furthering scholarly engagement with Buddhism.

4.5. Challenges, innovations, and adaptations

Despite its growth and contributions, Buddhism in Germany faces several challenges. Public understanding of Buddhism in Germany is sometimes shaped by stereotypes, such as viewing it solely as a philosophy or a meditation technique rather than a comprehensive spiritual path. This limited perception can obscure the richness and diversity of Buddhist traditions.

In response to these challenges, German Buddhist communities have developed innovative approaches to ensure their relevance and accessibility. Many Buddhist teachers in Germany adapt their teachings to address contemporary issues such as work-life balance, mental health, and environmental sustainability. Secular mindfulness programs and online meditation courses have made Buddhist practices more accessible to younger generations and urban professionals.

Moreover, the digital age has enabled Buddhist groups in Germany to reach a wider audience through social media, podcasts, and online platforms. Virtual meditation sessions, live-streamed teachings, and online discussion groups have become common, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Efforts to bridge the gap between ethnic and convert Buddhists have gained momentum. Multicultural events and joint initiatives foster unity among Germany's diverse Buddhist communities, creating a sense of shared purpose. Contemporary Buddhism in Germany reflects both continuity and change. It honors the rich heritage of its diverse traditions while adapting to the unique challenges and opportunities of modern society. Through its contributions to mental health, social activism, and interfaith dialogue, Buddhism has become an integral part of Germany's cultural and spiritual fabric.

V. FOSTERING UNITY: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

In an interconnected and increasingly globalized world, Buddhism in Germany has embraced its potential as a unifying force for peace, environmental sustainability, and interfaith dialogue. This section explores how German Buddhist communities and organizations contribute to fostering global harmony through collaborative efforts that transcend cultural, national, and religious boundaries.

5.1 Buddhism as a framework for unity

The teachings of Buddhism, particularly its emphasis on compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and interdependence, provide a strong foundation for unity and collective action. These principles resonate deeply with global challenges such as social inequality, environmental degradation, and conflict. In Germany, Buddhist groups have leveraged these teachings to build connections both within their communities and on a global scale.

5.2. Interfaith dialogue and cooperation

Germany's Buddhist organizations are actively engaged in interfaith initiatives aimed at promoting mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among different religious and cultural groups. Buddhist leaders regularly participate in interfaith councils and events, such as the **World Interfaith Harmony Week** and the **Parliament of the World's Religions**. These gatherings provide a platform for sharing Buddhist perspectives on global issues while fostering dialogue with representatives from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other faiths.

Buddhist groups in Germany have collaborated with churches and mosques to organize public forums, workshops, and educational programs on religious tolerance. For instance, Buddhist centers such as the **Tibetisches Zentrum Hamburg** host events that bring together diverse communities to discuss common values, such as compassion, peace, and service to humanity.

In addition to interfaith work, Buddhist organizations have also collaborated with secular groups, academics, and human rights activists to address ethical and moral questions in a pluralistic society. These initiatives have contributed to building bridges between spiritual and non-spiritual communities in Germany.

5.3. Contributions to global environmental sustainability

Buddhist teachings on interconnectedness and respect for all living beings have inspired German Buddhist organizations to take a leading role in environmental activism. German Buddhist groups actively participate in global movements such as the Buddhist Climate Action Network (BCAN) and local initiatives like Green Buddhism, which advocate for sustainable living, renewable energy, and environmental conservation. Monasteries and retreat centers, such as the Benediktushof, often incorporate eco-friendly practices like renewable energy usage and organic farming.

Collaborative projects between German Buddhists and international environmental organizations have resulted in large-scale initiatives like tree-planting drives and ecological workshops. These projects not only raise awareness about the climate crisis but also empower communities to take collective action. German Buddhists have also been vocal in advocating for ecological policies at national and international levels. Through petitions, open letters, and participation in United Nations climate summits, they highlight the urgent need for global cooperation in addressing environmental challenges.

5.4. Humanitarian and social justice efforts

Buddhism in Germany also contributes to global harmony through its focus on humanitarian work and social justice. Buddhist organizations in Germany have been deeply involved in providing aid to refugees, particularly during the 2015 European migrant crisis. Temples and meditation centers have served as safe spaces for refugees, offering shelter, counseling, and vocational training. This compassionate response embodies the Buddhist principle of alleviating suffering.

Very important is the focus on gender equality for contemporary German

Buddhism, with organizations promoting the empowerment of women both within Buddhist communities and in broader society. German Buddhist groups also collaborate with international organizations to advocate for the rights of women in conflict zones and marginalized communities.

Moreover, German Buddhist groups are active participants in peace-building initiatives. They organize marches, meditative peace vigils, and educational campaigns promoting nonviolence and reconciliation. The 'Deutsche Buddhistische Union' (DBU) has also partnered with global organizations like 'The Peace Council' to address issues such as war, racism, and poverty.

5.5. Unity within the Buddhist community

Unity among Germany's diverse Buddhist traditions has been a critical factor in their collective ability to contribute to global harmony. For example, the DBU organizes annual gatherings that bring together leaders and practitioners from different traditions to share insights and collaborate on common goals. Another initiative comes from Buddhist institutions in Germany that have established shared platforms for education, such as the **Buddhist Academy Europe**¹⁹, which offers courses and workshops accessible to practitioners from all traditions. These platforms also serve as launching points for joint advocacy campaigns on issues such as climate change, human rights, and ethical leadership.

In the context of the global Buddhist networks, German Buddhism's contributions extend beyond its national borders, playing an active role in the global Buddhist community. German Buddhist groups maintain close ties with Asian Buddhist monasteries and teachers, ensuring the authenticity and continuity of traditional practices. These partnerships also facilitate cultural exchange and mutual learning.

Germany frequently hosts international Buddhist conferences and summits, such as the **European Buddhist Union (EBU)**²⁰ meetings, which address global challenges from a Buddhist perspective.

Germany has also been instrumental in popularizing secular mindfulness practices inspired by Buddhism. German psychologists and educators, often working in collaboration with global institutions, have helped integrate mindfulness into fields such as education, healthcare, and corporate training worldwide.

Buddhism in Germany exemplifies the potential for religious and cultural traditions to contribute to global harmony. Through interfaith dialogue, environmental activism, humanitarian efforts, and collaboration within the Buddhist community, German Buddhists have established themselves as very initiative in promoting unity and compassion on a global scale.

VI. THE FUTURE OF BUDDHISM IN GERMANY

The future of Buddhism in Germany will depend on its ability to remain

¹⁹ <https://www.buddhistacademy.eu>

²⁰ <https://europeanbuddhism.org>

relevant and accessible to diverse audiences, including younger generations, marginalized groups, and those unfamiliar with Buddhist teachings.

6.1. Reaching younger generations

Younger Germans are increasingly drawn to Buddhism's emphasis on mindfulness, ethical living, and personal transformation. To engage this demographic, Buddhist organizations must continue to innovate by:

- Expanding their presence on digital platforms such as social media, podcasts, and apps.
- Offering contemporary approaches to meditation and mindfulness that address modern challenges like stress, mental health, and climate anxiety.
- Hosting youth-centered retreats and workshops that combine traditional teachings with modern themes.

6.2. Promoting diversity and equity

Ensuring inclusivity within Buddhist communities is another critical challenge. This includes addressing barriers related to race, gender, and economic inequality. For example:

- Supporting the ordination and leadership of women in Buddhist traditions.
- Creating programs and outreach efforts that welcome underrepresented groups, including refugees and immigrants.
- Offering affordable and accessible programs to ensure that financial constraints do not limit participation.

6.3. Deepening integration with German society

As Buddhism becomes increasingly recognized as a spiritual and philosophical resource, its integration into German society is likely to deepen in several ways:

Buddhism can play a more prominent role in education and public discourse by:

- Collaborating with schools and universities to include Buddhist philosophy, ethics, and mindfulness in curricula.
- Offer public lectures, workshops, and exhibitions that highlight Buddhism's historical and contemporary contributions to German culture.

Buddhist principles can moreover enrich various fields, including:

- Psychology and Medicine: Expanding the use of Buddhist-based mindfulness and compassion practices in therapeutic and healthcare settings.
- Leadership and Business: Promoting ethical leadership and workplace mindfulness to address issues such as burnout and corporate ethics.
- Art and Literature: Inspiring creative works that explore Buddhist themes of impermanence, compassion, and interconnectedness.

As we look ahead, the Buddhist principles of compassion, interdependence, and ethical living offer a timeless and transformative vision for a more

harmonious and sustainable world.

VII. CONCLUSION

Buddhism in Germany has come a long way since its introduction in the 19th century and has transformed from an intellectual curiosity to a thriving spiritual tradition. Today, it stands as a vibrant and evolving tradition that enriches German culture and contributes to global harmony. Its rich history, contemporary relevance, and potential for the future demonstrate its capacity to address modern challenges while fostering unity, peace, and compassion in both Germany and the global community. Its future will depend on the ability of its communities to remain adaptable, inclusive, and engaged with the pressing challenges of our time.

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THE LAW OF DEPENDENT ORIGINATION: BRIDGING CULTURES AND FOSTERING GLOBAL HARMONY

Ven. Yang Kihoon*

Abstract:

The paper explores the profound Buddhist principle of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) as a universal foundation for understanding interdependence and cultivating global unity. Highlighting its resonance with quantum physics, the paper underscores the interconnectedness of all phenomena and its implications for resolving societal discord. Key contributions include a comparative analysis of Buddhist and Islamic philosophies, emphasizing shared values of compassion and mutual respect as pivotal for interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Ven. Yang Kihoon reflects on his experiences in Uzbekistan, where he strives to revive Buddhism amidst a predominantly Islamic context, illustrating how Buddhist teachings can inspire coexistence and cultural preservation. The paper further critiques the Sangha's inward focus, advocating for proactive engagement in social welfare and cross-cultural understanding. By drawing on historical parallels, such as the societal influence of early Christian missionaries and Buddhist contributions to medicine, the author calls for a reimagined role of Buddhism in modern society, bridging spiritual enlightenment with tangible societal benefits. The innovative perspective on fostering unity through shared spiritual and cultural values positions this work as a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on global harmony and inclusivity.

Keywords: *Dependent origination, interfaith dialogue, global harmony, social engagement of Buddhism.*

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I. DEPENDENT ORIGATION AS A UNIVERSAL LAW FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

The truth that the Buddha realized is ‘the law of dependent origination and cessation’ that all Buddhists know well. The law of dependent origination is the proposition that “because this exists, that exists, and because that exists, this exists”.¹ This law of dependent origination does not have an independent identity that can be called this, and therefore, all existences do not change according to the given situation at that time, and they always change due to causes and conditions, not because a specific characteristic governs the change. When we think of something that does not have such an identity and changes, as always existing and trying to maintain this existence as it is, there is a conflict between. We call the discord that arises from such conflict suffering, and our Buddhism is about making efforts to eliminate that suffering and move toward a world without suffering, and pursuing the result. That is dependent origination (). Through dependent origination, we came to know the suffering of all sentient beings, and through cessation, we eliminated the suffering of all sentient beings. Let’s look back at what the Buddha said in his first declaration of the Dharma. I have escaped the trap of humans and the trap of God.² You, too, have escaped the trap of God and the trap of man. Spread this teaching to the world. For the sake of God and man, for their benefit and happiness, preach this Dharma with a good beginning, middle, and end. Do not go together, go alone. I, too, will go to Uruvela to spread this Dharma.³

This law of dependent origination is also showing the same position in quantum physics, which has great significance in recent science. It is the view that “all matter can be observed through interaction with other matter. In other words, all matter cannot exist without interaction”.⁴ This is the law of dependent origination and is a word that explains the nature of dependence in Buddhism. However, it is said that the matter does not combine with other elements according to its properties, but meets and comes into being according to a certain situation, that is, according to a relationship. I was invited to the Vesak Festival in Vietnam in 2019 as well. It was my first opportunity to participate in a large-scale Buddhist event held abroad, not in Korea. I had only heard about Vietnam, and many Vietnamese people were living in Korea, so when I first received the invitation, I thought it was just so-so and hesitated whether or not to participate with my busy schedule. However, when I participated and saw the dynamic appearance of Vietnam and the wonderful Buddhist temples, I learned a lot from the Vietnamese people’s pride in their own history and sincere attitude toward the Buddha’s teachings. So I talked

¹ *Samyutta Nikāya* 12.1. *Paticca Samuppāda Sutta*.

² *Dīgha Nikāya* 1- *Brahmajāla Sutta* or *Vinaya Mahāvagg*. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* – on parallels between Buddhist interdependence and quantum entanglement.

³ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Mahāvagga* I.6.10 – Declaration after enlightenment.

⁴ Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* – on parallels between Buddhist interdependence and quantum entanglement.

about Vietnamese Buddhism, Vietnam's beautiful natural scenery, and what I learned in Vietnam to many people I met. Then and now, I feel embarrassed that I am not qualified to be invited to such a great event and that I do not have enough knowledge to speak to such precious people, but I think the reason I was invited is probably because I am leading Buddhism in Uzbekistan.

II. PRACTICING THE DHAMMA IN UZBEKISTAN: A BUDDHIST PATH IN A MUSLIM LAND

Yes, that's right. I'm not an Uzbek, but a South Korean, and I'm a monk belonging to the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. And I'm trying to revive Buddhism in Uzbekistan, which was the holy land of Mahayana Buddhism that first registered Buddhism in the Republic of Uzbekistan and transmitted Buddhism to ancient China, Korea, and Tibet by digesting Buddhism well on their own. I think that's why I was invited to this wonderful place. And that's the second reason why I chose the fourth topic for my speech.

Most people in Uzbekistan are Muslim. After being under Russian rule since the mid-1800s and becoming communist under the Soviet Union, religion was not free to be practiced. The country gained independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed, and initially received a lot of support from the West, including the United States, during the Afghanistan War. Then, with the current president's open-door policy, the economy was revitalized, and the president himself boasted that he was Muslim; the power of Muslims has expanded rapidly over the past decade. Unlike in the past, it is common to see women wearing chadors and men without shaved beards. It is almost a trend. The sound of prayers at Islamic temples five times a day reverberates through speakers on the streets.

I came to Uzbekistan in 1991 and have been active there ever since. In the early days, the perception of Buddhism was not good, and most people thought of Buddhism as idolatry or totemism. There are still many difficulties today, and there is the arbitrary administration, such as building an above-ground railway over a small temple without our consent and then telling us to move to another place at our own expense when we complained of the inconvenience. However, I feel that many people are trying to overcome their misunderstandings and prejudices about Buddhism. Going through such difficulties, I keenly realized that while the upward pursuit of the truth of Buddhism is important, it is also very important for Buddhism to be considerate and active toward the general public.

In Korea, when asked what Buddhism is, people easily say that it is a religion of enlightenment. However, they do not clearly explain what enlightenment is or what the definition of enlightenment is. Meanwhile, it is made as if seeking nirvana is the only virtue of Buddhists. Since it is a metaphysical viewpoint and claim about enlightenment, there is only a flow toward the Sangha in the temple, and there is a great lack of consideration and behavior that should be given to ordinary people outside the Sangha. The opposite example of this can be the reason why Western Christian missionaries were able to come to Korea in the late 19th century and early 20th century and succeed. This is because

Christian missionaries were able to comfort people through medical practice by practicing medicine and by relieving them of the fear and pain of birth, old age, illness, and death contained in the Buddha's declaration of dharma. Some of the famous private universities in Korea are schools that these American Christian missionaries made money by treating members of the royal family and the nobility, and the reputation they gained by treating ordinary people. And by assuring people that they could hear answers to the traps of humanity - loving but not meeting, hating but having to meet, seeking but not receiving - and informing them that the two great causes of "healing and love" were the roles of the church, they made people firmly belong to the church. And in parallel, through charity work for the poor and hungry and orphanages, their influence naturally expanded. For over 1,700 years, they practiced the teachings of Buddha that Buddhism had failed to do properly, and they firmly established themselves as the representative religion of Korea. Just as Christianity was being missionized to Korea, when Buddhism was first introduced to Korea, some Buddhist monks were able to open the door to ignorant people through the wonders of their healing powers. And they shared advanced knowledge and information that they could obtain by connecting India, China, and Rome with the general public through temples.

In modern times, information is shared and overflowing due to the development of the Internet. It is so overflowing with information that it is hard to understand the situation in the past when people risked their lives to seek the sutras and walked the difficult path of seeking the sutras. Almost everyone has a smartphone with all the information I want to know. And there is no need to worry about foreign languages. There is a translation program, so although it is not exact, it can be translated easily to a certain extent. The English used in the content I am presenting now was also helped by a translation program called Google. That is why there are many cases where monks are even more behind in information than young students. These are very unfavorable factors in terms of the reason why the Sangha is respected, and also from the perspective of missionary work. Some religions that use God as a medium bind believers with the two axes of fear and desire. In other words, if you do not believe in God or follow Him, you will be punished because it is a great sin. However, if you believe in God, all your sins will be forgiven and you will gain eternal life and happiness. And the people are bound by that.

However, in our Buddhism, we call this foolishness "ignorance" and aim to eliminate this ignorance. However, it is not easy. The experiences and memories that have been nurtured for a long time, the shortcomings of having a finite and insignificant body that needs to be fed, put to sleep, kept warm or cool, and always taken care of, blind the eyes of truth. It is almost impossible to understand and practice the law of dependent origination, which states that this body grows through relationships, but also weakens and eventually disappears.

III. INTERRELIGIOUS REFLECTION: BUDDHIST AND ISLAMIC MEDICAL THOUGHT

In that sense, I believe that Buddhism needs social activities. While

spreading the truth, I also believe that activities that support the socially disadvantaged are necessary. Also, in today's world, where transportation by airplane and other means is more convenient and communication networks such as the Internet are in full swing, I believe that understanding and cooperation with other religions and cultures are very important. The decorations installed in the royal palace and Islamic seminary in Gulistan Square, built in the 16th century when Islam was flourishing in Central Asia, are unique. The deer, lion, and human faces, which are not allowed in Islamic doctrine, are carved. This expresses the content of the legend that was passed down in this region at the time. From an Islamic perspective, it can be said to be an expectation for Ali, the last caliph of the Umayyad dynasty, who suddenly disappeared one day. However, before that, it should be interpreted as a story of the incarnation of Maitreya Buddha, the future Buddha of Buddhism. It is said that when Maitreya Buddha appears, he will open this world of Saha and open a new world of Buddha, just like the King of the Kings who unifies the world. It expresses the Buddhist belief in Maitreya's birth. Furthermore, the Sworovsky script (д) is formed right below the picture. It is a hope that the promise of Maitreya Buddha coming to this land will be fulfilled. However, even if we explain the historical evidence that remains in Uzbekistan, such as the pagodas and Buddhist statues, Buddhist architecture, or Buddhist stories, it is likely to cause conflict rather than sympathy for the current absolute majority of Muslims. Rather, it would be better to emphasize the commonalities between these Islams and our Buddhism.

From this perspective, I would like to introduce Ibn Sina (980 – 1037), a representative figure of modern medicine who was a devout Muslim and an activist. In his books, Ibn Sina said, "All things are divided into light and heavy. Light things have a warm nature and become dry, and heavy things have a cold nature and absorb moisture. Light things are divided into fire and air, which have a warm nature. And heavy things are divided into water and earth, and these four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind become the most basic atoms that make up things".⁵

He believed that fire has a warm and dry nature, air has a warm and humid nature, water has a cold and humid nature, and earth has a cold and dry nature. This quality arises from the interaction of opposite qualities when it stops at a certain limit. This characteristic exists in small element particles so that the maximum amount of each element can come into contact with the maximum amount of the other element. He limited this theory to what exists on this earth.

He considered the function of the heaviest and wettest water important, and classified it into the differences in amount and amount for each age, and thus aging, illness, and death. With this basic premise, he explained it medically, which became the foundation of European medicine, and also created a field called 'Islamic medicine'. The place name Bukhara, where he was born, is 'vihara', which means "to stay" in our Buddhist Indian language.

⁵ Ibn Sina, *The Book of Healing & The Canon of Medicine*.

Some archaeological buildings and relics prove that Buddhism existed there before the 8th century. However, claiming that his theory came from Buddhism can cause a lot of conflict.

However, his medical theory is similar to the Buddhist classification of substances.

In the early Buddhist scriptures, substances are described as “Bhikkhus, the four basic substances and substances derived from the four basic substances are called substances.” He explains, “Friends, what is the aggregate of matter that is the object of attachment? The four fundamental substances and substances derived from the fundamental substances. Friends, what are the four fundamental substances? The element of earth, the element of water, the element of fire, and the element of wind.” Here, the fundamental substances refer to the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind, and the derived substances refer to the 24 substances derived from the fundamental substances.

In this way, in the early Theravada Buddhist Sangha, the 18 substances are the four fundamental substances (earth, water, fire, and wind), the five sensory substances (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body), the four object substances (form, sound, smell, and taste), the two sexual substances (female and male), the substance of the heart (the foundation of the heart), the substance of life (vitality), and the substance of food (nutrients). And the properties of these substances are called abstract substances and are included in the realm of substances. The four characteristics of substances, which are creation, inheritance, deterioration, and impermanence, are added to the four characteristics of substances, which are the void element, suggestion through the body and words, lightness of substances, softness of substances, and suitability of substances, making a total of ten abstract substances.

IV. REVIVING BUDDHIST KNOWLEDGE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL APPLICATIONS

The four fundamental substances do not refer to the actual earth, water, fire, and wind, but to the elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. The elements of earth are hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, heaviness and lightness. The elements of water are fluidity and cohesion, the elements of fire are warmth and cold, and the elements of wind are support and movement.

The four elements are the most basic elements that make up substances, and they cannot be separated from each other; they are combined in various forms to make up all substances. The Abhidhamma, a Buddhist commentary on the teachings, lists four causes of the arising of matter: mind, karma, temperature, and food. In each moment when the mind arises, stays, and disappears, matter arises together with the mind due to that mind, and in the early Buddhist scriptures, the heap of matter is defined as “matter because it is transformed. Then by what is it transformed? It is transformed by cold, by heat, by hunger, by thirst, by flies, mosquitoes, wind, sunlight, and reptiles.” Here, transformation is different from change. Transformation is when something with a form or shape

changes its form or shape, and this is a characteristic of matter alone. Why did the Buddha define matter, or the body, as transformation? It is because when you disassemble my body, the impermanence of transformation is revealed. When you see the impermanence of matter defined by transformation in this way, you realize it.

However, most of the living beings, which can be said to be almost all, do not open their eyes to enlightenment by seeing the transformed matter in this way, but rather suffer the pain of misalignment called birth, old age, illness, and death. And they seek a place to rest to avoid birth, old age, illness, and death. It is important to whip them to reach the highest enlightenment, but I think that the social role of religion is to comfort them so that they can be comfortable. Ibn Sina practices a similar definition. He seems to have developed it as a medicine that deals with the human body, not as a noble path to enlightenment, but as a path of comfort for those who are suffering. He utilized it as a medical treatment necessary for real life, and he created Islamic medicine and contributed greatly to the development of Western medicine. He did not try to become a Muslim alone with his knowledge to receive God's grace, but he made Islam something necessary for people and made them become Muslims. On the other hand, our Buddhism has regrets that its political theories end as theories and are not put into practice.

Looking at the global trend of modern medicine, "Currently, traditional medicine from each country around the world that can supplement the limitations of modern Western medicine is in the spotlight. According to WHO, more than 3/4 of the world's population relies on traditional medicine for health management. It is reported that 50% of Australians, 40% of Americans, and 25% of British people have experienced alternative medicine. Recent studies have largely divided traditional medicine into Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, European traditional medicine that originated in Greece and Rome and spread to Europe and North and South America, and Islamic medicine. Among them, Islamic medicine had a great influence on the development of Western modern medicine. Their theoretical research and clinical trial results were included in all Arab medical introductory books and encyclopedias, and they were translated again and adopted as textbooks for medical schools in Europe and directly used in clinical treatment."⁶

Even when a monk gets sick, he relies on Western medicine, not Buddhist medicine. In a sense, he relies on modern Western medicine, which is derived from Buddhist philosophy, and only tries to change the transformed phenomenon without considering the cause of the transformation. I reflect on whether it is foolish to try to collect trash on the street without knowing that he has a huge treasure in his hands.

My opinion on the topic I will present, Promoting Unification:

⁶ Journal of Korean Oriental Medicine Vol. 36 No. 3 (September 2015) J. Int. Korean Med. 2015 :36(3)252-264 Choi Hyo-jae and Shin Gil-jo, Understanding Islamic Medicine with a Focus on Ibn Sina.

Cooperative Efforts for Global Harmony, is about affirming myself and acknowledging the other person based on that affirmation. I think this is closely related to the law of dependent origination. I explained it at length, but I think it is necessary to positively accept the strengths of others and complement my weaknesses, or develop my strengths in the direction of actively trying to make my strengths into the strengths of the other person. In our Sangha, we often use the phrase, “Seek nirvana above and save sentient beings below.” Seeking nirvana is recognized as a noble and respectable act, but there is an aspect of neglecting the actual salvation of sentient beings. If the Buddha had first confirmed the enlightenment that transcended birth and death and simply entered nirvana, Buddhism and sentient beings would have been wandering in the dark sea of suffering of birth and death.

To share that, the Buddha came down from that high and pure place to the place of the five desires, where birth and death are reincarnated. From that holy place and while walking the path, he guided us in the right direction. Because he knew me and took pity on me.

V. CONCLUSION: FROM INTERBEING TO GLOBAL AWAKENING

As we contemplate the truth of dependent origination, we come to realize that no suffering arises in isolation, and thus no healing is complete until it encompasses all beings. The insight that “this exists because that exists” is not merely a metaphysical formulation but a call to ethical interbeing - a recognition that our liberation is bound with the liberation of others. This paper has traced that insight from its roots in the Buddha’s first turning of the wheel of Dhamma, through its expression in quantum theory, to its contemporary significance in interreligious engagement and social responsibility.

From the plains of ancient India to the cities of modern Uzbekistan, the Dhamma continues to blossom in unexpected places, not through conquest or dogma, but through gentle understanding and mutual respect. In this light, forgiveness becomes not weakness but strength, and compassion becomes not sentiment but strategy. Interfaith dialogue, when grounded in shared human values and the recognition of suffering as universal, becomes a sacred act of reconnection - a return to the heart of the Dhamma itself. Whether through the Four Elements of Buddhist Abhidhamma or the elemental theories of Ibn Sina, the truth remains that wisdom flows most powerfully when it is not hoarded but offered.

In a world fractured by dogma, identity, and fear, the greatest offering the Sangha can make is to embody the spirit of engaged Buddhism—to meet the pain of the world not with detachment, but with discerning compassion. The Buddha did not remain in the stillness of Bodhi under the tree. He walked back into the world of five desires, of politics and family and sickness and death, to teach and serve and heal. This, too, is the calling of our time. In an age of spiritual materialism and technological saturation, we must return to the essence: not only to seek Nibbāna above but to bring light below, to walk as

Dhamma messengers among the ordinary, sharing wisdom not through debate but through presence, not through division but through deep listening.

Buddhism, when rightly lived, is not a closed tradition but an open hand. It is a raft across suffering, not a gate to prestige. The memory of early Buddhist missionaries who carried not only texts but medicine and healing herbs, who built hospitals and opened paths of knowledge across civilizational lines, must be reawakened. Today, in honoring that spirit, we must build bridges between cultures, restore trust between faiths, and cultivate gardens of inner peace that blossom into fields of outer harmony.

Let this conclusion not be an end but a vow: to continue embodying the truth of interdependence with compassion, to dissolve the illusion of separation with insight, and to serve not only the liberation of the self but the collective awakening of humanity. In this way, dependent origination becomes more than a doctrine - it becomes a living path toward global harmony, cultural reconciliation, and spiritual flourishing for all.

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UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The paper explores the profound role of Buddhist principles in nurturing interfaith dialogue and fostering global harmony. The author underscores the Buddhist ideal of coexistence, emphasizing the need for mutual respect and understanding among diverse religious traditions. The paper critically examines how Buddhism's emphasis on wisdom (*paññā*), moral discipline (*sīla*), and mental cultivation (*samādhi*) serves as a foundation for constructive interreligious engagement. A key contribution of this study is its analysis of Buddhist diplomacy and ethical leadership, illustrating how Buddhist teachings have historically contributed to peaceful negotiations, conflict resolution, and cross-cultural interactions. The author further highlights the importance of compassion (*karuṇā*) and nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) as essential pillars for global peace-building efforts. The paper also introduces a practical framework for fostering unity, proposing interfaith educational initiatives, ethical governance strategies, and cultural exchanges to strengthen solidarity among nations. Additionally, the study discusses contemporary challenges, such as religious intolerance and sectarian divisions, advocating for Buddhism as a unifying force in addressing these global issues. By presenting historical precedents and modern applications of Buddhist engagement in diplomacy, the author provides a renewed perspective on interfaith collaboration as a means to achieving sustainable peace. Ultimately, the paper calls for a collective commitment to ethical values and spiritual inclusivity, positioning Buddhism as a guiding force in shaping a more harmonious and interconnected world.

Keywords: *Buddhism, world peace, sustainable development.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

After the end of World War II, humanity began to develop a more unified perspective on human rights. The recognition of fundamental human rights became a global consensus, driven by a collective awareness of the atrocities of war and acts of genocide. People who had no prior conflicts with each other engaged in violence, including acts of cruelty against children, women, and the elderly. In the aftermath of the war, numerous legal frameworks were established, particularly in the field of international human rights law. These laws encompass principles, agreements, systems, and mechanisms that serve as global standards for the protection of human rights. Today, the belief that all human beings possess equal rights and inherent dignity is firmly upheld by both international human rights laws and national legal frameworks, such as constitutional provisions in various countries.

Regardless of race or language, all human beings value their dignity. Human rights and human dignity are fundamental concerns in contemporary society. Many nations worldwide are increasingly alarmed by issues related to migrant labor and mass labor migration - commonly referred to as “foreign workers” in Thailand. Migrant workers across the globe often face human rights violations by local employers, impacting their dignity. The issue of human dignity has been a root cause of conflicts in the past, present, and future. Several factors contribute to human dignity, including social class, occupational status, expertise in a particular field, educational attainment, or the relative power of one country over another.¹

II. A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ON WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Buddhist community places great emphasis on the moral virtues upheld by different religions, fostering coexistence in harmony and ensuring that no harm is inflicted upon others. It recognizes and respects the moral values that each religion attributes to communal living, not to create conflict but to adapt them to the social context of each community. This approach upholds human dignity while promoting religious awareness through significant communal activities. For instance, Buddhist religious observances, such as merit-making ceremonies during festivals and traditional celebrations, play a crucial role in reinforcing communal harmony. Similarly, it is essential to encourage interfaith participation in religious and cultural activities within each religious space, rotating the hosting responsibilities without discrimination. To facilitate this, key community institutions should act as coordinators and supporters, ensuring that religious ceremonies, rituals, and events are organized inclusively. By doing so, communities can foster an environment where mutual respect for differing beliefs and teachings enhances peaceful coexistence.

Living together in a multicultural society, as seen in Thailand, is a way of life

¹ Banjerd Singkaneti, *Fundamental Principles of Rights, Liberties, and Human Dignity under the Constitution*, 2nd ed. Bangkok: Winyuchon Publishing House, 2014, p. 104.

shaped by continuous learning and social construction. Culture is not static; rather, it is fluid and constantly evolving through exchanges and integrations between different cultural traditions. This ongoing process results in a complex and diverse cultural landscape where knowledge and traditions are shared and reshaped over time. In the contemporary world, cultural exchanges have become even more dynamic due to globalization and increased human mobility. As people travel and interact across borders, cultural integration and adaptation occur continuously, reflecting the essence of multiculturalism. Scholars define multiculturalism as a set of beliefs and perspectives shared by diverse social groups, fostering interconnections between traditions, beliefs, and ways of life. It represents the coexistence of people from different backgrounds, engaging in social interactions while valuing diversity in aspects such as clothing, cuisine, religious beliefs, and cultural expressions. Multiculturalism also encompasses varied thought patterns, attitudes, and behaviors, reflecting the intricate relationships between people's ways of life and their natural and social environments.² Therefore, multiculturalism refers to the diversity of human lifestyles shaped by differences in ethnicity, religion, language, culture, and identity.³

III. CONCEPTS OF HUMAN DIGNITY

The historical development of the term “dignity” has led to various definitions across different cultures and periods. In Roman thought, *dignitas* referred to personal honor recognized by the public, thus signifying a status conferred upon individuals rather than an inherent quality possessed by all.

The concept of human dignity has been extensively discussed in moral, ethical, and political discourse, particularly in the context of the intrinsic right of every individual to be respected and treated with moral consideration. It represents an inherent rational belief within individuals, an inviolable right closely linked to principles of value, respect, self-esteem, self-determination, human rights, and other rational considerations. The term “dignity” was first used in Latin before the Renaissance, later adopted into French and, ultimately, English. As a longstanding philosophical concept, “dignity” has been widely interpreted and applied in political science, law, and scientific ethics – particularly in debates concerning genetic research, euthanasia, and suicide, where human dignity serves as a critical argument in ethical deliberations.

If humans were capable of existing in complete isolation, principles protecting dignity, rights, and freedoms would be unnecessary. However, regardless of whether philosophers perceive human nature as inherently good or bad, one undeniable fact remains: humans are inherently social beings who cannot exist apart from society or the state. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue

² Collins English Dictionary (2003).

³ Phra Maha Mongkolkan Thitathammo and Aphornrat Lertphairod, “Coexistence in a Multicultural Society in Thailand: A Case Study of Multicultural Society in Mueang District, Chiang Mai Province,” *Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University Journal*, no. 5 (September – December 2020): 3.

that the development of protections for human dignity, rights, and freedoms coincided with the emergence of organized society and the state. As human communities formed out of necessity, they developed diverse cultural traditions and lifestyles, resulting in distinct attitudes, values, and behaviors. Culture, in this sense, represents humanity's collective effort to address various challenges in life, with solutions differing across societies. Over time, these behaviors are refined and established as patterns widely accepted as ethical and are passed down through generations. The consolidation of these cultural patterns gives rise to overarching master patterns that shape and regulate societal norms.

Following this principle, the development of human dignity, rights, and freedoms within a cultural framework aligns with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which has become a foundational global standard. Although some debate persists regarding the universality of the philosophical foundations of the UDHR, an analysis of its origins, content, and objectives – along with its evolution over time - provides insight into the historical progression of human dignity as a legal and ethical principle. More than fifty years after its adoption, the UDHR is widely recognized as a fundamental safeguard for human rights and freedoms under the rule of law, protecting individuals from arbitrary and unjust state power. However, the UDHR is not the origin of the principles of human dignity, rights, and freedoms; rather, it serves as a key reference for international legal frameworks, guiding the development of mechanisms to uphold and protect these principles. A historical perspective on the protection of human dignity thus provides a clearer understanding of its idealistic foundations and its evolution as a universal principle in human rights discourse.⁴

IV. THE ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BUDDHISM IN SOCIETY

Buddhism consists of two words: “Buddha,” meaning the enlightened, awakened, and fully liberated one, and “Sasana,” meaning teachings or religion. Together, Buddhism refers to the religion of enlightenment, with the Triple Gem -Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha - as its highest refuge. These three components are interrelated and inseparable: the Buddha attained enlightenment and taught the Dhamma, the Saṅgha preserved and practiced the teachings, and the Dhamma itself is the foundation of both the Buddha's The Triple Gem, or Triratna, is considered the highest and most sacred treasure for Buddhists. The term “*ratna*” (gem) signifies preciousness, rarity, and supreme value. The knowledge within Buddhism stems from the Buddha's investigation and realization, forming various theories of wisdom. The Buddha's teachings can be categorized into three main aspects:

(i) Teachings that we're newly discovered, such as the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination.

⁴ Nathaworn Khunawaro (Thawornsak), *The Respect for Human Dignity in Buddhism* (Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Buddhist Era 2565 [March 8, 2022]).

(ii) Teachings that were reformed from pre-existing religious doctrines, such as the transformation of the concept of merit-making. While Brahmanism emphasized that merit should be given to Brahmins by birth, the Buddha redefined merit as an offering to those with pure morality (*Patigahaka*) and stipulated that the donor (*Dāyaka*) must be pure in intention before, during, and after the act of giving.

(iii) Teachings that contradicted existing practices, such as the refutation of animal sacrifice, which was traditionally considered an auspicious act. The Buddha opposed all forms of killing, considering them inherently sinful.

Although Buddhism encompasses vast knowledge, its ultimate goal remains Nibbana, the cessation of suffering and the cycle of birth and death. Attaining Nibbana signifies absolute liberation, where the mind remains pure and tranquil throughout life, and upon death, there is no rebirth into the cycle of existence. Since human beings cannot achieve this ultimate goal immediately, Buddhism outlines three progressive levels of benefits in life:

(i) *Ditthadhammikattha* (Present Benefits): These include good health, financial stability, employment, social status, debt-free living, and a harmonious family life.

(ii) *Samparayikattha* (Future Benefits): These involve mental contentment, confidence, fulfillment, courage, and peace of mind.

(iii) *Paramattha* (Ultimate Benefit): This refers to transcendence beyond worldly concerns, equanimity amidst life's changes, unshakable peace, and wisdom-led existence.

Buddhism is a religion based on rational doctrines, structured under two main pillars: the *Dhamma* (teachings) and the *Vinaya* (discipline). The core scriptures of Buddhism, known as the *Tiṭṭaka* (Three Baskets), comprise the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (Basket of Discipline), the *Sutta Piṭaka* (Basket of Discourses), and the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (Basket of Higher Teachings). Furthermore, Buddhist teachings are systematically categorized into 84,000 *Dhammakhandhas* (units of doctrine). From the past to the present, Buddhism has played a crucial role in shaping Thai society, encompassing various aspects of life, thoughts, and behaviors. Most importantly, Buddhism is a religion of action (*kammavāda* and *kiriyaavāda*) and perseverance (*viriyavāda*), rather than one of supplication or mere aspiration. The teachings of the Buddha emphasize practical application, guiding individuals to manage their lives in the present world and to take immediate action toward self-improvement.

Buddhism has been the national religion of Thailand, upheld and venerated by the Thai people for centuries. Many traditions, customs, and cultural expressions of the nation are deeply rooted in Buddhist principles. The Thai monarchy has historically played a significant role in supporting Buddhism, with every king being a devout Buddhist and serving as the Supreme Patron of Buddhism. This continuous royal patronage has reinforced Buddhism's enduring presence as the spiritual foundation of the Thai nation throughout history.

Thailand's national stability and sovereignty have been sustained in part due to the people's adherence to Buddhist principles. The Three Jewels - *Buddha* (the Enlightened One), *Dhamma* (the Teaching), and *Saṅgha* (the Monastic Community) - serve as the moral refuge for the Thai people. Buddhism has profoundly influenced Thai society, shaping national character traits such as peacefulness, generosity, courage, wisdom, and social harmony.

Although approximately 95% of Thailand's population identifies as Buddhist, contemporary Thai society presents a challenge in terms of genuine engagement with Buddhist teachings. Many Thai Buddhists adhere to Buddhism out of tradition or family registration rather than through active study and practice. Various factors contribute to this phenomenon, yet the development of society inevitably requires the moral guidance of religion to foster social progress and stability. Given its integral role in Thai society, Buddhism holds significance both nationally and globally, as summarized below:

(i) A Guiding Principle for Life: Buddhism provides a moral foundation for Thai people, influencing their daily behavior and interactions. The emphasis on kindness, compassion, and harmony fosters positive relationships and social cohesion.

(ii) A Framework for Governance: Thai kings have historically incorporated Buddhist principles into governance, such as the Ten Kingly Virtues (*Dasavidhārājadhamma*), principles of righteousness (*Dhamma-dhipateyya*), and collective harmony (*Aparihāṇiyadhamma*) in democratic rule.

(iii) A Unifying Force in Society: Buddhist teachings promote love, unity, and mutual compassion, making Buddhism a spiritual and cultural anchor for Thai society.

(iv) A Source of Thai Culture and Tradition: Buddhist rituals and customs shape key Thai cultural practices, including ordination ceremonies, weddings, merit-making traditions, and observances of Buddhist holy days, forming the basis of Thai identity and heritage.

(v) An Essential Social Institution: As a long-standing institution, Buddhism continues to influence Thai society in education, social ethics, and artistic expression.

(vi) A Root of Thai Civilization: Buddhist teachings are deeply integrated into the Thai way of life, influencing thought, behavior, and traditions. Over time, some aspects of Buddhism have evolved or intermingled with local beliefs, while others have remained pure and intact.

(vii) A National Identity: The long-standing presence of Buddhism has ingrained its values into Thai culture, fostering distinct national characteristics such as independence and generosity.

(viii) A National Heritage: Historical evidence suggests that Buddhism was introduced to the Suvarnabhumi region before the 5th century CE. The Thai monarchy, from the Sukhothai period onward, has continuously supported Buddhism, further cementing its status as the national religion.

(ix) A Contributor to Global Civilization: Thailand, as an ancient and culturally rich nation, has played a role in shaping global civilization through its Buddhist-inspired art and culture, which exhibit a distinct Thai identity.

(x) A Promoter of Global Peace: Buddhism has not only contributed to the advancement of civilization but also to global peace. Historically, Buddhism challenged the rigid caste system in India by rejecting birth-based social hierarchy and emphasizing moral conduct over lineage. By discouraging reliance on rituals and sacrifices, Buddhism redefined human agency, advocating for self-determination through ethical conduct. This ideological shift marked a significant movement toward human liberation.

Thus, Buddhism remains a cornerstone of Thai society, continuing to shape its moral, cultural, and philosophical foundations while contributing to broader human civilization and global harmony.⁵

V. CULTIVATING INNER PEACE FOR WORLD PEACE

World peace is the ultimate goal that all societies strive to achieve. However, world peace cannot be realized without inner peace at the individual level. When people attain inner tranquility, conflicts within families, communities, and between nations will diminish. This article focuses on approaches to cultivating inner peace and its impact on global peace.

Concept of Inner Peace: Inner peace refers to a state of mental tranquility, free from conflict and emotional stress. It results from self-awareness, emotional regulation, and the development of a positive attitude toward others.

Approaches to Cultivating Inner Peace: Mindfulness and Meditation: Practicing mindfulness and meditation helps individuals recognize and manage their emotions more effectively.

Forgiveness and Letting Go: These practices reduce resentment and frustration, promoting psychological calmness. **Compassion and Kindness:** Helping and understanding others fosters positive relationships and reduces conflicts. **Moral and Ethical Development:** Upholding integrity and ethical conduct builds trust within society. **Continuous Learning and Self-Improvement:** Embracing new ideas and enhancing interpersonal skills contribute to peaceful coexistence.

Impact of Inner Peace on World Peace: Reduces interpersonal and societal conflicts; promotes a culture of peace and mutual understanding; Encourages ethical leadership and policy-making that supports peace; establishes a foundation for sustainable development.

VI. SOME CONCLUSIONS

4.1. World peace begins with inner peace

When individuals achieve mental tranquility, their actions positively influence society and the world. Cultivating inner peace is, therefore, the first

⁵ Kosalathammanusit, Phra Khru. "Buddhism and the Development of Thai Society in the Thailand 4.0 Era." *Silpakorn University Journal*, no. 12, July – August 2019, p. 12.

crucial step toward building a peaceful and harmonious world. Forgiveness and Mindfulness: Paths to Reconciliation. In a society filled with conflicts and divisions, forgiveness and mindfulness play crucial roles in fostering reconciliation and peace. Whether at the personal, familial, communal, or societal level, forgiveness helps alleviate anger and pain, while mindfulness allows individuals to understand themselves and their surroundings better. These two elements contribute to social harmony and stability. The Meaning of Forgiveness and Mindfulness: Forgiveness” is letting go of anger, resentment, and the desire for retaliation against those who have wronged us. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or condoning the wrongdoing but freeing oneself from suffering and negative emotions. “Mindfulness” is being aware of the present moment, having control over emotions, thoughts, and behaviors without being driven by anger or sadness. Role of Forgiveness and Mindfulness in Reconciliation. Reduces Conflict and Hostility: Forgiveness diminishes feelings of enmity, while mindfulness enables rational decision-making rather than emotional reactions. Enhances Mutual Understanding: Mindfulness fosters active listening and appreciation of different perspectives without prejudice. Promotes Inner Peace: Letting go of anger and practicing mindfulness create psychological tranquility, which is fundamental to a strong and cohesive society. Prevents Violence and Conflicts: Societies that embrace forgiveness and mindfulness experience lower levels of violence and discord. Practical Approaches to Forgiveness and Mindfulness: Practicing mindfulness and meditation to regulate emotions. Accepting and understanding one’s emotions before extending forgiveness to others. Recognizing the benefits of forgiveness and understanding that anger does not resolve conflicts. Engaging in constructive and non-judgmental communication. Developing empathy to comprehend others’ motivations and circumstances.

4.2. Forgiveness and mindfulness are vital tools for fostering reconciliation

They not only reduce conflicts at the personal level but also cultivate a more compassionate and understanding society. Incorporating these principles into daily life leads to true peace and unity. Buddhist Compassion in Action: A Shared Responsibility for Human Development. Compassion is a fundamental Buddhist principle that fosters peace and harmony in society. Beyond personal virtue, compassion forms the basis for collective responsibility in human development at the individual, family, community, and global levels. This article explores the meaning of compassion, related Buddhist principles, and practical approaches to sustainable human development. Metta, or loving-kindness, is one of the Four Sublime States (*Brahmavihara*). It refers to an unconditional desire for others’ well-being, not only seeking to relieve their suffering but also encouraging their growth and prosperity. Compassion enables people to coexist peacefully, fostering understanding and mutual support. Buddhist Principles Related to Collective Responsibility. *Brahmavihara* (Four Sublime States): Loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity serve as ethical guidelines for human interaction. *Sangahavatthu* (Four Principles of Social Harmony): Generosity, kind speech, altruism, and impartiality

promote social unity. Ten Wholesome Actions (*Kusala Kamma Patha*): Ethical conduct in thought, speech, and action contributes to societal peace. Threefold Training (*Trisikkha*): Moral discipline, mental cultivation, and wisdom lead to sustainable human development. Practical Approaches to Human Development Through Compassion. Promoting education in both secular and spiritual aspects. Fostering a compassionate society by aiding the underprivileged and encouraging mutual understanding. Encouraging ethical development at personal and societal levels. Utilizing peaceful conflict resolution methods. Collaborating on social and environmental development initiatives to improve quality of life sustainably.

4.3. Buddhist compassion is not only a personal virtue but also a fundamental principle for societal and human development

Applying compassion through Buddhist teachings and concrete actions fosters sustainable progress and creates a world enriched with understanding, peace, and shared prosperity. Mindfulness in Education for a Compassionate and Sustainable Future. In an era of rapid global change, education serves not only as a tool for knowledge acquisition but also as a foundation for building a compassionate and sustainable future. Mindfulness in the learning process enhances awareness of the value of wisdom, peaceful coexistence, and balanced development. How Mindfulness Contributes to a Compassionate and Sustainable Future: Encourages empathy and understanding among learners; Reduces unnecessary competition, fostering collaborative learning and support; Promotes ethical decision-making by considering the broader impact of actions; Enhances deep learning by emphasizing comprehension over rote memorization; Supports responsible knowledge application to address social and environmental issues. Methods to Cultivate Mindfulness in Education: Practicing meditation and setting intentions before studying; Learning with a clear purpose and reflecting on the societal impact of knowledge; Taking breaks for reflection and reviewing lessons to deepen understanding

4.4. Mindfulness in education not only improves knowledge retention and accuracy but also forms the foundation of a compassionate and sustainable society

By recognizing the role of ethical learning and responsible knowledge application, we can create a balanced and beneficial future for all. Fostering Unity: A Collective Effort for Global Harmony. Unity is a crucial factor in building a peaceful and progressive society. In a world characterized by cultural, religious, and lifestyle diversity, fostering unity among individuals poses a challenge requiring collective efforts from all levels - individual, community, and international. Importance of Global Unity: Promote Peace and Reduce Conflicts: When people understand and accept differences, conflicts caused by biases or misunderstandings decrease; International Cooperation Can Help Solve Global Issues: Issues such as war, climate change, and inequality can be addressed through international collaboration; Sustainable Economic and Social Development: Unity promotes economic cooperation and social development; Collaboration Between Countries and Organizations Creates New Opportunities: Working together opens new avenues for technological,

educational, and healthcare development; Promote Human Rights and Equality: When society is united, it reduces discrimination and creates equal opportunities for everyone; Promote Understanding of Different Cultures and Religions: This leads to peaceful coexistence. Ways to Promote Unity at the Individual and Societal Levels: Education and Awareness: Foster understanding of cultural diversity and promote learning about the importance of unity through school curricula and social activities; Creative Communication and Dialogue: Provide spaces for open discussions and exchanges of opinions, using peaceful negotiation when conflicts arise within society or between nations; Collaboration at the Community and Global Levels: Support volunteer activities and projects that promote cross-cultural cooperation, as well as international collaboration in areas like public health, education, and the environment; Promote Equality and Human Rights: Support laws and policies that protect everyone's rights, and ensure equal opportunities for education and employment for all individuals.

4.5. The application of religious teachings in practice

Living together in society is natural, but it can also lead to problems such as misunderstandings, conflicts, and divisions. Therefore, creating a harmonious society is essential, and this can be achieved by promoting unity through the application of religious teachings. *Veera Ampansuk* (2008, p. 62) discusses the application of moral principles in the management of people to promote unity, focusing on four essential principles:

4.6. Saraniya Dhamma 6

Saraniya Dhamma 6 refers to the six principles that serve as a foundation for mutual remembrance, helping people to be unselfish, to think of others, to show kindness, and to foster connections based on goodwill. The six aspects are:

(i) Physical Action (*Kayakammā*): Acts of kindness, such as helping and supporting others and refraining from harming them.

(ii) Verbal Action (*Vācīkammā*): Speaking kindly, politely, and reasonably, avoiding slander or causing distress to others.

(iii) Mental Action (*Manokammā*): Thinking kindly toward others both in public and private, avoiding jealousy, ill-will, or malicious intent.

(iv) Public Property Sharing (*Sāthārika Bhājanīya*): Sharing resources when appropriate, demonstrating love and goodwill within the community.

(v) Shared Morality (*Sīla Sammānā*): Mutual affection and unity, following ethical conduct, maintaining a good reputation and behavior. By applying these principles, society can live together peacefully, fostering love, unity, and mutual support.

(vi) *Tiddhisāmannattā*: Having a common, righteous view, both in public and private, with fellow ascetics, meaning to agree on principles that lead to liberation, the cessation of suffering, and the resolution of problems.

4.7. Sangahavatthu 4

Sangahavatthu 4 refers to the four principles that help bind people's hearts

together and create mutual goodwill. They are:

- (i) Generosity (*Dāna*): Giving, sacrificing, and sharing to benefit others, cultivating unselfishness and cooperation.
- (ii) Pleasant Speech (*Piyavācā*): Speaking with kind, gentle, sincere words, refraining from rudeness, and saying what is beneficial and appropriate.
- (iii) Beneficial Conduct (*Atthacariya*): Helping and acting in ways that benefit others.
- (iv) Consistency (*Samānatā*): Acting with consistency and maintaining good conduct toward others at all times.

These principles are the foundation for peaceful coexistence in society, promoting kindness, selflessness, and mutual benefit.

4.8. Brahnavihāra 4

Brahnavihāra 4 refers to the four virtues related to love, compassion, joy, and equanimity:

- (i) *Metta* (Loving-kindness): Wishing for the happiness of others and acting with goodwill in all situations.
- (ii) *Karunā* (Compassion): Wishing for others to be free from suffering and helping them escape their distress.
- (iii) *Muditā* (Sympathetic Joy): Rejoicing in the success and happiness of others without envy or malice.
- (iv) *Upekkhā* (Equanimity): Maintaining a balanced mind, especially when witnessing the suffering of others when there is nothing we can do.

These principles promote love, understanding, and peace, encouraging a society where individuals act kindly, are happy for others, and maintain an impartial perspective in difficult situations.

4.9. Sappurisadhamma 7

Sappurisadhamma 7 refers to the seven qualities that make a person virtuous and wise. They are:

- (i) *Dhammannatā* (Righteous Understanding): Understanding the cause-and-effect relationship of actions.
- (ii) *Atthannatā* (Understanding the Goal): Understanding the purpose of one's actions and the consequences of one's behavior.
- (iii) *Attannatā* (Self-awareness): Knowing oneself, including one's capabilities, position, and limitations, and acting accordingly.
- (iv) *Mattannatā* (Moderation): Knowing balance in all things, living within one's means.
- (v) *Kālanatā* (Time-awareness): Managing time well, allocating time wisely for different tasks.
- (vi) *Parisanatā* (Community-awareness): Understanding the society and community in which one lives and adjusting accordingly.
- (vii) *Buddhinatā* (Wisdom in Choosing Associates): Understanding others

and selecting companions wisely.

These principles guide individuals to be virtuous, skilled, and effective members of society, encouraging self-awareness, moderation, and respect for others.

By applying these four sets of teachings – Saraniya Dhamma, Sangahavatthu, Brahnavihāra, and Sappurisdhamma – a society can foster love, unity, and peace. These principles guide individuals in their relationships, fostering mutual respect, harmony, and collective well-being. When everyone practices these teachings, it leads to a happy, united society where individuals contribute to the common good and live in harmony.⁶

VI. CONCLUSION

Unity is the key to creating a peaceful and prosperous world. Through the collective effort of all parties, from the individual level to the international level, we can build a society where everyone is accepted, respected and has the opportunity to develop equally. Promoting unity is not just an idea but a mission that we must all collaborate on to create a better future for generations to come. Living together in society will inevitably bring conflicts as people have differing thoughts, feelings, and actions. If conflicts arise and are not resolved, they will lead to division and the decline of society. Therefore, unity and reconciliation are the paths that enable people to love, cooperate, and bond together strongly to preserve the nation's essence for future generations.

Unity or reconciliation does not mean that everyone shares the same opinion, but rather that when differences arise, we can understand and utilize them to benefit the group and align with the primary goals set by that society. If conflicts or divisions occur, we must find ways to mend the rift, create love and unity, and strengthen the social bonds to guide the nation through challenges, aiming for progress while prioritizing the common good, which is the foundation of the nation's stability.

A society with unity, affection, and harmony—where people agree and work together - will prosper and live in peace. However, a divided society cannot achieve prosperity or peace. Building unity can only happen when Thai people develop public awareness, prioritize the common good, show generosity, respect differences, work together, and overcome conflicts. This will shape a unified society, advancing toward progress, creating goodness, and restoring peace to society once again.⁷

⁶ Dictionary of Buddhism by Somdet Phra Buddhaghosacharya (P.A. Payutto) 43rd Edition, February 2021.

⁷ Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Year 2, Issue 3, September - December 2019, Thonburi Rajabhat University.

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UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract:

In a world fraught with division and environmental crises, fostering unity and inclusivity is essential for safeguarding human dignity and achieving sustainability. The Buddha Dhamma, particularly its emphasis on interconnectedness, provides transformative insights to address these challenges. This article explores the foundational principle of Buddhist interconnectedness and its relevance to inclusivity and unity. Some practical applications, such as eco-temples, ESG-compliant events like the Vesak celebrations in Malaysia, and the recognition of Vesak as a public holiday, are shown to illustrate the merger of the Buddha's teaching with modern societal demand. Additionally, this article articulates how the Buddha's teaching could serve as an alternative or complementary civilisational force that can mend a world torn by the clash of civilisations.

Keywords: *Interconnectedness, inclusiveness, ESG compliance, eco-temples, Vesak, clash of civilisations.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Humanity faces pressing challenges in the 21st century, including deep social divisions, growing inequality, and the escalating climate crisis. These issues not only threaten peace and sustainability but also undermine human dignity. To address these interconnected challenges, we must embrace inclusive frameworks that recognise our shared humanity and ecological interdependence.

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Buddhism, with its timeless teachings on interconnectedness, offers profound guidance for achieving unity and inclusivity. Central to the Buddha Dhamma is the understanding that all beings are interdependent, as encapsulated in the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*). This realisation transcends individual ego and fosters a worldview of compassion, mutual respect, and shared responsibility.

This article explores how interconnectedness underpins unity and inclusivity, presents some tangible efforts, such as ESG-compliant events, eco-temples, and Vesak as a public holiday, as examples that illustrate the application of the Buddha's teaching in modern society, thus highlighting the transformative potential of Buddhist principles in promoting world peace and sustainability.

This article further examines the relevance of Buddhist insights to contemporary global challenges. It articulates the plausibility of Buddhism as an alternative or complementary civilisational force that can mend a world torn by the clash of civilisations.

II. BUDDHIST PRINCIPLE OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS

2.1. Central position of the principle of interconnectedness

The central position of the principle of interconnectedness is best illustrated by an encounter between Sāriputta and the Ven. Assaji. The story took place before Sāriputta became one of the Buddha's disciples. At that time, Sāriputta and his close friend Moggallāna were wandering ascetics, searching for the truth. They had heard about the Buddha but had not yet met him. One day, Sāriputta encountered Ven. Assaji, one of the Buddha's first five disciples, and this encounter became a turning point in his spiritual journey.

Sāriputta, upon seeing Ven. Assaji was struck by the serenity and peaceful demeanour of the monk. Being an experienced seeker of truth, Sāriputta felt an immediate recognition of something profound in Assaji's presence. He approached Ven. Assaji, with great respect and inquired about the teachings that had led him to such peace.

Ven. Assaji, instead of giving a lengthy discourse, simply replied with a brief but powerful statement that encapsulated the essence of the Buddha's teaching. He said: "Of things that arise from a cause, that cause the Tathāgata has told; and how they cease to be, so said the great *Samana*".¹

Upon hearing these verses, Sāriputta gained the first stage of sainthood, *Sotāpanna*. Herein, Ven. Assaji aptly summarised the Buddha's teaching into this simple yet profound statement of Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*).

2.2. Understanding interconnectedness

According to this teaching, all phenomena arise due to specific causes and conditions, and just as they arise, they also cease when their causes and conditions are no longer present.

¹ *Mahā-Vagga* 1.23.1.

Since all phenomena are interdependent and do not exist by themselves, there is, in reality, no self or “I”. This concept of no-self, or Anattā, challenges the notion of a fixed, independent self. Instead, it emphasises that our existence is shaped by our interactions with others and the environment. This understanding encourages individuals to transcend egoistic tendencies and embrace the interconnectedness of all life. This principle thus dismantles the illusion of separateness, fostering a sense of unity and mutual dependence among all beings. This concept of Anattā thus reinforces inclusivity by dismantling the barriers created by the delusion of “I” or ego and identity. By realising that all beings are interconnected, individuals are encouraged to treat each other with respect and compassion, irrespective of differences.

Furthermore, by understanding that the so-called “I” is dependent on others, we come to realise that in “I” there are “others”, and in “others” there is “I”, (much like the Yin-Yang symbol in Taoism, in which the black fish has a white eye, and the white fish has a black eye, and both hugging or complementing each other), we begin to see each other with greater empathy.

Furthermore, interconnectedness is not a metaphysical principle or a speculative theory but a practical foundation of Buddhist ethics. In spiritual practice, the recognition of how things arise and cease helps practitioners to understand the nature of suffering (*dukkha*), how it arises (*samudaya*), how it can cease (*nirodha*), and how to overcome it (*magga*) through ethical conduct (*sīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*). This teaching thus encourages actions that promote harmony and well-being.

The practice of Sila, for instance, emphasizes the concept of non-violence and the precept of no killing. The Buddha, in advising Rahula, said, “Do you feel pain and regard it as unpleasant for you? If you do, you should not commit any wrong act in secret or in open. If you do, you cannot escape from pain.”² This teaching is of great significance as it establishes the basic principle of morality based on reciprocity—which is but another ramification of the law of interconnectedness. (This is unlike morality based on some external authoritarian dictate). When the Buddha saw a group of children beating a snake, he admonished them: “Whosoever, seeking his happiness, harms with rods other beings, experiences no happiness hereafter.”³ This is a basic concept of building peace.

Likewise, practices such as cultivating loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) arise from the recognition that one’s happiness is intertwined with the happiness of others. The cultivation of *mettā* and *karuṇā* plays a vital role in promoting inclusivity, as it nurtures empathy and goodwill toward all.

² MN 61.

³ Dhṛp 131.

The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*,⁴ for instance, exhorts practitioners to extend loving-kindness to all beings, regardless of their differences: “Whatever beings there are — weak or strong, long or short, big, medium-sized or small, subtle or gross, (*Ye keci pāna bhūtatthi Tasāvā thāvarā vā anavasesā Dighā vā ye mahantā vā Majjhimā-rassakānuka thūlā*), those visible or invisible, residing near or far, those that have come to be or have yet to come, (without exceptions) may all beings be joyful (*Ditthā vā yeva aditthā Ye ca dūre vasanti avidūre Bhūtā vā sambhavesi vā Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhi-tattā*). Such teachings are profoundly inclusive, breaking down barriers of race, class, and religion, and even extended to beings yet to be born, thus bearing in mind our responsibility to the future generation.

In the modern context, the understanding of interconnectedness has profound implications. It can bridge cultural and social divides, creating a foundation for dialogue and collaboration. For instance, recognising shared humanity encourages efforts to address global challenges, such as climate change and inequality, which require collective action.

2.3 Interconnectedness, unity, and inclusivity

From its inception, Buddhism has exemplified unity and inclusivity. However, at a glance, it may seem that the Buddha advocated exclusiveness for his teachings, as the Buddha mentioned:

Of paths, the Path of Eight Constituents is the noblest; of truths, the Four Noble Truths are the noblest; of the *Dhammas*, the absence of craving (i.e., *Nibbana*) is the noblest; of the two-legged beings, the All-Seeing Buddha is the noblest.”⁵ This is the only Path, and there is none other for the purity of vision. Follow this Path, it will bewilder *Mara*.⁶ Following this Path, you will make an end of *Dukkha*. Having myself known the Path which can lead to the removal of the thorns of moral defilements, I have shown you the Path.⁷

The Buddha’s assertion on the exclusivity of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path as the path to liberation is an assertion based on His personal experience. If He experienced it as such, it must be stated as such. His assertion means the Buddhist approach to inclusivity does not go to the extent of compromising the Truth he discovered.

However, the Buddha reminded us in *Majjima Nikāya* 95: “If a person has conviction, his statement is my conviction ‘upholds the truth. But he hasn’t yet come to the definite conclusion that ‘Only this is true; anything else is worthless.’ To this extent, Bharadvaja, there is the upholding of the truth. To this extent, one upholds the truth.”⁸

⁴ Sn 1.8.

⁵ Dhṛp 273.

⁶ Dhṛp 274.

⁷ Dhṛp 275.

⁸ *Majjima Nikāya* 95, Caṅkīśutta available on <https://suttacentral.net/mn95/en/bodhi>

Therefore, for an ordinary worldling (*puthujjana*) who has yet to realise the truth, he/ she should hold on to the conviction that the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path are the truths, without further stating that anything else is useless. The Buddha had exemplified His approach to inclusivity in various ways, without compromising the Truth he discovered.

For example, He debated with Upāli, a well-known lay disciple of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, over the subject of *Kamma*. This was to uphold the truth. Later, when Upāli decided to become a disciple of Him after being defeated in the debate, the Buddha advised him to continue to support his old religious teachers as he used to.⁹ This was a show of respect, a demonstration of inclusivity.

The Buddha's establishment of the Saṅgha (monastic community) was another revolutionary example. The Saṅgha welcomed people from all castes, genders, and social backgrounds. In an era when caste hierarchies dominated social structures, the Buddha's egalitarian principles were ground-breaking, reflecting a profound commitment to unity and inclusivity.

This is further exemplified by historical figures like Emperor Ashoka, who embodied the Buddhist ethos of inclusivity. After embracing Buddhism, Ashoka promoted policies of religious tolerance, social welfare, and nonviolence. His edicts reflected a commitment to unity, encouraging mutual respect among diverse communities,¹⁰ thus laying the foundation for a harmonious and inclusive society.

In Southeast Asia, Buddhist kings often used Buddhist principles to govern inclusively, fostering harmony among multi-ethnic and multi-religious populations. For example, King Rama I (1737 - 1809) granted land for the construction of mosques¹¹ and allowed Muslims to govern their communities based on Islamic laws. King Narai (1656 - 1688) welcomed French Catholic missionaries to build churches and spread Christianity in Ayutthaya.¹² These historical precedents demonstrate the practical application of Buddhist inclusivity in fostering social cohesion.

These historical precedents continue to resonate in contemporary efforts to build unity and inclusivity on a global scale. For instance, in contemporary times, Buddhist organizations have actively promoted inclusivity and social justice. Initiatives like interfaith dialogues that emphasise the shared values of compassion and mutual respect across religious traditions are often held. The World Fellowship of Buddhists has a standing committee on Interfaith Dialogue¹³ that actively promotes such dialogue and interactions. Such efforts

⁹ *Majjima Nikāya* 56, Upālisutta available on <https://suttacentral.net/mn56/en/bodhi>

¹⁰ Walpola Rahula (1967), p. 4.

¹¹ Kudi Charoenphat in Bangkok is a mosque of the Muslim Shia sect or Chao Sen, built during King Rama I's reign,

¹² Alan Strathern, *Tensions and Experimentations of Kingship: King Narai and his response to missionary overtures in the 1680s*. accessed on 26th Jan. 2025, available on <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid>

¹³ World Fellowship of Buddhists, accessed on 26th Jan. 2025, available on <https://www>.

highlight the relevance of Buddhist insights in addressing modern challenges.

It may thus be seen that the teachings of the Buddha remain relevant today, especially in addressing societal divisions and fostering human dignity. By advocating for inclusivity and emphasizing the shared nature of suffering, Buddhism offers a transformative perspective that encourages individuals and communities to work together for the common good.

III. PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Apart from the above historical and contemporary examples, this section will show a few further practical examples of modern times. It is hoped that these tangible efforts inspired by Buddhist principles, as well as meeting the demands of our modern times, would inspire more Buddhist organisations to emulate.

3.1. ESG compliance in organising events

On May 6, 2023, the Selangor state government in Malaysia, together with the Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia (Young Buddhist Foundation of Malaysia), the Buddhist Missionary Society of Malaysia, and 45 Buddhist groups, held the Selangor Vesak Day celebration at the Bodhi Park–Samadhi Vihara complex. There was a huge crowd that day, and there was an endless stream of people. When people came through the gate of Bodhi Park, they immediately saw a small truck. It was placed in a conspicuous position and attracted attention. People couldn't help but wonder what was that truck?

It turned out that this truck was a compost truck, carrying an electric composter – specifically turning food waste into fertilizer. The organiser deliberately placed it in a conspicuous position to convey an important message and commitment – environmental protection and protection of all living beings.¹⁴

It is not uncommon for Buddhist organisations to adopt environmentally friendly practices when organising events, but to adopt a complete environmental protection concept in a large scale event, complying with ESG (Environment, Social, Governance)¹⁵ and applying ISO14067: 2018¹⁶ to calculate the amount of carbon emitted during the event, is a first for the Buddhist community and even a first for the Selangor state government.

While we are all proud to host events, people are now increasingly aware that events themselves spread carbon that causes global warming and climate change. According to the Malaysian Green Technology Agency

wfbhq.org/about-office-bearers.php

¹⁴ Ang, Choo Hong (2023).

¹⁵ Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) sets standards for a company's impact on the planet and people. Investors use ESG criteria to evaluate potential investments. It covers environmental responsibility, social relationships (employees, suppliers, and communities), and governance, which ensures ethical management and control.

¹⁶ ISO 14076:2018. *Green House Gases, Carbon Footprints of Products, Requirements and Guidelines for Quantification*, accessed on 26th Jan 2025, available on <https://www.iso.org/standard/71206.html>

report, in an event, transportation will account for 54% of carbon emissions, energy use will account for 35% of carbon emissions, and according to the United Nations Development Program, food waste will account for 5% of greenhouse gas emissions.”¹⁷ said Ang Choo Hong, the chairman of Yayasan Belia Buddhist Malaysia. “Therefore, we should be more sensitive and cautious when preparing for such events, and this time, we have adopted the concept of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) in preparing for the Vesak Day celebrations.

By the ESG concept, the organiser used cost subsidies to encourage the public to use public transportation, including buses, minibuses, or shared private cars; used compostable paper tableware; used LED light bulbs; used Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) papers; did not use staples on papers; the souvenirs were rice packed in cloth bags, and the opening ceremony was planting of trees by distinguished, etc.

Also, the organiser offered vegetarian food throughout the event. Today, 52% of greenhouse gases come from the livestock industry. Reducing meat consumption is equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from animal husbandry, which also reduces global warming and achieves environmental protection effects.

After the event, an expert consultant¹⁸ calculated that the event emitted 12450.51 kgCO₂e. The largest emission comes from transportation, reaching 6619.7 kgCO₂e, followed by food, reaching 2093 kgCO₂e. After dividing the total carbon emissions by the number of attendees, 4090, the carbon emission per person was 3.044 kgCO₂e. (Ang, Choo Hong, 2023.)

The carbon-reduction function of the composting machine in this event was to turn food waste into compost. This event produced 10 kg of compost. This compost was later used to fertilise trees planted by distinguished guests. This was just one of the carbon reduction efforts of the entire event. The main purpose of placing the composting machine at the entrance was to attract attention and arouse people’s awareness of environmental protection.

ESG is not limited to environmental concerns but covers social and governance as well. In this event, food was purchased from nearby Muslim-Malay vendors. It is a social concept that whatever we do, we want it to be beneficial to the neighbourhood as well.

The inclusivity of Vesak celebrations in Selangor was further evident in their outreach to diverse communities where people of different faiths and racial origins were invited. By inviting people of different religious and cultural backgrounds to participate, these events embodied the spirit of unity that lies at the heart of Buddhist teachings. Such initiatives not only celebrate the Buddha’s life and teachings but also foster mutual respect and collaboration among diverse groups, promoting human dignity and societal harmony.

¹⁷ UNDP Food Waste Index Report (2021).

¹⁸ Netseco Report 2023. Unpublished.

The above initiative serves as an example of how the Buddhist community could contribute to human welfare and environmental protection by embedding its philosophy of interconnectedness in ESG. As more and more international events are organized, it is time that the global Buddhist community seriously consider the adoption of ESG in event organization.

3.2. Transforming temples into eco-temples

The Buddha had taught about the relationship between humans and the environment. When human beings are obsessed with wrongdoing, the environment will deteriorate. He said, “Since folks are ablazed with illicit lust, overwhelmed by unrighteous greed, obsessed by wrong doctrines, on such as these the sky rains not steadily. It is hard to get a meal. The crops are bad. Accordingly, many come by their ends.”¹⁹

The Buddha further demonstrated how to live in harmony with nature. Once, the Buddha stayed at Palelai forest, with no monk or layman in attendance. There, the Buddha lived happily with food and water offered by an elephant and honey by a monkey.²⁰ This story is still celebrated today by the Barua and Chakma people of Bangladesh²¹ as the *Madhu Purnima* (honey full moon) festival.

Since temples (including Buddhist establishments with temple-like buildings) are important spiritual and cultural hubs in Buddhist communities, transforming these sacred spaces into eco-temples would reflect the Buddhist commitment to living in harmony with nature. Present-day eco-temples can incorporate sustainable practices such as solar energy, rainwater harvesting, and organic gardening. They can also educate visitors about environmental stewardship, linking ecological consciousness with spiritual development.

For example, the Bodhi Park in Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, had a green policy in place, educating and guiding the public on how to use the Bodhi Park, such as saving water and electricity and practicing recycling. It has a solar energy system, a rainwater harvesting installation, and a relatively large garden of trees and plants to enhance the environment. Its solar energy initiative was honoured by the Sustainable Energy Commission of Malaysia (SEDA) as an example for others to follow.²²

Another example is the Wat Pa Maha Chedi Kaew temple in Thailand, also known as the “Temple of a Million Bottles”. The temple is constructed from recycled glass bottles, highlighting the Buddhist commitment to sustainability and interconnectedness.²³ The International Network of Engaged Buddhists has an initiative that promotes the concept and application of ecology in temples.²⁴

¹⁹ AN 56.

²⁰ Buddhist Scripture Retrieval, Mahidol University. Accessed on 26th Jan. 2024. Available on https://mahidol.ac.th/budsir/E_hist66.htm

²¹ Wisdom Quarterly (2010).

²² Sustainable Energy Malaysia (2018).

²³ Thai PBS World, (2022), p.11.

²⁴ Seeds of Peace, (2024), p. 10.

Dr. David Loy, a renowned Buddhist scholar, has produced a book on Eco-Dhamma, laying the doctrinal foundation for temples to adopt ecology in their operation.²⁵

The above cases resonate with what was taught by the Buddha more than 2500 years ago. The Buddha was particularly conscious about preserving the natural environment, particularly trees and water. His association with trees throughout His life is a testimony of his close affinity to the natural environment. It is well known that He was born under an Asoka tree in Lumbini, His first meditation during the ploughing festival was under a Jambu tree, he attained Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, and entered into *Mahāparinibbāna* in between two Sala trees. And for most of his ministry he stayed in groves such as Jetavana and Veluvana. He set rules for monks not to destroy vegetable growth,²⁶ to eat only seedless fruits²⁷ (eat with respect and preservation), and not to wear sandals made from palm leaves or young bamboo.²⁸ He advised on gratitude to the natural environment: “The tree that gives you pleasant shade, to sit and lie at ease, you should not tear its branches down.”²⁹

On the conservation of water, the Buddha made rules to prevent the contamination of water. For example, He forbids excrement or urine into water³⁰ or spit into water.³¹ He advised on proper upkeep of wells and toilets, to be lined with stones or bricks, and to cover wells and to clean and turn upside down bowls after use.³²

Thus, these eco-temples can serve as living reminders of the interdependence between humans and the environment, as taught by the Buddha. They not only reduce environmental impact but also educate communities about sustainable practices.

3.3. Vesak as a Public Holiday

The celebration of Vesak, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, can serve as a powerful example of inclusivity and peaceful co-existence.

Recognising Vesak as a public holiday can be a significant step toward fostering inclusivity and promoting mutual respect among diverse communities. By making Vesak a public holiday, governments would send a powerful message about the importance of acknowledging and respecting cultural and religious diversity. This fosters a sense of unity and shared humanity, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and harmonious society.

²⁵ Loy, David, (2019), p. 22.

²⁶ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Pacittiya* rule 11.

²⁷ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Cullavagga*. (V.5.2)

²⁸ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Culla-vagga*.

²⁹ *Rukkhadhamma Jataka* (*Jataka* 74)

³⁰ *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Sekiya* 74.

³¹ *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Sekiya* 75.

³² *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Culla-vagga*.

The importance of Vesak as a public holiday cannot be underestimated. From the social psychological perspective, Vesak as a public holiday would enhance and expand the collective memory of all citizens, as exemplified in the case of Malaysia.³³

Collective memory is often maintained through tangible rituals, and Vesak celebration itself is such a ritual. Further classifying Vesak Day as a public holiday would expand this collective memory, that is, extend it to all Malaysians, Buddhists or otherwise, and also enhance the collective memory of all communities. On this public holiday, whether you are a Buddhist or not, you would remember this day and live a different life on this day. Whether one joins the celebration, takes a holiday abroad, or simply lazes at home, it would be a day different from other days that one would likely remember.³⁴

Furthermore, the recognition of Vesak as a public holiday would also accelerate the development of Buddhism. In the case of Malaysia, Vesak as a public holiday reminds the majority of Chinese Buddhists of their identity as Buddhists and inspires them to learn about Buddhism. In 1949, there was no distinction between gods and Buddhas. (At that time, those who signed the petition calling for Vesak Day to be a public holiday also included some syncretic form of Chinese temples). After Vesak Day became a public holiday in some states in 1949, traditional Chinese religious believers generally identified themselves as Buddhists.³⁵ This identification as Buddhists certainly helps in the promotion of Buddhism.

Perhaps it is worth noting that the Singapore Select Committee 1950, in rejecting an appeal for Vesak as a public holiday in the island, said, “Vesak as a public holiday should await the expected revival of orthodox Buddhism and should not be used as a means to accelerate that revival.”³⁶ This message implied that Buddhism had not revived to a considerable scale, and the declaration of Vesak as a public holiday would become a means of accelerating that revival, which the government was not obliged to do. Interestingly, the declaration of Vesak as a public holiday in Penang, Kedah, Perak, and Malacca in 1949 proved the validity of the above point as it had motivated the Singapore Buddhists to work harder and, hence, accelerate the revival of Buddhism in Singapore.³⁷

Furthermore, after becoming a public holiday, Vesak Day has become the most appealing “totem” in the Buddhist movement. Every year on Vesak Day, Buddhist temples and organisations would decorate with lights and launch various programmes to attract the attention of the masses to Buddhism, strengthen people’s identity with Buddhism, and directly promote the development of Buddhism.³⁸

³³ Ang, Choo Hong, 2021, p. 62.

³⁴ Ang, Choo Hong, 2021, p. 65.

³⁵ Ang, Choo Hong, 2024, 70.

³⁶ The Straits Times, 19 July 1950, p. 4.

³⁷ Ang, Choo Hong (2021), p.46.

³⁸ Ang, Choo Hong (2024), 65.

It is noteworthy that the following countries or territories have declared Vesak (or the Buddha's birthday on the 8th day of the 4th lunar month) as a public holiday: Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan (Nirvana day), India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, South Korea, Hong Kong, Macao, and Indonesia.³⁹ It is most heartening to know that even Muslim-majority countries like Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia have Vesak as a public holiday.

However, there are countries, including countries with substantial Buddhist populations, that do not have Vesak as a public holiday. The global Buddhist community and the International Council of Vesak Day as well as other stakeholders, should petition the governments of those countries to declare Vesak as a public holiday in those countries. This will foster a sense of shared heritage and underscore the value of tolerance, inclusivity, and harmonious co-existence.

IV. PRINCIPLE OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS: AN ALTERNATIVE PATH TOWARD GLOBAL PEACE AND SUSTAINABILITY?

While acknowledging that the teachings of the Buddha remain relevant today, especially in addressing societal divisions and upholding human dignity, one should not overlook the bigger forces that are tearing the world apart and creating enormous suffering for all beings. I am referring to the clash of civilizations in global politics.

4.1. Clash of civilisations

The end of the Cold War marked a pivotal moment in history, with global power dynamics shifting and new ideological battles emerging. Samuel P. Huntington famously argued that this new world order ushered in the “clash of civilisations,” primarily between Western and Islamic civilisations.⁴⁰ Huntington's thesis contends that cultural and religious differences, rather than ideological or economic ones, would become the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. These two civilisations dominate global affairs today, not only through geopolitical influence but also through the shaping of cultural and social structures. While both Western and Islamic civilisations are rich in historical, intellectual, and social strengths, they also have profound weaknesses that contribute to global unrest and dehumanisation.

The concept of the “self” or “I” arising from monotheistic beliefs is a central tenet in both Western and Islamic thought. The affirmation of the self in these belief systems has led to exclusiveness, dualistic thinking, and, in some cases, extremism. Monotheism, by definition, stresses the worship of a single, all-powerful God, which, while promoting unity within a specific faith community, can also lead to a sense of superiority, exclusiveness, and isolation from others. The emphasis on the individual, or “I,” has reinforced notions of identity that are rigid and self-contained, further entrenched by the language of moral absolutism that often accompanies religious discourse.

³⁹ Ang, Choo Hong (2021), p.70.

⁴⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, (1996), p. 201.

This is particularly obvious when each tried to project its own identity and symbolism. These attitudes have fostered ideological polarisation and conflict, as different “I” or groups clash over their beliefs, resulting in societal fractures and, at times, violent extremism.⁴¹

4.2. Consumerism, Dehumanisation

Furthermore, consumerism has permeated the whole world, Western and Islamic civilisations not excluded, contributing to the dehumanisation of individuals and communities. The materialism that characterises modern society places a disproportionate focus on wealth, power, and personal consumption, often at the expense of spiritual and social well-being. The rapid spread of consumerist ideologies has led to an erosion of personal and communal values, as individuals increasingly define themselves by their possessions and consumption habits rather than by their relationships or shared ethical values. This dehumanisation of individuals – reducing them to mere consumers – has perpetuated a global system that prioritises economic growth over social and environmental sustainability, often neglecting the issues like poverty and inequality that it created.⁴²

4.3. The alternative path

In stark contrast to the individualism and consumerism that dominate the world today, the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness and “No-self” offers an alternative worldview that stands in opposition to the self-affirmation found in monotheistic belief systems. This Buddhist insight of interconnectedness and “No-Self”, had already been discussed under Sections 2.2 and 2.3.

However, it is deemed appropriate to reemphasise here certain points of interconnectedness and “No-self” that are relevant in global politics. The idea of “No-self” does not deny individual existence but rather rejects the notion of a permanent, unchanging self that exists independently of others. This understanding fosters a sense of inclusiveness, pluralism, and mutual respect, as individuals recognise that their identity is shaped by their relationships with others and the environment. The interconnectedness of all beings implies that the well-being of one is inherently linked to the well-being of others, creating a foundation for empathy, compassion, and cooperation. These are important values in global politics.

Further, the principle of interconnectedness offers a pathway toward greater peace and harmony. The concept of No-self helps dismantle the walls of exclusivism that often arise from the affirmation of a singular identity. If individuals and civilisations can embrace the notion that all people are interconnected, there is potential for greater social harmony and collective action to address global challenges.

Arising from the principle of interconnectedness is the Buddhist “Middle Path – *Majjhima paṭipadā*”, a key element of the Buddhist worldview that

⁴¹ Ang, Choo Hong (2019), p. 270.

⁴² Dieynaba Gabrielle Ndiaye (2022), p. 80.

advocates for a balanced approach to life that avoids extremes of sensual pleasure and extreme deprivation.⁴³ In the context of world affairs, this principle can guide international relations, encouraging diplomacy and dialogue rather than polarisation and conflict. The Middle Path fosters a mindset that seeks understanding and compromise, rejecting the dualistic thinking that often characterises political and ideological disputes. This approach can lead to a more peaceful world order, where cooperation between civilizations is prioritised over competition and rivalry.

One of the root causes of global political conflicts is the struggle to control the limited global resources (which is now aggravated by climate change and environmental degradation). The principle of interconnectedness can contribute to sustainable development efforts by encouraging a shift in values from wanton consumption to spiritual and communal well-being. This would entail upholding the Buddhist concept of moderate or sufficiency consumption, as elaborated in *bhojane mattaññutā* (moderation in eating): “When a noble disciple is moderate in eating, he reflects carefully: I eat this food not for fun, not for taste, not for pleasure, not for beautification, not for decoration, but only for the maintenance and continuance of this body⁴⁴...” This teaching of sufficiency consumption is further reinforced by the Buddha’s advice that “contentment is the greatest wealth.”⁴⁵

Buddhist teachings emphasize the impermanence of material wealth and the importance of living in harmony with nature. If the world were to adopt this perspective, it could lead to a fundamental rethinking of how resources are managed and shared, creating a more equitable and environmentally responsible global system. Rather than pursuing growth for the sake of growth, societies would focus on meeting the needs of all people while maintaining the health of the planet, thus reducing conflicts.

While the idea of interconnectedness may seem idealistic in a world dominated by powerful states and competing ideologies, it offers a necessary counterbalance to the destructive tendencies of monotheistic absolutism and consumerism. By embracing the interconnectedness of all life, individuals and nations can move beyond the narrow confines of self-interest and work toward a global community characterised by mutual respect, compassion, and shared responsibility. In this way, the Buddhist principle of No-self can contribute to a more peaceful and sustainable world order, where the needs of the many are prioritised over the desires of the few.

In brief, in the “clash of civilisations”, it is important to recognise the weaknesses within both civilisations that contribute to conflict and dehumanization. The affirmation of the self and the exclusivism inherent in monotheistic belief systems, coupled with the rise of consumerism, have created a world order that is increasingly polarised and unsustainable. In

⁴³ MN 13.

⁴⁴ AN 7.64.

⁴⁵ Dhṛp 204.

contrast, the Buddhist principle of interconnectedness, with its emphasis on No-self, inclusiveness, and the Middle Path, would well offer a viable alternative that could contribute to global peace and sustainability. By embracing these values, humanity may find a way to transcend the divisions that define current global conflicts and move toward a future of greater cooperation and harmony.

4.4. The challenges and opportunities

While advocating that Buddhist insights could offer a plausible solution to the problems of the world today, one must also acknowledge that Buddhism by itself, at least at the present stage, is not a civilizational force to be reckoned with. Huntington contended that Buddhism is not a civilisational force, despite its great influence over China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. He acknowledged that Theravada Buddhist civilisation is alive in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia but contended that Buddhism does not form the foundation of a great civilisation.⁴⁶ Alfred Toynbee further classified Theravada Buddhism and Lamaism as fossil civilisations.⁴⁷

The Catholic Encyclopaedia published in 1910 describes Buddhism thus: “In short, Buddhism is all but dead. In its huge organisation, the faint pulsations of life are still discernible, but its power of activity is gone. The spread of European civilisation over the east will inevitably bring about its extinction.”⁴⁸ Of course, this description might not be true given the facts of the present day, but it is clear that, from a macro perspective, Buddhism does have its problems.

Hence, as a civilisation, Buddhism itself is at a critical juncture. If Buddhism fails to make a positive contribution to the survival of humanity at this time, then its relevance to the world will disappear, and it will truly qualify as a fossil civilization. But if Buddhism can overcome its challenges and make a contribution in the nick of time, it will meet the principle of historical development as noted by Toynbee: when civilisation responds correctly, it grows.

Fortunately, time offered an unprecedented opportunity for Buddhism. This is the time for Buddhism to overcome its challenges and contribute to all humanity. The advent of globalisation means that all civilisations, religions, cultures, and ideas have the opportunity (albeit not necessarily equally) to exert their influence on all of humanity. Although Buddhism is at a disadvantage in terms of organisational structure (including political and economic disadvantages), the potential for the globalisation of Buddhist thought cannot be ignored. In a conversation with Ikeda, Toynbee said, “The greatest event in present history, and one that is often neglected by the West, is the meeting of Buddhism in the West.”⁴⁹ This shows that Buddhism can be a force to be reckoned with in the West.

⁴⁶ Samuel P Huntington (1996), p. 48.

⁴⁷ Alfred Toynbee (1988), p. 34.

⁴⁸ The Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. II, 1910 – Buddhism, accessed on 26th Jan. 2025, available on <https://www.newadvent.org/>

⁴⁹ Daisaku Ikeda (2007), p. 139.

The world is in a state of flux, and the focus of international order is gradually shifting eastward. Futurist John Naisbitt says that the twenty-first century is an era of Asian renaissance.⁵⁰ This renaissance encompassed economics, politics, and culture. This means Buddhism, which has been nurturing Asia for 2,500 years, will follow the megatrend and re-emerge on the global stage, a trend that was accidentally accelerated by the events of 9/11.

After the 9/11 incident, the West suddenly became Islamophobic and was looking for countermeasures. The response included exploring Islam and dialoguing with Islam. In this process, Buddhism was naturally included. Nowadays, Buddhism is almost invariably involved in religious dialogues around the world. This is because thinkers and academicians are seriously considering whether there is any other doctrine or idea, apart from Christianity and Islam, that can save the suffering world. Buddhism, Confucianism, and Hinduism have all been considered.

The American sociologist P. Berger classified religions into “religion of confrontation” (referring to divinely inspired religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and “religion of interiority”⁵¹ (referring to mystical religions). People began to realise that among the many religions of interiority, Buddhism seemed to be the one best equipped to offer a solution to this world. Confucianism and Hinduism, though strong, lacked the transnational and tran-ethnic elements.

The advent of the information age has further facilitated the globalisation of Buddhism. The emergence of 5G and AI further accelerated this process. With geographical and language barriers dismantled and the world becoming borderless, an instantaneous and voluminous flow of information is already happening. This means that as long as Buddhists are willing to make an effort, a great deal of Buddhist information, including Buddhist teachings and ideas, will be transmitted to the world.

From the above analysis, it appears that although Buddhism is not the foundation of any major civilisation, time has provided an opportunity for it to grow. Although it is weak in organisational structure, it is strong in ideology. To sum up, Buddhism can contribute to the happiness and benefit of the world through its ideological approach.

4.5. Advocacy, implementation, dialogue

Political reforms can come from the top down or from the bottom up, but the promotion of ideas often comes from the top down, led by intellectuals with vision, knowledge, and courage, and cascaded to the grassroots. Sakyamuni Buddha and the 60 Arhats, who were the “intellectuals” of India at that time, were examples of those who promoted the truth they had realised to the world, and that has now spread all over the world.

⁵⁰ John Naisbitt (1995), p. 120.

⁵¹ Berger (1981), p. 14.

Today, if we want to promote Buddhist thought, we can follow the above example and start with tertiary institutions and research institutes. If Buddhist colleges and institutes have already made efforts in this direction, they should step up their efforts. If they have not yet done so, they should begin to develop talents in Buddhist thought. Only when there is a sufficiently large pool of people well versed in Buddhist thoughts can we truly promote it. At the same time, it is necessary to actively organise academic seminars in this field to create a climate for the study and promotion of Buddhist thought.

In this regard, it is also necessary to enter into the academic institutions of the West, which is still the centre of the world. The Buddhist community can make use of the convenience of information technology to promote Buddhist thought, riding on the trend of globalisation.

However, if Buddhist thought remains in the academic or research institutes, it will not be of much use to mankind. Therefore, it is important for Buddhist thought to reach out to the people and be internalised in their daily lives. Buddhist organisations can play an active role in this regard, including engaging the services of highly qualified monks and laypeople who can play a leading role in applying Buddhist thought in various fields such as politics, economics, culture, education, science, and medicine.

This work should include providing alternative thinking in these areas: awakening and encouraging people to correct social injustices and upholding human dignity. In recent years, Buddhism has done well in looking after the welfare of the community. This is commendable; however, it is weak in providing alternative thoughts to address the structured ills of the world.

Buddhism will not survive if it stays at the level of personal practice and does not address the structural ills of society. Buddhists' preference for life-releasing, giving alms, and recycling resources is admirable and is an important facet of Buddhist thought. However, Buddhists should also actively reform and provide alternative thoughts for the structural ills of politics, economics, and culture. Buddhists should not only release and protect life; they should participate in peace movements and defend human rights; they should not only give alms but also advocate an economic system that is in line with Buddhist thinking. Today, 8.5% of the world's population, or about 700 million people, live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$2.15 a day,⁵² as a result of the capitalist economic structure. Buddhists should endeavour to solve this problem at its root. Thai scholar Sulak Sivaraksa, speaking at a Buddhist - Muslim dialogue on Buddhists and Muslims Working Together in Southeast Asia, Bangkok, 26th-28th June, 2006, said: "When you use the money you earn from the capitalist economy to give relief to the poor, you should ask yourself, are you doing good or are you contributing to the economic system that exploits the weak?"

⁵² World Bank Group (2024).

Buddhist ideals cannot be truly accomplished if they are confined to Buddhist circles. Buddhist thought must play a part in the major civilisations of the world, bringing itself into the mainstream of world thought to truly benefit all beings. In this era of globalisation and dialogue, Buddhist ideas could be disseminated through the dialogue of religions and civilisations. The natural result of dialogue between religions or civilisations is that each school of thought will spread freely on the earth, and each school of thought will be able to draw nourishment from other schools of thought and thus grow stronger. In other words, the new civilisation of mankind will be a civilisation that is the result of the convergence of many human ideas.

In the area of religious dialogue, the efforts of the Buddhist community still leave much to be desired. It can be said that the Buddhist community does not have a deep understanding of the theoretical foundations of dialogue (including objectives, goals, limits, conditions, formulations, techniques, models, rules, etc). The Buddhist literature on this subject is less extensive and less in-depth than that of other religions. Dialogue requires specialised knowledge, and Buddhist knowledge or practice alone is not enough. Therefore, the Buddhist community can nurture dialogue talents so that they can effectively disseminate Buddhist ideas to the world.

V. CONCLUSION

Buddhist teachings on interconnectedness, unity, and inclusivity offer profound insights into the challenges facing the modern world. By fostering a sense of shared humanity and mutual responsibility, these principles contribute to human dignity, world peace, and sustainability. Practical initiatives such as ESG-compliant events, eco-temples, and the recognition of Vesak as a public holiday demonstrate the transformative potential of Buddhist thought.

In an era when the world is threatened by wars and environmental degradation, the Buddhist teaching of interconnectedness could serve as an alternative or complementary civilizational force in a world torn by the clash of civilizations, thus offering the world a pathway for greater peace and sustainability.

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UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN TIAN TAI BUDDHISM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR WORLD PEACE

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Abstract:

Stressing the unity of theory and practice, Tian Tai established a record-breaking philosophic framework in China. To union all Buddhist schools is a unique creation of Chinese Buddhism. To unite different cultures and religions, Tian Tai provides an insight to solve the problem. From Tian Tai's Classification of teaching, we can propose that all the religions are valid. People from different cultural backgrounds tend to believe in certain religions. We should also start to reflect on ourselves in our daily lives. Accept and tolerate differences while following one's tradition without criticizing others. Different groups and different schools should be tolerant of others and truly respect others. Tian Tai's Round and Inter-inclusive theory is the key to solving the differences of diversities in modern society.

Keywords: *Buddhism, unity, Tian Tai, world peace.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Chinese Buddhism and its core features

Since ancient times Chinese have tended to think holistically or inclusively. Confucians and Daoists tended to observe things as they are and, with increasing ontological penetration, to see differences. The wonder of the universe, for Confucianism and Daoism, is a harmony among diversities and even opposites. According to the Yin-Yang School, *the Yijing* (Book of Changes), and *the Daodejing* (Way and Virtue Classic), the universe is a united whole. It is composed of pairs of opposites: *yin* and *yang*, positive and negative, male and female. The interaction of *yin* and *yang* produces all things and all kinds of movement.¹

Jan Yunhua has argued: "The core of Chinese Buddhism surpasses the

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¹ Cheng (2006): 149.

boundary of religions, it represents the profundity of the Chinese Buddhism.”² The central philosophy of Chinese Buddhism was established as a consequence of the Chinese criticisms of *Mahāyāna* doctrines that originated in India, and Tian Tai was the first Chinese school. Following the holistic and inclusive thinking, Tian Tai masters adopted the *yuanjiao* (round teaching) and developed a philosophy of all in one and one in all. The core feature of Tian Tai is round, inclusive and surpassing the boundary of religions. Nowadays, our society is full of conflicts; it is necessary and significant to re-examine Tian Tai and its functions.

1.2. Tian Tai School on the unity of diversity

After the introduction of Buddhism to China, the first Chinese school to systematically develop its thoughts on theory and practice was Tian Tai. This is the first time that the Chinese expressed their understanding of Indian Buddhism with confidence. The real founder of the school was Zhiyi (538 - 597). most of his whole life was spent in practicing meditation in the Mount Tian Tai in modern Zhejiang, from which the school gets its name.³

Zhiyi constructed a vast syncretistic system of *Mahāyāna* thought and practice that aimed at giving a comprehensive overview of all of Buddhism so that people could find a place for all known modes of practice and doctrine. Confronted with the massive influx of *Mahāyāna* texts translated into Chinese, many of which directly contradicted one another in matters of both doctrine and practice, Zhiyi was faced with the challenge of accommodating the claim that all these texts represented the authoritative teaching of the Buddha. The solution he arrived at can be described as an insight into the interconnection between two central *Mahāyāna* doctrines: the concept of *upāya* (expedient means) and the concept of *śūnyatā* (emptiness). From the synthesis of these ideas, Zhiyi developed a distinctive understanding of the buddhanature, rooted especially in the universalist exposition given in *the Nirvāṇa Sūtra*.⁴

What is unique for Tian Tai is that both its doctrine and praxis stress the unity of diversity. This also reflects the fact that the founder, Zhiyi, lived in the divided China during the fifth century. Zhiyi himself experienced a divided China to a united China (from the Northern dynasty to the Sui dynasty). Zhiyi's biography shows that he studied and gave Dharma talks at an early stage and went to Tian Tai Mountain, meditating there for more than ten years. At his later stage, he gave lectures on Round and Abrupt meditation.

Its main theory contains three sections: (1) Classification of teachings (*pan jiao* 判教); (2) Round and inter-inclusive threefold truths (*san di yuan rong* 三諦圓融); and (3) *Samatha* and *vipaśyanā* (*zhi guan* 止觀).

1.3. The classification of teachings (*pan jiao*) to unite all Buddhist schools

The translation of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese produced a large number of volumes. It was easy for the beginners to be confused,

² Jan Yunhua (2000): 419.

³ Lyucheng (2024): 246.

⁴ Ziporyn (2004): 846a.

as some sūtras contradict others and the Chinese has the spirit of round and integration. They tried to unite them by analyzing the differences and synthesizing them together. Under this circumstance, Zhiyi developed this theory of “classification” to unite all Buddhists in the divided China at that time in the Southern and Northern dynasties (420 — 589). Zhiyi believed that the Buddha taught for forty-nine years in different places for different people, and he taught differently according to the audience’s capacities. Categorizing the Buddha’s doctrines will help people understand the teaching and enter the path without confusion. Facing a large volume of translated texts from India during the fifth century, the Chinese presumed all the teachings presented in different sūtras were taught by the Buddha, while they found that the contents of some sūtras contradicted other sūtras. The best way to solve this problem was to categorize his teachings according to their nature and contents, thus, Tian Tai formed the “Five Periods and Eight Doctrines”.⁵

1.4. Five periods

The Buddha’s teaching can be chronologically divided into five periods. Here, “chronically” does not mean that the sūtras composed time; rather, it refers to the time the Buddha taught to his followers in Mahāyāna tradition:⁶

- (i) The *Avatamsaka* Period: After the Buddha’s enlightenment, he taught the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* to bodhisattvas and Brahmins.
- (ii) The *Mṛgadāya* Period: The Buddha taught the four noble truths recorded in the *Āgamas*.
- (iii) The *Vaipulya* Period: The Buddha taught bodhisattva and compassion in the early *Mahāyāna* sūtras.
- (iv) The *Prajñāpāramitā* Period: There are no permanent dharmas. Things are by designation only; even the *nirvāṇa* and the Buddha are concepts only. We do not need to become attached to them. This kind of teaching is taught in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*.
- (v) The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Mahāparinirvāṇa* Period: Teachings are about expedient means (*upāya*) in the *Lotus Sūtra* and the Buddha-nature in the *Mahāyāna-mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*.

Within the doctrinal framework of the *Five Periods* (五時), it is the *Lotus Sūtra* (法華經) that stands as the culmination of the Buddha’s teachings, embodying what is known in *Tiantai* (天台) thought as the *Perfect Teaching* (圓教). The term “round” (*yuan*, 圓) holds profound significance within Chinese Buddhist philosophy, particularly within the *Tiantai* school. Unlike doctrines that present segmented or provisional truths, the *Perfect Teaching* is comprehensive and all-encompassing - free from sharp distinctions, hierarchies, or exclusions.

⁵ Lyu Cheng (2024): 492.

⁶ *Tiantai Four Teaching Guidelines* (T46, no.1931): 774c.

Buddhism, as elucidated in the *Lotus Sūtra* and interpreted by *Tiantai* master Zhiyi (智顗), operates as a system of *skillful means* (*upāya*, 方便), guiding practitioners from partial understandings toward a fully integrated realization of truth. While other Buddhist teachings are not considered erroneous, they are seen as provisional - stepping stones leading toward the ultimate doctrine of the *One Vehicle* (*eka-yāna*, 一乘), which finds its fullest expression in the *Lotus Sūtra*. The doctrine of the *Five Periods* is based on the chronological unfolding of the Buddha's teachings, systematically categorizing the *sūtras* according to their profundity and purpose. Each period represents an evolving stage in the transmission of Dharma, reflecting the Buddha's adaptation of teachings to the capacities of his audience. Zhiyi's classification provides a structured vision of how the entirety of the Buddha's teachings interconnect, culminating in the *Lotus Sūtra*, which transcends earlier distinctions and harmonizes all doctrines into a singular, perfect path. In this way, the *Tiantai* school presents a uniquely comprehensive understanding of Buddhist doctrine, illuminating the progressive nature of the Buddha's wisdom.

1.5. Eight doctrines

In the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha's teachings are not monolithic but rather tailored to the spiritual capacities and inclinations of different beings. This adaptive approach is encapsulated in the *Four Methods of Conversion* (四攝法), which categorize how the Buddha skillfully leads sentient beings toward liberation: (1) the *sudden teaching* (頓教), in which enlightenment is revealed instantly without reliance on gradual steps; (2) the *gradual teaching* (漸教), where wisdom unfolds progressively, suited to those who require step-by-step guidance; (3) the *secret indeterminate teaching* (秘密不定教), in which different listeners receive different meanings from the same teaching based on their capacities; and (4) the *express indeterminate teaching* (顯示不定教), where the same doctrine carries varying implications depending on the level of understanding of the audience.⁷

Complementing these methods are the *Four Dharmas of Teaching* (四教法), which refer to the varying doctrinal content expounded by the Buddha according to the spiritual receptivity of his audience. These include: (5) the *storehouse teaching* (藏教, *zang jiao*), which corresponds to the foundational teachings found in the *Āgamas* and serves as an entry point for those new to the Dharma; (6) the *pervasive teaching* (通教, *tong jiao*), which bridges earlier teachings and the deeper Mahāyāna path; (7) the *separate teaching* (別教, *bie jiao*), emphasizing more advanced Mahāyāna doctrines distinct from the foundational teachings; and (8) the *round teaching* (圓教, *yuan jiao*), which embodies the most complete and non-dualistic realization of the Buddha's wisdom. Zhiyi (智顗), the great systematizer of *Tiantai* (天台) doctrine, emphasized the necessity of contextualizing any *sūtra* within the framework of both the *Five Periods* (五時) and the *Four Methods of Teaching*. He taught that to fully comprehend the Dharma, one must examine not only the textual

⁷ *Tiantai Four Teaching Guidelines* (T46, no.1931): 774c.

content but also the time, place, and audience for whom it was delivered. Yet, doctrinal analysis alone is insufficient. Zhiyi insisted that true verification of the Buddha's teachings comes through direct experience and practice.⁸ Only by internalizing the Dharma through meditative insight and ethical conduct can one transcend mere intellectual understanding and arrive at the heart of the Buddha's wisdom.

Any level of practice is acceptable in Tian Tai. In Tian Tai, there is no best level; any method is just skillful and expedient means. Tian Tai may favor *the Lotus Sūtra* and *Mahāpravīrvaṇa Sūtra*, but it does not mean that other sūtras are useless. They are valid when one practices them. Tian Tai call themselves as Round teaching; by round here means anything is acceptable and there is no fixed position in the circle. Anyone who follows the Buddha's teaching, whether one is beginner or advanced, can be included in the Round. This is why Tian Tai is called Round and Inclusive Teaching. Round, inclusive are significant for modern society. We need to accept others; we cannot force others to give up their traditions. Any tradition and culture should be truly accepted. Actually, in early Buddhism, the Buddha does not deny other religions in India. What the Buddha denies is the extreme belief that there is a permanent unchanging self or Brahma. In Tian Tai, any level of practice is acceptable under the expedient means; anyone can receive benefits from the Buddha's teaching.

In the system of doctrinal classification developed within the *Tiantai* (天台) tradition, the *Five Periods* (五時), *Four Methods* (四攝法), and *Four Dharmas of Teaching* (四教法) serve as three fundamental guidelines for understanding the Buddha's teachings in both their historical and doctrinal dimensions. Each of these frameworks carries profound significance, offering a structured approach to the seemingly vast and intricate landscape of Buddhist soteriology. The *Five Periods* categorize the Buddha's teachings based on the stages of his life, illustrating how different doctrines were revealed progressively in accordance with the capacities of his audience. This schema not only contextualizes the various *sūtras* within a historical framework but also clarifies their doctrinal relationships, ensuring that no single teaching is viewed in isolation from the broader trajectory of the Buddha's enlightenment pedagogy. The *Four Methods of Conversion* delineate the skillful means (*upāya*) employed by the Buddha to guide sentient beings toward liberation. This categorization acknowledges the diverse spiritual aptitudes of practitioners, illustrating how different modes of instruction—whether sudden, gradual, secret, or indeterminate - are used to lead individuals from limited understanding to ultimate realization. The *Four Dharmas of Teaching* further elaborate on the varying levels of doctrine expounded by the Buddha. By classifying teachings into the *storehouse*, *pervasive*, *separate*, and *round* categories, this framework encapsulates the transition from elementary, foundational doctrines to the most profound and encompassing insights of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is within this structure

⁸ Ikeda (2002): *The Function of Tian Tian Thought in the 21th Century*. Accessed on January 25, 2025, available at: https://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/jp/search/search_detail.jsp?seq=351738

that the *Tiantai* school situates its unique interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*), regarding it as the most complete and perfect expression of the Dharma. Together, these three classifications not only illuminate the relationships between different *sūtras* and schools of thought but also serve as a guiding methodology for comprehending the coherence of the Buddha's teachings. More than a mere system of categorization, this framework reflects the *Tiantai* tradition's distinct hermeneutical approach - one that underscores the all-encompassing and harmonizing nature of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Through this lens, the Buddha's teachings are not seen as disparate or contradictory but as an interconnected and dynamically evolving revelation, leading all beings toward the realization of the ultimate truth.

1.6. Round and Inter-inclusive Threefold Truths (三諦圓融)

The three truths doctrine in Tian Tai follows the doctrine of Dependent Co-arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) explained in the *Madhyamakakārikā* by Nāgārjuna, which holds that everything arises from causes and conditions, thus, things are void (*śūnya*) of inherent nature (*svabhāva*).

What is the nature of reality and existence? What is the relationship between the perfect and the ordinary? Nāgārjuna's answer is found in the *Madhyamakakārikā* in chapter twenty-four, verses eight and nine.⁹ The Dharma teaching of the Buddha rests on two truths: conventional truth and supreme truth. Those who do not know the distinction between the two truths do not understand reality in accordance with the profound teachings of the Buddha.

Conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*), also called "worldly truth" (*lokasaṃvṛtisatya*), is the ordinary, common acceptance of the everyday phenomenal world as experienced and interpreted through our senses. What is the relationship between Conventional and Supreme truth (*paramārthasatya*)? The two truths are one twofold truth in that they are two ways of viewing one reality. Then what is the relationship between the two views?

Zhiyi developed a solution utilizing a threefold structure. Zhiyi's threefold truth concept is an extension of the traditional Madhyamaka theory of the two truths. The direct literary inspiration for the formulation of the threefold truth concept is found in verse eighteen of the same chapter.¹⁰

<i>yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ</i>	Dependent co-arising
<i>śūnyatām tām pracakṣmahe</i>	We declare to be <i>śūnyatā</i>
<i>sā prajñaptir upādāya</i>	That is dependent concept
<i>pratipat saiva madhyamā 18 </i>	That is the Middle Path.

Pratītyasamutpāda means all things arisen due to a multitude of causes and conditions. *Śūnyatā* (emptiness) means the lack of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*).

⁹ Siderits & Shōryū (2013): Chapter24, Verses, 8-9: *dve satye samupāśritya buddhānām dharmadeśanā | lokasaṃvṛtisatyaṃ ca satyaṃ ca paramārthataḥ || 8 || ye 'nāyor na vijānanti vibhāgaṃ satyayor dvayoh | te tattvaṃ na vijānanti gambhīre buddhaśāsane || 9 ||*

¹⁰ Siderits & Shōryū (2013): Chapter24, Verses, 18.

Svabhāva is defined as something absolute, uncreated, and not dependent on anything else, and it never changes. *Śūnyatā* is an attack on such concepts. *Prajñāptirupādāya* (dependent concept) refers to our phenomenal world, which has a temporary reality. This is called conventional existence. *Madhyama* means the teaching of *śūnyatā* denies the view of externalism; the teaching of conventional designation denies the view of nihilism.

Co-arising, emptiness, conventional existence, and the Middle are not four realities, four separate existences, or four independent doctrines, but four ways to express the same one reality, the Buddha-dharma, which is *saṃsāra* to us common ignorant mortals and *nirvāṇa* to a Buddha. Hence the common Mahāyāna proposition that “there is no difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.”¹¹

For Zhiyi, the threefold truth is an integrated unity with three aspects. First, emptiness, often identified with the Supreme truth. Second conventional existence of the phenomenal world as co-arising, often identified with the worldly truth. Third, the Middle, a simultaneous affirmation of both emptiness and conventional existence as aspects of a single integrated reality. Thus, these three components are not separate from each other but integral parts of a unified reality. They are simultaneous aspects of one reality.

This Middle Path, however, must not be grasped as an eternal; it is, rather, manifested in and through and is identical with temporal phenomenal reality, which is again in turn empty of an unchanging substance. The circle is complete in itself, what Zhiyi calls “a round and inter-inclusive threefold truth.” Zhiyi summarized in his *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sūtra*:

The “round threefold truth” means that it is not only the Middle Path that completely includes the Buddha-dharma but also the real and the mundane [truths]. This threefold truth is round and inter-inclusive: one-in-three and three-in-one.¹²

In other words, the real truth, the mundane truth, and the Middle Path are three ways of expressing the threefold aspects of a single integrated reality. This concept of the threefold truth plays a central role in Zhiyi’s Tian Tai philosophy and provides the structure for his interpretation of the Buddha-dharma.

Threefold Truth in Tian Tai is not three but one rounded and integrative doctrine. One is all, all is one. In reality, it is one truth, but conventionally we speak three. Zhiyi quoted from *the Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* and *Lotus Sūtra* to support his idea.¹³

Swanson argues that the key to Tian Tai Buddhism is Zhiyi’s concept of the “Threefold Truth”: Emptiness, Conventional Existence, and the Middle, not the “Five Teachings and Eight Periods.”¹⁴ The Threefold Truth provided the principle for bringing together the disparate elements of Buddhism into a

¹¹ Swanson (1989): 5 - 6.

¹² *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sūtra* (T33, no.1716): 705a5-7.

¹³ *The Great Calming and Contemplation* (T46, no. 1911): 28b12-15.

¹⁴ Swanson (1989): ix.

cohesive system of teaching and practice.

The Round teaching in Tian Tai is based on the three truths. Each truth mutually includes each other. With the inter-inclusive three truths, one can understand the Round teaching better. These three truths also offer a theory for our daily practice. One needs to observe each moment of our mind with three truths, one will accept others and be calm and serene. The threefold truth is the fundamental theory for Tian Tai's meditation practice. The notion of the threefold truth is Zhiyi's understanding of the Buddha's teaching through his practice.

1.7. One mind contains three thousand realms

Zhiyi divided the realms of existence into ten interpenetrating realms: buddhas, bodhisattvas, *pratyeka-buddhas*, *śravakas*, heavenly beings, fighting spirits (*asura*), human beings, beasts, hungry spirits (*preta*), and depraved hellish beings (hell). These are not ten separate distinct worlds but rather experiences or states of existence in one reality. It refers to these ten “destinies” as states of experience.¹⁵ For example, when one performs an altruistic deed, one experiences the realm of the bodhisattva. When one has an insight into the true nature of reality, one experiences the realm of the Buddha. These realms are “interpenetrating” or “mutually inclusive”. Each sentient being experiences these realms in accordance with its actions.

Each realm is a process of causes and effects that inherently entails all the other realms. Each of these realms can at each moment be characterized by the ten “suchnesses” from the *Lotus Sūtra*. All of these may be understood either in terms of the sentient beings experiencing these realms, the environment conditioning these beings, or these beings considered in terms of their components. Ten realms, each including all the others makes one hundred; multiplied by the ten suchnesses, one gets one thousand, and multiplied by the three aspects, three thousand.

In the final analysis, all of reality is an integrated, interdependent unity. Everything contains everything else, and the whole contains all things. It is described in terms of “the inter-inclusiveness of the ten realms” (‘fi%o »¥). These three thousand worlds are contained in one thought.¹⁶

The actual number, whether a thousand or a hundred or whatever, is irrelevant; what matters is the inclusion and interpenetration of all of things in one reality.

1.8. Round and abrupt contemplation in Tian Tai

The practice of this school consists of meditation based on the methods of *Zhi Guan* (*śamatha-vipaśyanā*). *Zhi* (*śamatha*): ‘stopping’ and ‘calm abiding.’ It refers to meditative practices aimed at the stilling of thought and development of concentration. *Guan* (*vipaśyanā*): through understanding of the threefold truth, enlightenment may be attained in a single spontaneous thought. “One Mind Contains Three Thousand Realms” is the famous Tian Tai theory about how one thought embodies the universality of all things. It is translated with

¹⁵ *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sūtra* (T33, no.1716): 696a.

¹⁶ *The Great Calming and Contemplation* (T46, no. 1911): 54a5-9.

such terms as ‘analysis’ or ‘clear observation’ and refers to the application of one’s concentration power to dependent co-arising. Zhiyi’s *Zhi Guan* systems are: Gradual – Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) and contemplation on the foul (*asubha-bhāvanā*; Round and Abrupt – Threefold contemplation; Indeterminate- Advanced Contemplation.

The Threefold contemplation is how to observe the three truths in our daily life. Each moment of mind can be checked by the three: empty, conventional, and the middle. Gradual methods are taught in *the Smaller-Śamatha-vipaśyanā* (T46, no.1915) and *the Gradual Methods of the Dhyāna Pāramitā* (T46, no.1916).

Here, we only discuss the Round and Abrupt meditation, which is recorded in Zhiyi’s book: *The Great Calming and Contemplation* (T46, no.1911).

1.9. Round and abrupt contemplation

What is Round and Abrupt contemplation (圓頓止觀)? The definition given by Zhiyi:

Round and Abrupt means, when one knows the reality, one faces all objects as middle, and nothing is not real. When one thinks of the Dharma-realm, one moment of dharma-realm, one color, one smell are all middle path. One’s realm, Buddha realm and sentient beings’ realm are also the same. The five aggregates (*khandha*) are the same, there is no suffering (*dukkha*) to be abandoned. Ignorance, *saṃsāra*, is the same as the *bodhi*; there is no cause of suffering to be removed. Extreme views are also middle; there is no path to practice. *Saṃsāra* is *nirvāṇa*; there is no secession, nothing attainable. There is no suffering, no cause; thus, there is no mundane world (*loka*). There is no path, no cessation; thus, there is no supra-mundane (*lokottara*). Pure reality; there are no other things beyond reality. The nature of dharmas (*dharmatā*) is serene and thus called *zhi* (*śamatha*). Serenity and constant illuminating are called *guan* (*vipaśyanā*). There may be beginners, but not different from the second. This is called the Round and Abrupt *zhi guan*.¹⁷

Zhiyi further explains: In the Round and Abrupt *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, if one practices one truth, then one also practices the three (emptiness, temporal existence, and the middle). Just like the eyes, light, and objects, those three things are always together when we perceive an object. One contains three, three contains one.¹⁸

A practitioner should apply anyone of the three truths into practice. When one is applied, the others are automatically applied. In that sense, the moment one applies the Buddha-dharma, the moment one is practicing the Round and Abrupt contemplation. At that moment, a beginner practitioner has the same experience as an advanced one. The most important message here is that one needs to apply the Dharma to present present-moment mind.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* (T46, no. 1911): 1c-2a.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* (T46, no.1911): 25b.

Zhiyi also explains that his meditation system is inclusive Dharma (攝法). *Śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* include all of Buddha's teaching. *Śamatha* can calm all things, and *vipaśyanā* can lighten the truth (理 principles). Thus, it includes all Buddha Dharmas.¹⁹

It is called Round and Abrupt contemplation in the sense that it includes all the practice methods found in Buddhism. Those with a sharp faculty of understanding can directly move to the last stage. It is "Abrupt" in the sense that anyone can locate their practice at any moment. The most important thing is that one needs to apply any method to practice.

1.10. The ten objects of contemplation

The seventh chapter of *the Great Calming and Contemplation* occupies half of the entire text. It is again divided into ten topics known as the Ten Objects of Contemplation.²⁰ When one practices diligently, the obstructions and demons, such as heavy sleepiness and distraction, will arise. In such cases, one need not follow them nor be afraid of them, for by following them, we are led to the devil's path, and if we are afraid of them, then they will become obstructions to the path.²¹ The Ten Objects of Contemplation are:

- (i) The object of *skandha*, *āyatana*, and *dhātu*: This refers to the objects of our mind. Zhiyi explained this in more detail than any other objects. From this object, again the Ten Modes of Contemplation are further explained.
- (ii) The object of *kleśa* (affliction): When practicing contemplation, *kleśa* may arise.
- (iii) The object of illness: One needs to overcome the illness from meditation.
- (iv) The object of karma marks: Some illness may be related to former actions (*karma*).
- (v) The object of demonic forces: One needs to overcome the demons that appear in one's mind as one's practice advances.
- (vi) The object of *dhyāna* concentration (*samādhi*): Various forms of *dhyāna* may appear to distract one's mind.
- (vii) The object of false views: False views formerly held by the practitioner may now appear to distract one's attention.
- (viii) The object of overweening pride: Having overcome the false views, one may become proud and fancy oneself to have arrived at the final stage.
- (ix) The object of the two vehicles: Even if one can overcome pride, one may fall into the *śrāvakahood* or *pratyekabuddhahood*.
- (x) The object of the Bodhisattvahood: The practitioner may mistakenly

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (T46, no.1911): 29c.

²⁰ *Ibid.* (T46, no.1911): 49a27.

²¹ *Ibid.* (T46, no.1911): 48c-49a.

come to imagine the tentative role of the bodhisattva as the ultimate goal. Thus, one needs to continue practicing to overcome this object.

The Ten Objects of Contemplation under the proper practice (正觀) apply to all kinds of practices. This proper practice in *the Great Calming and Contemplation* is also called the Round and Abrupt contemplation, where Zhiyi includes all methods of practice such as ritual practice and repentance. Any object can be practiced if one understands that the higher truth is not beyond the conventional. One should see the phenomena as empty, conventional, and middle in one single thought.

II. CONCLUSION

The advantage of Tian Tai in the modern world is that it balances theory and practice. Not only does it systematically present all Buddhist thoughts, but it also contains its systematic practice. Round, inclusive are significant to modern society. We need to accept others; we cannot force others to give up their traditions. Any tradition and culture should be truly accepted. In Tian Tai, any level of practice is acceptable under the expedient means; anyone can receive benefits from the Buddha's teaching. Even the immoral person still has the possibility to survive. Also, "one mind with three thousand realms" includes the hell realm in the Buddha realm. This is the unique doctrine of Tian Tai—Anyone has hope and the possibility to become a Buddha.

Stressing the unity of theory and practice, Tian Tai established a record-breaking philosophic framework in China. To unite all Buddhist schools is a unique creation of Chinese Buddhism. To unite different cultures and religions, Tian Tai provides an insight to solve the problem. We need to understand the different needs of different people by accepting all. From Tian Tai's Classification of teaching, we can propose that all the religions are valid. People from different cultural backgrounds tend to believe in certain religions. We should also start to reflect on ourselves in our daily lives. Accept and tolerate differences while following one's tradition without criticizing others. In the third century BC, the great Buddhist emperor, Ashoka of India, following this noble example of tolerance and understanding, honored and supported all other religions in his vast empire. Being tolerant of differences is important. Different groups and different schools should be tolerant of others and truly respect others.

Tian Tai's Round and Inter-inclusive theory is an ideal concept for our leaders to include others while developing their own institutions/countries. It is a key to solving the differences of diversities.

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NEW LIFE CONCEPT TOWARDS GLOBAL HARMONY WITH THE INTERNATIONAL NATURE LOVING ASSOCIATION (INLA)

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Abstract:

The essence of global harmony is the belief that unity can overcome differences of opinion. This is a good time to reflect on human relations and the shared responsibility we bear in creating a peaceful world. This unity transcends borders, cultures, and ideologies. The research method used in this article is the library research method. This method is carried out by collecting data through research and understanding theories from various literature related to the research. The goals and objectives of building unity in the current concept of life that is very appropriate for a change towards global harmony with INLA. The International Nature Loving Association (INLA) is an association of universal love. The INLA Association was initiated by Master Wang Che Kuang, has established activities to instruct the younger generation in Natural Love. Nature and culture. Quoted on the official website of the International Federation of Nature Lovers, the purpose of establishing the INLA organization is to create a harmonious world through four renewals, namely New culture, namely the culture of loving the universe. New civilization, namely a civilization that respects the nobility and dignity of all forms of life. New life values, namely the concept of life that believes that the dignity of human life is priceless and New morality, namely the Morality of a World of One Family.

Keywords: *Fostering Unity, Collaborative Efforts, Global Harmony, INLA.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering unity is essential for ensuring global peace and prosperity. Amidst cultural, religious, and ideological differences, collaborative efforts play a crucial role in promoting understanding,

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tolerance, and cooperation among nations and communities. This article explores the significance of unity, the challenges to achieving it, and the collective strategies that can contribute to global harmony. Unity is the foundation of a peaceful society. It strengthens social cohesion, reduces conflicts, and enables collective problem-solving. When people and nations work together, they can address pressing global issues, such as poverty, climate change, and humanitarian crises, more effectively. A united world fosters economic stability, encourages cultural exchange, and ensures a better future for all.

Global Harmony is a program of the Ministry of Communications of Saudi Arabia that aims to promote diversity in Saudi Arabia to the world community. One of them is a cultural and arts festival held at Al Suwaidi Park, Riyadh, involving 9 countries, one of which is Indonesia. In the journey towards global harmony, creating a pleasant sense of unity and oneness for the people of the world is important. Building strong relationships can create positive outcomes for all citizens involved.¹

The teaching of Buddhism is based on compassion, non-violence, and understanding of self and offers a moral code for all people irrespective of their gender, caste, religion, region, etc. Buddhism shows a way to reach a deeper insight into human nature and the reality of life through meditation. At last, the entire humanity can gain the harmony of mind and unity in social life. It is important to seek the way for social development by understanding the principle of unity and ways to achieve unity. The teachings of the Buddha reveal the step-by-step process of changing the state of mind for long-lasting happiness. It makes the mind become more positive and constructive so that the life experience becomes more satisfactory and helpful for others.²

The French philosopher Ernest Renan - stated that solidarity and unity is a feeling of unity without coercion because of an obsession to make something happen for the collective good that is considered noble, which ultimately creates a national identity or the identity of a nation.³

Building unity requires a detailed concept of state, nation, tribe, and national identity. According to Anthony Smith, increasing solidarity can take the form of ideology, or forms of behavior, or both. As an ideology, nationalism represents a system of ideas that affirms the right to self-determination (self-determination).⁴

¹<https://tvbrics.com/en/news/saudi-arabia-s-ministry-of-media-launches-global-harmony-initiative-to-celebrate-cultural-diversity/> Accessed in December 20, 2024.

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³ Jati, Wasisto Raharjo, (2017) Melihat Kekinian Lima Konsep Kebangsaan dan Keindonesiaan Bung Karno, makalah Seminar Nasional di Ruang Seminar Gedung Widya Graha Lt. 1, Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (LIPI) Jalan Jend. Gatot Subroto 10 Jakarta.

⁴ Smith, A. D., (1986): The Ethnic Origin of Nations. New York: Blackwell. P. 72.

Despite its importance, unity faces several obstacles, including:⁵

1.1. Cultural and religious differences – Misunderstandings and prejudices based on cultural or religious beliefs can create divisions. “Nonetheless, both Buddhas and their followers will free from suffering or reach the state of Nirvana by only one way, understand Three Characteristics of Nature (*Tilakkhana* in Pali); changing, suffering, and non-self (*AN* 3.134) and must practice the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariya Magga* in Pali); right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (*SN* 45.8). Simply put, not all religions will lead to the highest happiness, according to Buddhism, but only a doctrine that teaches the Three Characteristics of Nature and the Noble Eightfold Path. Strictly speaking, only Buddhism is the way to Nirvana during the Buddha’s time. In this regard, exclusivism can also be found in Buddhism.”⁶

1.2. Economic inequality – The gap between wealthy and developing nations often leads to competition rather than cooperation. The Buddhism of Shakyamuni’s time also assumed a low-tech culture which had comparatively little impact on its environment, as well as relative freedom from the external economic (although not political) forces that ravage many indigenous societies today. Because our situation is in many ways unique, it requires a creative response that cannot be discovered in early Buddhist teachings but must rather be informed by them. The important question is: who should decide what that response will be? In any case, there is much in those teachings to inform us. According to the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Buddha taught that some people are like the completely blind because they do not have the vision to improve their material circumstances, nor the vision to lead a morally elevated life. Others are like the one-eyed because, although they have the vision to improve their material conditions, they do not have the vision to live morally elevated life; the third class have the vision to improve both. Such Buddhist teachings imply that when measuring poverty it is not enough to evaluate the material conditions. For a more comprehensive evaluation of deprivation it is necessary to take into account the moral quality of people’s lives. But that is not to minimize the importance of the first eye. There is a causal relationship between material poverty and social deterioration, according to the Lion’s Roar Sutta (*Cakkavattisihanada Sutta*).⁷

⁵ Eldad J. Pardo and Indri Retno Setyaningrahayu, (2023) Unity in Diversity The Indonesian Curriculum, The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, Impact-se in collaboration with Ruderman Family Foundation.

⁶ Jesada Buaban (2021), Buddhist Perspectives On Pluralism And Public Sphere , International Review of Humanities Studies, Volume 6, Number 2, Article 20. Available at: <https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/irhs/vol6/iss2/20>

⁷ <https://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MISC/101785.htm>, accessed,

1.3. Political conflicts – National interests and political ideologies can sometimes hinder global collaboration. Example Radical political Buddhism has garnered unexpected support by successfully interweaving local concerns with international alarmism. Such global concerns are reproduced to fit local-level social and political contexts. In post-war Sri Lanka, Islam fills an ideological vacuum in Sinhala nationalism after the defeat of the Tamil Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2009. From this perspective Islam has replaced LTTE as the significant “Other” in Sinhala nationalist ideology. Moreover global discourses on terror seem to be a convenient myth in local competition for power and resources. For example Rohingya militant groups in Rakhine are accused of international jihadist connections, even though Rohingya militancy rather must be understood in the local context of ethnic minority resistance to internal Burmese colonialism and state repression.⁸

The first meaningful instance of Buddhist political development occurred quite early in Buddhism’s history with the Buddha’s founding of the first sangha from his initial group of disciples. Despite lacking a broad political theory, Buddhism does place a premium on the idea of community, stemming from the Buddha’s decision to create the sangha as a means to bring together Buddhist practitioners. The term itself has a number of meaning or implications, depending on the tradition in which it is being used. Its oldest sense sangha simply describes the proper monastic community of Buddhists. However, in the Mahāyāna tradition, and in much modern usage, this term has shifted and expanded to include the totality of all Buddhist practitioners.⁹ The sangha founded by the Buddha, though not meant to be a proper political order, nonetheless gives us some insight into the Buddha’s mindset. The Buddha chose to arrange his religious community on the principle of democracy and shared rule. The Buddha, while the religious leader of the community, was not the ruler of the sangha in any proper sense. Though it is not hard to imagine that his opinion had a disproportionate influence, decisions in the sangha were made democratically, with men and women holding equal standing.¹⁰

1.4. Misinformation and social media – The spread of false information can fuel divisions and misunderstandings. Today news, true and false, circulates faster and wider, especially via electronic media, although word of mouth is still a major factor in its dissemination. Social media, like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and dozens of others,

March 14, 2025.

⁸ Iselin Frydenlund (2015), The rise of Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Asia and possibilities for transformation, NOREF, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/195450/888bfa90bfb97db91ff78ad9a774b37e.pdf>

⁹ Smith, Huston, and Philip Novak. Buddhism. HarperCollins, 2005. Pg 144. Accessed on march 14, 2025, available at : https://repository.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5891&-context=gradschool_dissertations

¹⁰ Jayasuriya, Pgs 51 and 53.

represent a major contributor to speed and circulation. Disinformation is information that is false and deliberately created to harm a person, social group, organisation or country. Misinformation is information that is false but not created with the intention of causing harm. Mal-information is information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, social group, organisation or country. It is evident that the experts who coined these definitions have given great emphasis to the thoughts, intentions - or objective – of the creator of such information, just as the Buddha did – although he defined four types.¹¹

False speech, according to Dhammasangani Atuwa, is verbal or physical actions with the intention of doing harm:

*“Musāthi visanvādāna purekkhārassa aththabhañjako vachīpayogo kāyappayōgō vā; Visanvādanādhīppā yena parassa parañ visāñvādakā kāyavachī payōga samuttāpikā chēthanā musāvādo.”*¹²

As per Atthasālini atuwa, such words favour one against another (third person) and bring dislike towards the third person are considered slanderous. In this includes rumours and conspiracy theories we have about other people and communities which are shared with the intention of causing harm or bringing disdain towards another who is not present)

*“Yāyavāchāya-yassanañ vāchañ bhāsathi thassa hadaye aththanō piyabhāvañ parassacha piyasuññbhāvañ karothe sā pisunāvāchā.”*¹³

At the poin of global harmony is the belief that unity can overcome differences of opinion. This is a good time to reflect on human relationships and the shared responsibility we bear in creating a peaceful world. This unity transcends borders, culture and ideology. In a world that often appears divided and fragmented, efforts to achieve global peace become a unifying force that transcends borders and promotes harmony between nations.

The study has found that the unity or harmony taught in the Theravāda Buddhism starts from being amiable in deed, in word and in thought towards friends and general fellows. Unity also means one should not consider oneself greater than others while should be respectful to them too. Unity will make people united and go along well which results in the completeness of action.¹⁴

Building connections and increasing solidarity between individuals and communities can contribute significantly to achieving world peace. In an age where communication occurs instantaneously, we often ignore the important role of dialogue in forming relationships and enhancing cooperation between societies and countries. The importance of prioritizing diplomacy focused on

¹¹ <https://www.dailymirror.lk/print/news-features/Viral-false-news-and-hate-speech-online-A-Buddhist-response/131-214168>

¹² Dhammasangani Attakatha 109.

¹³ Atthasālini atuwa 109.

¹⁴ Phra Jittipan Sangsri, *A Study of Unity in Buddhism*, The Journal of The International Buddhist Studies College, Received March 9,2019; Revised Jul 12, 2019; Accepted Jul 18, 2019.

peace and dialogue is becoming clearer as conflict escalates globally. According to the UN, the world is currently experiencing the highest number of violent conflicts since World War II. By 2023, a quarter of humanity, or 2 billion people, will live in conflict-affected areas.¹⁵

The world has entered the 21st century, where science, information and technology are developing rapidly. However, in an era where everything is developing rapidly, happiness seems to be getting further away from our lives. Culture has values contained in the culture itself, one of which is the value of unity, where the value of unity in a culture is certainly related to the element of understanding that each society has in that culture. Society plays an important role in understanding society's understanding of the value of solidarity that exists in a particular culture. Therefore, this diversity must be recognized by the entire nation in order to safeguard it and maintain national unity and integrity by understanding cultural values, both regional and national culture, to foster a sense of national solidarity and unity to achieve the ideals of global harmony.

The concept of unity: according to the definition, unity is the state of being undivided or joined as a whole. All Buddhists have faith in the Buddha, his teaching (Dhamma), and the religious community (Sangha). Moreover, based on the Lord Buddha's teachings, Buddhists believe that everything in life is united somehow and somehow. Speaking about the concept of unity, G.W. Leibniz said, "many in body and one in mind."¹⁶ This exposition is based on the Buddha teaching that "we are all different but share the same spirit (united)."¹⁷

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Building unity

The meaning of solidarity and unity is very important for the Indonesian people so that it can become a weapon and have negative impacts since the Indonesian people fought for their independence. The simple meaning of solidarity and unity of the Indonesian nation is to unite the nation, combine diversity and encourage progress and national development in brotherhood with full tolerance. Where unity means a combination of many different patterns of diversity into one whole. Solidarity means uniting many different models into one whole. Unity of Indonesia The third principle of Pancasila includes unity of ideology, politics, economics, social, culture and defense and security. With the values of Indonesian solidarity, Indonesian society places unity and the interests and safety of the nation and state above the interests of individuals or groups. Putting the interests of the state and nation before personal interests means that Indonesian people are able and willing to make

¹⁵ Fay Patel, Mingsheng Li & Prahalad Sooknanan, (2013) *Intercultural Communication: Building a Global Community*, Publisher: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446270318>

¹⁶ Leibniz G. W. (1965). *Philosophical Writings*. London: Dent, Rowman and Littlefield.

¹⁷ Hughes, M. (2013). *Unity in Buddhism*. Blog post. Retrieved from <http://stin.ac.th/th/file.pdf>

sacrifices for the interests of the state and nation.¹⁸

2.2. The concept of unity in Buddhism

Buddhism is a way of living. The teachings of Buddha about the noble truths and the moral code of conduct expounded by him are available for all human beings irrespective of their sex, caste, region and religion. It helps individuals to understand the true nature of human personality. It promotes understanding of self along with moral code of conduct that helps all individuals to generate respect for others, honesty and also help them to develop clear and strong mind power. Buddha realized that peace would come only when the person is happy. He wanted man to get rid of all malice, hatred, indulgence in lower desires and evil thoughts. He wanted to substitute these with good thoughts, worthy desires, feelings of generosity and compassion, and an attitude of serenity and composure. Let men purify their thoughts and desires and complete happiness will be theirs. Such a thought-effort will, then, lead to universal peace. As a social code, Buddhism leads us to peace, understanding and integration. Buddha tried to inculcate in his followers the sense of service and understanding with love and compassion by separating man from passion and elevating humanistic tendency in man with the help of morality, compassion (karuna) and concentration (samatha).¹⁹

2.3. Collaborative efforts

Is a term commonly used to describe the cooperative relationship model carried out by many parties. The definition of collaboration is often interpreted by many experts based on different points of view. These definitions are based on the same principles, namely solidarity, cooperation, division of tasks, equality and responsibility in joint cooperation, namely relationships between organizations that participate and work together and agree to achieve common goals, share information, share resources, share profits, and are also responsible for making joint decisions to resolve various problems. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, collaborating is working together, especially in an effort to combine ideas. This is based on what was explained by Gray who explained that collaboration is a thinking process of the parties involved looking at various aspects of a problem and looking for solutions to these differences as well as the limitations of their views on what can happen. Collaboration is also defined as solidarity, cooperation, division of tasks, equality and responsibility of the parties who collaborate with the same goal, cognitive similarity, desire to handle things. Mutually beneficial, honest, loving and community based.²⁰

¹⁸ Marion Edman (1994) , Journal Article Building Unity Within A Community The Elementary English Review Vol. 21, No. 5, pp. 179 - 185 (7 pages) Published By: National Council of Teachers of English.

¹⁹ Saksana R. Buddhism and Its Message of Peace. Retrieved from <http://www.ayk.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SAKSANA-Rakesh-Buddhism-and-Its-Message-of-Peace.pdf>

²⁰ Xavier Castañer and Nuno Olivei, Collaboration, Coordination, and Cooperation Among Organizations: Establishing the Distinctive Meanings of These Terms Through a Systematic Literature Review, Journal of Management, Vol. XX No. X, Month XXXX 2020:1–37,

The goal of collaboration is to speed things up together to achieve goals. Even in the process of achieving these goals it is not recommended to divide the work done. This problem, as Nawawi said, collaboration is an effort to achieve a common goal that has been set through dividing tasks, not by grouping work but as a unit of work that is all focused on achieving goals.²¹

One definition also evokes behaviors relating to common communication systems and language to facilitate collaboration, which is defined as joint learning and problem solving relying on knowledge transfer²² which can be understood as both behavior (trying to learn) and outcome (having actually learnt). Interestingly, communication, a broader construct, is intrinsic to negotiation. Relatedly, one of the three outcome-based definitions treats collaboration as the product of sets of conversations, reinforcing the centrality of bilateral, functional communication in the meaning of collaboration. However, as we detail below negotiation and communication behaviors are also evoked in the definitions of coordination and cooperation. The negotiation emphasis in collaboration definitions probably stems from a power/politics perspective about the IOR context in which different organizational actors need to find a common ground.²³

2.4. Harmony

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), harmony is an expression of feelings, actions, ideas and interests; harmony; harmony. We can understand that harmony is an expression of differences that exist in a harmonious unity. Harmonization was also used by Chiocehetti and in the context of harmonization of legal language terminology between several countries such as the Republic of France, Germany, Italy and Austria through the LexALP (Harmonization of Legal Languages) convention. A system of spatial and environmental planning in the multilingual Alps. Unity in harmony is a dream in everyone that is expected to come true in order to show and maintain feelings of care and affection and mutual respect. In life, harmony and unity are needed to unite each organization. With the existence of harmony and unity, the organization will be strong and compact so that it can achieve common goals maximally.²⁴

DOI: 10.1177/0149206320901565

²¹ Viera Baèova, *The Construction of National Identity - On Primordialism and Instrumentalism*, accessed on [December 20, 2024], available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266484743_The_Construction_Of_National_Identity_-_On_Primordialism_And_Instrumentalism

²² Holloway, S. S., & Parmigiani, A., Friends and profits don't mix: The performance implications of repeated partnerships. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59: 2016: 460 – 478.

²³ Hardy, C., Lawrence, T. B., & Grant, D. 2005. Discourse and collaboration: The role of conversations and collective identity. *Academy of Management Review*, 2005: 58 - 77

²⁴ Fauziah Nurdin, *Moderasi Beragama Dalam Konteks Budaya*. Rumah Moderasi Beragama Accessed on [December 20, 2024] available at: <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/27312/>

The study has found that the dhamma which states virtues for fraternal living or the state of conciliation, is called “*Sāraṇīyadhamma*”. As stated in the Theravāda Buddhism, it supports harmony. The dhamma can be applied in daily life and will make people in the society live together more peaceful. It includes six dhammas which, when kept in one’s mind, bring mutual respect, sympathy or solidarity, non-quarrel, harmony, and unity. These six factors are:

- i. *Mettākāyakamma*: to be amiable in deed, openly and in private,
- ii. *Mettāvacīkamma*: to be amiable in word, openly and in private,
- iii. *Mettāmanokamma*: to be amiable in thought, openly and in private,
- iv. *Sādhāraṇabhogitā*: to share any lawful gains with virtuous fellows,
- v. *Silāsāmaññatā*: to keep without blemish the rules of conduct along with one’s fellows, openly and in private, and
- vi. *Diṭṭhisāmaññatā*: to be endowed with right views along with one’s fellows, openly and in private (Phra Brahmaganabhorn, 2014).

All these dhammas reflect the endearing and keeping others in mind. It can be seen that when monks are in unison, admiring each other and do not engage in quarrel they would look like water that can be mixed harmoniously with milk. There will be no dissension, threaten or expelling of others, which will result in gaining trust from those who are yet to have faith, whitest increase trust from those who already faith (Phrakhru Sirithanasan, 2015).

Harmony is a concept essential to Confucianism and to the way of life of past and present people in East Asia. Integrating methods of textual exegesis, historical investigation, comparative analysis, and philosophical argumentation, this book presents a comprehensive treatment of the Confucian philosophy of harmony. The book traces the roots of the concept to antiquity, examines its subsequent development, and explicates its theoretical and practical significance for the contemporary world. It argues that, contrary to a common view in the West, Confucian harmony is not mere agreement but has to be achieved and maintained with creative tension. Under the influence of a Weberian reading of Confucianism as “adjustment” to a world with an underlying fixed cosmic order, Confucian harmony has been systematically misinterpreted in the West as presupposing an invariable grand scheme of things that pre-exists in the world to which humanity has to conform. The book shows that Confucian harmony is a dynamic, generative process, which seeks to balance and reconcile differences and conflicts through creativity. Illuminating one of the most important concepts in Chinese philosophy and intellectual history, this book is of interest to students of Chinese studies, history and philosophy in general and eastern philosophy in particular.²⁵

III. METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this article is the library research method. This

²⁵ Chenyang Li, The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony, Accessed on [December 20, 2024] available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350173503_The_Confucian_Philosophy_of_Harmony.

method is carried out by collecting data through research and understanding theories from various literature related to research. There are four stages in the library research process, namely preparing the necessary equipment, compiling a list of libraries to be used, time management, and reading and recording research materials. Data collection is carried out by looking for relevant sources and using them as content to build research, such as books, magazines and websites. Library materials obtained from various reference materials are analyzed critically and in depth to support arguments and propose ideas.

IV. RESULTS: BRIDGING HUMANITY AND NATURE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The modern era also complex global challenges that link globalization throughout the world. different benefits and problems. This has never happened before. The challenges of the global era currently facing humanity are so great that they must be of common concern. These challenges include climate change, increasing poverty, political conflicts within and between countries, and various social differences.

Buddhism is a gospel of peace and non-violence. Non-violence is a way of life devoid of all extremes of passion like anger, enmity, pleasure and pain. True peace emanates from non-violence which is a rational and mighty force. The practice of non-violence is life-affirming, which contributes to human unity, progress, and peace. Non-violence teaches one to live in harmony with others and with oneself. It requires adherence to high standards of truth and self-control (*Ahimsa* or Non-Violence).

Non-clinging is the basic need for attaining the state in which such mind is realized or cultivated. The theme is well elaborated in the Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-śāstra: "The highest kind of moral conduct, its perfection, consists in the non-clinging way, not clinging to sin or merit as absolute and unconditioned. The Bodhisattva that enters deep into the truth of things, cultivating the contemplation of their sūnya-nature, beholds with his eye of wisdom that sin and merit are not absolute and unconditioned."²⁶

The value of unity in the new culture Wang Tzu Kuang, says that we have entered the 21st century, material progress has reached its peak. Progress in true mental and spiritual evolution is still far behind. The proof is that people's lives today are not happy and enjoyable. If there is only material progress but mental and spiritual evolution continues to decline, this symbolizes the Degeneration of human life. Currently, many people suffer from mental disorders, stress, depression, and even self-harm or suicide. This is the result of physical evolutionary development that surpasses mental and spiritual evolution. This is also the cause of the human survival crisis.²⁷

全人類生存進化大潮流已蜂擁而起，為了人類自己能永續生存，實現「世界一家」這是人類歷史巨輪必然呈現的結果。適者生

²⁶ Kumārajīva, (tr.) The Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-śāstra of Nāgārjuna, T. 1509, Vol. 25, p. 163.

²⁷ Tzu Kuang, Wang, Jalan Keberlangsungan Hidup Umat Manusia, Publisher britan : tzu Kuang, 2015, available at https://library.iteba.ac.id/index.php?p=show_detail&id=246

存,最優秀者才能生存,我們唯有不斷往上提昇,往上超越;唯有不斷往前創新和邁進,共創全人類新文化、新文明、新道德、新價值,共同實踐十共精神,讓自己具有「世界一家」的、胸襟跟理念,才能成為最優秀的人類。進而,你我、他,人人都具有世界一家的胸襟跟理念,一起實現「世界一家」,我們全人類才能永續生存當我們全人類一起來建構地球成為最可愛、最美麗、最快樂、最和諧的家園,我們人類是何等的幸福!永世太平、永世幸福,這是人類生存進化的最後成果!

(According to Wang Tzu Kuang (2009, 2) The meaning of global harmony is expressed in One Family World as follows, you and I are one family, the earth is one family, all humans are one family, the world is one family, different ethnicities, but still one family, various religions and beliefs, also one family, different ethnicities, still one family, different skin color and race, but also one family, many nationalities, all one family, different cultures but still one family, different customs are also one family, different customs, same family name, different language, same family name, same words Different spelling, same family, all humanity is one family, all life is all one family).²⁸

People are so busy looking outward that they sacrifice their glory and survival. Current culture, civilization, concepts of life values, and morality are no longer able to solve the complex life problems that are before us. To answer the question of continuity and happiness in life in an era of rapid technological advancement and environmental challenges, the need for a balanced and sustainable way of life has never been more critical. The **International Nature Loving Association (INLA)** advocates for a **New Life Concept** – a transformative approach that harmonizes human life with nature, fostering global peace, environmental sustainability, and social well-being. INLA launched four reform movements, including a new culture, namely a culture of universal love, a new civilization, a civilization that values glory and the value and dignity of all forms of life, a new concept of value, especially the concept of life that the value and dignity of human life is priceless, the new morality is the morality of the world of one family.

The International Nature Loving Association (INLA) is a universal love association. The INLA Association was initiated by Master Wang Che Kuang, also known as Master Wang in Hong Kong in 2006. However, since 2001, Master Wang has been holding activities to educate the younger generation about the Love of Nature and culture. Quoted on the official website of the International Federation of Nature Lovers, the aim of establishing the INLA organization is to create a New Culture (a culture that loves the universe), a New Civilization (a civilization that respects all forms of life), New Life Values (life), values of respect for all forms of life and New Ethics (One

²⁸ Tzu Kuang, Wang., The nature loving wonderland : the Universal family. Taiwan ROC: 2009: p.2, Tzu Kuang Publisher. available at <https://www.the-inla.org/publication.html>

Family World ethics)²⁹

國際熱愛大自然促進會 The International Nature Loving Association (INLA) 於2006年首先成立於中國香港，之後繼續於中華台北、印尼馬來西亞、美國、加拿大、菲律賓、澳洲、新加坡、韓國、尼泊爾成立分會，五大洲各國分會亦在籌備中。³⁰

(The International Nature Loving Association (INLA) was first established in Hong Kong, China, in 2006, and has subsequently established branches in Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Australia, Singapore, South Korea, and Nepal. Branches in countries on five continents are also being planned.)

為促使世界一家，建造美麗又和諧的新世界，我們必須天天實踐十共精神 處處熱愛大自然，展現人之美，時時有幸福的時間觀。當我們的良心逐漸光明，每天都感到幸福、快樂又歡喜，才能站在「世界一家」生存進化大潮流的前面，帶領大家共同開創新文化、新文明、新道德，以及新價值。現在，就讓我們從「心」開始。(To promote the world as one family, and build a beautiful and harmonious new world, we must practice the spirit of Jukyo every day, love nature everywhere, show the beauty of human beings, and always have a happy time perspective. When our conscience gradually becomes brighter, and we feel happy, joyful and happy every day, we can stand at the forefront of the great trend of survival and evolution of “the world as one family”, and lead everyone to jointly create a new culture, new civilization, new morality, and new values. Now, let us start from the “heart”)³¹

The **New Life Concept** is rooted in the philosophy of living in harmony with nature while promoting ethical and sustainable lifestyles. It encourages individuals and communities to embrace values that support environmental conservation, humanitarian efforts, and peaceful coexistence. This concept is built on three core principles:³²

i. Love for Nature – Recognizing nature as a fundamental part of human existence and protecting the environment through sustainable practices.

Inla's motto is protecting, loving, and glorifying life.

ii. Compassionate Living – Fostering kindness, empathy, and respect for all living beings, regardless of nationality, race, or religion.

²⁹ _____, Pusat Pengembangan dan Informasi Budaya Kasih Semesta, page 14, <https://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/1659/3/2TA12591.pdf>

³⁰ _____, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/about.html>

³¹ _____, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/concept.html>

³² _____, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/about.html>

iii. Global Responsibility – Encouraging collective action to address pressing global issues such as climate change, deforestation, and social inequality.

Protecting life is rolling out insight into how important it is to “protect life”, the whole of life and harmony; not hurting, not hating, not persecuting, not wasting life. Starting from how to treat your own life, understanding, understanding the meaning of life, its goals and values, affirming your own life, being able to care for yourself, maintaining health, improving the quality of life, building positive attitudes and behavior habits, and a progressive philosophy of life. Also, respecting the lives of others, helping others achieve a healthy life and positive living habits, extending to all forms of life, the right to life of all creatures, saving and appropriate use of natural resources, loving blessings, togetherness of life and common property.³³

Loving life is dynamic and fighting spirit, optimistic and progressive, harmonious and together in life; always have a smile on your face, have respect, tolerance, gratitude for everything, whether towards people, work or creatures, fill your life with abundant joy and happiness. Starting from loving one's own life, progressing to loving the lives of others, helps all lives live dynamic and progressive, joyful and happy. From a mental aspect, developing altruistic actions, benefiting people, building harmonious relationships between people. All creatures that live in the air, on land, in the sea and on plants, have life. It is through human relations with the environment and the universe, mutual respect and mutual care, that we can hope to live sustainably. The relationship between humans and nature, achieving balance and order, shared glory and shared joy.³⁴

Glorifying life is emulate the heavens, earth and countless creatures, who always give (benefit) all life, serve and serve selflessly, display the glory of life, the light that shines and prospers all creatures. With a limited life line, it produces unlimited life value, from oneself to others, helping others also participates in the glorification of life. Starting from benefits for oneself, to family, community, nation and country, even the world and the entire universe. Thus, starting from the individual to the universe. Combining everyone's strengths, together to create a peaceful world, togetherness of blessings and mutual success.³⁵

INLA is a social organization that aims to spread moral messages, life values and a culture of universal love through cultural, artistic and educational activities. This is contained in INLA's vision, namely to love, protect and celebrate life, and the hope to achieve this is outlined in INLA's mission, especially One World of Families. This organization provides a new culture, namely the culture of universal love, meaning the culture of guarding heaven, respecting the earth, and loving the humanity of all nations. The culture of universal love is a culture of universal love, which embraces all life like one big family. This is stated in the vision and mission that INLA wants to carry out,

³³ -----, INLA Indoneisa, Accessed on [Desember 14, 2024] available at <https://www.the-inla.or.id/>

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

namely protecting, loving and celebrating life to form a world of one family.³⁶

The INLA Association is currently carrying out moral and ethical education through cultural and artistic education with various types of activities including singing, dancing, gymnastics, rhythm, all of which have the theme of universal love. It is hoped that this problem can produce virtuous young people who will create a world of one family. INLA tries to initiate activities to fill quality free time to change the lifestyle of the younger generation which is sluggish, wasteful, full of violence and emotionality. In a life full of competition, the younger generation grows up under unpredictable burdens. Since childhood, humans are programmed to compete to get the highest score in exams, and achieving material wealth is the main goal in life. As a result, the younger generation is more susceptible to stress and is looking for various ways to reduce stress. burden and stress in your life. Through songs glorifying nature and lively dance movements, it is hoped that the young generation can eliminate selfishness and greed, have a spirit of loving life and the universe, so that they become young people who are responsible for society and the country. Likewise, by borrowing dance and singing, may the distance between each other be narrowed, the frost be filled, the relationships between people thaw so that warmth reigns again.³⁷

INLA has organized various events to engage humanity about the importance of protecting nature, loving the universe, and celebrating all forms of life. INLA (International Nature Lovers Association) is a non-profit social organization which aims to spread moral messages, life values and universal culture through arts and culture and educational activities which are steps to create a harmonious family, society, nation, world and one family. INLA wants to invite every human being to return to nature, discover the greatness of nature and then protect and love nature. INLA has been established in several countries in Asia, especially Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan and Korea. INLA Indonesia was founded in early 2006. INLA Indonesia's membership consists of people from various backgrounds, cultures and regions. INLA's mission is to spread a culture of love for nature to all mankind and implement educational values through cultural activities. Hopefully, through various cultural events, the younger generation will be able to find the meaning of life and participate more in appreciating life.

目標” 建立人和大自然和諧的身心；建立人和大自然和諧的家庭；建立人和大自然和諧的社會；建立人和大自然和諧的國家；建立人和大自然和諧的世界。³⁸

(Goal: Build a harmonious body and mind between man and nature; Build a harmonious family between man and nature; Build a harmonious

³⁶ -----, INLA Indoneisa, Accessed on [Desember 14, 2024] available at <https://www.the-inla.or.id/>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ -----, INLA Federation, Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at <https://www.the-inla.org/about.html>

society between man and nature; Build a harmonious country between man and nature; Build a harmonious world between man and nature.)

The **International Nature Loving Association (INLA)** is a global movement dedicated to integrating these principles into daily life. Through education, environmental initiatives, and humanitarian programs, INLA inspires individuals and organizations to take part in shaping a better world. Some of its key initiatives include:³⁹

- **Environmental Conservation Projects** – Reforestation, clean water initiatives, and sustainable agriculture programs.
- **Education and Awareness Campaigns** – promoting eco-friendly lifestyles, vegetarianism, and ethical consumerism.
- **Community-Based Activities** – Encouraging social harmony through cultural exchange, volunteerism, and interfaith dialogue.
- **Youth Engagement Programs** – Empowering young leaders to become ambassadors of peace and sustainability.

INLA held various events to appeal to humanity regarding the importance of protecting nature, loving the universe, and glorifying everyone's forms of life, including waste management such as eco enzyme, counseling about the environmental crisis, global warming campaign, vegetarian bazaar, and seminars on love of nature.

For example, the Bali DPD held an activity with the theme Loving Heaven, Earth, Humans, Creatures and Objects is a Characteristic of the Culture of Universal Love. This activity was held to commemorate International Earth Day, which falls every April 22, 2018.⁴⁰ On that occasion, INLA Bali invited Wayan Patut, who is a Kalpataru recipient, to share his story with INLA Bali.⁴¹ At Green Bali Island present kalpataru recipients who care about the environment. This is in accordance with us who talk about natural harmony. Because nature is part of our lives, if nature is damaged, human life will be threatened. So we actually want to educate people to pay attention to the natural environment both on land and at sea.

One of the international events held is the Dance Arts Festival International Youth Dance Festival which was attended by youth from various countries with the philosophy of loving festivals, protect, and cherish life. Starting from 2004, the festival The first was held in Chinese Taipei, which at that time was only followed by 10 countries and regions. The second festival in 2005 was held again in Chinese Taipei which was attended by youth from 10 countries and regions. Festival The third was held in Hong Kong in 2006 with more participants there

³⁹ -----, INLA Indoneisa, Accessed on [Desember 14, 2024] available at <https://www.the-inla.or.id/>

⁴⁰ Donny Tabelak, INLA Bali Konsisten Tanamkan Budaya Kasih Semesta Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at: <https://radarbali.jawapos.com/events/70811636/inla-bali-konsisten-tanamkan-budaya-kasih-semesta>

⁴¹ Ibid.

are many more, namely 12 countries and regions. In 2007, the fourth festival held in Indonesia – Jakarta with participants from 16 countries and regions. And Recently the International Universal Love Dance Festival was held again on August 11 - 12 2009, held in Beijing, China. A total of 17 countries and regions participating in this festival, namely China, America,

Canada, Hungary, Australia, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Philippines, Thailand, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Madagascar and Taiwan, with a total of 27 teams. The festival is held at the Workers Gymnasium, one of the sports hall used for last year's Olympics New life values, namely a concept of life that believes that the dignity and worth of human life is priceless, and a new morality, namely the "One World Family" ethic. In advancing a pluralistic culture in Indonesia, several factors were revealed that led to the need to develop an intellectual and oriented national culture. One of these factors is: (1) the deepening of socio-cultural interactions between people who have diverse cultural backgrounds. Where the aim of cultural development and development is aimed at providing insight and meaning of culture in national development and all aspects of social, national and state life and aims to increase human honor and dignity, as well as strengthening national identity and personality.⁴²

In Indonesia, for example, the harmony of the Sanjaya and Syailendra Dynasties in the Ancient Mataram Kingdom is clear evidence of the importance of the value of global diversity. Despite their different religious beliefs, these two dynasties were able to coexist peacefully, as can be seen from their architectural monuments, such as Plaosan Temple and Kalasan Temple. This shows that tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation were the keys to social life at that time.⁴³

Diversity-based history learning can play an important role in strengthening and maintaining the diversity of society, as well as strengthening solidarity in the world. Each of them has a different culture. NOT only the culture, the religion may also be different. A place with diverse ethnicities and cultures is certainly very vulnerable and can trigger divisions between tribes. However, it turns out that this did not happen because the Indonesian people adhere to the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* means different but still one. Let's say *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* is taken from the book *Sutasoma* written by Empu Tantular, a poet from Majapahit. The complete audio is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* Tan Hana Dharma Mangrwa. The motto of the Indonesian nation

⁴² _____, Pusat Pengembangan dan Informasi Buddha Kasih Semesta Accessed on [January 10, 2025] available at: <https://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/1659/3/2TA12591.pdf>

⁴³ I Ketut Ardhana and I Nyoman Wijaya, Indian Influences on Balinese Culture: The Role of Hinduism and Buddhism in Present Day Bali, *International Research Journal of Management, IT & Social Sciences* Available online at <https://sloap.org/journals/index.php/irjmis/Vol.4.No.1,January2017,pages:88~105> ISSN: 2395-7492 <https://sloap.org/journals/index.php/irjmis/article/view/442>

is written at the foot of the state symbol Garuda Pancasila. Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is a tool for national unity. Because we have to really understand what it means. To maintain harmonious national integration, tolerance between very diverse communities needs to be further improved. In addition, national control is necessary to maintain global harmony.⁴⁴

V. CONCLUSION

Fostering unity requires commitment and effort from individuals, communities, and governments. By embracing diversity, encouraging collaboration, and addressing global challenges together, humanity can move towards a more peaceful and harmonious world. In the face of adversity, unity remains our strongest tool in building a brighter future for all. The New Life Concept offers a holistic approach to achieving **global harmony**. By fostering environmental stewardship, ethical responsibility, and social unity, the vision of a peaceful and sustainable world can become a reality. The **INLA movement** serves as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that through collective action, humanity can thrive in balance with nature. As individuals, we have the power to contribute to this vision—whether through simple daily choices or active participation in global initiatives. The journey towards a harmonious world begins with a commitment to **love nature, cherish life, and work together for a better future**.

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⁴⁴ Ibid.

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VIETNAMESE RECEPTION OF THE ALCHEMIST (WRITTEN BY PAULO COELHO) FROM THE 2025 VESAK VALUE SYSTEM OF UNITY, COLLABORATION, AND HARMONY

Nguyen Thanh Trung*

Abstract:

The widespread popularity of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* raises the question of the work's cultural value when its value system seems to encompass Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist elements. Employing the archetypal criticism method, structural analysis, and poetics, this article aims to approach *The Alchemist* from the perspective of the cohesive, cooperative, and harmonious value system of 2025 Vesak. Therefore, an examination of the novel's imagery, symbolism, and structure reveals a congruence with the Vesak values in three aspects: richness, harmony, and humanism. The article clarifies the artistic methods of conveying Vesak values, providing a valuable explanation for the work's popularity and offering insights into organizing, promoting Buddhist values, and conducting research and teaching foreign literature in Vietnam.

Keywords: *The Alchemist*, Vesak value systems, unity, collaboration, harmony.

I. INTRODUCTION

A classic book, a guiding light, the best-selling book of all time after the Bible¹,... This is what the Vietnamese media have been saying about

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¹ Pham Ngo (2019), What makes *The Alchemist* the best-seller after the Bible, *Phu Nu Online*. <https://www.phunuonline.com.vn/dieu-gi-khien-nha-gia-kim-ban-chay-chi-sau-kinh-thanh-a1393087.html>

VOVTV (2021), *The Alchemist*. <https://truyenhinhvov.vn/nha-gia-kim-16421012715413796.8.html>

Paulo Coelho's 1988 novel, *The Alchemist*. However, the reality is quite different², ignoring the PR tactics of the publisher and other related parties, this phenomenon still reveals that *The Alchemist* has a special appeal. With over 150 million copies sold, this novel, however, has been criticized for "more self-help than literature."³, however One thing people agree on is that this book is inspiring and promotes harmony between the inner and outer self; this transcends cultural, ethnic, and religious boundaries. Studying this work from the general perspective of Vesak values and literature specifically, therefore, can open new avenues in literary research and interdisciplinary solutions in today's globalized era.

In reality, cultural, ethnic, religious, and belief-based conflicts remain significant challenges of the 21st century. According to Lê Hải Đăng and Phạm Minh Phúc (2020), these conflicts stem from unresolved religious-rooted contradictions that gradually influence other economic, political, and social issues. In the Middle East and North Africa, economic decline, rising unemployment rates, and the intensified activities of extremist Islamic forces have led to political upheavals, notably the Arab Spring. The ethnic and religious diversity in East Asia, coupled with separatist tendencies and the aftermath of colonialism, is directly impacting the region's stability and development. Religious and ethnic conflicts not only cause casualties and property damage but also exacerbate political, social, and humanitarian instability. Embracing the values of unity and humanism as presented in *The Alchemist* is thus a step towards fostering the resolution of cultural, ethnic, religious, and belief-based conflicts worldwide while simultaneously maintaining Vietnam's stability and development.

The academic study of the reception of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* also carries significant educational value. Within foreign literature programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels, this work serves to cultivate reading comprehension skills, broaden horizons, stimulate critical thinking, and foster sustainable development. Particularly when connected to Buddhism, core values such as the pursuit of dreams, perseverance, and the meaning of life, along with the Vesak value system, have the potential to assist students in understanding themselves, comparing and contrasting Buddhist thought, and gradually engaging in and developing Buddhist values within academic and international cultural contexts.

Focusing on Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist*, this article aims to

Even the cover of the 2017 Vietnamese edition of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, translated by Lê Chu Cầu and published by Van hoc Publisher, supports this claim.

² As per Penguin Random House's list, the leading spots go to *Don Quichotte, A Tale of Two Cities*, <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/532/nine-books-sold-more-100-million-copies-and-how-they-compare-my-book>. Despite the Bible's inclusion, *The Alchemist* isn't among the top 10 best-selling books ever, as reported by Deseret News in 2023.

³ Cowles, Gregory (October 8, 2009), Inside the List, *The New York Times*. Archived from the original on August 4, 2017. Retrieved January 28, 2012.

approach the work through the lens of the Vesak values of unity, cooperation, and harmony. Specific objectives include: (1) clarifying the cultural context of the work, focusing on its intercultural nature; (2) comparing the core values of Vesak with the artistic elements of the novel; (3) exploring how these values are conveyed through language, imagery, structure, etc.; and (4) proposing applications of the research findings in teaching, propaganda, and organizing Buddhist cultural activities, as well as multi/intercultural activities. Thus, the question arises: which Vesak values align with *The Alchemist*, how are they artistically expressed, and what is their significance for Vietnamese art and culture? In addressing these questions, the perspective of Vietnamese culture and Buddhism is adopted as a novel viewpoint, combining literature, culture, and positioning within the context of Vietnamese culture's reception of the work about Vesak values. Furthermore, this represents a new methodological approach, combining literature, culture, and Buddhism in the study of *The Alchemist* as a case study, proposing a method for researching and evaluating reading culture as an effective way to promote universal values and Vesak values. Finally, the Vietnamese cultural perspective in this article is situated within the context of the United Nations Vesak Day celebrations held in Vietnam – after Hanoi (2008), Ninh Binh (2014), and Hà Nam (2019), now in Ho Chi Minh City in 2025 – reflecting Vietnamese Buddhism's alignment with the nation, with the motto “Buddhism - Nation - Socialism,” and aiming towards the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the South (1975 – 2025), the unification of the country, and the 80th National Day on September 2nd (1945 – 2025).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to their rich and profound significance, the Vesak value system and the novel *The Alchemist* have been widely studied and have achieved certain successes, which can be roughly divided into three main groups.

The first group is interested in the rich value of the object. Muraleedharan, in *Multi-disciplinary dimensions in Paulo Coelho's Novel The Alchemist* (2012), examined the novel's symbols through a rich system including history, geography, philosophy, theology, psychology, and mythology. Cheyma and Maroua, in addition to Catholicism, focused on analyzing Islamic culture in the novel⁴. This characteristic is similar to the comprehensive meaning of Vesak – “Triply Blessed Day of Vesak (Birth, Enlightenment and Passing Away of Gautama)”⁵ and aims at a richness that transcends national and ethnic boundaries – “Developing the United Nations Vesak Day, commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and passing away of the Buddha as a truly special and sacred international event that can be shared with the world community, regardless of religion, skin color, or ethnicity.” Vesak's sacredness is interpreted as an awareness of the mind that is not tied to symbols that become icons of

⁴ Cheyma, B., & Maroua, B. H. (2022). *The Impact of Islamic Culture on Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist* (Doctoral dissertation, Kasdi Merbah Ouargla University).

⁵ Thich, N.T. (2019), *Buddhist Studies: Contemporary Approaches – Vietnam Buddhist University Series*. HCMC: Religion Publisher, p. xiii.

religion or the state. Sacredness as self-strength shapes Buddhists' identity by applying religious and moral values in modernity and the plurality of society, nation, and state."⁶ Thus, the research hypothesis (H1) is that the rich value is compatible between Vesak and *The Alchemist*.

The second research group seems to focus on unity. Zahra, in *Santiago's Sanguine Personality in Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist* (2017), analyzed Santiago's optimism as a reflection of unity, reconciliation, and a drive towards personal cooperation and harmony; or as stated in "The concept of the spiritual universe... symbolizes the unity and harmony that permeate the cosmos and the potential for spiritual connection and enlightenment"⁷. This aligns with the traditional values of Vesak, as exemplified by "This year's Vesak celebrations will be similarly fruitful and stimulating, with its theme on Buddhist contributions to human development"⁸; and "Against the backdrop of such widespread misery and strife leading to complex issues and crises, Buddhism with its rich heritage of tolerance and non-violence can contribute immensely and inspire us with His message of loving-kindness, peace and harmony in today's world. The United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) 2019 is a testimony to this fact"⁹; hence, the second research hypothesis (H2: Harmony and Unity) is formulated.

The third group emphasizes the purpose of Vesak and the Alchemist in spiritual development and human perfection. On December 15, 1999, the United Nations General Assembly, at its 54th session, agenda item 174, officially recognized Vesak as an international religious and cultural festival of the United Nations – "Vesak Day is a great occasion for an international gathering to meet, celebrate, remember and learn from the life of Buddha."¹⁰ The humanistic – spiritual value, as a research hypothesis (H3), is also reflected in *Alchemy of the Soul: A Comparative Study of Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist and Manoj Das's The Escapist* (2012) by Dash; Vesak is seen as "... constitute acknowledgement of the contribution that Buddhism, one of the oldest religions in the world, has made for over two and a half millennia and continues to make to the spirituality of humanity"¹¹. Similarly, works such as *Magic and Literature - the*

⁶ Yatno, T., Wijaya, M., Subiyantoro, S., Pitana, T. S., & Basrun, M. C. (2020), Cultural And Spiritual: Representation Of Vesak Before And During The COVID 19 Pandemic. *Productivity management*, 25, p. 947.

⁷ Thu, T. A., Dan, T. C., & Han, T. P. B. (2024). Researching the methods of executing "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho using symbols to convey an additional message. *European Journal of Literary Studies*, 5(2), p.94.

⁸ Tobgay, T. (2018), Buddhist contributions to human development. *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 38, p.1

⁹ Thich, N.T. (2019), *Buddhist Studies: Contemporary Approaches – Vietnam Buddhist University Series*. HCMC: Religion Publisher, p.xiii

¹⁰ Tobgay, T. (2018), Buddhist contributions to human development. *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 38, p.1

¹¹ United Nations General Assembly (1999), *International recognition of the Day of Vesak at the United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices: Resolution/ adopted by*

case of modern Latin American fantasy novels (2016), *Magical realism in Latin American novels viewed under the Impermanence of Theravada Buddhism* (2018) also affirm that “the alchemist wears a pseudo-scientific coat to gradually open up spirituality.”¹²

III. METHODOLOGY

From the perspective of Vietnamese culture when approaching the novel *The Alchemist* and the value of Vesak, the question arises: how can these rich value systems be conveyed through artistic generalization and abstraction into effective images and symbols? Traditional criticism, therefore, becomes necessary to examine a research object that is so rich in thought and artistic symbolism. Traditional criticism, as developed by Karl Jung in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1969), systematically presents the concept of the collective unconscious and archetypes. It applies this theory to the analysis of literature, mythology, and other cultural manifestations through the process of identifying symbols, analyzing their meanings, and making cross-cultural comparisons. The advantage of this method is that it broadens the scope of literary and psychological research, bridging diverse cultures. However, it is also limited by its subjectivity and the difficulty of verification. Recognizing both sides of this specialized method, this article applies archetypal criticism to analyze symbols such as the desert and sandstorms, placing them within a universal cultural context to examine human values like love, challenges, and happiness.

The system of symbols, while inherently suggestive, runs the risk of leading the viewer far away from the cultural and artistic framework, specifically the Vesak value system. Therefore, structural analysis is employed to examine the nature, role, and relationships between elements within the system and between elements themselves. This method was introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916) when he analyzed the relationship between the signifier and the signified, determining that value does not reside in the element itself but in its systemic relationship. Later, Levi-Strauss developed this method into a cultural anthropology trend in his study of kinship exchange patterns to avoid the risk of incest in *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949). The primary operation of structural analysis is to identify elements, their positions, relationships, and influences within the system, and how the shift of one element can lead to changes in the entire system. This specialized method is applied in this article to examine the system of images, symbols, and their meanings within the narrative related to the Vesak theme.

The task of literary and art criticism is to demonstrate how everyday language is transformed into artistic language with figurative thinking, which

the General Assembly. A/RES/54/115, p.1. Available from <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/405679>

¹² Nguyen, T.T. (05/2016), Ma thuật và văn học – Truong hop tieu thuyet My Latin hien dai [Magic and literature: the case of modern Latin American magical novels], *Journal of Science* 5(83)/2016, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, p.100.

is also the distinguishing feature of literary research. It doesn't merely identify ideas and meanings but strives to point out the underlying principles and artistic methods used to develop corresponding systems of thought and meaning. Within that value system, the poetics method is applied to the writing to fulfill the above task. Poetics is a method that Trần Đình Sử used in his work *Poetics of Tố Hữu's Poetry* (1987). It includes a system of techniques for analyzing form, language, structure, and the relationship between content and form to explore the characteristics of Tố Hữu's use of words, images, sounds, rhythm, and rhyme. The advantage of this method is a new, more scientific, and systematic approach to literary research; however, sometimes the excessive theorization makes the analysis difficult for readers to access. Applying the poetics method to the study of the novel *The Alchemist* from the Vesak value system, this article aims to clarify the artistic connection between images, symbols, and the plot, thereby enhancing the understanding and value of Vesak from a Vietnamese cultural perspective.

From the hypothesis, method, nature of the research object, and research model of the article, we can generalize it in the following table:

[Table 1. Research Model]

Hypothesis	Method	Characteristic	Aspect	Meaning
H1. Richness of values	Classical criticism	Richness of thought	Literary symbols	Deeper exploration of the values of love, connection, and cooperation
H2. Harmony and unity	Structural analysis	Harmony through unity and cooperation	Plot/ Context	Broadening the perspective of unity and harmony in modern society
H3. Humanism	Poetics	Upholding human dignity	Literary images	Education to enhance awareness and humanistic values

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. Diversity and unity

The rich intellectual nature of Vesak is primarily evident in interfaith respect – Vesak functions as a significant forum for interfaith dialogue, encouraging individuals from various religious traditions to engage with one another respectfully. In this spirit, the value of cultural exchange becomes a significant orientation for understanding the novel *The Alchemist*. Melchizedek and the alchemist, as two sages from different cultures, guide Santiago step by step to help him develop spiritually. Additionally, Paulo Coelho has skillfully interwoven many spiritual and philosophical elements from various cultures into the story, creating a colorful tapestry of Santiago's journey of self-discovery. Initially coming from a Catholic background, Santiago follows signs and is advised by a gypsy fortune teller (often considered heretical) to embark on a journey to find treasure in Egypt. He learns from thieves, intellectuals,

warriors, and Muslims to understand the soul of the universe and realize that everything is not opposed but is inherently unified. However, the story is not that simple. The rich intellectual nature of the novel is not a mere summation but rather the result of transformation through conflicts and struggles arising from differences in value systems and philosophies of life. Of course, each religion/ culture offers its worldview. Islam emphasizes submission and faith in destiny, while Buddhism promotes enlightenment and the transcendence of worldly desires. At times, Santiago must choose between pursuing his dreams and adhering to the rules and expectations of society. It is this that creates the depth of the character and the overall picture of rich intellectual values.

The richness of thought is also reflected through a holistic consciousness. Since ancient times, humans have deeply understood the intimate connection with nature through observations of the universe, spiritual experiences, and the need to seek inner peace. While the Western rationalist tendency tends to affirm the central position of humans, at certain crossroads, it converges with the Eastern spirit in a tendency towards overall harmony, of which alchemy is one. Paulo Coelho has conveyed the principle of alchemy in a simple yet profound way – alchemy is the cultivation of the mind to harmonize with the soul of the universe. This consciousness is clear and focused throughout the novel, and collective awareness is also a common theme of Vesak because the observance of Vesak underscores the paramount importance of collective cognizance of diversity. Therefore, *The Alchemist* has a universal theme that transcends many cultures, aiming at the common value of pursuing dreams and realizing the purpose of human life. In that spirit, the work emphasizes the deep commonalities among religions such as belief in a higher power, the pursuit of one's dreams and destiny, and the connection between humans and the universe. The message of *The Alchemist* and Vesak, therefore, implies the idea that all paths lead to the same destination - harmony between oneself and the universe, regardless of religion or ethnicity. To achieve this, one needs to listen to the inner voice, even though it may not always be clear, but it is the source of strength to overcome obstacles and realize dreams. *The Alchemist* and Vesak guide people toward moral obligations, meaning they promote the fulfillment of moral duties that serve to strengthen unity among diverse groups. Paulo Coelho's novel is a synthesis of moral concepts from various religious cultures; it is a self-reflective tale mirroring Greek mythology (the story of Narcissus, son of the river god Cephissus), and it upholds Christian covenants (representative biblical motifs like the Gypsy fortune teller, the King of Salem - Melchisedek who does not accept money but takes a tenth of the treasure; the words of a Roman nobleman to Jesus in Luke 7:26¹³), or "Maktub... You would have to have been born an Arab to understand, ... 'It is written.'"¹⁴ – is

¹³ "Lord, I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed." (Paulo Coelho (2017): 207).

¹⁴ Paulo Coelho (2017), *Alchemist* [*Nha gia kim*] (Lê Chu Cầu trans.). Hanoi: Van hoc Publisher, p. 83.

mentioned seven times as a sacred, predetermined destiny inscribed in the Quran. While Buddhism is not explicitly mentioned, the narrative alludes to the impermanent journey of transformation that Santiago undergoes, where each person or object acts as a catalyst, supporting the character like dependent origination. Santiago's understanding that the mind is the root of all things aligns closely with the Buddhist concept of consciousness. The character's quest for treasure, located within the heart, evokes the concept of Nirvana and enlightenment, attainable only through recognizing interconnectedness (emptiness). The passage where the camel driver speaks to Santiago resembles a Zen teaching, emphasizing mindfulness and focus in the present moment: "When I'm eating, that's all I think about. If I'm on the march, I just concentrate on marching. If I have to fight, it will be just as good a day to die as any other... Because I don't live in either my past or my future. I'm interested only in the present."¹⁵ It's important to note that any diversity has the potential to weaken a system, even causing internal contradictions. Therefore, while promoting the principle of individual morality, Jewish tradition presents two stones:

They are called Urim and Thummim. The black signifies 'yes,' and the white 'no.' When you are unable to read the omens, they will help you to do so. Always ask an objective question. "But, if you can, try to make your own decisions"¹⁶.

Similarly, the protagonist, Santiago, encounters people from various cultures and religions, such as Arabs and Egyptians. Although they share a common moral quest, each individual has a unique understanding of their goal (pilgrimage to Mecca, comprehending the desert). These differences sometimes lead the character to face dilemmas and contradictions as they must choose between intuition and reason, dreams and societal norms, the material and the spiritual, freedom and responsibility...

4.2. Harmony through collaboration

The religious and cultural conflicts and contradictions in the world today are complex issues with deep-rooted causes. These can be broadly categorized into three components: self-doubt, external pressures, and historical challenges. The era of globalization has both promoted diversity and challenged traditional identities; people are questioning their identities, searching for meaning in life, and feeling threatened by different value systems. Santiago's repeated self-questioning about whether he is on the right path or should return is a result of this identity crisis. Secondly, under external pressure, Santiago had to contend with the opinions of others and differences, as exemplified by the robber who mocked his treasure. The harmony of cultures and religions today is often influenced by political, economic, and social pressures, leading to conflicts in many places. Thirdly, factors such as historical legacies (occupation history, territorial division), power competition, and changes in geopolitical status often cause instability and cultural and religious conflicts worldwide; this

¹⁵ Ibid, p.119.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 49 – 50.

process is analogous to the difficulties, challenges, failures, and temptations that Santiago encountered on his journey to find the treasure. In reality, this is a major issue that goes beyond the capacity of individuals, communities, or specific religions to solve.

To bridge differences and conflicts, the pressing need is to harmonize through unity and cooperation. Despite their diverse paths, characters like the King of Salem, the Gypsy seer, the Islamic glassblower, the Arab alchemist, and Fatima all contributed to Santiago's journey of self-discovery, helping him understand and align with the universe's message. The Vesak celebration in 2025 mirrors this sentiment, bringing together over two thousand delegates from 80 countries with diverse cultural backgrounds, all united under a common purpose. This spirit of solidarity and cooperation is beautifully depicted in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*. Through Santiago's journey, we see how overcoming challenges, embracing diverse cultures, and seeking his legend fosters a deep understanding of unity and interconnectedness. The most profound lesson he learns is to respect diversity, for he discovers a universal language that connects all things, transcending cultural and religious boundaries. This personal legend, encompassing love and the power to overcome obstacles, is a quest for each individual. The novel's conclusion reveals a profound truth: the treasure we seek is often found where our journey begins. This aligns with Coelho's timeless quote, "When you want something, all the universe conspires to help you achieve it"¹⁷, a message that resonates with the spirit of Vesak, a tradition celebrated since 1999.

4.3. To exalt the dignity of human beings

Vesak and *The Alchemist* share a positive influence in uplifting human dignity and value. Vesak, marking noteworthy events in Buddha's life, embodies principles of compassion, peace, and the pursuit of enlightenment. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of understanding suffering, Vesak encourages individuals to cultivate mindfulness, compassion, and a sense of community, fostering a harmonious society. Similarly, in *The Alchemist*, Santiago embarks on a journey to discover his "Personal Legend," a metaphor for his true life purpose. This journey, transcending the pursuit of material wealth, emphasizes self-discovery and understanding one's place within the universe. Coelho suggests that individual dreams reflect a greater universal truth, mirroring Vesak's principle of interconnectedness and highlighting the unique role each individual plays in the collective human experience. Therefore, the most important value to discuss here is the freedom to pursue one's dreams and live authentically. Santiago's story revolves around his pursuit of his Personal Legend, which reflects a deep respect for individual dreams and the freedom to choose one's path. To achieve this, Santiago relentlessly faces challenges, from leaving his homeland to crossing the desert with unwavering courage and a strong will to surpass his limits.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 89.

The second set of values conveyed in both *Vesak* and *The Alchemist* is wisdom and experience. Participating in *Vesak* is a journey that connects ancient Buddhist knowledge with contemporary issues, fostering wisdom and encouraging self-improvement through communal experiences such as rituals, meditation, and finding peace. At the end of the novel, Santiago realizes that the true treasure is not gold and silver, but rather the experiences, lessons, and relationships he has gained; life, in itself, is a journey of discovery and experience, and true joy lies in the process rather than the destination. This set of values is symbolized by the character Melquíades, who represents wisdom and life experience – he taught Santiago valuable lessons about life, love, and the pursuit of dreams; by the language of the universe – symbolizing the ability to communicate with nature and animals, demonstrating a deep connection between humans and the universe; and by the divine presence that Santiago increasingly becomes aware of on his journey, seeking harmony with the universe. Ultimately, this wisdom does not come from external sources but is only obtained through personal experience – “Actually, it wasn’t that those things, in themselves, revealed anything at all; it was just that people, looking at what was occurring around them, could find a means of penetration to the Soul of the World.”¹⁸

He third group of values is love and connection. *Vesak* establishes a new framework and meaning for connection in a universal, cultural, and practical bond of love. As a global event, *Vesak* honors universal values such as peace, love, and wisdom, thereby spreading the collective power of humanity’s love. This love is inherited from the legacy of the Buddha’s life and the Buddhist tradition, contributing to the development and preservation of culture, connecting the past and the present through practical and concrete actions such as charity, environmental protection, creating positive social change, and encouraging altruism and tolerance. Similarly, the love that Paulo Coelho mentions in *The Alchemist* is not possessive but liberating – “love would never keep a man from his Legend”¹⁹; Santiago’s love for Fatima does not tie him down to the oasis but empowers him to continue pursuing his dreams and sacred journey. Thanks to that love, Santiago expands his limits, harmonizes with the universe in a spirit of altruism and selflessness, and learns to hear and understand the language of the universe.

V. DISCUSSION

In the novel, when the alchemist “was speaking the language of alchemy. But the boy knew that he was referring to Fatima”²⁰, this serves as the clearest evidence of the spirit of reception, which is the very essence of cognition. Reception is a co-creative process with the literary author, extending the life of the work through the reader’s perspective and anticipation. This is the literary and artistic aspect of this article, answering the question of how the system of

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 139.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 210.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 116.

values and ideas is conveyed in Part 3 and what is special about approaching Vesak values through the novel... These issues will be temporarily addressed on three levels: symbolism, structure, and literary imagery. From a symbolic perspective, *The Alchemist* constructs a metaphorical system of life linked to a journey, which is the largest symbol, encompassing smaller symbolic elements such as the desert symbolizing life, challenges, but also the blossoming of aspirations and dreams; sandstorms symbolize instability, impermanence, but also the spiritual strength gained through harmony with nature. This symbolic system operates on the principle of analogy, using concrete images to develop multiple layers of abstract meanings. As a result, philosophical themes such as love, destiny, and fate are deeply pondered but conveyed in a simple, understandable, and enjoyable manner; alchemy being a prime example:

The alchemists spent years in their laboratories, observing the fire that purified the metals. They spent so much time close to the fire that gradually they gave up the vanities of the world. They discovered that the purification of the metals had led to a purification of themselves²¹.

Structurally, the work employs a simple narrative style with a clear storyline. It is told from a third-person perspective, yet occasionally shifts to a first-person narrative to delve into the inner thoughts and perceptions of the characters, particularly in the philosophically rich dialogues about the nature of dreams and the importance of listening to one's heart. This structure demonstrates Paulo Coelho's creativity as he incorporates episodic narratives, such as the stories of the old glassblower and the Englishman, into a traditional storyline that has its roots in *One Thousand and One Nights*²², was rewritten by Borges into a short story²³, and finally, it takes on the form of a substantial novel. The central figure that links all the symbols and plays a pivotal role in the plot is Santiago – a traveler on a quest for the meaning of life and reality; he is the synthesis and embodiment of a system of characters, representing a journey of experiencing faith and transcending cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries. Santiago succeeds in summoning the wind and engaging in a spiritual dialogue with the universe: "The boy began to pray. It was a prayer

²¹ Ibid, p.113.

²² *The Tale of Prince Zein Alasman and the Lord of the Spirits*: Zein dreamed that a spirit instructed him to go to Egypt to find a treasure. Upon arriving, he was told to return. Later, he dreamt of a secret chamber and was guided to meet a spirit. The spirit promised him the most beautiful statue in the world on the condition that he bring the spirit the most beautiful woman. In the end, this woman became Zein's reward. (Edward William Lane (1882), *The Thousand and One Nights*).

²³ *The Tale of Two Dreams*: A young man dreamed of a treasure in Egypt, so he traveled a long way from Baghdad to the land of the Pyramids to search for it, but to no avail. In the end, he was mocked by a captain who claimed to have had the same dream about a treasure in Baghdad. The young man returned to his homeland and found the treasure. (Jorge Luis Borges (2001), *Tuyen tap*).

that he had never said before, because it was a prayer without words or pleas.”²⁴ The character does not employ any specific language or invoke any deities, yet they exemplify the highest degree of human dignity – universal humanity.

Literary research moves from the text to the underlying ideas. The ideological systems of Vesak and *The Alchemist* have been discussed in the third part. Here, the Vietnamese cultural and ideological framework as a basis for reception will be analyzed and clarified. Approaching the research object from the perspective of Vietnamese culture ensures a rich and unified approach, given Vietnam’s long-standing and rich tradition of Southern and Northern Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Catholicism, alongside the vibrant and free religious practices of today. Muraleedharan and Manju, in *The Triad of Man, Universe and God in Paulo Coelho’s novel The Alchemist* (2011), discussed a model of harmony between man, the universe, and God through a journey involving three levels: the physical, the spiritual, and ultimately, consciousness; Santiago achieves a state of pure self-awareness in harmony with the cosmic soul. This is not foreign to Vietnamese thought. However, Vietnamese culture views Santiago’s journey as a process of engagement with the world, where the realities of life are the ultimate destination. Therefore, Buddha becomes the benevolent old man in folktales who helps the weak and the kind, and many monks engage in worldly activities, such as dispensing medicine and teaching Chinese characters, while spreading their teachings. Vietnamese culture not only synthesizes these ideas but also demonstrates creativity in its reception, fostering unity in history through the emergence of the trend of the unity of the three religions (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism developed side by side, contributing to medieval Vietnamese society; and indigenous and introduced religions such as Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo emerged). Mậu Tử, an early Vietnamese Buddhist scholar, asserted: “I respect Buddhism and I study Buddhism, but that doesn’t mean I have to abandon Yao, Shun, Zhou, and Confucius. Gold and jade do not tarnish each other, and beryl and agate can coexist peacefully”²⁵. In Vietnamese history, there have been many monks who were well-versed in three religions (Khuông Việt, Vạn Hạnh, Mãn Giác), with an open theoretical and practical system: “monks not only combined the three religions but also used Confucian knowledge in the spirit of Buddhism” (Nguyen Thi Toan, 2013: 72), playing the role of political and diplomatic advisors to the court and the nation. This is the result of the spirit of solidarity, unity in diversity, and cooperation for common development, associated with the thousands-year-old history of Vietnamese agricultural activities, disaster prevention, and resistance to enemies. In this context, the spirit of harmony for human development is also clearly defined in the country’s development orientation. Therefore, Vietnamese people, with a rich tradition of solidarity

²⁴ Paulo Coelho (2017), *Alchemist* [*Nha gia kim*] (Lê Chu Cầu trans.). Hanoi: Văn học Publisher, p. 199.

²⁵ Nguyen, L. (2008), *Viet Nam Phat giao su luan* [*Vietnamese Buddhist historiography*]. Hanoi: Văn học Publisher, p. 46.

and harmony, each person is a Santiago in the global community, in today's universal affection, organize the United Nations Vesak Day (UNDV) in 2025 at the Vietnam Buddhist Academy: to the core of Vietnamese values, leading the universal Vesak values of caring for humanity: unity, collaboration, and harmony.

VI. CONCLUSION

In essence, this article, through the specialized system of three methods: archetypal criticism, structural analysis, and poetics, has clarified the rich, harmonious, and universal nature of Vesak values and Paulo Coelho's novel *The Alchemist* as a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures and the interdisciplinary fields of Buddhism and literature. The research findings offer a new perspective on the Buddhist spirit and Vesak from a literary and artistic standpoint, specifically through images, symbols, and artistic structures, as perceived from the cultural and life context of Vietnam, with a mindset of sharing love, unity, harmony, and striving for human development and the development of humanity.

The article's three research hypotheses have proven to be suitable and effective in connecting the values of unity, cooperation, and harmony of Vesak 2025 and *The Alchemist*. However, within the framework of the Vesak 2025 event and the limitations of the research, the article has not examined the original Portuguese version to consider the language arts, nor has it been able to fully generalize the studies and values of Vesak... These are directions for future research.

Based on this article, we have some suggestions:

(1) Strengthening interdisciplinary research on literature and Buddhism: This should be done in a multidisciplinary manner to address contemporary literary and artistic issues in the spirit of exchange, revitalizing traditional values. Building a database of literary works related to Buddhism for extensive research and reference, inheriting and promoting the spirit of Vesak.

(2) Continuing to build and perfect the system of Buddhist criticism: This should be viewed as a multidisciplinary research direction, examining the transformative relationship between literature and Buddhism, and organizing teaching and guidance in undergraduate and graduate programs of literature and Buddhism.

(3) Promoting and diversifying creative Buddhist cultural activities and events: This aims to attract the interest of various social classes and age groups to develop a solid Buddhist culture in the new era of the country and the world.

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FOSTERING UNITY; COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

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Abstract:

This paper explores the Buddhist perspective on global peace and social unity, emphasizing the practical application of Buddha's teachings to mitigate modern societal conflicts. It analyzes how spiritual development through patience, compassion, loving-kindness, and equanimity fosters interpersonal and interfaith harmony. The study critiques the origins of global disunity – such as dogmatic views, religious extremism, and sensual attachments – and proposes a Middle Path approach to overcome these obstacles. Drawing from canonical texts like the *Metta Sutta* and *Kaccānagotta Sutta*, the paper reveals how avoiding extremes and embracing nonviolence, tolerance, and truth can transform individuals and societies. The importance of responsible speech, equality, and mutual respect is also emphasized, alongside the impact of ego and hatred on social disharmony. Through historical and contemporary examples, the research illustrates that true peace requires inner transformation and a commitment to universal goodwill. Ultimately, it advocates for a collective spiritual consciousness rooted in Buddhist values as a practical foundation for global reconciliation.

Keywords: *Buddhism, global harmony, loving-kindness, compassion, non-violence, tolerance, spiritual ethics, unity, Middle Path, social reconciliation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism always prescribes unity and peace in society and living all beings as one family. Due to the various problematic and complicated social environments, men are fighting with each other to defeat each other. This tensional situation does much harm to the entire society and destroys the peace and harmony among mankind. Irrespective of cast, class, nationality, color, rich and poor, etc. Buddhism emphasizes the unity of human beings.

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So, to build up such a society, the Buddhist teachings that are affected to that purpose are investigated in this paper. The noble qualities that are introduced by the Buddha for a peaceful and harmonious society are revealed here, and how spiritual development affects social harmony is also discussed. The spiritual and behavioral factors compassion, kindness, generosity, etc., which are affected by the harmony and hatred, craving, anger, and ignorance obstructed to harmony, are investigated in the Buddhist point of view. So, the aim of this paper is,

- (1) Defining the noble human qualities that affected the global harmony.
- (2) Revelation of how to interfere global harmony as individual character.
- (3) Discovery of collective interference for global peace and harmony.

So, the causes of the wars and social conflicts are defined in the Buddhist perspective, and the proposals that are proposed by Buddhism for peace and harmony are broadly explained. Instead of discussing mere theoretical interpretations, the practical values of the Buddha's teachings are emphasized for world peace. Here, the causes that affect the world conflicts and war, such as religious extremism, dogmatism, and conceptual attachment, are broadly discussed, and how to avoid these kinds of unnecessary issues are discussed from the Buddhist point of view.

In but the world, it appears that, people have divided in to various divisions by themselves due to the various reasons. Religion, national, caste, class, colour, province, attitudes, language, views, philosophy and dogmas are the major reasons which are affected to divide the people in to the divisions. Man has a sheer right to believe, respect, and accept any aforesaid factors, making his own identity among the diversity with peace and unity. But, in this world, many people create various problems and conflicts among the people affirming their own belief is true and all others are wrong, empty, and blind (*idameva saccaṃ moghamaññaṃ*).¹ This position is rejected by the Buddha, who advises to respect others' beliefs, views, religions, and ideas. To promote this stance, we all must work individually as well as collectively.

In *Brahmajāla Sutta*, Buddha studied every view and discovered his own identity among them, not condemning all those views. It is affirmed that all those views are introduced as 'views' (*diṭṭhi*), not 'wrong views' (*micchādiṭṭhi*) (*diṭṭhijālantipi taṃ dhārehi*).² Although the Buddha was born in India, which were originated and dominated diverse sixty two views or multi-religions held a cordial association and discussion with them. Always advised not to hold the position 'this is only true, all others are wrong and false to avoid unnecessary contradictions among the religions or views. The positive reaction, which was practiced by the Buddha, is appreciation and respect of the partial truth of the other religions. In *Alagaddupama sutta* emphasizes that even "*dhamma* also should be abandoned and not to be grasped as a dogmatic view (*dhammopi*

¹ A.I.146.

² D.I.81.

vo bhikkhave pahātabbo)”³ in the attachment of any concept or dogma caused for the origination of controversial situation in the world which is damaged to the social harmony. “His doctrine should be practiced and used as a raft only to cross over the stream of reincarnation (*saṃsāra*) or cessation of the suffering not making room for the conflict, disunity and destruction of the social harmony”.⁴ His *dhamma* is the only means to the free from suffering and not to make arguments and disputes (*mā takka hetu*).⁵ When the Buddha arrived in the village Kesaputta, the householders reported that all the *Brahmins* and recluses who came to their village declared his doctrine is the only true and all others are wrong and false. So, they were so confused and got upset about which one was correct and true. In this situation, Buddha gave so reasonable answer that “It is fair and reasonable you confused and doubt about that (*alam kaṅkhitum alam vicikicchitum*)”.⁶ Here, the Buddha did not say his doctrine should be observed without doubt, and even his *dhamma* should also be doubted, and analytical investigation has to be done. According to this discourse, the Buddha expected the free and reasonable thinkers (*ākāravati saddhā*) and not the followers endowed with blind faith (*amulikā saddhā*).

Buddhism was not targeting only his followers, and all beings, not only human beings, are considered for his noble and great service. He always used the term ‘*sattā*’ or beings and not referred to the term Buddhist. Sometimes, he had a good friendship with contemporary teachers of other religions. Sometimes, Buddha visited other religious temples to have a cordial discussion with them and exchange ideas in a very friendly manner. On that occasion, Buddha was so cordially welcomed by them and highly respected at their residences. When the Buddha was coming to their temples, they made silent their followers and advised them not to disturb him, and silence is appreciated by him. Having gone there, Buddha asked them what they were talking about and discussing. But, they replied that they were discussing unnecessary talks and the Buddha’s sermon is so important than their useless discussion at this moment, requested to deliver the meaningful *dhamma* speech⁷ This incident proves that although there are discrepancies and differences among the religions and religious leaders the harmony and unity among the men and the followers are highly appreciated by the Buddha.

In his first missionary effort appealed to all the human beings (*bahujana hitāya.. sukhāya ..attāhaya*) and guided the disciples to serve them preaching his noble *dhamma* for the betterment of all the human beings and gods (*devamanussānaṃ*)⁸ Many people had come to see the Buddha whom were belong to various religions and respected in various views and discussed

³ M.I.338.

⁴ *Ibid.*336.

⁵ A.I.338.

⁶ *Ibid.*336.

⁷ M.II.332.

⁸ D.II.70.

many things with the Buddha. At that moment, Buddha welcomes everyone irrespective of their belief, religion, cast, class, and “he is welcoming (*ehisvāgatavādī*), kindly of speech (*sakhilo*), courteous (*sammodako*), genial (*abbhākutiko*), clear face (*uttānamukho*) and speaks firstly (*pubbabhāsi*) so friendly manner.”⁹ Among them some worshipped (*abhivādetvā*), some exchanged with the compliments of friendship and civility that should be reminded (*sammodimsu sammodaniyaṃ kataṃ sārāṇiyaṃ vītisāretvā*) some bowed or respected stretching their fingers (*tenañjalim paṇāmetvā*) some having asked the name and clan (*nāmagottaṃ sāvetvā*), some were silent (*tunhībhitā*) and sat down aside.”¹⁰ This clearly shows that the people who came to the Buddha were not only Buddhists, but they were also common people belonging to various religious groups. But, the Buddha had a personality being patient to discuss and converse with them on equal platform not making any dispute. Buddha accepted their privacy, right, and identity to hold any belief and religion according to their interest. But, human beings have the right and obligation to exchange their ideas in a responsible, ethical, and peaceful manner. Buddha never requested them to observe his *dhamma* and give up their religion at any moment. This religious harmony is so important even present world to make religious harmony and make unity among the diverse religious groups.

In the *Upāli sutta* house, householder Upāli was so pleasant and happy about the Buddha and requested to accept him as a follower of the triple gems. At that moment, Buddha rejected his request and said, “Investigate thoroughly, reminding householder, it is good for well-known people like you to investigate thoroughly (*anuviccekāraṃ kho gahapati karohi. Anuviccekāro tumhākaṃ ñātamanussānaṃ sādhu hotīti*)”. At last, Buddha advised him that although he observes the Buddha’s teaching, he must give alms to *Nighanṭhās*, who were supported very long period.¹¹ Here, the Buddha did not want to convert Upāli, his follower, and wanted to make religious harmony among the multi-religious society. It was a big challenge for the Buddha to propagate his doctrine among the multi-religious society, avoiding conflicts and making harmony among the people. Although his opponents accused and blamed Buddha in various ways, Buddha was not getting upset or confused and so patiently handled the situation to create unity and peace in the society. Buddha did not expect any conflict, war, or harmful destructive situation for the sake of his teaching.

II. PATIENCE AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE

In *Brahmajāla, Sutta* mentions the instructions to build up the interrelationship among mankind. Various conflicts are created in the world due to misunderstanding, ignorance, jealousy, and hatred. In the discourse, one of the *Paribbājakās* called *Suppiya* insulted and blamed the Buddha, his doctrine, and the Order of the *Sangha*. His disciple *Brahmadatta* praised triple

⁹ D.I.230.

¹⁰ M.I. 662.

¹¹ M.II.70.

gems and disagreed with his teacher's positions. A dispute arose between them on this matter. This incident was reported the *bhikkhus* to the Buddha and then the Buddha explained how to solve such a conflict peacefully and settle the conflict in a wise manner.

If someone insults and blames the triple gems, you must not be angry, resentful, or upset on that account (*tumhehi na aḡāhato na appaccayo na cetaso anabhiraddhikaraṇīyaṃ*). If you were to be angry, displeased at such a situation, it would be harmful to you. If you are in such a situation, you cannot identify whether they are saying right or wrong. If the allegation is correct, it must be accepted as really as it is. If it is incorrect, it must be abandoned and not cared about. If they are praised, they must not be overjoyed and proud. "It is also must be understood in its real way (*bhūtaṃ bhūtato paṭijānitabbaṃ*)."¹²

In this way, if others are blamed, disparaged, and insulted, cultivating this kind of wise attitude is so important to avoid the origination of unnecessary conflicts in the society. Usually, the common nature of the people is attachment to the people who are praising them and detachment from those who are dispraised. However, the Buddha advised to abandon these two extremist positions and follow the middle position for a peaceful society. Avoiding attachment and detachment and, making the balance mentality, the balance society also can be created. Unnecessary reactions to prove one's purity, correctness, and fairness pave the way to create unnecessary conflict among the people. But here, the solution is finding based on the realistic manner and the so calm and peaceful manner with so patiently. The people who are hate and love, both are considered as equal way and develop the equanimity (*upekkhā*) with the correct perspective on the matter following the reformative step. Endowing with this kind of attitude the contradictive positions with opponents can be settled.

The aforesaid instructions encourage the investigation of oneself behavior and being patient, compassionate, with loving-kindness to those who are hated and insulted instead of reacting similar manner. Usually, in the present modern developed world, people attack and commit war in the name of religion and so angry, dispraising and insulting on one's religion. "Buddhism is opened to the religious conversation and encouraged. Buddha advised not to perform attach with family, religious or any of the group."¹³ This originates from individual to international level and fighting each other with arms, nuclear weapons and bombs. Finally, assassinate the opponent. Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasrin are very famous writers receiving the unfair punishment due to criticizing the religions and blacklisted and banished from the country. But, Buddhism can be criticized by anybody, and nobody is permitted to fight with him by the Buddha. Buddha emphasizes that "Buddhism brightened when it is opened not covered or hid (*tathāgatappavedito dhammavinayo vivaṭo vorocati no paṭiccanno*)".¹⁴

¹² D.I.06.

¹³ Cheo Chu B.170.

¹⁴ A.I.510.

“*Poranametaṃ atula –netam ajjhatanāmiva. Nindanti tunhimaśiṇaṃ, nindanti bahubhāniṇaṃ, mitabhāniṇampi nindanti – natthi loke anindito.*” “O, Atula, is an old saying, it is not one of today only, they blame those who sit silent, they blame those who speak too much, those speaking little too they blame.”¹⁵

Here, mentioning and making awareness the eternal truth, expect to cease the conflict in the society. Usually, the conflicts that cannot be solved by the law can be solved by making awareness each other. Buddha mentions here the old eternal saying that the people who are over speaking, moderate speaking, and silent persons all are blamed baselessly without any reason. It is the nature of the world, and it must be understood and patiently reacted to. This means that there is no person in the world free from blame, dispraise, and insult. This instruction is so helpful to settle the social conflicts and cease the hateful feelings among the people by understanding this nature which is not inherited only one person all the people inherited this nature. Under this circumstance, the peaceful step can be taken for a peaceful society. Those who think furthermore are not eager to dispute, fight with any person and live a very calm and peaceful life. His exemplified behavior good example for others and it much benefit to the society to make peaceful and harmonious society due to the fact that following others too his behavior. The next stanza says that “there never was, there never will be, nor does there exist now, a person who is wholly blamed or wholly praised”. “*Nacāhu naca bhavissanti- nacetarahi vijjati. Ekantaṃ ninditi poso- ekantaṃ vā pasansito.*”¹⁶

By understanding this eternal truth, the wise person does not react unnecessarily to others’ insult and blame. So, following this noble advice of the Buddha, the blood shedding, conflicts among the people, between nations, countries, can be prevented and make a peaceful environment globally.

Concerning global peace, the two major factors are patience and understanding. When discussing the great character, the Buddha’s chief disciple Sāriputta mentions these two qualities as very important factors in one’s behavior. “*Khanti balo paṭhavi samo na kuppati/ Nacāpi cittassa vasena vattati/ Anukampaka kārūnikoca nibbuto/ Parinibbutaṃ vandatha sārīputto.*”¹⁷

These two mental attitudes and behavioral qualities are considered as the major pillars bringing up the peace and unity in the society. “*Thera Sāriputta* is equal to the great earth by the power of patience. Never got angry, not under control of the mind, pities on, being compassionate and so calm”. These noble human qualities are major factors that benefit mankind and never conflict with the members who are living around him. The above-mentioned qualities make many benefit mankind and unite society with peace and harmony. Everybody must sacrifice something for the peace, unity, and harmony of society and mankind, and to achieve that purpose, another much-needed factor is bearing up and tolerance of unfavorable reactions of others. “Peace is always obtainable,

¹⁵ *Dhp.*227.

¹⁶ *Dhp.*228.

¹⁷ S. III.179.

but the way to peace is not only through prayers and rituals. Peace is the result of man's harmony with his fellow beings and with his environment... Peace cannot exist on this earth without the practice of tolerance."¹⁸

To tolerate them, one must have deep compassion, patience, and understanding with a very wide heart equal to the earth. One who has such qualities, so many problems and conflicts are solved in the world. Patience and humanity are two factors interrelated each other.

"Forbearing patience is the highest austerity. Nibbāna is supreme, says Buddha's. He verily, is not a recluse who harms another nor is he an ascetic who oppresses others."¹⁹

For peace and unity, Buddha prescribes the tolerance and careful maintenance of the mind. The *Kakacupama sutta* explains how far to be the tolerance dominated in people while living in the society. "When we are accused, blamed, abused, condemned, despised, look down, our mind should not be confused or changed by hating and getting angry due to that reason wickedly and sinfully should not be spoken and should be disciplined with the mind of loving-kindness not hatred mind (*nceva cittaṃ viparinataṃ bhavissati na ca pāpikaṃ vācaṃ nicchāressāmi. Hitānukapica viharissāmi mettacitto na dosantaro*)."²⁰ One who hating others due to the two reasons which are desire of household life (*gehasita chando*), and thought of household life (*gehasita vitakko*).²⁰ Here, household life means association with sensual pleasures (*pañcakāmagunanissita*), desire means craving and hatred (*chandati taṇahāchandāpi paṭighachandāpi*),²¹ and due to the sensual pleasures and anger thoughts making social problems and hatred. But, the Buddha advised not to hate when opposition accusing, hit by hand, hit with bar, hits with stones and at that moment also not to be changed the mind committing with hatred. If the members of the society tolerate such difficulties with consciousness of loving-kindness hateful environment of the society can be changed to some extent.

Patience is not only tolerating the blame and disparagement but also tolerating others' attitudes, ideas, behavior, fashions, arguments, feelings, and different views. It is freedom of thought. Without developing freedom of thought, any development in the physical, spiritual, and philosophical fields is unexpected. As mentioned above, Buddha declared that those who kill and bring in to the difficulties others are not monk or recluse. So, the major characteristics of the recluse are patience and harmlessness. The order of the Buddha was established based on humanity and loving-kindness. "Those who destroy others good qualities in further definition made by the commentary that those who do not have patience others are killed and hurt and he is not a recluse but an animal (*yo adhivāsanakhanthirahitattā paraṃ ghāteti upaḡhāteti bādheti vihiṃsati*).

¹⁸ *Dhp.* 286.

¹⁹ *Dhp.* 184: "“*Khanti paramaṃ tapoti titikkhā – nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti Buddhā/Na hi pabbajito paropaghāti- samaṇo hoti paraṃ vihethayanto*”.

²⁰ *M.I.* 312.

²¹ *M.II.* 79.

So pabbajito na hoti catuppado pana tasseva vevacanaṃ)”.²² In this way, the Buddha doesn’t recommend the harmfulness and destruction of any being and affirms the patience and harmlessness. Especially in human history, Buddhism is the only religion that is not propagated by the power of weapons. The only weapon it used was none other than patience and loving-kindness. If anybody is being harmful and destructive to the society the unity and harmony cannot be expected. In that society, people identified each other with the signs of animals and killed each other. Under this circumstance the society becomes confused and unstable. So, it can identify the quality of the patient, including very wide meanings bearing up with equanimity such as belief, diversity, harmfulness, resentment, false accusations, insults, and different ideologies.

III. ERADICATION OF HATRED FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

Usually, the world follows the usual system and or ‘going with the stream,’ and it is called in Buddhism as the practice of *anusotagāmi*. Its opposite side is ‘against the stream,’ which is *paṭisotagāmi*.²³ Buddhism introduced the practice of going against the stream instead of going according to the stream for global unity, harmony, and peace. The Buddha said his teaching is ‘*against the current*’ and man’s selfish desire.²⁴ In the Second World War majority of the member countries in the UN council recommended bombing Japan, except then Srilankan president J. R. Jayawardhana, and guided the entire world to the going against the stream practice. In his speech in San Francisco in the USA on 06th September 1951, he expressed his view on the war and peace based on the Buddhist philosophy.

For we believe in the words of the great teacher whose message has ennobled the lives of the countless millions in Asia, that ‘hatred ceases not by hatred, but by love’ it is the message of the Buddha, the Great teacher, the founder of the Buddhism, which spread wave of humanism through south Asia, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Siam (Thailand), Indonesia, Vietnam and Ceylon and also northwards through the Himalayas in to Tibet, China and finally Japan which bound us together for hundreds of years with common culture and heritage.²⁵

This is a practical example that the Buddha’s one stanza brought peace for the entire world. That historical stanza is, “Hatred cannot be appeased by hatred. Hatred can be appeased by non-hatred or loving-kindness”.²⁶

Hatred is a poisonous mental factor and as well as a cancer of the mind. It destroys the person who deals with this only one factor. By understanding the danger of this negative mentality, people must develop loving kindness for

²² DA.I.325.

²³ M.I.408.

²⁴ Rahula.52.

²⁵ Jayawardene. p.15.

²⁶ Dh.p.05: “*Nahi verena verāṇi -samantidha kudācanaṃ/ Averenaca sammanti -esa dhammo sanantano*”

the entire world, even their enemies, and then the peace will restore the world as well as every being on this earth. The usual way of mankind and human nature is endowed with craving, hatred, and ignorance. Having understood this mental culture, it is better to control and tame the mind by applying the positive mental factors, which are generosity, loving-kindness, and wisdom. Kalupahana explains that going against the stream that its the sheer purpose is the prevention of preventing harmful actions and selfish tendencies,

It is a stream or continuity of a human person who goes against the normal temptations characteristic of the uncultivated and immoral character. As the unwholesome and harmful tendencies are gradually overcome and the human personality is gradually transformed, the very conceptual apparatus utilized in describing that person needs to be changed without doing violence to the community.²⁷

War is a big problem in the past, present, and future world, which are badly damaged not only mankind but also every being, killing thousands of people and destroying and polluting the environment, obstructing confidence and mutual-relationship among each other and cultivating hatred. But, taking back one step, the vast destructive war can be stopped. Once, the Pakistan prime minister challenged India to attack if it is necessary. But the Indian Prime minister reacted very peaceful manner though he is powerful world leader. He said there is no war in this land, this is Buddha's serene and peaceful land. This shows the power of Buddha's teaching that avoided the unfortunate destructive event and restoration of the peace and unity between two countries. This proves that once again, Buddhism can stop the wars by using even the name of Buddha. Although many religions originated in India, the only religion spread throughout the world is Buddhism, taking the message of peace to become the common religion or global religion. This kind of statement regarding the war is made by powerful world leaders not concerning the unbearable destruction of mankind and the natural resources. "For Buddhism has never claims any exclusive power to divides mankind in to two groups, saved and lost. Its long history has no battles of persecution or inquisition. In the history of religion, the Buddhist has displayed variety and freedom of thought"²⁸

The only consequence made by war is none other than suffering, hatred, revenge, separation, destruction, division, bloodshed, assassination, disabled people, mental patients, loss of dearest people, and destruction of trust among the people. In this circumstance the Buddhism introduced and replaced loving-kindness, sacrifice, generosity, forgiveness, compassion, wisdom, truthfulness, goodness, hatred, selfishness, craving, revenge, anger, ignorance, falsity, and badness. It is the policy of going against the stream. Although many people introduce this policy as a weak and backward nature, it is much helpful build up the unity, peace and harmony among the mankind. Buddha explained how to win over the world peacefully.

²⁷ Kalupahana.103.

²⁸ Malalasekara.66.

“Conquer anger by love, conquer evil by good, conquer stingy by generosity, and conquer the liar by truth.”²⁹

Replacing loving-kindness with hatred, Buddha goes against the current (*sota*) in the society. This was a turning point in world history. The majority of human beings believe that badness can be won by badness. But, the Buddha did not follow this easy and simple practice and selected the difficult practice, which is a better way for the betterment of mankind as well as every being in this world and universe. It paves the way to harmony and unity among men. The mutual understanding builds up each other due to the loving-kindness. Here, the confidence in goodness must be developed for the sake of a peaceful environment in the society. Replacing generosity with stinginess or craving causes to the happy and peaceful society. Replacing the truth with falsity, the confidential and faithful community comes into effect. The falsity never develops the understating among the men, and doubt is the only consequence. Telling lies is a vital factor in the society making disunited society. So, instead of practicing the practice of ‘going according to the stream,’ the practice of ‘going against the stream’ is a much effective attitude for a peaceful and united society.

It is clear that for the betterment of the entire mankind, everyone must follow the practice of going against the stream or *paṭisotaḡāmi paṭipadā*. Man has clearly understood that hatred cannot conquer by the hatred, and this reality forgets due to the ignorance. This hateful situation was created by man, not by god. But, they pray to the almighty God for the sake of peace. How is the irrational, illogical, and contradictory step taken by the man? Ven. Dr. Walpola Rahula explains it correctly in this way;

Human beings fear the situation they have themselves created, want to find a way out, and seek the same kind of solution, but there is none except that held out by the Buddha. His message of non-violence and peace, of love and compassion, of tolerance and understanding, of truth and wisdom, respect and regard for all life, of freedom from selfishness, hatred, and violence.³⁰

Buddha has explained how to appease hatred and develop loving-kindness by following a comprehensive methodology. The methodology is stated in the *Āḡhātaṭaṭivinaya sutta*. The five kinds of steps are mentioned in this way;

(1) “Loving-kindness should be practiced and cultivated to the particular unfavorable person (*mettā tasmim̐ puggale bhāvetabbam̐*). (2) Compassion should be practiced and cultivated to the hating people (*karuṇā -pe-*). (3) Equanimity should be practiced and cultivated to the hating people (*upekkhā -pe-*). (4) Not thinking of the particular person and forgetting him (*amanasikāro tasmim̐ puggale bhāvetabbam̐*). (5) Concerning that it is his *kamma* or action

²⁹ *Dhp*.223: “Akkodhena jine kodham- asādhum̐ sādhunā jine / Jine kadariyam̐ dānena-saccena alikavādinam̐.”

³⁰ *Rahula*. 86.

which inherited him (*kammassakata tasmim puggale adhiṭṭhābbam*).³¹

There is no perfect person in the world. So, we have to tolerate the unfavorable behavior of those who are living with us. Sometimes, they are our near dear people and our enemies. The above five attitudes can be applied to our lives in controversial situations with the contradicted behavior of the people. Here, out of four sublime abode the three factors are practiced and the balance mentality and the *kamma* concept are operated here in troublesome situation to settle the conflict among the people. The concept of *kamma* is so useful and comprehensive concept to settle controversial situations and create a peaceful and united community. Instead of fighting enemies, the better way is to forgive and allow the problem to be solved by nature or *kamma*. There is saying that 'if you cannot forgive please forget him'. The fourth factor is similar to this saying, and it is so vital factor in avoiding conflict while living with mismatched people.

The *Dutiya Āghātaṭṭhavinaya sutta* mentions another vital methodology to suppress anger and hatred. "It is mentioned that some people's bodily actions are impure, but verbal actions are pure; some people are vice versa. Some people are both pure, and some people are both impure. So, we must think only their good qualities not the bad qualities".³² We cannot live in a perfectly purified and virtuous society and have to deal with bad people and good people both. In the social system, the major obstruction for unity and peace is recollecting others' faults at every time instead of recollecting their good qualities. Every man has good qualities that are to be contemplated, but the problem is that men are not sincere in contemplating them. The consequence of this mental condition is the origination of the hatred that is so harmful to social harmony. Buddha says: "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me' in those who harbor such thoughts hatred is not appeased".³³

This is the way of origination of hatred, and this mental condition has to be conquered for the good of oneself as well as everyone in the society. To cease the hatred, recollecting the good qualities of others is proposed by the Buddha. Not recollecting opposition's abuse, beating, defeat, or robbery, the hatred naturally ceased.³⁴ In the establishment of global peace these kinds of attitudes or mental conditions are so obstructive in nature. Buddha forgave *Devadatta*, who attempted to kill him, *Akkosa Bhāradvāja* abused him, woman *Cinchi mānavikā* insulted and dispraised him, his close friend in his lay life Channa blamed the Buddha not giving the portfolio in the Order of the *sangha*. South African President Nelson Mandela forgave the officer who had been harming him at the prison in his twenty year imprisonment providing him good meal. Mahatma Gandhi forgave the person who assassinated him. Forgiveness is one

³¹ A.II.302.

³² A.II.305.

³³ *Dhp*.02: "Akkocchi maṃ avadhi maṃ ajini maṃ ahāsi me/ Ye taṃ upanayhanti –veraṃ tesaṃ na sammati."

³⁴ *Dhp*.03.

of the great and noble characteristics of noble man. They always think of the good of the entire society, not their respect. The best example given by these characters is the noble people are doing what is to be done very hardly and difficultly. It is so easy to cultivate loving kindness in those who love us. But the difficult thing is to cultivate loving-kindness and forgive those who are hating us. But, due to the noble attempts of the noble people in this society, the robbers, killers becomes serene people. Buddha discovered the *arahant* or liberated person in robber *Āṅgulimāla*, who killed hundreds of people.

The four sublime abode (*catu brahma vihāra*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), altruistic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) are four factors building up the harmony and peace among the people in the society. By practicing these four factors, any separation, division, degeneration, destruction, and confusion are not expected. Success, benefits, happiness, development, harmony, and peace are expected sincerely by everyone, not only the dearest people but also the hating and unfavorable people. In the aforesaid society minimize the war, conflicts, and destruction and living based on the friendly and mutual understanding principle. “One who endowed with loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity his heart filled with abundant, grown great, measureless, free from enmity and free from distress.”³⁵

Commentators define loving-kindness (*mettā*) as “pervading blessings for every being is loving kindness (*metta cittanti sabba sattānaṃ hitaparānacittam*)”.³⁶ Another commentary says that the loving-kindness consciousness is friendly and loving consciousness for all living beings.³⁷

One who practices the loving-kindness is so popular, beloved, and dear among the people who are living around him like fellow monks (*sabrahamacārīnaṃ piyo hoti manāpo*). Even gods protect and care for lives and spend comfortable life (*devatāni rakkhitā gopito sukhaṃ viharati*). Kings and ministers are cherished and live happy lives (*rājarājamahāmatādisu mamāyito sukhaṃ viharati*). When entering the village for mendacity, the people are respected (*gāmanigamādisu bhikkhācariyādisu manussena sakkato garukato*)”.³⁸

When concern the definitions on the *metta* or loving-kindness, this mental condition is associated with all the beings and their friendly and dearest association is always confirmed. In that sense, the loving-kindness is so influential factor for social harmony and, peaceful social environment. Without this mentality the society will become a place where living animals with hatred as a mentality.

Compassion is defined by the commentators as “compassion is trembling the heart with regarding the difficulties experiencing by the people (*para*

³⁵ *Nyanaponik*.253.

³⁶ *AA.I*.40.

³⁷ *ApdA.II*.419.

³⁸ *Ibid*.162.

dukkhe sati sādhuṇaṃ hadaya kampanaṃ karotīti karuṇā).³⁹ This is clear that the dearest attitudes to all the people who are living with him are spread. One who is thinking of others instead of thinking only of himself or selfishness means his immeasurable compassion and expectation is unity and peace of entire society. Always happiness of all the beings is expected and not doing anything what cause to harmful for the beings. “Compassionate person does not like others suffering and unhappiness (*ahitadukkhāpanāyanakāmatā karuṇā*)”.⁴⁰ So, if mankind has sensitive attitudes on others and trembling nature in the heart with regarding the suffering of the people they never expect to see and hear the unfortunate conditions of their lives.

Muditā, or altruistic or appreciative joy, is a much much-needed factor for a united society. Because of that, people are naturally jealous of others’ success, and others’ degeneration is expected. But the person endowed with this mental culture does not expect others’ degeneration and expects the success of their lives (*hitasukhāvippayogakāmatā muditā*).⁴¹ Expecting success of others is proved the generosity and their happiness with their family is delighting factor for the abiding with this quality.

Equality is also a remarkable factor for world peace. It eradicates the racism and religious hatred, extremism, and favoritism like that partial attitudes. “Equanimity enables us to transcend all the divisive thoughts and feelings based on class, caste, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and all forms of parochialism, as well as gender distinctions”.⁴²

Nyanaponika Thera explains the true nature of the four sublime abodes and the mentality of the person endowed in them. “They should be non-exclusive and impartial, not bound by selective preferences or prejudices. A mind that has attained to that boundless of the Brahma-vihāras will not harbor any national racial, religion or class hatred.”⁴³

Even the Buddha also had to live with good and bad people in his life. In this situation people have to live with presence of mind, careful and responsible manner. The secret of following this method is ability to purify our mind free from the hatred, revenge and anger. Ven. Dr. K. Dhammananda therā mentions very important instructions to avoid hateful situation and build up the peaceful society based on the Buddhist perspective.

(1) “Contemplating the Buddha’s advice of danger of the anger. (2) Instead of recollecting the bad qualities of the hated person recollecting the good qualities. (3) Contemplating the concept of the kamma that kamma is owner of them. (4) Cultivation of the loving-kindness. (5) Not letting your

³⁹ *DhaA*.181.

⁴⁰ *Sn*.87.

⁴¹ *Dha*.181.

⁴² *Karunadasa*.109.

⁴³ *Nyanaponika*.(2006), p.250.

mind contaminate evil thoughts and cultivate love every being in the world”⁴⁴

The unity and harmony highly appreciated and emphasized by the Buddha in his order of the *Saṅgha* and entire society. Without this noble quality any success cannot be expected in any organization and the society. In the conflict among the *bhikkhus* in his life time in city *Kosambi* advised “do not dispute each other and be unite and harmony (*samaggā hotha mā vivadatha*)” irrespective of ethical discrepancy which was caused for the conflict among them.⁴⁵

According to the *Kosambiya sutta*, misunderstanding among the members of the society and not respecting others’ ideas are the major reasons for disunity. They could neither convince each other nor be convinced by others; they could neither persuade each other nor be persuaded by others.⁴⁶ Buddha emphasized that this disunity has caused to much harm and suffering for a long time (*bhavissati digharattam ahitāya dukkhāyāti*). Buddha introduced the six principles for unity and harmony in society and organization. They are,

(1) “Maintaining Bodily acts of loving-kindness (*mettā kāya kammaṃ*). (2) Maintaining verbal acts of loving-kindness (*mettā vacī kammaṃ*). (3) Maintaining metal acts of loving-kindness (*mettā mano kammaṃ*). (4) Sharing with the members what were received (*appaṭivibhattabhogī hoti... sādharanabhogī*). (5) Being virtuous or practicing good moral life (*sīlesu sīlasāmaññāgato*). (6) Endowing with noble view or philosophy which is caused to the emancipation (*yayam ditthi ariya niyyanika*)”⁴⁷

These principles are so important for establishing and form a good and united society and the collective effort for this goal is able to identify. It is important to mention here that these principles should be practiced in personally and publicly (*āviceva rahoca*). These principles are so important to build up the mutual -understanding among the people and any doubt of each other is not originated due to the faithful behavior.

The two reasons are mentioned for the origination of conflict in the society: (1) The disputes arise among the rulers and householders due to the attachment of lust for sensual pleasures (*kāmarāgavinibandha*). (2) Disputes arise among thinkers or religious leaders due to dogmatic views (*diṭṭhirāga vinibandha*).⁴⁸

So, it is able to identify that all the conflicts and problems in the world and among people are originated due to physical and intellectual reasons. Its other conclusion is that these two reasons are the major factors for the origination of world conflicts. Generally first factor of attachment to the lust of sensual pleasure attachment is caused for the conflicts of general people and *diṭṭhirāga* or conceptual attachment caused to religious teachers, thinkers, philosophers

⁴⁴ Dhammananda.(1998), p. 69-70.

⁴⁵ Dha.48.

⁴⁶ Nānamoli and Bodhi.(2009), p. 419.

⁴⁷ M.I.752 - 756.

⁴⁸ A.I.130.

and policy makers. Those who attached (*abhinivesa*), bound to (*vinibaddha*), pervade (*paruytṭhāna*) in these any factors attempt to dominate his idea in the entire society and believe that all others must observe his position. But, the Buddha refused attachment in any dogmatism. Murti says that “Buddha is a practical man and he vehemently refused all the theoretical consideration which is not useful for the spiritual progress.”⁴⁹ If his position is rejected he reacts them with anger and hate and this is the prime reason for the origination of the conflicts. In the modern world, whatever reason and defections are mentioned with regarding the cause of conflict and struggles, the aforesaid two reasons are the major factors for them.

Generally, the religious wars are originated due to the conceptual attachment or dogmatic religious views among the people. It is so unfortunate situation origination of the wars for the sake of religion which is providing peace and harmony to the world. Buddha never affirmed and recommended any harmful and destructive step for the name of his teaching. So, the Buddha introduced the concept ‘seeing as really as it is’ (*yathābhūtañāṇa*) instead of attachment to the views (*ditthiñca anupagamma*). Abandoning attachment to the views endowing with the correct philosophy or realistic view (*dassanena sampanno*) the unnecessary conflicts in the world can be solved.⁵⁰ This realistic knowledge or view is referred as right view or ‘*sammādiṭṭhi*’. One who has a correct vision he sees the world in correct and real manner and abandons the ‘extremism’ and realized that “there is no substance or entity to be grasped as I, MY, and MYSELF (*neso mam neso hamasmiṃ neso me attāti*)” In the second discourse of the Buddha these three concepts are rejected and identified that the major reason for origination of the mental and social problems.⁵¹ Those who see the world through this view understand that nothing to be grasped as soul and minimize the mental and social conflicts and applied the best mental application of equanimity (*upekkhā*) which is avoiding attachment (*taṇhā*) and detachment (*dosa*).

IV. AVOIDING EXTREMISM AND SOCIAL HARMONY

In *Kaccānagotta sutta* in *Samyutta nikāya* explains how the people making conflicts among the society. It is mentioned that the two extremist positions ‘exist’ and ‘non-exist’ are the major factors worldly people mostly associated (*dvayaṃ nissito kho kaccāna loko*). Having understood these two positions correctly the wise person follows the middle position which is avoided the extremism “exist is one extreme kaccana and non-exist is second extreme”.⁵² In the first sermon of the Buddha emphasizes to abandon the extremist positions and follow the middle position. “O, *bhikkhu* there are two extremes not to be associated”.⁵³ *Mahāyāna* teacher *Nāgārjuna* also in his work

⁴⁹ Murti.(1998), 29.

⁵⁰ Sn.152.

⁵¹ S.III.32.

⁵² S.II.28: “*atthi kho kaccāna eko anto natthi dutiyo anto*.”

⁵³ S.V.(2).270: “*dve me bhikkhave antā pabbajitena na sevitaḍḍhā*”

Mūlamadhyamakakārikaā explains this position correctly. “*Astīti sāsvatagrāho – nāstīti ucchedadarsanaṃ/ Tasmā dastitvanastitva – nasriyate vicaksanak*”.⁵⁴

Exit and non-exit and purity and impurity are extremist positions. So, abandoning these two positions the wise man does not attach even in the middle position. Exit is represented the eternalism and non-exist represented the nihilism. These two positions are so harmful to the world and making room for origination of the complex and complicated problems among the human beings. The first position is attitude of permanency and everything what we have is considered as permanent and their changing is never expected and the second position nihilistic attitude which endowed with destructive attitudes. This dogmatic position is dominated not in the religious, philosophical fields but also in the scientific field which is doing much harm to the every being. Bhikkhu Bodhi who was one time a scientist before his monkhood, says, “I saw how dogmatic some scientists could be. The science that I saw in the labs of Cambridge. Science had lost its sense of humility. Ecological opinion prevailed over the impartial search for truth.”⁵⁵

That is why the Buddha prescribes the middle position which is seeing the real nature of the world and the causes of conflicts and the problems and applying the correct, analytical and practical answer for them. In this busy and tiresome world people don’t have a patience to see the problems in correct perspective and the middle position is the best way to look into the real answer for unavoidable problems in our lives and peace and harmony for entire world. “Victory breeds hatred, the defeated live in pain. Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat.”⁵⁶

Abandoning two extremes defeat and victory the man can live peacefully and happily. The conflict arises in the world due to these two extremist factors and one who endowed with equanimity living as a perfect and calm man. Buddha always emphasizes that the real victory is not winning the external world or people, but the winning of one’s own mind. “Victory oneself indeed is noble instead of wining mankind. One who is restraining oneself living so calm and serene.”⁵⁷

This mental attitude is so important to inculcate for the unity and harmony in the world. One calm and restrained never harmful and always free from all the harmful activities performs kind and acts for the benefit of all beings. Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda explains this nature so beautifully in this way,

Learn to cultivate and sustain the benevolent forces of kindness, love, and harmony. The battleground is within us, and it is within us that the greatest

⁵⁴ *Kalūṇyapaṇṇāsa*.(2012), XV.10.

⁵⁵ *Sunday Times*.(2009), p. 02.

⁵⁶ *Dhp*.201: “Jayam veram pasavati- dukkham seti parājito/ Upasanto sukham seti- hitvā jayaparājayo.”

⁵⁷ *Dhp*.104: “Attā have jitaṃ seyyo –yā ca’yaṃ itarā pajā/ Attadantassa posassa –niccaṃ saññatacārino.”

battle has to be fought and won. The battle is not fought with weapons, but with mental awareness of all the negative and positive forces within our minds. This awareness is the key to unlocking the door from which conflict and strife as well as wholesome thought emerge.⁵⁸

Buddha introduces very vital concepts “*anuruddhapaṭiviruddhapaṭipadā*” and “*ananuruddhaappaṭiviruddhapaṭipadā*”.⁵⁹ The usual nature of mankind is first one which is practice of attachment and detachment, and the second one is practice of free from the attachment and detachment. Practicing the second one is so important to build up a peaceful and united society. The commentary correctly defines the nature that attachment in craving and detachment in anger, and this nature transforms the society into to confused and troublesome nature (*rāgena anuruddhassa kodhena paṭiviruddhassa*).⁶⁰ Abandoning these two natures the society can be transformed equal and balanced society which is not fighting for taking others’ wealth, valuables, land and countries and not destroy others’ lives for gain stop wars against other countries and nations. “Craving originates the grief (*soka*), and fear (*bhayam*) and one who free from the craving grief and fear ceased.”⁶¹ Anger or hatred is also poisonous mental factor that destroys the entire society and the good heart of mankind creating the world an unfavorable place to live the mankind.

In the *Kalahavivāda sutta* mentions the causes for the origination of the conflicts and problems and “the noble person who calm and serene understood the reality does not involve the disputes with this worldly people (*ñatvā vimutto na vivādameti*)”.⁶² ‘*Vinicchaya*’ judgment is another factor caused for the conflict and always tries to affirm and prove one’s position and interest disputing with others. But “the intelligent person abandons all the judgments and free from the disputes with any one (*hitvāna sabbāni vinicchayāni- na medhagam kurute jantu loketi*)”.⁶³ So, if we are living in a multi-cultural and multi-national society we must respect their beliefs, social acceptances and even their opposition stance also should be respected and appreciated. Because he has a right to hold even his wrong position. Buddha does not emphasize observing his doctrine with blind faith, and reasonable observation is recommended. ‘Come and see’ (*ehiṭhassika*) is the cordial invitation for any one and if he doesn’t favor the doctrine, he has a right to give up the teaching. This freedom is so helpful to a cordial and peaceful society.

V. LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL HARMONY

Although the Buddha preaches the transcendental truth the conventional truth or traditional usage is not refused due to the fact that without using conventional truth the transcendental truth cannot be revealed. But these two

⁵⁸ *Dhammananda*.122.

⁵⁹ *M.I*.158.

⁶⁰ *MA.II*.08.

⁶¹ *Dhp*.216.

⁶² *Sn*.881.

⁶³ *Sn*.889.

sections have to be maintained so carefully. Once the Buddha declared that “he does not dispute with the world, but the world dispute with the Buddha (*nāhaṃ bhikkhave lokena vivadāmi lokoca bhikkhave mayā vivadati*)”. This disputation arises among the people due to the Buddha is preaching the reality and it is contradicted with what the world is believed. But “one who realizes a reality in the world never disputes with anyone (*dhammavādī kenaci lokasmiṃ na vivadati*)”.⁶⁴ But finally, Buddha says “whatever confirmed as existed and non-existed by the intelligent people I do not disagree with those positions”. This is meant that how far the Buddha was sensitive on the conventional and traditional usage for the reconciliation of the entire society. Buddha never tells the false, but the truth. It is very interesting to note that even the truth also not tells if the conflict is arisen among the society and in the right time it is expressed.⁶⁵ This is clear that when we using the language more important reason is safeguarding the unity and harmony in the society. If there is any conflict originates due to the statement made by us better to be silent and the meaningful statement have to be expressed, “if there is no reasonable talk noble to be silent”.⁶⁶

Language is best equipment express our ideas and exchanges our ideas, knowledge, traditional beliefs, healing the mind of people, make the people happy etc. But, on the other hand, it is so powerful bad weapon destroy the unity of entire society. Buddha says, every man’s “mouth has fixed the axe (*kuṭhāri jāyate mukhe*)”.⁶⁷ So, the language should be maintained very carefully. It can destroy the entire world by one irresponsible word and one responsible word can be silent thousands of weapons. Four kinds of verbal actions are mentioned by the Buddha not to be used for the benefit of the society. They are telling lies (*musavāda*), malicious speech (*pisunā vāca*), harsh words (*pharusāvāca*), gossip (*samphappalāpa*),. All these speeches are not affecting to the social unity and harmony and affect to the social disunity and disharmony. When the definitions made to these four speeches it is clear that they can be used in its positive manner and for the harmony and unity of the society. “*Musāvāda* or telling lies is defined as refraining from telling lies (*paṭivirato*), telling truth (*saccavadi*), connected with the truth (*saccasandho*), trustworthy speech (*theto*), reliable (*paccaiko*), and not contradicted with the world (*avisanvādako lokassa*)”.

Telling truth is so important factor for a peaceful and balanced society. Distorting information is setting fire to the world and making enemies among the people. Here, the trustful combination among the men is building up due to the truthful speech. The speech that is used by us must be matched with the world for trustworthy communication. If it is not so, people are looking at doubtful attitude each other.

⁶⁴ S.II.238.

⁶⁵ M.II.96.

⁶⁶ M.I.396: “*dhammi vā kathā ariyo vā tunjibhāvo.*”

⁶⁷ A.VI.306.

Refraining from the malicious word is very vital for the peaceful environment of the society. This factor gives the guideline for social harmony.

Refraining from malicious speech, having heard here not telling other place to make for disunity, having heard other place not telling here for disunity, used the words to make unity (*iti bhinnānaṃ vā sandhātā*), gives out keeping together (*sahitānaṃ vā anuppadātā*), for rejoicing in peace (*samaggarāmo*), attaché in unity (*samaggarato*), delighted with unity (*samagganandi*), peace-making words are used. (*samaggakaraṇim vācaṃ bhāsītā hoti*).

This is clear that Buddhism emphasizes that language must be used responsibly for the harmony and unity of the society. Unity is the highlighted term here, and every word has to be used to make harmony among the men. As a summary every word is used avoiding disunity and making and building up the unity.

Refraining from harsh words is so important to create a heartiest society. The mere usage of language is unexpected the Buddhism and qualitative and commendable speech is recommended. “That speech must be blameless or innocent (*nelā*), pleasant to hear (*kaṇṇasukhā*), amiable (*pemaniyā*), agreeable or heartiest (*hadayaṅgamā*), polite (*pori*), delighted by many people (*bahujanakantā*), cherished by many people. (*bahujanamanāpā*).

This is the way language among the community.

The other one is refraining from gossip or idle talk. Sometimes even the truth also must not be told due to its danger and the correct time and correct place to be spoken.

It is defined that refraining from idle talks, speaking at proper time (*kālavādi*), truthful (*bhūtavādi*), meaningful (*atthavādi*), speaking according to the law (*dhammavādi*), speaking according to the ethics (*vinayavādi*), speak treasured to be treasured (*nidhānavatimavācaṃ*), speak seasonable connected with goal (*kālenasāpadesaṃ pariyantavatim atthasanhitam*).⁶⁸

All these explanation emphasizes the unity and harmony in the society. Speaking truth with heartiest language with people creates the peaceful environment in the society. In the speaking responsibly must be performed concerning the others' benefits. The place where the language should be used responsibly is mentioned that, “in the assembly (*sabhaggaṭovā*), in the public place (*parisaggaṭovā*), in the relations (*ñātimajjhaggaṭovā*), in the trade union (*pūgamaṭjhaggaṭovā*), in the royal family (*rājakulamajjhaggaṭovā*)”,⁶⁹ All these communities are can be considered as the entire society and for good relationship with them the only means of communication the language must be used responsibly.

⁶⁸ D.I.110.

⁶⁹ MA.II.275.

A human being is the only being who can express developed and updated complex attitudes through the language. Now they are so updated and developed expressing their ideas using internet throughout the world in a minute. It has already been damaged so much to the society telecasting, propagating false and distorted news and information to the communities and create unstoppable wars, conflicts and struggles among the mankind cultivating anger, hatred, revenge and ignorance, especially for the name of religion, race, nation and country motivating for the wars. So, never before in history has the responsible usage of language been needed for mankind to build up a peaceful society. So, Buddhism never agreed with using language for disunity and a harmful environment.

Five kinds of speeches are used by the people in the world, and five are cause to benefit of the others and five are cause to making many problems. "They are right time (*kālena*) wrong time (*akālena*), productive (*bhūta*) and useless (*abhūta*), smooth (*sanhena*) harsh (*pharusena*), meaningful (*atthasamhitā*) meaningless (*anattasamhitā*), with consciousness of loving-kindness (*mettacitto*) with hatred (*dosantaram*)". Usually, people do not get upset or confused at receiving pleasant words. But, when others are blaming with the unpleasant words get so upset and angry with opposition. The first one is so easy to follow, while the other one is difficult. But, if the person can tolerate others' bad words with a compassionate and loving heart, the difficult thing is done by him. Buddha says,

At that moment mind should not be changed, and harsh words should not be used; the attitude of loving-kindness should pervade towards them. Furthermore, the Buddha advises that the loving-kindness should pervade all the beings unlimitedly replacing the hatred.⁷⁰

Here, the term '*sabbāvantam lokam*' is important to explain which is appropriate this issue and considered the entire beings for the benefit. The intention of loving-kindness is extended to all beings, not just in this world even other worlds also intends the individual loving-kindness extended to the universal loving-kindness.⁷¹ The world is so large one being is tiny. Forgetting this tiny being, the noble mind should be established and contemplated all the beings and then hatred mind can be appeased and his interference to life can be forgotten. This mental attitude is so effective for a peaceful society.

To control the mind and tolerate others' harsh words, Buddha gave very vital similes, and considering these similes, the mind can be settled by thinking uselessness of reacting to the enemy, and the value of the peaceful mind can be understood.

(1) "The first simile is that thinking the earth and it cannot be shaken and destroy person. In the same way, others cannot be shaken in the mind who are endowing with loving-kindness by insulting and blaming (*paṭhavisama*).

⁷⁰ M.I.318: "tadārammanaṇca sabbāvantam lokam mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāneṇa averena abbyāpajjhena pharitvā viharissāmāti."

⁷¹ MA.II.89.

(2) The second one is the person attempting to draw the pictures in the space and it is not being successful. In the same way, others' blame should not be concerned at all (*ākāsasama*). (3) The fourth one is a person who tries to set fire to the river Ganga but is not successful. In the same way, others should not be allowed to change the mind by their blame and insult (*gangāsama*). (4) The fourth one is a person trying to make a noise cat skin and it is unsuccessful. In the same way, others should not be allowed make angry.”⁷²

In this way person should train the mind to cease the hatred and anger and cultivate loving-kindness. The ultimate tolerance of the Buddhism is mentioned the Buddha in this way, “*Bhikkhus*, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handle saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching Buddha emphasizes that this advice always s to be contemplated.”⁷³

This implied that Buddhism prescribes patience (*khanti*) and loving-kindness (*metta*) for a peaceful society. The usual nature of men is to be jealous, deceitful, and cheating others, and that nature makes many troubles in the society. In that uneven society, the intelligent people cultivate patience and love for the benefit of many and sometimes tolerate the loss, defeat, blame, and hatred of worldly people. If they make a similar reaction to the worldly people with a hateful mind, what will happen to the world? One irresponsible political leader can destroy an entire society with his irresponsible decisions. That is why the Buddha advises the rulers to practice patience (*khanti*) when they are ruling the country. “The patience, tolerating endurance with non-violence and equal peacefully and happily is *khanti*”.⁷⁴ So, tolerating is not a mere volition that arises in the mind, but an intellectual updated concept with deep understanding. That means not committing suicide and not being concerned only others' security. The harmful feelings that are contaminating the mind should be abandoned, and compassion and kindness should be spread everywhere so sincerely that the oppositions also can be changed, and the kind person will be followed by them.

Puññovāda sutta explains how to manage the terrible environment in society. *Thera puñña* was getting ready to propagate Buddha's doctrine in the country *Sunāparanta*, where the people were so cruel and harmful. Buddha questioned him on how to propagate his *dharma* in that terrible and unprotected country. The reply given by the *therapist* is so vital and so effective in building up a peaceful society and making the mind peaceful by removing the hatred. Even in a troublesome environment the responsibility of the intelligent and patient person is building up a good society for the name of peace and harmony. Buddha asked Can you live in *Sunāparanta* city, and can you restrain and calm them? If the people in the city *sunāparanta* were hit by the hand, hit with clod of earth, hit with sticks, hit by arms and finally killed,

⁷² M.I.318-322.

⁷³ *Ñānamoli and Bodhi*:223.

⁷⁴ *Dhs*.490: “ya khanti khamanatā adhivāsanatā acandikkam anasuro po attamanatā cittassa”.

what would you do? The answer given by the *therapist* is that he considers them as good people because they do not kill. He had confidence and faith in his duty of propagation and unshaken compassion and loving-kindness for the people who were introduced as cruel and terrible people. Finally, the discourse reported that the *Thera* converted the people in that country so a peaceful manner to Buddhism.⁷⁵

Converting to the religion by force is not recommended by the Buddha, and making awareness in reality and the truth is the best weapon the Buddha much appreciated and recommended. Emperor Asoka in India stopped his cruel and terrible war mission and chose the voice of *dhamma*, which is a peaceful methodology for the propagation the *dhamma*. According to Buddhism, “safeguarding and protecting others is protecting oneself and vice-versa with patience, humanity, loving-kindness and altruistic joy (*attānaṃ bhikkhave rakkhanto, paraṃ rakkhanto attānaṃ rakkhati.. khantiyā avihinsāya metta cittatāya anuddayatāya*)”.⁷⁶ *Thera puṇṇa* also thought of the others’ protection, and progress, and then his humanity, kindness protected himself too. Protecting others is related to very deep meaning, as mentioned in the discourse, which is patience, humanity, loving-kindness, and altruistic joy. It correctly identified the valuable factors that affect to social harmony and peace. Here, “patience is tolerance (*khantiyāti adhvāsana khantiyā*)”. It means that tolerance of others’ mistakes, faults, discrepancies, unfavorable actions and different ideologies, etc. are able to be considered. On the other hand, tolerating others’ reactions so patiently is protecting their rights, which paves the way to a united society. Humanity is compassion (*avihinsāyati sapubbabhāga karuṇā*). This is so vital that one who endows with this nature unexpected the others suffering at all and so sensitive others’ lives and their happiness is wished. Loving-kindness is a friendly attitude toward the people who are living around us. Kindness is a person so sensitive of others suffering and expecting others success with a delighted mind.⁷⁷ By examining these statements, it is clear that safeguarding others’ rights are safeguarding the human rights of the entire society. On the other hand, his mind is transformed in to noble mind, and the entire society is considered as one family invariably.

VI. METTA SUTTA OR DISCOURSE OF LOVING-KINDNESS

Metta sutta is the remarkable discourse that was preached by the Buddha to create a universal friendly society even to the tiny being. Being compassionate and loving to other beings is not a simple an easy performance. On the other hand, being a compassionate person entire world is harder than it is preached. So, the discourse explains to achieve that purpose to become a skillful and talented person (*atthakusala*). The *Metta sutta* or discourse of loving-kindness introduces a person endowed and exhibited with perfect personality, highly developed spirituality, and human kindness. The only person who is skillful and

⁷⁵ M.III.548 - 550.

⁷⁶ S.V. (I). 302.

⁷⁷ SA.III.182.

talented person can compassionate others, spread loving-kindness, thinking of others equally, and others benefit and success. Such a person is introduced by the discourse for the global peace and harmony.

It is mentioned the fourteen skills or the qualities to be a kind and loving person. "They are skill, uprightness in action, further uprightness in action, obedience, soft, humility, happiness or joy, easily be nourished, few duties, balanced life, disciplined senses, presence of mind, calm and quiet, non-attachment."⁷⁸ One who endowed these qualities in his behavior he is so loving and kind to the entire world irrespective of the boundaries and limitations which are established and created by the mankind. The usual nature of the human being is attachment in what he is favorable and detachment in what he is unfavorable in the world. But, according to the Buddhism there is nothing to be attached and detached in the external world and this mind culture is created by us. "There are no sensual objects in the world and it make sensual object by ourselves (*nate kāmāyāni citrāni loke- saṅkapparāgo purisassa kāmo*)".⁷⁹ Due to the fault of the man and his attitude external world transform in to sensual pleasures and displeasures. By understanding the real nature of the world the intelligent person does not attach and detach in any objects in the world. The emancipation which is explained in the Buddhism or enlightened person mustn't be found in any religion. But, it is not obstruction to the harmony among other religions. Bhikkhu Bodhi explains it in this way,

The Noble Eightfold Path, as an integrated system of spiritual training, cannot be found outside the dispensation of a Fully Enlightened One. Surprisingly, this exclusive stance of Buddhism regarding the prospects for final emancipation has never been a policy of intolerance on the part of Buddhists towards the adherents of other religions.⁸⁰

Those who endowed with above qualities hardly work for the good of people and their every action of verbal, physical and spiritual are focused for the harmony and unity of the mankind. "*they should become our inseparable companions, and we should be mindful of them in all our common activities.*"⁸¹ All the beings not only the human beings, environment is considered as part of his life. It is so common factor that people work hard not for the betterment of the mankind instead of the destruction and harmfulness. But here the Buddha advises here not to be harmful to human beings even by thought. The main theme of the discourse is "may all beings endowed with happiness (*sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhittā*)". This sincere wish can be done only the person who has spiritually skillful and balanced personality. Such a person firstly fulfill his mind with loving-kindness and then spread it throughout the entire society and make the society better place to live everybody with peace and harmony. In this way, being a first person of endowing the loving-kindness transform

⁷⁸ Sn.143 - 144.

⁷⁹ S.I.p.42.

⁸⁰ Bodhi.(2015), 109.

⁸¹ Nyanaponika.(2006), 250.

other people also being peaceful and be a part of creating united social system. This is not the individual effort and it is collective effort of all the human beings making the society comfortable and happy place.

The skillful person works for the welfare and betterment of the entire world and make the society united world. Although others harmful to him, his mind is not changed and fulfilled with loving-kindness and victory is expected only through the loving-kindness. The character of youngster *Maṅgha* won his social welfare through the patience and loving-kindness as mentioned in the Buddhist literary history is exemplify character. He conducted his followers spread the loving-kindness to the king and village headman who opposed, revenged and disturbed to their welfare activities.⁸² The skillful person doesn't change his loving mind in to hateful mind at any condition of his life tolerate all the disturbances, difficulties and unsatisfactory reactions of the society.

The term '*sabbe sattā*' or 'all the beings' are unlimited and immeasurable and spread the loving-kindness to all the beings without any division. This attitude is so helpful for the united, harmonious and developed society. Replacing the '*muditā*' or sympathetic joy of others success to the jealous many unnecessary mental and social conflicts can be solved avoiding competitiveness and pleases others success sincerely. The policy he followed is so friendly and his expectation is success and development of not only the favorable men but also the unfavorable men without any division. Seeing with doubt each other is main cause of conflict in the world and extends it to the constant wars among nations and countries. Peter d. Santina explains the nature of loving-kindness and how to prepare the mind for the cultivation of loving-kindness. "One can cultivate loving-kindness and compassion through recognizing the essential equality of all living beings. The recognition of the fundamental equality of all living beings is basic to the basic to the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion."⁸³

The compassionate person builds up the confidence and guaranty of protection of lives and mutual relationship among the people that any damage or harm is not done for their lives. If the attitude of '*no harm any being*' is performing in the society everybody responsible each other for the unity and harmony and reconciliation is dominated throughout the society. No one has a right to destroy others' life and has a right to save the life and its unavoidable responsibility of all the people. "These teachings are not at all limited to meditative contexts. Since, Gotama had indicated the motivation for social activity in these instructions; he could relate the discourses on love and compassion to more contemplative aspects of the religious life"⁸⁴

This concept is affirmed and re-affirmed by the discourse for the sake of all the beings. If mankind believe and respect this reality and truth this world become one family living in the one global village. Although there is an opportunity in the cyber space to develop the human minds with compassionate

⁸² *DhaA*.130 - 138.

⁸³ *Santina*.(1984), 76.

⁸⁴ *Harvey*. (1986), 64.

and intellectual feelings much attempts are made to contaminate their minds. So, all the performance the verbal, physical and mental should be success and development and unity of the society not for the disunity, division and disharmony. The noble person abstain from killing beings and others are also observe in it (*neva pānam hanti.. parampi tathattāya samādapeti*).⁸⁵

“*Pānaṃ na hāne na ca ghātayeyya –na cānujaññā hanataṃ paresaṃ/ Sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ- ye thāvarā ye ca tasa santi loke*”.⁸⁶ Here emphasizes that weapons and rods are abandoned which are harmful to all the beings and not appreciate or allow to others to do it. This is important that not only him others also tempted not to kill beings. On the other hand, here, not considered only the beings the environment which is helpful for the life continuum is mentioned not to damaged and destroyed. So, protecting the environment is protecting animate and inanimate beings for the sake of all the beings and unity and harmony of the mankind. The term ‘*tasa-thāvara*’ is environment which is not accepted by the traditional commentators. But professor Oliver Abeynayake argues that this term is represented the environment. “In the light of this interpretation, *pāna*, by definition, is not only human and animal life but also plant.”⁸⁷

Another specific indication in the *Metta sutta* is this attitude should be dominated in the minds of the men which they are standing, walking, sitting and lying down. Under this circumstance people tolerate others minor mistakes and faults assist to minimize the social conflicts building up the balance society with unity and harmony. This attitude is not roaming in the mind and world and to achieve this purpose all the men should be perform sincerely and energetically. Attitudes which affect to the unity and harmony and avoid the conflicts in the society are reasonably identified in the discourse.

(1) May one not deceive another (*na paro paraṃ nikubbetha*). (2) May the actions of one cause no pain others (*nāthimaññetha katthaci naṃ kañci*). (3) May not arise anger and ill-will in any minds (*byārosanā paṭighasaññā*). (4) Suffering and pain not expected each other (*nāññamaññassa dukkhaṃ iccheyya*).⁸⁸

These four factors are so vital for the building up the united and harmonious society. Deceiving others is destroying the trust each other and expecting others pain is inhuman attitudes. Hatred and ill-will never make a good society. So, it is so vital that the attitude of “not expecting the suffering each other (*aññamaññassa dukkhaṃ na iccheyya*)”. Usually people wish others destruction, pain, suffering and degeneration due to the hatred and pray for the various invisible powers to fulfill this ambition against the people who are living around themselves. Others should be despised by their race, clan and national in any area of this earth. The next verse explains that the protection of all the beings is expected as a mother protects her only son. Here, the term ‘*aparimānaṃ*’ comprises so

⁸⁵ A.I.338.

⁸⁶ Sn.338.

⁸⁷ Abeynayake. (1995), 125.

⁸⁸ Sn.148.

deep meaning. The immeasurable comfort, happiness, and success are expected the all beings. According to the *sutta* limitless beings considered in all the directions in the universe (*tañca aparimānasattārammaṇavasena*) and without remainder any being (*satte anavasesapharanavasena*). Further explanation not expecting the inconveniences (*sambādhavirahitam*) and break the boundaries (*bhinnasīmanti*).⁸⁹ In this way, kind hearted human society is to be created and then it is vital reason for the united and sensitive society loving each other irrespective of any division. The loving-kindness which is defined in the discourse extended from global loving-kindness to the universal loving-kindness.

Sometimes someone may think and surprised whether this wishes are practical and pragmatic. The meaningful answer is given by Ven. Gunaratana in this way:

As you cultivate loving - kindness within yourself, you naturally interact with others in a friendly manner, free from biases, prejudices, discrimination, or hatred. Your noble behavior enables you to help others in a truly practical way, easing their pain and suffering. It is compassionate individuals who are best able to support and uplift others. Noble behavior, in essence, means treating others with the utmost friendliness and sincerity.⁹⁰

The concept of ego, or egocentric attitudes, is the primary cause of conflicts in society. Even within the same family, disputes arise due to this self-centered mindset. To resolve and prevent such conflicts, individuals must cultivate an attitude free from ego and develop loving-kindness toward all beings a valuable teaching of the Buddha. Only a noble and skillful person can nurture such a vast and compassionate mind. As long as people hold on to selfish and egocentric attitudes, true unconditional loving-kindness cannot be expected. Ignorance is another factor that fuels jealousy and hatred in the mind. This tendency is a natural condition of worldly beings, but with wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*), it can be recognized and overcome, leading to the cessation of such harmful tendencies.

Hatred, which is the opposite of loving-kindness, harms others and ultimately leads to destruction and criminal actions. By cultivating universal loving-kindness, global peace and harmony can be fostered. A person endowed with loving-kindness wishes for the well-being of all beings visible and invisible, near and far, up and down, born and to be born. Such a person expects nothing in return, with their only wish being harmony, happiness, and peace for all mankind. The attitude of “may all beings be well and happy” represents freedom from craving (*lobha*) and hatred (*dosa*), as well as the purification of all worldly impurities. Cultivating loving-kindness results in a noble mind, free from attachment and aversion. This person does not engage in disputes, but instead lives with equanimity, establishing peace, happiness, and harmony among mankind.

⁸⁹ SnA.143.

⁹⁰ Gunaratana.(1990), 97.

The ten factors are based on to promulgate the *Vinaya* rules in the Order of the *Saṅgha*. Out of these ten two factors are considered for the harmonious society and not to contradict with the society. Regulations are promulgated for the pleasing of whom displeasing people and more are pleasing for the pleasing people.⁹¹ Without good relationship with main society the order of the *saṅgha* cannot be existed and this reality had been understood by the Buddha well and this advice is emphasized not giving room for the contradiction with the society. The Buddha regulated some rules due to the request of people, more concerned the attitudes of the people and it is more useful for the balance society. Regulation of “Suspension of cutting trees (*jīva saññino hi bhikkhave manussā rukkkhasmiṃ*)”⁹² and digging earth (*jīva saññino hi moḅhapurisa manussā paṭhaviyaṃ*)”⁹³ is made by the Buddha concerning favor of the majority of the people. Because people concerned that trees and earth have life and so these activities must be stopped all the higher ordained monks. Other examples which are observing *Uposatha* and observing *vassupanāika* rules are directly request of the society. All the attempts made by the Buddha to build up the harmony among the mankind and peaceful society.

In the *Singālovāda sutta* prepare the master plane for the unity and harmony of the society which is to build up the good relationship among all the communities. Identifying the six divisions in the society the rights and obligations of each other are prescribed to practice for the unity and harmony of the society. Here, emphasized that rights and obligations are depending on each other and without respecting others rights the one's own rights are not fulfilled. “Buddhism primarily concerned with duties and obligations rather than with right and privileges”⁹⁴ These duties are to be worshiped by everyone the Buddha's advice. Dr. Walpola Rahula defines this teaching in this way:

Here the word ‘worship’ (*namasseyya*) is very significant, for one worships something sacred, something worthy of honor and respect. These six family and social groups mentioned above are treated in Buddhism as sacred, worthy of respect and worship. But how is one to ‘worship’ them? The Buddha says that one could ‘worship’ them only by performing one's duties towards them.⁹⁵

The race question was much serious problem during the time of the Buddha. In that society, the society was divided into the four sections as privileged and non-privileged. But the Buddha openly emphasized that all the mankind is one and everybody has equal rights in the society refusing this unfair divisions criticizing it in various angles. “The high caste and low caste is decided according to the behavior of the person and not by the birth”⁹⁶

⁹¹ *Vin.I.44.*

⁹² *Vin.III.498.*

⁹³ *Ibid*,102.

⁹⁴ *Karunaratne*.(1993), 21.

⁹⁵ *Rahula*.(1996), 78.

⁹⁶ *Sn.136: “Na jaccā vasalo hoti- na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo / Kammanā vasalo hoti kammanā*

By encouraging people to be virtuous and ethically upright, a disciplined and restrained society is established. When individuals cultivate good behavior, they refrain from harming others and act responsibly, contributing to a peaceful and harmonious society. The Buddha vehemently rejected racism and taught that all beings belong to one family, with no fundamental differences among them. As stated, “The Buddha was the first to proclaim the equality of mankind in the fullest sense of the term. There is absolute spiritual equality, as anyone can aspire to become a Brahma or a Buddha there are no chosen castes, chosen churches, or chosen individuals”.⁹⁷

But Buddhism accepts the identity of the individuals in fundamental equality.⁹⁸ This philosophy is not limited to the preaching and practically interferes for the united society without any separation. He ordained the many members in the society belong to the low castes and appointed his high posts in his Organization the Order of the *Sangha*. Thera Upāli belongs to the low caste of hair cutting and appointed as the chief disciple of *Vinaya*.

In the political stream, without plan, system and mechanism the society cannot be stabilized. In the *Kūṭhadanta sutta* explains that ruler must be performing responsibly and with correct vision. If it is not the entire society will disunited and go astray. Rulers must provide facilities to the farmers for their cultivation and traders and the government servants to establish a balanced and peaceful society by minimizing poverty.⁹⁹ The *Cakkavattisihanāda sutta* mentions that the major problem for the disunited and harmful society is none other than poverty.

When the wealth is not provided to poor people poverty will be developed. Due to this major problem the taking what is not given (*adinnadāna*), killing beings (*pānātipāta*), telling lies (*musāvāda*), malicious speech (*pisunāvācā*), sexual misconduct (*kāmesumicchācāra*), harsh words (*pharusāvāca*), gossip (*samphappalāpa*), excessive craving (*abhiijhā*), ill-will (*vyāpāda*) wrong view (*micchādiṭṭhi*) originated in the society which are harmful to the society and peace. As a result of above misbehavior the incestuous passion (*adhammarāga*) uneven craving (*visamalobha*), wrong vision (*micchādhamma*), disrespect to mother (*amattēyyatā*), disrespect to father (*apettēyyatā*), disrespect to the religious clergy (*asāmaññatā*), disrespect to the Brahmins (*abrahmaññatā*).¹⁰⁰

These kinds of series of problems arise in the society and to settle this dispute, unevenness, struggle and conflicts, the poverty must be reduced. Under these circumstances, the disunity and disharmony among every members of the society common feature which is a big obstruction to the

hoti brāhmaṇo”.

⁹⁷ Jayatilleke.(1966), 25.

⁹⁸ Jayatilleke.(2006), 52.

⁹⁹ D.I.262.

¹⁰⁰ D.III.118.

peace and harmony in the society. In the *sutta* mentions several steps which cause to the disunity and attitudes of each other in the social atmosphere.

(1) Anger, malevolence and ill-will originate with each other (*aghato.. byāpādo..manopadoso paccupaṭṭhito*); (2) Sharp murderous consciousness arises on mother to son vice versa, father to son vice versa, brother to sister vice versa, (3) Finally every member of the society arises the perception or sign of the animal (*migasaññampaṭilabhissati*) and killing each other (*jīvita viropessanti*)".¹⁰¹

By investigating this process, it is clear that human performance affects the making problem throughout the society. To settle this unfortunate situation in society the loving-kindness and compassion are the major mental conditions. This global confusion and destabilization cannot be settled through praying and rituals, with the sacrifice of the all mankind can be achieved it.

In this way, if the social system is created with the attitude of loving-kindness and compassion, that social system much benefit not only the Buddhists but also entire world and mankind, beings. The consequence of this kind of society is making the world endowing with love, unity and harmony who are expecting the others success and development of each other protecting all the beings. According to that, the Buddha expected society is "united (*samaggā*), with mutual appreciation (*sammodamānā*), without disputing (*avivadamana*), blending like milk and water (*khīrodakibhūtā*), viewing each other with kindly eyes (*aññamaññaṃ piya cakkhūhi passantā*)".¹⁰² This concept can be used for the global peace and harmony making the people one family.

The significant events of the Buddha which are birth, enlightenment and passing away took place in the Vesak full moon day. He was born as a human among the human being and realized the four noble truths on this day. His birth and preaching of the dhamma make happy the entire world. To celebrated these three incidents all the Buddhists get together and practice his *dhamma* and propagate his teaching throughout the world. So, the real celebration of the Buddha's significant events is practicing his teaching wholeheartedly. Buddha emphasizes that one who wants to respect and offer him his teaching must practice it instead of making various offerings.

This golden moment which is celebrating the three incidents of the Buddha's life, the international *Vesak* day of 2025 sponsored and held in Vietnam. So, we are so happy to express our wishes to the Vietnamese government and the people for propagating the noble teaching of the Buddha throughout the world, giving sponsorship for the world *Vesak* Day. When the world is dominating with peace and harmony the name of the Vietnamese people, venerable great *Saṅgha* will be written with golden letters in the human history.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 120.

¹⁰² *M.I.456*.

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TOWARDS AN ECO-CONSCIOUS FUTURE: BUDDHIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL UNITY

Dr. Gurmeet Kaur

Abstract:

This paper examines the complementary approaches of Theravāda and Vajrayāna Buddhism to environmental conservation and sustainable development, emphasizing principles such as interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and mindfulness (*sati*). By analyzing key texts, including the *Pāli* Canon and Tibetan Buddhist teachings, the study highlights how these philosophies promote environmental ethics through reverence for all life and responsible stewardship of natural resources.

Case studies from Ladakh and Thailand illustrate the practical application of these principles in community practices. In Ladakh, Buddhist communities integrate sacred landscapes and eco-monastic projects, fostering a deep respect for the environment. In Thailand, Theravāda communities emphasize mindful simplicity and conservation through practices like forest preservation and water management.

The paper employs a comparative philosophical approach to explore the nuanced ways these traditions converge and diverge in their environmentalism. While Vajrayāna Buddhism emphasizes the sanctity of nature as a pathway to enlightenment, Theravāda Buddhism encourages individual mindfulness and non-harm to achieve sustainable harmony. Ultimately, the study argues that the integrated wisdom of both traditions offers a compelling model for sustainable development that promotes inner peace, environmental preservation, and collective responsibility. By bridging diverse Buddhist teachings, the paper contributes to broader discussions on peace and sustainability, advocating for Buddhist-informed pathways toward a compassionate and ecologically aware world.

Keywords: *Buddhism, eco-conscious future, sustainable development, global unity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind

- Albert Einstein

Human dignity has been a central tenet of dharmic traditions for centuries, emphasizing the intrinsic worth and potential for self-realization inherent in every individual. Within Buddhism, this principle is particularly pronounced through the belief in each individual's capacity for enlightenment. The potential for self-perfection, or Buddhahood, underscores the inherent value of every person, as they possess the ability to transcend suffering and attain spiritual liberation. This perspective not only highlights individual dignity but also serves as a foundation for broader ethical and social frameworks.

One of the key mechanisms for preserving and promoting human dignity is sustainable development. Sustainable development¹ is traditionally understood as a multidimensional approach aimed at meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. The dignity of these future generations lies firmly in the stewardship of the current generation. However, historical patterns of resource exploitation have revealed the adverse consequences of unsustainable practices. These include global unrest, exemplified by the Ukraine - Russia conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the illegal occupation of resource-rich regions. Such actions deplete the local resources and, at the same time, undermine the dignity of communities that derive their identity, pride, and livelihoods from their natural and cultural heritage.

Religious traditions rooted in philosophical and moral principles have historically played a vital role in upholding human dignity by providing moral authority, mobilizing communities, and preserving cultural practices. These traditions foster a collective commitment to the common good, anchoring societal values in ethical and spiritual frameworks. Among these traditions, Buddhism offers a particularly compelling approach due to its ability to blur the lines between religion, faith, and spirituality. The Buddhist philosophical concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination), deeply rooted in Indian philosophical systems (with the notable exception of the Cārvāka school of thought), emphasizes the interconnectedness of life. This principle challenges the singular focus on material wealth, encouraging a more holistic understanding of well-being and interdependence.

This paper begins by deconstructing the concept of human dignity within the Buddhist framework, linking it to key teachings such as *dukkha* (suffering) to explore the root causes of societal and environmental crises, including greed and overconsumption. Buddhist philosophy advocates development models that prioritize collective well-being over individual accumulation, drawing on principles from the Eightfold Path to guide ethical action. The concept of *anattā* (non-self) fosters a community-oriented approach to progress,

¹ Skt. Satata-Vikāśaḥ, Pāli: *Santati-Vikāso*, Tib. Gyun du 'gro ba'i sgo sbyong.

emphasizing the importance of shared responsibility and collective welfare. Furthermore, *sati* (mindfulness) and *karuṇā* (compassion) are central tools for cultivating inner peace and creating sustainable futures. These principles gained global recognition when 15 Buddhist leaders at the 2015 Paris Climate Summit called for urgent action on climate change, emphasizing renewable energy transitions and moral accountability.²

While *Theravāda* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism exhibit variations based on regional practices and interpretations, this paper focuses on their shared overarching philosophical frameworks, which can serve as models for sustainable development that promote inner peace, environmental preservation, and collective responsibility. The rationale for this focus lies in the extensive body of scholarship on Buddhist environmentalism. For instance, Christopher Ives's (2020) critical examination of Buddhism's ecological potential highlights the philosophical richness of Buddhist teachings. However, Ives critiques selective interpretations of Buddhist doctrines, particularly the overemphasis on philosophical detachment as a barrier to ecological engagement. His analysis lacks empirical depth, as it prioritizes textual exploration over grassroots eco-Buddhist initiatives. This gap underscores the relevance of the current study, which seeks to integrate textual insights with practical applications.

Building on this foundation, Cairns (2024) identifies the evolution of Buddhist environmentalism through three distinct phases: premodern, early eco-philosophies, and mainstream adoption. Initially, Buddhist views on ecology were diverse and inconsistent. The environmental awakening of the 1960s introduced Buddhist-inspired eco-philosophies, largely limited to countercultural movements in the global North. By the 1990s, the escalating climate crisis prompted mainstream Buddhist organizations to adopt environmental practices. While the adaptability and non-confrontational nature of Buddhism facilitated this transition, these same traits also delayed proactive ecological engagement. Nevertheless, Buddhist environmentalism continues to grow, offering valuable insights into integrating ethical, spiritual, and ecological principles for sustainable development.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research design

This study uses a comparative research design, combining textual analysis of Buddhist scriptures and scholarly literature with case studies of Buddhist communities in Ladakh (India) and Thailand, focusing on their integration of ecological principles. These regions were selected based on meta-analyses showing strong Buddhist traditions and active engagement in ecological conservation. The data collection process involved a systematic review of academic articles, books, and reports from databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar, and PubMed, using keywords such as "sacred ecology," "Vajrayāna

² UNFCCC, 2015 available at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>, accessed on 01/09/2024.

Buddhism,” “Theravāda Buddhism,” and “Buddhism and environment.” Peer-reviewed articles from the last two decades were prioritized to ensure contemporary perspectives.

Ethnographic case studies were also analysed to provide insights into community-based environmental practices. These studies were identified through searches in journals on religious studies, anthropology, and environmental science, with a focus on Buddhist principles in resource management, sacred landscape preservation, and sustainable living. Geographical diversity in South Asia, including the Himalayan belt and Southeast Asia, ensured a comprehensive analysis of Buddhist traditions’ engagement with environmental conservation.

2.2. Data analysis

The data analysis employed a mixed-methods approach, combining deductive and inductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning guided the analysis of Buddhist philosophy from various schools, particularly drawing on the Pāli Canon (*Pāli Tipiṭaka*) and Tibetan Buddhist teachings from the Kangyur and Tengyur collections. This analysis applied established ecological frameworks based on Buddhist principles of interdependence, compassion, and sustainability. Inductive reasoning was used to examine ethnographic case studies from Ladakh and Thailand, identifying patterns in how Buddhist communities integrate ecological principles into their practices. Thematic analysis was then employed to identify core themes - interdependence, compassion, mindfulness, and non-harming - central to Vajrayāna and Theravāda Buddhism’s environmental conservation practices.

2.3. Ethics adhered

This study adheres to ethical principles that ensure respect for cultural, religious, and academic integrity. It respects the beliefs and practices of the Buddhist communities involved, ensuring that interpretations of texts and teachings are sensitive and accurate. Participants in any fieldwork, if conducted, will be fully informed about the purpose of the research, with their participation being voluntary and anonymous. The study prioritizes confidentiality and transparency, maintaining strict standards of academic integrity. Any limitations or biases in the research process will be acknowledged, and the study will strive to represent the perspectives and practices of Buddhist communities fairly and accurately.

III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Buddhist textual analysis offers a unique lens through which to view the relationship between spirituality and environmental ethics. By examining the foundational texts and teachings of Vajrayāna and Theravāda Buddhism, we can trace the underlying principles that shape each tradition’s approach to ecology and conservation. These texts not only reveal the philosophical underpinnings of Buddhist environmentalism but also provide practical guidance for sustainable living. In Vajrayāna Buddhism, the Kalachakra Tantra emphasizes the sanctity of nature and its deep interconnections with human life and cosmic order. Theravāda Buddhism, on the other hand, draws from the

Pali Canon to advocate simplicity, mindful consumption, and a commitment to non-harm. Together, these traditions illustrate the diversity within Buddhist ecological thought, presenting a rich tapestry of teachings that advocate respect for the natural world.

3.1. Theoretical foundations in Buddhist philosophy

This paper is guided by key Buddhist philosophical concepts that contribute profoundly to sustainable development. The concept of interdependence (*Patīcasamuppāda*)³ emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life and ecosystems, promoting a holistic perspective that encourages actions in harmony with natural balance and environmental respect.⁴ For instance, the *Pāyāsi Sutta* uses the metaphor of planting seeds in fertile vs. poor soil to emphasize that non-harmful actions, right intention, and ethical conduct lead to spiritual prosperity and societal well-being.⁵ In SN 12.1, the Buddha said: “When this exists, that comes to be;/ with the arising of this, that arises./ When this does not exist, that does not come to be;/ with the cessation of this, that ceases.”⁶

³ *Patīcasamuppāda*, a fundamental Buddhist concept, refers to the principle of dependent origination or interdependence of phenomena (Hayes, 2021, p.98). It explains the conditioned flux of existence, particularly the interdependent flow of the five aggregates without an ontological substratum (Skorupski, 2016, p. 112). This concept is closely linked to Buddhist theories of causality, including *kamma*, *hetu*, and *pratīyaya*, which collectively describe how conceptual entities arise and vanish in space and time (Skorupski, 2016, p. 56). Various interpretations of *Patīcasamuppāda* exist within Buddhist philosophy, reflecting its richness and complexity (Jannel, 2022, p. 92). From an environmental perspective, this principle highlights the interconnectedness of human activities and environmental degradation, suggesting that ignorance and attachment to materialism are the root causes of climate change and global warming (Meena, 2019, p. 78). Understanding *pratīyasamutpāda* is crucial for addressing suffering (*dukkha*) and achieving the principal goal of Buddhism: avoiding suffering by eliminating its causes and conditions (Hayes, 2021, p. 145).

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Retrieved from Hayes, R. P. (2021). *Pratīyasamutpāda*. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion.

⁴ Meena, A. (2019), *Pratīyasamutpāda* in Buddhist philosophy: An environmental perspective. *Prācyā*, 11 (1), 38 – 53. <https://doi.org/10.22271/pracya.2019.v11.i1.64>.

Ojha, S., (2024), A transformative exploration into environmental realization in light of early Buddhism and *Bṛahdāraṇyaka Upanishad*, *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)*, 6(4). <https://www.ijfmr.com>.

⁵ *Pāli Canon*, *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Mahāvagga*, 23. Retrieved from <https://suttacentral.net/dn23/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>.

⁶ *Pāli Canon*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, *Nidānavaggasaṃyutta*, *Buddhavagga*, 12.1 *Paṭi-*

This is the Buddha's foundational teaching on interdependence. It describes how all phenomena arise and cease based on conditions, rejecting the notion of isolated existence. In SN 12.23, the Buddha said: "All supporting conditions are dependently arisen. Among dependently arisen phenomena, no being or person is found (as an independent entity)".⁷

This verse underscores that even the "supporting conditions" for life (e.g., food, water, ecosystems) are themselves interdependent and empty of inherent separateness. Likewise, in Vajrayāna Buddhism, *Khadirā Tārā* embodies the interconnectedness of all sentient beings and promotes harmony and balance in the world. This interconnectedness also aligns with Buddhist teachings on dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), where all phenomena arise due to the conditions set by others, reinforcing the idea that compassion, healing, and protection are not only individual acts but part of a collective interdependent network. Similarly, Nāgārjuna's views emphasize interconnectedness through dependent origination, rejecting domination over nature. His concept of emptiness highlights interdependence, while non-duality encourages harmonious relationships between humans and the environment for ecological balance.

This principle extends to environmental perspectives, suggesting that human activities and environmental degradation are interlinked.⁸ The Buddhist approach to economics incorporates this interdependence, challenging Western economic assumptions by emphasizing altruism, shared prosperity, and environmental care.⁹ Similarly, Aldo Leopold's land ethic underscores the importance of interdependence in shaping ethical responsibilities towards the environment, encompassing both positive and negative causal relations.¹⁰ This interconnectedness suggests that human well-being cannot be separated from the health of the environment, urging a responsible approach to natural resources and ecosystems.

Compassion (*Karuṇā*), central to Buddhist ethics, extends care to all sentient beings, fostering a moral responsibility to safeguard nature.¹¹ Since

casamuppāda. Retrieved from https://www.digitalpalireader.online/_dprhtml/index.html?loc=s.1.0.0.0.0.0.m and <https://suttacentral.net/sn12.1/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>.

⁷ Pāli Canon, *Sariyutta Nikāya*, *Nidānavaggasariyutta*, *Buddhavagga*, 12.23.

⁸ Meena, A., (2019), *Pratītyasamutpāda* in Buddhist philosophy: An environmental perspective, *Prācyā*, 11 (1), 38 – 53. <https://doi.org/10.22271/pracya.2019.v11.i1.64>.

⁹ Brown, C., & Zsolnai, L., (2018), Buddhist economics: An overview, *Society and Economy*, 40 (4), 497 – 513. <https://doi.org/10.1556/204.2018.40.4.2>.

¹⁰ Millstein, R. L. (2018). Understanding Leopold's concept of "interdependence" for environmental ethics and conservation biology. *Philosophy of Science*, 85(5), 1127–1139. <https://doi.org/10.1086/701080>.

¹¹ Compassion holds a central position in Buddhist philosophy, particularly in Mahāyāna traditions (Walsh-Frank, 1996). It is viewed as a powerful tool for mental purification, protection, and healing in early Buddhism, while in Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, it becomes a means to communicate non-conceptual wisdom and express the mind's unconditioned nature

harm to the environment is harm to oneself and others, compassion drives sustainable behaviour. While some argue that Buddhism is inherently eco-friendly due to its worldview, others suggest that its environmental relevance stems from its emphasis on virtues such as compassion, equanimity, and humility.^{12 13} In verse 359 of Dhammapada, it is said by the Buddha that: “Grass is the bane of field;/ Craving is the bane of mankind;/ Therefore, being free of craving;/ The practice of generosity yields great results.”¹⁴ Similarly, in *Cūḷagopālaka Sutta*,¹⁵ the Buddha said: “The *Tathāgata*, monks, is compassionate towards beings, not harmful,/ desiring their welfare and well-being, with a mind of loving-kindness.”

The above verses emphasize compassion (*karuṇā*) and non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) toward all beings, including nature. The Dhammapada (verse 359) warns against unchecked craving, linking it to environmental degradation, while the *Cūḷagopālaka Sutta* highlights compassionate guardianship.¹⁶ These principles promote mindful consumption, sustainability, and ecological stewardship, aligning with Buddhist ethics of right livelihood. Likewise, Avalokiteshvara’s mantra emphasizes compassion for all beings, fostering peace. Similarly, the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje (2011), highlights

(Makransky, 2021). Buddhism advocates compassion as a path to moral perfection and inner freedom, with the Bodhisattva ideal being highly venerated (Dar, 2020). The concept of compassion in Buddhism encompasses virtues such as generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, humility, and wisdom (Tashi et al., 2013). In contemporary times, compassion is seen as a potential solution to restore peace and prosperity in a world plagued by materialism, political chaos, and declining moral values (Dar, 2020). Some scholars suggest that understanding the Buddhist perspective on compassion could enrich Western medical ethics discourse, which often focuses heavily on patient autonomy and paternalism (Walsh-Frank, 1996).

Retrieved from Suri, K., (2018), Understanding historical, cultural, and religious frameworks of mountain communities and disasters in Nubra valley of Ladakh, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 31, 504-513. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2018.06.004>.

Retrieved from Walter, P., (2007), Activist Forest monks, adult learning, and the Buddhist environmental movement in Thailand, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(3), 329–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370701310278>.

¹² James, S. P., & Cooper, D. E., (2007), Buddhism and the environment, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 8(2), 93–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940701636075>.

Capper, D., (2023a), *Buddhist ecological protection of space: A guide for sustainable off-Earth travel*, Lanham: Lexington Books.

¹³ Cooper, D. E., & James, S. P. (2005). Buddhism, virtue, and environment. Aldershot: Ashgate.

¹⁴ Negi, W.D., (2013), *Dhammapada (Pali & Tibetan Text) Commentary in the Context of Modern Times*, Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi.

¹⁵ Pāli Canon, *Majjhima Nikāya*, *Mūlapaṇṇāsa*, *Mahāyamakavagga*, Verse 34. Retrieved from <https://suttacentral.net/mn34/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none¬es=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin>.

¹⁶ Negi, W. D., (2013), *Dhammapada (Pali & Tibetan Text) Commentary in the Context of Modern Times*, Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi.

the importance of understanding emptiness and cultivating compassion to address environmental issues, arguing that ignorance of these concepts leads to egotism and environmental degradation.¹⁷

Mindfulness (*Sati*) cultivates awareness of one's impact on the environment, inspiring conscious, sustainable choices that curb impulsive consumption and encourage respect for the natural world.¹⁸ Buddhaghosa's teachings also emphasise mindfulness, compassion, and interconnectedness, which resonate with sacred ecology. His focus on awareness fosters respect for nature, while his emphasis on *kamma* aligns with ecological ethics and the consequences of harmful actions.¹⁹ In Dhammapada verse 52, the Buddha also emphasizes that humans are usually ignorant of their *kamma*. Hence, sentient beings should think seriously about the *kamma* they accumulate and what type of *kamma* can help them attain this rare human birth and use it for the welfare of themselves and others.²⁰

Mindfulness, originally a core component of Buddhism, has been secularized and popularized as a therapeutic tool.²¹ Theravāda Buddhism identifies three forms of mindfulness: *sati* (present moment awareness), *appamāda* (ethical awareness), and *sampajañña* (spiritual awareness). Recontextualizing mindfulness within its Buddhist roots could enhance its ethical and spiritual dimensions.²² The Buddhist path of moral action, mindfulness, and wisdom,

¹⁷ Ogyen Trinley Dorje H. H. T. G. K. (2011). Walking the path of environmental Buddhism through compassion and emptiness. *Conservation Biology: The Journal of the Society for Conservation Biology*, 25 (6), 1094 – 1097. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2011.01765.x>.

¹⁸ Mindfulness, a core concept in Buddhism, has undergone significant transformation as it moved from Asia to the West. Originally embedded in a complex framework of Buddhist philosophy and ethics, mindfulness (*sati*) was seen as a key component of the path to liberation from suffering (Ditrich, 2016). However, its popularization in the West has led to a secularized, decontextualized version focused primarily on stress reduction and well-being (Ditrich, 2016; Purser & Milillo, 2015). This shift has prompted calls for “recontextualization,” emphasizing the ethical and spiritual dimensions of mindfulness as understood in *Theravādins* Buddhism (Lomas, 2017). Lomas proposes a model distinguishing three forms of mindfulness: *sati* (present-moment awareness), *appamāda* (ethical awareness), and *sampajañña* (spiritual awareness). Critics argue that divorcing mindfulness from its soteriological context risks reducing it to a self-help technique that may inadvertently reinforce institutional power structures and toxic organizational cultures (Purser & Milillo, 2015).

Retrieved from Purser, R. E., & Milillo, J., (2014), Mindfulness revisited: A Buddhist-based conceptualization, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 24(1), 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492614532315>.

¹⁹ Raghawi, (2023), Protecting environment through the teachings of Buddha. *Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies*, 4(2), 220. <https://doi.org/10.47362/EJSSS.2023.4210>.

²⁰ Negi, W. D. (2013). *Dhammapada (Pali & Tibetan Text) Commentary in the Context of Modern Times*. Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi.

²¹ Ditrich, T. (2017). The conceptualisation and practice of mindfulness: Buddhism and secular perspectives. In *Mindfulness and education: Research and practice* (pp. 1-16). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

²² Lomas, T. (2017). Recontextualizing mindfulness: Theravada Buddhist perspectives on

exemplified by the bodhisattva, offers a model for sustained commitment to environmental protection and lessening the suffering of all beings (Raghawi, 2023). Overall, Buddhism emphasizes the interconnectedness of mindfulness, compassion, and environmental awareness, offering a holistic approach to personal and ecological well-being (Ogyen Trinley Dorje, 2011; Ditrich, 2016; Lomas, 2017). Together, these principles form a cohesive ethical framework for environmental stewardship, aligning individual actions with a commitment to ecological well-being.

Keeping these philosophical concepts in mind, the paper first explores Vajrayana and Theravāda Buddhism’s perspectives on sacred ecology, highlighting their philosophical underpinnings. Second, it presents case studies of Buddhist-inspired environmental practices, showcasing real-world applications. Thirdly, a comparative analysis of Vajrayana and Theravada approaches provides insights into their distinct contributions to environmental preservation and ecological harmony.

3.2. *Vajrayāna and Theravāda Buddhism’s perspectives on sacred ecology*

Vajrayāna and *Theravāda* Buddhism, though differing in practices and doctrines, both share a profound perspective on sacred ecology rooted in the principle of interdependence. In these traditions, human beings are seen as fragile and interconnected with the wider cosmos rather than as the central or dominant force. Both schools emphasize the idea that all beings, from humans to nature, are interdependent and that harm to one part of the ecosystem harms the whole. This understanding fosters humility, reminding humans that they are a part of the larger web of life and must live in harmony with the environment.

Aspect	<i>Vajrayāna</i> Buddhism	<i>Theravāda</i> Buddhism
Intercon- nectedness	Emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the environment, viewing nature as a manifestation of the divine. The principle of <i>pratītyasamutpāda</i> (Skt.) or <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> (Pali) is key to understanding this interconnectedness. In Tibetan, this is often referred to as <i>Tendrel</i> (ཐོན་འབྲེལ་).	Teaches that all actions have consequences (<i>karma</i> , Skt.; <i>kamma</i> , Pali), extending to our relationship with the environment. Dependent origination (<i>pratītyasamutpāda</i> / <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i>) emphasizes how our actions affect the natural world.

the ethical and spiritual dimensions of awareness. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 9(2), 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000080>.

Sacred Practices	Rituals like mantras (Skt.) and mandalas (Skt.) harmonize practitioners with nature and cultivate its sacredness. These practices are rooted in the tantric (Skt.: <i>Vajrayāna</i>) worldview, where transformation and awakening involve active engagement with the environment.	The monastic life (Skt.: <i>bhikṣu</i> , Pali: <i>bhikkhu</i>) emphasizes simplicity, sustainability, and detachment from material excess, reflecting a commitment to ecological balance and ethical consumption.
Bodhisattva Ideal	Encourages compassion (Skt.: <i>karuṇā</i> , Tibetan: <i>söpa</i>) toward all beings, with environmental stewardship being an extension of altruism. The Bodhisattva (Skt.: <i>bodhisattva</i> , Tibetan: byang chub sems dpa') path emphasizes selflessness and the wish to benefit all sentient beings, including the environment.	Not applicable. <i>Theravada</i> Buddhism focuses on the path to Arhatship (Skt.: <i>Arhat</i> , Pali: <i>Arahant</i>) and personal liberation, where individual enlightenment is the ultimate goal rather than collective altruism.
Tantric Ecology	Uses tantra (Skt.) to transform the natural world and awaken Buddha-nature (Skt.: <i>buddhadhātu</i> , Tibetan: <i>buddha chitta</i>), seeking harmony between the spiritual and environmental realms. Direct engagement with nature is seen as a path to spiritual enlightenment.	Not applicable. <i>Theravada</i> does not emphasize tantric practices, instead focusing on the practice of mindfulness (Pali: <i>sati</i> , Skt.: <i>smṛti</i>) and ethical conduct in everyday life.
Mindfulness and Presence	Meditation (Skt.: <i>dhyāna</i> , Pali: <i>jhāna</i>) fosters deep awareness of the present moment, recognizing the sacredness (Skt.: <i>śrī</i> , Tibetan: gangs can) in all life, including nature. Vajrayana views this mindfulness as essential for understanding the interconnectedness of all things.	Focuses on mindfulness (Pali: <i>sati</i> , Skt.: <i>smṛti</i>) and simplicity in daily life, encouraging reverence for nature and the environment. This mindfulness fosters an understanding of interconnectedness through ethical living.

Community and Ecology	Individual transformation is emphasized, but community rituals (Skt.: <i>sangha</i> , Tibetan: <i>tshogs</i>) and ceremonies (Skt.: <i>puja</i> , Tibetan: <i>choe or gyüpa</i>) support ecological awareness and collective responsibility for environmental care. The community plays a role in upholding ecological values.	The Sangha (Pali: <i>saṅgha</i> , Skt.: <i>saṅgha</i>) plays a central role in the practice of mindfulness and ethical living, with collective responsibility for environmental care and shared ecological mindfulness within the monastic setting.
Ethical Living	Ethical living (Skt.: <i>śīla</i> , Pali: <i>sīla</i>) involves cultivating compassion (Skt.: <i>karuṇā</i> , Tibetan: <i>söpa</i>) for all beings and the environment, where actions in harmony with nature are considered virtuous. The Bodhisattva's path incorporates environmental care as an act of love and compassion.	Ethical living (Pali: <i>sīla</i> , Skt.: <i>śīla</i>) focuses on mindfulness (<i>sati</i>) and non-harm (<i>ahimsa</i> , Skt.; <i>avihiṃsā</i> , Pali), including ethical consumption (Pali: <i>ājīva</i> , Skt.: <i>āyāsa</i>), care for the environment, and the responsible use of resources. Sustainability is seen as part of the moral code of living.
Role of Nature in Spirituality	Nature (Skt.: <i>prakṛti</i> , Tibetan: <i>gyaṅ</i>) is seen as an embodiment of divine energy (Skt.: <i>śakti</i> , Tibetan: <i>sangye</i>), and engaging with it is considered part of the spiritual awakening process. The environment is not separate from the spiritual realm but is an active participant in spiritual practices.	Nature (Skt.: <i>prakṛti</i> , Pali: <i>paṭhavī</i>) serves as a reflection of spiritual truths, with natural elements (Skt.: <i>dharma</i> , Pali: <i>dhamma</i>) used as metaphors for Buddhist teachings, such as the impermanence (Skt.: <i>anitya</i> , Pali: <i>anicca</i>) of all things. <i>Theravada</i> emphasizes personal insight into the nature of existence through nature's reflection.
Ecological Stewardship	Practitioners are encouraged to protect (Skt.: <i>rakṣaṇa</i> , Tibetan: <i>tshogs</i>) the environment through compassionate actions (Skt.: <i>karuṇā</i> , Tibetan: <i>söpa</i>), seeing the	Environmental care (Skt.: <i>pālana</i> , Pali: <i>pāṭimokkha</i>), is part of ethical monasticism (Skt.: <i>bhikṣu</i> , Pali: <i>bhikkhu</i>), with an emphasis on sustainable practices

	welfare of all beings as interconnected. Stewardship is a sacred duty that contributes to collective well-being and spiritual growth.	within the community. Monastics (Skt.: bhikṣu, Pali: bhikkhu) engage in practices like sustainable agriculture (Skt.: krishi, Pali: kammaṭṭhāna) and resource conservation.
Cosmology and Ecology	The cosmic interconnectedness (Skt.: Vajrayāna cosmology) of all beings in Vajrayana suggests that environmental harmony is a path to spiritual fulfilment. Ecological well-being is seen as integral to personal and collective enlightenment.	The Theravada cosmology, with its emphasis on dependent origination (Skt.: pratītyasamutpāda, Pali: paṭiccasamuppāda), reinforces the idea that human actions (karma or kamma) have far-reaching effects on the balance of nature. Environmental harmony is a reflection of ethical conduct.

The above can also be viewed from the standpoint of the *apoha* theory, which is rooted in the epistemological and philosophical discourse on exclusion and conceptual designation, and offers a lens through which to analyse and bridge the ecological mindfulness embedded in Vajrayana and Theravada traditions.

In *Vajrayāna* Buddhism, nature is seen as an extension of sacred reality, intricately connected to the path of spiritual awakening. Through *Apoha*, the Vajrayana perspective can be understood as transcending conventional distinctions between the sacred and the mundane. By perceiving the sacredness of nature, practitioners exclude (*apoha*) the notion that nature is merely material or inert. Rituals, meditation, and tantric practices thus become means of dissolving dualities - such as subject and object, human and environment - aligning human awareness with universal forces. This transformative engagement mirrors the idea that human enlightenment is interconnected with the care and transformation of the natural world.

For instance:

Rituals and Nature: Vajrayāna rituals symbolize the integration of the practitioner with the forces of nature, excluding views that separate the human from the cosmos. This resonates with tantric ecology, where rituals like offering mandalas or meditating on elements (earth, water, fire, air, space) cultivate an awareness of the sacredness of the environment.

Similarly, In Theravāda Buddhism, the *apoha* framework can illuminate how ethical living and mindfulness arise through a process of negation—excluding what is unwholesome or unsustainable. Theravada’s emphasis on *sati* (mindfulness) and *ahiṃsā* (non-harm) reflects an intentional alignment with the natural order through ethical choices. Here, nature serves as a symbolic

teacher of impermanence (*anitya*) and interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), guiding practitioners to exclude ignorance and attachment that lead to ecological harm.

For instance:

Mindful Consumption: Through the practice of mindfulness, Theravāda practitioners exclude greed and excess, fostering sustainability by living in harmony with nature's rhythms. The understanding of transience reminds practitioners to avoid exploiting finite resources and to cultivate a sense of ecological balance. In *Dhammapada* verse 92, it is said: "Those who do not accumulate;/ Those who take measured meals;/ Those who can see nirvana;/ Which is causeless and empty,/ Move about like birds in the sky,/ Whose movement is unknowable."²³

Further, the convergence of Vajrayāna and Theravāda lies in their shared ethos of compassion (*karuṇā*) and interconnection, which *apoha* helps elucidate. Both traditions reject a dichotomy between humans and the environment, promoting an ecological perspective grounded in the realization of interdependence.

Through *Apoha*:

Vajrayāna's transformative rituals exclude the dualistic view of humans dominating nature, emphasizing sacred reciprocity.

Theravāda's ethical mindfulness excludes exploitative actions, promoting simplicity and ecological responsibility.

By employing the *apoha* framework, we can explore practical applications of Buddhist traditions to address modern environmental crises. Vajrayāna-inspired initiatives, for instance, could emphasize rituals that re-sacralise environmental spaces, fostering a collective sense of ecological mindfulness and deepening the spiritual connection to nature. On the other hand, Theravāda-inspired approaches might focus on personal ethical transformation, encouraging individuals to reduce their environmental footprints through mindful consumption and sustainable practices. Both paths, when interpreted through *Apoha*, underscore that ecological responsibility is not a separate undertaking but an intrinsic aspect of the Buddhist journey toward enlightenment. By excluding harmful concepts and practices, practitioners cultivate a deeper awareness of interdependence and compassionate living, aligning their actions with the well-being of all life forms.

3.3. Historical linkages

If we look at Buddha's life, his life was intricately tied to nature and environmental beings, demonstrating a harmonious relationship with the natural world from his birth to his attainment of *nibbāna* and passing into *parinibbāna*. This connection is reflected in his actions, teachings, and the symbolism surrounding his life. For instance, Siddhartha Gautama, who would

²³ Negi, W.D. (2013). *Dhammapada* (Pali & Tibetan Text) Commentary in the Context of Modern Times. Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi.

become the Buddha, was born in Lumbini, a verdant grove. His mother, Queen Maya, gave birth under a Sal tree, which is said to have bent down to support her. This moment symbolizes the natural world bearing witness to and participating in this significant event. The connection between the Buddha's birth and nature underscores the sacred bond between humans and the environment. Similarly, as a child, Siddhartha is said to have displayed compassion for all beings. One well-known story from the early life of Siddhartha Gautama recounts how he intervened to save a swan that had been injured by an arrow. According to the narrative, Siddhartha's cousin Devadatta claimed ownership of the bird, arguing that he had shot it. However, Siddhartha countered that the swan's right to life outweighed Devadatta's claim, as he had sought to harm it while Siddhartha had sought to protect it. This incident led to a debate, ultimately resolved in Siddhartha's favour, symbolizing the moral precedence of compassion over violence. This story reflects Siddhartha's innate sensitivity to the suffering of all living beings, a profound empathy that would later become central to his teachings on nonviolence, compassion, and the interconnectedness of all life. This account appears in various Buddhist texts and oral traditions, particularly in the Jataka tales, which recount significant moments from the Buddha's many lives. While details vary across interpretations, the story underscores the foundational Buddhist principles of *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence) and *karuṇā* (compassion), showcasing Siddhartha's alignment with these values from an early age. This early act reflects his innate sensitivity to the suffering of all creatures, a theme that would later define his teachings.

Further, the most pivotal moment in the Buddha's life was his enlightenment, achieved under the Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya. For seven days, he meditated under the tree, attaining profound insights into the nature of existence. The Bodhi tree not only sheltered him but also became a symbol of wisdom and spiritual awakening. The natural setting of his enlightenment is significant—it suggests that spiritual truths are intertwined with the natural world. After his awakening, the Buddha is said to have expressed gratitude to the Bodhi tree for its role in his journey.

Overall, if we look, the Buddha frequently drew on natural imagery to convey his teachings, emphasizing harmony, impermanence, and interconnectedness. Examples include:

The Simile of the Lotus: The lotus flower, which rises pure and undefiled from muddy waters, symbolizes spiritual growth and enlightenment amidst worldly suffering.

Dhammapada Verse 49 said: "As a bee gathers nectar and departs without harming the flower, its colour, or its fragrance, so should a wise person live in a village."²⁴

The Forests as Teachers: The Buddha often meditated and taught in forests,

²⁴Negi, W.D, (2013), *Dhammapada (Pali & Tibetan Text) Commentary in the Context of Modern Times*, Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, Varanasi.

which he saw as places of solitude and wisdom.

The Buddha's passing, or *parinibbāna*, took place in a forest grove in Kusinārā, beneath two *sāla* trees. As he lay between the trees, they are said to have bloomed out of season, showering him with flowers in reverence. His final moments were spent in harmony with the natural world, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and death. The Buddha's life can be seen as a model of ecological awareness and sustainability:

Interdependence: The teachings of *paticcasamuppāda* (dependent origination) explain that all phenomena arise in dependence on others. This concept applies to ecosystems, emphasizing the interconnectedness of life.

Non-Harming: The practice of non-violence extends to environmental ethics, advocating for the protection of all forms of life.

Impermanence: The understanding that all things are transient encourages mindfulness and responsible use of resources.

3.4. Buddhist-inspired environmental practices in the contemporary era

The interplay between tradition, practice, and cultural values is central to understanding the environmental and socio-economic resilience of regions like Ladakh and Thailand. Both regions demonstrate how deeply embedded spiritual and cultural frameworks, particularly Buddhism, influence ecological stewardship and sustainable development. Ladakh, nestled in the fragile Himalayan ecosystem, exemplifies the integration of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Buddhist principles, and indigenous practices to maintain a harmonious relationship with nature. However, modernization, urbanization, and climate change pose significant challenges to preserving this delicate balance. Similarly, Thailand showcases a syncretic blend of Buddhist teachings and indigenous animistic beliefs, shaping innovative conservation practices like tree ordinations and community-led organic farming. Despite these regions' unique contexts, they share common themes of interdependence, ethical conduct, and reverence for nature, rooted in Buddhist philosophy.

This section explores key aspects of tradition and practice in Ladakh and Thailand, comparing their responses to ecological and cultural challenges. Drawing from diverse literature, it highlights how these traditions not only foster sustainability but also offer critical insights for addressing modern environmental crises. Through a comparative lens, the narratives from these two regions underscore the vital need to integrate traditional wisdom with contemporary strategies to ensure ecological resilience and cultural preservation amidst rapid global changes.

3.4.1. Ladakh

Singh stated that communities in Ladakh historically thrived with nature, practising sustainable agriculture and unique traditions such as fraternal polyandry.²⁵ However, modernization and tourism have disrupted this

²⁵ Singh, A., (2011), *Buddhist traditional ethics: A source of sustainable biodiversity: Examining*

socio-cultural balance, leading to population growth, ecological strain, and the decline of traditional practices. While efforts like preserving the Amchi medical system and cultural documentation continue, rapid urbanization challenges Ladakh's sustainability. Balancing development with local values is vital to safeguard Ladakh's rich cultural and environmental heritage amid the pressures of globalization. Butcher examined the flash floods in Ladakh, which were attributed to climate change, karmic retribution, and a sentient, agentive landscape.²⁶ Ladakhi Buddhists engage religiously with the environment to construct and maintain moral and physical order. Monastic leaders interpret disasters as karmic consequences, necessitating ritual intervention. Modern socio-economic transformations disrupt this harmony, angering mountain deities who protect the land but unleash destruction when displeased. The study highlights the role of mountain gods in shaping a moral cosmos, where water symbolizes both sustenance and devastation.

Gaur states that the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Leh-Ladakh, developed by indigenous communities like the Ladakhi, Tibetan, and Changpa, is vital for sustainable resource management in this cold desert region. Practices such as terraced farming, artificial glaciers, and grazing management reflect a deep understanding of local ecosystems, enabling climate resilience.²⁷ However, modernization and urbanization threaten the preservation of TEK, with younger generations showing declining interest. Local governance structures, such as the *Goba*, and policy support are essential to safeguard this heritage. Integrating TEK with modern approaches offers opportunities to enhance ecological sustainability, preserve cultural identity, and strengthen community resilience against environmental challenges.

Suri (2018) explored the role of cultural and religious contexts in shaping disaster responses.²⁸ Ladakh's vulnerability to hazards like flash floods and landslides has intensified, with communities relying on cultural knowledge and cohesion for resilience. The predominantly Buddhist and Muslim populations interpret disasters through religious beliefs, guiding recovery efforts. Historical experiences highlight long-standing challenges, though recent disasters are

ing cases amongst Buddhist communities of Nepal, Leh-Ladakh, and North-East region of India.

Retrieved from http://saarcculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2013-14_Anand_Sigh.pdf.

²⁶ Butcher, A., (2013), Keeping the faith: Divine protection and flood prevention in modern Buddhist Ladakh. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, 17(1), 46–63. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685357-12341277>.

²⁷ Gaur, M. K., & Goyal, R. K., & Choudhary, V., & Raghuvanshi, R., (2024), Traditional ecological knowledge and natural resource management in the cold desert of Leh-Ladakh, India, *Ecofeminism and Climate Change*, 5 (2), 81–88. <https://doi.org/10.26480/efcc.02.2024.81.88>.

²⁸ Suri, K., (2018), Understanding historical, cultural and religious frameworks of mountain communities and disasters in Nubra valley of Ladakh, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 31, 504 – 513. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2018.06.004>.

more frequent and severe. Limited government support necessitates self-reliance, prompting recommendations for integrating cultural insights, early warning systems, and community-based strategies into disaster risk reduction frameworks.

Ladon, Nüsser and Garkoti (2023) highlights the role of Buddhism in shaping agro pastoral practices in Leh, Ladakh.²⁹ Buddhist beliefs, rituals, and monastic institutions historically guided grazing patterns, resource use, and community cooperation. Sacred landscapes, linked to Buddhist traditions, influenced sustainable grazing practices and maintained ecological balance. However, socio-economic changes, including modernization and reduced dependence on monastic authority, have disrupted these practices. The article stresses integrating Buddhist ecological principles with modern strategies to sustain cultural and environmental resilience in the region.

Dwivedi's article "Community Initiatives Tackle Climate Change in Ladakh Village" highlights the Ladakhi community's resilience amidst climate change and socio-economic pressures.³⁰ The shifting climatic patterns – reduced snowfall and increased rainfall – have disrupted traditional farming and housing practices, causing crop failures and reliance on chemical fertilizers, which further degrades the environment. Local initiatives, such as those by the Himalayan Institute of Alternatives Ladakh (HIAL), promote sustainable practices through afforestation, community engagement, and organic tourism. However, challenges persist, including water scarcity, flooding, and fears of cultural erosion due to tourism, urbanization, and land reforms. The article underscores the need for government-community dialogue to balance development and cultural preservation.

Singh (2024) highlighted the profound role of Buddhist teachings in addressing contemporary water and ecological challenges.³¹ Rooted in the historical consciousness of Jambudvīpa and Buddhist cosmology, water is revered as a sacred and vital element, integral to life and spiritual practice. The Buddha's teachings on moderation, interdependence, and ethical stewardship resonate deeply in today's context of ecological crises. The article explores how Buddhism-bridging spiritual principles with modern environmental concerns-provides actionable solutions to water scarcity and degradation. By integrating concepts of communal ownership and sustainability, it critiques the commercialization of water and industrial exploitation, which have disrupted the balance between human needs and nature. Notably, initiatives

²⁹ Nüsser, P.L. & Garkoti, S.C., (2023), Mountain agropastoralism: Traditional practices, institutions, and pressures in the Indian Trans-Himalaya of Ladakh, *Pastoralism: Research, Policy and Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13570-023-00251-7>.

³⁰ Dwivedi, R., (2019), Community initiatives tackle climate change in Ladakh village, *Mongabay India*. <https://india.mongabay.com/2019/09/community-initiatives-tackle-climate-change-in-ladakh-village/>.

³¹ Singh, A. (2024), Water sources in the Buddhist ecology: Looking through the engaged tradition, *Journal of Social Innovation and Knowledge*.

like Ladakh's *ice stūpa* project reflect the application of Buddhist principles to innovate and adapt in the face of climate change, emphasizing communal benefits and ecological harmony.

Angmo (2024) explores traditional knowledge (TK) of plant use in the Surru, Wakha, and Lower Indus valleys of Western Ladakh.³² It documents 246 plant species used for purposes such as medicine, fodder, food, and religious practices, emphasizing their cultural and ecological significance. The study reveals that older individuals retain greater plant knowledge, influenced by factors such as remoteness, ethnicity, and education. It highlights the urgent need to preserve traditional knowledge (TK) amid declining interest among younger generations, advocating for the integration of traditional practices into conservation strategies to sustain Ladakh's heritage and ecology. The study underscores the Buddhist ethos of harmony with nature, reflected in sustainable practices and reverence for sacred landscapes. It calls for the preservation of this traditional knowledge, deeply rooted in Buddhist teachings, which is at risk due to modern influences and generational shifts.

Studies show Buddhism's profound influence on the cultural and ecological practices of Ladakh. Rooted in principles like *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence) and *paṭīccasamuppāda* (interdependence), Ladakhi communities have traditionally thrived in harmony with nature. Sacred landscapes, rituals for *lha* (deities), and sustainable techniques like terraced farming reflect Buddhist values of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *sīla* (ethical conduct). Projects like the ice stūpa embody Buddhist innovation in addressing climate change.

3.4.2. Thailand

Darlington (2007) examines the interplay between Buddhism, indigenous spirit beliefs, and environmental conservation in northern Thailand.³³ The syncretic belief system blends Buddhist teachings with local spiritual traditions, shaping both pro-development and conservation narratives. While environmentalist monks advocate for preservation through Buddhist principles and rituals honouring forest spirits, government-backed economic projects often lead to deforestation. Concepts such as "thammachat" (nature) reflect evolving perceptions of nature. Successful conservation efforts involve community engagement and integrating cultural beliefs with sustainable practices. Darlington underscores the importance of balancing cultural traditions with modern environmental challenges in Thailand.

Johnson (1992) explores the role of Buddhism in environmental conservation.³⁴ Integrating Buddhist principles like interdependence with local

³² Angmo, K., Adhikari, B. S., Bussmann, R. W., & Rawat, G. S. (2024), Harmony in nature: Understanding the cultural and ecological aspects of plant use in Ladakh, *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 20 - 34. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13002-024-00495-3>

³³ Darlington, SM (2007), The good Buddha and the fierce spirits: Protecting the northern Thai forest, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 8(2), 169-185. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940701636133>

³⁴ Johnson, L. K., (1992), The Buddhist perception of nature: Implications for forest

animistic traditions, Thai Buddhism fosters a deep respect for nature. Johnson highlights initiatives such as temple sanctuaries, monk-led reforestation, and Buddhist agriculture as examples of conservation inspired by Buddhist values. However, industrialization and modernization challenge these principles, threatening sustainability. Despite these pressures, the paper argues that Buddhist ethics provide a powerful framework for promoting harmony between humans and nature, advocating for culturally rooted and sustainable conservation practices in Thailand.

Speece (2019) explores diverse interpretations of Buddhist economics within Thailand's urban reform Buddhism.³⁵ Unlike the monolithic view often held in Western discussions, Speece highlights variations in approaches to sustainability. Wat Phra Dhammakaya promotes moral improvement within the existing capitalist system, requiring minimal systemic change. In contrast, Santi Asoke advocates anti-capitalist principles, with adherents embracing simple, collectivist lifestyles. Reform-from-within promotes a mixed economy that balances capitalist and socialist elements, while Kuan Im supports small-scale capitalism with constraints on large corporations. The study underscores Thailand's diverse Buddhist perspectives as a comprehensive framework for sustainability debates.

Song's (2020) article examines the integration of Buddhist principles into sustainable development through the sufficiency economy philosophy.³⁶ Rooted in moderation, self-reliance, and respect for natural resources, this framework emphasizes balanced economic growth aligned with environmental conservation and social well-being. Case studies highlight its effectiveness in fostering sustainable practices and enhancing community resilience. Despite challenges from modernization and globalization, the philosophy offers a viable path for addressing contemporary environmental and social issues. Song underscores its potential to harmonize economic activities with Buddhist values, promoting a sustainable, responsible approach to development in Thailand.

Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel (2016) explore Buddhism's relationship with environmental issues, highlighting its potential as a framework for ecological ethics.³⁷ Rooted in the Three Refuges (Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha), Buddhism emphasizes interconnectedness, non-harm (*ahimsā*),

conservation in Thailand, *Trumpeter*, 9(3), 135-141. <https://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/445/733>.

³⁵ Speece, M. W., (2019), Sustainable development and Buddhist economics in Thailand, *International Journal of Social Economics*, 46(5), 634-649. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSE-04-2018-0177>.

³⁶ Song, C., (2020), Sufficiency economy philosophy: Buddhism-based sustainability framework in Thailand, *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 29(8), 2995-3005. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2553>.

³⁷ Sponsel, L., & Natadecha-Sponsel, P., (2016), Buddhism and ecology, In *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion* (p. 9296-9302). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-27771-9_9296-2.

and compassion toward all beings, aligning naturally with environmentalism. The authors connect the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path to ecological challenges, showcasing Buddhist ecology and activism, including monks' contributions to environmental protection. Despite critiques of detachment and inconsistencies in practice, their work underscores Buddhism's evolving engagement with contemporary ecological issues, advocating for a more proactive, socially engaged approach.

Walter's article (2007) explores the transformative role of activist Buddhist monks in Thailand's grassroots environmental movement.³⁸ Emerging since the late 1980s, these monks – referred to as “development monks” and “ecology monks” – have led efforts in forest conservation and sustainable community development, employing symbolic practices like ordaining trees to protect them. Rooted in Buddhist principles of interconnectedness, the movement challenges state and corporate development models, emphasizing self-sufficiency and ecological harmony. Despite successes, monks face resistance from the state and corporate sectors, as well as internal gender disparities. Walter situates this activism within the broader framework of adult education and social movements, highlighting its potential to empower communities while calling for greater inclusivity and gender sensitivity. The study underscores the monks' pivotal role in integrating spirituality, environmental stewardship, and community resilience.

Kaufman and Mock's (2014) study explores the adoption of organic farming in Yasothon Province, Thailand, emphasizing its socio-economic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.³⁹ Farmers transitioned to organic practices primarily to improve health and reduce debt, with Buddhist eco-spiritual principles fostering well-being and value shifts. The study highlights the role of farmer support networks, such as the Dharma Garden Temple and Green Net, in enabling this transition. Challenges like poor soil quality and agrochemical health risks contextualize the region's need for sustainable farming. The study concludes that expanding organic farming in Thailand requires integrating eco-spiritual values and enhancing organizational support systems.

Darlington (2012) examines the intersection of Buddhism and environmental activism in Thailand through the unique ritual of tree ordination.⁴⁰ This practice, rooted in Buddhist teachings, sanctifies trees to symbolize their protection, addressing ecological crises like deforestation and biodiversity loss. The book highlights the Buddhist worldview's emphasis

³⁸ Walter, P., (2007), Activist Forest monks, adult learning, and the Buddhist environmental movement in Thailand, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(3), 329–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370701310278>.

³⁹ Kaufman, A. H., & Mock, J., (2014), Cultivating greater well-being: The benefits Thai organic farmers experience from adopting Buddhist eco-spirituality, *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 27(5), 871–893. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-014-9497-5>.

⁴⁰ Darlington, S. M., (2012), *The ordination of a tree: The Thai Buddhist environmental movement*, State University of New York Press.

on interconnectedness and compassion, providing an ethical foundation for environmental stewardship. Employing qualitative methods, including interviews and participant observation, Darlington captures the movement's challenges, such as economic pressures and state repression. While insightful, a deeper analysis of socio-political dynamics could enhance the discussion of institutional influences.

Darlington's (2019) *Buddhist Integration of Forest and Farm in Northern Thailand* examines how Buddhist environmental activists address deforestation and economic challenges through sustainable farming practices.⁴¹ Focusing on Phrakhrū Somkit Jaranathammo's promotion of "dhammic agriculture," the article highlights an approach that blends Buddhist principles with integrated, eco-friendly agriculture to counteract the harmful effects of cash-cropping and industrial farming. Darlington emphasizes the centrality of spiritual ecology, portraying the forest as vital to livelihoods and moral responsibility. Somkit's community-based initiatives-educating farmers on biodiversity, organic methods, and traditional crops-empower farmers while fostering environmental health. However, state repression and corporate resistance pose significant challenges. The article underscores the ethical dimensions of Buddhist activism, framing environmental conservation as justice, and illustrating its potential to address ecological and social crises.

Strain (2016) explores how Buddhist traditions can evolve to address climate change effectively.⁴² Strain critiques the superficial "greening" of religious practices, advocating for deeper, context-specific adaptations. He examines three approaches: Thai tree ordination rituals, Joanna Macy's *Work That Reconnects*, and Gary Snyder's concept of re-inhabitation. Tree ordination symbolizes resistance to deforestation, fostering spiritual and community connections. Macy's workshops address emotional engagement with environmental crises, while Snyder emphasizes ecological mindfulness through bioregional living. Strain critiques these practices for their limited confrontation of systemic issues, urging the integration of activism with spirituality. Ultimately, he calls for adaptive, action-oriented Buddhist practices to address environmental and social challenges collaboratively, contributing to sustainability and justice.

Habito (2007) explores how Buddhism can address modern ecological crises.⁴³ He critiques traditional Buddhist cosmology for sidelining environmental care but highlights Mahayana concepts like non-duality

⁴¹ Darlington, S. M., (2019), Buddhist integration of forest and farm in Northern Thailand, *Religions*, 10(9), Article 521. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10090521>.

⁴² Strain, C. R., (2016), Reinventing Buddhist Practices to Meet the Challenge of Climate Change, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 17(1), 138–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2016.1162976>.

⁴³ Habito, R. L. F., (2007), Environment or earth sangha: Buddhist perspectives on our global ecological well-being, *Contemporary Buddhism*, 8(2), 131–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940701636117>.

and the *bodhisatta* ideal as ethical foundations for ecological engagement. Drawing on Ian Harris’s typology, Habito emphasizes the reinterpretation of teachings to address global ecological suffering through frameworks like the Four Ennobling Truths. He showcases examples such as Thai monks’ forest protection efforts and calls for collective action rooted in interconnectedness and responsibility, inspiring transformative responses to climate change and environmental degradation.

IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF AND VAJRAYĀNA AND THERAVĀDA APPROACHES

Examining *Theravāda* and *Vajrayāna* Buddhism in terms of their environmental approaches provides insight into how each tradition engages with ecological principles rooted in Buddhist philosophy. Both traditions value compassion, reverence for life, and a sense of interdependence, yet they differ in how these values shape practical environmental approaches. *Vajrayāna* emphasizes sacred landscapes and spiritual ecology, viewing nature itself as inherently sacred. In contrast, *Theravāda* Buddhism stresses individual mindfulness and non-harm, often prioritizing internal transformations that lead to outer environmental changes. A comparative analysis highlights these convergences and divergences, shedding light on how different interpretations of Buddhist principles can influence environmental practice and sustainable behaviour.

Region	Practice	Aspect	Details
Ladakh	Sustainable Agriculture and Water Systems	Ecological Sustainability	Practices such as terraced farming, grazing management, and artificial glaciers (e.g., the Ice Stūpa Project) embody climate resilience and water conservation. Modernization threatens these systems, highlighting the need for integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) with modern strategies.
	Buddhist Cultural Practices and Landscapes	Cultural Resilience	Buddhist principles have historically shaped agro pastoral practices, resource use, and community cooperation, while sacred landscapes guided sustainable grazing. Socio-economic changes are reducing monastic authority’s influence, necessitating modern strategies aligned with Buddhist principles.

	Traditional Knowledge and Medical Systems	Cultural and Ecological Value	Ladakhi communities utilize over 246 plant species for medicine, food, and religious purposes, while the Amchi system of Tibetan medicine continues to be preserved amidst urbanization. These systems face challenges due to declining generational interest, requiring efforts to conserve this knowledge.
	Community and Climate Resilience	Socio-Economic Sustainability	Local initiatives, including afforestation, organic tourism, and sustainable practices led by organizations like HIAL, address climate change and urban pressures. Rituals honoring sacred landscapes and interpreting disasters as karmic disruptions also emphasize moral and ecological balance.
Thailand	Buddhist-Inspired Conservation and Farming	Ecological Ethics and Sustainability	Tree ordination rituals, Buddhist-inspired organic farming, and environmentalist monks highlight Thailand's fusion of Buddhist principles with grassroots ecological activism, advocating for harmony between humans and nature while challenging unsustainable development.
	Sufficiency Economy and Buddhist Economics	Sustainable Development	Thailand promotes a balanced approach to economic growth through the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, emphasizing moderation, self-reliance, and environmental conservation. Buddhist economics ranges from anti-capitalist reforms to mixed economies aligned with sustainability.

	Interconnectedness and Cultural Rituals	Ecological and Cultural Ethics	Rituals honoring forest spirits and integrating indigenous beliefs with Buddhist practices reflect cultural-environmental synergy, fostering community engagement in forest preservation and ecological activism guided by compassion and interconnectedness.
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Buddhist traditions in Ladakh (Vajrayāna) and Thailand (Theravāda) emphasize sacred ecology and mindful conservation, offering innovative approaches to sustainable development. In Ladakh, sacred landscapes and rituals historically guided sustainable grazing and agriculture, reflecting the interconnectedness of humans and nature. Similarly, Thailand’s tree ordination rituals protect forests by making trees sacred, transforming spiritual reverence into ecological action.

Both traditions foster community resilience through spiritual ecology. Ladakh’s Ice Stūpas and terraced farming mitigate water scarcity and climate challenges, while Thailand’s Sufficiency Economy Philosophy promotes moderation, self-reliance, and interdependence, fostering socio-economic sustainability. These practices are rooted in Buddhist ethics like compassion (*karuṇā*) and interconnectedness (*pratītyasamutpāda*), promoting harmony between humans and the environment.

Preserving indigenous knowledge is central to both traditions. Ladakh’s Amchi medical system and Thailand’s rituals honouring forest spirits reflect rich ecological wisdom now threatened by modernization. Integrating this knowledge into modern conservation strategies is crucial.

Lastly, Buddhist economics, focusing on balanced growth and ethical responsibility, offers sustainable alternatives to consumerist frameworks. Through principles like the Noble Eightfold Path, these traditions inspire ecological activism, bridging spirituality with practical solutions for global sustainability challenges. Together, they present a transformative vision for harmonious living with nature.

V. INTEGRATING BUDDHIST WISDOM INTO GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORKS

Buddhist wisdom offers profound insights that can complement global sustainability frameworks by emphasizing interconnectedness, simplicity, and ethical living. The modern sustainability discourse often revolves around technological solutions, policy frameworks, and economic incentives. While these are essential, they frequently overlook the cultural and spiritual dimensions of sustainability. Buddhism, with its teachings on harmony with nature and the ethical responsibility of humans toward all sentient beings, can address this gap, offering a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development.

At the heart of Buddhist philosophy is the principle of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), which underscores the interdependence of all life forms. This principle aligns with the ecological understanding of the Earth as a system of interconnected processes. By integrating this perspective, sustainability efforts can transition from anthropocentric to eccentric approaches, promoting a sense of shared responsibility for planetary well-being. For example, policies inspired by interdependence could encourage regenerative agriculture, conservation efforts, and community-centric resource management, ensuring that the needs of all species - not just humans - are considered.

Buddhism also promotes a lifestyle grounded in simplicity and mindful consumption. The concept of *Santutṭhi* (contentment) challenges the consumerist culture that drives environmental degradation. Buddhist teachings urge individuals and communities to redefine success and happiness, moving away from material accumulation toward mental and spiritual well-being. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where responsible consumption and production (Goal 12) remain critical yet underachieved targets. Practical applications could include campaigns for voluntary simplicity, waste reduction, and sustainable consumption inspired by Buddhist principles of moderation.

Ethics form another cornerstone of Buddhist wisdom, reflected in the precepts of *ahiṃsā* (non-harming) and *karuṇā* (compassion). These values resonate with the global emphasis on social and environmental justice. For instance, the Buddhist ideal of reducing suffering can inspire fair trade practices, equitable distribution of resources, and inclusive policies that protect marginalized communities disproportionately affected by climate change. Incorporating these ethical imperatives can enhance frameworks like the Paris Agreement or the UN's SDGs by fostering a deeper sense of moral accountability in achieving sustainability goals.

Buddhist wisdom also integrates mindfulness practices that encourage present-moment awareness and thoughtful decision-making. Such practices can help policymakers, corporate leaders, and citizens reflect on the long-term impacts of their actions. For example, mindfulness-based programs for environmental education could empower communities to adopt sustainable behaviours while cultivating empathy for future generations and non-human species.

Moreover, the Buddhist emphasis on the right livelihood aligns with the need to develop green economies and sustainable industries. Encouraging businesses to adopt ethical and environmentally sound practices can bridge the gap between economic growth and ecological preservation. Initiatives such as eco-tourism, community forestry, and organic farming, rooted in Buddhist teachings, can serve as models for sustainable development.

Buddhist Principle	Action	Implementa-tion	Practical Suggestion
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Interconnect- edness (Paticca Samuppada)	Build ecological awareness	Conduct workshops or storytell- ing sessions to explain interconnected ecosystems.	Create an “Interconnectedness Map” showing how local actions impact global systems.
Contentment (Santutthi)	Practice mindful consumption and reduce waste.	Practice mindful consumption and reduce waste	Consumption Reflection” exercise, analysing their consumption patterns and the impact of mindful decisions on sustainability.
Compassion (Ahim- sa and Karu- na)	Embed com- passion into sustainability policies	Develop fair-trade programs, community support funds, and justice-focused campaigns.	Form a local group to address social- environmental issues, like clean water access.
Mindfulness	Foster long-term, thoughtful decision- making	Host medita- tion sessions or mindfulness workshops to reflect on environmental impacts.	Lead a “Metta Meditation” session focusing on cultivating loving-kindness toward the Earth and all its beings, promoting compassionate and sustainable action.
Right Livelihood (Samma Ajiva)	Promote green enterprises and ethical livelihoods	Train local entrepreneurs in sustainable businesses like organic farming or eco-tourism.	Partner with artisans or farmers to promote eco-friendly products at markets or online.

By integrating Buddhist wisdom into global sustainability frameworks, humanity can shift toward a more compassionate, mindful, and interconnected approach to solving ecological and social challenges. This synthesis of spiritual values with scientific and technological advancements could redefine

sustainability, creating a future that honors both human aspirations and the Earth's inherent balance.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Buddhist principles, particularly those articulated within Vajrayāna and Theravāda traditions, offer profound insights into environmental ethics. Central to both traditions is the recognition of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (interdependence), which underscores the interconnectedness of all life forms and ecological systems. This principle fosters a sense of collective responsibility, emphasizing that harm to the environment ultimately impacts all beings. *karuṇā* (compassion) emerges as another cornerstone, inspiring an ethical obligation to protect nature as a manifestation of care for all sentient beings. *Sati* (mindfulness) enhances individual awareness of consumption patterns, advocating for conscious choices that align with sustainability.

Vajrayāna Buddhism, with its reverence for sacred landscapes and spiritual ecology, portrays nature as a divine entity integral to spiritual and physical well-being. Sacred sites and eco-monastic projects in regions like Ladakh exemplify how this tradition integrates spirituality with conservation. Meanwhile, Theravāda Buddhism offers a pragmatic approach, emphasizing simplicity, non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), and mindful consumption as pathways to ecological harmony. Practices in countries like Thailand highlight how these values translate into community-based conservation efforts and resource management strategies.

The findings indicate that both traditions provide unique yet complementary frameworks for addressing modern environmental challenges. While Vajrayāna emphasizes collective reverence for nature, Theravāda focuses on individual ethical conduct. Together, these perspectives form a holistic foundation for ecological awareness and sustainable practices, applicable across diverse cultural and geographical contexts.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: RELEVANCE OF BUDDHIST VALUES IN PROMOTING GLOBAL UNITY AND ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION

Buddhist values hold significant potential for addressing global sustainability challenges. At the core of these values is the ethic of care, extending compassion (*karuṇā*) not only to humans but to all life forms. This perspective aligns with the principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those concerning climate action, life on land, and responsible consumption. Buddhist teachings advocate for a balanced coexistence between human needs and ecological preservation, promoting lifestyles that minimize environmental degradation while enhancing societal well-being.

The global relevance of Buddhist values lies in their ability to foster unity and shared purpose. The principle of interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), for example, resonates universally, offering a philosophical foundation for collaborative action on environmental issues. By framing sustainability as a moral and spiritual imperative, Buddhism provides an ethical lens through

which communities and policymakers can evaluate and reform their interactions with nature.

Additionally, Buddhist-inspired practices can influence sustainable development through tangible applications. The emphasis on mindful consumption (*sati*) and simplicity supports resource-efficient living, reducing waste, and promoting economic sustainability. Buddhist community initiatives, such as forest monasteries in Thailand, demonstrate scalable models that blend cultural heritage with modern ecological practices. These approaches can inspire similar projects globally, integrating traditional wisdom with innovative solutions to address pressing environmental challenges.

VIII. FUTURE DIRECTIONS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTEGRATING BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY INTO POLICY AND COMMUNITY-BASED SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

To harness the potential of Buddhist philosophy in promoting sustainability, several steps can be taken at both policy and community levels. First, policymakers should explore integrating Buddhist principles, such as *paṭiccasamuppāda* (interdependence) and *karuṇā* (compassion), into national and international frameworks for sustainable development. This can include incorporating Buddhist-inspired ethical guidelines into environmental policies, emphasizing the moral responsibility of governments and corporations to safeguard ecosystems.

Educational programs can serve as a vital tool for disseminating Buddhist ecological wisdom. Workshops and curricula that highlight Buddhist teachings on sustainability can be developed for schools, universities, and community organizations. By fostering ecological mindfulness (*sati*) and ethical awareness, such programs can nurture a generation of environmentally conscious global citizens.

At the community level, partnerships between Buddhist organizations and environmental groups can catalyze grassroots initiatives. Collaborative projects, such as eco-monastic practices and sacred site conservation, can serve as models for integrating spirituality with practical sustainability efforts. These initiatives can also foster cross-cultural dialogue, bringing together diverse traditions to collectively address environmental concerns.

Furthermore, research should continue to explore the practical applications of Buddhist teachings in sustainability science and policy-making. Comparative studies of Buddhist-inspired environmental practices across different cultures can provide insights into best practices and innovative solutions. These efforts can expand the relevance of Buddhist philosophy beyond its traditional contexts, enabling its integration into global sustainability movements.

In summary, Buddhist philosophy offers a profound and actionable framework for promoting ecological harmony and social responsibility. By translating its principles into policies, educational initiatives, and community projects, the wisdom of Buddhism can contribute significantly to global efforts toward sustainable development and environmental conservation.

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CULTIVATION OF UNITY, INCLUSIVITY, AND HUMAN DIGNITY, THE ROLE OF THE FOUR SUBLIME STATES OF MIND (BRAHMA VIHARAS) AND KŪTADANTA SUTTA, OF THE DĪGHA NIKĀYA IN ACHIEVING WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

The *Brahma Viharas*, or the Four Sublime States of Mind – loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) and the sermon, i.e., Kūṭadanta represent profound principles that cultivate peace, inclusivity, and human dignity. Rooted in ancient Buddhist teachings, these virtues provide a framework for personal transformation and social harmony. As the world faces complex challenges such as conflict, inequality, environmental degradation, and the erosion of human rights, the integration of these Four Sublime States of Mind and sermon, i.e., Kūṭadanta can significantly contribute to global peace and sustainable development. The practice of loving-kindness fosters an attitude of benevolence, breaking down barriers of hatred and division by encouraging empathy and care for all beings. Compassion nurtures a deep sense of solidarity with the suffering of others, compelling individuals and communities to act for the alleviation of distress. Sympathetic joy promotes a celebration of others' happiness and successes, counteracting the pervasive attitudes of jealousy and resentment that divide societies. Equanimity, the cultivation of mental calm and balance in the face of challenges, enables individuals to engage with the world without attachment

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or aversion, fostering a sense of impartiality and fairness. These qualities, when adopted on a global scale, have the power to transform societal structures, addressing root causes of violence, inequality, and environmental exploitation. This study employs thematic analysis to systematically explore and analyze Buddhist literature related to the *Brahma Viharas*. It aims to uncover how these states of mind contribute to the promotion of unity, inclusivity, and human dignity. Through this method, the study identifies and interprets recurring themes and patterns that illustrate the impact of the *Brahma Viharas* on individual and societal well-being. The *Brahma Viharas* offer a pathway to personal well-being and create fertile ground for collective harmony, guiding nations towards peaceful coexistence. By embodying these principles in policy, education, and interpersonal relations, a more inclusive and just world with human dignity is created and sustainable development is realized. The Four Sublime States of Mind are thus essential tools for cultivating unity, inclusivity, and lasting peace in an interconnected world.

Keywords: *Four Sublime States of Mind, Kūtadanta Sutta, nurture empathy, sustainable development, societal flourishing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

We live in a complex society. Being a complex society, modern man has become far removed not only from the habits of a simple society but also from the ideas and thoughts of a relatively simple society. Due to the pursuit of unlimited desires created by the commercial society, modern man has become a creature free from his own nature, a creature that is alienated, artificial, and far from soft skills. The light that can be obtained from Buddhism to free the current complex society from this difficult situation, which is trapped in wars that do not seem to have a victory that can be won by itself, is unlimited. This study is conducted in this regard.

It has never been more important to work for unity, inclusivity, and human dignity in a world that is struggling with growing divisions, wars, and inequities. These principles form the framework for achieving a peaceful, just, and sustainable global society in which people and communities can live side by side. Buddhist teachings are among the deepest ethical and intellectual frameworks that provide direction in this regard. The Four Sublime States of Mind, also known as the *Brahma Viharas*, are essential to Buddhist ethics. They include equanimity (*upekkhā*), sympathetic delight (*muditā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and loving-kindness (*mettā*).¹ These attributes stand for an ambitious mindset that promotes wholesome interpersonal connections and greater social cohesiveness.

¹ Silva, P. (2009). Sustainable Development and the Four Brahma Viharas: Ethical Foundations of Peace and Well-Being. *Social Ethics Journal*, 10(2), p. 213 - 231.

In addition to these virtues, the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya*,² one of the major collections of the *Sutta Pitaka* in the Pali Canon, offers insightful teachings on governance, ethical conduct, and the role of spiritual practice in promoting peace and prosperity. The sutta highlights the relationship between spiritual wisdom and societal welfare, making it highly relevant in contemporary discussions of world peace and sustainable development.

This essay explores how the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* and the Four Sublime States of Mind might promote a world that is inclusive, united, and dignified. It looks at how these teachings have the capacity to address global issues in a revolutionary way, in addition to providing a framework for personal spiritual development. People, leaders, and communities can help create a more compassionate, just, and sustainable world by combining the *Brahma Viharas*' ethical precepts with the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*'s governance principles.³ By using this perspective, we analyze how important these teachings are to bringing about world peace and sustainable development, providing both philosophical nuance and real-world applicability for today's pressing global concerns.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF KŪṬADANTA SUTTA IN CREATING WORLD PEACE

In the realm of spiritual wisdom and teachings, the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* (also known as the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*) occupies a significant place in Buddhist literature, offering timeless insights into the cultivation of peace. This discourse, found in the *Dīgha Nikāya* of the Pāli Canon, presents a conversation between the Buddha and a Brahmin named Kūṭadanta, who is seeking guidance on how to establish peace and harmony in his kingdom. The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* not only addresses the practical aspects of peace but also emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct, compassion, and mindfulness as the foundation for both individual and societal peace.

2.1. The story of Kūṭadanta and the Buddha's teachings

Kūṭadanta, a ruler, was deeply concerned about the welfare of his kingdom and wished to perform a great sacrifice to ensure the prosperity and peace of his people. He consults the Buddha, seeking advice on how best to achieve peace and harmony. Instead of endorsing the sacrifice, which involves the offering of animals, the Buddha provides an alternative perspective based on morality and non-violence.

The Buddha's response is profound, as he teaches Kūṭadanta that the foundation of lasting peace lies not in external rituals or sacrifices, but in the cultivation of internal peace through ethical living.⁴ Through this conversation,

² Smith, R. (2012). Buddhism and World Peace: The Concept of the Brahma Viharas. *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 18 (1), p. 123 - 141.

³ Kasulis, T. P. (2003). *Buddhism and World Peace: A Theoretical Framework*. *Asian Philosophy*, 13 (2), p. 91 - 108.

⁴ Harvey, Peter. (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 50.

the Buddha emphasizes key principles that remain crucial for creating peace, both within oneself and within the broader society.

2.2. Ethical living: The core of peace

One of the most important teachings in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* is the emphasis on ethical living. The Buddha explains that the way to establish peace begins with the individual. A ruler or leader who acts with moral integrity, compassion, and wisdom will naturally inspire peace within the kingdom. This is in stark contrast to the notion of achieving peace through force or external ceremonies.

The Buddha highlights several core ethical practices, such as right speech, right action, and right livelihood. These are part of the Noble Eightfold Path, which is central to Buddhist teachings. By adhering to these principles, individuals can reduce conflict, foster harmonious relationships, and create a society rooted in fairness and justice. Ethical conduct ensures that people live in a way that promotes the well-being of all, rather than pursuing self-interest or power at the expense of others.

2.3. The role of compassion and nonviolence

Another key element of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* is the importance of compassion and nonviolence. The Buddha teaches that true peace cannot be achieved through violence or harm. Instead, it is the practice of compassion – acting with kindness and empathy toward all beings – that can lead to genuine harmony. By encouraging leaders to act with compassion, the Buddha emphasizes that it is through understanding and love for others that conflicts can be resolved and peace can be attained.

Non-violence, or Ahimsa, is a foundational principle in Buddhism and is considered essential for fostering peace at both the individual and societal levels. The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* demonstrates that peace is not merely the absence of war or violence but the active presence of compassion, care, and respect for all living beings.⁵

2.4. Mindfulness and wisdom in leadership

A vital lesson in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* is the importance of mindfulness and wisdom in leadership. The Buddha counsels Kūṭadanta to be a wise and mindful ruler, one who considers the long-term consequences of his actions and leads with clear, discerning judgement. Leaders must be mindful of the impact their decisions have on their people, understanding that true peace can only arise when decisions are made with wisdom, patience, and clarity of mind⁶.

Mindfulness in leadership encourages a thoughtful, reflective approach to governance, where the needs and well-being of all members of society are considered. This can prevent rash decisions, foster cooperation, and reduce tensions. It also creates an environment where dialogue and mutual respect

⁵ Prebish, Charles S. (2002). Buddhist Buddhism and Global Peacebuilding. *The Buddhist Journal*, 22 (1), p. 45 - 66.

⁶ DN 5.

flourish, rather than one dominated by authoritarianism or imposition of force.

2.5. A universal approach to peace

The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* offers a universal message of peace that transcends the boundaries of time and place. Although the conversation takes place within the context of ancient Indian society, the principles the Buddha outlines are just as relevant today. In our modern world, marked by conflict, violence, and division, the teachings of the Buddha in this Sutta offer a pathway toward global peace.

The principles of ethical living, compassion, nonviolence, and wisdom are applicable to individuals, communities, and governments alike. When embraced by leaders, these principles can transform nations, creating a world where peace and harmony are not only ideals but realities. The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* encourages us to reflect on our behavior, challenge our assumptions, and approach conflict with a spirit of reconciliation and respect.

The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* presents a timeless and deeply transformative message for creating world peace. It teaches that true peace arises not from external rituals but from cultivating peace within ourselves through ethical behavior, compassion, mindfulness, and wisdom. By applying these principles on both an individual and collective level, we can foster a society where peace, harmony, and understanding prevail. As the Buddha's teachings continue to resonate today, the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* remains a powerful reminder that the path to world peace begins with each of us, and with the choices we make in our daily lives.

2.6. The role of *Brahma Viharas* in building world peace

The concept of world peace is multifaceted, involving the promotion of harmony, understanding, and cooperation among diverse peoples across the globe. It requires fostering positive mental states and attitudes that can transcend divisions and lead to collective well-being. One powerful framework for cultivating such inner qualities is found in the *Brahmaviharas*, the Four Divine Abodes or Four Immeasurables, a central teaching in Buddhism. These qualities – *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic Joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity) – are not merely spiritual practices but essential attitudes that can directly contribute to a more peaceful and harmonious world.

2.7. *Mettā* (Loving-kindness)

Mettā refers to the unconditional love and goodwill we extend toward all beings without any form of bias, discrimination, or expectation of return. It is the practice of wishing others to be happy, healthy, and free from suffering. When individuals cultivate loving-kindness, they begin to view the world and its people with a sense of warmth and affection. This attitude can foster positive relationships and reduce hostility and fear, key drivers of conflict.⁷

Example: In the context of world peace, *mettā* can be seen in global peace

⁷ Murcott, Susan. (2006). Buddhism and Social Engagement: The Role of the *Brahmaviharas* in Modern Times. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 14 (2), p. 122 - 139.

movements that encourage compassion and understanding among people from different backgrounds. An example is the reconciliation efforts in post-apartheid South Africa, where leaders like Nelson Mandela emphasized forgiveness and healing, promoting unity rather than division. Similarly, global movements that advocate for refugee rights and provide humanitarian aid are grounded in the loving-kindness principle. When people extend goodwill to those in need, it promotes cooperation, reduces enmity, and builds trust, all vital elements for lasting peace.

2.8. *Karuṇā* (Compassion)

Karuṇā is the quality of empathy that arises when we recognize the suffering of others and act to alleviate it. Compassion is not just an emotional response but involves practical steps to reduce harm and bring relief.⁸ This active care for the well-being of others is a vital component of world peace because it motivates individuals and societies to act responsibly in the face of injustice and suffering.

Example: The international humanitarian response to natural disasters is an embodiment of *Karuṇā*. For example, the global efforts following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami or the 2010 Haiti earthquake were fueled by compassion as nations and organizations came together to provide immediate relief, medical aid, and long-term reconstruction. Moreover, *karuṇā* calls for addressing systemic suffering, such as poverty, inequality, and the violation of human rights. When individuals and governments act with compassion, whether through social policies, charitable efforts, or international cooperation, they contribute to a more equitable and peaceful world.

2.9. *Muditā* (Sympathetic joy)

Muditā refers to the ability to take joy in the success and happiness of others, free from jealousy or envy.⁹ In a world often driven by competition and comparison, *muditā* encourages a mindset that celebrates the well-being and achievements of others. This quality fosters social harmony and reduces the sense of rivalry, which can lead to conflict and strife. When individuals can rejoice in others' successes, it encourages cooperation, shared happiness, and collective prosperity.

Example: On a global scale, *muditā* can be seen in efforts like the celebration of international achievements, such as peace treaties, successful diplomacy, and the overcoming of challenges like poverty and disease. The success of global health initiatives, such as the eradication of smallpox or the ongoing efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, brings people together in a spirit of collective joy and celebration. When nations and individuals take pleasure in the well-being of others, it leads to a reduction in conflict and an increase in collaboration.

⁸ Murcott, Susan. (2006). Buddhism and Social Engagement: The Role of the Brahmaviharas in Modern Times. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 14 (2), p. 143 - 145.

⁹ Murcott, Susan. (2006). Buddhism and Social Engagement: The Role of the Brahma Viharas in Modern Times. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 14 (2), p. 152 - 155.

Sympathetic joy strengthens the sense of shared human experience, making it easier to build a peaceful world.

2.10. *Upekkhā* (Equanimity)

Upekkhā, or equanimity, refers to mental balance, stability, and the ability to remain unmoved by extreme emotions, whether positive or negative¹⁰. It is the quality of maintaining calm and composure in the face of both personal and collective challenges. In the context of global peace, equanimity helps individuals and societies navigate conflicts and crises without being overwhelmed by anger, hatred, or fear.

Example: In situations of political or social unrest, leaders who practice *Upekkhā* are better able to respond to tensions with a sense of fairness and perspective, avoiding rash decisions driven by anger or fear. A good example of this is the way Mahatma Gandhi approached the struggle for India's independence. Despite facing oppression, violence, and injustice, he maintained a stance of non-violence and equanimity, which inspired millions and contributed to the peaceful liberation of India. Similarly, leaders who can remain calm and objective during international negotiations – especially in conflict zones – can guide their countries towards peace without escalating tensions.

The *Brahma Viharas* provide a spiritual foundation for world peace by promoting positive attitudes that transcend division and conflict. By cultivating *mettā*, individuals create a culture of goodwill and empathy. With *karuṇā*, they develop a sense of responsibility for others' suffering, motivating humanitarian actions. *Muditā* fosters shared joy and a celebration of collective success, reducing the competitiveness that often fuels conflict. Finally, *Upekkhā* provides the equanimity needed to navigate challenges without resorting to violence or hatred.

In a world that often seems divided by differences in culture, religion, and politics, the *Brahma Viharas* offer a universal path to peace. By integrating these qualities into daily life, both at the personal and societal level, we can create a world that is more compassionate, joyful, and balanced – ultimately contributing to global peace.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Central objective: To understand the core teachings of *Brahma Viharas* and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* and to identify how these teachings promote peace, compassion, and social harmony.

Specific objectives: (1) To explore the relationship between these teachings and sustainable development. (2) To develop a practical framework for implementing these principles in modern society. (3) To propose a roadmap for integrating these teachings into global policies for peace and sustainability.

¹⁰ Murcott, Susan. (2006). Buddhism and Social Engagement: The Role of the Brahma Viharas in Modern Times. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 14(2), p. 160 - 165.

3.1. Research methodology

Achieving world peace and sustainable development is a goal that has eluded humanity for centuries. However, the teachings found in ancient texts, such as the *Brahma Viharas* (the Four Divine Ethics, one Abidings) in Buddhism and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, offer profound insights into human behavior and social harmony. These teachings, when applied in a modern context, can contribute significantly to creating a more peaceful and sustainable world.

This research aims to explore the potential of the *Brahma Viharas* (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* to address the challenges of global peace and sustainable development. A systematic methodology will be employed to examine the texts, extract relevant principles, and assess their applicability to contemporary global issues.

The research methodology consists of four key phases: Literature Review, Textual Analysis, Comparative Analysis, and Practical Application. A mixed-method approach combining qualitative research and case studies will be used to explore the implications of these teachings.

3.2. Literature review

The pursuit of world peace and sustainable development often hinges on the cultivation of values such as unity, inclusivity, and human dignity. In Buddhist philosophy, these ideals are embodied in the Four Sublime States of Mind (*Brahma Viharas*) and the teachings of the *Kūṭadanta Sūtra*, particularly found in the *Dīgha Nikāya*. These teachings provide profound insights into fostering harmony and ethical practices that can contribute to both personal and collective well-being.

Literature Review Chart: In the first phase, a comprehensive review of existing literature will be conducted. This will involve studying key texts such as: (1) The *Brahmaviharas: Kūṭadanta Sutta* (Sutta from the *Dīgha Nikaya* that deals with governance, social justice, and the role of the state in promoting peace). (2) The literature review will focus on the historical context and significance of the *Brahma Viharas* and *Kūṭadanta Sutta*. Interpretations and modern applications of these teachings. The relationship between ethics, spirituality, and sustainable development.

3.3. Textual analysis

This phase involves a deep textual analysis of the *Brahma Viharas* and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*. Key components of the analysis will include *Brahma Viharas*: Exploring the four attitudes of loving-kindness (*Mettā*), compassion (*Karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*Muditā*), and equanimity (*Upekkhā*) as tools for promoting individual and collective well-being.

Kūṭadanta Sutta: Analyzing the teachings on social harmony, governance, and justice. The Sutta presents the Buddha's advice to a ruler on how to maintain peace and prosperity by ensuring ethical governance and social welfare.

The analysis will involve: Identifying key ethical principles and values. Understanding the relationship between personal virtues (such as compassion)

and societal well-being. Evaluating how these principles can be adapted for contemporary global challenges.

3.4. Comparative analysis

In this phase, the research will compare the teachings of the *Brahma Viharas* and *Kūṭadanta Sutta* with modern frameworks for peace and sustainable development. This will involve comparing the Four *Brahma Viharas* with concepts like empathy, social justice, human rights, and environmental ethics in modern discourse. Comparing the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* with contemporary policies on governance, social justice, and peace-building.

A matrix will be developed to map the principles of the *Brahma Viharas* and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* against various global development goals (SDGs), including:

3.5. Practical application

This final phase will involve developing actionable strategies to implement the principles of the *Brahma Viharas* and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* into modern global policy. A framework will be proposed for integrating these teachings into various sectors, including:

Governance and Policy: Applying the ethical principles of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* to modern governance, law-making, and social justice practices. **Education:** Incorporating the *Brahma Viharas* into educational systems to promote emotional intelligence, empathy, and global citizenship.

Sustainable Development: Creating initiatives that integrate compassion, justice, and sustainability in development projects, particularly in regions facing social, economic, and environmental challenges.

This research will provide a comprehensive methodology to understand how the ancient teachings of the *Brahma Viharas* and *Kūṭadanta Sutta* can be applied to achieve global peace and sustainable development. By combining textual analysis with contemporary frameworks for peace and development, the research will offer practical solutions for building a harmonious and sustainable world.

IV. DISCUSSION

The aspiration for a world characterized by peace, sustainability, and dignity is deeply rooted in various cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. One of the most profound teachings in Buddhism that speaks to this aspiration is the concept of the Four Sublime States of Mind (*Brahma Viharas*). These states – loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) – represent qualities that not only nurture inner peace but can also be the foundation for social harmony, global unity, and sustainable development. These teachings are encapsulated in several Buddhist scriptures, including the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya*, which further provides guidance on the importance of virtuous living for societal well-being¹¹.

¹¹ Upadhyaya, D. (2012). Buddhism and Peace in the Modern World. *Buddhist Academic Journal*, 22 (1), p. 34 - 48.

In this discussion, we will explore how the Four Sublime States of Mind can cultivate unity, inclusivity, and human dignity in the contemporary world. Moreover, we will examine how these principles, as articulated in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, contribute to achieving world peace and sustainable development, linking ancient Buddhist wisdom with modern global challenges.

The Four Sublime States of Mind (*Brahma Viharas*): The *Brahma Viharas* are mental states or practices that transcend individual desires and concerns, aiming to establish universal qualities of peace and goodwill. Each of these states fosters emotional and psychological harmony that can extend to society, contributing to a broader sense of unity and inclusivity.¹²

4.1. Loving-kindness (*Mettā*)

Loving-kindness, or *Mettā*, is the wish for all beings to experience happiness and well-being. It is an unconditional, universal love that transcends personal attachments and biases. When practiced sincerely, *Mettā* promotes inclusivity, as it does not discriminate between friend and foe, rich and poor, or any other categories that often divide people. In a world marked by divisions, the cultivation of loving-kindness can bridge gaps between communities, fostering empathy and mutual respect.

On a global scale, *Mettā* can encourage nations and communities to act with compassion towards one another, focusing on collective well-being rather than individualistic or nationalistic interests. It can become a cornerstone of diplomacy, international relations, and humanitarian efforts, ensuring that decisions are made with the welfare of all in mind.

4.2. Compassion (*Karuṇā*)

Compassion, or *Karuṇā*, is the deep awareness of the suffering of others and the desire to alleviate that suffering. It goes beyond pity or sympathy, calling for active engagement in the world to reduce suffering wherever it is found. In the context of sustainable development and world peace, compassion becomes a crucial motivator for social action. It encourages individuals, organizations, and governments to take meaningful steps to address issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

Furthermore, *Karuṇā* fosters inclusivity by ensuring that the voices and needs of the marginalized and oppressed are heard and addressed. It calls for systemic changes that promote justice and fairness, supporting the idea that all human beings deserve to live with dignity and free from suffering.

4.3. Sympathetic joy (*Muditā*)

Sympathetic joy, or *muditā*, is the ability to feel joy in the happiness and success of others. Unlike jealousy or envy, *muditā* recognizes that the well-being of others contributes to the overall well-being of society. In a world where competition often leads to division, *muditā* fosters a sense of unity

¹² De Silva, Padmasiri. (2004). Buddhism, Peace and the Four Sublime States of Mind. *Buddhist Quarterly*, 16 (4), p. 72 - 88.

by encouraging individuals to celebrate the successes of others rather than viewing them as a threat.¹³

On a societal level, *muditā* can help reduce feelings of resentment, inequality, and divisiveness, especially in multicultural and multi-ethnic societies. It can be a powerful antidote to the cynicism and distrust that often arise in environments marked by social or political tensions. *Muditā* encourages individuals to build a more harmonious society where people from diverse backgrounds and walks of life work together for common goals.

4.4. Equanimity (*Upekkhā*)

Equanimity, or *upekkhā*, is the quality of being undisturbed by the highs and lows of life. It involves maintaining a balanced mind in the face of success or failure, pleasure or pain. This state of mental clarity and composure is essential for fostering peace and stability, both within the individual and within society.¹⁴

In terms of world peace, *upekkhā* provides the emotional resilience needed to navigate conflicts and crises without losing sight of the larger goal of harmony. It allows individuals and communities to remain centered, even in the face of adversity, and to respond to conflict with wisdom rather than reactivity. Equanimity also fosters a sense of justice and fairness, encouraging impartiality and the equitable treatment of all people, regardless of their background or status.¹⁵

The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* and its contribution to world peace

The *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, found in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, is a discourse where the Buddha addresses the topic of social harmony and the role of ethics and virtuous conduct in creating a just and peaceful society. The Sutta presents the story of a Brahmin named Kūṭadanta who seeks the Buddha's guidance on how to ensure the prosperity and well-being of his society. The Buddha's teachings highlight the importance of both individual and collective moral conduct in achieving peace and stability.

At the heart of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* is the idea that good governance, prosperity, and societal peace are not merely the result of material wealth or external power but are deeply connected to the ethical and moral behavior of individuals and communities. The Buddha emphasizes the significance of right intention, right speech, and right action, which align closely with the practice of the *Brahma Viharas*.

In the Sutta, the Buddha also speaks about the importance of generosity, non-violence, and the establishment of a just society where leaders act with wisdom and compassion. These principles are directly related to the cultivation

¹³ Buddhism and Human Rights: The Role of Compassion in Promoting Human Dignity and Global Peace. (2008). *Buddhist Studies Quarterly*, 18 (3), p. 78 - 90.

¹⁴ Zimbardo, Philip. (2007). *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. Random House, p. 45.

¹⁵ Buddhism and Human Rights: The Role of Compassion in Promoting Human Dignity and Global Peace. (2008). *Buddhist Studies Quarterly*, 18(3), p. 92 - 100.

of the *Brahma Viharas*, as they promote the kind of ethical conduct that leads to long-term societal well-being.

For example, Kūṭadanta is advised to use his resources wisely, ensuring that the welfare of the people is prioritized. He is encouraged to show compassion not only to his friends and allies but also to those who might be considered his enemies. This is similar to the *Brahma Vihara* teachings on loving-kindness and compassion, which urge individuals to extend goodwill and empathy universally.¹⁶

The teachings of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* also provide insight into how leaders and communities can work together towards sustainable development. Sustainable practices are not just about material resource management but also about ensuring the moral and ethical integrity of society. The *Sutta* suggests that peace and prosperity can only be attained when individuals and leaders act with virtue, wisdom, and compassion, promoting an environment where human dignity is upheld and all people have the opportunity to thrive. *Brahma Viharas* in the Context of World Peace and Sustainable Development.

The practice of the *Brahma Viharas* can be seen as essential in addressing contemporary global challenges, including the pursuit of world peace and sustainable development. These two interrelated goals are deeply aligned with the values of unity, inclusivity, and human dignity - all of which the *Brahma Viharas* help foster.

4.5. Cultivating unity and inclusivity

The *Brahma Viharas*, when practised by individuals and groups, contribute to the breakdown of barriers between people. Whether these barriers are based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, or class, the *Brahma Viharas* call for an inclusive and compassionate approach to human interaction.¹⁷ The practice of *Mettā* and *Karuṇā* calls for the extension of goodwill to all beings, transcending divisions and prejudices. Empathetic joy celebrates the successes of others, fostering cooperation and collective progress. Finally, equanimity ensures that individuals are not swayed by emotions of superiority or inferiority, promoting fairness and justice.

In the context of sustainable development, these qualities encourage collaboration rather than competition, helping to create global partnerships that work toward shared goals. They promote a world where resources are shared equitably and where people are seen as part of a common human family, deserving of dignity and respect¹⁸.

The *Brahma Viharas*, also known as the “Four Immeasurables” or the “Four Divine Abodes,” are central to Buddhist ethics and practice. They represent four qualities of mind and heart that are considered essential for the cultivation

¹⁶ Walser, R. (2009). Buddhist Thought and the Environment: Perspectives on Sustainability and the Four Sublime States. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 6 (4), p. 233 - 252.

¹⁷ Kasulis, T. P. (2003). Buddhism and World Peace: A Theoretical Framework. *Asian Philosophy*, 13 (2), p. 91 - 108.

¹⁸ Kasulis, T. P. (2003). Buddhism and World Peace: A Theoretical Framework. *Asian Philosophy*, 13 (2), p. 91 - 108.

of inner peace, compassion, and wisdom. These qualities are: “(1) *Mettā* – Loving-kindness. (2) *Karuṇā* – Compassion. (3) *Muditā* – Sympathetic Joy. (4) *Upekkhā* – Equanimity”

By cultivating these virtues in individuals, it is possible to address the root causes of conflict and violence, ultimately leading to peace on a broader, societal level¹⁹. This essay will explore how the *Brahma Viharas* can be used to establish world peace by providing concrete examples and practical applications.

4.5.1. *Mettā* (Loving-kindness) and its role in world peace: *Mettā*, or loving-kindness, is the practice of wishing well for all beings, regardless of their race, nationality, religion, or any other distinguishing feature. It is a boundless form of love that transcends personal biases and preferences.

Example: Personal Transformation Through *mettā*

Imagine an individual who, through regular meditation on *mettā*, gradually transforms their capacity for love and kindness. Instead of harboring anger or resentment towards others – especially those they might view as different or threatening – they begin to genuinely wish well for everyone, regardless of the circumstances. Such a person may still disagree with others, but their interactions will be tempered with compassion and goodwill rather than hostility.²⁰

This transformation has ripple effects. When individuals in society practice loving-kindness, it leads to the creation of a compassionate and non-violent society. For instance, a teacher who embodies *mettā* in their interactions with students fosters an environment of mutual respect and understanding. This, in turn, can help reduce bullying, conflict, and prejudice in schools.

Broader Implication: Diplomacy and International Relations: On a global scale, political leaders, diplomats, and peacekeepers can be inspired by the practice of *mettā*. If they approach negotiations and conflicts with the mindset of loving-kindness, they are more likely to seek peaceful, win-win solutions that prioritize the well-being of all parties involved. An example of this can be seen in post-apartheid South Africa, where leaders like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu emphasized reconciliation and healing over retribution²¹. Their approach was deeply rooted in the principle of *Mettā* – extending goodwill even to those who had previously caused harm.

4.5.2. *Karuṇā* (Compassion) and its role in world peace: *Karuṇā*, or compassion, is the ability to empathize with the suffering of others and to take action to alleviate that suffering. Compassion is not simply a passive feeling but involves an active commitment to reducing suffering, whether through acts of kindness, social justice initiatives, or the alleviation of systemic harm.

¹⁹ Walser, R. (2009). Buddhist Thought and the Environment: Perspectives on Sustainability and the Four Sublime States. *Journal of Global Ethics*, 6 (4), p. 233 - 252.

²⁰ Harvey, Peter. (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 67.

²¹ Chandra, S. (2005). Sustainable Development and Ethical Life in the Buddha's Teachings. *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 10 (2), p. 98 - 110.

Example: Compassion in Action

One real-world example of compassion in action can be seen in humanitarian aid efforts during natural disasters. When a devastating earthquake strikes, countries and individuals from all over the world often respond with acts of compassion. They provide food, shelter, and medical assistance to those affected, not because they expect anything in return, but because they recognize the shared humanity in the suffering of others. This response is an embodiment of *Karuṇā* at a global scale, as it transcends national, cultural, and ethnic boundaries.²²

Another example is the work of organizations like Doctors Without Borders, who provide medical aid to war-torn regions, often in areas where others are too afraid or unwilling to go. Their work is driven by the compassion to alleviate suffering and save lives, regardless of the political or religious affiliations of those in need.

4.6. Broader implication: Addressing global inequality

At a societal level, compassion can play a significant role in addressing global inequality. For example, the international community's response to poverty, healthcare, and education can be viewed through the lens of *Karuṇā*. Governments and NGOs that invest in social programs that help the poor and vulnerable are engaging in compassionate actions. The eradication of extreme poverty, the fight against diseases like malaria and tuberculosis, and the expansion of access to quality education are all aspects of compassion that can help bring about peace by addressing the root causes of social unrest.

Compassion can also address the wounds of historical injustices, such as slavery, colonialism, and oppression. When communities and nations come together to acknowledge and heal the suffering of past wrongs, they lay the groundwork for peace. For instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, headed by Desmond Tutu, was an effort to provide a compassionate space for individuals to share their experiences, seek forgiveness, and begin the process of healing.²³

***Muditā* (Sympathetic Joy) and its role in world peace:** *Muditā*, or sympathetic joy, is the practice of feeling happiness and joy for the success and well-being of others. In a world often driven by competition and jealousy, *Muditā* invites us to celebrate the successes of others without any feelings of inadequacy or envy. This practice creates an environment of mutual respect and encouragement, where individuals and communities can thrive together.

Example: Overcoming Envy and Cultivating Joy

Consider a scenario where two neighbors live in the same community. One neighbor receives an award for their environmental activism. Instead of feeling jealous or resentful, the other neighbor practices *Muditā* and genuinely feels

²² Harvey, Peter. (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues*. Cambridge University Press, p. 89.

²³ Kalupahana, David J. (1994). *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Motilal Banarsidass, p. 87.

joy for the achievement of the first. They might even express their admiration and support. This not only strengthens their personal relationship but also contributes to a culture of support and mutual growth.²⁴

In the workplace, *Muditā* can foster a collaborative environment. Employees who genuinely celebrate the successes of their colleagues, rather than seeing them as threats, create a culture of teamwork and shared purpose. This can lead to increased productivity, higher morale, and a more harmonious workplace. This spirit of collaboration can extend to larger communities and even entire nations.

4.7. Broader implication: Promoting global cooperation

On a global scale, *Muditā* can be instrumental in promoting cooperation rather than competition. For example, when nations celebrate the achievements of others, such as breakthroughs in scientific research, climate change mitigation, or peace-building efforts, they create a shared sense of global responsibility. Countries that embrace *Muditā* are more likely to collaborate on international issues, such as global health initiatives, climate change agreements, and conflict resolution efforts. Instead of competing for resources or dominance, nations can work together for the collective good²⁵.

An example of this is the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic. While there were certainly moments of rivalry between nations, there were also many instances of mutual support and solidarity, such as the sharing of medical supplies, vaccines, and research findings. This spirit of global cooperation, rooted in *Muditā*, is essential for addressing future challenges, including climate change, global poverty, and humanitarian crises.

4.8. *Upekkhā* (Equanimity) and its role in world peace

Upekkhā, or equanimity, is the quality of mental stability and balance, even in the face of adversity. It is the ability to remain calm and composed, free from excessive attachment or aversion. Equanimity is essential for creating lasting peace, both on an individual level and in the world at large.

Example: Inner Peace Through *Upekkhā*. An individual who practices *Upekkhā* will not be easily swayed by emotional extremes, such as anger, fear, or anxiety. In a conflict situation, they remain grounded, offering a sense of calm that can help de-escalate tensions. For instance, a mediator who is grounded in equanimity will be better able to navigate difficult discussions without being overwhelmed by personal emotions or biases.

In family dynamics, equanimity can be especially valuable. During times of stress or disagreement, a family member who maintains inner balance can help keep the peace and prevent the situation from escalating. Rather than reacting impulsively or defensively, they respond with mindfulness and patience,

²⁴ Chandra, S.. (2005). Sustainable Development and Ethical Life in the Buddha's Teachings. *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 10 (2), p. 98 - 110.

²⁵ Schumann, H. (2004). The Four Sublime States of Mind (Brahmaviharas) and Human Dignity. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 21(2), p. 195 - 215.

contributing to a more peaceful home environment.²⁶

4.9. Broader implication: Conflict resolution and global peace

On the global stage, equanimity can play a key role in conflict resolution. Leaders who practice *Upekkhā* are less likely to react impulsively or make decisions based on fear or anger. Instead, they approach complex geopolitical issues with a sense of calm and perspective, seeking solutions that benefit all parties involved. The role of equanimity in peacekeeping missions is also significant. Peacekeepers who embody equanimity are able to maintain order and stability in volatile environments without succumbing to the emotional stress of the situation.

An example of equanimity in global peace-building can be seen in the efforts of organizations like the United Nations, which work to resolve international conflicts, provide humanitarian assistance, and promote global cooperation. In peace talks and diplomatic negotiations, maintaining equanimity allows parties to approach each other with a sense of fairness and openness, rather than hostility or suspicion.

4.10. Conclusion: The *Brahma Viharas* as a path to world peace

The *Brahma Viharas* – loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity – are powerful practices that can lead to profound personal transformation. When these qualities are cultivated individually, they contribute to a more peaceful, compassionate, and harmonious society. On a global scale, the practice of the *Brahma Viharas* can help address the root causes of conflict, inequality, and suffering, creating a world where peace is not only possible but sustainable.

The examples presented in this essay show that the *Brahma Viharas* are not abstract concepts but practical tools that can be applied in various contexts – whether in personal relationships, community building, or international diplomacy. By fostering these qualities in individuals and societies, we can lay the foundation for a more peaceful and compassionate world.

4.11. Human dignity and ethical governance

Human dignity is central to both the *Brahma viharas* and the teachings of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*. Sustainable development is not solely concerned with economic or environmental concerns but with the well-being of people. Human dignity involves respect for individuals' rights, opportunities for personal growth, and the protection of their well-being.²⁷

The cultivation of the *Brahma Viharas* within leadership and governance promotes ethical behavior that upholds human dignity. Leaders who act with loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity will create policies and systems that are fair, just, and sustainable. These ethical principles will ensure that all people, regardless of background, have access to resources,

²⁶ Kalupahana, David J. (1994). *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Motilal Banarsidass, p. 98.

²⁷ DN 5.

opportunities, and protection from harm.

4.12. *Kūṭadanta Sutta* and peace

The *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, found in the *Dīgha Nikāya* (a part of the *Pali Canon*), offers valuable teachings on the nature of peace, governance, and moral conduct. It provides a unique perspective on the relationship between ethical behavior, leadership, and the establishment of peace. The central message of the *Sutta* revolves around the story of King Kūṭadanta, who seeks advice from the Buddha on how to establish peace in his kingdom, especially through sacrifice. The Buddha guides the king on how true peace can be attained, not through external rituals or violent means but through wisdom, ethical behavior, and harmonious governance. This essay will explore the central themes of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, how they relate to the concept of world peace, and provide examples of how these principles can be applied to today's world.

The Context of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*: The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* is a discourse where King Kūṭadanta, a ruler concerned about the well-being of his people and the stability of his kingdom, approaches the Buddha. He is contemplating a large animal sacrifice to appease the gods and ensure the prosperity of his kingdom.²⁸ However, he is uncertain about the effectiveness of such rituals and wonders if there is a better way to establish peace and prosperity.

In his search for a solution, King Kūṭadanta turns to the Buddha, who offers him advice not just on the specifics of rituals but on the broader issues of morality, leadership, and the cultivation of peace within society. The Buddha's teachings challenge the king's assumptions and offer him an alternative path, one grounded in ethical leadership, generosity, and mindfulness.

4.13. The four major teachings of the Buddha in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*

The importance of ethical leadership: The Buddha first advises King Kūṭadanta on the role of the ruler in creating a just and peaceful society. He emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct in leadership. The ruler, according to the Buddha, must practice virtues such as compassion, honesty, and wisdom. A just ruler governs not through fear or force but through the example of moral behavior. By living according to these principles, the ruler inspires the people to do the same.

Example: A modern parallel can be seen in the leadership of countries where political figures embody integrity and ethical behavior. For instance, the leadership of Nelson Mandela in South Africa emphasized reconciliation and moral leadership after years of apartheid. His commitment to justice and equality helped bring about peace in a divided nation.²⁹

Generosity and the Role of the People: The Buddha also advises that the prosperity of a kingdom is tied to the generosity of its people. He suggests

²⁸ Brahm, Ajahn. (2014). *The Four Noble Truths: Understanding the Basics of Buddhism*. Buddhist Publication Society, p. 68.

²⁹ Brahm, Ajahn. (2014). *The Four Noble Truths: Understanding the Basics of Buddhism*. Buddhist Publication Society, p. 67.

that a ruler should encourage and promote acts of charity and support for the less fortunate. Generosity fosters goodwill among people, reduces social inequality, and strengthens the social fabric. The king should focus on fostering an environment where people are encouraged to give to those in need rather than relying on expensive and violent rituals.

Example: The modern concept of welfare systems and social security programs embodies this principle. Nations like Scandinavian countries (e.g., Sweden, Norway) invest heavily in social welfare, providing healthcare, education, and other forms of support for their citizens. This helps create a more equitable society and promotes peace and stability.

Avoiding the Harmful Effects of Violence: The Buddha teaches that violence only breeds further violence and suffering. The king's idea of appeasing the gods through animal sacrifices is critiqued by the Buddha, who explains that such acts of violence do not lead to lasting peace. True peace comes from non-violence (*ahimsā*), compassion, and wisdom. Leaders must avoid using violence as a tool for maintaining power or establishing peace. Instead, they must focus on resolving conflicts through dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect.

Example: A contemporary example of this teaching can be seen in the movements for non-violent resistance, such as those led by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. These leaders demonstrated that social and political change could be achieved without resorting to violence. In modern conflicts, peace processes that prioritize diplomacy, dialogue, and negotiation rather than military intervention are often more successful in achieving lasting peace.

Mindfulness and Personal Conduct: Finally, the Buddha emphasizes the importance of mindfulness and personal conduct in establishing peace. A kingdom is composed of individuals, and peace begins with the conduct of each person. When individuals practice mindfulness, ethical behavior, and wisdom, they contribute to the collective peace of society. The Buddha suggests that through meditation, self-awareness, and moral training, individuals can cultivate the qualities necessary for a peaceful existence.

Example: The practice of mindfulness and meditation is becoming increasingly popular worldwide, with many people recognizing its benefits for personal peace and social harmony. Countries like Bhutan have incorporated mindfulness into their national policies, and their concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) places a strong emphasis on mental well-being and ethical living. This approach demonstrates how individual well-being is intertwined with collective societal peace.³⁰

4.14. Applying the teachings to modern world peace

The principles found in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* are timeless and can be applied to the modern world to foster peace in various contexts, from personal relationships to international diplomacy.

³⁰ Thich Nhat Hanh. (1991). *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. Bantam Books, p. 34.

Global Leadership and Ethical Governance: At the level of international relations, the teachings of ethical leadership are crucial. Leaders in today's world, whether they govern nations or multinational organizations, must embody integrity, fairness, and compassion. The importance of international agreements that promote human rights, environmental sustainability, and economic equity reflects the ethical principles outlined in the *Sutta*.

For instance, the United Nations plays a vital role in promoting peace, human rights, and social justice globally. Efforts such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reflect the idea that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, equality, and sustainability.

Social Justice and Redistribution of Resources: The emphasis on generosity and the welfare of the people in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* aligns with the modern principles of social justice. Addressing poverty, inequality, and social exclusion is essential to creating a peaceful society. Governments and organizations that invest in education, health care, and poverty alleviation help ensure that their citizens have the opportunity to live fulfilling lives, which in turn reduces the likelihood of social unrest and conflict.

A good example of this in practice is the Universal Basic Income (UBI) trials in various countries. By ensuring that all citizens receive financial support, these initiatives aim to reduce inequality and promote social harmony. The goal is to reduce the economic pressures that often lead to violence and unrest, creating a more peaceful society overall.

Non-violence in Conflict Resolution: The Buddha's teachings on non-violence and avoiding the harmful effects of violence are incredibly relevant in today's world. Armed conflicts and wars continue to cause immense suffering, but there are many instances where peace has been achieved through diplomatic means.

The Iran Nuclear Deal, the peace accords in Colombia, and the ongoing negotiations between Israel and Palestine are examples of international efforts to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. These peace processes often require patience, compromise, and understanding – qualities that are emphasized in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*.

Cultivating Mindfulness for Personal and Collective Peace: On a personal level, mindfulness and ethical conduct are essential for fostering peace in everyday life. Practicing mindfulness helps individuals remain calm, compassionate, and clear-headed in the face of challenges. This not only benefits personal well-being but also has a ripple effect on relationships and communities. The growing popularity of mindfulness programs in schools, workplaces, and prisons demonstrates the universal applicability of these teachings. By fostering a culture of mindfulness, society can address issues such as mental health, stress, and interpersonal conflict, contributing to a more peaceful world.³¹

³¹ Brahm, Ajahn. (2014). *The Four Noble Truths: Understanding the Basics of Buddhism*.

V. UNDERSTANDING THE BRAHMA VIHARAS

The Four Sublime States of Mind – also known as the *Brahma Viharas* – are a set of qualities that are cultivated to foster personal well-being and collective harmony. These four states are: (1) *Mettā* (Loving-kindness): The wish for all beings to be happy and free from suffering. (2) *Karunā* (Compassion): The wish to alleviate the suffering of others. (3) *Muditā* (Sympathetic Joy): The joy in others' happiness and success. (4) *Upekkhā* (Equanimity): A state of mental calmness, balance, and impartiality in the face of life's challenges.³²

These four qualities offer a framework for personal transformation that extends to the societal and global levels. In cultivating them, we can create environments where unity, inclusivity, and human dignity are respected and nurtured.

5.1. The role of the *Brahma Viharas* in unity and inclusivity

Mettā (Loving-kindness) and Unity: Loving-kindness is the foundation of social cohesion. It is the antidote to hatred, division, and enmity, which are at the heart of many conflicts. *Mettā* transcends cultural, racial, religious, and political differences, providing a universal appeal. By practicing loving-kindness toward all beings, individuals and communities break down barriers of fear, prejudice, and discrimination. A society based on *mettā* fosters cooperation, mutual understanding, and the recognition of shared humanity.

Furthermore, *mettā* can be a powerful tool in addressing global challenges like migration, refugee crises, and ethnic or religious conflicts. When leaders and citizens alike embody *mettā*, it can transform contentious negotiations and conflicts into opportunities for healing and reconciliation. The practice of *mettā* should, therefore, be incorporated into global peace initiatives, diplomacy, and even corporate governance.

Karunā (Compassion) and Inclusivity: Compassion is not simply the act of feeling sorry for those in suffering; it is the active desire to alleviate that suffering. Compassion moves us to take tangible steps toward inclusivity, ensuring that marginalized voices and communities are not left behind. The pursuit of social justice, access to basic human rights, and equality is closely aligned with the cultivation of *karunā*.³³

In practical terms, compassion manifests in policies and actions that seek to uplift the disadvantaged. Governments, international organizations, and non-profits can create structures that provide health care, education, and economic opportunities to the poor and underprivileged. On an individual level, compassion encourages active solidarity with those who face inequality, be it due to race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status.

Muditā (Sympathetic joy) and human dignity: *Muditā* fosters an attitude of rejoicing in the success and happiness of others, which is essential for preserving human dignity. In a world where competition often breeds jealousy,

Buddhist Publication Society, p. 35.

³² Kalupahana, David J. (1994). *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Motilal Banarsidass, p. 67.

³³ Kalupahana, David J. (1994). *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. Motilal Banarsidass, p. 56.

resentment, and bitterness, *Muditā* provides an antidote by encouraging a shift in mindset. When people rejoice in the success of others, it breaks the zero-sum mentality and promotes a culture of mutual support and shared success.

This attitude is crucial for fostering a world where human dignity is upheld. If individuals and societies are able to celebrate the achievements of others – whether in personal growth, professional accomplishments, or the well-being of a nation – it cultivates an environment of mutual respect and shared humanity. *Muditā* encourages individuals to see the value in one another's achievements and fosters a collaborative approach to solving collective challenges.³⁴

Upekkhā (Equanimity) and Sustainable Development: Equanimity, or the ability to remain calm and balanced amidst the ups and downs of life, is crucial for sustainable development. In a world marked by volatility, uncertainty, and rapid change, the practice of *upekkhā* helps individuals and societies approach problems with wisdom and patience. In the context of environmental sustainability, this quality is particularly relevant as it allows for long-term thinking and a balanced approach to resource use and conservation.

Upekkhā fosters a mindset that prioritizes collective well-being over individual or short-term gain. In the face of climate change, for example, *Upekkhā* encourages decisions that benefit future generations, even if they require short-term sacrifices. Similarly, when economic systems and policies are developed with *Upekkhā*, they can integrate the needs of the planet, the economy, and social well-being, ensuring sustainable practices that respect both the environment and human dignity.

The *Kūṭadāntha Sutta* and Its Relevance to World Peace and Sustainable Development: The *Kūṭadāntha Sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya* offers a valuable perspective on peace and the importance of mutual respect, reconciliation, and dialogue in addressing conflicts. This sutra focuses on the resolution of disputes and the restoration of peace through wise and compassionate means. Several teachings within the *Kūṭadāntha Sutta* resonate with contemporary approaches to peace-building and sustainable development.

5.2. Mutual respect and dialogue

One of the central themes in the *Kūṭadāntha Sutta* is the importance of mutual respect in resolving disputes. In today's polarized world, the emphasis on respect in dialogue and negotiation is critical. Rather than focusing on winning an argument, the *Kūṭadāntha Sutta* encourages a balanced approach where all parties are heard and their dignity is respected. It reminds us that true peace arises not from the suppression of conflict but from its compassionate resolution.

In terms of global governance, the *Kūṭadāntha Sutta*'s emphasis on respectful dialogue can serve as a guide for international diplomacy. International conflicts often arise from a lack of understanding and respect

³⁴ Schumann, H. (2004). The Four Sublime States of Mind (Brahmaviharas) and Human Dignity. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 21(2), p. 195 – 215.

between nations or cultures.³⁵ The *Sutta* suggests that peace can be found through genuine listening, respect for differences, and a commitment to resolving disagreements in a spirit of mutual benefit. This approach can be applied in addressing issues such as territorial disputes, trade negotiations, and conflicts related to resources.

Non-Violence and Sustainable Development: The *Kūtadantha Sutta* also speaks to the value of non-violence (*Ahimsa*) in achieving peace. Non-violence is not only relevant in interpersonal and political contexts but also in the way we interact with the environment. Sustainable development, in this sense, cannot occur without considering the environmental cost of human activity. It calls for a shift towards practices that are non-exploitative, just, and considerate of the planet's long-term health.

The *Sutta's* emphasis on non-violence aligns with the growing recognition that human development cannot be achieved at the expense of environmental destruction. Sustainable development must, therefore, be built upon the principles of non-harming to the Earth, with policies and practices that foster ecological balance.³⁶

Final suggestions for practical implementation: Education and Awareness. To integrate the *Brahma Viharas* and the teachings of the *Kūtadantha Sutta* into the modern world, it is essential to focus on education and awareness. Educational curricula worldwide can incorporate teachings on loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, as well as the importance of respectful dialogue and nonviolence. By instilling these values in the younger generations, we prepare them to navigate the complex global challenges ahead with wisdom, empathy, and fairness.

5.3. Global leadership and policy-making

Leaders at the national and international levels must embrace the core teachings of the *Brahma Viharas* and the *Kūtadantha Sutta*. Policies that prioritize human dignity, inclusivity, environmental sustainability, and peaceful conflict resolution can be informed by these principles. Governments and global organizations should foster cooperation, listening to the voices of marginalized communities and considering the long-term implications of their decisions.³⁷

Community and Grassroots Movements: Grassroots movements play a critical role in creating change from the bottom up. Communities can come together to practice and promote the *Brahma Viharas*, fostering unity, inclusivity, and dignity at the local level. Local initiatives aimed at environmental conservation, social justice, and peace-building can create

³⁵ Ratanakul, Phramaha Somboon. (2010). Sustainable Development and Buddhist Ethics: The Role of the Brahmviharas. *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 11 (2), p. 67 - 88.

³⁶ Gombrich, Richard. (1996). *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. Routledge, p. 47.

³⁷ Ludwig, E. (1996). Buddhism and Peace: Exploring the Role of Buddhist Practice in Conflict Resolution. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 3, p. 45 - 65.

models of sustainable development that resonate globally.

The Brahma Viharas and the *Kūṭadantha Sutta* offer profound insights into how individuals and societies can work toward unity, inclusivity, and the preservation of human dignity. By cultivating loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, we can create a world where cooperation, respect, and sustainability are prioritized. When applied to global challenges such as conflict resolution, environmental sustainability, and social justice, these teachings can offer a holistic framework for creating a more peaceful and just world for future generations.

Final Conclusion: Cultivating Unity, Inclusivity, and Human Dignity through the Four Sublime States of Mind and the *Kūṭadanta Sūtra* in Achieving World Peace and Sustainable Development in a World Marked by divisions, Inequality, and environmental challenges, the cultivation of unity, inclusivity, and human dignity has never been more crucial. These values are essential not only for personal well-being but also for the establishment of peaceful societies and sustainable global development. Buddhism, with its profound teachings on compassion, wisdom, and interconnectedness, offers a path toward achieving these goals. Among the most significant Buddhist concepts in this regard are the Four Sublime States of Mind (Brahma Viharas) and the *Kūṭadanta Sūtra* from the *Dīgha Nikāya*. These teachings provide both a philosophical framework and practical guidance for fostering harmony and addressing the pressing challenges of our time.

5.4. The four sublime states of mind (*Brahma Viharas*)

The Four Sublime States of Mind – loving-kindness (*Mettā*), compassion (*Karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*Muditā*), and equanimity (*Upekkhā*) – are central to the cultivation of a peaceful and just world. These states of mind are not mere emotional responses; they are practices that shape our behavior and interactions with others, both on an individual and collective level.³⁸

Loving-kindness (*Mettā*): Loving-kindness is the wish for all beings to be happy. It transcends boundaries of race, nationality, and creed, fostering a universal sense of compassion. When individuals and communities embody this attitude, conflict and division can give way to cooperation and solidarity. In the global context, the practice of loving-kindness challenges prejudices, discrimination, and xenophobia, encouraging people to see beyond their differences and recognize the shared humanity that connects them.

Compassion (*Karuṇā*): Compassion involves the desire to alleviate the suffering of others. It encourages not only empathy but also active engagement in reducing the harm and suffering caused by poverty, injustice, and environmental degradation. In the context of sustainable development, compassion calls for addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, recognizing that global peace and sustainability are impossible when large

³⁸ Gombrich, Richard. (1996). *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. Routledge, p. 78.

segments of humanity are excluded from the benefits of development.

Sympathetic Joy (*Muditā*): Sympathetic joy is the ability to rejoice in the happiness and success of others. This practice counters envy and resentment, promoting a sense of collective well-being. In the pursuit of world peace, sympathetic joy fosters a global culture of cooperation, where individuals and nations celebrate each other's achievements and work collaboratively towards common goals. It encourages the sharing of resources and knowledge for the betterment of all, rather than fostering competition or the hoarding of wealth³⁹.

Equanimity (*Upekkhā*): Equanimity is the practice of maintaining balance and composure in the face of life's challenges, neither clinging to success nor being disturbed by failure. In a world often defined by turmoil, conflict, and inequity, equanimity helps cultivate resilience, patience, and wisdom. It teaches individuals and societies to respond to adversity with calm and rational thought rather than reactive violence or anger. As such, equanimity is essential for creating peaceful societies where dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation replace conflict and strife.

Together, these Four Sublime States of Mind form a holistic framework for personal and societal transformation. By fostering loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, individuals can transcend ego-based thinking and contribute to the creation of harmonious and inclusive communities. On a global scale, when these qualities are practiced collectively, they can foster international cooperation, peaceful coexistence, and sustainable development.

The *Kūṭadanta Sūtra* and Its Relevance to World Peace: The *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, a significant text from the *Dīgha Nikāya*, provides further insight into the relationship between moral conduct, social harmony, and sustainable development. In the Sutta, the Buddha addresses the issue of how rulers and leaders can establish peace and prosperity in their realms. The Sutta emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct, the welfare of the people, and the well-being of the environment as fundamental to achieving peace and sustainable development.⁴⁰

The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* offers a vision of leadership grounded in moral integrity and a commitment to the common good. It stresses the importance of rulers who act with wisdom, compassion, and fairness, ensuring that all people, regardless of status, have access to the resources necessary for their well-being. This vision is particularly relevant in the contemporary world, where political leaders and policymakers play a crucial role in shaping the conditions for peace and sustainable development.

Moreover, the *Sūtra* highlights the significance of environmental stewardship. In ancient times, rulers were encouraged to protect natural resources, ensure food security, and maintain ecological balance. In the

³⁹ Ludwig, E. (1996). Buddhism and Peace: Exploring the Role of Buddhist Practice in Conflict Resolution. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 3, p. 45 - 65.

⁴⁰ Ratanakul, Phramaha Somboon. (2010). Sustainable Development and Buddhist Ethics: The Role of the Brahmaviharas. *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 11 (2), p. 67 - 88.

modern context, these teachings are increasingly relevant as the world grapples with issues such as climate change, deforestation, and resource depletion. By promoting responsible stewardship of the Earth's resources, the *Kūṭadanta Sūṭta* offers a timeless reminder of the interconnectedness of human well-being and environmental sustainability.

The Role of the *Brahma Viharas* and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* in Achieving World Peace and Sustainable Development. The integration of the Four Sublime States of Mind with the teachings of the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* provides a comprehensive approach to achieving world peace and sustainable development. Both sets of teachings emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings and the need for ethical, compassionate leadership.

Fostering Unity and Inclusivity: The *Brahma Viharas* cultivate attitudes that transcend narrow identities and promote inclusivity. By practicing loving-kindness and compassion, individuals and societies can move beyond divisive ideologies and create environments that embrace diversity and mutual respect. The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* also emphasizes the need for rulers to consider the well-being of all their subjects, regardless of rank or status, reinforcing the importance of inclusivity in governance.

Promoting Social Justice and Human Dignity: Compassion and empathetic joy directly address issues of social justice, urging societies to uplift the oppressed and marginalized. In the context of sustainable development, these teachings emphasize the importance of the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. The *Kūṭadanta Sūtra* similarly calls for policies that ensure the welfare of all citizens, particularly the poor and vulnerable, and stresses that true prosperity is based on fairness and moral conduct.

Environmental Sustainability: The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* highlights the importance of environmental stewardship, which is echoed in the *Brahma Viharas* through the practice of equanimity. A balanced, composed approach to natural resources is essential for sustainability as it allows for mindful decision-making that respects the Earth's limits. The *Brahma Viharas* can help cultivate a collective attitude of responsibility toward the environment, encouraging actions that protect and preserve the natural world for future generations.

Ethical Leadership: Both the *Brahma Viharas* and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* stress the importance of ethical leadership. Leaders who embody loving-kindness, compassion, and wisdom can create societies that prioritize peace, justice, and sustainability. The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* provides specific guidance for leaders, encouraging them to act with fairness, integrity, and foresight, ensuring the long-term well-being of their people and the planet.

In conclusion, the cultivation of unity, inclusivity, and human dignity is essential for achieving world peace and sustainable development. The Four Sublime States of Mind offer a powerful framework for individual transformation, while the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* provides guidance for ethical governance and environmental stewardship. Together, these teachings form a comprehensive path toward creating a more just, compassionate, and

sustainable world. By integrating these values into our personal lives, our communities, and our global institutions, we can work toward a future where peace, prosperity, and dignity are shared by all.

VI. CONCLUSION

The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* offers profound insights into the nature of peace, governance, and morality. Its teachings emphasize that true peace is not achieved through violence, rituals, or force, but through ethical leadership, generosity, non-violence, and mindfulness. These principles are as relevant today as they were in the time of the Buddha, offering practical guidance for individuals and leaders seeking to establish lasting peace in the world.

By applying the Buddha's teachings from the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* to modern issues such as global leadership, social justice, non-violent conflict resolution, and personal mindfulness, we can work toward a more peaceful and harmonious world. The path to world peace may not be simple, but with wisdom, compassion, and ethical action, we can move closer to a society where peace prevails.

Final Suggestions on Cultivating Unity, Inclusivity, and Human Dignity through the Brahma Vharas and *Kūṭadantha Sutta* for World Peace and Sustainable Development. In an era where global challenges such as political polarization, environmental degradation, and social injustice seem overwhelming, the need for a more unified, inclusive, and humane world has never been greater. To address these issues, it is crucial to draw from timeless wisdom and spiritual practices that promote harmony, compassion, and respect for all beings. Among the most profound teachings in the Buddhist tradition are the Four Sublime States of Mind (*Brahma Viharas*) and the principles expounded in the *Kūṭadantha Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. These teachings provide a path to cultivating inner peace and contributing to global peace while also supporting the broader goals of sustainable development.⁴¹

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BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND UNITY ON UNITED NATIONS DAY OF VESAK 2025

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Abstract:

The teachings of Buddhism, particularly as reflected in the Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta, Lotus Sutta, and the mindfulness practices of Sakyamuni Buddha, offer profound insights into fostering unity, inclusivity, and human dignity – core principles for achieving world peace and sustainable development. The Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta advocates for the cultivation of loving-kindness (*mettā*) towards all beings, promoting harmony and non-violence, which is essential for peaceful global relations. The Lotus Sutta further emphasizes inclusivity, demonstrating that all paths ultimately lead to enlightenment, echoing the need for a diverse yet united approach in addressing global challenges, including those tied to climate change and sustainable development. The mindfulness teachings of the Buddha, as outlined in his Noble Eightfold Path, advocate for mental clarity, compassion, and equanimity, all of which are necessary for fostering a deep sense of shared responsibility for the planet and humanity.

In line with these teachings, the global community must adopt collaborative efforts for climate action, focusing on slashing emissions, supporting the transition to a renewable future, and ensuring financial and climate justice for those most affected by environmental degradation. Scientists and innovators play a crucial role in this transformation, working to provide sustainable technologies that align with the Buddhist principle of harmony between humanity and nature. The Pact for the Future stresses the need for peace through disarmament, the prevention of conflict, and the interconnectedness of security, peace, and sustainability.

Human rights, an essential foundation for global justice and equality, serve

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as the cornerstone for addressing environmental issues, ensuring that every individual's dignity and freedom are upheld, irrespective of their background. By integrating Buddhist values into global policy, particularly on the United Nations Day of Vesak, the world can move towards a harmonious, just, and sustainable future for all.

Keywords: *Unity, inclusivity, sustainability, mindfulness, human rights, compassion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Vesak Day, also known as Buddha Purnima, is the most important and widely celebrated festival in the Buddhist tradition. It commemorates the birth, enlightenment (Bodhi), and death (Parinirvāṇa) of Gautama Buddha, Sakyamuni, Tathāgata, the founder of Buddhism. The day is celebrated on the full moon of the month of Vesak (April-May) across the globe. It is not only a religious observance but also a time for Buddhists to reflect on the core teachings of the Buddha, which are centered on wisdom, compassion, and the path to enlightenment.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF VESAK DAY

2.1. Celebrating the Life of the Buddha

Vesak Day marks the three key events in the life of the Buddha:

His Birth: According to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha was born in Lumbini (present-day Nepal) on the full moon day 563 BC.

His Enlightenment: At the age of 35, after years of meditation and spiritual searching, Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) attained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya, India. This event is regarded as the most important moment in the Buddha's life, as it marked his realization of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the key teachings that form the foundation of Buddhism.

His Parinirvāṇa (Death): Buddha's passing into Parinirvāṇa occurred at the age of 80 in Kushinagar, India. His death represents the final attainment of Nirvana, the cessation of suffering, and the liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara). The Buddha's Parinirvāṇa is also considered a moment for Buddhists to reflect on the impermanence of life.

These three significant events — birth, enlightenment, and death — collectively define the essence of Vesak Day, highlighting the Buddha's journey towards liberation and his teachings that guide others toward the same path of awakening. On Vesak, Buddhists around the world meditate on these teachings, striving to deepen their understanding and practice them in daily life. It is a day of introspection, renewal, and strengthening of one's commitment to the Dhamma.

2.2. Loving-kindness in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*: A foundation for global harmony

Vesak Day serves as a time for Buddhists to renew their commitment to the Dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha), which provide a path to end suffering.

The Buddha's teachings are focused on:

The Four Noble Truths: *Dukkha* (The Truth of Suffering); *Samudaya* (The Truth of the Cause of Suffering); *Nirodha* (The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering); *Magga* (The Truth of the Path to the Cessation of Suffering).

The Noble Eightfold Path: This is the practical guide to living ethically and mindfully to achieve enlightenment. It consists of:

Sammā Dīṭṭhi (Right Understanding) – This refers to having a proper understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the nature of reality.

Sammā Saṅkappa (Right Intention) - This denotes the right thoughts or intentions of renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness.

Sammā Vācā (Right Speech) - It signifies truthful, harmonious, and kind speech, avoiding lies, slander, and harsh words.

Sammā Kammanta (Right Action) - This focuses on ethical conduct, such as refraining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct.

Sammā Ājīva (Right Livelihood) - This emphasises earning a living without causing harm to others, directly or indirectly.

Sammā Vāyāma (Right Effort) - This involves making a balanced effort to develop wholesome mental qualities and abandon unwholesome ones.

Sammā Sati (Right Mindfulness) - This pertains to the cultivation of awareness and attentiveness, particularly in regard to the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena.

Sammā Samādhi (Right Concentration) - This highlights practising deep meditation to achieve mental stability and clarity.

2.3. Loving-kindness in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*: A foundation for global harmony

Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta for Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development and; Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony:

The Buddha's teaching, "This is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness, and who knows the path of peace," highlights the qualities essential for cultivating peace and loving-kindness. To be "skilled in goodness" means practising virtues like generosity, patience, compassion, and wisdom. These qualities foster self-discipline and virtuous conduct, which are crucial for promoting unity and inclusivity. They help break down barriers of exclusion and create a world where human dignity is universally respected.

In the context of world peace and sustainable development, ethical leadership and conscious action play a key role. Actions rooted in goodness promote harmony and justice while avoiding harm caused by greed, corruption, or conflict. Societies and individuals embodying these values can work towards equitable and sustainable solutions, uniting across divides.

The phrase "knows the path of peace" emphasises that peace is more than the absence of violence – it requires active, continuous practice. This

includes both inner peace and societal harmony. The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* provides practical guidance, urging individuals to cultivate loving-kindness and goodwill towards all beings. By embodying this wisdom, people can act as agents of peace, driving sustainable development through compassionate, cooperative efforts for the benefit of all.

“Let one be able and upright, straightforward and gentle in speech.” This teaching underscores the importance of ethical communication, advocating honesty, humility, and gentleness as essential for fostering inclusivity and human dignity. In a world often marked by misinformation and hostility, the Buddha’s words remind us that trust and respect stem from uprightness, straightforwardness, and gentle speech. Uprightness and straightforwardness reflect integrity and transparency in words and actions. By speaking honestly and directly, individuals create a safe environment where trust thrives, free from deceit or manipulation. In the context of unity and inclusivity, such honesty enables open dialogue, fostering mutual respect and reducing fear of exploitation. Transparent communication strengthens social structures built on truth rather than division. Gentleness in speech is equally vital for maintaining peace and resolving conflicts. Harsh or divisive language can intensify tensions, while gentle speech fosters understanding, empathy, and solidarity. In promoting world peace, the Buddha’s guidance encourages us to choose words that heal, build bridges, and inspire cooperation. By avoiding aggression and cultivating inclusive communication, individuals uphold human dignity and ensure all voices are respected. Such ethical speech lays a strong foundation for sustainable development and collective harmony.

“Let them be harmless, and live a life of peace.” This line calls for the practice of non-violence and peace in all aspects of life. Harmlessness entails treating all beings – human and non-human – with compassion, respect, and care. It extends beyond refraining from physical violence to avoiding harm through speech and thought. This principle fosters human dignity by encouraging societies to prioritise the well-being of all individuals without causing harm. Living a life of peace complements this ideal by promoting inner peace and social harmony. Non-violence supports cooperation, mutual respect, and compassion, which are essential for sustainable development. It also encompasses the protection of the environment, responsible resource use, and equitable treatment of all people. By practising harmlessness, individuals help safeguard both human dignity and the planet for future generations. Furthermore, living peacefully involves advocating for policies and systems that ensure fairness, such as equitable access to resources, education, healthcare, and opportunities. Harmlessness challenges structures that perpetuate inequality and violence, urging the creation of systems rooted in empathy, collaboration, and shared responsibility. In this way, the Buddha’s teaching inspires collective efforts to build a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world for all.

“Let them be wise, and not proud or arrogant.” This teaching highlights the importance of wisdom, humility, and overcoming arrogance to promote unity and inclusivity. Wisdom involves understanding the interconnectedness

of all beings and the impermanence of life. It fosters compassion, empathy, and cooperation, enabling individuals to recognise the shared needs of all - happiness, freedom from suffering, and the right to dignity.

A wise person works for the common good, making decisions that prioritise the welfare of everyone, particularly the marginalised and vulnerable. Such wisdom also emphasises the need for long-term thinking, focusing on solutions that are just, compassionate, and sustainable.

The phrase “not proud or arrogant” warns against ego-driven behaviour that leads to division and inequality. Arrogance fosters a sense of superiority, often resulting in discrimination, exploitation, and exclusion. In contrast, humility allows individuals to recognise the inherent worth and dignity of every person, regardless of their status or background. In the context of global peace and sustainable development, wisdom and humility are essential for leaders and policymakers. A humble leader acknowledges the long-term impact of their decisions and prioritises inclusivity, empathy, and sustainability, fostering unity and contributing to a just and harmonious world.

“Let them not be greedy or desirous of the possessions of others.” This teaching highlights the virtue of non-greed, essential for creating a just and sustainable society. Greed, driven by excessive desire for personal gain, lies at the root of inequality, exploitation, and environmental degradation. The Buddha encourages individuals to rise above materialism and prioritise the greater good, including the well-being of all beings and the preservation of the planet.

Non-greed, as expressed in the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, emphasises recognising the finite nature of resources and the need for equitable distribution. Greed leads to the concentration of wealth among the few, leaving others to suffer. This exacerbates inequality and neglects social and environmental justice. Instead, letting go of greed fosters sustainability and fairness. The phrase “desirous of the possessions of others” warns against envy and competition, which breed division and animosity. By practising contentment, individuals can build mutual respect and cooperation. This mindset promotes resource redistribution that uplifts everyone, ensuring dignity and sustainability.

In global terms, non-greed eliminates conflicts over resources, fostering collaboration among nations. Cooperation replaces exploitation, advancing sustainable development and ensuring mindful stewardship of the planet for future generations.

“Let them not harbor ill-will towards anyone.” This teaching encourages the cultivation of loving-kindness and the elimination of hatred, anger, and ill-will. Ill-will is a major source of conflict and violence, whether interpersonal or within broader social and political contexts. The Buddha’s message calls for letting go of resentment and hostility, replacing them with compassion, understanding, and forgiveness. Not harboring ill-will means consciously choosing not to hold grudges or negative thoughts. In the context of unity and inclusivity, this teaching encourages empathy and compassion, urging individuals to see beyond differences. In divided societies, this practice fosters

peaceful conflict resolution, promoting mutual respect. On a global scale, the Buddha's teaching is relevant to international relations. Resentment between countries, often rooted in historical or territorial disputes, can be healed through goodwill and understanding. Reconciliation replaces animosity, allowing nations to pursue cooperation over competition, leading to lasting peace. Furthermore, not harboring ill-will opposes discriminatory attitudes, particularly towards marginalised groups. By releasing ill-will, individuals contribute to a society where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, regardless of background, race, or social status. This aligns with human dignity and social justice, fostering inclusion and equity for all.

"Let them not, by anger or hostility, wish for others to suffer." This teaching extends the Buddha's message of non-harm to thoughts and intentions. The Buddha urges us not to wish harm upon others, even those who may have wronged us. Anger and hostility are destructive emotions that fuel conflict, and the Buddha calls for replacing these feelings with love, understanding, and compassion.

Anger and hostility stem from fear, ignorance, and attachment. When driven by anger, individuals create harm not only for others but also for themselves. This teaching encourages rising above reactive emotions and responding with wisdom and equanimity, fostering peace and promoting unity. In terms of human dignity, this teaching calls for the removal of vengeful attitudes that perpetuate cycles of oppression and violence. It advocates for healing over retribution, allowing for reconciliation and restorative justice. These principles are vital for peacebuilding and sustainable development. Globally, nations acting out of anger contribute to cycles of conflict that hinder progress. The Buddha's message promotes diplomacy, dialogue, and cooperation, encouraging nations to address the root causes of conflict with understanding and a commitment to peace, fostering global harmony and sustainable development.

"Let them be free from envy and mental pain." This line calls for the elimination of envy, which breeds destructive emotions like jealousy and resentment. Envy arises when individuals compare themselves to others, creating division and competition, undermining unity and inclusivity.

The Buddha encourages cultivating a generous heart, free from envy, allowing individuals to celebrate the success and happiness of others rather than feeling threatened. This mindset promotes unity, encouraging people to lift others up rather than tear them down. When free from envy, individuals focus on collective well-being, fostering social harmony and contributing to sustainable development.

In terms of human dignity, this teaching calls for the removal of punitive or vengeful attitudes, which perpetuate cycles of oppression and inequality. It advocates for healing over retribution, fostering reconciliation and restorative justice – critical elements of peacebuilding and sustainable development. On a global scale, envy and hostility lead to conflict, hindering progress. The Buddha's teaching encourages nations to seek diplomacy and cooperation,

addressing the root causes of conflict with understanding. By fostering peace, non-harm, and compassion, countries can create a more inclusive and sustainable future for all.

“Let them be free from envy and mental pain.” This line calls for the elimination of envy, which leads to destructive emotions like jealousy, resentment, and competition. Envy arises when individuals compare themselves to others, creating division and hostility. This mindset undermines unity and inclusivity. The Buddha encourages cultivating a generous heart, free from envy, allowing individuals to celebrate the success and happiness of others rather than feeling threatened. This attitude promotes unity and inclusivity, inspiring people to lift others up instead of tearing them down. When free from envy, individuals can focus on collective well-being rather than personal gain, fostering social harmony and contributing to sustainable development. Mental pain, often caused by envy and comparison, is also addressed. Freedom from envy brings greater peace and contentment, both personally and within relationships. This internal peace is essential for personal well-being and societal harmony, as it allows individuals to contribute positively to a just and sustainable world. By cultivating this mindset, individuals become agents of peace and unity, creating environments where compassion, mutual respect, and shared responsibility thrive. In turn, this helps build a society that values human dignity and supports sustainable development.

“Let them not be caught up in the suffering of the world” emphasises transcending suffering while remaining compassionate and supportive of others. The Buddha acknowledges that suffering is inherent in human existence, but the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* encourages resilience, wisdom, and equanimity in addressing it. This approach allows individuals to engage with the world’s hardships without being consumed by despair, fear, or anger. In promoting unity and inclusivity, this teaching calls for channelling emotions into actions that foster healing, peace, and social harmony. Rather than being overwhelmed by global injustices, individuals can focus on uplifting the dignity of all beings and working towards sustainable development. The world faces immense suffering caused by poverty, injustice, inequality, and environmental degradation. However, one’s response to these challenges is crucial. Instead of succumbing to hopelessness, individuals can remain mindful and actively transform suffering through compassion, wisdom, and collective effort. This teaching is particularly relevant to social and environmental justice. Issues like climate change, poverty, and inequality require practical solutions through advocacy, activism, and collaboration. By approaching these challenges with an open heart and clear mind, individuals can ensure their actions lead to meaningful, long-lasting change. “Let them not do anything that is wrong, or harm others” highlights the ethical core of Buddhist practice, rooted in non-harming and respect for all beings. It calls for moral conduct, encouraging individuals to refrain from actions that cause harm and to contribute positively to the welfare of others. This includes avoiding physical, verbal, and mental harm, such as gossip, slander, or ill-willed thoughts, promoting mindfulness

and compassion. Living ethically, according to principles like non-violence, truthfulness, and generosity, fosters peace, unity, and human dignity. It underscores the interconnectedness of all beings, urging individuals to act with care towards others. In the context of unity and inclusivity, this teaching advocates for ethical practices by individuals, leaders, and nations to prioritise human dignity and collective well-being. Challenges such as war, poverty, and environmental degradation often stem from greed, hatred, and ignorance. By practising non-harming, people can build a more peaceful, just, and inclusive world. This teaching also underscores ethical decision-making in sustainable development. Industries and policies affecting vulnerable communities and the environment must prioritise ethics over profit to ensure equity, sustainability, and the long-term welfare of all. In doing so, human dignity is upheld through fairness and respect.

“Let them be joyful and happy” emphasises the cultivation of inner joy, a key theme in Buddhist teachings. This joy is not tied to external circumstances but arises from kindness, wisdom, and contentment. The Buddha encourages individuals to foster genuine well-being and happiness for themselves and others, promoting inner peace and compassion. Joy and happiness in this context do not mean indulgence in selfish pleasures but rather developing a deep sense of empathy, positivity, and satisfaction. A joyful person uplifts those around them, fostering unity, harmony, and inclusivity. This teaching highlights that happiness is a universal right, reinforcing the dignity of all individuals, irrespective of their background or social status. In a world marked by deprivation and oppression, the Buddha’s message serves as a reminder that everyone deserves access to conditions enabling a fulfilling life. Joy is essential not only for personal well-being but also for collective progress. For world peace and sustainable development, joy plays a vital role in fostering collaboration and harmony. Communities rooted in happiness are more likely to address challenges together and derive satisfaction from actions that benefit others, ensuring well-being for present and future generations. Happiness, thus, becomes a foundation for sustainable, peaceful societies.

“Let them have a mind that is free from hatred, enmity, and ill-will.” This line calls for the elimination of negative mental states that contribute to division, conflict, and violence. Hatred, enmity, and ill-will arise from ignorance and delusion, leading individuals to view others as enemies rather than fellow beings. By cultivating a mind that is free from these harmful emotions, individuals contribute to a more peaceful, harmonious, and inclusive society. A mind free from hatred means that an individual is no longer swayed by prejudice or animosity. It reflects the ability to see others as equals, deserving of respect and compassion. In the context of unity and inclusivity, this line promotes the idea that no one should be discriminated against or treated with hostility, regardless of their race, religion, nationality, or socioeconomic status. It calls for the recognition of the shared humanity in all individuals and the rejection of divisive ideologies that promote hatred and intolerance. For human dignity, this teaching is crucial because it reinforces the principle that

everyone deserves to live free from fear, discrimination, and hostility. When we free ourselves from hatred and ill-will, we create an environment in which people can live with dignity and respect, regardless of their background. On a global scale, this line advocates for peace and cooperation among nations. Hatred between countries leads to war, conflict, and suffering. By eliminating enmity, nations can work towards resolving disputes peacefully and engaging in mutually beneficial partnerships that contribute to the well-being of all.

“Let them live harmoniously and peacefully, with mutual respect.” The final line of the *Karaṇiya Mettā Sutta* calls for a society where individuals live in harmony with one another, with mutual respect and understanding. This reflects the ideal of a community where everyone is treated with dignity, kindness, and compassion. Such a society is free from division, conflict, and oppression, and instead fosters collaboration, cooperation, and peace. Living harmoniously means that individuals respect each other’s differences and work together towards common goals. Mutual respect is the foundation of any healthy relationship, whether between individuals, communities, or nations. When people recognise the inherent worth of others and act with consideration and care, unity is fostered, and human dignity is upheld. For sustainable development, living harmoniously and peacefully is essential. Global cooperation is necessary to tackle the challenges of climate change, poverty, and inequality. By working together, respecting one another’s perspectives and needs, and prioritising the common good, humanity can create a more sustainable and just world.

“Let them be free from arrogance and pride.” Arrogance and pride are closely linked to an inflated sense of self-importance, which can lead to the oppression of others and a lack of empathy. The Buddha teaches that true strength comes from humility and self-awareness, not from being overly proud or superior to others. The message here is clear: individuals should strive to be humble and open-hearted, recognising that no one is inherently superior to others. This quality is essential for fostering a society that is inclusive, fair, and just, where human dignity is upheld. In the context of unity and inclusivity, freedom from arrogance and pride helps to dismantle systems of hierarchy and domination that often marginalise certain groups of people. When individuals, leaders, or communities are free from pride, they are better able to build genuine, collaborative relationships based on mutual respect. Arrogance tends to create separation, fostering inequality and a lack of understanding. When it is replaced by humility, it allows for open communication, dialogue, and cooperation. For human dignity, this line stresses the importance of recognising the equal worth of all individuals, regardless of their social status, wealth, or position of power. It serves as a reminder that everyone deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, and that no one should be discriminated against or looked down upon. In a world where many still face prejudice and discrimination based on race, gender, religion, or economic status, this line calls for a collective shift towards equality and respect. On the global stage, freedom from arrogance and pride also impacts international relations. Nations that act from a place of humility,

rather than seeking to dominate or impose their will on others, contribute to a more peaceful world. Humility fosters international cooperation, where countries work together for the greater good, rather than engaging in power struggles that perpetuate division and conflict.

“Let them not, through desire or ill-will, wish for any harm to come to anyone.” This line emphasises the importance of cultivating non-harming and compassion. It calls upon individuals to let go of desires that lead to harm, such as vengeance or the urge to dominate others. Desire, in this sense, refers to attachments or cravings that compel actions causing suffering. Similarly, ill-will encompasses negative emotions like hatred, anger, and resentment, which disrupt peace and unity. In the context of unity and inclusivity, this teaching advocates for non-violence and goodwill. It urges individuals to abandon harmful desires that result in exploitation, oppression, or violence. Practising compassion and loving-kindness fosters a society where no one wishes harm upon another. This applies to relationships between individuals, communities, and even nations. Actions driven by goodwill contribute to collective well-being and harmony. For human dignity, the line calls for a world free from harm, oppression, and suffering. Harmful desires often stem from fear, ignorance, or the perception of others as threats. Cultivating empathy, understanding, and compassion reduces hostility, enabling peaceful coexistence. A society rooted in such values upholds dignity, allowing individuals to live without fear of violence or discrimination. On a global scale, nations must move beyond desires like territorial conquest, resource exploitation, or military dominance. The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* promotes international cooperation based on mutual respect and peace. When countries prioritise actions that cause no harm, they enhance global stability and contribute to sustainable development.

“Let them be as kind-hearted as a mother to her only child.” The Buddha uses a mother’s love for her child as a metaphor for the compassion that should be extended to all beings. A mother’s love is selfless, unconditional, and boundless, serving as an ideal for the empathy and care individuals are encouraged to cultivate. This line invites us to treat all beings as if they were as precious and vulnerable as an only child. In the context of unity and inclusivity, this teaching promotes selfless care for others. Just as a mother would go to great lengths to protect her child, individuals should act with kindness and compassion towards all. This attitude transcends personal preferences or biases, encompassing the well-being of everyone, regardless of background or status. It is a call for inclusivity, ensuring no one is marginalised or forgotten.

For human dignity, this line underscores that every individual deserves to be treated with love, respect, and care. A mother’s protective love symbolises how society should treat its most vulnerable members, such as children, the elderly, the impoverished, and marginalised groups. A society that emulates this level of compassion is one where dignity is upheld, and everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Regarding world peace and sustainable development, this teaching emphasises caring for the planet and future generations. Just as a mother safeguards her child’s future, humanity must protect the environment

and its resources. Addressing climate change, reducing environmental degradation, and promoting sustainability are acts of compassion that ensure the well-being of all beings and the planet for generations to come.

“Let them not be overbearing, but gentle in speech and actions.” This line speaks to the importance of gentleness and moderation in one’s speech and actions. Being overbearing or harsh can lead to misunderstanding, conflict, and harm, while a gentle approach fosters communication, cooperation, and understanding. The Buddha encourages individuals to speak and act in ways that are kind, respectful, and considerate of others’ feelings and needs. In the context of unity and inclusivity, this teaching promotes the idea of respectful dialogue and engagement. When individuals approach each other with gentleness, they create an environment where mutual understanding can flourish. Harsh words or actions often create barriers, while gentle speech and behaviour open the door to connection, cooperation, and unity. This is crucial for building inclusive communities where everyone feels valued and heard. For human dignity, being gentle in speech and actions ensures that individuals are treated with respect and kindness. Harsh or overbearing behaviour can cause harm, humiliation, or alienation, which diminishes human dignity. Conversely, gentle words and actions uplift others, allowing them to maintain their sense of self-worth and dignity. On the global stage, this line advocates for diplomacy and peaceful negotiation rather than aggressive or domineering tactics. Nations that engage with one another through gentle diplomacy and mutual respect are more likely to resolve conflicts peacefully and work towards common goals.

This approach is essential for maintaining global peace, fostering international cooperation, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

1. **Slashing Emissions:** This involves drastically reducing greenhouse gas emissions, particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂), to mitigate climate change. It’s a key goal in international climate agreements like the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global temperature rise.
2. **Supporting the Transition to a Renewable Future:** Shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources (like solar, wind, and hydropower) is vital for achieving long-term sustainability. This transition not only helps reduce emissions but also promotes energy security and economic resilience.
3. **Financial and Climate Justice:** Climate justice emphasizes that the countries and communities who have contributed least to climate change should not bear its worst impacts. Financial justice, in this context, includes providing financial support to developing countries to adapt to and mitigate climate change.
4. **Scientists and Innovators for Humanity:** This highlights the role of research, innovation, and technological advancements in solving global challenges. Scientists and innovators are instrumental in developing cleaner technologies, sustainable practices, and solutions for mitigating climate change.
5. **Pact for the Future - Peace through Disarmament and Prevention:** This speaks to the interconnectedness of peace, security, and climate action. Global peace can be promoted through disarmament agreements, addressing the root causes of conflict, and fostering cooperation for sustainable development.

Slashing Emissions: The Path to a Sustainable Future. The issue of slashing emissions, particularly carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases (GHGs), is at the heart of the global effort to mitigate climate change. This effort involves reducing emissions from a range of sectors, including energy, transportation, agriculture, and industry. The consequences of failing to cut emissions are stark – rising global temperatures, severe weather events, sea-level rise, and widespread disruption to ecosystems and human livelihoods. Therefore, achieving significant emissions reductions is not just an environmental concern but a matter of survival for future generations.

The Science of Emissions: Emissions refer to the release of gases that trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere, contributing to the greenhouse effect. The primary greenhouse gases are CO₂, methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and fluorinated gases. Of these, CO₂ is the most abundant and has the most significant impact on global warming. Fossil fuels, such as coal, oil, and natural gas, are the main sources of CO₂ emissions, particularly in the energy, transportation, and industrial sectors. The scientific consensus, backed by organisations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), is clear: human activities, particularly the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes, are driving unprecedented levels of greenhouse gas emissions, which in turn are accelerating the rate of climate change.

The Need for Slashing Emissions: To prevent catastrophic climate change, the global community must reduce emissions to levels that can stabilise global temperatures. The Paris Agreement, adopted at COP21 in 2015, set the ambitious target of limiting global temperature rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C. However, current emission reduction commitments are insufficient to meet these targets. In fact, global emissions continue to rise, exacerbating the impacts of climate change. In order to meet these targets, global emissions must peak as soon as possible and then rapidly decline. The world needs to achieve “net-zero” emissions, where the amount of GHGs emitted is balanced by the amount removed from the atmosphere. This requires drastic reductions in emissions, alongside scaling up carbon capture and storage technologies, reforestation efforts, and the adoption of new climate-positive practices.

Sectors Contributing to Emissions: To slash emissions effectively, it is essential to understand the major sources of GHGs. The key sectors that contribute to global emissions include:

2.3.1. Energy: The energy sector is the largest contributor to global emissions, accounting for around 73% of total GHG emissions. This includes electricity generation, heat production, and transportation. Fossil fuels are still the dominant source of energy worldwide, with coal, oil, and natural gas providing the majority of global electricity and heating. The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources – such as wind, solar, and hydroelectric power – is critical in slashing emissions from the energy sector. Increasing energy efficiency through smart grids, energy storage, and demand-side management also plays a key role in reducing emissions.

2.3.2. Transportation: Transportation is another major source of emissions, contributing around 16% of global GHGs. The reliance on petrol and diesel-powered vehicles, ships, airplanes, and trains has led to an increase in transportation-related emissions. Electrification of transport is one of the most promising solutions. The widespread adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), combined with clean energy for charging, can drastically reduce emissions. Additionally, improving public transport systems, encouraging cycling and walking, and adopting alternative fuels like hydrogen can further reduce the carbon footprint of transportation.

2.3.3. Industry: Industrial processes, including manufacturing, cement production, steelmaking, and chemical production, are responsible for around 19% of global emissions. These processes often involve the burning of fossil fuels and the release of industrial gases. Reducing emissions in industry requires a combination of improved energy efficiency, the adoption of low-carbon technologies, and the use of alternative materials. For instance, the development of green steel, produced with hydrogen instead of coal, offers a potential solution to emissions in the steel industry.

2.3.4. Agriculture, forestry, and land use: Agriculture, forestry, and land use account for approximately 22% of global emissions. Deforestation, land degradation, and the release of methane from livestock and rice paddies are major contributors. Shifting to sustainable farming practices, reforestation, afforestation, and improved land management can significantly reduce emissions in this sector. Moreover, reducing food waste and shifting dietary patterns, such as promoting plant-based foods, can also contribute to lower emissions.

2.4. Technological and Policy Solutions

To slash emissions effectively, a wide range of technological innovations and policy measures are required. The following are some of the most promising approaches:

2.4.1. Renewable energy transition: The most effective way to cut emissions in the energy sector is to transition to renewable sources of energy. Solar, wind, geothermal, and hydropower are all low-carbon alternatives to fossil fuels. Increasing the share of renewables in global energy production, improving energy storage solutions, and modernising grids to accommodate renewable sources are all essential steps.

2.4.2. Energy efficiency: Increasing energy efficiency in buildings, industrial processes, and transportation can significantly reduce emissions. This includes upgrading building insulation, adopting energy-efficient appliances, and retrofitting old infrastructure.

2.4.3. Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS): CCS is a technology that captures carbon emissions from power plants and industrial processes and stores them underground to prevent them from entering the atmosphere. While still in its early stages, CCS has the potential to play a key role in slashing emissions from hard-to-decarbonise sectors.

2.4.4. Carbon pricing: One of the most effective policy tools for reducing emissions is the implementation of carbon pricing mechanisms, such as carbon taxes or cap-and-trade systems. By putting a price on carbon, governments can incentivise companies and individuals to reduce their emissions.

2.4.5. Circular economy: A circular economy, which promotes the recycling and reuse of materials rather than creating waste, can significantly reduce emissions. This approach reduces the need for new raw materials, lowers energy consumption, and minimises waste production.

2.4.6. Afforestation and reforestation: Reforestation and afforestation efforts can act as a carbon sink, absorbing CO₂ from the atmosphere. Additionally, promoting sustainable land-use practices and protecting existing forests are essential to prevent further emissions from land degradation.

2.4.7. International cooperation: Climate change is a global issue that requires coordinated action. International agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, play a crucial role in ensuring that countries commit to emissions reduction targets and support one another in their climate goals. Developed countries have a particular responsibility to support developing nations through financial assistance and the transfer of green technologies.

Slashing emissions is not just a matter of environmental necessity; it is an urgent moral and economic imperative. Failure to act will result in irreversible damage to the planet and its ecosystems, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable populations. The transition to a low-carbon economy requires a concerted effort from governments, industries, and individuals.

By adopting innovative technologies, implementing strong policy frameworks, and fostering international cooperation, the world can meet the challenges of emissions reduction. While the task ahead is daunting, the opportunity to create a sustainable, equitable, and resilient future is within our reach. The question is not whether we can reduce emissions, but whether we have the collective will to do so before it is too late.

2.5. Supporting the transition to a renewable future

The transition to a renewable future is one of the most critical undertakings of our time. As the world grapples with the devastating effects of climate change, the need to shift away from fossil fuels towards sustainable and clean sources of energy has become an imperative. Fossil fuels, such as coal, oil, and natural gas, have long been the cornerstone of global energy production. However, their use has been linked to the increasing levels of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere, which are driving global warming, extreme weather events, and a host of environmental crises. A renewable future, on the other hand, offers a cleaner, more sustainable way of meeting global energy needs while reducing the harmful impacts on the planet. The Need for a Renewable Transition The evidence for climate change is overwhelming, with rising global temperatures, melting polar ice, and more frequent and intense weather events. The burning of fossil fuels is the primary driver of climate change, accounting for the majority of global CO₂ emissions. These emissions are primarily sourced from sectors

like energy production, transportation, and industry. To avert catastrophic climate impacts, experts agree that the world must rapidly transition to a low-carbon energy system. This shift must involve moving away from fossil fuels and investing in renewable energy sources that can provide clean, sustainable power for future generations. A renewable energy future promises multiple benefits. It can help reduce dependence on fossil fuels, mitigate the effects of climate change, promote energy security, create new job opportunities, and stimulate economic growth. By transitioning to renewables, we can also ensure that energy production becomes more decentralised, allowing communities to become energy self-sufficient and resilient in the face of external shocks.

2.6. Types of renewable energy sources

The shift to renewable energy entails a move towards several key sources of clean energy. The most widely recognised renewable sources include:

2.6.1. Solar energy: Solar power is one of the most abundant and versatile forms of renewable energy. It involves harnessing the sun's energy through photovoltaic (PV) panels or concentrated solar power (CSP) systems. Solar energy is particularly appealing because it is abundant, widely available, and can be deployed on both small and large scales, from individual households to large solar farms. Technological advancements have made solar energy increasingly affordable, with the cost of solar PV falling dramatically in recent years. Solar power has the potential to provide a significant portion of global electricity needs, especially in areas with high levels of sunlight, such as the Middle East, parts of Africa, and Southern Europe.

2.6.2. Wind energy: Wind energy harnesses the power of moving air to generate electricity. Wind turbines, which are often seen in large offshore and onshore wind farms, convert kinetic energy from the wind into electrical power. Wind power is one of the fastest-growing sources of renewable energy, with significant capacity installed worldwide, especially in countries like China, the United States, and Germany. Wind power is highly efficient, particularly when located in areas with strong and consistent winds, such as coastal regions or high-altitude areas. Offshore wind farms have become a particularly promising area of development, offering vast potential for energy generation.

2.6.3. Hydropower: Hydropower, also known as hydroelectric power, is one of the oldest and most widely used renewable energy sources. It generates electricity by harnessing the energy of flowing water, typically through the construction of dams or through run-of-river systems. While large hydropower projects have raised concerns due to their environmental and social impacts, smaller-scale hydropower projects are increasingly seen as a more sustainable and community-friendly option. Hydropower is a reliable and efficient source of energy, capable of providing a constant supply of electricity. It accounts for a significant share of global renewable energy production, particularly in countries like Canada, Brazil, and Norway.

2.6.4. Biomass and bioenergy: Biomass refers to organic materials, such as wood, agricultural residues, and waste, that can be used to produce energy. Biomass can be burned directly for heat or converted into biofuels

like ethanol and biodiesel. While biomass is a renewable source of energy, its sustainability depends on responsible management and ensuring that its use does not lead to deforestation or food insecurity. Bioenergy can be used in a range of applications, from heating homes to powering vehicles. It is seen as an important energy source, particularly for countries with large agricultural sectors. However, there are ongoing discussions about the environmental impact of bioenergy and its role in the broader renewable energy mix.

2.6.5. Geothermal energy: Geothermal energy involves harnessing the heat from beneath the Earth's surface to generate electricity or provide direct heating. It is a reliable and consistent source of energy, especially in regions with significant geothermal activity, such as Iceland, parts of the United States, and New Zealand. Geothermal power plants are typically located in areas where the Earth's heat is easily accessible. Although geothermal energy has a relatively small global share in comparison to solar and wind, it has significant potential for providing baseload power – continuously available energy, unlike some other intermittent renewables.

2.7. Supporting the transition to renewables

Challenges and Solutions: The transition to a renewable future, while necessary, comes with several challenges. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from governments, businesses, and individuals, as well as investment in infrastructure, technology, and policy frameworks.

2.7.1. Investment in renewable technologies

The first step towards a renewable future is making substantial investments in renewable energy technologies. This includes funding research and development to improve the efficiency and affordability of renewable energy systems. Continued innovation in energy storage, grid management, and energy efficiency will be critical to overcoming the intermittent nature of some renewable sources, such as solar and wind. Energy storage solutions, such as batteries, will play a key role in ensuring that renewable energy is available when needed. Governments and private sector actors must commit to long-term investments in renewable energy, offering incentives and subsidies to encourage the adoption of clean technologies. This may involve tax credits, green bonds, and public-private partnerships to foster innovation and accelerate the renewable transition.

2.7.2. Energy storage and grid infrastructure

One of the main challenges of renewable energy is its intermittent nature. Solar and wind power generation is dependent on weather conditions, and thus, the electricity supply may not always align with demand. Energy storage technologies, such as large-scale battery storage and pumped hydro storage, can store excess energy generated during periods of high production for use during periods of low generation. Furthermore, the existing energy grid infrastructure needs to be modernised to accommodate large-scale renewable energy generation. Smart grids and better transmission networks will be necessary to efficiently distribute energy from renewable sources to consumers, especially

in remote or rural areas.

2.7.3. Policy and regulatory support

Effective government policies are crucial in supporting the transition to renewable energy. Governments must implement strong regulatory frameworks that promote the growth of renewable energy while discouraging the continued use of fossil fuels. This could include carbon pricing mechanisms, such as carbon taxes or cap-and-trade systems, that place a cost on carbon emissions and incentivise the use of clean energy. In addition, governments should invest in renewable energy infrastructure, such as electric vehicle charging stations, renewable energy plants, and research institutions. International cooperation is also vital, as countries must work together to share technology, expertise, and resources to ensure a global transition to renewables.

2.7.4. Public awareness and engagement

Finally, public awareness and engagement are essential for ensuring that the transition to a renewable future is supported by individuals and communities. Governments, environmental organisations, and businesses must work to educate the public about the benefits of renewable energy and the importance of reducing reliance on fossil fuels. Individuals can play an active role in supporting the transition by adopting energy-efficient practices, investing in renewable energy solutions for their homes, and advocating for stronger climate policies. Supporting the transition to a renewable future is essential for combating climate change, promoting energy security, and building a sustainable global economy. It requires the collective effort of governments, industries, and individuals to accelerate the adoption of renewable technologies, improve energy efficiency, and implement supportive policies. While challenges remain, the opportunity to create a cleaner, more resilient energy system is within reach. The move towards a renewable future not only offers a path to a healthier planet but also promises economic growth, job creation, and improved quality of life for future generations.

2.7.5. Financial and climate justice

Ensuring Equity in the Global Response to Climate Change: The concepts of financial justice and climate justice are central to the global discourse on addressing climate change and ensuring that the benefits and burdens of climate action are distributed equitably. As the world confronts the urgent and widespread impacts of climate change, it is increasingly clear that justice – both financial and environmental, must be at the heart of the solutions. The inequality between countries, communities, and individuals that exists in relation to climate change is profound and warrants focused attention. This article explores the principles of financial and climate justice, their intersection, and the need for equitable action in mitigating and adapting to climate change.

2.7.6. Climate justice

Climate justice is rooted in the understanding that climate change is not only an environmental issue but a deeply social and ethical one. It recognises that the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect the world's most

vulnerable populations, particularly those in the Global South, who are least responsible for the crisis. Climate justice asserts that addressing climate change must not only involve cutting emissions and adapting to inevitable changes but also ensuring that the burden of the crisis is shared fairly, with particular attention given to the most affected and marginalised communities.

Key principles of climate justice include:

i. **Responsibility and historical emissions:** Developed nations, particularly those that industrialised earlier and have contributed the largest share of historical emissions, are primarily responsible for the current climate crisis. Climate justice demands that these countries take greater responsibility in tackling climate change, both by reducing their emissions and by supporting those who are most affected.

ii. **Equity and fairness:** Climate change disproportionately impacts the poor, women, children, indigenous communities, and other marginalised groups who have fewer resources to adapt and recover. Climate justice calls for fair treatment, ensuring that vulnerable populations are not left behind in climate policies and that they are provided with the tools and support to build resilience.

iii. **Intergenerational justice:** Climate justice also has an intergenerational dimension, demanding that the current generation acts to protect the rights and opportunities of future generations. The choices made today in terms of climate policies and actions will impact the planet's health and the well-being of future societies.

iv. **Inclusion and participation:** For justice to be realised, the voices of affected communities must be central in the development of climate policies. This means empowering indigenous peoples, women, youth, and other marginalised groups to have a say in the decision-making process.

Financial Justice: Financial justice in the context of climate change refers to ensuring that adequate financial resources are made available to those who need them most in order to tackle climate change, both through mitigation and adaptation. It is about ensuring that financial burdens are shared equitably and that funding is allocated to where it is most needed. The issue of financial justice is particularly important when considering the vast inequalities in resources available to different countries. While wealthy countries have the financial means to invest in green technologies and adapt to the impacts of climate change, many developing countries struggle to access the necessary funding. In turn, they face the greatest challenges in managing the consequences of climate change, despite contributing far less to the problem.

Principles of financial justice include:

i. **Adequate funding for climate action:** Developed nations, given their historical responsibility for emissions, are expected to provide financial support to developing nations for both adaptation (helping countries cope with the effects of climate change) and mitigation (reducing emissions). This support can take the form of grants, loans, or other financial instruments.

ii. **Access to climate finance:** Financial justice also means ensuring that

funding for climate action reaches the communities and countries that need it most. This includes eliminating barriers to accessing climate finance, such as complex bureaucratic processes or lack of technical capacity in developing countries.

iii. Capacity building and technology transfer: Financial justice also involves providing the necessary resources to support developing countries in building the capacity to adapt to and mitigate climate change. This may involve not only funding but also technology transfer and knowledge sharing, so that countries can develop and implement their own solutions.

iv. Equitable distribution of resources: Financial justice requires that funding be distributed in a way that prioritises the most vulnerable communities. This can include funding for climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and disaster risk reduction in regions most affected by climate change. The Link Between Climate Justice and Financial Justice The intersection between financial justice and climate justice is clear. Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities, and without financial resources being directed where they are needed, the impacts of climate change will continue to deepen these divides. Financial support is not just a matter of generosity from wealthy nations; it is an essential mechanism to ensure that developing nations have the resources they need to address the climate crisis and build a sustainable future.

For example, many countries in the Global South are facing the brunt of climate change, including rising sea levels, extreme heatwaves, and more intense storms. These countries often lack the infrastructure, technology, and financial resources to cope with these impacts. At the same time, these nations have contributed far less to the problem. Financial justice, in this case, would involve wealthier nations taking responsibility by providing financial assistance to help vulnerable countries adapt and reduce emissions. Additionally, financial justice includes addressing the disparities between sectors and communities within countries. Climate change disproportionately affects low-income populations, indigenous groups, and women. Therefore, financial justice requires that the allocation of resources be designed in such a way that the most vulnerable people are supported in adapting to and mitigating the impacts of climate change. This may involve targeted investments in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and local climate solutions, ensuring that these communities are not left behind.

2.8. International mechanisms for financial and climate justice

Several international mechanisms exist to support climate and financial justice. These mechanisms aim to ensure that countries with historical responsibility for emissions assist those with the greatest need. Some mechanisms include:

i. The Green Climate Fund (GCF): The GCF was established to help developing countries raise their ambition in addressing climate change. It provides financial support for mitigation and adaptation efforts, including

projects aimed at reducing emissions and enhancing resilience to climate impacts. The GCF is funded by contributions from developed countries and aims to allocate 50% of its resources to adaptation.

ii. The Paris agreement: One of the foundational aspects of the Paris Agreement is the commitment by developed nations to provide financial support to developing nations. The agreement sets a goal of mobilising \$100 billion annually by 2020 to support developing countries in their climate action efforts. This funding aims to help countries reduce emissions and build resilience against climate change.

iii. Loss and damage: One of the key areas of financial justice under the UN climate negotiations has been the concept of “loss and damage,” which refers to the financial assistance provided to countries suffering irreparable losses due to climate change impacts. This includes funding for the loss of homes, livelihoods, and cultural heritage, as well as support for rebuilding efforts after extreme weather events.

iv. Climate finance for gender justice: Women are disproportionately affected by climate change, yet they are often excluded from decision-making processes related to climate policy. The climate justice movement emphasises the need for gender-responsive climate finance, ensuring that resources are directed towards supporting women, particularly in rural and marginalised communities, in their efforts to build climate resilience.

Financial and climate justice are essential principles for ensuring that the global response to climate change is equitable, effective, and inclusive. The wealthy nations that have historically contributed the most to emissions must take responsibility for financing climate action in developing countries. At the same time, climate policies must ensure that vulnerable communities and individuals, who are often the least responsible for the crisis, are supported and given the resources they need to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Achieving climate justice and financial justice requires a fundamental shift in how resources are allocated and how decision-making processes are structured. It calls for greater international cooperation, stronger commitments from developed nations, and the active involvement of those most affected by climate change in policy discussions. Only by integrating both financial and climate justice into the global response can we ensure a fairer, more sustainable world for current and future generations.

2.9. Scientists and innovators for humanity: driving progress for the greater good

Scientists and innovators play a crucial role in shaping the future of humanity, offering solutions to some of the world’s most pressing challenges. Their work not only advances our understanding of the natural world but also drives technological progress that has the potential to improve lives, solve societal problems, and create a more sustainable and equitable world. In the context of global challenges such as climate change, health crises, and resource scarcity, the contributions of scientists and innovators are invaluable. They are

instrumental in developing new technologies, designing solutions to complex problems, and fostering societal progress through innovation.

2.10. The role of scientists and innovators in addressing global challenges

Scientists and innovators are at the forefront of addressing many of the challenges faced by humanity. Their work is often driven by a sense of responsibility to improve quality of life, protect the environment, and ensure that technological advancements benefit all members of society, particularly those in need.

2.10.1. Tackling climate change

The urgent need to address climate change has brought science and innovation to the forefront of the global agenda. Scientists are continually working to understand the causes and consequences of climate change, as well as to develop strategies for mitigating its impacts. They conduct research on renewable energy technologies, carbon capture, and sustainable practices that can reduce the carbon footprint of human activities. Through innovation, they help design solutions that make it possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to a low-carbon economy. Innovators are instrumental in developing new clean technologies, such as solar panels, wind turbines, and electric vehicles. These technologies are helping to revolutionise industries and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Additionally, the emergence of green building materials, energy-efficient appliances, and sustainable agriculture practices are helping to reduce the environmental impact of everyday activities. Scientists are also leading the way in understanding and implementing adaptation strategies to help vulnerable communities cope with the impacts of climate change. These include improved early warning systems for natural disasters, the development of climate-resilient infrastructure, and strategies for managing water resources more effectively.

2.10.2. Advancing global health

Scientific research and innovation have revolutionised healthcare, providing new ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat diseases. Scientists in the fields of immunology, virology, and genetics have collaborated globally to respond to the pandemic, demonstrating the potential of scientific research to address urgent health threats. Moreover, scientists and innovators are driving advances in precision medicine, personalised treatments, and genomics. These innovations promise to revolutionise healthcare by offering more targeted and effective treatments tailored to individual genetic profiles, leading to better outcomes and fewer side effects. Breakthroughs in medical technologies, such as robotic surgery, artificial intelligence in diagnostics, and telemedicine, are transforming healthcare delivery and making it more accessible to people in remote or underserved areas. Innovators are also focused on tackling the underlying causes of health disparities, such as poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. By developing low-cost medical devices, affordable medicines, and scalable healthcare solutions, they are helping to improve access to care in low-income and developing countries.

2.10.3. Promoting sustainable development

As the global population grows and natural resources become increasingly scarce, scientists and innovators are exploring new ways to promote sustainable development. They are investigating ways to increase food production without depleting natural resources, developing water purification technologies, and creating more efficient waste management systems. Innovations in agriculture, such as genetically modified crops, vertical farming, and precision irrigation, are helping to feed the growing global population while minimising environmental impacts. Additionally, the concept of a circular economy – where products are designed for reuse, repair, and recycling – is being advanced by innovators to reduce waste and conserve resources. This shift towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns is essential for creating a future in which both people and the planet can thrive.

2.10.4. Promoting social good and equity

Beyond technological innovations, scientists and innovators are also concerned with the social impact of their work. The ethical implications of new technologies are central to their considerations, and many are actively working to ensure that innovations serve the greater good. For instance, the development of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning technologies has raised questions about job displacement, privacy, and fairness. Scientists and innovators are working to ensure that AI is developed and used responsibly, with a focus on human rights and social equity. In fields such as education, innovators are developing digital tools and online platforms that make learning more accessible to people in remote or underserved areas. Through open-source education platforms and digital libraries, they are helping to bridge the gap in educational opportunities, particularly in developing countries. Furthermore, scientists are increasingly involved in promoting gender equality, social justice, and human rights. They advocate for policies that ensure that the benefits of innovation are distributed equitably, with particular attention to the needs of marginalised communities. For instance, innovations in clean energy are being deployed in ways that ensure women and children in rural areas have access to safe and reliable energy sources, which can improve education, health, and economic opportunities.

2.11. Innovation and technology for the future

Innovation and technology have the potential to transform every aspect of society, from the way we communicate to the way we work, travel, and interact with the world around us. In this context, scientists and innovators are not just addressing present-day challenges but also laying the foundation for a better future. Some key areas where innovation is driving progress include:

1. **Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.** AI and machine learning are transforming industries ranging from healthcare to transportation to finance. These technologies have the potential to optimise resource allocation, improve decision-making, and create new opportunities for individuals and businesses. For instance, AI is being used to develop new medicines, enhance diagnostic accuracy, and personalise healthcare treatments. In the field of transportation,

autonomous vehicles have the potential to reduce traffic congestion, improve road safety, and reduce carbon emissions. 2. Space Exploration and Technology Space exploration continues to capture the imagination of scientists and the public alike. Innovations in space technology, such as satellite-based communication systems, space tourism, and the exploration of Mars, are not only expanding our understanding of the universe but also driving technological advancements that benefit life on Earth. For instance, satellite technology has revolutionised communication, weather forecasting, and global navigation systems, while space exploration provides insights into materials science, robotics, and energy generation. 3. Blockchain Technology Blockchain technology, often associated with cryptocurrencies, has the potential to revolutionise various industries, including finance, supply chain management, and healthcare. By providing a secure and transparent way to track transactions and data, blockchain can reduce fraud, increase efficiency, and create more trustworthy systems. Its applications extend far beyond finance, with the potential to improve voting systems, enhance data privacy, and promote transparency in supply chains. 4. Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Advances in biotechnology and genetic engineering hold the promise of addressing some of the world's most pressing challenges. From genetically engineered crops that can withstand extreme weather conditions to gene-editing technologies that could eliminate hereditary diseases, the potential of biotechnology to transform healthcare, agriculture, and the environment is immense. While these technologies raise ethical questions, they also offer the potential to solve problems that were once thought insurmountable. Scientists and innovators have long been at the forefront of advancing human progress and solving complex global problems. From tackling climate change to improving health and promoting social equity, their work is essential for creating a sustainable and just future for all. However, the full potential of their contributions can only be realised when innovation is driven by the principles of equity, sustainability, and social good. By ensuring that scientific discoveries and technological advancements benefit humanity as a whole, scientists and innovators can help create a world that is not only more advanced but also more inclusive, fair, and just for all people.

2.12. Pact for the future

Peace through Disarmament and Prevention: The concept of a Pact for the Future, centred around peace through disarmament and prevention, calls for a comprehensive and collaborative approach to ensuring a world free from conflict, violence, and the threat of war. At its core, this pact envisions a global commitment to reducing and ultimately eliminating the weapons that fuel violence, while simultaneously addressing the underlying causes of conflict. The principles of disarmament and prevention, alongside sustainable development, human rights, and diplomacy, play pivotal roles in this future-oriented vision of peace. In the face of global challenges such as nuclear proliferation, conventional arms races, civil conflicts, and the potential for emerging technologies to be misused for violence, the Pact for the Future

offers a framework for international cooperation and long-term peace. This approach emphasises not just the cessation of hostilities but the creation of conditions that render war and violence unnecessary.

To understand the significance of this pact, it is important to explore its key elements: disarmament, prevention, and their role in fostering lasting peace.

Disarmament: Reducing the Means for Conflict Disarmament is the process of reducing or eliminating weapons, particularly weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) such as nuclear, chemical, and biological arms, as well as conventional arms like firearms, tanks, and military aircraft. The concept of disarmament has been a central component of international peace efforts for decades, with various treaties and agreements working towards limiting the spread and proliferation of weapons. The Pact for the Future envisions a world where nations actively engage in disarmament processes to reduce the stockpiles of both nuclear and conventional weapons. This is particularly important in the context of nuclear weapons, where the threat of global annihilation looms large. The Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT), signed in 1968, has been a cornerstone of disarmament efforts, aiming to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons while encouraging the peaceful use of nuclear technology. However, despite some successes, the world still faces the challenges of nuclear proliferation, with new actors pursuing nuclear capabilities. In addition to nuclear disarmament, the reduction of conventional weapons is also a critical component of the Pact for the Future. Conventional arms, which include small arms, landmines, and cluster munitions, are responsible for much of the violence and instability in conflict zones. The global trade in weapons fuels civil wars, insurgencies, and terrorism, contributing to the suffering of millions. The Pact for the Future calls for stronger international controls on the arms trade, greater transparency, and efforts to eliminate the flow of arms to non-state actors such as militant groups and criminal organisations.

Prevention: Addressing the Root Causes of Conflict. While disarmament is a crucial element of the Pact for the Future, peace cannot be achieved simply by reducing weapons. Prevention, understood as addressing the underlying causes of conflict, is equally essential for long-term peace. Conflict prevention involves proactive efforts to address the factors that drive violence, such as poverty, inequality, human rights abuses, and the lack of access to basic services like education and healthcare.

Development and Human Rights: Central to the concept of prevention is the promotion of sustainable development and the protection of human rights. Economic inequality, social injustice, and the marginalisation of certain groups often lead to instability and violence. By promoting economic development, education, and social inclusion, the Pact for the Future seeks to create a foundation for peace that addresses the root causes of conflict. For instance, countries that experience high levels of poverty and unemployment are often more vulnerable to internal conflicts and violent extremism. By investing in education, infrastructure, and healthcare, nations can reduce the grievances that lead to violence and create societies that are more resilient to conflict. Furthermore, addressing issues such as

gender inequality, ethnic discrimination, and political repression is crucial to preventing violence. Human rights abuses, including the denial of basic freedoms and the oppression of minority groups, often spark conflicts. A focus on human rights protection and the establishment of accountable governance structures is therefore an essential aspect of the Pact for the Future.

Diplomacy and Dialogue: Another critical element of conflict prevention is diplomacy. Effective diplomatic efforts, dialogue, and negotiation can prevent the escalation of tensions and resolve disputes before they turn violent. Diplomacy must be prioritised in the global order, with international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) playing a vital role in mediating conflicts and encouraging peaceful solutions. The Pact for the Future envisions a world where countries embrace diplomatic mechanisms for resolving disputes rather than resorting to military action. This approach includes strengthening international institutions that can facilitate dialogue, such as the UN and regional organisations like the African Union and the European Union. Peacebuilding initiatives, which focus on reconciliation, justice, and the reconstruction of war-torn societies, are also crucial to preventing future conflicts.

Prevention of Emerging Threats: In addition to traditional forms of conflict, the Pact for the Future recognises the potential threats posed by emerging technologies. The rise of cyber warfare, the proliferation of drones, and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in military applications are all challenges that need to be addressed proactively.

Cyber-attacks, for instance, have the potential to disrupt critical infrastructure, cause economic damage, and even escalate into physical conflict. The misuse of AI in weaponry raises significant ethical concerns, as these technologies could be used for targeted assassinations, autonomous warfare, or other forms of violence. To prevent these emerging threats from escalating into widespread conflict, it is essential to establish international norms, regulations, and agreements that govern the use of these technologies. The Pact for the Future calls for the development of global agreements on the responsible use of emerging technologies, as well as international cooperation to prevent the weaponisation of innovations.

Peacebuilding and Multilateralism: For the Pact for the Future to succeed, multilateral cooperation is essential. No single nation or group of nations can ensure peace and security on its own. International cooperation is key to addressing the global nature of modern conflicts and the interconnected challenges that nations face. The Pact for the Future calls for a renewed commitment to multilateralism, with nations working together to strengthen international frameworks for disarmament and conflict prevention. This includes the reinforcement of international treaties such as the UN Charter, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Arms Trade Treaty, as well as the establishment of new mechanisms to address emerging threats. Peacebuilding is also an integral aspect of the Pact for the Future. Peacebuilding involves efforts to foster reconciliation, restore trust, and rebuild societies in the aftermath of conflict. It focuses on creating inclusive, democratic institutions

that respect human rights and promote social justice. The international community must invest in peacebuilding efforts, providing support for post-conflict reconstruction and ensuring that peace is sustainable in the long term.

The Pact for the Future – centred on peace through disarmament and prevention – offers a hopeful vision for the future, one where nations prioritise dialogue, diplomacy, and mutual cooperation over conflict and violence. Disarmament, particularly the reduction of nuclear and conventional weapons, is a critical step in diminishing the means for war. However, true peace requires more than the absence of weapons; it requires addressing the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality, and human rights abuses, through prevention efforts. By investing in development, promoting human rights, strengthening diplomacy, and preventing emerging threats, the international community can work towards a peaceful, stable, and secure future for all. The Pact for the Future urges nations to make a collective commitment to a world where peace is achieved not just through the absence of war but through proactive efforts to build a just, equitable, and sustainable global society.

III. UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FROM THE *LOTUS SUTTA*

Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development. *Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony*.

The *Lotus Sutta* from *Mahayana* is one of the most influential Buddhist texts, provides profound insights into fostering unity, inclusivity, and human dignity. Its teachings align closely with the goals of world peace and sustainable development by emphasising compassion, interdependence, and the inherent potential for enlightenment in all beings.

Lotus Sutta and its message of inclusivity: The *Lotus Sutta* highlights the concept of the “One Vehicle”, asserting that all paths ultimately lead to enlightenment. This inclusivity reflects the idea that no individual or group is inherently excluded from spiritual growth. Similarly, in global governance, inclusivity ensures that every community, culture, and nation has a voice in sustainable development.

3.1. Lessons for unity and inclusivity

3.1.1. Interconnectedness of all life: The *Lotus Sutta* portrays all beings as interconnected, symbolising that their well-being is mutually dependent. Sustainable development, as echoed in the UN’s 2030 Agenda, relies on recognising this interdependence – encouraging nations to collaborate for ecological preservation, equitable resource sharing, and societal equity.

3.1.2. Universal potential for enlightenment: The parable of the lotus flower in the sutra explains that even amidst muddy waters, a beautiful lotus can bloom. This signifies that every individual, irrespective of social or economic conditions, has the capacity for growth and transformation. Policies that uphold human dignity and empower marginalised groups align with this principle.

3.1.3. Bodhisattva ideal: The Bodhisattva vows to work tirelessly for the welfare of others. Similarly, fostering global harmony requires collective efforts from nations and individuals to prioritise humanity's welfare over individual interests, creating pathways for lasting peace.

3.2. Fostering unity: Collaborative efforts for global harmony

The *Lotus Sutta* inspires collaborative approaches to global challenges:

3.2.1. Dialogue and understanding: The *sutta* advocates open-mindedness and mutual understanding, which can bridge cultural and ideological divides. Mechanisms like multilateral organisations and forums can embody this principle to address global crises, such as climate change and inequality.

3.2.2. Shared responsibility: Just as the *Lotus Sutta* urges practitioners to embrace the collective responsibility of nurturing others, nations and communities must share responsibility for building a sustainable and peaceful world.

3.2.3. Respect for diversity: The *sutta* teaches that the *dhamma* (teachings of the Buddha) is adaptable to diverse capacities and contexts, symbolising the need for inclusive policies that respect cultural and geographical diversity while working towards shared goals.

Contemporary Relevance:

The insights from the *Lotus Sutta* resonate deeply with the principles of world peace and sustainable development:

Unity in Diversity: Recognising humanity's shared destiny while respecting differences; Compassionate Leadership: Promoting governance rooted in empathy and service; Sustainability: Understanding that the planet's well-being is inseparable from humanity's survival. By embodying the values of the *Lotus Sutta*, individuals and societies can foster a spirit of unity and inclusivity, upholding human dignity and contributing to the creation of a harmonious global community.

IV. MINDFULNESS AS TAUGHT BY SAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

Mindfulness is central to the Noble Eightfold Path, particularly under Right Mindfulness. The Buddha's mindfulness practices, outlined in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (The Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness), encourage awareness of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, fostering clarity and compassion.

4.1. Aspects of mindfulness for unity and inclusivity

Awareness of Interdependence: Sakyamuni Buddha taught that all beings are interconnected through Dependent Origination. This understanding fosters a sense of shared existence and responsibility, encouraging collaboration and mutual care for sustainable development and global peace.

Equanimity (Upekkha): Mindfulness promotes equanimity, a mental state of impartiality and balance. By practising mindfulness, individuals learn to view all beings with equal regard, breaking down barriers of race, nationality, or social status, and fostering inclusivity and human dignity. Compassion

(Karuna): Through mindful observation of suffering, the Buddha encouraged practitioners to develop compassion for others. This insight aligns with the need for policies and actions that prioritise alleviating human suffering, whether through poverty reduction, social justice, or environmental protection. Letting Go of Greed and Hatred Mindfulness helps individuals see the roots of greed, hatred, and delusion, which are causes of conflict. By addressing these mental states, mindfulness creates a foundation for harmony and collaboration at personal and societal levels.

4.2. Fostering unity through mindfulness as taught by Sakyamuni: Mindful listening and dialogue

The Buddha emphasised the importance of listening with full attention and compassion. This practice, central to mindfulness, can bridge divides in communities and nations, fostering dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding.

Non-Violence and Harmony: The Buddha's mindfulness teachings advocate Non-Violence in thought, speech, and action. This principle encourages individuals and societies to resolve conflicts peacefully, creating a foundation for global harmony. Leaders practising mindfulness can focus on long-term well-being and sustainable solutions for societal and ecological challenges.

Mindfulness in Action: The Buddha's teachings promote mindful living, encouraging simplicity and ethical consumption. This resonates with the principles of sustainable development, advocating for lifestyles that respect natural resources and ensure equity for future generations.

4.3. Relevance for world peace and sustainable development

Unity through Shared Humanity: Mindfulness teaches that all beings share common experiences of joy, sorrow, and impermanence. Recognising this shared humanity fosters unity and compassion, reducing divisions and promoting global peace.

Inclusivity through Non-Attachment: By cultivating non-attachment to labels, ideologies, or identities, mindfulness helps individuals and societies embrace inclusivity, recognising the dignity and worth of all people.

Sustainability through Awareness: Mindful awareness of consumption, waste, and interdependence with nature aligns with sustainable development goals, encouraging responsible use of resources and harmonious living.

Mindfulness, as taught by Sakyamuni Buddha, is a powerful tool for cultivating unity, inclusivity, and dignity in an interconnected world. By fostering awareness, compassion, and equanimity, mindfulness helps individuals and nations overcome divisions, address global challenges, and work collaboratively toward world peace and sustainable development. It is through the transformative practice of mindfulness that humanity can achieve lasting harmony and balance.

V. CONCLUSION: HUMAN RIGHTS AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

An In-Depth Overview: Human rights are inherent, universal, inalienable,

and indivisible rights that belong to every individual, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, or any other status. They aim to uphold the dignity, freedom, and equality of all human beings, forming the foundation of a just and fair society. Characteristics of Human Rights: 1. Universal: Human rights apply to everyone without discrimination, transcending borders, cultures, and political systems. 2. Inalienable: These rights cannot be taken away or forfeited, except in specific circumstances, such as lawful imprisonment following due process. 3. Indivisible and Interdependent: All human rights are equally important and interconnected. For instance, the right to education (economic right) affects the right to participate in governance (political right).

Types of Human Rights Human rights are broadly classified into three categories based on their nature and scope: 1. Civil and Political Rights: These rights protect individuals' freedom and ensure equal participation in public life. Examples: Right to life and liberty; Freedom of speech, assembly, and religion o Right to a fair trial; Protection from torture and arbitrary arrest; Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights: These rights ensure individuals can live with dignity and access essential resources and opportunities. Examples: Right to education; Right to work and fair wages; Right to health and adequate living standards; Cultural rights and participation in community life 3. Collective or Solidarity Rights: These rights focus on communities and nations rather than individuals. Examples: Right to self-determination; Right to development; Right to a clean and healthy environment.

International Human Rights Framework The protection and promotion of human rights are enshrined in several international documents and institutions:

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948: The foundational document in the modern human rights movement, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It outlines 30 articles covering civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.
2. International Covenants: o International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966): Protects individual freedoms and civil liberties. International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966): Focuses on socio-economic justice and cultural freedoms.
3. Regional Human Rights Instruments: European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR): Adopted by the Council of Europe, enforced by the European Court of Human Rights. American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR): Focuses on the Americas. African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR): Protects human and collective rights in Africa.
4. United Nations Human Rights System: The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) oversees human rights implementation. Human Rights Council: A UN body responsible for addressing human rights violations. Treaty-Based Bodies: Committees like the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) monitor compliance with specific treaties.

Challenges to human rights

5.1. State violations: Governments sometimes suppress dissent, curtail

freedom of speech, or engage in unlawful detention and torture. 2. Economic Inequalities: Poverty and lack of resources hinder individuals from enjoying their socio-economic rights. 3. Cultural Relativism: Some argue that human rights are a Western concept, leading to resistance in adopting universal norms. 4. Technological Misuse: o Digital surveillance and data breaches threaten the right to privacy. 5. Armed Conflicts and Refugee Crises: Wars and instability displace millions, depriving them of basic rights like shelter, education, and healthcare.

5.2. Advancing human rights: Current initiatives

1. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goals like eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality, and ensuring education aim to advance socio-economic rights globally. 2. Advocacy and Civil Society: Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch work to document violations and advocate for reforms. 3. Judicial Mechanisms: Courts at national and international levels, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), prosecute grave violations like genocide and war crimes. 4. Education and Awareness: Raising awareness through campaigns and education ensures that individuals know and demand their rights.

Human rights represent the moral and legal compass of societies, ensuring every individual can live with dignity and equality. While challenges remain, the international community's commitment to human rights continues to evolve, driven by a shared vision of justice, equity, and peace. The effective realisation of these rights requires collaboration between states, civil society, and international institutions.

In this way, the teachings of Sakyamuni can inspire the entire world to unite, collaborate, and safeguard Mother Earth.

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THE MESSAGE OF BUDDHIST SAṄGHA'S UNITY IN A MULTI-FAITH WORLD

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Abstract:

The study presents the message of unity of the Buddhist *saṅgha* in a multi-religious world. The findings highlight the role of the *saṅgha* not only in cultivating individual liberation but also in promoting peace, kindness, and compassion in society. The study also highlights how the principles of unity in the *saṅgha* can promote global harmony based on mutual respect and understanding among different Buddhist traditions and other religions. In addition, the study discusses the historical development of the *saṅgha*, its contribution to promoting spiritual peace, cultural cooperation, and the revival of Buddhist pilgrimage sites. Finally, the study concludes that the message of unity of the *saṅgha* is important for building a peaceful and tolerant society in today's diverse world.

Keywords: Buddhism, *saṅgha*'s unity, multi-faith world.

I. INTRODUCTION

The land of India has given birth to many ancient traditions throughout world history, offering humanity a priceless gift. Among these, Buddhism, which originated on this very land, is a great and ancient tradition whose primary goal is not only the attainment of individual liberation but also the propagation of peace, goodwill, and compassion in society. The Buddhist *saṅgha*, that is, the community of Buddhist monks and nuns, follows the fundamental principles of this religion, working not only for their spiritual well-being but also for the welfare of all humanity. Buddhism upholds the belief that every individual and community has its own unique cultural and religious characteristics, and fostering unity among these diverse identities is essential. In today's multi-religious world, the message of the Buddhist *saṅgha* becomes even more significant, as different religions, cultures, and traditions

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have coexisted for centuries. This article aims to explore the message of the Buddhist *saṅgha* in the light of Buddhist literature, demonstrating how the principles of unity in the *saṅgha* can promote global harmony based on mutual respect and understanding.

When we examine the history of the world's major religions, we find that disputes, whether minor or major, have arisen within almost every tradition. Over time, these very disputes have led to the emergence of different branches, each developing according to its fresh interpretations and perspectives. It would not be entirely appropriate to view such divisions solely from a negative standpoint, as they often give rise to new thoughts and directions. These divisions can serve as catalysts for intellectual and philosophical discourse, fostering both internal and external debates that contribute to the evolution of religious thought. Lord Buddha encouraged his monks to follow a path of inquiry rather than blind acceptance. He advised them not to believe something merely because a teacher had said it but to examine and test it before accepting it as truth. The Buddha not only preached this principle but also engaged in deep contemplation of new ideas that came from the outside. When necessary, he integrated them into his teachings and rules. This is evident in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, where, upon people's criticism, he established rules regarding the *vassāvāsa* (rainy retreat) and later modified them as required.¹ These rules were carefully compiled by later generations of teachers.² Within the *saṅgha*, this tradition of discussion and debate continued. For instance, Mahākassapa advocated for a strict ascetic life (*dhutavādānaṃ*) for monks,³ whereas Ānanda was more flexible in this regard.⁴ Mahākassapa was initially against the inclusion of women in the monastic order,⁵ while Ānanda strongly supported their entry.⁶ Despite these differences, both were highly revered across all Buddhist traditions and deeply respected each other, even while holding differing views. This pattern of discourse and adaptation did not stop with them. It continued from the First Buddhist Council to the Third Buddhist Council and remains an ongoing process even today. However, in the end, all Buddhist traditions unify in their reverence for the fundamental words of the Buddha. Though they may hold different interpretations, they all acknowledge the historical Gautama Buddha as their common origin. This shared foundation is the ultimate proof of the unity of the *saṅgha* and serves as a message for all followers.

II. THE FOUR PILLARS AND THE ROLE OF THE BUDDHIST SAṅGHA

Buddhism fundamentally rests on four pillars: *Bhikkhu* (monks), *Bhikkhuni*

¹ *Mahāvagga* (1998): p. 136.

² *Cullavagga* (1998): p. 451 ff.

³ *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (1998): p.31; Thera (1975): p. 38 - 39.

⁴ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1998): p. 190 ff.

⁵ Thera (1975): p.19.

⁶ *Cullavagga* (1998): p. 253ff.

(nuns), *Upāsaka* (lay male followers), and *Upāsikā* (lay female followers).⁷ Among these, the community of monks and nuns together is called the Buddhist Saṅgha,⁸ which is further divided into the *Bhikkhu Saṅgha* and *Bhikkhunī Saṅgha*.⁹ The purpose of this Saṅgha is not merely the attainment of individual liberation (*nibbāna*) but also the welfare of society and humanity as a whole. This role of the Saṅgha has been evident from ancient times to the present day. In Buddhism, the Saṅgha holds a crucial position, as its members cultivate inner peace, compassion, and dedication, strengthening their own spiritual lives while also working to bring positive transformation in society. The message of unity conveyed by the Buddhist Saṅgha is not limited to monks and nuns alone; it extends to all of humanity. The very word “Saṅgha” itself embodies the spirit of unity, as its literal meaning is “assembly” or “community.” This signifies the coming together of individuals with a shared purpose, emphasizing harmony and collective progress.

III. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE OF THE BUDDHIST SAṄGHA

It is well known that the Buddhist Saṅgha was established at the time of Lord Buddha's first sermon in Sarnath.¹⁰ After delivering his teachings there, he provided clear guidance to his disciples with these words: “Go forth, monks, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the benefit, and the happiness of devas and humans.”¹¹

Each word in this statement conveys a profound message of universal welfare: “*Caratha*” (Wander) - This refers to movement, but not aimless wandering. Instead, it signifies traveling with a purpose. “*Bhikkhave*” (O monks) - This term is addressed to the *bhikkhus*, meaning “those who see the dangers of worldly existence.” Since they recognize these dangers, they also seek ways to overcome them¹². The Buddha instructed his disciples to spread his teachings not only for the benefit of the many (*bahujana hitāya*) and their happiness (*bahujana sukhāya*) but also for the well-being of all beings, including devas and humans. To accomplish this great mission, the Buddha entrusted the Buddhist Saṅgha with the responsibility of carrying his message far and wide. He directed his disciples to go in different directions,¹³ ensuring that the path of wisdom, compassion, and liberation reached all corners of the world. Lord Buddha once said, “Every member of the Saṅgha should work for the welfare of society through their conduct, thoughts, and actions.” This principle not

⁷ Rhys Davids (1952): p.92.

⁸ *Upasaka* (1975): p. 209 - 210.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1998): p. 124.

¹¹ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1998): p. 124. “*caratha, bhikkhave, cārikaṃ bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ.*”

¹² *Vism* (1998): “*Saṃsāre bhayaṃ ikkhatitī bhikkhu.*”

¹³ *Samyutta-nikāya* (1998): p. 124: “*mā ekena dve agamittha; desetha, bhikkhave.*”

only guides individuals on the path of meditation and practice but also offers a holistic vision - one that emphasizes the collective responsibility of improving society and the world. Thus, the message of the Buddhist *Saṅgha* extends beyond religious and spiritual advancement; it also fosters social and political unity and harmony. Buddha provided his disciples with a structured framework of rules (*Vinaya*) while also allowing flexibility. He permitted certain minor rules to be modified over time, depending on necessity. Examining Buddhist literature, we find that throughout history, the *Saṅgha* has upheld its unity by resolving internal disputes based on these very principles. Instead of erasing historical disagreements, the *Saṅgha* preserved records of gradual reforms, offering a profound lesson - while immediate transformation may not always be possible, consistent effort leads to meaningful change within individuals and society alike.

IV. HISTORICAL UNITY OF THE SAṅGHA ACROSS TRADITIONS AND ITS MESSAGE

When we look at the history of the Buddhist *Saṅgha*, we find that, under the guidance of Lord Buddha, the *Saṅgha* adhered to strict discipline, with only a few occasional disturbances. Through this, the *Saṅgha* set an example of unity and harmony for the *Saṅgha* and society. It is human nature that when diversity arises, the need for unity becomes even stronger. The first historical instance of division within the *Saṅgha* is seen in the case of Devadatta, who, along with some followers, separated and went to Gayāsisa Mountain¹⁴. However, through the efforts of two of Buddha's most enlightened disciples, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, those followers returned to the *Saṅgha*, further strengthening its foundation¹⁵. Another example occurred in Kosāmbi, where a dispute among monks led to Buddha leaving for the forests in dismay¹⁶. Realizing their mistakes, the monks later returned and strengthened the unity of the *Saṅgha*.

The importance of unity was also preserved in Buddhist scriptures. The *Saṅgīti Sutta*¹⁷ records how Buddhist monks engaged in collective recitation of Buddha's teachings to maintain doctrinal integrity, much like Jain ascetics did when resolving disputes.¹⁸

V. UNITY AND MESSAGE OF THE SAṅGHA THROUGH VARIOUS COUNCILS (SAṅGĪTI)

This commitment to unity did not end with Buddha's *Mahāparinirvāṇa*. Immediately after his passing, the future of the *Saṅgha* was threatened, prompting Mahākassapa, the most senior disciple, to take charge. He organized the First Buddhist Council in Rājagaha (Modern: Rājagṛha), ensuring the

¹⁴ *Cullavagga* (1998): p. 337 ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 319 ff.

¹⁶ *Mahāvagga* (1998): p. 473 ff.

¹⁷ *DN 33*

¹⁸ *Dīgha Nikāya* (1998): p.165 ff.

preservation of Buddha's teachings and the continued strength of the Saṅgha. Could this council have been held without Saṅgha unity? The answer is clear - it would not have been possible. This unwavering unity was a direct reflection of Buddha's compassionate teachings, ensuring that his *Dhamma* and the Saṅgha remained strong for generations to come. The division within the Buddhist Saṅgha did not stop at the time of Devadatta but continued naturally over time. Approximately 100 years after the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, disagreements arose regarding *Vinaya* (monastic discipline). To resolve these disputes, the Second Buddhist Council was convened,¹⁹ which laid the foundation for the first major division in Buddhism.²⁰ Despite their doctrinal differences, both factions of the saṅgha remained strong in their ways and continued to spread the teachings of the Buddha for the welfare of humanity. By the time of Emperor Aśoka, the Buddhist tradition had further split into eighteen different schools. To address these growing divisions, the Third Buddhist Council was held.²¹ The outcome of this council, regardless of how it is viewed from the Theravāda perspective, reveals that, from the standpoint of various branches of the Buddhist saṅgha, each branch had its own independent and strong foundation. Additionally, each was firmly rooted in its philosophical perspective. This serves as a message for today's society that, despite all differences, the ultimate goal of all was to pave the path of liberation. The significance of these three Buddhist councils is not limited to merely preserving the words of the Buddha. They also reflect the saṅgha's understanding that differences arising in various branches over time should not be accepted blindly just because they are inherited from tradition. Instead, they need to be analyzed periodically and, if necessary, revised. This aligns with the Buddha's teaching that, like a goldsmith tests gold for its purity before accepting it, one should examine and embrace only what is truly valuable while letting go of minor matters. This message is crucial for fostering global brotherhood and peace in the present era.²² One of the greatest outcomes of this council was Emperor Aśoka's initiative to send Buddhist emissaries in nine directions,²³ extending the mission initiated by Lord Buddha during his lifetime, who had originally sent his disciples to spread the *Dhamma*. These Buddhist messengers played a crucial role in establishing a strong foundation for Buddhism in distant lands. From its very inception, the mission of spreading Buddhism carried a profound meaning and purpose centered on human welfare. It was not only aimed at the well-being of humanity but also at paving the way for the re-establishment of the *dhamma* whenever necessary. This mission ensured that dedicated ambassadors would continue to carry the teachings outward. We know that after flourishing in its homeland, this noble

¹⁹ *Cullavagga* (1998): p. 462 ff.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 462 ff.

²¹ *Vinayapiṭaka-aṭṭhakathā* (1998): p. 42 ff.

²² *Tattvasaṅgraha* (1968): p. 1115. "tāpāchedācca nikaṣāt suvarṇamiva paṇḍitaiḥ, parikṣya bhikṣavo grāhyam madvaco na tu gauravāt."

²³ *Vinayapiṭaka-aṭṭhakathā* (1998): p. 42 ff.

dhamma nearly disappeared from its place of origin. However, the memory of the missions sent by Lord Buddha himself and Emperor Aśoka inspired the *saṅgha* in a later phase. As a result, the *saṅgha* played a crucial role in re-establishing the *dhamma* in its motherland. Even almost 1,200 years later, the voice of the Buddha continues to be heard, studied, and understood across India. This serves as a powerful message from the *saṅgha* to humanity - that what declines can rise again, and what rises will also eventually fade. It offers a profound lesson to the world about the cycle of existence and renewal. If we set aside the theoretical differences among various Buddhist traditions and focus on their core purpose, we find that all sects of the *saṅgha* ultimately aimed to preserve their internal unity while upholding the original teachings of the Buddha for the benefit of all beings. This process of divergence and expansion continued within and beyond India, leading to the formation of the three major Buddhist traditions we recognize today: (1) *Theravāda*, meaning “the teaching of the elders,” is the oldest surviving school of Buddhism.²⁴ It is based on the *Pāli* Canon, which is considered the most authentic record of the Buddha’s teachings. *Theravāda* emphasizes individual liberation through wisdom, ethical conduct, and meditation. It is the dominant tradition in countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. (2) *Mahāyāna* (great vehicle) is one of the major branches of Buddhism, emphasizing compassion (*karuṇā*) and the attainment of Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.²⁵ It developed around the 1st century CE and spread across China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Tibet. (3) *Vajrayāna* (diamond vehicle) is a later development within *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, incorporating esoteric and tantric practices to achieve rapid enlightenment.²⁶ It emerged around the 7th century CE and is primarily practiced in Tibet, Bhutan, Mongolia, and parts of Nepal and India.²⁷ These traditions, despite their differences, continue to flourish in harmony, carrying forward the message of compassion, wisdom, and unity that Lord Buddha envisioned for the world.

VI. CROSS-CULTURAL BUDDHIST EXCHANGES

The work of the Buddhist *saṅgha* was not limited to the establishment of Buddhism in different parts of the world but also contributed significantly to the promotion of cross-cultural Buddhist exchanges. During the peak of Buddhism’s influence, it was the efforts of the *saṅgha* that sowed the seeds of democratic principles in society, where every individual was considered equal based on their actions (*kamma*) rather than their birth.²⁸ The efforts of the *saṅgha* led to the widespread establishment of these egalitarian principles, not only in India but also in countries beyond India, such as Sri Lanka, China, Tibet, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, and others.

²⁴ Bapat (1956): p. 101.

²⁵ Tripathi (2015): VII - XIV.

²⁶ Wayman (1977): p. 62.

²⁷ Bapat (1956): p. 73 - 77.

²⁸ *Majjhima-nikāya* (1998): p. 419.

These principles were firmly established through the relentless efforts of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, laying the foundation for India's cultural relations with other countries. Furthermore, it paved the way for mutual cultural exchange among contemporary Buddhist nations, creating lasting international and intercultural connections. The Buddhist *saṅgha* also played a significant role in promoting the method of reasoning and debate taught by the Buddha, which led to the dawn of a new era of organized educational traditions in India. This led to the establishment of universities such as Nālandā, Vikramaśīla, Odantapuri, and Vallabhi, where not only Buddhist teachings were studied and taught, but aspects of other traditions were also included. The famous seventh-century Chinese traveler Xuanzang mentions in his travel accounts that Nālandā University offered courses in 18 subjects, some of which were related to Hinduism. If we study the travel accounts of Chinese pilgrims, we find that from present-day China to various countries of Central Asia and across the vast expanse of India, thousands of monasteries belonging to different Buddhist traditions existed. The remnants of these monasteries are still being discovered today, reflecting their extensive presence and profound influence. The thousands and even millions of Buddhist monks residing in these monasteries cultivated a rich educational environment throughout the region. They actively promoted Buddhist education, philosophy, and practice while spreading the message of peace, nonviolence, and coexistence in society. Remarkably, these monks remained dedicated to their peaceful endeavors without causing harm to anyone, thereby providing society with a strong ethical and intellectual foundation. Such a well-structured and organized tradition of education concentrated in one region is extremely rare, with very few parallels found across the world. This historical tradition not only highlights the grandeur of Buddhist civilization but also serves as evidence of how education and spirituality can uplift an entire society.

To ignore the *saṅgha*'s role in initiating this organized educational tradition would be an injustice. While we now use the term "university" under modern educational systems, the seals found from that time show that these institutions were referred to as *saṅghārāma* (monastic complexes). Thus, the various *saṅghārāmas* and their educational systems were the result of the *saṅgha*'s vision and diligent efforts, though royal patronage undoubtedly also played a role. The vision of these *saṅghārāmas* was so mature and trustworthy that evidence has been found of donations being received not just from India but from distant countries as well. A prominent example is King Bālaputra of the Śrīvijaya Kingdom (9th century CE), from present-day Indonesia, whose name is inscribed on a copper plate as a donor by Pāla King Devapāladeva of Bengal (Pāla Empire). This copper plate was discovered during the excavation of Nālandā *saṅghārāma* and is now kept at the Indian Museum in Kolkata (Image No. 1).



Image No. 1: Copper plate inscription by Pāla King Devapāladeva of Bengala (Pāla Empire)

From a religious perspective, if we highlight the role of the Buddhist Saṅgha in inter-country relations, we find that there are very few references to kings from countries outside of India visiting India's Buddhist sites. However, due to the influence of the Saṅgha, we find records of donations being sent to the Mahābodhi Temple in Bodhgaya from various Chinese emperors (Image No. 2), as well as Myanmar and other Buddhist nations.²⁹ It is also through their contributions that it became possible to familiarize the general public, not only in India but across all Buddhist countries, with these sacred Buddhist sites, a feat made possible through the noble cooperation of the Saṅgha.



Image No. 2: Chinese Inscriptions discovered from the Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya

²⁹ Cunningham (1892): p. 67 - 77.

VII. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE BUDDHIST SAṄGHA IN PROMOTING MENTAL PEACE

The greatest emphasis in Buddhism is on global peace, and to attain that peace, an individual needs to have control over their mind. The Buddhist *saṅgha* has played a significant role in promoting mental peace. It not only encourages meditation and self-discipline but also fosters a sense of peace and coexistence on both social and global levels. Due to the worldwide presence of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, it has been possible to establish thousands of Buddhist meditation centers across the world, where people practice meditation for mental tranquility and spiritual growth. Major centers include Buddhist monasteries and institutions in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, Tibet, China, and Western countries. Various meditation techniques are practiced within these centers, such as: (1) *Vipassanā* meditation: A widely practiced technique in India and Myanmar that focuses on self-observation and mental purification. (2) *Zen* meditation: Popular in Japan and China, this emphasizes simplicity and mindfulness (*sākṣībhāva*). (3) Mantra chanting and tantric meditation: In the *vajrayāna* tradition, mantras and specific *mudrās* (hand gestures) are used to bring mental peace. Buddhist meditation techniques have been found effective in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. Modern research confirms that regular meditation induces positive changes in the brain, enhancing concentration and inner peace. Leaders such as the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and other Buddhist monks have led non-violent movements, spreading the message of peace across the world. Their ability to do so stems from their inner tranquility and their commitment to sharing this experience with others. Due to the profound impact of these teachings, not only Asian countries but the entire world has been drawn toward this practice. The Buddhist *saṅgha* has played a pivotal role in preserving and enhancing this practical method over the centuries. Today, millions of people across various centers in different countries are benefiting from it, experiencing peace of mind. This practice leads to the development of *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity) in individuals. These qualities are crucial for global unity and welfare.

VIII. THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BUDDHIST SAṄGHA IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS SOCIETY

In today's world, various religions, cultures, and traditions coexist alongside Buddhism. In such a context, the Buddhist principle of "showing compassion and respect for all living beings" becomes especially important. Lord Buddha always taught his disciples that instead of rejecting any religion or belief, we should examine it critically and maintain respect for every individual and their beliefs.³⁰ This principle of the Buddhist *Saṅgha* is essential for fostering cooperation, peace, and understanding in a multi-religious society. Buddhism encourages religious tolerance, advocating that every religion and culture be given equal respect, even though followers of different religions may differ

³⁰ *Aṅguttara-nikāya* (1998): p. 216.

in their beliefs and practices. The fundamental values of compassion, peace, and unity are shared across these various traditions. Lord Buddha taught his followers that to achieve peace and balance in the external world, we must first maintain inner peace and balance. This is why the Buddhist *Saṅgha* has been actively involved in interfaith dialogue from ancient times to the present day, striving to develop better understanding and tolerance among different religions and cultures.

IX. ROLE IN THE REVIVAL OF BUDDHIST INSTITUTIONS

As stated in the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence, whatever arises is bound to cease - this is an eternal law that applies not only to the entire world but also to the Buddhist *saṅgha* established by the Buddha and the monasteries that emerged over time.³¹ Perhaps keeping this reality in mind, the Buddha remarked at the time of allowing women into the *saṅgha* that its lifespan would be reduced to 500 years. He was well aware that every individual and institution gradually moves toward decline, and it was likely for this reason that he chose such words. The truthful words spoken by the Buddha, along with historical records, indicate that after reaching its peak, Buddhism and the *Saṅgha* began a gradual decline in India. Accounts from Chinese travellers of that era and other contemporary sources provide insights into this progressive deterioration. Over time, the various branches of Buddhism that once flourished in India began to fade away from its geographical boundaries. In central India, in particular, the tradition disappeared for an extended period, even though it continued to thrive and evolve in many countries beyond India. This historical shift reflects the natural cycle of rise and decline, which aligns with the fundamental principle of impermanence as taught by the Buddha. Even in such prolonged and challenging circumstances, the Buddhist *saṅgha* was unable to visit any of its sacred sites. From China to Assam and Kashmir to Kanchipuram, Buddhism had lost many of its monastic establishments and, most importantly, the great centers of learning that once illuminated the world with knowledge. Despite these losses, the monks remained steadfast in their discipline and dedication, continuing their welfare activities in their respective countries without wavering. However, during the British colonial period, when conditions became somewhat favorable, the seeds of Buddhism, which had sprouted and flourished in foreign lands, began to extend their branches back to their motherland, India. Slowly but steadily, efforts were made to revive Buddhist pilgrimage sites, and initiatives were taken to re-establish Buddhist monasteries and educational institutions. Over time, this led to the foundation of several universities dedicated to Buddhist studies, marking a significant step towards the revival of Buddhism in its land of origin. Taking advantage of this opportunity, with the support of the Buddhist *Saṅgha*, three great Buddhist monks - Jagdish Kashyap, Bhante Anand Kausalyayan, and Rahul Sankrityayan - emerged in India. Among them, Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap, inspired by the ancient monastic traditions, conceptualized and established Nava Nalanda

³¹ *Dīgha Nikāya* II (1998): p. 117.

Mahavihara in Nalanda in 1951 with the support of the Government of India. Today, it stands as a deemed university, dedicated to the study and promotion of Buddhist teachings.³² This journey did not stop here. With the support of Lama Bakula Rinpoche, the foundation was laid for the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies in Leh, which has since evolved into a deemed university.³³ The Central Institute of Tibetan Higher Studies was also established by the Government of India in consultation with H.H. the Fourteenth Dalai Lama near Sarnath, Varanasi, along with another significant Buddhist institution, the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies in Arunachal Pradesh.³⁴ These institutions are actively engaged in the promotion and dissemination of Buddhist education, and as a result of their efforts, today, a network of modern monasteries can be seen across almost every state in India, spreading the teachings of the Buddha and the message of *dhamma*. This endeavor was not confined to India alone but continued uninterrupted in countries like Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, and it remains active even today. With the support of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, grand monasteries and universities have been established in these nations, dedicated to the service of humanity. It is impossible to describe all of them in a single article, but it is evident that Buddhism and its teachings continue to play a significant role across the world.

X. ROLE IN THE REVIVAL OF BUDDHIST PILGRIMAGE AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, the Buddhist *saṅgha* has played a crucial role in reviving the lost glory of Buddhism in India, the land of its origin. After centuries of decline, the unity of *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* traditions has been instrumental in restoring Buddhism's presence through organized pilgrimages, heritage conservation, and spiritual practices. One of the most significant aspects of this revival has been the continuous flow of Buddhist devotees from across the world - particularly from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, China, Japan, and Korea - who undertake pilgrimages to sacred Buddhist sites in India and South Asia. Their devotion has encouraged governments to recognize the immense potential of Buddhist tourism, leading to the development of key pilgrimage circuits. In the past decade, several previously lesser-known Buddhist sites have been rediscovered and developed into important pilgrimage destinations. The combined efforts of monastic communities, scholars, and governmental initiatives have facilitated this resurgence. The ongoing process of site development, infrastructure enhancement, and spiritual activities has strengthened Buddhism's presence in India. A remarkable feature of this revival

³² "Nalanda Nalanda Mahavihara: History." *NNM Official Website*, n.d., accessed on February 21, 2025. Available at: <https://www.nnm.ac.in/about-us/history/>.

³³ "Historical Background." *Central Institute for Buddhist Studies*, n.d., accessed on February 21, 2025. Available at: <https://cibs.ac.in/historical-background/>.

³⁴ "History of the Institute." *Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies*, n.d., accessed on February 21, 2025. Available at: <https://cihcs.edu.in/history.php>.

is the cooperation between the three major Buddhist traditions - *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna*. Despite their doctrinal differences, these traditions have come together to protect and promote Buddhist heritage. Their collective efforts have ensured that Buddhist culture is not just preserved but actively practiced at ancient sites. Another significant trend is the increasing practice of *tipitaka* recitals at key Buddhist sites. These sacred chantings - whether from the *pāli*, *Sanskrit*, or *Tibetan* canons - help reconnect Buddhist communities with their scriptural heritage. In recent years, Indian state governments have gradually begun to support these events, recognizing their cultural and spiritual importance.³⁵ This growing support for Buddhist recitations, festivals, and pilgrimages marks a new phase in India's engagement with its Buddhist past. The revival is not just about tourism; it is about reinstating Buddhism as a living tradition in the land of its birth. With continued unity among the Buddhist *saṅgha* and support from governments and international devotees, the Buddhist renaissance in India is set to flourish further, making the subcontinent once again a global center of Buddhist learning and practice.

XI. CONCLUSION

The message of unity and the contributions of the Buddhist *saṅgha* hold immense relevance in today's multi-religious and multicultural society. The diversity among its various branches teaches us that true strength lies in unity and that respect amidst diversity is the foundation of a harmonious world. This message is not only an inspiration for followers of Buddhism but for all of humanity, encouraging us to foster a peaceful and tolerant society by embracing each other's identities and beliefs. If we examine the above-mentioned work of the Buddhist *saṅgha* from ancient times to the present, we find that their role extends beyond the development of Buddhism to a profound contribution to the welfare of humanity. Their unwavering dedication serves as a guiding model for modern civilized society, demonstrating how, even in times of adversity, they upheld their principles while actively propagating Buddhism. They played a crucial role in cross-cultural Buddhist exchanges, promoting mental peace, fostering a multi-religious society, and significantly contributing to the revival of Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism development across various nations. The universal message of the Buddhist *saṅgha* underscores that only through meaningful dialogue and mutual respect among religious and cultural diversities can we progress toward a prosperous and peaceful world. This has been a consistent teaching of Buddhist masters from ancient times to the present day, shaping and inspiring global Buddhist traditions and interfaith harmony. Their efforts continue to remind us that in an era of growing divisions, the path to coexistence lies in understanding, respect, and shared values.

³⁵ Dipananda, BD. "13th International Tipitaka Chanting Ceremony Held at Bodh Gaya." *Buddhistdoor*, 15 Dec. 2017, accessed on February 21, 2025. Available at: <https://www2.buddhistdoor.net/news/13th-international-tipitaka-chanting-ceremony-held-at-bodh-gaya>.

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BUDDHIST UNITY AND HISTORICAL TRUTH: THE DEBATE OVER JAMBUDVĪPA IN MOD- ERN CONTEXTS

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Abstract:

Buddhist historiography and cosmology widely recognise Jambudvīpa as a fundamental concept in shaping the Buddhist civilisation's geographical and cultural identity. Traditionally, *Jambudvīpa* refers to the Indian subcontinent, the birthplace of the Buddha, and the historical epicenter of Buddhist thought. However, recent efforts by some groups in Thailand and Sri Lanka to reinterpret *Jambudvīpa* as their respective countries challenge long-established historical narratives. The current study critically analyses these efforts through methodologies like textual criticism, historical linguistics, and archaeological evidence. The findings show that such reinterpretations are not supported academically and are driven mainly by nationalist ideologies rather than historical factuality. Such representations pose a threat to the unity of Buddhist solidarity and misrepresent a common heritage. The study underscores the importance of preserving historical integrity through scholarly collaboration and inter-Buddhist dialogue to maintain unity and global harmony.

Keywords: *Jambudvīpa, Buddhist historiography, Buddhist cosmology, Buddhist solidarity, Buddha homeland.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Jambudvīpa (also spelt *Jambudīpa*) holds great significance in Buddhist cosmography and historical thought. It traditionally refers to the Indian subcontinent, recognised as the birthplace of the Buddha (Siddhārtha Gautama) and the location of his enlightenment, first sermon, and Parinirvāṇa (final passing away). Canonical texts, inscriptions, archaeological discoveries, and several literary works have all uniformly testified to this, describing *Jambudvīpa* as the cradle of Buddhist civilisation.

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In recent years, certain groups from Thailand and Sri Lanka have put forth alternative claims that challenge these established narratives. According to their arguments, *Jambudvīpa* corresponds to their respective territories and should redefine Buddhism's geographical and historical landscape. The present study examines these claims through a critical lens, exploring their origins, ideological motivations, and implications for the solidarity of Buddhism. By engaging with a robust body of textual and archaeological evidence, the study seeks to reaffirm the historically supported understanding of *Jambudvīpa* while fostering dialogue that promotes unity and global harmony.

II. JAMBUDVĪPA IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The term '*Jambudīpa*' originates from *Pāli* and is equivalent to the Sanskrit '*Jambudvīpa*' (जम्बुद्वीप). Derived from the words 'Jambu' (a type of fruit) and 'Deepa' (island or landmass), this term frequently appears in ancient Buddhist texts and cosmography. In ancient *Pāli* and Sanskrit, '*Jambu*' (*Syzygium cumini*) denotes the same fruit, *Damba*, in Sinhala.¹ In Sanskrit, '*Jambu*' corresponds to the Sinhala terms *Mādam*, *Baludham*, and *Damba*. Sanskrit literature states, "*Ramyate bhakshyate sarve assaphalang iti jambu adate*," which translates to "sweet for everyone to eat," elucidating that the term '*Jambu*' signifies something pleasurable for everybody. *Jambu* is extensively referenced in medical treatises such as the *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*.² Furthermore, in the *Rājanighaṇṭu* by Narahari, *Jambu* is a substantial, dark-hued tree with a pleasant aroma and robust foliage that produces blue fruits.³

In *Pāli*, the term '*Deepa*' is equivalent to '*Dvīpa*' in Sanskrit. '*Dvīpa*' derives from the amalgamation of '*dvi*,' signifying 'two' phonetically, and '*pā*,' which encompasses multiple connotations, including the act of consuming water. In the *bhūvādi gaṇa* of verbal roots, '*pā*' denotes the act of drinking. In this setting, '*dvīpa*,' meaning 'one who drinks twice,' came to signify an elephant or an elephantine creature, as elephants initially draw water into their trunks and then consume it. The term '*Dvīpa*' or '*Deepa*' metaphorically signifies a land that sustains life by protecting water and famine. It is also used to denote a continent or island.⁴

Consequently, '*Jambudīpa*' in *Pāli* and '*Jambudvīpa*' in Sanskrit denote a continent or territory named after the '*Jambu*' tree (often called *Damba*). From a linguistic perspective, there is no impediment regarding '*Jambudīpa*' as a mountainous continent. This concept has been translated into Sinhala as '*Dambadiv*' or '*Dambadiva*'. Early allusions in Eastern religious texts suggest that *Jambudvīpa* is one of the seven islands of the planet, around the prominent Mount Meru, regarded as the axis of the earth. This cosmological idea is rich in legendary details, including the depiction of a massive *Jambu* tree on

¹ Sanskrita Sabdārnava (2009): 315; Sinhalese Materia Medica (1994): 73.

² Glossary of Vegetable Drugs in *Bṛhatrayī* (1972): 164-165.

³ *Rājanighaṇṭusahitho Dhanvantariya Nighaṇṭuh* (1986): 186.

⁴ Liyanage, "Jambudvīpaya Yannēhi Arthaya - Arut Pahaduva 4". Accessed On January 05, 2024, available at <https://liyanarala.blogspot.com/2014/05/4.html>.

Jambudvīpa, purportedly with a circumference of 15 *yojanas*, a height of 100 *yojanas*, and branches extending 100 *yojanas* on each side.

“*Jambudīpa*” derives from the Jambu tree, a relationship reflected in *Pāli* grammar. “*Jambudvīpa*” is referenced in multiple literature.⁵ The *Vinaya Piṭaka* (*Mahāvagga Pāli*) provides a detailed account of the Buddha’s interaction with the Jambu tree, linking it directly to *Jambudvīpa*.⁶

Additionally, the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (*Indriya Saṃyutta*, *Sambodhi Vagga*) describes *Jambudvīpa* as the land of the Jambu tree, further substantiating its long-standing etymological connection.⁷

Jambudvīpa is one of the four continents surrounding Mount Sumeru in Buddhist cosmology and is considered the most significant as this is the only place where Buddhas can be born. This belief underscores the reverence for *Jambudvīpa* within the Buddhist tradition. Historically, *Jambudvīpa* has been associated with the Indian subcontinent, an area crucial to the origins and dissemination of Buddhism.

Buddhist cosmology outlines a vast and complex universe of many realms and universes. Within this cosmological framework, the human realm is divided into four continents, each inhabited by different beings. The continents are *Jambudvīpa*, *Pubbavideha*, *Aparagoyāna*, and *Uttarakuru*.⁸

Among these, *Jambudvīpa* was regarded as the most significant. According to the descriptions in the *Tripitaka* of the four continents, only *Jambudvīpa* serves as the birthplace of eminent figures, including the Buddhas and the *Cakravarti* kings.⁹ It is often identified with the Indian subcontinent, particularly Northern India, where the Buddha was born, attained enlightenment, and preached his teachings. The term “*Jambudvīpa*” is derived from the Jambu tree

⁵ “*Jambuya lakkhitho kappattaikadippbhavena va kappattano deepo Jambudipo*” “*Jambuya Pannatho Lakkhitho Deepo Jambudipo*”.

⁶ “*Atha kho Uruvelakassapo jaṭilo tassā rattiyā accayena yena Bhagavā tenupasaṃkami, upasaṃkamitvā Bhagavato kālaṃ ārocesi—‘Kālo, Mahāsamaṃa, niṭṭhitam bhatta’nti. Gaccha tvaṃ, Kassapa, āyāmaṇ’nti Uruvelakassapaṃ jaṭilaṃ uyyojetvā yāya ‘Jambuyā Jambudipo’ paññāyati, tassā avidūre ambo... pe... tassā avidūre āmalakī... pe... tassā avidūre haritakī... pe... Tāvatiṃsaṃ gantvā Pāricchattakapupphaṃ gahetvā paṭhamataraṃ āgantvā aggāgāre nisiīdi. Addasā kho Uruvelakassapo jaṭilo Bhagavantam aggāgāre nisiīnam, disvāna Bhagavantam etadavoca—‘Katamena tvaṃ, Mahāsamaṃa, maggena āgato? Ahaṃ tayā paṭhamataram pakkanto, so tvaṃ paṭhamataram āgantvā aggāgāre nisiīno’ ti. Idhāhaṃ, Kassapa, tam uyyojetvā Tāvatiṃsaṃ gantvā Pāricchattakapupphaṃ gahetvā paṭhamataram āgantvā aggāgāre nisiīno. Idam kho, Kassapa, Pāricchattakapupphaṃ vaṇṇasampannam gandhasampannam. Atha kho Uruvelakassapassa jaṭilassa etadahosi—‘Mahiddhiko kho Mahāsamaṃo mahānubhāvo, yatra hi nāma maṃ paṭhamataram uyyojetvā Tāvatiṃsaṃ gantvā Pāricchattakapupphaṃ gahetvā paṭhamataram āgantvā aggāgāre nisiīdissati, na tveva ca kho arahā yathā aha’nti.’*”

⁷ “*Ye ke ci Jambudīpikā rukkhā Jambu tesāṃ aggagamakāyati*”.

⁸ The *Jataka*, Vol. 6 (1896): 278. “*Purato videhe passa, goyāniye ca pacchato; Kuruyo jambudīpaṇca, maṇimhi passa nimmitam*”

⁹ *Majjhima-Nikāya Commentary* (*Papañcasūdanī*), vol. II: 917.

(Indian blackberry), which is said to grow in abundance.

Jambudvīpa is prominent in various Buddhist texts, including the *Pāli* Canon and *Mahāyāna* scriptures. It is depicted as the central continent where significant events took place in the life of the Buddha. For example:

Birth of the Buddha: The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, was born in Lumbinī.

Enlightenment: The Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in Buddhagaya.

First Sermon: The Buddha delivered his first sermon at Isipatana in Sarnath, near Varanasi.

Passing Away: The Buddha's passing away (*Parinirvāṇa*) occurred in Kusinārā.

These events highlight the sacred geography of *Jambudvīpa* in the Buddhist tradition, establishing it as a central point of spiritual significance. The *Mahāpadāna Sutta* (DN 2) further confirms *Jambudvīpa*'s historical and spiritual importance, noting that during the era of Vipassī Buddha, the land supported eighty-four thousand monasteries.¹⁰ Such references confirm that *Jambudvīpa* has been venerated across multiple Buddhist ages, reinforcing its status in Buddhist cosmology. Further validating the prominence of *Jambudvīpa*, the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* (DN 3) explicitly states that Metteyya Buddha, the future Buddha, will be born in *Jambudvīpa*, along with the universal monarch, King Saṁkha.¹¹

This prophecy underscores that *Jambudvīpa* remains the centre of Buddhist cosmology and sacred geography, aligning with historical interpretations that identify it with the Indian subcontinent, particularly in the regions of modern-day Northern India and Nepal. Both Buddhist and non-Buddhist ancient Indian texts frequently refer to *Jambudvīpa*, reinforcing its association with this geographical area. For instance, *Arthashastra* and other ancient Indian literature mention *Jambudvīpa* as a term for the entire subcontinent.¹² The

¹⁰ DN 2: "Tena kho pana samayena Jambudīpe caturāsītī āvāsasahassāni honti".

¹¹ "Asitavassasahassāyukesu, bhikkhave, manussesu ayaṃ Jambudīpo iddho ceva bhavissati phīto ca, kukkuṭasampātikā gāmanigamarājadhāniyo. Asitavassasahassāyukesu, bhikkhave, manussesu ayaṃ Jambudīpo avīci maññe phuṭo bhavissati manussesu, seyyathāpi naḷavanam vā saravanam vā. Asitavassasahassāyukesu, bhikkhave, manussesu ayaṃ Bārāṇasī Ketumatī nāma rājadhāni bhavissati iddhā ceva phītā ca bahujanā ca ākiṇṇamanussā ca subhikkhā ca. Asitavassasahassāyukesu, bhikkhave, manussesu imasmim Jambudīpe caturāsītīnagarasahassāni bhavissanti Ketumatīrājadhānīpamukhāni. Asitavassasahassāyukesu, bhikkhave, manussesu Ketumatīyā rājadhāniyā Saṁkho nāma rājā uppajjissati cakkavattī dhammiko dhamma-rājā cāturanto vijitāvī janapadatthāvariyaṃ pappatto sattaratnasamannāgato".

¹² *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Vol. 1 (1952): ch. 39.; *Mahabharata*, *Bhishmaparva*, 6.12, 13; 7.13, 14; 6.31.; *The Mahavastu* (1949); Vol. III, Ch. IX.; *The Nāṭyashastra* (1951): Ch. XXIII.; *Surya Siddhanta* (1861).; *The Hitopadesha* (1830): 302, 303.; *Manimekhalai In Its Historical Setting*, (1921): 111.; *The Concise Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* (1984): ix-x.

association between *Jambudvīpa* and India is also evident in historical maps and descriptions by travellers and scholars. The Chinese pilgrim *Xuanzang*, who travelled to India in the 7th century CE, referred to the land he visited as *Jambudvīpa* and documented the various Buddhist sites he encountered.¹³

In Sri Lankan historiography, the connection to *Jambudvīpa* has been highlighted to underscore the island's ties to the sacred geography of Buddhism. Ancient texts such as the *Mahāvamsa* and *Dīpavamsa*, chronicles of Sri Lankan history, emphasise the island's Buddhist heritage and its links to the Buddhist heartland in India.¹⁴

III. MODERN REINTERPRETATIONS

3.1. Thailand's claims: Sukhothai as *Jambudvīpa*

The idea that *Jambudvīpa* corresponds to the Sukhothai region of Thailand has been promoted since 1998 by a group led by Prof. Chayong Brahmawong, notably through works such as *The Birthplace of the Lord Buddha Found to Be in Thailand: Not in India or Nepal*.¹⁵ This ideology asserts that the foundational geographical space for the Buddha's Enlightenment and other key Buddhist events was in the Sukhothai area, formerly *Jambudvīpa*.¹⁶

Proponents argue that for thousands of years, Southeast Asians, particularly in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma, have regarded their region as *Jambudvīpa*. They claim that this perspective was distorted by European scholars, who mistakenly identified India as *Jambudvīpa*. Historical references cited include the *Sangkitiyawong*, a palm-leaf manuscript written in 1789 during the reign of King Rama I, which describes Sukhothai as the land of the Buddha's birth. Additionally, the manuscript refers to the region as "Chompoo Dwip," meaning "the land of Chompoo (rose apple) trees," a name derived from the abundance of wah chompoo trees in the northern and northeastern regions of Thailand.¹⁷

¹³ *Si-Yu-Ki Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Vol I (2000): 11.

¹⁴ *Dīpavamsa* (1879); *The Mahāvamsa: The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, 1 (912).

¹⁵ Brahmawong, *The Birthplace of Lord Buddha Found to Be In Thailand: Not In India or Nepal*, Accessed On August 22, 2022, available at <https://buddhabirthplace.com>.

¹⁶ *Why Did We Have Doubts That Lord Buddha Was Not Born in Ancient India?* Educational Research and Innovation Development Institute, Siam, 2016.

¹⁷ "In Thailand and neighboring countries, the History of Buddhism, *Sangkitiyawong*, was written on bai larn (a type of palm leaves) in Makati Language (*Pāli*) by Venerable Pra Wannarat of Wat Chetupon Temple in B.E. 2332 (1789 AD) during the reign of King Rama I (King Pra Putta Yodfah) in the early Bangkok period. This document clearly indicated on many pages that Sukhothai of Siam was in Chompoo Dwip the land recorded as the place the Lord Buddha was born. And for more than thousand years, people in Thailand and Laos believe that their Lord Buddha was born in the present land known as Suwannabhumi (mentioned in the Tripitaka as "Chompoo Dwip-meaning the land of Chompoo trees). The presence of the Lord Buddha was recorded in ancient inscriptions and palm leaves writing in the North and the Northeastern parts of Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Cambodia." Brahmawong, Accessed On [August 22, 2022], available at <http://www.buddhabirthplace.net>

Proponents also critique early European interpretations, such as those by Francis Buchanan, who allegedly misheard “Chompoo Dwip” as “Tamsa Dwip” during his study of the ruins at Bodh Gaya, leading to the erroneous association of India with *Jambudvīpa*. They argue that the rose apple tree (*Syzygium jambos*), which influenced *Jambudvīpa*, is more prevalent in Thailand than in India, which is neither typical nor linguistically associated with the term.¹⁸

Furthermore, proponents assert that ancient inscriptions and palm-leaf writings from Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Burma correspond with the cultural and behavioural descriptions found in the Tipitaka, suggesting a closer connection between these regions and the Buddha’s life. For instance, they contend that Sri Lanka received Buddhism from India and Thailand, emphasising Thailand’s central role in Buddhist tradition.

However, these claims are not universally accepted within Thailand. Many Thai scholars and citizens recognise India as the historical *Jambudvīpa*. Even proponents of the Thai-centric view acknowledge that this belief does not reflect mainstream societal opinion. The argument that India is falsely regarded as *Jambudvīpa* is presented as an attempt to assert Thailand’s cultural and historical significance within Buddhism.

3.2. The reinterpretation of *Jambudvīpa* in contemporary Sri Lankan historiography

This section delves into a particular study of how *Jambudvīpa* has been reinterpreted in some contemporary Sri Lankan historiography, examining the key arguments, sources, and motivations.

Recently, a movement has emerged in Sri Lanka that claims *Jambudvīpa* refers to the island rather than India. This reinterpretation is driven by sociopolitical and cultural motives, particularly the reinforcement of national

¹⁸ “Chompoo Fruit” - a kind of wah fruit when ripe is dark pink and look very much like cherry. Wah is a species of big plants commonly found in Thailand. They grow in plenty in the garden, orchards, woods, or rice fields. It is a big tree just about the same size as mango trees but taller. There two types of wah trees: small wah and big wah. Big wah is called Wah Chompoo. They grow in the North and Northern Thailand. It is the origin of the term Chompoo Dwip meaning “the land of Wah Chompoo.” Francis Buchanan misheard the word Chompoo Dwip as Tamsa Dwip at the time when he discovered the ruin Brahmin temple at Bodha Gaya and declared it a Buddhist temple. This clearly shows that Chompoo Dwip or Tamsa-Dwip is not in India. In India, there also exists a type of big wah trees but it is not called Chompoo, Jamu or any other words closer in sound like Choompoo indicating that Chompoo Dwip does not have anything to do with India. The Indian people, in general, are not aware of or have never known that Chompoo Dwip is a name referred to their country. Sad to say, some Thai people get convinced and believe that Chompoo Dwip is India. In conclusion, in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Burma, people’s everyday life are in harmony to those found in the Tipitaka. When people read the Chataka or Buddha’s past lives in the Tipitaka, they have no doubts or suspicious on the ways people act or behave as appear in the various stories.” Brahmawong, The Birthplace of Lord Buddha Found to Be in Thailand: Not In India or Nepal, Accessed On [August 22, 2022], available at <https://buddhabirthplace.com>

identity and religious pride. Contemporary texts and statements by certain Buddhist monks and guys assert that crucial events in the Buddha's life occurred in Sri Lanka. These claims are frequently backed by misinterpretations of archaeological findings and ancient texts despite lacking scholarly consensus or rigorous historical proof. Proponents of this reinterpretation frequently cite the Sri Lankan archaeological sites as evidence of the country's ancient Buddhist heritage. However, mainstream archaeological scholarship typically places these sites within Sri Lanka's well-documented historical and cultural development, distinct from the traditional events associated with *Jambudvīpa*.

In modern Sri Lanka, the concept of *Jambudvīpa* has been reinterpreted and sometimes distorted to construct specific historical narratives that serve various political and ideological agendas. One significant manipulation is the assertion that *Jambudvīpa* refers to Sri Lanka. These narratives often emphasise a glorified and ancient connection to the Buddhist world, legitimising contemporary political power and cultural identity. This reinterpretation is evident in the works of several modern Sinhalese authors and organisations who argue that Sri Lanka, rather than India, is the true *Jambudvīpa*.

3.3. Meewanapalane Dhammalankara Thero's reinterpretation

In the Tripitaka *Pāli* and related commentaries, as well as in later Buddhist literature, the term "*Jambudīpa*" is frequently used. However, Meewanapalane Dhammalankara Thero refers to it as "*Janbudvīpa*." Instead of the letter 'M' (*halanta* M) in "*Jambudīpa*," he artificially created the term "*Janbudvīpa*" by using the letter 'N.'¹⁹ He further divides the term Jan+Budh+Dvīpa, which linguistically and contextually misrepresents the original meaning. Dhammalankara Thero's interpretation posits that the term "Buddha's Born Island" (Jan + Buddh + Dvīpa) signifies that a Buddha can attain the supreme state of Buddhahood only on the island of Sri Lanka. He asserted that Jambudīpa (Janbudvīpa) is located in the interior of Sri Lanka.²⁰ This effort by Dhammalankara Thero attempts to localise all significant places mentioned in the Tripitaka to Sri Lanka, asserting that present-day Sri Lanka, once known as '*Sivhelaya*' (four Sinhalas), is the true *Jambudvīpa* and not India. It can be recognised that Meewanapalane Thero has adopted the views of Professor Chaiyong Brahmawong, who has published papers arguing that India was not the birthplace of the Buddha.²¹

The interpretations presented by Dhammalankara Thero and his associates are misleading and promote nationalistic agendas. Criticising the historical research and writings of Western scholars like George Turner and Wilhelm Geiger, they accuse them of distorting the history of Sri Lanka. Dhammalankara Thero's proponents argue that the established history of Sri Lanka, as constructed by Westerners, lacks credibility and authenticity.

¹⁹ Dhammalankara Thero (2016): 9.

²⁰ Dhammalankara Thero (2009); Dhammalankara Thero (2016): 6.

²¹ *The Birthplace of Lord Buddha Found to Be in Thailand: Not In India or Nepal*. Accessed On August 22, 2022, available at <https://buddhabirthplace.com>.



1 A map of Sri Lanka distorted to show Jambudvīpa within Sri Lanka
 ("Jambudvipaya," October 26, 2010, <https://jambudvipaya.wordpress.com/2010/10/26/dvipa-mean-island-island-in-asia-is-sri-lanka/>.)

Dhammalankara Thero's statements challenge the traditional understanding of *Jambudvīpa* by claiming that this name has historically referred to India. They argue that Tripitaka's references to places associated with the Buddha are locations within Sri Lanka, such as Teldeniya for *Lumbinī* and Hirivadunna for Buddhagaya. This interpretation contradicts established historical and archaeological evidence that supports the Indian subcontinent as the true *Jambudvīpa*, where Lord Buddha lived and taught.²²

For example, they assert that Siddhartha Gautama was born in Heladiva (Sri Lanka) rather than Lumbinī in Nepal and that key locations in the Buddha's life, such as

Lumbinī: Buddha's birth location is in Theldeniya, Kandy.

Buddhagaya: Identified as Hirivadunna, Anuradhapura, where Buddha attained enlightenment.

Isipathana: The site of the first sermon is claimed to be Isinbassagala Viharaya, Anuradhapura.

Kusinārā: The place of Buddha's passing is stated to be Budugala, Ratnapura.

²² "Jambudvipaya," Accessed On September 22, 2022, available at <https://jambudvipaya.wordpress.com/2010/10/26/dvipa-mean-island-island-in-asia-is-sri-lanka/>.

Certain proponents claim that King Ashoka constructed replicas of Buddhist sites in India, suggesting that the original locations were elsewhere. Though widely discussed, this controversial interpretation lacks substantial evidence and scholarly validation. It represents an attempt to redefine Buddhist geography and history in a way that aligns with nationalistic sentiments rather than historical accuracy. Dhammalankara's methodology in presenting these claims undermines the credibility of established historical sources and misleads readers by promoting skewed versions of history.

3.4. The Ariyakammattana Organization and its reinterpretation

Ariya Kammattana is an organisation established to advocate for a particular perspective and promote a region in Sri Lanka called *Jambudvīpa*. This group was conceptualised and developed in Europe and led by Ariyamagga, who acts as a Buddhist monk. They make multiple claims regarding the locations of key Buddhist sites.

Lumbinī: Identified as Dedigama Kotawehera, Kegalle District.

Buddhagaya: Located in Urulewa, Andiyagala Grama Sewa Division, Anuradhapura District.

Isipathana: Proposed to be in the Ibbagamuwa and Mawathagama areas, North Western Province.

Kusinārā: Claimed to be in Avukana and Vijitapura, Anuradhapura District.²³

The Ariyakammattana organisation challenges conventional historical narratives without sufficient evidence or adherence to academic standards by reinterpreting these sacred sites.

3.5. Other contemporary works

Several contemporary Sinhalese texts have contributed to this narrative revisionism. Prominent examples of this manipulation can be found in the writings of various modern Sinhalese authors, who claim that Sri Lanka is the original *Jambudvīpa*. Prominent examples include the following.

(1) Jayaratna Pathiraarachchi:

- "Budun Upan Deshaya Lankawai" (The Birthplace of Buddha is Sri Lanka)

- "Pavatina Lanka Ithihasaya Harida?" (Is the Current History of Sri Lanka Correct?)

- "Gautama Budurajanana Vahansē Vādasit Indrasala Guhāva" (The Cave of Indrasala where Gautama Buddha Resided)

(2) Mukalangamuwa Pannyananda Thero:

- "Budunge Urumaya Sirilaka Derana" (The Heritage of Buddha is Sri Lanka)

²³ Ariyakammattana, "Four Buddhist Sacred Sites," Accessed On Augst 15, 2022, available at <https://ariyakammattana.org/true-sacred-sites/four-buddhist-sacred-sites/>.

- “Sammāvat Suraki Hela Bhikshu Sangharatnaya” (The Monastic Order that Protected the True Discipline)
- “Meth Bosath Bavata Gautama Budunṅen Vivarana Labu Dutugāmunu Maharajanan” (King Dutugemunu Received the Prediction of Buddhahood from Gautama Buddha)
- (3) Hiran Shashi Herath: “Budunṅe Deshaya” (The Land of Buddha)
- (4) Maheshi Panatigala: “Upan Deshayē Idak Nati Vū Gotamanam Hela Budun” (The Hela Gotama Buddha who lost a place in his native land)
- (5) Susanta Dias: “Janbudvīpaye Atulata Kathāva” (The Story Inside of Janbudvīpa)
- (6) P. S. T. Chulavansa: “Budun Nohadunana Indiyāvē Dakuṇu Deshaya” (The Southern Land of India that Did Not Recognise the Buddha); “Atita Śrī Vibhutiya hā Kirula Pāladi Hela Rajavaru” (Past Glory and Crowned Sinhala Kings).

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR BUDDHIST SOLIDARITY

The reinterpretation of Jambudvīpa as Thailand or Sri Lanka challenges the shared understanding of Buddhist history, promoting exclusivity and risking division within the global Buddhist community. To better contextualise these ideological motivations, incorporating references to broader theoretical frameworks such as Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983)²⁴ on nationalism or Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978)²⁵ would strengthen the analysis.

One primary concern is the rise of revisionist ideologies that use these reinterpretations to assert cultural and religious supremacy. For instance, Proponents in Thailand and Sri Lanka claim their territories as central to Buddhist history, often overlooking well-documented evidence that identifies the Indian subcontinent as Buddhism’s historical heartland. This approach fuels regional rivalries and creates divisions among Buddhist communities worldwide, counteracting Buddhism’s foundational principles of harmony and inclusivity. Such historical distortions weaken Buddhist history and diminish trust among practitioners.”

The dangers of sectarianism and division have long been recognised in Buddhist teachings. The *Sāmagāma Sutta* (MN 104) outlines six sources of disputes (*vivādamūlāni*), including anger (*kodho*), contempt (*makkho*), and adherence to one’s views (*sanditṭhiparāmāsī*),²⁶ all of which are evident in modern nationalist reinterpretations of Jambudīpa. Similarly, the *Vivādamūla Sutta* (AN 6.36) highlights these same causes of conflict and prescribes loving-kindness (*metta*) in bodily action, speech, and thought as the means to overcome them: “Loving-kindness in bodily actions... loving-kindness in

²⁴ Anderson (1983): 698.

²⁵ Said (1978): 324.

²⁶ *Majjima Nikāya* (1997): 1189.

speech... loving-kindness in thoughts.”²⁷

Such teachings align with the *Samgīti Sutta* (DN 33), which states, ‘For a united Sangha is happy and without disputes’ (*Samaggo hi saṅgho mudito niradhiso*).²⁸ This affirms that unity, not territorial claims, is central to Buddhist practice and harmony.

These claims hinder international efforts to preserve the Buddhist heritage. UNESCO’s recognition of sites like Lumbinī and Bodh Gaya as World Heritage Sites reflects a global acknowledgement of their historical and spiritual significance.²⁹ Attempts to relocate the narratives associated with these sites to other regions, such as Sri Lanka or Thailand, dilute their authenticity and complicate conservation efforts. For example, the excavation at Lumbinī, led by Professor Robin Coningham, revealed structures dating back to the Buddha’s time, providing strong archaeological evidence for its historical status.³⁰ Reinterpreting such findings risks delegitimising these efforts and diminishing their global importance.

Additionally, these reinterpretations affect the transmission of Buddhist teachings by altering canonical texts’ geographical and cultural context. The Tripitaka and its commentaries repeatedly refer to *Jambudvīpa* as the Indian subcontinent, framing it as the heartland of Buddhism.³¹ Redefining *Jambudvīpa* to fit modern nationalist narratives disrupts the historical continuity of these texts and undermines their credibility. For instance, the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa* explicitly distinguish Sri Lanka from *Jambudvīpa*, yet proponents of alternative claims often ignore these distinctions.³²

The First Buddhist Council, described in the *Cūlavagga* of the Vinaya Piṭaka, reinforces the need to maintain historical and geographical accuracy in Buddhist teachings: “Come, friends, let us recite the Dhamma and the Vinaya.”³³

The council, held at Rājagaha, was convened by the most venerable Mahā Kassapa to ensure that Dhamma and Vinaya were not misrepresented or forgotten.

The divisive impact of these reinterpretations is further exacerbated by using pseudohistorical narratives to assert the primacy of specific nations in Buddhist history. This approach detracts from the collective effort to address contemporary challenges facing Buddhism, such as declining monastic participation and the commercialisation of sacred sites. By focusing on nationalist agendas, Buddhist communities risk losing sight of the universal values of compassion, wisdom, and mindfulness that underpin the religion.

²⁷ *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (1997): 945. “*Mettaṃ kāyakammaṃ... mettaṃ vacīkammaṃ... mettaṃ manokammaṃ*”

²⁸ *Dīgha Nikāya* (1997): 679.

²⁹ Coningham et al. (2013): 1104 - 1123.

³⁰ Coningham et al. (2013): 1104 - 1123.

³¹ Gombrich (1975): 125.

³² *The Mahāvaṃsa: The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*.

³³ “*Handa mayaṃ, āvuso, dhammaṃ ca vinayaṃ ca saṅgāyāma*”

To preserve Buddhist solidarity, it is crucial to reaffirm a historically grounded understanding of *Jambudvīpa* and resist the politicisation of Buddhist history. Collaborative scholarship that brings together experts from diverse cultural and national backgrounds can play a pivotal role in countering divisive narratives. The global Buddhist community can reinforce its unity and contribute to a more harmonious world by fostering a shared commitment to preserving historical integrity.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOSTERING UNITY

A multifaceted approach is required to address the challenges posed by modern reinterpretations of *Jambudvīpa* and strengthen Buddhist solidarity. The following recommendations aim to promote unity and inclusivity within the global Buddhist community.

One key step is promoting collaborative scholarship. International research groups of scholars from diverse cultural and national backgrounds should be established to study Buddhist heritage. These groups should prioritise evidence-based methodologies to ensure historical accuracy. Additionally, joint archaeological projects can help verify claims and preserve historically significant sites such as Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, and Sarnath.

The *Dutiyamārapāsaṣutta Sutta* reinforces the importance of spreading the true Dhamma beyond national boundaries, rejecting exclusivist claims: “Go forth, O monks, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and humans.”³⁴

Educational initiatives are also vital. Developing curricula that emphasise Buddhist history’s shared and inclusive nature is essential. Such curricula should incorporate canonical texts, inscriptions, and archaeological findings. Public seminars, workshops, and lectures can be organised to dispel pseudohistorical narratives and promote an evidence-based understanding of *Jambudvīpa*. Furthermore, translating key Buddhist texts into multiple languages will make authentic teachings accessible to a global audience.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Buddha’s teachings transcend national and geographical boundaries, emphasizing wisdom, compassion, and unity. However, modern efforts to redefine *Jambudvīpa* as Thailand or Sri Lanka distort Buddhist history and threaten global Buddhist solidarity. Rooted in nationalist historiography, these claims undermine historical accuracy, fragment the Buddhist community, and challenge the authenticity of established Buddhist texts and archaeological evidence.

To safeguard Buddhist unity, upholding a rigorous, evidence-based understanding of *Jambudvīpa* through scholarly research, academic collaboration, and inter-Buddhist dialogue is imperative. Prioritising historical integrity and fostering inclusivity will strengthen Buddhist solidarity, ensuring the preservation of its shared heritage and the universal values of the Dharma.

³⁴ *Samyutta Nikāya* (1997). “Caratha, bhikkhave, cārikaṃ bahujaṇahitāya bahujaṇasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ”

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THE ROLE OF BUDDHISM IN GLOBAL UNITY: COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS TO PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract:

This study examines how Buddhism contributes its wisdom to fostering global unity by providing cooperative pathways toward peace and mutual understanding. In a world increasingly marked by conflict, division, and social unrest, the Buddha's teachings present a framework for harmonious coexistence through the values of compassion (*karuṇā*), dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), and nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*). Buddhism stresses the interdependence of all beings, encouraging empathy, mindful communication, and ethical responsibility, which are essential for fostering unity. The study explores historical examples of Buddhist diplomacy, such as the 14th Dalai Lama's and Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh's peace efforts, and highlights contemporary initiatives led by Buddhist leaders who engage in interfaith dialogue and promote environmental sustainability. Practical applications of Buddhist principles in conflict resolution and mindfulness education are also discussed, illustrating Buddhism's potential to address current global challenges. Ultimately, this study underscores Buddhism's role as a unifying philosophy that can bridge cultural and ideological divides, inspiring collaborative efforts for a more peaceful and understanding world. By understanding and applying Buddhist principles, we can create a more inclusive, compassionate, and harmonious world.

Keywords: *Buddhism and global unity, compassion (karuṇā), conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, mindfulness education.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, issues of global unity and peace are increasingly urgent. Nations, communities, and individuals are faced with a range of challenges that foster division and conflict. Whether it is political tensions between countries, racial and religious divides within societies, or social unrest sparked by inequality, these issues underline a universal need for peace and understanding. The rapid flow of information and opinions through digital platforms often amplifies these divisions, while problems like climate change, economic disparities, and humanitarian crises demand cooperative solutions that can bridge cultural and ideological gaps. Against this backdrop, the search for a unifying philosophy that promotes compassion, mutual respect, and harmony is more relevant than ever.

Buddhism, with its emphasis on interdependent co-arising (or dependent arising: *paṭiccasamuppāda*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and loving-kindness (*mettā*), offers valuable insights and practices that can foster global unity.¹ Unlike approaches centered around competition or division, Buddhism teaches that all beings are interconnected, advocating for a compassionate perspective that transcends cultural, social, and national boundaries.² Central to Buddhist teachings is the principle of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) and the pursuit of peace, which encourage individuals to resolve conflicts mindfully, build connections, and cultivate empathy.³ These values serve as a foundation for harmonious coexistence, reminding individuals and communities of the importance of caring for one another and for the world we share.

With the aforementioned purpose, this study attempts to explore how Buddhist values and practices can contribute to global unity and promote pathways to peace and understanding. By examining Buddhism's approach to interconnectedness, compassion, and nonviolence, the study will delve into how these teachings provide a suitable framework for collaborative peacebuilding.

Ultimately, this study seeks to illuminate Buddhism's role as an important unifying force with the potential to address today's complex challenges, bridging divides and offering collaborative pathways to a more peaceful and understanding world. In a time when collective action is crucial, Buddhism's philosophy of interconnectedness and compassion can inspire and guide efforts toward achieving global harmony that benefits all.

II. METHODS

In this research paper, we adopt a multidisciplinary approach to exploring Buddhism's role in promoting global unity. It begins with a review of Buddhist texts and teachings, focusing on key principles like compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) as essential foundations

¹ Nyani (2018), p. 21.

² Sumit (2023), p. 48.

³ See Mun (2009), p. 7, and Bawa (2024), p. 363.

for peacebuilding. The next step involves analyzing historical case studies, such as the peace missions of the 14th Dalai Lama and Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, as well as modern Buddhist initiatives that encourage interfaith dialogue, social harmony, and ecological sustainability. Drawing on existing research and reports, these examples will provide a well-rounded perspective on how Buddhist values and practices contribute to global peace and mutual understanding.

III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

3.1. Essential Buddhist teachings on unity and peace

At the heart of Buddhist philosophy is the principle of dependent arising (*S. prāṭīyasaṃutpāda*, P. *paṭiccasamuppāda*), which teaches that all things and phenomena are interconnected. The Buddha expressed this principle as: “When there is this, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When there is not this, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.”⁴ In the framework of this discussion, the idea of dependent arising serves as a foundation for understanding global unity, as it suggests that the well-being of an individual or group of people is intimately connected to the well-being of others. The concept underscores the necessity of cooperation and respect, showing that no person or nation exists in isolation. Dependent arising, therefore, becomes a bridge connecting diverse cultures and communities, fostering collaboration to address shared challenges like conflict, inequality, and environmental crises.

Closely tied to interdependent co-arising are the values of compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*), which are central to Buddhist practice. Compassion represents the heartfelt desire to alleviate the suffering of others, while loving-kindness embodies the wish for all beings to experience happiness and well-being.⁵ These qualities create a profound sense of empathy, allowing individuals to connect beyond personal or cultural boundaries. By cultivating compassion and loving-kindness, people are guided to respond to conflicts with understanding rather than hostility. For example, in interpersonal relationships, these values inspire individuals to listen attentively and seek resolution rather than escalate disputes. At a broader level, they encourage nations and leaders to adopt policies that prioritize humanitarian goals and peacebuilding.

The principle of nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) stands as another pillar of Buddhist teachings, offering a transformative approach to conflict and aggression. As the Buddha said: “Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a law eternal.”⁶ Nonviolence goes beyond the absence of physical harm; it encompasses thoughts, words, and actions that

⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* (1995), p. 655 (M. II. 32); and *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (2000), p. 575 (S. II. 65).

⁵ Fowler (1999), p. 60-2; and Harvey (2012), p. 154.

⁶ *Dhp.* 5, p. 22.

avoid causing pain to others.⁷ This holistic commitment to peace aligns with the Buddhist ethical path, fostering a world where differences are navigated without resorting to harm. Through nonviolence, societies are reminded that strength lies not in domination but in the ability to resolve disagreements with integrity and mutual respect.

Supporting non-violence is the practice of right speech (*sammā vācā*), which is the third element in the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*). Right speech emphasizes the importance of truthful, kind, and constructive communication. According to Gautam Sharda, “right speech is a mindful practice”.⁸ In the context of peaceful coexistence, mindful communication plays a pivotal role. When individuals and communities engage in mindful dialogue, misunderstandings and hostilities diminish, paving the way for reconciliation and trust, because right speech “gives expression both to wisdom and to love and compassion”.⁹ Therefore, the right speech can become one of the effective tools for resolving conflicts at all levels, from personal disagreements to international negotiations.

Together, these teachings create a comprehensive framework for promoting unity and peace. Interdependence provides the understanding of shared existence, while compassion and loving-kindness offer emotional pathways to connection. Non-violence and right speech act as practical strategies to embody those ideals in daily life. By integrating these principles, individuals and societies are equipped to transcend divisions, build harmonious relationships, and contribute to a more peaceful world. Buddhism, therefore, not only presents a philosophy but also a practical guide for achieving global unity and fostering an enduring culture of peace.

3.2. The impact of Buddhist role models on the history of global unity and peace

Buddhism has long played a pivotal role in fostering unity across cultures and nations, particularly through its contributions to diplomatic efforts aimed at peace. The historical spread of Buddhism, combined with Buddhist diplomacy, since the time of Emperor Ashoka, has significantly influenced cross-cultural relations. In recent decades, prominent figures like the 14th Dalai Lama and Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh have exemplified how Buddhist principles can transcend geographical and cultural boundaries, encouraging understanding, compassion, and peace.

One notable example of Buddhist diplomacy is the Dalai Lama’s peace missions, which have been central to his efforts in promoting global unity.¹⁰ As the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, the 14th Dalai Lama has consistently advocated for nonviolence, compassion, and mindful dialogue as essential

⁷ Barua (2023), p. 104.

⁸ Sharda (2019), p. 33.

⁹ Sangharakshita (1999), p. 57.

¹⁰ Zhang (2012), p. 37 - 40.

tools for conflict resolution.¹¹ As such, he is considered a “symbol of peace and harmony”.¹² His diplomatic efforts include engaging with world leaders, participating in interfaith dialogues, and promoting human rights. Through his peaceful approach to international relations, the Dalai Lama has been instrumental in promoting unity not only within Buddhist communities but also between different faiths and nations. His teachings on the interconnectedness of all beings have resonated globally, highlighting the importance of mutual respect and understanding in fostering harmonious coexistence.

Similarly, Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh (1926 - 2022), a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, has made significant contributions to Buddhist diplomacy through his peace efforts. Known for his work as a peace activist during the Vietnam War, Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized mindfulness and compassion as means of resolving conflict.¹³ He pioneered the concept of “engaged Buddhism”, which combines meditation with active involvement in social and political issues. His influence extended beyond Vietnam as he worked internationally to advocate for peace, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Thich Nhat Hanh’s peace missions were not just about addressing specific conflicts but also about promoting a broader message of unity and reconciliation.¹⁴ His work can, therefore, be seen as exemplifying how Buddhist principles could be applied to foster global harmony.

Ultimately, the historical role of Buddhism in diplomacy demonstrates its ability to unite people across ideological divides. Buddhist leaders, through their commitment to peace, have illustrated that the Buddha’s teachings are not just spiritual guidelines but also powerful tools for resolving conflict and promoting unity. Through their examples, Buddhism has become a bridge between cultures, encouraging cooperation and mutual understanding in an increasingly divided world. By advocating for compassion, non-violence, and mindful dialogue, figures like the 14th Dalai Lama and Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh have shown how Buddhism can contribute to global unity.

3.2.1. Practical applications of Buddhist principles in collaborative efforts for global harmony

Buddhist principles, particularly those of mindfulness, compassion, and nonviolence, offer profound insights into resolving conflicts and fostering peace in a world increasingly marked by division. As global conflicts continue to escalate, the need for innovative and holistic solutions becomes ever more urgent. Buddhism, with its emphasis on inner peace, interconnectedness, and ethical responsibility, offers valuable tools for addressing both interpersonal and international disputes.¹⁵ In this discussion, we will present two important areas where Buddhist principles can be applied in collaborative efforts for global

¹¹ Stril-Rever (2016), p. 111; and Tongvijit (2021), p. 371.

¹² Thapa (2014), p. 3.

¹³ Fukuoka (2023), p. 203, and Sankapal (2024), p. 89.

¹⁴ See Edelglass (2009), p. 419 - 27.

¹⁵ cf. Yeh (2006), p. 91 - 112; and Tanabe (2016), p. 1 - 14.

harmony: (1) reconciliation and conflict resolution and (2) the promotion of mindfulness-based peace education.

Reconciliation and conflict resolution: One of the core teachings of Buddhism is the importance of mindfulness and compassion in all aspects of life. These principles can be particularly effective in diplomatic and conflict resolution settings, where the goal is not only to resolve immediate disputes but also to build long-lasting relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. Buddhist reconciliation practices, such as those employed in Buddhist-majority countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, focus on creating a space for open dialogue, free of judgment or hostility, where all parties involved can express their views and listen to each other deeply.¹⁶ This approach is grounded in the Buddhist belief that all beings are interconnected, and it encourages the cultivation of empathy toward others, even those with whom one is in conflict.

According to Thich Nhat Tu, a Vietnamese scholar and practitioner, suggests that mindfulness enables practitioners to clearly observe their own emotions and reactions, allowing them to respond thoughtfully rather than impulsively.¹⁷ In conflict resolution, Buddhist mindfulness practices are particularly useful because they help individuals and leaders stay calm and present in emotionally charged situations. This can be especially helpful in international diplomacy, where the stakes are high and the potential for misunderstanding is wide. By using mindfulness, negotiators can focus on the present moment, creating a more constructive atmosphere for dialogue. Moreover, compassionate listening – caring for others and wishing them well – can foster a spirit of collaboration and goodwill, even in the tensest negotiations.¹⁸

Furthermore, Buddhist principles advocate for non-attachment, which can be crucial in conflict resolution processes. Non-attachment does not mean indifference or passivity, but rather the ability to engage with the world and others without being driven by ego or personal agendas.¹⁹ This approach encourages negotiators and diplomats to remain open to compromise and flexible in their thinking, reducing the rigidity that often escalates conflict.

By focusing on the collective good rather than individual gain, Buddhist-inspired conflict resolution models encourage the creation of solutions that benefit all parties involved. In this way, Buddhism's emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and non-attachment offers a holistic framework for resolving conflicts in a way that fosters long-term peace and global harmony.

Mindful education for peace: In addition to its applications in reconciliation and conflict resolution, Buddhism's emphasis on mindfulness can be applied to education, particularly in schools and communities, to promote peace and

¹⁶ See e.g., Satha-Anand (2020), p. 59 - 74; and Makhumtup et al. (2024), p. 404 - 12.

¹⁷ Thich Nhat Tu (2018), p. 39 - 43.

¹⁸ For reviews, see Rothbart (2019), p. 91; and Klimecki (2019), p. 310.

¹⁹ cf. Sahdra et al. (2016), p. 819 - 29; and Hong & Shogenji (2023), p. 745 - 66.

unity.²⁰ Mindfulness programs in educational settings have already shown promise in fostering greater resilience, emotional regulation, and empathy among students,²¹ which are key elements in reducing conflict and building a sense of community. By teaching students how to be present with their emotions and thoughts without judgment, mindfulness can help them develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them. This self-awareness helps to enhance emotional intelligence, enabling individuals to navigate conflicts with greater resilience and empathy.

Moreover, mindfulness education offers a powerful tool for cultivating unity in diverse communities. As schools and communities become increasingly multicultural and pluralistic, it is essential to foster understanding and respect among individuals from different backgrounds and belief systems. Mindfulness-based education encourages students to listen attentively and with an open heart to others' perspectives, reducing prejudice and building bridges between different groups.²² When individuals practice mindful communication, they are less likely to engage in reactive behaviors or misunderstandings, thereby contributing to more harmonious relationships.

Many studies have shown that mindfulness education also supports resilience,²³ which is essential for overcoming the challenges that arise in conflict-prone environments. Whether in schools affected by violence or communities struggling with social unrest, mindfulness practices can help individuals and groups develop the mental fortitude needed to navigate difficult situations. By focusing on the present moment and regulating emotions, mindfulness helps reduce stress, anxiety, fear, and insecurity – psychological states commonly arising in conflicts –²⁴ enabling people to approach challenges with a calm and clear mind.

Ultimately, the integration of mindfulness into education is a powerful way to instill the values of compassion, empathy, and interconnection in future generations.²⁵ By embedding these principles into educational curricula, we can create a more peaceful and understanding society. The practice of mindfulness not only aids in resolving current conflicts but also works proactively to prevent future disputes by fostering a culture of peace and cooperation.

In brief, Buddhist principles offer a unique and transformative approach to addressing global conflicts. By integrating mindfulness and compassion-based practices into conflict resolution and education, we can build a foundation for lasting peace. Whether through diplomatic efforts, community initiatives, or educational programs, the teachings of Buddhism provide powerful tools for fostering empathy, understanding, and unity in a fragmented world. As

²⁰ Salomon (2014), p. 1134 - 36.

²¹ Meiklejohn et al. (2012), p. 295.

²² See Huston (2007), p. 51 - 8.

²³ e.g., Meiklejohn (2012), p. 291 - 307; and Mrazek et al. (2017), p. 139 - 52.

²⁴ Tophoff (2016), p. 465.

²⁵ Fulton (2018), p. 52 - 4.

we continue to face complex global challenges, the application of Buddhist principles has the potential to inspire profound change, helping to bridge divides and promote harmony among all people.

3.2.2. Challenges and opportunities for Buddhism in promoting global unity

In this part of the discussion, we argue that in its pursuit of fostering cross-cultural understanding and promoting global unity, Buddhism faces a variety of challenges, particularly in regions with differing political or religious ideologies. These barriers may hinder the full potential of Buddhism to unite diverse communities and promote peace on a global scale. Nevertheless, there are also several opportunities for Buddhism to overcome these obstacles and expand its unifying influence across the world.

One of the primary challenges Buddhism encounters in promoting global unity is the presence of cultural and political barriers.²⁶ For instance, in some countries where religious orthodoxy plays a central role, the introduction of Buddhist principles might be viewed as a challenge to existing religious practices. This resistance is particularly noticeable in regions where other dominant religions, such as Christianity or Islam, may not be receptive to alternative philosophies. The idea of nonviolence, which is central to Buddhism, may also be at odds with political ideologies that emphasize militarism or power-based conflict resolution.

Despite these challenges, there are several opportunities through which Buddhism can increase its impact and promote global unity. One of the most significant opportunities lies in the use of digital platforms.²⁷ In the age of technology, Buddhism can reach a vast and diverse audience through online platforms, social media, and digital resources. These platforms allow Buddhist teachings to be disseminated to people who may not have direct access to traditional Buddhist communities. By leveraging digital tools, Buddhist leaders and practitioners can engage with people from all walks of life, across cultural and geographical boundaries, thereby fostering a broader understanding of Buddhist principles.

Furthermore, we propose that educational partnerships represent another powerful opportunity for Buddhism to expand its influence. By collaborating with academic institutions, both in the East and the West, Buddhism can be integrated into curricula that promote cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. Educational programs that focus on mindfulness and compassion can help nurture a new generation of global citizens who value peace and cooperation.²⁸ These partnerships also offer a platform for Buddhist scholars and practitioners to engage with students and academics, deepening their understanding of Buddhist teachings and their relevance to modern global issues.

²⁶ See McMahan (2012), p. 157.

²⁷ cf. Krusunthornsangkhapinit & Laolee (2015), p. 8 - 20.

²⁸ See Ludvik (2023), p. 275 - 97.

Community engagement is also crucial for Buddhism's efforts in promoting unity. Initiatives such as charity work and environmental activism not only reflect Buddhist values but also help to build bridges between communities of different religious and cultural backgrounds.²⁹ By addressing common challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, and social inequality, Buddhism can demonstrate its practical relevance to the contemporary world, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and interconnectedness among people of diverse backgrounds.

In conclusion, while Buddhism faces several challenges in promoting global unity, including cultural and political barriers, it also possesses ample opportunities to overcome these obstacles and extend its reach worldwide. Digital platforms, educational partnerships, and community engagement offer powerful tools for Buddhism to amplify its message of peace, compassion, and interconnectedness, helping to create a more harmonious and unified global community.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the teachings of Buddhism provide a powerful framework for fostering global unity, emphasizing compassion, nonviolence, and the principle of interdependent co-arising as foundational values. Through both historical influence and modern initiatives, Buddhism has consistently contributed to peace and understanding across diverse communities and cultures. Key Buddhist practices – such as mindfulness, loving-kindness, and ethical conduct – serve as pathways to personal growth while also fostering harmony in communities and inspiring global collaboration on issues like environmental stewardship and conflict resolution. By valuing empathy and unity over division, Buddhism provides a model that resonates deeply in today's divided world.

As we reflect on the potential of these principles, we are inspired to integrate Buddhist values into daily life, recognizing the potential for small actions to create lasting positive change. Whether through practicing mindfulness in our interactions, advocating for compassionate policies, or engaging in community service, each step can contribute to a more unified and understanding world.

Looking to the future, Buddhist teachings offer a beacon of hope, reminding us that a peaceful, interconnected, and harmonious world is possible through collaboration and a shared commitment to the well-being of all beings.

²⁹ e.g., Darlington (2018), p. 77 - 93; and Hoang et al. (2019), p. 1075 - 87.

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GENDER EQUALITY AS A PATH TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

Men and Women are the two wheels of society. Men earn money for their families, and the rest of the responsibilities fall on the heads of women. Their roles are often defined by societies and stereotypes, but women's contributions to society are not limited by these traditions. Men and women play a critical role in peace-building processes worldwide, but women's contributions are often underappreciated and undervalued. The discourse on gender equality and sustainable peace has gained momentum in contemporary peace studies, human rights discussions, and interfaith dialogues. Buddhism, with its core teachings on compassion, wisdom, and non-discrimination, provides a valuable framework for understanding how gender equality can contribute to enduring peace. Buddhist doctrines, historical practices, and modern applications of gender equality present a comprehensive analysis of their role in promoting a peaceful society.

This paper explores the intricate relationship between gender equality and sustainable peace from a Buddhist perspective. It delves into the fundamental teachings of Buddhism that advocate equality, nonviolence, and interdependence,

Keywords: *Women, men, peace, conflict, resolution, gender equality.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Men and women are considered the two wheels of a cart. They should be considered equal if we want the cart to advance. The movement will be impaired if one wheel is smaller than the other. Women play a vital role in society. They are the backbone of families and are crucial to the growth and development

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of societies. Yet, for centuries, women have been relegated to the sidelines and subjected to discrimination and marginalization. In recent years, however, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of women in society.

The concepts of peace have been rich in content across various religious and philosophical traditions. From the early period of human thinking, there has been a clear understanding that war is neither a natural phenomenon nor the will of the Gods. A peaceful world belongs to a society where people can work and live together in harmony and friendship, and the domination of one group over another is a major obstacle to peace. In Eastern religions, there is a strong emphasis on links between spiritual life and action for social justice. The Buddhist traditions emphasize justice, equity, nonviolence, concern for the well-being of others, and compassion among living beings. They also reflect a well-ordered state of mind, inner peace, and harmony within a culture. Tranquillity in the inner state of mind and harmonious interpersonal relationships contribute to universal peace.

II. FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN BUDDHISM

The Buddha is the only spiritual leader who paved the way for the upliftment of women. In the Brahmin religion, women are considered despicable, and the patriarchal society of the Hindu religion has always placed women subordinate to men. The Hindu religion has strategically kept women backward and slaves to men, denying them the right to knowledge. But Buddha preached to men and women without any discrimination and allowed women to embrace Buddhism with equal rights. Buddha Dhamma paved the way for the emancipation and progress of women. The Hindu religion, which denied women the right to education and equality, contributed to the regression of women. Buddha is a true leader of women's emancipation.

Buddha preached to a group of five *Parivaajakas* who embraced the Buddha Dhamma and became free. Buddha preached the same to *Yasa's mother* and his wife. They became the first *upasikas* of the Buddha Dhamma.¹ After *Yasa* became a monk, Buddha went to his place, seated at his father's place, and imparted wisdom to his mother and wife. He enlightened them with the truth of unhappiness, its inevitability, ways to fight unhappiness, etc. Just like an unpigmented cloth is colored effortlessly, likewise, the mother of *Yasa* and his wife internalized the Buddha Dhamma and gained a new insight into the Dhamma. They embraced Buddha Dhamma without any doubt and said to the Buddha, "It's a wonder monk! Sublime monk! Just like a covered thing is uncovered, a person who has lost his way finds his destination, just like a torch bearer. The most compassionate Gautama Buddha, refuting all sorts of inequality, gives the message of equality and well-being of every living being. Unlike Gautama Buddha, the religious gurus of many other religions have given a secondary place to women in society. You have enlightened us with the Dhamma. We go to the Buddha for refuge, we go to Dhamma for refuge, and we go to Sangha for refuge. Please accept us as the *upasikas* of your Dhamma."

¹ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1997): 136.

In this way, they became the first upasika chanting these three vows.”² The Buddha paved the way for the upliftment of women through his Dhamma.

The Buddha showered equal compassion, affability, and equality for all the four constituents, namely Bhikkhu, Bhikkhunis, Upasakas, and Upasikas, which is experienced through the conversation between the Buddha and Mara. Mara comes to the Buddha and asks him to enter parinirvana, but Buddha replies, “I will not enter parinirvana until there will be Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, and Arhats, who concentrate signal-mindedly on cultivating merit and treat all beings with reverence; being the objects of the people’s devotion, they will impartially preach and convert. They will pity the poor, keep the old in their thoughts, and take care of those in poverty and difficulty. They will constantly induce the people to worship and serve scriptures and images, doing all good acts that bring merit; their wills and natures will be kind and good.” He preached all equality.

The ideal society of Buddhist tradition provides a structure to prove the Buddhist point of view on gender without condemning the social attitude. The request made by Buddha to the MahPajapati Gtami is a very good example of the Buddhist approach to showing its attitude on gender to society. Before her *parinibbana*, when MahPajapati Gtami³ visited Buddha to get permission, Buddha requested MahPajapati Gtami to clear doubts about a woman’s capability to attain spiritual attainments. He never stopped women, but he was worried about their security and dignity; lots of thinkers misinterpreted his understanding. The Buddhist tradition has a positive viewpoint on the physical and mental differences in gender.

The social roles of the individual are described with this framework. For instance, in *Sigloda Sutta*,⁴ Buddha discusses the relationship between husband and wife, which is a good example of that. When King Ksala heard he had a daughter, he was not happy, as he believed in the social attitude of women. Buddha explained the importance of the woman’s social role, which is based on her physical and mental differences in gender, as follows:

“Even if it’s a woman, would be nobly nourished by the king, wise, virtuous, worship the mother-in-law, and love her husband. Those born to her will be heroes and district leaders. The son of such a good wife might even be the advisor to kings.” The responsibilities discussed there are based on the physical and mental differences of gender. The responsibilities *bhikkhu* and *bhikkun* have to each other, which are mentioned above, are another example of it.⁵

When describing the social role, Buddhist teachings emphasize the individual’s spiritual development and the outcome one can gain. According to it, the other person’s response regarding that matter is immaterial. When it comes to virtuousness or fulfilling responsibilities, other people’s actions

² Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1997): 195.

³ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1997): 194.

⁴ T. W. Rhys Davids, 2016, p. 173.

or reactions are immaterial to the individual. The things an individual does physically, verbally, or mentally will matter. Therefore, the virtuousness of a spouse is irrelevant when it comes to the spiritual development of the person. If the spouse is virtuous, it will help. However, if it is not there, individuals can use that as a great opportunity to develop mentally. *Uggaha Gahapatisutta* in *AguttaraNikaya*⁵ is a very good example of understanding the way a spouse should develop his or her spirituality. In that *sutta*, Buddha lists out the responsibilities of a wife, as he advises to daughters of *UggahaGahapati*, and mentions that a woman endowed with these five things, after death, is born in the company of the gods of pleasantness.

“Do not belittle your husband, who supports you actively and zealously.
Do not disturb the master’s mind and make him angry with selfish thoughts.

The wise should honor the master and all the elders in the clan

With aroused effort zealously attend to the lower staff too,

Do the wishes of the master and protect all

The woman who sees to the interests of the husband, thus,”

In this *sutta*, it is not mentioned that a wife should perform the above duties if her husband is virtuous. Whether the husband is virtuous or not, if a wife can perform the above duties with a whole heart, she can attain the spiritual development that she wishes. This applies to the husband in the same manner. If both follow the Buddha’s teachings, their family will become peaceful.

The Buddha explains the qualities of women; Women are devoid of violence, theft, adultery, Prevarication, and drug addiction. Because of these qualities, women progress a lot in their lives. Women remain happy and healthy because of faith, grace, knowledge, sacrifice, and wisdom. If men get this quality, then no conflict and no worries will arise in the families.

An incident about the Buddha staying in the forest of Amrapali in Vaishali throws light on how much respect the Buddha had given to women. Amrapali invited the Buddha and his Sangha to her place to offer food.⁶ The Buddha accepted the invitation, and at that time, the *Lichhavi* Prince came to meet the *Bhikkhu* sangha and invited them to his palace for lunch. But the Buddha refused his invitation and gave respect to a lay woman by accepting her invitation. Prakruti was a Chandali. Once, when she was filling the water, Anand requested water. Prakruti regretted being a lower caste woman and therefore her inability to offer him water. But Ananda said that castes have no importance to them and drank water from the hands of Prakruti.⁷ After that, the Buddha preached Prakruti. These examples show us that men and women are equal. Buddha never discriminated, and he always promoted gender

⁵ T. W. Rhys Davids, 2016, p. 103.

⁶ T. W. Rhys Davids, 2016, p. 103.

⁷ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, 1997, p. 197.

equality. The impact of Dhamma was positive, and because of that, societies were peaceful.

III. INTERCONNECTEDNESS: GENDER, HARMONY, AND PEACE

Gender equity and equality have been very popular topics in the past few decades. It not only influences the social status of the individual but also affects the religious aspects as well. Devotees of some theological religions even debated on the gender of the god and also suggested to God in a gender-neutral manner. Buddhist teachings have a somewhat different approach to gender, as it seems,

- i. one's attachment to the gender as an obstacle to the spiritual development,
- ii. gender as a factor which is impermanent like other factors,
- iii. gender is a factor that is bound to one's mental state, and can be changed by changing the mental state of the individual.

Individuals born into the biological categories or are assigned to the stereotyped social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity. Thus, gender has a lot to do with the social behaviour and characteristics and the construction of masculine and feminine with the linked to power relations arising from the practice of attaching meaning to gender identities. Emotion, body, and nature have been historically associated with the identity of the female gender. It has been regarded as inferior to the male gender identity characterized by reason and mind. Men are supposed to kill and die on behalf of the state to prove their manhood, while women have to be properly subservient to satisfy the demand of a military comprised largely of men. Competitive, organizational, and exclusive masculine values support a model of hierarchical human relationships. These values are often reflected in the bureaucracies of states, churches, corporations, political parties, and the military. State-building is a masculine project that encourages a willingness to engage in violence. Men, considered an aggressive biological class, are given a license to engage in wars and are motivated to fight. The arms race and other national security priorities were the main factors in the subordination of women. Social welfare is traded for military spending, and it further exacerbates female poverty. The growing entry and success of women in politics and other institutional arenas have been enhanced by women's adoption of masculine values as a strategy to be accepted for an authority role. As the prime minister of Britain, he undermined advanced social services for women and children. Several prominent women in the highest governmental decision-making positions do not remain as peacemakers but as war heroines. This is a reason for conflict. Peace depends on individuals. If men do not change their mentality and do not give her equal opportunity, then how will she be able to prove herself? This is a root cause of conflict.

Nowadays, both women and men are victims of sexism and racism. Human rights abuse, poverty, and particular types of violence afflict women more than men; violence and sexual and emotional abuse of women are major concerns

in many parts of the world. Direct violence against women includes rape and unorganized random physical abuse as well as attacks on women in organized war. Some women suffer from the demands of dowry, sex, and domestic violence. Day by day, human become animals and lose their emotions. Greed is one of the major reasons. In India, every second, a crime against a woman is increasing. This conflict lost its capabilities and caliber. Casteism, statism, social riots, and domestic violence are increasing. This conflict destroys peace and harmony. If society has a conflict, then we will not be able to establish peace and harmony. If all relationships grow based on justice, equality, and fraternity, then society becomes peaceful, and all will live in harmony.

In many countries having insurgencies, like Peru, Colombia, and other places, there have been reports of assaults on women by the security forces.⁸ Yet, most governments failed to condemn or punish those who committed rape and killings. Since time immemorial, structural violence has severely affected women in many impoverished countries. Among the poorest of the poor are young widows and elderly individuals with little capacity to manage household economies. The high level of as well as harsh working conditions has put a particularly heavy burden on female heads of households who do not have adult males to help them. Even in contemporary times, young women provide a hard-working labour force for multinational corporations, but are paid low wages. Women in certain regions of the world form the majority of subsistence farmers. In particular, women produce a percentage of the food. However, with the introduction of a market-oriented economic system, women's income was valued for their economic activity.

IV. BUDDHIST WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACE BUILDING

Buddhism does not consider women to be inferior to men. Because Dhamma has no discrimination. While accepting the biological and physical differences between the two sexes, Buddhism considers men and women equally useful to society. The Buddha emphasizes the fruitful role women can and should play as wives and good mothers in making family life successful. In the family, both husbands and wives are expected to share equal responsibility and discharge their duties with equal dedication. The husband is admonished to consider the wife a friend, a companion, a partner. In family affairs, the wife was expected to be a substitute for the husband when the husband happened to be indisposed. A wife was expected even to acquaint herself with the trade, business, or industries in which the husband engaged so that she would be in a position to manage his affairs in his absence. This shows that in Buddhist society, the wife occupied an equal position with the husband. Some scholars point to the misinterpretation and warping of the Buddhist ethos to suit socio-cultural attitudes and prejudice in *Theravada* Buddhist countries, conflicting with the Buddhist ethos and negating its effects in varying degrees as the universal ideology of masculine superiority. So, in all three societies - Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar- there is ambivalence in the attitudes towards women.

⁸ Global Report, 1995, 124.

Sujata was the wife of the elder son of *Anathpindaka Gahapati*.⁹ She was very insolent. She would disrespect everyone. Then, the Buddha preached to Sujata and told her that there are seven types of wives. The first type of wife does not respect her husband, and the second type of wife only thinks about luxury and materialistic pleasure and spends her husband's money for her material gain. The third type of wife utters abusive words to her husband and neglects him. The fourth type of wife takes care of her husband like his son, protects him, and wisely spends his money. The fifth type of wife is always loyal to her husband and takes care of her husband like a sister. The sixth type of wife becomes happy to see her husband. She is always graceful, disciplined, and respectful to her husband. The seventh type of wife serves and respects her husband. She remains calm and patient and puts in the effort to make her husband's life happy. Then the Buddha asked Sujata, she replied that she wanted to become the seventh type of wife and achieve nirvana.¹⁰

The Buddha established the Bhikkhu Sangha and attained a very high position. All messages of the Bhikkhuni are collected and secured in the form of *Theri-Gatha*. In each part of *TheriGatha*, there is a mention of "Shreshthatam Nirvanapad."¹¹ The emancipation and the goals gained by it are seen in it. Dr. Bharat Singh Upadhyay says about *Therigatha* that the Buddha *Bhikkhunis* have expressed their life experience in a very melodious, Literary, and insightful manner. Moral truth, depth of feelings, and the undefeatable voice of the soul are the characteristics of these songs. There is music as well as a manifestation of life. *Bhikkhunis* are not pessimistic. They are well-equipped to fight back against their grief and problems. They have won over the grief of their life and created peace. They understand and preach the message of peace through Nirvana. They determinedly fight with Mara and come off victorious. At the moment of victory, they pronounced these words, "Aah! I am a Buddhakanya." These words come directly from their heart, enlightened by the blessings and wisdom of Buddhism. They remain aloof from the disappointment and pain of life, and they exclaim, "Aah! I am so happy." They again and again pronounced, "Sitibhutamhi Nibbuta."¹² I have attained supreme peace through Nirvana. Buddhism places full faith in the ability of women.

Buddhism does not restrict either the educational opportunities of women or their religious freedom. The Buddha unhesitatingly accepted that women are capable of realizing the Truth, just as men are. This is why he permitted the admission of women into the Order, though he was not in favor of it at the beginning because he thought their admission would create problems in the Sasana. Once women proved their capability of managing their affairs in the Order, the Buddha recognized their abilities and talents and gave them responsible positions in the Bhikkhuni Sangha. *Mahāpajāpati Gotamī* was the first woman to

⁹ Mrs Rhys Davids, 2005, 143.

¹⁰ Mrs Rhys Davids, 2005, p. 144.

¹¹ Bharat Singh Upadhyaya, 1994, p. 322.

¹² Shastri Dwarikadas, 2020, p. 248.

receive ordination and a key figure in early Buddhism. The Buddhist texts record eminent saintly Bhikkhunis, who were very learned and who were experts in preaching the Dhamma. Dhammadinna was one such Bhikkhuni; Khema and Uppalavanna are two others. *Visākhā*, a prominent laywoman, was known for her generosity and social work, supporting the Buddhist monastic community and contributing to social welfare. The Theri-gatha contains numerous stanzas that clearly express the feelings of joy experienced by saintly bhikkhunis at their ability to enter the Order and realize the Truth. They contribute their life to cultivate peace and become ideal for society.

Buddha explained about nuns, monks, women lay disciples, and men lay disciples in the *Anguttara Nikaya*. He told that chief among his women disciples, who are nuns of long standing, is great Prajapati Gotami, among who are nuns of great wisdom is Khema, among who has supernormal powers is Uppalavanna, proficient in the rules of discipline is Patacara, among Dhamma Teachers is Dhammadinna, among who are meditative powers is Nanda, among who strive energetically, is Sona, among who are clairvoyant is Sakula, quick to win abnormal powers is Bhadda of the curly hair, able to remember past births is Bhadda of Kapilas, among of those who attained great supernormal power is Bhadda Kaccana. Chief among his disciples, lay followers of those who first took refuge, are the merchants Tappasu and Bhalluka, among alms givers is Sudatta, among dhamma teachers is Citta, among those who give choice alms food is Mahanama, among those who give pleasant gifts is Ugga, among those who wait on the order is Uggata, among those of unwavering loyalty is Sura Ambattha. Next, he explained about his lay women disciples, chief among his women disciples who are first took refuge is Sujata, among who minister to the order is Visakha Migaras mother, who have wide knowledge is Khajjuttara, who live in kindness is Samavati, among of meditative power is Uttara, among who nurse the sick is Suppiya, among who give choice alms food is Suppavasa.¹³

Buddha said, If a man places a woman given to drink and squandering, or a man of the same kind, it is cause of loss to the man. ¹⁴Buddha focuses on the equality and freedom of monks, nuns, and lay followers as well, and all can achieve their goals in their lives. He praised their qualities and responsibilities collectively. Buddhist women, whether monastics or lay practitioners, have contributed significantly to peace-building through their advocacy, humanitarian work, and spiritual leadership. Their efforts, grounded in Buddhist teachings on compassion and wisdom, continue to shape more peaceful and inclusive societies worldwide.

V. HOW DOES BUDDHA'S TEACHING CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE?

Buddha's teachings are universal. He promotes sustainable peace by fostering inner harmony, compassion, and nonviolence for every human being. Through mindfulness and meditation, individuals cultivate self-awareness

¹³ E. M. Hare, 2006, p. 20 - 23.

¹⁴ F. Max Muller, 2017, p. 19.

and emotional balance, reducing conflict. The principles of the Middle Way and non-attachment encourage moderation, reducing greed and exploitation, which are the root causes of social unrest. The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path guide people toward ethical living, right speech, and right action, fostering mutual respect. By embracing loving-kindness (*Metta*) and compassion (*Karuna*), communities build tolerance and understanding, preventing violence. Thus, Buddhism nurtures both inner and societal peace, creating a foundation for lasting harmony and coexistence.

5.1. Loving kindness (*Metta*)¹⁵ is an essential aspect for sustainable peace

Loving-kindness is essential for sustainable peace because it fosters empathy, compassion, and mutual respect among individuals and communities. Sustainable peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of understanding, cooperation, and harmony. Loving-kindness helps bridge divisions by promoting forgiveness and reducing resentment. It encourages people to see each other as fellow human beings rather than enemies, creating a foundation for reconciliation and healing.

In conflict resolution, loving-kindness leads to nonviolent communication and peaceful negotiations. When individuals approach disputes with goodwill rather than hostility, the likelihood of long-term solutions increases. Moreover, societies that cultivate loving-kindness through education, cultural practices, and governance are more resilient against violence and hatred. On a global scale, policies driven by kindness ensure equitable treatment, reducing socioeconomic disparities that often lead to unrest. Leaders who embody loving-kindness inspire cooperation, diplomacy, and fair decision-making.

Without loving-kindness, peace remains fragile, as underlying grievances and animosities persist. However, when people genuinely care for one another's well-being, peace becomes a way of life. Therefore, loving-kindness is not just important—it is a fundamental pillar of sustainable peace, ensuring stability, justice, and coexistence for future generations.

5.2. Compassion (*Karuna*)¹⁶ and social justice for sustainable peace

Compassion (*Karuna*) is the foundation of a peaceful society. It goes beyond empathy, inspiring action to alleviate suffering and promote the well-being of all. True peace cannot exist without justice, as inequalities, conflict, resentment, and instability. Social justice ensures fairness, dignity, and equal opportunities, addressing systemic oppression and economic disparities.

When *Karuna* guides social justice efforts, policies and reforms are driven by a deep concern for human dignity rather than mere political or economic interests. Compassionate leadership fosters inclusive governance, promotes human rights, and encourages dialogue over division. It nurtures a culture where the marginalized are empowered, and communities work collectively to resolve conflicts peacefully.

¹⁵ First Sublime State of Mind.

¹⁶ Second Sublime State of Mind.

Sustainable peace emerges when compassion and justice intersect, creating systems that uphold equality and address the root causes of suffering. Education, healthcare, and economic opportunities become accessible to all, reducing social tensions and fostering harmony. By embedding Karuna in social justice movements, societies move beyond temporary solutions, cultivating a world where peace is not just the absence of war but the presence of equity, kindness, and shared prosperity.

5.3. Non-Violence: A key to sustainable peace

Nonviolence is the foundation of sustainable peace, promoting harmony, understanding, and coexistence among individuals and nations. Rooted in principles of compassion and respect, nonviolence rejects aggression and seeks solutions through dialogue and cooperation rather than conflict.

Throughout history, leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela have demonstrated that non-violent resistance can bring about meaningful change. Their movements proved that social and political transformations are possible without bloodshed. By advocating for justice through peaceful means, they inspired generations to pursue reconciliation over retaliation.

Sustainable peace requires men and women to make long-term commitments, and nonviolence fosters an environment where differences can be resolved through diplomacy and mutual respect. Violence often leads to cycles of revenge, creating instability and suffering. In contrast, nonviolence encourages tolerance, empathy, and constructive problem-solving. In today's world, where conflicts arise due to political, religious, or economic differences, embracing nonviolence is crucial. Educational programs, policy reforms, and community dialogues can instill non-violent values, ensuring lasting peace. By choosing nonviolence, societies can break free from hostility and build a future based on trust and cooperation. Ultimately, nonviolence is not just an absence of war but a proactive force that nurtures justice, equality, and sustainable peace for society.

5.4. Mindfulness (*Sati*) and the deconstruction of gender bias for sustainable peace

Mindfulness (*Sati*), a core Buddhist practice, fosters present-moment awareness and non-judgmental observation, enabling individuals to recognize and dismantle deep-seated biases, including gender bias. By cultivating mindfulness, individuals develop the ability to observe thoughts, emotions, and social conditioning without immediate reaction, creating space for critical reflection on ingrained gender norms.

Gender bias, often rooted in cultural and societal conditioning, perpetuates inequality and conflict. Mindfulness helps deconstruct these biases by promoting self-awareness, empathy, and compassion. When individuals mindfully examine their thoughts and behaviours, they can challenge discriminatory patterns, fostering more inclusive and equitable interactions. This transformation at the personal level extends to communities, promoting

mutual respect and social harmony.

For sustainable peace, gender equality is essential. Mindfulness-based practices encourage deep listening and compassionate engagement, reducing gender-based violence and discrimination. In conflict resolution, mindfulness fosters emotional regulation and open-mindedness, which are essential for constructive dialogue and reconciliation. By integrating mindfulness into education, leadership, and policymaking, societies can shift toward greater gender equity, ultimately contributing to lasting peace. Through Sati, individuals and societies can dismantle unconscious gender biases, paving the way for a more just and harmonious world where peace is built on equality, respect, and mindfulness-driven awareness.

5.5. Ethical conduct (*Sīla*) and equitable societal structures for sustainable peace

Sustainable peace is deeply rooted in ethical conduct (*Sīla*) and the establishment of equitable societal structures. *Sīla*, a core principle in Buddhist ethics, emphasizes moral discipline, non-harming, and compassionate living for men and women equally. It encourages individuals to act with integrity, fostering trust, harmony, and social cohesion. When individuals uphold ethical values such as honesty, kindness, and nonviolence, conflicts are reduced, and peaceful interactions become the norm.

Equally essential is the creation of just and inclusive societal structures that ensure fairness, equal opportunities, and the protection of human dignity. Equitable systems address social disparities, economic injustices, and political oppression, which are often the root causes of unrest. Policies that promote social welfare, education, and human rights help build a stable society where all individuals can thrive.

The synergy between personal ethical conduct and just social structures creates a foundation for lasting peace. Ethical individuals contribute to fair institutions, while just systems reinforce moral behavior. By integrating *Sīla* into governance, economics, and community life, societies can move toward a sustainable peace where harmony is maintained not by force but by collective moral responsibility and justice.

VI. EQUANIMITY IS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Equanimity, the ability to maintain calmness, composure, and emotional stability in all situations, serves as a cornerstone for achieving sustainable peace both at the personal and societal levels. It plays a vital role in fostering harmony, reducing conflicts, and creating a balanced environment where peace can thrive. Not every human being is satisfied. Their desires are increasing day by day. He always thinking about profit and becoming selfish. When people practice equanimity, they are less likely to react with anger or prejudice, creating an environment of patience and acceptance. This mindset promotes empathy, allowing diverse communities to coexist peacefully. By maintaining emotional stability, equanimity strengthens relationships, resolves disputes, and contributes to a more inclusive and harmonious society, where differences

are embraced rather than dividing.

Equanimity is not just a personal virtue but a powerful tool for building sustainable peace. By cultivating emotional balance, tolerance, and understanding, individuals and societies can overcome conflicts and create environments where peace can flourish in the long term. True peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of inner calm and mutual respect, all rooted in equanimity. These qualities are required for men and women.

VII. CONCLUSION

Gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also a crucial factor in achieving sustainable peace. Through a Buddhist lens, we recognize that peace is deeply intertwined with justice, inclusivity, and the dismantling of systemic inequalities. It highlighted how Buddhist teachings on compassion, nonviolence, and interdependence support the idea that true peace cannot be achieved without gender justice. The conclusion also calls for societal and structural changes that empower women and marginalized groups, reinforcing that sustainable peace requires harmony and balance in all aspects of life. Ultimately, gender equality is not just a moral or social issue but a fundamental component of a peaceful and enlightened society. By revisiting Buddhist teachings and practices, contemporary societies can gain valuable insights into fostering harmonious, non-violent, and egalitarian communities that contribute to lasting global peace.

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THE PEACE AND HARMONY OF WOMAN: A TEXTUAL STUDY OF THE POSITION OF WOMAN AND HER LIBERATION IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

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Abstract:

Buddhism is a teaching that always prioritizes the well-being and happiness of all beings without discrimination. Its aim is not only to liberate men but also to liberate women and all other beings. However, there is a common belief that Buddhism discriminates against women in its soteriological path. This paper aims to study the Theravada perspective on the position of women and their liberation, while examining whether Theravada Buddhism views women's ability to attain the final goal as inferior to that of men. It will also explore how Theravada Buddhist texts explain the social roles of women as mothers, wives, and nuns.

The paper will begin by discussing the position of women in pre-Buddhist India. It will then illustrate the social position of women as mothers, wives, and nuns as depicted in Theravada Buddhist texts. Finally, the paper will examine how Theravada Buddhism addresses the religious liberation of women and whether there are any limitations in the soteriological path for women.

Keywords: *Theravada Buddhism, women, position, liberation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Early Buddhist fundamental teachings provide the philosophical clarification of the nature of “being” (man/ woman), the explanation that is very important to establish the thesis of emptiness of all the word conditions (*dhammās*). Buddha had never categorised any male or female aggregate in the analysis of being. Thus, in *Khandhasutta*¹, the discourse of the Five

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Aggregates, the physical and psychical phenomena of existence, is called a “being.” This explanation emphasises that at the absolute level (*paramattha*), there is no male or female figure, but conventionally (*sammuti*), there are two figures: ‘being a man (*purisabhāva*)’ and being a woman (*itthibhāva*). This convention helps to distinguish the characters of man and woman, for example, ‘knowing here to be women (*tassa itthibhāvaṃ natvā*).’² Furthermore, the origin of male and female differences as conventions has been defined in the *Aggañña sutta* (what came first).³ This discourse describes how gender differences appeared in the world as secondary evolutions, but at the beginning, all the beings were without male and female figures. Hence, the fundamental explanation of the Aggregates of being in Early Buddhism has only biological and sociological aspects, which, on the other hand interpreted as conventions, but at an absolute level, it does not associate any gender in Theravada Buddhism. This teaching of Theravada Buddhism is, to a certain degree, compatible with Judith Butler’s opinions. She explains the conventional nature of womanhood as a set of possibilities in two ways: appearance in the world for perception and concrete expression in the world must be understood as the taking up of a set of historical possibilities.⁴ The above two opinions hint that Judith Butler also analyses womanhood as convention (*sammuti*). These theoretical approaches of Buddhism and some modern scholars employed here elaborate on whether Buddhism has discriminated against women from men in its family, social, religious, and soteriological path. The research problem here is whether there are any limitations to the so-called soteriological path for a woman. If there are such limitations, what are those limitations? Examining selected discourses from the Pali canon concerning the topic is the scope of this research. Comparative and analytical methods are used here to clarify the hypothesis by collecting data from university libraries and e-libraries.

II. PRE-BUDDHIST BACKGROUND

The position in the pre-Buddhist era in India was much worse. She had been cast aside from her basic human rights. Freedom to think and act by her will was limited. *Manusmṛti*, one of the principal books of the Brahmanism tradition, clearly illustrates the position of women during the period. She should live her childhood under her father, her young age under her husband, and her old age under her son, and she had no free will to act as she wished.⁵ Furthermore, it mentions that her sole duty was to obey and treat her husband, and that is the way to go to heaven: “No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women [apart from their husbands]. If a wife obeys her husband, she will

Hamburg, Germany.

¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi (2000).

² Nyanatiloka (1970), p. 210.

³ Sujato, B. (2018)-I.

⁴ Butler, J. (1988). pp. 519 - 53.

⁵ Adhikari, S. R. (2020).

for that [reason alone] be exalted in heaven.”⁶ Here, the woman is mercilessly and perhaps jealously, dragged down from her basic human right on religion. She could not engage in religious activities like men. For this purpose, the Brahmanism tradition emphasized the so-called characteristics of women. For example, in the Rig Veda, it is mentioned that the woman is not truthful at all, she is abnormal, and she is always dishonest and dirty. Therefore, should not have a long-lasting relationship with her. These types of characteristics⁷ established by Vedic tradition are used to discriminate against women in social interaction, equal to men. A widow’s situation in this era was ruthlessly manipulated by Vedic tradition. According to *Manusmṛti*, she must never even mention the name of another man after her husband has died.⁸ As a result, she had no chance to remarry as her wish, she had to live her entire life lonely, or commit suicide by jumping into the funeral pyre of her husband, which is famously called *Satīpūjā*. Furthermore, in *Brahmanic* society birth of a girl was inauspicious; she could not participate in the ceremonies of her father’s funeral, hence, she was regarded as a child-bearer. In this regard, I. B. Horner mentions that women’s status in pre-Buddhist society was, on the whole, low and without honour.⁹

Thus, pre-Buddhist era, the status of women was more miserable, and their rights were equal to the rights of lower-caste people in India. It seems that she had no voice or power to protest or stand against the male-dominated society. Also, her knowledge was not enough to pragmatically win freedom, as she did not allow herself to enter the *Brahmanic* education system. Consequently, she lived in the custody of men without family, social, and religious freedom while bearing all the injustices put on her by *Brahmanic* society. In the aforesaid situation, it is primarily important to discuss the position of women and their liberation given in Buddhism, which came into existence in such a society.

III. WOMAN AS A MOTHER

The first, mother and father in the *Pali* canon have been recognised by giving them similar status. According to *Sigālovāda sutta*,¹⁰ children should treat their mother and father equally, and they put on the top “*Pubba disā*” (The North), thus giving primary veneration among others to be worshipped. Furthermore, not only father but also mother is called in Buddhism as “*Māhā Brahma (Brahmāti mātā pitaro)*”¹¹ - the god highly venerated by Hindus as the creator of the world. Children who do not look after once own parents are considered low caste persons¹² as well, and treating them well is auspicious.¹³

⁶ Buhler, G. (1837 - 1898) p.196. Ch.V. v. 155.

⁷ Rgveda-Samhita Volume III, 6-8 Mandalas (1941).

⁸ Buhler, G. (1837-1898) p.196.

⁹ Horner, I.B. (1975). p.1.

¹⁰ Sujato, B. (2018)-III.

¹¹ Morris, R, Sabbrahma-sutta (1976).

¹² Mills, K. (2015)

¹³ Sujato, B. (2020).

Thus, in the social context, a woman as a mother is honoured and treated well in Theravada Buddhism without discriminating against her from men.

Second, it seems that in the explanations of the woman in place of mother in the *Pāli* canon, she is always given priority, and her name is mentioned first. In this regard, I. B Horner mentions “the cult of the mother (including duty made incumbent on children to take care of their parents, for “Brahma [god] is the cherishing of parents may account for many passages in early Indian literature Sanskrit, *Pāli* and Jain which refer to laymen and laywomen, in which the women are almost invariably mentioned first... *Pāli mātāpitaro* is a combination of the words for mother and father, in which “mother” precedes “father.” Then, she illustrates a list of occasions in the *Pāli* canon that support her thesis. They are 01). “My mother and father I maintained” (*mātāpettibhāro āsim*), 02) “Waiting on mother and father” (*mātāpitu upaṭṭhānam*), 03) “Who so his mother and father keeps” (*mātāpettibhāro āsim*). In these illustrations, I. B. Horner has pointed out that some other aforesaid *Pāli* quotations about mother and father clearly emphasise that the name of the mother is mentioned first. I.B. Horner says the purpose of this usage is not clear, but she gives some reasons for this usage. First, she supposes the origin of the phrase “mother and father” descended from some ancient forgotten social organization where mother-dominant social statuses were prominent. Second, she proved that during the Buddhist epoch, the mother name was used by men to describe their identity, ex, “son of the *Brahmin* lady *Mantāni* (*mantāniputta*)” and “son of *Brahmin* lady *Sāri* (*Sāriputta*).” Third, she points out the observance of filial duty by which children were abided by their parents as another reason for the above usage of the *Pāli* canon¹⁴. Besides these reasons of I. B Horner, it is possible to suppose that the biological relationship between mother and son may also be applied to the giving priority of the name of the mother in Buddhist literature. All the above examples reveal the position of a woman as a mother in Theravada Buddhism.

IV. WOMAN AS A WIFE

Pascale F. Engelmaje mentions, “Women’s traditional roles of wife and mother described in Buddhist texts have long been considered suspicious by feminist scholars who decry them as enabling roles in which women’s function is to support the men around them.”¹⁵ Therefore, it discusses how Theravada Buddhism recognizes the wife with her husband and investigates whether she is in an inferior position equivalent to her husband as described in the texts. The position of a wife in a family is mostly related to the husband. She is not like a mother; the mother relationship is with the entire family. So, here it examines the wife concerning the Husband. In the *Bhāriyā sutta* (Kinds of Wives),¹⁶ Buddha has described the nature of different types of wives to *Sujāta*, daughter-in-law of *Anātapindika* (a millionaire who supported Buddhist

¹⁴ Horner, I. B, (1975) p.5.

¹⁵ Pascale F. Engelmaje, (2019).

¹⁶ Sujato, B. (2018) - II

dispensation), as she did not respect elders and her husband. Seven wives are 1. *Vadhaka Bhariyā* (executioner): a wife who's rough and inconsiderate to her husband. 2. *Chori Bhariyā* (robber): she who wastes her husband's wealth and indulges in surreptitious misbehaviour. 3. *Ayya Bhariyā* (master): a wife who lords over her husband. 4. *Bhagini Bhariyā* (sister): She is obedient and adores her husband as if he were her elder brother. 5. *Sakhī Bhariyā* (friend): she who is trustworthily concerned and attached, as if her husband is her good friend. 6. *Dāsi Bhariyā* (servant): a wife who never tires of working to please her husband. 7. *Mātu Bhariyā* (mother): she who is loving, concerned, attentive, and protective as if her husband were her son. In this categorization, 1, 2, and 3 are the wives that bring problems for marriage, remaining all other types of wives bring happiness and peace for a well family life. After this sermon, *Sujātā* agreed to be a wife like a housemaid. In this analysis of kinds of wives, Buddha may have expected to give instructions that which useful for a wife when she maintains family life and gains her due respect from her husband and other family members.

Uggaha Sutta is another discourse that explains about five qualities to be cultivated by a good wife. Here, Buddha advises a young girl who expecting to get married. According to the *Sutta*, a wife should process the following ways, as a good wife to her husband. "...get up before him and go to bed after him, and be obliging, behaving nicely and speaking politely...hose our husband respects-mother and father, ascetics and Brahmins-we will honour, respect, revere, and venerate, and serve with a seat and a drink when they come as guests... be deft and tireless in doing domestic duties for our husband, such as knitting and sewing. Understanding of how to go about things to complete and organize the work.... know what work our husband's domestic bondservants, servants, and workers have completed, and what they've left incomplete. We will know who is sick, and who is fit or unwell. We will distribute to each a fair portion of fresh and cooked foods...ensure that any income our husbands earn is guarded and protected, whether money, grain, silver, or gold. We will not overspend, steal, waste, or lose it."¹⁷ Prima facie, this explanation appeared as how a wife should behave in male dominant society, but careful study of the above qualities reveals that the purpose of the admonishment given by Buddha, just like a father who advises his daughter at marriage is to show the way how she should get respect and honour from part of his husband relatives and friend by fulfilling her obligations.

When the wife ministers husband, he also should minister wife as mentioned in *Sigālovāda sutta*¹⁸. According to the *sutta* husband needs to perform his duties to the wife, giving her due respect, without disgracing her, without going for other wives, buying required ornaments for her, and transferring required properties to her. This example shows that a wife is not a slave of her husband, as mentioned in Theravada Buddhism. She has the same

¹⁷ Sujato, B. (2018) - II.

¹⁸ Carpenter, (1911), *Singāla Sutta*.

rights as her husband. Obligations and duties are not common only to the wife, it is the husband who should treat her wife when she treats him. *Samajīva sutta* is the best example to show how Theravada Buddhism considers husband and wife in an equivalent position. This example is connected with the story of *Nakulamātā* and *Nakula Pitā*. This story emphasizes the ideal character of a great husband and wife. Many problems arise in the family due to disagreements between husband and wife, as well as misunderstandings of each other. But *Nakulamātā* and *Nakulapitā* never engaged in quarrels and disputes because they had the same characteristics and the same agreements. They are equal faith (*Sama saddhā*), equal morality (*Sama sīla*), equal charity (*Sama cāga*), and equal wisdom (*Samapaññā*). In this explanation, it is clear that husband and wife are not discriminated against in Theravada Buddhism regarding their due position in family life.

V. WOMAN AS A NUN

Women's Ordination is one of the very important milestones that revolutionized the status of women in India. This incident can be identified as the greatest position that women had achieved during Buddha's period. As a result, she became free from family bondages and cultivated spiritual freedom. So, it is a type of total freedom accomplished by women from the male-dominated society of India. A woman who became a nun was venerated and respected by men, a situation that could be carried into effect during this period.

I. B. Horner said that growing up in a Buddhist society reasons to practise the religion in two ways: as a lay woman devotee or as a *Bhikkuni* (nun).¹⁹ The pioneer of the *Bhikkuni* order was *Prajāpati Gotamī*, the second mother of the Buddha. She realized Nibbāna with supernatural power; her supernatural power was similar to *Moggallāna's* (*Moggallāna* was the foremost supernatural power among monks) supernatural power.²⁰ *Uppalavannā*, *Khemā*, *Kisāgotamī*, *Paṭācārā*, and *Yasodharā* are some famous nuns who came into order from different family backgrounds. Nuns like *Ambapālī* and *Vimalā* were courtesans, and some others were of royal families like *Sumedā* and *Sela*. Furthermore, there were nuns from merchant families like *Bhaddā*, *Kundalakesi*, *Sujāta*, and *Anopama*, and low castes like *Punnika* the slave girl, *Chanda*, the daughter of a poor Brahmin. According to *Etadaggapālī* (Vide: *Āṅguttara Nikāya-Ekakanipāta-Etadaggavagga*), seeing the individual characteristic ability of nuns in the soteriological path, Buddha offered positions for some nuns,

1. Out of the *Bhikkhuni* disciples, *Mahāpajāpati* is the first to realize *Arahantship*,
2. *Khemā* for high wisdom,
3. *Uppalavannā* for psychic powers,
4. *Paṭācārā* for keeping the discipline,
5. *Dhammadinnā* for explaining the Teaching.

¹⁹ Horner, I.B. (1975) p.95.

²⁰ Apadāna Pāli 3, (1983) Mahā Prajāpati Gotami Apadānana.

6. *Nandā* for attaining *jhāna* (trace),
7. *Sonā* for aroused effort.
8. *Bakulā* for the heavenly eye.
9. *Kuṇḍalakesī* for realizing the Teaching instantly
10. *Baddha Kāpilāni* for recollecting previous births.
11. *Baddha Kaccānā* for great wisdom.
12. *Kisāgotamī* for wearing rough robes.
13. *Singālakamātā* for release through faith.

These bodies of nuns were given by the Buddha equal to the monks who had similar positions. This is on the other hand, one of the best examples shows how women like men had the same place in the Theravada Buddhist order. *Therīgāthā* contains several utterances that clearly express the spiritual joy and freedom gained by nuns after entering into the Buddhist dispensation. For instance, their *Muttā* expressed the freedom she felt, thus, “So freed! So thoroughly freed am I!- from three crooked things set free: from mortar, pestle, & crooked old husband. Having uprooted the craving that leads to becoming, I am from ageing & death set free.”²¹ This utterance of *Muttā* reveals the social, cultural, and domestic barriers she had in her lay life as a woman during that period and the happiness and joy she felt as a nun after entering Buddhism. This is only one example from *Therīgāthā*; all the other utterances provide an account to understand the freedom accomplished by *Bhikkhunīs* by attaining *Nibbāna*.

VI. ENLIGHTENMENT AND WOMEN

It is a very popular argument in modern academia whether a woman can become a Buddha or not. In the *Bahudhātuka-sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya*, Buddha has mentioned the woman’s impossibility of becoming a Buddha and the possibility of a man to be a Buddha.²² Prima facie, this appears as a clear discrimination against women in the aspect of Buddhahood. Therefore, first, however, one should understand the religious and cultural background of Indian society at the time of the Buddha and the compiler of the Pāli canon, etc., get comprehend the facts behind this statement. Second, the human Buddha in Theravada Buddhism is the pathfinder; He is *Gautama* Buddha in this aeon, who, on the other hand, revealed the path to all others. No, man or woman would be a Buddha in this aeon other than *Gautama* Buddha. Buddha was born in a male-dominated society, his teachings were continued and developed by males. Just like the male Gods are the one and only gods of other religions, the *Gautama* Buddha is the only one who attained Buddhahood in this aeon. This anthropology of religions also must be studied to apprehend to fact that women cannot attain Buddhahood.

However, as mentioned at the beginning, being a man (*purisabhāva*) and being a woman (*itthibhāva*) are conventional conditions (*sammuti*) in the

²¹ Thānissaro Bhikkhu, (2015) p. 117.

²² Sujato, B (2018).-IV

world. According to the fundamental teachings, like, Five Aggregates, in the absolute (*paramatta*), the being is neither male nor female. Furthermore, the highest good (*Nibbāna*) that can be attained by any human being is free from gender. *Vinaya Piṭaka* gives accounts of how Buddha has said a woman's ability to attain different stages of the Buddhist soteriological path up to the realization of the final highest good (*nibbāna*). Here, Buddha addressed Ananda and said, "Women, Ānanda, having gone forth from home into homelessness life in the doctrine and discipline proclaimed by the Truth-finder, can realise the fruit of stream-attainment (*sotāpanna*), or the fruit of once-returning (*sakadāgāmi*), or the fruit of non-returning (*anāgāmi*), or perfection (*arahant*).²³ The attainment of *Arahant* itself is *Nibbāna* (the extinction of craving is called *Nibbāna*). Buddha, *Paccekabuddha*, and *Arahant* attained *Nibbāna*. The accomplishment of *Nibbāna* is not limited only to Buddha or *Pacceka* Buddha, it is for every human being, including women.

One of the best examples that denies gender discrimination in the soteriological path in Theravada Buddhism is the *Soma Sutta* (sister Soma in *Samyutta Nikāya*). Here, Mara, the Evil One, said in front of Sister Soma that no woman could reach the high good because she has only the "two-finger knowledge (*dvangulapaññā*)", an allusion to cooking where the consistency of the cooked rice is tested by pressing it between the fingers. This notion of Mara the Evil One was reputed to say, "What difference does being a woman make when the mind's well-centred, when knowledge is progressing, seeing, rightly, into the Dhamma."²⁴ This dialogue shows that womanhood (*ittibhāvo*) is a mere reference in the conventional world; mind and knowledge, etc., are the same as those of men, therefore, gender is not a barrier to the accomplishment of the Highest Good of Buddhism. If womanhood is conventional, as mentioned in Buddhism, and it is a historical evolution as mentioned by Judith Butler ability to attain *Nibbāna* cannot be denied. I. B. Horner, on the other hand, points out, that even though Buddha was reluctant to women admission into the order, he had never hinted that women did not have the same chance as men on the way to the *Nibbāna*, so, the way of salvation was not closed to the women. Moreover, she explains that *Gotama*, the Buddha, according to *Āṅguttaranikāya*, is represented as saying that both mother and son, by following the Eight-Fold Noble Path, can eradicate the three Terrors. Therefore, she concludes that Buddha had no doubt in his mind as to the equality of the power of men and women, and Buddha decided to admit women into the order.²⁵

VII. CONCLUSION

At the time when Buddha was born in India, women did not have the same rights as men. The social, cultural, and religious position of the woman was very miserable. In the context of Theravada Buddhist literature (*Pāli* canon) that originated in the same social background, it is impossible to discover

²³ Chullavaaggaṇṇapali, (1983) Bhikkhunikhandaṇṇa.

²⁴ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, (1998).

²⁵ Horner, I. B. (1975). P. 103 – 104.

gender inequality depicted in its fundamental teachings. As depicted in Early Buddhism, womanhood and manhood are only mere references in the common-sense world. First, as a mother, the woman was venerated; as a result, in Buddhist societies, she is respected, called “the Buddha in the home is mother.” The second, the husband respected his wife by giving her due place, considering her as a “mother,” “sister,” or “friend.” The third, most important fact here is that a woman could accomplish the establishment of the *Bhikkhuni* order and thus, laywomen entered into the dispensation and attained *Arahantship*. Theravada Buddhism is a teaching that does not discriminate against women in social, cultural, and religious activities as well as in the attainment of final salvation. Thus, according to Theravada Buddhism highest and final good that can be achieved by human beings (male/female), *Nibbāna* is free from gender discrimination. Therefore, there are no restrictions or limitations for a woman in the attainment of the final good in Theravada Buddhism.

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THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM AS A FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSION AND HUMAN DIGNITY: ADDRESSING NATIONALISM AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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Abstract:

This paper discovers the potential of Theravāda Buddhism in addressing contemporary nationalism and ethno-religious conflicts, offering a path toward inclusion and human dignity. In a world marked by violence and division, Buddhism's emphasis on non-violence, compassion, and tolerance offers valuable insights for conflict resolution. Drawing on the Tripiṭaka and key suttas, the study highlights Buddhist values such as forgiveness, non-hatred, interconnectedness, and equanimity, which challenge divisive ideologies and promote shared humanity. The paper also examines the synergy between Buddhist philosophies and contemporary theories like Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, John Rawls' Theory of Justice, and Martha Nussbaum's focus on human rights, advocating for social justice and equality. Furthermore, it connects Buddhist teachings to anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan perspectives, such as Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" and Kwame Anthony Appiah's Ethical Cosmopolitanism. Through practical applications of Buddhist values, such as Sri Lanka's post-conflict reconciliation efforts and the Dalai Lama's influence, the paper illustrates how Buddhist principles can transform international relations, challenge nationalism, and foster sustainable peace and harmony. The research proposes a unified framework combining Buddhist philosophy with contemporary peace theories to address global conflicts and promote inclusivity and human dignity in national contexts.

Keywords: *Theravada Buddhism, nationalism, conflicts, inclusion, unity, modern theories.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

With endless wars, ethnic conflicts, and growing nationalism, the modern world is experiencing an unprecedented period of instability. From Gaza to Kashmir, many people were heartlessly killed and displaced in the names of the nation and religion. With countries and people holding onto divisive ideologies that threaten human dignity and harmony, the world is becoming more and more divided. Approaches to conflict resolution need to be reevaluated in the context of this “war-minded” circumstance. Therefore, it is important to address nationalism and ethno-religious conflicts through the philosophical discourse of the world’s most peaceful religion, Buddhism. Buddhism offers valuable insights into unity, inclusivity, and human dignity, which can play a significant role in fostering peace and addressing conflicts. Despite its renowned value for peacemaking, some Buddhist countries have also faced conflicts and disruptions in their everyday politics.¹

With its deep ethical precepts, *Theravāda* Buddhism offers a philosophical foundation for promoting compassion, peace, and non-violence. The teachings of the Gautam Buddha, which are based on the *Theravāda Tripiṭaka*, provide important guidance for resolving conflict at its source, encouraging forgiveness. They develop conscious healing in order to establish a long-lasting path to peace. Anger, hostility, pleasure, and suffering are all extremes of passion that are absent from a non-violent lifestyle. As Buddhists believe, non-violence as a powerful and logical force is the source of true peace.² This research examines the Buddhist values of tolerance in inclusion, and peacemaking. It reads their roots in key suttas including the *Dhammapada*, *Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta*, and *Paṭhamasāṅgāma Sutta*. Many Buddhist suttas address ignorance, hatred, and craving as the main causes of conflict and encourage to development of inner and exterior peace. The article will continue by looking at how the practical use of Buddhist teachings can be applied to promote world peace and harmony. When it comes to nationalism and ethno-religious conflicts, there are many modern instances in Buddhist countries when leaders have followed the Gautam Buddha’s splendid example. The paper will conclude with a discussion of contemporary theoretical frameworks that also promote harmony in the world through human dignity and inclusiveness. It will combine contemporary theories and Buddhist values into a single framework for better implementation within national contexts of conflict.

II. GAUTAMBUDDHA’S RESPONSES TO CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE

Buddhism has been a message of non-violence and peace since its earliest days. In the Pali Theravada Tripiṭaka, the Buddha’s emphasis is on non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) and compassion. These teachings resonate throughout the Theravāda canon. The teachings of the Buddha have meaningful (*sattha*),

¹ P. Demieville (2009) *Buddhism and war*. (M. Kendall, Trans.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 17-59.

² Nicholas F. Gier (2004) *The Virtue of Nonviolence from Gautama to Gandhi*, New York: State University of New York Press, pp. 52-53, 59.

together with well-sounding letters (*sabyañjana*), complete in their entirety (*kevalaparipunṇa*), deep (*gambhīra*), difficult to understand (*duddasa*), just not a theory (*atakkāvacara*), and known by the wise (*paṇḍitavedanīya*).³ The Buddha explicitly rejected violence as a means of resolving disputes. He has condemned killing or harming living beings and promoted introspection or mindfulness (*satipatthana*) as the proper course of action. In the *Ambalatthika-Rahulovada Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 61), the Buddha says, “the rightness or wrongness of an action centers around whether the action itself would bring about harm to self and/ or others”.⁴

In Pali Theravada Tripitaka, the word “conflict” is used as a synonym with *virodha*, *viggaḥa*, *sanghattana*, *vivāda*, and often the word “*raṇa*” is used. In describing ideological conflicts that were prevalent among various religious groups, three terms, *kalaha* (contention), *viggaḥa* (dispute), and *vivāda* (debate), have been used quite often. The *Dhammapada* (Verse 5) emphasizes, “Hatred is never appeased by hatred; hatred is only appeased by non-hatred. This is an eternal law.” In *Dandavagga*, there are several verses were committed to reject the violence and promoted peace. The *Dhammapada*’s verses 129–132 provide further examples of the Buddha’s advocacy for tolerance.⁵

“All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill.”

“All tremble at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill.”

“One who, while himself seeking happiness, oppresses with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will not attain happiness hereafter.”

“One who, while himself seeking happiness, does not oppress with violence other beings who also desire happiness, will find happiness hereafter.”

There are many other Suttas encourage peace and tolerance. The *Kakacupama Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 21), teaches unconditional tolerance, urging the Buddhists to maintain a calm and loving mind even in the face of violence. This Sutta was delivered by the Buddha at Savatthi, focusing on Bhikkhu Moliyaphagga. It highlights the dangers of ill temper and serves as a guide for monks to exercise control over their emotions. This teaching emphasizes the importance of emotional regulation in the pursuit of spiritual practice, reminding practitioners of the consequences of uncontrolled feelings.

³ Swe Swe Mon (2016) “A Study of Conflict Management in Buddhism with special reference to Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya”, p. 2 <http://research.thanhsiang.org/sites/default/files/attachment/Swe%20Swe%20Mon%20-%20Conflict%20Management%20in%20Buddhism.pdf>

⁴ *Ambalatthika-Rahulovada Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, (MN 61).

⁵ Acharya Buddhārakkhita (2020) *The Dhammapada - The Buddha’s Path of Wisdom*, Onalaska: Pariyatti Publishing, p. 9.

“Mendicants, there are these five ways in which others might criticize you. When others criticize you, they may do so in any of these ways. If that happens, you should train like this: ‘Our minds will not degenerate. We will blurt out no bad words. We will remain full of sympathy, with a heart of love and no secret hate. We will meditate spreading a heart of love to that person. And with them as a basis, we will meditate spreading a heart full of love to everyone in the world – abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.’ That’s how you should train.”⁶

The *Pathamasangāma Sutta* in *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 55.21) critiques war, stating that “Victory breeds enmity, and the defeated one sleeps in misery, but one who has abandoned victory and defeat sleeps in peace.” In this Sutta, the Buddha gave a very powerful explanation on the connection between *Sansara* and acts of violence.⁷

“What is it that produces a person?
 What does he have that runs around?
 What enters upon *saṃsara*?
 What is his greatest fear?”
 “It is craving that produces a person;
 His mind is what runs around;
 A being enters upon *saṃsara*;
 Suffering is his greatest fear.”

The *Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 31) is another example the Buddha promoted harmony between Buddhist monks and discourage conflict.⁸ The Buddhist focus on personal serenity as the basis for social harmony is also important in this discussion. The Buddha asked from the monks:

“I hope you’re living in harmony, appreciating each other, without quarreling, blending like milk and water, and regarding each other with kindly eyes?”
 “Indeed, venerable sir, we live in harmony like this.”
 “But how do you live this way?”
 “In this case, Venerable Sir, I think, ‘I’m fortunate, so very fortunate, to live together with spiritual companions such as these.’ I consistently treat these venerable with kindness by way of body, speech, and mind, both in public and in private I think, ‘Why don’t I set aside my own ideas and just go along with these venerable’ ideas?’ And that’s what I do. Though we’re different in body, sir, we’re one in mind, it seems to me.”⁹

The lesson of the *Maha Nidhāna Sutta* in *Dīghanikāya* (DN 15), which

⁶ *Kakacupama Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 21).

⁷ *Pathamasangāma Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 55.21).

⁸ *Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 31).

⁹ *ibid.*

is relevant to the materialism and political rivalries causing violence today, explains that greed and attachment to material belongings are the primary causes of war.¹⁰ Furthermore, the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* in *Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 18) emphasises how mental expansion (*papañca*) causes miscommunications and divides, and promotes awareness and mindfulness as countermeasures.

“Mendicant, judgments driven by proliferating perceptions beset a person. If they don’t find anything worth approving, welcoming, or getting attached to in the source from which these arise, just this is the end of the underlying tendencies to desire, repulsion, views, doubt, conceit, the desire to be reborn, and ignorance. This is the end of taking up the rod and the sword, the end of quarrels, arguments, and disputes, of accusations, divisive speech, and lies. This is where these bad, unskillful qualities cease without anything left over.”¹¹

The Buddha’s approach to war and conflict is best exemplified in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* in *Dīghanikāya* (DN 5), in which he advises the king to bring an end to an uprising by addressing the underlying causes – poverty and injustice. The Buddha encouraged rulers to rule through moral leadership and charity rather than by using force. The destructive character of desire and greed as root causes of violence is further examined in the *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* (MN 13), which emphasises the necessity of spiritual practice to combat such tendencies.¹²

These teachings highlight the importance of calmness and renunciation of ego-driven desires and how they often fuel religious and societal discord. In the Buddha’s day, conflicts between tribes, kingdoms, and religious groups were common. The Buddha frequently used empathy and dialogue to resolve disputes. For example, the Buddha stepped in to resolve the Sakyan and Koliyan clans’ dispute over water rights by stressing the meaninglessness of using aggression and the mutual reliance of all living things. His capacity to arbitrate conflicts amicably shows how Buddhist teachings place a higher value on understanding and harmony than on dominance or submission. Acting out of greed, anger, or delusion causes personal misery and harms others. Filling one’s life with the divine abiding (*brahma-vihāras*) of loving kindness, compassion, empathetic happiness, and equanimity prevents one from causing misery to others.¹³ In the next section, we will discuss how the Buddha explains the path to practice for the unity and inclusion with human dignity. He has used several mindful methods to establish peace and harmony in human society.

¹⁰ *Maha Nidhāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya* (DN 15).

¹¹ *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta in Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 18).

¹² *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, (MN 13).

¹³ P.D. Premasiri (2021) “Implications of Buddhist Political Ethics for the Minimisation of Suffering in Situations of armed Conflict”, in *Contemporary Buddhism*, Vol. 22, Nos. 1–2, pp. 75–76.

III. THE BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES FOR UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY WITH HUMAN DIGNITY

Buddhism provides concepts to ease tensions and make the world a more peaceful place. However, in order to completely prevent conflicts, there should be a substantial change in the beliefs and behaviours of world leaders and communities. Buddhist teachings can address underlying problems like power conflicts, ideological disagreements, and competition for resources that frequently lead to wars. The possibility of tensions turning into war can be reduced if more leaders and people adopted the Buddhist values such as compassion, non-violence, and respect for one another. This would substitute durable peace by understanding and reconciliation. This section will examine how Buddhist values and concepts can be used in practical methods to change conflict-driven mindsets.

3.1. Breaking down the illusion of self and other

One of the main concepts of Buddhism that promote inner and outer harmony is the concept of Non-Self (*Anatta*). The Buddhist teaching of *anatta*, or non-self, encourages people to see beyond rigid identities and personal attachments. Identities that we adopt today, regardless of ethnicity, caste, nation, or class, can be considered delusional constructions with no real worth. Identity developments like nationalism often exaggerate differences between “us” and “them,” and seek divisions based on imagined identity. Adopting the non-self doctrine encourages people to see beyond arbitrary divisions, realising that they are limited and temporary as well as not absolute. Letting up of attachments (*Upādāna*) is another significant Dhrama the Buddha emphasised. Buddhism teaches that a permanent self or soul is impossible. Attachment to the idea of “I” or “mine” leads to conflict motivated by ego. Acknowledging the lack of an innate self reduces the urge to hold on to things, concepts, or connections.

Nationalism is often an attachment to cultural symbols, historical pride, or perceived identity superiority. Buddhist teachings encourage letting go of these attachments. By embracing non-attachment, individuals are more likely to see beyond narrow identity markers, nurturing a more inclusive worldview. In recent decades, non-attachment was included into diplomatic approaches by Buddhist leaders. Buddhist nations like Thailand and Myanmar place a strong emphasis on letting go of attachments and imposed many laws for religious freedom.¹⁴ This is a good policy for the nations that are linked to inflexible national identities and authority, which frequently cause conflicts to worsen. Humility, collaboration, and willingness to make concessions for peace can be fostered by encouraging leaders and citizens to take a less ego-driven approach. From 1960s’ Thai government gives its attention to integrate non-Buddhist tribes and communities into Thai nation in a peaceful manner. There are many programs were introduced to smooth the process. This shift

¹⁴ Thailand: International Religious Freedom Report (2022). <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/thailand/>

of assumptions concerning the relationship between Buddhism and national integration can be clearly shown with reference to the recent history of North Thailand.¹⁵

Another Buddhist concept that we can adapt to this discussion is interconnectedness (*Pratītyasamutpāda*). The Buddhist principle of dependent origination teaches that all beings are interconnected. This counters the common nationalist ideology, which frequently emphasizes separation and superiority. Acknowledging interconnectedness can help communities see the common humanity in others, reducing feelings of hostility based on national or ethnic lines. This principle states that all beings are interdependent, meaning that suffering or happiness in one place affects others, creating a sense of shared human experience. As the society and its living beings as well as the living environment are interconnected, it is important to establish peace between the communities. Wars and miseries will bring instability to the whole world and human life will be more and more difficult in the future if we cannot stop wars and hate today.

Equanimity (*Upekkha*) can be understood as another principal philosophy in Buddhism. The Buddha encourages equanimity or an even-minded approach to all people, whether they belong to one group or not. Equanimity encourages a balanced and impartial mindset, reducing the emotional and aggressive attachments that often fuel nationalist sentiments and conflict driven mindset. It is cognitive evenness or unbreakable independence of mind that creates an inner balance to be unaffected by gain and loss, honour and dishonour, praise and blame or joy and sorrow. Aung San Suu Kyi one of prominent leaders in Myanmar is one example who adapted Buddhist policies into her political view points and practice equanimity and meditation during her hard times. She has invoked Buddhism repeatedly in her calls for peaceful protest and passive resistance to military rule. The military regime and other activists as well as harsh suppression of the pro-democracy movement, often tested her Buddhist equanimity. As she emphasised “I felt...intense irritation and impatience, I listened to the radio every day for many hours, so I knew what was going on in Burma, the economic problems, the poverty, so many things that needed to be rectified...I thought, ‘Why are we wasting our time?’” Then she would turn to vipassana, and “24 hours later... those feelings would subside”.¹⁶

3.2. Developing compassion and empathy to prevent violence

Universal Compassion (*karuṇā*) is one of the most significant principles that Buddha prompted through his entire teaching. He places a strong emphasis on *karuṇā* or compassion for all beings. In famous and widely used Buddhist

¹⁵ Charles F. Keyes, (1971) “Buddhism and National Integration in Thailand” in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 May, pp. 551-552.

¹⁶ Joshua Hammer (2012) “Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma’s Revolutionary Leader: The Nobel Peace Prize winner talks about the secret weapon in her decades of struggle—the power of Buddhism” <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/aung-san-suu-kyi-burmas-revolutionary-leader-17728151/>

sutta; *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, the Buddha has encouraged universal kindness.¹⁷ In Theravada Buddhist countries, many devotees practice *karuṇā* meditation based on this Sutta. It is advised that their vipassana meditation can be very successful when they start the session with the *karuṇā* meditation.

As the Buddhist notion of compassion has extended universally and encouraged the view that all beings deserve respect, care, and dignity it can be used as a tool to develop an empathetic environment. To promote the universal kindness, one should practice non-violent (*Ahimsa*) mentality in everyday life. Buddhism strongly advocates for non-violence, which underscores the value of every life and promotes resolving conflicts without causing harm.¹⁸ The Buddha encourages one to release thoughts of kindness “without hate or ill will.” Any killing is forbidden in Buddhism including killing animals. It is considered *parajika* for a monk or nun to kill another person and it is not allowed for them to kill an animal. The five precepts (*pañcasīla*) are fundamental to the morals and serve as the fundamental ethical code that lay Buddhists must adhere to in their everyday life. The precepts begin with a pledge not to kill living beings. As a result, the Buddha prioritised nonviolence and ahimsa from the very beginning of devotees’ religious life.

Buddhism’s core concept of *karuṇā*, or compassion, urges individuals to grow in empathy for all sentient beings. By encouraging people to view others as members of the same global community deserving of respect and dignity, this promotes inclusion. In actuality, bringing loving-kindness into problem areas can lessen hostility and boost empathy, two qualities that are essential for creating tranquil environments. By fostering empathy beyond national and ethnic boundaries, this all-encompassing strategy may lessen nationalist sentiment. Excessive nationalism has the potential to prioritise one group’s wellbeing ahead of others’.

Particularly in areas of conflict, the *metta* principle may prove to be a potent remedy for anger and animosity. For instance, Buddhist leaders who adhere to *metta* teachings promote empathy and understanding during the upheaval in Myanmar, fostering harmony among many ethnic and religious groups. In Myanmar, where there have been severe ethnic tensions and violence against Rohingya Muslims, some Buddhist monks and officials have aggressively promoted empathy and communication. Buddhist monks like Ashin Issariya have worked to spread compassion and tolerance among Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.¹⁹ This helps counterbalance extremist nationalist terminology that has sometimes been mistakenly connected with Buddhism by redefining Buddhism as a source of oneness.

If more leaders used this method, they may help shift attitudes from separation to togetherness. The Dalai Lama’s Middle Way approach to the

¹⁷ *Karaniya Metta Sutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 1.8).

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Matthew J. Walton (2017) *Buddhism, Politics and Political Thought in Myanmar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 32.

Tibetan dispute with China is a living example of this doctrine. Rather than taking an aggressive stance, he seeks a peaceful resolution via communication and reconciliation.²⁰ Many international disputes may be mitigated or even avoided if leaders from opposing countries took similar positions. As a result, it might be argued that Buddhist teachings can help guide peace talks by encouraging opposing parties to respond with kindness and forgiveness rather than retribution, so lessening the cycle of hostility that fuels war. Buddhism emphasises the significance of relinquishing anger, resentment, and clinging to grievances, encouraging individuals and societies to move beyond the historical animosities which generate conflict.

3.3. Mindfulness and self-reflection to avoid hater

Buddhism teaches mindfulness (*sati*) as a way to understand one's thoughts and emotions without letting anger, hatred, or desire take control. Leaders and individuals who practice mindfulness are more likely to act with patience and clarity, reducing the likelihood of impulsive decisions that could lead to conflict. This concept can be used as a tool for peace. To fulfill all the other concepts introduced before one should be mindful and stay calm. According to *Satipatthana Sutta* or "Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness," (*Majjhima Nikāya* 10), mindfulness (*sati*) as a way to understand one's thoughts, emotions, and impulses clearly.²¹ This awareness helps individuals respond to situations with calmness and insight, rather than being driven by anger, hatred, or fear. To develop *Sati*, the Buddhists must practice meditation everyday and let the mind to be settled till they achieve *Samadi*. In various military and law enforcement situations, mindfulness training based on Buddhist ideas has been applied to assist people make more grounded, non-impulsive decisions. For example, the United States military use mindfulness-based training to reduce stress and foster clear, attentive decision-making, which may aid in the prevention of avoidable escalations.

In order to help decision-makers become more self-aware and respond with restraint and tolerance in high-stress circumstances that may otherwise result in confrontation, mindfulness meditation could be incorporated into political and diplomatic training. Numerous research has been conducted in the United Kingdom to examine how practicing mindfulness can improve politicians' capacity for cooperative cooperation. In a review article, Bristow (2019) described "the developments of mindfulness in politics and identified potential benefits of mindfulness training for elected officials: attention, impulse control, kindness toward self and others, and meta-cognition".²² These suggested benefits broadly mirror personal benefits described by the former Labour Party Member of Parliament (MP) Chris Ruane, who credits

²⁰ Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari (2022) *The Dalai Lama's Special Envoy: Memoirs of a Lifetime in Pursuit of a Reunited Tibet*. New York: Columbia University Press, p. 10.

²¹ *Satipatthana Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya* 10

²² J. Bristow, (2019) "Mindfulness in politics and public policy" in *Current Opinion in Psychology*. Vol. 28 pp. 87 – 91.

mindfulness training with changes in his relationship to himself, others, and the world at large.²³ These studies demonstrate that mindfulness training could have a variety of personal and professional benefits for politicians working in western governments. Beyond its individual benefits, the implementation of mindfulness training in a group setting appears to have produced more constructive interactions amongst politicians in a competitive atmosphere, as well as greater consideration of their circumstances.

3.4. The Middle path (*Madhyam Prathipada*)

The Buddhist Middle Path advocates avoiding extremes, which might help combat the radical beliefs promoted by nationalist ideologies. Rather than a rigorous emphasis on pride or cultural isolation, the Middle Path promotes moderation, openness, and balance characteristics that can reconcile national pride with respect for others. By applying this idea, countries and individuals can resolve disputes by looking for points of agreement rather than taking rigid, divisive stances. The Buddha Tripitaka's *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* (*Samyutta Nikāya* 56.11) serves as an illustration of the value of taking the middle path in life.²⁴ As the Buddha's first discourse, this Sutta explains the Middle Path (*Majjhima Patipada*), a moderate approach that stays away from extremes. This approach emphasises moderation and steers clear of rigid, divisive stances, and it applies to both individual and community behaviour.

The middle way of life can be implemented in the context of global conflict. The Middle Path strategy might be useful in peace talks where opposing parties would otherwise take uncompromising views. Peace treaties, for example, that adhere to the Middle Path principle allow for compromise and flexibility, promoting long-term resolution. Northern Ireland's peace process is an example of both sides agreeing to compromises, using a middle way strategy. When nations or parties negotiate in a balanced, non-extreme manner, they are more likely to secure mutually beneficial accords and maintain peace. It is crucial to use the middle path when negotiating. The Middle Path promotes moderate, well-rounded strategies as opposed to radical ones. As seen in the peace negotiations between South Korea and North Korea, where Buddhist-influenced NGOs have facilitated conversation advocating non-extremist, inclusive perspectives, policymakers might employ this strategy to negotiate fair, win-win solutions in conflict zones. International organisations and nations can promote de-escalation and compromise in existing conflicts by adopting the Middle Path. Instead of zero-sum benefits, which frequently lead to more conflict, this strategy encourages outcomes that benefit both parties.

3.5. The importance of right speech and right intention

Buddhism emphasises "right speech," which refers to communication that is truthful, kind, and beneficial. Nationalist ideologies frequently rely

²³ Otto Simonsson et.al (2023) "Mindfulness in Politics: A Qualitative Study on Mindfulness Training in the UK Parliament", *Mindfulness* (N Y), May 29, p. 1.

²⁴ *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Samyutta Nikāya* (SN 56.11).

on rhetoric that creates division or demonises others. Communities can promote more inclusive and courteous communication by using appropriate language, so bridging gaps and reducing tensions. Buddhism advocates correct intention, which entails acting with goodwill, renunciation, and harmlessness. Adopting the appropriate intentions can encourage people to act from a place of understanding rather than fear or hostility, countering nationalist tendencies towards exclusion and dominance. According to Buddhism, overcoming conflict via communication is essential. The Buddhist emphasis on appropriate speech encourages honest and courteous conversation. This can be used to diplomatic processes in which respectful discourse and mutual understanding can lead to peaceful resolutions.

The dialogue and reconciliation have been neatly described the *Kosambiya Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 48). In the *Kosambiya Sutta*, the Buddha addresses a dispute among monks in the town of Kosambi, instructing them to overcome their differences through unity, patience, and compassion.²⁵ He emphasizes reconciliation over division and urges them to prioritize harmony in the community. Among the many Asian countries, South Korea gave more freedom for their citizen to have free speech and right intention, The country's constitution provides its citizens the right to free speech, press, petition, and assembly. However, the National Security legislation can be used to penalise actions or remarks in support of the North Korean regime or communism. Nevertheless, prosecutions under this statute have been rare in recent years. South Korea is also known as the country in Asia with the most freedom of press.

3.6. Sri Lankan example for forstering unity through Buddhism

When we apply these concepts in modern conflict resolution there are many aspects to emphasise. This can be applied to reconcile groups in ethnically or religiously divided regions. For example, Buddhist teachings on harmony and reconciliation aided Sri Lanka's peace and reconciliation efforts following the civil war, with suttas such as the *Kosambiya Sutta* helping to mend ethnic tensions. Encouraging conversation and mediation among warring parties is consistent with the Buddha's approach in Kosambi. By encouraging open discussion, parties can resolve disagreements without resorting to violence.

To foster understanding and ease tensions, Sri Lankan Buddhist monks have held interfaith discussions with leaders of other religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. Temples have functioned as impartial forums for discussion and the advancement of peace, especially in regions impacted by conflict. Buddhist monks have taken the lead in projects to reconstruct war-torn communities, aid displaced people, and offer trauma counselling. Programs that promote meditation and mindfulness have been utilised to assist people deal with trauma and cultivate inner calm, which has improved community cohesion generally. Buddhist ideas, which emphasise moral ideals and group healing, have been incorporated into national reconciliation frameworks, such as the work of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR).

²⁵ *Kosambiya Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya* (MN 48).

Values of tolerance and coexistence have been ingrained in younger generations thanks to the incorporation of Buddhist ethics and concepts into educational curricula. Buddhist monks have been trained to actively participate in peacebuilding through specialised training programs, which have helped them comprehend the sociopolitical complexity of post-war Sri Lanka.²⁶

Sri Lanka has shared its experiences in fostering reconciliation and emphasised the relevance of Buddhist teachings in advancing world peace by taking part in international Buddhist conferences, such as the United Nations Day of Vesak. International Buddhist leaders' visits to Sri Lanka have reinforced local efforts for reconciliation by highlighting interconnectedness and unity. The 14th UN day of Vesak has been held on May 12th to 14th, 2017 in Colombo Sri Lanka with many national and international Buddhist guests.

Sri Lanka has become a unique example of a peace process that addresses civil war and national conflict in an intellectual way. International acceptance and support are often sparked by support for standards like sustainability, the rule of law, and freedom of speech. To give Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists the impression that they are also accepted and understood internationally, the government may want to think about incorporating Buddhist parallels to popular ideals into its foreign policy rhetoric. Such references should simultaneously promote Sinhalese-Buddhist identity and generate favourable responses from foreign governments, the media, and civil society.²⁷ Most nations and cultures around the world would embrace values like nonviolence, compassion for all life, and freedom of inquiry that are found in the *Pāḷi* canon that serve as scriptural authority for Sinhalese Buddhists and other *Theravāda* Buddhist communities in Thailand and Myanmar. Therefore, an effort to include allusions to the *Pāḷi* canon in Sri Lanka's foreign policy discourse may result in favourable international recognition for Sinhalese Buddhists. Additionally, it would draw attention to their position within the larger global *Theravāda* Buddhist community. Buddhists in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia would also find resonance in references to the *Pāḷi* canon, which would provide a basis for further multilateral cooperation with other nations with a large *Theravāda* Buddhist population. From 1990s', Thailand is a taking a great move for religious freedom and has established a new dialogue on peace between religious communities.²⁸

The question of what it would look like in practice emerges if the justification for Buddhist principles being included in foreign policy communications is evident. One example of Buddhist foreign policy messaging is the 1951 San

²⁶ Iselin Frydenlund & Phyo Wai (2024) "Revolution or Order? Buddhist Responses to the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar", in *Journal of Contemporary Asia* Volume 54, Issue 5: Revolution and Solidarity in Myanmar, pp. 801-803.

²⁷ Nira Wickramasinghe (2006) *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 123 - 124.

²⁸ Buddhist Research Institute (1995) *Peacemakers*. Thailand: Mahacala Buddhist University.

Francisco Peace Conference experience of Sri Lanka. The purpose of the peace conference was to decide Japan's place in the post-World War II world order. The delegation from Sri Lanka, led by then-finance minister J. R. Jayawardene, campaigned for a freer Japan and rejected war reparations, while other nations argued for harsh restrictions to quell Japanese nationalism. By referencing Buddhism, this reconciling position incorporated compassion and nonviolence into policymaking. Jayawardene said "We do not intend to [seek reparations] for we believe in the words of the Great Teacher [the Buddha] whose message has ennobled the lives of countless millions in Asia, that hatred ceases not by hatred but by love". Together with Pakistan, Sri Lanka presented its Buddhist-inspired argument for a free Japan.²⁹

Utilising Sri Lanka's Buddhist heritage served a particular political goal: promoting the liberal peace for Asia that was supported by the West and became known as the San Francisco System. At the same time, Jayawardene linked religious ideas to the secular humanist concept of compassion by using language that did not burden the message with complex beliefs. He avoided focussing his message primarily on religion. Jayawardene made the religious component of the message more approachable for the conference's global audience by subtly highlighting Buddhism's relevance to current political challenges rather than portraying these ideals as universal truths.

Therefore, these practical examples can be viewed as how Buddhism offers a comprehensive framework for overcoming the negative sides of nationalism. The Buddhist national discourse and its leadership must encourage integration, compassion, and non-attachment. It essentially promoted to include all the religions, ethnicities and castes into one collective community that value human dignity. Buddhist ideas can promote a change in perspective, frigid identity boundaries to shared human experiences. It also encourages people to be matured from polarising pride to inclusive compassion.³⁰ Even though the communities might not completely eradicate nationalism they can develop peace and harmony within them. In order for Buddhism to be a remedy, these principles would have to be incorporated into both individual behaviours and governmental regulations, creating a culture in which respect and empathy for everyone who has tempered with nationalism.

Buddhist-inspired initiatives have been implemented in conflict areas to assist people in coping with fear, anger, and trauma. In post-conflict contexts, these initiatives have proven very helpful in assisting ex-combatants in reintegrating into society without resorting to violence. Buddhism alone cannot stop wars, but its principles can guide individuals and leaders towards peaceful, constructive ways of resolving conflicts. We observe that Buddhist-

²⁹ Barana Waidyatilake and Myra Sivaloganathan (2018) "Can Buddhist Values Overcome Nationalism in Sri Lanka?", <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2018/07/can-buddhist-values-overcome-nationalism-in-sri-lanka?lang=en¢er=india>

³⁰ .. Iselin Frydenlund (2005) *The Sangha and its relation to the peace process in Sri Lanka*. Oslo: PRIO Report, pp. 8 - 10.

inspired peace projects can lessen violence and promote a road towards unity and healing in areas like Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Buddhist techniques like compassion, mindfulness, and non-attachment might be used as instruments to address the underlying causes of conflict, changing perceptions and promoting a more peaceful world community if leaders and communities around the globe adopted them.

IV. MODERN SCHOLARLY THEORIES TO EXPAND THE BUDDHIST DIALOGUE OF PEACE AND INCLUSION

There are many modern scholars and policy makers who brought different approaches but promoted the similar values of human dignity and inclusion. Therefore, to conclude this discussion of Buddhist approaches to stop wars and build peace, I would like to highlight few theoretical approaches in modern day scholarly world. In contemporary scholarly discourse, theories of inclusion are quite relevant, and we can integrate them with Buddhist teachings to promote greater peace and harmony. In order to address structural inequities that frequently exclude particular groups based on factors like race, religion, nationality, or socioeconomic position, inclusion theories concentrate on establishing fair chances for participation and representation throughout all spheres of society.

4.1. Capability approach

One of the important theories that explains how inclusion hurts human society is the Capability Approach, developed by Indian academic Amartya Sen. Sen's thesis highlights the significance of giving people the chance to accomplish their life goals. According to this viewpoint, avoiding inclusion entails making sure that everyone has access to the tools, liberties, and capacities necessary for them to fully engage in society. Rather than mere equality of opportunity, the Capability Approach calls for a deeper understanding of individual needs, advocating that society enable individuals to achieve their potential regardless of their social background.³¹ This can be use with the Buddhist philosophy of equality and the governments can provide opportunities to people regardless their race, ethnicity, religion, class and caste. These equal opportunities will lead the country into a more harmonic place. Since the Gautam Buddha has also promoted a greater inclusion, it is very vital that Buddhist leaders encourage inclusion and harmony in their countries. As diverse Buddhist nations, Mayanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, China and Vietnam can promote this policy and enjoy peace and harmony.

4.2. Theory of justice & social identity theory

Another important theory in the modern scholarly discussion is John Rawls' Theory of Justice. In the Theory of Justice, Rawls introduces the concept of "justice as fairness," which promotes equality in the distribution of social goods. Rawls advocates for a "veil of ignorance" in which people

³¹ A. Sen (1979). "Equality of What?" *The Tanner Lecture on Human Values*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 2-5.

design a society as if they do not know their social position. This causes systems to foster inclusion and give the least advantaged people's well-being priority. By emphasising impartiality and fairness, Rawls' theory encourages structural adjustments. It fosters human dignity and tackles social inequity.³² Furthermore, Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory can be used to comprehend more harmonious social inclusion. Tajfel's Social Identity Theory explains how people categorize themselves into "in-groups" and "out-groups," often leading to exclusionary practices and discrimination. This theory helps explain why nationalist identities often nurture the exclusion of "other" groups. Addressing inclusion means challenging these rigid identities and promoting a shared, interconnected sense of identity.³³

To promote social inclusion and justice, Theory of Justice and Social Identity Theory can be used with Buddhist ideas. As Rawls' concept of "justice as fairness," prioritizes equality and the least advantaged, it can be resonated with the Buddhist principle of *karuṇā* (compassion) and the ethical responsibility to alleviate suffering. The "veil of ignorance" reflects the Buddhist concept of *anatta* (non-self) and promotes fairness by eliminating ego-based distinctions. Tajfel's views on in-group and out-group dynamics get together with the Buddhist principle of interconnection (*patichcha samuppāda*). It aims to promote harmony by breaking down rigid identities. Together, these frameworks can promote structural inclusion and peace.

4.3. Human dignity theories

Human Dignity Theories are another collection of theories that can be used to elaborate on Buddhist discourse. Human dignity theories are based on the premise that everyone has inherent value and deserves to be treated with respect and honour. They emphasise the universal significance of human life and the moral imperative to defend and respect everyone's rights. Immanuel Kant's Deontological Ethics is one such theory that can be altered. Kant's moral philosophy is based on the idea that humans should be viewed as ends in themselves, not as means to an end. His approach to human dignity is grounded in the idea that each individual has intrinsic worth because of their capacity for rationality and moral agency. Kantian ethics calls for respect and autonomy, suggesting that policies or systems that disregard an individual's dignity are morally unacceptable.³⁴

Martha Nussbaum, a philosopher, also contends that social justice and dignity are fundamental human rights. Human dignity, according to Nussbaum, necessitates granting people fundamental rights and liberties that enable them to follow their own life objectives. This concept challenges systems that deny

³² J. Rawls (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 4 - 10.

³³ H. Tajfel & Turner, J. C. (1979). "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict." In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Chicago: Burnham Inc Pub location, pp. 33 - 38.

³⁴ I. Kant (1785). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 12 - 22.

dignity through marginalisation or discrimination and is in line with the aim to build inclusive societies that value each individual.³⁵ In order to address human dignity, Donna Hicks' dignitarian theory is equally significant. The core of Hicks' philosophy of dignity is realising and honouring each person's intrinsic value. According to Hicks, most disputes stem from abuses of people's dignity, and conflict can be avoided and resolved by respecting each individual's dignity. By urging nations to respect dignity as an inherent human value, this idea offers a framework for dealing with nationalism and conflict.³⁶

Buddhism's emphasis on the inherent worth and universal respect for all beings is consistent with human dignity theories. Recognising each person's inherent potential for enlightenment is the foundation of the Buddhist concept of dignity, which is consistent with Kant's thesis that people are ends in and of themselves. Martha Nussbaum's emphasis on fundamental rights aligns with Buddhist teachings on compassion and non-discrimination, which promote inclusive societies. Donna Hicks' dignitarian perspective is consistent with Buddhism's emphasis on resolving conflict via mutual respect. Appiah's cosmopolitanism echoes the Buddhist notion of interconnection, advocating for a universal ethic of empathy and unity that transcends dividing nationalism.

4.4. Cosmopolitanism and anti-nationalism

The theories of cosmopolitanism and anti-nationalism are another group of concepts developed by modern scholars. Anti-nationalism theories support more inclusive, universal forms of identity in place of nationalist ideologies, which are exclusionary and frequently polarising. Kwame Anthony Appiah's Ethical Cosmopolitanism is important to this debate. Appiah's cosmopolitanism encourages a global code of ethics that transcends national or ethnic barriers and treats every human being equally. Cosmopolitanism opposes the idea of giving one country or group precedence over another and acknowledges the interconnection of all people. By advocating for a "citizen of the world" mentality that fosters empathy and respect for other cultures, Appiah's method opposes nationalism.³⁷

Numerous anti-national views that align with the teachings of the Buddha can be applied to this subject. One notion that should be comprehended when analyzing nation and nationalism is Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities." According to Anderson's thesis, nations are not innate or natural groupings but rather "imagined" communities created via shared symbols, histories, and ideologies. By demonstrating that national identities are created and subject to deconstruction, this point of view bolsters anti-nationalist arguments by proposing more inclusive and universally based

³⁵ M.C. Nussbaum (2000). *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 34 - 37.

³⁶ D. Hicks (2011). *Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays in Resolving Conflict*. Connecticut: Yale University Press, pp. 67 - 71.

³⁷ K. A. Appiah (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 23 - 28.

alternative identities.³⁸ Erich Fromm offered a theory on humanism and radical humanism. He advocates for “radical humanism,” which highlights how mankind can move past limited, polarising identities and adopt a more inclusive, holistic sense of self. Fromm’s theories oppose nationalist inclinations by urging people to look for contentment and a sense of belonging in universal human values rather than in national or ethnic differences.³⁹

Buddhism can coexist with anti-nationalist ideologies such as Erich Fromm’s “Radical Humanism” and Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities.” Buddhism’s view of impermanence and conditioned existence aligns with Anderson’s conviction that nations are socially constructed. Buddhist discourse is more akin to contemporary anti-nationalism theories since Buddhism promotes the dismantling of fixed identities in favour of connectivity. Fromm’s advocacy for radical humanism, which prioritizes universal human values over divisive national or ethnic divisions, is consistent with the Buddhist ideals of *metta* (loving-kindness) and *karuṇā* (compassion). By criticizing nationalist ideas, both modern theories and ancient Buddhist philosophies promote inclusivity, harmony, and an emphasis on common human dignity, matching Buddhism’s teachings on transcending egoistic attachments and accepting the oneness of all life.

Stefan Berger as a German historian has also critically evaluated the nation and nationalism. The main focus of Stefan Berger’s critique of nationalism is its widespread impact on politics, identity formation, and historiography. He draws attention to the ways nationalism has influenced historical narratives by elevating national heroes, silencing minority voices, and producing teleological, oversimplified interpretations that further nation-state objectives. His writings, including *The Search for Normality*, examine how German historiography evolved away from nationalist frameworks, especially in the years following World War II. Berger emphasizes how nationalism creates myths about shared histories to support national sovereignty while omitting regional and international communities. He criticizes it for discouraging restricted identities, which frequently result in bigotry, xenophobia, and the repression of opposition. Berger promotes a transnational perspective to history that emphasizes interconnection and shared experiences across borders to counteract these tendencies.⁴⁰

In his book *History and Identity: How Historical Theory Shapes Historical Practice* (2022) he critically investigates the relationship between history, nation, and identity, emphasizing the importance of a more inclusive approach to historical studies. Berger criticizes the traditional nation-centric narratives

³⁸ B. Anderson (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, pp. 44 - 47.

³⁹ E. Fromm (1961). *Marx’s Concept of Man*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., pp. 45 - 46.

⁴⁰ Stefan Berger (2007) *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 11 - 13.

that have dominated historical writing, claiming that they frequently foster exclusivity and marginalize opposing viewpoints. He has made numerous critiques of nationalism and identity, as well as observations of essentialism in national histories. Berger argues that national histories usually establish identity using essentialist frameworks. These narratives frequently homogenize varied experiences inside a country, resulting in an artificial sense of togetherness while obscuring internal divisions. He criticizes the tendency of national histories to promote dominant groups while ignoring minorities and alternative viewpoints. Berger claims that this promotes exclusion and fails to reflect nations' complex, heterogeneous realities. He observes that nation-centric histories are frequently used to legitimise political authority and perpetuate hegemonic ideology. This instrumentalization reinforces cultural superiority illusions and promotes conflict over understanding. Berger pushes for a more inclusive historiography that welcomes many voices and ideas in the country. He contends that historical narratives should reflect the diversity of experiences within cultures, shifting away from the nation-state as the fundamental paradigm.⁴¹

Berger's critique of nationalism coincides with Buddhist teachings by questioning the fixed identities and divisive beliefs which often promoted by nationalism. Buddhism emphasizes the impermanence of all creations, including national identities. Buddhism is the main philosophy that encourages people to move beyond their allegiance to narrow attachments. Berger's idea for a transnational viewpoint is consistent with Buddhism's idea of interdependence (*patichcha samuppada*), which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and events. Berger's work exemplifies the Buddhist goal of overcoming ignorance of voiceless people and building compassion for all by criticizing nationalist tendencies that marginalize minorities and exacerbate discord. Both approaches promote togetherness and understanding across artificial barriers and exclusive identities.

4.5. Universal upliftment policy & anti-colonial humanism

On the other hand, a Hindu philosopher and a political activist Mahatma Gandhi has introduced *Sarvodaya* (Universal Upliftment) policy. Gandhi's concept of *sarvodaya* advocates for the upliftment and welfare of all, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or religion. *Sarvodaya* is based on the idea that true progress benefits everyone, and it opposes nationalism that benefits only select groups. Gandhi's philosophy encourages moral behaviour, community collaboration, and non-violence while taking an anti-nationalist and humanist viewpoint.⁴² Frantz Fanon's *Anti-Colonial Humanism* also discusses inclusivity and human dignity in graphic detail. Fanon critiques the repressive power structures of colonialism and nationalism, which are divisive

⁴¹ Stefan Berger (2022) *History and Identity: How Historical Theory Shapes Historical Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 21 - 26.

⁴² M. K. Gandhi (1909). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, pp. 31 - 33.

and dehumanising. He advocates for humanism that upholds each group's own cultural identity while also advancing equality, dignity, and respect for one another across all boundaries. In order to uphold justice and dignity for all, Fanon's anti-nationalist humanism demands a dedication to humanity as a whole.⁴³ These all concepts and theories promote equality, inclusion and human dignity that can be correlated with Buddhist ideas. Therefore, it can be argued that both modern scholarly discourse and Buddhist philosophies value same humanitarian perspectives for peace and harmony for a better world.

4.6. Universal declaration of human rights

The concept that all people have inherent value is promoted by universal humanism as a framework for developing policies. It also supports actions and regulations that uphold human rights, dignity, and global inclusion. Embodying the ideals of universal humanism, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) provides a framework for universal human dignity and rights that cut beyond state borders. It declares that everyone is entitled to justice, freedom, and peace. As a cornerstone text for human rights, it encourages a worldwide commitment to human dignity and opposes nationalistic policies that violate fundamental rights. These are the following important articles of UDHR that secure human dignity and inclusion.

Article 1- "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2- "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty."

Article 3- "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."⁴⁴

These Articles of the UDHR emphasize the fundamental principles of equality, dignity, and freedom that underpin universal human rights. They advocate for mutual respect, inclusivity, and the protection of every individual's right to life, liberty, and security, transcending all forms of discrimination or political boundaries. Together, these articles form a cornerstone for fostering a just and harmonious global community. They also resonate deeply with Buddhist philosophy, emphasizing the intrinsic dignity and equality of all beings. Rooted in compassion and wisdom, these principles call for the recognition of interconnectedness and the practice of loving-kindness toward

⁴³ F. Fanon (1961). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Présence Africaine. New York: Grove Press, pp. 17 - 19.

⁴⁴ UDHR- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

all, transcending distinctions of race, religion, or status. By safeguarding the right to life, liberty, and security, they align with the Buddhist path of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) and the collective aspiration for harmony and universal well-being.

V. CONCLUSION

Buddhist ideas have a significant impact in fostering world peace and settling disputes. The ideas of equanimity (*upekkha*), compassion (*karuṇā*), non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), and interconnection (*pratītyasamutpāda*) provide useful strategies for transforming conflict-driven attitudes and advancing inclusivity. Buddhism breaks down rigid identities by promoting non-attachment (*upādāna*) and highlighting the impermanence of the ego (*anatta*), which promotes unity over division. Core teachings like mindfulness (*sati*) and the Middle Path (*madhyamā-pratipadā*) encourage moderation, self-awareness, and balanced decision-making, that is essential for leaders negotiating complex disputes. Historically, Buddhist nations have utilized these teachings in national integration and reconciliation efforts. Sri Lanka's post-conflict rebuilding and Thailand's inclusiveness of minority communities exemplify these values in action. Aung San Suu Kyi and the Dalai Lama are two Buddhist leaders who proved that how Buddhist principles may influence leadership and diplomacy on a global scale. Buddhist concepts can be incorporated into international politics to change nationalist viewpoints, advance lasting peace, and foster international collaboration. One example of how Buddhist ideas can have a positive effect on international relations is Sri Lanka's support for rapprochement with Japan during the San Francisco Peace Conference. Buddhist teachings place a high value on empathy, dialogue, and non-attachment, offering a timeless, universally applicable framework for resolving current issues and fostering world peace.

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THE BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE ABOUT SOCIAL EQUALITY

The My, Vo*

Abstract:

“Men is the Measure of all things,”¹ Protagoras, who was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher (around 485 - 415 BCE) announced. However, not only in the ancient period but also in modern times, people are still consistently seeking themselves equality in society because it has been lost justice and social equality. It is considered the biggest problem of human history. Particularly, in the pre-Buddhism period, Indian society was classified into four classes separated by Vedic Tradition. At the moment, Indians, in particular, still face discrimination and classism. In Greek and Roman society, society was separated into master and slave classes. Slaves were viewed as a purchase bought and trafficked. They lacked freedom and equality. Modern society, nowadays, is not equability since there are the rich and the poor.

The Buddha, who is the father of Buddhism, established justice and equality in ancient India through main principles such as pratityasamutpāda (inter-relationship), four Noble Truths (suffering, reasons raising suffering, happiness, and the ways leading happiness), and three dharma sights (impermanence, suffering, non-self). These principles are foundational ground to deal with not merely metaphysics but also social problems, especially social justice. However, although the Buddha pioneered and advocated for a justice society, he also preached the deed theory (karma) as a responsibility for themselves and community as Mahāyāna Buddhism. Justice in society is viewed from Buddhist perspectives as responsibility for ourselves and the community.

Keyword: *Buddhist, social equality, karma, interdependence, human rights, non-discrimination, compassion.*

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¹ Joshua J. Mark, “Protagoras of Abdera: Of All Things, Man Is The Measure”, <<https://www.worldhistory.org/article/61/protagoras-of-abdera-of-all-things-man-is-the-meas/>>, (Update, 23th December 2024).

I. INTRODUCTION

Over two thousand five hundred years ago, Buddhism offered a diversity of philosophy for humankind, in which it could be discoursed about society. The Buddha pioneered and advocated for freedom, social justice, and equality. Furthermore, the Buddha was a person who tried to perform a big revolution to overthrow the existing society in India. However, because Vedic prejudice became the foundational root of Indian ideology, lower classes could not stand it. Buddhism is viewed as their salvation. In ancient Indian society, the words “social justice” and “social equality” were injustice and non-human rights in the society, nowadays. No one could deny ancient China and the Greeks, typically, which is the reason why philosophers tried to mention their social philosophical ideas.

Relating to this issue, Buddhism handled this through metaphysics or ontology; particularly, the Buddha declared that “this exists that exists, this becomes that become”.¹ This idea of Buddhism has been a reputed theory about the hierarchic social structure of the Vedic tradition (varṇa).² Besides, living in relationships is nurtured, from Mahāyāna Buddhism, compassion. Furthermore, karma (deed) is employed to distinguish between a Brahmanic and a moral man.

His preachings included justice and equality from the lens of society. Today, it still has profound value, by realistic experience to send a vitally important message to human beings. In this paper, it will mention four issues, in particular: firstly, Buddhism’s ontology to deal with some problems of recent society in the world; secondly, the definition of social equality and notices concerning; thirdly, the Buddhist perspective about social equality combined between own responsibility with family and society; and lastly, how the teachings’ value of the Buddha to establish social equitability in the world. The content of the paper focused on the biggest puzzle concerning social equality and seeks solutions for ones.

II. BUDDHISM’S ONTOLOGY TO DEAL WITH SOCIAL PROBLEMS

“Man is a measure of all things,” Protagoras declared, however, there are many severe problems such as race, religion, sexualism, and skin-colour discrimination while, from the Buddhist view, man is conscious of one thing and free will.³ However, it is difficult to approach the definition of humanity if it is not concerned with Buddhist ontology.

First and foremost, Cause-and-effect Principle or inter-relationship (Pratīyasamupāda), the Buddha admitted that all phenomena are in inter-relationship, which means “this exists that exists, this becomes that becomes”

¹ SN.12.23.

² Martin T. Adam (2013), Buddhism, Equality, Rights. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, volume 20, pp. 422 - 43.

³ Ibid., Martin T. Adam, p. 433.

in Sutta Nidānasamyutta.⁴ Eventually, one cannot live independently in society. He is protected by human rights, but they must have a responsibility for themselves and society as karma (deed) in Buddhism.

Furthermore, the theory of equality is viewed as the centre of Buddhism with three main compelling reasons: all people have buddha-hood potential (1); all are equal in suffering (2), and all live independently (3). Therefore, why people are differing is impossible. In 2020, it was witnessed that, according to the BBC of Britain, 164 Black men and women were killed by police in the United States.⁵

Buddhism mentioned Karma (deed) as the result of activities like protecting all human beings instead of protecting the authority and power of Brahman in ancient society. Whether good or bad karma is created by their activities, it determines the dignity of a person, while Vedic tradition dignity through their origin and family position. Generating morality is viewed as the way leading to getting rid of suffering and entering liberty (nirvana). Morality contrasts with the greed of war. However, nowadays, military, economic wars, and arms race have been the biggest problems. The result of the war made workers unemployed, which means they could not take care of themselves and their relatives, poverty and society's vices happening if they were not supported enough by the government. Karma is indeed like people's responsibility for themselves and society.

Moreover, human beings have just gotten over the trauma of 19-covid that was a biological weapon; furthermore, COVID-19 is still being seen as unequitable. Nowadays, it is the biggest question concerning the biological weapon, which created the result, 179 billion people having been infected by COVID-19. There are 3.88 billion people dead from the infection (the numbers may be higher).

There are many virtually important events happening in the world, impact human rights, and there is no social equality because of so much desire from humans. Although International Laws or Global Human Rights support human rights, which are living rights, liberty rights, possessing rights, and so on. Many people are seeking any religion to find salvation and address what is occurring in the world, but they have not been found.

III. THE TERM "SOCIAL EQUALITY" AND SOME DEFINITIONS REGARDING

The term "equality society" is really difficult to define as it connects to political institutions and parties. In particular, Anatole France from "The Red Lily" (1894), "The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well

⁴ Bhikkhu Bodhi (translated), (2000), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikaya)*, The United States of America: Wisdom Publication, p. 533.

⁵ Li Cohen, "Police in the U.S. killed 164 Black people in the first 8 months of 2020. These are their names", September 10, 2020, <<https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/black-people-killed-by-police-in-the-u-s-in-2020/>> Updated, 20th January, 2025.

as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.”⁶ It is proved that in society, all could be protected and all have living rights. They must be offered basic living necessities that fulfil the living, such as food, room, and happiness. On contract, it is hard to do because of different deeds. The Buddha mentioned private deeds, although he had radical thinking about social justice. Another definition

Social equality is a state of affairs in which all people within a specific society have equal rights, liberties, and status, possibly including civil rights, freedom of speech, property rights, and equal access to certain social goods and social services. Social equality requires the absence of legally enforced social class or caste boundaries and the absence of discrimination motivated by an inalienable part of a person’s identity.⁷

This definition of equality is shown at three essential angles: equal rights, liberties, and status in a society. There is without distinction about the caste system in society, humankind is alike among a society to enjoy social services. Social equality has sustainable cooperation with human rights. On contract, the definition does not state the responsibility for citizens in society. Buddhists admit karma as citizens’ responsibilities for themselves and the community. It is both a religious aspect to reach true happiness (nirvana), equality of human rights, and responsibility for society in spite of the fact that Buddhism, in the past, reached this definition and had essential ideas of social equality, human rights, and duty. One of the most important is the absence of a caste system in society.

Discoursing about human rights, according to the International Human Rights Law, declared in Paris on 10 December 1948, said that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”⁸ The declaration not only shows human rights but also mentions those who are equal and free. It focuses on morals as well as good activities based on relatives in a society. One aspect of the definition is proved truthfully through brotherhood as Buddhism mentioned about inter-relationship. Furthermore, relating to this topic, it must clarify the concept of Justice.

Justice is in its broadest sense, is the principle that people receive that which they deserve, with the interpretation of what then constitutes “deserving” being impacted upon by numerous fields, with many differing viewpoints and perspectives, including the concepts of moral correctness based on ethics, rationality, law, religion, equity and fairness.⁹

⁶ Bernadette McSherry, *What is the Social Equality?*, <<https://socialequity.unimelb.edu.au/stories/what-is-social-equity>>, updated 20th June 2024.

⁷ Wikipedia, “social equality”, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_equality#cite_note-Blackford-1>, updated 20th December 2024.

⁸ *International Human Right Law*, United Nations, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-and-mechanisms/international-human-rights-law>, Updated 23th November 2024.

⁹ Wikipedia, Justice, <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice>>, Updated 20th June 2024.

Some definitions mentioned above are some social categories that show the social issues. In human history, when people were conscious of their existence, they consistently protected and fought for their rights. Those wars are viewed as social evolutions for human rights as well as social equality. In some ways, human rights, social equality, justice, affair, and so on, are to protect humans. All people have the right to be protected in society by international law.

Summary, although, in Buddhist period, the definition social justice is not Buddhist perspective about social equality that relating to karma and own responsibility complete, however, obviously, the Buddha suggested theory of karma (deed), inter-relationship, compassion in brotherhood to deal well with social problems, especially, hierarchical social structure. Nowadays, teachings are still available for social peace and human rights to establish an equal society globally.

The Buddha taught what the way leading to social equality is, which starts from karma with responsibility; to seeking wealth for themselves in the light of righteous livelihood; from making wealth for themselves, society, and country, and larger.¹⁰ Because family is an essential atom to build a beautiful society. If there is a good family, there will be a good society. After that, he got into a larger society and declared that all are non-discrimination. Furthermore, from the based theories of Buddhism, inter-relationship and reciprocal relationship are viewed as the foundation for establishing community, which is the ground for equality in society. It started from the relationship.

In a family, both parents and a child must have responsibility

The Buddha highlighted reciprocal responsibilities. In this perfective, the Buddha showed six-pair relationships. (1) A son should minister to his parents and vice versa, (2) A Pupil should minister to their teachers and vice versa, (3) A husband should minister to his wife and vice versa, (4) A man should minister his friends and companions and vice versa,

(5) A master should minister to his servants and vice versa; (6) A man should minister to ascetics and Brahmins, and vice versa.¹¹

Responsibility is a duty to address some things and control some things. The Buddha showed the responsibility for all based on relationships in society, which is social justice and is appropriate with all periods of age, in some way. It is witnessed above, taking responsibility for all is the first essential step to building social equality. If everyone has accountability with themselves and others. People would not need social equality.

Justice is linked to human rights; it is obvious because people cannot demand their rights while they ignore their responsibilities, as the Buddha mentioned about karma. Karma is deeds with their intentions, which also means all are equal in their responsibility, conscious action, and rights.

¹⁰ Bodhi, B. (2016), *The Buddha's Teaching on Social Communal Harmony*, The United States of America: Wisdom Publication, p. 165.

¹¹ Nanamoli and Bodhi, B. (trans.) (2015), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikāya)*, The United States of America: Wisdom Publication, pp. 466 - 8.

Seeking wealth righteously. The Buddha taught that being a layman seeks wealth righteously, without violence, making him pleased; sharing this and meritorious deeds to others; not being tied by wealth, infatuated with it; understanding the escape.¹² Regarding this, the Buddha encouraged the layman to avoid five trades: trading in weapons, trading in living beings, trading in meat, trading in intoxicants, and trading in poisons.¹³ Since living by righteousness brings benefits for themselves and society, that is good karma. Additionally, as Global Law of Human Rights, all have living rights, freedom, and ownership rights. Practicing the teachings of the Buddha, people establish their duties in private and equality in society.

Trading in weapons can incite a war between countries or two sides. One weapon a businessman could cause suffering and harm to human rights because all people have equal rights to live and be free. Trading in living beings is alike. Trading in intoxicants and trading in poisons could make intelligent people fools. Intoxicants, wind, alcohol, and poisons threaten others, truthfully become bankrupt, and kill as well, which is mentioned in five precepts. Buddhism not only mentions social fields but also states natural physics. All are non-discriminatory; the Buddha encouraged that people do not trade animals and their meat since trading in meat is the cause of killing animals.

Furthermore, in Buddhism, there are five precepts, such as nurturing compassion and accumulating it. Five precepts are foundational of social justice relating to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on July 15, 1989 in Paris. It mentions three essential rights, particularly, freedom, living right, and ownership. Buddhism has established human rights and social justice based on five precepts to protect human beings. Besides precepts, the Buddha instructed that a layman must use their wealth for themselves and carries benefit for society, five ways follow: (1) Making themselves happy, (2) Making their friends and companions happy, (3) Making provisions his wealth against the losses (such as fire, flood, kings, bandits or unloved heirs, son destroys, and so on (or re-investment). (4) Making the five oblations to relatives, guests, ancestors, the king, and the deities. (5) Concerning religion and culture, establishing an uplifting offering of alms, a heavenly offering, resulting in happiness, conducive to heaven; to those ascetics and Brahmins.¹⁴

Five virtuous behaviors or five precepts. To build social equality, the community must accomplish virtuous behaviors, The Buddha taught that a noble disciple abstains from the destruction of life; abstains from taking what is not given; abstains from sexual misconduct; abstains from false speech; abstains from liquor, wine, and intoxicants, the basic for headless-ness.¹⁵

¹² Bodhi, b. (trans.) (2000), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikāya)*, The United States of America: Wisdom Publication, p. 1356.

¹³ Bodhi, B. (trans.) (2000), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikāya)*, The United States of America: Wisdom Publication, p. 177.

¹⁴ Bodhi, B. (trans.), *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikāya)*, pp. 665 - 6.

¹⁵ Bodhi, B. (translated), *The Numerical discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikāya)*, ibid.,

Which are the basic factors to carry social equality. The behaviors will bring happiness to themselves and others.

Consequently, these precepts are thought of as human rights and responsibilities for themselves to accumulate compassion as well. It is impossible there was compassion without precepts. John Locke (1632 - 1704) mentioned the legal rights, natural birthright, life rights, liberty, and property.¹⁶ Therefore, there is non-discrimination among human beings living in the world, so the teaching of the Buddha is proved by modern Western philosophy. Negating the social classes in ancient India is an indispensable principle to protect human rights and build social justice. Turning back to the Buddha's declaration, the Buddha taught that there was no discrimination.

“... Nor in the hands nor the feet
Nor in the fingers or the nails
Nor in the knees nor the thighs
Nor in their color or voice:
Here, birth makes no distinctive mark
As with the other kinds of birth.”¹⁷

In addition, in the Vasala Sutta, the Buddha destroyed Indian social classes: “Not by birth does one become an outcast, not by birth does one become a brahmana; by deeds or karma one becomes an outcast, by karma alone one becomes a brahmana.” The Buddha repeats: “Not by birth does one become a brahmana; not by birth is he a non-brahmana. It is karma that makes a person brahmana and non-brahmana.” In the Sutra, the Buddha focused on karma (deeds) rather than their origin. In the meaning of actions, or deeds, rather than where is the origin of a person. In the ideas, Buddhism gives no discrimination between religions in the spirit of equality. Buddhism taught all to live in tolerance and co-operation or co-existence with other religions.¹⁸ That is the reason why he used “water of the ocean” to show the association between Buddhism and other religions. Because of three main ideas, Martin T. Adam suggested all human beings are equal in suffering and happiness (1), all have potential Buddhahood (2), and all have the same karma of human beings (3).¹⁹

The Buddha showed that all people in a society have non-discrimination, which is the Buddhist perspective about social equality. The Buddha wanted to destroy the caste stratification in the Indian-social system. According to the Hindu law books, which classified the Indian-Social system into 4 castes

449 - 50.

¹⁶ Krzysztof Łazarski, *John Locke's State of Nature and the Origins of Rights of Man*, Łazarski University, Warsaw, pp. 48 - 56.

¹⁷ Nanamoli Bodhi, B. (trans.) (2015), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikāya)*, The United States of America: Wisdom Publication, pp. 799 - 800.

¹⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi (translated), *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikāya)*, Ibid., p. 640.

¹⁹ Martin T. Adam, *ibid.*, pp. 422 - 43.

Brahmin, Khattiya, Vessa, and Suddas. The Buddha declared, all are alike, and there is no discrimination, which relies on the non-discrimination of Mahayana Buddhism and the ontology of the dependent theory.

The Buddhist perspective about social equality is proved by stating the responsibility of the individual in a society. It invades to seek the property in the light of five livelihoods, using the possession of social benefit. Furthermore, Buddhism declared Indian social boundaries without discrimination, whatever and wherever each person was born. This is a spiritual non-discrimination as well as spiritual compassion of Buddhism.

IV. HOW THE TEACHINGS' VALUES OF BUDDHISM ESTABLISH SOCIAL EQUITABILITY IN THE WORLD

How to apply the Buddhist perspective in our society is the biggest issue. However, the Sutras above show thoroughly.

Firstly, the Buddhist ideals about social equality start from an individual's responsibility as karma that is considered a brick to build up society. If one person has a duty with themselves and their relatives in family and others, a society will be established with equality. Because human beings are part of a community in a society. All thanks to the Dependent Principle or inter-relationship of Buddhism based on ontology, which means all people are in fraternity. As the Sutta Nipata 705 shows As I am, so are these; as are these, so I am.

Secondly, seeking wealth righteously and sharing a wealthy property with others means they carry happiness for themselves and others in a society based on non-discrimination. Besides, in the light of human rights, people have living rights, freedom, and property. No one can violate, kill, or threaten them; therefore, the community has to be protected. Throwing away the hate in a mind is the worst way that leads to non-violence, no war, and so on.

Lastly, by practicing compassion, helping, and sharing difficulties with others, there will be without discrimination in a society, in the modern world, people, religions, cultures, and so on, living in the light of conscience and compassion in brotherhoods.

V. CONCLUSION

In the history of humankind, social equality and some issues regarding human rights have been put at priority while people were conscious of their existence. Based on the ontology of Buddhism, all phenomena have interrelationships (*pratiyamamupāda*). Conditionally, all have the same suffering and happiness, the same human karma, and all have Buddhahood. Therefore, there is no discrimination of religion, race, and origin. As the Buddha declared:

“While in these births, the differences
Of birth make their distinctive mark,
With humans, no differences of birth

Make a distinctive mark in them.”²⁰

However, when there are the rich and the poor, many religions, different skin colours, racism, cultures, and so on, there is discrimination, which means there is no equality in the society. Besides the human philosophy of Protagoras, the Buddha declared that “humans possess the Buddha nature”, and according to Biblical tradition, “humans are the God above the earth.”²¹ The Buddha mentioned the role of humankind in society in terms of responsibility. He presented all things starting from karma of themselves; seeking righteous wealth; sharing property to all in the light of compassion; protecting five virtue activities; respecting other religions and cultures, which are viewed as the best way to build up social equality.

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²¹ Sellia B. King, *Buddha Nature*, *ibid.*, p. 139.

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LEAVING HATRED BEHIND: THE TRUTH IN EXCLUSIVISM FROM THE R20 FORUM THROUGH A THERAVĀDA PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

The inaugural Religion Forum of the G20 (R20), held in Bali, Indonesia, in 2022, underscored the urgency of interfaith dialogue in addressing global challenges, especially religious conflict. Organized by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), it emphasized the need to transcend traditional exclusivism and foster collaboration among religious leaders. This paper explores exclusivism from a Theravāda Buddhist perspective, distinguishing between internal exclusivism, which promotes self-development and harmony, and external exclusivism, which fosters divisiveness and enmity.

Through historical and doctrinal analysis, the paper highlights the importance of balancing faith (*saddhā*) with wisdom (*paññā*) to overcome the mental defilements (*kilesa*) that perpetuate external exclusivism, such as jealousy (*issā*) and stinginess (*macchariya*). Key teachings, including the *Kesamutti sutta*, *Sakkapañha sutta*, *Anattalakkhaṇa sutta*, and *Dhammapada*, advocate coexistence in a pluralistic society and critical inquiry. Buddhist contemplative practices, particularly the contemplation of feeling (*vedanānupassanā*), offer a practical pathway to reduce unskillful qualities (*akusala*) and cultivate skillful qualities (*kusala*) by mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*) as antidote of blind faith.

The forum's discussions from global religious leaders underscored the destructive power of hatred as the root of conflict, and the necessity of interfaith collaboration to leave it behind. Drawing on Theravāda Buddhism's millennia-long experience in peaceful coexistence, the study advocates the active participation of Buddhist leaders in order to figure out a harmonious and tolerant global society.

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Keywords: *United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV), R20 Forum, interfaith dialogue, religious exclusivism, conflict resolution, Theravāda religious tolerance, pluralism, contemplation of feeling (vedanānupassanā), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), global harmony.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Religion Forum in G20 (R20), held for the first time in Bali, Indonesia, in 2022, marked a significant momentous in promoting global interfaith dialogue. Organized by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, this century-old institution has long championed religious tolerance and pluralism in the country with the world's largest Muslim population. The conference brought together religious leaders from diverse backgrounds to address pressing global challenges. A total of 160 international religious leaders and 250 domestic figures participated, amounting to approximately 400 attendees, reflecting the forum's dedication to fostering interfaith cooperation (Firmansyah, 2022).

The event was inaugurated by President Joko Widodo of Indonesia, who expressed his aspirations in his opening speech:

“Religious leaders of different faiths and nations must work together to strengthen religion’s contribution to solving the world’s problems, reduce rivalry, end conflict, and achieve a peaceful, united world.”¹

The forum aimed to encourage collaborative solutions through interfaith dialogue, addressing critical issues such as climate change, poverty, and conflict – whether between religious groups or with secular movements. As the only Buddhist nun participant at this significant gathering, the issue of conflict resonated deeply, inspiring a focus on nurturing peace and understanding. The conference showcased diverse perspectives on achieving global harmony. Religious leaders shared profound insights rooted in their traditions, emphasizing their moral responsibility to address global challenges and advocate for peace and unity among their followers. For example, persistent conflicts, such as those between Palestine and Israel, highlighted the urgent need for religious leaders to contribute to solutions (Benthall, 2023).

Religious intolerance and conflict often arise from the belief that one’s religion is the sole path to salvation, viewing other faiths as false or even harmful.² This mindset can lead to prejudice, discrimination, and violence. Understanding the reasons behind exclusivist claims is essential to bridging divides and promoting religious freedom. Such understanding also encourages self-reflection within faith traditions, prompting individuals to critically examine their beliefs and consider their impact on others.

The R20 Forum represented a significant step forward but also revealed the limitations of traditional interfaith dialogue. Achieving practical harmony

¹ Center of Shared Civilizational Values (2023): 2.

² D’Costa (1996): 224.

requires moving beyond doctrinal debates and focusing on shared goals present in all religions: prioritizing happiness and well-being for humanity. This vision can be realized through meaningful collaboration among global religious leaders, with active participation from Buddhist leaders playing a key role.

II. THE UNEVENNESS OF INTERFAITH GROUND FOR HARMONY

The Buddha's teaching also acknowledges and accepts the diversity of religions as a reality. Referring to *Koraṇḍiya Jataka*, the world is uneven, with hills, mountains, valleys, and ravines. Attempting to flatten the mountains or fill the valleys to create uniformity is unwise.³ Instead, one should understand the nature of the terrain and accept it as it is, thereby avoiding harm. In essence, this analogy captures the Buddhist perspective on religious pluralism: respect for diversity, avoidance of imposition, and a focus on tolerance. Just as nature thrives through its diversity, humanity flourishes when religious traditions are respected and allowed to coexist. Attempting to impose uniformity among religions is not only counterproductive but also a source of conflict and suffering. Instead, the emphasis lies in understanding and appreciating the unique characteristics of each religion.

However, some suggest that all religions share moral commonalities to foster tolerance⁴ and encourage inclusivism in society. Inclusivism, while striving to foster harmony, has potential weaknesses that may render it unbeneficial in certain contexts (Irlenborn, 2010). One significant issue is philosophical complexity and lack of clarity. Inclusivism is less developed in philosophical debates compared to exclusivism and pluralism, often relying on nuanced theological and philosophical arguments. The concept of "inclusivity" itself is prone to misinterpretation. Some may mistakenly perceive it as an endorsement of all beliefs, irrespective of their truth claims, which can conflict with the firm convictions held by certain traditions.

Another challenge lies in the concept of partial truth, which inclusivism speculates exists in other religions. It can be seen as the dilution of core beliefs, as efforts to find common ground can sometimes lead to compromises in religious principles. This is particularly problematic for traditions with strong doctrinal foundations. Inclusivism also risks slipping into religious relativism, where all religions are viewed as equally valid, potentially undermining the core convictions of faiths that uphold objective truth.

Finally, inclusivism runs the risk of ignoring real differences between religions. While emphasizing common ground is valuable, failing to acknowledge and address the significant distinctions between faiths can hinder genuine understanding and meaningful interfaith dialogue.

For further illustration, an example of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) exemplifies challenges with inclusivism in contexts of religious pluralism and political polarization. Despite NU's effort as a minority defender and their commitment

³ *J-a.III*: 158.

⁴ Donovan (1986): 375.

to its slogans of inclusivity, tolerance, and pluralism, a gap exists between its ideals and practices, as followers often show limited tolerance compared to other Muslims. The resistance from radical groups, who view their beliefs as superior, and the persecution of minority sects like Ahmadis and Shiites, highlight the difficulty in translating inclusivist principles into action (Mietzner & Muhtadi, 2020). These challenges reflect the complexities of implementing inclusivism, particularly in politically and religiously polarized societies (Reitsma & Nes-Visscher, 2023).

In this way, it is essential to recognize the profound differences among religions and build understanding of each other. These differences arise from variations in theologies and ethical frameworks, as illustrated below in brief.

Table 1 Contradictory Beliefs for Four Major Religions

Religion	Core Belief 1	Core Belief 2	Contradictory Beliefs
Christianity	Monotheism (One God)	Jesus Christ as Son of God & Savior	Islam: Does not accept Jesus as the Son of God or divine.
Islam	Monotheism (Allah as the only God)	Muhammad as the final prophet	Christianity: Does not recognize Muhammad as a prophet.
Hinduism	Reincarnation	<i>Dharma</i> (duty)	Abrahamic Religions: Generally, reject reincarnation and karma.
Buddhism	Four Noble Truths (<i>Ariyasacca</i>)	<i>Nibbāna</i> (liberation from suffering)	Abrahamic Religions: Focus on a single God and afterlife in heaven or hell, unlike <i>Nibbāna</i> .

Abrahamic religions, such as Christianity and Islam, believe in one God, while Hinduism recognizes multiple deities. Buddhism, which does not focus on the existence or non-existence of God, centers its teachings on achieving enlightenment, known as *Nibbāna*⁵. These religions have differing beliefs; for example, Christianity views Jesus as God in human form, whereas Islam sees him as a prophet. These fundamental differences shape the beliefs, values, and goals of their followers, making it challenging to find equal ground. Without proper understanding, such differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.

However, religious leaders often hesitate to openly discuss and share their core beliefs, fearing it might lead to conflict. This situation is similar to neighbors who avoid addressing their issues, allowing resentment to grow and even pass

⁵ Free from attachment is called *Nibbāna* (*It-a*: 157).

it on to their families. In this context, religious leaders play a crucial role. They should not only deepen their knowledge of their own faith but also engage in dialogue to learn about other religions with wisdom. By fostering mutual understanding, they can lead to prevent conflicts and promote harmony.

III. UNDERSTANDING TRUTH CLAIMS

The study of major religions shows that many claim to hold the exclusive truth, while also having diverse interpretations within their own traditions. Although many religions assert that their path is the only true one, their interactions with one another often fluctuate between conflict and peaceful coexistence.

Table 2 Overview Four Major Religions toward the Truth

Religion	Claim to Truth	View on Heaven or the Afterlife
Christianity	Only Christianity leads to salvation (Acts 4:12). (Zondervan, 2019)	Strongly exclusive, limited to Christians.
Islam	Only Islam is accepted by Allah (Quran 3:85). (Quranx, n.d.)	Firmly exclusive, rejecting other paths.
Hinduism	Multiple paths to ultimate reality (<i>Upaniṣads</i>). (Buitenen & Narayanan, n.d.)	Generally inclusive; aims for <i>mokṣa</i> (liberation).
Buddhism	Four Noble Truths (<i>Ariyasacca</i>) ⁶	Inclusive: heavens are part of the 31 planes, exclusive: the ultimate goal is <i>Nibbāna</i> .

Religious exclusivism often sparks debates about which faith is “correct” or “incorrect” In extreme cases, this mindset has contributed to violence. It is contradictory when religions that advocate for peace engage in conflict or war, as this contradicts their shared principle of treating others as one would like to be treated, a fundamental human right.⁷

Moreover, biased media coverage can significantly harm interfaith relations by amplifying prejudice and deepening divisions. The media often perpetuates harmful stereotypes and spreads hate speech about certain religions, fueling discrimination and hostility. By oversimplifying complex issues, media narratives frequently focus solely on religious differences, ignoring deeper political and cultural factors that contribute to conflict. Such portrayals erode trust and foster fear between religious groups, making collaboration and mutual understanding increasingly difficult. Additionally, biased reporting tends to polarize society, creating an “us vs. them” mentality that hinders

⁶ *Dasuttara sutta*, D.III: 231.

⁷ Center of Shared Civilizational Values (2023): 88.

the search for common ground. Political interests further exacerbate these tensions, as politicians often exploit religious divisions through manipulated media coverage to secure support. Historical conflicts and cultural norms also influence how religious issues are framed, perpetuating biases and obstructing efforts toward harmony and coexistence (Mokodenseho, Jasiah, Muharam, Rizaq, & Hasibuan, 2024).

IV. RULERS' DEDICATION TO RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

In contrast with conflicts, the impact of the *Theravāda* perspective of interfaith is illustrated in the history of King Ashoka (265 – 238 BCE) (*Dhammika*, 1994). He was a devout Buddhist and renowned for his unwavering commitment to religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Despite his deep personal faith, Ashoka refrained from imposing Buddhism on his subjects, advocating instead for religious freedom and the right of individuals to practice their own beliefs. His reign marked a significant shift from policies of aggressive conquest to one of compassion and harmony, guided by Buddhist principles.

Ashoka's approach to governance emphasized shared values such as compassion, moderation, and respect for all forms of life, which transcended religious boundaries and fostered unity among his subjects. Ashoka also prioritized peaceful coexistence with neighboring kingdoms, moving away from militaristic expansion in favor of diplomacy and mutual respect. His administration, shaped by these ideals, became a model of tolerance, ensuring that diverse religious traditions could thrive under his rule without fear of persecution or discrimination.

Through his actions and edicts, Ashoka demonstrated how a ruler could integrate personal spiritual convictions with a broader commitment to tolerance. His reign remains a timeless model for promoting religious mutual understanding in diverse societies.

Another evidence, in 9th century Indonesia, the Prambanan Temple, a grand Hindu temple complex, was built alongside nearby Buddhist temples such as Sewu and Mendut temple, symbolizing coexistence. The kings of Ancient Mataram upheld religious tolerance by providing protection and support to all faiths within their kingdom. Freedom of religion was a fundamental principle of their rule, as reflected in the coexistence of thriving Hindu and Buddhist communities. This inclusive approach fostered harmony among diverse religious traditions and demonstrated the kingdom's commitment to unity and mutual respect. (Khoirul, 2024)

Other religions also give historical evidence about exclusivism in plurality. Emperor Akbar (1542 – 1605) of the Mughal Empire fostered interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange, engaging with scholars of Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity, and enacting policies of religious pluralism.⁸ In modern history, Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)

⁸ Stausberg & Engler (2016): 45.

championed nonviolence and interfaith harmony. He worked tirelessly to bridge divides between Hindus and Muslims during India's independence movement that encouraged peacemakers around the world.⁹

In this context, rules inspired by religion or guided by religious leaders play a crucial role in fostering peace and tolerance within society. The success stories of Buddhist leaders exemplify how exclusivism can coexist peacefully within pluralistic communities. By upholding principles of tolerance, compassion, and respect for diversity, these leaders have demonstrated that religious distinctiveness need not lead to division but can instead serve as a foundation for harmonious coexistence.

V. EXCLUSIVISM PERCEPTION IN THERAVĀDA

The interplay between religious exclusivism and social inclusion is complex, raising crucial questions about how these concepts interact in a multireligious world (Reitsma & Nes-Visscher, 2023). While some level of exclusivism is necessary for defining group identities, which suggests that groups often define themselves in contrast to others - this can lead to significant challenges in fostering mutual understanding. Religious texts and societal norms often reinforce each other, shaping perceptions of good and evil and leading to varied forms of exclusion.

For instance, at the R20 Bali forum during session five, titled "What Values Lead to Peaceful Co-existence," Most Venerable Kotapitiye Rahula Thera from the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka highlighted *Pañcasīla* (the Five Precepts)¹⁰ as a fundamental of public morality. His insightful speech resonated deeply with the *Theravāda* Buddhist community, emphasizing nonviolence and ethical living as essential for world peace. Whoever is practicing *Pañcasīla* means offering safety (*abhaya*), kindness (*avera*), and freedom from ill will (*abyābajjha*) to society.¹¹ However, while *Pañcasīla* serves as a moral guide for Buddhists, it may not align with the values of other faiths.

For example, the first precept, *pāṇātipātā veramaṇī* (abstaining from killing), can contradictive practices like animal sacrifice, which holds religious significance in other traditions. During Eid al-Adha in Islam, animals are sacrificed as an act of devotion and charity. Similarly, some Hindu traditions involve ritual animal sacrifices as offerings to specific deities, and the Old Testament in Christianity contains examples of animal sacrifices for atonement and thanksgiving.¹² Attempts to impose a singular set of moral values across

⁹ Stausberg & Engler (2016): 808.

¹⁰ *Pāṇātipātā paṭivirato ca hoti, adinnādānā paṭivirato ca hoti, kāmesumicchācārā paṭivirato ca hoti, musāvādā paṭivirato ca hoti, surāmerayamajjappamādaṭṭhānā paṭivirato ca hoti* – Abstaining from killing any living being, abstaining from stealing what is not giving by the owner, abstaining from sensual misconduct, abstaining from telling lie, abstaining from intoxicant what is the cause of forgetfulness (*Pañcasīla sutta*, S.II. 442).

¹¹ *Abhisanda sutta* (A.III. 76).

¹² For examples in Genesis 8: 20 - 21; Exodus 29: 38 - 42; Leviticus 1: 3 - 16, 4: 1 - 35 and 16: 1 - 34 (Zondervan, 2019).

diverse faiths are often unrealistic and counterproductive, potentially fostering resentment among communities that feel their beliefs are being undermined or disrespected.

Theravāda Buddhism itself exhibits a form of exclusivism rooted in its adherence to the *Tipiṭaka* and monastic *Vinaya* rules, which have remained unaltered since their classification in the First Buddhist Council and subsequent reaffirmations,¹³ most recently in the Sixth Council in Myanmar. This strict preservation of doctrine reflects *Theravāda* Buddhism's commitment to maintaining the originality of its teachings over 2,500 years.

Through *Theravāda* texts analyzing, exclusivism manifests in two distinct ways. The first is exclusivism with the *right view* (*saccañāṇa* – Knowledge of the truth),¹⁴ where the perception of truth serves internal self-development and spiritual progress, called Internal Exclusivism. The second is exclusivism with the wrong view (*idameva saccaṃ, moghamaññaṃ* – “only this is true, and the others are wrong”),¹⁵ which fosters defilements (*kilesa*) by using perceived truth to judge and blame others, that also called External Exclusivism. This distinction underscores the potential for exclusivist attitudes to either promote self-improvement or deepen divisions, depending on their application.

Despite its exclusivist recognition, *Theravāda* Buddhism has been historically renowned for its peaceful propagation and coexistence in pluralistic societies. Its example demonstrates that religious exclusivism can coexist with harmony when it focuses on internal growth rather than external judgment.

VI. INTERNAL EXCLUSIVISM

Exclusivism refers to a belief in a particular truth that establishes distinct identities within various sects or assemblies. Internal exclusivism emphasizes a strong sense of identity among its followers, reinforcing their belief in the truth

¹³ Vn. IV: 485.

¹⁴ There are two types of *saccañāṇa* (knowledge of the truth): first is the Knowledge through Understanding (*anubodha-ñāṇa*). This type of knowledge is mundane (*lokiya*) and arises from learning, hearsay, or study rather than direct realization of the supermundane path (*ariya-puggala*). According to the *Visuddhimagga*, this knowledge helps overcome various wrong views:

- 1) Knowledge of suffering (*dukkha-sacca*) overcomes the wrong view of personality belief (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*).
- 2) Knowledge of the origin of suffering (*samudaya-sacca*) dispels the annihilation view (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*).
- 3) Knowledge of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha-sacca*) counteracts the eternity view (*sassata-diṭṭhi*).
- 4) Knowledge of the path (*magga-sacca*) negates the belief in the inefficacy of action (*akiriya-diṭṭhi*).

The second is the Knowledge through Penetration (*paññedha-ñāṇa*)

This type of knowledge is supermundane (*lokuttara*) and directly realizes the extinction of suffering (*Nibbāna*) as its object. It penetrates and fully comprehends the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*) through its functions (*Vsm.II: 142*).

¹⁵ A.I. 75.

as a means of self-development.

In *Theravāda* Buddhism, traditions have been predominantly led by the monastic community (*bhikkhu Saṅgha*) since the time of the Buddha. Evidence of this continuity can be observed in the preserved style of monastic robes and bowls (*cīvara* and *patta*), as even depicted in the relief carvings of the ancient Borobudur Temple in Indonesia built in the 7th century. These carvings reflect the faithful preservation of practices that were transmitted from the origin place of India, similar until now spreads in the world. Moreover, the Pāli language, used in the *Tipiṭaka*, exclusively serves as the international language of *Theravāda* Buddhism, ensuring the teachings' consistency across the world. Maintaining the Pāli language minimizes the risk of misinterpretation or distortion, as some terms have no exact equivalents in other languages.

However, internal exclusivism in *Theravāda* Buddhism is not rooted in blind faith. The truth in the Buddha's teachings, known as *Ariyasacca* (Noble Truth),¹⁶ is grounded not just in belief but also in knowledge. The Buddhist Faith (*saddhā*)¹⁷ becomes stronger while engaging in skillful qualities (*kusala*). For instance, the unwavering faith of a *Sotāpanna* (stream-enterer)¹⁸ is so strong that they would rather face death than abandon their beliefs.¹⁹

Theravāda Buddhists, if categorized, could be considered "Internal Exclusivists," as their belief in the truth primarily focuses on personal self-development to cultivate goodness, correctness, and nobility.

Similarly, *Tipiṭaka* examples highlight *Theravāda* Buddhism's tolerance. For instance, General Siha (*Sihasenāpati*), a convert from Jainism to Buddhism, was encouraged to continue supporting his former teachers and spiritual places even after embracing the Buddha's teachings. He was advised not to think that offerings should be made exclusively to the Buddha and his disciples, nor to think that offerings to others were without merit.²⁰ This attitude reflects the recognition of diversity and the coexistence of different paths.

VII. EXTERNAL EXCLUSIVISM

While internal exclusivism focuses on personal self-development and harmony, external exclusivism reveals the challenges of interfaith engagement and the potential for conflict, necessitating a closer examination of its roots and impacts.

External exclusivism is marked by the uncritical belief that one's own religion or sect is the most correct while viewing other beliefs as inferior, wrong, or even dangerous (*idameva saccaṃ, moghamaññaṃ*). This wrong-view mindset often fosters a sense of superiority and, in extreme cases, hostility toward other faiths

¹⁶ *Buddhānañhi catusaccavinimuttā kathā nāma natthi* – There is no Buddha's teachings which are free from the noble truths. (*D-a.I*: 312)

¹⁷ The nature a person with *saddhā* is want to see the virtue person, want to listen the dhamma, want to share with generosity (*A.I*: 149)

¹⁸ The "Stream-winner", is the lowest of the 8 noble disciples (*ariya-puggala*).

¹⁹ *Cp-a*: 302.

²⁰ *Vn.III*: 333.

or traditions. Such attitudes arise from defilements of the mind, particularly hatred (*dosa*), which obscures wise consideration (*yonisomanasikāra*)²¹ and promotes divisiveness. In Buddhism, this state of mind is an indirect result of attachment (*lobha*) to one's views and manifests as *micchādiṭṭhi* (wrong view), directly contradicting the Buddha's teachings.²²

The Buddha emphasized the dangers of hatred and the importance of overcoming it for spiritual growth. In the *Dhammapada* (verse 5)²³, He states: "Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world; by non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is an eternal law." To counter external exclusivism, practitioners must balance faith (*saddhā*) with wisdom (*paññā*).²⁴ Strong faith without wisdom can lead to a feeling of superiority (*māna*) and susceptibility to adopting wrong views (*micchādiṭṭhi*). Conversely, individuals with intelligence but without moral principles might exploit others for personal gain (*lobha*), even using deceptive beliefs to cause harm.²⁵

The Buddha's teachings advocate for an inclusive approach to diversity. The *Kesamutti sutta* encourages critical inquiry and understanding, rejecting blind acceptance of doctrines. Wisdom (*paññā*) acts as an antidote to blind faith, enabling individuals to discern what is beneficial or harmful, correct or faulty, and praiseworthy or blameworthy.²⁶

This wisdom helps individuals recognize that all beings consist of a combination of mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*), and it underscores the importance of cultivating a mind free from enmity (*averacitto*) and ill will (*abyāpajjhacitto*). Wisdom understands that enmity arises from immediate dissatisfaction and manifests as reactive hostility, often leading to harmful speech or actions. Ill will, on the other hand, represents a more sustained and deliberate form of hatred, characterized by a desire to harm or see others suffer. Wisdom can recognize and abandon those harmful thoughts when arise due to unbeneficial. It fosters the development of loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), even toward those with differing beliefs or identities.

For example, the Buddha's tolerance is evident in his interactions with people of different beliefs. He welcomed followers of other traditions without

²¹ To get wisdom of right view, it needs two factors: internal causes (*yonisomanasikāra* – wise consideration) and external causes (*paratoghosa* – learning from other) (A.I: 89).

²² D.II: 220.

²³ *Dhp*: 14.

²⁴ The 'faculty of faith' (*saddhindriya*) should be balanced with that of wisdom (*paññindriya*). It is said: "A monk who has understanding, establishes his faith in accordance with that understanding" (*Vsm.I*: 126)

²⁵ D. III. 220.

²⁶ *Ime dhammā akusalā, ime dhammā sāvajjā, ime dhammā viññugarahitā, ime dhammā samattā samādinā ahitāya dukkhāya sarivattanti'ti, atha tumhe, kālāmā, pajaheyyātha*. These things are evil deeds, with fault, criticized by sensible people, and when you undertake them, they lead to harm and suffering', then you Kālāmā should give them up. (*Kesamutti sutta*, A.I. 192)

denigrating their practices. For example, when the wealthy Upāli, a devout follower of *Dīghatapassī*, converted to Buddhism, the Buddha, again, advised him to continue honoring and supporting his former teachers.²⁷ This guidance illustrates the Buddha's respect for others' beliefs and his recognition of the value in diverse spiritual paths.

In this way, regardless of whether heaven exists or not, the teachings aim to create a world free of enmity and ill will—a world that is untroubled and filled with happiness. On the contrary, external exclusivism undermines the potential for interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

VIII. A NEW APPROACH: LEAVING HATRED BEHIND

As examined as the product of external exclusivism, at the R20 Forum in Bali, it commonly emphasized that hatred is the true enemy of harmony, peace, and loving-kindness.

His Holiness Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, stated that hatred must be rejected, not only in actions but also in volition, as it stands contrary to the goals of any religion.²⁸ Similarly, Rabbi Abraham Skorka, in his speech “Religions and Present Reality,” highlighted the destructive power of hate speech, which can incite violence and cause immense suffering.²⁹ His Excellency Shaykh Dr. Shawki Ibrahim Abdel-Karim Alam, Grand Mufti of Egypt, further asserted that to live in peace and love, the dangers of hatred must be continually addressed through programs in respected religions, media, schools, and art.³⁰

In this way, Buddhist leaders should actively engage in this approach, drawing on thousands of years of historical experience in fostering peaceful coexistence. Addressing hatred as a root cause of division underscores the need to examine exclusivism within religious traditions, especially through the lens of *Theravāda* Buddhism.

IX. BREAK THE FETTERS' JEALOUSY AND STINGINESS

Recognizing hatred as a central obstacle to effective interfaith dialogue underscores the need for a thorough understanding of its nature and consequences. While it is evident that everyone desires freedom from enmity, violence, hostility, and hate, these unwholesome states persist. In this context, *Theravāda* Buddhism offers valuable insights through the *Sakkapañha sutta*³¹, which identifies two fetters (*saṃyojana*) – jealousy (*issā*) and stinginess (*macchariya*) – as significant barriers to cultivating a mind free of hatred. These mental defilements obstruct individuals from achieving peace and harmony, highlighting the importance of addressing their root causes to foster a more compassionate and tolerant society.

²⁷ M.II. 42.

²⁸ Center of Shared Civilizational Values (2023): 12 - 13.

²⁹ Center of Shared Civilizational Values (2023): 23.

³⁰ Center of Shared Civilizational Values (2023): 25.

³¹ D.II. 211.

Jealousy arises from desiring what others possess. In this case, it can also stem from religious competition for a number of followers and for resources, such as political influence or economic opportunities, creating tensions as groups contest for dominance. A sign of jealousy is the inability to rejoice or feel sympathetic joy (*muditā*) for the success or happiness of others.

Another fetter is stinginess which arises from an unwillingness to share what one has. It manifests as a reluctance to share resources or opportunities with members of other faiths, often limiting access to education, employment, or social services. It also includes withholding support for interfaith initiatives and hindering efforts to foster collaboration and unity. A sign of stinginess is the inability to wish other people happiness by obtaining (*mettā*) and failing to feel compassion (*karuṇā*) for the needs of others.

These examples illustrate how jealousy and stinginess, as internal obstacles to personal harmony, can have profound external consequences in the context of interfaith relations. These two defilements perpetuate mistrust, competition, and division, undermining efforts to create peaceful and tolerant societies. In this way, there is a need to find the root and antidote as a solution.

Referring to *Theravāda* study, the roots of jealousy and stinginess lie in the duality of what is liked (*piyā*) in this term referring to one's religion, and disliked (*appiyā*) to the other faith. This duality arises due to the desire (*chanda*), for instance, to have the strongest religion's community, which originates from thought processes (*vitakka*). These thoughts are driven by the three kinds of proliferation of perceptions (*papañcasaññāsaṅkhāya*). Firstly, this condition is fueled by attachment (*taṇhā*) to one religion and its attributes and thinking "This religion is mine - *etaṃ mama*". Secondly, by feeling of superiority (*māna*), leads to conversion, discrimination, or violence against other faiths due to thinking "I am in this religion - *esohaṃ asmi*". The last is the wrong view (*diṭṭhi*), that due to associated with greed, will accommodate the wrongdoing as true, or even worse, to defend it with violence because thinking "this religion as myself - *eso me attā*". The *Sakkapañha sutta* elucidates this chain of causation, highlighting how these mental defilements are interconnected and contribute to the conflict. However, this proliferation of attachment is unable to arise without the cause of the arising of feeling (*vedanā*) that is based on the support of perception (*saññā*). In this way, the second rector of ITBM University Sayadaw Nandamālabhivamsa elucidates in *Mahāsatiipatṭhāna sutta*³² the important key to unravel the tangled is by the contemplation of feeling (*vedānānupassanā*) through mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*).

X. CONTEMPLATING OF FEELING (VEDANĀNUPASSANĀ) TO OVERCOME PERCEPTION PROLIFERATION (PAPAÑCASAÑÑĀSAṅKHĀYA)

A key to addressing exclusivism lies in understanding and regulating the underlying emotions that drive divisiveness. In *Theravāda* Buddhism, the

³² D.II. 231.

contemplation of feeling (*vedanānupassanā*) provides a practical approach to reducing defilements and fostering harmony and peace.

As human beings, feeling (*vedanā*) is an inseparable aggregate³³ that often drives our actions influenced by the wrong view that compares emotion with feeling. Actually, feelings (*vedanā*) arise as experiences or sensations in response to the strike (*phassa*) of six sense objects (*ārammaṇa*³⁴) and their corresponding sense bases (*vatthu*³⁵). Emotions such as liking, disliking, or indifference emerge due to underlying defilements (*kilesa*) when encountering these objects. Therefore, it is encouraged not to react to feelings with emotional attachment. This paper emphasizes the importance of cultivating wisdom through learning from the wise (*paratoghosa*) to enhance wise consideration (*yonisomanasikāra*). While this discussion does not delve into meditative practices, integrating these principles with meditation can yield significant benefits and lead to the arising of insight knowledge.

The impermanent nature of feeling is elaborated in the *Anattalakkhaṇa sutta*,³⁶ which explains that feeling is not self (*atta*). If feeling were self, it would not cause suffering, and one could control it, dictating, “Let it be this way” or “Let it not be this way.” However, because feeling is non-self (*anatta*), it cannot be managed in this manner and inevitably leads to suffering (*dukkha*).

This teaching reveals the true nature of feeling that they are non-self (*anatta*), impermanent (*anicca*), subject to change (*vipariṇāmadhamma*), and inherently tied to suffering (*dukkha*). Recognizing this nature allows one to approach feeling with detachment and wisdom, reducing the mental clinging that perpetuates suffering.

In relation to reduce jealousy and stinginess, it is essential to decrease unskillful qualities (*akusala*) and cultivate skillful ones (*kusala*) through the contemplation of feeling, discerning which to nurture (*sevitabba*) and which to abandon (*asevitabba*) by wisdom.

Feeling, by nature, can be differentiated based on the object. There are three types which are likable feeling (*sukha vedanā*) due to the pleasurable object (*iṭṭhārammaṇa*), dislikeable feeling (*dukkha vedanā*) due to unpleasurable object (*aniṭṭhārammaṇa*) and indifferent feeling (*adukkhamasukha vedanā*) due to neutral object (*iṭṭhamajjhāttārammaṇa*). It is very important to know the nature of feeling and differentiate it from emotions such as joy, sadness, fear, shame, excitement and so on that are associated with defilements.

³³ Feeling (*vedanā*) is the second of five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*): material qualities (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), coefficients of consciousness (*saṅkhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*).

³⁴ Visible object, sound, odor, taste, body-impression, mind-object.

³⁵ Eye sense base, ear sense base, nose sense base, tongue sense base, body sense base, and mind sense base.

³⁶ S.II. 55.

Likable feeling (*sukha vedanā*) refers to the feeling of happiness or pleasure, whether mental or physical. For example, happiness derived from wholesome actions, such as sharing property, observing morality, and practicing meditation, should be cultivated. During this process, emotions like disappointment may arise, but they should not be followed or clung to. Conversely, a feeling of excitement arising from indulgence in sensual pleasures, such as drinking alcohol, may also be wrongly perceived as happiness. However, such forms of pleasure should be reduced or avoided, as they contribute to the increase of defilements.

Dislikeable (*dukkha vedanā*) are feelings of discomfort or pain, which most people instinctively reject. However, contemplating discomfort can lead to disillusionment with worldly attachments. By contemplating the pain into the three universal characteristics (*tilakkhaṇaṃ*) namely impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*) one can have an acceptable mind in good or bad conditions. Contrary, the arising of emotions such as despair, anger or resentment fueled by hatred (*dosa*) should be reduced to unskillful qualities.

An Indifferent feeling (*adukkhamasukha vedanā*) is a neutral feeling³⁷ that is neither suffering nor happiness, or neither pain nor pleasure. In Buddhism, one method to balancing the feeling during undesired and difficult circumstances or in desired and overjoyed situations is through the first right view—*kamassakatā sammādiṭṭhi* (right view regarding ownership of *kamma*). By recognizing that everyone, including oneself, is subject to their own *kamma*, one can find balance in the feeling. However, the arising emotions of apathy, neglect, or not caring that can be wrongly perceived as equanimity (*upekkhā*), such tendencies must be avoided.

For illustration, in Buddhism, faith in the religion and its teachings is believed to embody the truth and bring a sense of happiness and security. However, challenges arise when faults occur, such as a famous Buddhist spiritual leader suspected of acting immorally and facing public criticism in the mass media. In such cases, by contemplating the feeling, there is no reaction with anger or attachment to the Buddhist religion or the leader. There is no need to defend the leader with violent actions, whether physical or verbal. Instead, through *sati* (mindfulness) and *paññā* (wisdom), Buddhist practitioners can transform the discomfort of such situations into *kusala* (skillful qualities) by contemplating the impermanence of identity (as I) with religion and leader. If the criticism is invalid, it is the leader's *kamma* to face blame and slander for actions he did not commit. Conversely, if the criticism is valid, it is also his *kamma* to bear the consequences of immoral conduct and any lies used to defend his wrongdoing.

Contemplating feelings allows one to face the *lokadhamma*³⁸ (worldly conditions) with a stable and resilient mind, unshaken by external circumstances.

³⁷ Often misunderstood as equanimity (*upekkhā*) in the *Brahmavihāra* (Four Divine Abodes).

³⁸ Eight worldly-dhamma (*Aṭṭha lokadhammā*): 1) gaining (*lābho*) or benefit (*hita*), 2) not gaining (*alābho*) or no benefit (*ahita*), 3) fame (*yaśo*), 4) bad fame (*ayaso*), 5) slander (*nindā*), 6) praise (*pasamsā*), 7) happiness (*sukham*), and 8) suffering (*dukkham*).

This practice helps the mind recognize that blame is impermanent (*anicca*), not enduring (*assasata*), and subject to change (*vipariṇāmadhamma*). In this way, one gains the wisdom to understand that both praise and criticism are universal experiences that no one can avoid.

Through this understanding, practitioners can transform worldly conditions into opportunities for spiritual growth for cultivating patience (*khanti*) in the face of fame and slander, loving-kindness and compassion (*mettā karuṇā*) in situations of gain or loss, and equanimity (*upekkhā*) in moments of happiness or suffering.

By analyzing the impact of any feeling – whether likable, unlikeable, or indifferent – on one’s mental and spiritual development, individuals can prioritize those feelings that reduce unskillful qualities and cultivate skillful qualities. With this mindful approach, interfaith dialogue transcends mere ceremonial gatherings or conferences addressing past disharmony; it becomes a practical tool for finding genuine solutions to ongoing conflicts.

The contemplation of feeling is a progressive practice marked by refinement, gradually leading to states free of mental effort and increasingly rooted in wisdom. By practicing this, one moves closer to the cessation of judgments and the calming of perception proliferations.

XI. CONCLUSION

The insights from the R20 Forum, coupled with the wisdom of *Theravāda* Buddhism, underscore the transformative potential of coexistence in pluralistic communities and interfaith dialogue in addressing global challenges. The foundational R20 Forum in Bali served as a pivotal moment in addressing the pressing need for interfaith dialogue and cooperation in a world increasingly divided by religious, cultural, and ideological differences. The discussions underscored the destructive impact of hatred and the urgency of fostering peace, unity, and understanding across faiths as conflict mitigation.

From a *Theravāda* Buddhist perspective, the distinction between internal and external exclusivism offers a valuable framework for navigating religious differences. Internal exclusivism, when grounded in wisdom (*paññā*), fosters self-development and harmony, aligning with the Buddha’s teachings on loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). In contrast, external exclusivism, driven by defilements such as hatred (*dosa*) and attachment (*lobha*), perpetuates division and conflict, undermining the potential for constructive interfaith dialogue.

Historical examples from Buddhism and other traditions demonstrate that tolerance and respect for diverse beliefs are achievable when faith is balanced with critical inquiry and understanding. It provides practical guidance for reducing unskillful qualities, cultivating skillful qualities, and fostering a peaceful coexistence with others.

The R20 Forum’s focus on leaving hatred behind resonates deeply with the Buddhist principle of discarding enmity and ill will. Contributions from global religious leaders, including Pope Francis, Rabbi Abraham Skorka, and Shaykh

Dr. Shawki Ibrahim Abdel-Karim Alam, emphasized the need to address hatred at its roots through education, media, and community engagement. Buddhist leaders, drawing upon thousands of years of experience in fostering harmony, have a crucial role to play in these efforts.

In conclusion, achieving global harmony requires moving beyond doctrinal debates and internal exclusivist attitudes to embrace shared values that prioritize human well-being and unity. The lessons from the R20 Forum and the *Theravāda* perspective serve as a call to action for all faith traditions to collaborate in creating a world free of hatred, division, and suffering – a world that values faith, wisdom, and internal exclusivism as a pathway to tolerance and peace.

Pāli Abbreviation

A.I.	<i>Ekaka Duka Tika Catukka Nipāta Pāli</i>
A.III.	<i>Aṭṭhaka Navaka Dasaka Ekādasaka Nipāta Pāli</i>
Cp-a.	<i>Cariyāpiṭaka Aṭṭhakathā</i>
D. II.	<i>Mahāvagga Saṃyutta Pāli</i>
D. III	<i>Pāthikavagga Pāli</i>
D-a. I.	<i>Sīlakkhandhavagga Aṭṭhakathā</i>
Dhp.	<i>Dhammapada Pāli</i>
It-a.	<i>Itivuttaka Aṭṭhakathā</i>
J-a.III	<i>Jātaka Aṭṭhakathā. Vol. III</i>
S.II.	<i>Khandhavagga Saḷāyatanavagga Saṃyutta Pāli</i>
Vn.III.	<i>Mahāvagga Pāli (Vinaya Piṭaka)</i>
Vn.IV.	<i>Cūlavagga Pāli</i>
Vsm. I	<i>Visuddhimagga Vol. I</i>
Vsm. II	<i>Visuddhimagga Vol. II</i>

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NATURE OF THE BUDDHIST MONK BEFORE THE INTRODUCTION OF THE PRECEPTS OF DISCIPLINE

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Abstract:

This paper explores the historical development and the ethical transformation of Buddhist monastic life prior to and following the formal implementation of disciplinary precepts (*Vinaya*). It highlights the early period of the Saṅgha when monks upheld self-discipline guided by devotion to the Buddha and the goal of Nibbāna, without the necessity of formal regulations. The gradual expansion of the monastic community introduced diverse personalities and social influences, leading to moral challenges that required a structured system of discipline. Through the establishment of the Vinaya, the Buddha provided practical guidelines to preserve harmony, promote spiritual focus, and ensure the longevity of the Dhamma. The study further analyzes the principles underlying the monastic code, such as mindfulness, non-attachment, compassion, and moderation. It also evaluates the impact of discipline on monastic and lay communities, emphasizing its role in sustaining the integrity and purity of the Buddhist path across centuries.

Keywords: *Buddhist monasticism, Vinaya, Middle Path, Saṅgha, discipline, Nibbāna, ethical conduct, self-transformation, early Buddhism, spiritual development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Lord Buddha expounded the exact reality of human life and its nature throughout the never-ending process of growth and the temporary existence of the world. He accomplished this tremendous task due to the immense compassion he had cultivated over many eons in the *Sansarik* cycle. His

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doctrine is nothing but the absolute truth and reality, shedding light on the true nature of existence and the path to liberation from suffering.

At the time of Lord Buddha's Enlightenment, the Brahmin community held dominance over almost every aspect of social life. Brahmins adhered to extreme sensual indulgence in their pursuit of comfort and pleasure, believing that such a life led to fulfillment. On the other hand, another school of thought promoted extreme self-mortification, involving the infliction of severe bodily pain to attain spiritual enlightenment. These individuals were known as the "seekers of eternal happiness," as they believed that self-denial and suffering would lead to the ultimate bliss.

Lord Buddha meticulously analyzed both approaches and demonstrated that they were fundamentally flawed. He proclaimed that neither extreme sensual indulgence nor extreme self-mortification could lead to true happiness. Instead, he introduced the Middle Path, a balanced way of life that avoids the two extremes and leads to genuine liberation. This practical path resonated with many who were disillusioned by the rigid doctrines of the Brahmins and the severe self-torture of the ascetics. As a result, many abandoned their previous beliefs and embraced the Middle Path, recognizing its effectiveness in achieving supreme happiness.¹

Lord Buddha's Middle Path was neither indulgent nor excessively austere. Instead, it focused on self-discipline, mindfulness, wisdom, and compassion. It was a path of moderation that guided individuals toward spiritual awakening without the unnecessary suffering caused by self-mortification or the distractions of sensual indulgence. Those who had been tormented by the doctrines of the Brahmins and the seekers of eternal happiness found solace in Lord Buddha's teachings. His doctrine offered a practical, logical, and achievable way to attain enlightenment, and it became a beacon of hope for those yearning for truth and liberation.

The Middle Path, as laid out by Lord Buddha, was based on the Eightfold Path, which consists of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. This framework provided a clear and structured approach to achieving spiritual progress while maintaining a balanced life. By following these principles, individuals could transcend suffering and attain Nirvana, the ultimate state of peace and liberation.

The Eightfold Path emphasizes ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom. Ethical conduct included Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, which encouraged individuals to speak truthfully, act morally, and engage in righteous work. Mental discipline involved Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, which helped individuals cultivate awareness and focus their minds. Wisdom encompassed Right View and Right

¹ *Suttanipāta* p.122: "sambadho'yam aharāvaso rajassāyatanam iti/ abbhokaso'va pabbajjā Iti disvāna pabbaji".

Intention, which provided the necessary understanding and motivation for one's spiritual journey.

Lord Buddha's teachings were transformative as they directly addressed the suffering inherent in human existence. He identified the Four Noble Truths as the foundation of his doctrine. The First Noble Truth, *Dukkha*, states that suffering is an inescapable part of life. The Second Noble Truth, *Samudaya*, explains that suffering arises from attachment and craving. The Third Noble Truth, *Nirodha*, asserts that the cessation of suffering is possible by eliminating attachment. The Fourth Noble Truth, *Magga*, outlines the Eightfold Path as the means to end suffering.

Many individuals who had previously adhered to Brahmanical rituals and extreme asceticism found great relief in Lord Buddha's practical approach. Unlike the rigid caste-based hierarchy of the Brahmins, which imposed severe restrictions on people's lives, Buddhism offered an inclusive and egalitarian spiritual path. Lord Buddha emphasized that liberation was attainable by anyone, regardless of caste, gender, or social status. This revolutionary idea attracted numerous followers, including those who had been marginalized by society.

As Lord Buddha's teachings spread, they inspired countless individuals to renounce lay life in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. The monastic community, known as the *Saṅgha*, grew rapidly, consisting of monks and nuns who dedicated themselves to the practice of the Middle Path. The *Saṅgha* upheld the principles of morality, meditation, and wisdom, serving as a guiding force for those seeking the ultimate truth.

Despite opposition from certain sections of society, the Middle Path continued to gain acceptance due to its rational and compassionate approach. The doctrine resonated with people from all walks of life, as it did not rely on blind faith but instead encouraged personal experience and insight. Lord Buddha's teachings emphasize self-reliance and inner transformation, urging individuals to take responsibility for their actions and thoughts.

Through the Middle Path, Lord Buddha provided a solution to the eternal human dilemma - how to achieve true and lasting happiness. His teachings underscored the impermanence of life, emphasizing that attachment to worldly pleasures and material possessions leads to suffering. By cultivating detachment, wisdom, and compassion, individuals could break free from the cycle of birth and death and attain *Nirvana*.

In conclusion, Lord Buddha's profound wisdom and boundless compassion led him to reveal the true nature of human life and the path to liberation. At a time when society was dominated by extreme views - either indulgence in sensual pleasures or severe self-mortification - he introduced the Middle Path, a balanced and practical approach to achieving enlightenment. His teachings, encapsulated in the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, provided a clear and accessible way for individuals to overcome suffering and attain supreme happiness. The Middle Path remains a timeless and universal guide for those who seek truth, peace, and liberation, proving that true happiness lies not in extremes but in balance and wisdom.

II. THE ORGANIZATION OF MONKS AS AN ORGANIZATION OF ITS OWN

Thus, Lord Buddha became the one and only expositor of truth and reality in their true and practical sense, which needed to give wide and practical publicity to this great exposition. Buddha decided to preach his new exposition to the great five disciples, *Koṇḍañña*, *Vappa*, *Bhaddiya*, *Mahānāma*, and *Assaji*, who were intellectually very close to grasping the doctrine fully and completely. Through his supreme intelligence, He arrived at this conclusion correctly and aptly. The first doctrinal principles were explained as *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, advising the followers to do away with the two extremes of sensual living and torturous lives and to follow the “Middle Path.” Out of the five above-mentioned disciples, the eldest, *Koṇḍañña*, requested entry into higher ordination (*upasampadā*) and monkhood in Lord Buddha’s doctrine.² As the *Dhammacakkappavattana-Sutta* records, at the end of the sermon, the eye of doctrine (*dhammacakkhu*) arose in *Koṇḍañña*. Accordingly, he was thereafter named *Aññākoṇḍañña*.³ Furthermore, as he was the first follower of the Master to get both recognitions in the order, he became the first monk in the order of Buddha. Gradually, with the march of time, the other three monks, *Bhaddiya*, *Mahānāma*, and *Vappa*, also attained awakening through listening to *Anatta-lakkhaṇa-sutta*.⁴ They had the honor of attaining supreme intelligence (*arahant*) before anyone else. This was solely due to the practicability of *Anatta-lakkhaṇa-sutta*.⁵

From the five great ascetics commenced the organization of the community of monks. The team of friends of the young man named Yasa, too, was absorbed into the Buddha’s order. The number of disciples went up to sixty. They were instructed by the Buddha to march all over the country as single persons and preach the doctrine to the largest possible number of persons, either in heaven or on earth.⁶ Those who listened to them deeply desired to follow the Buddhist doctrine and obtain the higher ordination.⁷ On realizing the practical difficulties of traveling from one end of India to the other, Lord Buddha permitted experienced monks who lived in separate locations to absorb laymen into the monkhood.⁸ The sacrifices of the first five great monks were very fruitful. Many people followed the Buddhist doctrine.

The followers of Buddhism aimed at achieving *nibbāna* or the complete cessation of defilements. *Uruvelakassapa*, *Nadikassapa*, and *Gayākassapa* were brothers of Afghan origin, known as the triplet of turban wearers or

² *Suttanipāta* p. 26: “labheyyahāṃ ahaṃ bhante Bhagavato santike pabbajjāṃ labheyyāṃ upasampadaṃ.”

³ *Mahavagga* I, p. 24: “aññāsi vata bho Koṇḍañño vata bho Koṇḍañño titi hidaṃ āyasmato Koṇḍaññassa aññākoṇḍañño tveva nāmaṃ ahosi.”

⁴ *Mahavagga* I, p. 24: “atha kho āyasmato ca Vappassaa yasmato ca Bhaddiyassa.”

⁵ *Mahavagga* I, p. 30: “tena kho pana Samayena cha loke arahanto honti.”

⁶ *Mahavagga* I, p. 42: “caratha bhikkhave cārikaṃ bahujaṇahitaya bahujaṇasukhāya.”

⁷ *Mahavagga* I, p. 44: “tena kho pana samayena bhikkhu nanādisā nānājanapadā.”

⁸ *Mahavagga* I, p. 44: “tumheva dāni bhikkhave tāsū tāsū disāsū tesu tesu janapadesu.”

Jaṭila Brothers. A total of 1,300 *Jaṭilas* were absorbed into Buddhism. *Kolita* and *Upatissa* were *Brahmin* friends who joined the order with fifty of their companions. Other well-known persons who entered the order included *Aṅgulimāla*, *Nanda*, *Rāhula*, *Pipphali*, *Anuruddha*, *Baggu*, *Kimbila*, *Ānanda*, *Upāli*, *Devadatta*, and *Upasena*. Altogether, there were three hundred individuals. The followers of the great monk, Maha Kapphina, numbered a thousand, and they, too, joined the Buddhists.

With the grant of permission by Lord Buddha to his most experienced senior monks to ordain novice members into Buddhism, the number of monks expanded into the thousands. Monks either led a “Wayfarer” life or put up in temporary abodes known as *ārāma*. This wonderful gathering of monks all over India became the limelight of the Buddhist renaissance. As the numbers increased, so did the organizational strength of the Buddhist monastic order (*Saṅgha*). The *Saṅgha* played a crucial role in preserving, practicing, and spreading the teachings of Lord Buddha. The monastic community upheld the principles of discipline (*Vinaya*), and through rigorous adherence to the precepts, they maintained the purity of the doctrine.

As Buddhism flourished, centers of learning and monastic institutions emerged. Monasteries (*Viharas*) were built across different regions, providing a conducive environment for meditation, study, and teaching. The monastic life attracted scholars, kings, and commoners alike, all of whom contributed to the expansion and preservation of Buddhist knowledge. With the establishment of monastic centers, Buddhist philosophy and ethics spread beyond India to neighboring regions such as Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), and later to China, Japan, and other parts of Asia.

The organized structure of the *Saṅgha* allowed for the systematic propagation of *Dhamma*. Senior monks took responsibility for guiding novice monks and lay followers in understanding the path to enlightenment. The monks and nuns lived a life of simplicity, renunciation, and discipline, following the code of conduct set forth by the Buddha himself. Their dedication inspired many to embrace the path of righteousness and inner peace.

Over time, the Buddhist *Saṅgha* was instrumental in shaping the cultural and ethical fabric of many societies. Buddhist values of nonviolence, compassion, and wisdom became embedded in the governance and moral outlook of various regions. Kings and rulers, inspired by the teachings of the Buddha, adopted policies that promoted peace and social harmony. Some of them, like Emperor Ashoka, played a pivotal role in the widespread dissemination of Buddhism through inscriptions, edicts, and missionary activities.

With the growth of Buddhism, various sects and schools of thought emerged within the monastic order. These variations reflected the adaptability and diversity of Buddhist philosophy, accommodating different interpretations and practices. However, despite the differences, the core principles of the Middle Path, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eightfold Path remained unaltered.

The success of the Buddhist monastic order was not merely in its numbers but

in its ability to maintain the authenticity of Lord Buddha's teachings over centuries. The preservation of the *Tripitaka* (the three baskets of Buddhist scriptures) ensured that the doctrine remained intact for future generations. Monks and scholars dedicated their lives to transcribing, memorizing, and interpreting these texts, ensuring that the wisdom of the Buddha was not lost with time.

In conclusion, the organization of monks within Buddhism marked the beginning of a structured and disciplined approach to spiritual life. From the initial five disciples to the thousands who later joined, the *Saṅgha* became a beacon of wisdom, guiding countless seekers on the path to liberation. The Buddhist monastic order remains one of the most enduring and influential institutions in human history, continuing to inspire people worldwide in their quest for truth, inner peace, and enlightenment.

III. THE CONTEMPORARY NATURE OF THE BUDDHIST MONKS

Human society has historically given rise to a distinct community of monks, characterized by a unique set of disciplines aimed at selfless service. Buddhist monks dedicate themselves to alleviating human suffering and pain, completely rejecting selfishness. They strive to transcend *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and rebirth, which is reflected even in their attire. Their robes are fashioned from discarded cloth, cut into squares and stitched together, symbolizing their renunciation of material attachments. Some monks even use shrouds found in cemeteries as their garments.

Buddhist monks follow a disciplined lifestyle, earning their sustenance as mendicants and residing in simple shelters, such as the shade of trees or temporary huts. Their lives are marked by minimalism, with only essential comforts. Even during illness, they rely on purified medicinal liquids made by boiling various herbs. Simplicity is the hallmark of their existence, as they dedicate themselves to the pursuit of truth while relinquishing worldly desires. Their ultimate goal is the attainment of liberation, free from all worldly and sensual attachments.

The foundation of a Buddhist monk's life is selfless service, particularly after higher ordination. Lord Buddha emphasized the principle of cooperative existence as the path to supreme bliss (*Nirvāṇa*).⁹ A monk must be free of hatred, as unity within the monastic community fosters harmony and peace. A deeply devoted monk, immersed in the doctrine, experiences the bliss of *Nibbāna*, a state of freedom from sinful thoughts.¹⁰ The unity among Buddhist monks not only brings them personal peace but also extends harmony to the world.¹¹ In this sense, Buddhist monks serve as the lifeblood of eternal bliss, embodying the path to *Nibbāna*.

The disciplined and humble demeanor of a Buddhist monk is deeply symbolic. Walking with downcast eyes and a begging bowl in hand, seeking

⁹ *Dhp* 194: “*sukhā saṅghassa sāmaggī samaggānaṃ tapo sukho*.”

¹⁰ *MN* 31: “*idha panāham bhante bhikkhū passāmi, samaggā sammōda mānā*,” p. 494.

¹¹ *It* 18 - 9: “*ekadhammo bhikkhave loke uppajjamaṇo uppajjati bahujaṇahitāya*,” p. 336.

only sustenance for survival, represents the profound philosophy of meaningful human life.¹² This unique characteristic is inherent only in the teachings of the Buddha. A monk's life is structured around strict physical and mental discipline, with minimal personal expectations.¹³

In contrast to other ascetic traditions that adopted extreme practices, such as nudity or refraining from shaving, the Buddhist monk presents a composed and serene image, inspiring a sense of calm in those who behold them. Lord Buddha likened the monk to a bird soaring through the sky, unhindered and free. Buddhist monks, content with their simple robes and meager alms, embody this ideal of spiritual freedom.¹⁴

The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* outlines seven key principles that sustain the high moral and ethical standards of Buddhist monks:¹⁵

- (1) Monks must assemble in unity.
- (2) Decisions should be made collectively, with open discussions to resolve disciplinary matters.
- (3) No new disciplines should be introduced, nor should existing rules be violated.
- (4) Senior monks must be honored and respected.
- (5) Monks must remain free from sensual desires.
- (6) A solitary life, preferably in a secluded temple, is to be cherished.
- (7) Compassion and consideration should extend to both known and unknown ascetics.

These principles form the foundation for any organization that values unity and cooperation. The adherence to such qualities ensures not only the prosperity of the monastic community but also contributes to the general well-being of humanity as a whole.

IV. MONKLY DISCIPLINE BEFORE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RULES

Before formal disciplinary rules were established, the Buddhist monastic community consisted of individuals who sought refuge from worldly suffering and disillusionment. During this period, good advice sufficed to maintain discipline among monks. A simple reminder of their mistakes was enough to guide them back onto the right path. Their ultimate goal was *nirvāṇa*, and thus, rigorous discipline was not initially necessary. Devotion to Lord Buddha was their guiding force, and they followed his teachings obediently.

Discipline was viewed as a gradual path to liberation. The *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* and the *Cullahatthipadopama Sutta* illustrate that following minor steps

¹² AN 10. 59: “*sapadānaṃ caramāno guttadvaro susaṃvuto, khippam pattamm apūresi sampajāno patissato Pabbajjāsutta*,” p. 122.

¹³ Dhṛp 78: “*alamkato cepi samaṇi careyya santo danto niyato brahmacārī/ sabbesu bhūtesu nidhāya daṇḍaṃ – so brahmaṇo so samaṇo sa bhikkhu*.”

¹⁴ MN 27: “*seyyathapi nāma pakkhisakuṇo yena yeneva ḍeti sapattabhārova ḍeti*.” p. 438.

¹⁵ D. II. 72.

of discipline alone was not the final goal. These minor disciplines outlined what one should and should not do but did not constitute the entirety of the spiritual journey. The early monks adhered to discipline naturally, without the need for imposed regulations.¹⁶

At the time of the Buddha's enlightenment, no formal rules were required because the monks were self-disciplined due to their deep spiritual understanding. The Buddha did not prescribe punishments for breaches of discipline; instead, he offered teachings and discourses known as "advice needed to reach perfection."¹⁷ These teachings emphasized the importance of avoiding sinful actions, cultivating merits, and engaging in continuous mental purification.¹⁸ Patience was considered a sublime virtue, and acts of violence, whether by laypeople or monks, were condemned. Monks were instructed not to insult others or dwell on the faults of their peers. Even the act of consuming food was to be approached with mindfulness and moderation.¹⁹

Through brief but timely discourses, monks and novice monks made significant progress toward *Nibbāna*. The Buddha described the ideal discipline of a Buddhist monk as follows: in the early stages of monastic life, a novice monk should take only one meal per day, as this practice promotes physical health and minimizes distractions from worldly affairs.²⁰ During this period, strict supervision by the Buddha was unnecessary; a simple reminder was enough to maintain discipline.

Furthermore, individuals who committed transgressions were not cast out of the monastic community. Instead, discipline evolved naturally through self-correction and the example set by fellow monks. This approach reinforced the principle that true discipline arises from inner understanding rather than the external end.

V. EVOLUTION OF MONASTIC DISCIPLINE

As the monastic community grew, the need for more structured disciplinary rules emerged. Initially, monks lived in harmony, guided by their devotion to the Buddha and their pursuit of enlightenment. However, as more individuals joined the *Śaṅgha*, differences in behavior and understanding became apparent. Some monks struggled to maintain the high level of self-discipline exhibited by the earliest disciples. Consequently, Lord Buddha gradually introduced specific disciplinary rules to ensure consistency and

¹⁶ MN 21: "dhammaṃ yeva sakkaronto dhammaṃ garukaronto dhammaṃ apacāyamāno suvacā," p. 316.

¹⁷ Dh 72: "sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ kusalassa upasampadā, sacitta pariyodapanaṃ etaṃ Buddhānasāsaṇaṃ."

¹⁸ Dh 72: "khantī paramaṃ tapo titikkhā – nibbanaṃ paramaṃ vadanti Buddhā, na hi pabbajito Parūpaghātī – samaṇo hoti paramaṃ viheṭṭhayanto."

¹⁹ Dh 72: "anūpavado anūpaghāto pātimokkhe ca saṃvaro/ mattaññutā ca bhattasmiṃ panthaṃ ca sayanāsaṇaṃ/ adhicitte ca āyogo etaṃ Buddhānasāsaṇaṃ"

²⁰ MN 21: "ārādhayaṃsu vata me bhikkhave bhikkhu ekaṃ samayaṃ cittaṃ idhāhamṃ bhikkhave bhikkhū amantesiṃ."

harmony within the community.

The formalization of discipline was not intended to impose restrictions arbitrarily but rather to create an environment conducive to spiritual growth. The *Vinaya Pitaka*, which forms a major section of the Buddhist canon, contains detailed rules and guidelines governing monastic conduct.²¹ These rules were established in response to specific incidents and were designed to address challenges that arose as the community expanded. The emphasis remained on internal transformation rather than mere adherence to regulations.

VI. PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING BUDDHIST DISCIPLINE

The Buddhist monastic discipline is rooted in key principles that promote ethical conduct, mental clarity, and detachment from worldly distractions. These principles include:

- (i) **Mindfulness and awareness** – Monks are expected to cultivate constant mindfulness in their thoughts, speech, and actions. This practice helps them remain focused on their spiritual goals and avoid behaviors that lead to suffering.
- (ii) **Non-attachment** – The rejection of material possessions and personal desires is a fundamental aspect of monastic discipline. By minimizing dependence on external comforts, monks strengthen their commitment to spiritual practice.
- (iii) **Compassion and non-harm (*Ahimsa*)** – Buddhist discipline emphasizes the importance of kindness and non-violence. Monks are prohibited from harming living beings, physically or verbally, and are encouraged to foster goodwill toward all.
- (iv) **Moderation in all things** – From food consumption to social interactions, monks practice moderation to avoid indulgence and distraction. Even acts as simple as eating are performed with mindfulness, ensuring that sustenance is taken only to maintain physical health.
- (v) **Respect for the monastic code (*Vinaya*)** – The rules outlined in the *Vinaya Pitaka* serve as a guide for monks to navigate daily life in a way that upholds their spiritual integrity. Observing these rules is considered essential for preserving the purity of the *Saṅgha*.

VII. THE ROLE OF THE BUDDHA'S GUIDANCE

The Buddha's approach to discipline was characterized by wisdom and compassion. He recognized that different individuals had varying levels of spiritual maturity and tailored his teachings accordingly. Instead of imposing rigid rules from the outset, he provided guidance that allowed monks to develop self-discipline organically. When disciplinary issues arose, he addressed them through reasoned discussions and ethical considerations rather than punitive measures.

One of the Buddha's key teachings regarding discipline was the importance of introspection. He encouraged monks to reflect on their actions and assess

²¹ DN 29: "na tāva Sāriputta Satthā sāvakānaṃ sikkhāpadaṃ paññāpet," p. 22 - 35.

whether they aligned with the path to enlightenment. This emphasis on self-awareness ensured that discipline was not merely an external obligation but an integral part of personal transformation.

VIII. THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLINE ON MONASTIC LIFE

The implementation of monastic discipline had a profound impact on the Buddhist community. It created a structured environment that facilitated deep meditation and study, allowing monks to dedicate themselves fully to the path of liberation. The emphasis on ethical conduct also strengthened the credibility of the *Saṅgha*, making it a source of inspiration for lay followers.

Additionally, discipline played a crucial role in preserving the teachings of the Buddha. By maintaining a consistent standard of behavior, monks ensured that the Dhamma was passed down accurately from generation to generation. The monastic code became a model for ethical living, not only for monks but also for lay practitioners who sought to incorporate Buddhist principles into their daily lives.

The early Buddhist monastic community functioned effectively without formal rules due to the high level of self-discipline exhibited by its members. However, as the community expanded, structured disciplinary guidelines became necessary to maintain harmony and spiritual focus. The evolution of monastic discipline was a natural response to the challenges posed by a growing *Saṅgha* and was guided by the principles of mindfulness, non-attachment, compassion, moderation, and respect for the monastic code.

The Buddha's approach to discipline was rooted in wisdom and adaptability. Rather than enforcing rules through fear or punishment, he emphasized self-awareness and ethical conduct. This method ensured that monastic discipline remained a means of inner transformation rather than a mere set of external restrictions.

Ultimately, Buddhist monastic discipline serves as a foundation for spiritual growth, enabling monks to cultivate purity of mind and progress toward the ultimate goal of *Nibbāna*. It also provides a valuable ethical framework for lay practitioners, demonstrating the timeless relevance of the Buddha's teachings on discipline and self-restraint.

VIII. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF INDISCIPLINE AMONG THE MONKS COMMUNITY

For twenty years following the attainment of Enlightenment by the Buddha, there was no necessity to introduce rules of discipline for the monastic community. The disciples, deeply committed to the teachings of the Great One, adhered to a path of purity and moral rectitude without the need for a codified set of regulations. Their conduct was naturally restrained, and even minor infractions were corrected through mere admonitions by the Buddha. However, as time progressed and the Buddhist Order expanded, the complexities of human behavior began to manifest among the members of the *Saṅgha*. The once-unified community began experiencing challenges related to discipline and ethical conduct.

8.1. The gradual emergence of indiscipline

Initially, the monastic community functioned harmoniously, bound by a shared sense of devotion and purpose. However, with time, the influx of individuals from various social backgrounds introduced elements that threatened the unity and ethical integrity of the Order. Monks gradually became entangled in worldly affairs, including economic activities, personal rivalries, and indulgence in sensual pleasures. The erosion of discipline necessitated a structured approach to governance within the monastic community, leading to the formulation of disciplinary rules (*Vinaya*).

The Buddha, recognizing these emerging threats to the purity of the *Saṅgha*, laid down regulations to address the growing indiscipline. He explained the necessity of discipline to his chief disciple, Reverend *Sāriputta*, when queried about the means to prevent the distortion and piracy of the Doctrine. The Buddha outlined the following measures to uphold the sanctity and discipline of the monastic community:²²

- (i) The Doctrine should be explained to monks in great detail to ensure clarity and correct understanding.
- (ii) The teachings of the “*navāṅgasatthusāsana*” should be preached consistently to reinforce core Buddhist principles.
- (iii) Rules of discipline should be strictly enforced to regulate monastic conduct.
- (iv) The *Pātimokkha*, the essence of monastic discipline, should be frequently recited and emphasized.

These measures aimed at ensuring the longevity and authenticity of the Doctrine while safeguarding the ethical conduct of the monastic community.

8.2. Factors contributing to indiscipline

The *Mahāvagga*, an important text in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, records various categories of individuals who sought admission into the Buddhist Order. While many entered the *Saṅgha* with genuine spiritual aspirations, others had ulterior motives. These categories include:

- (i) Devotees of other faiths were attracted by the benefits they believed monastic life could offer.
- (ii) Individuals seeking treatment under the renowned state physician *Jīvaka* for their ailments.
- (iii) Soldiers who deserted the royal army in fear of military discipline.
- (iv) Thieves and highwaymen attempting to escape royal punishment.
- (v) People who had suffered public disgrace due to royal punishment.
- (vi) Those wishing to avoid a life of domestic servitude.
- (vii) Individuals who failed to become intellectuals in secular society.
- (viii) Those averse to both manual and intellectual labor.

²² Ibid, p. 20.

- (ix) People seeking to counteract perceived astrological misfortunes.
- (x) Individuals whose lifestyles were completely at odds with Buddhist monastic values.
- (xi) People from diverse social backgrounds and castes are bringing varying perspectives and challenges to monastic life.

The admission of such individuals, many of whom lacked a deep commitment to the teachings, led to a gradual weakening of the moral foundation of the Saṅgha. As a result, various malpractices began to surface, undermining the original purity of the Order.

8.3. Manifestations of indiscipline

Several incidents recorded in Buddhist texts highlight the growing concerns regarding indiscipline. Some notable cases include:

- (i) **Disputes among the monks of Kosambi:** A significant schism arose among monks in *Kosambi* due to disagreements over Vinaya interpretations, leading to factionalism within the *Saṅgha*.
- (ii) **Devadatta's rivalry:** Devadatta, a cousin of the Buddha, attempted to usurp leadership of the monastic Order, instigating dissent and seeking to introduce his own set of stricter monastic rules.
- (iii) **The misconduct of Bhaddāli and Kokalika:** These monks engaged in behavior contrary to monastic discipline, setting negative precedents for others.
- (iv) **Material possessions among monks:** Some monks began accumulating excessive possessions, violating the principle of renunciation central to Buddhist monasticism.
- (v) **The Chabbaggiya and Sattarasavaggiya monks:** These groups engaged in various misconducts, challenging the disciplinary structure and ethical principles established by the Buddha.

Despite these challenges, the Buddha initially refrained from imposing harsh disciplinary measures. Instead, he attempted to reform errant monks through compassionate guidance, emphasizing moral reminders, gentle warnings, and meditation techniques aimed at achieving *Nirvana*. However, as indiscipline persisted, stricter regulations became necessary.

IX. REASONS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF PRECEPTS

The establishment of monastic precepts was driven by several factors, including:²³

- (i) The passage of time since the Buddha established the Order necessitated structured regulations.
- (ii) The increasing number of monks required a well-defined disciplinary system.
- (iii) The significant social privileges enjoyed by monks created opportunities for ethical lapses.

²³ Ibid, p. 22.

(iv) The rise of highly learned monks made it crucial to maintain the credibility and moral integrity of the *Saṅgha*.

Additionally, the *Bhaddāli Sutta* highlights another key reason for declining discipline – monks received immense public honor and reverence, which sometimes led to complacency and moral laxity.

9.1. Objectives of monastic discipline

To address these concerns, the Buddha instituted disciplinary rules aimed at preserving the ethical purity of the *Saṅgha*. These rules served the following ten purposes:²⁴

- (i) Ensuring the excellent conduct of disciples.
- (ii) Guaranteeing the physical and mental comfort of monks.
- (iii) Subduing unruly and disruptive members of the community.
- (iv) Promoting peace and harmony within the *Saṅgha*.
- (v) Suppressing worldly and sensual inclinations among monks.
- (vi) Eliminating the remnants of sensual attachment that might linger in a monastic life.
- (vii) Attracting individuals who were not initially drawn to the monastic path.
- (viii) Strengthening the commitment of those already following the monastic path.
- (ix) Preserving the noble doctrine for future generations.
- (x) Encouraging adherence to strict discipline to ensure the longevity of the monastic tradition.

9.2. The legacy of monastic discipline

The Buddha consistently emphasized the necessity of strict discipline, recognizing that the long-term survival and purity of the *Saṅgha* depended on adherence to ethical principles. He saw discipline not as a form of oppression but as a means to achieve higher spiritual goals. The *Pātimokkha*, recited fortnightly, became a cornerstone of monastic discipline, reinforcing the importance of ethical conduct and communal accountability.

Even after the Buddha's *Parinirvana*, the *Saṅgha* continued to uphold the Vinaya, recognizing that without discipline, the monastic tradition would decline. The Buddhist councils that followed the Buddha's passing played a crucial role in preserving the *Vinaya*, ensuring that monastic discipline remained a defining characteristic of the *Saṅgha*.

The growth and development of indiscipline within the monastic community were inevitable consequences of the expanding Buddhist Order. The diverse backgrounds and motivations of new entrants led to various ethical and disciplinary challenges. However, through the implementation of the *Vinaya*, the Buddha successfully addressed these issues, ensuring the continuity and purity of the monastic tradition. The rules of discipline not only curtailed moral decline but also provided a structured framework for spiritual

²⁴ Ibid, p. 48.

growth, reinforcing the *Saṅgha*'s role as the custodian of the noble Dharma. Even today, monastic discipline remains central to the practice of Buddhism, embodying the ethical and moral principles laid down by the Buddha over 2,500 years ago.

X. CONCLUSION

After the lapse of twenty years, the Buddha's disciples realized the immense importance and practicability of the doctrine, which was firmly supported by the rules of discipline. The Buddhist monastic community, or *Saṅgha*, was founded with the clear objective of attaining the "Supreme Bliss" or *Nibbāna*. This ultimate goal served as the guiding force behind their commitment to the Dhamma and Vinaya. While the teachings provided the philosophical foundation, the monastic rules ensured a disciplined lifestyle, enabling the practitioners to stay on the righteous path without being distracted by worldly temptations. The structure provided by these disciplinary codes was not merely restrictive but served as an essential framework to cultivate moral purity, mental clarity, and spiritual advancement.

The section of preaching entitled *Ovādapātimokkha* was particularly significant in directing and guiding the disciples toward the realization of *Nibbāna*. This teaching encapsulated the core principles of monastic conduct, emphasizing the importance of non-violence, adherence to moral precepts, and diligent practice of meditation. The monks and nuns who adhered to these teachings were completely devoid of sin and lust, having abandoned all attachments to sensory pleasures. They embodied the highest ethical standards and self-discipline, ensuring that no evil or harmful action could be expected from them. Their renunciation of worldly pleasures was not born out of mere asceticism but was driven by a profound understanding of the dangers of craving and attachment. Having realized the suffering inherent in worldly existence, they chose a path of complete renunciation to transcend the cycle of birth and death. Their disciplined and virtuous lives served as an inspiration to lay followers and contributed to the longevity and purity of the Buddhist teachings.

However, as time passed, the monastic order inevitably faced challenges. With the expansion of the *Saṅgha* and the growing number of followers, instances of ill-discipline began to surface among some monks. Human nature, with its inherent weaknesses, occasionally manifested even within the monastic community. Some members strayed from the strict path, engaging in behaviors that were not in alignment with the *Dhamma*. Such deviations posed a serious threat to the integrity of the *Saṅgha* and the purity of the teachings. Recognizing this, the Buddha and his senior disciples took necessary measures to curb these harmful trends by reinforcing and expanding the disciplinary rules. The Vinaya, or monastic code of discipline, was systematically developed in response to specific incidents of misconduct, ensuring that appropriate guidelines were in place to maintain harmony and order within the *Saṅgha*.

The implementation of these disciplinary principles played a crucial role in preserving the spiritual sanctity of the monastic community. It ensured that the monastic life remained focused on the ultimate goal of liberation rather than

being compromised by personal desires or external influences. The enforcement of discipline was not punitive but was aimed at guiding erring monks back onto the path of righteousness. This structured approach to monastic discipline not only upheld the sanctity of the *Śaṅgha* but also reinforced the faith of lay followers in the Buddhist teachings. Ultimately, the commitment to discipline and moral purity safeguarded the transmission of the *Dhamma* for future generations, ensuring its continuity as a path to enlightenment.

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LEADERSHIP FORMATION IN KOREAN BUDDHIST CONTEXT: THE CASE OF INHONG AND BHIKKHUNIS' CONTRIBUTIONS

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Abstract:

This study explores the formation and institutionalization of charismatic leadership in the context of Korean Buddhism, with a particular focus on female leaders. The study analyzes the case of Inhong, a renowned Zen master, and how she combined rigorous monastic discipline with leadership positions in organizations to become a respected model of leadership. The analysis draws on Max Weber's theory of personal charisma, examining the transition from pure charisma to institutionalized charisma through formal roles and community recognition. The study highlights the importance of morality, self-control, and perseverance in the construction of religious leadership and examines its implications for the *bhikkhuni* (nun) community and the development of Korean Buddhism in general. The results suggest that the combination of personal virtue and institutional power can promote change and inclusion in a system traditionally dominated by men.

Keywords: *Bhikkhunis' contributions, leadership formation, Korean Buddhist.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership within religious organizations fundamentally differs from leadership in secular or business contexts. While business leaders prioritize profit generation and operational efficiency, religious leaders focus on inspiring and guiding their communities by addressing existential questions and fostering spiritual growth. Within the context of Buddhism, leadership revolves around the pursuit of life's ultimate essence, grounded in the principle of self-power (自力) - a concept that emphasizes personal effort, self-discipline,

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and rigorous practice over reliance on external forces. This foundational principle, articulated by Shakyamuni Buddha, underscores perseverance and self-discipline as essential pathways to enlightenment. Following this tradition, contemporary Buddhist leaders are expected to embody these principles, inspiring their followers through personal commitment to spiritual development and ethical living. Buddhist leadership is distinct in its emphasis on cultivating self-awareness, compassion, and spiritual realization, offering a framework for addressing fundamental human concerns rather than achieving material success. This divergence from pragmatic leadership models underscores the role of religious leaders as moral and spiritual guides who foster personal responsibility and collective transformation within their communities. Within the Buddhist framework, leadership provides a unique lens through which to examine the interplay of philosophical principles, spiritual practice, and communal engagement, particularly in addressing modern societal challenges. Buddhist leadership is distinct in its emphasis on cultivating self-awareness, compassion, and spiritual realization, offering a framework for addressing fundamental human concerns rather than achieving material success. This divergence from pragmatic leadership models underscores the importance of religious leaders as moral and spiritual guides who foster personal responsibility and collective transformation within their communities. Within the Buddhist framework, leadership provides a unique lens through which to examine the interplay of philosophical principles, spiritual practice, and communal engagement, particularly in addressing modern societal challenges. *Tariki* (他力), or other-power, stands in contrast to *jiriki* (自力), or self-power, within Buddhist philosophy. A deeper understanding of Buddhist leadership necessitates examining the interplay between these two principles, as discussed in Buddhist texts like the *Tannishō* and the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*. Self-power reflects the individual's capacity for self-discipline and effort, while other-power represents reliance on external forces, such as divine intervention or the guidance of enlightened beings. Together, these principles form the foundation of Buddhist leadership, which prioritizes personal accountability and spiritual discipline as essential elements of effective leadership. Analyzing how these concepts are applied by modern Buddhist leaders can shed light on their potential to address issues of inclusivity, adaptability, and relevance in a rapidly changing world. Within this context, South Korea's *Bhikkhunis* (female monastics) offer a particularly compelling case for exploring leadership formation in Buddhism. Despite facing significant institutional and societal challenges, the Korean *Bhikkhunis* have played a vital role in sustaining and evolving the Sangha (monastic community). This paper examines the leadership of Inhong (仁弘, 1908 – 1997), a renowned Sōn Master (禪僧) and key figure in the modern history of Korean Buddhism, to illustrate the distinct contributions of *Bhikkhuni* leadership.¹ Known as “the Tiger of Kaji-san,” Inhong was celebrated for her

¹ Park (2007): p. 189.

rigorous practice of questioning meditation (Kor. *Kanhwa Sŏn*, 看話禪) and her transformative role in the Buddhist Purification Movement (1954 – 1962). Her efforts in rebuilding *Sŏngnam-sa* (石南寺), a temple devastated during the Korean War, exemplify the Buddhist ideal of transforming sentient beings below (下化衆生) through self-discipline, collective action, and spiritual renewal. By applying Max Weber's theory of charismatic leadership, this study analyzes how Inhong exemplified Buddhist principles in her leadership, inspiring transformation within the monastic community while fostering resilience and adaptability. Her leadership, rooted in rigorous discipline and communal effort, demonstrates the strengths of *Bhikkhunis* in creating sustainable, inclusive spaces for monastic and spiritual practice in the modern information age, characterized by globalization, diversity, and shifting societal values, female leaders in Buddhism are increasingly recognized for their ability to foster inclusivity, power-sharing, and attentive care. While traditional male-centered Buddhist leadership has often emphasized discipline and hierarchical structures, the relational and moral dimensions of female leadership - exemplified by figures like Inhong - present a model that aligns well with the needs of contemporary society. This paper also examines whether the underutilization of women's leadership within Korean Buddhism has hindered its ability to adapt to modern societal values, particularly as the community faces challenges such as slowing growth and declining public engagement. Through an analysis of Inhong's leadership and its broader implications, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of *Bhikkhuni* leadership as a distinct model within Korean Buddhism, one that integrates Buddhist philosophy, ethical practice, and modern relevance. The findings aim to contribute to ongoing discussions about the role of female leadership in addressing challenges within global Buddhist communities. By examining Inhong's leadership and the broader role of *Bhikkhunis* in fostering inclusive monastic spaces, this study highlights how female leadership in Buddhism contributes to unity and global harmony. Through their emphasis on relational ethics, communal resilience, and adaptability, *Bhikkhunis* offer a collaborative model of leadership that aligns with the evolving needs of contemporary society. This paper explores how their efforts not only sustain Buddhist communities but also contribute to a more harmonious and inclusive global landscape.

II. LEADERSHIP IN CONTEXT: TRADITIONAL AND NEOTRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The study of leadership has evolved significantly, with researchers conceptualizing and examining leadership from diverse perspectives. Early research primarily focused on specific aspects of leadership, often falling into distinct schools of thought. Traditional leadership theories are generally categorized into three primary approaches: trait theory, which examines fixed characteristics that differentiate leaders from followers; behavioral theory, which identifies observable and developable behaviors of effective leaders; and situational theory, which posits that leadership effectiveness depends on contextual factors. These traditional approaches have provided the foundation

for mainstream leadership studies. In the 1980s, however, a shift toward neotraditional leadership theories expanded the scope of leadership research. This new generation of theories introduced models such as attribution theory, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, visionary leadership, and cultural leadership, all of which emphasize dynamic and relational aspects of leadership. These approaches aim to capture the complexities of influence, inspiration, and the contextual interactions between leaders and followers. This paper applies insights from neotraditional leadership theories and Max Weber's concept of charisma to analyze the leadership of Sŏn Master Inhong (仁弘), particularly her practices of "never lying down" (Kor. *Changjwa purwa*, 長座不臥) and "a day without work is a day without food".² Inhong's disciplined practices are examined through the lens of attribution theory, while her "questioning meditation" (*Kanhwa Sŏn*, 看話禪), including the practice of contemplating the phrase "Zhaozhou's dong",³ is explored as a form of transformational leadership inspired by new trend theories. The concept of charisma originates from the Greek term meaning "divine gift" and traditionally encompassed abilities such as prophesying, teaching, healing, ruling, and serving.⁴ In his sociological analysis, Max Weber redefined charisma as a form of influence arising from followers' perceptions that a leader possesses extraordinary qualities rather than authority derived from position or tradition. Weber's theory of charisma has had a significant impact on the study of leadership, particularly in the contexts of politics, social movements, and religious leadership. Charisma is widely regarded as a relational concept, shaped by the interplay between leaders' actions, followers' perceptions, and the broader social or organizational context. Leadership studies often debate whether charisma originates inherently from a leader's attributes or emerges through reciprocal influence between leaders and followers. Contemporary interpretations generally emphasize its interactive nature, with leadership effectiveness influenced by followers' individual and collective needs, as well as the sociocultural context. Applying Weber's theory of charisma, this paper explores Inhong's leadership, particularly during her tenure as president of the Korean *Bhikkhuni* Association. It examines how her practices and formal leadership position contributed to her perceived charisma, both as a spiritual leader and as an organizational figure. The analysis distinguishes between pure charisma, rooted in extraordinary individual qualities, and routinized charisma, institutionalized through organizational roles and formal authority.

III. INHONG'S LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE: THE FORMATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP

This paper emphasizes how Inhong's unique style of Buddhist practice - rooted in disciplined meditation and asceticism - served as the foundation of her leadership. Rather than focusing on the direct impact of her practices on

² Kor. *Ililbujak ililbulsik*, 一日不作 一日不食.

³ Kor. *Joju muja*, 趙州無字.

⁴ Potts (2009): p. 40 – 59.

followers, this analysis investigates how her dedication to spiritual principles shaped her ability to inspire and guide others. While Buddhist practices vary widely and their relative efficacy remains a topic of scholarly debate, this study highlights the specific relationship between Inhong's ascetic practices and her charismatic leadership within the monastic community and beyond. From the perspective of the *Bhikkhuni Sangha*, Inhong's leadership played a crucial role in uniting and motivating both monks and *Bhikkhunis* during the Buddhist Purification Movement of the Jogye Order. Her leadership fostered a collective sense of purpose and spiritual renewal among her followers. Conversely, from the perspective of the broader Buddhist community, her influence extended beyond monastic boundaries. For example, her role in the rebuilding of *Söngnam-sa* revitalized not only the temple but also provided followers with a meaningful opportunity to engage with Buddhist teachings and embody the principle of "transforming sentient beings below" (*xià huà zhòng shēng*, 下化衆生). The formation of Inhong's leadership is deeply rooted in her practice of "questioning meditation" (*Kanhwa Sön*, 看話禪) and her consistent commitment to *Sön* (禪) principles, which her followers perceived as extraordinary. Weber's concept of charisma provides a useful framework for understanding how these perceptions formed the foundation of her leadership. Her election as president of the Korean *Bhikkhuni* Association further illustrates how her charisma transitioned from being purely spiritual to becoming institutionalized as formal authority, a process Weber described as the "routinization of charisma." This study argues that Inhong's leadership was shaped by the interplay between her spiritual practices, the needs of her community, and the institutional contexts in which she operated. By applying Weber's theory of charisma to Inhong's life and practices, this paper aims to deepen our understanding of how religious leadership differs from secular models, such as business leadership. While business leadership often prioritizes material goals and operational efficiency, Buddhist leadership emphasizes spiritual growth, moral guidance, and the pursuit of life's essence.

2.1. Charisma formation through practice: A Weberian perspective

This discussion does not assess the efficacy of Inhong's "never lying down" practice as a Buddhist discipline. Rather, it examines how this practice influenced the development of her charismatic leadership. While Buddhist practices vary widely and their effectiveness remains a subject of debate, the focus of this paper is to analyze how Inhong's asceticism contributed to her perception as a charismatic leader within her community. In the context of communal Buddhist practice, a leader often takes on the role of a "guardian," supporting practitioners by ensuring their material needs - such as food and shelter - are met and addressing any issues that arise. However, Inhong diverged from this role in 1952 when, after 10 years of communal practice at Masan Söngju, she sought a more solitary and focused path to deepen her practice. She embarked on a holy retreat at Jogyeam (曹溪庵) on Cheonsung Mountain (千聖山) in Yangsan, Gyeongsangbuk-do, where she undertook a 100-day *Changjwa purwa* retreat. During this period, she committed herself

to never lying down, a practice symbolizing her unyielding determination to pursue enlightenment without rest. This extreme self-discipline epitomized the principle of forsaking physical comfort to achieve spiritual liberation, a commitment that laid the foundation for her charismatic authority. Inhong's practice of *Changjwa purwa* can be interpreted as an act of extraordinary determination and self-sacrifice, qualities that resonate deeply with Weber's theory of charisma. The term "charisma," derived from the Greek word meaning "divine gift," initially carried a theological connotation, referring to the spiritual gifts described by St. Paul. German sociologist Max Weber redefined the term within a sociological framework, describing charisma as a type of leader influence that arises from followers' perceptions of the leader's extraordinary abilities rather than from institutional authority or tradition. Charisma, Weber argued, is inherently relational: it is conferred upon leaders by their followers when they recognize qualities they perceive as exceptional, often within the context of a crisis or challenge.⁵ Weber further contended that charismatic leaders are often regarded as mysterious, self-confident figures who present transformative solutions to crises. Their influence stems not from their inherent traits but from followers' recognition and acknowledgment of their extraordinary qualities, which may be perceived as supernatural or superhuman. Neo-Weberian scholars, such as Jermier, expanded this understanding by emphasizing that charisma is shaped through relational and perceptual dynamics, underscoring the importance of the interaction between leader behavior, follower perception, and context. Inhong's *Changjwa purwa* practice exemplifies behaviors that align with Weber's concept of charisma.⁶ For many individuals, even maintaining seated meditation for an hour is a challenging feat. Inhong's 100-day commitment to never lying down transcended ordinary standards of physical and mental endurance, inspiring followers to view her as possessing exceptional spiritual qualities. This perception of superhuman discipline and unwavering resolve contributed to the formation of her charisma as a leader, as it reflected a willingness to sacrifice personal comfort and even risk her life in pursuit of enlightenment. The *Changjwa purwa* practice can also be analyzed through Conger and Kanungo's Attributive Theory of Charismatic Leadership, which emphasizes the role of followers' attributions in the creation of charisma.⁷ According to this theory, charismatic leaders are recognized based on their observable behaviors, particularly those involving self-sacrifice, risk-taking, and an unwavering commitment to their vision. These behaviors often carry significant personal cost, enhancing the perception of the leader as extraordinary and inspiring confidence and loyalty among followers. Inhong's vision was enlightenment - a spiritual goal requiring immense dedication and perseverance. Her *Changjwa purwa* practice demonstrated an unparalleled commitment to this vision, exemplifying the self-sacrificial and risk-taking behaviors identified by Conger and Kanungo

⁵ Yukl, G. A. (2002): p. 293.

⁶ Jermier, J. M. (1993): p. 217 – 233.

⁷ Conger & Kanungo (1987): p. 78 - 97.

as hallmarks of charismatic leadership. By embodying these qualities, Inhong inspired her followers to perceive her as a figure of exceptional spiritual authority and resolve. Her actions not only symbolized her determination but also served as a tangible manifestation of her vision, reinforcing her status as a leader capable of guiding others toward spiritual transformation. Inhong's charismatic leadership illustrates the inherently relational nature of charisma. Her extraordinary practices, such as *Changjwa purwa*, did not exist in isolation but gained significance through the recognition and acknowledgment of her followers. Drawing on both Weber's theory of charisma and the Attributive Theory of Charismatic Leadership, it becomes evident that the perception of Inhong's superhuman qualities was rooted in her actions, which resonated deeply with the spiritual aspirations of her community. Her willingness to endure immense physical and mental hardship elevated her status as a leader, fostering a collective sense of purpose and inspiration among her followers. Through her *Changjwa purwa* practice, Inhong demonstrated profound self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and commitment to her vision of enlightenment. These qualities not only exemplified the behaviors associated with charismatic leadership but also served as the basis for her followers' perception of her as an extraordinary leader. By applying Weber's theory of charisma and Conger and Kanungo's Attributive Theory, this analysis highlights how Inhong's practices and behaviors contributed to the formation of her leadership. This case study underscores the relational and perceptual dynamics of charisma, illustrating how extraordinary commitment and discipline can inspire followers and foster the development of leadership within a religious context.

2.2. Leadership formation of religious leaders through ascetic practices and spiritual inquiry

The ascetic practice of consuming only one meal a day (Kor. *Ill-Ill-Ill-Shik*, 一日一食), similar to *Changjwa purwa* (never lying down), exemplifies the profound role of rigorous self-restraint in shaping religious leadership. Within the Buddhist tradition, such ascetic practices transcend mere personal sacrifice; they function as pathways to wisdom, detachment, and self-mastery. The Buddha himself endorsed this practice in the *Kitagiri Sutta*, stating: "I eat only one meal a day. By eating one meal a day, I experience good health, agility, vigor, and a comfortable abiding."⁸ This doctrinal affirmation legitimizes the practice within Buddhist ascetic traditions, emphasizing its function as a means of spiritual cultivation rather than mere deprivation. Moreover, beyond individual discipline, such practices distinguish monastic leaders who embody the highest ideals of renunciation. The Buddha highlighted that true spiritual authority arises not from external status but from inner discipline, as reflected in the *Dhammapada*: "Though thousand times a thousand in battle one may conquer, yet should one conquer just oneself one is the greatest conqueror."⁹ From a sociological perspective, the practice of consuming only one meal a

⁸ MN. 70.

⁹ Dh. 103.

day can be analyzed through the lens of the attributional theory of charismatic leadership. By demonstrating an extraordinary degree of self-control, ascetics cultivate an aura of sanctity that distinguishes them within monastic traditions. For the average layperson accustomed to consuming three meals per day, the ability to subsist on a single meal for an entire lifetime appears to transcend ordinary human capacity. This perceived transcendence fosters charisma among followers, reinforcing the spiritual authority of those who embody such rigorous disciplines. Thus, ascetic practices function not only as tools for self-purification but also as mechanisms in the construction of religious leadership and the cultivation of reverence within monastic communities. Unlike modern fasting practices adopted for health or lifestyle purposes, monastic practices such as *Ill-Ill-Ill-Shik* hold profound spiritual significance - symbolizing renunciation, self-mastery, and an unwavering commitment to enlightenment. However, within the Buddhist traditions, the efficacy of ascetic practices is not determined solely by physical austerity but rather by the practitioner's spiritual intent. The *Dhammapada* emphasizes this distinction: "Not going naked, nor having matted hair, nor smearing oneself with mud, nor fasting, not sleeping on bare ground, no penance on heels, nor sweat nor grime can purify a mortal still overcome by doubt."¹⁰ This passage underscores that ascetic practices, in and of themselves, do not guarantee spiritual purification; rather, they must be accompanied by inner transformation and wisdom. Beyond personal spiritual cultivation, ascetic practices like *Ill-Ill-Ill-Shik* serve a broader function within religious leadership. While institutional leaders often impose strict moral codes on their followers, many fail to uphold these standards themselves, leading to perceptions of hypocrisy. The Buddha warned against such moral inconsistencies, stating: "Not others' opposition nor what they did or failed to do, but in oneself should be sought things done, things left undone."¹¹

By adhering rigorously to *Ill-Ill-Ill-Shik*, Inhong aligned her conduct with the strictest monastic codes, reinforcing the authenticity of her leadership. The visible consistency of her ascetic practice affirmed her commitment to Buddhist principles, inspiring followers and positioning her as a paragon of spiritual integrity. In this sense, asceticism functions not only as a personal practice of self-discipline but also as a public demonstration of ethical leadership, fostering trust and reverence within the monastic community. The Buddhist tradition affirms that both men and women can attain the highest spiritual realization through practice and wisdom. The *Therīgāthā*, a collection of verses by early *Bhikkhunis*, celebrates the ascetic struggles of female practitioners who renounced worldly life in pursuit of awakening. The *Somā Sutta* further reinforces that spiritual realization depends on wisdom and concentration, not gender: "What difference does womanhood make when the mind is serene, and knowledge is present as you rightly discern the *Dhamma*."¹²

¹⁰ *Dhp.* 141.

¹¹ *Dhp.* 50.

¹² *Sn.* 5.2.

Figures such as Mahāpajāpati Gotamī and other early female ascetics attained spiritual authority through rigorous self-discipline, and Inhong's leadership was similarly legitimized by her unwavering commitment to asceticism. The Buddha reaffirmed that virtue and wisdom, not gender-determine one's spiritual stature: "When one has faith in the Tathāgata, unshakable and well established, and good and virtuous behavior, loved by the noble ones and praised; when one has confidence in the *Sangha* and one's view has been straightened out, they say that one is not poor, that one's life is not lived vain."¹³ By embodying monastic ideals of discipline, self-sacrifice, and humility, Inhong cultivated a leadership identity deeply rooted in integrity. Her practice of *Ill-Ill-Ill-Shik* symbolized her willingness to impose upon herself the same rigor she expected of her followers. This alignment between her actions and the values amplified her charismatic authority and legitimized her leadership. The relationship between asceticism and charismatic authority highlights the transformative role of discipline and self-mastery in religious leadership. Ascetic practices like *Ill-Ill-Ill-Shik* provide a visible, tangible manifestation of spiritual commitment, allowing leaders to cultivate trust, admiration, and reverence among their followers. The *Therīgāthā* suggests that women who engage in rigorous discipline and wisdom can attain the highest levels of spiritual realization, as illustrated in: "Having heard the excellent *Dhamma*, I became a nun. Following the Supreme Teacher's instruction, I attained the bliss of *Nibbāna*."¹⁴ Beyond individual attainment, ascetic practice contributes to ethical leadership and communal harmony within the monastic order. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, emphasizes that communal harmony is essential for the longevity of monastic institutions: "So long, O mendicants, as the brethren meet together in full and frequent assemblies – so long as they meet together in concord, and rise in concord, and carry out in concord the duties of the order – so long may the brethren be expected not to decline, but to prosper."¹⁵ Through asceticism, Inhong's leadership transcended institutional authority, grounding itself in the disciplined pursuit of monastic ideals and the broader ethical framework of Buddhist practice. Her example highlights how spiritual integrity, moral consistency, and self-mastery collectively contribute to the formation of charismatic religious leadership.

III. RELIGIOUS DISCIPLINE AS THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership within religious traditions often emerges through a combination of spiritual discipline, ethical commitments, and the ability to inspire followers. In the context of Buddhist monasticism, the formation of leadership is deeply intertwined with rigorous ascetic practices and the embodiment of moral and doctrinal principles. This study examines the case of Inhong, whose leadership exemplifies a pathway rooted in strict monastic discipline and charismatic authority. By engaging in the practice of *Ill-Ill-Ill-Shik*, Inhong cultivated a

¹³ AN. 4.52.

¹⁴ Thig. 137.

¹⁵ DN. 16.

leadership model centered on self-sacrifice, integrity, and devotion, positioning her as a guiding figure within her religious community. Analyzing her leadership through the lens of transformational and charismatic leadership theories provides insight into how monastic discipline fosters religious authority and inspires followers. Transformational leadership, as defined by Burns (1978), is characterized by the ability to elevate individuals by fostering core values such as humanism, peace, equality, and freedom. Unlike transactional leadership, which relies on material exchanges to secure compliance, transformational leadership seeks to inspire profound inner change. Inhong's leadership aligns with this model through her unwavering dedication to monastic discipline, which served as a source of inspiration for her followers. Her practice of *Ill-Ill-Shik*, a rigorous form of ascetic discipline, reinforced her credibility and moral authority, allowing her to cultivate trust and admiration among monastics and lay practitioners alike. Bass (1985) identifies three key components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation. Inhong's leadership primarily reflects the first two components. Idealized influence is demonstrated through her embodiment of monastic virtues, positioning her as a moral exemplar whose actions reinforced the values of the Buddhist community. Her visible commitment to self-discipline and ethical living created a foundation for trust, as followers perceived her as a figure of extraordinary dedication and authenticity. This perception of moral and spiritual excellence aligns with Weber's (1968) concept of charismatic authority, wherein individuals inspire devotion through their perceived sanctity and exceptional qualities. Inspirational motivation, another key aspect of transformational leadership, is evident in the way Inhong's practice encouraged others to deepen their spiritual commitments. By adhering to the demanding discipline of *Ill-Ill-Shik*, she demonstrated the transformative potential of monastic practice, motivating her followers to pursue similar paths of dedication. Her leadership did not rely on institutional authority but rather on her ability to inspire through example, fostering a collective aspiration toward spiritual growth and ethical refinement. Religious discipline serves as a cornerstone of Buddhist leadership, providing a tangible demonstration of commitment to spiritual ideals. Inhong's ascetic practice reinforced her leadership authority by illustrating her willingness to transcend personal comfort in pursuit of enlightenment. This form of leadership aligns with the Buddhist ideal of self-sacrifice, wherein a leader's credibility is measured by their adherence to the *Dhamma* and their ability to embody its principles in daily life. Furthermore, Inhong's leadership reflects the broader Buddhist emphasis on ethical integrity as a foundation for religious authority. The *Vinaya Pitaka*, the monastic code, underscores the importance of discipline in shaping a monk or nun's credibility within the community. Inhong's strict adherence to this code not only legitimized her leadership but also positioned her as a model for others seeking to cultivate moral and spiritual excellence. Her ability to sustain such rigorous discipline fostered a sense of reverence among followers, reinforcing her influence without reliance on institutional power. Charismatic leadership plays a crucial role in shaping

religious and institutional frameworks, particularly where personal authority intersects with organizational structures. In the Korean Buddhist tradition, the leadership of Inhong (1908–1997) exemplifies the complex interplay between extraordinary personal attributes and institutional roles in the formation of charismatic authority. Inhong’s disciplined ascetic practices and institutional leadership transformed her into a revered figure within Korean Buddhism, illustrating Max Weber’s theories on charismatic and routinized authority. This study examines her ascetic practices, institutional roles, and broader impact to explore how charismatic authority is cultivated and institutionalized within the context of Korean Buddhism. Inhong’s extraordinary ascetic practices were central to her emergence as a charismatic leader. She consistently engaged in “never lying down,” “a day without work is a day without food,” and “questioning meditation” (Kor. *Kanhwa Sŏn*, 看話禪). While these practices were not unique to her, her disciplined and sustained application of them distinguished her among Buddhist teachers. These rigorous practices, often beyond the capacity of ordinary individuals, symbolized her deep spiritual commitment and exceptional sanctity, qualities that resonate deeply within the Buddhist tradition. Such practices allowed Inhong to cultivate a level of charisma rooted in personal sanctity and spiritual mastery. Max Weber’s concept of “pure charisma” is particularly applicable here, as it refers to leadership derived from the recognition of extraordinary qualities by followers. Inhong’s asceticism not only demonstrated her spiritual dedication but also solidified her status as a figure of reverence and inspiration. Her ability to endure and thrive under extreme physical and mental discipline elevated her to a status that transcended conventional boundaries, marking her as an extraordinary individual within the Buddhist community. In addition to her ascetic practices, Inhong’s appointment as the president of the *Bhikkhuni* Association granted her traditional and legal-rational authority. The *Bhikkhuni* Association, a key organization for female monastics (*Bhikkhunis*) in Korea, provided a formal institutional framework that enhanced her leadership. Her position within this association allowed her to bridge the gap between personal charisma and institutional authority, aligning with Weber’s theory that charismatic leadership often evolves into traditional and legal-rational forms of authority through institutionalization. Traditional authority, according to Weber, arises from an enduring belief in the sanctity of established traditions and customs. Inhong’s leadership was steeped in this tradition, as her practices and teachings were grounded in the established norms of Korean Buddhism. Legal-rational authority, on the other hand, is rooted in codified rules and the legitimacy of positions within a system. Inhong’s presidency of the *Bhikkhuni* Association provided her with a platform to exercise legal-rational authority, formalizing her influence within the organizational hierarchy. This dual authority reinforced her leadership, enabling her to impact both individual followers and the broader institutional structure. The case of Inhong illustrates the formation and evolution of charismatic leadership within the Korean Buddhist context. Her disciplined ascetic practices and institutional roles exemplify the dynamic interplay between pure charisma and routinized

charisma, as theorized by Max Weber. By integrating personal sanctity with organizational authority, Inhong emerged as a transformative leader whose influence extended beyond conventional boundaries. The broader implications of her leadership are particularly significant within the context of South Korea's *Bhikkhuni* community. Despite facing systemic challenges, the resilience and achievements of the *Bhikkhunis* underscore the enduring relevance of charismatic leadership in addressing contemporary issues within the global Buddhist tradition. Inhong's legacy serves as a testament to the transformative potential of charismatic authority in sustaining and evolving religious and organizational structures.

IV. CONCLUSION

The leadership of Inhong within the Korean Buddhist tradition provides a compelling case study on the formation and institutionalization of charismatic authority in female religious leadership. Her extraordinary ascetic practices, coupled with her prominent institutional roles, illustrate the dynamic interplay between personal sanctity and structured authority. Through a Weberian lens, her leadership exemplifies the transition from pure charisma, rooted in exceptional spiritual qualities, to routinized charisma, embedded within institutional frameworks. This conclusion synthesizes the key findings of the study and considers the broader implications of charismatic leadership, particularly within the *Bhikkhuni* community and the evolving landscape of Korean Buddhism. Inhong's emergence as a charismatic leader was deeply tied to her ascetic discipline. Her rigorous engagement in practices such as *Changjwa purwa* and *Kanhwa Sŏn* distinguished her from other Buddhist teachers. These practices, often surpassing the endurance of ordinary practitioners, symbolized a heightened level of spiritual commitment and sanctity. Within the Buddhist tradition, asceticism has long been associated with extraordinary spiritual insight, and Inhong's ability to maintain such discipline positioned her as a revered figure. Weber's concept of pure charisma aptly captures this phenomenon, as her followers recognized and revered her spiritual mastery, elevating her status beyond conventional leadership roles. However, charismatic authority, by its nature, is transient unless institutionalized. Inhong's appointment as the president of the *Bhikkhuni* Association provided a structured platform through which her charisma was transformed into routinized authority. The *Bhikkhuni* Association, as a key institutional body for female monastics in Korea, reinforced her leadership by granting her legal-rational authority within the Buddhist hierarchy. This aligns with Weber's theory that charismatic leadership often evolves into traditional or legal-rational authority to ensure continuity. Her presidency enabled her to influence both individual practitioners and the broader institutional framework, further legitimizing her leadership. The broader organizational structure of Korean Buddhism, particularly the principle of *Jong-heon* (宗憲, supreme rule), reflects the coexistence of multiple forms of authority. Traditionally, the supreme patriarch holds both traditional and legal-rational authority within the Jogye Order. While female monastics historically faced

structural limitations within this framework, Inhong's leadership demonstrated how a *Bhikkhuni* could integrate personal charisma with institutional power to enact meaningful change. By holding a formal leadership position, she bridged the gap between historical traditions and contemporary institutional needs, reinforcing the legitimacy of female monastic leadership within a male-dominated hierarchy. The case of Inhong further illustrates Weber's distinction between pure and routinized charisma. Her leadership was initially rooted in pure charisma, recognized through her ascetic practices and spiritual devotion. However, over time, her authority was institutionalized through her presidency and the organizational recognition of her influence. This transition is crucial for understanding the sustainability of charismatic leadership. Pure charisma, while powerful, is inherently unstable and dependent on the continued recognition of an individual's extraordinary qualities. Routinized charisma, on the other hand, embeds these qualities within a structured system, ensuring their continuity beyond the individual leader's presence. A significant example of this process is found in the development of *Sōngnam-sa*, a temple on Mount Kaji in South Kyōngsang Province. Originally established by the National Master *Doui* (道義, ? - 825), the temple was reconstructed under Inhong's leadership following its destruction during the Korean War. Her efforts to rebuild and revitalize the temple as a center for *Sōn* meditation highlight the intersection of personal charisma and institutional transformation. The temple's later designation as a special site for *Sōn* meditation within the Jogye Order underscores the lasting impact of her leadership. *Sōngnam-sa* thus serves as a tangible representation of how charismatic authority can be harnessed to drive organizational development and religious renewal. Beyond Inhong's contributions, her leadership holds broader implications for the *Bhikkhuni* community in South Korea. Historically, female monastics have faced systemic challenges, including limited access to leadership positions and institutional recognition. However, Inhong's ability to ascend to a position of authority and influence demonstrates the potential for *Bhikkhunis* to shape the religious and institutional landscape of Korean Buddhism. The establishment of the National *Bhikkhuni* Hall in 2002, serving as a central hub for female monastic activities, reflects the growing institutional presence of *Bhikkhunis*. Leaders like Inhong have played a crucial role in advocating for greater recognition and representation, challenging long-standing gender disparities within the monastic hierarchy. The resilience of the *Bhikkhuni* community and its continued institutional advancements highlight the enduring relevance of charismatic leadership in addressing contemporary challenges. While traditional Buddhist structures have often been resistant to change, figures like Inhong illustrate how charismatic authority can catalyze institutional evolution. Her leadership did not merely reinforce existing frameworks but actively contributed to their transformation, ensuring greater inclusion and representation for female monastics. In conclusion, the leadership of Inhong provides a valuable case study for understanding the formation and institutionalization of charismatic authority in religious contexts. Her disciplined ascetic practices cultivated pure charisma, while her institutional roles facilitated the routinization of that charisma, allowing

her influence to extend beyond her presence. This interplay between personal sanctity and organizational authority underscores the transformative potential of charismatic leadership, particularly within the traditionally male-dominated structures of Korean Buddhism. The case of Inhong also highlights the broader implications of charismatic leadership in fostering resilience and organizational development. By navigating the complexities of personal charisma and institutional authority, she exemplified how religious leaders can effect meaningful change within established traditions. Her legacy continues to inspire contemporary *Bhikkhunis*, reinforcing the importance of integrating charismatic and routinized leadership in sustaining and evolving religious institutions. Ultimately, Inhong's contributions to Korean Buddhism serve as a testament to the enduring power of charismatic leadership in shaping both spiritual and institutional landscapes.

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ROLE OF THE DĀNA PĀRAMITĀ IN ALLEVIATION OF POVERTY AND ESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE AS REFLECTED IN THE VESSANTARA JĀTAKA

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Abstract:

Dāna is the fundamental human value that everyone should practice, and every religion lists it as one of the criteria for becoming a decent human being. *Dāna* can be performed in various ways. In this presented monograph researcher tries to give details about what exactly Dāna is. This paper delves into the profound significance of *Dāna Pāramitā*, the perfection of giving, as a potent framework for alleviating poverty and fostering peace, drawing inspiration from the Vessantara Jātaka, a revered Buddhist narrative. The Jātaka recounts the extraordinary acts of generosity exhibited by Prince Vessantara, who repeatedly sacrifices his possessions, his beloved wife, and even his own children to alleviate the suffering of others, culminating in a profound demonstration of selfless giving. By analyzing how the Jātaka exemplifies the core principles of *Dāna Pāramitā*, such as fostering economic empowerment by supporting those in need and creating a more equitable economic order, strengthening community bonds through acts of kindness and compassion, and advocating for a just and equitable social order that prioritizes the well-being of all beings, this study explores the contemporary relevance of these principles. Furthermore, the paper examines how the practice of *Dāna*, in its various forms, can contribute to alleviating poverty by promoting economic empowerment, strengthening social safety nets, and supporting sustainable development initiatives. Moreover, it explores how *Dāna* can foster peace by cultivating compassion, empathy, and altruism within individuals and societies, thereby reducing conflict and promoting harmonious coexistence. Ultimately, this paper argues that the profound wisdom embodied in the Vessantara Jātaka

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and the principles of *Dāna Pāramitā* offer valuable guidance for navigating the complexities of the modern world and creating a more just, equitable, and peaceful society for all.

Keywords: The Buddha, giving (*dāna*), *vessantara jātaka*, *vessantara*.

I. DĀNA

What is *Dāna* or gift? How is it related to society? How does it show human values? Is the concept of *Dāna* new, or does it have its roots in ancient times? Is it the same as altruism or Philanthropy? Where lies the root of this tradition? Is it related to or bound to the development of society? There are queues of questions and different answers. All of us researchers, professors, historians, Businessmen, and corporate workers viewed this practice according to our fields of work, and interests. The tradition of giving is not bound to any country or religion, it is a universally accepted phenomenon. People give as they have faith in the cause and might believe in the universal saying “Do good and good will come to you”, or they are empathetic towards the people who lack money and are not able to manage their basic life which leads to suffering, poverty, ill-health, or might be because it gives them the social recognition in the society which wealth is not giving them. According to psychologist Robert J. Lifton, it would be known as “symbolic immortality”.¹ ²According to Sprio and Gombrich, *Dāna* is all about detachment and generosity. Marcel Mauss says that giving is what forms a cordial relationship between society and people. In his renowned essay, “The Gift”, He assesses “presentations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested, and spontaneous, but are voluntary, disinterested, and spontaneous, but are obligatory and interested”.³ For some people, giving comes quite easily; they enjoy giving and feel miserable if they cannot do so. Additionally, giving is generally a very decent and honourable thing to do, even though it is evident that one can donate carelessly. Most religions acknowledge this: in Christianity, we are informed that giving is more blessed than receiving, and in Islam, it is encouraged to donate some of one’s income to the less fortunate.⁴ In Hinduism, people got confused between dan, Dakshina, and Bhiksha. Dan is charity; giving away something to the needy, Bhiksha is alms and Dakshina is repayment. The giver writes off the loan in

¹ Eck (2013), p. 360.

² Symbolic immortality is a concept developed by psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton. It refers to the human desire to leave a lasting impact on the world and transcend the limitations of mortality. These modes of symbolic immortality provide individuals with a sense of connection to the past and future, allowing them to feel that their lives have meaning and purpose beyond their own existence. Lifton’s concept of symbolic immortality highlights the human capacity for hope, creativity, and resilience in the face of mortality. It suggests that even though we cannot escape death, we can still find ways to leave a lasting mark on the world and contribute to something larger than ourselves.

³ Mauss (1969), p. 1.

⁴ Walshe (2005), p.45

Daan. The receiver is not required to do anything in return. Daan was therefore regarded as being superior to Dakshina and Bhiksha.

Dāna (Pāli) or *Dāna* (Sanskrit) or Dan (Hindi) or Giving is rooted in the Indian culture from earlier times, in every religion be it Hinduism, Jainism, or Buddhism it is considered a basic value and practice performed by every individual, or a group who is capable of giving. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism all hold to enduring ideals that have withstood the test of time. One of these is the idea that spiritual merit is found in the renunciation of material prosperity. The material economy itself is understood in all three religions to be a realm of flow, change, and impermanence. When taken in the long view, creation, and accumulation along the ever-changing river of life and death cannot be possessed or contained. In the end, it is impossible to grab and hold. Samsara, which means “a word of motion and a world in motion”, is how the world in which we exist is characterized. This is merely an observation of the constant movement and change that characterizes what we so confidently refer to as “the world,” not a hypothesis about the nature of the universe.⁵

II. DĀNA FROM THE BUDDHIST POINT OF VIEW

Dāna is a Pāli word derived from the stem words “da” and “ana”, which means to give, to deal out, to offer, generosity, munificence, liberality, almsgiving; particularly a special gift made to a bhikkhu or a community of bhikkhus; constitutes a meritorious act (PTS).⁶ It is a fundamental Buddhist virtue that helps people overcome selfishness and attachment as well as being a major source of merit (*puñña*). When used in Theravadin contexts, it refers to laypeople giving alms to monks, whereas in Mahayana contexts, it typically alludes to the Perfection of Generosity (*Dāna-pāramitā*).

Pāramitas in Buddhism are divided into three sub-categories, making it a total of thirty: Ordinary; Inferior; The unlimited perfection of Virtue.

Dāna paramita comes in the ordinary group. In the Sinhalese dictionary Childres by quoting Rev. Benjamin Clough describes it as; *Dānapāramitā* expresses the obligation in generic words and denotes actions of generosity or offers without any consideration of the type or value. *Dāna-upāpāramitā* denotes the gift of inferior types or materialistic gifts such as gold, silver, robes, etc. *Dāna-paramatthapāramitā* denotes religious offerings or the gift of the highest order, they are the gifts of one’s wife and children, the gift of one’s own body, flesh, and blood. Every bodhisattva practices thirty paramitas in these three categories.⁷

⁵ Eck (2013), p. 363.

⁶ Root: *dā* (Sanskrit) – “to give”.

Suffix: *-ana* (Sanskrit) – meaning “the act of”.

Dāna: (derived word) – “the act of giving,” “generosity,” or “gift”.

⁷ Da (2015) pp. 10 – 12.

A “field of merit” (*puñña-khetta*) is a very deserving recipient of a gift.⁸ Giving is a fundamental Buddhist principle. It exemplifies crucial Buddhist values like detachment (from the gift itself), compassion (for the recipient who is in need), and faith (when the gift is given to a fellow Buddhist or the Buddha himself).

It is a humanitarian act of giving something to people in need without any intention of getting anything in return, Buddhists believe that doing so leads to greater spiritual wealth and reduces the impact of bad karma. Giving is seen as one of the most fundamental human qualities and is a sign of one’s humanity and capacity for self-transcendence. This virtue is practiced by all people. In the *Magha sutta* (SN) discourse 506 Buddha said to Māgha that when generosity is established in one hate just gets blemished⁹. Although it is not mentioned in the four noble truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*) or eightfold path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*) it reserved a special place in Buddhism which can be realized from the fact that *Dāna* or *Dānakatha* was always the first topic to be discussed by the Buddha before he comes to the Dhamma discourse (*dhammadesana*). The Buddha always began with the graduated discourses on Generosity (*Dāna*), Morality (*sīla*), and Heaven (*sagga*), exhibiting them the danger, degradation, and malfeasance of sense desires and the profit of Renunciation.¹⁰ When the Lord Buddha realized that the disciples’ minds were ready, pliant, devoid of obstacles, joyous, and tranquil, the Buddha then gave the sermon on the Dhamma in Brief.

The importance of *Dāna* in the ethical life of an individual can be judged by the fact that it occupies the first place in several ethical categories. It is the first among the three ways of earning merit (*puññakiriyavatthu*): giving (*Dāna*), moral discipline (*sīlamayapuñña*), and meditative cultivation (*bhāvanāmayapuñña*).¹¹ Among the four characteristics of sympathy (*sangahavatthūni*), *Dāna* is the first, the other three being *peyyavajja* (kindly speech), *atthacariyā* (sagacious conduct), and *saṁānattatā* (impartiality). It is the first of the ten perfections (*Pāramitā*) of a Bodhisatta.¹² *Dāna* is one of the four ways for maintaining a nourishing relationship.¹³ It also comes under the seven-Ariyan treasures (*sat-ari-dhanani*) which should be proclaimed by the Buddha¹⁴ and four kinds of resolve, Giving is one of the seven promises that King Sakka made when he was a human to become the Lord of the Devas. It is the quality that one must have to become a stream-enterer (*arahant*)¹⁵. It is one of the five areas of growth a male and female Noble disciple should

⁸ Keown (2003), p. 69.

⁹ Chalmers (1932), p. 119.

¹⁰ Horner (2007), p. 23.

¹¹ Bodhi B. (2005), p. 293.

¹² Sarao (2017), p. 335.

¹³ Bodhi (2012), p. 1255.

¹⁴ Walshe (2005), p. 501.

¹⁵ Bodhi (2012), p. 219.

have to have noble growth (Growth in virtue (*sīla*), growth in learning, growth in generosity (*cāga*), growth in wisdom (*paññā*), growth in faith (*saddhā*).¹⁶ These are also the characteristics of *sappurisa*

Giving is of utmost importance in the Buddhist program of mental purification (*akuśalamūla*). Since we identify with our personalities and our belongings as “I” and “mine,” greed is entwined with egoism and selfishness. Giving is the medicine to the ailment of egoism and greed, and it aids in the curing of egoism.¹⁷ The *Sakkasamyutta* urges, when one commits himself to practicing the Dhamma and discipline as taught by the Tathagata, as well as virtue, learning, generosity, and knowledge. After doing this, when one dies, then he was reborn in a good place, with the Tavatimsa devas, in a celestial world where he outshined the other devas in terms of beauty and grandeur.¹⁸ The Dhammapada exhorts us that Generosity will triumph over miserliness.¹⁹ *Dāna* or giving is not a simple act of giving or transferring things from one hand to another.

III. SEVERAL FACTORS DETERMINED THE AUSPICIOUSNESS OF THE ACT OF DĀNA.

(1) The intention of the giver before the act, during the act, and after the act played an important role in determining the quality of *Dāna Sakkaccaṃ Dānaṃ deti*: *Dāna* should be done in a manner so that the recipient will not feel humiliated, inferior, or hurt. *Cittikatva Dānaṃ detail*: *Dāna* should be made by keeping respect and honor for the recipient²⁰. The Buddha mentions three aspects of the Doner; Doner must be cheerful before giving, confident at the time of giving, and must be content after performing *Dāna*.²¹

The *Pāli* suttas use a wide range of words to convey the characteristics of a giver. He is a person of faith (*saddhā*), believing in the virtue of living a morally upright life, the teachings of Kamma, and the possibility of eternal existence. He considers that a morally and spiritually flawless man is possible. He believes in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, thus to put it briefly, he is not a materialist. He is a lordly donor, *s(dāyako)* not just a giver (*Dānapati*). The giver is often referred to as one who maintains an open door for the less fortunate (*anāvaṭadvāro*). He serves as a source of well-being (*opānabhūto*) for hermits, Brahmins, the poor, travelers, wanderers, and beggars. He performs admirable actions since he is such a one. He is generous (*muttacāgo*) and willing to spread his good fortune to others (*Dānasaṃvibhāgarato*). He is a humanitarian who is aware of the struggles faced by the underprivileged (*vadaññū*). He is willing to accommodate another's desire and has an open

¹⁶ Bodhi (2012), p. 693 - 694.

¹⁷ Silva (2011), p. 25.

¹⁸ Bodhi B (2000), p. 331.

¹⁹ Sarao, (2009), p. 165. *Akkodhena jine kodhaṃ asādhunā sādhanā jine, jine kadariyaṃ dānena saccenā'likavidinaṃ*

²⁰ Silva (2011), pp. 35 – 36.

²¹ Bodhi B., p. 899.

hearer (*payatap*). He is a suitable person to request from (*yācayogo*). He has a generous heart (*cāgaparibhāvitacitto*) and enjoys providing presents to those in need (*vossaggarato*). These are the labels employed in the suttas to characterize the characteristics of the liberal-minded.²² Performing this virtue of giving is the most difficult task to do, *devatasamyutta* compares it with a battle (*(Dānañ ca yuddhañ ca samānam āhu)*).²³

Ānguttara Nikāya mentions Eight motivations behind the practice of *Dāna*

- 1) A gift is given out of annoyance (*Asajja Dānam deti*).
- 2) A gift from fear is given (*Bhaya Dānam deti*).
- 3) A gift is given for returning a favor (*Adasi me ti Dānam deti*).
- 4) One donates something because he expects in return (*Dassati me ti Dānam deti*).
- 5) One gives a gift, thinking giving is good (*Sadhu Dānan ti Dānam deti*).
- 6) Give gifts out of altruistic motives (*aham pacami, ime ne pacanti, na arahami pacanto apacantanam adatan ti Dānam deti*).
- 7) Give gifts because it flourishes the reputation (*Imam me Dānam dadato kalyano kittisaddo abbhuggacchati ti Dānam deti*).
- 8) One gives a gift to adorn or equip the mind (*Cittalankara-cittaparikkarattham Dānam deti*).²⁴ Buddhist teachings pay particular emphasis to the psychological underpinnings of giving and distinguish between the many mental states in which one may give. It is important to distinguish between actions of giving that are guided by wisdom (*paññā*) and those that are not, with the latter being preferable to the former.

In one of the incidents, a powerful king who was also a financier gave almsfood to *Paccekabuddha* known as *Tagarishki*. But after giving, he regretted his decision thoughts and wished that he had given the alms food to slaves or employees instead. He was born seven times in a good place, in the land of heaven, thanks to his *kamma* of giving almsfood to *Paccekabuddha* *Tagarishkī* alms. However, as a result of his regret for his *kamma*, he was unable to enjoy good products from the five cords of sensual pleasure, including excellent food, clothing, and transportation.²⁵

Dāna associated with wisdom (*paññā*) is considered the apical standard of *Dāna*. The mind's inspiration for doing any *kamma* comes from *cetanā*. Depending on the *cetanāic* force that drives it, the *Kamma* emerges. The mind is motivated by that subtle *cetanā*, nevertheless. The Buddha referred to *cetanā* as the action or *Kamma* since it precedes all actions and is completely responsible for their achievement. When doing an action, encourages the mind or consciousness, and its concomitants to execute their various duties

²² Silva (2011), p. 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴ Bodhi B. (2012), p. 237.

²⁵ Bodhi (2000), 183 - 184.

to accomplish the action (1) *Pubba-cetanā*: Volition before the act is done, the thoughts and intention of the donor before making any *Kamma* first takes place in the *cittā* of the individual; (2) *Munca-cetanā*: Volition at the time of the act, at the time of transferring things from oneself to another; (3) *Apara-cetanā*: Volition after the act is done, or whenever one thinks of the act, what thoughts arise in his *citta*.²⁶

Volition according to the intensity of a *para-cetanā* divided into three types: Inferior (*Hina*), Medium (*Majjhima*), and Superior (*Panita*). Volitions are superior (*panita*) when four factors of spiritual power (*Iddhipādas*) are stronger and vice-versa. The giver is also described as someone who maintains an open-door policy for the less fortunate (*anavatadvaro*). For recluses, brahmans, the poor, wayfarers, wanderers, and beggars, he serves as a wellspring (*opanabhuto*). He performs admirable actions since he is such a one. He is generous (*muttacago*) and eager to spread his blessings to others (*Dānasamvibhagarato*). He is a humanitarian who recognizes the struggles of the underprivileged (*vadannu*). He is willing to accommodate others' requests and has an open heart (*payatapani*). He can answer questions (*yacayogo*). He enjoys providing gifts to those in need (*vossaggarato*), and his heart is set on giving (*cagaparibhavatitto*). These are the slurs that the suttas use to characterize the traits of the liberal-minded.²⁷

IV. THE INTENTION OF THE RECIPIENT WHILE RECEIVING

The recipient's level of immaculateness is another aspect that influences the *kammic* fruitfulness of a gift/ *dāna*. Giving to the most deserving persons accessible is wise since the rewards to the donor will be higher the more worthy they are. In *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, Buddha mentions three aspects of the receiver; the recipient must be free from lust, hatred, and delusion or work diligently to overcome these emotions.²⁸

According to the recipient's purity, the Buddha listed fourteen grades of offerings in the *dakkhinavibhanga sutta* (MN). Samma Sambuddha holds the highest position, followed by Pacceka Buddha and the eight individuals who have attained each of the four pathways and four fruits. The non-Buddhist ascetic has gained the five supernormal powers and is a cause-and-effect believer. The final three are, in declining order, virtuous people, non-virtuous people, and animals.²⁹ The same *sutta* lists a series of people to whom alms should be given, together with the merit that results from doing so. Giving anything to an animal yields a hundredfold return. Giving a present to a regular person with bad moral habits will return a thousand times its value; giving a gift to a good person will return a hundred thousand times its value. The return is a hundred thousandfold crores when a gift is made to someone outside of the Buddhist dispensation who is unattached to sense pleasures. The gift given

²⁶ Kula (2018), p. 162.

²⁷ Silva (2011), pp. 27 – 28.

²⁸ Bodhi B. (2012), p. 899.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

to someone who is moving toward stream-entrance is both incalculable and infinite.³⁰ A gift provided to ascetics and brahmins who possess eight factors³¹ bears significant fruit and benefits.³²

The *Digha Nikaya* particularly mention the person whom the *Dāna* should be done, they are brahmans (*brahmana*), recluses (*sramaṇa*), destitute (*kapaṇa*), warfarers (*addhika*), wanderers (*vanibbaka*) ariyas, the noble ones, such as the Buddha himself and those of his disciples who have attained the supramundane paths and fruits, are the most laudable recipients of gifts because it is their wisdom-acquired purity of mind that enables the act of giving to be capable of reaping abundant benefits. We should, therefore contribute to the noble ones as much as we can and as frequently as we can if we want to achieve the greatest amount of merit. Gifts given to a bhikkhu who aspires to the state of a noble one or a Buddhist contemplative who upholds the Five Precepts will likewise bring about abundant benefits. Ariyas accept offerings to provide the giver a chance to gain more dignity, which is why they do so. The two highest stages of sanctity, acquired by non-returners and Arahats in particular, have eradicated the³³ craving (*taṇhā*) for sense objects.³⁴

As a result, when people receive gifts, their minds are not attached to the items being given but rather are filled with empathy for the donor.³⁵

V. SIZE AND TYPE OF THE DĀNA

Buddha was once questioned by certain devās regarding the benefits of *Dāna* and giving of what gives what. Then the Buddha responded, “*Dāna* of food gives strength, *Dāna* of cloths offers beauty, *dāna* of the vehicle gives convenience, *Dāna* of light/lamp gives sight, and the giver of the abode is the giver of all.” But the one who teaches the *Dhamma* is the source of the deathless³⁶. The *Dhamma* is the ultimate gift, the *Dhamma* is the ultimate taste, and the *Dhamma* is the ultimate delight. All ills (*Samsara dukkha*) are defeated by the cessation of Craving (achievement of *arahatship*).³⁷

What should be given is the third factor in the process of *Dāna*, the process of choosing a gift that benefits beings in several ways and requires wisdom (*paññā*). The perfection of giving should be cultivated through helping beings in a variety of ways, including by donating one’s joys, possessions (*āmisā Dāna*), body, and life to others, allaying their fears (*abhayaDāna*), and teaching them the *Dhamma* (*Dhamma Dāna*), the gift of *dhamma Dāna* shine the most according to the Buddha. His followers-monks who deliver sermons or quote

³⁰ Nanamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 1104.

³¹ Eight factors constitutes the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*).

³² Bodhi B. (2012), p. 1167.

³³ Sarao (2009), p. 259.

³⁴ Walshe (1995), p. 136.

³⁵ Bodhi B. (2000), pp. 13 - 14.

³⁶ Bodhi B., pp. 120 – 121.

³⁷ *Dhp* 354: “*Sabbadānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti, sabbarasaṃ rasaṃ dhammaraso jināti, sabbaṃ ratim dhammaratī jināti, taṇhakkhayo sabbadukkhāṃ jināti*”.

passages from the *Tripitaka*, teachers of meditation (*samadhi*)-often share the Truth, exemplifying the ultimate form of charity. Once a Bhikkhu asked the Venerable what is the root cause of someone here, with the dissolution of their body, after death, reborn in the company of egg-born *nāgas*³⁸. Venerable replied that as they do the *Dāna* of food, clothes, drink, vehicle, dwelling, garland, and unguent lamp, they are reborn in the company of egg-born *nāgas*.³⁹

The Dhamma can be given in other ways by those of us who lack the qualifications to instruct others in the teachings of Dhamma. To spread the message of the Buddha, we can donate Dhamma books or pay for the translation or printing of valuable sermons. We can have informal discussions on the Dhamma and inspire people to practice meditation and observe precepts and teachings in their day-to-day lives. Providing financial help to build a Buddhist or a meditation center where the monks (*bhikkhus*) and (*bhikkhunis*) can teach and flourish dhamma also comes in the category of *Dhammadāna*. In the form of the gift, monetary value does not play any role; *Dāna* is all about the intention of the doner behind the act of *Dāna*. There are various instances in Buddhist literature where it was shown that giving a very minor thing with good intentions brings more merit than giving the whole kingdom just for the sake of showing and gaining and making a name. For instance, the story of Sivali and the honeycomb. Now the question arises of what we can give other than mentioned above. Buddha himself said that one gains merit when one throws dishwashing water in a pond or cesspit and thinks that the creatures that live there sustain themselves with this.⁴⁰

According to Buddhist tradition, a metalsmith named Cunda regretted offering alms food to the Buddha shortly before the Buddha's passing. To console Cunda, Ananda, the Buddha's attendant, explained that giving alms to the Buddha held special merit in two circumstances: (1) When offered after the Buddha had attained enlightenment; (2) When offered after the Buddha had eaten.⁴¹ The Buddha identifies two forms of generosity (*dāna*): giving material things and sharing the teachings (*Dhamma-dāna*). Among these, the Buddha emphasizes *Dhamma-dāna* as the superior practice. In the act of giving, a material gift (*amisadāna*) played a pivotal role. The Buddhist scriptures mention various sorts of *Dāna* depending on the various goods to be donated⁴².

Firstly, the *Vinaya*, a code for monastic life, outlines four basic needs for monks: clothing, food, medicine, and lodging. These guidelines help maintain the strength and purity of the monastic community (*Bhikkhu Sangha*). By understanding these needs, laypeople can gain merit by offering appropriate support.

Secondly, the *Suttas*, or *Discourses*, list ten types of appropriate gifts for

³⁸ As *Bhikkhu* He heard that *nāgas* that egg-born *nāgas* live a long time, are magnificent, and are happy all the time.

³⁹ Bodhi B. (2000), p. 1022.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁴¹ Walshe (2005), p. 261.

⁴² Bodhi B. (2012), p. 67.

monks, including necessities like food, clothing, and shelter, as well as offerings for comfort and well-being, such as flowers, ointments, beds, and lighting.

Thirdly, *Abhidhamma*, the Buddhist philosophy focused on mental and physical processes, proposes a broader view of generosity. It categorizes gifts based on the six senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and mind. This expands the concept of giving beyond material objects.

(1) Gifts for the Senses: Offerings can stimulate each sense, promoting well-being. For example, providing someone with eyeglasses improves their sight (*Cakkhudhamma Dāna*). Similarly, offering audio recordings or helping someone learn a new language benefits their hearing (*Sotadhamma Dāna*).

(2) Gift of *Dhamma*: The most valuable gift, according to *Abhidhamma*, is the gift of *Dhamma*, the teachings of the Buddha. This involves sharing knowledge, guiding others on the path to enlightenment, or supporting the spread of Buddhist teachings.

Fourthly, the *Vinaya Piṭaka* discourages the following items from being offered as *Dāna*:

(1) Intoxicants (*Majja Dāna*): This includes substances that can cloud judgment or cause harm.

(2) Sensual Entertainment (*Samajja Dāna*): Lavish festivals or performances that arouse worldly desires are not considered appropriate offerings.

(3) Sexual Services (*Itthi Dāna*): Exploiting or harming another person is against the core principles of Buddhist generosity.

(4) Animals for Breeding (*Usabha Dāna*): The focus of *Dāna* should be on detachment, not encouraging attachment or servitude.

(5) Obscene Materials (*Cittakamma Dāna*): Gifts that promote negativity or immorality are discouraged.

(6) Items that Cause Harm (in general): Weapons, poisons, or anything that can injure or kill living beings goes against the Buddhist principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*).

In essence, *Dāna* should be a gift given freely and mindfully to support the recipient's well-being on the path to enlightenment.⁴³

There are eight types of *Dāna* attributes to a good person. The *Dāna* is what is true, what is great, what is timely, and what is acceptable. He also provides what has been well-researched, what is offered regularly, what gives him peace of mind while he provides it, and what makes him joyful.⁴⁴ Various *suttas* of *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (AN.5:148) lays out five qualities of a good giver: He offers reverently, with respect, with his own hands, with items that wouldn't be

⁴³https://www.urbandharma.org/pdf/PDF_BuddhismCourse/13_%20Ten%20Bases%20of%20Meritorious%20Action%20-%20Dana.pdf

⁴⁴ Bodhi B. (2012), p. 1172

thrown away, and with an eye toward the benefits of giving.⁴⁵

There are eight types of rebirth mentioned in the *Pāli* canon based on the *Dāna*. When one donates clothing, a vehicle, food, beverages, garlands, fragrances,; as well as housing, bedding, and illumination. He expects something in return for whatever he gives. He observes wealthy brahmins, wealthy householders, or wealthy Khattiyas enjoying themselves after having been gifted with the five things of sensual pleasure, observes devas, the Tavatimsa devas - the Yama devas, the Tusita devas, the devas who take pleasure in creation, the devas who have control over other people's creations – are gorgeous, long-lived, and rich in enjoyment. He develops this mindset by focusing on it with his thoughts, heart, and actions. and desires to be reborn among them, and his *Kamma* of giving causes his reborn to arrive where he intends to be reborn⁴⁶.

The *Pāli* Canon discusses both the advantages of giving and the disadvantages of not giving particular things. For instance, not giving property to those in need causes an increase in sexual misconduct, derogatory remarks about others, and disdain for parents, teachers, and teachers, all of which consequently lead to decreasing the life span⁴⁷. *Aṅguttara Nikāya* also mentions the rewards one gain after giving; One does not wander from the proper responsibilities of the householder, is beloved and endearing to the public at large, is esteemed by decent people, has a good reputation, and upon the dissolution of the body at death, reappears in a good place, the heavenly realm⁴⁸.

VI. DĀNA AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE VESSANTARA JĀTAKA

A Jātaka is a birth story, and this anthology of tales is about the Bodhisatta, the being destined to become the current Buddha in his final life, and his numerous births -and deaths. Written in Pāli, the Theravada Buddhist sect's original language. Jātakas can be found sporadically in the early Buddhist schools' writings as well as in subsequent compositions and compilations, commentaries, and compositions. Although the JA is the largest and most well-known collection, there are numerous other jātaka collections both inside and outside of the Pāli scriptures, as well as more general collections of narrative that frequently include some Jātakas.⁴⁹ There are a total of five hundred and fifty Jātakas, which are divided into twenty-two books (*nipātas*).⁵⁰ All 547 jataka stories originated from the same vow in which a Bodhisatta pledged the foot of the Buddha Dipankara to put off his enlightenment and release from the cycle of rebirths until he is prepared to become a Buddha himself and pass on his teachings. The Jātakas are distinctive and unique because they are the only compilation of tales in the world where a central character's growth is tested

⁴⁵ Bodhi B. (2012), p. 763.

⁴⁶ Bodhi B. (2012), 1168 – 1170.

⁴⁷ Walshe (2005), p. 201.

⁴⁸ Bodhi B. (2012), pp. 661 – 662.

⁴⁹ Appleton, (2016), pp. 2 – 5.

⁵⁰ Originally there were 550 Jātakas but now we have only 547 Jātakas.

not only by the events of one lifetime but by hundreds. The Bodhisatta can take many different forms of rebirth because of the vow he made at the foot of Buddha Dipankar, rebirths including those of animals (such as monkeys, fish, elephants, horses, and mice), tree spirits, and serpent kings (*nāga*), as well as many different social classes when taking human form, such as the untouchable, merchant, cook, archer, forester, warrior, musician, brahmin, minister, and king. He resembles god at times. He achieves all ten perfections (*pāramī*) of generosity (*dāna*), virtue or restraint (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), wisdom (*paññā*), effort (*virīya*), forbearance (*khanti*), truthfulness (*sacca*), resolve (*adhiṭṭhanā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) in these lifetimes, according to later commentarial traditions that quickly become incorporated into the Jātakas.⁵¹ Buddha's activity and actions as depicted in Jātaka tales as Bodhisattva acted as a manual, not for the Buddhist followers but for everyone. They strongly emphasize the theory of rebirth and karma. There are different versions of Jātaka tales available; many were picked and compiled in various types of literature, and some of them were beautifully and artistically depicted in various art forms such as Paintings, Stone reliefs, or bas-reliefs.

Among all the Jātakas, the most common, famous, and longest is the Vessantara Jātaka, the last Jātaka in the list. Vessantara Jātaka, in different forms, is known throughout the Buddhist world of Asia. In Sanskrit, it is known as *Viśvantara*; in Tibetan, it is *Dri med Kun ldan*; and in the East Asian versions, it is *Sudāna*. Vessantara Jātaka is famous in literature and various art forms in India and South East Asia, and its different translations and versions are also available. It is the story of the antepenultimate birth of Gautama Buddha and was recited by him when he was dwelling in the banyan grove of Kapilvatthu accompanied by twenty thousand attendants and Udayi. This Jātaka tale has 786 verses, which are split into eight khandas. The "perfection of Giving (*Dāna*)" is the main theme of this Jātaka tale. The story was told by Buddha himself to the laypersons when he was dwelling in Kapilvatthu.

Prince Vessantara was born in the dynasty of Sivi in the kingdom of Jetuara, which was famous for its practice of giving or charity from the time immortal. The story started with the *dasvarakhanda*, where Sakka, the king of gods granted ten boons to Phusati, in one of the wishes granted to her she asked to have a son who is admired by kings, well-known, glorious, dapper, generous, unreserved, and willing to listen to prayers (fousball). After marrying king Sanjaya, she was blessed with a son who was born in the lane of. Vessa, thence got the name Vessantara.⁵² The king was generous and had extraordinary qualities from the time of birth. when he was just eight, he thought to himself:

I wish to provide something of my very own because everything I give is from outside, and this does not please me. If someone were to ask for my heart, I would cut open my breast, tear it out, and give it to them. If they asked for my eyes, I would gouge them out and give them. If they asked

⁵¹ Shaw (2006), p. 1.

⁵² Fausboll (1896), p. 485.

for my flesh, I would chop off all of my body's flesh and give it to them.⁵³

Prince Vessantara, renowned for his boundless generosity, married Maddī, and together they showered the people with alms. Their kingdom thrived, but a harsh famine gripped the neighboring land of Kalinga. Eight Brahmin priests from Kalinga, aware of Vessantara's compassion, approached him with a desperate plea. They begged for the magical white elephant, Paccaya, whose presence was said to bring rain. Without hesitation, Vessantara bestowed upon them Paccaya, adorned with priceless jewels and accompanied by a vast retinue.

However, this grand gesture of giving wasn't met with universal praise. The citizens grumbled, feeling the prince's generosity had gone too far. They pressured King Sanjaya, forcing his hand. With a heavy heart, the king banished his son. Vessantara, given only a day to prepare, announced a final act of unparalleled charity - the "Great Offering of Seven Hundred". He pledged to give away seven hundred of everything: horses, chariots, slaves, even elephants. The following day, Vessantara embarked on his exile, his heart heavy yet his resolve unwavering. Accompanied by Maddī, their children, a charioteer, and their prized Sindh horses, he journeyed towards the Himalayas. Even on this arduous path, his legendary generosity continued. When encountered by those in need, he readily gave away the horses and charioteer, demonstrating his remarkable selflessness even amidst his hardship. Finally, disguised as a human, the god Sakka approached Vessantara and requested Maddī. Even in this ultimate test, Vessantara, with a heavy heart, offered his wife.

These acts of *Dāna*, as performed by Vessantara, were critiqued by various scholars as inhuman or *atidāna*. As it is believed according to some monks of Srilanka what Vessantara did was incorrect.⁵⁴ Khorche, in his book, explains this as "People with malicious hearts hardly ever endorse a Bodhisattva's behavior, much less emulate it."⁵⁵ The tale also finds mention in Milinda- Pañha two times, first about the quake of earth seven times during Vessantara's time, in which Nagasena replied that it was because of the virtues possessed by the Vessantara. In the second incident, King Milinda asked sage Nāgasena whether all future Buddhas performed this level of sacrifice they gave away their offspring and wife, or if it was just the case in the time of Vessantara, he continued and asked that if they had given away with their consent or it just the own will if Vessantara as Maddī was a mature lady to give her consent but the children were very young to understand the situation and give their consent. Milinda gives a list of statements criticizing what Vessantara did; for instance, he mentioned that he has a heart of Gold and lacks compassion, which one should possess. Further, he said that to gain merit, one should bring suffering to oneself, not to others, and ended his statement by saying that what

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.486

⁵⁴ Collins (2016), p. 7.

⁵⁵ Khorche (1989), p. 58

na bodhisattva-carita sukham anumoditum apy-alpasattvaie prāṇevācaritu

Vessantara did was *ati-Dāna*.⁵⁶ Sage Nāgasena lists ten qualities attributed to future Buddhas, in which last quality stated that their path is Unique, difficult to comprehend and acquire, to answer the Milind question Nagasena said these values or sacrifices are hard to understand by a layman but very common for the Bodhisatta and said that in the eyes of Vessantara at the time of giving it was not any living creature which he was donating but it's the attachment with them, which he gave away.⁵⁷

This story of the perfection of Generosity was the most famous one in all the Buddhist Countries and reserved a place for itself in all the artistic activities and Visual representation. In India, it was represented in the form of stone reliefs, Bās-Reliefs, and paintings, mostly in various places.

VII. DĀNA IN HELPING POVERTY

In the face of contemporary global consumption patterns, a crucial question arises for Buddhists: How should they respond ethically and effectively? Does Buddhist philosophy offer a clear “position” on consumerism? Should Buddhists actively engage in environmental causes or advocate for consumer change based on their ethical principles? One of the most potent aspects of the Buddhist spiritual path lies in its emphasis on *awakening* – a profound shift in consciousness that liberates individuals from the grip of suffering. This concept of awakening offers a powerful framework for understanding the current state of global consumption. In a society deeply entrenched in consumerism, individuals often remain “asleep,” largely unaware of the environmental and social consequences of their collective actions. This “sleep” manifests as a collective unconsciousness regarding the interconnectedness of individual choices and the broader ecological and social impacts of overconsumption. The Buddha, in his teachings, consistently urged his disciples to investigate the root causes of suffering and to apply the path of liberation at the source. In the context of contemporary consumerism, a key root cause lies in the pervasive ideology of consumerism itself. This ideology, meticulously crafted and propagated by those who stand to benefit most from it, presents a particular worldview that shapes individual desires and behaviors.

Consumerism, as an ideology, operates by constructing a reality where human desires are perceived as infinite and ever-expanding. This creates a continuous cycle of dissatisfaction, fuelling the relentless pursuit of new products and experiences. By constantly bombarding consumers with an overwhelming array of choices, advertisers effectively confuse and manipulate their sense of needs and wants. This constant barrage of information and the relentless pursuit of novelty leave individuals perpetually chasing ephemeral desires, ultimately leading to a sense of dissatisfaction and a deepening sense of emptiness. This constant striving for material possessions and fleeting pleasures not only undermines individual well-being but also has profound ecological and social consequences. The relentless pursuit of economic growth, driven by

⁵⁶ too generous giving, an excessive gift of alms (PTS Dictionary).

⁵⁷ Gabaude (2016), p. 37.

consumerism, is a major contributor to environmental degradation, resource depletion, and social inequality. It exacerbates poverty, creates social divisions, and perpetuates cycles of exploitation and injustice.⁵⁸

The Jātaka tale of Vessantara exemplifies the profound practice of *dāna* (generosity), one of the ten *pāramīs* (perfections) on the path to enlightenment. Vessantara, the prince of Sivi, is renowned for his unwavering generosity, a virtue that ultimately leads to his exile from the kingdom. The narrative unfolds as Vessantara, driven by a deep-seated compassion and a desire to alleviate suffering, repeatedly relinquishes his possessions and even his family members. This begins with the magnanimous act of gifting the magical white elephant, revered by the people of Sivi for its rain-making powers, to eight Brahmins from the neighboring kingdom of Kalinga. This act, while deeply compassionate, incurs the wrath of the citizens who depend on the elephant for their well-being. Facing public outcry, King Sivi, Vessantara's father, is compelled to exile his son to a remote forest. Undeterred by his exile, Vessantara embraced a life of voluntary simplicity. He willingly relinquishes his possessions, including his luxurious chariot and his loyal horses, further demonstrating his unwavering commitment to generosity. Despite these trials, Vessantara and his family, consisting of his wife, Maddi, and their two children, find happiness in their simple life in the forest. However, Vessantara's trials are far from over. Jujaka, an elderly Brahmin, arrives and requests Vessantara's children to serve his young wife. Despite the immense pain of separation, Vessantara, adhering to the principle of selfless giving, consents to this request. In a final test of his generosity, Indra, the king of the gods, disguised as a human, approaches Vessantara and asks for his wife. With unwavering compassion and a deep understanding of the impermanence of all things, Vessantara agrees to this seemingly impossible request.

Through these acts of extraordinary selflessness, Vessantara demonstrates the true essence of *dāna*. His generosity extends beyond material possessions; it encompasses the selfless giving of his family, his comfort, and ultimately, his very self. The story highlights the profound transformative power of *dāna*, demonstrating that true generosity transcends material possessions and encompasses a deep-seated compassion for all beings.

Furthermore, the narrative emphasizes that voluntary poverty, while seemingly a sacrifice, can be a powerful catalyst for spiritual growth. By relinquishing worldly attachments, Vessantara cultivates detachment and inner peace, paving the way for deeper spiritual realization. Ultimately, Vessantara's story serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of cultivating generosity and selfless compassion on the path to enlightenment. It highlights the profound impact of ethical conduct on personal and spiritual development and underscores the interconnectedness of all beings.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Kaza (2000), p. 33.

⁵⁹ Swearer (1998), p. 83.

VIII. THE VIRTUOUS POVERTY OF SERVICE AND LOVE

The concept of poverty, often viewed solely as material renunciation for spiritual gain, takes on a deeper significance when understood as a virtue. This perspective, embraced by various thinkers, emphasizes its connection to service, love, and compassion. Philip E. Mulhern, a Dominican scholar, argues that dedicated poverty fosters virtue by removing material distractions and encouraging selfless service to God. Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, directly links voluntary poverty to love and benevolence, stating that it is the only way to truly see and help those in need⁶⁰. William James, while acknowledging the historical association of poverty with monasticism, sees it as a universally valuable virtue. He believes that by relinquishing material possessions, individuals undergo a profound inner transformation, freeing themselves from self-preoccupation and aligning with a deeper reality. This shift in perspective cultivates a sense of equality and interconnectedness, fostering love, altruism, and a non-preferential benevolence toward all beings. Essentially, voluntary poverty, when understood as a virtue, is not merely about material deprivation; it is about cultivating a disposition of service, love, and compassion. It is about aligning one's life with a higher purpose and fostering a deeper connection with both the self and the world.⁶¹

The theme of voluntary ascetic poverty profoundly permeates the Jataka tales, ancient Buddhist narratives that recount the previous lives of the Buddha. These stories often depict renunciation as the pinnacle of moral perfection, a path that transcends personal desires and cultivates profound compassion for all beings. A prime example is the Dasajataka, which commences with the tale of Temiya, the prince of Benares. To mitigate the severe karmic repercussions of his father's harsh judgment upon four robbers, Temiya renounces his royal privileges and embraces the ascetic life. This act of self-sacrifice exemplifies the profound connection between voluntary poverty and the good of others. Temiya's renunciation, like the selfless actions of Sanaa and Vessantara in other Jataka tales, demonstrates that true benevolence is inextricably linked to a life lived in simplicity and detachment from worldly desires.

Within the narrative framework of these stories, the pursuit of conventional goals, such as wealth and power, appears to be an obstacle to the development of genuine other-regarding virtues like loving-kindness and generosity. The Jataka tales present figures such as Sama, Vessantara, and Temiya as embodiments of these moral principles. Sama, for instance, is not merely a benevolent individual who performs acts of kindness; he embodies the very essence of loving-kindness itself. His actions, characterized by their purity and selfless nature, produce unforeseen and widespread benefits for himself, his family, and all beings. This concept of "extensive benevolence," where an individual deeply and genuinely shares in the joys and sorrows of others, resonates with David Hume's philosophical ideas, although he was not familiar with these specific

⁶⁰ Mulhern (1973), p. 199.

⁶¹ Swearer (1998), p. 75.

Buddhist narratives. The Jataka tales, in essence, offer a Buddhist perspective on Hume's notion of the interconnectedness of humanity, where all beings are considered members of one vast and interdependent family.⁶²

Reduced consumption, coupled with diligent and consistent wealth accumulation (assuming no debt), creates greater scope for charitable giving. This is not merely desirable because generosity is considered a virtue for householders but also because it provides a crucial avenue for practicing non-attachment to material possessions and overcoming possessive desires. Through the act of giving, Buddhists cultivate selflessness and cultivate an understanding of non-self (*anattā*), the core Buddhist doctrine of impermanence and the absence of a fixed, unchanging self. According to Phra Rajavaramuni, a renowned Thai scholar-monk, lay practice in Theravada Buddhist countries traditionally emphasizes three key areas: *dāna* (charitable giving), *sīla* (moral conduct), and *bhāvanā* (mental development). This emphasis on *dāna* distinguishes lay practice from the monastic path, which primarily focuses on *sīla* (observance of precepts), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom).

Phra Rajavaramuni suggests that the strong emphasis on giving within lay Buddhism arises from the importance of cultivating positive social relationships. Other scholars, such as Gutschow, highlight the symbiotic relationship between monasteries and households. This reciprocal relationship involves the flow of material support from households to monasteries (through donations) and the flow of spiritual guidance and blessings from the monastic community back to the lay community. This mutually beneficial exchange creates an optimal environment for both spiritual and social well-being.

From a lay perspective, charitable giving (*dana*) can be viewed as a straightforward and accessible means of accumulating merit, a concept that can be understood as a form of spiritual currency. This merit, accumulated through virtuous actions, is believed to contribute to a better future in this life and to ensure a more favorable rebirth in the next. The concept of "fields of merit" further guides lay Buddhists in their giving practices. These fields represent different recipients of charitable donations, each offering varying levels of merit. The more noble and accomplished the recipient, the higher the perceived merit of the donation. For instance, funding the construction of a new temple is generally considered to yield greater merit than offering daily alms to monks. This hierarchical understanding of *dana* emphasizes the importance of discerning the most effective avenues for accumulating spiritual wealth. While the doctrinal definition of *dana* primarily focuses on religious giving, many contemporary Buddhists embrace a more socially engaged approach. They strive to benefit not only the monastic community but also the wider community of laypeople and the environment. This broader perspective on giving is often inspired by the Four Sublime States: *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). By cultivating these qualities, Buddhists aim to extend their compassion

⁶² Swearer (1998), p. 82.

beyond the realm of religious institutions and actively contribute to the well-being of all sentient beings.⁶³

IX. THE ENDURING RELEVANCE OF *DĀNA* IN ADDRESSING CONTEMPORARY POVERTY

Dāna, the ancient Buddhist practice of selfless giving, offers a profound framework for addressing the multifaceted challenges of poverty in the modern world. Transcending the act of mere charity, *Dāna* emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the transformative power of generosity, not only for the recipient but also for the giver. In a world grappling with increasing inequality and complex social issues, the principles of *Dāna* provide valuable insights for developing effective and sustainable poverty alleviation strategies.

One of the key ways *Dāna* contributes to poverty alleviation is by fostering economic empowerment. By encouraging community-driven initiatives that support education, vocational training, and entrepreneurial ventures, *Dāna* aligns with modern development goals that emphasize self-sufficiency and sustainable livelihoods. For example, investing in quality education equips individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for securing gainful employment. Similarly, supporting vocational training programs can provide individuals with in-demand skills, making them more employable and contributing to local economies. Furthermore, fostering entrepreneurship through initiatives like microfinance and business development support can empower individuals to create their jobs and generate income, leading to economic growth and self-reliance within communities.

Beyond economic empowerment, *Dāna* plays a crucial role in strengthening community bonds and fostering resilience. Acts of generosity create a ripple effect, inspiring collective action and fostering a culture of mutual support within communities. By strengthening interpersonal relationships and building social capital, *Dāna* enables communities to effectively address shared challenges, including poverty. This can be achieved through initiatives such as community-led development projects, volunteerism, and the preservation of cultural traditions, which all contribute to a stronger sense of community and shared responsibility.

Furthermore, integrating the principles of *Dāna* into policymaking can influence systemic reforms that address the root causes of poverty. Advocacy rooted in the philosophy of generosity promotes equitable resource distribution, ensuring that all members of society have access to essential services such as healthcare and education. It also advocates for inclusive development models that prioritize the needs and aspirations of marginalized communities and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared equitably across all sectors of society. Modern philanthropy can learn valuable lessons from the wisdom of *Dāna*. By adopting data-driven approaches, aligning charitable efforts with measurable outcomes, and fostering collaborative partnerships,

⁶³ Essen (2010), p. 77.

philanthropists can maximize their impact and ensure that their resources are used effectively and efficiently in addressing poverty.

Innovative models, such as the Four-Alms-house Model (FAM), demonstrate the potential of *Dāna* in tackling complex challenges, such as pandemics, through collective action and coordinated responses. However, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the potential challenges associated with the practice of *Dāna*. Unintended consequences, such as fostering dependency or addressing systemic poverty superficially, can arise if not carefully considered. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that acts of giving are contextually relevant, avoid unintended harm, and align with broader social justice goals. Ethical guidelines and transparent mechanisms are crucial to ensure that philanthropic efforts are conducted responsibly and effectively.

X. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the holistic approach of *Dāna* bridges immediate relief with long-term development by addressing both individual needs and structural inequalities. By fostering economic empowerment, strengthening community bonds, and advocating for systemic change, *Dāna* not only uplifts recipients but also transforms givers, nurturing a society rooted in empathy and mutual support. To maximize the potential of *Dāna* in alleviating poverty, individuals, organizations, and policymakers must integrate its principles into their efforts. By embracing a culture of generosity, we can create sustainable solutions to one of humanity's most pressing challenges. Incorporating the spirit of *Dāna* into daily life can contribute significantly to poverty alleviation. Everyday acts of kindness, such as sharing knowledge, offering emotional support, and engaging in community service, can have a profound impact when practiced universally. These small gestures contribute to a culture of compassion and shared responsibility, fostering a more just and equitable society.

This study of Buddhist ethics underscores the acquired nature of virtue. The cultivation of moral excellence is not merely a matter of intellectual understanding; it requires dedicated practice and consistent effort. Techniques such as breathing meditation, as emphasized by Buddhadasa, play a crucial role in cultivating non-attachment and fostering inner peace. Buddhaghosa's guidance on cultivating loving-kindness through meditative practices further highlights the importance of experiential learning. The significance of the moral precepts (*sikkhapada*) as "training rules" cannot be overstated. They serve as both a foundation for social harmony and a roadmap for individual spiritual growth. While the goal of human flourishing in Buddhism is certainly intellectually comprehensible, its realization primarily occurs through dedicated practice, embodied example, and active participation in the Buddhist community.

The pervasive presence of the Buddha's life story in temple murals, the frequent recitation of his teachings, the veneration of exemplary figures like Prince Vessantara, the solemn affirmation of the precepts at the beginning of every Buddhist ceremony, and most importantly, the central role of meditation in internalizing values and cultivating life models all testify to the primacy of experiential learning and communal practice in the Buddhist path to enlightenment.

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION: BUDDHIST SOCIAL WORK APPROACH BASED ON BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

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Abstract:

Buddhism has long been recognized as a religion of peace and nonviolence. In today's world, conflicts arise between nations, religions, and ethnic groups. The Buddha taught that people can live together freely as individuals, be equal in principle, and be responsible to one another. He emphasized that every member of the human family, both men and women, has an equal right to liberty. He recognized that each of us is fundamentally the same – a human being like everyone else. The Buddha demonstrated this principle within his monastic community. Monks from different castes lived together in the same monastery and engaged in communal activities such as meetings, alms round (*piṇḍapāta*), and *Dhamma* discussions, irrespective of ethnicity, caste, or religion. This study aims to examine the Buddha's teachings on social and ethnic harmony as preserved in the Buddhist scriptures (*Pāli Canon*) and to explore their application in conflict resolution. Special attention is given to the doctrines expounded by the Buddha that can foster mutual understanding, strengthen relationships, and promote peace. The research methodology involves a content analysis of historical texts (*Sutta Piṭaka*), employing a library-based survey approach

Keywords: *Social harmony, Buddhism, Sutta Pitaka, conflict resolution.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism has long been celebrated as a religion of peace and nonviolence. In today's world, various conflicts arise between nations, religions, and ethnic groups, often threatening the stability of societies. However, the modern world has become increasingly interconnected, functioning as a global entity, almost like one nation. The Buddha taught that people can coexist freely as individuals, equal in principle, and responsible to one another. The social aspect of Buddhism is rooted in the pursuit of social justice through

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nonviolence. Buddhism, founded by Siddhārtha Gautama (the Buddha) more than 2,500 years ago in India, is followed by approximately 470 million people today. Scholars recognize it as one of the world's major religions. Some have argued that Buddhism focuses solely on personal salvation without concern for broader societal welfare. This perspective was notably promoted by German sociologist, philosopher, and political economist Max Weber.

In his book *The Religion of India*, he writes concerning the Buddhist ideal of liberation: "Salvation is a personal performance of the self-reliant individual. No one and, particularly, no social community can help him. The specific asocial character of genuine mysticism is here carried to its maximum."¹ This is a gross misrepresentation of the facts since several texts in the *Pāli Canon* (*Tipiṭaka*) negate this claim. The image of the socially withdrawn character of Buddhism created by Weber was taken for granted by later sociologists, either due to their inability to read the original texts or their lack of proper understanding of Buddhism in practice: "The teaching of the Buddha evolved into a religion with followers of different mental capacities even during the lifetime of the Buddha. All were admonished to realize the truth themselves. However, the social and political dimensions found in many parts of the *Pāli Canon* bear evidence to the fact that early Buddhism held social service in high esteem."² This is a strong rebuttal to the idea that there is no encouragement of social welfare in Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism has the opportunity to speak about social and ethnic harmony.

1.1. Research problem

The wave of globalization has been connecting all the countries of the world into a single community to an unprecedented extent, which implies that a society of mankind in its true sense is taking shape. In the face of globalization, there have been various conflicts, violence, and animosities between different ethnic groups and religions based on the economy. Social, economic, political, and cultural factors have been identified as the main factors influencing this. Powerful countries try to keep poor countries under their control. These can be considered as major barriers to bringing peace in the world. As a result, precious human lives, as well as socio-cultural value systems, are destroyed while suspicion and animosity are spreading among nations.

In the meantime, the significance of peace and harmony is recognized by more and more far-sighted people because they can bring peaceful and stable order to society, and they are necessary conditions for the survival and development of mankind. A world deprived of peace and harmony will certainly fall apart and return to the jungle era in which the strong prey on the weak. Peace and harmony are enjoyed and possessed jointly by mankind, which is the base for the full realization of the creative potential of individuals, the sustainable development of the economy and culture of nations, and true security for the long-lasting prosperity of human society.

¹ Weber (1958): 213.

² P. Gñānārāma (2012): 4.

In such a situation, Buddhist teachings on conflict and conflict resolution can be utilized more effectively to reduce the conflict, violence and animosity mentioned above. The research problem of this paper is to explore how Buddhist teachings are related to harmony and how they can build social and ethnic harmony to promote human society. Moreover, this paper will identify conflict resolution strategies based on Buddhism and explore the core values that underpin those strategies.

1.2. Research methodology

This paper is based on a literature study analyzing both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of Buddhist teachings (*sutta*) and original texts, primarily the *Sūtra Piṭaka*. The secondary sources include academic articles in this field, which are referenced where deeper analysis is required. This research focuses on exploring how Buddhist teachings can be applied to conflict resolution in social work. The methodology employed in this study involves content analysis of primary Buddhist teachings relevant to the subject area.

II. CORE CONCEPTS: WHAT IS HARMONY?

The term “social harmony” cannot be defined separately. Definitions vary from one another. It is necessary to look at the etymological meaning of the term “social harmony” for explicating the expression “social harmony” to explain the term. The word combines two words: social and harmony. The word “social” comes from the French root word “social” or the Latin word “socialism/socius.” It means “friend”, a word relating to society which is concerned with the mutual relations of human beings. The second word is “harmony”. It comes originally from the Greek root, “*harmonia*,” in French “*harmonie*” which means “Joining concord.” Thus “harmony” means a combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions.

The term ‘social harmony’ does not have a single, universally accepted definition, as its meaning varies across different contexts. To clarify its significance, it is essential to examine its etymological origins. The phrase consists of two words: ‘social’ and ‘harmony.’ The word ‘social’ is derived from the French ‘social’ or the Latin ‘socius,’ meaning ‘friend’ or ‘companion.’ It pertains to society and the mutual relationships among human beings. The term ‘harmony’ originates from the Greek *harmonia* and the French *harmonie*, meaning ‘joining’ or ‘concord.’ In its musical sense, ‘harmony’ refers to the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions. Thus, in a broader sense, ‘social harmony’ implies a state of unity, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence within a society.

Social harmony can be simply defined as “a society or human being living together with other societies in a friendly or cordial manner”.³ In a narrow sense, harmony in human relationships might be defined using Heider’s conception, highlighting the drive toward one’s psychological balance as a cognitive

³ Oxford Dictionary (1989): 937.

consistency motive used and developed also in social network theory.⁴

However, from the social work perspective, social harmony should be defined as follows. "Social harmony is about maintaining the level of equilibrium in economic terms in civil society." Social harmony is multi-tiered: it encompasses harmony between all ethnic groups and cultures (between the dominant culture and subculture and cultures of different social classes): harmony in the sense of respect for a country or a culture, harmony between different religions, and harmony between man and nature.⁵ Thus, social harmony can be said to be the peace between ethnicities, castes, and religions, and it has an impact on the development of a country.

Buddha explains that every member of the human family, men and women alike, has an equal right to liberty. He recognized that each of us is just a human being like everyone else. The Buddha has given this example in his monasteries. The monks who belonged to different castes were allowed to spend time together in the same monastery, which included holding meetings altogether irrespective of ethnicity, caste, or religion, walking together in the *Pindapāde*, and holding *Dhamma* discussions together in the single *Dhamma* hall.⁶ This shows that the Buddha practically contributed to the building of harmony between different ethnic groups, between the rich and poor, and between castes.

III. CORE CONCEPTS: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Even if a society seeks harmony, there are many conflicts that must be dealt with at the individual, family, society, or global level. As Mayer pointed out, "In many respects, the social work field has always been about conflict. We deal with people who conflict with social institutions, communities, their families, peers, and themselves. One of our basic roles is to facilitate the interaction between individuals and systems, and our effectiveness is strongly connected to our ability to handle conflict".⁷ By saying "we," Mayer addresses his text to social workers who are supposed to have the knowledge, skills, and competency to deal with various conflicts. However, any conflict resolution process must necessarily reflect social structure, lifestyle, patterns of behavior, and shared values. It is needless to say that cultural competence and humility are crucial in this process. Moreover, this process may show huge diversity reflecting different value systems. In this study, we focus on Buddhism and its value system to add a new piece to the discussion on this diversity.

In the field of social work, conflict resolution strategy is represented by Thomas-Kilmann's five modes.⁸ They identified avoiding, competing,

⁴ Heider (2015): 1 - 8.

⁵ Craip (2013): 3.

⁶ In *Pāli-pindapātikāṅga*, the practice of going for alms is one of the thirteen ascetic purification - exercises.

⁷ Mayer (2013): 76.

⁸ Thomas; Kilmann (1974): 1 - 11.

accommodating, collaborating, and compromising as the main strategies. Keeping these strategies in mind, this study derives original resolution strategies from Buddhist teachings. Mayer recognizes three dimensions of conflict: perception, feeling, and action.⁹ Thus, in this study, these dimensions will be followed to show how Buddhist teaching perceives conflicts and how causes are recognized, and further, which strategies are provided as conflict resolution.

IV. BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON SOCIAL HARMONY

Appreciating world peace, the Buddha worked hard to spread his teachings in the world, promoting unity and harmony among nations. The Buddha has advised about how to live harmoniously in societies where those of different religions or ethnic backgrounds are free from oppression, savageness, and exploitation. His teachings provide a ground of liberation upon which each nation and person can build according to their own needs. To understand the Buddha's authentic teachings, one must examine the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

The *Sutta Piṭaka* is one of the three sections of the *Tipiṭaka* (*Pāli*) or Tripitaka (Sanskrit), the Buddhist canonical collection. *Tipiṭaka* means "three baskets," which are *Sutta Piṭaka*, *Vinaya Piṭaka* (summarizing monastery rules), and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (summarizing detailed scholastic analysis). Out of these, the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which includes the core texts of Buddhist teaching, has been selected for this study.

The Buddhist texts (*Tipiṭaka*) form an integral part of the Buddhist tradition. Initially transmitted orally by Buddhist monastics, these texts were later committed to writing and compiled into manuscripts in various Indo-Aryan languages such as *Pāli* and Sanskrit. Over time, they were incorporated into different Buddhist canons and translated into languages such as Sinhala, English, and many others. Buddhist historical texts serve as one of the most important sources for students of Buddhism, as they preserve the original teachings and philosophical ideas of the tradition. These texts have been carefully transmitted from the past to the present without compromising their core values. The *Theravāda* school of Buddhism asserts that it has preserved the original teachings of the Buddha. There are strong reasons to consider that the doctrine found in the *Pāli* scriptures comes as close as possible to the Buddha's actual teachings. In any case, the *Pāli Tipiṭaka* remains the only fully preserved canon of an early Buddhist school.¹⁰

4.1. Perception and causes of conflict

According to the causes of the present and previous wars of the world, we can see craving and sensual desire of the people as the basic causes for war and conflicts. In the *Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta*, Buddha has explained three types of causes of immorality (unwholesome roots).¹¹ They are:

⁹ Mayer (2000): 97 – 214.

¹⁰ Walshe (1995): 19.

¹¹ MN. 110/MLDB. 132 - 133.

- (1) Greed (*Lobha*)¹²
- (2) Hate (*Dosa*)¹³
- (3) Delusion (*Moha*)¹⁴

The Buddha explains that the person who controls their senses and has eliminated craving does not tend to quarrel or cause harm to others, abuse others, or steal or despoil another's wealth. The Buddha points out that there is no end to human wants and desires, and people are slaves to their cravings.¹⁵ They are difficult to give up.¹⁶ As the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* reads, the following seven kinds of psychological tendencies tend to cause conflicts:

- (1) *Kāmarāga* - the latent tendency to sensual pleasure
- (2) *Paṭigha* - the latent tendency to aversion
- (3) *Diṭṭhi* - the latent tendency to speculative opinion
- (4) *Vicikiccā* - the latent tendency to speculative doubt
- (5) *Māna* - the latent tendency to conceit and pride
- (6) *Bhavarāga* - the latent tendency to crave to continue existence
- (7) *Avijjā* - the latent tendency to ignorance

These seven kinds of tendencies lead to the taking up of rods and bladed weapons, to arguments, quarrels, disputes, accusations, divisive tale-bearing, and false speech. However, when individuals eliminate these tendencies by properly cultivating their minds, they gradually cease engaging in such harmful actions. They stop taking up rods and bladed weapons, refrain from arguments, quarrels, disputes, and accusations, and abandon divisive tale-bearing and false speech. The *Sutta* further clarifies that people typically experience the world in two ways: through attraction and repulsion. They seek ownership of what they find attractive, often leading to quarrels and conflicts in an attempt to acquire those things. Conversely, they attempt to reject and distance themselves from what they dislike, generating further discord. Buddhism primarily focuses on identifying the root causes of conflict rather than offering temporary solutions. Its teachings emphasize inner transformation as the fundamental approach to resolving disputes and fostering lasting harmony.

In the *Sangīti Sutta*, the Buddha has shown three ways of seeing oneself. They are (1) I am better than others, (2) I am equal to others, and (3) I am worse than others.¹⁷ Of these, one who sees himself as superior to others acts with the idea that he is always 'right.' It is a cause of conflict. The same *Sutta* Buddha has shown four ways of going wrong (*agati-gamanī*)¹⁸: One goes wrong through

¹² *lobha*, "greed", is one of the three unwholesome roots (*mūla*) and a synonym of *raga* and *tanhā*.

¹³ *dosa*: "hatred", anger, is one of the three unwholesome roots, *Citta*: hate consciousness.

¹⁴ *moha*: "delusion", is one of the three unwholesome roots. The best-known synonym is *avijjā*.

¹⁵ *kāmesu loke na hi atthi titti* – MN 2. 420.

¹⁶ MN 2. 420.

¹⁷ DN 3. 358-360/LDB. 481 - 482.

¹⁸ *Agati*: the four "wrong paths" (DN 3 .386/ LDB. 491)

- (1) desire (*chanda*)¹⁹
- (2) hatred (*dosa*)
- (3) delusion (*moha*)
- (4) fear (*bhaya*)²⁰

Misunderstanding is a major factor influencing many conflicts in society. Disagreements eventually lead to a confrontation. This situation goes from the so-called family institution to the social organizations. Reluctance to respect the opinions of another person, personality traits, social status, and economic and political power are all factors that contribute to this. Buddha also taught about issues that could lead to arguments and quarrels. There are ten reasons for increasing arguments, quarrels, contention, and disputes, which are mentioned in the *Vivāda Sutta*.²¹

Table 1: Ten reasons for increasing arguments, quarrels, & disputes

<i>Bhikkhus</i> explain non- <i>Dhamma</i> as non- <i>Dhamma</i>	Others say, “ <i>Dhamma</i> as <i>Dhamma</i> ”
They explain non-discipline as non-discipline.	Others say “discipline as discipline”
They explain what has not been stated and uttered by the <i>Tathāgata</i> ²² as not having been stated and uttered by him	Others say, “What has been stated and uttered by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as having been stated and uttered by him.”
They explain what has not been practised by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as not having been practised by him.	Others say, “What has been practised by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as having been practised by him.”
They explain what has not been prescribed by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as not having been prescribed by him.	Others say, “what has been prescribed by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as having been prescribed by him.”

The distortion of the Buddha’s doctrine (*Dhamma*), the distortion of discipline (*Vinaya*), and the redefinition of the doctrine were the causes of disputes.²³ Some *bhikkhus* declared what was non-*Dhamma* to be non-

¹⁹ Intention, desire, will., As evil quality, it has the meaning of “desire”, and is frequently coupled with terms for “sensuality”, and greed.

²⁰ As an emotional arousal fear arises in the mind as a mental state. Fear does not arise by itself alone but in combination with other factors, such as suspicion, presumption, jealousy, misleading information, vanity, and hostility.

²¹ AN 6. 138.

²² *Tathāgata*: the ‘Perfect One’, the one who has ‘thus gone’, or ‘thus come’, is an epithet of the Buddha used by him when speaking of himself. Thera (1952): 208.

²³ *Vinaya*: The ethics taught by the Buddha to bring about the unity of the monks. Taught

Dhamma, while others argued that *Dhamma* was indeed *Dhamma*, leading to divisions within the monastic community. The *Vepacitti Sutta* describes that responding with tolerance in such conflict situations is a mark of an individual's wisdom and character.²⁴ If individuals fail to act wisely, conflicts inevitably arise. Similarly, the *Paṭhamasaṅgāma Sutta* states that victory fosters the maturing of hatred, while the defeated suffer in sorrow.²⁵ However, one who remains at peace finds ease, having abandoned both victory and defeat. The Buddha further elaborates on the consequences of conflict and aggression in the *Dutiyasaṅgāma Sutta*. He explains that a person may plunder as he pleases, but when others plunder, the plunderer himself will eventually be plundered. The fool believes it is his turn to act without consequence, but when his misdeeds ripen, he inevitably faces distress. The killer eventually encounters another killer in turn; the victor ultimately faces another vanquisher. The abuser is met with abuse, and one who acts with anger encounters another who responds in anger. Thus, as the tides of fortune shift, the plunderer inevitably becomes the victim of plunder.²⁶

4.2. Buddhist values and ethical aspects necessary to develop harmony

As in many other teachings, Buddhism rejects war and values peace. In his teaching, Buddha introduced love (compassion) and kindness instead of violence.^{27, 28} War and peace have been the fundamental concerns of modern man. Wars of aggression, conflict, and confrontation taking place all over the world because of politics, culture, religion, and race are detrimental to both the material and spiritual welfare of humanity. It has been pointed out that due to the arms race, the very survival of man is at stake. Buddhism aims to create a peaceful society in the sense of the attainment of inner peace and finding the way to peace. It also has the strongest tradition of non-violence and peace in world history. Moreover, Buddhism aims to create a world where Compassion and Loving-Kindness are the driving forces. Buddhism conquers hatred by kindness and evil by goodness, where enmity, jealousy, ill-will, and greed are absent. For Buddhism, the most effective and forceful reason for conflicts is unwholesome psychological traits such as greediness, acquisition, unlimited hunger for power, hatefulness, and ignorance. Buddha describes both peace and the consequences of war. There is no victory or defeat in war. The group that wins the war is happy, and the other group that loses is unhappy. Those who are unhappy often live with hatred and anger towards the other group. There is no victory in that. In the *Paṭhama Saṅgāma Sutta*, Buddha shows shown results of war, namely: (1) Victory breeds enmity; (2) The defeated one

about "how you should behave". For example, how to act at the time of eating.

²⁴ SN 1. 222 – 223.

²⁵ SN 1. 154 – 156.

²⁶ SN 1. 157.

²⁷ Recognized as *Karuṇā* in both, *Pāli* and Sanskrit.

²⁸ *Mettā* (*Pāli*) is generally translated as loving-kindness is one of core values in Buddhism (called *Maitrī* in Sanskrit).

sleeps badly; (3) The peaceful one sleeps at ease, having abandoned victory and defeat.²⁹

This also shows that war causes mental anguish, and no one can be happy about it. The one who wins (the victor) hates the one who loses (the defeated), and the one who loses hates the one who wins. Accordingly, neither can be mentally happy. The conflicts and wars that occur in society are observed in Buddhism as an unavoidable part of *samsāric* misery.³⁰ The Buddha speaks of unrest in the form of quarrels (*kalahā*), disputes (*viggahā*), and contentions (*vivādā*), which occur at different levels of social interaction. The *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta* begins with the sensory process and identifies *papañca* (mental proliferation) as the most noteworthy psychological cause for social conflicts. The discourse highlights that Buddha and his disciples have higher moral practices. They never harm others and never plunder or steal from others. Once, when Buddha was in Kapilavatthu, his hometown, he went for alms rounds (*piṇḍapāta*), sat under a tree, and started to rest. Atpilavatthu, a *Sākyan* named *Dandapāṇi*, also came to that park in the morning for exercise. He went where Buddha sat and worshipped and asked Buddha one question: “What is the contemplative doctrine? What does he proclaim?”³¹

Buddha answered: “The nature of doctrine, friend, is where one does not keep quarreling with anyone in the world with its *devas*, *māras*, and *brahmās*. These are the teachings of the *Dhamma*. Then, the Buddha explains the two concepts that are needed to practice to live life without conflict. These concepts are extremely vital to protect peace in society. Conflicts and wars arise first in our minds due to following the teachings of Buddhism. These two concepts are: (1) departing from the sensual pleasures (*kāmehevisaṃyuttaṃ*); (2) eliminating craving (*vitatanhaṃ*)

The *Sāriputtasīhanāda Sutta*³² explains how Buddha resolved the conflict. According to this Sutta, Venerable Sāriputththa, at the end of the *wassāna* program, went to Buddha and took permission from Buddha before leaving the temple. Then, while going to live in another place, another monk complained to Buddha by saying, “When Venerable Sāriputththa left, he fell on my body and left without apologizing.” Buddha recalled Venerable Sāriputththa back to the temple. The two met and discussed many issues. Venerable Sāriputththa spoke in detail. In the end, the other monk confessed to the Buddha that he had lied. Buddha asked Venerable Sāriputththa to forgive the monk, and Venerable Sāriputththa apologized. Misunderstanding is a major factor influencing many conflicts in society. Disagreements eventually lead to a confrontation. This situation progresses from the so-called family institution

²⁹ SN 1. 154.

³⁰ *Samsāra*: ‘round of rebirth’, perpetual wandering; is a name by which is designated the sea of life ever restlessly heaving up and down, the symbol of this continuous process of ever again and again being born, growing old, suffering and dying. – Unbroken chain of the rebirth.

³¹ *Kim vādī samaṇo, kimakkhāyīti?*

³² AN 5. 402

to the social organizations. Reluctance to respect the opinions of another person, personality traits, social status, and economic and political power are all factors that contribute to this. Also, the story of this principle shows us some important points in problem-solving. At the same time, it is clear that the right leadership is important in resolving conflicts as well.

The *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* draws attention to how conflicts take place due to sensual pleasure.³³ The Buddha speaks of conflicts in the form of quarrels (*kalaha*), disputes (*viggaha*), and contentions (*vivāda*) arising at various levels of social interaction. These conflicts manifest on a large scale as wars between nations or states when one ruler disputes with another (*rājānopi rājūhi vivādenti*). They also occur within a single nation between religious or ethnic groups and even within families among relatives. The root cause of conflict, as the Buddha teaches, is attachment to sensual pleasures. The *Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta* emphasizes how the pursuit of sensual pleasure leads to discord and strife, ultimately giving rise to suffering and conflict.

“Again, *Bhikhu* with sensual pleasures as the cause, sensual pleasures as the source, sensual pleasures as the basis, the cause being simply sensual pleasures, kings dispute with kings, warriors with warriors, *Brahmins* with *Brahmins*, householders with householders, mother disputes with the son, the son with the mother, the father with the son, the son with the father, brother with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. They dispute, quarrel, and approach each other with hands, clods, sticks, and weapons, and even face death or come to deadly unpleasantness.³⁴ This is the danger here, the mass of unpleasantness owing to sensual pleasure.”³⁵

Buddha pointed out that the way to build harmony between ethnic groups is to have patience with the opinions of others and respect for the diverse ethnicities and religions of others. Buddha also pointed out that patience is the main way to solve conflicts. This is mentioned in the *Punnovāda Sutta*. This factor is clearly explained in the dialogue between the Venerable Punna *Bhikkhu* and Buddha known as “On how to practice patience.”

Table 2: Dialogue with Punna *Bhikkhu*: Patience is the main way to solve conflicts.

³³ Sensual pleasure, (*Bhikkhu* Bodhi translation). (*kāmahetu* (sensual pleasures as the cause), *kāmanidānam*, (sensual pleasures as the source) *kāmadhikaranam*, (sensual pleasures as the basis) *kāmānamewa hetu*, (the cause being simply sensual pleasures): *Kāma*; two kinds of *kāma* are called 1. *Kilesa-kāma*, (*kāma* as a mental defilement), [eg: The restlessness of mind. Occurrence of lustful thoughts.], 2. *Vatthu-kāma*, *Kāma* as the object-base of sensuality. A liking for material things. (eg, Lands, houses, wife, husband/ and children...) Thera (1952): 87.

³⁴ *Bhikhu* means Buddha's followers, Buddhist monks.

³⁵ MN 1. 204.

Questions asked by Buddha	Punna Bhikkhu's Answers
The people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> are fierce and rough. If they abuse and threaten you, what will you think then?	If the people threaten me, then I shall think: "These people are kind, truly kind as they did not give me a blow with the fist."
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do give you a blow with the fist, what will you think then?"	If the people do give me a blow with the fist, then I shall think: "These people are kind as they did not give me a blow with a clod"
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do give you a blow with a clod, what will you think then?"	If the people do give me a blow with a clod, then I shall think: "These people are kind; they did not give me a blow with a stick."
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do give you a blow with a stick, what will you think then?"	If the people do give me a blow with a stick, then I shall think: "These people are kind as they did not give me a blow with a knife."
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do give you a blow with a knife, what will you think then?"	If the people do give me a blow with a knife, then I shall think: These people are kind as truly kind as they have not taken my life with a sharp knife"
"But, Punna, if the people of <i>Sunāparanta</i> do take your life with a sharp knife, what will you think then?"	If the people do take my life with a sharp knife, then I shall think thus: There have been disciples of the Blessed One who, being humiliated and disgusted by the body and by life, sought to have their lives deprived by the knife. But I have had my life deprived by the knife without seeking it.

The Buddha expressed his admiration for the patience of the Venerable Punna Bhikkhu. The Buddha said, "Good, good, Punna! Possessing such self-control and peacefulness, you will be able to dwell in the *Sunāparanta* country. Now, Punna, it is time to do as you think fit."³⁶

³⁶ MN 3. 548.

4.3. Application in the context of social work/ conflict resolution strategies

Ahimsā is the principle of non-harm.³⁷ Most Buddhists strive to practice *ahimsā* in their daily lives, believing that violence is wrong in all circumstances. This principle suggests that a Buddhist may refuse to engage in violence, even in situations of conflict. In the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, the Buddha describes how one should respond when faced with blame or criticism. If someone blames us and we respond with blame in return, conflict arises. To prevent such conflicts, the Buddha provides clear guidance on cultivating patience and restraint. He advises that if conflicts arise within the home, one should reflect: “My mind will remain unaffected. I shall speak no harsh words. I shall abide with compassion for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, free from inner hatred.”³⁸ Furthermore, if someone strikes with their hand, throws a clod, wields a stick, or even a knife, the Buddha instructs that one should maintain inner composure and recall: “My mind will remain unaffected. I shall abide with compassion for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, free from inner hatred.”

The Buddha further emphasizes:

“If anyone should strike you with their hand, a clod, a stick, or a knife, you must abandon all desires and thoughts rooted in household life. You should train yourself as follows: ‘My mind will remain unaffected, and I shall speak no harsh words. I shall abide with compassion for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, free from inner hatred.’ That is how you should train, Phaggunā.”³⁹

According to the *Kosambiya Sutta*, there was a conflict of opinion among the *Kosambi bhikkhus* over a minor issue. As a result, the monks were divided into two groups and blamed each other. Here, Buddha preached the following six points for the development of love and virtue among the monks, explaining the consequences of violence to both groups. They are (1) Good acts of the body, (2) Avoiding mistakes in one’s words (speech), (3) Avoiding mistakes in the mind, (4) Sharing what one gets in his/her bowl, (5) Good discipline, (6) By living according to Buddhist virtues.⁴⁰ In the *Ambalatthikārāhulowāda Sutta*, Buddha states that one should research the effects of an action before committing to it. Buddha said: “Investigate the situation before you take action” (1) Action with the body should be done after repeated reflection, (2) Action by speech should be done after repeated reflection, and (3) Action by mind should be done after repeated reflection.⁴¹ Rahula *Bhikkhu* was instructed by Buddha to inquire into the outcome of an action before committing it.

³⁷ The Buddhist principle of total non-violence, in thoughts, words & actions (c.f. five precepts).

³⁸ MN 1. 312.

³⁹ MN 1. 312.

⁴⁰ MN 1. 752 - 455.

⁴¹ MN 2. 132.

V. CONCLUSION

In the above analysis, it is clear that the Buddha focused on social and ethnic harmony and provided encouraging teachings on harmony. Buddhism always speaks of peaceful and harmonious ways, which are essential for the whole world, including both human society and the environment. According to the details given of the Buddhist perspective of social harmony, we can summarize the following resolutions: Refusing violence, affirming friendship, focusing on negotiations, respecting diversity, true understanding of humanity, bad results of using weapons, evaluation of morality, and proper reflection. Buddhism aims at creating a society that is free from violence in any form; where calm and peace prevail apart from conquest and defeat; where there is no persecution of the innocent; where hatred is conquered by kindness, and evil by goodness; where enmity, jealousy, ill will and greed do not infect peoples' minds; where compassion, peace and harmony thrive.

There are several ways in which a social worker can intervene in any social problem, including in conflict situations. There are four main approaches in social work intervention, which are the therapeutic approach, preventive approach, correctional approach, and developmental approach. Similar approaches could be found in Buddhism as well. "Instead of treating the illness, you should treat the causes". In Buddhism, it is said that. This is the Buddha's vision. An example can be seen in violence or conflicts; immediately after the conflicts, the victims are physically and mentally disrupted. They lose their possessions, and their lives collapse. Ordinary people volunteer to help rescue them and provide basic human needs. It is a "therapeutic approach" that may include legal work, etc. But the Buddha's teachings are to create a social environment to avoid such a situation. That is, to make sure that something does not happen instead of regretting it after it has happened. This concept is a reflection of the vision of Buddhists' "preventive approach." The simple idea here is to eliminate the causes of conflict.

Buddha teaches that our views influence all other aspects of our lives. The influence begins with the impact of our views on our motivation. In the structure of the eightfold path, the wrong view is the condition for wrong motivation, for intentions governed by lust, ill will, and violence, while the right view is the condition for right motivation, for intentions governed by non-attachment, benevolence, and compassion.⁴² Buddha pointed out the importance of behaving wholesome instead of behaving unwholesome. Running parallel with the adoption of wholesome conduct is the endeavor of inner cultivation. Mental cultivation involves a double process aimed at shifting the mind away from defiled emotions and at generating mental qualities conducive to lightness, purity, and inner peace. Therefore, many of the Buddha's discourses deal with these two processes. In addition to these, the training of the mind involves the cultivation of virtuous qualities. Among the virtues most crucial to establishing ethnic harmony are those comprised

⁴² Bodhi (2016): 29.

under the “four divine abodes” (*brahmavihāra*), which are loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity.⁴³

Problem-solving strategies are necessarily rooted in the cultural background. While exploring the appropriate and culturally relevant method or strategy, cultural and societal foundations should be taken into consideration. In his study, Eisenbruch identified the Buddhist roots of impunity in post-war Cambodia and showed how Buddhist teachings affect relationships between former perpetrators and victims in avoiding social conflicts.⁴⁴ As proved in Buddhist social work projects, social work theories and methods should be based on the local context.⁴⁵ In other words, not indigenization or localization of imported models, but exploring the indigenous (local) model might lead to a more culturally relevant intervention. This paper shows how this scheme may be applied in the field of conflict resolution.

Abbreviations

AN - *Āṅguttaranikāya*

DN - *Dīghanikāya*

MN - *Majjhimanikāya*

SN - *Saṃyuttanikāya*

SN – *Suttanipāṭa*

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⁴³ The four ‘sublime’ or ‘diving abodes’- also called the four boundless states (*appamaññā*) – are living kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), altruistic (or sympathetic) joy (*mudītā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Thera (2016): 42.

⁴⁴ Eisenbruch (2018).

⁴⁵ Gohori (2017).

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THE MĀDHYAMAKA BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY: A FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVITY AND HARMONIOUS COEXISTENCE

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Abstract:

Mādhyamaka Buddhist philosophy, established by Nāgārjuna, offers a profound framework for fostering inclusivity and harmonious coexistence through its emphasis on *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination). By rejecting essentialism and advocating the interdependence of all phenomena, *Mādhyamaka* promotes a worldview that transcends binary thinking, encouraging mutual understanding and respect. This study explores the relevance of *Mādhyamaka* principles in addressing contemporary issues of diversity, conflict, and societal discord.

The research investigates *Mādhyamaka*'s epistemological and ontological foundations, its critique of absolutism, and its potential to inform ethical practices and conflict resolution strategies in diverse sociocultural contexts. Employing a multidisciplinary approach, the paper analyses key *Mādhyamaka* texts alongside comparative insights from modern philosophy, sociology, and peace studies.

The findings underscore how *Mādhyamaka* philosophy can serve as a transformation theoretical and practical model for inclusivity and harmony, fostering dialogue across cultural, religious, and ideological divides. By integrating *Mādhyamaka*'s principles into contemporary global frameworks, this paper demonstrates its enduring relevance and inspires hope for a more compassionate and equitable world. This paper explores *Mādhyamaka* philosophy as a practical framework for promoting inclusivity and harmonious coexistence in contemporary global contexts.

Keywords: *Mādhyamakaphilosophy, śūnyatā (emptiness), pratītyasamutpāda (dependent origination), inclusivity and harmony, conflict resolution.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mādhyamaka philosophy, founded by the Indian Buddhist scholar Nāgārjuna in the 2nd century CE, remains one of the most influential schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Central to this philosophy are the concepts of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), which reject inherent existence and underscore the interdependence of all phenomena. By dismantling dualistic thinking and embracing relationally, *Mādhyamaka* offers a profound and unique framework for addressing contemporary challenges, particularly cultural, religious, and ideological diversity.

Inclusivity and peaceful coexistence issues have become increasingly pressing in the modern era as societies grapple with globalization, social inequalities, and inter group conflicts. Philosophical frameworks prioritizing interconnectedness and mutual respect are essential for fostering dialogue and understanding across differences. *Mādhyamaka*'s critique of absolutism and its emphasis on the Middle Path provides a compelling model for navigating such complexities. This paper examines *Mādhyamaka* Buddhist philosophy as a theoretical and practical tool for promoting inclusivity and harmonious coexistence. It explores its foundational principles, ethical implications, and applicability in contemporary global contexts, particularly conflict resolution and peace-building efforts. The study aims to illuminate *Mādhyamaka*'s potential for cultivating a more equitable and compassionate world by engaging with classical texts, modern interpretations, and case studies.

1.1. Research problem

Identifying the challenges in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, cultural, religious, or ideological diversity has become both a source of enrichment and a potential ground for conflict. Societies worldwide face urgent challenges in fostering inclusivity and harmonious coexistence amidst differences. Rising polarization, ethnonationalism, and ideological rigidity underscore the pressing need for frameworks promoting understanding and cooperation. This paper aims to address these critical issues by exploring the potential of *Mādhyamaka* philosophy as a theoretical and practical tool for promoting inclusivity and harmonious coexistence.

Existing approaches to inclusivity often fail to address these challenges holistically. Legal and political frameworks may provide structural equality but rarely tackle the underlying epistemological and ontological biases perpetuating exclusivity. Similarly, many philosophical traditions focus on resolving conflicts through universal principles but fail to accommodate human existence's contextual and relational nature, highlighting the urgent need for a new perspective. *Mādhyamaka* philosophy, with its unique emphasis on *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), could provide this much-needed perspective.

The role of philosophy in resolving conflicts: Philosophy has long shaped

¹ Keith, A. B. *Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, p. 229.

ethical frameworks and mediated between conflicting worldviews. However, many philosophical systems are rooted in essentialist or absolutist assumptions that reinforce binary oppositions, limiting their capacity for inclusivity. This raises the question: Can an intellectual framework that rejects inherent existence and emphasizes interdependence provide a more practical approach to inclusivity and coexistence?

The Relevance of Mādhyamaka: Mādhyamaka philosophy, with its unique emphasis on *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination), challenges the very foundations of rigid dichotomies and essentialist thinking. Advocating the Middle Path and relational ontology provides a unique and compelling perspective to address inclusion's epistemological and ethical dimensions. Its practical application to contemporary social and political challenges remains underexplored but holds great potential for fostering inclusivity and harmony.

1.2. Research questions

How do *Mādhyamaka* principles of *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda* contribute to an inclusive worldview? What are the ethical implications of Mādhyamaka's philosophy for fostering harmonious coexistence? How can *Mādhyamaka* be applied to contemporary conflict resolution issues and global peace-building?

1.3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a multidisciplinary approach that integrates textual analysis, comparative philosophy, and case study methods to explore the practical applications of *Mādhyamaka* philosophy as a framework for inclusivity and harmonious coexistence in modern contexts. The methodology is designed to examine the theoretical foundations of *Mādhyamaka* and practical applications, providing a comprehensive understanding of its relevance.

Textual analysis: The study involves an in-depth examination of primary *Mādhyamaka* texts, including Nāgārjuna's *Mūla Mādhyamakakārikā* (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way), which lays the foundation for the doctrine of *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda*. Commentary by later *Mādhyamaka* scholars, such as Candrakīrti (*Madhyamakāvatāra*), and other works of Nāgārjuna are also included. These texts are analyzed to extract core philosophical principles and their ethical implications. The analysis also includes secondary sources and contemporary interpretations of *Mādhyamaka* by modern Buddhist scholars and philosophers.

Comparative philosophy: The study parallels *Mādhyamaka* with other philosophical traditions, such as postmodernism and deconstruction, and examines relational ontology in Western philosophy. It also addresses nonviolent communication and conflict resolution theories. This comparative analysis highlights Mādhyamaka's unique contributions, positioning them within broader philosophical and sociological discussions on inclusivity and peace-building, thus underscoring the novelty and significance of the research.

Case studies: The practical relevance of *Mādhyamaka* is examined through

case studies in multicultural and conflict-prone contexts, such as Interfaith dialogue initiatives that promote mutual understanding, applying Buddhist principles in peace-building efforts (e.g., in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Tibet) and analyzing how *Mādhyamaka* philosophy has influenced modern thinkers like Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama.

Ethical framework development: Based on the findings, the study develops an ethical framework rooted in *Mādhyamaka* principles, offering practical guidelines for fostering inclusivity and harmonious coexistence in diverse sociocultural settings.

II. DISCUSSION

2.1. The literal meaning of the term *Mādhyamika*

In *Mādhyamika* philosophy, the term *Mādhyamika* derives from the word 'Madhyam' with the suffix 'Thak,' signifying a follower of the Middle Path. The Madhyama path embodies the emptiness that transcends any concepts of existence and non-existence, lacking any origin or entity. Individuals adhering to this philosophical trajectory are referred to as *Mādhyamikas*. They interpret phenomena (Dharma) as embodying emptiness (*śūnyatā*) instead of acknowledging them as accurate in regards to ultimate truth (*paramārthataḥ satyaṃ*) or conventional truth (*lokasaṃvṛti satyaṃ*). These practitioners adhere to the Middle Path espoused by Gautama Buddha, deliberately steering clear of unilateral perspectives on eternalism (*śāśvatavāda*) and annihilationism (*ucchedavāda*) within philosophical discourse. Furthermore, the *Mādhyamikas* are recognized as *Śūnyavādin* (believers in emptiness), as they affirm *śūnya* as the embodiment of truth (*Tattva*). The *Mādhyamika* school of Buddhist philosophy was founded and propagated by Nāgārjuna, regarded as its zenith.

2.2. Two sects of the *Mādhyamika* school

Within the *Mādhyamika* school, leading Buddhist scholars like *ācārya* Tsongkhapa recognize two sects: The positivist (*Svātantrika Mādhyamika*) and the reduction ad absurdum (*Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika*).

Svātantrika Mādhyamika – *Mādhyamika* philosophy firmly denies the existence of external factors regarding ultimate truth while affirming a belief in practical existence tied to conventional reality. Based on the concept of existence (*Sattā*), *Svātantrika Mādhyamikas* can be divided into two primary groups: *Sūtrācāra svātantrika* and *yogācāra svātantrika*. *Sūtrācāra svātantrika* defines convention (*vyavahāra*) similarly to the *Sautrāntikas*, with Bhāvaviveka and Jñānagarbha recognized as key teachers. *Yogācāra Svātantrika* - These *Mādhyamikas*, categorized as impersonalists (*niḥsvabhāvavādī*),

²Bhāvābhāvadvayarahitavāt sarvasvabhāvānūtpattilakṣaṇā śūnyatā tadāśrito mārgaḥ madhyamaḥ. Pāṇḍeya, Raghunātha (ed.). (1989). *Madhyamakaśāstram of Nāgārjuna* (with Nāgārjunakṛtākutobhayā-buddhapālitaḥkṛtamādhyamikavṛtti-bhāvavivekakṛtaprajñāpradīpa-candrakīrtikṛtaprasannapadā). Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, First Part, First Edition, p. 22

³ Singh, Vikas. (2023). A study of the concept of *śūnyatā* in *Mādhyamika* Buddhist Philosophy. *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal*, Volumes-LX-LXI. Hoshiyarpur: VVBISIS, p. 30.

establish convention through the lens of *Yogācāra* philosophy, leading to the term *yogācāra svātantrik*. Prominent proponents of this view include Ācārya Śāntarakṣita and Ācārya Kamalaśīla.

Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika – The *prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika* school utilizes *prasaṅga*, a reasoning method that leads opponents to absurd conclusions. Followers of *prasaṅga* are termed *prāsaṅgika*, forming the foundation of the *prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika* school. Notable scholars, including ācārya Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, and Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna, along with four sects of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, adhere to this school.

III. MĀDHYAMICKA SCHOOL: ORIGINS AND BUDDHA’S TEACHINGS

Buddhism encompasses various schools, each with its philosophy. The *Mādhyamika* school, known as *śūnyavāda*, is seen as the most developed of these. All Buddhist schools value the teachings of ‘*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*’ and ‘*Kaccānagotta Sutta*’ for their insights into Gautama Buddha’s middle way. It is believed that the *Mādhyamika* school emerged from these two *Suttas*, considered the bedrock of Buddhist wisdom and understanding.

3.1. *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* and the Middle path

In the *Migadāya vana* (Deer Forest) of Vārāṇasī, the Buddha shared his teachings with five monks: Koṇḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji. He expounded on the “*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*” and emphasized avoiding extremes:

“*Dveme, bhikkhave, antā pabbajitena na sevitabbā. Katame dve? Yo cāyaṃ kāmesu kāmasukhallikānuyogo hīno gammo pothujjaniko anariyo anattasamhito, yo cāyaṃ attakilamathānuyogo dukkho anariyo anattasamhito. Ete kho, bhikkhave, ubho ante anupagamma majjhimā paṭipadā tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaraṇī nāṇakaraṇī upasamāya abhiññāya sambodhāya nibbānāya samvattati.*”

This Buddha’s teachings mean that avoiding two detrimental extremes when embarking on a path is vital. The first is succumbing to sensual pleasures, which are base, vulgar, and ultimately unproductive. The second is subjecting oneself to unnecessary suffering, which is painful and ineffective. The best approach is to follow the middle way (*majjhimāpaṭipadā*), as realized by the Tathāgata. This path leads to insight and understanding, resulting in peace, direct knowledge, and self-realization liberation. So, what is this middle way? It is called the Noble Eightfold Path, which includes the Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. This path leads to insight and understanding, resulting in peace, direct knowledge, self-realization, and liberation.

⁴ Singh, Vikas. (2023). *A study of the concept of śūnyatā in Mādhyamika Buddhist Philosophy*. Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal, Volumes-LX-LXI. Hoshiyarpur: VVBISIS, p. 31.

⁵ *Samyuttanikāya*, 5/12/2/1, p. 485. *Vinayapiṭaka*, Mahāvagga, 1/6, p. 13.

⁶ *Ibid*

3.2. *Kaccānagotta Sutta* and the Middle path

In the *Kaccānagotta Sutta*, Gautam Buddha discusses with Kaccāna that most people rely on the concept of existence and nonexistence, which creates a duality. However, for those who truly understand the origin and cessation of the world, there is no notion of nonexistence or existence. Kaccāna, this world is mainly controlled by attachment, clinging, and adherence. However, with the right view, one does not become attached or cling to mental standpoints, underlying tendencies, or the idea of oneself. They do not doubt that suffering arises, and what ceases is the cessation of suffering. This knowledge is independent, and this is what constitutes the right view.

Kaccāna, two opposing viewpoints can be adopted: “all exists (*sabbam atthi*)” and “all does not exist (*sabbam natthi*).” However, the Buddha refrains from embracing either extreme and instead advocates the Dhamma through the Middle Path. The Dhamma of the Middle Path is taught without tilting towards either the concept of existence or non-existence.

The Middle Path teachings, as outlined by Buddha in the Pāli Canon, served as the foundation for *Mādhyamika* philosophy. *Ācārya* Nāgārjuna expanded on these Middle Path principles, integrating them into Buddhist teachings and establishing the *Mādhyamika* school of thought within Buddhism.

IV. CORE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS OF THE MĀDHYAMIKA SCHOOL

4.1. Theory of causality in *Mādhyamika* philosophy

The *catuḥstavaḥ* by *ācārya* Nāgārjuna posits that phenomena arising from conditions do not possess true existence and are devoid of intrinsic being. Consequently, they are regarded as empty. The core tenet of Mahāyāna emphasizes that conditioned beings and objects are neither genuinely born nor annihilated. Anything without inherent existence resembles a rope that seems like an independent entity solely because of how it is positioned and structured. In the *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, Nāgārjuna explores the concept

⁷ *Samyuttanikāya*, 2/1/2/5, p. 17: “Dvayanissito khvāyaṃ, kaccāna, loko yebhuyyena – atthitañceva natthitañca. lokasamudayaṃ kho, kaccāna, yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato yā loka natthitā sā na hoti. lokanirōdhaṃ kho, kaccāna, yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya passato yā loka atthitā sā na hoti. upayupādānābhinivesavinibandho khvāyaṃ, kaccāna, loko yebhuyyena. tañcāyaṃ upayupādānaṃ cetaso adhiṭṭhānaṃ abhinivesānusayaṃ na upeti na upādiyati nādhīṭṭhāti – ‘attā me’ti. ‘dukkhameva uppajjamānaṃ uppajjati, dukkhaṃ nirujjhamānaṃ nirujjhati’ti na kaṇṭhāti na vicikicchati aparapaccayā ñānamevassa ettha hoti. ettāvatā kho, kaccāna, sammādiṭṭhi hoti.”

⁸ Ibid, 2/1/2/5, p. 17: “Sabbam atthi’ti kho, kaccāna, ayameko anto. ‘sabbam natthi’ti ayam dutiyo anto. ete te, kaccāna, ubho ante anupagamma majjhena tathāgato dhammaṃ deseti.”

⁹ Nāgārjuna (2001). *Catuḥstava*. Translated by – Jñalachena Namaḍola, Sarnath: Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, 3/3, p. 38: “Pratyayebhyaḥ samutpannamanutpannaṃ tvayoditam. Svabhāvena na tajjātamiti sūnyaṃ prakāśitam.”

of *pratītyasamutpāda* and its key attributes, which include non-ceasing, non-arising, non-annihilation, non-permanence, non-identity, non-difference, non-appearance, and non-disappearance. While certain philosophers support self-causation, other-causation, or a combination of both, Nāgārjuna dismisses all notions of substance origin. He argues that existents do not arise from themselves, others, or other source non-causes.

4.2. *Śūnyatā* (emptiness)

Śūnyatā, or emptiness, serves as a fundamental tenet of *Mādhyamaka* philosophy, primarily articulated by the philosopher Nāgārjuna. This concept asserts that all phenomena lack inherent, independent existence. Nāgārjuna argues that nothing exists in a vacuum, instead, everything is interconnected, depending on various factors, rendering identities relational rather than innate. This philosophical stance fundamentally challenges conventional notions of fixed identities, suggesting that distinctions between individuals, groups, and ideologies are transient constructs instead of immutable realities.

So, what does emptiness truly signify? Nāgārjuna offers a profound interpretation, asserting that emptiness can remedy all emotional disturbances. Individuals with limited understanding may grapple with the concepts of existence and non-existence, they often overlook emptiness's tranquil and positive nature. In his work *jñānasārasamuccaya*, philosopher *ācārya* Āryadeva echoes Nāgārjuna's sentiments, categorizing intelligence into four distinct classes: existent (*sat*), non-existent (*asat*), both existing and non-existent (*sad-asat*), and non-both (*anubhaya*) phenomena. Notably, the *Śūnyatattva* (the essence of emptiness) transcends these traditional categories, illustrating its complex nature. To elucidate this idea, consider the analogy of a pitcher (*Ghata*). If a pitcher exists (*sat*), creating another is redundant; conversely, crafting one would be futile if it does not exist (*asat*). Thus, objects like the pitcher exist beyond the rudimentary binary of existence and non-existence, hence their classification as "empty" or *śūnya*.

In *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, Nāgārjuna delineates five characteristics of *śūnyatattva*: Independent realization (*aparapratyayaṃ*), tranquillity (*śāntaṃ*), freedom from obsessions (*prapañcair-aprapañcitaṃ*), nondiscrimination (*nirvikalpaṃ*), and non-diverse meanings (*anānārthaṃ*). The notion of independence in realization (*aparapratyayaṃ*) denotes a unique comprehension that surpasses apparent causality. Candrakīrti's telling depiction illustrates this concept through the experiences of a person afflicted

¹⁰ *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, Prefatory verses, p. 101: "Anirōdhamanutpādamanucchedamaśāśvatam./ Anekārthamanānārthamanāgamamanirgamam./ Yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaṃ prapañcōpaśamaṃ śivam./ Deśayāmāsa sambuddhastam vande vadatām varam."

¹¹ *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, 1/1, p. 105: "Na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpyaheturāḥ./ Utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kṛcchraḥ kecana."

¹² *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, 18/9, p. 270: "Aparapratyayaṃ śāntaṃ prapañcairaprapañcitaṃ. Nirvikalpamanānārthametattattvasya lakṣaṇam."

with night blindness (*timira rogah*). The night-blind individual perceives false images that an unaffected observer cannot correct. Clarity only arises when the individual's blindness is alleviated, paralleling the journey to understanding ultimate emptiness.

Nāgārjuna discourages reliance on metaphysical speculations, advocating instead for knowledge derived from a "right view" (*sammā diṭṭhi*), which engages directly with the empirical world. Such knowledge focuses on phenomena arising and dissolution, emphasizing an individual's ability to verify their experiences. Furthermore, tranquility (*sāntaṃ*) is reached through the cessation of conceptual thought, leading to peace. This cessation mirrors a perceptual stability one can attain upon overcoming biases, reflecting Nāgārjuna's assertion that a lack of intrinsic nature imbues a profound sense of serenity. By prioritizing genuine experiences over abstract concepts, individuals enhance their understanding. Additionally, freedom from obsessions (*prapañcair-aprapaṇcitam*) highlights how biases hinder genuine tranquility. The term "obsession" here refers to attachments that distort perceptions. Emptiness, thus, exists free from these distortions, showcasing its intrinsic independence from language and conventional expressions.

In the context of nondiscrimination (*nirvikalpaṃ*), Nāgārjuna elucidates the importance of relinquishing unwarranted divisions in the quest for understanding. He argues against the rigid classifications that often complicate knowledge acquisition and emphasizes the fluidity inherent in emptiness. Finally, the notion of non-diverse meanings (*anānārthaṃ*) encapsulates that proper understanding transcends many worldly experiences, aligning with a unified approach to truth. In summary, Nāgārjuna's exploration of *śūnyatā* illuminates a path to deeper insight, self-realization, and liberation from the confines of conventional understanding, urging practitioners to embrace an emptiness that encapsulates reality's interconnectedness while dissolving rigid conceptual boundaries.

This realization of emptiness can lead to greater openness and flexibility, breaking down barriers created by rigid identities. When applied to human relations, it fosters empathy as individuals recognize their shared dependence and interconnectedness. It encourages acceptance of diversity and diminishes the need for conflict, rooted in the belief that no entity exists independently and without relation to others.

¹³ Candrakīrti. (1989) *Madhyamakaśāstre Prasannapadā*. Edited by Raghunātha Pāṇḍeya, First Edition. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, vol II, p. 73: "Yathā hi taimirikā vitatham keśamaśakamakṣikādirūpaṃ paśyanto vitimiropadeśenāpi na śaknuvanti keśānām yathāva-davasthitam svarūpamadarśananyāyena adhigantavyamataimirikā ivādhigantum, kiṃ tarhi ataimirikopadeśānmithyaitadityetāvanmātrakameva pratipadyante. Yadā tu timiropadhātya viparītaśūnyatādarśanāñjanāñjitabuddhinayanāḥ santaḥ samutpannatattvajñānā bhavanti, tadā tat tattvamanadhigamanayogena svayamadhigacchanti. Evamaparapratyayaṃ bhāvānām yat svarūpaṃ tat tattvam."

4.3. *Pratītyasamutpāda* (Dependent origination)

Pratītyasamutpāda, or dependent origination, is a crucial concept in Buddhist philosophy, particularly articulated in the *mūlamadhyamikakārikā*. This text highlights eight essential qualifiers of *pratītyasamutpāda*: non-ceasing, non-arising, non-annihilation, non-permanence, non-identity, non-difference, non-appearance, and non-disappearance. Nāgārjuna reverently acknowledges the Buddha, who elucidated these principles to alleviate attachment and promote well-being.

Candrakīrti defines essential terms such as cessation (*nirōdha*) as stopping, arising (*utpāda*) as originating, and annihilation (*uccheda*) as the termination of existence. Nāgārjuna illustrates the intricacies of dependent origination by emphasizing that these phenomena do not exist inherently but depend on various conditions. The qualifications reveal that things arise based on specific causes; therefore, they cannot occur in isolation or independently.

The Buddha taught that all things arise in reliance on their conditions, thus debunking the beliefs that phenomena arise without a cause or solely by themselves. The *mūlamadhyamikakārikā* posits that dependent-arising is inherent without cessation, indicating that the qualities of cessation and arising cannot be accurately established as separate entities. Through profound reasoning, Nāgārjuna emphasizes that rationality should guide our understanding as it unravels existing and non-existent misunderstandings.

In addressing the provisional and definitive meanings of *pratītyasamutpāda*, Nāgārjuna clarifies that while the eight qualifiers frame the discourse, proper understanding arises from grasping the true nature of phenomena. He counters the Conservative Buddhist argument that these qualifications contradict Buddhist teachings on impermanence and cessation. Instead, he argues that our impulses (*saṃskāra*) stem from ignorance and cease once ignorance is vanquished. This cessation contributes to true happiness, as the impermanent elements will inevitably perish, supporting the transient nature of existence.

Nāgārjuna's *Mādhyamakaśāstra* aims to distinguish between temporary teachings and those that indicate a more profound, permanent truth. While the Buddhist Canon does not endorse a self-existing nature in phenomena, it recognizes that conditioned insights lead us toward the ultimate truth of *nirvāṇa*. This truth is devoid of deception, sharply contrasting with conditioned experiences that lead to misunderstanding.

The treatises written by Nāgārjuna guide various audiences, particularly those struggling with misconceptions and those who confuse provisional meanings with ultimate truths. He aims to unravel these complexities through logical reasoning and authoritative teachings, highlighting the nature of all conditioned things as deceptive and impermanent.

Connected to the concept of *śūnyatā*, *pratītyasamutpāda* emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings. It underscores how societal, political, and cultural divisions are not inherent but arise from specific historical contexts. Understanding this interdependence fosters a sense of shared responsibility

and promotes efforts toward mutual well-being.

Recognizing these dynamics transforms perspectives on conflicts and divisions, encouraging a mindful approach to interactions that nourishes peace and cooperation. By fostering awareness and mindfulness, individuals can achieve a well-being that encompasses the fundamental understanding of all Dharmas as lacking an intrinsic self, ultimately contributing to harmony in themselves and society.

V. ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MĀDHYAMAKA PHILOSOPHY

Mādhyamaka's rejection of fixed identities and its emphasis on relationally have profound ethical implications. The philosophy provides a moral framework rooted in compassion and nonviolence, encouraging individuals to see the interconnectedness of all sentient beings. Nāgārjuna explained that activities are neither constituted nor non-constituted by conditions. Conditions are neither constituted nor non-constituted of activity. By recognizing the emptiness of fixed categories such as “us” and “them,” *Mādhyamaka* advocates for a more inclusive worldview that transcends the boundaries of race, nationality, religion, and other divisive factors. This inclusive, ethical approach fosters:

Compassion: *Mādhyamaka*, a philosophical school linked to the teachings of the *prāsaṅgika* (often associated with Nāgārjuna), offers a profound exploration of compassion that is intricately connected to its central tenets of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). At the core of *Mādhyamaka* thought is that all phenomena, including our concepts of self and others, lack inherent existence. This viewpoint challenges entrenched beliefs in dualism and separateness, suggesting that compassion arises not from a fixed understanding of self and others but from recognizing our interconnectedness.

In *Mādhyamaka* philosophy, compassion is viewed as a natural response to the suffering of beings. Realizing that all beings are interconnected nurtures a sense of responsibility and care. When one understands that one's happiness is interwoven with the happiness of others, compassion becomes a way of life. This is not merely an emotional response but a profound recognition of relational dynamics. Emptiness signifies that our existence is contingent upon various conditions and interactions, emphasizing the importance of every individual.

The concept of dependent origination holds significant weight in understanding compassion within *Mādhyamaka* thought. This principle indicates that phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena and do not exist independently. Therefore, when we witness someone suffering, the *Mādhyamaka* perspective encourages us to recognize the myriad causes and conditions contributing to that suffering. Understanding that suffering is not an isolated event but the result of interconnected circumstances, we cultivate

¹⁴ *Mūlamadhyamikakārikā*, 1/4, p. 108: “Kriyā na pratyayavati nāpratyayavati kriyā. Pratyayā nākriyāvantaḥ kriyāvantaśca santyuta.”

compassion through awareness and empathy.

Furthermore, *Mādhyamaka* thought stresses the idea of non-attachment. Compassion, within this framework, transcends attachment and aversion. It does not arise from a desire for personal gain or a sense of superiority, instead, it is an expression of genuine concern for the well-being of others. Thus, compassion becomes a universal sentiment that does not discriminate based on personal preferences or biases. This radical inclusivity is foundational to the *Mādhyamaka* perspective, where all beings are perceived as deserving of compassion, regardless of their actions or status.

Mādhyamaka also encourages a critical approach towards how we engage with our understanding of compassion. It invites practitioners to examine the motivations behind their compassionate actions, fostering a sense of honesty and clarity. Are we acting out of a genuine wish to relieve suffering, or do we cling to our perceptions and judgments? This introspective quality encourages an authentic dynamic in the practice of compassion, free from the clutches of ego.

Ultimately, *Mādhyamaka* teaches that cultivating compassion is a transformation journey. It invites us to transcend the dualistic notions of 'us' versus 'them' and embrace the wholeness of existence. By recognizing that suffering is part of a shared human experience, practitioners become more attuned to the struggles of others, acting with kindness and grace. The essence of *Mādhyamaka* thought on compassion embodies a profound, active engagement with the world – an ethos of care that acknowledges the relational nature of existence and acts thoughtfully to alleviate the suffering of all beings.

In this way, *Mādhyamaka*'s thought offers a nuanced understanding of compassion that transcends personal attachment. Recognizing interdependence and emptiness compels one to act compassionately towards all sentient beings, promoting the vision of a more compassionate and interconnected world.

Nonviolence (*ahimsa*): Nonviolence, a core principle in many philosophical and ethical traditions, is significant in *Mādhyamaka* philosophy. At the heart of *Mādhyamaka* philosophy is the doctrine of emptiness, which posits that all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence. This means that things do not possess an essence or fixed identity; their existence is contingent upon numerous factors and interrelations. The rigid attachment to personal views, beliefs, or identities begins to dissolve when viewed through this lens. This dissolution is a critical first step towards fostering a nonviolent mindset.

In practice, recognizing the emptiness of one's views mitigates the extreme sense of self that often fuels conflict. When individuals hold tight to their opinions, they are likely to react defensively, leading to hostility and aggression. However, *Mādhyamaka*'s teaching encourages practitioners to see their views as fluid and interconnected with the perspectives of others. This realization fosters empathy and understanding, critical components of nonviolence.

Interdependence further deepens this understanding of nonviolence. *Mādhyamaka* asserts that all existence is interconnected; nothing exists in isolation. This profound recognition encourages individuals to consider how

their actions impact others. When one sees oneself as an integral part of a more extensive web of life, the desire to harm others diminishes. The realization that hurting others ultimately leads to suffering for oneself is a powerful deterrent against violence. Hence, nonviolence becomes a moral choice and a pragmatic approach to harmonizing with others.

Moreover, nonviolence in the context of *Mādhyamaka* applies not only to physical actions but also to speech and thought. The practice of nonviolence extends to how one communicates and interacts with others. Harsh words, judgments, and criticisms can be forms of verbal violence that disrupt peace and harmony. *Mādhyamaka* philosophy encourages practitioners to adopt a speech that arises from wisdom and compassion, recognizing the emptiness of one's views and, by extension, the views of others.

The synthesis of emptiness and interdependence within *Mādhyamaka* philosophy effectively cultivates a nonviolent ethos in life. For a practitioner, embodying nonviolence means engaging with the world in a way that seeks to alleviate suffering rather than perpetuate it. This involves active listening, patience, and a willingness to engage with differing perspectives without hostility. Nonviolence thus becomes a natural byproduct of an awakened and interconnected consciousness. Furthermore, the *Mādhyamaka* philosophy's nondual understanding of existence challenges the dichotomy of self and other, emphasizing that the boundary we often draw between ourselves and others is ultimately illusory. This nondual perspective can transform how individuals approach conflicts. Instead of seeing another as an adversary, one begins to recognize them as an extension of oneself. This shift is pivotal in pursuing nonviolence, as it reframes interactions based on shared humanity rather than opposition.

In conclusion, nonviolence in *Mādhyamaka* philosophy emerges from a profound understanding of emptiness and interdependence. By reducing attachment to rigid views and recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings, individuals can cultivate a mindset that naturally inclines towards nonviolence in thought, speech, and action. This philosophical groundwork not only encourages ethical living but also offers a transformation path towards peace and reconciliation. This path involves actively seeking to understand others, fostering empathy, and promoting dialogue and collaboration, all of which are crucial in a world often fraught with division and conflict.

Equity and justice: The philosophical school of *Mādhyamaka*, rooted in the teachings of Nāgārjuna, offers profound insights into the nature of reality and its practical implications for social, political, and economic structures. A key tenet of *Mādhyamaka* is the rejection of essentialist categories, which refers to the tendency to attribute absolute and unchanging characteristics to entities and social groups. This rejection is not merely an abstract philosophical position; it carries significant ethical and practical consequences for understanding and engaging with one another.

In contemporary society, essentialist categories often manifest in various forms, such as racial, gender, and economic stereotypes, that can

lead to discrimination and inequality. These divisions promote a simplistic view of individuals as representatives of their categories, stripping them of their complexity and unique experiences. By challenging this essentialism, Mādhyamaka invites us to consider our shared interdependence – the idea that all beings and phenomena are interconnected and that our actions have ramifications beyond ourselves. This emphasis on inclusivity makes everyone feel valued and included.

The concept of interdependence, as championed by Mādhyamaka philosophy, fosters a sense of fairness in our social interactions and deepens our empathy and understanding. It implies that no single group should dominate or marginalize another based solely on an essentialist viewpoint. Instead, understanding that we all share a common humanity encourages empathy and collaboration. This means advocating for systems that recognize individual differences yet promote fairness and equality.

In the political sphere, the Mādhyamaka approach is a beacon of hope. It challenges the rigidity of party politics and national identities and urges us to rethink our allegiances. It does not just question but transforms our adherence to essentialist notions of identity that can create an ‘us versus them’ mentality. Mādhyamaka inspires a more inclusive politics built upon recognizing that societal issues are often complex and require cooperative solutions that transcend such boundaries.

Economically, Mādhyamaka’s principles push us to reconsider the foundations of our systems. Traditional economic models often justify inequalities using essentialist categories like class or nationality. *Mādhyamaka* encourages us to view these economic divides as constructs that can and should be dismantled in favor of a system prioritizing shared well-being. A focus on interdependence illustrates the importance of equitable resource distribution. It emphasizes the need for policies that support the welfare of all individuals rather than the mere accumulation of wealth for a privileged few.

Thus, applying Mādhyamaka’s rejection of essentialism to our current social, political, and economic landscapes fosters a more equitable framework. It challenges and actively promotes us to envision societies that thrive on collaboration rather than competition, where everyone’s voice is valued and heard. This leads to governance responsive to the needs of all its members and economies that operate not solely on profit motives but instead on human flourishing.

In summary, Mādhyamaka’s commitment to rejecting essentialist categories sheds light on how we can work towards a fairer world. Emphasizing our shared interdependence encourages us to create systems that reflect inclusivity, empathy, and equality. These ideals are philosophical musings and practical imperatives that can reshape our lives and societies – for the better. It calls us to action in our daily engagements and the structures we support, advocating for a society that recognizes and celebrates diversity while fostering a genuine sense of connection among all individuals. The path forward lies in our collective commitment to fairness and equality, inspired by the profound insights offered by Mādhyamakan thought.

III. APPLICATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS

6.1. *Mādhyamaka* philosophy and interfaith dialogue

In the contemporary landscape of globalized societies, the intersection of religious and cultural diversity presents challenges and opportunities for dialogue. Among the various philosophical frameworks, *Mādhyamaka* emerges as a vital perspective, particularly in its interpretation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*). These foundational concepts challenge conventional views of truth and difference, making *Mādhyamaka* significantly contribute to interfaith dialogue.

Mādhyamaka, a school of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism founded by the philosopher Nāgārjuna, posits that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. This principle of emptiness, or *śūnyatā*, does not mean that things do not exist but rather that they do not exist independently or in the way we often perceive them. It suggests that what we perceive as solid and distinct entities are, in truth, products of interrelated conditions and causes. Regarding religious beliefs, this perspective asserts that no single religion possesses absolute truth. Each tradition, while authentic in its context, is shaped by many historical, cultural, and social influences. Consequently, *Mādhyamaka* encourages a more nuanced view of religious diversity, advocating that differences should not be seen as divisive barriers but as opportunities for enrichment through mutual understanding.

The interdependence emphasized by *Mādhyamaka* further supports the idea that relationships and connections between faiths are essential in pursuing truth and wisdom. In realizing that our perspectives are formed through various contexts, adherents to this philosophical view can foster dialogues that transcend superficial understandings, such as stereotypes or oversimplified views of other faiths. For instance, practitioners of *Mādhyamaka* suggest that interfaith communication should be underpinned by compassion and empathy. By engaging with others respectfully and openly, individuals can collectively search for meaning rather than defensively holding on to their own beliefs as the ultimate truth.

Understanding this dynamic perspective can disarm religious fundamentalism, which often views differing beliefs as threats. By recognizing the fluidity and interdependence of truths, *Mādhyamaka* fosters a climate where interfaith dialogue is not only possible but also enriching. Differences, rather than obstacles, can serve as mirrors reflecting deeper understandings of one's beliefs. This reflective approach aligns closely with contemporary calls for dialogue in a pluralistic world, where the richness of diversity is seen as an asset rather than a liability. Moreover, *Mādhyamaka* philosophy provides a framework for adherents to examine their identities and belief systems critically. Individuals can cultivate a more profound self-awareness by recognizing that historical and social factors condition their views. This self-awareness opens new pathways for dialogue, wherein participants approach discussions with humility, curiosity, and a willingness to learn from one another rather than convert or persuade.

Mādhyamaka philosophy offers actionable insights into the complexities of religious diversity in modern societies. Promoting the values of emptiness and interdependence, which suggest that all phenomena are interconnected and lack inherent existence, provides a compelling framework for fostering interfaith dialogue rooted in mutual respect, understanding, and compassion. In a world rife with conflict arising from religious and cultural differences, Mādhyamaka's teachings remind us that, through a collective journey of understanding, we can transcend divisions and embrace a more harmonious existence.

6.2. *Mādhyamaka* in peace-building

The *Mādhyamaka* school of thought, rooted in the teachings of Nāgārjuna, has profound implications for peace-building efforts, particularly in contexts marked by ethnic and religious tensions. Its principles, emphasizing non-essentialism and interdependence, offer a fresh lens through which to view conflict and resolution. In regions such as Sri Lanka, where Buddhist and Tamil communities have endured a long history of conflict, Mādhyamaka's philosophies can inspire meaningful dialogue and cooperation among disparate groups.

The Sri Lankan civil war, which lasted from 1983 until 2009, was characterized by deep-seated ethnic tensions, primarily between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and the Tamil minority. A key aspect of *Mādhyamaka* thought is the recognition that identities are not fixed but are shaped by historical and social contexts. By fostering an understanding that the conflict is a constructed narrative rather than an inherent part of the groups' identities, peace activists have cultivated an environment conducive to dialogue and reconciliation. Scholars argue that this change in viewpoint has fostered peace initiatives focusing on mutual understanding and respect rather than divisive narratives.

Similarly, the application of Mādhyamakaprinciples can be observed in the Tibetan context, particularly in the teachings of the Dalai Lama. Renowned for his commitment to peace, the Dalai Lama consistently emphasizes interdependence and compassion, key tenets of the Mādhyamaka philosophy. His approach to conflict resolution advocates for dialogue between Tibetans and Chinese authorities, framing the situation as one that requires understanding and cooperation among all parties involved rather than a zero-sum conflict. This method reflects the *Mādhyamaka* view that all phenomena are interconnected; thus, a solution can only be reached when the needs and perspectives of all parties are recognized and addressed.

Various initiatives, such as interfaith dialogue forums, have sought to apply *Mādhyamaka*-inspired principles in peace-building efforts across different regions, including Sri Lanka and Myanmar. These initiatives foster mutual understanding by encouraging participants to engage with one another's perspectives, thereby diminishing prejudices and building empathy. The influence of Buddhist teachings on modern thinkers like Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama further underscores the relevance of Mādhyamaka in the

contemporary discourse on peace and conflict. Both figures advocate for a compassionate approach transcending traditional boundaries, promoting a collective understanding of suffering that can guide practical efforts towards lasting peace.

In conclusion, applying Mādhyamaka principles in peace-building offers a transformation framework that encourages dialogue, understanding, and compassion in conflict. By recognizing the interdependent nature of conflicts and fostering a non-essentialist view of identity, Mādhyamaka provides valuable insights that can facilitate reconciliation in regions grappling with deep-rooted tensions. As contemporary peace-building efforts evolve, integrating these philosophical insights may deepen their impact and promote sustainable peace.

6.3. Challenges and critiques of *Mādhyamaka* in practice

Mādhyamaka, as a Buddhist philosophical framework, offers a rich perspective on inclusivity and peace. However, its application in real-world contexts presents several challenges. Critics often point to the abstract nature of key concepts such as *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *Pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) as obstacles to their implementation in social or political arenas. For instance, detractors argue that the philosophical emphasis on non-attachment might inadvertently encourage passivity, potentially leading individuals to disengage from pressing social issues in favor of a detached perspective.

To counter these criticisms, this paper proposes a dynamic interpretation of *Mādhyamaka* that acknowledges its ethical dimensions while promoting active engagement in pursuing justice and equity. By marrying Mādhyamaka's foundational principles with contemporary theories of social change, a more pragmatic approach to inclusivity and peace emerges.

The ethical implications of *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda* – which emphasize the interrelatedness of all phenomena – become particularly relevant when addressing societal inequities. The concept of emptiness allows us to recognize that rigid distinctions between groups are socially constructed and, therefore, can be deconstructed to pursue a more harmonious society. Furthermore, the understanding of dependent origination reinforces the idea that social changes depend on interconnected actions and relationships, thus encouraging collective responsibility and participation in social justice initiatives.

Mādhyamaka's philosophical insights present a compelling vision for fostering equality and peace. Despite the challenges of translating these abstract ideas into actionable strategies, they are potent tools in navigating contemporary social dilemmas. As such, *Mādhyamaka* offers a valuable lens through which to examine and approach modern conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. To maximize Mādhyamaka's potential in addressing contemporary issues, its principles must be understood in isolation and integrated within existing social justice and activism frameworks. This integration promotes a more active stance among practitioners, urging them to apply philosophical insights in ways that are responsive to and transformation for society.

In conclusion, while *Mādhyamaka* faces critiques regarding its practical applicability, its fundamental teachings concerning interdependence and rejecting inherent distinctions provide rich ethical guidelines. By embracing a dynamic interpretation that aligns these principles with modern social movements, practitioners can cultivate a more engaged approach to creating inclusive and equitable societies. *Mādhyamaka*, therefore, remains an essential philosophy for those committed to justice and peace in the contemporary world.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is concluded that this paper explores *Mādhyamaka* Buddhist philosophy, focusing on the concepts of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) and *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) as frameworks for promoting inclusivity and harmonious coexistence. Through a combination of textual analysis, comparative philosophy, and practical case studies, the paper illustrates how *Mādhyamaka*'s emphasis on the interconnectedness of all phenomena provides insights for addressing contemporary issues surrounding diversity, conflict, and peace. Central to *Mādhyamaka* is its challenge to dualistic thinking, which often fuels social, cultural, and religious conflicts. By dismantling essentialist views and highlighting the relational nature of all beings, *Mādhyamaka* encourages the recognition of our shared humanity. This philosophical perspective remedies rigid categorizations that foster polarization and intolerance. Furthermore, the ethical contributions of *Mādhyamaka*, grounded in principles of compassion, nonviolence, and justice, lay the groundwork for social systems that value equity and reconciliation. The application of *Mādhyamaka* in peace-building efforts, examined through case studies in Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Myanmar, demonstrates its practical relevance in real-world conflicts. Its non-essentialist approach fosters dialogue and cooperation, bridging divides while promoting mutual respect and emphasizing the importance of balance and interdependence in navigating modern complexities.

Future Directions: Although *Mādhyamaka*'s philosophical framework holds transformation potential, its implementation across various cultural and political landscapes necessitates thoughtful adaptation. The difficulty of translating abstract philosophical ideas into actionable solutions for social challenges, especially in contexts of entrenched conflict, is substantial. Future studies should aim to merge *Mādhyamaka* principles with effective conflict resolution strategies, investigating how these concepts can be implemented within international peace initiatives and community development efforts.

Mādhyamaka philosophy offers a timely and insightful perspective for promoting a more inclusive, compassionate, and harmonious world in a time characterized by division, uncertainty, and strife. Its dismissal of rigid identities and focus on interdependence provides a road map for cultivating a future where diversity serves not as a trigger for conflict but as a basis for collective flourishing.

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THE RACE AND GENETICS OF BUDDHA AND THE SAKYA CLAN: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND ETHNOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

Previous research has highlighted the perspectives of several Western scholars, including Levman, Bryan G., Michael Witzel, and Christopher I. Beckwith, regarding the race and ethnicity of Shaky Buddha. In contrast, many Eastern Buddhist monks tend to concentrate primarily on the core teachings of Buddha, often overlooking discussions on related subjects such as psychology, religion, and economics within Buddhism. This paper aims to explore “The Race and Genetics of Buddha and the Sakya Clan,” addressing various aspects: the classification of race and genetics in humanity globally, the racial classifications in India, the race and genetics of Shaky Buddha, and the Buddha’s perspective on the human race. It is established that Gautama Buddha’s discourses are rooted in the principles of anthropology and ethnology. His teachings advocate for global harmony, urging people to coexist peacefully, promoting unity and inclusiveness.

Keywords: *Buddha’s ancestry, Sakya genetics, race and Buddhism, anthropological view, inclusive humanity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Anthropology represents the scientific exploration of humanity, focusing on various aspects such as human behavior, biological characteristics, cultures, societies, and linguistics, encompassing both contemporary and historical contexts, including archaic human forms. This discipline encompasses several subfields, including Archaeological, Biological, Social-Cultural, and

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Linguistic studies. Ethnology, derived from the term meaning “nation,” serves as an academic field dedicated to the comparative analysis of diverse peoples and their interrelations. The evolution of Anthropology and Ethnology can be traced back to the 18th and 19th centuries, although the examination of human races, cultures, and civilizations has roots that extend to the time of Buddha and even earlier.

In the Indian context, the population is primarily descended from four major racial groups: the Negritos, Proto-Australoids, Mongoloids, and Caucasoids. The subcontinent has experienced various waves of immigration, resulting in a rich tapestry of multiple races and ancestral genetic groups. The Negritos were the earliest racial group to arrive in India, followed by the Proto-Australoids. The Mongoloids entered through the northern and eastern mountain passes. Notably, the Indo-Aryan migrations introduced an ethnolinguistic group that spoke Indo-Aryan languages and contributed significantly to the region’s civilization. The Indo-Aryans and their cultural practices began to permeate northwest India around 1500 BCE, leading to the establishment of the Vedic-Brahmanic culture, which included the development of language and Vedic theories.

Traditionally, the Hindu sociocultural framework was organized into exclusive, hereditary, and endogamous castes, characterized by a hierarchical and unequal structure. Racial segregation has manifested as a systemic separation of individuals into distinct racial or ethnic groups, persisting from ancient times to the present. Discriminatory practices, such as restrictions on dining in restaurants, accessing public facilities, attending educational institutions, enjoying entertainment, and securing housing, continue to affect human interactions today.

Buddha is an Enlightened One revered by his followers globally. In the year 2000, the United Nations General Assembly officially recognized the Day of Vesak to honor the contributions of Buddhism. His teachings have awakened individuals from the slumber of ignorance, leading them to liberation from suffering. Typically, Buddha is depicted through religious myths and narratives. This paper will explore “The race and genetics of Buddha and the Sakya Clan,” through the lenses of anthropology and ethnology. It is argued that the themes of race and genetics have played a significant role in shaping the doctrines and literature of Buddha and Buddhism.

Race:

The term “race,” as it is understood in contemporary discourse, is a relatively modern concept. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, it was primarily used to denote “nation” or “ethnic group.” The etymology of “race” can be traced back to the Latin words *ratio*, meaning “reason,” or *radix*, meaning “root,” as well as to the Hebrew term for “head” or “origin.” It encompasses notions such as “a family ascendancy,” “a family descendancy,” “a generation or collective family,” and “a particular breed.”¹

¹ Dr. Gulrukh Begum, Classification of Race, <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/antp01/chapter/classification-of-races>.

Race can be defined as a classification of humanity into groups of individuals who share common physical characteristics, traits, and appearances that are hereditary and sufficient to distinguish them as a unique human type. The concept of race is also synonymous with terms such as type, sort, or kind. Populations around the globe can typically be categorized into three to five races, or even more, based on distinctive traits such as skin color, hair texture, head shape, facial features, eye shape, nose, lips, stature, blood type, and dermatoglyphic characteristics.

Race encompasses aspects such as color, nationality, citizenship, and ethnic or national origins. Another definition posits that race classifies different groups of humans based on genetic and physical attributes, with a unique combination of physical traits resulting from inheritance.

In 1921, Bradley identified three racial categories: White (both Bearded and Beardless), Negroes (with Straight and Woolly Hair), and Intermediates (Mulattoes). Ottenberg was the first scientist to attempt racial classification using the ABO blood group system.

Commonly recognized racial groups include Caucasian, Mongoloid, Negroid, Australoid, and Amerindian. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752 – 1840) categorized the Caucasian race to include Europeans, Middle Easterners, and South Asians; the Mongolian or yellow race to encompass all East Asians; the Malayan or brown race to include Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders; the Ethiopian or black race to cover all sub-Saharan Africans; and the American or red race.

In 1951, Ashley Montagu introduced a classification system that gained acceptance among numerous anthropologists. He identified three primary races: Negroid, Mongoloid, and Caucasoid. Additionally, he noted a further classification known as Australoid, which is considered archaic.

Caucasoid: Skin Color: Ranges from light reddish-white to olive brown, with some individuals exhibiting brown tones.

Mongoloid: Skin Color: Varies from light yellow to yellow-brown, with some presenting reddish-brown hues.

3. Negroid: Skin Color: Ranges from brown to brown-black, with some showing yellow-brown shades.

The Caucasian race, also referred to as Caucasoid or White race, encompasses the inhabitants of Europe, America (White), Australia (White), New Zealand (White), South Africa (White), West Asia, South Asia, and certain regions of Central Asia. An alternative perspective on geographical distribution includes parts of Europe, Western Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa.

According to contemporary classifications, the complexion within this group varies from white-skinned to dark brown, with skin tones ranging from light reddish-white to olive brown, and some individuals are classified as brown. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach was the pioneer in using the term Caucasian (White race) to describe Europeans, although this term was later expanded

to encompass Middle Easterners and South Asians. The term Caucasian is also Caucasian to represent the Europeans because a skull from the Caucasus Mountains of Russia represented the epitome of beauty.

Caucasoid populations are typically categorized into three subgroups: Aryan (Indo-European), Semitic (related to Semitic languages), and Hamitic (associated with Hamitic languages, including Berber, Cushitic, and Egyptian). These groups are further identified as Mediterranean, Atlantid, Nordic, East Baltic, Alpine, Dinaric, Turanid, Armenoid, Iranid, Indid, Arabid, and Hamitic.

The Negroid race, originally referred to as “Ethiopian” and less frequently as “Congoid,” saw its earliest documented mention in 1859. In 1982, Blumenbach identified “Negroid” and “Congoid” as synonymous terms, both signifying “black resemblance.” This group primarily inhabits regions of Africa, the Americas, New Guinea, and adjacent islands, including the Andaman Islands, the Malay Peninsula, eastern Sumatra, and the Philippine Islands. Additionally, Australians, Melanesians, and Negritoës are categorized as sub-races of the Negroid, despite residing outside the African continent.

Individuals within this race exhibit a height range from very short to tall, with skin tones varying from dark brown to black, and occasionally yellow-brown. Their hair is typically dark brown to black, characterized by a coarse texture and a curly, frizzy, or woolly appearance.

The Mongoloid race encompasses extensive regions of Asia, the Americas, and certain areas in Europe and Oceania.² This group has been referred to by various terms, including “Mongolian race,” “yellow,” “Asiatic,” and “Oriental.”

Mongoloids are classified into four primary subdivisions based on geographical distribution: 1. The Classical or Central Mongoloid, 2. The Arctic or Northern Mongoloid, also known as Eskimoids, 3. The Southern or Indo-Malayan Mongoloids, and 4. The American Indians.

Individuals of this race typically have medium to short stature, with skin tones ranging from yellow to yellow-brown, and occasionally reddish-brown, as well as shades from saffron to yellow-brown.

The Australoid race, also referred to as Australo-Melanesians, encompasses various indigenous groups from Melanesia and Australia, with some populations located in parts of Southeast Asia and South Asia. Some scholars categorize the Australoid as a branch of Archaic Caucasoid, noting that they exhibit certain primitive characteristics akin to those of Caucasoids, thus placing them within a subdivision of the Caucasoid racial stock. The Australoids are primarily divided into two significant categories: the Australian aborigines and the Pre-Dravidian or Veddoid groups.

In 1870, Huxley characterized Australoids as dolichocephalic, describing their hair as typically silky, black, and either wavy or curly. They are noted for their prominent jaws and prognathism, with skin tones resembling chocolate and dark brown or black irises.

² The Malayan or brown race, including Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders.

The Classification of Human Race in India

India serves as a historical crossroads for various races and tribes, resulting in a rich tapestry of ethnic diversity. The Indian population, exceeding one billion, comprises 4,693 communities, numerous endogamous groups, 325 spoken languages, and 25 scripts. Consequently, anthropologists have provided various classifications of the racial composition of the Indian populace. Notable classifications have been proposed by figures such as Sir Herbert Hope Risley, B.S. Guha, Giufrida-Ruggeri, A.C. Haddon, Eickstedt, and S.S. Sarkar.

Race classification as proposed by Herbert Hope Risley includes the following categories: 1. The Dravidian type. 2. The Indo-Aryan type. 3. The Mongoloid type.³ 4. The Aryo-Dravidian type. 5. The Mongolo-Dravidian type,⁴ which arose from the intermingling of Mongolian and Dravidian populations, with some Indo-Aryan influences. 6. The Scytho-Dravidian type. 7. The Turko-Iranian type.

Biraja Shankar Guha's classification identifies six primary racial types along with nine sub-types: 1. The Negrito. 2. The Proto-Australoid. 3. The Mongoloid, which is further divided into: a) Palaeo-Mongoloid, including i) Long-headed and ii) Broad-headed subcategories, and b) Tibeto-Mongoloid. 4. The Mediterranean type,⁵ which encompasses: a) Palaeo-Mediterranean,⁶ b) Mediterranean; c) Oriental. 5. The Western Brachycephals, which includes a) Alpinoid, b) Armenoid, and c) Dinaric subtypes. 6. The Nordic type.

Giufrida's classification includes: 1. Negritos. 2. Pre-Dravidian or Australoid types,⁷ represented by groups such as the Veddaic, Santhals, and Mundas. 3. Dravidians. 4. Tall dolichocephalics. 5. Dolichocephalic Aryans. 6. Brachycephalic Leucoderms.

A.C. Haddon categorized races into: 1. The Himalayan Zone; 2. The Northern Zone (Hindustan); 3. The Deccan region.

Eickstedt's classification identifies: 1. Weddid; 2. Melanid; 3. Indid; 4. Palaeo-Mongoloid.

S.S. Sarkar's classification includes: 1. Australoid; 2. Indo-Aryan; 4. Mundari speaking people;⁸ 5. Far Eastern; 6. Mongolian.

³ The Tharus, <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/antp08/chapter/classification-of-indian-population>.

⁴ This racial type emerged as a consequence of the intermixture of Mongolians and Dravidians, with some Indo-Aryan elements also present. <https://lotusarise.com/racial-groups-of-india-race-of-indian-upsc>.

⁵ Mediterranean (Dravidian). Ms. Gangaina Kameih, *Classification of Indian Population*, <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/antp08/chapter/classification-of-indian-population>.

⁶ Palaeo-Mediterranean, examples: The Dravidian speaking people of South India especially Tamil Brahmins of Madura, Nairs of Cochin, and Telugu Brahmins.

⁷ Veddaic Santhals, Mundas. <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/antp08/chapter/classification-of-indian-population>.

⁸ Sarkar describes them as people of stocky built and thick set with short stature, long

In general terms, the Indian population encompasses all four primary morphological types: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, Australoid, and Negrito. From a linguistic perspective, this population is classified into four principal language families: Indo-European, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, and Austro-Asiatic. It is believed that the Proto-Australoids, in conjunction with the Mediterranean race, played a significant role in the development of the Indus Valley Civilization. Skeletal remains attributed to them have been discovered in the archaeological sites of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa.⁹

Genetics:

Genetics refers to the study of genes, genetic variation, and heredity in living organisms, deriving its meaning from the term “origin.” This field emphasizes the concept of “trait inheritance,” which describes the patterns through which traits are transmitted from parents to their offspring over generations. Genetic information plays a crucial role in influencing our health, physical appearance, and even aspects of our personality. Additionally, it serves as a basis for classifying populations and understanding human typology, particularly in morphological terms.

India is home to a diverse array of human groups, each carrying a unique combination of genetic and cultural traits. The country encompasses nearly all primary ethnic groups, including Proto-Australoid (characterized by dark brown skin), Mediterranean (light brown skin), Mongoloid (yellow skin), and Negrito (black skin), along with various composite strains. It is also the origin of over 4,000 Mendelian populations, among which 3,700 endogamous groups are organized within the Hindu caste system, referred to as “Jatis” (birth).

II. THE RACE AND GENETICS OF SHAKYA BUDDHA

The Shakya clan, known in Pāli as Sakya and in Sanskrit as Śākya, is historically significant as it is associated with the Buddha, referred to as Shakyamuni (Sakka-muni in Pāli and Śākya-muni in Sanskrit). The term “śākya” translates to “capable” or “skilled.” During the late Iron Age, specifically in the 6th and 5th centuries BC, the Shakyas inhabited the Terai region, located south of the Himalayan foothills and north of the Indo-Gangetic Plain.

Ikshvaku, known in Pāli as Okkāka and in Sanskrit as Ikṣvāku, is a mythical king prominent in Indian religious traditions, particularly within Hindu and Jain narratives. Okkāka is recognized as a king and the forebear of both the Shakyas and the Koliyas. According to the Ambattha Sutta, Okkāka, who cherished his queen, decided to pass the throne to her son, leading to the exile of the elder princess from a different marriage. This lineage resided in

headed with lighter skin color than the Australoid. Their thick straight hair is nearly similar to those of Mongolian. They migrated from east and they appear to have some sort of affinities with the Mongoloid. (Ms. Gangaina Kameih, Classification of Indian Population, <https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/antp08/chapter/classification-of-indian-population>.)

⁹ Jagranjosh, Racial Groups of India, <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/racial-groups-of-india>.

the Himalayan foothills, and their descendants included Jayasena. Sīhahanu, his son, was the grandfather of the Buddha, thus establishing the Sākya tribe.

King Śuddhodana, referred to in Sanskrit and Pāli as Suddhodana, along with Queen Māyā, is believed to have resided in Kapilavastu, where their son, Prince Siddhartha Gautama, lived until he departed the palace at the age of 29. The name Kapilavatthu, meaning “tawny area,” reflects the region’s reddish sand. Śuddhodana translates to “he who cultivates pure rice.” Buddhist texts frequently depict Śuddhodana as a king, highlighting the opulent lifestyle of Prince Siddhartha. Consequently, the Buddha’s lineage is often considered to belong to the pure Indo-Aryan Kshatriya warrior caste, although contemporary scholars debate the exact origins of the Shakya clan.

Michael Witzel and Christopher I. Beckwith have traced the origins of the Shakya tribe to Central Asian nomads known as Scythians or Sakās (Śāka). In Sanskrit, they are referred to as Śāka, while in Iranian, they are called Saka. The term “Saka” specifically denotes the ancient nomads of the eastern steppe, whereas “Scythian” pertains to a related group inhabiting the western steppe. The cultures of the Scythians and Sakas began to develop on the Eurasian Steppe at the onset of the Iron Age in the early 1st millennium BC. The Sakas communicated in a language that belongs to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. The Indo-Iranian peoples, often referred to as Ārya or Aryans, derived their identity from this linguistic heritage.

The Iranian Saka are thought to have evolved from earlier cultures, including Andronovo, Sintashta, and Srubnaya, with secondary influences from the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC). The Iron Age also introduced genetic contributions from East Asia.¹⁰ Before this period, the maternal lineages in the Altai region were exclusively of West Eurasian origin. However, Iron Age specimens indicate a dramatic shift, with a 50% decrease in Western Eurasian lineages and a corresponding 50% increase in East Asian lineages.¹¹ The authors hypothesize that the proliferation of East Asian mitochondrial DNA lineages likely occurred during the Iron Age Scythian period, resulting in a complex mixture of East and West Eurasian ancestries.

According to Michael Witzel and Christopher I. Beckwith, the individuals associated with the Buddha were likely Saka soldiers who entered South Asia with Darius the Great’s army during the Achaemenid conquest of the Indus Valley. They suggest that the nomadic traditions of the Scytho-Saka played a significant role in shaping the Buddha’s concept of wandering asceticism.¹² Furthermore, the Śākyas may have had a tenuous connection to Iran.

Evidence possible:

The Shakyas’ name is believed to originate from the śaka or sāka tree,

¹⁰ Saka, <https://saka.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saka>.

¹¹ Demographics of Central Asia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Central_Asia (Demographics of central Asia).

¹² Shakya, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakya>.

which Bryan Levman has linked to either the teak or sāla tree. This association is tied to the Sanskrit word śākhā (शाखा), meaning “branch,” and highlights the Shakyas’ practice of worshipping the śaka or sāka tree.¹³ Furthermore, the name Shakyas is derived from the Sanskrit root śak (शक), which is also connected to the term Śaka (Sycthian).

Nevertheless, some researchers contend that the Shakyas were a native population of the north-east Gangetic plain, unrelated to the Iranian Sakas. They maintain that the Buddha was not of Scythian/Saka descent, pointing out that “Saka” (शक) and “Shakya” (शाक्य) are fundamentally different. Additionally, while the Khas people in Nepal are mentioned, there is insufficient evidence to confirm any link to the Shakya clan.

The research of Franciscus Kuiper, Manfred Mayrhofer, and Levman, the name Ikshvaku is believed to stem from an Austro-Asiatic Munda origin associated with the Munda tribe. F. E. Pargiter has linked the Ikshvakus to the Dravidian ethnic group. Edward Thompson suggests that they may have had some Mongolian lineage. Bryan Levman describes the Shakyas as having a “mixed origin” (*saṃkīrṇa-yonayah*), comprising both Indo-Aryan and Munda ancestry, with the former being a minority.¹⁴ The Atharvaveda and Brahmanas categorize the Ikshvakus as non-Aryan, setting them apart from the Aryans. Nevertheless, the Brahmana texts also assert that the Ikshvakus were descended from the Purus, who are identified as one of the Aryan tribes in the Rigveda. The Rigveda narrates that Mandhatri, an Ikshvaku leader, vanquished the Dasyus and called upon the Ashvin twins, the divine physicians of the Vedic faith.

In the corresponding analysis of the Indian population’s classification, Sir Herbert Hope Risley discovered the Aryo-Dravidian group, which is characterized by the integration of Aryan and Dravidian ancestries. This group is primarily located in regions like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. Additionally, the Mongolo-Dravidian group is formed through the intermingling of Mongoloid and Dravidian elements, along with some Indo-Aryan influences. This population is predominantly found in West Bengal and Orissa, particularly among the Brahmins and Kayastha. It is crucial to demonstrate the diversity and racial interconnections within the Shakya clan.

According to Bryan Geoffrey Levman, the eastern ethnic groups faced disdain from the Aryans who migrated from the northwest, viewing them as inferior. The core of the Aryan homeland, referred to as Āryāvarta, meaning “the abode of the noble ones,” was located to the west of the confluence of the Yamuna and Ganges rivers. The Buddha, on the other hand, was part of the Sakyas, an ethnic group from the eastern sub-Himalayan region. Furthermore, the Vaidehas, Māgadhis, Licchavikas, and Mallakas, who lived near the Shakyas, were also categorized as non-Aryan compared to the noble Aryans who had immigrated from Indo-European territories.

¹³ E. J. Thomas says: The “Shak” is the Shal tree (*Shorea Robusta*), not the teak.

¹⁴ Shakya, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakya>.

The Shakya ethnic group can be understood as having a considerable percentage of elements from various major races, particularly as follows:

Shakya Buddha is identified as Mongoloid. In the 5th century BCE, the Shakya community was situated on the outskirts, both geographically and culturally, of the eastern Indian subcontinent. This region experienced the influx of Sino-Tibetan or Tibet-Burma peoples in the early centuries. The Tharu people from the Tarai region of India and Nepal claim to be descendants of the Shakya. Moreover, a significant number of Newars in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal bear the surname Shakya and also assert their heritage from the Shakya clan. The present-day homeland of the Tharu aligns with the historical locations of Kapilavastu and Koliya, which are now known as Lumbini and Devadaha in Nepal. Both the Tharu and Newar groups are recognized as having originally belonged to the Sino-Tibetan peoples.

Shakya Buddha is identified as Dravidian, Austroloid, and Negroid. Shakya Buddha is linked to a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, including Dravidian, Austroloid, and Negroid, particularly from the Munda tribal group. The ancient Pundras, an eastern tribe, were located in the sub-Himalayan foothills, just southeast of Bihar, where the Buddha lived and taught, and east of Jharkhand, the current region of the Mundas. The Buddha's teachings were predominantly focused on areas like Magadha. The Munda tribe is classified under Austro-Asian languages, and anthropologists categorize them as part of the Australoid race. Their migration from the east suggests some connections to Mongoloid traits, while they also exhibit relationships with Dravidian and Negroid characteristics. Additionally, it is believed that Shakya Buddha may have **Caucasian ancestry**.

Over time, artists have created iconic representations, particularly in the context of Gandharan and Central Asian Buddhism, which were significantly influenced by Hellenistic art, leading to a style known as Greco-Buddhist art. This artistic tradition subsequently impacted the development of East Asian Buddhist imagery, as well as the art of Southeast Asian Theravada Buddhism.

Anthropologists often categorize humans into races such as Caucasoid, Negroid, Mongoloid, and Australoid, based on their origins and the variations observed among these groups. However, it is important to note that there are no definitive boundaries, and intermediate types exist that exhibit a mixture of characteristics. Consequently, each race shares certain overlapping traits.

The Sakyas are noted for their "mixed origin" (*saṃkīrṇa-yonayah*), which implies a mixing of Aryan and indigenous ancestry. Brahmanical tradition regards the Sakyas as "non-Aryan" and assigns them to a lower caste. In his teachings within the Nikaya, the Buddha employs the term *Samaṇas* to describe his community, aiming to refute the flawed perspective that the Aryans constitute the most untainted of the White races. And rejected it, that the dilution of Aryan blood through intermarriage with lower castes contributed to the decline of their civilization.

The Buddha undoubtedly represented a cosmopolitan figure, shaped by a

diverse array of cultures and traditions. In the contemporary world, the concept of pure races is nonexistent. The intermingling of races has been occurring for centuries. While some groups may assert their racial purity, such claims are likely unfounded.

III. THE BUDDHA'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN RACE: PROMOTING UNITY AND INCLUSIVENESS

In 1920, Lothrop Stoddard categorized the majority of populations in the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia as “brown.” He designated “white” status exclusively to European peoples and their descendants, along with a select few groups located in regions adjacent to or across from southern Europe, including certain areas of Anatolia and parts of the Rif and Atlas mountains.

Scholars in Europe and America provided rationale and evidence to illustrate the perceived inferiority of non-Europeans. Arthur de Gobineau argued for the superiority of the White race, linking it to the ancient Indo-European culture, commonly known as “Aryan.” He and others contended that “the Negro” lacked genius and was incapable of civilization, suggesting that their savagery was an intrinsic and unalterable trait.¹⁵ Morton’s studies seemed to support the idea that Black individuals were less intelligent than their white counterparts.¹⁶ Furthermore, some characterized the Mongolian race as weak in both body and spirit, morally flawed, and deficient in virtue.

The idea of race is central to the phenomenon of racism, which posits that humans can be divided according to the superiority of one race over another. This belief has led to numerous tragic events, including slavery and genocide. From a societal viewpoint, individuals have persisted in believing that racial differences significantly impact their careers and their fate. The ideas of “superiority” and “inferiority” continue to exist among various racial and ethnic groups around the world.

3.1. Point of view of the scientist, anthropologist, and ethnologist on the Human race

From a scientific viewpoint, British anthropologist and ethnologist A. C. Haddon contended that the ideas of racial superiority and inferiority were unfounded.

There is the main point that typologists held several erroneous beliefs about the physical attributes of races. One of these was the assumption that racial traits were immutable across generations, implying that average measurements, such as height, would remain constant. Furthermore, there was a misguided belief that statistical averages could truly reflect the characteristics of vast populations, as the averaging process tended to obscure the significant variability present within those populations.

Additionally, both anthropologists and biologists categorize all human

¹⁵ Race human, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human/Scientific-classifications-of-race>.

¹⁶ Ibid., <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human/Scientific-classifications-of-race>.

racess as belonging to a single species, *Homo sapiens*. The genetic material shared among all races exceeds 99.99%, indicating that racial distinctions are primarily subjective. At the DNA level, there is no genetic foundation for the concept of race.

Human races can be categorized based on physical characteristics; however, these classifications do not imply any differences in mental or intellectual capabilities. The potential for cognitive and cultural development exists equally across all races. Therefore, distinctions among races should not be made based on cultural variations or intelligence levels. It is conceivable that one nation may exhibit a greater degree of racial diversity, while another may show less. National, religious, geographical, cultural, and linguistic affiliations are completely independent of race. There is no correlation between physical attributes and the languages and cultures that individuals possess.

The understanding of human diversity was based on the premise that physical differences among populations were a result of environmental factors. This perspective was prevalent during the Enlightenment, a movement that dominated the 18th century. Early Enlightenment authors often emphasized the importance of education and espoused liberal ideals about the potential of every individual.¹⁷

3.2. Point of view of Buddha on human race

The understanding of the caste system and the perspective of Buddha can be derived from texts such as the *Madhura Sutta* (84), *Assalayana Sutta* (93) of the *Majjhima Nikaya*, and the *Ambatttha Sutta* from the *Digha Nikaya*, among others.

Human classifications, including Mongoloid, Caucasoid, and Austroloid, as well as racial categories like White, Black, Yellow, Brown, and Red, do not reflect any inherent differences. Distinctions based on skin color, hair texture, head shape, or nose shape are merely social constructs and do not warrant the division of humanity into separate species. In terms of intelligence, all humans, along with other sentient beings, share the same fundamental nature.

The Caucasus stands as a symbol of extraordinary beauty and is deeply rooted in the ancient Indo-European culture, often termed “Aryan.” In Buddhist philosophy, however, the term “Aryan” is redefined to signify “Noble,” “Spiritual,” and “Moral,” thus portraying holy figures as those rich in moral integrity and wisdom. Individuals of pure White descent were seen as exemplary saints, while those categorized as Black were linked to professions such as butchers, fowlers, hunters, fishermen, dacoits, and executioners, which were associated with a harsh lifestyle. This demographic was typically regarded as belonging to the lower castes and was characterized by darker skin tones. Those who caused harm to others were often referred to as Black men or cruel beings.

Buddha reinterprets the notion of Brahman quality, as illustrated in Verse

¹⁷ Race human, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human/Building-the-myth-of-Black-inferiority>.

393 of the Dhammapada: “One is not a Brahmin by birth or family, but through austerity. He who embodies truth and Dhamma is pure; he is a true Brahmin.”

It is highlighted that there is no genetic homogeneity in social “race” groups—racial categorization, but not genetic ancestry. Nevertheless, certain genetic markers related to ancestry can aid in understanding health patterns among humans. Buddha challenges the idea of “trait inheritance” being absolute across generations, rejecting the notion that the view of Brahman is tied to permanent “superiority or inferiority.” The phrase “By birth one becomes an outcast, by birth one becomes a Brahmin” is transformed into “By deeds one becomes an outcast; by deeds one becomes a Brahmin.”

IV. CONCLUSION

The Negritos, Proto-Australoids, Mongoloids, and Caucasoids, often referred to as racial categories such as Black, Brown, Yellow, White, and Red skin peoples, are classified as distinct races despite their genetic similarities. There should be no boundaries between nations, ethnicities, races, and groups. We all share this planet with peafowl and humans.

In regions characterized by abundant sunlight, including sub-Saharan Africa, Southern India, Southeast Asia, and Australia, darker skin has evolved as a protective adaptation against high levels of UV radiation. Conversely, populations that migrated to areas with reduced UV exposure, such as Northern Europe and Siberia, have developed lighter skin throughout human evolution. The global variation in skin color highlights that ancestral influences are more closely related to geographical factors than to racial categories. Additionally, environmental conditions significantly contribute to the evolution of human traits.

The perspective of Buddha regarding humanity emphasizes compassion, mindfulness, and the interconnectedness of all beings. He teaches that understanding the nature of suffering and the importance of alleviating it can lead to a more harmonious existence for the human race. His philosophy promotes equal treatment of all individuals with kindness and wisdom.

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REALIZING PEACE AND HARMONY THROUGH A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE IN SOCIETY

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Abstract:

This article explores various Buddhist concepts that can be applied in conflict resolution and create peace and social harmony in Indonesia. Using a literature study approach, this study analyzes various Buddhist principles such as love (*Mettā*), compassion (*Karuṇā*), sympathy (*Muditā*), equanimity (*Upekkhā*), cause-effect (*Paticcasamuppada*), nonviolence (*Ahiṃsā*), wisdom (*Pañña*), ignorance (*Avijjā*), and attachment (*Upādāna*). These principles are explained in the context of social, political, and cultural conflicts that occur in Indonesia, such as interfaith conflicts in Poso, Ambon, and Tolikara, as well as ethnic conflicts in Sampit and conflicts in Yogyakarta in 2000. The results show that Buddhism offers a holistic and transformative approach to resolving conflict, emphasizing the importance of dialogue, empathy, and a deep understanding of the root of the problem. Applying these principles allows Indonesian society to create a more harmonious, fair, and peaceful environment. This article is expected to contribute to academic and practical discussions on peace and social harmony in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Tolerance, peace, social conflict, Buddhism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization marked by technological advancements, cultural exchanges, and trade, the world is increasingly connected in various aspects of life. But behind this progress, global challenges such as conflicts between countries, social injustice, political tensions, and environmental crises continue to threaten international stability and peace. Although global conflicts are a significant concern, Indonesia, as a country with many cultural, religious, and ethnic diversities, also faces similar challenges in maintaining

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social peace. Therefore, efforts to create peace and harmony at the national level are becoming increasingly urgent. In this context, Buddhism offers deep and practical insights for overcoming conflicts and promoting peace. This article explores Buddhist principles that can be used as a foundation for conflict resolution and creating social harmony in Indonesia.

Social harmony in Indonesia is not just an idealism but an essential need for the survival of the nation; conflicts that occur in various regions, both horizontal between community groups and vertical between society and the government, have caused deep suffering, threatened economic stability, and hindered the development of the nation. In the face of these challenges, an approach that understands each other is necessary to build a structured dialogue and create sustainable solutions. Buddhism, with its emphasis on wisdom, compassion, and causation, offers a variety of relevant teachings and ways of overcoming conflicts and promoting peace.

The Sutta that is an important cornerstone of the Buddha's teachings on peace and conflict resolution is the *Sutta Nipāta*, specifically in the *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta*, or the Sutta on love. This Sutta teaches the universal practice of love (*Mettā*), which is aimed not only at friends or family but also at all beings, regardless of boundaries. The Buddha's teachings emphasized the importance of developing compassion and understanding towards all parties, even those who may be perceived as enemies or hated. By applying these principles, conflict can be resolved through understanding and empathetic dialogue, not through violence or revenge.

Hatred is defined as a feeling of dislike or hostility emitted by one or more people with the desire to bring down or even destroy the object of hatred. Psychologically, hatred is often associated with negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, or hostility, but it is important to distinguish between hatred and ordinary dislike, as hatred tends to be more profound and potentially destructive. Hatred is one part of human feelings that cannot be separated¹. The Buddha once taught how to overcome hatred, the teachings are in the *Dhammapada*. *Dhammapada* is one of the most well-known texts in Buddhist literature, offering valuable insights into conflict resolution. In The *Dhammapada*, precisely in Chapter 1: (*Yamaka Vagga*), paired words, it is said:

“Na hi verena verāṇi, sammantī’dha kudācanarī;
Averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano.” (Dh. I. 5)²

It means “Hatred can never be overcome with hatred. Hatred can only be overcome with love. This is an eternal law.” This principle affirms that violence and hatred will only give birth to other violence and hatred that can be worse, while love and compassion are the keys to breaking the chains of violence and creating lasting peace.

This topic is important to discuss because social conflicts that occur in

¹ Fischer A., et al., (2018): 309 – 20.

² Dhammadhīro, (2018): 3.

Indonesia are often triggered by misunderstanding, prejudice, and injustice. Buddhism offers a flexible approach, not only focusing on the superficial resolution of conflicts but also directly on the root causes, such as ignorance (*Avijjā*) and attachment (*Upādāna*). By understanding and applying Buddhist principles, individuals and communities can develop wiser attitudes and foster morals and sympathy, which in turn can encourage social cooperation³. With a wiser mind, high morals, and a sense of sympathy, peace is created.

The concept of tolerance in the social context of Indonesia is also an important aspect that needs to be considered. Indonesia is known as a country with high religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Tolerance, in social, cultural, and religious contexts, refers to attitudes and actions that prohibit discrimination against different groups or groups in society. Tolerance is manifested in a life of mutual respect, not interfering with each other. Tolerance is not just walking alone without interfering with each other, but tolerance as an interfaith cooperation. In Buddhism, tolerance is reflected in the principle (*Upekkhā*) equanimity, which teaches to remain calm and balanced in the face of change, including conflicts. In addition to (*Upekkhā*), other principles can be related to (*Upekkhā*) so that this principle is stronger, namely (*Ahiṃsā*) nonviolence, which teaches not to hurt and injure other beings. All of these references are very relevant in the context of Indonesia, where diversity is often a trigger for conflict if not managed properly.

This article will discuss how the principles of Buddhism will affect people's lives, such as one of them is (*Brahmavihārā*) or the four noble qualities that if practiced, a person will get a happy, peaceful life, and can add insight and understanding that can create peace, the four noble qualities are (*Mettā*) love, (*Karuṇā*) compassion, (*Muditā*) sympathy, and (*Upekkhā*) equanimity⁴. In addition, there is also wisdom (*Pañña*) and cause and effect (*Paticcasamuppada*) that can be applied in the context of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Indonesia. In addition, this article will also explore how the concept of tolerance in Buddhism can be the foundation for creating a harmonious and harmonious society. As such, this article is expected to make a meaningful contribution to academic and practical discussions on conflict resolution and peace in Indonesia, as well as enrich our understanding of how Buddhism can be a source of inspiration and solutions to the social challenges we face today. Through a collaborative approach based on universal values, we can together create a more peaceful, just, and harmonious society.

II. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method with a literature study or literature review approach. Literature study is the process of searching, reading, understanding, and analyzing literature, research results, or studies related to the research to be conducted. This method is also called library research

³ Untung, S., et al., (2023): 134 – 45.

⁴ Dewi, M., et al., (2023): 94 - 103.

or literature study⁵. This approach was chosen because this research aims to explore and analyze Buddhist principles relevant to conflict resolution in politics, culture, and society for peacebuilding in Indonesia. Literature studies allow researchers to dig deeper into the topics discussed through analysis of various written sources, such as scientific journals, books, academic articles, and other related documents. Data is collected from sources such as scientific journals, books, academic articles, and relevant official documents. The data collection process involves searching through academic databases such as Google Scholar and the Garuda Portal, with keywords such as “Buddhist conflict resolution” and “social harmony in Buddhism.” Data analysis is carried out through theme identification, categorization, content analysis, synthesis, and interpretation. Key themes such as love (*Mettā*), compassion (*Karuṇā*), sympathy (*Muditā*), equanimity (*Upekkhā*), cause and effect (*Patīccasamuppāda*), and non-violence (*Ahimsā*) are identified and associated with the Indonesian social context.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Application of Buddhist Principles in Social Conflict Resolution in Indonesia

The Indonesian nation, as a country with a large diversity of cultures, religions, and ethnicities, often faces challenges in maintaining peace and social harmony. Social conflicts that occur in various regions, both horizontally between community groups and vertically between the community and the government, are often caused by misunderstanding, prejudice, confusion, and injustice. In this regard, Buddhism offers principles that can be the foundation for resolving conflicts and creating peace in society. The main principles in Buddhism that can be used to promote peace and harmony are (*Avijjā*) ignorance, (*Upādāna*) attachment, then there is also (*Brahmavihārā*),⁶ which consists of (*Mettā*) love, (*Karuṇā*) compassion, (*Muditā*) sympathy, (*Upekkhā*) equanimity, then there is (*Patīccasamuppāda*) cause-and-effect, (*Ahimsā*) nonviolence, and (*Pañña*) wisdom. Then the sutta that is relevant in overcoming social conflicts to create peace and harmony in society is *the Karaniya Metta Sutta*.

3.1. *Karaniya Metta Sutta* and *Mettā*

Karaniya Metta Sutta teaches that love must be directed to all beings, regardless of limitations. This principle emphasizes the importance of developing compassion and understanding towards all parties, even towards those who may be perceived as enemies, to create a harmonious life. In the Indonesian context, where religious or ethnic differences often trigger conflicts, the principle of *Mettā* can be the basis for building an understanding and empathetic dialogue so that a fair and peaceful atmosphere will be created⁷. A

⁵ Muskananfol (2022): 21 - 26.

⁶ Krishnanda (2020): 95.

⁷ Tsabitah, Saputra, and Saputra (2024):4.

real example of the application of the principle *Mettā* can be seen in efforts to resolve the conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi, which occurred between Muslim and Christian groups in the early 2000s. This conflict caused heavy casualties and material damage. However, by taking a dialogue approach involving religious leaders from both sides, the conflict was successfully suppressed. These religious leaders taught the importance of love and understanding for different parties, which ultimately helped create peace in the area⁸.

3.1.1. *Karuṇā*

Compassion or (*Karuṇā*) also plays an important role in resolving conflicts in society, because this principle teaches us to feel the suffering of others and suppress the selfish nature that exists, thus giving rise to efforts to alleviate such suffering. The use of *Karuṇā* in social conflict can help to reduce hatred and hostility from within individuals and groups, because those involved in the conflict will be better able to understand the suffering or problems experienced by the other side, so that they can have a dialogue that ends in peace⁹. Examples of application of the principle *Karuṇā* can be seen in efforts to resolve the conflict in Ambon, Maluku, which occurred between Muslim and Christian groups in the late 1990s. The conflict in Ambon, Maluku, which broke out between Muslim and Christian groups in the late 1990s, began in January 1999 after a minor skirmish between public transport drivers and local youths. These tensions quickly escalated into major riots, killing thousands of people and displacing tens of thousands. The conflict was exacerbated by the arrival of militia groups such as Laskar Jihad and Christian Forces from outside Maluku, who carried weapons and escalated violence. However, thanks to an approach involving religious leaders and local communities, the conflict was successfully mitigated through the Malino II Agreement in February 2002¹⁰. These religious figures taught the importance of compassion and understanding towards different parties, which ultimately helped create peace in society.

3.1.2. *Muditā*

Sympathy (*Muditā*) is one of the four *Brahmavihāra* in Buddhism. *Muditā* is defined as the ability to feel happiness over the happiness of others without envy or jealousy. Philosophically, *Muditā* describes the understanding that all living beings are interconnected. By understanding this, we are invited to appreciate and celebrate the kindness and achievements of others, rather than feeling envious or jealous, this attitude helps in creating better relationships and encouraging a more peaceful and harmonious life¹¹, in the practice of daily life *Muditā* teaches individuals to suppress selfishness and develop a sincere sense of empathy, to create a more harmonious and cooperative social dynamic. This value also promotes the development of emotional balance, reducing internal

⁸ Wijaya, (2016): 1 – 73.

⁹ Wulandari, and Purnomo (2021): 76 – 85.

¹⁰ Indrawan, and Putri (2022): 12 – 26.

¹¹ Lo, (2022): 51 – 65.

conflicts such as envy¹², and strengthening community bonds through mutual recognition and celebration of the good.

Another example of the conflict that has occurred in Indonesia is the Sampit Conflict that occurred in 2001, precisely in Central Kalimantan, which involved the Dayak (native) and Madura (migrants) tribes. These conflicts are caused by long-simmering socio-economic tensions, including the scramble for natural resources, cultural differences, and injustice in land distribution, as well as the Madurese ethnic group is known as hardworking people who are considered extremely dominating the economic sector, while the Dayak ethnic group who are (indigenous) feel marginalized from their ancestral land. In February 2001, these tensions exploded into mass violence after a murder incident involving both groups. This conflict resulted in hundreds of casualties, especially from the Madurese ethnicity, and tens of thousands of refugees. This violence is also characterized by extreme actions, such as beheadings, which cause deep trauma for both parties. The Sampit conflict highlights the importance of addressing social inequalities, strengthening intercultural dialogue, and building inclusive conflict resolution to prevent similar violence in the future. *Muditā* values can play an important role in resolving conflicts like these, as the practice of *Muditā* encourages individuals to feel happiness over the success and well-being of other groups, reducing prejudice and interethnic hatred. Socially, *Muditā* can be the basis for building dialogue and improving relationships, by teaching respect for differences and recognition of each group's contribution. From a Buddhist perspective, the practice of *Muditā* can help create the balance of feelings and awareness necessary to address the root causes of conflict, such as injustice and unbelief. In conflict resolution theory, this approach is in line with the principles of conflict transformation, which emphasize increased awareness, changing attitudes, and inter-party relationships as the key to sustainable peace¹³. Thus, *Muditā* is not only a tool to ease tensions, but also to build a more just and harmonious society.

3.1.3. *Upekkhā*

Equanimity or *Upekkhā* is defined as the ability to maintain calm and equanimity in the face of situations of joy and sorrow, praise and insult, profit and loss, and uncertain situations. *Upekkhā* is not an attitude of indifference to a situation, but a wise attitude arising from a deep understanding of impermanence (*anicca*) and selflessness (*anattā*)¹⁴. In everyday life, *Upekkhā* helps individuals to be able to respond to situations calmly, without being provoked by negative emotions such as anger, greed, or fear. In the context of conflict, *Upekkhā* allows one to look at the situation objectively, avoid rash actions, and promote harmony through the development of empathy, patience, and understanding towards the other party. Thus, *Upekkhā* not only becomes a tool for changing one's personality but also becomes the foundation

¹² Praptiyono, and Supriyanta, (2023): 50 – 58.

¹³ Nuraini, (2022): 20 – 43.

¹⁴ Gunasekare, and Dissanayake, (2015): 65 – 68.

for building social harmony.

One example of the conflict that occurred in Indonesia due to intolerance was the Tolikara Riot in Papua on July 17, 2015. This conflict was triggered by the rejection of a group of Christians against the implementation of Eid prayers by the Muslim community in a field adjacent to the location of a Christian religious event. This tension led to riots, burning several stalls and mosques, and causing injuries. These conflicts reflect an inability to respect differences in beliefs and a lack of dialogue between groups, which ultimately exacerbates social polarization in society.

Upekkhā values can play an important role in resolving conflicts such as the Tolikara Riots. *Upekkhā* teaches them not to be easily provoked by negative emotions such as anger or fear, but rather to respond to situations wisely and with a clear mind. For example, Christians and Muslims in Tolikara can train themselves to understand that differences in beliefs are not a threat, but rather part of diversity that must be respected. Socially, *Upekkhā* itself encourages the creation of an inclusive dialogue space, where each group can express its interests without prejudice or hostility. By applying this principle of equanimity, communities can work together to build fair and sustainable conflict resolution mechanisms, such as establishing interfaith forums or multicultural education programs. Thus, *Upekkhā* not only helps to defuse tensions but also creates the foundation for a long-term peace based on mutual respect and appreciation for differences.

3.1.4. Patīccasamuppāda

Patīccasamuppāda or the law of cause and effect is one of the core concepts in Buddhism that explains that all things in this world arise and exist due to interrelated conditions and causes then According to¹⁵ Nothing arises on its own, everything is connected in the law of cause and effect. In everyday life, this understanding teaches them to see that their actions, thoughts, and words are always related, with the existence of lust then comes desire, as explained in. The application of *Patīccasamuppāda* in conflict emphasizes the importance of recognizing that conflicts do not arise without cause, but are the result of various interrelated factors, such as injustice, misunderstanding, or social imbalance. By understanding this, parties to the conflict can develop empathy, acknowledge each other's role in creating tension, and work together to break the cycle of causes of conflict. Thus, *Patīccasamuppāda* becomes the foundation for building solutions that are inclusive and sustainable.

One of the major conflicts in Indonesia, triggered by intolerance and social injustice, was the May 1998 Riots. The riots occurred from May 13 to 15, resulting from the economic and political crisis, where tensions between ethnic Chinese and indigenous groups peaked in almost the entire Jakarta area. The riots were marked by looting, arson, and sexual violence against

¹⁵ Sapardi, (2019): 219 – 29.

ethnic Chinese women, as well as killing hundreds of people¹⁶. These conflicts reflect social imbalances, racial prejudices, and the government's inability to ease tensions between groups¹⁷, which ultimately exacerbates the rejection and trauma of many people.

The meaning contained in *Patīccasamuppāda* can also help in resolving conflicts such as the May 1998 Riots. Individually, this concept teaches that everyone is responsible for the actions they commit and that violence and hatred do not arise in isolation, but rather are the result of the social, economic, and political conditions that cause such conflicts. For example, society can realize that prejudice against ethnic Chinese is not an isolated problem, but rather a result of a long history of injustice and economic inequality. Socially, *Patīccasamuppāda* encourages an integrated approach to conflict resolution, such as repairing incompatible economic systems, improving multicultural education, and creating spaces for dialogue between groups, to eliminate all causes of such conflicts. By understanding that all parties are interconnected and dependent on each other, society can work together to build a more equitable and calculated system, thus preventing the recurrence of similar conflicts in the future. In doing so, *Patīccasamuppāda* not only helps to defuse tensions but also creates the foundation for sustainable peace through a deep understanding of common cause and effect and responsibility.

3.1.5. *Ahiṃsā*

Ahiṃsā, or nonviolence, is a fundamental teaching in Buddhism that emphasizes the avoidance of all forms of violence, whether physical, verbal, or mental, against all living beings. This concept is rooted in the view that all living beings want to live happily and that violence only creates continued suffering for both the perpetrator and the victim. In the practice of daily life, *Ahiṃsā* teaches individuals to develop feelings of love (*Mettā*), compassion (*Karuṇā*), and patience (*Khanti*) in the face of conflict or injustice. In conflict resolution, *Ahiṃsā* encourages a dialogical and reconciliatory approach, in which disputing parties are invited to accept differences without using violence or other harmful things, but through understanding, empathy, and compromise. This principle is in line with the Buddhist teachings contained in the Dhammapada, Verse 129, which reads,

*"Sabbe tasanti danḍassa,
Sabbe bhāyanti maccuno;
Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā,
Na haneyya na ghātaye."* (Dh. V. 129)

It means "All creatures are afraid of violence, all creatures are afraid of death. Aware of this, one should not kill or cause murder." Then it continues to Dhammapada, Verse 130, which reads,

¹⁶ Hutahaeon, (2014): 27 – 33.

¹⁷ Ales, Jamaludin, and Simanjorang, (2024): 131 – 34.

*"Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa,
Sabbesaṃ jīvitaṃ piyaṃ;
Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā,
Na haneyya na ghātaye."* (Dh. V. 130)¹⁸

It means "All beings want happiness, and all beings are afraid of suffering. Aware of this, one should not hurt or cause others to hurt." Thus, *Ahiṃsā* can be the ethical foundation for creating sustainable peace.

One example of a prolonged conflict in Indonesia involving intolerance and other violence is the Aceh Conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian government, which lasted from 1976 to 2005. This conflict was triggered by demands for independence from the GAM, which felt that Aceh's natural resources continued to be exploited by the Indonesian government at the time without providing fair welfare for the local community¹⁹, and another factor that caused this conflict to occur was that the Acehnese people moved because they felt that their position was threatened economically and politically because of the centralistic policies of the Indonesian Government²⁰. This conflict killed thousands of people, resulted in mass displacement, and left deep trauma for the people of Aceh. Although these conflicts have a strong political dimension, tensions are also exacerbated by identity sentiments and social injustices.

Ahiṃsā or nonviolence can play an important role in resolving conflicts such as the one that occurred in Aceh last year. *Ahiṃsā* itself contains teachings to train every action related to violence, refrain from violence, and develop an attitude of love and compassion towards all beings. For example, GAM members and government forces can train themselves to see that violence will only prolong the conflict and add to the suffering, so they can pave the way for conflict resolution to achieve the goal of peace. Socially, *Ahiṃsā* encourages the creation of an unbiased dialogue space, where all parties can express their opinions without the threat of violence. This was reflected in the 2005 Helsinki Agreement, which ended the conflict through peaceful negotiations and granted special autonomy to Aceh. By applying these principles, the people of Aceh can create a safe environment, overcome past traumas, and create a more harmonious future. compassion, and causation

3.1.6. Pañña

Pañña, or wisdom, is one of the three main practices (in addition to the Precepts and Samadhi) in Buddhism, which refers to a deep understanding of reality, including the law of karma, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*), and selflessness (*Anatta*). *Pañña* also consists of the correct sense (*sammā-ditthi*) and right mind (*sammā-sankappa*), the true meaning in question is the ability to understand the Buddha's teachings such as the four

¹⁸ *Dhammapada* (2019): 52.

¹⁹ Hertiana, and Amboro, (2017): 44 – 60.

²⁰ Jayanti, (2013): 49 – 70.

noble truths (*Cattari Ariya Saccani*) which discusses suffering, three general patterns (*Tilakkhaṇa*) which consist of (anicca), (*Dukkha*), and (*Anatta*)²¹ which of course is still related to (*Paticcasamuppāda*) but in this section, we will discuss more about *Pañña*.

In addition to teaching to understand, *Pañña* jugs allow a person to see things as they are without being affected by feelings. In everyday life, *Pañña* helps individuals to make informed decisions, avoid adverse actions, and respond to a problem with a clear mind. In the context of conflict, *Pañña* plays an important role when certain parties in conflict can see the root of the problem objectively, understand the opponent, and make a fair decision. By developing wisdom, individuals and groups can overcome hatred, reduce prejudice, and create space for reconciliation and peace.

One of the conflicts that occurred in Indonesia due to intolerance was the Interreligious Conflict in Tanjung Balai, North Sumatra, on July 29, 2016. The conflict was sparked by tensions between the Muslim and Buddhist communities after a Muslim citizen complained about the volume of loudspeakers in a monastery. These tensions led to mass riots, in which several monasteries and other places of worship were vandalized, and dozens of people were arrested²². These conflicts reflect society's inability to manage differences in beliefs and lack of dialogue between groups, which ultimately exacerbates social polarization. The teachings of *Pañña* can make a significant contribution to resolving conflicts such as the one that occurred in Tanjung Balai²³. *Pañña* teaches individuals and groups to view conflict not as a personal problem, but as the result of ignorance (*Avijjā*) and an inability to understand the perspective of others. For example, Muslims and Buddhists can train themselves to understand that the loudspeaker volume problem and not a religious problem, but rather just the inability of one side to tolerate, which causes the conflict to arise. Socially, *Pañña* encourages the creation of conflict resolution mechanisms based on dialogue and mutual understanding. For example, communities can form interfaith forums that aim to discuss sensitive issues openly and find solutions that are fair to all parties. By developing wisdom, society can reduce accusations, avoid violence, seek solutions through dialogue, and create a harmonious environment where differences are respected and managed wisely. In doing so, *Pañña* not only helped defuse conflicts but also built the foundations for long-term peace based on a deep understanding of the nature of reality and cause and effect.

3.1.7. *Avijjā*

Avijjā, or ignorance, is one of the main concepts in Buddhism that refers to the inability to see reality as it is, specifically in understanding the Four Noble Truths (*Cattari Ariya Saccani*) and the law of cause and effect (*Paticcasamuppāda*). *Avijjā* is considered to be the root of all forms of

²¹ Arifin, (2022): 95 – 102.

²² Hartana, (2017): 55 – 63.

²³ Ismiati, and Fedryansyah, (2017): 1 – 14.

defilement (*kilesa*) and suffering (*dukkha*) because this ignorance causes one to get caught in a cycle of greed, hatred, and malice²⁴. In everyday life, *Avijjā* can manifest as prejudice, misunderstanding, and inability to understand the causes and consequences of a bad action. In terms of conflict, *Avijjā* is often one of the main causes of a conflict, because the parties to the conflict are unable to see the other person's point of view or understand the real root of the problem. By eliminating *Avijjā* through the development and deep understanding of wisdom (*paññā*) and awareness (*sati*), individuals can learn to respond to conflicts more wisely, reduce prejudice, and seek equitable solutions. As explained in *Samyutta Nikaya*, precisely in the *Vibhanga Sutta*, "With the advent of *Avijjā*, mental formations (*sankhara*) also appeared; with the disappearance of *Avijjā*, the disappearance of mental formations (SN 12.2).²⁵ Thus, overcoming ignorance is the way to eliminate conflict and suffering.

One of the conflicts that occurred due to intolerance and ignorance was the Cikeusik Conflict in Banten on February 6, 2011. Before the incident, there had been an increase in negative propaganda and pressure on the Ahmadiyya community, which was perceived as deviating from mainstream Islamic teachings. On the day of the incident, a mob fueled by incitement and ignorance of the Ahmadiyya faith attacked their homes and places of worship in Umbulan Village, Cikeusik, leaving three people dead and several others injured. This conflict was triggered by ignorance and prejudice against the Ahmadiyya faith, which was considered to deviate from mainstream Islamic teachings. The police, who were present at the location, were considered incapable of effectively preventing violence²⁶. This conflict reflects how ignorance and prejudice can trigger violence and damage the peace of the community's environment.

Avijjā principles can make a significant contribution in resolving conflicts, such as in the Cikeusik Conflict. Overcoming *Avijjā* means developing awareness to understand that prejudice and hatred against Ahmadiyya groups stem from ignorance of their beliefs and also suppress pride and selfish feelings²⁷. By studying and understanding differences in beliefs objectively, individuals can reduce prejudice and foster an attitude of tolerance. Socially, overcoming *Avijjā* requires efforts to improve multicultural education and interreligious dialogue, so that people can understand that differences in beliefs are not a threat, but rather a part of diversity that must be respected²⁸. In the Buddhist context, this is in harmony with the inner teachings (*Sammāditṭhi Sutta*), which explains that true wisdom arises when one understands the true nature of suffering and its causes. By applying these principles, the Cikeusik community can build sustainable reconciliation and peace, address past traumas, and create

²⁴ Baudh, (2024): 1 – 4.

²⁵ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2009): (SN 12.2).

²⁶ Panggabean, and Ali-Fauzi (2014): 85 – 93.

²⁷ Pratiwi and Martono, (2021): 173 – 83.

²⁸ Hidayat, (2019): 13.

a more harmonious environment for all groups. Thus, overcoming *Avijjā* not only helps to ease tensions but also creates a foundation for sustainable peace through a deep understanding of reality and interdependence.

3.1.8. *Upādāna*

Upādāna, or attachment, is one of the concepts in Buddhism that refers to the mental tendency to cling to a view, desire, material object, or self-identity and not wanting to let go. This attachment is considered to be one of the main factors that prolong the cycle of suffering (*saṃsāra*) because it creates emotional dependence and inner conflict²⁹. This concept is closely related to *anicca* (impermanence), which teaches that everything is temporary and constantly changing³⁰. By being aware of *anicca*, individuals can release attachment to temporary things such as views, desires, material objects, or self-identity. In the case of conflict, attachment is essentially impermanent, often igniting divisions and hindering peaceful resolutions. By eroding the *Upādāna* through development (*sati*) and wisdom (*paññā*), as well as a deep understanding of *anicca*, individuals can learn to let go of narrow views and open themselves to cooperation and promote peace. As explained in *Majjhima Nikāya* 11, precisely in (*Cūḷasihanāda Sutta*), “When he is not attached, he is not agitated. When he is not agitated, he attains Nibbana by himself.” (MN 11)³¹ Thus, overcoming *Upādāna* and understanding *anicca* is the key to creating harmony and peace.

One example of the conflict that occurs due to attachment to group identity is the Interreligious Conflict in Yogyakarta in 2000. The conflict has been sparked by tensions between Muslim and Christian groups in several areas of Yogyakarta, involving attacks on places of worship and religious properties. This conflict stems from the dissatisfaction of some community groups with religious activities that are considered too disruptive or provocative. For example, the construction of churches in Muslim-majority areas is often a source of tension, especially if it is not considered to go through a transparent licensing process or involve local community consensus. In 2000, these tensions escalated into violence, including church burnings and attacks on Christians. These conflicts are exacerbated by attachment to religious identities and intergroup prejudices, leading to an escalation of violence and polarization of society. The social impact is significant, including the breakdown of interfaith relations and collective trauma that affects social harmony in the area³². *Upādāna* and *anicca* values can make an important contribution to resolving conflicts, such as in Yogyakarta. Individually, overcoming *Upādāna* means letting go of attachment to rigid religious identity and realizing that everything, including beliefs and identities, is temporary (*anicca*). For example, Muslims and Christians can train themselves to understand that attachment to their

²⁹ Lovejoy, (1898): 126 – 36.

³⁰ Manggala, Nyanasuryanadi, and Suherman, (2023): 3128 - 3132.

³¹ *Majjhima Nikāya* (2013): 256 (M. I. 11).

³² Hasan, (2018): 387 – 400.

own beliefs does not need to get in the way of respect for the beliefs of others. By understanding *anicca*, they can realize that conflicts and tensions are also temporary and can be resolved through dialogue. Socially, eroding the *Upādāna* and applying an understanding of *anicca* can be used to build interfaith dialogue and educational programs that emphasize the values of tolerance and pluralism. In the Buddhist context, this is in line with the teachings in *Samyutta Nikaya*, the Buddha said, "If a mendicant has given up greed for the feeling element. Perception element. Choices element. Consciousness element, the support is cut off, and there is no foundation for consciousness. Since that consciousness does not become established and does not grow, with no power to regenerate, it is freed." (SN 22.53)³³ which explains that suffering arises due to attachment to the five groups of elements of life (*khandha*) that are impermanent. By applying these principles, the people of Yogyakarta can build harmonious relationships and a peaceful future, overcome past traumas, and create a more harmonious environment for all groups. Thus, letting go of *Upādāna* and understanding *anicca* not only helps to defuse tensions but also creates a foundation for sustainable peace through a deep understanding of impermanence and freedom from attachment.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis that has been carried out above, it can be concluded that the Buddha's teachings provide some principles that are very relevant in resolving conflicts and creating peace and social harmony in Indonesia, as well as providing more ethical solutions. By applying (*Brahmavihārā*), which are the four noble qualities consisting of love (*Mettā*), compassion (*Karunā*), sympathy (*Muditā*), and equanimity (*Upekkhā*), they can think rationally and find the best solution to the conflicts that occur in societies with various religions. Not only can (*Brahmavihārā*) provide solutions to conflicts, but with a deep understanding of the concepts of cause and effect (*Patīccasamuppāda*), nonviolence (*Ahiṃsā*), wisdom (*Pañña*), ignorance (*Avijjā*), and attachment (*Upādāna*) can be used as a strong foundation for overcoming various forms of conflict, both horizontal between community groups and vertical between society and government.

The application of the above principles to the Indonesian nation has proven effective in several cases, such as the resolution of conflicts in Poso, Ambon, and Tolikara, through dialogue that is mutually understanding, understanding, and accompanied by wisdom, so that the community can reduce accusations, eliminate hatred, and build a just and sustainable solution. Additionally, principles such as *Patīccasamuppāda* and *Ahiṃsā* teach the importance of understanding the root of the problem and avoiding violence, while *Upekkhā* and *Pañña* encourage equanimity and wise decision-making.

In conclusion, Buddhism is not only a source of spiritual inspiration but also a practical solution to Indonesia's social challenges. By applying these principles, Indonesian society can create a more harmonious, fair, and peaceful

³³ *Samyutta Nikāya* (2009): 1592 - 1593 (SN 22.53).

environment where differences are respected and managed wisely. Through a collaborative approach based on universal values, we can together build a better future for the entire nation.

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A VIABLE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO RECONCILIATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING

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Abstract:

The world today is subjected to turmoil due to various conflicts and wars caused by socio-political complexity found in the present world. It is a well-known fact that most people have lost their human rights throughout the world due to such issues. Therefore, the phenomenon of reconciliation, which has become a trending principle in the contemporary world, is defined as the act of restoring dignity to all parties, addressing past mistakes, promoting forgiveness, to rebuilding relationships. In this paper, the focus is mainly on the utility of Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and mindful healing for reconciliation. Secondly, it is expected to examine how far forgiveness and mindful healing are required for reconciliation and the applicability of Buddhist teachings in the current social scenario. The methodology used in this research was the textual method based on qualitative data, which was collected by referring to primary and secondary sources. The problem of this research is how Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and mindful healing can be applied in establishing reconciliation. Buddhism, being a humanistic religion, always appreciates the dignity of humanity as well as gives value to human life. According to Buddhist teachings, all are equal in front of the law and should have equal rights. Similarly, Buddhism emphasizes that no one should discriminate due to any circumstance, and therefore peace, harmony, unity, co-existence, and reconciliation are considered in Buddhism as fundamental ethical concepts that lead to ensuring human dignity. Buddhist theory of forgiveness and mindful healing is exemplified from the recitation of offences (*āpattidesanā*), oneness of Mankind, loving kindness, and noble friendship as elaborated in Sutta and Vinaya. The Discourses, such as *Assalāyana*, *Vāseṭṭha*, *Vasala*, *Kaṇṇakatthala*, and *Aggañña*, state the unity of mankind and their utility to

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reconciliation, which can be gained through forgiveness and mindful healing.

Keywords: *Reconciliation, forgiveness, mindful healing, Buddhist teachings, equality.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of reconciliation has been a pivotal point discussed throughout the world in the present context. According to scholars, the concept is defined in diverse ways as follows. Tutu D. defines reconciliation as the act of restoring dignity to all parties, addressing past wrongs, and promoting forgiveness to rebuild relationships.¹ Mohommed, M. states that healing is an integral component of reconciliation, where both psychological and emotional wounds of all parties must be addressed to move forward.² Bar-Tal & Bennink mention that the nature of reconciliation requires a transformation of relationships, which entails acknowledging past suffering and working towards mutual recognition and understanding.³ According to Clark, reconciliation processes in post-conflict societies seek to address the legacies of violence by facilitating social reintegration and addressing the grievances of all sides.⁴ Galtung thinks that reconciliation means coming to terms with the past, understanding the reality of the present, and creating a future of peaceful coexistence.⁵ The definition of Bush and Folger is a little bit different from others. They point out that reconciliation involves not only a resolution of the conflict but a transformation of relationships that foster mutual respect and recognition.⁶ Moreover, Zehr opines that reconciliation requires a willingness to face the harm done, take responsibility, and seek a path of healing that includes all parties.⁷ At present, for varied reasons, this concept has turned out to be one of the major concepts that draws attention among the people of the world. Therefore, it is of much importance to examine this question from the Buddhist perspective.

II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Reconciliation, as one of the most valuable concepts that is sought by the world today, is a universal concept essentially required in the modern burning

¹ Tutu, D. (1999). No future without forgiveness. Doubleday. (p. 123)

² Mohammed, M. (2010). The role of healing in post-conflict reconciliation. In C. K. Anugwom & S. E. Juma (Eds.), Conflict management and peace-building (pp. 55-72). Cambridge Scholars.

³ Bar-Tal, D., & Bennink, G. H. (2004). The nature of reconciliation in divided societies. Blackwell Publishing. (p. 6)

⁴ Clark, P. (2010). The dynamics of transitional justice: International perspectives. Palgrave Macmillan. (p. 89)

⁵ Galtung, J. (1996). Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization. Sage Publications. (p. 173)

⁶ Bush, R. A. B., & Folger, J. P. (1994). The promise of mediation: Responding to conflict through empowerment and recognition. Jossey-Bass. (p. 57)

⁷ Zehr, H. (2002). The little book of restorative justice. Good Books. (p. 45)

world. Therefore, the problem of this research is how Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and mindful healing can be applied in establishing reconciliation.

2.1. Objectives of the research

The general objective of this research is to examine the utility of Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and mindful healing for reconciliation. Similarly, the specific objectives are to identify Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and to examine how far mindful healing is required for reconciliation. Further, it is expected to discuss the applicability of Buddhist teachings on forgiveness and mindful healing for the current social scenario.

2.2. Methodology

The methodology used in this research is the textual method by referring to primary and secondary sources while adapting the qualitative research method.

III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

3.1. Social inequality prevailed in contemporary indian society

At the very beginning, the word Varna, which means complexion, was used for the caste system. Later, it gradually developed from time to time till the creation theory. According to the Rig Veda, Brahma created the society from four parts of his body. Brahmins from the mouth, Kshatriyas from the arms, Vaisyas from the thighs, and the Sudras from the feet.⁸ In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna says that it was he who created the four varnas in respect of Qualities and deeds. The main purpose of this theory of creation is to maintain social inequality while showing the supremacy of the Brahmin caste. The way Brahmins tried to maintain social inequality, which is harmful to maintaining peace and harmony, can be illustrated through the place given to the Sudra caste through Brahmanic teachings. Sudras, being considered the lowest social group, were denied many of the privileges enjoyed by the so-called higher castes. A person born to a particular caste had to live within the limits imposed on that caste by the Brahman law givers. If a Sudra mentions at least the name of a Brahmana arrogantly or proudly, a red-hot iron nail ten fingers long should be thrust or pushed into his mouth. If he proudly tries to advise a Brahmana, the king should order hot oil to be poured into his mouth and ears. He is a slave of a Brahmana by birth. If he listened to a hymn being sung, a hot lead must be poured into his ears. He is not allowed to enter religious premises or participate in religious activities.

The social inequality prevailing in contemporary Indian society can be identified through the place given to women. During the period of the Brahmana tradition, the place of women was gradually reduced. According to the Bhagavadgītā, the position of women was reduced to the state of a Sudra. Women do not need to perform any sacrifice or follow religious rites or observances on their own. Obedience to the husband alone would exalt the

⁸ Brāhmanosya mukhamāsīd - bāhu rajanyah kṛtāh, ūru tadasya yad vaisyam - padbyām sudro ajāyata, Rig Veda, 10th chapter, Purusha sukta, 12th stanza.

woman in heaven. Similarly, Satapata Brahmana points out that even the body of a woman also did not belong to her. If the wife goes against the husband, she has to apologize in a public place. Therefore, the women were put in the same state as sinful sudras, dogs, crows, etc. This shows how even the fundamental human rights of certain parties of the society have been lost and reveals that social inequality prevailed in Indian society during the time of the Buddha.

3.2. Causing barriers for reconciliation

Humans commit crimes and any kind of activities that are harmful to peace and reconciliation due to the three fundamental mental attitudes. Craving (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and ignorance (*moha*). Accordingly, craving-insatiable desire to acquire, ill will-dissatisfaction towards people and circumstances, and delusion-lack of understanding, social dealings, sense of fellow feelings, education, law, etc. Therefore, it is essential to find remedies that could be practiced to overcome the above unwholesome roots by implementing remedies such as the development of Shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*), becoming virtuous (*sīla sampanna*), and avoiding four wrongful mental states, such as prejudice (*canda*), ill-will (*dosa*), fear (*bhaya*), ignorance (*moha*) as found in Sigālovāda sutta. The remedy for overcoming such barriers can also be identified from the concept of the Four Noble Truths.

- Identification of the root causes for the origin of conflicts is very important according to the theory of dependent origination. The Problem has to be known or understood – *Pariññeyyaṃ*
- Three psychological notions, such as I, my, mine, are the main causes, dogmatically embraced views and theories, are another cause for the origin of disputes. Abiding by their views, people dispute, saying that only this is true, and everything else is false. Thus, they contend that they dispute. Therefore, such causes have to be removed – *Pahātabbaṃ*
- Solution has to be found – *Saccikātabbaṃ*
- The path leading to the cessation of the problem (Solution) has to be practiced – *bhāvetabbaṃ*⁹

3.3. Conflicts and social distress

Conflicts and wars are the main barriers, challenges, and obstacles for reconciliation. The whole world today is haunted by many conflicts, tensions and turmoil based on gender, ethnicity, race, religion, politics, ecology, and even ideology. A sense of destruction, uncertainty, frustration, misconduct, and above all, a grave risk of mass destruction of humanity is seen in every part of the world. A few terms are found in Pali texts to denote conflicts such as *Kalaha* (Contention), *Viggaha* (Disputes), *Vivāda* (Debate), *Ghaṭṭana* (Conflicts), etc. Once, the Buddha said that he was not in dispute with the world, but the world was in dispute with him.¹⁰

⁹ Samyutta Nikāya 5-II, Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, 270p.

¹⁰ Nāham bhikkhave lokena vivadāmi, loko ca ko bhikkhave mayā vivadati, Samyutta Nikaya II, 238p

According to Buddhism, all the conflicts are psychological, and they originate based on the mind.¹¹ Mind precedes thoughts, mind is their chief, their quality is made by mind, if with a polluted mind one speaks or acts through then suffering follows one like a wheel follows an ox's foot.¹² If with a pure mind one speaks or acts, through that happiness follows one like a shadow which never leaves.¹³

Māgaṇḍiya Sutta mentions the causes for the arising of conflicts. Accordingly, there are two causes for the arising of conflicts, such as perceptions and Views.¹⁴ Kalaha-vivāda Sutta¹⁵ states that quarrels and disputes arise due to a series of mental concomitants. Answering the question, where have there arisen quarrels, disputes, lamentation, sorrows, along with selfishness, conceit, and pride, along with divisiveness? Buddha mentioned that the main cause is the animate and inanimate objects in the world. The Sutta further elaborates the sequence of mental concomitants that led to the arising of quarrels and disputes, such as things that are dear (loved objects), greed or craving, desire, feelings of pleasure and pain, or pleasant or unpleasant, contacts, and names and forms.

The Cūlavyuha and Mahāvyuha suttas, lesser discourse and greater discourse on battle array, discuss that disputes are coming into existence due to ideological differences. Ex: Dogmatic view of truth based on difference parties claim that they alone have truth while others do not.¹⁶ Similarly, Araṇavibhaṅga sutta, discourse on non-war or non-conflicts illustrates six factors that are conducive to originate conflicts.¹⁷

- One should not pursue sensual pleasure (self-mortification) should avoid two extremes, should practice noble eight-fold path.
- One should know what is to extol and what is to disparage, knowing both, one should neither extol nor disparage but should teach only the Dhamma.
- One should know how to define pleasure and knowing that one should pursue pleasure within oneself.
- One should not utter covert speech, and one should not utter overt harsh speech
- One should speak unhurriedly, not hurriedly.

¹¹ Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā, manoseṭṭhā manomayā, Dhammapada, Yamaka Vagga, 1st stanza.

¹² manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā, tato naṃ dukkham-anveti cakkam va vahato padaṃ, Dhammapada, Yamaka Vagga, 1st stanza.

¹³ manasā ce pasannena bhāsati vā karoti vā, tato naṃ sukkham-anveti chāyā va anapāyini, Dhammapada, Yamaka Vagga, 2nd stanza.

¹⁴ Majjhima Nikaya II, Māgaṇḍiya Sutta, 288p.

¹⁵ Sutta Nipāta, Kalaha-vivāda Sutta, 272p.

¹⁶ Idham'eva saccam, moghamaññam, Sutta Nipāta, Cūlavyuha sutta, 278p.

¹⁷ Majjhima Nikāya II, Araṇavibhaṅga sutta, 484p.

- One should not insist on local language, and one should not override normal usage.

Moreover, *Kama Sutta* of *Sutta Nipāta* mentions the motivational drive called *kāma* is the main cause for arising quarrels.¹⁸

i. *Kilesa Kāma* – Subjective Sensuality (strong desire and attachment to ideologies, concepts and theories)

ii. *Vatthu Kāma* – Objective Sensuality – (material things such as wealth and so on)

Accordingly, it is obvious that conflicts are the main obstacles for reconciliation and mindful healing. Therefore, it is the time to find remedies to overcome such conflicts and cause factors in conflicts and wars while cultivating forgiveness through developing loving kindness.

IV. RECONCILIATION THROUGH FORGIVENESS AND MINDFUL HEALING

Buddhism as a humanistic religion which always appreciates the peace, unity, harmony and co-existence. It further points out the importance of forgiveness for mindful healing and world peace. According to Buddhism no one is an eternal wrong doer, and anyone can uplift one's life from wrong to right through their deeds. As mentioned in *Sāriputta Sihanāda Sutta* Buddha advised the monk who made an accusation against Venerable *Sāriputta* "Indeed, monk, you made a mistake. It was foolish, stupid, and unskillful of you to act in that way. But since you have recognized your mistake for what it is, and have dealt with it properly, I accept it. For it is growth in the training of the Noble One to recognize a mistake for what it is, deal with it properly, and commit to restraint in the future."¹⁹ The Buddhist theory of reconciliation through forgiveness and mindful healing can be illustrated as follows.

- Recitation of Offences (*āpattidesanā*)
- Oneness of Mankind
- Loving Kindness
- Noble Friendship
- Forgiveness as revealed in *Dhammapada*

4.1. Recitation of offences (*āpattidesanā*)

Buddhist view on forgiveness and mindful healing is manifested from Vinaya rules promulgated by the Buddha which consists of 227 for monks and 311 for nuns. The collection of Vinaya rules related to monastic life are enshrined in *Pātimokkha*. There are two main purposes of reciting the *Pātimokkha* every fortnight namely 1. Uniting the Sangha 2. Preserving the Dhamma for future generations. Out of these two the most important purpose

¹⁸ *Sutta Nipāta, Kāma Sutta*, 242 p.

¹⁹ *Vuddhihesa bhikkhu ariyassa vinaye yo accayaṃ accayato disvā yathā dhammaṃ patikaroti āyatim samvaram āpajjatiti.....Āṅguttara Nikaya V, Sihanāda Vagga, Sāriputta Sihanāda Sutta*, 408 p.

of the fortnight *Pātimokkha* recitation is assuring the unity of the Sangha by meeting frequently, united and harmoniously. Another purpose of *Pātimokkha* recitation is the control of shameless individuals.

According to Vinaya recitation of offences or confession is the most effective strategy for forgiveness and mindful healing. Those monks who have gathered to a particular Simā hall should confess one another between or among Bhikkhus bringing up shame and fear of future wrong doing in the offender. The procedure for the confession of light offences (*lahukāpatti*) and heavy offences (*garukāpatti*) are known in Buddhist Vinaya as āpattidesanā which can be considered the symbol of forgiveness in Buddhism. On the other hand, it is expected from this practice to maintain mindful healing as well.

4.2. Oneness of mankind

One of the main causes of being an obstacle to reconciliation is unequal treatment, discrimination contributes to human predicament. Buddhism, totally rejecting the theory of social stratification based on caste, creed, gender and socio-economic factors speaks of the unity, the oneness of humankind. Exploitation and discrimination against the 'lower' castes therefore resulted in denying them elementary human rights in many ways such as political, economic, social, educational, religious freedom and justice and equality before the law onwards.

The arguments adduced in Buddhism against the caste system can be viewed from Biological (or Genetical), Sociological, Historical, Ethical and Religious perspectives. In the Assalāyana sutta the Buddha asks Brahmin Assalāyana as follows. Assalāyana? Do you see women belong to brahmin clan are known to have menstruation, conceive, give birth and breast-feed their infants and are seen as such by every day. Then Brahmin Assalāyana Replied yes. Taking this into consideration Buddha pointed out that if so how will Brahmins claim that they are the only sons of Brahma, born of his mouth, born of Brahma, formed by Brahma and heirs of Brahma? Elaborating this point the *Assalāyana Sutta* further states that a son born to a *Ksatriya* youth and a Brahmin girl would be like his father or mother and be called a *Ksatriya* or a Brahmin. Likewise, a son born to a Brahmin youth and a *Ksatriya* girl would be called a Brahmin or *Ksatriya*. Moreover, the Buddha continues and questions *Assalāyana* when a mare mated with an ass gives birth to a foal (young one) would it be like the mother or like the father and therefore should it be called an ass or a horse? *Assalāyana* replied that because of crossed birth it is called a mule. The argument establishes the fact that the children of inter-caste marriages are not a cross-bred species like mules.²⁰

The Vaseṭṭha Sutta says that with regard to different kinds of grasses, trees, beetles, moths, ants, four-footed creatures big and small, reptiles, snakes, long-backed animals, fishes and birds, differences are seen. But with regard to men, no such difference is seen in relation to their hair or head or ear or eyes or

²⁰ *Majjhima Nikaya* II, Assalāyana sutta, 610 p.

mouth or lips or brows etc.²¹

In the Kaṇṇakathala²² and the Assalāyana Suttas the question has been attacked from different sociological angles. The fire produced by dry teak or Sal or Salala or sandalwood has no difference in heat or brilliance whatsoever. In the Assalāyana Sutta, the Buddha points out that in Yona, Kamboja and adjacent districts there are only two castes, the masters and the slaves. Having been a master, one may become a slave, and having been a slave, one may become a master.

The historical arguments are found in Aggañña Sutta of Dīgha Nikāya. Accordingly, man is not a creation of an omniscient god but is a creation based on the theory of causality. As per the explanation of Aggañña sutta, *Mahāsammata* (the great elect), *Khattiya* (Lord of the Fields), *Rājā* (one who delights others in Dhamma), *Brāhmaṇa* (one who puts away evil and immorality), *Jhāyaka* (one who meditates) *Ajjhāyaka* (one who does not meditate but devotes himself to study), *Vessa* (one who engages in various trades), *Sudda* (one who engages in hunting and such other menial works).²³ Accordingly, it is clear that the formation of the society has occurred not because of the influence of a super-natural god but because of the cause and effect theory.

Further speaking on this point Vaseṭṭha Sutta elaborates that one's social status is decided not because of his/ her birth but because of his/her profession likewise one who cultivates is a farmer, one who lives on workmanship is an artisan, one who plies a trade for livelihood is a trader, one who works for another is a servant, one who lives off things not given is a thief, one who practices archery is a soldier, one who lives by priestly craft is a celibate, one who rules a village is a rajah.

Social stratification based on the birth has also been denied from ethical Arguments. If a person breaks into a house to steal or commit a robbery etc., he is called a thief. If anyone of the four castes refrains from unwholesome acts, he is called a recluse. Kaṇṇakathala Sutta shows that there is no difference of achievement by the striving persons despite their caste distinctions: faith, good health and full of energy endowed with wisdom. According to Assalāyana Sutta, "Whom do you select to be the best to be served with offerings for the dead out of two uterine Brahmin brothers: one who is learned, skilled and of evil habits and the other who is not learned, unskilled and of evil habits and the other who is not learned, unskilled and of moral habits? Although uneducated the Brahmin of good moral habits is chosen to be served with the offering for the dead, but not the educated one who is of evil habits. It is mentioned in Soṇadaṇḍa Sutta, the five qualities to be a Brahmin are given: caste, good birth from both sides, technical training, virtue, wisdom. But he eventually arrives at the recognition of a Brahmin by virtue and wisdom. *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* of *Dīgha Nikāya* states that the first fruit of being a recluse is the honour and

²¹ *Majjhima Nikaya* II, Vaseṭṭha Sutta, 700 p.

²² *Majjhima Nikaya* II, Kaṇṇakathala Sutta, 562 p.

²³ *Dīgha Nikāya* III, *Aggañña Sutta*, 144p.

respect shown by the people, probably without any regard for his birth.

Through these arguments it is revealed the Buddhist point of view on social discrimination based on castes and how Buddha assured oneness of mankind, equality and unity by completely rejecting the inequality.

4.3. Loving kindness

It is rare to find real peace, reconciliation, harmony and co-existence in current complex society because of lacking loving-kindness or goodwill amongst mankind. Loving kindness is considered one of the effective ways of forgiveness practices in Buddhism. The Pali term *Mettā* meaning loving-kindness, friendliness, goodwill, benevolence, fellowship, amity, concord, inoffensiveness and non-violence is known in Buddhism as the Godly way of living (*brahma-vihāra*) is one of four gradually upgraded qualities of love such as loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*). It is also collectively known as the status of unbounded or magnanimous living (*appamāna vihāra* or *appamaññā*). Pali commentators define *mettā* as the strong wish for the welfare and happiness of others (*parahita-parasukkha-kāmanā*). Essentially *mettā* is an altruistic attitude of love and friendliness as distinguished from mere amiability based on self-interest. True *mettā* is devoid of self-interest, evokes within a warm-hearted feeling of fellowship, sympathy and love, which grows boundless with practice and overcomes all social, religious, racial, political and economic barriers. *Mettā* is indeed a universal, unselfish and all-embracing love which is essential for reconciliation.

To practice loving-kindness, one must first practice the Noble Principle of non-violence, essential to overcome selfishness while showing the correct path to reconciliation. Loving-kindness radiates through the purified mind after eradicating hatred, jealousy, cruelty, enmity and grudges. According to the Buddha, Loving-kindness is the most effective method to maintain purity of mind and to purify the mentally polluted atmosphere which is essential to establish reconciliation and mindful healing. In *Metta Sutta*, the Buddha has expounded the nature of love in Buddhism. Accordingly, the real loving kindness should be cultivated just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. The *sutta* further emphasizes that one should let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world, above, below and across without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.²⁴ Accordingly, the universal loving kindness mentality expounded in Buddhism is truly the only way for reconciliation.

The advantageous that can be gained by practicing loving kindness can be seen in *Mettānisamsa Sutta*.²⁵ As mentioned in the *Sutta* one who practices loving-kindness undertakes eleven results such as sleeps peacefully, wakes

²⁴ *Sutta Nipāta, Metta Sutta*, 46 P.

²⁵ *Anguttara Nikaya VI, Mettānisamsa Sutta*, 644 P.

peacefully, sees no bad dreams, dear to human beings, dear to non-human beings, will be protected by Devas, Fire, poison and weapons can't injure, mind becomes easily concentrated, facial complexion will be serene, will die unconfused and if one does not penetrate higher will be reborn in the Brahma-world. Buddhism illustrates how mindful healing can be gained through practicing of loving kindness.

4.4. Noble friendship

The conversation that took place between the Buddha and Ananda as mentioned in the *Samyukta Nikaya* is very important in this regard "About half, Lord of this life in religion consists in righteous friendship, righteous intimacy, righteous association". To this the Buddha replied that it was not so: "Verily, the whole of this life in the religion consists righteous friendship, intimacy and association".²⁶

One who has a righteous friendship will develop and expand the noble eight-fold path. It is stated in the *Samyutta Nikāya* that "There is one condition, monks, that is most useful for the arising of the Noble eight-fold path. What is the condition? That is the friendship."²⁷ Moreover, it is mentioned in the *Samyutta Nikāya* itself, two metaphors are used to describe the righteous path, *Kalyāṇamittatā*. "Just as monks, the dawn is the forerunner, harbinger, of the sun's arising, even so, friendship with what is lovely is the forerunner, and the harbinger of the arising of the seven limbs of wisdom in a monk. In this regard it is essential to identify wise and immoral friends as found in *Sigālovāda Sutta*.²⁸ Out of them foes in the guise of friends are a rapacious person (*aññadattuhara*), a man of words does not deed (*vacīparama*), a flatterer (*anuppiyabhāni*), a fellow waster (*apāyasahāya*). Similarly, *Sutta* mentions four friends such as a helper (*upakāraka*), a friend who is the same in both happiness and adversity (*samānasukhadukkha*), a friend of good counsel (*attakkhāyi*), a friend with a sympathetic heart (*anukampaka*). Further, it is mentioned in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* that three qualities are available for good friends.²⁹

- i. Gives the things unable to give for the sake of the friend.
- ii. Does the things unable to do for the sake of the friend.
- iii. Bear the things unable to bear for the sake of the friend.

Another seven factors possessed by a good friend are mentioned in *Aṅguttara Nikāya* as follows.³⁰

- i. Gives the things unable to give.
- ii. Does the things unable to do.

²⁶ *Samyutta Nikāya*, V-I, Upaḍḍa Sutta, 5p.

²⁷ Ekadhammo bhikkhave bahupakāro ariyassa aṭṭaṅgikassamaggassa uppādāya. Katamo ekadhammo? Yadidaṃ kalyāṇamittatā.... *Samyutta Nikāya* V, Kalyāṇamitta Sutta, 50p.

²⁸ *Dīgha Nikāya* III, *Sigālovāda Sutta*, 308 P.

²⁹ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* I, *Tika Nipāta*, 514 P.

³⁰ *Aṅguttara Nikāya* IV, *Sattaka Nipāta*, *Mitta Sutta*, 330 P.

- iii. Bears the things unable to bear.
- iv. Tells the secret.
- v. Keeps the friend's secrets
- vi. Doesn't forsake when in trouble.

Forgiveness can easily be practiced only by noble friends who cultivate good qualities. On the other hand, mindful healing can also be gained only through noble friends who turn one's mind into a calm status, avoiding him/her from being unwholesome.

4.5. Forgiveness as revealed in *Dhammapada*

Dhammapada, the compendium handbook of Buddhists, clearly emphasizes the importance of forgiveness. It mentions that for not by hatred do hatred cease at any time in this place, it only ceases with non-hatred, this truth is surely eternal.³¹ Another stanza states that how thinking one should forgive others on their mistakes. He abuses me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me, those who bear not ill-will towards this, their hatred is never appeased.³² Similarly, on the opposite it is mentioned that he abuses me, he struck me, he overcame me, he robbed me, those who bear not ill-will towards this, their hatred is surely appeased.³³ Since anger, ill will and such negative thoughts will not cease with negative thoughts themselves one should cultivate opposite mentality based on loving-kindness which is praised in early Buddhism as a matter of fact for long-term welfare and happiness. Even if you are cut off by bandits using a double-edged saw, you should not have ill-will towards them and should continue to feel care for their well-being while maintaining an attitude of loving kindness and a lack of inner hatred. Similarly, great compassion, the Buddha's method of solving conflicts and establishing reconciliation is the best that persists anymore. Moreover, Bodhisattva's approach can also be considered as an alternative way of forgiveness and mindful healing which makes resolution based on self-defense because it takes both the interests of one's group and against injustice.

V. CONCLUSION

Humanistic nature of Buddhism naturally makes it quite concerned with human rights. It holds that all people belong to humankind which is of one species and hence they all have equal right to entertain basic human rights. Therefore, all are equally entitled to enjoy the safety of life, to own private property, freedom of expression and movement, to follow a faith of their choice. This is known in Buddhism as freewill and quest that should be possessed by everyone irrespective of caste, creed, gender or any inclinations.

³¹ Na hi verena verāni sammantida kudācanaṃ, averena ca sammanti, esa dhammo sanantano. *Dhammapada, Yamaka Vagga*, Verse 05.

³² Akkocci maṃ avadhi maṃ, ajini maṃ, ahāsi me, ye ca taṃ upanayihanti, veraṃ tesāṃ na sammati, *Dhammapada, Yamaka Vagga*, Verse 03.

³³ Akkocci maṃ avadhi maṃ, ajini maṃ, ahāsi me, ye ca taṃ nupanayihanti, veraṃ tesupasammati, *Dhammapada, Yamaka Vagga*, Verse 03.

Buddhism being a religion that upholds democracy naturally upholds equality before the law. This can be identified from the ecclesiastical judicial sanctions in the Vinaya Piṭaka. It is seen in the life of the Buddha how he practiced the concept of forgiveness throughout his life which can be exemplified from the episode of venerable Devadatta. Whenever, he acted against as a rival cousin by working against the Buddha, He practiced the quality of forgiveness. Similarly, due to the qualities like patience and forgiveness of the Buddha, certain characters such as Aṅgulimāla, Ālavaka and Nālāgiri etc. were tamed by harnessing mindful healing. Moreover, the disciplinary rules promulgated by the Buddha are also on the basis on forgiveness. The prime purpose of enacting Vinaya rules was to ensure mindful healing. Hence, it is obvious that Buddhist teachings have appreciated the social reconciliation through forgiveness and mindful healing.

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THE ESSENCE OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND HARMONY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Every realm and domain of classical and academic endeavor tends toward continuous development and remains dynamic. Nobody desires mere economic stability at the expense of inner contentment. This research, therefore, focuses on the stability of development, including behavioral qualities related to inner happiness. Among these so-called qualities, certain predominant dimensions emerge, such as religious tolerance and harmony. Accordingly, this study investigates the key aspects of the inner essence of sustainable development. When sustainable development is considered, it typically encompasses the sustainability of industrialization, economic growth, advancements in science and technology, environmental conservation, ecological balance, education, agriculture, and infrastructure development, among others. This research is significant in that regard, addressing a critical gap in classical discourse within the broader scope of social investigation. The prevalence of religious extremism, coupled with the absence of tolerance and harmony, stands in contrast to sustainable development and constitutes the central research problem of this study. The research, therefore, explores this issue, employing a methodology of analysis relevant to the inquiry. The study relies on primary and secondary sources, dialogues with scholars in relevant fields, and the analysis of academic research papers as its primary methodologies.

Keywords: *religion, tolerance, harmony, sustainable development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The present world operates on an unreliable platform due to the multiplicity of newly emerging disciplines and domains, driven by continuous technological advancements and the integration of artificial intelligence.

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Despite these advancements, pressing global issues such as violent wars, ethnic struggles, border disputes, religious terrorism, and conflicts persist as ongoing and critical challenges. Therefore, continuous research aimed at finding solutions to these grave issues is essential in the current social landscape. There are three key aspects that scholars must focus on in this investigation: religious conflicts, religious tolerance and harmony, and sustainable development. These social dynamics and discourses are universally observed across nations. For instance, the USA, Afghanistan, Israel and Palestine, and Russia and Ukraine serve as crucial examples in the contemporary global political arena. Consequently, the social foundation of sustainable development must be closely integrated with religious tolerance and harmony to eliminate religious conflicts. Religions worldwide have provided moral guidance to lead societies toward peace and prosperity. However, religion is often intrinsically linked to unity and harmony.¹ For this reason, researchers must pay significant attention to this interplay. Sustainable development is fundamentally based on economic stability within a nation.² Economic stability can only be achieved through tolerance, harmony, and sovereignty within societies. Historically, societies characterized by tolerance, harmony, and sovereignty were referred to as experiencing a “golden age,” marked by the absence of religious conflicts, social unrest, and obstacles to progress. In this context, the duty and responsibility of researchers lie in uncovering pathways to religious tolerance and harmony, with the ultimate goal of fostering long-term social stability and development. To fully grasp this phenomenon, it is crucial to examine the characteristics of developed nations. The defining feature of such countries is that basic human needs can be met without difficulty and in a fair manner. People in these societies enjoy a high standard of living with peace of mind, which contributes to increased longevity. This is why barriers to sustainable development must be removed. Human beings are creatures who seek happiness, and true happiness is inherently tied to sustainable development. Above all, focusing on these three aspects within their definitions will be highly beneficial for the research. In academic investigations, the consideration of definitions is a fundamental requirement. It plays a crucial role in identifying prior research conducted on a particular problem. Such observations unquestionably fall under the category of methodology as an essential component. No one can fully grasp the intricacies of a research topic, especially when it involves important technical terms, without an etymological understanding. Therefore, as a first and foremost step, let us turn our attention to brief interpretations.

Serious disputes arising from disagreements between two or more religious groups are generally regarded as conflicts. “Conflict is a state of open, prolonged clash between two opposing parties or individuals. In psychological terms, conflict is a psychic struggle, often unconscious, resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, desires, tendencies, wishes, or

¹ Premasiri, P. D. (2015): p. 35.

² Bulathsinghala (2022): p. 11.

demands.”³ According to the Buddhist exegesis of conflict, *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (hatred), and *moha* (delusion) are considered the root causes of conflicts. These are influential factors not only in religious disputes but also in all forms of struggles and discord. “It is clear that Buddhism defines conflict profoundly and philosophically. When we examine the term ‘conflict’ concerning Buddhist doctrine, several *Pāli* terms can be found that denote various aspects of conflict.”⁴ The *Pāli* technical terms mentioned above signify the emotions and mental states of individuals. Conflicts serve as a powerful driving force behind bloody combat among ethnic groups worldwide. History provides numerous examples of such grave struggles. The Crusades, for instance, serve as a historical lesson that highlights the importance of peace and the concept of cosmopolitanism. Religious tolerance can be defined as the acceptance of other doctrines coexisting alongside one’s religious background without persecution, obstruction, hardship, or any form of violation. Harmony is a state of amicable coexistence that arises as a natural consequence of tolerance. The planet must be a better place for all of us to live. Religious tolerance and harmony are essential as a universal foundation for achieving that aspiration. Through religious tolerance and harmony, it is possible to prevent social decline and alleviate mental apathy toward goodness. “Sustainable development is one of the main concepts to have emerged in the late twentieth century in the West.”⁵ The idea of sustainable development can be interpreted as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, according to the Encyclopedia of Sustainable Development, when considering Wikipedia’s explanation.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND HARMONY

According to the clarification given by the world-famous philosopher Plato (428/ 427 BCE - 348/ 347 BCE), man is a social being. With this statement, he highlighted the interconnection among all human beings on the planet. Another implication of the term social being is that no one can survive without the support of others. This is a universal truth, as even a recluse cannot sustain himself without some level of interaction with society. From birth to death, every individual acquires essential needs from others. A person receives life from their parents, food from others, clothing from others, and so forth. Other necessities, such as shelter, medicine, education, rice, vegetables, ingredients, and household items like pots, pans, jugs, and cups, are not self-produced. In essence, every material possession and countless other necessities are obtained from others. Even fundamental elements like breath and oxygen depend on the environment and are not self-generated. The underlying meaning of the aforementioned statement is that “all things are composed”; that is, everything is interconnected. Every individual is essential for the survival of others on this planet. Therefore, tolerance and harmony are prerequisites, serving as tangible

³ Wijewardhana (2015): p. 350.

⁴ Sirisudhamma (2015): p. 200.

⁵ Wimalathissa (2019): 196.

criteria or fundamental components of coexistence. Another dimension associated with tolerance and harmony is religion. Religion is a pluralistic and multifaceted phenomenon. There are eleven major world religions encompassing various philosophical perspectives, including theism, atheism, eternalism, annihilationism, determinism, nihilism, fideism, and materialism.⁶ In addition, there are beliefs such as physiolatry (worship of natural elements), dendrolatry (worship of trees), demonolatry (worship of spirits or demons), and idolatry (worship of idols). When classifying religions, various additional categories can be identified under the scope of alternative and new religions. These include historical religions, prehistorical religions, modern religions, contemporary religions, Eastern and Western religions, ethnic religions, universal religions, and segmental religions. Considering the supreme position of religious founders, religions can also be categorized as monotheism (belief in one God), polytheism (belief in many gods), and henotheism (belief in one primary deity while acknowledging others). There are various important aspects related to religious tolerance and harmony, which serve as fundamental components of religious peace. Religious extremism and fundamentalist activities contribute to the violation of religious peace. Therefore, above all, the eradication of religious extremism is urgently needed, and eliminating violations that contradict religious tolerance is essential. Numerous examples from the recent past illustrate this issue worldwide, including in Sri Lanka. There are many such instances - political crimes, bombings, riots, attacks, ethnic conflicts, border disputes, and deadly wars - that disrupt social reconciliation. Even the ongoing rivalry between Israel and Palestine serves as a notable example. Due to these aforementioned issues, violations of human rights have become widespread, accompanied by radicalism.⁷ Illegal religious activities and their applications should be addressed constructively. Here, the predominant duty and responsibility lie in fostering respectful and virtuous social behaviors among individuals. The authority of a consistently honorable judicial system must be implemented in every necessary location. Through this process, law-abiding citizens can better understand the vulnerabilities caused by religious violations against adherents. Religion should be protected by law because mental disorders and psychological stress - issues that legal frameworks cannot entirely regulate - can often be alleviated through religious teachings. Inner human qualities such as compassion, loving-kindness, generosity, non-hostility, and the absence of delusion are beyond the scope of jurisprudence. Most likely, while the physical body can be controlled by law, mental states cannot. The only effective way to guide the human mind is through religion, which provides pedagogical approaches as remedial measures.⁸

⁶ Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Taoism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism.

⁷ Anti-social thinkers represented the terrorist group, such as the Taliban, ISIS, Jihadists, and Boko haram, are accountable for the prevalence of violations to a large extent, and all of them are Islamic extremist groups.

⁸ Practices endowed with mental exercise for wholesome behaviours related to inner

The modern world presents a pluralistic and complex social landscape due to the emergence of new and alternative ideologies. Therefore, new rules, regulations, and legal implementations must be introduced promptly. These regulations must be enforced irrespective of caste, creed, race, or political affiliation, without interference from objectionable iconoclasts. The present social environment is diverse yet tainted by deceitful politicians, objectors and cynics, thugs, extortionists, robbers, masterminds of terrorism, conspirators, and perpetrators. Due to these complexities, society is rife with multifaceted corruption, and people from all walks of life experience its detrimental consequences. As a result, there is no social equilibrium in today's world. In contrast to these chaotic conditions, religion can foster social welfare, counteracting the decline of philanthropic and moral values. Religious tolerance and harmony can be disseminated globally through religious teachings and practices. Numerous religious doctrines provide benevolent guidelines for public well-being. Indeed, these religious teachings, upheld by major world religions, possess timeless value and universal applicability. Universal loving-kindness, compassion, the *pañca-sīla* (Five Precepts in Buddhism),⁹ the Decalogue (Christianity and Judaism),¹⁰ *Sanātana Dharma* (Hinduism), and absolute non-violence (*param-avihiṃsā*) are among the altruistic principles contributed by world religions. Although these doctrines originate from religious traditions, they consistently and extensively influence the establishment of a well-ordered society as they offer profound solutions for the common afflictions of the human mind. Religious extremism arises through conflicts in various groups, such as (1) among adherents of the same faith, (2) between different sects, (3) between two nations, and (4) among ethnic groups. Reconciliation and brotherhood are seriously undermined among people due to extremist activities. Consequently, peace and harmony are lost as enmity and rivalry prevail. Historical and contemporary examples illustrate the deadly consequences of such catastrophes. The Crusades were a devastating calamity that drenched the world in blood, prematurely destroying the lives of countless helpless individuals. It remains an indelible stain on human history. In 2019, Zahran Hashim orchestrated the Easter Sunday attack, disrupting ethnic cohesion in Sri Lanka and instilling widespread fear and anxiety among its people. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine is another tragic struggle that continues to afflict the world. None of these instances contribute to peace or serve as beneficial acts of providence; rather, they are provocations that deepen divisions. As a result, societal unrest and collective paranoia will continue to spread. Public reciprocal interconnections that have been depleted due to the aforementioned catastrophes can be restored through religious teachings. People are in a position to embrace the prospects of sustainable development by putting religion into practice. The reconstruction of a nation, including religious reconciliation, is both an act of

trainings as well.

⁹ "*Pañca Sīla*" in connection with Buddhism.

¹⁰ It is known as Ten Commandments (Decalogue) in Judaism and Christianity.

revivalism and a form of revitalization that can be achieved through religious applications, such as fostering brotherhood among ethnicities worldwide.

No one can speak of a renaissance or rejuvenation of sustainable development in the absence of religious peace, which is endowed with tolerance and harmony. There are hundreds of teachings and guidelines, such as those mentioned below, that contribute to better lifestyles in society. Buddhism is a significant repository of human virtues, including psychological well-being. All Buddhist teachings are interconnected with mental faculties, and religious tolerance and harmony are directly linked to wholesome emotions and insight. Buddhism can be suggested as a solution to the deterioration of reconciliation due to its profound essence. Indeed, this represents a trajectory of development with commendable depth. By practicing Buddhist admonitions, society can be nourished by the ethos of Buddhist principles. "Hatred does not cease by hatred; it is by non-hatred that it can be removed."¹¹ This indicates detrimental retributions of hatred. "The pragmatism of Buddhism holds that a distorted mind cannot come up with sensible solutions"¹² When there is tolerance and harmony, there is no hatred, and when there is hatred, there is no tolerance and harmony. Mahatma Gandhi, the great role model of the Indian subcontinent, emphasized the importance of altruistic and philanthropic mental approaches by disseminating the well-known slogan: "Take an eye for an eye and the whole world will be blind." The Buddha, the great founder of universal loving-kindness, proclaimed its significance in contrast to retaliation and viciousness. "May all beings be well and happy"¹³ Other textual interpretations also align with this motto, such as: "May all beings be healthy; may all beings be safe from harm; may all beings be free from mental and physical suffering; may all beings be free from greed, hatred, and delusion," etc. In this sense, the Buddha was the universal friend of all beings in the universe, advocating the value of all creatures. This is why the *mettā* meditation was taught in the 6th century BCE. Before the Buddha, only one entity had been regarded as a universal friend in human history - that was the sun in the Indus Valley Civilization. The Buddha explained the degradation of human behavior in society and illustrated the mentality associated with the feelings of punishment through the *Dhammapada* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. "All fear punishment; all fear death, comparing oneself with others, one should neither kill nor cause to kill"¹⁴ "All fear punishment: to all life is dear. Comparing oneself with others, one should neither kill nor cause to kill."¹⁵ Accordingly, Buddhist teachings are highly

¹¹ *Khuddaka nikāya* (1987): p. 77. "Nahi verena verāni sammanti ca kudācanam-/ Avereṇa ca sammanti esadhammo sanamthano".

¹² Bulathsinghala (2022).

¹³ Sn 1.8. "Sabbe sattā bhavanti sukhi sattā"

¹⁴ *Khuddaka nikāya* (1987): p. 89. "Sabbe thasanti dandassa-sabbe bhāyanti maccuno/ Atānam upaman kathvā nahaneyya na gāthaye."

¹⁵ *Dhammapada* (1992): p. 122. "Sabbe tasanti dandassa-sabbe jivitam piyam/ Attānam upaman kathvā nahaneyya na gāthaye."

significant for the world, as it is inherently pluralistic due to its multi-religious and multi-cultural context. The inspirations of Buddhism have been admired by world-renowned scholars as benign and commendable teachings, providing superb guidelines for the historical course of humanity. One such scholar was Bertrand Russell, who, through modern Western philosophy, recognized the value of Buddhist thought. Sustainable development comprises several essential aspects, including economic, geopolitical, and cultural stability. All these facets fundamentally depend on the stability of peace.¹⁶ If a government genuinely seeks to establish peace among its citizens, it must first and foremost stabilize the cultural foundation of the country. Culture serves as a repository that historically encompasses religion, playing a crucial role in shaping the social structure of a nation. Accordingly, religion has the potential to guide society along a benevolent and distinguished path. This is because religion, as a social phenomenon, is inherently rich in commendable virtues. Three fundamental components influence the human mind: money, sex, and power. Stressful emotions arise due to these powerful forces, which become intertwined with human impressions deep within the heart. Consequently, chaotic behaviors manifest throughout human life. Religion and the law are the primary means to mitigate these harmful emotional outbursts. However, while the legal system plays a crucial role, it does not possess the power to regulate the human mind as effectively as religion does. Mental reformation is most successfully achieved through religious teachings. Although the law cannot compel individuals to help those in need, religion inherently fosters this virtue - an idea also echoed in Benthamism. Helping the needy is a principle taught by religion, not by law. (That being said, the contribution of law is not underestimated in the governance of society.) Buddhist teachings, in particular, provide essential paradigms for preventing segregation, ethnic disintegration, and dissension among diverse communities. This is one of Buddhism's most significant contributions to the ongoing global peace-building process.

III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ITS UTILITY FOR THE WELL-GROUNDED SOCIETY

Scientific and technological evolution has contributed to a more comfortable and better life on Earth. Humanity has undertaken a long journey throughout history in this regard. Technical terms such as the digital world, globalization, global village, and artificial intelligence clarify the unique state of the modern world. The continuity of these improved opportunities is recognized as sustainable development according to modern understanding. It is not a state of privation or nothingness. There is no lack of facilities for a better life. Here, another important fact must be noted: sustainable development is not a static condition but a changing and moving stream, a dynamic process. No one can argue otherwise, because humanity did not

¹⁶ Bulathsinghala (2022): 89. "Peace, peacemaking or peace building; however, we may coin these words refers primarily to a mental state. Peace begins first in our inner universe centered in the core of our awareness."

stop with the inventions and discoveries of the wheel, cart, fire, the theory of gravity, the telephone, electricity, and the light bulb - nor with X-rays, aviation technology, the invention of the computer and later the laptop, the discovery of Python, and nanotechnology. Had progress ceased, the improved conditions we experience today would never have been achieved. Sustainable development lies in continuous investigation and discovery. Humanity requires a background of free will and free thinking, without impediments, to achieve the highest potential in these endeavors. The man constantly struggles with ways and means to earn money for the sake of daily survival. Everybody anticipates a comfortable life from it, and the usage of the term sustainable reflects the unchanging nature of that stable affluence. There must be a lifetime guarantee for sustainability, as it represents a belief in the future. This is the aspiration of people from all walks of life. The features of stability include respectful thinking toward others, mental concentration and inner peace, law-abiding behavior, and so on. If a well-grounded society is to be endowed with the sustenance of material development, the crime rate must also be attenuated. To achieve this aspiration, the government must implement a national framework that ensures the maintenance of the sovereignty of law. In this context, the education system is another crucial facet in affirming the quality of life.¹⁷ It is a Greek philosophical concept that education and morality are like two sides of the same coin. Morality is taught in religion, and religion plays an important role in education.¹⁸ Religious teachings, which provide admonitions for a better life, are conveyed through the path of education. A well-structured society is essential for this purpose. The ethical foundation is the most important aspect here. Accordingly, the ethics of industries, professions, science, medicine, religion, and household life are among the various taxonomies of ethics. Without ethics, no one can survive on this planet with reliable and resilient negotiations or associations with others. Religion is the core of tradition, bequeathed to us by ancient man as a legacy of the past. The strength of virtues is the most important continuity related to historical human development. The repository that transmits sublime human qualities to conscientious descendants from era to era is religion. No task in human history has been more difficult for mankind than controlling the mind. Many fields develop various theories, principles, and disciplines related to a wide range of subjects. Mathematics, science, languages, technology, astrology, astronomy, geography, social studies, sociology, aesthetics, philosophy, drama, and telecommunication are among the most prominent classical disciplines studied by humankind. The problem is that no subject specifically represents discipline, morality, heartfelt emotions, attitudes, and wholesome qualities.

¹⁷ Bulathsinghala (2022): p. 97. "Why is our modern education system not creating professors and economic experts who will ask what a thinking nine years-old with average intelligence will?"

¹⁸ Ibid: "There is no doubt that we have intelligent and innovative manpower. Why are we not building an education system catering to our national needs for innovation and job creation using primarily renewable energy?"

What is the use of any subject if it does not bring both physical and mental consolation to the world? Religion can offer the contentment sought by future generations, delighting humanity. However, mankind often misuses religion, jeopardizing the lives of all beings. Religion should not be exploited for narrow, self-serving purposes.¹⁹ Religion is not a criterion for segregating people into groups. As religious followers, every adherent must incline only toward the essence of religion without being influenced by brutal and inhuman mentalities. Only then will religious harmony prevail in society. Living as a human, both the heart and the brain must be present. A brain without a heart is empty and hollow; a heart without a brain is dull and cruel. In the same way, the completion of sustainability consists of both internal and external prosperity - inner peace and affluence. Human qualities such as peace, loving-kindness, compassion, and generosity represent inner development, while physical affluence represents external prosperity. Material development is often essential to sustain the facilitation of secular social uplift and revitalization. Accordingly, sustainable development has two main components: virtuous inner stability and external physical stability. No one can speak of a well-grounded society in the absence of both of these aspects. So-called material development is truly meaningful only when it is utilized by individuals who are also endowed with spiritual development. When sustainable development is present, it leads to the betterment of humanity, and when humanity improves, society becomes a better place for all beings in the world. These aspects are deeply interconnected. Human beings often reach spiritual development through physical development. People tend to steal when they lack necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. This is why the Buddha also emphasized the importance of social security, referring to financial support provided by the government. The Buddha indicated that rulers should introduce investment methods and other economic opportunities for the common people. The *Aggañña Sutta* clearly explains that the origin of theft emerged due to poverty. Although there are many developed countries in the world, it is impossible to claim that fraud and corruption are absent in those nations. However, citizens of developed countries have generally managed to mitigate pressing issues and existential struggles to a greater extent than those in underprivileged regions. On the other hand, for people to contemplate morality or engage in philosophical discourse, their minds must be free from immediate survival concerns. This is where sustainable development, particularly in terms of material advancement, plays a crucial role. A liberated and thoughtful intellect is necessary for the evolution of human thought. When people attain such a state, they turn their attention toward human problems with a philosophical perspective, addressing critical issues with deep reflection and a refined mind. The interconnection between sustainable development, religious tolerance and harmony, and a well-grounded society becomes evident through this

¹⁹ It was discussed above cases where even human assassinations were carried out in the name of religion in this paper.

understanding. This foundation is essential for a prosperous and fulfilling life in the world.

IV. CONCLUSION

The objective of this research is to explain the significance of religious peace in the amelioration of sustainable revitalization. Every country has achieved geopolitical, economic, and social stability due to the farsighted wisdom of rulers who facilitated geopolitical development. Researchers and young scholars are in a position to explore this concept through the investigation of this study. No country in the world has developed in the absence of religious tolerance and harmony. There are perceptible examples of this issue, demonstrated through objectionable and formidable challenges. Afghanistan cannot restore its social structure with inner stability due to the lack of religious freedom and peace among the public, exacerbated by fatal violations of human rights, including restrictions on education for females at present. The Gaza Strip has suffered devastation due to the disintegration of social structures and the calamitous and detrimental consequences of bloody wars. Therefore, political leaders in conflict zones around the world must take necessary security measures to promote religious reconciliation, tolerance, and peace among humankind for the well-being of diverse nationalities. This is because sustainable development can only be achieved through sustainable peace, and a sustainable peace process is inseparably linked to sustainable religious tolerance and harmony. In this sense, this study advocates for peacebuilding (rooted in tolerance and harmony) and human well-being through religious spirituality, particularly concerning Buddhism, as a means of fostering sustainable development in contrast to the prevailing instability of human existence on the planet.²⁰ Conceptual change can also be applied to transform mental attitudes that lead to violations of religious tolerance and harmony. The concept of Diversity is Beauty can serve as a fruitful psychological approach in this regard. Honoring and respecting others, as well as their norms and ideologies, can be integrated into religious teachings to support this proposition. Another approach to fostering conceptual inner development in tolerance and peace is the idea of All in One. The Buddha himself deliberately engaged with the founder of Jainism, yet he never attempted to exert undue influence over the Jain religious leader and instead showed respect for other doctrines.

²⁰ Bulathsinghala (2022): p. 11.

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BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR PEACE, COMPASSION, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REVEALED THROUGH AŚOKAN EDICTS

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Abstract:

The study explores Buddhist values of peace, compassion, and human development, especially through the edicts of King Aśoka. The findings present the Buddha's teachings on the cessation of suffering and highlight the role of Buddhism in addressing contemporary issues. The study focuses on King Aśoka's conversion to Buddhism after the Kalinga War, his propagation of the Dhamma through edicts carved on stones and pillars throughout the empire, and his efforts to promote ethical principles and religious harmony for the benefit of his people. Excerpts from various edicts are analyzed to shed light on Aśoka's Dharma-based philosophy of governance.

Keywords: *Buddhist values, King Aśoka, Dhamma, edicts, governance.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The great message of Lord Siddhartha Gautama Buddha to the universe and the insight of Buddhism is to promote peace and unity among humankind, providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, compassion, cultivating inner peace, and mindful healing. Gautama, the enlightened or awakened one, who attained the supreme goal of Buddhism, variously known as *nirvana* (blowing out), *Bodhi* (awakening, enlightenment) and *vimutti* or *vimokkha* (liberation), and one who fully understands the Dharma, the true nature of all things or the ultimate truth, founded the path of cessation of *dukkha* (suffering created by attachment to desires and distorted perception and thinking) for the peace, harmony and welfare of all the living beings. Nowadays, the world is confronted

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with several crises and unprecedented natural disasters. The imminent threat of terrorism, ethnic violence, war, poverty, and social and economic disparity cause widespread misery and strife, leading to complex issues and crises. Buddhism with its rich heritage of tolerance and non-violence can contribute immensely and inspire us with His message of loving-kindness, peace and harmony to today's world and take us to the right path of cordial relationship among the society, tackling poverty, providing education and sustainable development to endeavour for social justice and welfare of humanity.

II. THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA AND THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

India, is not only the land of Buddha's birth but also blessed with preaching by Lord Buddha Himself the true path of living of humankind. After His Enlightenment at Bōdh Gaya, the Buddha went to the Deer Park, near *Sārnath* (Figure 1 and 2), and preached His First Sermon on the Four Noble Truths to the five ascetics, who then went forth and were ordained as the first Buddhist monks, establishing the *saṅgha* in the process. Following that, Buddha travelled to various parts of India continuously in the remaining 45 years of His life till His *mahāparinibbāna* to preach the Dharma and the path to liberation. Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, viz., (1) The truth of suffering (*dukkha*), which teaches that everyone in life is suffering in some way, (2) the origin of suffering (*samudāya*). This states that all suffering comes from desire (*taṇhā*), (3) the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*), and it says that it is possible to stop suffering and achieve enlightenment and (4) the path to the cessation of suffering (*magga* or *mārga*) is about the steps to achieve enlightenment.

The Noble Eightfold Path, one of the principal summaries of the path of Buddhist practices leading to liberation from *saṃsāra*, the suffering-laden, continuous cycle of life, death, and rebirth, in the form of *nirvāna*. The Eightfold Path consists of eight practices: Right View, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and right *samādhi* (meditative absorption or union or equanimous meditative awareness). In Buddhist symbolism, the Noble Eightfold Path is often represented using the *dharmacakka* (wheel of Dharma), in which its eight spokes represent the eight elements of the path. Lord Gautama Buddha has been an incredible drive for peace and Buddha's teaching of peace, self-sacrifice, benevolence, and charity, not solely as it leads mankind to overcome various challenges, but shaped the lives of countless individuals. Humanism, which was a hallmark of Buddha's lessons, crossed all racial and national boundaries. In India, Buddha's approach of peace, self-sacrifice, thoughtfulness, and charity not only motivated individuals in common but also the rulers, who made it the basis of their state guiding principle.

III. EMPEROR AŚOKA AND HIS TRANSFORMATION

Emperor Aśoka (268 - 232 BCE), one of the greatest rulers in Indian history, was renowned for his remarkable transformation from a ruthless conqueror to a champion of Buddhism and also for the propagation of Buddha Dharma throughout the world (Figure 3). After Aśoka's successful but devastating conquest of Kāliṅga early in his rule, he converted to Buddhism and was inspired

by its doctrine of Dharma. Thereafter, he ruled his empire through peace and tolerance and focused on public works and probation of the true path of living of humankind and welfare of humanity (Figure 4). The thirteenth Major Rock Edict (Shahbazgarhi, Kalsi, Girnar, Mansehra, Erragudi, Kandahar) carries his statement of remorse at the suffering caused by his campaign in Kalinga.

Asoka's adaptation to Buddhism is attested in the Bairat Rock inscription (Bhabra Minor Rock Edict) kept in the Indian Museum, Kolkata. It states, "the Magadha king Priyadarśin, having saluted the *saṃgha*, hopes they are both well and comfortable. You, Sirs, are aware of my deep respect and belief in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the *saṃgha*. What so ever, Sirs, has been spoken by the blessed Buddha, all that is quite well spoken." However, Sirs, I am obliged to state what would seem to me (to be referenced by the scripture's words): "Thus the true Dharma will be of long duration." The following expositions of the Dharma, Sirs, (viz.) (1) the *vinaya-samukkasa*, (2) the *Aliya-vasas* (3) the *Anagata-bhayas*, (4) the *muni-gāthā*, (5) the *Muni Sutta*, (6) the *Upatissa-paṇhā*, and (7) the *Lāludovāda Sutta* which was spoken by the blessed Buddha concerning falsehood, I desire, Sirs, that many groups of monks and (many) nuns may repeatedly listen to these expositions of the Dharma, and may reflect (on them). Both laymen and laywomen should behave similarly. I am writing this for the following reason, sir: So that they will understand what I want to do.¹ Asoka's adaptation to Buddhism is also mentioned in many records. The Minor Rock Edict I records the proclamation of Dēvānāmpriya that a little more than two and a half years have passed since I have been avowedly a lay follower (*upāsaka*) of the Buddha or Buddha Śākya. I have been actively working for the Dharma for almost a year now, ever since the *saṃgha* became closely attached to me (*saṃgham upeti*).

The Minor Rock Inscription found at Rūpnath states, "Dēvānāmpriya speaks thus. Two and a half years and somewhat more have passed) since I openly am a Śākya. But (I had not been very zealous). However, it has been a year and a half since I visited the *saṃgha*, and I have been enthusiastic. In Jambudvīpa, those gods who had hitherto been unmingled (with mortals) have now been mingled (with them) by me. For this is the fruit of zeal. Only individuals of high rank may do this; nevertheless, if a person is passionate, even a lowly person can reach the great heaven. And this proclamation was made for the following reasons: (1) the poor and the high may be zealous, (2) even (my) borderers may be aware of it, and (3) this same zeal may last for a long time. Because I will make this matter move forward, and it will move forward significantly, it will move forward to at least one and a half. And cause this matter to be engraved on rocks where an occasion presents itself. Additionally, it must be made to be carved on the stone pillars here, wherever they may be. Furthermore, in accordance with the writing of this proclamation, you are required to send an officer wherever, up to the extent of your district. While on tour, I released this declaration. 256 (nights) had been spent on tour

¹ E. Hultzsch (1925), p. 172 - 174.

at that point.”²

In the Minor Rock Inscription discovered at Ahraura, Uttar Pradesh, Dēvānāmpriya announced this while on a pilgrimage journey lasting 256 nights from the time when the relics of the Buddha were placed on the platform (i.e., I arranged for the relics of Buddha to be worshipped on the platform).³ After adopting Buddhism, Aśoka made a pilgrimage to the sites associated with Buddha's life and immortalized them by erecting *stūpas*, *chaityas*, *vihāras*, pillars, and other edifices and also made donations for the upkeep of the Buddhist establishments there. The Rummindei Pillar Inscription (also known as Lumbini Pillar Edict) records a visit of Emperor Aśoka to Lumbinī. The inscription records, “when King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin had been anointed twenty years, he came himself and worshiped (this spot). (He) caused it to be anointed that the Buddha Śākyamuni was born here and thereby caused to be created a strong desire (among people) for (that spot). Moreover, he had a stone pillar erected to signify that the Blessed One was born here. He made the village of Lummini free of taxes, and paying an eighth share (of the produce).”⁴ Aśoka exempts the village from the land tax and reduces the *bhāga* to one-eighth, but even his piety does not permit him to exempt the village from all taxes.⁵

The Nigālisāgar Pillar inscription in Nigalihawa, Nepal, records his enlargement of the *stūpa* of Konakamana and his pilgrimage to the site. This inscription provides a direct reference to Aśoka's embellishing a *stūpa* and thus making a donation at the site. It records, “When King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin had been anointed fourteen years, he enlarged the *stūpa* of the Buddha Kōṇakamana to the double (of its original size). And after [20] years of anointing, he came and worshiped (this location) [and] had [a stone pillar] erected.”⁶ Major Rock Edicts VIII records that King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin visited *Samboḍhi* (i.e., the Sacred Bōdhi Tree at Bōdh Gaya) ten years after his coronation. Thence started these pilgrimages for Dharma. Aśoka's dedication to Buddhism led him to construct a large number of *stūpas*, *chaityas*, *vihāras*, and other Buddhist edifices in his territory. Both *Mahāvamsa* and *Aśokāvadāna* mention that after the *parinirvāṇa* and cremation of the Buddha, his relics were divided into eight shares, one for each of the eight kings of that time. Each of these monarchs then built a *stūpa* over his portion of the relics at Rājagriha, Vaisāli, Kapilavastu, Allakappa, Rāmagrāma, Vethadīpa, Pava, and Kusinagara. Years later, Aśoka collected all the relics of the Buddha except from Rāmagrāma for redistribution and re-enshrining in his 84,000 *stūpas*.⁷ *Aśoka's commitment to Buddhism and the royal patronage which he extended to it doubtless helped to establish it in various parts of the subcontinent and the neighbouring areas.* Bud-

² E. Hultzsch (1925), p. 166 - 169

³ Ajay Prasad, *et.al.*, (2024), p. 151 - 163.

⁴ E. Hultzsch (1925), p. 164 - 165. S. Paranavitana (1962), p. 163 - 167.

⁵ Romila Thapar (1994), p. 15 - 36.

⁶ E. Hultzsch (1925), p. 165.

⁷ John S. Strong (1994), p. 141 - 181. *Mahāvamsa*, p. 32 - 33.

dhist literary sources mentioned that during the time of Aśoka, missionaries were sent to various places even beyond the borders of his territory after the Third Buddhist Council for the propagation of Buddhist Dharma.⁸

IV. THE ROLE OF AŚOKAN EDICTS IN PROMOTING DHARMA

The inscription on the Topra Pillar, now in Delhi and dated in the 27th year from the coronation summaries, Aśoka's (king Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin) efforts for the promotion of the *Dharma* in his own words.⁹ For this purpose, have I (Aśoka) caused proclamations on *Dharma* to be proclaimed and various kinds of instructions in *Dharma* have I ordered to be imparted, so that those officers of mine who are placed by me over many people will also preach and disseminate them. And the Rajjukas are placed by me over many hundred thousand of beings and they have also been ordered: "Instruct the people who are devoted to *Dharma* in such and such a manner."

Having this very matter in view, I have set up pillars bearing records relating to *Dharma*, appointed *Mahāmātras* to deal with the affairs connected with *Dharma*, and issued proclamations on *Dharma*. Those *Mahāmātras* of mine are occupied with various kinds of activities which are beneficial both to ascetics and to householders. And they are occupied with all the religious sects. I have arranged that some of them will be occupied with the affairs of the *saṅgha*. Likewise, I have arranged that some of them will be occupied with the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Ājīvakas*. Similarly, I have arranged that some of them will be occupied with the *Nirgranthas*. In the same way I have arranged that some of them will be occupied with various other religious sects. The different *Mahāmātras* are occupied not only with the communities referred to above but also with the other sects not mentioned specifically. I intend that the noble deeds of *Dharma* and the practice of *Dharma*, which consists of compassion, liberality, truthfulness, purity, gentleness, and goodness, will thus be promoted among men. Whatever good deeds I have performed, those the people have imitated and to those they are conforming. Thereby, they have progressed and will progress further in respect of obedience to mother and father, obedience to elders, courtesy to the aged, and courtesy to the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Śramaṇas*, to the poor and the distressed, and even to slaves and servants. I have only encouraged this progress of *Dharma* among men in two ways: by enforcing rules that are consistent with *Dharma* principles and by offering encouragement. But of these two, the restrictions relating to *Dharma* are of little consequence. By exhortation, however, *Dharma* has been promoted considerably. The *Dharma*-related restrictions are, in fact, those that I have mandated, such as the exemption from slaughter of specific animals and the many other *Dharma*-related restrictions that I have put in place. The progress of *Dharma* among men has indeed been promoted by me considerably by exhortation regarding the abstention from hurting any living being and abstention from killing any animal.¹⁰

⁸ *Mahāvamsa*, p. 82 - 87.

⁹ E. Hultzsch (1925), p. 119 - 137.

¹⁰ Ananda W. P. Guruge (1994), p. 37 - 91.

Major Rock Edict V speaks of the propagation of Dharma in territories of the western frontiers of Aśoka's empire. It records, "I (Aśoka) created the posts of Dharma *Mahāmātras* thirteen years after my coronation. These officers work with all religious groups to establish and promote Dharma, as well as to ensure the well-being and contentment of those who are committed to it, including the *Yavanas*, *Kāmbojas*, *Gandhāras*, *Rāshtrikapaitryānikas*, and others who live along my dominion's western borders." The comprehensive account of Aśoka's Dharma *vijaya* (conquest through Dharma) of foreign lands is recorded in the Major Rock Edict XIII. It states, "therefore, the Beloved of the Gods (*Dēvānāmpriya*) now regards the conquest via Dharma as the greatest conquest. And the Beloved of the Gods has accomplished this conquest not only within his dominions but also in the areas that border them, as far away as at a distance of six hundred *yōjanas*, where the Yavana king named Antiyoka (Antiochus II Theos of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria and West Asia) is ruling and where beyond the kingdom of the said Antiyoka, four other kings named Turamāya (Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Egypt), Antikini (Antigonos Gonatas in Macedonia), Makā (Magas of Cyrene in North Africa) and Alikasundara (Alexander of Epirus) are also ruling, and towards the south where the Cholas and Pāṇḍyans are living, as far as Tāmraparṇi. Likewise, here in the dominions of His Majesty, the Beloved of the Gods – in the countries of the *Yavanas* and *Kāmbojas* of the *Nābhakas* and *Nābhapanktis* of the *Bhoja-paitryānikas* and of the *Andhras* and *Paulindas* – everywhere, people are conforming to the instruction in Dharma imparted by the Beloved of the Gods." "Men have heard about the practices of Dharma, regardless of where the envoys of the Beloved of the Gods have not yet reached, the ordinances issued, and the Dharma teaching given by the Beloved of the Gods, and they are adhering to Dharma and will continue to conform to it." Aśoka's numerous rock and pillar inscriptions found in the Indian subcontinent explicitly highlight the Buddha Dharma and Buddha's teaching for the welfare of humanity and communal harmony. These inscriptions are dispersed throughout the areas of the present India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

V. THE AŚOKAN EDICTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Aśoka's edicts are categorized into Major Rock Edicts, Minor Rock Edicts, Major Pillar Edicts, Minor Pillar Edicts, and Separate Rock Edicts. The inscriptions are written in different scripts and languages. The inscriptions in the major part of the Mauryan empire were composed in the Prakrit language and written in the *Brāhmi* script. But in the north-western part, the Prakrit language was written in the *Kharosthi* script. The bilingual inscription at Kandahar (Shar-i-Kuna, the old city of Kandahar) in Afghanistan was composed in the Aramaic language and written in Aramaic script and the Greek language in Greek script. The locations of these edicts are quite interesting. Large numbers of the edicts are found in the peninsular India and the north India along the routes leading into the peninsula. The edicts in the peninsula were composed in Prakrit and inscribed in Brāhmī. The Rock Edict, issued in both Aramaic and Greek, is found in Kandahar, Afghanistan, which was

then a major centre of Hellenistic settlement. The local population here spoke Aramaic and Greek. The locations of the Major Rock Edicts are mainly in the nuclei of the trade centre. The majority of the edicts mention the author of the record as Dēvānāmpriya (Beloved of the Gods) Priyadarśin (he who regards others with kindness), and the name Aśoka is found only in the edicts found at Maski (Figure 5), Gujarrā, Nittur, and Udegulam.

The majority of the Rock Edicts of Aśoka do not directly refer to Buddhist concepts, but this does not change the fact that they had a Buddhist core. Aśoka's edicts had a Buddhist ideology to them but were set within the larger contexts of harmonious existence and respect for all living beings. The primary tenets of Aśoka's edicts include non-violence, tolerance for all sects and viewpoints, deference to parents, reverence for *Brāhmins* and other religious leaders, kindness to friends, the compassionate treatment of servants, and charity to everyone. Romila Thapar states that although Aśoka was personally a Buddhist, the majority of his edicts in which he attempted to define Dharma do not suggest that he was merely preaching Buddhism. In his edicts, Aśoka defines the main principles of Dharma as non-violence, tolerance of all sects and opinions, obedience to parents, respect to others, and generosity towards all. It suggests a general ethic of behaviour to which no religious or social group could object. Furthermore, it can serve as a centre of allegiance to unite the disparate elements that comprised the empire.¹¹

The Major Rock Edict is a set of fourteen edicts. The Rock Edict I speaks about principles for the protection of people, the prohibition of animal slaughter, ban of festive gatherings, and no living being must be killed and sacrificed. The Edict II of the Major Rock Edict defines Dharma as compassion, truthfulness, and virtue. The Edict mentions, "Everywhere in the dominions of king Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin, and likewise among (his) borderers, such as the Chōḍas (Chōḷas), the Pāṇḍyas, the Satiyaputo, the Kētalaputo even Tamibapaniṇi (Tāmrāparṇi), the Yōna king Am̐tiyakasa (Antiyaka) and also the kings who are the neighbours of this Am̐tiyakasa (Antiyaka), everywhere two (kinds of) medical treatment were established by king Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin, (viz.) medical treatment for men and medical treatment for cattle. Moreover, herbs that were good for cattle and men were required to be imported and planted everywhere they weren't already present. The roots and fruits were required to be imported and planted, where there were not exist. On the road's wells were caused to be dug, and trees were caused to be planted for the use of cattle and men." The Edict III of the Major Rock Edict advises the subjects to control violence, cruelty, anger, and envy and the duties of *Rājūka* and others. King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin speaks, "I ordered the following after I had been anointed for twelve years. Every five years, the *yuktas*, the *rājūka*, and the *prādēśika* will embark on a comprehensive tour (across their charges) for this very reason, i.e., to provide moral training and for other purposes. Obedience to parents is a sign of merit. Being generous to

¹¹ Romila Thapar (1994), p. 15 - 36.

Brāhmaṇas and *Śramaṇas*, as well as to friends, acquaintances, and relatives, is praiseworthy. It is admirable to refrain from harming animals. It is worthwhile to exercise moderation in both spending and possessions. The *yuktas* will also be ordered to register these rules by the *mahāmātras* council, both in accordance with the letter and with additional justifications.” The Edict IV of the Major Rock Edict speaks about the impact of Dharma on society. The Edict records that disrespect for family members, cruelty to animals, and discourtesy to *Brāhmaṇas* and *Śramaṇas* had been encouraged for hundreds of years in the past. However, as a result of King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin’s morality-promoting actions, the sound of drums has evolved into a morality sound, displaying to the populace images of elephants, flying chariots, fire masses, and other divine beings. Since they had not existed for hundreds of years, they are now encouraged by King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin’s moral instruction, which includes refraining from killing animals, refraining from harming living things, showing courtesy to family members, showing courtesy to *Brāhmaṇas* and *Śramaṇas*, obeying one’s parents, and showing obedience to the elderly. The practice of morality is encouraged in these and numerous other ways. And King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin will ever promote this practice of morality. And the sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons of King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin will promote this practice of morality until the destruction (of the world), (and) will instruct (people) in morality, abiding by morality (and) by good conduct. And the practice of morality is not (possible) for (a person) devoid of good conduct. Therefore, it is worthwhile to promote this object rather than ignore it. They caused this to be written for the following reason: They should dedicate themselves to promoting this practice, and they should not condone its neglect. This was caused to be written by King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin (when he had been) anointed twelve years. The Edict V of the Major Rock Edict records the appointment of Dharma-*Mahāmātras* and advice for performing virtuous deeds.¹²

In the past, the officers called *Mahāmātras* of morality (Dharma-*Mahāmātra*) did not exist. However, when I was anointed thirteen years ago, I appointed *Mahāmātras* of morality. These are involved with all sects in developing morality.... together with those who are committed to morals even among the Yōṇas, Kambōjas, Gandhāras, Ristikas, Pētēnikas, and any other western borderers (of my domain). They are engaged with servants and masters... for the... happiness of those who are committed to morals, as well as to free them from longing (for worldly life). They are engaged in providing financial support to prisoners, their children, those who are bewitched (i.e.,

¹² “King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin speaks thus. It is difficult to perform virtuous deeds. The person who begins to act morally achieves a challenging goal. Many good things have now been done by me. Thus, among my sons and grandsons, and among my descendants, who shall come after them until the aeon of devastation of the world, those who will fulfil this obligation will accomplish good deeds? However, the person who disregards even a small part of this obligation will perform evil deeds. For sin is easily committed.

terminally ill), and elderly persons. They are engaged everywhere, both in Pāṭaliputra and the surrounding areas ... and whatever other relatives I may have. These *Mahāmātras* of morality... Whether one is eager for morality. This official edict or announcement on morality has been written with the following goals in mind.”

The Edict VI of the Major Rock Edict describes Aśoka’s desire to get informed about the conditions of the people constantly and also talks about welfare measures. “King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin speaks thus. There was no such thing as the disposal of affairs or the submission of reports at any point in the past. However, I have made the following (strategic) changes. Everywhere, reporters are posted with instructions to inform me of the people’s concerns as they arise at any time. And I am handling people’s business everywhere I go. For I consider it my duty (to promote) the welfare of all men. But the root of that (is) this, (viz.) exertion and the dispatch of business. The promoting of the welfare of all people is the most vital duty than any other duty. And whatsoever effort I am making is to pay off the debt I owe to living things, provide them happiness in this world, and help them reach heaven in the other world. This moral code was written with the intention that it would last for a long time and that my sons, grandchildren, and great-grandsons would follow it for the good of all people.” In Edict VII of the Major Rock Edict, Aśoka appeals to all sects for self-control and purity of mind. “The objective of King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin is for all sects to live wherever they want. (For) all this desire both self-control and purity of mind. However, men have a variety of interests and desires. They will either fulfil the whole or just a portion of them. However, even someone who practises a lot of liberal behaviour but lacks self-control, purity of mind, gratefulness, and steadfast dedication is extremely cruel.” Edict VIII of the Major Rock Edict describes Aśoka’s Dharma *yatra* to Bodhi Gaya and the tour of morality.¹³

Edict IX of the Major Rock Edict condemns useless ceremonies and stress in ceremonies of Dharma. “King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin speaks thus. Men are practising various ceremonies during different occasions. However, in these situations, women are engaged in a wide range of obscene and useless rituals. However, these kinds of events don’t produce anything. However, the following the practice of morality bears a lot of fruit. This includes being kind and polite to slaves and servants, showing respect for elders, being kind to animals, and being generous to *Brāhmaṇas* and *Śramaṇas*. These and other virtues are referred to as the practice of morality. Therefore, a father, or a son, or a brother, or a

¹³ “In times past kings used to set out on pleasure-tours. Hunting and other such activities were (enjoyed) on these tours. But when King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin had been anointed ten years, he went to sambōdhi. Therefore, these tours of morality (were undertaken). These (tours) include visiting Brāhmaṇas and Śramaṇas and giving gifts to them, visiting the elderly persons and providing them gold, visiting the people of the country, teaching them morals, and asking them questions about morality as appropriate for the circumstances. This second period (of the reign) of King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin becomes a pleasure in a higher degree.”

master should declare: This is meritorious. This practice should be observed until the (desired) object is attained. Moreover, it has also been stated that Gifts are meritorious. But there is no such gift or benefit as the gift of morality or the benefit of morality. Thus, on such and such an occasion, a friend, a well-wisher, a relative, or a companion should, in fact, reprimand (another): This should be done, this is meritorious. It is possible to reach paradise by doing this (practice).” Edict X of the Major Rock Edict condemns the desire for fame and glory and stresses on popularity of Dharma. “Neither splendour nor fame, in the opinion of King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin, offers much benefit, excepting with the desire to persuade oneself to the practice of acquiescence to morality and persuade people to follow moral principles both now and in the distant future. On this (account), King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin desires glory and fame. But whatever effort King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin is making, all that (is) for the sake of (merit) in the other (world), (and) so that all (men) may run little danger. But the danger is this, viz. demerit. However, it is difficult for both high and lowly people to do this without putting aside all other goals and without a great deal of fervour. However, it is tougher to accomplish for a high (person) among these two types of people.” Edict XI of the Major Rock Edict elaborates the morality and emphasis on giving respect to elders, abstaining from killing animals, and liberality towards friends.¹⁴

VI. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY UNDER AŚOKA

Edict XII of the Major Rock Edict appeals towards tolerance and mutual respect among different religious sects. “King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadaṣin is honouring all sects: Both ascetics and householders, both with gifts and with honors of various kinds he is honoring them. However, Dēvānāmpriya does not place as much significance on gifts or honours as this, i.e., that the fundamentals of all sects should be promoted. But a promotion of the essentials (is possible) in many ways. Its foundation, however, is the idea that one should always speak reasonably and refrain from criticizing other sects or praising one’s own on inappropriate occasions. However, other sects should always be respected. By doing this, one is both aiding other sects and also advancing his sect. One is harming not only his sect but also other sects if he behaves differently. Anyone who extols his sect or puts blame on other sects does so out of loyalty to his sect, i.e., to exalt his sect. If he does this, he causes great harm to his sect. Therefore, concord alone is meritorious, (i.e.) that they should both hear and obey each other’s morals. For this reason, Dēvānāmpriya wants all sects to be learned

¹⁴ “King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadarśin speaks thus. The gift of morality, acquaintance through morality, distribution of morality, or kinship through morality are all non-existent. These include being polite and courtesy to slaves and servants, obeying one’s mother and father, being generous to friends, acquaintances, and relatives, including *Brāhmaṇas* and *Śramaṇas*, and refraining from killing animals. In this regard, a father, a son, a brother, a friend, an acquaintance, a relative, or even (mere) neighbors should say: This is meritorious. This should be done. If one behaves in this way, achieving of happiness in this world is (assured), and that the gift of morality creates limitless merit in the other (world).”

and to have the pure doctrine. Furthermore, the following should be spoken to those who are affiliated with their particular sects. Dēvānāmpriya does not value either gifts or honors so (highly) as (this), (viz.) that a promotion of the essentials of all sects should take place. And many (officers) are occupied for this purpose, (viz.) the *Mahāmātras* of morality, the *Mahāmātras* controlling women, the inspectors of cow-pens, and other classes (of officials). And this is the result of it, i.e., that morality is glorified and one's sect is promoted." Edict XIII is the largest of all the Edicts of the Major Rock Edict. It talks about Aśoka's victory over *Kaliṅga* (262 - 261 BCE) and mentions his remorse for the half million killed or deported during his conquest. The Edict pleads for conquest by Dharma instead of war. The Edict also provides details of various rulers of the neighbouring countries. Edict XIV of the Major Rock Edict states that these re-scripts on morality have been caused to be written by King Dēvānāmpriya Priyadaśin either in an abridged (form), of middle (size), or at full length. Further, it states, "For (my) dominions are wide, and much has been written, and I shall cause still (more) to be written. In addition, some of this has been spoken about again and again due to the allure of particular subjects and for men to behave appropriately. In some instances (some) of this may have been written incompletely, either on account of the locality, or because (my) motive was not liked, or by the fault of the writer."

VII. THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM BEYOND INDIA

The Minor Rock Edicts also discuss morality and propagation of the Dharma among the local community. The first segment of the Minor Rock Edict is, in some cases, addressed to the officers of the area, and the inscription, therefore, becomes one that is intended for the general public. This becomes amply clear in the statement that the officers are to make public its contents. Aśoka describes himself as a Buddhist upāsaka. In the second segment of the Minor Rock Edict, Aśoka again calls upon the officers and particularly the Rājūka, the rural officers, and the local chiefs to instruct the people of the countryside, assembling them with the sound of the drum. The virtues of Dharma are explained as obeying mother and father, obeying teachers, having mercy on living beings, and speaking the truth. These precepts are so broad-based that they do not require any religious sectarian identification. Such virtues were common to a large number of religious sects. The third segment reiterates these virtues and particularly calls on professional groups such as elephant keepers, scribes, and fortune tellers, as well as brāhmins, to instruct their apprentices that they must honour their masters and that within a family, relatives must treat each other with respect. This is described as an ancient custom conducive to long life. At the single site of Brahmagiri, the name of the engraver, *Capaḍa*, is written in *Kharoṣṭhi*. The Pillar inscriptions also narrate about Aśoka's message for the welfare and protection of the people and also the instruction for the abolition of the practice of harshness, cruelty, anger, pride among his subjects or sects, prevention of killing animals and birds, the duties of the Rājūkas, *Mahāmātras* and other officials and the rule and regulation of the *Saṅgha*.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Emperor Aśoka was the prime and faithful propagator of Buddhist insights for Peace, Compassion, and Human Development among the people and thus paved the way for the succeeding propagators of Buddha Dharma, the appropriate manner of transmitting the message of Buddha for the human welfare at the grassroots level. The basic attributes of Buddha Dharma included compassion, charity, truthfulness, purity and gentleness, extend respect, consideration, compassion and tolerance towards slaves and servants; obedience to parents and generosity towards friends and relatives, mutual respect and understanding between people of different sects and beliefs, regard and donations to *Brāhmaṇas* and *Śramaṇas* and religious and social harmony. All these aspects are sincerely deliberated in the Aśoka's edicts in detail.

Aśoka the Great, after witnessing the horrors of the *Kaliṅga* war, embraced Buddhism and dedicated his rule to promoting peace, tolerance, compassion, and sustainable human development through moral edicts. He realised that the Dharma's programme was an earnest attempt to solve some of the issues and problems that a complicated society faced and thus propagate compassion towards animals and proper behaviour towards relatives, friends, and elders. He also pleaded for tolerance of different religious sects in an attempt to create a sense of harmony. He undertook many human and animal welfare measures, such as the establishment of medical treatment facilities for men and cattle, the planting of medicinal plants, the drilling of wells to provide sufficient water to the public, and the planting of trees along highways. These operations were not carried out in his country alone, but also in the neighbouring kingdoms such as Chōḍas (Chōḷas), the Pāṇḍyas, the Satiyaputo, the Kēṭalaputo, Tāmīrapaṇi (Tāmrapaṇi, Sri Lanka), the Yōna king Amītyako (Antiyaka) and also the kings who were the neighbours of this Amītyakasa (Antiyaka).

Aśoka tried his level best to directly communicate the Buddha Dharma and the teachings of Buddha for the welfare of humanity and communal harmony among the masses by installing numerous rock and pillar edicts engraving the true path of life as taught by Lord Buddha throughout his vast empire in the Indian subcontinent. These edicts were composed in the language familiar in the particular locality where it was installed. This shows his sincere concern that the message of the rightful path of human beings had to reach the local public properly. He also appointed the officials called Dharma Mahāmātras to explain the righteousness engraved in the edicts and also take care of the needy. These rock edicts explicitly emphasize nonviolence, peace, forgiveness, respect for all life, fostering unity, ethical governance, and religious and communal harmony.

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BUDDHISM SPREADS COOPERATION, HARMONY, AND GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract:

The study examines the historical transmission of Buddhism and its role in fostering global unity. It highlights the adaptability of Buddhism across cultures, particularly from India to Vietnam, emphasizing Luy Lâu's influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism. Central to the discussion are Buddhist principles of compassion and selflessness, which reduce conflicts and promote cooperation. The paper underscores the transformative power of mindfulness and meditation in cultivating sustainable peace and resolving personal and social issues. A novel contribution is the integration of Buddhist teachings with environmental ethics, advocating for ecological consciousness through interconnectedness, thereby supporting sustainable development. The author further emphasizes the importance of ethical governance inspired by the Buddha's Ten Kingly Virtues, promoting leadership that upholds justice, nonviolence, and public welfare. Ultimately, the study positions Buddhism as a relevant and dynamic force capable of addressing modern global challenges, fostering cooperation, harmony, and sustainable progress in a rapidly changing world. Buddhism, which was born in the 5th century BC in northern India by Shakyamuni Buddha, has spread strongly and left a deep impression all over the world. The idea of compassion, wisdom, and harmony has helped Buddhism adapt and develop in many different cultures, including Vietnam, which is on the path of spreading Buddhism in East Asia.

Keywords: *Buddhism, sustainability, compassion, mindfulness, harmony, environmental ethics, global unity.*

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I. STAGE OF FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT

1.1. Beginnings in India

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, he shared his insights through lectures, spreading the teachings of compassion and wisdom. The Buddha's early disciples played an important role in spreading the teachings throughout Northern India. Thanks to their dedication and enthusiasm, the Buddha's message was quickly embraced by many strata of society. Buddhist teachings not only provide a path to liberation from personal suffering but also propose a way of living in harmony and compassion, which has attracted widespread interest and acceptance in the community. After becoming enlightened and achieving 60 60-monk, the Buddha taught:

Bhikkhus... Go on the road for the benefit of many, for the happiness of the many, for the sake of compassion for the world, for the sake of profit, for the happiness of heaven and man. You go, but don't go in the same direction, go one way at a time, spread the Dharma.... Raise the banner of the good mind, teach the supreme teachings, and bring goodness to others. Okay, you have completed your task.¹

1.2. Spreading out of India

In the 3rd century BC, during the reign of King Ashoka, Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. From there, the teachings continued to Central Asia, Vietnam, and China and then expanded to Korea, Japan, and Tibet. Vietnamese Buddhism spread in East Asia in the early centuries AD:

1.2.1. Luy Lôu (贏樓), A *Mahāyāna* Buddhist centre in Vietnam in the early centuries A. D.

During the Hán (漢, 206 BCE - 220 CE) dynasty in China there were at least three centres of Buddhism: (i) P'eng- ch'eng (彭城) or the lower Yangtze region in east China, (ii) Lo-yang (洛陽) by the Yellow river, and (iii) Luy Lôu (螺樓) which is now near the capital of Hà Nội, Vietnam. Luy Lôu was one of three ancient towns in Vietnam at the time: Cổ Loa (古螺), Long Biên (龍編), and Luy Lôu (螺樓).

Luy Lôu was a place where foreign traders from China, central Asia, India, and southeast Asia came to exchange merchant goods. On the prosperous Luy Lôu centre, Tiên-Hán-Thư (前漢書) writes: "The land of the Viets situates nearby the sea, having a lot of rhinoceros, tortoise-shell, pearl, gold, copper, fruits, likhi. Almost Chinese merchants frequented the area to do business and became rich. Phiên-Ngung (蕃隅) is its ruling place."²

Merchants accompanied by Buddhist monks from India, central and southeast Asia also arrived in Luy Lôu for their business. They not only brought goods for exchange but also brought knowledge from their homeland, such as medicine, agriculture, astronomy, customs and habits, and religious beliefs.

¹ Bhikkhu Indacanda (Trans.), Nguyet Thien. (2006). Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga 1, p. 238.

² *Book of the Former Han* (前漢書). (n.d). vol. 28, part II, p. 36.

Through their interaction, languages were also developed. Vietnamese, Chinese, and Sanskrit were all used in trade and spreading Buddhism. Vietnamese was enriched with the entry of new words from other countries, particularly India, such words as mít (Jack tree), nhài (Jasmine), bụt (*Buddha*), bồ-đề (*bodhi*), bồ tát (*Bodhisattva*), tháp (*stūpa*), Tăng-già (*Sangha*), etc. Both Hán (漢) and Sanskrit languages also took an opportunity to develop. Naturally, Luy Lâu became a converging place of various cultures.

Some historical factors prove that there appeared a fairly developed form of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in Luy Lâu (贏樓) in the late 2nd century AD coming directly from India by sea route:

(i) The earliest Chinese translations of the *Mahāyāna* texts are those of the *Sukhāvatīyūha-sūtra* (阿彌陀經), between 148 and 170 AD, of the *Śatasāhasrikāprajñā* (百千論般若), between 175 and 220 AD.³

(ii) The Indian vessels visited Southeast Asia to exchange trade goods before the end of the 1 millennium BC. The interest in the area probably intensified after Emperor Vespasian, who succeeded in 69 AD, prohibited the export of gold coinage from the Roman Empire. The seasonal pattern of the prevailing wind, in which northeast winds dominated between November and May and southwest winds from May to November, meant that the landfall in southeast Asia lasted for some months. Among their passengers were numbered Hindu Brahmins and Buddhist monks.

Naturally, following the trading affair was cultural expansion, which resulted in the Indianized kingdoms in the Indochinese peninsula and in the islands of Indonesia. Coedes writes: “the relations between Indian proper and Father India date back to the prehistoric times.”⁴

(iii) Monk Đàm Thiên answered the Sui Emperor Wen-di (隋文帝, 603 - 617): “The region of Giao Châu has routes connected to Thiên Trúc (千竺, India). By the time Buddhism (in China) did not yet become popular in Giang Đông (江東), the region [of Giao Châu, 交州] had had already more than twenty *stūpas* in Luy Lâu, five hundred monks, and fifteen translated *sūtras*. So, Buddhism was introduced into Nam Việt (南越) before into our state. At that time, such monks as *Māraṇvaka* (摩羅示域), Khương Tăng Hội (康僧會), Chi Cương Lương (支僵良), Mâu Bác (牟博), etc. have stayed there already.”⁵

(iv) Khương Tăng Hội (康僧會), whose parents were Sogdians (Central Asia) migrating to Giao Châu and doing business in the early 3rd century AD (200 - 247), was ordained in Giao Châu, became a well-known Ch’an Master, and was well-versed in Sanskrit and Chinese. He translated some *sūtras* from

³ Nanjio, B. *Catalogue* No. 678.

⁴ Coedes, G. (1968). *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Trans. Susan Brown Cowing), Hawai, p. 14.

⁵ *Anthology of Outstanding Figures in the Zen Garden* (禪畹集英). (1993). (Trans. Ngo Duc Tho & Nguyen Thuy Nga), Hanoi, p. 91 - 92.

Sanskrit to Chinese, for example, *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñā* (八千誦般若), which was one of the most ancient *sūtras* of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. After that, he arrived in Kiến Nghiệp (建業, Nanking in China) for propagation and was considered the first Buddhist monk to preach meditation there, and

(v) The Tam Quốc Chí (三國志) recording the story of Sĩ Nhiếp (士燮) mentioned a letter by Viên Huy sent to *Tuân Húc* in 207 AD, which praised Sĩ Nhiếp for ruling Giao Châu for more than twenty years and “When going or coming he was accompanied with solemn rituals including plenty of horse-carriages. Brass brand, scores of the Hồ (Indian monks) burning incense...”⁶

Buddhism found a ready acceptance in Vietnam, appealing not only to the common folk with its religious practices but also captivating the interest of the elite and scholars. In the 1st century AD, through the early interactions, Indian merchants and Buddhist monks, whether by chance or design, introduced straightforward religious practices. These included prayers to *Dīpankara Buddha* (佛然燈) and *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara* (觀世音) for protection and salvation, particularly during perilous sea voyages; taking refuge in the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Sangha*; observing moral precepts; and making donations to earn merit for this life and the next. Such fundamental religious activities resonated with the existing beliefs of the Vietnamese populace, especially under the harsh rule of Chinese dominion. The tale of Tắm Cám, a cherished and ancient Vietnamese legend handed down through generations, embodies Buddhist principles of *karma*, depicting *Buddha* as a benevolent figure aiding the virtuous and the wicked facing repercussions from the heavens. This simplistic interpretation of Buddhism was also in harmony with the rural community’s belief in the continuation of the soul after death and the natural cycle of life.

As recounted in the 14th century Vietnamese chronicle Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái (嶺南摘怪), the earliest Vietnamese adherents to Buddhism were Chử Đồng Tử and his wife Tiên Dung, a princess of the Hùng Vương (雄王, 300 BC - 111 AD) dynasty. They were said to have learned the teachings of Buddhism from an Indian monk named Phật Quang (佛光) around the mid-3rd or 2nd century BC at Quỳnh Viên mountain in Cửa Sót (present-day Hà Tĩnh).

In the 2nd century AD, the region of Giao Châu (交州), incorporating Luy Lâu (羸樓), became a pivotal center for Buddhism in Vietnam. It marked the beginnings of a Buddhist *Sangha*, the initiation of translating Buddhist Sanskrit *Sūtras* into the local script, and the construction of *stūpas* and temples dedicated to the faith. It also saw the birth of Buddhist scholarly work, notably the composition of Lý Hoặc Luận (理惑論) by Mâu Tử (牟子, 165AD - ?). This text is significant as it provides insights into the state of Buddhism in Vietnam during these initial centuries. According to Kenneth K. S. Ch’en, this period was crucial for laying the foundations of Buddhism in the region, signaling the start of a profound religious transformation that would deeply

⁶ Thích Tam Duc. (2008). Buddhist Solutions, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 36.

influence Vietnamese spiritual and cultural landscapes for centuries to come:

The first point we learn from the preface of Mou-tzu is that, in addition to the Buddhist centers in east China and Loyang, there existed a flourishing Buddhist community in south China during the Han dynasty. The origins and early development of this community are shrouded in mystery. We do know that Indian traders were already making the trip by sea to ports in China during the Han dynasty. Even merchants from the Roman Empire appear to have participated in this trade, for in 166, an individual who claimed to be an envoy of the Roman ruler An-tun (Marcus Aurelius Antonius) arrived in China by sea. Among the Indian traders were undoubtedly Buddhist converts. Buddhist monks must have been present also, for we find them described in Mou-tzu as shaving their heads, wearing saffron-colored robes, eating one meal a day, controlling the six senses, leaving the household life, and abandoning their wives and children. K'ang Seng Hui⁷, who arrived in Nanking in 247, was said to have been descended from a Sogdian family who had moved to Tonkin⁸ for commercial reasons after having lived in India for a number of generations.⁹

The “*Lý Hoặc Luận*,” surfacing in the late second century A. D., references the “*Sūtra in 42 Sections*,” (四十二章經), suggesting that the latter emerged in the early second century A. D. It is believed to have been translated in Luy Lâu, serving as a pivotal point for Buddhism’s spread to China. Despite this, in the compilation by Đạo An (道安) in 374 A.D., known as “*Tổng Lý Chúng Kinh Mục Lục*,” (总理眾經目录) neither the “*Lý Hoặc Luận*” nor the “*Sūtra in 42 Sections*” is listed among the earliest Chinese *sūtras*, which according to Đạo An, were all translated in Loyang. As a resident of Loyang and a knowledgeable figure regarding the dissemination of Buddhist *sūtras* in the north, Đạo An’s unawareness of the “*Sūtra in 42 Sections*” implies its origin outside the north. Paul Pelliot suggests that this *sūtra* most likely originated in the south of the Yangtze River, specifically in Luy Lâu. It is a plausible hypothesis that the “*Sūtra in 42 Sections*,” recognized as one of the earliest texts translated into Chinese in the second century AD, originated from Luy Lâu, which was then a prominent Buddhist hub under Chinese rule.

During the late second to early third century AD, in Giao Châu, amid the eras of Mậu Tử and Khương Tăng Hội, there circulated at least fifteen *sūtras*, supported by five hundred Buddhist monks and marked by the erection of twenty *stūpas*. The “*Sūtra in 42 Sections*” primarily targets monastic life rather than lay spirituality.

1.2.2. Luy Lâu, A microcosm of *Buddha Dhamma*’s broader role in strengthening Asia

The content of Luy Lâu closely aligns with the summit’s theme, “Role of

⁷ Kang Seng Hui (? - 280): The person bringing the cultural strength from Vietnam to China was K’ang Seng Hui.

⁸ Tonkin is a place name for present-day northern Vietnam.

⁹ Ch’ên, K. K. S. (1964). *Buddhism in China*, Princeton, p. 38.

Buddha Dhamma in Strengthening Asia,” by highlighting the historical roots and the expansive influence of Buddhism in Vietnam, specifically through the lens of the Luy Lâu Buddhist center. By illustrating how Luy Lâu emerged as a significant Buddhist hub in the 2nd century AD, the article underscores the role of Buddhism not only in fostering spiritual and cultural growth within Vietnam but also in facilitating cultural and religious exchange between Vietnam and other regions of Asia.

Luy Lâu had its critical position along the trade routes connecting China, Central Asia, India, and Southeast Asia, making it a melting pot of diverse cultures and religions. This convergence enabled the introduction and dissemination of Buddhism in Vietnam, facilitated by the efforts of foreign traders and Buddhist monks. It showcases how Buddhism, through its foundational beliefs and practices, resonated with local traditions and beliefs, leading to its acceptance and integration into Vietnamese society.

Buddhism’s role in bridging different cultures is further exemplified by the translation and circulation of Buddhist *Sūtras* in Luy Lâu, demonstrating the early movement of Buddhist texts from India to Vietnam and onto China. Such activities precipitated a synthesizing of knowledge, language, and religious practices that extended beyond geographical boundaries, strengthening the cultural and spiritual connections among Asian countries.

Moreover, by mentioning key figures and texts, such as the “*Sūtra* in 42 Sections,” and the involvement of influential monks who contributed to the spread and establishment of Buddhism in Vietnam, the article highlights how Buddhism has been a unifying force across Asia. It has encouraged the exchange of ideas, fostered mutual understanding, and contributed to the spiritual and cultural enrichment of Asian societies.

In essence, the historical narrative of Buddhism’s growth in Vietnam, exemplified by Luy Lâu, serves as a microcosm of *Buddha Dhamma*’s broader role in strengthening Asia. It symbolizes the enduring influence of Buddhism in shaping the social, cultural, and spiritual fabric of Asian civilizations, fostering interconnectedness, and promoting peace and harmony across the continent.

1.3. Modern Buddhism

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Buddhism began to gain traction in the West, mainly through waves of migration from Asia and the discovery of Buddhist philosophy and practice by Western scholars. Academic studies and translations of Buddhist scriptures have contributed greatly to the spread of the teachings to a large Western audience. Tibetan Buddhism expanded beyond Tibet mainly due to the influence of the Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368), founded by Kublai Khan, who ruled China, Mongolia, and parts of Siberia. During the modern period of history, Tibetan Buddhism has spread throughout Asia through the efforts of the Tibetan community that migrated from China.

There had occurred the dissemination of Tibetan culture to many other countries: southwards to all the Himalayan regions, the northern side of present-day Pakistan, and northern present-day Myanmar. Eastwards, Tibetan

culture spread to northern China and Manchuria; northwards to Mongolia, Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva regions of Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and Dzungaria in East Turkistan.¹⁰

Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (18/10/1870 – 12/7/1966), self-proclaimed “Daisetz” since 1894, was a Japanese essayist, philosopher, religious scholar, and translator. He is famous for his extensive understanding of Buddhism, especially Zen and Shin, and played a key role in expanding interest in these areas, as well as the philosophy of the Far East in general, to the Western world. In addition, Suzuki is an elite translator of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Sanskrit literature. He has spent many years teaching at universities in the West and serving as a professor at Ōtani University, a Buddhist educational institution in Japan. “Western interest in Zen Buddhism is steadily rising, and the ferment introduced by Dr D. T. Suzuki is beginning to take effect and to appear in visible reaction.”¹¹

The *Pāli* Text Society (PTS), or *Pāli* Text Society, is a publishing organization founded in 1881 by Thomas William Rhys Davids. The goal of the Society is to promote the study of texts written in the *Pāli* language, the language in which texts belonging to the Theravada Buddhist school are preserved. This is the oldest collection of Buddhist scriptures that have preserved the original language intact. The *Pāli* Text Society not only focuses on the translation of the *Pāli* Sutras but also on publishing a wide variety of Buddhist literary works, teaching the *Pāli* language, and disseminating the material to libraries throughout Europe in order to spread the scholarly value of Buddhism in the region.

II. PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATION AND HARMONY

2.1. Compassion and selflessness

Compassion and selflessness are two core principles in Buddhist teachings, which have a positive influence on how we interact and live with others in society.

(1) Compassion:

Compassion encourages us to treat people with love and tolerance, no matter who they are. This includes being empathetic and willing to help those who are struggling or suffering, thereby building relationships based on understanding and goodwill. The presence of compassion in everyday life minimizes hostility and improves the quality of social relationships, facilitating a peaceful living environment.

(2) Selflessness:

Selflessness teaches that there is no fixed ego. This awareness helps us to let go of unnecessary clinging to ourselves and reduce ego and individualism. When we understand that most conflicts stem from self-esteem and self-

¹⁰ Abenayake, O., & Tilakaratne, A. (2011–2012). 2600 Years of Sambuddhatva. Government of Sri Lanka, p. 137.

¹¹ Linssen, R. (1960). *Living Zen*, New York: Random House, p.7.

interest, it will be easier for us to resolve conflicts by moving toward tolerance and fairness. The reduction of self-grasping will lead to increased cooperation and harmony in society.

It is the misconceptions about “self” and “soul” that lead people to disputes and suffering.

It is our soul that speaks, feels, and enjoys the retribution of good and evil karma that has done this and that, and that very soul is permanent, permanent, eternal, unchanging, and will exist forever. “Bhikkhus, this is called wrong view, forest view, dangerous view, ideological view, dispute view, and grasping view.”¹²

Today, several studies on the brain attract attention, such as “Body swap study shows itself to be a trick of the mind”¹³ in *The Guardian* magazine. Accordingly, brain scientists have succeeded in deceiving people into thinking that they are inside someone else’s body or a plastic dummy; that is, human perception can be an illusion.

2.2. Meditation and mindfulness

Meditation and mindfulness are key Buddhist practices that offer many profound benefits to individuals and communities. When practiced regularly, they contribute to the development of emotional control and create a peaceful mental state, which helps to reduce stress and anxiety in daily life.

And, *Ānanda*, in this world, the bhikkhu contemplates the body, is enthusiastically awake, mindful, suppressing greed-sadness to the world, contemplating the senses... contemplating on the mind... contemplating the dhammas. Thus, *Ānanda*, the bhikkhu himself is a lamp for himself, he relies on himself, he does not rely on anyone else, he uses the Dharma as a lamp, he uses the Dharma as a refuge, he does not rely on anything else..., these people, *Ānanda*, are the supreme beings of my bhikkhus.¹⁴

(1) Controlling Emotions

Meditation encourages self-awareness and self-observation, which helps people better understand their reactions and emotions. This helps us not to be overwhelmed by negative emotions such as anger or anxiety, thereby minimizing internal conflicts.

(2) Reducing stress

Mindfulness guides people to pay attention to the present rather than worrying about the past or the future. This helps to calm the mind, reduce stress, improve mental health, and helps to improve the quality of life.

(3) Conflict Resolution

¹² *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), I, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), (1973). Saigon: Van Hanh University, p. 9.

¹³ Randerson, J. (2008, December 3). “Body swap research shows that self is a trick of mind”. *The Guardian*.

¹⁴ *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), I, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), (1973). Saigon: Van Hanh University, p. 11.

When the mind is peaceful and clear, people are able to face difficult situations with wisdom and compassion. This facilitates the peaceful and effective resolution of conflicts, both in personal relationships and in the wider community.

Bhikkhu, due to any predisposition, some delusional thoughts haunt a person, if there is nothing here to rejoice, to be welcomed, to be obedient, then such a time is the end of concealed desire, the end of concealed aversion, the end of concealed view, the cessation of suspicion, the cessation of concealed conceit, the cessation of concealed affection, the cessation of concealed ignorance, the cessation of the concealed scepter, the concealed sword, the struggle, the win or lose, the argument, the resistance, the separation speech, the wrong speech. It is here that these evils and unwholesome dharmas are destroyed, and there is no remnant.¹⁵

III. THE ROLE OF BUDDHISM IN MODERN SOCIETY

3.1. Comprehensive education, intellectual and moral development

Buddhist education focuses not only on the transmission of knowledge but also on the development of body, mind, intellect, and morality, including mindfulness education. These are important factors that help individuals develop holistically, not only academically but also physically, mentally, and emotionally. “Bhikkhus, before I became enlightened, I had not yet attained enlightenment, when I was a bodhisattva, I dwelt a lot with the mindfulness of the in-out breath, so that my body and my eyes did not get tired, and my mind was liberated from impurities.”¹⁶

Wisdom in Buddhism is not only wisdom but also the ability to deeply understand the nature of life and relationships. Buddhist education encourages the cultivation of morality, teaching values such as compassion, selflessness, and justice. This helps students develop a solid value system, which underpins all decisions and actions in life.

The Buddha warned mankind, “The world is impermanent, going to destruction... The world is deprived, desired, and enslaved to craving.”¹⁷ It is craving (*taṇhā*) that is the cause of human suffering. It is for this reason that people struggle, fight, and war.

3.2. Awareness of linkage, environmental protection, and sustainable development

Buddhism teaches about the deep connection between all living things and the natural world. The Green Buddhist movement encourages people to realize that human survival and well-being depend heavily on the health and sustainability of ecosystems.

¹⁵ *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), I, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), (1973). Saigon: Van Hanh University, p. 110.

¹⁶ *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), I, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), (1973). Saigon: Van Hanh University, p. 55.

¹⁷ *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), II, “Ratthapāla Sutta”, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), Saigon: Van Hanh University, 1974, p. 69B – 72.

After his ordination in search of the truth and for the first six years of his study with the Brahmin masters, although he attained the two highest types of meditation at that time, Non-possession Concentration and Thoughtless and Non-thoughtless Concentration, the Recluse Gautama was not satisfied until he made up his mind to seek the truth on his own. After sitting in meditation for seven weeks under the Bodhi tree, at midnight at the end, he became enlightened. The truth that he summed up was called the theorem of dependent arising.

“This exists, that exists/ This is born, that is born/ This does not exist, that does not exist/ This destroys, that destroys”¹⁸

Thereby, he showed that suffering human beings are made up of a series of psychological and physiological processes: “...conditioned by ignorance are the karma-formations; conditioned by the karma-formations is consciousness; conditioned by consciousness is psycho-physicality; conditioned by psycho-physicality are the six (sensory) spheres; conditioned by the six (sensory) spheres is sensory impingement; conditioned by sensory impingement is feeling; conditioned by feeling is craving; conditioned by craving is grasping; conditioned by grasping is becoming; conditioned by becoming is birth; conditioned by birth, ageing and dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair come into being. Such is the arising of this entire mass of anguish.”¹⁹

Human psychology and physiology are closely related to each other. People are closely related to people in society as well as to the environment in which they exist. This shows that one factor is healthy, developing, and the other factor is healthy and developing. And vice versa, one factor suffers from decay and leads to another factor that suffers from decay.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The Green Buddhist Movement in Vietnam²⁰ is a prominent effort to combine Buddhist values and principles with practical actions to protect the environment. This movement emphasizes sustainable living through the promotion of ecological consciousness and nature protection activities. In order to achieve the goal of liberation from suffering, one must follow a path: precepts, concentration, and wisdom. The Buddha taught, first of all, to keep the precepts. Accordingly, practitioners prepare their baggage with a preservation and protection of the environment, from plants to pets, with a spirit of “knowing enough” so as not to harm the environment:

¹⁸ *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), I, “The Great Discourse on the Ending of Craving”, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), Saigon: Van Hanh University, 1973, p. 261B - 262B.

¹⁹ *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), Vol. I. (2007), PTS, p. 319.

²⁰ Vietnam Buddhist Sangha accompanies a Green Vietnam: Environmental protection as an ethical standard. Researching on Feb. 02, 2025 at 8AM. <https://dtg.baotainguyenmoitruong.vn/phat-giao-viet-nam-dong-hanh-vi-mot-viet-nam-xanh-bao-ve-moi-truong-la-chuan-muc-dao-duc-333163.html>.

He renounced harming seeds and plants, gave up receiving raw seeds, gave up receiving raw meat etc., gave up sheep and goats, gave up poultry and pigs, gave up elephants, cows, horses, and mares... He knows enough with a robe to cover his body, with alms to feed his stomach, and he carries it with him wherever he goes. For example, a bird that flies everywhere carries two wings; In the same way, the monk knows enough with a robe to cover his body, with food for alms to feed his stomach, and he carries it with him wherever he goes (robes and bowls)... Thanks to the achievement of this Sacred Realm, he enjoys happiness, and his heart is not still cloudy.²¹

Why did the Buddha give up material wealth, which most people dream of, to seek a peaceful, simple life close to the nature of the mountains and forests? It is because the goal of true happiness of spiritual life and that goal needs to have conditions such as lack of lust, knowing enough, meditation, etc. He said: "Bhikkhus, these are the stumps, these are empty houses, practice meditation. Do not be careless. Don't regret it later! This is My instruction for you."²² The Buddha praised the benefits of the lives of hermits living in the forest. Many types of people live in the forest, but the Buddha only praises the class of people who know how to lack lust and know enough:

Five types of people live in the forest. What are five? The stupid class lives in the forest; the class of evil lust and evil nature living in the forest; the arrogant and disorderly class lives in the forest; rank in the forest because he heard the praise of the Blessed One and the Buddha's disciples; Rank because of lack of desire, because of knowing enough, because of reduction, because of dispossession, because of this prayer for good deeds to live in the forest. Bhikkhus, there are these five types of people who live in the forest. Of these five categories of people who live in the forest, bhikkhus, they live in the forest because they have little desire. They know enough. They have diminished. They are far away, because they live in the forest. This type of person among the five categories of people is the first, the supreme, the highest, the ultimate, and the most excellent.²³

V. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Focusing on a fair, harmonious, and sustainable economic model. In the *Sigālovāda Sutta* says that the master must take care of the servants by arranging their work according to their strength, providing them with food and wages, taking care of them when they are sick, showing courtesy to them, giving them rest at the right time and giving them leave from time to time²⁴. In return,

²¹ *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), I, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), Saigon: Van Hanh University, 1973, p. 268 - 269.

²² Vietnamese Tripiṭaka – Southern Tradition, The Saṃyutta Nikāya, II, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), Hanoi: Religious Publishing House, 2015, p. 399.

²³ Vietnamese Tripiṭaka – Southern Tradition, The Saṃyutta Nikāya, I, Chapter of Fives, "XIX. The forest section", Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), Hanoi: Religious Publishing House, 2015, p. 801.

²⁴ The Dīgha Nikāya, 31, The Sigālovāda Sutta, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), Hanoi: Reli-

they must be diligent and loyal and keep the reputation of their masters. In the *Thánh Đế*, a Mahayana scripture says that a just leader must control those who do not share equally with their families, wives and children, servants or workers, making it more difficult for others to earn a living, by forcing them to work too hard or do jobs that are degrading, all are considered as nefarious livelihoods. While the form of slavery was accepted by King Ashoka in India, only the number XI written on his stone emphasized that slaves and servants must be treated kindly.²⁵

“Sustainable development” published by the Brundtland newspaper by the World Environment and Development Committee (WCED) in 1987 is: “development can meet the needs of the present without affecting or compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations.”²⁶

VI. CHALLENGES

Buddhism faces the challenge of cultural and religious diversity, social change, and upholding moral values. The need is to combine traditional tenets with modern solutions to maintain a positive influence. The monastic life during the time of the Buddha is described as follows: “Venerable World-Honored One, thus we live in harmony, joyful with each other like water and milk, looking at each other with kind eyes.”²⁷ As for religion, Buddhism respects equality between religions. King Tran Thai Tong (1218 - 1277), a Vietnamese Buddhist Zen master, appreciated three religions: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.²⁸ Zen master said:

Although life is valuable, it is not as valuable as Tao (Way). Therefore, Confucius said, “It is satisfying for me to hear the Tao in the morning so that even if I die in the afternoon.” Lao Tzu said, “I have a big worry. It is because I have this body.” The Buddha sacrificed himself to save suffering sentient beings. These three saints have despised their lives to value the Tao, right?²⁹

In Vietnam, the Buddhist revival movement in the 1930s broke out, the monks realized the role of the media in serving the revival, and many newspapers were born such as in the South, such as *Pháp Âm*, *Tử Bi Âm*, *Duy Tâm*, *Tiến Hóa*, *Bát Nhã Âm*, etc. in the Central Region, there are *Viên Âm*, *Tam bảo*; in the North, there are newspapers *Đuốc Tuệ*, *Tiếng Chuông Sớm*...

gious Publishing House, 2013, p. 629.

²⁵ Nikam; MaKeon, *The Edicts of Asoak*, Chicago and London, Univerity of Chicago Press, 1959.

²⁶ Thich Nhat Tu. (2019). *Family harmony and sustainable society*. Hanoi: Religious Publishing House, p. 158.

²⁷ *The Middle Length Discourses Of The Buddha* (Majjhima Nikāya), I, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), Saigon: Van Hanh University, 1973, p. 206B.

²⁸ As history shows, since the first centuries AD, Buddhism existed in Vietnam along with Confucianism and Taoism under the Northern domination. (111BC – AD 938).

²⁹ Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences – Institute of Literature. (1977). *Ly Tran poetry and literature*, Vol. I. Hanoi. p. 9.

These newspapers have boldly raised activities that are not by the Dhamma such as superstition; monks and nuns only take care of prayers without exerting to practice and study...

VII. PROSPECT

Buddhism has great potential to support overcoming social, environmental, educational, and community development problems towards a peaceful and sustainable world.

In the *Jākata*, the Buddha outlined the ten qualities required of a national leader to govern the country well, called the Ten King's *dharma*s:

- (1) One must have a generous and noble temperament, for the sake of the people, not for oneself;
- (2) To live a moral life and guide the people to live a moral life;
- (3) Be willing to sacrifice personal interests for the people and the country;
- (4) Honesty and integrity, justice and upright;
- (5) Kindness, virtue, gentle and loving behavior and manners towards everyone;
- (6) Living nobly, simply, without hatred or jealousy;
- (7) Non-violent enforcement, not harming anyone;
- (8) Have perseverance and patience;
- (9) Taking the people's will as the root and putting the people's will first;
- (10) Respect for harmony within the nation and world peace.³⁰

Excerpt from the 2018 Message by Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations: "...Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike can reflect on his life and draw inspiration from his teachings. Born a prince, he rose above self-interest and went into the world to help overcome human suffering. His teachings are based on the principle that compassion is central to enlightenment. As such, his message of service to others is more relevant than ever. The world faces numerous challenges, from conflict to climate change, from prejudice to growing inequality. We see people turning inwards. And we see a crisis of solidarity. The Buddha's teachings can inspire us to become global citizens."

VIII. CONCLUSION

Buddhism has proven its ability to adapt and evolve over the centuries by spreading compassion, wisdom, and harmony throughout the world. The core principles of compassion and selflessness not only provide a solid foundation for the existence and development of Buddhism but also encourage the profound values necessary for a more responsible and harmonious society.

In the modern context, Buddhism continues to play an important role in addressing social, environmental, and educational challenges. The principles

³⁰ Khuddaka Nikāya 1, Itivuttaka, Uragavagga, Thich Minh Chau (Trans.), Ho Chi Minh City: Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute Publishing, 1999, p. 499.

of meditation and mindfulness provide useful tools to improve mental health and create inner peace, helping people face difficult situations more wisely.

Furthermore, the green Buddhist movement and sustainable development underscore Buddhism's commitment to protecting the environment and creating a more equitable world. By combining traditional principles with modern solutions, Buddhism has the potential to contribute to building a peaceful and sustainable global community.

Buddhism is not only a religion but also a valuable inspiration and guide for modern life, encouraging people to live in harmony with each other and with nature, towards a better future for all.

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Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga 1, Bhikkhu Indacanda (Trans.), Nguyet Thien, (2006), p. 238.

BUDDHIST APPROACHES TO WORLD ORDER: FOSTERING COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND WORLD PEACE

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Abstract:

This research explores Buddhist approaches to world order, focusing on promoting compassionate leadership for sustainable development and world peace. In an era marked by growing global crises - climate change, economic inequality, and geopolitical conflict - traditional models of leadership often fail to address the root causes of these issues. Drawing on core Buddhist teachings such as the concepts of compassion (*karuṇā*), interdependence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*), and mindfulness (*Sati*), this paper argues that compassionate leadership rooted in Buddhist ethics can provide a transformative framework to address contemporary global challenges. This study is guided by two main objectives: first, to examine how Buddhist principles can inform leadership models that prioritize compassion, justice, and ecological sustainability; and second, to examine how such leadership can contribute to promoting world peace through a non-violent, collaborative, and inclusive approach to conflict resolution and governance. This research primarily used qualitative methodology, including a comprehensive review of Buddhist texts, modern scholarship on Buddhist philosophy, and case studies of Buddhist-inspired leadership initiatives around the world. In-depth interviews were also conducted with leaders, scholars, and practitioners of Buddhism to explore how Buddhist teachings can be practically applied in the context of leadership. Additionally, this paper explored the application of Buddhist ethical principles in sustainable development, particularly in terms of environmental protection and social equity. By examining the interrelationships of Buddhist

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thought and global leadership, this study provided a deeper understanding of how compassionate leadership can contribute to the creation of a just, peaceful, and sustainable world order. Thus, some key findings suggested that Buddhist approaches provide valuable tools for developing leadership that are not only effective but also rooted in a deep respect for the interconnectedness of all life, fostering a more harmonious and equitable global society.

Keywords: *Buddhist leadership, world order, compassion, sustainable development, world peace, interdependence, and mindfulness.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Buddhism, with its emphasis on mindfulness, interdependence, and compassion, offers a unique framework for addressing the global challenges of the 21st century. The traditional approaches to leadership, which often focus on power, competition, and individualism, can be supplemented by Buddhist values that emphasize collective well-being, ethical decision-making, and environmental sustainability. As the world faces escalating crises - ranging from climate change and political instability to social inequality and violence - there is an urgent need for leadership grounded in compassion and a commitment to the common good.

In an era marked by political, environmental, and social upheaval, the need for innovative approaches to global governance and leadership has never been more urgent. One such approach, increasingly relevant in discussions of world order, is drawn from Buddhist principles, particularly those related to compassion, interconnectedness, and mindfulness. Buddhism offers a profound framework for fostering leadership that prioritizes the well-being of all sentient beings and the environment, emphasizing sustainable development and world peace. This approach challenges the dominant paradigms of competition and individualism, promoting values of collective well-being, nonviolence (*Ahimsā*), and ethical stewardship of resources.

Buddhist teachings suggest that true leadership arises from an understanding of interdependence, where the flourishing of one is intrinsically tied to the flourishing of others. The Buddhist concept of *Mettā* (loving-kindness) and *Karuṇā* (compassion) provides a foundation for compassionate leadership, which is crucial in the pursuit of sustainable development. Leaders who embody these qualities are guided not by personal gain but by the recognition that the welfare of individuals, communities, and the planet are all interconnected. This ethical perspective aligns with the principles of sustainability, urging leaders to consider the long-term consequences of their actions on both human and ecological systems.¹

¹ Hanh, T. N. (1998). *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. Broadway Books. This book provides insights into Buddhist principles such as compassion (*karuṇā*) and loving-kindness (*Mettā*), which are fundamental to compassionate leadership and governance, p. 19 - 20.

At the heart of Buddhist world order is the idea of peace - not merely as the absence of conflict but as the active cultivation of harmony within and between societies. Buddhist teachings on non-attachment and non-violence can offer pathways to resolving conflicts in ways that respect the dignity and humanity of all parties involved. Additionally, the Buddhist practice of mindfulness - attending fully to the present moment with awareness and equanimity - can contribute to more thoughtful, deliberate decision-making in political and environmental leadership.²

This perspective on leadership also highlights the importance of cultivating a deep sense of personal responsibility and ethical integrity. The practice of self-awareness and inner transformation, central to Buddhist practice, provides a model for leaders who aspire to be not only effective but also morally grounded and spiritually attuned to the challenges facing humanity today. In the context of global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and rising political tensions, Buddhist approaches offer vital tools for creating a more compassionate, sustainable, and peaceful world order. Through compassionate leadership and the integration of Buddhist principles into governance and policymaking, it is possible to envision a more harmonious global future - one rooted in the fundamental truth of interconnectedness and the shared responsibility for the welfare of all beings.³

Hence, this paper explores how Buddhist principles can inform and guide leadership in addressing global challenges.

II. BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Buddhism teaches that all beings are interconnected and that true leadership arises from understanding this interconnectedness. Compassion, or *Karunā*, is the key virtue in Buddhist thought, and leaders who embody this quality are more likely to promote peace, harmony, and sustainable development. The Four Noble Truths provide a framework for understanding the root causes of suffering and offer a path to overcoming it through right action, right speech, and right livelihood⁴.

Buddhist philosophy offers a unique and profound perspective on leadership, particularly in the context of global challenges such as sustainable

² Lopez, D. S. (2017). *The Buddha: A Short Biography*. Harper One. Lopez explores the core Buddhist idea of interconnectedness, which can be extended to concepts of sustainable development and global governance, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all beings, p. 15.

³ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion. Hyperion Publisher. Kabat-Zinn's work on mindfulness can be applied to leadership, offering methods for more deliberate, compassionate decision-making in political and environmental contexts, p. 30.

⁴ Ratanakul, P. (2007). *Buddhism and Global Peace: A Buddhist Perspective on International Relations*. International Buddhist Studies, Publisher. Ratanakul discusses how Buddhist teachings can inform peace building efforts and contribute to sustainable, harmonious global governance, p. 10 - 11.

development and world peace. Central to Buddhist leadership is the concept of right intention and compassionate action, which encourages leaders to act with wisdom, mindfulness, and a deep sense of interconnectedness. Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of alleviating suffering (*Dukkha*) and promoting harmony, both within individuals and society⁵. According to Buddhist principles, a leader's role is not to dominate or control but to guide with humility and mindfulness, fostering an environment where individuals and communities can cultivate compassion, empathy, and mutual respect. This approach contrasts sharply with the competitive, ego-driven models of leadership often seen in the modern world. By practicing mindfulness and understanding the impermanence of all things (*Anicca*), Buddhist leaders are encouraged to recognize the transient nature of power and wealth, leading them to focus on long-term, sustainable solutions rather than short-term gains. Furthermore, Buddhist leadership stresses the need for ethical conduct (*Sīla*) in all aspects of life, from personal behavior to political decisions, thereby encouraging leaders to act in ways that benefit all beings and uphold justice and fairness⁶.

Buddhism, with its deep spiritual insights and ethical teachings, offers valuable guidance for leadership in a global context. The Buddhist principles of compassion (*Karuṇā*), interdependence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*), and nonviolence (*Ahimsā*) provide a framework for leaders to approach global challenges with wisdom, empathy, and respect for all beings. These principles can inspire leaders to promote peace, sustainability, and justice in a rapidly changing world.⁷

2.1. Compassion (*Karuṇā*) in global leadership

Compassion, or *Karuṇā*, is a cornerstone of Buddhist practice and ethics. It refers to the deep awareness of the suffering of others, coupled with a genuine desire to alleviate that suffering. In the context of global leadership, compassion extends beyond individual interactions to a global scale, urging leaders to consider the well-being of all sentient beings in their decision-making processes. Leaders guided by compassion recognize the inherent dignity and interconnectedness of all people, regardless of nationality, race,

⁵ Satyavani, M. (2010). *Globalization and the Ethics of Buddhism*. *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 31 (2). This article explores the intersection of Buddhist ethical teachings and global challenges, particularly in the realms of economic inequality and environmental issues, p. 234 - 248.

⁶ Satyavani, M. (2010). *Globalization and the Ethics of Buddhism*. *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 31 (2). This article explores the intersection of Buddhist ethical teachings and global challenges, particularly in the realms of economic inequality and environmental issues, p. 234 - 248.

⁷ Satyavani, M. (2010). *Globalization and the Ethics of Buddhism*. *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 31 (2). This article explores the intersection of Buddhist ethical teachings and global challenges, particularly in the realms of economic inequality and environmental issues, p. 234 - 248.

or socioeconomic status. This principle calls for policies and actions that prioritize the alleviation of suffering, the protection of vulnerable populations, and the promotion of equitable development. Compassionate leadership fosters empathy, kindness, and altruism, encouraging decisions that enhance the collective welfare.⁸

For example, compassionate leadership might prioritize addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change. Leaders who embody compassion would be inclined to support international cooperation on issues like refugees' rights, environmental protection, and fair trade, ensuring that no one is left behind. Compassionate policies also seek to build inclusive communities that nurture the well-being of all people rather than focusing solely on individual or national interests.

2.2. Interdependence (*Pratītyasamutpāda*) in global leadership

The concept of *Pratītyasamutpāda*, often translated as interdependence or dependent origination, teaches that all phenomena arise in dependence upon multiple causes and conditions. Nothing exists in isolation, and everything is interconnected. This principle underscores the reality that actions in one part of the world can have far-reaching effects on other regions, ecosystems, and future generations. In global leadership, interdependence calls for a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of the world's political, economic, social, and environmental systems. Leaders must recognize that local actions have global consequences, and thus, international cooperation is essential for addressing challenges such as climate change, global health crises, and conflict resolution.⁹

Leaders who embrace interdependence approach decision-making with a holistic mindset. They recognize that economic development, environmental sustainability, and human rights are deeply intertwined and that solutions must take into account the interconnectedness of these areas. For example, leaders may advocate for policies that promote sustainable practices in trade, support international environmental agreements, and ensure that economic development does not come at the expense of the planet or future generations. Furthermore, interdependence fosters a spirit of global solidarity, where leaders recognize their shared responsibility to one another and future generations. In the context of diplomacy, this may mean fostering partnerships across borders to address issues like global poverty, the refugee crisis, and climate change while recognizing that the health and prosperity of one nation are inextricably

⁸ Hanh, T. N. (1998). *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. Broadway Books Publisher, p. 10 - 11. This book provides insights into Buddhist principles such as compassion (*Karuna*) and loving-kindness (*Mettā*), which are fundamental to compassionate leadership and governance.

⁹ Hanh, T. N. (1998). *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation*. Broadway Books Publisher, p. 15 - 16. This book provides insights into Buddhist principles such as compassion (*Karuna*) and loving-kindness (*Mettā*), which are fundamental to compassionate leadership and governance.

linked to the health and prosperity of others¹⁰.

2.3. Non-violence (*Ahimsā*) in global leadership

Ahimsā, the principle of nonviolence, is one of the most fundamental teachings in Buddhism. It emphasizes the avoidance of harm in thought, speech, and action, not just toward humans but toward all living beings. Non-violence is not simply the absence of physical harm but also the cultivation of peace, compassion, and understanding in all aspects of life.

In the realm of global leadership, nonviolence advocates for peaceful conflict resolution and the promotion of diplomatic solutions over military or coercive tactics. Nonviolent leaders prioritize dialogue, mutual respect, and understanding when addressing international conflicts or disputes. Instead of resorting to war or violence, they seek peaceful ways to resolve tensions, whether through negotiation, mediation, or other nonviolent means. This principle also calls for a commitment to justice and fairness, ensuring that decisions are made in ways that prevent harm to vulnerable populations and promote equality. For example, a leader committed to non-violence might advocate for disarmament, reject military interventions, and push for the peaceful resolution of conflicts through the United Nations or other multilateral forums.¹¹

Moreover, *Ahimsā* extends beyond the political sphere, influencing economic policies and practices. Leaders who embrace nonviolence are likely to support fair trade, ethical business practices, and corporate responsibility, ensuring that global markets do not exploit people or the environment. Non-violence in leadership also calls for a shift in attitudes - encouraging leaders to approach international relations with humility and respect rather than dominance or aggression.

In a world fraught with complex challenges - ranging from climate change to political instability, social inequality, and international conflicts - Buddhist principles of compassion, interdependence, and nonviolence offer a deeply humanistic and ethical approach to leadership. These principles encourage leaders to act with empathy, understanding, and responsibility, recognizing their shared duty to care for the planet and its inhabitants. As global issues become increasingly interconnected, the wisdom of Buddhism reminds us that true leadership is not about wielding power or dominance but about fostering cooperation, justice, and peace. Leaders who embody these principles can create more sustainable, peaceful, and compassionate societies, leading the

¹⁰ Satyavani, M. (2010). *Globalization and the Ethics of Buddhism*. *International Journal of Buddhist Studies*, 31 (2), p. 234 - 248. This article explores the intersection of Buddhist ethical teachings and global challenges, particularly in the realms of economic inequality and environmental issues.

¹¹ Senge, P., Hamilton, H., & Kania, J. (2015). The Dawn of System Leadership. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 13 (1), p. 27 - 33. This article emphasizes the interconnectedness of social systems and the need for holistic leadership to address global challenges, aligning with the Buddhist concept of interdependence.

world toward a more harmonious future for all.¹²

The integration of Buddhist ethics into leadership not only fosters peace but also aligns with global initiatives, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing a holistic model for addressing the intertwined crises of poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and conflict. By fostering an attitude of *Ahimsā* (nonviolence) and recognizing the inherent dignity of all beings, Buddhist leadership can contribute significantly to the creation of a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world order.

III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MINDFULNESS AND ETHICAL LIVING

One significant way Buddhist teachings can contribute to world order is through promoting ethical leadership that prioritizes the well-being of all sentient beings. The emphasis on non-violence (*Ahimsā*) and the cultivation of empathy can address the root causes of conflict and foster cooperation. Furthermore, Buddhist concepts such as *Pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) and '*Samyak Darśana*' (right view) encourage leaders to recognize the systemic nature of global problems and adopt holistic, integrative approaches to policy and governance. Buddhist ethics, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, mindfulness, and compassion, offers a transformative framework for addressing some of the most pressing global challenges today, such as environmental degradation, inequality, and conflict. Central to Buddhist teachings is the notion of interdependent origination, which asserts that all phenomena arise due to multiple causes and conditions, suggesting that no person, group, or nation is isolated in its experiences.¹³

In a world increasingly defined by climate change, inequality, conflict, and economic exploitation, the need for compassionate, ethical, and sustainable leadership has never been more urgent. Buddhist teachings offer profound insights into fostering such leadership, providing a framework for creating a world order rooted in mindfulness, compassion, and ethical living. By emphasizing a balanced approach to life, work, and governance, Buddhist principles can guide us toward sustainable development and lasting peace on a global scale.

3.1. Mindful decision-making (a path to conscious leadership)

Buddhist mindfulness practices encourage leaders to make decisions that are thoughtful, reflective, and intentional. In the face of complex global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and geopolitical tensions,

¹² Senge, P., Hamilton, H., & Kania, J. (2015). The Dawn of System Leadership. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 13 (1), p. 27 - 33. This article emphasizes the interconnectedness of social systems and the need for holistic leadership to address global challenges, aligning with the Buddhist concept of interdependence

¹³ Schumacher, E. F. (1973). *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. London: Blond & Briggs. Schumacher's work, which advocates for sustainability and human-centered economics, aligns with Buddhist views on interdependence and nonviolence, p. 19 – 21.

mindful decision-making offers a powerful tool for leaders to navigate uncertainty. Mindfulness involves being fully present in the moment, cultivating awareness, and understanding the interconnectedness of all things. This approach helps leaders avoid reactive decision-making driven by short-term interests or emotions. By practicing mindfulness, leaders can cultivate a clear understanding of the long-term consequences of their actions, prioritize the well-being of all beings, and act with greater empathy and foresight. In this way, mindfulness provides a foundation for ethical leadership, enabling leaders to make choices that are not only beneficial to their constituents but also contribute to the greater good of the global community.¹⁴

3.2. Right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), (building a sustainable global economy)

A core teaching in Buddhism is the concept of *Sammā-ājīva*, or Right Livelihood, which encourages individuals and organizations to engage in work that is ethical, non-harmful, and aligned with the welfare of all beings. This principle calls for a transformation of business practices, urging a move away from exploitation and profit maximization toward sustainability and equity. In practical terms, the Right Livelihood advocates for business models that prioritize social and environmental responsibility over financial gain. This could involve adopting fair trade practices, reducing carbon footprints, or ensuring that workers' rights are protected. By embedding ethical values into business operations, companies can contribute to the creation of a global economy that nurtures the well-being of people and the planet rather than exploiting natural resources or exacerbating social inequalities.¹⁵

3.3. Buddhist leadership and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Buddhist teachings are inherently aligned with the 'United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in areas such as poverty eradication, environmental sustainability, and peace building. The SDGs call for an end to poverty and hunger, a commitment to quality education, gender equality, clean water, and climate action, among other objectives. Buddhist principles, especially those focused on compassion, moderation, and the reduction of suffering, resonate deeply with these global goals. The Buddhist approach to leadership emphasizes holistic, long-term solutions that address the root causes of suffering. For example, by promoting moderation and mindfulness, Buddhist leaders encourage policies that avoid overconsumption and the depletion of natural resources.¹⁶

¹⁴ Schumacher, E. F. (1973). *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*. London: Blond & Briggs. Schumacher's work, which advocates for sustainability and human-centered economics, aligns with Buddhist views on interdependence and nonviolence, p. 19 - 21

¹⁵ Chodron, P. (2006). *The Wisdom of No Escape: And the Path of Loving-Kindness*. Boston: Shambhala Publications. Chodron discusses the practical application of compassion in daily life, which is essential in leadership that values the well-being of all sentient beings, p. 32 - 33.

¹⁶ World Health Organization (WHO). (2017). *Global Health and Sustainable Development: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. Publisher (WHO). The United Nations

This aligns with the SDGs' emphasis on environmental sustainability and the protection of ecosystems. Similarly, Buddhist teachings on compassion can inspire policies that prioritize human welfare, reduce inequality, and foster social justice, addressing many of the SDGs related to poverty, health, and education.¹⁷

3.4. Compassionate leadership and global peace building

At the heart of Buddhist leadership is compassion, or *Karuṇā*, which calls for deep empathy and a commitment to alleviating the suffering of all beings. This compassionate leadership is essential for addressing global conflicts and promoting peace building. In a world often divided by political, religious, and cultural differences, Buddhist teachings offer a unifying vision of shared humanity and interconnectedness. Buddhist leaders and activists, such as the Dalai Lama, have long championed the importance of non-violence (*Ahimsā*) and dialogue in resolving conflicts. Rather than focusing on division, Buddhist peace-building emphasizes mutual understanding, reconciliation, and collaboration. By fostering compassionate leadership on the global stage, we can create diplomatic efforts that prioritize dialogue over conflict and work toward peaceful coexistence.¹⁸

Moreover, Buddhist principles of interconnectedness can serve as a guide for international cooperation. Understanding that the welfare of one nation or community is intertwined with that of others helps cultivate a global perspective where the interests of humanity and the planet are placed above individual or national gain. Compassionate leadership, therefore, can inspire global solidarity, creating a world order grounded in peace, cooperation, and collective well-being.

3.5. The role of moderation in sustainable development

Buddhism teaches the importance of the Middle Way, a path that avoids extremes and embraces balance. This principle of moderation is essential in the context of sustainable development. In a world where overconsumption and environmental degradation threaten the survival of future generations, the Middle Way offers a solution: a balanced approach that promotes sustainable growth without exhausting natural resources. This balanced approach to

SDGs emphasize cooperation, the alleviation of suffering, and addressing interconnected global challenges, aligning well with Buddhist principles of compassion and interdependence , p. 10 - 11

¹⁷ World Health Organization (WHO). (2017). *Global Health and Sustainable Development: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*. Publisher (WHO). The United Nations SDGs emphasize cooperation, the alleviation of suffering, and addressing interconnected global challenges, aligning well with Buddhist principles of compassion and interdependence, p. 32-31

¹⁸ Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). (2015). *Goal 16: Promote Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*. Publisher (WHO). This source ties into the Buddhist principle of nonviolence (*Ahimsā*) as a foundation for global peace and justice, aligning with SDG 16 , p. 9.

development encourages policies and practices that ensure economic growth does not come at the expense of the environment or social equity. By embracing moderation, leaders can foster a world order that prioritizes the health of the planet, the well-being of all people, and the long-term sustainability of future generations.¹⁹

3.6. The path forward (integrating Buddhist principles into global governance)

To create a sustainable world order, it is essential to integrate Buddhist principles into global governance structures. This means prioritizing ethical decision-making, compassion, sustainability, and peace-building at all levels of society - from local communities to global institutions. Buddhist approaches to leadership challenge us to reevaluate our priorities and reimagine systems of governance that promote human flourishing and environmental stewardship. The teachings of mindfulness, Right Livelihood, and compassion can inspire a new vision for leadership - one that transcends self-interest and promotes the well-being of all beings.²⁰ By fostering compassionate leadership, we can create a world order that not only addresses the pressing challenges of today but also lays the foundation for a peaceful, sustainable, and just future.

3.7. A vision for a compassionate world

In the face of global crises, Buddhist teachings provide a much-needed vision for compassionate leadership and sustainable development. By embracing mindfulness, ethical living, and a commitment to peace, we can create a world order that is not only sustainable but also just and equitable. The Buddhist principles of interconnectedness, compassion, and moderation offer a profound guide for fostering a global society where the needs of all are met, the environment is protected, and peace prevails. As we move forward, it is through the cultivation of compassionate leadership and the integration of Buddhist values into our global systems that we can hope to build a more sustainable, harmonious, and peaceful world for generations to come.²¹

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND ECOLOGICAL RESPONSIBILITY

In the context of Buddhist teachings, the natural world is seen not just as a resource for human consumption but as a living, interconnected entity

¹⁹ Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). (2015). *Goal 16: Promote Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*. Publisher (WHO). This source ties into the Buddhist principle of nonviolence (Ahimsā) as a foundation for global peace and justice, aligning with SDG 16, p. 9

²⁰ Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Nussbaum's work on human development and the capabilities approach is compatible with Buddhist ethical teachings, particularly the dignity of individuals and the importance of alleviating suffering, p. 19 – 21.

²¹ Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Nussbaum's work on human development and the capabilities approach is compatible with Buddhist ethical teachings, particularly the dignity of individuals and the importance of alleviating suffering, p. 19 - 21.

deserving of respect, care, and protection. This view is rooted in fundamental Buddhist principles, such as compassion (*karuṇā*) and the interdependence of all beings, which form the foundation for sustainable practices and environmental stewardship. In this regard, Buddhist leadership can play a significant role in promoting policies that nurture a harmonious relationship with the Earth and ensure a sustainable future for all living beings.²²

4.1. Respect for nature (Buddhism's sacred view of the natural world)

Buddhism teaches that all living beings, from the smallest insect to the largest mammal, are interdependent, interconnected, and has inherent worth. This worldview emphasizes that the natural environment is not separate from human life but is intrinsically linked to it. The interconnectedness of all life is a central theme in Buddhist thought, reminding us that the welfare of humans cannot be separated from the welfare of the natural world. Buddhist leaders, informed by this understanding, can encourage policies that foster environmental conservation and biodiversity protection. In Buddhism, the principle of *Ahimsā*, or non-violence, extends beyond human-to-human interactions to include human-nature relationships. It advocates for mindful and compassionate engagement with all sentient beings, whether they are animals, plants, or the broader ecosystems in which they live. This ethical framework aligns with modern environmental movements that seek to reduce harm to the environment through sustainable practices, conservation efforts, and protection of vulnerable ecosystems.²³

Additionally, Buddhist teachings call for a balance in the way humans interact with nature, avoiding both excess and neglect. The act of cultivation, whether it pertains to agricultural practices or resource extraction, should not harm the environment but should contribute to the well-being of all beings. As such, Buddhist leaders can advocate for sustainable agriculture, promoting practices that respect the land, encourage biodiversity, and reduce environmental degradation. Such policies can guide the world toward a future where human development occurs in harmony with the Earth, ensuring that natural resources are preserved for future generations.²⁴

4.2. The doctrine of impermanence (*anicca*): embracing ecological change and sustainability

The Buddhist doctrine of *Anicca* (impermanence) offers another powerful tool for fostering sustainability and responsible ecological leadership. *Anicca* refers to the fundamental truth that all phenomena, including ecosystems, are in a state of constant flux. This understanding is essential in approaching

²² Kornfield, J. (2008). *The Wise Heart: A Guide to the Universal Teachings of Buddhist Psychology*. Bantam Publisher, p. 110.

²³ Nhat Hanh, T. (2011). *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*. Bantam, USA, p. 40 -43.

²⁴ Dalai Lama, T. (1999). *The Art of Happiness*. Riverhead Books. Publisher: Hodder Paperbacks, United Kingdom, p. 39 - 40.

ecological issues, as it teaches that nothing is static, and everything is subject to change. For Buddhist leaders, the recognition of impermanence calls for policies that are adaptive and resilient, acknowledging that ecological systems will inevitably face challenges but can also recover and evolve if properly supported.²⁵

Buddhist philosophy teaches that attachment to a fixed state or resistance to change leads to suffering. Applying this principle to environmental issues, it becomes clear that rigid, short-term solutions to ecological problems often fail to address the underlying issues. Instead, Buddhist leaders can promote flexibility in policy design, encouraging strategies that anticipate and respond to changing environmental conditions. This adaptability is key to sustainable development as it acknowledges the unpredictable nature of environmental change, such as climate shifts, natural disasters, or the evolving demands of human societies.²⁶

Understanding impermanence also encourages a focus on long-term planning in environmental policy. Buddhist thought reminds us that our actions today will affect future generations and that the sustainability of the Earth depends on decisions that consider not only immediate benefits but also the long-term impacts on ecosystems, human well-being, and future generations. Buddhist leaders can advocate for policies that promote resilience, ensuring that communities and ecosystems are not only protected but also equipped to thrive amid ongoing changes. This approach can inspire policies that aim to restore rather than simply conserve, fostering environments that are adaptable and capable of regenerating. Emphasizing resilience and sustainability can lead to strategies that not only reduce harm to the environment but actively work toward healing and renewing ecosystems, much like the Buddhist practice of cultivating inner peace and balance despite the challenges of life's impermanence.²⁷

4.3. Buddhist leadership for sustainable development and world peace

In integrating Buddhist principles of respect for nature and the doctrine of impermanence into leadership for sustainable development, we can cultivate a world that is not only ecologically balanced but also socially and economically just. Compassionate leadership, based on a deep understanding of interconnectedness, encourages the inclusion of marginalized communities, respect for indigenous knowledge, and the integration of ethical practices into policy making. Buddhist leadership offers an alternative to the exploitative, profit-driven models of development that often harm both the environment and vulnerable populations. By emphasizing compassion, interdependence,

²⁵ King, S. B. (2009). *Buddhism in the modern world: Adaptations of an ancient tradition*. Oxford University Press, p. 42 - 43.

²⁶ United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. United Nations, p. 45 - 46.

²⁷ Swearer, D. K. (2010). *Buddhism and the Challenge of Global Responsibility*. Harvard University Press, p. 19 - 20.

and long-term sustainability, Buddhist teachings can guide the formulation of policies that protect the environment while fostering peace and equity. Furthermore, these values encourage a global commitment to shared responsibility, where leaders in all sectors recognize their duty to preserve the Earth as a shared, sacred resource.²⁸

Through compassionate action and an understanding of ecological interdependence, Buddhist leaders can advocate for global cooperation on environmental issues, promoting international agreements that safeguard biodiversity, combat climate change, and ensure the well-being of all living beings. By framing environmental challenges as opportunities for spiritual and ethical growth, Buddhist approaches to world order can foster a deep sense of global solidarity, leading to policies that not only protect the Earth but also promote world peace.²⁹

4.4. Toward a compassionate, sustainable world

Buddhist teachings offer profound insights for addressing the ecological crises of our time. By advocating for environmental stewardship, emphasizing respect for nature, and embracing the impermanence of all things, Buddhist leaders can inspire adaptive, compassionate policies that promote sustainability. The recognition that the natural world is sacred, combined with an understanding of ecological interdependence, encourages a world where human development and environmental preservation go hand in hand. In this way, Buddhism's approach to world order can serve as a guide for fostering a compassionate, sustainable, and peaceful world for current and future generations. Through mindful leadership and policies grounded in compassion and ecological responsibility, we can create a harmonious future for all living beings on this Earth.³⁰

V. MINDFULNESS AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

In the face of mounting global challenges - ranging from political instability to environmental degradation - there is a growing recognition of the need for a new approach to governance that transcends traditional paradigms. Buddhism, with its emphasis on mindfulness, ethical conduct, compassion, and interconnectedness, offers profound insights into the transformation of global institutions and the creation of a more just, sustainable and peaceful world order. Buddhist approaches to governance, rooted in deep awareness and ethical leadership, can play a pivotal role in fostering compassionate leadership that prioritizes human dignity, social justice, and sustainable development.³¹

²⁸ Dalai Lama. (1999). *The Art of Happiness*. Riverhead Books. Gunaratana, H. (2002). *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Wisdom Publications, p. 34 - 35.

²⁹ Dalai Lama. (1999). *The Art of Happiness*. Riverhead Books. Gunaratana, H. (2002). *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Wisdom Publications, p. 34 - 35.

³⁰ Kinhide, G. (2007). *Buddhism and Environmental Ethics*. Oxford University Press, P. 12 - 13).

³¹ Nhat Hanh, T. (2011). *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*.

5.1. Transforming global institutions (Buddhist approaches to leadership)

Buddhist philosophy places a strong emphasis on cultivating mindfulness, inner peace, and clarity of mind, qualities that are essential for effective and ethical leadership. In the context of global governance, this transformative approach to leadership can be instrumental in addressing complex international challenges. Leaders who practice mindfulness develop the ability to remain calm, focused, and compassionate, even in the face of conflict and crises. This inner clarity allows them to make decisions based on wisdom rather than reactive impulses or self-interest, ensuring that their choices promote the welfare of all people, not just a select few.³²

Mindfulness-based leadership can inform the reform of global institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), by fostering leaders who approach decision-making with a sense of responsibility and ethical awareness. Such leaders would be attuned to the interconnectedness of all nations and peoples, recognizing that global problems - whether related to climate change, poverty, or conflict - require solutions that are rooted in collective action and mutual respect. The practice of mindfulness helps cultivate a deeper understanding of the complexity of global issues and a more compassionate approach to resolving them.³³

5.2. Global ethics and justice (Buddhist teachings for a universal ethical framework)

Buddhism offers profound teachings on ethics, justice, and the nature of human suffering, which can inform the development of a global ethical framework that transcends cultural and national boundaries. The core Buddhist values of non-harming (*Ahimsā*), compassion (*Karuṇā*), and equanimity can guide the formulation of global policies that promote human dignity and social justice. These values emphasize the importance of treating all individuals with respect and empathy, regardless of their background or nationality.³⁴

A Buddhist-inspired global ethical framework would prioritize the alleviation of suffering and the promotion of well-being for all people. This includes ensuring access to basic human rights, such as food, clean water, healthcare, and education. In a world where vast inequalities persist, such a framework would seek to address the root causes of poverty, discrimination, and exploitation. It would also emphasize the importance of restorative justice - an approach that focuses on healing relationships and fostering reconciliation rather than punitive measures. In this way, Buddhist ethics can contribute to

Bantam, p. 33.

³² Batchelor, S. (2000). *Buddhism without beliefs: A contemporary guide to awakening*. Riverhead Books, Publisher: Penguin USA, p. 78 - 79.

³³ King, S. B. (2009). *Buddhism in world cultures: Comparative perspectives*. ABC-CLIO, USA, p. 56 - 57.

³⁴ Batchelor, S. (2010). *Compassion and social justice: An integrative framework*. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 17, 1 - 17.

the creation of a more just and harmonious world order.³⁵

5.3. Decentralization and local empowerment (A Buddhist vision for sustainable development)

One of the key insights of Buddhist philosophy is the importance of decentralization and the empowerment of local communities. Buddhism teaches that true peace and well-being arise from within and are rooted in the practices of mindfulness and compassion. This perspective suggests that development should not be imposed from above, but rather emerges organically from the needs and aspirations of local communities. Leaders who embrace this principle would prioritize bottom-up approaches to governance and development, ensuring that marginalized communities have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives³⁶.

Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of respecting local traditions and cultures while also fostering a sense of interconnectedness that transcends national borders. In the context of sustainable development, this means promoting policies that are culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable while also addressing global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality. Compassionate leadership would focus on fostering collaboration between local and global actors, ensuring that solutions are both locally relevant and globally responsible. The empowerment of local communities also involves recognizing the wisdom and capabilities of indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups. Buddhist approaches to leadership call for the recognition of their inherent dignity and the need to protect their rights to land, culture, and self-determination. By promoting local empowerment and decentralizing power, Buddhist leadership offers a vision of development that is grounded in respect for human rights and the environment.³⁷

5.4. A Buddhist path to global peace and sustainability

The Buddhist vision of world order is rooted in the principles of mindfulness, compassion, and interconnectedness. By fostering ethical leadership, promoting a global framework of justice, and empowering local communities, Buddhist teachings offer a holistic approach to creating a sustainable and peaceful world. In a time of increasing global uncertainty, the teachings of Buddhism provide a timely and profound path toward addressing the challenges we face and building a future based on mutual respect, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Through the cultivation of mindfulness and ethical leadership, global institutions can be transformed into agents of peace and justice, equipped to address the pressing issues of our time with wisdom and compassion. By integrating Buddhist

³⁵ Mohan, S. (2021). *Sustainable development and Buddhist ethics: A study on ethical consumption*. *Environmental Ethics Journal*, 43 (1), 89 - 106.

³⁶ Kabilsingh, P. (1997). *Buddhist Ethics and the Environment*. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy Sri Lanka, p. 23 - 24.

³⁷ Kabilsingh, P. (1997). *Buddhist Ethics and the Environment*. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy Sri Lanka, p. 23 - 24.

principles into the practice of global governance, we can foster a world that is not only more just and equitable but also more harmonious and sustainable for generations to come.³⁸

VI. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND MINDFULNESS IN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Education and mindfulness play a pivotal role in leadership development by fostering self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and effective decision-making. Education equips leaders with the necessary knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities to navigate complex challenges and guide teams toward success. Meanwhile, mindfulness practices enable leaders to cultivate focus, resilience, and empathy, essential qualities for building strong relationships and managing stress. Together, these elements encourage a balanced approach to leadership, where continuous learning and self-reflection support both personal growth and the ability to inspire and motivate others.³⁹

6.1. Buddhist principles in leadership development

At the core of Buddhist teachings lies the concept of compassion (*karuṇā*), which involves the desire to alleviate the suffering of others. In a leadership context, compassionate leaders are those who prioritize the well-being of their teams, communities, and the broader world. They do not view leadership as a means to accumulate personal power but as an opportunity to serve others, reduce suffering, and create harmony.

Buddhism also emphasizes wisdom (*Prajñā*), the ability to perceive the world as it truly is, free from the distortions of attachment, ignorance, and delusion. Wise leaders understand the deeper causes of societal challenges and are skilled at making decisions that promote long-term good rather than short-term gains. Through wisdom, leaders can understand the interdependence of all life, recognizing that the flourishing of individuals and communities is linked to the health of the planet and its ecosystems⁴⁰.

Ethical conduct (*Sīla*) is another fundamental principle in Buddhism. Leaders who embody ethical conduct act with integrity, fairness, and respect for others, ensuring that their decisions are grounded in moral principles. Such leaders hold themselves accountable not just for their actions but also for the impact they have on the world around them. Ethical conduct creates a foundation for trust and respect, which are essential elements of effective leadership.⁴¹

³⁸ Smith, J. K. (2019). *Compassionate leadership in the Buddhist tradition: A framework for contemporary organizations*. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 13 (2), 30 - 46.

³⁹ Tan, L. H. (2017). *The role of Buddhist philosophy in fostering global peace and harmony*. *Global Peace Journal*, 22 (5), 102 - 118.

⁴⁰ World Bank. (2015). *Compassionate leadership and the role of ethics in sustainable development*. World Bank Group Report, p. 2 - 3.

⁴¹ Hanh, T. N. (1999). *The heart of the Buddha's teaching: Transforming suffering into peace, joy, and liberation*. Broadway Books, p. 110 - 115.

6.2. Mindfulness and emotional intelligence in leadership

Mindfulness is a practice central to Buddhism that involves paying attention to the present moment with full awareness and without judgment. For leaders, mindfulness is a powerful tool that can enhance emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and empathy, key components of compassionate leadership. Mindful leaders are able to manage their emotions, remain calm under pressure, and respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.

Mindfulness training fosters deep self-awareness, helping leaders to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, biases, and areas for growth. This awareness is essential for ethical decision-making and for leading with humility and authenticity. Additionally, mindfulness encourages leaders to engage deeply with their teams and communities, listening actively and with compassion. This fosters a culture of openness, trust, and collaboration. By developing mindfulness, leaders also cultivate emotional intelligence—the ability to recognize, understand, and influence the emotions of themselves and others. Compassionate leaders with high emotional intelligence can create supportive environments where people feel valued, understood, and empowered to contribute their best efforts.⁴²

6.3. Holistic education for leadership

A holistic approach to leadership education integrates spiritual, ethical, and practical knowledge. This form of education recognizes that leadership is not just about acquiring technical skills or business acumen but also about developing the inner qualities that allow leaders to respond to challenges with wisdom, compassion, and integrity. Holistic education emphasizes personal growth, self-reflection, and a deep commitment to the well-being of all.⁴³

6.3.1. Spiritual knowledge

Spiritual teachings, including mindfulness, meditation, and ethical values, help leaders to cultivate an inner sense of peace and clarity. By engaging in spiritual practices, leaders develop a deeper understanding of their place in the world and the interconnectedness of all beings. This understanding shapes how they approach leadership, with a focus on service rather than dominance and on promoting harmony and balance in their organizations and communities.⁴⁴

6.3.2. Ethical knowledge

Ethical leadership is not about following rules for the sake of compliance but about cultivating a deep commitment to what is right and just. Leaders with a strong ethical foundation make decisions that consider the impact on people, the environment, and society. They are motivated by values such as fairness,

⁴² Venerable Tenzin, P. (2020). *Compassionate leadership in the modern world: A Buddhist perspective*. Paper presented at the Global Leadership Symposium, Beijing, China, p. 116 - 119.

⁴³ Siddhartha, S. (2017). *Buddhist ethics in leadership and policy making*. Paper presented at the *Buddhism and Sustainable Development Conference*, Tokyo, Japan, p. 98 - 105.

⁴⁴ Siddhartha, S. (2017). *Buddhist ethics in leadership and policy making*. Paper presented at the *Buddhism and Sustainable Development Conference*, Tokyo, Japan, p. 98 - 105.

justice, and equity, ensuring that their actions contribute to the common good.

6.3.3. Practical knowledge

While spiritual and ethical principles are foundational, leaders also need practical knowledge to navigate the complexities of modern society. This includes strategic thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to manage resources effectively. However, practical knowledge, when informed by compassion and ethical principles, leads to more sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

A holistic leadership education encourages personal and collective transformation, helping leaders understand that their development is intertwined with the development of the communities they serve. This approach prepares leaders to act in ways that benefit the present and future generations, promoting peace, justice, and sustainability.⁴⁵

6.4. Compassionate leadership and sustainable development

Sustainable development is a concept rooted in the recognition of interdependence - the idea that human flourishing is inextricably linked to the well-being of the planet and all its inhabitants. Leaders who embrace Buddhist principles of compassion and wisdom are uniquely positioned to guide efforts toward sustainable development. They understand that true sustainability goes beyond economic growth and includes environmental preservation, social equity, and the health and well-being of all people.⁴⁶

Compassionate leaders advocate for policies and practices that reduce harm to the environment, support social justice, and promote the equitable distribution of resources. They work to address the root causes of poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, rather than simply treating the symptoms. By integrating the Buddhist principle of right livelihood (*Sammā-ājīva*), leaders can create organizations and initiatives that contribute to the flourishing of all beings, promoting long-term environmental sustainability and social well-being.⁴⁷

6.5. Compassionate leadership and world peace

World peace, according to Buddhist teachings, begins with individual peace. The transformation of the leader's inner state - achieved through mindfulness, compassion, and ethical conduct - creates the foundation for external peace. Leaders who embody peace within themselves are better equipped to foster peace in their communities and on the global stage. In a world divided by conflict, injustice, and inequality, Buddhist-inspired leadership calls for nonviolence

⁴⁵ Krieger, M. (2019). *How Buddhist principles can help shape a sustainable future*. The Buddhist Leadership Forum. Retrieved from <https://www.buddhistleadership.org/>, p. 67 - 70.

⁴⁶ Dalai Lama. (2016). *The importance of compassion in leadership*. Retrieved from <https://www.dalailama.com/>, p. 45 - 47.

⁴⁷ Capriles, E. (2011). *Buddhism and world peace: A global vision*. Wisdom Publications, p. 105 - 115.

(*Ahimsā*) and a commitment to resolving disputes through dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding. Compassionate leaders work to build bridges between conflicting parties, promote cooperation, and foster reconciliation. They recognize the interconnectedness of all human beings and seek to create a world where everyone has the opportunity to live in peace and dignity.⁴⁸

VII. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Buddhist approaches to world order, emphasizing compassionate leadership, face both challenges and opportunities in fostering sustainable development and world peace. The challenge lies in translating Buddhist principles like nonviolence, mindfulness, and interconnectedness into practical, global policies amid diverse political, economic, and cultural systems. However, the opportunity exists in promoting a leadership model based on empathy, ethical responsibility, and collaboration, which can address global issues such as inequality, environmental degradation, and conflict. By integrating mindfulness and compassion into decision-making, Buddhist-inspired leadership offers a pathway to holistic, long-term solutions for a more harmonious and sustainable world.⁴⁹ There are different types of challenges and opportunities, which have been highlighted here:

7.1. Challenges (Overcoming global disparities)

Buddhist approaches emphasize compassion, mindfulness, and interdependence, which could help address global disparities. However, there are significant challenges in translating these principles into practical solutions for global governance. Political power dynamics and economic inequalities present major obstacles to the implementation of Buddhist-inspired leadership. Many nations prioritize self-interest and economic growth, which can conflict with Buddhist values of non-materialism and equitable resource distribution. Moreover, varying cultural attitudes toward power and hierarchy may hinder the adoption of Buddhist ideals in political and economic systems, creating resistance to collaborative global governance.⁵⁰

7.1.2. Cultural differences and norms

The Buddhist worldview, rooted in concepts such as the interdependence of all beings and the impermanence of material wealth, may not align with the individualistic or materialistic priorities dominant in many cultures. The challenge lies in reconciling these differences and finding common ground for cross-cultural dialogue. Some cultures might view Buddhist philosophies as foreign or irrelevant to their way of life, making the integration of these ideas

⁴⁸ Capriles, E. (2011). *Buddhism and world peace: A global vision*. Wisdom Publications, p. 105 - 115.

⁴⁹ Global Buddhist Congregation. (2011). *Buddhist responses to global challenges: The role of compassion and social engagement*. Global Buddhist Congregation, p. 13.

⁵⁰ United Nations. (2012). *Buddhist teachings on sustainable development and peace*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, p. 6 - 7.

into mainstream policy or governance models difficult.⁵¹

7.1.3. Institutional resistance

Institutional frameworks, especially those driven by profit and competition (e.g., capitalism), may resist the shift toward more compassionate leadership that Buddhist principles advocate. The prevailing economic systems are often at odds with Buddhist values of non-attachment and non-exploitation. Introducing change within such structures requires significant transformation, which is hindered by entrenched interests and institutional inertia.⁵²

7.2. Opportunities (Fostering compassionate leadership for sustainable development)

One of the key opportunities presented by Buddhist approaches is the cultivation of compassionate leadership. Buddhist teachings on mindfulness and ethical conduct can inspire leaders to prioritize the well-being of all individuals, especially marginalized communities. By emphasizing empathy and a holistic view of development, Buddhist leadership offers the potential to create more sustainable and human-centered solutions to global challenges. This can encourage policies that balance environmental sustainability with social and economic well-being, contributing to long-term peace and stability.⁵³

7.2.1. Building global solidarity

Buddhist approaches highlight the interconnectedness of all beings and the shared nature of human suffering, which can serve as a foundation for fostering global solidarity. By promoting an understanding of collective responsibility and mutual care, these principles offer an opportunity to bridge divides among nations and cultures. The teachings on non-duality and compassion could inspire nations to work together in addressing global issues such as poverty, climate change, and conflict. This solidarity could lead to more cooperative international relations as countries recognize their interdependence and the shared need for peace and justice.⁵⁴

7.2.2. Promoting non-violence and conflict resolution

Buddhist teachings on nonviolence (*Ahimsā*) and the transformative power of compassion provide an alternative framework for resolving conflicts. This approach could encourage diplomatic solutions that prioritize understanding and empathy over coercion and force. By fostering compassion in leadership, Buddhist-inspired models of conflict resolution can lead to more peaceful global relations, encouraging the de-escalation of international tensions and

⁵¹ Tan, L. H. (2017). The role of Buddhist philosophy in fostering global peace and harmony. *Global Peace Journal*, 22 (5), 102 - 118.

⁵² Smith, J. K. (2019). Compassionate leadership in the Buddhist tradition: A framework for contemporary organizations. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 13 (2), 30 - 46.

⁵³ Perera, R. (2016). *Buddhism, peace building, and conflict resolution*. *Peace Studies Journal*, 34 (1), 77 - 91.

⁵⁴ Mohan, S. (2021). Sustainable development and Buddhist ethics: A study on ethical consumption. *Environmental Ethics Journal*, 43 (1), 89 - 106.

the promotion of dialogue over conflict.⁵⁵

7.2.3. Inclusive approaches to development

Buddhist principles emphasize equity and the well-being of all individuals, regardless of status or background. This presents an opportunity for inclusive development frameworks that not only focus on economic growth but also address social, spiritual, and environmental needs. By integrating Buddhist values into development strategies, there is potential to reduce global inequalities, promote peace, and ensure that the benefits of progress are equitably shared across society.⁵⁶

While challenges exist in implementing Buddhist approaches to world order, particularly with regard to overcoming political and economic disparities, the opportunities for fostering a more compassionate, interconnected, and peaceful world are significant. Buddhist-inspired leadership holds the potential to transform global governance by focusing on ethical leadership, compassion, and global solidarity. The Buddhist approach to leadership provides a powerful framework for cultivating compassionate leaders who are equipped to navigate the complex challenges of our time. By integrating mindfulness, emotional intelligence, and ethical principles into leadership development, we can create a new generation of leaders who are committed to promoting sustainable development, world peace, and the well-being of all sentient beings. Through holistic education and the cultivation of compassion, wisdom, and ethical conduct, leaders can inspire collective transformation and create a world that reflects the values of interconnectedness, justice, and peace.⁵⁷

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Buddhist approaches to world order offer profound insights into fostering compassionate leadership that can contribute to sustainable development and global peace. Central to Buddhist teachings is the interconnectedness of all beings, emphasizing empathy, nonviolence, and mindfulness in leadership. By prioritizing the well-being of all sentient beings, Buddhist principles encourage leaders to act with wisdom, compassion, and a long-term vision that respects the environment, promotes social justice, and cultivates harmonious relations. The Buddhist commitment to non-harming (*Ahimsā*) and the reduction of suffering (*Dukkha*) offers a moral and ethical framework that challenges the exploitative practices often seen in modern governance and economics. Moreover, Buddhist perspectives on interdependence and impermanence call for a rethinking of development that is both environmentally sustainable and socially equitable.

⁵⁵ Capriles, E. (2011). *Buddhism and world peace: A global vision*. Wisdom Publications, p. 11 - 15.

⁵⁶ Perera, R. (2016). Buddhism, peace building, and conflict resolution. *Peace Studies Journal*, 34 (1), 77 - 91.

⁵⁷ McNamara, P. (2018). Leading with mindfulness: Buddhist principles in leadership studies. *Journal of Management and Organization*, 24 (2), 100 - 115.

As the world faces escalating environmental, economic, and political crises, embracing Buddhist-inspired leadership could help create a more just, compassionate, and peaceful world order, rooted in mindfulness, humility, and a collective commitment to the flourishing of all. Through such an approach, sustainable development and global peace are not merely aspirational goals but achievable outcomes grounded in the cultivation of inner peace and collective responsibility.

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BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, MINDFULNESS, AND GLOBAL PEACE BUILDING

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Abstract:

Conflict has been an inherent part of human existence, often leading to devastating consequences. While modern conflict resolution methods focus on external interventions, Buddhism offers an alternative approach rooted in self-mastery, ethical behavior, and inner peace. This paper explores how Buddhist teachings provide a holistic and sustainable model for managing conflicts, both at the interpersonal and societal levels. By analyzing key Buddhist scriptures, it highlights the relevance of mindfulness, compassion, and nonviolence in fostering peace and harmony. The primary objective of this study is to examine the role of Buddhist teachings in conflict resolution. It aims to analyze Buddhist perspectives on the causes of conflict, explore the practical applications of mindfulness and ethical conduct in mitigating disputes, and assess how Buddhist principles can contribute to global peacebuilding and ethical leadership. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, primarily utilizing content analysis of Buddhist scriptures such as the *Dhammapada*, suttas from the *Pāli Canon*, and contemporary scholarly works. A comparative analysis of Western conflict resolution theories and Buddhist approaches provides insights into their practical applications. The research also draws upon historical examples of Buddhist-inspired peace efforts to illustrate their relevance in modern society. The study reveals that Buddhism approaches conflict resolution through self-discipline, mindfulness, and ethical leadership. Key findings include: (1) Mental peace as the foundation: The root causes of conflicts lie in greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). By cultivating inner peace, individuals can foster external peace. (2)

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Loving-kindness and compassion: The practice of *mettā bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation) significantly reduces hostility and fosters harmonious relationships. (3) Non-violence as a conflict resolution strategy: Buddhist teachings promote non-violent approaches to resolving disputes, emphasizing dialogue, understanding, and patience. (4) Ethical leadership in governance and society: Buddhist-inspired leadership encourages fairness, empathy, and moral decision-making, contributing to long-term peace. Buddhism presents a humanistic and sustainable approach to conflict resolution by addressing its root causes within the human mind. The study highlights that the practice of mindfulness, ethical conduct, and compassion can lead to harmonious relationships and a more peaceful society. By integrating Buddhist principles into modern conflict management strategies, individuals and communities can create a culture of nonviolence and mutual understanding, ultimately fostering global peace and coexistence.

Keywords: *conflict resolution, mindfulness, ethical leadership, peacebuilding, Buddhist psychology.*

INTRODUCTION

It is fair to describe India as a land of armed conflict at the time of Prince Siddhartha's birth. It was also a time when there were many sages and philosophies of various levels seeking liberation in life. After attaining enlightenment, Gautama Buddha, instead of devoting himself solely to individual liberation, worked to save society from the terrible conflicts and inequalities that engulfed it, as is evident from the way he pacified the *Sākya-Koliya* conflict. The Buddha criticized the fact that race, caste, and religion were used as a means to treat people as superior or inferior. Just as Buddhism is a non-violent religion, it is also a humanistic religion that does not discriminate based on human differences. It is a matter of regret that instead of these humanistic cores in Buddhism, tendencies are emerging that support social divisions and conflicts. As a country where the majority of Buddhists live, Sri Lanka is a matter of concern for sincere Buddhists and learned monks, as tendencies are emerging that hinder the progress of society instead of adhering to the essential philosophy contained in Buddhism. It is a matter of concern that Buddhism, while expressing profound thoughts about the evils of war and accepting non-violence as a noble philosophy, has, through its fiery sermons, instilled in some of its followers hateful ideas that have been used to incite war. Thus, a dialogue should be held between scholars, laypeople, and ordinary individuals who desire coexistence, discussing the eternal significance of Buddhism and its humanistic vision. This is the need of the hour. If this booklet, prepared with this need in mind, helps in building a society that values peace, coexistence, and humanism, it will be a cause for our satisfaction.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to explore Buddhist teachings on conflict resolution, emphasizing their relevance in fostering peace, ethical leadership,

and harmony in both personal and societal contexts. By analyzing key Buddhist scriptures and philosophies, this study aims to highlight the practical applications of mindfulness, compassion, and ethical conduct in mitigating conflicts and promoting sustainable peace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rahula, Walpola (1959). *What the Buddha Taught* explores the ethical and philosophical teachings of Buddhism, with a detailed analysis of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path.¹ It provides insights into the role of mindfulness and right intention in mitigating interpersonal and societal conflicts. Rahula's explanation of nonviolence as an essential Buddhist virtue forms a cornerstone for understanding its applicability in conflict resolution. Analayo (2014). *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization* provides a detailed examination of the *Satipaṭṭhānasutta*, emphasizing mindfulness as a tool for managing emotions, thoughts, and behaviors that lead to conflicts.² His comparative analysis of early Buddhist texts provides a scholarly foundation for integrating mindfulness practices into modern conflict management frameworks. Harvey, Peter (2013). *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices* delves into Buddhist teachings on ethical behavior and social harmony.³ His analysis of *sīla* (morality) and *paññā* (wisdom) offers a comprehensive framework for resolving conflicts through ethical and mindful practices. The book also discusses the significance of the five precepts in fostering societal peace. Kabat-Zinn, Jon (2005). *Wherever You Go, There You Are - Though not specifically Buddhist, Kabat-Zinn's integration of mindfulness into contemporary therapeutic practices provides a bridge between Buddhist principles and modern psychology.*⁴ His work is pivotal in demonstrating how mindfulness can transform reactive behaviors into proactive conflict resolution strategies. Gethin, Rupert (1998). *The Foundations of Buddhism* explores Buddhist cosmology and psychology, shedding light on how unwholesome mental states, such as greed, hatred, and delusion, contribute to conflicts.⁵ His insights into the interplay between *saṃsāra* and human behavior provide a philosophical backdrop for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal and societal disputes. Shantideva (1997). *The way of the Bodhisattva; Mahayana text emphasizes compassion (karuṇā) and patience (kṣānti) as critical virtues in addressing interpersonal and societal conflicts. Shantideva's teachings on transforming adversity into opportunities for spiritual growth offer timeless*

¹ Rahula, Walpola. *What the Buddha Taught*. Grove Press, 1974, p. 1 – 50.

² *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization*. Anālayo, Bhikkhu. (trans.). Windhorse Publications, 2014, p.1 – 100.

³ Harvey, Peter. *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*. 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 2013, p.1 – 75.

⁴ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hachette Books, p 1 – 30.

⁵ Gethin, R. (2001). *Theravada Buddhism: A complete introduction*. London: Routledge Curzon. p.1 – 100.

guidance for conflict resolution. Śāntideva (1997). The way of the *Bodhisattva* - a Mahāyāna text - emphasizes *compassion* (*karuṇā*) and *patience* (*kṣānti*) as critical virtues in addressing interpersonal and societal conflicts.⁶ Śāntideva's teachings on transforming adversity into opportunities for spiritual growth offer timeless guidance for conflict resolution. Dalai Lama & Desmond Tutu (2016). The Book of Joy is a collaborative work that highlights the application of Buddhist and Christian principles for cultivating compassion, empathy, and forgiveness.⁷ Their practical advice on embracing joy amidst suffering aligns with Buddhist approaches to overcoming greed, hatred, and delusion in resolving conflicts. Jayewardene, J.R. (1951). Speech at the San Francisco Peace Conference. J.R. Jayewardene's invocation of the *Dhammapada* verse, "Hatred is not appeased by hatred, but by love alone," illustrates the practical application of Buddhist teachings in resolving international disputes.⁸ This historical example underscores the relevance of Buddhist principles in fostering peace at a global level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, primarily utilizing content analysis of relevant written materials on conflict and peace. These sources are treated as essential documents for the research. Additionally, data is gathered from *Pāli Canon* texts, with a focus on key teachings of the Buddha on peace, which play a central role in the data collection process. The methodology involves a detailed analysis of these texts to identify and interpret themes and patterns that align with the study's objectives. This thorough content analysis aids in gaining insights into the perspectives and teachings on peace found in both traditional and contemporary literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

"From that day until now, war has begun in the minds of men. Therefore, peace must be established in the minds of men." This is stated in the Charter of the United Nations.⁹ This is a modern idea in recent history, but it was also included in the teachings of the Buddha in the distant past. That is, the mind should be rooted in both good and bad. First, one must have mental peace within oneself. Only then can one establish mental peace among others. "No matter how much the gods, demons, *nagas*, *gandharvas*, and various other beings intend to live 'without hatred', without hostility, without taking up arms, without anger, they live with hatred, without hostility, taking up arms,

⁶ Shantideva. (1997). The Way of the *Bodhisattva*. Shambhala. p.1 – 100.

⁷ Dalai Lama, & Tutu, D. (2016). The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World. New York: Penguin Random House. p 1 – 200.

⁸ Jayewardene, J. R. (1951). *Speech at the San Francisco Peace Conference*. Historical Archives of the San Francisco Peace Conference. accessed on [January 24, 2025], available at: https://www.lk.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_00024.html.

⁹ United Nations. Charter of the United Nations. 1945. United Nations, accessed on [January 24, 2025], available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>.

and with anger.” “What combination, Marisa, do gods, humans, demons, *nagas*, *gandharvas*, and other beings, living in the moon.¹⁰ This is a very subtle explanation. Everyone wants to live peacefully. They talk about it in public. But how far are they willing to act in their hearts is a problem. Buddhism shows that the root of this is greed. When their good is more important than the common good, people sometimes have to take up arms in a hostile and competitive manner. Then, those who have not taken up arms also have to take up arms to confront those who have taken up arms. In this way, conflicts that arise at a small level can sometimes escalate into genocidal wars. Buddhism considers mental peace as the main thing. First, peace can be achieved within oneself, and second, peace can be achieved within the family. For this, greed, hatred, delusion, and prejudice should be avoided. According to Western theories of conflict resolution, there are four types: mediation, decisive mediation, executive mediation & informal mediation. It is also clear from the Buddhist scriptures that this method was used long before these theories were recognized and named. The *Veludvarasutta* states that one should look at others first. According to this, what is unpleasant to oneself is also unpleasant to others. What causes discord is also unpleasant to oneself. In the *Samyāgatanikaya*, those who dedicate themselves to society are classified as follows: (1) The person who protects himself and protects others, (2) The person who protects others and protects himself. The first is the person who practices and develops virtues in himself and society, works hard, and spreads them. The second is the one who acts with great non-violence, compassion, and kindness towards society. It is wrong to carry out one’s actions in a way that harms others. One’s actions should be in a way that benefits society. “What, monks, is the protection of oneself beyond that of others?” Meditation, meditation, and many actions - these, monks, are the greatest protection for the self. What, monks, is the greatest protection for the self? Kindness, non-violence, loving-kindness, forbearance, and compassion - these, monks, are the greatest protection for the self. “*Bhikkhus*, the one who is the protector of No one is superior or inferior to anyone else, and creating conflicts based on that difference is completely contrary to Buddhist principles.

I. ROOT COURSE FOR CONFLICTS

In *Kalahavivādasutta*, the Buddha explains the root cause for arising conflicts: “Where do quarrels and disputes come from? Buddha answers; Quarrels and disputes come from what we hold dear.”¹¹ This highlights that attachment and craving (*tanhā*), particularly in the form of lust and desire, are the root causes of conflicts. Lust drives individuals to pursue their desires at the expense of others, leading to competition, envy, and disputes. It is the fuel for greed and attachment, which manifest in both personal and societal conflicts. By recognizing and addressing lust at its root, individuals can prevent conflicts from arising. The Buddhist practice of mindfulness and contentment

¹⁰ DN. II, p. 263 - 289.

¹¹ Sn. IV p 169.

(*santutthi*) helps individuals reduce excessive desires, thereby fostering inner peace and harmonious relationships. The Buddha described eleven benefits of cultivating loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*). These benefits play a crucial role in conflict resolution: “You sleep at ease and wake happily.” A peaceful mind leads to a calm demeanor, preventing reactive behaviors that can escalate conflicts. “You don’t have bad dreams: Mental clarity and emotional stability reduce anxiety and distress, fostering a harmonious environment. “Humans love you”: Practitioners who cultivate loving-kindness exude warmth, making them less likely to be involved in disputes. “Non-humans love you”: The practitioner’s benevolent energy creates a peaceful atmosphere that even extends beyond human interactions. “Deities protect you”: Spiritual well-being reinforces moral integrity, preventing actions that contribute to conflicts. “You can’t be harmed by fire, poison, or blade”: While metaphorical, this implies that a compassionate person is less likely to invite hostility. “Your mind quickly enters immersion”: Meditation fosters mental discipline, allowing individuals to respond to conflict with wisdom rather than impulsiveness. “Your face is clear and bright”: A serene mind reflects in one’s demeanor, making interactions more amicable. “You don’t feel lost when you die”: Loving-kindness fosters a sense of purpose and peace, reducing fear-based reactions in conflicts. “If you don’t penetrate any higher, you’ll be reborn in a realm of divinity.” Even at a worldly level, cultivating loving-kindness results in a harmonious life.¹² By practicing these qualities, a practitioner naturally avoids conflicts and fosters positive relationships, leading to societal harmony. The ability to remain composed, compassionate, and mindful prevents conflicts from arising and ensures that one does not contribute to discord. In *Rohitassasutta*, Buddha clearly explains the nature of the world. There is the Buddhist perspective of the world: “For it is in this fathom-long carcass with its perception and mind that I describe the world, its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation.”¹³ In the *Rohitassasutta*, the Buddha states: “For it is in this fathom-long carcass with its perception and mind that I describe the world, its origin, its cessation, and the practice that leads to its cessation.”¹⁴ This statement highlights the Buddhist view that the true nature of the world is not external but is found within our perceptions and experiences. From a conflict resolution perspective, this teaching emphasizes that conflicts arise because people misunderstand the nature of the world. If one truly understands that the world is shaped by their mind, one would not become attached to worldly disputes. Instead, they would focus on understanding their role in the world, their contributions to harmony, and how their perceptions influence their reactions to external events. By realizing that attachment to material and ego-driven conflicts is futile, one naturally cultivates detachment, wisdom, and peace. A practitioner who internalizes this perspective does not

¹² AN 5. 342.

¹³ AN II p. 49. “*Api cāhaṃ, āvuso, imasmiṃyeva byāmamatte kalevare sasaññimhi samanake lokaṇca paññāpemi lokasamudayaṇca lokanirodhaṇca lokanirodhagāminiṇca paṭipadanti.*”

¹⁴ AN 4.45.

engage in unnecessary disputes but seeks to resolve conflicts through understanding and inner transformation. When individuals understand their minds as the source of their suffering and joy, they prioritize self-awareness and ethical conduct over external confrontations. In *Nibbedhikasutta*, Buddha explains the better approach to control oneself without engaging in conflicts: “It is intention that I call deeds. For after making a choice one acts by way of body, speech, and mind.”¹⁵ This teaching highlights the role of intention (*cetanā*) in shaping our actions. From a conflict resolution perspective, this means that conflict arises when individuals act impulsively without awareness of their intentions. Mindfulness at the stage of intention allows individuals to reflect on their thoughts before they manifest as speech or action. By cultivating awareness, individuals can prevent harmful behavior and choose responses that foster peace rather than discord. A person who is mindful of their intentions gains control over their actions, avoiding unnecessary conflicts and fostering harmony in their interactions. “Though one may conquer a thousand times a thousand in battle, yet he indeed is the noblest victor who conquers himself.”¹⁶ The *Dhammapada* verse emphasizes that true victory does not come from defeating others in battle but from conquering oneself. It highlights the futility of external wars and suggests that personal growth and self-mastery are far more meaningful. As human beings, we should strive to cultivate goodness and well-being, not just for ourselves but for the benefit of others. This is why Buddhism is often regarded as a deeply humanistic philosophy. Those who practice Buddhism tend to develop compassion, mindfulness, and a sense of interconnectedness, which can ultimately lead to a more peaceful world. If more people embraced these principles, conflicts and wars could diminish, paving the way for global harmony. The progress or future path of a society is determined by the people living in that society. All these things help in maintaining the peace of the society. If that peace is broken in any way, conflicts are bound to arise. In the discussion of conflicts, there is a possibility of conflicts between individuals, individuals with society, and society with society. Even if the conflict starts based on a minor reason, it sometimes ends up leading to several large-scale crimes. Due to the confusion in the thoughts of a person, he creates various problems within himself and clashes with his thoughts. If these conflicts are not resolved at the earliest opportunity, they can eventually lead to great tragedy. Accordingly, we can understand that the word conflict is not merely an ordinary or simple term. When we examine conflicts further, we find accounts in ancient stories indicating that conflicts have arisen not only in the highly complex society we live in today but also in ancient societies. When we discuss conflict and how it was incorporated into Buddhism, we hear from the *Pali Tripitaka* texts about the conflicts that existed in the society of Uttara Bharata during the time of the Buddha in the sixth century

¹⁵ AN III. p. 410 – 417. “Cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi. Cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā.”

¹⁶ *Dhp* verse 103. “Yo sahaṣṣam sahaṣṣena/ sangāme mānuse jine./ Ekañ ca jeyyam’attānam/ sa ve sangāmajuttamo.”

BC and about the people who thought about their nature. At that time, Sakkadevarāja, who had begun to pay attention to the problematic situation regarding these conflicts, went to the Buddha one day and inquired about this. The question posed by Sakkadevarāja is, “Blessed One, all these beings, gods, humans, demons, *nagas*, and *gandharvas*, think of not hating, not taking up arms, not having enemies, not being angry. But all of them are hating, taking up arms, having enemies, and becoming angry. Blessed One, what is the reason for this?” It is not surprising to think how timely the question posed by Sakkadevarāja is today. In pointing out the necessary answer to this question according to Buddhism, the Buddha gave several discourses on the emergence of conflicts in man and society, their causes, the nature of conflicts, and the ways to resolve conflicts, which are scattered throughout the *Nikaya* texts. Among them, this point can be analyzed with the help of several sermons that deserve closer attention. The Blessed One, in response to a question posed by Sakkadevarāja, identified *jealousy* (*issā*) and *avarice* (*macchariya*) as the immediate causes of conflict arising in the human mind. Both of these are rooted in *liking* (*chanda*) and *disliking* (*dosa*). Liking arises due to personal choice or will, which in turn stems from reasoning. The process by which argumentation arises is encapsulated in the term “*papañcita-saññāsāṅkhā*”, a concept used in Buddhist teachings to explain the proliferation of thoughts in a way consistent with Buddhist doctrine. The changes that occur in the human mind lead to behaviors that manifest as violence. As a result, conflicts escalate - not only through verbal disputes and harsh words but also through the taking up of sticks and clubs, the wielding of weapons, and ultimately, open warfare. In resolving the problem posed by Sakkadevarāja, the cause-and-effect nature of this process is systematically explained. Similarly, in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*, the Buddha describes the mental background of conflicts in the same way. According to Buddhist teachings, the fundamental factor leading to the origin of conflict is the struggle caused by the interaction between the five senses and their corresponding objects - namely, the eye and form, as well as the other senses: ear and sound, nose and smell, tongue and taste, body and touch, and mind and mental objects. This dynamic is thoroughly explained in three discourses: the *Sakkapañha Sutta*, the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*, and the *Kalahavivāda Sutta*. Furthermore, when discussing the causes of conflict, it becomes evident that they are not limited to inherent human weaknesses alone; social and institutional shortcomings also contribute significantly to conflict. This is illustrated in several *suttas*, among which the *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* provides a particularly insightful analysis of how institutional failures give rise to social problems through the doctrine of cause and effect.¹⁷ A key incident from this *sutta* is as follows: A thief was brought before the king. The king asked, “Why did you steal?” The thief replied, “Because, O King, I could not survive.” Taken as a whole, the origin of conflict stems from the mind, and according to the doctrine of cause and effect, every occurrence has

¹⁷ DN. III p. 58 – 79.

an underlying cause. Buddhist teachings indicate that impulsive reactions leading to conflict arise from unwholesome mental states such as greed (*lobha*), craving (*taṇhā*), and avarice (*macchariya*). Furthermore, external appearances alone do not provoke conflict; rather, people are often driven to engage in antisocial behavior when their fundamental needs are unmet. Taken as a whole, the origin of conflict occurs in our minds, and for something to occur, it is explained through the doctrine of cause and effect. According to the teachings of Buddhism, it can be shown that impulsive steps leading to conflict arise from thoughts produced by harmful mental states such as greed, desire, and avarice. Furthermore, mere appearance is not the only reason for engaging in conflict. This reveals that a person is tempted to engage in antisocial activities because their basic needs are not met. If something occurs, there must be an end to it or a way to control it. When it comes to conflict, Buddhism has clearly shown the nature of its management from its beginning to its end. The Buddha's advice on conflict management, appropriate for each situation, is found in various places in the Buddhist scriptures. Scolding, scolding, and condemning are ways to make ordinary people angry. They create situations that lead to chaos. Once, the Buddha was walking along the road with the great *saṅgha*. A monk named Suppiya and a young man named Brahmadata were walking behind the Buddha's group. Suppiya was criticizing the Buddha, the *dhamma*, and the *saṅgha*. He was scolding. Brahmadata, on the other hand, responded by extolling the virtues of the Buddha. The two continued in this manner as they walked. When they reached the place where the Buddha's group had stopped, Suppiya continued to scold. After spending the night there, the next morning, the Buddha addressed the group and gave them this advice: "When others scold you, you should not get angry; you should not become upset. If you are disturbed, you will not be able to discern whether what they say is true or false. When others speak of virtues, you should not become overly happy, elated or jump for joy. If you do so, you will not be able to see the truth of it. Listen carefully to what is said, consider the facts, and discern whether it is true or false. If it is false, discard it. If it is true, accept it." This advice is very practical for living peacefully without entering into conflict. It is also clear that it paves the way for one's development instead of leading to the great loss caused by conflict. Overall, what the Buddha was teaching here is that it is foolish to act out of anger, no matter the reason, and that many valuable lessons can remain hidden if one allows anger to take over. Taking another example from the character of the Buddha, we find another interesting incident in the *Akkosaka Sutta*, in which a certain Brahmin scolded the Buddha with obscene words. Hearing that a Brahmin had been ordained in the Buddha's assembly, the Brahmin Akkosa, enraged, came to the *Veluvana* monastery and began to scold the Blessed One with obscene and harsh words.¹⁸ The Buddha remained silent until the Brahmin had finished scolding him. Finally, when the Brahmin had fallen silent, the Buddha asked him, "Brahmin, do you have relatives or close friends visiting

¹⁸ SN II p.162 – 163.

your house? Yes, sir. Do you entertain those guests with food and drink? Yes, sir. Brahmin, what will you do with those guests if they do not accept the food you have prepared? Venerable sir, we will eat it ourselves. Brahmin, you have just given me a good meal. But I will not accept any of it. Therefore, eat it yourself.” The Brahmin, who had now calmed down and regained his senses, apologized to the Buddha and also received the Buddha’s ordination. This incident shows that if one has the patience to listen to an angry person without getting agitated until their anger subsides, not only can many fights not arise, but enemies can even become friends. Looking at today’s society, the root cause of many conflicts is the lust for power. Other human emotions have been suppressed due to intense greed for power. Additionally, conflicts in society have increased significantly due to factors such as intolerance of differing opinions, an inability to listen attentively, and selfishness. Like a group of people chasing a mirage in search of hidden treasure, human beings create conflicts when their attempts to stand out in society through competitiveness fail. At the origin of every conflict lies a single thought. If we can somehow control that thought, we can prevent many disastrous situations from arising. As we live in the world, encountering and managing emotions is an inevitable part of life. The above *sutta* teachings show that Buddhism provides valuable support for handling our emotions properly. Practices such as meditation, listening attentively before responding, and refraining from expressing opinions until we fully understand a situation can all be learned from Buddhism. Everything has a beginning - that is the nature of the world. Even conflict has a beginning. It is our responsibility to ensure that it’s ending is not a tragic one.

II. NATURE OF THE WORLD

“The world is wanting, insatiable, the slave of craving.”¹⁹ This statement in the *Majjhima Nikāya Raṭṭhapālasutta* highlights the inherent dissatisfaction (*dukkha*) that pervades human existence. According to Buddhist philosophy, craving (*taṇhā*) is the driving force behind suffering and conflict. The relentless pursuit of desires - whether for wealth, power, or status - leads individuals and societies into competition, aggression, and ultimately, disputes. The *Raṭṭhapālasutta* teaches that worldly attachments are fleeting and deceptive. People constantly seek pleasure, yet their desires remain unfulfilled, fueling further greed and conflict. This aligns with the Buddhist understanding that true peace does not come from acquiring external possessions but from cultivating inner contentment and wisdom. In the context of conflict resolution, this teaching suggests that addressing external disputes alone is insufficient. Sustainable peace requires addressing the internal cravings and attachments that drive conflict. By practicing mindfulness, non-attachment, and ethical living, individuals can break free from the cycle of craving and foster harmonious relationships, both personally and socially. Thus, the wisdom of the *Raṭṭhapālasutta* serves as a reminder that true resolution lies not in external conquest but in mastering one’s desires and perceptions.

¹⁹ MN II p.55. “ūno loko atitto taṇhādāso ti”

A CONFLICT ZERO SOCIETY

One might question the feasibility of a conflict-free society, considering the inherent nature of human beings as well as the occurrence of conflicts among deities and Brahmas. Even in the heavenly realms, gods and goddesses engage in disputes and conflicts. Conflict, arguments, and quarrels are not uncommon among Brahmas as well. Given these observations, it raises the question of whether such conflicts can be eradicated in the human world. In his renowned work “The Communist Manifesto,” Karl Marx presents several defining characteristics of his envisioned ultimate communist society. “The means of production are owned in common. There are no class divisions. All people have equal access to resources and opportunities. The state is no longer necessary. People are free to develop their full potential. There is no exploitation or oppression. There is peace and harmony.”²⁰ However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the notion of such a society remains a topic of ongoing scholarly debate due to its speculative nature and uncertain prospects of realization. Nonetheless, for critical analysis, let us hypothetically assume the existence of such a society. It is pivotal to recognize that individuals within this hypothetical society would inevitably exhibit the fundamental characteristics inherent to human nature. Even in the contemporary era, numerous instances arise wherein nations, such as the United States, engage in power struggles driven by aspirations for global hegemony. These ambitions extend beyond terrestrial boundaries, as evidenced by endeavors to colonize extraterrestrial entities like Venus or the Moon. It is noteworthy to mention that Karl Marx’s envisioned society shares certain similarities with the society portrayed in the *Aggaññasutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*. “They are mind-made, nourished by joy, self-luminous, sky-travelers, abiding in radiance; they remain for a long time.”²¹ Here, they are mind-made, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, moving through the sky, steadily glorious, and they remain like that for a very long time. The role of food is critical throughout this narrative. Food is a fundamental sustenance on which all creatures must rely, and the nature of the food reflects the being that consumes it. The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* states that the highest form of self is made of bliss (*ātma ānandamaya*). Finally, what happened to this world? The passage “Then, Vāseṭṭha, a certain being was greedy”²² This sutta discusses the origins of the world and society, including how beings gradually developed greed, attachment, and eventually social structures like castes. Thinking, “Oh my, what might this be?”²³ they tasted the earth’s nectar with their finger. Ghee and honey were among the finest offerings to the gods. The *soma* was often described as “honeyed.” Our text suggests that the Vedic sacrifices led to the corruption of divinity. They enjoyed it, and a craving was born in them.

²⁰ Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. International Publishers.

²¹ DN III p.80 – 98. “Tedha honti manomayā pītibhakkhā sayāmpabhā antalikkhacarā subhaṭṭhāyino ciraṃ dīghamaddhānaṃ tiṭṭhanti”.

²² DN. 27. “Atha kho, vāseṭṭha, aññataro satto lolajātiko.”

²³ Ibid. “Ambho, kimevidam bhavissati’ti rasapathaviṃ aṅguliyā sāyi.”

For *acchadesi*, read *assādesi* (“enjoyed”) after *Mu Kd 17’s āsvādayati*. The commentary explains *acchadesi* as “becomes suffused,” so if it is a misreading, it is an old one. “As that being tasted the flavored earth with their finger, attachment (*taṇhā*) arose in them”²⁴ Craving arose in them, and all social conflicts emerged from it - greed for food, sexual activity, control, kingship, and so on. Since their minds were neither developed nor well-practiced, everything arose chaotically. In light of this perspective, it becomes evident that placing trust in individuals who have not cultivated a well-developed mind is inherently problematic. A notable exemplar of a society that aligns with this ideal is the community of *arahants*, comprising ordained monks and nuns who have renounced worldly possessions and attained a state of profound contentment. This society can be considered a conflict-free entity, surpassing Karl Marx’s envisioned communist society. The nature of the *arahants’* lives - their emotions, communication, and actions - can be comprehended through canonical texts and scriptures. An *arahant*, having accomplished their ultimate aspiration, has completely eradicated the cycle of rebirth and transcended the fetters of suffering through enlightenment. They possess the highest level of mental well-being, experiencing a state devoid of anguish. *Arahants* are capable of harmonious coexistence with all beings, earning reverence from celestial entities, *Brahmā*, and even animals. The true nature of an *arahant* monk eludes the comprehension of ordinary individuals, as they defy comparison to anyone else. Consequently, understanding this reality is a personal endeavor that can only be attained by the individual, guided by the teachings of the Lord Buddha. This society, characterized by perpetual happiness and the absence of conflict, represents an ideal state, both in mundane and transcendent existence, wherein individuals can attain enduring bliss even beyond death.

CONCLUSION

Buddhist teachings offer a profound and timeless approach to conflict resolution by addressing the root causes of disputes - greed, hatred, and delusion. Unlike conventional methods that focus primarily on external mediation, Buddhism emphasizes inner transformation as the key to lasting peace. Through mindfulness, ethical conduct, and compassion, individuals can cultivate self-awareness and emotional intelligence, reducing the likelihood of conflicts at both personal and societal levels. The study highlights that true peace begins within the mind. The practice of loving-kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) fosters positive interpersonal relationships, while nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and ethical leadership promote justice and harmony in governance and community life. Buddhist scriptures illustrate how peaceful negotiation, patience, and wisdom can prevent conflicts from escalating into violence. By integrating these principles into modern conflict management strategies, societies can create more inclusive and cooperative environments. In a world increasingly marked by division and strife, Buddhism’s emphasis on nonviolence, mindfulness, and ethical leadership remains highly relevant.

²⁴ Ibid. “*Tassa rasapathaviṃ aṅguliyaṃ sāyato acchādesi, taṇhā cassa okkami.*”

If embraced widely, these principles can contribute to sustainable peace and global harmony. Ultimately, this study reaffirms that resolving conflicts is not merely about external solutions but about cultivating inner peace, which naturally extends to the world around us.

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MINDFUL COMMUNICATION AND A NEW PATH FOR PEACE JOURNALISM

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Abstract:

The Western model of Journalism we have been teaching across the world for the past half a century, based on the “watchdog” principle of a “free media” has created an adversarial journalism culture that drives conflicts and the media is unable to stop conflicts that they have helped to create in the first place. Today’s geopolitical conflicts are mainly driven by this model. A new definition and model of journalism is needed to promote cooperation and harmony in society, not conflicts. A Buddhist model of mindful communication for sustainable development and peaceful co-existence could be adopted to promote a new model of Peace Journalism. This paper discusses how Buddhist philosophical concepts could be adopted to design such a curriculum for journalism training. Specific recommendations are given on how we could use such a curriculum to train communicators across Asia and the world.

Many of today’s geopolitical tensions and conflicts can be attributed to the adversarial reporting culture promoted by the Libertarian Media Function Theory that underpins the Western “free media” model of “watchdog” journalism. It is creating and driving conflicts with the media, unable or unwilling to help solve them.

We need a model of Peace Journalism that helps to promote understanding, cooperation, and harmony among countries and within communities. The term Peace Journalism has been around for at least two decades, but we need an Eastern – more precisely, a Buddhist – model of Journalism.

Keywords: *Peace journalism, Buddhist communication model, mindful communication, geopolitical conflicts, media and conflict.*

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I. WHAT IS PEACE JOURNALISM

The practice of journalism is deeply rooted in getting at least two sides of a story together in reporting an issue, which naturally creates a conflict. We lead to war when a narrative of “them” and “us” is created. Conflict is portrayed as a zero-sum game where victory is achieved in the predominance of one party over the other.

The media will try to make us believe that one side is wrong and that it is the aggressor. Thus, the right side needs to win. We see this in the recent coverage of the Ukraine-Russia war.

Peace journalism, by contrast, is a journalistic approach committed to examining the root causes of conflicts to create opportunities for society to embrace non-violent responses. Its origins can be traced back to 1965, when Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge analyzed what rendered foreign news newsworthy in a Norwegian newspaper. Their study revealed that the media predominantly exhibit a bias toward violence, operating under the assumption that ‘conflict’ is synonymous with ‘war.’ Lynch and Galtung contend that such a view is problematic, as it precludes the possibility of seeing conflict as an opportunity to foster new forms of harmony among disputing parties – a process that need not necessarily culminate in war.¹

To provide a framework for peace journalism, Galtung and Lynch established four guiding principles:

1) Explore the genesis of conflicts: Analyze who the involved parties are, their respective goals, the socio-political and cultural contexts, and both the visible and invisible manifestations of violence.

2) Avoid dehumanization: Refrain from portraying the parties in conflict in dehumanized terms; instead, expose and understand their underlying interests.

3) Offer non-violent alternatives: Present responses to conflict that eschew militarized or violent solutions in favor of peaceful options.

4) Document grassroots initiatives: Report on non-violent actions at the grassroots level, following through the phases of resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation.²

This approach not only challenges the conventional media bias toward sensationalism and violence but also promotes a more balanced and constructive perspective on conflict, highlighting the potential for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

II. KALAMA SUTRA AND PEACE JOURNALISM

The Buddha’s discourse, commonly known as the *Kalama Sutta*, is widely regarded as the Buddhist Charter of Free Inquiry – a communication framework that predates Western theories such as the Libertarian Media

¹ De Michelis, 2018, p. 45.

² De Michelis, 2018, p. 45.

Function Theory by over 2500 years. In this seminal sermon, delivered to the warring Kalama community who were embroiled in debates over competing and often confusing doctrines propagated by various gurus seeking converts, the Buddha urged his listeners to engage their critical faculties. He emphasized that each individual should independently investigate and discern what is good and wholesome for practice.

In his address to the Kalamas, the Buddha advocated for a rational approach to ethical evaluation. He encouraged his audience to cultivate a mindset grounded in critical inquiry and self-reflection, thereby empowering them to determine the most beneficial practices for personal development. This method, which can be described in contemporary terms as 'scientific,' remains a timeless cornerstone of Buddhist thought.³

By challenging conventional reliance on dogmatic assertions, the Buddha's teaching in the *Kalama Sutta* not only provided a means for personal liberation but also laid the groundwork for free inquiry in matters of spiritual practice. His insistence on individual verification of truth underscores a profound respect for human agency – a principle that resonates with modern notions of intellectual autonomy and ethical responsibility.

Thus, the *Kalama Sutta* continues to serve as a model for how critical inquiry can lead to a deeper understanding of life and the development of wholesome practices. Its enduring relevance is evident not only in the realm of religious thought but also in broader discussions about the nature of free inquiry and the pursuit of truth. The integration of reason, ethical evaluation, and direct personal experience in this discourse offers a holistic approach that is as applicable today as it was over two millennia ago.

In summary, the Buddha's teaching to the Kalamas is a clarion call for self-determination in spiritual practice – a message that transcends time and culture. It calls on each individual to use reason and critical insight as the foundation for choosing a path that is both beneficial and life-affirming.⁴

Kalama Sutra sheds light based on Buddhist social philosophy with ten principles to guide one in what is acceptable. It includes:

1. views not to be accepted due to revelation;
2. tradition;
3. hearsay;
4. authority of sacred texts;
5. logical format;
6. merely on the view that seems rational;
7. reflection on mere appearance;
8. agreement with a considered view;

³ Gunanarama, 2003, p. 45.

⁴ Gunanarama, 2003, p. 45.

9. Considering the competence of a person;
10. or considering that the recluse is our teacher.⁵

Thus, the *Kalama Sutra* has valuable guidelines on free inquiry with the freedom of expression, personal verification, and the right to dissent. Western theories of journalism and mass communication have much in common, but where and how can we develop a Buddhist path to Peace Journalism?

Let us first look at two principles that are at the very root of the Buddhist philosophy.

III. TRIVISA – THE THREE POISONS

The *Trivisa* or the Three Poisons – greed, aggression, and ignorance – are fundamental mental states Buddhism identifies as the root causes of suffering and the obstacles to harmonious living.

The three poisons, greed (*raga*, also translated as lust), hatred (*dvesha*, or anger), and delusion (*moha*, or ignorance) are opposed by three wholesome, or positive attitudes essential to spiritual liberation - generosity (*dana*), loving-kindness (*maitre* or *metta* in *Pali*), and wisdom (*prajna*). Buddhist practice is directed toward the cultivation of these latter virtues and the reduction or destruction of the three poisons.

It is useful to think of the three poisons as a process that involves our insatiable urge to possess that which we desire and the ensuing aggravation that arises when we don't get what we want or have what we don't want forced upon us. These lead to hatred of the "other". Yet, we are oblivious to the futility of these conditioned responses due to our lack of discernment, and thus we mindlessly continue to get caught up in this casual nexus (Buddha-Nature)⁶.

If you look at today's geopolitical tensions, it is clear that what drives these conflicts is the three poisons, and the media continue to be trapped in a delusion of resolving these conflicts by militarization. I have recently written a book on how the media is pulling us in different directions by fueling geopolitical conflicts in Asia and the Pacific, and given one example after another of how that is happening.⁷

What is lacking in today's media is *prajna* – the wisdom – to understand the delusions behind the greed for the control of resources, and thus an inability to craft a journalistic strategy that would promote cooperation, understand the root causes of this grab for resources, and the need to control one's cravings by developing aspects of *dana* – generosity – and *metta* – a humanistic feeling towards people who are been subjected to inhuman treatment and misery in the process of the grab for resources.

Buddha introduced these poisons in *Adittapariyaya Sutta* as fires, and

⁵ Gunanarama, 2003, p. 45.

⁶ Tsadra Foundation. (n.d.). *trivisa*. Buddha-Nature. Retrieved from https://buddhanature.tsadra.org/index.php/Key_Terms/trivi%E1%B9%A3a

⁷ Seneviratne, 2024, p. 54.

putting off these “fires” (negative quality of mind or consciousness), is the goal of Buddhist practice that leads to the attainment of *nirvana* (*nibbana* in Pali).

Nibbana is the ultimate achievement of non-attachment. It may also be defined as the extinction of lust, hatred, and ignorance. “*Nibbana* is not situated in any place nor is it a sort of heaven where a transcendental ego resides. It is a state, which is dependent upon this body itself”⁸

IV. ANICCA – STATE OF IMPERMANENCE

Impermanence, called *anicca* (in Pāli) or *anitya* (in Sanskrit), appears extensively in the Pali Canon as one of the essential doctrines of Buddhism.

Practitioners have always understood impermanence as the cornerstone of Buddhist teachings and practice. All that exists is impermanent; nothing lasts. Therefore, nothing can be grasped or held onto. When we don’t fully appreciate this simple but profound truth, we suffer.⁹

Understanding impermanence is essential for today’s journalists to report about the impacts of climate change and other development issues, such as changing economic indicators, political instability, and so forth. Climate is changing at a rapid pace, particularly impacting farming and the environment, with regular droughts and floods. Mitigating climate change requires an understanding of how to cope with impermanence and design strategies and protection measures.

V. MINDULGENT COMMUNICATION AND PEACE JOURNALISM

Mindfulness has become an international fad today, but because it is being appropriated from Buddhist teachings to satisfy a desire to improve one’s concentration powers, its real objective in developing compassionate mindsets to address peaceful human existence has been lost.

Buddha elevated the practice of focused, calming self-observation into a well-defined discipline known as *vipassanā bhāvanā* – a method of self-transformation through direct introspection. Consequently, applying the *vipassanā* approach to peace journalism entails rejecting the conventional “them” versus “us” paradigm often found in conflict reporting. Instead, it advocates for a model of self-transformation in which one sees things as they truly are and understands their impact on communities, individuals, and the environment.

In early Buddhist teachings, the Pali term for mindfulness, *sati*, denotes an insightful awareness nurtured through meditation and self-reflection. Recognized as one of the seven factors of enlightenment, *sati* is described as the “correct” mindfulness necessary for achieving liberation.¹⁰ Equally important is the cultivation of compassion as an integral component of mindful communication – a vital pathway toward constructing a Buddhist

⁸ Narada Thera, 1933: 79 - 80

⁹ Fisher, 2024, p. 56.

¹⁰ Hsu, 2023, p. 78.

peace journalism model. This paper will discuss how such a paradigm can be developed.

Moreover, the evolution of peace journalism has been significantly informed by classical media theories. The work “Four Theories of the Press”¹¹ has, for over half a century, defined the role of journalism and mass communication through its encompassing models of Libertarian, Authoritarian, Social Responsibility, and Communist media functions. To develop an Asian model of libertarian communication theory, two principles rooted in traditional Asian thought emerge as essential. First is the recognition of impermanence: understanding that all phenomena are transient and subject to change, which allows individuals and societies to acknowledge and adapt to ongoing transformations. Second, it is crucial to address the three poisons – greed, hatred, and delusion – and to actively refrain from endorsing and propagating such delusions.

Between 2016 and 2017, I was part of a team at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok engaged in an UNESCO-funded project titled “Mindful Communication for ASEAN Integration.” The project aimed to develop a curriculum for training Asian journalists using philosophical concepts derived predominantly from Buddhist thought. In the following discussion, I will first elucidate several core elements of this curriculum, which serve as invaluable tools for introducing peace journalism training.

VI. FOUR NOBEL TRUTHS AND JOURNALISM

In the curriculum we developed, we turned a negative aspect of the Buddhist teachings, *dukkha* contained in the Four Noble Truths (FNT) into a positive path. The path is so secular that you do not need to become a Buddhist to put that into practice, as it is a people-focus methodology of participatory communication.

Let me explain it through this illustration.

Each Noble Truth	Meanings	Duties to deal with it
1. <i>Dukkha</i>	Suffering, dissatisfaction	To comprehension of suffering. To know location of the problem
2. <i>Samudaya</i>	The cause or origin of dissatisfaction or suffering	To eradicate the cause of suffering. To diagnose of the origin
3. <i>Nirodha</i>	The cessation or extinction of suffering	To realize the cessation of suffering. To envision the solution
4. <i>Magga</i>	The path leading to the cessation of dissatisfaction or suffering	To follow the right path through actual practices

¹¹ Seibert et al., 1956, cited in Nordenstreng, 1997, p. 115.

The first of the four noble truths addresses *dukkha* - unhappiness – and poverty is a cause of such unhappiness. It is a lack of access to services, resources, and economic means for driving day-to-day life. To understand that, we need to approach the communication process with a compassionate mindset – talk to the people who are suffering, listen deeply to them, and figure out the problem from their perspective. Listening deeply could be assisted with prior training in mindful meditation, which we included in the curriculum.

The second FNT path is the cause or origin of suffering or dissatisfaction (*samudaya*). If the problem is poverty, you need to ask questions. Is it due to the exploitation of the poor by employers, developers, labour recruiters, etc? Is it because of discrimination due to caste, ethnicity, or religion? Is it because of corruption at the government and business levels? Is it because of favours given to investors that have chased the people out of their homes? The list could go on and on; it all depends on the local situation and could also be linked to foreign trade, investment, and geopolitical issues. You need to be mindful of all these dimensions. This is the step to overcome *avijja* (ignorance).

At this stage, you go to the third phase of FNT – how to help in the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*). You need to think about how to craft your story/ message. The adversarial methodology of ‘watchdog’ journalism would start to point fingers at the government authorities, big business, ‘despotic’ leaders, greedy business people, etc - yes, that may be the problem - but you need to assist in finding a peaceful solution to it rather than encouraging people to come out to the streets in protest and end up in a riot.

Now we go into the fourth phase of FNT – path leading to the cessation of suffering, which leads you to the Buddhist ‘Eight Fold Path’ known as the *maggā* (path) to attaining enlightenment. This includes you as a communicator practicing compassion and loving-kindness, especially towards the people you are trying to help with your reporting/ communication. This path includes right understanding (through research and interviews/discussions), right thought (with compassionate mindset), right speech (being mindful of the language you use in your communication), right action (using proper and ethical channels to gather and disseminate your report), right livelihood (ie. no taking bribes/ junkets to write your report or compost it), right effort and right mindfulness.

If you go through this path, the communication methodology that comes out of it is naturally people-centric and participatory. It is also important to note that developing this path should be taken in the spirit of the *Kalama Sutra* – the Buddhist blueprint of free inquiry and personal verification – discussed earlier.

Gnanarama (2003) argues that on closer scrutiny, we should be able to discover from the discourse, “a positive way to approach problems involving man’s potential ability to mould his destiny” - that some of the important premises relevant to modern concepts of freedom and civil rights are included here.

American Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Bodhi, in an article written on the eve

of the UN Food Summit in New York in September 2021, reflected upon the ignorance (*avijja*) that drives the global media networks towards a delusion of development that does not serve a majority of humankind. He wrote:

Tackling global hunger requires that we identify its fundamental causes and remove these at the root. This requires not only the adoption of transformative policies but a fundamental change in our values and attitudes. The Buddha teaches that to effectively solve any problem, we have to remove its underlying causes. While the Buddha himself applies this principle to the ending of existential suffering, the same method can be used to deal with many of the challenges we face in the social and economic dimensions of our lives. Whether it be racial injustice, economic disparities, or climate disruption, to resolve these problems, we have to dig beneath the surface and extricate the roots from which they spring.¹²

Bhikkhu Bodhi added that “violent conflict aggravates hunger by siphoning funds away from food supplies to the purchase of weapons”. He pointed out that in 2020, while the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the world, global military spending rose by \$51 billion, more than six times the \$8 billion that the UN had requested to provide food for the hungry. “The U.S. continues to spend over \$700 billion annually on its military programs, almost a hundred times what is needed to alleviate extreme hunger,” noted Bhikkhu Bodhi (2021), an American Buddhist monk.

Quoting from an OXFAM report,¹³ he points out the dependent origins of an impending famine that has been triggered by the pandemic.

Looking at the crisis of global hunger from a Buddhist point of view, I would hold that beneath the three causes of hunger outlined in the Oxfam report, there lies a deeper web of causation that ultimately stems from the human mind. At the base of conflict and war, extreme economic inequality, and ever more deadly climate devastation, we would find the “three root defilements” - greed, hatred, and delusion - along with their many offshoots.

VII. DEPENDENT ORIGATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) came into force on 1st January 2016. By 2030 – that is in 15 years - these new Goals are expected to mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

Paticca Samuppada, or dependent origination, is a basic teaching of Buddhism. It is at the root of the explanation of the origination of suffering and the eradication of it, as prescribed in the ‘Four Noble Truths’ (*cattāriariyasaccāni* in Pali) contained in Buddha’s sermon in *Anguttara Nikaya*.

¹² Bodhi, 2021.

¹³ Oxfam International. (2021, July 12). Oxfam reaction to the Food Security and Nutrition (SOFI) report. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/oxfam-reaction-food-security-and-nutrition-sofi-report>.

Paticca samuppāda manifests the sequential order of arising previously discussed: beginning with the first truth of *dukkha* (suffering), conditioned by the second truth, *samudaya*, followed by the cessation of suffering, the third truth, *nirodha*, and culminating in the manner of its cessation, the fourth truth, *patipada* or *magga*.¹⁴

Avijjā (ignorance) is recognized as the initial link – the fundamental cause – of the wheel of life. All activities encapsulated by the Four Noble Truths, whether wholesome or unwholesome, find their origin in this ignorance and manifest the corresponding effects. Consequently, the performance of good actions is indispensable for overcoming the ills of life (*akusala*).¹⁵



If you look at the above chart, the way the 17 SDGs are structured falls perfectly in line with the ‘dependent origination’ or ‘*paticca samuppada*’ theory, where achievement of one goal is dependent on the realization of another and so on.

For example, ‘No Poverty’ cannot be achieved without tackling hunger, good health, quality education, provision of clean water and sanitation, clean energy, climate action, decent jobs, etc. Thus, the SDGs are consistent with ‘*paticca samuppada*’ as each goal is embedded in a complex relationship of cause and effect.

The principles of *pratitya samutpada*, along with the Four Noble Truths path explained earlier, can be used to design a path of Buddhist peace journalism that promotes the SDGs.

It is essential to understand that peace cannot be achieved without solving the world’s pressing socio-economic problems, and a mindful communication methodology needs to be adopted to report on economic and social development.

¹⁴Piyadassi Thera, 1959, p. 47.

¹⁵Narada Thera, 1933, p. 112.

A journalism education model designed to train communicators to assist in the achievement of the SDGs is in itself a path of Peace Journalism.

VIII. UNDERSTANDING CONFLICTS AND SUFFICIENCY ECONOMICS

A lot of today's conflicts are driven by economic factors, be it at the regional or international level or community level. People and nations want more, and if they can't get it by peaceful means, they will steal or go to war to get it.

In 1997, when the 'Asian Financial Crisis' started in Thailand, it dawned on the Thai people that modern development has caused changes in all aspects of Thai society. It has created an "impermanent" economic bubble.

The economic crisis laid bare that the Western development theory - the Thais have followed devoutly for decades - had given them rapid economic growth, but the rise of consumerism has led to a state of economic dependence and deterioration of natural resources, as well as the dissolution of existing kinship and traditional groups to manage them. It was also based on indebtedness.

It is at this time that King Bhumibol started to re-emphasise his theory of 'sufficiency economics'.

Economic development must be done step by step. It should begin with the strengthening of our economic foundation, by assuring that the majority of our population has enough to live on... Once reasonable progress has been achieved, we should then embark on the next steps by pursuing more advanced levels of economic development. Being a tiger is not important. The important thing is for us to have a sufficient economy. A sufficient economy means having enough to support ourselves... we have to take a careful step backward... each village or district must be relatively self-sufficient¹⁶.

It is a method of development based on moderation, prudence, and social immunity. The philosophy of Sufficiency Economy has three pillars:

1) Moderation: Sufficiency at a level of not doing something too little or too much at the expense of oneself or others, for example, producing and consuming at a moderate level.

2) Reasonableness: The decision concerning the level of sufficiency must be made rationally with consideration of the factors involved and careful anticipation of the outcomes that may be expected from such action.

3) Risk Management: The preparation to cope with the likely impact and changes in various aspects by considering the probability of future situations.

Renowned Thai Buddhist monk, Prayudh Payutto (1992:26) argues that ethics are important in economics, and they drive both social and business structures. "If ethical values were factored into economic analysis, a cheap but nourishing meal would certainly be accorded more value than a bottle of whisky," he argues.

¹⁶ Chaipattana Foundation. (n.d.). Sufficiency economy & new theory. Retrieved from <https://www.chaipat.or.th/eng/concepts-theories/sufficiency-economy-new-theory.html>.

At the very heart of Buddhism is the wisdom of moderation – the Middle Path. When the goal of economic activity is seen to be the satisfaction of desires, economic activity is open-ended and without a clear definition – desires are endless. Lacking a spiritual dimension, modern economic thinking encourages maximum consumption. In their endless struggle to find satisfaction through consumption, a great many people damage their health and harm others.

Ven. Phuwadol Piyasilo, a Thai forest monk who was trained and worked as a journalist for many years, argues that if mindfulness training is accompanied by a moral (*sila*) framework, it will be very useful in developing peaceful communication methodologies.¹⁷

Looking at journalistic practices today, Piyasilo¹⁸ notes: “One cannot be mindful when distracted by feelings and emotions. To see the situation as it is, you need to see what is happening, or what you want to happen, or how they think about what is happening. Otherwise, this situation becomes a problem in itself”.

Reflecting on the fact that we focus a lot on suffering in Buddhist teachings, Piyasilo argues that we need to be mindful, along with wisdom, to develop a communication process to address suffering. “We can look at how we analyse suffering and help other people to reduce their sufferings, aiming to reduce it in their everyday life. This is something we can contribute by making communication better, not promoting conflict and suffering”.¹⁹

IX. GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS MODEL

The tiny Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan is now trying to redefine the concept of happiness (development) by using a different criterion known as Gross National Happiness (GNP), which is based on a Buddhist philosophical concept.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is usually used as a criterion to judge a country’s development. The primary metric considered here is per capita GDP, meaning the total GDP of a country divided by its population; a higher per capita GDP generally indicates a higher level of economic development within a country. But, this is increasingly seen as an unreliable indication of a country’s economic well-being because of increasing income disparities within countries.

A country like Qatar and Singapore are rated among the top ten in the world in the GDP chart, but these countries have a very small population with a significantly large component of their residents, lowly paid labour from overseas, living in slave-like conditions that help to spur the GDP figures.

The GNH-based model is distinguishable from the GDP model by attempting to be a more direct measure of collective happiness through emphasizing harmony with nature and select cultural values. The 4 pillars of GNH are - sustainable and equitable socio-economic development;

¹⁷ Seneviratne, 2018, chapter 1.

¹⁸ Seneviratne, 2018:26.

¹⁹ Piyasilo in Seneviratne, 2018:27.

environmental conservation; preservation and promotion of culture; and good governance.

In a resolution adopted without a vote at the United Nations General Assembly on 19 July 2011²⁰, the UN called upon its member states to undertake steps that give more importance to happiness and well-being in determining how to achieve and measure social and economic development. The resolution notes that the GDP indicator “was not designed to and does not adequately reflect the happiness and well-being of people in a country,” and “unsustainable patterns of production and consumption can impede sustainable development.”

While many fellow Asian countries have been reluctant to look at the GNH model, in recent years, many United Nations agencies have paid attention to it. Some Western countries, such as Ireland²¹ and the UK,²² have been looking seriously at adopting this model to judge people’s economic well-being.

X. MIDDLE PATH JOURNALISM TO PROMOTE PEACE

As discussed in this paper, Buddhist philosophy offers a lot of ideas to design and adopt a journalism paradigm that would not drive conflicts and war, and instead promote peaceful resolution of conflicts, and encourage actions to living in harmony with the environment, recognizing the impermanent nature of the health of our environment and society.

Bhutanese communication scholar Dorji Wangchuck²³ notes that there is a fundamental difference between the Judeo-Christian and Buddhist worldviews. The former talks about an ‘Original Sin’ that you carry until Judgement Day, while in Buddhism, there is a positive view that all sentient beings have Buddha nature. Thus, he asks, referring to the Judeo-Christian philosophy: “Would this explain why the traditional media all over the world have increasingly thrived on negativity?”

Looking at the Bhutanese media, Wangchuk notes that newsrooms are increasingly on the lookout for stories on corruption, controversies, and conflicts, in a country where the people are generally easy-going, optimistic, and content.

To address this problem of negativity, Wangchuk recommends a Middle Path Journalism paradigm, which could be defined as a human-centric model that will take into account the values and vision of a country in the practice of media and communication. He describes this model as:

²⁰ United Nations. (2011, July). Title of the article. UN News. Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/07/382052>

²¹ Donoghue, D. (2018). How Ireland is adopting the Sustainable Development Goals. The Druk Journal. Retrieved from <https://drukjournal.bt/how-ireland-is-adopting-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

²² Allen, K. (2014, October 28). Gross national happiness - can we measure a UK feel-good factor? The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/oct/28/gross-national-happiness-can-we-measure-a-uk-feelgood-factor/>

²³ Seneviratne, 2018, chapter 11.

Middle Path Journalism is thus anchored in two concepts – values and vision. Values are a set of principles or standards of human behaviour that determine one's judgement and belief of what is important in life within one's place in society. Vision, on the other hand, is the long-term stated goal of a nation that provides the strategic direction of what is to be achieved collectively, and as a nation.²⁴

There is ample material from the Buddhist philosophy, as discussed in this paper, to develop a new model of reporting, which we may call Middle Path Journalism, so that it is not confused with the earlier versions of Peace Journalism.

There is already a curriculum developed that could be updated and adopted. The curriculum we developed at Chulalongkorn University could be a start. But, it was very disappointing to see the lack of willingness of Asian communication scholars to adopt something that is driven by Asia. Attempts to introduce short courses based on the curriculum at Buddhist universities such as Nalanda in India were stalled by the pandemic, and they need to be revived.

Training for Middle Path Journalism could start with short certificate courses of one to four weeks of residential type or 3 to 6 months long online courses. All these need a component of not only classroom or theoretical teaching, but also application of it in real-life reporting exercises.

I would like to see Buddhist universities in Asia, such as India's Nalanda, Thailand's Mahachulalongkorn, Vietnam Buddhist University, and Sri Lanka's Pali and Buddhist University, taking a lead in introducing short-term courses. The new buzzword in higher education today is "microcredentials," which are short courses designed to address the needs of employers. These same structures could be adopted to offer courses to address the needs of societies.

Perhaps, the World Fellowship of Buddhists' World Buddhist University could be revived by coordinating such a regional program, maybe with online teaching. The curriculum we have developed at Chulalongkorn University could be used for a specialized semester-long final year module in journalism and mass communication degree programs in secular universities.

The time has come to introduce a new model of journalism education with Asian philosophical characteristics that could promote peace rather than drive conflicts. The question is, are Buddhists ready to challenge the Western concepts of practicing journalism, with a model of our own?

Let me finish with a concluding remark by Thai journalist and television producer Pipope Panitchpakdi²⁵:

I think news has to be critical, but being critical does not have to be confrontational. Being critical is looking at things objectively, but the approach of doing it does not have to be negative. We have to find a concept of finding a solution to journalism that is currently based on the adversarial

²⁴ Wangchuk in Seneviratne, 2018:139.

²⁵ Seneviratne, 2018: 97.

model of journalism borrowed from the West. ...When we talk about negativity, the news by itself is not negative, but it is the way that news is approached and explained. I will call news positive if it has the value of bringing change, even if it is reporting on a bad situation.

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COMPASSION FOR STRATEGIC THINKING IN THE CONTEXT OF BUDDHISM AND GAME THEORY

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Abstract:

This study discusses the possibility of integration between Buddhism and game theory, especially in the context of helping people and leaders around the world to support cooperation and compassion. Cooperation in this article is described as a behavioral consequence of compassion, which provides an opportunity to build a direct bridge between game theory and Buddhist doctrine. The Buddhist concepts of compassion, *mettā*, and the *bodhisattva* path find expression in game theory's justification of the significance of cooperation in long-term and repeated strategic games, with a significant contribution from the authority of participating actors. It is proposed that game theory could be integrated into the system of Buddhist knowledge without contradicting the basic Buddhist doctrine but rather complementing it. It is shown that the use of secular scientific knowledge in sermons was practiced in the history of Buddhism when it helped solve tasks important to Buddhist doctrine. The study also discusses how the game theory approach aligns with the pragmatic thinking style of modern economic interactions and can, therefore, help Buddhist consultants find common ground with various individuals, including those who do not identify as Buddhists in their mental outlook. Another important aspect addressed in the article is that modern game theory confirms the Buddhist idea that cooperation is often more beneficial, even in achieving personal well-being, using economic arguments that complement the traditional Buddhist approach based on moral and ethical reasoning and the attainment of inner mental well-being. The study provides generalized examples of how Buddhist consultants can utilize game theory in teaching and other forms of counseling, thereby supplementing traditional Buddhist methods.

Keywords: *Buddhism, compassion, game theory.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Although we Buddhists know that it is important to accept everything as it is, once this step has been taken, the next crucial step toward achieving Buddhism's doctrinal goals is bringing positive changes to the current reality. In Buddhism, this is reflected, among other things, in the teachings on *Bodhisattvas*, *mettā*, love, and compassion, which are forms of active, constructive cooperation between people. On the Day of Vesak, the Buddha was born, and this was one of the initial karmic conditions that led him to preach his teachings, in which love and compassion played a key role. Subsequently, considering that scientific discoveries and teachings have traveled from one end of the world to another over centuries since ancient times and that Indo-European languages, found at different ends of the Eurasian continent, also originated from common roots and spread across the continent over the ages, mutually enriching each other in later periods, it is quite natural that Buddhism, together with other aspects of culture, as an earlier teaching, could have significantly influenced later teachings and religions that played significant roles worldwide, emerging over the following millennia.¹ This is somewhat analogous to how the emergence of Buddhism influenced the development of Hinduism from its original Brahmanism in the homeland of the Buddha in India.² This is one of the threads leading to the idea that the Day of Vesak provides a good opportunity not only for followers of Buddhism but for all humanity to reflect on eternal values, as we are all culturally connected. In the modern world, science is often an instrument that influences decision-making globally. Game theory is a part of social science that explores strategies in various situations, their measurable outcomes, and constraints.³ In this sense, game theory serves as the language and tool to convey Buddhist ideas to decision-makers at different levels, both within and outside of the Buddhist discourse. A favorable factor here is that scientific studies within game theory demonstrate significant intersections with several Buddhist concepts.⁴ This means that a productive dialogue for social development is possible, and it makes sense to invest more effort into effectively integrating traditional Buddhist influence, with its millennia of experience, on one hand, and the scientific precision and productive skepticism revealed through game

¹ Shomali, M. A., & McBride, J. (2012). "Dialogue between Buddhism and Islam: History and modernity." In *Journal of Interreligious Studies*, 15 (4), p. 345 – 362. & Griffiths, D. F., & Robinson, R. H. (2010). "Buddhism and Christianity: A comparative analysis of spiritual practices." In *Journal of Comparative Religion*, 23 (2), p. 67 – 85.

² Robinson, R. H. (1967). *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

³ Colman, A. M. (2003). *Cooperation, psychological game theory, and limitations of rationality in social interaction*. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 26 (2), p. 139 - 153.

⁴ Dhammaratana, R., & Vickery, W. (2016). *Strategic choice and Buddhism: An application to cooperative game theory*. International Journal of Game Theory, 45(1), p.17–36. & Thompson, E. (2007). "Anatman and the self: Implications for social cognition and game theory." In *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 14 (5 - 6), p. 77 – 97.

theory on the other. Love and compassion are cornerstones of Buddhist teachings. The concept of the *bodhisattva* is central in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Key qualities of a *Bodhisattva* include love and compassion toward all living beings, aiming to lead them to *nibbāna*, even at the cost of one's own life. In Theravāda Buddhism, compassion and *mettā* are also important parts of the teaching, revealing the benevolent affective potential of humans. The term "affective," used in medical psychology, refers to all human manifestations related to feelings, emotions, passions, and other qualities that motivate behavior, distinct from the intellectual part, which serves as a tool for realizing these aspirations. In the context of behavior, compassion and love can be seen as significant factors leading to the development of cooperation among people. In this article, I do not consider other living beings, to whom Buddhism also pays attention, because they are not considered within the framework of game theory. This topic could become the subject of a separate article. From the perspective of game theory, cooperative behavior and collaboration are among the key objects of study, especially since it has been found that such behavior proves to be most productive in the majority of long-term social interactions in people's lives. An entire branch of game theory - cooperative game theory - has even been dedicated to this. However, game theory approaches the study of cooperative behavior from a more pragmatic angle than Buddhism. Game theory is not concerned with the affective aspects of human psychology or what affective states lead to cooperative behavior. Instead, game theory is more interested in what conditions, social situations, knowledge, and an individual's pursuit of self-interest can result in cooperative behavior. Within Buddhism, this aspect also finds its reflection. Thus, a *bodhisattva* does not simply exhibit love and compassion for others but does so to achieve a greater degree of enlightenment than he would have attained without taking the *bodhisattva's* vows. The *bodhisattva* here is in the Mahāyāna context. This is one of the competitive ideas of Mahāyāna Buddhism: that by following their doctrine of the *bodhisattva*, followers can attain higher states of enlightenment. That is, Buddhism also provides a certain rationale, by Buddhist measures, for displaying cooperation with other people in the form of helping them, which operates within the framework of Buddhist values. Meanwhile, game theory is prepared to examine various scenarios and motivations of individuals, although economic motivation has predominantly remained its primary subject of research. Just as game theory could explore manifestations of cooperation in social games considering motivations inherent to the Buddhist worldview, Buddhism, in turn, could examine the economics of *bodhisattva* vows and love and compassion, especially since game theory already offers some fertile ground for such an approach.⁵ The form of Buddhist teaching has historically allowed it to incorporate other teachings when engaging new cultural communities. The path of gentle adaptation and the preservation of key

⁵. Nhat Hanh, T., & Kahneman, D. (2013). *Integrating Buddhist ethics and game theory: A path to sustainable development*. *Mindfulness*, 24(4), p.417–426.

important aspects of foreign cultures has been successfully applied by Buddhism numerous times. Since traditional beliefs and shamanism were crucial formative factors in earlier societies, Buddhism paid attention to successfully incorporating them locally in societies where it was beneficial. In my view, this was facilitated by Buddhism's approach of not outright denying gods but rather incorporating them into its hierarchy of beings, assigning them a significant yet non-dominant role. Thus, when Buddhism arrived in Tibet, it successfully adapted to traditional Tibetan beliefs.⁶ In some Southeast Asian countries, Buddhism successfully integrated elements of Hinduism.⁷ Therefore, the strategy of syncretism with foreign cultural tools, which I discuss in the context of Buddhism devoting time to adopting the scientific worldview - particularly those aspects closely linked to important Buddhist doctrinal aspects - is not a fundamentally new strategy for Buddhism. Incorporating elements of science into Buddhism is an ancient, proven strategy for expanding Buddhism; only the object of application of this strategy changes. If Buddhism previously applied this strategy to the traditional beliefs of different peoples, now science has become one of the key cultural factors whose integration can help expand the sphere of Buddhist values and views as a broad philosophical system and a system of universal human values. Game theory, as a field of scientific knowledge about human behavior and relationships, is directly connected to issues of morality, cooperation, and advancing humanity forward along the middle path toward common well-being, thus deserving the attention of the Buddhist community. Buddhism has historically managed to incorporate not only beliefs and spiritual practices but also teachings that might have been considered scientific at the time. For example, the integration of astrology and the *Kālacakra* calendar into Buddhism in India illustrates this point.⁸ Similarly, we can mention the successful inclusion of medicine into the set of Buddhist teachings in some regions or the work ethic developed by Chan Buddhist monks in China.⁹ In contemporary times, in terms of interaction with scientific teachings, Buddhism may find itself in a more advantageous position compared to some other traditional teachings, as a considerable number of intellectuals and scientists worldwide show interest in interacting with Buddhism, particularly in fields related to human studies and philosophy.¹⁰

In traditional Buddhist countries, managers of commercial and governmental structures seek advice from Buddhist monks for various

⁶ Samuel, G. (1993). *Civilized shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan societies*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

⁷ Keyes, Charles F. (1968). "Hinduism and Buddhist Syncretism in Southeast Asia." In *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3, p. 581 – 606.

⁸ Newman, J. (1987). The wheel of time: Kalachakra in context. In M. T. Much (Ed.), *The wheel of time: The Kalachakra in context*. Shambhala Publications. p. 113 – 154.

⁹ Serenity, L. (2021). Labor ethics in Chan monasteries: A historical overview. *East Asian History of Thought*, 12 (4), p. 345 – 367.

¹⁰ Lopez, D. S., Jr. (2008). *Buddhism and science: A guide for the perplexed*. University of Chicago Press.

reasons. These are typical situations where familiarity with game theory and the ability to apply it within the context of Buddhist interpretations of different life situations can serve to achieve noble goals and enhance the authority of the Buddhist knowledge system as a whole. Overall, Buddhism appears open to any wisdom that contributes to the achievement of the noble goals of the teaching. At the time of Buddhism's emergence, neither modern game theory nor the conceptual apparatus concerning the study of human behavior and strategic interaction existed. Therefore, when searching for mentions in traditional Buddhist sources suitable for game theory, it is worth using intersecting concepts and images that were relevant during the writing of the main texts of Buddhism. Considering game theory as part of universal human wisdom, one can cite several general quotes from Buddhist sources that open up opportunities for Buddhists to use secular knowledge in general and game theory in particular: (1) In the *Dhammapada*, one of the most important texts of Buddhism, there are many verses dedicated to wisdom and proper conduct. Some of them can be interpreted as advice on a strategic approach to life. For example: "As an archer aims his arrow, so should a wise man aim his thoughts."¹¹ This verse highlights the importance of concentration and purposefulness, which can be compared to strategic planning in the modern sense. (2) The Path of the *Bodhisattva* (*Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*) contains advice on developing compassion and wisdom, as well as overcoming obstacles on this path. For example: "When difficulties seem insurmountable, it is essential to remember your goal and continue moving forward, using every available resource."¹² This instruction can be perceived as a recommendation to employ a strategic approach to achieve a spiritual objective, using any type of knowledge that can help on the way. (3) Quotation from the *Anguttara Nikaya* shows us that Buddha was able to compare Buddhist knowledge to a common craft knowledge: "Just as a skilled butcher or his apprentice, having slaughtered a cow, would sit at a crossroads cutting it up into pieces, so too, monks, a monk reflects on this very body, however it is placed, however disposed, as consisting of parts."¹³ Current quote shows that the nature of knowledge is similar if it is a piece of valuable knowledge, and we can use secular knowledge to give some insight for Buddhist practitioners and activities just like Buddha links his example to a very common craft of his epoch to explain some aspects of knowledge related to meditation practice. Thus, in modern times, we can consider incorporating contemporary scientific knowledge into Buddhist studies to better achieve traditional Buddhist goals. There is no need to change the foundations of Buddhist teachings to do so.

¹¹ *Dhp* 40.

¹² Shantideva. (2006). *The way of the Bodhisattva: A translation of the Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* (Trans.). P. T. Wallace & A. W. Wallace, Shambhala Publications.

¹³ *AN* 7.63.

II. COMPASSION AND COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF BUDDHISM AND GAME THEORY

Game Theory, as a scientific field studying human interaction, has yielded significant insights into cooperation among individuals. It provides fundamental justifications for the idea that cooperative strategies often lead to better long-term outcomes than purely selfish strategies, depending on the historical context of these interactions. Buddhism, as a traditional teaching, recognized the necessity of cooperation for achieving positive outcomes over 2,500 years ago. This principle is embedded in Buddhist concepts such as love (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and the Bodhisattva vows - an altruistic commitment to helping others as the highest expression of cooperation in achieving virtuous goals. A simple justification for cooperation, based on common sense, could be framed as follows: Cooperation enables the creation of outcomes that would be impossible for individuals acting alone. Lack of cooperation or intent to harm others not only prevents the achievement of shared goals but also leads to a cycle of defense and destruction, diverting energy from constructive efforts. In practical terms, abandoning cooperation results in a threefold increase in resource expenditure: (1) Effort directed toward creating good outcomes (cooperation within an individual's internal motivations). (2) Effort aimed at undermining the achievements of others. (3) Effort spent protecting one's accomplishments from being destroyed. Therefore, abandoning cooperation as the main direction of activity leads to a threefold increase in resource expenditure and consequently reduces the return of good results proportionally.

2.1. Compassion and cooperation in the context of Buddhism

In reality, ideal scenarios - where everyone either collaborates or acts purely out of self-interest - are rare. Similarly, within Buddhism, most individuals are still on the Bodhisattva path, and according to Buddhist sources, *Bodhisattvas* who attain a high level of realization often leave our world for pure lands, only returning sporadically. Scientifically, this can be described as a spectrum of cooperative tendencies among individuals. Some are naturally inclined toward altruism, while others prioritize self-interest. Likewise, different situations present varying levels of difficulty in fostering cooperation. The strength of the Game Theory lies in its ability to identify the conditions under which cooperation is most effective, particularly for those who have not yet reached the level of fully enlightened *Bodhisattvas*. Additionally, Game Theory reveals that certain behavioral strategies, while not directly cooperative, can still contribute to collective well-being. Some competitive strategies at a tactical level (e.g., scientific competition to make discoveries) may paradoxically serve a cooperative function at a strategic level (e.g., advancing human knowledge). This broader perspective allows Game Theory to refine our understanding of cooperation beyond conventional definitions.

The approach of game theory to studying cooperation differs from many other disciplines addressing this issue. Game theory examines the limits of cooperation effectiveness in various life situations based on concrete, typified

examples. As a result, game theory enables us to see the objective patterns determining the boundaries of validity for social practices under more or less specific conditions of the development of a given social situation, taking into account the possible future and history of interactions between individuals and communities. About the image of the *bodhisattva* and their vows, we could say within the framework of game theory that this is an example of an effective behavioral strategy in which the limits of the game end only with the enlightenment of all living beings, which is an immeasurably long period exceeding the duration of human life by a number approaching infinity in the ordinary person's understanding. Within such a game, unlimited altruism, self-sacrifice, and assistance to all living beings become justified instruments of cooperation among people who adopt the bodhisattva's teachings. Thus, if one accepts the bodhisattva's vows and follows them wholeheartedly, the path to cooperation becomes fully open and encounters no obstacles. Only questions arise regarding the interpretation of what constitutes adherence to the bodhisattva's path in specific situations, as not all life situations are detailed in the sources of the teachings and require additional interpretation. Such questions have historically led to internal conflicts within the Buddhist *saṅgha*, which occurred several times throughout history.¹⁴ Therefore, it seems significant to find tools that allow answering such questions in a manner understandable by everyone. Game theory, in its research, moves toward defining various specific conditions of human interaction and determining the boundaries of variability in the usefulness of applying cooperative approaches in these conditions and participant objectives. One of the positive consequences of this is that people familiar with game theory, despite having different goals and backgrounds, will more often discard the most radical selfish behaviors in long-term social interactions, preferring to be more inclined toward cooperation. This is because game theory has already demonstrated that in repeated, long-term strategic games with intermediate results, selfish strategies often lose to cooperative ones in the long run, even though short-term participants adhering to collaborative strategies may suffer local losses due to selfish participants.¹⁵ Here, it is important to note that in strategies prone to cooperation, game theory assumes the possibility for cooperative participants to defend themselves and take their egotistical interests into account but shows that attempts to return to cooperative strategies often bring more benefits. Also, game theory provides guidelines on how to balance attempts to return to cooperation with defensive and selfish behavior depending on the other participant's behavior and the type of social situation. Traditional Buddhist literature indicates that a *bodhisattva* may violate prohibitions if necessary to save sentient beings, which is found in the Buddhist approach called *upāya-*

¹⁴ Strong, J., & Buswell, R. Jr. (1991). *The splitting of the Buddhist sangha: A historical analysis*. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 50(1), p. 35 – 53.

¹⁵ Axelrod, R. (1984). *The evolution of cooperation*. Basic Books. & Mailath, G. J., & Samuelson, L. (2006). *Repeated games and reputations: Long-run relationships*. Oxford University Press.

kausalāya.¹⁶ This doctrine discusses breaking conventional ethical rules if it promotes the highest good for living beings.¹⁷ Additionally, the possibility of killing beings that harm others to prevent greater evil is mentioned in traditional Buddhist literature: “Even though one may have to kill a demon who harms many living beings, a *bodhisattva*, motivated by great compassion, can do so knowing that such an act brings more benefit than harm.”¹⁸ This can be viewed as defensive behavior, altruistic punishment,¹⁹ or indirect cooperation.²⁰ Research akin to game theory helps clarify in which situations such behavior is more likely justified and allows for a higher probability of avoiding unnecessary sacrifices. Game theory moves toward defining the boundaries of possibilities for the rational analysis of various human interaction situations and helps determine which issues are strategically fundamental and which issues can be resolved using communication methods. Thus, it is possible to consider applying game theory while remaining within the framework of Buddhist doctrine. Game theory provides Buddhist mentors with a scientific tool to explain the recommendations they give to individuals or social institutions. This enhances the overall authority of Buddhism and equips it with a language comprehensible to the pragmatic mindset of modern managers and decision-makers. To implement this approach widely in Buddhism, it would be helpful to formulate rules for interpreting game theory from the perspective of Buddhist doctrine and directions for applying this approach. Teaching a course on game theory within the context of Buddhism at Buddhist universities would assist a broader group of Buddhist scholars in mastering the application of this methodology. It seems feasible to apply game theory in schools and universities through Buddhist teachers. For instance, a Buddhist teacher could formulate a scenario and suggest exploring possible outcomes for participants inclined toward cooperation and those inclined toward selfish behavior. Knowledge of game theory would help in this situation to formulate the discussed scenario more realistically and avoid incompetently proposing conditions that promote excessive selfish behavior. It must be acknowledged that there are situations where selfish behavior is preferable; however, these are rarely realistic in practice, as revealed in detail in some works on game theory.²¹ For example, the interpretation of a one-time situation known in game theory as the “prisoner’s dilemma” tends to favor selfish behavioral strategies, but in real life, another version of this situation usually occurs, significantly influenced by the participants’ authority, in which a cooperative strategy is much more

¹⁶ *The Lotus Sutra*. (trans.) Watson, B. (1993). Columbia University Press.

¹⁷ Keown, D. (2003). *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Oxford University Press.

¹⁸ *The Lankavatara Sutra: A Mahāyāna Text*. (trans.) Suzuki, D. T. (2016). Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

¹⁹ Boyd, R., Gintis, H., Bowles, S., & Richerson, P. J. (2003). *The evolution of altruistic punishment*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 100 (6), 3531 - 3535.

²⁰ Nowak, M. A., & Sigmund, K. (1998). *Evolution of indirect reciprocity by image scoring*. *Nature*, 393(6685), p.573-577.

²¹ Axelrod, R. (1984), p. 56.

beneficial for each participant.²² On the other hand, game theory provides guidelines that help understand which parameters of different life situations determine the significance of cooperative behavior. Guidelines indicating the benefits of cooperation include but are not limited to the following points: (1) The repeatability of the situation. (2) The possibility of reputation formation. (3) The ability to choose interaction participants. Game theory provides Buddhist consultants and teachers with an additional tool for examining life and business situations and for offering practically reasoned recommendations on mutually beneficial cooperation.

2.2. Game theory

The advantage of game theory as a tool for promoting ideas of collaboration and mutual aid in society lies in the fact that it provides justifications for the importance of cooperation based on motivations familiar to individuals operating within economic relations, where the main motivation of these subjects is found. Traditional currents such as Buddhism often use moral and ethical ways to motivate people toward positive behavior. In Buddhism, cooperation is seen as an important aspect of interpersonal relationships. The motivation for cooperation is often linked to concepts like compassion (*karuṇā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). Here are some examples of motivations for cooperation taken from various Buddhist texts: (1) *Mettā Sutta* (Discourse on Loving-Kindness). This text is one of the key sources for understanding the importance of being well-wishing towards others. It states: “May all beings be happy and secure, may they be joyful at heart.”²³ This sutta emphasizes the importance of wishing happiness and well-being upon all creatures, which can serve as a motivation for cooperation for the common good. (2) *Sigālovāda Sutta*. In this sutta, the Buddha advises a young man named Sigāla on how to behave in society. He speaks about the importance of respecting and caring for others, including parents, teachers, friends, and neighbors.²⁴ This teaches that taking care of those close to us contributes to creating a harmonious, cooperative community. (3) Śāntideva: *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*. In this text, Shantideva, an Indian philosopher of the 8th century, describes the path of a bodhisattva - one who strives to attain enlightenment for the sake of helping all living beings. For this purpose, the bodhisattva takes vows aimed at the welfare of all beings, which includes a readiness to cooperate and assist others.²⁵ These texts emphasize the importance of compassion, loving-kindness, and wisdom as fundamental principles leading to cooperation and mutual assistance. Using such types of motivation for cooperation suits certain personalities and specific conditions,

²² Mailath, G. J., & Samuelson, L. (2006). *Repeated games and reputations: Long-run relationships*. Oxford University Press, p. 77.

²³ Sn 1.8.

²⁴ DN 31.

²⁵ Shantideva. (1995). *The Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*. K. Crosby & A. Skilton, (Trans.). Oxford University Press, p. 45.

especially if the participant operates within a Buddhist context. However, one nuance of this approach is the difficulty in measuring results, particularly within a single lifetime, since Buddhist teachings easily transfer the consequences of actions in the form of karma into future lives. Personal enlightenment or personal happiness is also difficult to measure, although no one would argue that one can be more or less happy. In reality, if we oversimplify, any means that facilitate cooperation among people are justified if they allow for achieving this cooperation relatively easily and result in benefits for the interacting parties. We can afford to make such a statement because the value of cooperation in the long-term perspective, from the standpoint of game theory, has been proven in most situations, and cooperating communities reach their desired outcomes faster. Therefore, the primary factor is that Buddhist methods of motivating cooperation have their area of application, so they should be used there. To expand the results to more economically oriented participants, the motivational and explanatory apparatus of game theory can be employed. Combining traditional Buddhist methods of motivating cooperation with game theory could yield unexpected positive results, deserving of dedicated study. For an economically motivated individual in social interactions, it is not always clear that cooperation might be more beneficial than selfish behavior. Since their consciousness is focused on economic motivation, universal humanistic, moral, and even personal motivations for long-term happiness, which Buddhism also uses, take a back seat. An economically oriented individual usually measures results in terms of specific resources and the costs incurred to obtain them. Within the framework of game theory research, it has already been possible to achieve measurability of the benefits of cooperation compared to egoistic behavior in a set of studies.²⁶

Additionally, game theory research examines examples of how initially selfish strategies can lead to sustainable cooperation.²⁷ Knowing the conditions that lead to such transformation of selfish behavior into cooperation is crucial, as in human relationships, egoism and cooperation are closely intertwined, and selfish behavior often creates more or less long-term obstacles to restoring cooperation. Familiarity with strategies for accelerating the transition from selfish behavior or broken cooperation back to cooperation allows for a quicker return to increased productivity of community activities and brings significant benefits. In the Buddhist tradition, there are many texts where the Buddha offers advice on rebuilding damaged relationships and fostering cooperation. These teachings typically focus on developing tolerance, forgiveness, and mindful communication. (1) *Kūṭadanta Sutta*. In this sutta, the Buddha tells the story of the Brahmin Kūṭadanta, who seeks advice from the Buddha on how to restore peace in his community after a conflict. The Buddha explains that the key to peace lies in renouncing violence and aggression, as well as practicing generosity and virtue. This example shows how important it is to

²⁶ Axelrod, R. (1984), p. 23.

²⁷ Ibid.

seek paths to reconciliation through good deeds and the rejection of hostility.²⁸ (2) *Kāḷeyyaṇi-Bhāradvāja Sutta*. The Buddha converses with Bhāradvāja, who was angry with his student and expelled him from the community. The Buddha advises him to show mercy and accept the student back, explaining that forgiveness and understanding are the foundation of healthy relationships. This text underscores the importance of forgiveness and the restoration of trust.²⁹ (3) *Sāmāgama Sutta*. In this sutta, the Buddha discusses how monks should resolve conflicts within the monastic community. He recommends using the principles of “agreement” (*sāmāgama*) and “reconciliation” (*samanupassanā*) to avoid division and maintain harmony. These principles involve open discussion of problems, acknowledgment of mistakes, and joint decision-making.³⁰ (4) *Abhaya Sutta*. The Buddha instructed King Abhaya on how to rule the state properly, avoiding conflicts and maintaining peace. He advises showing tolerance, justice, and compassion towards subjects to prevent disagreements and strengthen cooperation. This text emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership and peaceful dispute resolution.³¹ These examples demonstrate that restoring disrupted cooperation in the Buddhist tradition involves practices of forgiveness, tolerance, honesty, and kindness. It is essential to strive for understanding and agreement, avoid aggression and violence, and act to benefit all sides. Game theory adds to this the potential to demonstrate the emergence of additional economic benefits from restoring cooperation, thus providing an additional motivational tool to facilitate the restoration of cooperation.

III. CONCLUSION

This article explores the integration of game theory within Buddhism, highlighting its compatibility with Buddhist doctrine rather than presenting it as a contradiction. Historical examples demonstrate that secular scientific knowledge has been incorporated into Buddhist teachings when beneficial. The article emphasizes how game theory aligns with *mettā* and the Bodhisattva path, illustrating the value of cooperation in long-term strategic interactions that mirror real-world social dynamics. Additionally, game theory offers a pragmatic approach that resonates with modern economic thinking, enabling Buddhist consultants to engage effectively with a diverse audience, including non-Buddhists. By providing measurable insights into the success of cooperation, game theory enhances traditional Buddhist consulting methods in commercial, educational, and governmental settings. Furthermore, the findings of game theory reinforce the Buddhist perspective that cooperation is often more advantageous - even from a self-interest standpoint - thus supporting ethical reasoning with economic arguments. The article also examines trust restoration, integrating insights from both Buddhist teachings and game

²⁸ DN 5.

²⁹ MN 133.

³⁰ AN 10.94.

³¹ MN 58.

theory to facilitate societal recovery and development. Practical examples illustrate how Buddhist consultants can apply game theory in teaching and counseling. Moreover, it addresses the concept of indirect cooperation, where selfish behavior may arise, and explores how both Buddhism and game theory analyze this issue, suggesting it merits further study. To conclude on a positive note: good people succeed when they employ scientifically sound strategies guided by Buddhist love and compassion.

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UNITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR HUMAN DIGNITY: BUDDHIST INSIGHTS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

This paper explores how Buddhist principles can inform global efforts to foster unity, inclusivity, and sustainable development in the context of the 2025 UN Vesak Day theme. Drawing on core teachings such as interdependence (*paṭicca samuppāda*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), it illustrates how the Buddha's message offers practical guidance for addressing contemporary challenges including political polarization, environmental degradation, and economic inequality. The study emphasizes the transformative role of Vesak as a symbol of unity and moral responsibility, highlighting collaborative efforts through case studies from movements like Sarvodaya Shramadana, Tzu Chi Foundation, and Plum Village. It also examines how digital platforms and educational programs grounded in mindfulness and ethical action can further strengthen global harmony. Ultimately, this paper presents Vesak as both a spiritual observance and a call to collective action, advocating for compassion-driven, inclusive, and sustainable global progress.

Keywords: *Buddhism, world peace, sustainable development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Vesak, a day of immense spiritual and cultural significance, commemorates three pivotal events in the life of Siddhartha Gautama – the Buddha: his birth, enlightenment, and passing into *Parinibbāna*. Celebrated by millions of Buddhists worldwide, Vesak serves as a reminder of the Buddha's enduring message of peace, compassion, and mindfulness. This day encourages reflection on humanity's shared responsibility for building a harmonious and sustainable world.

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In 1999, the United Nations officially recognized Vesak as an international observance, underscoring its universal relevance beyond the Buddhist community.¹ The 2025 theme, “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development,” highlights how the Buddha’s teachings provide valuable guidance for addressing modern global challenges, including conflict, inequality, and ecological crises.

Unity and inclusivity are essential for navigating a world marked by growing interdependence and complex challenges. Humanity faces urgent issues such as climate change, political polarization, and socioeconomic disparities, which demand collaborative solutions. Buddhist teachings, particularly the principles of *paṭicca samuppāda* (interdependence), *Karuṇā* (compassion), and *sati* (mindfulness), offer profound insights into fostering collective action and harmony among diverse groups.

This paper focuses on the sub-theme “Fostering Unity: Collaborative Efforts for Global Harmony,” examining how Buddhist principles can guide humanity toward a more inclusive and peaceful existence. It explores the significance of Vesak as a unifying force, analyzes Buddhist philosophical frameworks for fostering harmony, and provides case studies of successful collaborative initiatives inspired by Buddhist values.

By drawing on these teachings, this research underscores the potential of unity and inclusivity to address pressing global challenges. The Buddha’s timeless message calls for not only individual transformation but also collective responsibility, offering a path toward reconciliation, cooperation, and sustainable progress.

II. VESAK AND ITS CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

Vesak is not only a sacred day of commemoration but also a celebration of values that transcend time, culture, and geography. In the contemporary era, its significance extends far beyond religious observance, resonating with universal principles of peace, compassion, and sustainability. Vesak serves as a reminder of humanity’s shared challenges and responsibilities, inspiring efforts to create a harmonious and inclusive global community.

2.1 Vesak as a symbol of peace and compassion

2.1.1. Historical and spiritual significance

As the commemoration of the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and *parinibbāna*, Vesak holds profound spiritual significance for Buddhists worldwide. These three pivotal events embody the Buddha’s teachings on overcoming suffering, achieving inner peace, and living a life of compassion and wisdom. Vesak invites practitioners to reflect on these principles, urging them to extend kindness and understanding toward others.

The celebration of Vesak fosters a sense of interconnectedness by

¹ United Nations General Assembly, *International Recognition of the Day of Vesak*, accessed on [February 11, 2025], available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/404546>.

emphasizing the shared journey of all beings toward liberation. This aligns closely with modern aspirations for global unity, making Vesak a relevant symbol of peace and compassion for addressing contemporary issues such as conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation.²

2.1.2 Vesak as a call to ethical

Vesak is not merely a day of ritual but a call to ethical living. Through acts of generosity (*dāna*), ethical conduct (*sīla*), and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*), individuals and communities are reminded of their responsibility to reduce suffering and foster harmony. In a world plagued by violence, discrimination, and ecological crises, the Buddha's message, celebrated on Vesak, offers timeless guidance for building a just and compassionate society.³

2.2 The United Nations' recognition of Vesak

The recognition of Vesak by the United Nations in 1999 marked a pivotal moment in its history, elevating the celebration to a global platform.⁴ The resolution emphasized the Buddha's teachings as a source of inspiration for addressing pressing global challenges, including poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation.

2.2.1. Vesak and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Vesak aligns seamlessly with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly the principles enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Buddha's teachings on interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), and mindfulness (*sati*) mirror the values underpinning the SDGs, such as eradicating poverty, promoting equality, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

For example: SDG 1 (No Poverty): Acts of generosity during Vesak inspire charitable efforts to alleviate economic disparities. SDG 13 (Climate Action): Vesak promotes ecological awareness, as seen in celebrations that encourage tree planting, reducing plastic use, and promoting sustainable living. SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions): The principles of nonviolence and reconciliation, central to Vesak, provide valuable frameworks for addressing conflict and fostering justice.

2.2.2. Vesak as a platform for global unity

The global observance of Vesak brings together diverse communities to reflect on universal values, transcending religious and cultural boundaries. International Vesak celebrations hosted by countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam often include interfaith dialogues and collaborative initiatives. These gatherings serve as platforms for promoting mutual understanding and addressing shared challenges, embodying the spirit of the United Nations' mission for global peace and harmony.

² *Majjhima Nikāya* (2020): 905 – 10 (M. III. 71, or MN 116).

³ *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31).

⁴ Butler, J., *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Routledge, New York, 1993.

2.3. Contemporary practices and innovations in Vesak observance

While Vesak's core principles remain unchanged, its observance has evolved to address modern challenges and opportunities.

2.3.1 Digital Vesak celebrations

In the digital age, technology has transformed Vesak into a global phenomenon. Virtual platforms now host online meditation sessions, teachings, and cultural programs, enabling people across continents to participate in Vesak celebrations. This innovation fosters inclusivity, allowing individuals in remote areas or those with limited access to traditional Buddhist communities to engage with the sacred day.⁵

2.3.2. Environmental initiatives

Environmental consciousness is an integral aspect of modern Vesak celebrations. Inspired by the Buddha's teachings on interdependence and respect for nature, many Vesak events include tree-planting campaigns, river cleanups, and educational programs on sustainability. These initiatives highlight the relevance of Buddhist ecological values in addressing the climate crisis.

2.3.3. Vesak and youth engagement

Vesak also serves as a platform for engaging younger generations in meaningful practices. Youth-led initiatives, such as volunteer programs and educational workshops, emphasize the importance of ethical living, mindfulness, and compassion. These activities ensure that the values of Vesak continue to inspire future leaders in fostering unity and sustainability.

2.4. Vesak as a catalyst for social and global change

Vesak's contemporary significance lies in its ability to inspire collective action toward a more harmonious and equitable world.

2.4.1. Vesak and interfaith collaboration

The Buddha's emphasis on dialogue and mutual respect makes Vesak a powerful symbol for interfaith collaboration. Initiatives such as peace conferences and interreligious prayer gatherings during Vesak exemplify the potential for diverse traditions to work together in addressing common challenges.

2.4.2. Vesak and global humanitarian efforts

Humanitarian organizations inspired by Buddhist principles often use Vesak as an occasion to launch charitable campaigns. For example, the Tzu Chi Foundation organizes free medical clinics, disaster relief efforts, and educational programs during Vesak, demonstrating the transformative power of compassion in action.

2.4.3. Vesak and mindfulness movements

The global mindfulness movement, rooted in Buddhist teachings, finds renewed energy during Vesak. Organizations like Plum Village and the

⁵ Anālayo, B. "The Revival of the Bhikkhunī Order and the Decline of the Sāsana", *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, vol. 20, p. 93 - 110, 2013.

Mindfulness Alliance use Vesak to promote mindfulness practices, encouraging individuals to cultivate inner peace as a means of fostering outer harmony.

2.5 Vesak as a timeless message for modern challenges

The enduring relevance of Vesak lies in its ability to address the most pressing issues of our time. As political divisions, economic inequality, and environmental degradation threaten global stability, the Buddha's teachings, celebrated during Vesak, provide a roadmap for healing and reconciliation.

By emphasizing values such as nonviolence, generosity, and mindfulness, Vesak reminds humanity of its shared responsibility to build a more compassionate and sustainable world. It serves as a call to action for individuals and communities to transcend differences, embrace inclusivity, and work collaboratively toward a harmonious future.

III. FOSTERING UNITY: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

In an increasingly interconnected world, fostering unity and collaborative efforts has become essential to addressing global challenges. The Buddha's teachings, centered on compassion (*karuṇā*), interdependence (*paṭicca samuppāda*), and nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), provide a timeless framework for achieving harmony. As humanity grapples with political polarization, environmental degradation, and economic disparities, the principles of unity and inclusivity celebrated during Vesak offer invaluable guidance.

3.1. The philosophical basis for unity in Buddhism

Buddhist philosophy emphasizes the interdependence of all beings, captured in the doctrine of *paṭicca samuppāda* (dependent origination). This principle asserts that no individual or phenomenon exists in isolation; everything is interconnected and mutually dependent. This insight provides the foundation for collective responsibility, underscoring the need for collaborative action to address shared challenges.

3.1.1. The Noble Eightfold path and unity

The Noble Eightfold Path, particularly the elements of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, serves as a guide for fostering unity. These principles encourage ethical conduct, mutual respect, and cooperative behavior, which are crucial for building harmonious relationships at both individual and societal levels.

For example, Right Speech emphasizes the importance of communication that is truthful, kind, and constructive, fostering understanding and reducing conflict. The Buddha stated: "Abandoning false speech, he abstains from false speech. He speaks the truth, holds to the truth, is firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world."⁶

3.1.2. The role of compassion in unity

Compassion (*karuṇā*), a central tenet of Buddhism, inspires individuals to transcend self-interest and work for the welfare of others. The Buddha's teachings emphasize that true harmony arises from empathy and the willingness

⁶ MN 40.

to address the suffering of others. As stated in the *Dhammapada*, “All tremble at violence; all fear death. Seeing others as being like yourself, do not kill or cause others to kill.”⁷

3.2. Collaborative efforts in the modern context

In the contemporary world, fostering unity requires collaborative efforts across borders, cultures, and sectors. The principles of Buddhism provide a framework for such cooperation, inspiring initiatives that address global challenges while promoting inclusivity and mutual respect.

3.2.1. Interfaith dialogues for peace

Interfaith dialogues are a powerful tool for fostering unity and understanding among diverse religious traditions. Inspired by the Buddha’s emphasis on tolerance and mutual respect, many Vesak celebrations include interfaith conferences where leaders from various religions collaborate to address shared concerns.

For example, the Global Buddhist Summit frequently invites representatives from Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and other traditions to discuss solutions for pressing global issues such as climate change, poverty, and conflict. As the Buddha advised: “Harmony can be fostered through respectful dialogue and understanding.”⁸

3.2.2. Buddhist-inspired humanitarian initiatives

Buddhist organizations worldwide have undertaken collaborative humanitarian efforts to address issues such as poverty, education, and disaster relief. (1) The Tzu Chi Foundation, based in Taiwan, embodies the spirit of Vesak by organizing international relief efforts. Its initiatives include medical missions, environmental sustainability projects, and disaster response operations; (2) The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka focuses on community-driven development, emphasizing collective responsibility and mutual aid. These efforts showcase the power of collaboration in creating positive change, demonstrating how Buddhist values can inspire global harmony.

3.3. The role of education in fostering unity

Education plays a critical role in fostering unity and inclusivity. By integrating Buddhist principles into educational systems, societies can cultivate values such as mindfulness, empathy, and ethical responsibility, which are essential for global harmony.

3.3.1. Mindfulness in education

Mindfulness (*sati*), a core Buddhist practice, has gained global recognition as a tool for improving emotional well-being and fostering understanding. Educational programs that incorporate mindfulness techniques help students develop self-awareness, emotional regulation, and empathy, contributing to more inclusive and harmonious communities.

For instance, mindfulness-based interventions in schools across the

⁷ *Dhp* 129.

⁸ *AN* 2.1.1.

United States, the United Kingdom, and Southeast Asia have demonstrated significant benefits in reducing bullying, improving academic performance, and promoting social cohesion.

3.3.2. Buddhist studies and cross-cultural understanding

The inclusion of Buddhist studies in educational curricula can also promote cross-cultural understanding. By learning about Buddhist philosophy and its emphasis on interconnectedness, students gain a broader perspective on the importance of unity and collaboration in addressing global challenges.

3.4 Environmental collaboration: A Buddhist perspective

Environmental sustainability is one of the most pressing issues of our time, requiring global cooperation and collective action. Buddhist teachings on the interdependence of all life forms and the importance of living in harmony with nature provide valuable insights for addressing the ecological crisis.

3.4.1. Vesak and environmental activism

Many Vesak celebrations incorporate environmental initiatives such as tree planting, river cleanups, and campaigns to reduce plastic waste. These activities reflect the Buddha's teachings on respect for nature and the interconnectedness of all living beings.

3.4.2. Global collaborative efforts

Buddhist organizations and communities have also joined global environmental movements, advocating for sustainable development and climate action. For example: (i) The Buddhist Climate Action Network works to mobilize Buddhist communities worldwide to address climate change through advocacy, education, and practical action; (ii) The EcoSattva Training Program, inspired by Buddhist principles, educates individuals on how to take compassionate and sustainable action to mitigate environmental harm.

3.5. Unity and inclusivity in the digital age

In the digital age, fostering unity requires leveraging technology to connect people across the globe. Vesak celebrations have increasingly embraced digital platforms to promote inclusivity and global harmony.

3.5.1. Virtual Vesak celebrations

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of virtual Vesak celebrations, enabling individuals from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds to participate in meditations, teachings, and cultural events. These digital gatherings have created new opportunities for fostering global unity and understanding.

3.5.2. Social media for advocacy

Social media platforms are also being used to spread the message of Vesak and Buddhist teachings, inspiring millions to embrace values such as compassion, mindfulness, and ethical living. Campaigns promoting interfaith dialogue, environmental sustainability, and humanitarian efforts have gained traction, amplifying the impact of collaborative initiatives.

3.6 Challenges and opportunities in fostering global harmony

While the principles of Buddhism provide a strong foundation for unity, achieving global harmony requires addressing significant challenges such as political polarization, economic inequality, and cultural misunderstandings.

3.6.1 Addressing political divisions

The Buddha's teachings on dialogue and reconciliation offer practical tools for resolving political conflicts. Initiatives that bring together leaders from opposing factions to engage in meaningful dialogue guided by Buddhist principles can help reduce polarization and foster unity.

3.6.2 Overcoming economic inequality

Buddhist values of generosity (*dāna*) and ethical conduct (*sīla*) inspire efforts to address economic disparities. Collaborative initiatives that focus on poverty alleviation, education, and skill development can create more equitable and inclusive societies.

3.7. The way forward: A vision for global harmony

Fostering unity requires a collective commitment to embracing inclusivity, compassion, and ethical responsibility. Vesak, with its emphasis on interconnectedness and shared humanity, serves as a powerful reminder of the potential for collaborative action. By drawing on the Buddha's teachings, individuals and communities can work together to address global challenges, creating a more harmonious and sustainable future.

IV. CASE STUDIES OF COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Collaborative efforts rooted in Buddhist principles serve as powerful examples of how compassion, unity, and mindfulness can address global challenges. These initiatives showcase the transformative impact of collective action, bridging cultural, religious, and geographic divides to foster global harmony. Below are detailed case studies that illustrate the success of such efforts in different domains.

4.1 The Sarvodaya Shramadana movement (Sri Lanka)

Background

Founded in 1958 by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement is a grassroots organization inspired by Buddhist and Gandhian principles. The term *Sarvodaya* translates to "Awakening of All," while *Shramadana* means "Gift of Labor." The movement focuses on community-driven development, emphasizing self-reliance, inclusivity, and sustainable living.

Key Initiatives

- (i) **Community Empowerment:** Sarvodaya works with rural communities in Sri Lanka to provide education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities. It empowers villagers to take charge of their own development, fostering a sense of unity and collective responsibility.
- (ii) **Peace and Reconciliation Programs:** During the Sri Lankan civil war, Sarvodaya facilitated peacebuilding initiatives, bringing together

Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim communities to promote dialogue and reconciliation. These efforts were grounded in Buddhist teachings on nonviolence (*ahimsā*) and forgiveness.

(iii) Sustainable Development Projects: The movement has implemented renewable energy projects, organic farming initiatives, and water conservation programs. These projects reflect the Buddhist value of living in harmony with nature.

Impact

Sarvodaya has reached over 15,000 villages across Sri Lanka, improving the quality of life for millions. Its focus on grassroots collaboration has inspired similar movements worldwide, demonstrating the power of Buddhist values in fostering unity and sustainable development.⁹

4.2. Tzu Chi Foundation (Taiwan)

Background

Founded in 1966 by Dharma Master Cheng Yen, the Tzu Chi Foundation is a global humanitarian organization rooted in Buddhist principles of compassion (*karuṇā*) and altruism (*dāna*). It operates in over 50 countries, addressing issues such as poverty, disaster relief, and environmental conservation.

Key Initiatives

(i) Disaster relief: Tzu Chi has provided emergency aid to victims of natural disasters, including earthquakes, typhoons, and floods. Notable efforts include relief operations in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and assistance to refugees during the Syrian crisis.

(ii) Medical missions: The foundation operates hospitals, free clinics, and mobile medical units, providing healthcare to underserved populations. Its services extend to areas affected by conflict and poverty, ensuring that medical aid reaches those in need.

(iii) Environmental sustainability: Tzu Chi promotes recycling programs, eco-friendly products, and educational campaigns on sustainability. The foundation's commitment to environmental conservation reflects the Buddhist principle of interdependence.

Impact

Tzu Chi's humanitarian efforts have transformed countless lives, earning global recognition for their efficiency and compassion. The foundation's ability to mobilize volunteers from diverse backgrounds highlights the potential of collaborative action rooted in Buddhist values.¹⁰

4.3. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)

Background

Founded in 1989 by Sulak Sivaraksa, a prominent Thai social activist, the

⁹ Dhp. 270.

¹⁰ Dhp. 2.

International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) seeks to apply Buddhist principles to contemporary social and environmental issues. INEB brings together activists, monks, and scholars from various countries to collaborate on projects that promote peace, justice, and sustainability.

Key Initiatives

(i) Peacebuilding efforts: INEB organizes dialogues and workshops to address conflicts in regions such as Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and the Korean Peninsula. These initiatives focus on fostering mutual understanding and reconciliation.

(ii) Youth empowerment: The network runs leadership programs for young people, equipping them with the skills to address social and environmental challenges. These programs emphasize mindfulness, ethical leadership, and community engagement.

(iii) Ecological advocacy: INEB promotes sustainable practices through campaigns on climate change, deforestation, and waste management. It collaborates with local communities to implement eco-friendly solutions, such as organic farming and renewable energy projects.

Impact

INEB has created a global platform for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike to collaborate on pressing issues. Its emphasis on engaged Buddhism has inspired movements for social justice and environmental sustainability across Asia and beyond.¹¹

4.4. Plum Village and the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh (France and Global)

Background

Plum Village, founded by Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh in 1982, is a mindfulness practice center in France. It serves as a global hub for the practice of mindfulness and engaged Buddhism, offering retreats, teachings, and training programs.

Key Initiatives

(i) Mindfulness and peacebuilding: Plum Village conducts retreats for individuals from all walks of life, including educators, healthcare workers, and activists. These retreats emphasize mindfulness as a tool for cultivating inner peace and fostering harmonious relationships.

(ii) Interfaith dialogue: Thich Nhat Hanh was a pioneer in interfaith dialogue, collaborating with leaders from Christianity, Judaism, and Islam to promote mutual understanding and peace. Plum Village continues this tradition through its global outreach programs.

(iii) Youth and education programs: Plum Village offers workshops and training programs for young people, integrating mindfulness into

¹¹ *Dhp.* 5.

education. Initiatives such as the Wake Up movement inspire youth to lead lives of compassion and ethical responsibility.

Impact

Plum Village has become a global model for mindfulness-based living and engaged Buddhism. Its teachings have influenced movements for social and environmental change, demonstrating the potential of mindfulness to transform individuals and communities.¹²

4.5. The global Buddhist climate change collective

Background

The Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective (GBCCC) is an international alliance of Buddhist organizations dedicated to addressing the climate crisis. Inspired by the teachings of interdependence and respect for nature, the collective seeks to mobilize Buddhist communities worldwide to take meaningful action on climate change.

Key initiatives

(i) Educational Campaigns: GBCCC organizes workshops, webinars, and publications to raise awareness about the environmental crisis and the role of Buddhist principles in addressing it.

(ii) Advocacy and policy engagement: The collective collaborates with governments, NGOs, and other faith-based organizations to advocate for policies that promote sustainability and reduce carbon emissions.

(iii) Community-led projects: GBCCC supports grassroots initiatives such as reforestation programs, renewable energy projects, and sustainable agriculture practices.

Impact

The collective has successfully mobilized Buddhist communities across Asia, Europe, and North America to take action on environmental issues. Its collaborative approach demonstrates the potential of faith-based movements to drive global change.¹³

V. CONCLUSION

These case studies illustrate the profound impact of collaborative efforts rooted in Buddhist principles. Whether through grassroots movements like Sarvodaya, global organizations like Tzu Chi, or mindfulness initiatives like Plum Village, these examples highlight the transformative power of compassion, unity, and ethical action. They serve as a testament to the enduring relevance of the Buddha's teachings in addressing contemporary challenges and fostering global harmony.

5.1. Challenges and recommendations

Despite the growing recognition of Buddhist principles as essential for

¹² *Dhp.* 88.

¹³ Thich Nhat Hanh (2013): 23.

fostering unity and sustainable development, several challenges hinder the widespread adoption of these ideals. These challenges, both global and local in nature, stem from political, social, economic, and environmental factors. Through careful analysis and concerted effort, many of these barriers can be addressed. This section explores the key challenges to fostering unity through Buddhist teachings and provides recommendations for overcoming them.

5.2. Key challenges in fostering unity

5.2.1. Political polarization and conflict

One of the most significant challenges to fostering unity is the rising political polarization in many countries. Political divisions, driven by ideological differences, identity politics, and nationalism, often result in conflict and mistrust between communities. The Buddha's teachings on non-violence (*ahimsā*), dialogue, and reconciliation offer solutions, but political leaders may not always be receptive to these teachings.

Example: In regions like Myanmar, where political conflict is intertwined with religious and ethnic tensions, Buddhist teachings on compassion (*karuṇā*) and forgiveness (*khama*) have been overshadowed by nationalism and sectarian violence. Despite Buddhist calls for peace, these teachings are sometimes manipulated for political ends.

5.2.2. Economic inequality and social injustice

Economic inequality, both within nations and across the globe, remains a major obstacle to achieving true unity. The gap between the rich and the poor has been widening, leading to social unrest, disenfranchisement, and a sense of division within societies. Buddhist principles of generosity (*dāna*) and equitable sharing are at odds with the global economic system that prioritizes profit over people.

Example: Global income inequality has been exacerbated by neoliberal economic policies, which often neglect the welfare of the poor and marginalized. In many countries, wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, while large populations live in poverty, unable to access basic needs like healthcare, education, and housing.

5.2.3. Environmental degradation and climate change

Environmental degradation and climate change present a significant challenge to global unity. The exploitation of natural resources and the resulting environmental crisis disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, exacerbating social inequalities. Buddhist teachings on the interdependence of all beings (*paṭicca samuppāda*) highlight the need to live in harmony with nature, but economic and industrial interests often conflict with the goal of environmental sustainability.

Example: The deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, driven by agricultural expansion and logging, has led to significant environmental harm and displacement of indigenous communities. The global response has been slow, often due to competing economic interests.

5.2.4. Cultural misunderstandings and religious intolerance

Cultural differences and religious intolerance remain persistent barriers to fostering unity. In some regions, Buddhist values are perceived as foreign or incompatible with local traditions, especially in areas with strong religious identities or nationalist sentiments. This cultural clash can undermine efforts for peaceful coexistence and cooperation among diverse groups.

Example: In countries with religiously homogeneous populations, the growing influence of Buddhism as a global philosophy has been met with resistance, especially in areas where other religions view it as a threat to their traditions.

5.2.5. Technological divide and misinformation

While technology offers unprecedented opportunities for collaboration and unity, it also creates challenges. The digital divide – where access to technology is limited for some populations – reinforces inequalities. Additionally, the spread of misinformation and divisive rhetoric through social media platforms exacerbates social tensions and political polarization. The Buddha's teachings on Right Speech (*sammā vācā*) can be a guide, but without proper regulation and self-awareness, digital spaces can amplify conflict.

Example: Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have been used to spread hate speech, fake news, and political disinformation, contributing to divisions within societies.

5.2.6. Media ethics and responsible journalism

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and fostering unity. However, sensationalism, biased reporting, and the prioritization of profit over truth often contribute to social discord. The Buddha's teachings on ethical speech and mindfulness (*sammā vācā* and *sati*) emphasize the importance of responsible communication.

Example: In times of crisis, media outlets sometimes focus on divisive narratives rather than promoting understanding and empathy. This can exacerbate tensions and hinder efforts to foster unity.

5.3. Recommendations for overcoming challenges

5.2.1. Promoting Buddhist values in political discourse

To address political polarization, Buddhist teachings can be integrated into political discourse to promote peacebuilding, dialogue, and reconciliation. Political leaders and policymakers can benefit from applying principles such as non-violence (*ahimsā*), forgiveness (*khama*), and empathy (*anukampā*) in negotiations and conflict resolution.

Recommendation: Initiatives like interfaith peace dialogues, where Buddhist leaders engage with political leaders and other religious figures, can promote greater mutual understanding. These dialogues can address issues like communal violence, refugee crises, and political instability while emphasizing collective welfare and compassion.

Action: Politicians should be encouraged to use Buddhist principles as part of conflict resolution strategies in deeply divided societies. A focus on shared

humanity and mutual benefit should be prioritized over partisan interests.

5.2.2. Promoting economic models based on buddhist ethics

Addressing economic inequality requires a shift toward more equitable and sustainable economic systems. Buddhist teachings on generosity (*dāna*), right livelihood (*sammā ājīva*), and ethical consumption can offer an alternative to the exploitative capitalist model that perpetuates inequality. A Buddhist-inspired economic model, based on compassionate capitalism, prioritizes the welfare of people and the environment over short-term profits.

Recommendation: Governments and NGOs should promote social enterprises and cooperatives that align with Buddhist principles. These initiatives can focus on wealth redistribution, fair trade, and providing fair wages to workers.

Action: Incorporating Buddhist ethics into corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can help large businesses and corporations adopt more sustainable and equitable practices, such as investing in green technologies and supporting local communities.

5.2.3. Strengthening global environmental cooperation

To address the environmental crisis, global collaboration is essential. Buddhist teachings on the interdependence of all life forms provide a unique perspective on the need for collective action to safeguard the planet. Buddhist-inspired environmental movements can encourage people to reduce consumption, adopt sustainable practices, and support environmental justice.

Recommendation: Environmental organizations should partner with Buddhist groups to promote initiatives like reforestation, carbon reduction, and sustainable agriculture. The Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective can serve as a model for mobilizing Buddhist communities to advocate for climate action and environmental preservation.

Action: Governments must invest in green technologies and implement policies that prioritize environmental sustainability. This includes supporting international treaties on climate change, such as the Paris Agreement, and holding corporations accountable for their environmental impact.

5.2.4. Promoting intercultural and interfaith understanding

To bridge cultural divides, it is essential to promote intercultural dialogue and religious tolerance. Buddhist teachings on compassion (*karuṇā*), mindfulness (*sati*), and the shared nature of suffering provide a foundation for engaging with other cultures and religions in a respectful and open-minded way.

Recommendation: Initiatives such as interfaith dialogue conferences, like the United Nations Day of Vesak, can bring together people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to engage in meaningful discussions about common challenges. These dialogues can focus on shared values such as peace, justice, and compassion.

Action: Religious leaders, especially Buddhist monks, should engage in interfaith humanitarian work, supporting initiatives such as disaster relief,

peacebuilding, and poverty alleviation, which can bring different communities together.

5.2.5. Combating misinformation and promoting digital mindfulness

To address the challenges of misinformation and divisiveness in the digital age, digital platforms should adopt regulations to combat the spread of fake news and hate speech. Simultaneously, promoting mindfulness practices in online spaces can reduce the negative effects of technology and foster empathy in virtual communities.

Recommendation: Digital literacy programs grounded in Buddhist mindfulness practices can be integrated into education systems worldwide to teach young people how to navigate digital spaces mindfully and critically.

Action: Social media companies must work together with governments and civil society to create ethical guidelines for online conduct. Promoting the Right Speech principle (*sammā vācā*) from Buddhist ethics can help curb harmful rhetoric and foster more positive and productive online discourse.

5.2.6. Encouraging media ethics and responsible journalism

To combat sensationalism and biased reporting, media organizations should adopt ethical guidelines aligned with Buddhist principles. Promoting responsible journalism can help foster unity and understanding.

Recommendation: Media training programs can incorporate Buddhist teachings on Right Speech and mindfulness to encourage journalists to report truthfully and responsibly.

Action: Establish media watchdog organizations that promote ethical reporting and hold media outlets accountable for divisive or harmful content. Encourage public support for media outlets that prioritize ethical journalism.

5.3. Conclusion

The challenges to fostering unity and collaborative efforts for global harmony are significant but not insurmountable. By addressing political, economic, social, and environmental issues with a commitment to Buddhist principles of compassion (*karuṇā*), mindfulness (*sati*), and interdependence (*paṭicca samuppāda*), it is possible to create a more unified, just, and sustainable world. The recommendations provided offer concrete steps for overcoming these challenges and ensuring that the spirit of Vesak can inspire meaningful change on a global scale.

VI. CONCLUSION

The central theme of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025, “Unity and Inclusivity for Human Dignity: Buddhist Insights for World Peace and Sustainable Development,” reflects a profound call to action in an era of unprecedented global challenges. As the world grapples with political polarization, economic inequality, environmental degradation, and social unrest, the teachings of Buddhism offer a unique and timeless framework for fostering global unity, compassion, and sustainability. These principles have not only influenced spiritual practice but have also inspired concrete, real-

world applications for addressing some of the most pressing issues facing humanity today.

6.1. Vesak as a symbol of unity and compassion

Vesak, celebrated annually to honor the birth, enlightenment, and passing of the Buddha, holds deep symbolic significance as a day of reflection, compassion, and collective action. Beyond its religious and cultural importance, Vesak stands as a reminder of the transformative power of compassion, unity, and selflessness. The Buddha's teachings on compassion (*karuṇā*), mindfulness (*sati*), and non-violence (*ahimsā*) provide essential tools for confronting the challenges of contemporary society. By cultivating these qualities within ourselves and promoting them in our communities, we can create a foundation for harmony and cooperation in a divided world.

Vesak reminds us that human dignity is a shared value that transcends race, religion, and nationality. As such, its celebration can serve as an invitation for people of all faiths and backgrounds to come together in pursuit of a common goal: to foster a world rooted in mutual respect, peace, and sustainable development.

6.2. Buddhist insights for global peace and sustainability

The Buddha's teachings on the interconnectedness of all beings (*paṭicca samuppāda*) and the importance of ethical living offer profound insights for achieving world peace and sustainable development. As the world faces existential challenges such as climate change, inequality, and conflict, Buddhist principles provide a necessary ethical foundation for addressing these issues. The Buddhist notion of interdependence underscores the reality that all living beings, from the smallest microorganisms to the largest ecosystems, are deeply connected. This realization compels us to adopt practices that promote harmony with nature and a just society where the needs of all are met.

In particular, Buddhist perspectives on sustainability emphasize mindful consumption, eco-friendly technologies, and practices that promote environmental restoration. This approach offers a counter-narrative to the prevailing model of unchecked consumerism and environmental exploitation. By integrating Buddhist values into the global discourse on climate change, conservation, and ecological justice, we can pave the way for a more sustainable future that honors the interconnectedness of all life.

Moreover, Buddhist teachings on non-violence, peace, and reconciliation offer key insights for resolving global conflicts. Whether in war-torn regions or areas beset by civil unrest, Buddhist principles of forgiveness and dialogue can help pave the way for lasting peace. Through compassionate leadership and conflict resolution strategies grounded in mindfulness and ethical engagement, we can work to heal deep societal divides and build a more peaceful world.

6.3. The role of collaborative efforts in achieving global harmony

The concept of *saṅgha* (community) within Buddhism emphasizes the importance of collaboration in achieving collective well-being. In the context of the United Nations Day of Vesak 2025, this idea of collaborative action

is crucial. The case studies highlighted in this paper – from the grassroots efforts of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka to the global humanitarian work of the Tzu Chi Foundation – demonstrate the immense potential of collaboration rooted in Buddhist values. These initiatives show that when communities come together with a shared sense of purpose, guided by compassion and mindfulness, they can address even the most daunting global challenges.

However, as demonstrated in the challenges section, fostering such unity and collaboration is not without its obstacles. Political polarization, economic inequality, environmental degradation, and cultural misunderstandings continue to hinder global efforts to create a more just and sustainable world. Yet, the Buddhist principles of *sammā-ditṭhi* (Right View), *sammā-saṅkappa* (Right Intention), and *sammā-kammanta* (Right Action) offer a pathway through these challenges. The practice of mindfulness, the cultivation of compassion, and the pursuit of non-violence can help individuals and communities transcend these barriers and work together for the common good.

For global efforts to be truly effective, there must be an emphasis on inclusivity – ensuring that all voices, especially those of marginalized groups, are heard and valued. The lessons of Vesak, which highlight the dignity of all human beings, remind us that the road to world peace and sustainability must be inclusive, allowing for the active participation of all people, regardless of their background, nationality, or faith.

6.4. Moving forward: Practical steps for change

As we reflect on the themes of Vesak and the potential for Buddhist teachings to guide global peace and sustainable development, it is crucial to focus on actionable steps that can be taken at the individual, community, and global levels. The following practical recommendations can help guide the way forward:

Promoting Mindfulness and Compassionate Leadership: Encouraging the practice of mindfulness, both in personal life and in leadership, can enhance decision-making and foster empathy. Leaders – whether in politics, business, or social organizations – can benefit from mindfulness training to ensure that their decisions prioritize human dignity and environmental sustainability.

Advocating for Ecological Sustainability: Global campaigns that integrate Buddhist perspectives on environmental stewardship can be vital in combating climate change and promoting sustainability. This includes supporting policies that reduce carbon emissions, advocating for renewable energy sources, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

Fostering Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue: Building bridges between cultures and faiths can help overcome the barriers of religious intolerance and cultural misunderstanding. Interfaith dialogue that emphasizes shared values of compassion, non-violence, and mutual respect can help foster unity in diverse communities.

Strengthening Global Cooperation for Peace: Global initiatives that prioritize peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and humanitarian aid should

be supported. Buddhist-inspired initiatives that promote forgiveness and reconciliation can be particularly effective in post-conflict societies.

Empowering Youth and Future Leaders: Engaging young people in the practice of mindfulness, compassionate action, and social responsibility can ensure that the next generation is equipped to face the challenges of the future. Programs that combine Buddhist teachings with practical skills for leadership, peacebuilding, and environmental advocacy can help cultivate a generation committed to global harmony.

6.5. Conclusion: A call for collective action

In conclusion, the celebration of Vesak provides an opportunity for reflection on the profound teachings of the Buddha, which offer timeless wisdom for addressing the challenges of our modern world. By embracing the core principles of unity, compassion, and mindfulness, we can begin to build a more harmonious and sustainable world. The task at hand is not an easy one, but through collective effort, grounded in Buddhist insights, we can make significant strides toward achieving global peace and sustainable development. As we move forward, let us be guided by the spirit of Vesak – committed to the dignity of all beings, to collaboration across borders, and to a future where the welfare of the planet and its inhabitants is the foremost priority.

This journey toward global harmony requires not only individual transformation but also collective action. Together, through the wisdom of Buddhism and the principles of compassion and unity, we can create a world that reflects the highest aspirations of human dignity, peace, and sustainability.

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CULTIVATING HARMONY: THE BUDDHIST PATH TO UNITY

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Abstract:

In the face of growing global crises marked by violence, division, and moral decline, this paper explores the Buddhist path as a transformative framework for cultivating unity. Rather than relying on external diplomatic or political strategies, Buddhism emphasizes the transformation of the mind through ethics (*sīla*), wisdom (*paññā*), and concentration (*samādhi*). The teachings of the Eightfold Path and the practice of the brahmavihāras (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) offer a profound inner route to societal harmony. Unity, in Buddhist philosophy, is not imposed from outside but arises from within – a purified mind leads to compassion and connectedness with all beings. The paper argues that the sense of “We” must replace the ego-centered “I” to achieve integration at personal, social, and global levels. Through mindfulness, moral conduct, and spiritual insight, Buddhism presents a universally applicable model of peaceful coexistence, making it highly relevant in today’s fractured world.

Keywords: *Buddhism, unity, harmony, Eightfold Path, mind transformation, brahmavihāras, ethics, mindfulness, peace, social integration, nonviolence, sīla, samādhi, paññā.*

I. THE CORE POINTS OF CRISIS

War, atrocities, hatred, violence, bloodshed, and many other such negative forces have occupied human civilization. In a word, humanity traverses a blood-drenched path toward uncertainty daily. Lack of unity, disharmony, and disintegration stand as huge barriers in front of humanity. The gradual collapse of morality and the declining trend of values have given birth to frustration on one hand and impatience on the other. In this situation, it hardly appears that socio-political or diplomatic strategies will bring any solution to this crisis.

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Just as we are witnessing a lack of discipline in society, the malicious use of power, the nexus between rulers and criminals, ongoing audacity, restlessness, and increasing impatience - altogether, these raise the question of whether civilization exists at all! Unwanted incidents such as domestic violence, child abuse, violence toward senior citizens, human trafficking, gender disharmony, and religious conflict are rising day by day, and often, it is nearly impossible to visualize a harmonious, civilized society. Therefore, the transformation we are looking for is directly related to our psyche rather than external factors.

The religions of the world, within their fold, contain ample elements and possibilities to address this critical situation of disharmony. However, due to a lack of scientific appreciation of the core philosophy of religion and a lack of understanding of its very purpose, religious sentiment has become stronger than moral values and spiritual potential. In such a situation, the Buddhist way of fostering unity is under consideration in this paper.

II. RELEVANCE OF UNITY

The issue of unity is addressed on different platforms, such as political, diplomatic, religious, and philosophical platforms. The question of unity and integrity has become a serious concern for the entire world. Unity can make the world peaceful for all. Symbolically, there exists an invisible barrier that hinders the realization of unity among us. This barrier, which may lie within an individual's psyche or in the social sphere, needs to be eradicated to bring about a transformation in our thought process. Unity fosters peace, while the lack of unity leads to suffering. The Buddhist way has helped the world understand the hidden logic of cultivating unity and peace in both the individual mind and society. This paper seeks to explore this discourse in light of the recent global context.

2.1. What is the way to come out of it?

We are aware of the crisis of reality. But what is the way to overcome it? The Buddha's philosophy clearly states that the transformation of the mind, the vision of life, and the system by which an individual functions in society are essential for maintaining good, neighborly relations with fellow human beings, animals, and nature. In order to bring about a transformation in the thought process, noble qualities such as humanity, sympathy, kindness, tolerance, patience, and rendering service to others are essential. The Buddha also believed that human life should be directed toward the welfare of the world, including all living beings and nature. Buddhism helps us understand our minds, from which the sense of unity-consciousness arises.

2.2. The Buddhist approach to this problem

A unified and harmonious society is our goal. In order to reach this goal, according to the Buddha, three things are essential - *sīla* (maintaining discipline), *paññā* (wisdom; Sanskrit: *prajñā*), and *samādhi* (profound concentration). These will help transform our minds, our vision of life, and our behavior. The core principles of *pañcasīla* include refraining from killing, refraining from stealing, refraining from adultery, refraining from false or provocative speech,

and refraining from intoxication. Along with pañcasīla, the practice of the brahmavihāras also helps in developing moral capacity in individuals. In this regard, *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity) are also necessary.¹ These methods, along with the practice of pañcasīla and the brahmavihāras, will bring about transformation in an individual's psyche, resulting in *sammāpaṇihitaṃ cittaṃ*, elevating a person to a higher state. Such individuals can contribute significantly to fostering unity and harmony.

2.3. In Buddhism, mind-peace-unity are interrelated

In Buddhism, mind, peace, and unity are interrelated. Hence, a holistic and comprehensive appreciation of Buddhist philosophy is essential. The scope of unity in Buddhism begins with the individual and extends to the universal level (see: Universality of Buddhist Logic section). It encompasses a wide range, from the micro-level (individual) to the macro-level (universal). Unlike other religions, Buddhism emphasizes the core values of humanity without addressing the concept of God. The Buddha's main teachings focus on reducing human suffering and cultivating peace of mind. He maintained that causal relations and evolution are the two major factors of life.

2.4. Polluted-mind to pure-mind: a divine journey

One of the major teachings of the Buddha that promotes brotherhood and unity is love – that is, love for human life and love for the lives of animals. Love is the key unifying factor behind unity, and it fosters brotherhood. To cultivate love, we need to purify our minds. In the *Dhammapada*, we learn about the dichotomy of the mind, distinguishing between a polluted mind and a pure mind. The *Dhammapada* states: “*manasā ce paduṭṭhena/ manasā ce pasanne-na*.”² For love, we need *pasanna mana* (*prasanna mana*) - a pure-mind, pollution-free mind. Attaining purity of heart is essential. In such a state of pure mind, a sense of oneness with fellow human beings and with animals develops, leading to unity in society.

2.5. The sense of unity arises in mind

When differences become serious in society, what is the key to integration and unity? According to Buddhism, it is *karma* – deeds play a determining role. Bad deeds create mental distance, while good deeds foster unity. Violence and causing harm to others in any form are bad deeds. Hurting others through words or actions, by any means, is the root cause of inequality.

2.6. Bodhi - enlightenment

In Buddhism, enlightenment is to be attained - this is the goal. An enlightened being can overcome all difficulties and suffering, transcend sorrow, and act according to what is right. An enlightened mind can unify thoughts against all negativity. We must cultivate harmony in our decision-making; only then can unity emerge in society. The entire process of unity and harmony begins

¹ Barua (2001): 64, 67, 69, 70.

² *Dhammapada*, 1986; *Yamakavagga*.

at the psychic level of each individual. If we could attain this state of mind (enlightenment), we shall be able to liberate ourselves and attain *nibbāna*.

2.7. Psychic-philosophical teaching

Buddhism has provided the world with a psychic-philosophical teaching.³ The term *Buddhānusāsana* (Instruction of the Buddha) is more appropriate than Buddhist Religion. Buddhism is more of a way of life, a logical plan for living. A reason-based understanding of life and its needs places a high value on morality and welfare. According to this logic, for unity and integrity to be realized, the I-consciousness of every individual must be reformed. An individual is composed of five constituents (*pañcakkhandhā*)⁴, which are: (1) *Rūpa kkhanda* - Physical form, (2) *Vedanā kkhanda* - Feeling/ Sensation, (3) *Saññā kkhanda* - Perception, (4) *Sankhā rakkhanda* - Predisposition Sub-conscious, (5) *Viññā kkhanda* - Consciousness.

Consciousness is the most important stage (or state) in human existence and is directly connected to the mind (*mana*). Buddhism teaches that the I (ego) should be removed from our consciousness. The removal of I-consciousness from the mind allows us to perceive everyone as We - this is the psychic process of unity and integrity. The I-ego dissociates us from others, whereas the We-consciousness connects us with them. I-consciousness isolates, while We-consciousness unites.

2.8. Good Karma and the issue of unity

When differences become serious in society, what is the key to integration and unity? According to Buddhism, it is *karma* - deeds play a determining role. Bad deeds create mental distance, while good deeds foster unity. Violence and causing harm to others in any form are bad deeds. Hurting others through words or actions, by any means, is the root cause of inequality.

2.9. The Aṣṭāṅga Mārg⁵

The Eight-fold Path of Buddhism (*Aṣṭāṅga Mārg*) is a well-formulated scheme, following which one can purify his *karma* - and prompts to do good deeds. The paths are: (1) *Sammā diṭṭhi*: Right Vision - Knowing the truth, (2) *Sammā Samkappo*: Right Intent - Removing the evil from mind, (3) *Sammā Vācā*: Right Speech - Not hurting others with words, (4) *Sammā Kamanto*: Right Conduct - Good works, (5) *Sammā Ajīvo*: Right Livelihood - Living a controlled life, (6) *Sammā Vyāmo*: Right Endeavor - Effort to resist evil, (7) *Sammā Sati*: Right Mindfulness - Capacity to control mind and (8) *Sammā Samādhi*: Right Concentration - Practicing meditation.

The Eightfold Path will help to reduce many negative and disintegrating forces in society. Proper practice of *Aṣṭāṅga Mārg* helps to control the mind and behavior as follows:

³ Brahmachari, 1990: 1.

⁴ Brahmachari, 1990: 2.

⁵ Barua, 2001: 12 - 13.

(i) The Right Vision provides an individual with a comprehensive understanding of life and helps one attain happiness by reducing sorrow. To cultivate unity in society, a proper vision is essential.

(ii) Along with the right view, Right Consideration helps an individual take one step forward toward goodness. If one aspires to reduce malicious thoughts, the right consideration will help cultivate qualities such as love and compassion, thereby strengthening unity in society.

(iii) The Right Speech, along with these two qualities, is essential for developing friendship and brotherhood. Buddhism emphasizes the importance of controlling one's speech. Useless talk, instigating comments, and provocative words invite enmity and hatred. Therefore, exercising control over speech is crucial for fostering integration.

(iv) Right Action serves as a major criterion for strengthening unity, amity, and brotherhood. Bad actions lead to catastrophe, while good actions - such as purity, compassion, devotion, love, service, and charity - help expand the path of friendship.

(v) All the previous four qualities cannot be fully realized unless Right Livelihood is adopted. For the right livelihood, one must refrain from lying, cheating, killing, and taking intoxicants and must avoid causing harm to others - whether humans, animals, or nature.

(vi) Buddhism advocates taking Right Endeavor to promote good actions and dispel evil thoughts and deeds. The elimination of evil and the cultivation of good are essential.

(vii) For this purpose, Right Mindfulness must be developed, as the Buddha stated that mindfulness is the source of all good. The Buddha preached: "*Satiṃ khoṇaṃ, bhikkhave, sabbatthikaṃ vadāmi.*"⁶ i.e., "O Bhikkhus, I say: mindfulness is the source of all good." Without mindfulness, right speech, right action, and right livelihood remain unfulfilled.

(viii) The final factor, Right Concentration, holds great significance in Buddhist philosophy, imparting a valuable lesson to humanity. Psychologically, mindfulness and concentration go hand in hand. Concentration - i.e., fixing the mind on a single point, object, or ideal - becomes meaningful through meditation. The goal, achieved through mindfulness and concentration, is realized through meditation and diligent effort. In this state of concentration, the mind remains steady, like an unstirred flame of a lamp. This state is described as *samādhi* - the threshold of enlightenment.

2.10. Sense of unity is internal: It comes from within

Bringing unity is not an external affair. The process of unity through the *aṭṭhaṅgika magga* pertains to an individual's psychology. Right vision, right mindfulness, and right concentration are all associated with the mind and psyche. Unity or integration holds universal relevance. Buddhism states that men-

⁶ *Brahmachari*, 1990: 28 – 29.

tal faculties are universal (*sabba citta* and *sādhāraṇa*). This means that the human psyche is universal. The anthropologist Adolf Bastian (1826–1905) used the term psychic unity. According to Buddhism, some qualities of the universal mind include faith, greedlessness, and amity – these are fundamental qualities required for unity. Along with these elementary qualities, one must abstain from misdeeds and be free from greed, anger, and other defilements. This is known as *Virati*. Buddhism also speaks of *cittavutthi*, which simply means “mind-road,” i.e., the path that the mind traverses. Therefore, every conscious human being must follow the right path to bring unity to society. What are the ways? Buddhism teaches about the seven types of purity of morals that help one stay on the right mental path⁷, such as: (1) *Sīla visuddhi* - The purity of morals, (2) *Citta visuddhi* - The purity of mind, (3) *Diṭṭhi visuddhi* - The purity of views, (4) *Kaṅkha vitarana visuddhi* - The purity of transcending doubt, (5) *Maggāmagga nānadassana visuddhi* - The purity of vision in distinguishing right and wrong path, (6) *Patipadanānadassana visuddhi* - The purity of knowledge, insight in practice, and (7) *Nānadassana visuddhi* - The purity of insight.

III. NON-VIOLENCE: NON-KILLING

Nonviolence is a major force essential for fostering unity and harmony in the contemporary global scenario. Aggression and violence toward others create disharmony on one hand and, in return, give rise to further violence. This leads to a chain of violence and disharmony in human society. Killing, hurting, and causing physical or mental harm promote nothing but further violence, suffering, inequality, and disintegration. In this situation, we recall the Buddha’s golden words.⁸ “All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill. All tremble at violence; life is dear to all. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not kill nor cause another to kill.”⁹

The major three teachings that seem relevant for today are: (1) we have to put ourselves in the position of others, (2) we should remember that life is dear to all – each life is valuable irrespective of man and animal and (3) not to kill or cause others to kill. This is a philosophical framework that should be synthesized at the cognitive level and put into practice accordingly. This valuable teaching should be implemented at the personal, social, intra-state (intra-national), and inter-state (international) levels. For an individual, personal decision-making is sufficient. However, at the national and international levels, policy measures are required to determine the strategy for proper implementation. At the personal and social levels, the practice of meditation proves to be highly effective.

⁷ *Brahmachari*, 1990: 94.

⁸ *Dhammapada*: 1986; *Dandabagga*: 129-130; pg.52. “*Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa sabbe bhāyanti maccuno, attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye. Subbe tasanti daṇḍessa, sabbesāṃ jivitaṃ piyāṃ, attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye.*”

⁹ Acharya Buddhakarakhita. (trans), *Buddharakhita*: 1986: 53.

IV. THE TRI-SHARAN

Tri-Sharan,^e taking refuge in the Three Jewels - Buddha, Dhamma, and *Saṅgha* - creates a bond between wisdom and behavior. *Tri-Sharan* establishes equilibrium in one's psyche, fostering the qualities cultivated through the practice of *pañcasīla* and the *brahmavihāras*. The following verses from the *Dhammapada* can be cited here, as they speak of Buddha, Dhamma, and *Saṅgha* - the *Tri-Sharan*. "Those disciples of Gotama ever awaken happily who day and night constantly practice the Recollection of the Qualities of the Buddha."¹⁰ Those disciples of Gotama ever awaken happily who day and night constantly practice the Recollection of the Qualities of the *Dhamma*.¹¹ Those disciples of Gotama ever awaken happily who day and night constantly practice the Recollection of the Qualities of the *Saṅgha*.¹² To whom *Dhamma* is not known, the life cycle is longer¹³. As a spoon does not know the taste of soup, an immature man is unable to know the taste of *Dhamma*.¹⁴ The *Tri-Sharan* is an integrated form of 'qualities' that helps to 'remake' our consciousness and behavior.

V. REMOVAL OF CONFLICT FROM MIND

The *Dhammapada* states that an evil intention of the mind causes suffering. A polluted mind (*manasā ce paduṭṭhena*) invites sorrow (*dukkham*).¹⁵ *Dukkham* - suffering is a reality in human life. However, the Buddha taught us how to overcome sorrow. The *Dhammapada* mentions that tranquility of mind (*manasā ce pasannena*) brings happiness. A pollution-free mind bestows happiness (*sukham*).¹⁶

Blaming others for imaginative reasons will not make man free from hatred; dwelling on good thoughts will make our mind hatred-free¹⁷. A sense of hatred is a big barrier and acts as a negative force against unity or oneness. Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone is hatred appeased. This is a Law Eternal.¹⁸

¹⁰ Acharya Buddharakkhita, (trans), *Buddharakshita*: 1986: pg.117. Pali text equivalent: "Suppabuddhaṃ pabujihanti sadā Gotamasāvaka, yesaṃ divā ca ratto ca niccaṃ buddhagatā sati." (*Dhammapada*:1986, *Prakinnakabagga*: 296; pg.116.)

¹¹ Acharya Buddharakkhita (trans), *Buddharakshita*:1986: pg.117. Pali text equivalent: "Suppabuddhaṃ pabujihanti sadā Gotamasāvaka, yesaṃ divā ca ratto ca niccaṃ dhammagatā sati." (*Dhammapada*:1986, *Prakinnakabagga*: 297; pg.116.).

¹² Acharya Buddharakkhita (trans), *Buddharakshita*:1986: pg.117. Pali text equivalent: "Suppabuddhaṃ pabujihanti sadā gotamasāvaka, yesaṃ divā ca ratto ca niccaṃ saṅghagatā sati." (*Dhammapada*:1986, *Prakinnakabagga*: 298; pg.116.).

¹³ *Dhammapada*:1986, *Balāvagga* 5:60; p. 24.

¹⁴ *Dhammapada*:1986, *Balāvagga* 5:64; p. 24.

¹⁵ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Yamakavagga* 1:1, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Yamakavagga* 1:2, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Dhammapada*:1986, *Yamakavagga* 1:3-4, p.2.

¹⁸ Acharya Buddharakkhita, (trans), *Buddharakshita*:1986:5; pg.5. Pali text equivalent: "Na hi verana verāni sammantidha kudachanam/Averana na ca sammanti eso dhamma sanantano." (*Dhammapada*:1986, *Yamakabagga*, Verse-5-1; pg.4.)

A purified mind, moral behavior, disciplined thought, and truthfulness are highly valued in Buddhism.¹⁹ A wise person attains freedom (emancipation, *nibbāna*) through meditation.²⁰ Buddhism teaches that one should not be addicted to sensory pleasures²¹ to attain peace. It is difficult to bring the mind under control, but developing the capacity for mind control leads to happiness.²² Happiness follows a guarded mind.²³ A pure mind should be free from lust and hatred.²⁴ An undisciplined mind causes great harm, while a well-disciplined mind brings goodness.²⁵

VI. SOME OF THE CORE LESSONS THAT BUDDHISM TAUGHT

We get many lessons from Buddha's teachings. Some of such lessons may be remembered here concerning unity and harmony:

5.1. *Sammāpañihitaṃ cittaṃ* - well-directed mind

Buddhism emphasizes one's mind. For any individual, *sammāpañihitaṃ cittaṃ* - the well-developed mind is a treasure for him: "Neither mother, father, nor any other relative can do one greater good than one's well-directed mind."²⁶ Here, the Buddha emphasized a well-directed mind. The words he used in Pāli were: *sammāpañihitaṃ cittaṃ* (in Sanskrit: *samyak prañihitaṃ cittaḥ*).²⁷ A well-directed mind can be cultivated by following *paññā*, *sīla*, and *samādhi* - the *aṭṭhaṅgika magga* (Eightfold Path). Buddhism teaches the conquest of ignorance through wisdom.

5.2. MITTE KALYĀṆE – GOOD COMPANION

Good companionship and fellowship of the nobleman help to retain good character. Fellowship of the vile is not indulged in Buddhism. That is why Buddha said: "Do not associate with evil companions; do not seek the fellowship of the vile. Associate with good friends; seek the fellowship of noble men."²⁸ Concerning the association of noble men, *Dhammapada* further states: "Good it is to see the Noble Ones; to live with them is ever blissful. One will always be happy by not encountering fools."²⁹

¹⁹ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Yamakavagga* 1:10, p. 6.

²⁰ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Appamādavagga* 2:23, p. 10.

²¹ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Appamādavagga* 2:27, p. 12.

²² *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Cittavagga* 3:33, 35, p. 14.

²³ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Appamādavagga* 3:36, p. 14.

²⁴ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Cittavagga* 3:39, p. 16.

²⁵ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Cittavagga* 3:42 – 43, p. 16.

²⁶ *Dhammapada*:1986, (trans), Acharya Buddhārakkhita; *Buddharakshita*: 1986:16; p.17.

Pali text equivalent: "Na taṃ mātā pitā kāyirā, aññe vāpi ca ñātakā, / *Sammāpañihitaṃ cittaṃ*, seyyaso nāṃ tato kare." (*Dhammapada*:1986, *Chittabagga*: 43; p.16).

²⁷ Bosu, 2023, p. 21.

²⁸ Acharya Buddhārakkhita. (trans), *Buddharakshita*:1986: p. 31. Pali text equivalent: "Na bhaje pāpake mitte, na bhaje purisādhame, / Bhajetha mitte kalyāṇe, bhajetha purisuttame" (*Dhammapada*:1986, *Paṇḍitabagga*: 78; p. 30).

²⁹ Acharya Buddhārakkhita. (trans), *Buddharakshita*: 1986: p. 81. Pali text equivalent: "Sāhu dassanamariyānaṃ, sannivāso sadā sukho, / Adassanena bālānaṃ, niccameva sukhi siyā."

(i) Follow the path of the ‘noble’ one

In Sanskrit, the companion of noblemen is called *Sadhu Sanga* (*Sadhu* = noble man / Sage; *Saṅga* = Companion). Buddha considered to follow the path of the ‘noble’ one: “Therefore, follow the noble one who is steadfast, wise, learned, dutiful, and devout. One should follow only such a person - one who is truly good and discerning - just as the moon follows the path of the stars.”³⁰

(ii) *Ekassa caritam seyyo* - better to live alone

It is also better to live alone than have the company of fools/evil people and not to do any evil: “Better it is to live alone; there is no fellowship with a fool. Live alone and do no evil; be carefree like an elephant in the elephant forest.”³¹

(iii) Universality of Buddhist logic

Since Buddhism advocates a process of mind control and encourages human beings to purify their minds and hearts, it offers a universal prototype of the concept of unity. The Buddha’s teachings provide equal space for intelligence, mind, and heart. Unlike institutional religions that formulate God-centric codes, Buddhism is founded on universal values that apply to all. These include: (1) the vision of the singularity of humankind, (2) love and compassion, (3) the ideology of non-violence and non-injury, (4) tolerance,³² (5) brotherhood,³³ (6) the vision of coexistence, (7) accepting and respecting others, (8) striving for the betterment of both self and society. Living a value-oriented life with proper behavior and meditation is considered highly significant in Buddhist philosophy and the Buddhist way of life. These values, when practiced collectively, provide a universal prototype for the concept of unity.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The general understanding is that religion addresses the issue of God. In Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism, the concept of God is central. Unlike these religions, Buddhism remains silent about God. Instead, Buddhist philosophy places greater emphasis on reforming thought processes, developing a well-directed mind, prioritizing enlightenment, and ultimately attaining *nibbāna*. There are two paths: worldly attach-

(*Dhammapada*:1986, *Sukhabagga*: 206; p. 80).

³⁰ Acharya Buddharakkhita (trans), *Buddharakkhita*, 1986, p. 83. Pali text equivalent: “*Tasmā hi: Dhīraṇca paṇṇaṇca bahussutaṇca, dhorayhasilaṇ vatavantamariyaṇ; Tam tādisaṇ sappurisaṇ sumedhaṇ, bhajetha nakkhatta pathaṇ va candimā.*” (*Dhammapada*:1986, *Sukhabagga*: 208; p. 82.)

³¹ Acharya Buddharakkhita (trans), *Buddharakkhita*:1986: pg.129. Pali text equivalent: “*Ekassa caritaṇ seyyo, Natthi bāle saḥāyatā, / Eko care na ca pāpāni kāyira, appossukko matāṅga-raṇṇe va nāgo*” (*Dhammapada*:1986, *Nagabagga*: 330; p. 128.).

³² *Dharmapala*: 2010: p. 25. *Anagarika Dharmapala* while spoke on Buddhism mentioned ‘Buddha’s Exalted Tolerance’

³³ *Dharmapala*: 2010:pg. 11, 25. While talking about Buddhism, *Anagarika Dharmapala* talked about ‘Human Brotherhood’ and ‘Buddhist Brotherhood’

ment and nibbāna. The followers of the Buddha devote themselves to the path of nibbāna rather than worldly pleasures.³⁴ Buddhism advocates a unity of logical understanding between life and the world, encompassing the relationship between humans, animals, and nature. Through meditation, one can establish a connection between the self and the universe. Unity arises when an individual perceives others as their own. The feeling of oneness, cultivated through meditation, is a fundamental root of unity.

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³⁴ *Dhammapada*, 1986, *Bālavagga* 5:75, p. 28.

THE ROLE OF METTĀ (LOVING-KINDNESS) IN BUILDING COLLABORATIVE GLOBAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract:

This study examines the transformative impact of mettā (loving-kindness) in cultivating collaborative global communities founded on mutual respect, cooperation, and ethical behavior. It delves into the *Mettā Sutta*, a key Buddhist scripture that emphasizes the cultivation of universal compassion and loving-kindness as a fundamental approach to creating harmonious and inclusive societies. By examining the principles of *mettā*, this research identifies its profound potential to nurture ethical relationships, foster peace, and build collective well-being across diverse cultural and religious contexts. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study analyzes key elements of the *Mettā Sutta*, emphasizing virtues such as empathy, patience, humility, and unconditional love. These qualities are crucial in addressing contemporary global challenges such as social inequality, conflict, and environmental degradation. The research also draws comparisons with similar ethical teachings from other religious traditions, highlighting the universal nature of loving-kindness as a tool for promoting cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. Loving kindness in plain English is the practice of *mettā*. Through the lens of *mettā*, the study illuminates how communities can cultivate compassion as a unifying force that transcends divisions, encouraging individuals to act with mindfulness, integrity, and genuine care for the welfare of others. In a world marked by increasing fragmentation, the study advocates for the role of loving-kindness in fostering collaborative global partnerships, promoting peace, and advancing sustainable development goals. By focusing on these timeless virtues, the research underscores the importance of spiritual growth and ethical living in building global communities that are not only interdependent but also committed to the common good.

Keywords: *Mettā, loving-kindness, ethical behavior, global communities, collaboration, peacebuilding, spiritual growth.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The *Mettā Sutta*, also known as the “Discourse on Loving-kindness and Compassion,” offers numerous insights and benefits from multiple perspectives. This important scripture encapsulates the essence of loving-kindness (*mettā*) as a central tenet in the Buddhist path, serving as one of the fundamental teachings within the *Pāli Tipiṭaka*.¹ In the *Khuddaka Nikāya* of the *Sutta Piṭaka*, specifically in the *Uraga Vagga* of the *Sutta Nipāta*, the *Mettā Sutta* has become an essential practice within the Buddhist tradition. It is widely revered for promoting goodwill and compassion toward all sentient beings, transcending boundaries such as proximity, enmity, friendship, kinship, or attachment.² Reciting the *Mettā Sutta* has become a common practice among Buddhists, who offer loving-kindness for themselves and all beings, enhancing their spiritual resilience and benefiting the greater social environment by promoting peace and harmony. The cultivation of *mettā* generates an atmosphere conducive to a peaceful life, fostering an environment free from fear and suspicion.

The Buddha delivered the *Mettā Sutta* to a group of monks who had entered a forest for meditation. The local deities, disturbed by the monks’ presence, attempted to drive them away. In response, the Buddha preached this *sutta* to create a harmonious coexistence between the monks and deities, transforming a potentially hostile environment into one of peace and security. The *Mettā Sutta*, therefore, serves as both a protective chant and a means to cultivate loving-kindness toward all beings, creating conditions where harmony and peaceful coexistence prevail. Its timeless message extends beyond the original context, offering guidance for anyone seeking to lead a life of compassion, kindness, and universal love.³

In the context of Buddhist teachings, *mettā* is one of the four *Brahmavihāras* (sublime states), alongside *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity), all of which are crucial for spiritual liberation.⁴ Among these, *mettā* is particularly emphasized as the foundational quality upon which the other three virtues are built. *Mettā* is not just an ideal to be admired but a practice to be cultivated, beginning with self-directed loving-kindness and expanding to encompass all beings, including adversaries.⁵ The practice of *mettā* meditation involves systematically developing goodwill, starting with oneself, and then extending to loved ones, acquaintances, neutral individuals, and even perceived enemies. This expansive love has the power to dispel hatred and resentment, promoting a more harmonious and compassionate existence.

The *Mettā Sutta* highlights the intrinsic connection between moral conduct, mindfulness, and loving-kindness as essential components of spiritual growth. In Buddhism, ethical conduct (*Sīla*) forms the foundation upon

¹ Ñāṇamoli, B., Bodhi, B. (1995): 395.

² Bodhi, B. (2017): 157-159.

³ Gunaratana, H. (2017): 45.

⁴ Bodhi, B. (2005): 293.

⁵ S. Galmangoda (2022): 18.

which mindfulness (*sati*) and wisdom (*Paññā*) are built. The loving-kindness taught in the *Mettā Sutta* serves both as an ethical imperative and a practical necessity, encouraging individuals to live lives of compassion and altruism. This universal compassion fosters ethical behavior by preventing actions that could cause harm.⁶ Mindfulness ensures that thoughts, words, and deeds align with the principles of loving-kindness, cultivating a continuous attitude of compassion. Through the integration of ethical conduct, mindfulness, and *mettā*, spiritual growth is achieved, and the individual's well-being is closely connected to the well-being of the broader community. Buddhist teachings are a great foundation for human value, which crosses all racial and national barriers and becomes a great force for peace in the modern world.⁷

Research objective

The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the *Mettā Sutta*, with a focus on its teachings regarding ethical conduct, mindfulness, and loving-kindness as foundational pathways to both spiritual development and social harmony. Through a detailed examination of the qualities described in the *sutta*, this research aims to clarify their practical applications and the relevance of these teachings across a range of religious and cultural contexts.

The scope of the study extends beyond a mere textual analysis, seeking to explore the broader implications of the *Mettā Sutta*'s teachings for contemporary communities that are striving to cultivate peace, compassion, and ethical living. This research also aims to establish connections between the principles outlined in the *Mettā Sutta* and similar values found in other religious traditions, emphasizing their universal appeal and relevance in a diverse world.

In doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how *mettā* functions as a powerful tool for fostering ethical conduct and spiritual growth, both on an individual level and within the collective social fabric. Ultimately, the investigation aspires to provide practical guidance for those seeking to live by the enduring virtues highlighted in the *Mettā Sutta*, offering a framework for enhancing compassion, mindfulness, and ethical behavior in daily life.

II. FOUNDATIONAL ETHICS IN BUDDHISM

Buddhism places a strong emphasis on spiritual practice as an essential aspect of personal development, incorporating the threefold training of *Sīla* (ethical conduct), *samādhi* (concentration), and *Paññā* (wisdom). These elements come together to create a holistic approach to individual and spiritual growth.

2.1. *Sīla* (Ethical conduct)

Sīla refers to ethical conduct, which establishes the foundation for concentration and wisdom. Key components of *Sīla* include right speech, right action, and right livelihood, all of which are part of the Noble Eightfold

⁶ Shonin Edo., Gordon, William Van., Singh, Nirbhay N. (2015): 37.

⁷ Thich Nhat Tu, Thich Duc Thien (2019): 137.

Path.⁸ *Sīla* offers the groundwork for living a virtuous life in thought, speech, and action. For lay practitioners, the observance of the Five Precepts is fundamental. These precepts are a universal dharma that safeguards the rights of all communities. They include refraining from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxication. “*Idha, sārīputta, ariyasāvako paṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti, adinnādānā paṭivirato hoti, kāmesumicchācārā paṭivirato hoti, musāvādā paṭivirato hoti, surāmerayamajjapamādatṭhānā paṭivirato hoti*.”⁹ The Five Precepts serve not just as rules but as guides for spiritual practice, promoting harmony and ethical coexistence within the community. Adherence to these precepts prevents wrongdoing and fosters peace. Five precepts in Buddhism create a peaceful individual in the world.¹⁰

2.2. *Samadhi* (Concentration)

Samadhi refers to the mental concentration necessary for maintaining focus on a single object. Through *samadhi* meditation, individuals develop a concentrated and stable mind, which enables a deeper understanding of reality and supports the cultivation of wisdom. Ethical conduct plays a crucial role in *Samadhi*, as a mind disturbed by unethical behavior cannot attain deep meditation. A calm and concentrated mind creates the optimal conditions for insight and clarity, leading to profound understanding.¹¹

2.3. *Paññā* (Wisdom)

Paññā is the wisdom that arises from comprehending the true nature of existence. It is cultivated through the integration of ethical conduct and focused meditation, which together lead to the realization of impermanence, suffering, and non-self. Wisdom, in turn, reinforces ethical behavior. The understanding of interconnectedness naturally fosters compassion and non-harmful actions, guiding individuals toward greater moral integrity and spiritual advancement.

III. THE ROLE OF LOVING-KINDNESS IN PROMOTING MORAL CONDUCT

“Those who are skilled in the meaning of scripture should practice as follows to realize the state of peace.” With this invocation, the *Mettā Sutta* delineates a path toward inner serenity and ethical refinement, guiding practitioners in the cultivation of profound benevolence.¹² The discourse emphasizes that loving-kindness (*mettā*) is not merely an emotional state but an active ethical principle that informs moral conduct and spiritual discipline.

Within the framework of Buddhist ethics, *mettā* serves as a foundational force that nurtures compassionate action, wholesome thought, and the sincere intention to alleviate suffering. When cultivated diligently, this boundless goodwill fosters an environment in which virtuous deeds naturally flourish

⁸ S.Galmangoda (2022): 55.

⁹ Sujato, B. (2018): 179.

¹⁰ Nhat Tu, Thich., Thich Duc, Thien (2019): 304.

¹¹ Bodhi, B. (1994): 97.

¹² Bodhi, B. (2017): 157.

while harmful actions are restrained. In this way, the *Mettā Sutta* presents loving-kindness as both a moral obligation and a transformative practice— one that not only refines individual character but also contributes to collective harmony and global well-being.

The *Mettā Sutta* offers a pathway for behavior guided by loving-kindness, highlighting qualities such as being “able and honest,” “very honest,” “gentle and humble,” and “not conflicting with family members.” These attributes reflect a deep commitment to a moral life, one that seeks to promote the well-being of others.¹³ By cultivating loving-kindness, individuals do not merely follow moral teachings; they embody the spirit of these teachings, consistently acting with compassion and kindness in every interaction and situation.¹⁴ “Those who are skilled in the meaning of scripture should practice as follows to realize the state of peace.”¹⁵

The *Mettā Sutta* articulates a set of fundamental virtues that are essential for both moral integrity and spiritual cultivation. These qualities, deeply embedded within Buddhist ethical thought, serve as guiding principles for practitioners seeking to cultivate inner peace and harmonious relationships with others. However, their significance extends beyond Buddhist practice, resonating with universal moral values found across diverse religious, philosophical, and humanistic traditions. By emphasizing virtues such as patience, humility, honesty, and an unwavering commitment to non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), the *Mettā Sutta* offers an accessible yet profound framework for ethical living. It encourages individuals to embody a spirit of goodwill that transcends personal biases and divisions, fostering an inclusive and compassionate way of engaging with the world. As a transformative moral guide, the teachings within the *Mettā Sutta* provide a foundation for social harmony, encouraging not only personal spiritual growth but also a collective movement toward a more just and empathetic society.

Honesty (*sacca*) is a core component of Buddhist moral conduct. The *Mettā Sutta* stresses the value of being “able and honest,” highlighting the critical role of truthfulness in building trust and integrity within relationships. Honesty allows individuals to confront their weaknesses, reflect on their actions, and improve upon them, which is crucial for personal and spiritual growth. By embodying honesty, practitioners contribute to a transparent and trusting environment, which is foundational to communal well-being.¹⁶ Gentleness (*mudū*) and humility (*nivato*) are central to the *Mettā Sutta*’s teachings.¹⁷ Practitioners are encouraged to be “gentle and humble,” which involves refraining from harshness, aggression, and arrogance in speech and action. Gentleness fosters understanding and compassion, while humility

¹³ Gunaratana, H. (2017): 98.

¹⁴ S.Galmangoda (2022): 02.

¹⁵ Khuddaka Nikāya 1 (2021): 21.

¹⁶ S.Galmangoda (2022): 45.

¹⁷ L.Cooper (2023): 163.

involves recognizing one's limitations and respecting others. Together, these qualities help maintain harmony and respect within communities, making them indispensable for social cohesion and personal peace.

Contentment (*santutṭhi*) is emphasized in the *Mettā Sutta*, where practitioners are encouraged to be "free from dissatisfaction and burdens." The Buddha taught that true wealth lies in contentment, which is achieved by reducing cravings and attachments. Contentment fosters a peaceful mind, which is essential for concentration and wisdom. It also diminishes harmful behaviors driven by dissatisfaction and desire, promoting a more balanced and harmonious life. Mindfulness (*sati*) is a cornerstone of Buddhist practice, encompassing continuous awareness of one's thoughts, actions, emotions, and environment. In the *Mettā Sutta*, mindfulness supports the cultivation of loving-kindness by ensuring that one's thoughts and actions are intentional and aligned with ethical principles. Practicing mindfulness enhances concentration, ensuring that actions are grounded in compassion and guided by wisdom. It is an essential tool for maintaining ethical conduct and preventing harmful behavior, as it encourages practitioners to remain present and conscious of the effects of their actions. For anyone who has difficulty feeling loving kindness, mindfulness can be the first step, creating a firm bridge between heart and mind.¹⁸

IV. THE CONCEPT OF LOVING-KINDNESS (*METTĀ*) IN BUDDHISM

Loving-kindness (*mettā*) stands as a cornerstone of Buddhist ethics, embodying an unbounded, selfless love that extends to all sentient beings without distinction or expectation of reciprocity. Unlike affection that is conditioned by personal bonds, *mettā* is an altruistic force that embraces all creatures with unwavering warmth and care, fostering an inclusive, compassionate outlook on life. It is a deliberate practice of cultivating goodwill, dissolving barriers of separation, and transcending attachment to self-interest.

The Buddha's teachings emphasize *mettā* as an expansive and boundless state of being, illustrated in the *Mettā Sutta*: "Even as a mother would protect with her life her child, her only child, so too for all creatures unfold a boundless heart."¹⁹

This analogy underscores the depth of unconditional love that *mettā* entails- a love that is not confined to familial or personal attachments but is instead an all-encompassing embrace of life itself. As a transformative practice, loving-kindness nurtures inner peace, diminishes hostility, and serves as a profound means of cultivating harmony within individuals, communities, and the world at large.

The *Mettā Sutta* provides profound guidance on developing this universal love, using the metaphor of a mother's boundless love for her child to illustrate the depth and intensity of loving-kindness. This metaphor encourages practitioners to cultivate a heart that is free from attachment and partiality

¹⁸ Johnson, David C. (2018): 234.

¹⁹ Bodhi, B. (2017): 159.

and to extend love and compassion to all living beings equally. Such boundless compassion is a powerful force that fosters peace, unity, and spiritual growth, both individually and within the broader community. Loving-kindness, as embodied in the *Mettā Sutta*, is not only a meditative practice but also a way of life.²⁰ By continually extending *mettā* to all beings, practitioners can create a ripple effect of compassion and moral conduct, influencing the world around them. Through this cultivation of loving-kindness, individuals move closer to realizing the ultimate goal of Buddhism, inner peace and spiritual enlightenment, while simultaneously contributing to the collective well-being of society.²¹

V. SECULAR CONTEXTS: UNIVERSAL CONSIDERATION AND EMPATHY

Within secular and humanitarian philosophies, loving-kindness transcends religious boundaries to emerge as a universal principle of ethical consideration and empathy. As a foundational element in the cultivation of harmonious societies, it fosters a deep awareness of the intrinsic dignity and interdependence of all beings. This perspective underscores the moral responsibility to not only recognize but also actively alleviate suffering, irrespective of an individual's background, socio-economic status, or belief system. In secular contexts, the application of loving-kindness translates into ethical frameworks that prioritize inclusivity, justice, and the well-being of all members of society. It calls for compassionate engagement in policymaking, social initiatives, and interpersonal relationships, ensuring that empathy is not merely an abstract ideal but a guiding force in addressing systemic inequities. By integrating loving-kindness into humanitarian efforts, individuals and institutions alike can contribute to a world where ethical responsibility is informed by an unwavering commitment to the collective welfare of humanity.

Humanitarianism, a broad movement grounded in human welfare and dignity, places significant emphasis on kindness, support, and the alleviation of global suffering. Humanitarian efforts are driven by the belief that every individual deserves respect, care, and compassion. Loving-kindness, in this framework, becomes a call to action, urging individuals and organizations to work towards addressing inequalities, promoting peace, and providing aid to those in need without discrimination or prejudice.²² Philosophies like utilitarianism and deontological ethics integrate concepts that align closely with the Buddhist principles of loving-kindness. Utilitarianism emphasizes the promotion of the greatest good for the greatest number, advocating for actions that increase overall happiness and well-being. In this context, loving-kindness becomes a practical tool for maximizing happiness and minimizing harm in society.²³ It encourages individuals to act with compassion, considering the

²⁰ Harvey, P. (2000): 41.

²¹ Nhat Tu, Thich., Thich Duc, Thien (2019): 24.

²² Gunaratana, H. (2017): 3.

²³ B. Sujato (2006): 265.

needs and well-being of others in every decision.

Deontological ethics, on the other hand, emphasize moral duties and principles. It stresses the importance of adhering to rules that protect the rights and dignity of individuals. From this perspective, loving-kindness serves as a moral principle that commands respect, kindness, and empathy for others, regardless of the outcome. By acting with loving-kindness, individuals fulfill their ethical responsibilities to one another, ensuring that their actions reflect a commitment to respect, fairness, and care.²⁴

VI. THE ROLE OF LOVING-KINDNESS IN PROMOTING GLOBAL EMPATHY

When understood as a principle of universal consideration, *mettā* (loving-kindness) serves as a profound ethical foundation for cultivating empathy, urging individuals to recognize and connect with the suffering of others. Rooted in the Buddhist understanding of interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), *mettā* fosters an awareness that the suffering of one is inherently linked to the suffering of all. This realization can serve as a moral imperative, inspiring collective action aimed at addressing pressing global challenges such as poverty, systemic inequality, conflict, and injustice. In secular contexts, the embodiment of loving-kindness translates into the development of policies and institutional frameworks that prioritize human welfare, dignity, and the protection of fundamental rights. By integrating *mettā* into public discourse, societies can move toward governance models that are not only effective but also deeply humane, ensuring that compassion informs decision-making at every level.²⁵

Moreover, the application of loving-kindness in secular contexts extends beyond outward action, inviting individuals into a process of self-reflection and ethical introspection. Engaging in *mettā-bhāvanā* (the cultivation of loving-kindness) allows individuals to examine their own biases, prejudices, and unconscious conditioning, fostering a heightened sense of self-awareness. This internal transformation is a prerequisite for meaningful social change, as it enables individuals to actively deconstruct harmful narratives and engage in constructive dialogue that bridges divisions across cultural, political, and ideological lines.

By nurturing empathy and compassion as guiding principles, individuals become better equipped to navigate the complexities of modern society and contribute to collaborative efforts in resolving systemic injustices. The cultivation of *mettā* thus serves not only as a means of personal ethical refinement but also as a transformative force that can shape more inclusive, equitable, and harmonious communities. Through this integration of personal and collective well-being, loving-kindness emerges as a powerful tool for societal progress, fostering a world where interconnectedness is honored through compassionate action.

²⁴ Bodhi, B. (2016): 95

²⁵ Keown, D., Prebish, C. S. (2015): 89 - 92.

VII. INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS ON LOVING-KINDNESS

Loving kindness, as a concept, is not exclusive to Buddhism or religious traditions alone; it resonates across various secular and religious ideologies. Whether through the lens of humanitarianism, ethics, or spirituality, the message of loving-kindness remains the same: to transcend self-centeredness, embrace the welfare of others, and promote peace, equity, and understanding. This universal principle connects diverse systems of thought, creating a shared ethical foundation upon which both secular and religious societies can build.²⁶ By integrating the practices of loving-kindness in both personal and collective spheres, societies can foster greater understanding, unity, and social well-being. The Buddhist tradition's emphasis on *mettā* complements and aligns with these secular ethical systems, providing a framework for cultivating compassion that can transcend individual differences and work towards the greater good.

VIII. APPLICATIONS OF *METTĀ* IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

In modern society, the practice of loving-kindness (*mettā*) offers powerful solutions for a wide range of social, personal, and global challenges. Its applicability spans mental health, conflict resolution, social justice, and humanitarian work, providing a holistic approach to enhancing individual and collective well-being.²⁷

Loving-kindness has increasingly been recognized in psychological and therapeutic contexts as a tool for improving mental health. Research indicates that the regular practice of *mettā* meditation can significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, contributing to enhanced emotional resilience and overall psychological well-being. By fostering a mindset centered on compassion and care for others and oneself, *mettā* practice helps individuals develop a more positive outlook on life. This, in turn, supports mental clarity, emotional stability, and improved interpersonal relationships. As such, loving-kindness serves as a transformative practice for building emotional health, enhancing self-compassion, and fostering healthy relationships, all of which are essential for thriving in today's fast-paced, often challenging world.

In conflict resolution and peace-building efforts, *mettā* provides a powerful framework for addressing deep-rooted animosities and misunderstandings. When individuals or groups practice loving-kindness, they cultivate a mindset that values mutual respect, understanding, and goodwill, essential for effective dialogue and reconciliation. *Mettā* encourages individuals to view even adversaries with compassion, recognizing their shared humanity and common desires for peace and happiness. In practical terms, *mettā*-based approaches to conflict resolution promote non-violent communication, empathy, and the willingness to listen, creating the conditions for collaborative

²⁶ Ibid: 87.

²⁷ Nanamoli Thera (1994): 07.

problem-solving.²⁸ Internationally, the practice of Loving-Kindness has been incorporated into peace-building programs aimed at bridging divides between opposing parties, reducing hostility, and fostering reconciliation in areas affected by conflict.

Loving kindness serves as an ethical foundation for social justice and humanitarian efforts. The values of equality, compassion, and altruism inherent in *mettā* align with the core principles of human rights and social justice. In a world marked by growing inequalities, *mettā* practice encourages individuals and organizations to advocate for the fair treatment of all people, regardless of their social, cultural, or economic background. *Mettā's* emphasis on non-harm and the alleviation of suffering drives efforts to address systemic issues such as poverty, discrimination, and exploitation²⁹. Humanitarian organizations around the world adopt *mettā-inspired* values in their missions, striving to bring dignity, respect, and care to marginalized populations. Through *mettā*, individuals are empowered to engage in compassionate activism, promote equality, and contribute to a more just and inclusive society.³⁰

Mettā's principles are increasingly being applied in the corporate world and in leadership training to foster workplace environments based on respect, kindness, and emotional intelligence. Leaders who embody *mettā* principles are more likely to cultivate a culture of cooperation, trust, and accountability within their organizations. By promoting loving-kindness in leadership, organizations can improve employee morale, increase job satisfaction, and encourage collaboration. Leaders who practice empathy and compassion tend to make decisions that prioritize the well-being of their employees and the greater good of society. This approach to leadership emphasizes the importance of ethical business practices and corporate responsibility, aligning organizational goals with social and environmental impact.³¹

Mettā plays a significant role in contemporary education, particularly in promoting emotional intelligence, empathy, and social skills in children and adolescents. Schools and educational programs that incorporate loving-kindness training help students develop empathy and compassion for others, which are essential for fostering inclusive and supportive learning environments. *Mettā* encourages students to engage in positive, caring interactions, reducing bullying and fostering a sense of community. Teachers who practice loving-kindness are better equipped to model and teach these values, helping students grow into empathetic, ethical, and socially responsible individuals.

On a global scale, the integration of *mettā* (loving-kindness) into public health initiatives has the potential to revolutionize approaches to both mental and physical well-being. Rooted in the Buddhist understanding of interconnectedness (*paṭiccaṣamuppāda*), *mettā* fosters an ethical framework

²⁸ Ibid: 13.

²⁹ Gunaratana, H. (2017): 112.

³⁰ Nhat Tu, Thich., Thich Duc, Thien (2019): 387.

³¹ S. Galmangoda (2022): 03.

that encourages healthcare professionals to approach their patients with genuine compassion and deep empathy. This shift in medical ethics and patient care can lead to improved health outcomes, greater trust in healthcare systems, and the cultivation of a more humane and holistic medical practice.³² Beyond individual patient interactions, public health campaigns that emphasize *mettā* can contribute to destigmatizing mental health conditions, encouraging preventive healthcare, and fostering a shared sense of responsibility for collective well-being.

The relevance of *mettā* extends beyond personal health to global challenges such as pandemics, climate change, and humanitarian crises. In a world increasingly shaped by displacement, socio-political conflicts, and ecological disasters, the practice of loving-kindness can serve as a guiding principle for international cooperation and collective healing. By approaching global issues with a spirit of *karuṇā* (compassion) and *mettā-bhāvanā* (the cultivation of loving-kindness), societies can foster resilience, mutual support, and ethical leadership in times of crisis.

Furthermore, *mettā* is not confined to human relationships but extends to all sentient beings and the natural world. In the realm of environmental sustainability, loving-kindness calls for an ethical stewardship (*dharmic responsibility*) toward ecosystems, urging humanity to cultivate respect and care for all forms of life. A compassionate perspective on environmental ethics necessitates the protection of endangered species, the responsible management of natural resources, and the adoption of sustainable practices that align with the principle of non-harm (*ahiṃsā*). By perceiving the earth not as an object to be exploited but as a living, interdependent system worthy of reverence, individuals and institutions alike can be inspired to take meaningful action in addressing ecological crises. The cultivation of *mettā* in environmental advocacy thus serves as a moral compass, guiding humanity toward a more harmonious and sustainable relationship with nature.³³

IX. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the teachings of the *Mettā Sutta* on ethical conduct, mindfulness, and loving-kindness, shedding light on their profound significance in Buddhist practice and their universal relevance across cultural, religious, and secular contexts. At the heart of the *Mettā Sutta* is the cultivation of loving-kindness as a foundational principle for ethical behavior and spiritual development. It emphasizes that by embodying loving-kindness, individuals can foster compassion, harmony, and well-being in both personal and collective spheres of life. This cultivation is not only about personal growth but also about contributing to the greater good, enabling individuals to navigate life with wisdom, compassion, and equanimity.

³² Nhat Tu, Thich., Thich Duc, Thien (2019): 342.

³³ Nanamoli Thera (1994): 30.

The *Mettā Sutta* outlines essential qualities honesty, gentleness, humility, and contentment- that form the basis of ethical conduct and positive social interactions. These virtues are pivotal in creating a peaceful environment, whether in intimate relationships or in broader societal contexts. By practicing these qualities, individuals promote a culture of mutual respect, care, and understanding. Additionally, the role of mindfulness in aligning one's actions with loving-kindness is paramount. Mindfulness ensures that one's thoughts, words, and deeds reflect the intention to cultivate compassion and avoid harm, making it an indispensable tool in the practice of loving-kindness.

The universal relevance of loving-kindness extends beyond Buddhist teachings to other religious and philosophical traditions. In Christianity, Islam, and secular humanism, similar values of love, compassion, and care for others are central tenets. This alignment reflects the universality of the principle of loving-kindness in promoting ethical conduct and peace, irrespective of religious affiliation. The study of loving-kindness in the *Mettā Sutta* shows its capacity to bridge diverse belief systems and contribute to resolving global challenges, such as social inequalities, conflict, and environmental degradation.

In contemporary settings, the application of loving-kindness transcends individual practice to encompass social justice, mental health, education, conflict resolution, and even corporate leadership. In each of these contexts, the qualities embodied in the *Mettā Sutta* can help transform attitudes and behaviors, fostering environments where compassion, empathy, and collaboration thrive. By embracing these principles, we can address issues such as discrimination, injustice, and emotional distress with a compassionate and solution-oriented mindset.

The teachings of the *Mettā Sutta* offer a timeless framework for personal transformation and societal progress. The cultivation of loving-kindness provides a profound pathway to creating a compassionate world. As individuals integrate these teachings into their daily lives, both on a personal and professional level, they contribute to the creation of a more harmonious, equitable, and compassionate society. In this way, the practice of loving-kindness is not only a spiritual discipline but a powerful force for positive change in the world. Through the cultivation of loving kindness, we move closer to the vision of a world where all beings, regardless of their background, experience the benefits of peace, compassion, and mutual respect.

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THE BUDDHA AS A PEACE MAKER PAR EXCELLENCE

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Abstract:

The Buddha's biography could be considered as one of the world's greatest historical personalities reported and recorded in the history of human civilization, owing to several reasons. On one hand, the Buddha is not a created concept or a mythology; a real personality existed historically and acted in an ideal manner as an example for other humans, showing the highest culmination of human existence. On the other hand, the historical Buddha in the sub-continent of India during the sixth century B.C.E played a crucial role as a peace maker par excellence by providing some important strategies to make peace and harmony through individual and social morality. Even the dominant Indian Hindu tradition believes that the Buddha was a form of Shiva reincarnated in this world with the greatest compassion towards animals who were sacrificed in cruel ways, leading to an imbalanced and conflictual natural environment. Thus, the birth of the Buddha in the Indian context marked a significant milestone in the history by promoting peace and harmony in areas of the individual, social, and natural contexts. The internal peace leads to social peace and peace with nature, as the mental actions function dominantly according to Buddhist teachings. Buddha's contribution to peace on different levels based on a critical as well as a rational analysis. For instance, the Buddhist peace moral precepts are undeniable in any social background and circumstance as productive peace ideas. Thus, the micro peace theory in Buddhism, egalitarian ideas, concepts of otherness, social duties, universality concepts, etc., can be identified as Buddhist strategies that can be eternally implemented for peace and harmony. The Buddha, by providing a new paradigm for all in the universe to exist together as interconnected beings, was able to show the nature of a strong theory of peace, which could lead to peace and harmony as the ideal situation. From these, the present paper expects to explore the Buddha as a peacemaker and his teachings on peace, which can be

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utilized to solve the present-day problems related to war, conflict, violence, and disharmony.

Keywords: *Peace, harmony, conflict, paradigm, violence, moral.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of peace is one of the central teachings of Buddhism, and consequently, its founder, the Buddha, is regarded as a peaceful religious teacher. Buddhism predominantly has philosophical concerns rather than religious aspects. Thus, the Buddhist teachings and practices have been identified as a renowned religion in the world. At the same time, Buddhist teachings had been viewed from Philosophical viewpoints and standards. This nature of Buddhism encompasses the perfectness and eternality of Buddhist doctrines applicable to any given social, geographical, and environmental conditions. However, at a largely understood level, Buddhism is a religion of peace as perceived by both insiders as well as outsiders, unanimously due to enriched teachings related to the concept of peace in Buddhist teachings. Though there are exceptions, which can be provided as contradictions, they would have occurred due to problems of implementation and practice. Buddhism is commended mainly for its moral and spiritual doctrines of loving-kindness and compassion for all living beings. This universal tendency and attitude will become more relevant in the future as there is a threat of special war in the form of astronomical science and technology. Buddhist moral principles centered on the peace of all. As a fundamental concept, the idea of peace is originally rooted in the word “*santhi*,” which meant tranquility or peace.¹ Consequently, the Buddha is designated as the ‘king of tranquility’² because of his ideal character and personality traits. The goal of the Buddhist path is to attain the perfect inner peace through individual effort, and it is reckoned as the ultimate happiness.³ The practice of a moral life from the Buddhist perspective leads to a harmonious life not only with one’s relative human beings but also with all sentient beings, plus nature. At the outset, then, we can identify the Buddhist universal perspective on peace and harmony. Fundamentally, Buddhism expects to include everyone on the path, though due to the diversity of humanity, it is impractical to be implemented in the social context.

Buddhism is globally recognized and academically studied as a religion of peace owing to its profound teachings of eternality. At the primary level, according to the teachings of Buddhism, the responsibility of the individual to control their mental behavior through proper means is essential. One has to overcome three basic unwholesome roots: hatred, greed, and delusion.⁴ Hatred can be identified as the adversary of loving kindness and compassion towards

¹ Turner, Gregory and Vesselin (2009): 87.

² Santiraga.

³ Summum bonum in Buddhism.

⁴ Lobha, Dosa and Moha respectively in Pali, See Kalama Sutta in the Anguttara Nikaya.

others. Greed, on the other hand, can be the basic enemy of generosity, which is an important moral standard in peace morality. Then, delusion can hinder human cognition in many ways and distort reality.

As a distinguished characteristic in Buddhism, spirituality plays an essential part in both secular and profane contexts. Then, peace begins in the minds of persons at the level of individuality. This might be termed as inner peace. This very important inner peace may lead to what we call the social or global peace. No one can live happily with others if there is no inner tranquility. Even in the social context, peace begins at the micro level contrast to what is termed as the global peace. This idea of peace, as reflected in the Buddhist social philosophy, can be established as the Buddhist micro peace theory.⁵ Buddhist meditational practices, such as loving kindness and mindfulness, can also have moral outcomes of nonviolence responses, which would be effective at the social level.

In the present global scenario, one of the challenging issues is to establish a peaceful, harmonious, and integrated environment, as many of the present-day scholars argue. On one hand, to establish global peace might be an impractical and idealistic situation similar to the idea of utopia. On the other hand, such a view would be regarded as a pessimistic idea claiming that the goal of making global peace may lead to the most peaceful situation in nature. As opposed to the idea of global peace, one may build an argument on the nature of humanity, showing that the violence, aggression, conflict, etc., are natural tendencies. These debates prove that there is a dialectical process in the peace-making and building process. The goal of having global peace might be optimistic and ambitious. Yet, the peace-making process should be initiated to achieve world peace. Here, the idea of global peace is termed as macro-peace in contrast to micro-peace. This dichotomy is established based on the Buddhist teachings of peace and harmony. According to Buddhism, peace begins first in the mind of the individual, which can be identified as internal peace. When it comes to the social level of peace, there should be at least two persons to talk about outer peace. What is theorized here as the theory of micro-peace is derived from this unique peace concept found in the Buddhist literature. If the peace-making path is a process, it begins at the micro level in society. For instance, in the family as the smallest unit or the institution of society, the first and foremost thing is to establish peace among family members. This cannot be regarded as an impractical or utopian idea, as Buddhist teachings prove, it is probable through performing duties of morality. Buddhist social principles established based on social morality represent the norms of the ethical theory termed as 'deontology'.⁶ Buddhism emphasizes the value of performing duties towards others in society. Here, the individual has to play many roles in social relationships, such as parents, children, teachers, friends, politicians, employers, etc. After identifying

⁵ The best paradigm for the theory of micro-peace can be found in the Sigalovada Sutta of Digha Nikaya

⁶ Kantian ethical theory.

the role, it is up to the individual to play his or her role by fulfilling all types of duties. In the Buddhist context, no reference has been given to rights. Rights are considered privileges gained by doing duties.

According to Buddhist analysis of peace philosophically, using the theory of Dependent Origination,⁷ it is clear that peace causes peaceful and healthy human relationships and a harmonious society. Thereafter, it all connects with nature as an interconnected phenomenon. Human beings are a social species, as accepted by almost all social philosophers, including the Buddha. A human is born as a biological being, and in the process of socialization, s/he becomes a social being. Then s/he joins with others for security, pleasure, and happiness. While the latter comes under secondary or social needs, the former belongs to the biological or primary needs according to social psychologists such as Maslow and Fromm. How does this process happen? Since birth, everyone grows up in a family setup. In a family consisting of mother, father, and maybe brothers and sisters, everyone is exposed to the nuclear family, which is the smallest unit of the social institution. S/he has, in some way or the other, been influenced by the members of the family. This primary socialization is far more important in developing the individual personality, self-concept, and identity, etc. In the next level of socialization, the individual meets teachers and other students at the school. This is the beginning of the secondary, which lays the foundation for becoming a social member. During his/her course of existence, s/he join small or large groups of society, leaving their influence on, or being influenced by them. In this way, no one is an isolated islander like the mythical person Robinson Crusoe.

One's life becomes worthy in the social context only. Yet, associations and intimacies do not always provide security, pleasure, and joy; but confusions, upsets, and conflicts are also bound to arise. Thus, it is mandatory to learn how to live harmoniously and happily among fellows and the environment. Positive religious and ethical teachings of Buddhism provide this art of living with wise reflection, understanding, toleration, and responsibilities. If one just lives following instinctive nature and impulsion, it would lead to many conflicts and suffering within each individual, among other individuals, and society.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS OF THE BUDDHA

The theory that is the best paradigm to study the impact of environmental peace on the existence of beings, according to Buddhism, is none other than the Causality Principle or the Dependent Origination theory. The interconnectedness of all phenomena in the universe has been a philosophical inquiry from the beginning of human thought, i.e., to say when humans changed their perspectives differentiated from other beings, as evolutionists argue. However, this argument is also under the threat of controversy and criticism not only from religions but also from modern social thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For them, the primordial society consisted of a collection of human beings that was all good and calm without

⁷ Patīccasamuppāda in Pali.

any conflict.⁸ This is ally with the Buddha's view on the primordial society as explained in the *Agganna Sutta*, which speaks of the origin and evolution of the universe and society from a broader perspective.⁹ Anyhow, when we focus on the Buddha's doctrine on the interdependency of varied things in the world, one must use the dependent co-origination theory as a fundamental axiom. According to these teachings, nothing can be separated as independently existent things, as they all are causally interrelated and interconnected.

In explaining the evolution of the world and society in the *Agganna Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya*, the Buddha relates the fact that the moral degeneration of humans causes the degradation of the environment, and vice versa. The primordial beings were spontaneous beings with some extraordinary qualities. They were self-luminous, subsisting on joy, endowed with the ability to move in the skies, and were sexually undifferentiated, as the sutta explains. Yet all these qualities began to vanish gradually due to a primary change that occurred in the mind. As the earth was covered over with a honey-flavored butter-like creamy substance, these beings were attracted and fascinated. That was the origin of what we call the craving for taste. The entrance of craving in the form of taste paved the way for the decline of super qualities. Gradually, they ate solid and material things, and their physical bodies grew. Thus, the deterioration of mind and nature in peace was mutually begun, and this fact should be understood from the theory of Dependent Origination. When this substance was eaten in greater quantities, mental states also deteriorated with more and more greed. This moral degradation of humans had its effect on the external environment too. Those who were handsome became proud and conceited, and they looked down upon the others, and this attitude gave rise to further adverse effects on their personalities and the food resources in the external environment. Sexual differences manifested themselves in these beings, and spontaneous birth was substituted by sexual reproduction. In this way, the primordial simple society became much more complex and complicated. The fertility of the soil diminished, and self-growing rice became extinct.¹⁰

Though the Buddha rejects one thing as a reality, i.e., the monist view on reality, he did not analyze things as independent things. Then reality is identical with nature.¹¹ Even the Buddha is a part of this nature, and this fact has been profoundly enumerated in the Mahayana tradition. Taking the whole universe as a field of innumerable Buddhas, it has clearly emphasized the identity theory of everything. This gives a broad view of the universality and nature. On one hand, its moral implication is highly influential. Then harming nature is a harm done to this sacred Buddha nature. On the other hand, this sacredness is contained in everything. As a result of this cognition, a duty and an obligation towards nature are thoroughly emphasized. The Mahayanist

⁸ Buddhism perceives the primordial society from an optimistic way.

⁹ *Digha Nikaya*;27

¹⁰ *Digha Nikaya*;27

¹¹ Buddhism applies both analytical and synthetic methods to explain the reality.

idea would be taken as a neo-interpretation of the early Buddhist theory of Dependent Origination.

The interdependency between the Buddha and nature had been clearly explained using numerous numbers of myths in the Mahayana tradition. For instance, to be a Buddha, a Bodhisattva must fulfill perfections. To practice moral qualities such as giving or compassion, contributions are necessary. To give something, there should be a receiver. Thus, if someone meets a beggar, one's perception would be a Bodhisattva coming to help you to perform the perfection of giving.¹² A Buddha or a Bodhisattva depends on the nature, as this full enlightenment is considered a state of complete knowledge of the nature. Even in Theravada tradition, this ultimate knowledge is termed as the seeing of knowledge as things they are. This '*Yatha Bhutha*' is synonymous with the reality of everything, which includes the environmental factors too. This same knowledge is elucidated as the Vipassana knowledge in the path of meditation. That is to realize that everything is subject to the three characteristics of existence, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-substantiality. When looking at the biography of the Gautama Buddha, his enlightenment is a product of his nature.

Traditionally, we know the historical Buddha's three most important events took place in ecological contexts. The birth under a Sal tree, the enlightenment under a Bo-tree, and the passing away under a Sal tree were remarkable incidents. These were not only trees, but also, they were in the woods. Natural environments had been used even by other disciples of the Buddha as abodes of spiritual development. The best instances are found in Thera Theri Gatha, where both male and female enlightened ones enjoyed their spirituality at its best when they were in forestry areas. When there was a dispute between two factions in the Sangha order, the Buddha left for a wood named Parileyya for rest. In the present scenario, there is a huge demand for what we call eco-tourism in the field of tourism. A healthy environment with pure and clean water, air, space, and natural sound can cure both physical and psychological illnesses, as modern research has proved. In such experiences, sometimes people get a kind of deep insight into nature. Most importantly, health in terms of physical or mental health can be achieved in an environmental context, such as a monastery. The Buddha also encouraged establishing abodes in wooded areas with natural experiences. Nature can help to develop spirituality through places for meditation. Thus, spiritual health is also a product of a peaceful environment.¹³

As an Eastern or Indian religious tradition, Buddhism shows a method that is a unique one to unite the whole universe into one humanity. This has been metaphorically explained using the concept of love in a mother. Mother's love is a depiction of the universality of love, as explained in Buddhist Literature. Popularly known as the *Metta Sutta* explains the relevance of loving-kindness in the social context.

¹² A society with qualities of Bodhisattvas would be idealistic in many senses.

¹³ Thera-theri gatha of the Khuddaka Nikaya.

“As a mother loves her child,
 An only child,
 With love that knows no limit,
 Spreading wide,
 Measureless and immense”¹⁴

This quotation clearly shows that through spirituality, one can include the whole universe within oneself. This is done by the individual using the power of the mind. Love is the emotion used here as the method to invite all into the existence of the whole. In modern terminology, this can be identified as the method of inclusivism. If one can perceive others as parts of oneself, then no one will harm others. Thus, there are many ethical implications in the theory of inclusivism.

III. THE BIRTH OF THE BUDDHA AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE PHILOSOPHY

The birth of the Buddha in the Indian context in the century of sixth century B.C.E was a significant milestone from many angles. Many historians, as well as experts in religions, have noted these facts over the years. However, there has been little attention towards the Buddha's contribution to peace and harmony. When we examine the life of the Buddha, it is quite evident that he had played the role of a peacemaker from birth itself. In other words, it can be affirmed that the role and the task of the Buddha were to establish peace in all respects due to misreadings and perspectives on the nature of humanity and nature preached by other orthodox and unorthodox religious and philosophical teachers. For instance, following the teachings of Vedic-Brahmanical traditions, the public as well as rulers were forced to do sacrificial rituals on a larger scale.¹⁵ Though initially the sacrifice was introduced as a very simple method of showing gratitude to nature at the domestic level, later, Brahmins theorized it as a very complex religious ritual. Then, the peace in many respects was challenged and lost. For instance, humans' peace with nature deteriorated as the balance set up in the environment was challenged by the huge sacrifices performed by people at the instruction of Brahmins. One of the main criticisms of the Buddha was to condemn and prove the futile nature of sacrifice. Due to his intervention, almost everyone understood the futility of sacrificial rituals and stopped doing them. Then the peace with nature was restored, and the sustainability was affirmed. Even the Hindu tradition also assimilated the Buddha into one of the forms of Vishnu, claiming that through the compassion of the Buddha lives of many animals were saved and the natural order was reestablished. It was the time that the non-violent morality entered the Hindu tradition, and the cow became a sacred animal. Not only that non-vegetarian became a practice in Hindu tradition.

¹⁴ Karaniya Metta Sutta of the Samyuktha Nikaya.

¹⁵ The Buddha replaced yaga (sacrifice) by dana (giving).

IV. BUDDHA'S ROLE AS A PEACEMAKER

There had been several conflicts during the Buddha's time, and his attention was paid only to a few of them, which were relevant to his life. Others were mainly social and political, and beyond his context. In the event of the battle between the *Sakyan and Koliyan* Kingdoms, as mentioned in the Buddhist Literature, the Buddha used his *upaya*¹⁶ to prevent a brutal clash. After the reconciliation, the Buddha further explained the misery of war and violence. The idea of *veramani* that abstaining or refraining became a mandatory policy in Buddhist morality to avoid humans' violent drive, which is believed to be an intrinsic desire. Yet, such desires, which are not conducive to human well-being, have to be eradicated, as the Buddha showed.

One of the Buddha's closely associated friend-kings was King *Pasenadi Kosala*, whose feedbacks were admired by the Buddha at many events. In a war, when he was defeated by his nephew, the aggressive rival king *Ajatasattu*, the Buddha said an eternal truth concerning war and violence.

"Jayan veran pasawati - Dukkhan seti parajito

*Upasanto sukhanseti - Hitva jaya parajayan"*¹⁷

"The victory breeds enmity; the defeated one lives in misery. The peaceful one sleeps at ease, having abandoned victory and defeat."

Thus, aggression is discouraged in Buddhism as an immoral behaviour. Anyway, the Buddha never directly criticized or was involved in warfare because it was a secular activity beyond the control of Buddhism. Buddhist teachings were presented as reflections of the contemporary incidents that happened at that time. However, Buddhist reflections on war and violence had been utilized even then kings and rulers for their virtuous governments.

The Buddha's main concern was the peace and harmony within the Buddhist order as an ideal form of social structure. There were occasions of conflict within Buddha's monastic community. Once, there was a conflict between two factions in the order, and the Buddha used his skill-in-means in resolving such disputes without any major collapse in the community.

The Buddha had clearly shown the danger of violence in a society. This very famous verse is an example to prove it.

"Nahi verena verani - Sammantidakudachanan

*Averenacha sammanti - Esadhammo sanantano"*¹⁸

"Hatred at no time does cease through hatred, hatred ceases only through the negation of hatred."

This norm of peace is an eternal truth and can be implemented as a fundamental morality in peace peace-building process.

Establishment of Sangha community as the ideal peaceful society

¹⁶ Skill in-means

¹⁷ Dhammapada, 201 verse.

¹⁸ Dhammapada, 5 verse.

For Buddhists, the *Sangha* community is the ideal society, and for centuries, lay Buddhists have been influenced by norms, morals, customs, and behaviors about the teachings of the Buddha. As Buddhism accepts the diversity of persons based on differences in the influence of *Kamma*,¹⁹ each one may experience peace differently. An ideal society is, therefore, a pragmatic one. A Buddhist ideal harmonious society cannot be granted as a utopian idea. Morality is always in practice. It is a blissful and wishful thing to expect a society in which everyone is happy.

The Buddha once provided four events that can bring happiness to all. There seem to be four factors that constitute real happiness and bring happiness to the whole society. This proves the social impact of the lifestyle of the Buddhist order.

Birth of a Buddha

To hear the Dharma

The unity and harmony of the Sangha community.

The meditation of those united monks²⁰

The key term here is *samagga* in Pali. It had been defined as being in unity, conformity, and generality; the state of a monk. Once in the *Dhammacetiya Sutta*, King Pasenadi of Kosala honestly appreciates the peaceful co-existence of the Bhikkhu community as he experienced with other social institutions as follows.

Again, venerable sir, kings quarrel with kings, nobles with nobles, brahmins with brahmins, householders with householders; mother quarrels with child, child with mother, father with child, child with father; brother quarrels with brother, brother with sister, sister with brother, friend with friend. But here I see bhikkhus living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes. I do not see any other assembly elsewhere with such concord. This, too, venerable sir, is why I infer according to Dhamma about the Blessed One: 'The Blessed One is fully enlightened, the Dhamma is well proclaimed by the Blessed One, the Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is practicing the good way.'²¹

The Sangha community is incomparable in this sense as they are living in utmost peace and harmony. To live without disputes and in concord, the members of the Sangha practice some simple yet powerful characteristics. They are living as blended like water and milk. This is a unique type of metaphor found in Buddhism concerning the Sangha community and their peaceful existence. Thus, they are not separable that easily. They appreciate each other genuinely and constantly. The appreciation of the other is a significant aspect of social harmony. The other behavior among the members of the Sangha is the

¹⁹ The Buddhist theory of morality.

²⁰ Dhammapada, 194 verse.

²¹ Maha-dukkhakkhandha Sutta of the Digha Nikaya as quoted from the <https://www.suttas.com/> on 22.12.2025

perspective on each other. That also depends on kindness and mutual respect. We know the importance of eye contact in keeping fruitful social relationships. However, the eye contact is more expressive with empathy when it is full of kindness and compassion. The eye is talkative and it can express a lot that may consume thousands of words. If members can look at each other with pleasing eyes, then the well-being is established. This attitude is none other than friendship, which is highly admired in Buddhism.

The Buddha considered friendship a vital relationship in peace and harmony. He expected that all members of the order would live without disputes. Loving kindness is the moral quality of friendship. Envelopes much more than mere love. *Metta* means the nature of a friendship that is to show true care and share. As mentioned in early scriptures, once Ven. Ananda asked about the value of friendship. He said that “half of the dispensation is based on friendship, companionship, and association with the good.” Then the Buddha said, “Do not say so”. “Not half, but man’s entire life is established on friendship, companionship and association with the good.”²² Thus, it is clear that the foundational factor of the Buddhist order is friendship, which is a morality derived through *metta* or lovingkindness. Elsewhere, the Buddha asked about the happy living of Buddhist monks. Then Ven. *Anuruddha* said, “We have diverse bodies but assuredly only one mind.” This is another instance to prove the uniformity that appeared in the Sangha community since its inception.²³

This quotation, on the other hand, is important as a reflection of the social background with several disputes and quarrels among members of diverse social institutions such as the family and religion. Thus, it can be assumed that it was difficult to preach a doctrine like Buddhism, which places a thorough emphasis on unity and concord. According to Buddhist teachings, it can be implied that some of the key characteristics of a peaceful and harmonious society are. These might be idealistic, yet are practical and eternal.

V. CONCLUSION

From the above evidence, it can be implied that the Buddha was a peace maker par excellence due to his leadership, personality, exemplarity, skill in means, and philosophical and logical defending. When Buddha’s teachings are analyzed, it is evident that the Buddha and his message are oriented towards peace and harmony from a multi-dimensional analysis.

The peace from the Buddhist perspective can be multi-dimensional based on the context as follows.

Physical peace, which had been emphasized mainly in *Vinaya*

Mental peace, especially mentioned in suttas such as *Salleka*, *Madupinndika* etc.,

Social peace, for instance *Singalovada sutta*

Spiritual peace can be found in suttas like *Sathipattana*, *Sabbasawa*

²² Upaddha Sutta in the Samyutta Nikaya.

²³ Culagosinga Sutta in Majjima Nikaya.

Environmental peace had been explained in suttas such as *Agganna*, *Kutadanta*, and *Chakkavatti*

From a modern perspective, these types of peace ideas are considered interrelated and mutually beneficial instances. Thus, what has been approved to have a complete form of health. Pure water, clean air and healthy protection, food security, social security, shelter, and clothes, etc., are some of the basic requirements that measure the quality of life in the discussion of the concept of well-being. On the other hand, in the field of conflict resolution, it is highly recognized that the peace of society and human relationships with many aspects are vital.

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THE EPIC OF KING GESAR OF LING AS A CROSS-CULTURAL AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARY UNIFIER

Amalia Rubin*

Abstract:

The Epic of King Gesar of Ling is generally associated with Tibetan Buddhists, in particular, followers of the Nyingma and Kagyu schools within the Tibetan plateau area. However, this generally Buddhist epic in its many forms is shared across numerous ethnic groups, countries, and followers of various religions. The Gesar Epic is expressed through numerous cultural practices, ranging far beyond poetic writing and recitation. It is in all this variation that we see how the Gesar Epic and its cultural practices bring together the many types of people who engage with it.

In this paper, I will focus on different Gesar practices in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham, in particular within the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai, People's Republic of China. I will examine these practices as an exemplification of the global phenomenon of Gesar Culture acting to unite different groups. By examining different religious practices, traditional activities, popular culture, and location-based participation, this paper will demonstrate how strong cultural heritage can act to override differences and encourage cultural and communal cooperation and camaraderie. I argue that this Buddhist intangible heritage can be seen as a paradigm for greater discussions of how to foster unity within heterogeneous groups and cooperation in intercultural and international settings.

Keywords: *Gesar epic, cultural unity, Tibetan tradition, bardic practice, cross-cultural heritage.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the epic of King Gesar of Ling¹ གྲིང་རྩེ་གཉེན་རྒྱལ་པོའི་སྐད་ཀྱི་, alleged to be the longest epic poem in the world (Jabb, 2022: 265), has influenced Tibet and the surrounding region. Versions of the epic are performed in Mongolia, regions of Russia, across the Tibetan Plateau, and in the broader Himalayan region from Pakistan to Bhutan. Across these countries and regions where Buddhism, Shamanism, and Islam are practiced, the epic has taken on local flavors and traditions. Yet despite the variance, the core of the Gesar Story and its traditions act as a unifying force.

Among all of these regions and traditions, the epic is especially popular in the Eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau that Tibetans call Kham ཁམས་ and Amdo ཨ་མདོ་, most notably the regions of Dege རྟེན་གྲོ་, Nangchen རྒྱང་ཆེན་, Yushu ཡུལ་ལྷུས་²,

¹ I have chosen to use phonetics, with Tibetan script alongside the first usage, for all Tibetan words and names. Being that Wylie relies on knowledge of the Tibetan script, I would rather use the script along with a phonetic option for those unfamiliar with the Tibetan alphabet. I recognize that these phonetics are not universal to all Tibetan dialects. For the phonetics I have maintained any standard English spellings: for example, “Ling” is the widely accepted spelling of the kingdom, even though throughout eastern Tibetan dialects, it is pronounced “Leng.” Aside from this, I have chosen to use an anglicized version of the Yushu ཡུ་ཤུ་ dialect pronunciation. I have chosen this pronunciation for two main reasons.

The first is that it is the dialect that I am most comfortable with and had the most discussions about Gesar in. As such, I am familiar with the pronunciation. Yushu is a very central point for much Gesar work.

Secondly, while there is no universally intelligible dialect of Tibetan (to the point that these 'dialects' are arguably 'languages'), for Gesar traditions in eastern Tibet, Yushu dialect is one of the most intelligible. The Northern Kham dialect, used in Yushu, maintains a pronunciation that is very much in the middle between Amdo and Kham. In my experience, travelling throughout the region, the Yushu dialect is understood in further southern Kham regions, such as Dege and Chamdo, and also further north into Amdo regions, such as Golok. As such, while not being universal, these pronunciations are quite recognizable across virtually all of the regions of Eastern Tibet that hold strong Gesar Traditions.

I have simplified and anglicized the pronunciation. I have done this because I assume that any Tibetan speakers will use the Tibetan script as their basis of pronunciation. Therefore, these phonetics exist solely for those who do not read, and presumably speak, Tibetan. As such, I have slightly simplified pronunciations to make them easier for the English reader. For example, I have phonetized གཡལ་སངས་ཀྱི་འཇམ་དུང་རྒྱལ་པོ་ཞེས་ as “Ga Jyalo Sengjam Drukmo” rather than the more accurate-to-Yushu-dialect “Garjyalo Sengjam Drukmo”, for the simplicity of English speakers.

My goal in doing so is to make it so that a non-Tibetan speaker will be able to discuss these characters and place names in a manner that will be understood by as many people as possible and will make the discussion of Gesar accessible to those who are interested but do not yet speak Tibetan.

In the case of citations, I will use Wylie as, at time of writing, this is the predominant format.

Lastly, I recognize that there is no perfect solution for Tibetan phonetics in a way that makes it both accessible to non-Tibetan speakers and representative of Tibetan sounds. Therefore, I ask the readers patience with my efforts.

² There are several spellings of Yushu in Tibetan with ཡུ་ཤུ་ and ཡུ་ཤུ་ being the most common. As the former is closer to the Tibetan and the second seems to be adapted from the

and Golok མགོ་ལོག་ where its influence pervades everyday life.

In these regions, those who can recite the epic are revered, whether the *yig drung* ཡིག་རྒྱུང་, bardic singers of the epic who read it aloud from texts (hopefully with a beautiful melody), or the *bab drung* འབབ་རྒྱུང་ bards who are said to be divinely inspired and recite it in trance (FitzHerbert, 2010. David-Neél, 1934. Dryland, 2022. Yang, 2022.) Bookstores have shelves full of different episodes of the epic, and bardic reciters are broadcast on state television. Beyond the textual tradition, locals will also tell you of exact moments of the epic that happened “right here.” People may even bring their prize horses to places where Gesar’s horse, Jyangö རྟང་རྩོད་, was allegedly tied to his hitch post to bless and inspire them before a race. Families pass on Tibetan cultural values and traditional knowledge through the epic, which manages to instruct readers and listeners in the details of ritual, nomadic life, and even identification and use of medicinal herbs. People model their behavior on their favorite heroes and heroines. Men, it is said, should be like Gesar, women like his wife Drukmo འབྲུག་མོ་, and horses like his excellent horse (Coleman, 2014).

With its importance to Tibetan life, the epic has also been the focus of a fair amount of scholarship. Tibetan scholars like Chodpa Dhondrup and Lama Jabb look at the poetic tradition, both historically and how it has changed in a modern context, and Western scholars analyze it compared to other grand epics (FitzHerbert, 2010; Fedotov, 1994). And yet, to those for whom Gesar is a role model, a hero, or a Dharma King, his tales not only form the structure of a literary and oral storytelling tradition, but also an active mandala³ in which people can participate.

Temples feature Gesar as a *yidam* ཡི་དམ་, or tutelary deity, and perform a series of esoteric and exoteric practices ranging from incense offerings that are open to the public to entire practice cycles containing preliminaries through completion stage tantras⁴, accessible only to the most devoted initiates. He is worshipped in temples atop buildings in major cities and hidden retreat houses on mountainsides inaccessible by road.

In this paper, I will explore the tradition of the eastern Tibetan region of Kham as a paradigm of Gesar traditions as a model of unity in the greater world. In Kham, one can see a great breadth of traditions ranging from very traditional to very modern, and different spectrums of religiosity and secularism. As such, Kham acts as a microcosm of the diversity of Gesar traditions globally and a model for Gesar as a diversified tradition that acts as a unifier among different communities and perspectives.

Chinese Pinyin, I have chosen to use the former.

³ Buddhist universe in which a deity or Buddha is the centre.

⁴ The traditional order of Tibetan deity practices is preliminary practices རྒྱུང་འགོ་, which is an accumulation of basic practices such as prostration and mandala offering, generation stage རྩམས་ཆེན་ in which one learns to meditate upon their tutelary deity, and completion stage རྩམས་ཆེན་ tantras in which one ideally transforms the deity meditation into a meditation on ultimate reality. All stages past the preliminary are esoteric and not permitted to be further described to non-initiates.

II. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO GESAR

The epic of Gesar is embraced by numerous cultures across more than half a dozen countries, including China, Mongolia, Russia, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and India. Although in some regions it has a strong national identity, generally it is a case of cultural bonds beyond borders (UNESCO, 2009). In the Himalayan regions, it is generally connected by a Tibetan identity, whether Tibetan, Balti, Bhutanese, or one of the many other cultures in the region. In Mongolic regions of China, Mongolia, Russia, and pockets of Central Asia, Gesar is held across Mongolic cultures, including the Tu/ Monguor, Khalkha, Kalmyk, Tuvan, and Buryat, to name a few (Gcod pa don grub, 2013: 128-133).

Across all these regions and cultures, there are a few universal traditions. These include bardic recitation, “Trance-Inspired” bardic recitation, songs, and dramatic reenactment. Furthermore, in all of these regions, Gesar has a general cultural impact, with people talking about heroic young men being like Gesar, beautiful young women being like his queen, and strong horses being like his steed. (Coleman, 2014. David-Neel, 1934.)

Although details differ by region, the Epic of King Gesar of Ling tells the story of King Gesar (1038 - 1119⁵) and his conquests for the sake of his people and most often for the sake of religion. A few central chapters exist across different forms of the epic: a superhuman conception and birth, attaining the throne and the hand of his queen via a horse race, the kidnapping of his wife by an evil force, and the Hor Ling battle, to name a few. (David-Neel, 1934. Francke, 1905. Dryland, 2014., Zhou and Jambian, 2013. Wallace, 1991.)

Most forms of the epic are Buddhist, regardless of whether they are recited in Buddhist communities. While some scholars, such as Syed Muhammad Abba Kazmi, assert the Balti epic has no Buddhist aspects to it (Kazmi, 2013). This is contradicted in the versions collected by Dr. Estelle Dryland, wherein lamas and other Buddhist religious leaders and Buddhist aspects are throughout both the Stak and Sundus versions of the Balti epic (Dryland, 2013: Loc. 104). The epic maintains popularity, even with chapters recorded and shared in the Balti dialect on Facebook and YouTube, despite the region’s strong Shi’a Islamic beliefs (Unfaithful Wife, 2020 གེ་སར་རྒྱལ་པོ་, Kesar Rgyal Po, 2016).

Likewise, the Mongolic versions take on a stronger shamanic bent, rather than the Buddhist emphasis. However, by and large, the majority of versions of the epic, even in regions that do not primarily practice Buddhism, maintain at least some Buddhist aspects, and Gesar is, to an extent, a king acting in service of the Buddha Dharma.

III. YUSHU TIBETAN AUTONOMOUS PREFECTURE

Given the great breadth of the topic of Gesar, in this paper I will concentrate regionally on the Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, or Yushu TAP, located in the far southwestern corner of China’s northwestern Qinghai

⁵. Estimated dates according to Tibetan annals. See the works of Ju Mipham Gyatso and Yel Pa Wa for more information.

Province, and part of the Tibetan cultural region of Kham ཁམས་. Qinghai province itself makes up approximately one-third of the Tibetan plateau. The southern tip of the province is part of the Tibetan cultural region of Kham, and most of the remaining area of the province is part of the Tibetan cultural region of Amdo, with a few pockets of Mongolian culture. Within Yushu TAP are six districts, all of which are part of Kham. In the southeast is Yushu Metropolitan District, containing Yushu City, popularly known in Tibetan as Jyeku རྩེ་ཁུ་ or Jyekundo རྩེ་ཁུ་མཛད་, and in the far south is Nangqian ནང་ཆེན་ district, also often spelt Nangqen or Nangchen⁶. A few notable locations in this region, which will be discussed further, are the Gesar Palace Hotel, the King Gesar Hotel, and Jang Tana Monastery.

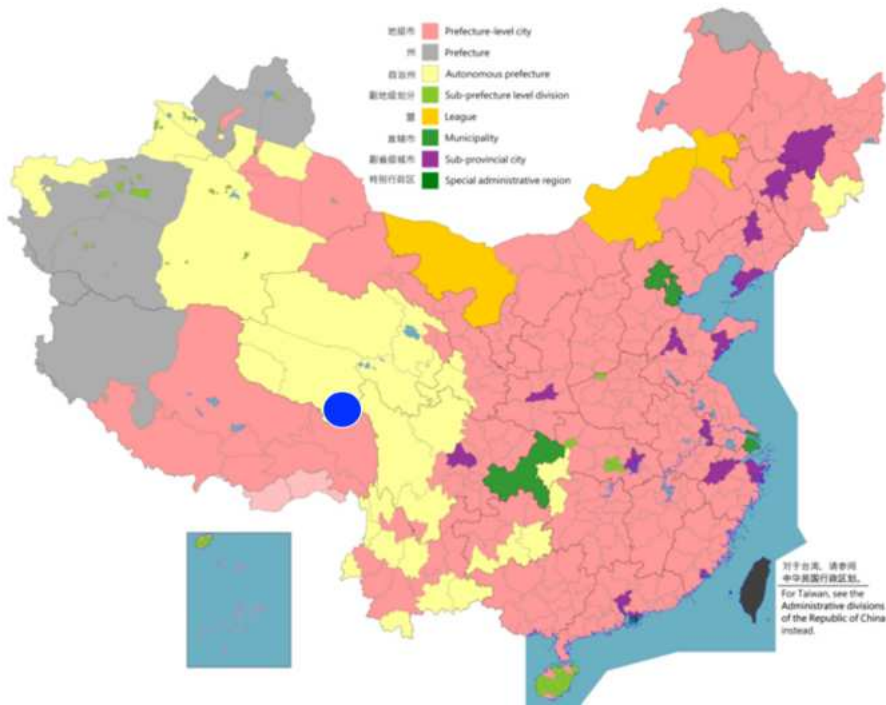


Figure 1: Map of China. The blue circle indicates the primary region discussed. (Wikimedia Commons. Edited by Amalia Rubin)

Nangchen, the southernmost county in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, is about 3 hours by road from Jyekundo. From there, to reach Jang Tana Monastery is another five hours, much of which is on unpaved roads.

Both the Gesar Palace Hotel and the King Gesar Hotel are located in Yushu City, the central city of Yushu Metropolitan District. It is the fourth largest

⁶ Due to the difference between Pinyin and English phonetic systems for Tibetan names, as well as local cultural names versus official names, locations often have multiple names or spellings.

city in Qinghai Province with a population of approximately 122,000. More than 90% of the population is Tibetan, either from Yushu or the surrounding Khampa⁷ cultural area. The remaining population is primarily Hui and Han. The majority religion is Buddhism, comprising virtually all the Tibetans, followed by a significant minority of Muslims, mostly Hui, who have a mosque in Yushu City. Within its Buddhist population, the region is very diverse, hosting monasteries of all four major sects of Tibetan Buddhism⁸, with the majority of the population following either the Sakya or Kagyu schools. The city of Jyeku has been a trade hub for centuries and was a stop along the “Tea Horse Road”⁹.

Almost all of the architecture in Yushu City is new, due to an earthquake that struck the region in 2010, killing thousands and destroying 90% of the buildings. The large Gesar statue in the center of Yushu City square survived the earthquake, earning it additional respect and a semi-legendary status.



Figure 2: Statue of King Gesar in the center of Yushu City.

Photo by Amalia Rubin

To the south of Yushu Metropolitan District is Nangqian County. It has a population of 101,000 and its capital is Xangda (Shomda, ཤོམ་དག་ in Tibetan). Shomda is located 170 km from Yushu city. Nearly 100% of the population is Tibetan and practices Buddhism, with most of the Nangqian practitioners following the Kagyu school. Tana monastery is only around 80 kilometers, as the crow flies, from Shomda. Despite the short distance, steep mountains and winding

⁷ Khampa ཁམ་པ་ refers to the people of Kham and sometimes the culture of the region as well.

⁸ A fifth smaller sect, Jonang, does not have a presence in the region.

⁹ 茶马道 chamadao or ཇ་མ་དག་ལ་ ཇ་མ་དག་ལ་ jatinalam, also known as “The Southern Silk Road” was a major trade route traversing from Shaanxi, China into Nepal and India from approximately the late 6th century to the 20th century.

roads make for a 160-kilometer journey, taking around 5 hours in an SUV.

IV. GESAR IN YUSHU TAP

Gesar has exerted a great cultural influence across the Tibetan plateau. This was bolstered in 2009 by China's successful petition to have the Epic of King Gesar of Ling inscribed by UNESCO on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity¹⁰. In Eastern Tibet, it has had an especially strong impact: multiple *tulku* (recognized incarnations) of figures in the Gesar epic have been recognized and certified both religiously and governmentally; numerous locations throughout Sichuan and Qinghai associated with the Gesar epic have received official governmental recognition of their significance, and research is broadly promoted including the presence of a large government funded Gesar Studies office in Yushu City.

The Gesar Palace Hotel is the largest hotel and one of the largest single buildings in Yushu City. It is located at the intersection of two major streets: Gesar Temple Lane, *Gesalakang Xiang* 格萨拉康巷, and Drukmo Street 珠母路 (named after King Gesar and his wife Sengjam Drukmo respectively), surrounded by major shopping centers, government offices, and banks. It is only 300 meters from the central market and 500 meters from the Gesar Square. The King Gesar Hotel is slightly smaller and located approximately one kilometer away on another major road.

The largest hotel in Yushu City is the Gesar Palace Hotel, founded in 2013. The hotel is popular amongst local Tibetans, domestic tourists, and foreigners alike. It is decorated with re-patriated Tibetan antiques and modern Gesar-inspired Tibetan art. In summer, the hotel hosts hundreds of guests, as well as special events like weddings. However, in the winter, it is largely empty aside from local Tibetan businessmen. The hotel owner, Adrak 阿拉克, comes from a family devoted to Jang Tana monastery. In 2018, he converted the majority of the top floor into a satellite temple for Jang Tana Monastery. It was formally granted the name of Tana Gesar Gonkhang, རྒྱ་རྩེ་གེ་སར་མགོན་ཁང་ (The Tana Gesar Protector Hall), and Atra sponsors at least two lamas to reside full-time in apartments attached to the temple.

The hotel is not only a central landmark in Yushu, but also serves to host many events and as one of 3 major wedding venues in the city. Furthermore, the hotel hosts numerous Gesar-related projects, such as an expo of Gesar artifacts from Jang Tana Monastery, performances of bards, and Gesar book releases.

A major religio-geographical center of Gesar Vajrayana practice is the aforementioned Jang Tana monastery in the Nangchen region of Kham. As the last active Yelpha Kagyu¹¹ ཡེལ་པ་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་ monastery in Tibet, Tana holds as a

¹⁰ "Intangible Cultural Heritage-Gesar Epic Tradition." UNESCO Culture Sector. UNESCO, n.d. Web. <<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?RL=00204>>.

¹¹ The Kagyu བཀའ་རྒྱུད་ school of Tibetan Buddhism, is one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It is further split into four larger and eight smaller Kagyu subschools. The

mark of pride that one of their prime Ngagpa ལྷགས་པ་,¹² Lang Amnye Jangchub Drenkol ལྷང་མཁའ་ལྷོ་ལྷ་མཚན་པ་ (968-1076) is held to be King Gesar's root teacher (Tibetan: Tsawe Lama རྩ་བའི་ལྷ་མ་¹³). As such, their temple considers itself, and is widely considered in Kham, to be the authentic holder of the Gesar tradition. Jang Tana has numerous shrines to different aspects of Gesar, and most notably, artifacts and the Stupas of the Thirty Heroes¹⁴.

Jang Tana contains areas for men and women, celibate monastics and ngakpas. On the mountainside are also small cabins for retreatants, ranging from short-term to lifelong. In general, roughly 50 - 60 male practitioners and 40-50 female practitioners live at the monastic complex at any given time, although during important events the population can rise to over 500. At the base of the mountain is a small guesthouse, the only nearby guest facility. It is famed for its natural hot springs and is popular among locals and pilgrims alike. The hotel is managed by Tana Monastery, and the proceeds go to the ongoing maintenance of the Monastery.

Many of the popularly researched aspects of the Gesar tradition, such as the trance bards and the practice texts, are connected to both locations. Famed bard Dawa Drakpa ལྷ་བ་གྲགས་པ་ had childhood memories of a past life as a monk at Tana (Coleman, 2014). He and other bards are invited frequently to recite at conferences hosted by the Gesar Palace Hotel and, more recently, the King Gesar Hotel. Many of the key Gesar practice texts are held at Jang Tana, and the recreation of the Gesar Serbum, གསེར་འབྲུག་ (texts in golden writing), has been sponsored and hosted by the Gesar Palace Hotel.

V. GESAR AND BUDDHISM

Although religion is a popular area of study within Tibetan studies, there is little consensus on universal Tibetan or English terminology about “religion” and “secular” in the Tibetan cultural sphere. In the context of greater modern Tibetan society, under the People's Republic of China's governance, and with encouragement from official levels, Tibetans have been formulating new ways to understand what “secular” means in a Tibetan context (Gayley and Willock, 2016: 14-17). In addition to changes in such philosophical understanding, rapid modernization has caused physical changes in how people engage in religious practice. As a result of this and numerous other causes, there is no consensus on the Tibetan terminology for “Religious” and “Secular,” and the current terminology does not perfectly fit with the English language ideas. However, for the sake of this discussion, I will go by the general Western idea

Yelpa is one of the smaller subschools. For more information see “The Great Kagyu Masters: The Golden Lineage Treasury”, translated by Khenpo Könchog Gyaltsen

¹² ལྷགས་པ་ “Ngakpa, Mantrika. Tantrika. A person who has received empowerment, continues the Sadhana practice, and keeps the commitments.” (Rangjung Yeshe Dictionary). Ordained non-celibate tantrikas. Female ལྷགས་མ་ ngakma. more information, please see the works of Nicolas Sihle and Ben Joffe.

¹³ “Root teacher” (Rangjung Yeshe Dictionary), one's primary teacher.

¹⁴ King Gesar's primary generals and companions on his conquests.

of secular as being not overtly within the sphere of clerical influence.

As yet, the earliest recorded religious Gesar text is attributed to the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi ཀརྨ་པཌྱི་ (1204/6 – 1283) and is a smoke offering text entitled སེང་ཆེན་ལྷེ་བུ་དྲོན་གྲུབ་ལ་བསང་མཚན་འབུལ་ཚུལ་ལགས་སོ། *sengchen jyebu dondrup la sang chö bul tsul la so*, “How to make a smoke offering to the all-accomplishing great being, the great lion” (Karma Pakshi, 2022: 5). This implies that as little as one to two centuries after the end of Gesar’s alleged reign, religious texts in devotion to him were already being published by major Buddhist figures.

In a formal religious context, Gesar forms the basis for a series of Vajrayana practices within the Dzogchen and Mahamudra traditions¹⁵. One major religious author of the Gesar liturgies was Ju Mipham Rinpoche. Ju Mipham Rinpoche འབྲུ་མི་པམ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། (1846-1912), also called Mipham Gyatso or Kunkhyen Mipham, was a scholar of the non-sectarian movement and a གདེར་སྟོན་ *terton*¹⁶. His cycle of Gesar texts is among the most popular and includes texts ranging from public smoke offerings, to secret tantric practices to the ལྷ་དྲོ་བླ་མ་དེ་ཆེན་རྣམས་། *Lingdro Dechen Rolmo*, a collection of sacred dances and songs performed as a moving tantric meditation. Prime among the popular practice texts is his Guru Yoga text entitled རིག་པ་འབྱུར་མེད་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ལྷེ་བུ་ཆེན་པོའི་སྒྲ་མཉམ་རྒྱལ་འབྱོར་རྒྱལ་མཁུར་འཇག་ཅེས་བྲུ་བ་བཞགས་སོ། *rigpa jyumre yeshe jyi jyewu chenpö lame nanjor lam nyur juk che ja wa shuk so*, “A Method for Quickly Entering the Stream of Blessings of the Guru Yoga of Gesar, Who Is the Unchanging Wisdom of Awareness.” (Ju Mipham Gyatso Rinpoche, 1994.) According to many of the Gesar religious texts and practices, including those of Ju Mipham Rinpoche (Ju Mipham, 1994) and others, Gesar is a direct emanation of Padmasambhava (C. 8th Century) (Tibetan: Guru Rinpoche གུ་རུ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།¹⁷). All of the major figures of the epic are also manifestations or emanations of major Buddhist deities or Bodhisattvas: Sengjam Drugmo as Tara, Trothung as Hayagriva/Red Tamdrin, and so forth (Rdo rje tshe ring and Gao Ning, 1998).

Another tradition promoted by Mipham was the Lingdro Dechen Rolmo, or the tantric dances of Ling. Within these dances, the dancers dressed as heroes and heroines of Ling visualize themselves as enlightened beings in a Buddha field and dance in a form of movement meditation (Drolma, 2012: 43)

After the development of the Lingdro, its propagation split into two streams. The first was put forth by Reting Rinpoche (1912 - 1947) in Lhasa. This tradition was further carried by Reting Dropon Norsang (1906 - 1987) to South India in the 1950s and has remained a popular tradition among exile-

¹⁵ Dzogchen རྫོགས་ཆེན་ “Great Perfection” and Mahamudra (Tib. བུག་ཆེན་ *chakchen*) “Great Seal” are the highest essential teachings of the Nyingma and Kagyu schools respectively.

¹⁶ “Treasure-finder, treasure revealer” (Rangjung Yeshe Dictionary.) An individual who allegedly reveals the teachings hidden by Padmasambhava so that they would be shared with humanity at the appropriate time. For more information on Tertön and གདེར་སྟོན་ (treasure teachings), please see the works of Oriane Lavolé, and Robert Mayer.

¹⁷ Although the Sanskrit ‘Padmasambhava’ directly translates to the Tibetan as པདྨ་འབྱུང་གནས་ Pema Jungne, literally in both “lotus born”, he is primarily known by Tibetans as “Guru Rinpoche” literally “precious teacher”.

born Tibetans (Drolma, 2012: 39). It is also practiced by students of the Gesar Terton, Namkha Drime Rinpoche (b.1938), both in his seat in South India and his seat in Nepal. This version is notable for slow, highly curated movements, a slow melody, and often monastic musical accompaniment.

A second version, based on the same Lingdro by Mipham, was propagated by Khenchen Jigme Phuntsok (1933-2004) at Serta Larung Gar in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This version relied upon the same visualizations and sacred language, but with more secular and modern eastern Tibetan style melodies and dance movements (Tshul-khrims, 2009). This latter form is more popular in Kham today and is also practiced in Bhutan, especially at Larung Chodeypung monastery in Bumthang, which is a spiritual branch of Larung Gar.

VI. BARDIC TRADITION

According to the Tibetan tradition, different kinds of bards or ལྷ་བ་ are differentiated according to both how they learn to recite and the content of their recitation. The primary forms are:

-བབས་ལྷ་-Babdrung: Literally “Falling Epic” or “Falling bards.” The term *bab* here is the same term used regarding shamans, where it is said that ལྷ་བ་ Lhabab, or the deity “falls” into them. Likewise, the epic is said to come spontaneously in a trance state into the bards. (Gcod pa don grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་གྲགས།, 2013: 30).

-གཏེར་ལྷ་-Terdrung: Literally “Treasure epic” or “Treasure bards.” *Ter*, as in *terma*, refers to the secret treasure teachings allegedly hidden by Guru Padmasambhava to be revealed at a time when people were ready to receive their particular teachings. In the case of Terdrung, these are usually either physical termas, such as hidden books of texts, or mental termas, which are spontaneously received teachings in the mind of the recipient. (Gcod pa don grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་གྲགས།, 2013: 33).

-བྲ་ལྷ་-dradrung: Literally “Mirror divination epic” or “Mirror divination bards.” Unlike babdrung or Terdrung who receive generally visions or information in their mind directly, dradrung gaze into, generally, a mirror, where they “see” the epic and recite what they see in a semi trance state induced by mirror gazing (Gcod pa don grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་གྲགས།, 2013: 36). Although it is referred to as “mirror gazing” divination, may will also gaze at their fingernails or even a blank sheet of paper (David-Neel, 1934: 23).

-བསྐབས་ལྷ་-Labdrung: Literally “Speech epic” or “speech bards”. This refers to people who, at a young age, began studying the epic, and they are instructed by having it recited to them chapter by chapter so that they can learn it. Often this is accompanied by reading the text in the case of literate labdrung (Gcod pa don grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་གྲགས།, 2013: 38).

-ཐོས་ལྷ་-Thödrung: Literally “Listening epic” or “Listening bards.” This category is especially notable among the illiterate population of non-trance or non-divinely-inspired bards, whereby a person simply hears the epic and memorizes via listening, a feat deemed remarkable (Gcod pa don grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་གྲགས།, 2013: 39).

-བཞུད་ལྷ་-Jyüdrung: Literally “Lineage Epic” or “Lineage Bard.” These bards

come from family lines of bards going back multiple generations. They are generally split into two categories. The first has received the epic orally, and the second via writing. In both cases, they learn it in line with their family lineage and instruction. (Gcod pa don grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་གྲུབ།, 2013: 43).

Terdrung, Dradrung, and Babdrung are viewed as divinely inspired. While the others are generally viewed as more normal accomplishments of learning, even if highly unusual and admirable.

As of writing, in Yushu alone, there are currently 16 registered living bards, most of whom are babdrung, and over fifty registered bards in Kham as a whole. Two notable bards among them are Dawa Drakpa ལྷ་བ་གྲགས་པ། and Tenpa Gyaltsen བསྟན་པ་རྒྱལ་མཚན།, a babdrung and dradrung respectively.

Dawa Drakpa, born in Dzatoe in 1972, came from a family devoted to Gesar for many generations, but without any drungpa. As a child, he was an illiterate nomad and herder. At the age of approximately 14, he fell asleep on a mountainside and had a vision wherein he met an old monk who offered him knowledge of the language of the animals or knowledge of the Gesar epic. Choosing the latter, he received the ability to tell the epic of Gesar (Gcod pa don grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་གྲུབ།, 2013: 311). Initially, he struggled to maintain the trance that would allow him to recite without stopping, but he went to visit the 17th Karmapa at Tsurphu (Coleman, 2014), who opened his channels, and since then, he has been able to recite without pause. In 2014, he was the subject of the documentary “A Gesar Bard’s Tale: གེ་ས་རྒྱལ་པའི་རྒྱལ་”, published internationally, which told his story.

Tenpa Gyaltsen is one of the rare Dradrung in Kham. Born in 1973 in Baltang དཔལ་ཐང་ to a family without literate members or any history of bards, at the age of 8, he had an unusual dream. In the dream, he was approached by a grand warrior astride a horse. He was asked, “Do you remember your past life? Do you know who I am and my story?” It was after that he gained the ability to tell the epic. After this, he went on to learn how to read via self-study so that he could write down the epics he received, which he did until the age of 21. At 21, he was looking at a blank paper when he saw words arising upon it, and since then, he has read the epic from mirror gazing (Gcod pa don grub གཅོད་པ་དོན་གྲུབ།, 2013: 458). Although primarily he works from a mirror, he is also capable of working from a blank sheet of paper or even gazing at an open sky or fingernail¹⁸.

VII. MODERN POPULAR GESAR CULTURE

While perhaps the best researched aspects of the Gesar epic are more traditional, such as religion, textual study, and the bardic tradition, Gesar is not limited only to the traditional sphere. In Yushu, Gesar popular culture pervades life in the form of arts, music, hotels, and so forth.

The Gesar Palace Hotel and King Gesar Hotel are central landmarks in Yushu, but also serve to host many events. For example, the Gesar Palace

¹⁸ Tenpa Gyaltsen, personal communication. August, 2018.

Hotel is one of the 3 major wedding venues in the city. Furthermore, the hotel hosts numerous Gesar-related projects, such as artifact expos, performances of bards, and Gesar book releases.

In 2018, the Gesar Palace hotel hosted an expo of Gesar artifacts at the Gesar protector hall. This featured over 60 objects of important Kagyu history and primarily objects allegedly belonging to King Gesar and the 30 heroes (“གླིང་གི་རྫོག་དང་དར་ཕུ་སྐོར།” “gling gi rmok dang dar phru skor”, 2022.) The expo, initially slated for 3 days, ended up running for 15, and attracted local pilgrims and members of both local and regional government, culminating in the application (later approved) for Tana to build a museum to hold its artifacts (Yu Xuan, 2018).



Figure 3: A calligrapher hand-copies the Prajñāparamita in gold ink in the workshop atop the Gesar Palace Hotel, July 2019. Photo by Amalia Rubin

Atra also sponsors other Gesar-related projects at the hotel. One of the most notable is the Gesar Prajñāpāramitā Restoration project. A great treasure of Tana Monastery was a copy of the Prajñāparamita, hand calligraphed in gold on traditional Tibetan black paper. The bulk of this multivolume text was destroyed in a fire. (Yu Xuan, 2018)

Atra has maintained a few rooms as a workshop on the upper floors of the hotel and hired over a dozen Tibetan calligraphers from different Tibetan regions, and a traditional calligrapher as well as a pen and ink maker to head the project. He led the sponsorship of the more than half-million-dollar project, which used traditional ink made of gold leaf and resin on black, handmade paper, and with traditional wooden and cloth bindings.

Another major hotel in Yushu is the King Gesar Hotel, founded in 2022 by Asam ཨ་བསམ, a popular singer from Nangchen. This hotel likewise features a large Gesar shrine, and Asam also sponsored a Gesar protector shrine to be added to Thrangu Monastery around 15 kilometers outside of the town.

The top floor of this hotel features a Tibetan restaurant, which is also a *nangma*, or Tibetan nightclub/cabaret, with live dance and music performances. This setting, seemingly unrelated to Gesar, is adorned with masks, images, and statues of Gesar, deities, and heroes. Furthermore, large banners representing the Kingdom of Ling are brought out and waved when singers are awarded a special khata¹⁹ by the audience.

The popular music connection with Gesar is well established. A 2016 song from Amdo entitled “Alalamo” became one of the most popular hip hop songs of the 2010s and used the traditional Gesar aria introduction of “lu alalamo alalen” as a chorus (ALALAMO, 2016). In 2018, Asam published a song entitled “Ling Gesar,” which likewise became very popular. The high-budget video included custom costumes to represent the individual heroes, and they can be identified. The backgrounds and B reels feature the stupas of the 30 heroes at Tana, Gesar Bard’s such as Dawa Drakpa, and other sacred Gesar locations and people (dzam ging ge sar rgyal po, 2018). In 2021 a Khampa singer who goes by the pen name of “Alalamo” created a Gesar Devotional song called “Alalamo,” in praise of different aspects of Gesar culture and especially the singer’s hometown (which he also asserts as Gesar’s hometown) of Dege (Alalamo, 2021).

VIII. DISCUSSION: GESAR AS A UNIFYING FORCE

As illustrated above, the traditions and practices of Gesar are wide and varied. However, I argue that to consider a cultural phenomenon a ‘unifying force,’ it must have two particular features: modes of accessibility to a broad population and how said broad populations feel a sense of connection with each other. These Gesar traditions in Kham, as a microcosm of the global set of traditions as a whole, meet both of these criteria.

In terms of accessibility, there is a great variety of practices, as described above. Some, such as tantric religious practices, require a great religious commitment and initiation. Others, such as smoke offerings, are publicly available, but still self-limit to Buddhist believers. Bards are a tiny population allegedly selected by Gesar himself in the case of inspired bards, and trained through extensive work in the case of learned bards. However, anyone can listen to and enjoy the bardic songs.

Staying at either hotel is available to anyone with financial means, regardless of ethnicity, citizenship, or religious background. And attending the restaurant and nangma is even more accessible with a much lower financial threshold. With widespread internet access, popular music is accessible and available to

¹⁹ Khata ཁ་ཐ་མ་ are long scarves traditionally white and made out of silk, draped around someone’s neck as a sign of welcome or respect. In nightclubs, patrons will buy khata at different price points from the club and offer them to their favorite singers, who in turn are paid per khata.

anyone with internet access.

With regard to Gesar as a unifying force, in Kham, the Gesar tantric practices all appear, to at least some extent, within the four sects present. As previously mentioned, one of the most popular practice text series was written by the 19th-century scholar, Ju Mipham Gyatso, also a famed proponent of the *rime* རིམ་མེད། or non-sectarian movement. Although his works are generally more embraced by the Nyingma and Kagyu sects, and to a lesser extent the Sakya, some of his works have been embraced both currently and historically by the Gelug.

Likewise, the Gesar tradition is generally affiliated with Nyingma and Kagyu, especially given the traditional connection between Gesar and Guru Rinpoche. However, the Gesar tradition spans all the regional schools of Buddhism. The Lingdro, for example, was greatly promoted by Reting Rinpoche, the regent of the 14th Dalai Lama and one of the most important Gelugpa lamas of his era. Currently, one of the most famed local Gesar masters in Yushu, སྤུལ་པ་ཀ་ལྷ་དར་རྒྱལ་རྩེ་རྒྱལ་ Ngakpa Karma Dargye Dorje Tsegyal, is a practitioner of the Sakya sect. Trance bards ཚུལ་ཁྱེལ་རྒྱལ་མཚོ། Tsultrim Jyamtso, ཆེ་ཤིང་བསོད་ནམས་ Tsering Sonam, and བསོད་ནམས་རྩོམ་བྱ། Sonam Norbu, among others, follow the Gelug (Gcod pa don grub གཞི་དབང་པ་དོན་གྲུབ།, 2013).

However, both historically and contemporarily, cross-sectarian tensions have existed. Among the many bards in the Yushu area, a few come from Gelugpa towns and families. Most notably, a few come from a Gelugpa town known for practicing a subsect of Gelug known for its emphasis on sectarian purity and discouraging participation in practices of other sects. This sect is disapproved of by many others in the region and the broader Tibetan sphere, with occasional boycotts of participating regions or families (“10 vor 10”, 1998). Some proponents of such strict sectarian purity even theorized that Reting Rinpoche was supernaturally killed for his involvement in cross-sect practices. (Bell and Palden, 2023)

However, the babdrung of this sect participates fully with the other bards of Yushu. They are invited to events in other regions of Yushu and maintain friendships with other bards. They are broadly accepted as compatriots. Several bards said, with regards to the bards of the sect, that although they disapproved of their religious position, those bards were also divinely inspired and chosen by Gesar, and therefore were colleagues and friends²⁰. Their connection through Gesar far outweighed any sectarian concerns.

As mentioned before, the religious tradition is accessible not only across sects but also along different tiers of religiosity as well. Tana monastery is notable for catering not only to monks but also to monks, nuns, ngakpas, and ngakmas. The Gesar practices are also available to lay people. Many Yushu lay people practice the smoke offerings and libation offerings. Others may practice the Guru Yoga. Yet all are seen as practitioners. WeChat groups exist for people to share their accumulations of Gesar mantras, and 24-hour Gesar

²⁰ Tenpa Gyaltsen, Personal Communication, 2018.

groups pop up just for Gesar's birthday. These groups, populated by hundreds of participants, include laity, monastics, ngakpas, and everyone across the spectrum.

Likewise, for those less interested in religious participation, the arts are available and are deeply appreciated by those on the religious side. For example, the 2018 Gesar video published by Asam featured bards such as Dawa Drakpa. Tenpa Gyaltzen, meanwhile, proudly shares clips of public-school children's plays and musicals of Gesar. For them, these are valid forms of Gesar expression.

IX. CONCLUSION: GESAR AS A MODEL OF UNITY

In a divisive world, few cultural phenomena can function as a unifying factor. The traditions related to Gesar, however, span countries, cultures, religions, levels of religiosity, and secular cultural divides. In the Yushu region of Kham alone, the tradition spans across four sects of Buddhism, even uniting groups that are at great tension. It embraces participants of all ages through traditional and modern media, invites people to immerse themselves regardless of their background in hotels and restaurants, and generally creates a sense of deep cultural pride in an ancient king and kingdom.

This Buddhist-centered tale and its broad embrace may be seen as a potential model or paradigm for using regional histories and traditions to unite diverse populations. By finding a sense of pride that can be embraced by people of diverse backgrounds, differences are put aside for the greater sake of the unifying force of the tradition as a whole. By embracing different modes of participation and accessibility to numerous different groups of people and then unifying them under a greater banner of a single tradition, the Gesar tradition can provide a potential model for how cultural traditions can be used to unite disparate groups in a positive manner conducive to regional and cultural development.

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COLLABORATIVE INTERRELIGIOUS INITIATIVES FOR RECONCILIATION AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE: ALIGNED WITH THE PRINCIPLE OF YATHĀVĀDĪ-TATHĀKĀRĪ

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Abstract:

In the present-day world, there are a great number of issues associated with the ethics of conduct, violation of human rights, and social injustice, all this is further exacerbated by lack of governance. Such challenges put an individual's mental state at risk and also compromise the social stability of the already multi-cultural societies. This paper emphasizes the importance of interreligious communication and retrieves *yathāvādī-tathākārī* (acting as one speaks) as an important tool in the promotion of peace and mediation. It calls for creating a constituency of faith leaders, scholars and practitioners, policy makers, and agencies at all levels to enhance understanding and address the root causes of hostilities. It is worth implementing some practices and fostering dialogue through this initiative to back up tolerance, counter hate speech and discrimination, and, in effect, support the attainment of durable peace. The paper explores a number of comprehensive strategies allowing effective implementation of the dialogue, specifying objectives in reconciliation. Also, it focuses in more detail on education and social activism about reinforcing these dialogues being non-violent, inclusive, diverse, and understanding based on the need for integration of the diverse groups within society. This research, through practical applications and concrete illustrations, demonstrates the efficacy of discourse as a solution to conflict and the enhancement of mutual appreciation. Finally, this research endeavors an effective inter-religious outreach as a strategy towards the envisioning of a better world.

Keywords: *Interreligious collaboration, reconciliation, peace, yathāvādī-tathākārī.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly pluralistic and globalized world,¹ the ramifications of ethical violations, pervasive gender discrimination,² and grave human rights abuses³ have become overtly evident. Social discrimination and exploitation, compounded by the inequitable distribution of resources,⁴ have led to a marked deterioration of both mental health and social stability.

The growing inequality in wealth and opportunities, often exacerbated by mismanagement and ineffective governance, poses serious threats to the psychosocial foundations necessary for harmonious coexistence in today's diverse societies. In this context, interreligious dialogue emerges as a crucial tool for developing mutual understanding and overcoming entrenched prejudices. When executed effectively, interreligious dialogue can significantly foster peace and reconciliation among diverse religious communities worldwide.

For these dialogues to be effective and yield positive outcomes, they must be anchored in the principle of *yathāvādī-tathākārī* - acting in accordance with one's spoken commitments while earnestly seeking to understand the practical implications of this principle within interreligious dialogues focused on peace and reconciliation.

The universal theme of *yathāvādī-tathākārī*,⁵ which underscores the alignment of speech and action, is a cornerstone of Buddhist ethical teachings and is celebrated across many religious traditions. This principle highlights integrity, truthfulness, and the reliability of individuals, especially in the context of interreligious dialogue, where the credibility of participants is essential for meaningful exchange. Religious leaders, whether lay or ordained, alongside influential figures from various disciplines, are ideally positioned to lead these dialogues. By embodying the principles of *yathāvādī-tathākārī* in their interactions, they can significantly influence the outcomes of these dialogues, creating an environment of trust and respect that fosters peace and reconciliation.

This paper investigates the practical application of *yathāvādī-tathākārī* in interreligious dialogue. Through an analysis of this principle amid contemporary challenges, the research aims to identify strategies that enhance the efficacy of interreligious dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding. It advocates for a concerted effort among religious authorities, scholars, policymakers, and various stakeholders to effectively implement this principle. Such collaboration, rooted in the ethical foundations of *yathāvādī-tathākārī*, has

¹ Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, USA, p. 5 - 15.

² World Economic Forum (2023), <https://www.weforum.org/meetings/world-economic-forum-annual-meeting-2023/>

³ Amnesty International (2023), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/5670/2023/en/>

⁴ Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, UK, p. 150 - 200.

⁵ DN 19. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. Walshe, Maurice, (2012). Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 302.

the potential to address the core origins of conflicts while nurturing a more harmonious societal structure.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As the *Lokāvabodha Sutta* reveals, “Monks, whatever way the Tathāgata speaks, that is exactly the way the Tathāgata acts. Whatever way the Tathāgata acts, that is exactly the way the Tathāgata speaks. In this way, the Tathāgata acts as he speaks and speaks as he acts. Therefore, he is called the Tathāgata.”⁶

The principle of *yathāvādī-tathākārī*, or “acting as speaking,” is a fundamental element of Buddhist ethical teachings. It is intricately linked to the ethical framework that emphasizes the alignment of an individual’s words, thoughts, and actions. Early Buddhist texts, such as the *Sāleyyaka sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*⁷ *Mahāgovinda sutta*⁸ and *Pāsādika sutta*⁹ of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, convey implications that a disconnect between speech and action not only undermines individual credibility but also disrupts societal harmony. It is implied how Right Speech (*vammā vācā*) is connected to Right Action (*sammā kammanta*), underlining the importance of consistency between one’s words and actions to maintain ethical integrity. It emphasizes that speech and conduct should not contradict each other and must align to be considered truly virtuous. The *Cundakammāraputta Sutta* focuses on Right Speech in the broader context of ethics and practice.¹⁰

The *Sāleyyaka Sutta*¹¹ and the *Vācā sutta*¹² primarily addresses the importance of right speech (*sammā-vācā*) and provides guidelines for ethical communication highlighting that speech should be truthful, timely, beneficial, and should avoid lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle chatter while the *Sāleyyaka Sutta*¹³ where the Buddha addresses a group of people from the *Sāleyyaka* region exposes various aspects of ethical conduct, including the topic of right speech.

⁶ AN 4.23: “*Yathāvādī bhikkhave Tathāgato tathākārī. Yathākārī Tathāgato tathāvādī. Iti yathāvādī tatākārī, yathākārī tathāvādī. Tasmā Tathāgato ‘ti vuccati.’*”

<https://www.serenacolombo.org/itv-112-lokavabodha-sutta-the-discourse-about-realizing-the-world/>

⁷ Ñāṇmoli & Bodhi, (1995). *Sāleyyaka sutta* (MN 41), *The Middle-length Discourses of the Buddha*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 379 - 385.

⁸ DN 19. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. Walshe, Maurice, (2012). Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 302.

⁹ DN 29. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. Walshe, Maurice, (2012). Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 427 - 439.

¹⁰ AN 10.176. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*. Bodhi, Bhikkhu, (2012). Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 1518.

¹¹ MN 41. *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Ñāṇmoli & Bodhi, (1995). Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 379 - 385.

¹² AN 5.198. *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Aṅguttara-Nikāya) or More Numbered Suttas: Vol. III (The Book of the Fives and Sixes)*. Hare, E. M., (Tr.), (1973). London: the Pāli Text Society, p. 178.

¹³ MN 41. *The Middle-length Discourses of the Buddha*. Ñāṇmoli & Bodhi, (1995). Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, p. 379 - 385.

The *Sappurisa sutta*,¹⁴ the Chapter on the Noble Friend or The Chapter on the Good Companion clarifies how Right Speech is essential for maintaining harmony within the monastic community and emphasizes the role of speech in fostering good relationships and a unified *Saṅgha* community emphasizing a noble or good companion (*sappurisa*) helps preserve the integrity of the community through ethical speech and behavior. The *Ambalaṭṭhikārahulovāda Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*¹⁵ explicates that mental, verbal, and bodily actions should be conducted by one, with mindfulness emphasizing right conduct, speech, and action and welfare of oneself and others. The *Itivuttaka*¹⁶ often stresses the importance of consistency between one's words and actions, showing the concept of *yathāvādī-tathākārī*. Keeping in line with the above, what is to be cultivated and what is not be cultivated can be decided in order to put into action as the *Sevitabbāsevitabba sutta* elaborates.¹⁷

In the realm of interreligious dialogue, *yathāvādī-tathākārī* is crucial as it fosters trust and enables genuine interactions among individuals of different faith backgrounds.

Scholar Leonard Swidler¹⁸ explains essential tenets for productive interreligious discourse, emphasizing openness, reciprocal respect, and a commitment to learning from others. However, these principles must be underpinned by ethical standards. Research indicates that dialogues often falter when there is a discrepancy between the statements made by religious leaders and their actual practices. When leaders engage in dialogue but fail to confront injustices within their communities, their reliability is called into question, leading to distrust among dialogue participants. This disconnect underscores the necessity for leaders to embody their teachings consistently to foster an environment conducive to meaningful exchange.

The role of ethical leadership in fostering peace and reconciliation has been extensively examined. In today's society, inadequate governance and unethical leadership significantly hinder social cohesion. Leaders who do not adhere to ethical values perpetuate social injustices and conflicts, while those who embody principles like *yathāvādī-tathākārī* cultivate trust and cooperation among their followers. The importance of this principle is especially pronounced in interreligious dialogue, where the authority of religious leaders can substantially influence participants' willingness to engage in open and sincere discussions. Thus, the alignment of words and actions becomes

¹⁴ MN 113. *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha*. Ñāṇmoli & Bodhi, (1995). Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society. Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 909-912.

¹⁵ MN 61. *The Middle-length Discourses of the Buddha*. Ñāṇmoli & Bodhi, (1995). Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 523 - 526.

¹⁶ Iti 18. *An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon: The Itivuttaka*. Bodhi, (2000). Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 20.

¹⁷ MN 114. *The Middle-length Discourses of the Buddha*. Ñāṇmoli & Bodhi, (1995). Boston: Wisdom Publications, p. 913 - 924.

¹⁸ Swidler, L. (2013). *Interreligious dialogue: A practical guide*. Maryknoll, USA, p. 45 - 46.

essential not only for individual credibility but also for the broader goal of fostering a culture of peace and mutual respect across diverse communities.

2.1. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing case studies, interviews, and content analysis to explore the application of *yathāvādī-tathākārī* within interreligious dialogue. The qualitative methodology allows for an in-depth examination of the dynamics at play in interreligious dialogue and the ethical leadership involved. Case studies will be drawn from various contexts where interreligious dialogue has served as a strategy for conflict resolution and reconciliation. These case studies will provide insights into how *yathāvādī-tathākārī* operates in practice and its impact on the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue initiatives.

Interviews will be conducted with a diverse group of participants, including religious leaders, scholars, and practitioners involved in interreligious dialogue. These interviews aim to gather perceptions regarding the significance of coherence between speech and action and the challenges faced in maintaining this coherence in professional activities. Additionally, the interviews will seek to identify effective methods for embedding *yathāvādī-tathākārī* within interreligious dialogue frameworks.

Content analysis will focus on religious texts, dialogue transcripts, and other relevant documents to depict the interpretation and implementation of the *yathāvādī-tathākārī* principle in this field. The analysis aims to uncover common themes and trends related to interreligious dialogue and the importance of ethical leadership. The findings will serve as a foundation for strategic recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue through robust monitoring mechanisms.

2.2. Analysis and discussion

The case studies examined will highlight instances where interfaith dialogue has effectively alleviated conflicts and promoted peace. Notably, initiatives in conflict-affected regions, where leaders from various faith communities have collaborated for reconciliation, will be illustrated. The positive impact of these efforts has often been linked to leaders consistently aligning their actions with their verbal commitments to peace and justice. In these examples, dialogue has facilitated significant progress in reconciliation, especially when leaders publicly condemned violence and actively assisted victims of conflict.

Conversely, the analysis will also cover scenarios where interreligious dialogue failed to achieve its objectives due to a disconnect between words and actions (*yathāvādī-tathākārī*). In some cases, leaders who sought dialogue simultaneously supported policies that perpetuated inequity within their communities. These inconsistencies have led to diminished trust and, at times, exacerbated conflicts. Such experiences underscore the critical importance of *yathāvādī-tathākārī* for ensuring the integrity and effectiveness of interfaith dialogue.

The discussion will address the challenges inherent in implementing

yathāvādī-tathākārī within interfaith dialogues. Internal opposition within religious communities, where traditional beliefs may clash with values of transparency and mutual respect, represents a significant barrier. Additionally, political factors, such as the exploitation of religious identity for political gain, can obstruct efforts to promote peace through dialogue. Nevertheless, the increasing recognition of the necessity for interreligious dialogue in tackling global issues - such as extremism, social disparity, and environmental degradation - offers a unique opportunity for religious leaders to exhibit exemplary leadership.

Moreover, the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue can be significantly enhanced when leaders engage in active listening and demonstrate a genuine willingness to understand differing viewpoints. This approach not only fosters deeper connections among diverse groups but also helps to cultivate an atmosphere of trust and collaboration. Drawing from the findings, the study will propose strategic recommendations for religious and lay leaders, as well as organizations and policymakers. These recommendations will emphasize the importance of ethical leadership and the need for leaders to embody the principles they promote in interreligious interactions.

It is advisable to develop training programs for religious leaders that focus on ethical leadership and the practical application of *yathāvādī-tathākārī*, as these could significantly enhance the effectiveness of interreligious dialogue. Furthermore, organizations engaged in interreligious dialogue should establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation to ensure adherence to the principle of *yathāvādī-tathākārī* throughout the dialogue process. By incorporating these strategies, the potential for interfaith dialogue to serve as a transformative tool for peace and reconciliation can be greatly increased, ultimately fostering a more harmonious coexistence among diverse communities.

III. DEVELOPING HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

This study aims to outline comprehensive strategies for facilitating interreligious dialogue as a pathway to enduring peace and reconciliation. These strategies will be rooted in the principle of *yathāvādī-tathākārī* - acting in accordance with one's spoken commitments. This principle transcends mere ethical guidance; it serves as a pragmatic foundation for constructive engagement among diverse communities.

3.1. Key strategies

- (i) Creating awareness and literacy regarding different religious traditions, fostering mutual respect and understanding.
- (ii) Implementing collaborative community-based projects that unite diverse faith communities.
- (iii) Confronting systemic issues such as economic disparity and social injustice, which often serve as catalysts for religious and cultural animosities.

To facilitate the effective implementation of these strategies, this paper will propose specific measures, including the design of training programs for

religious leaders, the establishment of monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and the creation of partnerships between religious and secular institutions. Such measures will institutionalize the practices of *yathāvādi-tathākārī* and ensure their integration into broader initiatives aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation.

Additionally, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and dialogues can deepen the understanding of shared values across different faiths, creating a sense of common purpose. By promoting narratives that highlight cooperation rather than division, communities can cultivate a culture of peace that permeates daily interactions. Furthermore, engaging youth in these initiatives is crucial as they represent the future of interreligious relations; empowering them with the skills and knowledge to challenge intolerance can create a more resilient foundation for sustainable peace.

Finally, leveraging technology to facilitate virtual dialogues and educational platforms can enhance participation and reach a broader audience, breaking down geographical and social barriers. By embracing these holistic approaches, this study aims to contribute to a transformative process that not only addresses immediate conflicts but also fosters long-term understanding and cooperation among diverse communities.

3.2. The essential requirement for collaborative leadership

In the current global landscape, characterized by increasing diversity and pluralism, the challenges to achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation are multifaceted and daunting. The causes of conflict are numerous, encompassing religious intolerance, cultural misunderstandings, economic disparities, and social injustices. These issues are exacerbated by the rise of populism, the erosion of democratic values, and the proliferation of misinformation.

In this context, religious leaders, scholars, political figures, and experts - both lay and clergy - hold the potential to make significant contributions. Due to their influential positions, they can guide society toward greater understanding and harmony. However, the effectiveness of their efforts hinges on their ability to forge a collective commitment that transcends personal agendas and ideological differences, conceptualizing the common good.

This collaborative leadership approach requires open channels of communication and a willingness to listen actively to diverse perspectives. By embracing a culture of inclusivity, these leaders can create spaces where marginalized voices are heard and valued, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Additionally, joint initiatives that leverage the strengths of various stakeholders can amplify their impact, transforming isolated efforts into a cohesive movement for change.

Moreover, leaders must be prepared to address difficult conversations head-on, acknowledging uncomfortable truths and historical grievances that often underlie tensions. This willingness to engage in dialogue, even when it challenges their beliefs, is essential for building trust and forging meaningful relationships. Ultimately, the success of collaborative leadership in promoting peace and reconciliation lies in its capacity to unite diverse communities

around a shared vision, inspiring collective action that is grounded in empathy and respect for one another.

3.3. Developing an effective and integrated monitoring platform

Addressing these complex challenges necessitates the creation of a harmonized, integrated, and effective monitoring mechanism. Such a platform should serve as a foundational element of a global initiative dedicated to fostering mutual understanding and harmony among diverse communities. The objective of this platform is to unite a wide array of religious leaders, scholars, policymakers, and civil society members for ongoing dialogue and collaborative problem-solving.

The platform will operate on multiple levels - local, national, and international - allowing it to address issues specific to certain areas while also contributing to global peacebuilding efforts. It will facilitate the identification of the root causes of conflicts, often obscured by more visible social and political tensions. By creating an environment conducive to deep and honest reflection, the platform will enable participants to confront underlying issues, whether they stem from historical grievances, economic disparities, or cultural misunderstandings.

In addition, the monitoring platform will utilize data-driven methodologies to assess the effectiveness of dialogue initiatives and measure the impact of interventions in real time. This evidence-based approach will not only enhance accountability among leaders but also foster a culture of transparency, allowing stakeholders to see the tangible outcomes of their collaborative efforts. Moreover, by integrating technology and communication tools, the platform can facilitate broader participation, reaching marginalized voices that are often excluded from traditional dialogues. This inclusivity is essential for building trust and ensuring that the platform reflects the diverse perspectives of all community members. Ultimately, an effective and integrated monitoring platform will catalyze sustainable peace, empowering communities to engage in continuous learning and adaptation as they navigate their unique challenges.

3.4. Strategic integrity and interfaith dialogue as tools for peacebuilding

The effectiveness of the monitoring platform will depend on the commitment of all stakeholders to uphold strategic integrity - a concept emphasizing the alignment of one's actions with professed beliefs and values. Within the context of interfaith dialogue, this means that both religious and secular leaders must not only advocate for tolerance, peace, and reconciliation but also embody these principles in their daily conduct. This alignment between speech and action is crucial for building trust and credibility within communities and society at large. When conducted sincerely, effective interfaith dialogue becomes a powerful mechanism for peacebuilding, allowing participants to engage in meaningful discussions about the sources of conflict and collaboratively develop strategies for resolution.

Such dialogues must be inclusive, integrating diverse religious and secular perspectives to ensure comprehensive solutions that acknowledge the

varied needs and challenges faced by different communities. By fostering an environment of mutual respect, these dialogues can dismantle prejudices and build bridges across cultural divides. The platform is expected to play a vital role in facilitating interfaith dialogues, providing the necessary resources and support to ensure respectful and constructive discussions aimed at producing tangible outcomes. This initiative will address not only urgent issues such as intolerance, hate speech, and discrimination but also promote a broader culture of peace and understanding, thereby preventing the emergence of future conflicts. Additionally, by encouraging active participation from marginalized groups, the platform can amplify voices that are often overlooked, further enriching the dialogue and ensuring that solutions are equitable and representative of the entire community. Ultimately, strategic integrity and interfaith dialogue can cultivate a shared vision for peace, one that is sustainable and resilient in the face of evolving challenges.

3.5. Guaranteeing accountability and fostering collective influence

A key aspect of the platform's operation will be to ensure accountability among both religious and secular leaders. Many leaders hold substantial influence over their communities, and their actions - or lack thereof - can have significant repercussions. Therefore, the platform will incorporate mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the behaviors of these leaders, ensuring that their commitments to peace and reconciliation are demonstrated through concrete actions within their communities. Upholding the principle of accountability is vital for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the platform. This will require systematic evaluations of leaders' actions, supported by feedback from community members and other stakeholders. Such assessments will help identify any discrepancies between leaders' discourse and their actual behaviors, allowing for timely and effective responses to these issues.

Moreover, the platform is poised to leverage the collective influence of its members to advocate for transformative change. By collaborating cohesively, leaders from religious, academic, and political realms can amplify their advocacy efforts, thereby more effectively promoting policies and practices that foster peace and reconciliation. This united approach, grounded in a shared aspiration for a just and cohesive global society, is likely to catalyze substantial social and political transformation. Additionally, fostering collective influence will encourage cross-sector partnerships that can harness diverse resources and expertise, leading to innovative solutions that address the root causes of conflict. By creating a culture of shared responsibility, the platform can mobilize communities to actively engage in peacebuilding efforts, ensuring that accountability is not just a top-down directive but a community-driven process. This holistic model can enhance the platform's effectiveness, ensuring that all stakeholders are committed to a vision of sustained peace and justice.

IV. CONCLUSION

The principle of *yathāvādī-tathākārī* is indispensable for the success of interreligious dialogue aimed at peace and reconciliation. By aligning speech with action, religious leaders and other participants in interreligious dialogue

can establish the trust and credibility essential for productive engagement. This paper highlights the critical role of ethical leadership in interreligious dialogue and proposes strategic imperatives for implementing *yathāvādī-tathākārī*. It is essential for both religious and secular leaders, alongside various stakeholders, to collaborate in fostering peace and reconciliation. They must embody the principles they advocate, working towards a more just and harmonious society where dialogue facilitates genuine and lasting transformation. Ultimately, the effective application of the *yathāvādī-tathākārī* principle in interfaith communication requires coordinated and collaborative efforts from religious leaders, scholars, politicians, civil society organizations, NGOs, and other relevant parties at both national and global levels to establish shared responsibility for human development in the fields of economic prosperity, reconciliation, resilience, harmony, and peace at both national and global levels.

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THE ROLE OF INTERFAITH COLLABORATION IN PROMOTING GLOBAL HARMONY, WITH A SPECIFIC FOCUS ON MUSLIM MAJORITY NATIONS, EFFORTS TO PRESERVE BUDDHIST HERITAGE SITES

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Abstract

In an era marked by geopolitical tensions, cultural fragmentation, and growing mistrust among communities, fostering unity has become a global imperative. This research paper explores the role of interfaith collaboration in promoting global harmony, with a specific focus on Muslim-majority nations' efforts to preserve Buddhist heritage sites. These efforts transcend religious and cultural boundaries, demonstrating a commitment to shared human values and collective history. The paper delves into historical precedents, contemporary case studies, and philosophical commonalities between Islam and Buddhism that underpin these collaborative endeavors. From Pakistan's meticulous preservation of Gandhara civilization artifacts to Indonesia's efforts in maintaining Buddhist temples like Borobudur, these examples illuminate how cultural preservation can catalyze unity. Challenges such as political instability, resource constraints, and extremism are analyzed alongside opportunities for partnership and cooperation through platforms like UNESCO. Finally, actionable recommendations are presented, advocating for policies that institutionalize heritage preservation and promote interfaith understanding as pathways to peace. Aligning with the UNDV 2025 theme of fostering unity, this paper underscores the transformative power of cultural preservation in bridging divides and advancing global harmony.

Keywords: *Interfaith, heritage, preservation, Islam, Buddhism.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context and importance

The globalized world has witnessed unprecedented interconnectivity, yet this progress has been accompanied by increasing cultural and ideological divides. Misunderstandings and mistrust among different religious and cultural communities have often led to conflict, undermining global efforts for peace and stability. Within this context, the preservation of cultural heritage has emerged as a universal endeavor, bridging divides and fostering mutual respect. Religious heritage sites, in particular, serve as powerful symbols of shared humanity and history. They remind us of the interconnectedness of civilizations and the importance of collective stewardship over our past.

Muslim-majority countries, with their rich histories of interfaith engagement, have played a vital role in preserving Buddhist heritage. These efforts not only highlight the spirit of coexistence but also challenge stereotypes, showcasing Islam's emphasis on protecting cultural and religious diversity. The preservation of Buddhist sites such as Pakistan's Taxila and Takht-i-Bhai or Indonesia's Borobudur exemplifies the potential of cultural preservation as a tool for global harmony. Such initiatives align perfectly with the overarching theme of the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) 2025, which emphasizes fostering unity across cultures and faiths.

1.2. Scope and objectives

This research focuses on the intersection of interfaith collaboration and heritage preservation, using Buddhist heritage conservation in Muslim-majority countries as a case study. Specifically, it aims to:

- Highlight the historical and philosophical foundations of interfaith respect in Islam and Buddhism.

- Examine contemporary examples of cultural preservation efforts undertaken by Muslim countries.

- Analyze challenges and identify opportunities for enhanced collaboration in heritage conservation.

- Offer actionable recommendations for institutionalizing interfaith efforts in heritage preservation policies.

By addressing these objectives, this paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on cultural preservation as a mechanism for peacebuilding. Furthermore, it aspires to inspire policymakers, religious leaders, and international organizations to embrace heritage preservation as a pathway to fostering unity in diversity.

II. INTERFAITH INTERACTIONS IN HISTORY

The interaction between Islam and Buddhism spans centuries, with periods of conflict interspersed with profound cultural and intellectual exchange. These encounters were particularly significant in regions such as South Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, where Buddhist communities flourished alongside growing Islamic empires.

In the 8th and 9th centuries, as Islam spread into the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia, Muslim rulers and scholars encountered Buddhist traditions, art, and architecture.¹ While some conflicts arose during conquests, historical accounts also highlight episodes of mutual respect. For instance, early Islamic scholars translated Buddhist texts into Arabic and Persian, contributing to a shared pool of philosophical and scientific knowledge. In the Abbasid Caliphate, the translation of Buddhist texts into Arabic was part of the broader movement of knowledge transfer, demonstrating respect for intellectual heritage beyond religious boundaries.²

Buddhist communities in areas like Central Asia to South Asia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan coexisted with Islamic populations for centuries. Buddhist monasteries in the region were not only spiritual hubs but also centers of art and learning, influencing Islamic art and architecture. The fusion of Buddhist and Islamic motifs is evident in architectural designs, such as those of the Seljuk Empire, which incorporated floral and geometric patterns reminiscent of Buddhist art.

2.1. Preservation of cultural heritage in Islamic traditions

Islamic principles emphasize the protection of cultural and religious heritage as a divine responsibility. The Quran underscores the sanctity of diversity in creation, stating, “O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and (Haleem, 2004). This verse reflects a universal message of coexistence and respect for diversity, which extends to cultural and religious artifacts.³ Similarly, Buddhist scriptures emphasize the importance of preserving cultural heritage. The Dhammapada, a Buddhist scripture, states, “Hatred will never cease by hatred, but by love alone is healed” (*Dhammapada*, 2007)⁴.

The Prophet Muhammad’s (peace be upon him) teachings further reinforce this ethos. In one of his sayings, he warned against the destruction of places of worship and cultural symbols, even during times of war. This principle was upheld by early Muslim leaders who ensured that non-Islamic religious sites remained protected under Islamic rule. For example, during the conquest of Sindh in the 8th century, Islamic rulers respected and preserved the Buddhist stupas and monasteries in the region, recognizing their historical and cultural significance.

The tradition of protecting non-Islamic heritage continued in subsequent Islamic empires. The Mughal Empire, which ruled over a predominantly Hindu and Buddhist population, adopted policies of tolerance and preservation.

¹ Eaton, R. M. (1993). *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*. University of California Press. (e.g., Eaton, 1993, p. 156).

² Ahmed, A. S. (2002). *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*. Routledge. (e.g., Ahmed, 2002, p. 156).

³ Abdel Haleem, M.A.S. (Trans.). (2004). *The Quran*. Oxford University Press. (e.g., Quran 2:143, as cited in Abdel Haleem, 2004, p. 23).

⁴ Dhammapada, 1.5, as cited in Easwaran, (2007, p. 45).

Akbar, one of the most notable Mughal emperors, not only promoted interfaith dialogue but also supported the restoration of Buddhist and Hindu monuments. His approach to governance exemplified the Islamic principle of protecting the cultural diversity of the lands under Muslim rule.

2.2. Buddhist-Muslim collaboration in preserving heritage

The historical coexistence of Muslim and Buddhist communities provided fertile ground for collaborative preservation efforts. In regions such as modern-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indonesia, Islamic rulers and communities played a direct role in maintaining Buddhist sites, recognizing their cultural and historical value.⁵ “Do not go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views”⁶ (*Kalama Sutta*, 2005). This spirit of critical inquiry and respect for diverse traditions facilitated the preservation of Buddhist heritage sites.

Pakistan: The Gandhara region, renowned for its Buddhist heritage, thrived under Islamic governance. The preservation of ancient Buddhist stupas and monasteries, such as Taxila and Takht-i-Bahi, reflects the enduring legacy of Muslim stewardship. Islamic rulers in the region often collaborated with local communities to ensure that these sites remained integral to the region’s cultural identity.⁷

Indonesia: As Islam became the dominant religion in Indonesia, it coexisted with Buddhism and Hinduism, which had deep roots in the region. The preservation of Buddhist temples like Borobudur highlights the Islamic community’s respect for its shared cultural heritage. Today, Indonesia’s government and Muslim-majority population actively support the conservation of these sites, recognizing their significance as national and global treasures.

Afghanistan: In pre-Taliban Afghanistan, Buddhist heritage sites such as the Bamiyan Buddhas were symbols of the country’s rich cultural history. Despite the tragic destruction of these statues in 2001, efforts to restore the Bamiyan Valley’s cultural heritage have been led by both local Muslim communities and international organizations, underscoring the possibility of reconciliation and collaboration.

These historical examples demonstrate that interfaith collaboration in heritage preservation is not a new phenomenon. Rather, it is deeply rooted in the values of mutual respect and coexistence that have characterized Islamic and Buddhist interactions for centuries.

⁵ Ali, M. (2018). Historical Interaction between Islam and Buddhism in South Asia. *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 39 (1), 1-15. (e.g., Ali, 2018, p. 8).

⁶ *Kalama Sutta*, AN 3.65, as cited in Bodhi, (2005, p. 365).

⁷ Marshall, J. (1960). *The Buddhist Art of Gandhara*. Cambridge University Press. (e.g., Marshall, 1960, p. 45).

III. CASE STUDIES: PRESERVATION OF BUDDHIST HERITAGE IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES

3.1. Pakistan: Guardians of Gandhara civilization

Pakistan, historically home to the Gandhara civilization, has one of the richest collections of Buddhist heritage sites globally. This region, encompassing modern-day Taxila, Swat Valley, and Peshawar, was a prominent center of Buddhist art, culture, and education between the 1st and 7th centuries CE. Despite becoming a Muslim-majority nation after the partition of India in 1947, Pakistan has maintained a strong commitment to preserving its Buddhist heritage.

Taxila and Takht-i-Bahi: Taxila, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, contains remnants of stupas, monasteries, and temples that illustrate the height of Buddhist architectural and artistic achievements. Similarly, Takht-i-Bahi, another UNESCO site, is a monastic complex that remains one of the best-preserved examples of Buddhist architecture. Successive Pakistani governments have collaborated with international organizations such as UNESCO to restore these sites, ensuring their global recognition and accessibility.⁸

Tourism and Education: The Pakistani government and the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have actively promoted Buddhist heritage sites as part of their cultural tourism initiatives. Events such as the “Gandhara Festival” and exhibitions of Buddhist artifacts have attracted Buddhist pilgrims from countries like Sri Lanka, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Thailand, fostering interfaith understanding and economic development.

Conservation Challenges: Despite these efforts, challenges such as funding limitations, political instability, and the threat of extremism persist. However, the commitment of local Muslim communities to protect these sites underscores the spirit of coexistence. For instance, communities near Takht-i-Bahi have resisted encroachments and worked alongside authorities to maintain the site’s integrity.

3.2. Afghanistan: Reviving the legacy of the Bamiyan Buddhas

Afghanistan’s Bamiyan Valley, once a thriving center of Buddhist culture, is renowned for its monumental Buddha statues carved into the cliffs. These statues, standing 55 and 37 meters tall, symbolized the region’s Buddhist heritage until their tragic destruction by the Taliban in 2001. The loss of these iconic statues was met with global condemnation, but it also ignited efforts to preserve and revive Afghanistan’s cultural heritage.

Post-Taliban Reconstruction Efforts: Since 2002, initiatives to restore the Bamiyan Valley’s cultural significance have been led by UNESCO and supported by the Afghan government. Local Muslim communities have played a vital role in these efforts, participating in educational campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of preserving the region’s heritage. Efforts

⁸ UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). Taxila. Retrieved from UNESCO official website. (e.g., see UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d., para. 3).

have also focused on restoring murals in the surrounding caves, which depict Buddhist themes and reflect the artistic synthesis of Greco-Buddhist styles.⁹

Symbol of Reconciliation: The restoration of the Bamiyan Valley is not just about rebuilding monuments; it is a symbolic act of reconciliation. It demonstrates Afghanistan's willingness to embrace its multicultural past and underscores the potential for interfaith harmony. By involving local Muslim leaders and international Buddhist organizations, these initiatives serve as a model for collaborative heritage preservation. The Bamiyan Buddha statues were not only artistic marvels but also deeply tied to Buddhist teachings. The *Lalitavistara Sutra*, a Mahayana Buddhist text, describes the Buddha's life and his past incarnations, some of which are believed to have influenced the artistic representation of these colossal figures¹⁰. Additionally, the *Mahāvastu*, an early Buddhist text, references the importance of Buddhist relics and their veneration, emphasizing the spiritual significance of such monuments. The Bamiyan Valley also connects with the *Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras)*, which were widely studied in Buddhist centers along the Silk Road, including Gandhara and Bamiyan¹¹.

3.3. Southeast Asia: Indonesia and Malaysia

Southeast Asia, with its deep Buddhist roots, has witnessed a remarkable evolution as predominantly Muslim nations like Indonesia and Malaysia continue to preserve and honor their Buddhist heritage.

Indonesia: Borobudur Temple

Borobudur, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the largest and most magnificent Buddhist temples in the world. Built in the 9th century, it represents the pinnacle of Buddhist architectural achievement in Southeast Asia. After the arrival of Islam in the archipelago, Borobudur was abandoned but not destroyed, showcasing a respect for the cultural artifacts of prior civilizations.¹²

Preservation Initiatives: Modern Indonesia, despite being the largest Muslim-majority country, invests heavily in the preservation of Borobudur. Restoration projects funded by the Indonesian government, UNESCO, and international partners have ensured that the temple remains a global heritage symbol.

Borobudur is deeply connected to Buddhist teachings, as its architectural design reflects the Mahayana Buddhist path to enlightenment. The temple is

⁹ Dalrymple, W. (2013). *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan, 1839 - 42*. Bloomsbury. (e.g., Dalrymple, 2013, p. 234).

¹⁰ Lefèvre, V. (2011) The *Lalitavistara* and the early Buddhist art of Gandhara and Central Asia. *Arts Asiatiques*, 66, 3 - 21.

¹¹ Conze, E. (1973). *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its verse summary*. *Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation*.

¹² UNESCO World Heritage Centre. (n.d.). Borobudur Temple Compounds. Retrieved from UNESCO official website. (e.g., see UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d., para. 2).

structured in three levels: Kamadhatu (the world of desire), Rupadhatu (the world of form), and Arupadhatu (the formless world), mirroring the Buddhist cosmology found in the Avatamsaka Sutra.¹³

Interfaith Pilgrimage and Tourism: Borobudur attracts millions of visitors annually, including Buddhist pilgrims from around the world. Events such as Vesak celebrations, supported by local Muslim authorities, underscore the spirit of coexistence.

Malaysia: Wat Chayamangkalaram

Malaysia, though predominantly Muslim, is home to several Buddhist temples, reflecting its multicultural heritage. Wat Chayamangkalaram, a Thai Buddhist temple in Penang, houses a 33-meter reclining Buddha statue, one of the largest in the world.

Community-Led Preservation: Local Muslim-majority authorities collaborate with Buddhist communities to maintain and promote these temples as cultural landmarks. This collaboration is a testament to Malaysia's pluralistic society and its commitment to safeguarding religious and cultural diversity.

3.4. Lessons from the case studies

These examples from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia highlight the critical role of Muslim-majority countries in preserving Buddhist heritage. Key lessons include:

- i. **Collaborative Leadership:** Successful preservation efforts often involve partnerships between governments, local communities, and international organizations.
- ii. **Cultural Tourism as a Bridge:** Promoting Buddhist heritage sites as cultural tourism destinations fosters economic growth and interfaith dialogue.
- iii. **Educational Campaigns:** Raising awareness about the historical and cultural significance of these sites among local communities ensures long-term sustainability.

IV. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HARMONY

4.1. Shared values in Buddhism and Islam

Both Buddhism and Islam share fundamental values that provide a philosophical foundation for interfaith harmony. Despite differences in theology, their teachings converge on principles such as compassion, respect for all beings, and the pursuit of peace, which underpin the spirit of coexistence.

Compassion and Mercy:

In Buddhism, compassion (*karuṇā*) is a central tenet, urging individuals to alleviate the suffering of others. The Metta Sutta (Loving-Kindness Discourse) teaches that one should radiate boundless love to all beings, just as a mother

¹³ Cleary, T. (1993). *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*. Shambhala Publications.

loves and protects her only child.¹⁴ Similarly, Islam emphasizes mercy (*rahma*), with the Quran frequently describing Allah as “the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate” (Quran 1:1). These shared values encourage adherents of both faiths to embrace kindness and mutual respect.

Non-violence and Justice:

The Buddhist concept of non-violence (*ahimsa*) aligns with Islamic principles of justice (*adl*) and peace (*salaam*). Both religions advocate resolving conflicts through dialogue and understanding rather than aggression. This shared emphasis on peaceful coexistence provides a strong ethical framework for interfaith collaboration.¹⁵

Stewardship of the Earth:

Buddhism promotes mindfulness and interdependence, encouraging followers to live in harmony with nature. The Sigalovada Sutta emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life and the duty of humans to care for their surroundings¹⁶. In Islam, the concept of stewardship (*khalifa*) calls on humans to protect the earth and its resources. These parallel teachings support the preservation of cultural and environmental heritage as a shared responsibility.

4.2 Ethical frameworks for preservation

Cultural preservation is deeply rooted in the ethical teachings of both Islam and Buddhism. Protecting heritage sites is not merely a logistical or financial endeavor but a moral obligation that reflects broader values of interconnectedness and respect for diversity.

Islamic Ethics on Heritage Preservation:

Islamic teachings emphasize the protection of sacred spaces, art, and knowledge. This extends to non-Islamic heritage, as exemplified by the preservation of ancient libraries, temples, and monasteries during Islamic rule. The Quran states, “And do not cause corruption upon the earth after its reformation” (Quran 7:56), which is interpreted as a call to protect cultural treasures from destruction.

Buddhist Ethics on Heritage Preservation:

Buddhism encourages the safeguarding of physical manifestations of the Dharma, such as stupas, temples, and statues. These sites are seen as vehicles for spiritual reflection and communal harmony, making their preservation an ethical imperative.

Interfaith Perspectives:

Both faiths recognize the value of cultural heritage as a bridge between

¹⁴ Bodhi, B. (2017). *The Buddha's teachings on loving-kindness: A study of the Metta Sutta*. Wisdom Publications.

¹⁵ Gombrich, R. F. (2009). *What the Buddha Thought*. Equinox Publishing. (e.g., Gombrich, 2009, p. 145).

¹⁶ Walshe, M. (1995). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications.

generations and communities. Preserving Buddhist heritage in Muslim-majority countries reflects a commitment to these shared ethical principles, demonstrating respect for humanity's collective history.

4.3. Contributions of Sufi and Buddhist philosophies to unity

The mystical traditions within Islam and Buddhism, Sufism and Zen Buddhism, offer profound insights into the pursuit of unity and peace. These philosophies emphasize inner transformation and universal love, transcending religious and cultural boundaries.

Sufi Universalism:

Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, focuses on the oneness of humanity and divine love. Sufi poets like Rumi and Ibn Arabi often spoke of transcending religious labels to embrace a universal spiritual truth. Rumi's famous verse, "I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Muslim. I am of no religion" (Rumi, 1995), reflects the Sufi ideal of unity through love and understanding.¹⁷

Buddhist Interconnectedness:

Zen Buddhism and Mahayana teachings highlight the interconnectedness of all beings (*pratityasamutpāda*). Zen Buddhism similarly teaches direct experience of reality beyond conceptual distinctions. Rooted in Mahayana thought, Zen emphasizes *satori* (sudden awakening) as the realization of one's intrinsic Buddha-nature¹⁸. This is echoed in the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, where Huineng states, "Look within! The Buddha is not outside of you"¹⁹. This philosophy fosters a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others and the preservation of shared spaces.²⁰ Zen masters often employ paradoxical *koans* (riddles) to transcend dualistic thinking, mirroring the Sufi practice of *dhikr* (remembrance) to dissolve the ego and awaken to divine unity.

Common Ground:

Both traditions advocate for meditation, self-discipline, and mindfulness as paths to inner peace and societal harmony. The convergence of these ideas creates a fertile ground for interfaith dialogue and collaboration. For example, initiatives that bring together Sufi and Buddhist leaders for discussions on compassion and peacebuilding have yielded practical models for fostering unity.

V. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

5.1. Challenges in Preserving Heritage

Preserving cultural heritage, particularly Buddhist sites in Muslim-majority countries, faces several challenges. These include political instability, economic

¹⁷ Rumi, J. al-D. (13th Century). *The Essential Rumi* (C. Barks, Trans.). HarperOne. (1995). (e.g., Rumi, 13th Century/1995, p. 123).

¹⁸ Suzuki, D. T. (1953). *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings*. Doubleday.

¹⁹ Huineng. (1999 p.87). *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (P. Yampolsky, Trans.). Columbia University Press.

²⁰ Hirakawa, A. (1993). *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*. Motilal Banarsidass. (e.g., Hirakawa, 1993, p. 187)

limitations, ideological conflicts, and environmental degradation.

Political Instability and Conflict:

In regions affected by war and political unrest, heritage sites often become collateral damage. For instance, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha in Afghanistan highlighted the vulnerability of cultural landmarks during times of conflict.²¹ Governments in conflict zones often struggle to prioritize heritage preservation amid pressing humanitarian concerns.²²

Economic and Resource Limitations:

Heritage conservation is a resource-intensive process. Many Muslim-majority countries, particularly in the developing world, face budget constraints that limit their ability to invest in the restoration and maintenance of heritage sites. International funding, while helpful, is often insufficient to address the scale of the challenge.

Extremist Ideologies:

Extremist groups sometimes target heritage sites as symbols of cultural identity, seeking to erase histories that conflict with their ideological narratives. This threat complicates efforts to protect and promote Buddhist heritage in regions where such groups operate.

Environmental Degradation:

Natural disasters, climate change, and pollution pose significant threats to ancient structures. For example, rising humidity levels and acid rain have accelerated the deterioration of stone carvings and frescoes in sites like Borobudur in Indonesia.

Cultural and Social Sensitivities:

Preserving Buddhist sites in Muslim-majority countries requires navigating complex cultural dynamics. Misinterpretations or mistrust between religious communities can hinder collaborative efforts, emphasizing the need for inclusive and transparent approaches.

5.2. Opportunities for collaboration

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for Muslim-majority countries to lead in cultural preservation and foster interfaith harmony.

Leveraging International Platforms:

Organizations like UNESCO provide frameworks and funding for heritage preservation. Muslim-majority nations can strengthen partnerships with such organizations to ensure sustainable conservation efforts. For example, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee has successfully collaborated with

²¹ Abu-Nimer, M. (2001). Conflict Resolution in Islamic Contexts: Principles, Training, and Experiences. *Peace and Conflict Studies Journal*, 8(1), 12-35. (e.g., Abu-Nimer, 2001, p. 20)

²² Ahmed, A. S. (2002). *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*. Routledge. (e.g., Ahmed, 2002, p. 156)

Pakistan to preserve Gandhara sites and with Indonesia to protect Borobudur.

Cultural Diplomacy:

Highlighting the preservation of Buddhist heritage can enhance the global image of Muslim-majority countries as advocates for interfaith harmony. Initiatives such as hosting Buddhist festivals, exhibitions, and academic conferences can foster goodwill and mutual respect.

Community-Driven Preservation:

Engaging local communities in preservation projects not only ensures the sustainability of these efforts but also builds trust between Muslim and Buddhist populations. Examples from Malaysia and Pakistan show that involving local stakeholders fosters a sense of shared ownership and responsibility.

Educational and Awareness Campaigns:

Raising awareness about the historical and cultural significance of Buddhist sites among Muslim-majority populations can combat stereotypes and foster a culture of respect. Educational programs in schools and universities can play a pivotal role in promoting interfaith understanding.

5.3. Role of Muslim countries in global harmony

Muslim-majority nations are uniquely positioned to lead global efforts in fostering unity through cultural preservation. Their involvement in protecting Buddhist heritage sends a powerful message about the compatibility of Islam with diversity and coexistence.

Setting Examples of Interfaith Collaboration:

By preserving Buddhist sites, Muslim countries demonstrate that protecting cultural heritage transcends religious boundaries. This serves as an inspiration for other nations to prioritize heritage conservation as a means of peacebuilding.

Strengthening Interfaith Dialogue:

Cultural preservation projects provide opportunities for dialogue between Muslim and Buddhist communities. Platforms that bring together religious leaders, scholars, and policymakers can help address misconceptions and build bridges of understanding.

Economic Benefits of Cultural Tourism:

Buddhist heritage sites in Muslim-majority countries attract millions of tourists and pilgrims annually. Investing in these sites not only preserves history but also boosts local economies, creating jobs and fostering cross-cultural interactions.²³

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE COLLABORATION

6.1. Policy recommendations

To institutionalize the preservation of Buddhist heritage as a tool for

²³ World Tourism Organization (WTO). (2020). Cultural Tourism and Heritage Preservation. Retrieved from WTO official website. (e.g., see WTO, 2020, para. 5).

interfaith harmony, specific policy measures must be adopted by governments, organizations, and international bodies.

6.1.1. Integrating heritage preservation into national policies:

Governments of Muslim-majority countries should create robust frameworks that prioritize cultural preservation as part of their national agendas. This includes allocating dedicated budgets, enacting heritage protection laws, and establishing specialized agencies to oversee conservation efforts.

6.1.2. Promoting interfaith heritage preservation in international agreements:

Cultural preservation should be included as a key component of global peacebuilding efforts. Through bodies like UNESCO and the United Nations, Muslim-majority nations can advocate for binding agreements that mandate the protection of religious heritage sites worldwide.

6.1.3. Enforcing stronger protections in conflict zones:

The international community, with active support from Muslim countries, should develop stronger protocols to safeguard heritage sites in areas of conflict. These could include peacekeeping measures that specifically protect cultural landmarks or post-conflict restoration programs funded by multilateral agencies.

6.2. Expanding cultural and academic exchanges

Educational initiatives and academic partnerships can foster a deeper understanding of shared histories and interfaith values, paving the way for sustainable collaboration.

6.2.1. Interfaith education programs

Schools and universities should include curricula that highlight the interconnected histories of Buddhism and Islam, emphasizing shared values such as compassion and coexistence. This can help future generations appreciate the significance of preserving cultural heritage.

6.2.2. Joint research initiatives

Scholars and researchers from Muslim and Buddhist communities can collaborate on studies about heritage conservation and interfaith dialogue. Such projects can produce valuable insights into best practices for preservation and inspire future initiatives.

6.2.3. Cultural exchange programs

Exchange programs that bring together students, artists, and community leaders from Muslim and Buddhist backgrounds can foster mutual respect and understanding. These programs can include workshops, exhibitions, and visits to heritage sites.

6.3. Collaborative models for sustainable heritage preservation

To ensure the long-term preservation of Buddhist heritage in Muslim-majority countries, innovative and inclusive models of collaboration should be adopted.

6.3.1. Public-private partnerships:

Governments can partner with private organizations, including

businesses, NGOs, and philanthropic foundations, to fund and manage heritage conservation projects. These partnerships can mobilize resources and expertise that are often unavailable in the public sector.

6.3.2. Regional cooperation:

Neighboring countries with shared cultural histories can work together on cross-border heritage preservation projects. For example, Pakistan and Afghanistan could collaborate on initiatives to restore Gandhara-era Buddhist sites.

6.3.3. Community-led conservation:

Engaging local communities in preservation efforts ensures that heritage sites are maintained sustainably. This model has been successful in regions like Malaysia, where local stakeholders are involved in the upkeep and promotion of Buddhist temples.

6.3.4. Technology-driven solutions

Advances in technology, such as 3D scanning and digital archiving, can be leveraged to document and restore heritage sites. Muslim-majority countries can invest in these technologies to preserve Buddhist relics for future generations.

6.4. Promoting heritage tourism for unity

Cultural tourism has the potential to serve as a bridge between different faiths and communities. By promoting Buddhist heritage sites as tourist destinations, Muslim-majority countries can foster interfaith understanding while supporting economic development.

6.4.1. Developing inclusive tourism policies:

Tourism strategies should focus on inclusivity, ensuring that Buddhist pilgrims and visitors from all backgrounds feel welcome. Facilities at heritage sites should cater to diverse needs, including multilingual guides and interpretive centers.

6.4.2. Hosting interfaith festivals and events:

Festivals celebrating Buddhist heritage can serve as platforms for interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange. For instance, Vesak celebrations at sites like Borobudur or Takht-i-Bahi could involve both Buddhist and Muslim communities.

6.4.3. Collaborating with global tourism platforms:

Partnering with international tourism organizations can enhance the visibility of Buddhist heritage sites in Muslim-majority countries. This includes participation in global travel expos and the creation of digital campaigns highlighting these sites.

VII. CONCLUSION

7.1. Reflections on the theme of unity

In an increasingly polarized world, fostering unity through collaborative efforts holds immense potential to heal divides and build bridges across

cultures and faiths. The preservation of Buddhist heritage by Muslim-majority countries exemplifies this ethos, demonstrating how cultural and historical preservation can transcend religious and ideological boundaries. From Pakistan's guardianship of the Gandhara civilization to Indonesia's meticulous care of Borobudur, these efforts underscore a universal commitment to protecting humanity's shared legacy. By actively participating in heritage conservation, Muslim nations affirm their role as stewards of peace and coexistence, rooted in the shared values of Islam and Buddhism.

This paper has shown that the philosophical principles of compassion, respect, and interconnectedness inherent in both Islam and Buddhism provide a strong foundation for interfaith collaboration. Historical precedents and contemporary examples illustrate how these principles translate into tangible actions, fostering unity through cultural preservation.

7.2. Call to action

As the world gathers for the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) 2025, it is imperative to recognize the transformative power of cultural preservation in fostering unity. Muslim-majority countries have demonstrated that interfaith collaboration is not only possible but essential for global peace building. The preservation of Buddhist heritage offers a pathway to mutual respect, understanding, and coexistence a legacy that transcends religious affiliations and geographical boundaries.

The international community must prioritize heritage preservation as a means of fostering interfaith dialogue and global harmony. Governments, organizations, and communities should embrace this opportunity to create policies and initiatives that safeguard our shared cultural treasures for future generations. Let the UNDV 2025 conference in Vietnam serve as a call to action, inspiring nations to work together in the spirit of unity, compassion, and respect.

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COMPASSION, UNITY, INTEGRITY, AND MINDFUL EFFORTS FOR THE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: AS DEPICTED IN THE THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

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Abstract

The study presents key concepts in Theravāda Buddhism, especially compassion, unity, integrity, and mindful efforts. The study emphasizes that compassion in Buddhism is not just ordinary compassion but also a noble quality necessary for building a harmonious society. The study analyzes the unity in the Buddhist *saṅgha* in ancient times, highlighting the qualities that help preserve harmony. Integrity is demonstrated through the lives of the Buddha and his disciples, as well as through precepts and ethical behavior. Finally, the study discusses the importance of mindful efforts and meditation practices in achieving a sustainable future. The study suggests that the combination of compassion, unity, integrity, and mindfulness can create an ideal society and a sustainable future for all.

Keywords: *Compassion, unity, integrity, mindfulness, sustainable future.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Compassion is generally defined as kindness, a kind gesture, or sympathy towards people suffering from any ailment. In the English Dictionary, it is defined as – a strong feeling of sympathy for people who are suffering and a desire to help them.¹ But in Buddhism, this term has immense value. It was so intense in the Buddha that he was given the epithet of *Mahākāruṇiko* (the great compassionate One). Not only His compassion but His whole life and His dispositions were such that several great personalities of the world have spoken

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¹ Oxford, *Advance Learner's Dictionary* (2000), Ed. by Sally Wehmeer, Phonetics Editor Michel Ashby, Oxford University Press, p. 245.

so many things about His life and His behavior. R. N. Tagore calls him the greatest man ever born.² Fausboll, a Russian, says that the more I know Him, the more I love Him. H. G. Wells, a great thinker, assigns Him the first place amongst the seven great men in the world.³ This Compassion together with Universal Friendliness (*mettā*), Universal Joy (*muditā*), and Universal Equanimity (*upekkhā*) constitute the Sublime wayfaring of life (*Brahma Vihāra*).⁴

This Compassion is not something that one is passing through a road and sees a beggar in a shamble condition and on demanding something one gives some paise or scents and feels elated in doing so. This is also not something when someone asks for some money and people generally give whatever their pocket allow and think that it is sufficed. In Buddhism this term has great meaning and the Buddha had preached it to make a cosmopolitan society where a man can leave freely and happily honoring others and in turn get honored.

Mettā is to think or to wish about welfare or true happiness of all the living beings. The third constituent of Sublime Welfare of Life (*brahmavihāra*) is *muditā*. It is appreciative joy to see progress of others and is antidote of jealousy. The fourth part is Equanimity (*upekkhā*). There are eight worldly conditions (*aṭṭha loka dhammā*). These are loss (*hāni*), gain (*lābha*), fame (*yasa*), defame (*apayasa*), despise (*nindā*), praise (*pasamsā*), happiness (*sukha*) and pain (*dukkha*).⁵ Under this First Worldly affairs *Sutta* (*paṭhamalokadhammasuttaṃ*) in the *Āṅguttaranikāya* it is explained in Pāli as follows. The Buddha says in this *sutta* that whosoever remains balanced in all the above condition he crosses the world smoothly. This teaching of Equanimity in true sense is the spirit of Buddhism therefore, the author of this article consider it as utmost need and is quoting from the *Āṅguttaranikāya* in full:

Lābho alābho ca yasāyaso ca,/ Nindā pasamsā ca sukhaṃ dukhañca I/ Ete aniccā manujesu dhammā,/ Asassatā viparināmadhammā II/ “Ete ca ñatvā satimā sumedho,/ Avekkhati viparināmadhamme I/ Itṭhassa dhammā na mathenti cittaṃ,/ Aniṭṭhito no paṭighātameti II/ “Tassānurodhā atha vā virodhā,/ Vidhūpitā atthaṅgatā na santi I/ Padañca ñatvā virajaṃ,/ Sammappajānāti bhavassa pāragū”ti II.

The second part of Sublime Welfare of Life is *Karuṇā*. It is made up of two parts. *Kaṃ + Ruṇāti*. *Kaṃ* means suffering (*dukkha*). *Ruṇāti* means to enter into it and not to stop till its solution is found. Therefore, it is not showing mercy or favor towards anyone. It is also not just giving something to someone and in this way feeling elated.

² *A Manual of Buddhism* (1992), Buddhist Missionary Society, Buddhist Vihar, 123 Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, p.85.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *The Suttanipāta* (1990), Ed. by Prof. P. V. Bapat, pub. by Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Book Centre, 40/5, Shakti Nagar, Second Edition, First Edition Poona 1924, Delhi, p. 20.

⁵ *Āṅguttaranikāya III, (paṭhamo khandho)*, (1998), pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 7.

Writing about this Compassion, an author writes - “It is compassion that compels one to serve others with altruistic motives. A truly compassionate person lives not for himself but for others. He seeks opportunities to serve others, expecting nothing in return, not even gratitude.”⁶

In the *Visuddhimagga*, it is explained that when a noble person’s heart is moved by seeing the suffering of others, it is said as compassion (*paradukkhe sati sādhuṇaṃ hadayakampanaṃ karotī ti karuṇā*).⁷ Further, its characteristic feature (*lakkhana*) is called as promoting the aspect of allaying suffering; its function (*rasa*) resides in not bearing others’ suffering. It is manifested (*puccuppaṭṭhāna*) as non-cruelty. Its proximate cause (*padaṭṭhāna*) is to see helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. It succeeds (*sampatti*) when it makes cruelty subside, and it fails (*vipatti*) when it produces sorrow.⁸ The text also talks about its Near (*āsanna*) and Far enemies (*dūrapaccatthikā*). Compassion has grief based on the home life as its near enemy, since both share in seeing failure. Cruelty, which is dissimilar to the grief, is far enemy. Therefore, it is said that compassion must be practiced free from fear of that because it is not possible to practice compassion and be cruel to breathing things simultaneously.⁹

Those who need compassion regarding this include not only people suffering from any ailment are considered but also those people who are spiritually bankrupt are also considered. Narrating about this, an author writes- “Many in this world are badly in need of substantial spiritual food, which is not easily obtained, as the spiritually poor far exceed the materially poor numerically, as they are found both amongst the rich and the poor.”¹⁰

These four are called illimitable as there are no certain boundaries regarding which direction these can be increased. These can be increased in all directions and are limitless.

One can doubt why wicked, vicious, cunning, and ignorant persons deserve compassion when their behavior is totally in contrast. A solution to this problem is given by the same author, and he writes- “The vicious, the wicked and ignorant deserve compassion even more than those who suffer physically as they are mentally and spiritually sick. They should not be condemned and despised but sympathized with for their failings and defects. Though a mother has equal compassion towards all her children still she may

⁶ *The Buddha and His Teachings* (1988) by Nārada Thera, pub. by Buddhist Missionary Society, 123, jalanaBerhala, 50470, Kualalumpur, Malaysia, First Edition 1964, Fourth Edition, ISBN; - 967-9920-44-5 (1988), p. 629.

⁷ *The Visuddhimagga* (1977), Ed. by Swami Dwarikadas Sastri, Bauddha Bharti Series-12, Bauddha Bharti Varanasi, p. 262.

⁸ *The Path of Purification* (2007), by Ven. Buddhaghosa, tr. by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 344.

⁹ Ibid. p. 345.

¹⁰ *The Buddha and His Teachings* (1988) by Nārada Thera, p. 631.

have more compassion towards a sick child. Even so, greater compassion should be exercised towards the spiritually sick as their sickness ruins their character.”¹¹ This is supported by the same author by giving examples of the courtesan Ambapālī and dreaded dacoit Aṅgulimāla to whom the Buddha had great compassion, and both of them later became members of the *saṃgha* and attained *arahathood*.¹²

In the present situation world needs this compassion more than ever because several countries are at war with others, and several countries are preparing for war. In the name of religion, several countries are involved in helping like-minded countries, and in this process, humanity suffers, and innocent people are being killed in the name of the expansion of religion. Some organized religions lure people of other faiths to convert to their own religion by giving financial or false promises. Other organized religion tries to convert people of lower strata by the sword or by increasing the population. India has witnessed all these conversions in the epoch of history and is witnessing them in modern times too. Here it is important to note that some of the neighboring countries were part of India, and due to external aggression and mass conversion, Buddhism vanished from those areas, and slowly-slowly those areas became independent countries. As Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal) can be seen, which slowly-slowly became Muslim dominated countries. In all these countries previously, conglomeration of Hinduism and Buddhism constituted majority of population.

Here it is also important to note that great *Vipassanā Acārya* (teacher) Shri S. N. Goenka spoke clairvoyantly in the U N Assembly when he was invited for talks that he was certainly for conversion but not from one organized religion to other. According to him he wanted to have conversion from misery to happiness, conversion from suffering to pleasant state of mind, conversion from poverty to richness by the means of self-awareness, diligence and by hard labour.

It is said that greatness is latent in every wicked person or persons of different professions. Above example of Āmbapālī and Aṅgulimāla have been discussed in the sense of why vicious persons need compassion. They were notorious in their field but when they got serene company of Buddhist Fraternity lead by the Buddha they got supreme position in the *saṃgha*. Examples of some of the kings can be seen as Ajātasattu of Magadha and the great king Ashoka of Maurya dynasty. When Ajātasattu came in contact with the Buddha his idea about the Buddha and Buddhist *Samgha* changed and Later on he became patron of the First Buddhist Council.

Who can forget the caṇḍāsoka who after getting good words became so much benevolent towards men and animal that he was christened as Dhammasoka with his charitable and Dhammic works. Here example of king Pasendi and king of Gandhāra Pukkusāti can also be seen who became of pious minded in contact of the Buddha. The King of Gandhara Pukkusati

¹¹ Ibid, p. 633.

¹² Ibid.

exchanged gifts with the king Bimbisara who was the ruling Magadha at that time. In reverence to the Buddha he went to see him on foot to pay respect to the Buddha.¹³

Seeing all the above ingredients of Compassion, it can be said that *karuṇā* is not just pity or kindness or sympathy. In Buddhism it has great meaning. Passing through several births and observing all the perfections the Buddha was christened as Mahākāruṇiko (the great Compassionate One).¹⁴ Not only this the disposition of the Buddha was such that the same author has given Him epithet of possessor of Great Mind (*mahāmāti*), possessor of great strength (*mahāvīro*), great meditator (*mahājhāyī*), the Possessor of great force (*mahābalo*) and destroyer of great darkness (*mahātamapanūdano*) and all these are in Pāli as follows:

“*Mahāmāti, mahāvīro, mahājhāyī, mahābalo* I/ *Mahākāruṇiko nātho mahātamapanūdano* II.”¹⁵ His disposition is equated with sinlessness of the rays of the Sun. Whatever beauty is not in the great Himalayas, whatever calmness is not in the Moon, what depth has not in the depth of the great Ocean that depth has been told in His disposition (*cariyā*), is in His *Iriyāpatha*, is in His words.¹⁶

II. UNITY

The next unit of this paper is Unity. What is Unity? In the Dictionary, it is explained as “The state of being in agreement and working together or the state of being joined together to form one unit.”¹⁷ After getting enlightenment and initiation of the Five-fold monks (*pañca vaggīya bhikkhū*), the Buddha initiated *Yasa*, the son of a great merchant of Varanasi, and his four friends, Vimal, Subāhu, Puṇṇaji, and Gavampati, and fifty friends of *Yasa* in his village.. The *saṃgha* was established by the Buddha.¹⁸ Up to here, there were 61 *Arahatas*. The Buddhist *saṃgha* was an epitome of example of Unity where anyone could become a member of the Fraternity, but not for forceful conversion or illegal works. According to one author, after getting enlightenment up to the first twenty years, there was no schism in the *Samgha* (*paṭhama bodhiyaṃ*

¹³ Ancient India (*An Introductory Outline*). (1990}, by D. N. Jha, Pub. by People's Publishing House, New Delhi, First Edition 1977, Sixth Print, 1990, p. 43.

¹⁴ . *The Paramatthadīpanī (Theragāthā- Aṭṭhakathā)*, (1998), pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri-422403, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthmālā- 61, Co-published by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 1.

¹⁵ *The Paramatthadīpanī (Theragāthā- Aṭṭhakathā)* {1998}. p. 33.

¹⁶ Pāli Sāhitya Kā Itihāsa (1986), by Dr. Bharatsingh Upādhyāya, Pub. by Hindi Sāhitya Sammelana, Prayāga, 12, Sammelana Mārga, Allahabad (Modern name as Prayāgarāj), 4th Improved Edition, p. 713.

¹⁷ *Oxford, Advance Learner's Dictionary* (2000), Ed. by Sally Wehmeer, Phonetics Editor Michel Ashby, OxfordUniversity Press, p. 1420.

¹⁸ *The Mahāvaggapālī*, (1998), pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 23.

vīsati vassāni).¹⁹ Few rules had been framed by the Buddha, but there was no dissension in the *Samgha*, and it was pure as a unit. If anyone has to see crystal purity, he or she could have seen it in the *Samgha*. The author of this article does not mean that thereafter there was no Unity in the *Samgha*, but for the sake of mass unity and for the pious cause of getting *nibbāna*, Unity in the *Samgha* was marvelous.

How unity can be protected can be seen in the *Dīghanikāya* in the *Mahāpari nibbāna Sutta* when the minister of Ajātasattu named Vassakāra went to meet the Buddha and after salutation asked the will of his king Ajātasattu to destroy the Vajji the Buddha replied after enquiring with Ānanda that so long as Vajjian held regular and frequent assemblies, carried their business in harmony, so long as Vajjian did not authorize what has not been authorized, so long as they were hearing and so long as they did not forcibly abduct others' wives and daughter forcibly, so long as they saluted shrines at home and abroad etc. Vajjian would be prosper and would not decline.²⁰ A little ahead in the same text after returning of the minister Vassakāra the Buddha asked Ānanda to get monks assembled and the Buddha taught Seven things that were conducive to welfare. Some of these were holding frequent assemblies, not to authorize what had not been authorized by law, honoring of parents and other elders etc.²¹

These are such properties which can be applied in any society and any society can remain united. For durable peace every society needs it and their public need these seven qualities which are known as *aparīhāṇīyadhammā* and in the *Dīghanikāya* these qualities have been two kinds. (Qualities related to kings) *rājaaparīhāṇīyadhammā* and (Qualities related to monks) *bhikkhuaparīhāṇīyadhammā*

In the *Dhammapada* regarding unity it is said that birth of Awakened One (the Buddha) is very happier state, teaching of the true Dhamma is very joyful, unity in the *saṃgha* is matter of great happiness and austerity of the united is matter of great joy or happiness. “*Sukho buddhānaṃ uppādo, sukhā saddhammadesanā* I / *Sukhā saṃghassa sāmaggī, samaggānaṃ tapo sukho* II.”²²

¹⁹ *Pāli Sāhitya Kā Itihāsa* (1986), by Dr. Bharatsingh Upādhyāya, Pub. by Hindi Sāhitya Sammelana, Prayāga, 12, Sammelana Mārga, Allahabad (Modern name as Prayāgarāj), 4th Improved Edition, p. 375

²⁰ Op. Cit. *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), by Maurice Walshe, pub. by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, first published in 1995, Wisdom Publication, 361 Newbury Street Boston, Massachusetts, USA, ISBN 955-24-0154-2, p. 231-232

²¹ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 233, Also *Dīghanikāyo* II, (1998), Ed. by pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 57 - 58

²² *The Dhammapada a Translator's Guide* (2009), by K. T. S. Sarao, pub. by Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. PO Box 5715, 54 Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi-110055, ISBN-978-81-215-1201-5, verse no. 194.

It is well-known fact that most of the things in the form of teachings have been given by the Buddha for monks and nuns but lay devotee also can extract good things for themselves. Here too lay people can take unity for themselves.

In the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya*²³ the Buddha talks about sign of great man and says in His former life Tathāgata ... rejecting idle chatter, spoke at the right time, what was correct and to the point, of Dharma and discipline and what was bound up with profit ... and in unity enjoyed (*yampi, bhikkhave... piṣuṇaṃ vācaṃ pahāya ... samaggārāmo samaggarato samagganandī samaggakaraṇiṃ vācaṃ bhāstā ahoṣi.*)

It is seen in several instances that person of lower strata and of followers of some religions become united in the name of religion or caste and creed. The Buddha was aware about this and He advises His fellow brothers that in the name of *samaṇa* (monk) some persons think them as so. Remove those persons as chaff who are not *samaṇa* and blow them away who have sinful desires and have sinful deeds and objects. In the next verse the Buddha admonishes that be pure and live together with pure, being thoughtful agreeing with wise you can put an end to the sufferings or pain. In Pāli it is as follows: “*Tato palāpe vāhetha assamaṇe samaṇamānīne* I/ *Niddhamitvāna pāpicche pāpācāragocare* II/ *Suddhā suddhehi saṃvāsaṃ kappayavho patissatā* I/ *Tato samaggā nipakā dukkhassantṃ karissathāti* II.”²⁴

So unity with sinful persons is not advised by the Buddha. He advocates unity and unison with wise (*samaggā nipakā*). Now it seems pertinent here to say who is a *samaṇa* and *Thera* and who are not. Regarding these verses from the *Dhammapada* is necessary to quote here. He is not a *samaṇa* who have shaved his head and is immoral and speaks a lie. Who is full with desire and greed how he can become a monk. In the same way he is not an Elder (*thera*) who has shaven head and has come of ages. Such persons are only aged persons and have grown up in desires. The verses are as follows: “*Na muṇḍakena samaṇo abbato alikaṃ bhaṇaṃ, Icchālobhasamāpanno samaṇo kiṃ bhavissati? Na tena thero hoti yenassa Pālitaṃ siro, Paripakko vayo tassa moghajjīṇṇo ti vuccati* II 260 (verse no. 260)”²⁵

In contrary to this it is said at the same *vagga* of the *Dhammapada* that who quietens evils small or big, thoroughly he is indeed an ascetic as he quietens all evils. About an Elder (*thera*) it is said that in whom there is truth and righteousness, non-violence, restraint and moderation is indeed an Elder who has discarded impurity and is wise.²⁶ About a real *samaṇa* it is said that one

²³ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 458 and also *Dīghanikāyo* III (1998), Vipassanā Research Institute, Igatapuri, *Dhammagiri – Pāli-Gaṇthamālā*, Devanāgrī-3; p. 129.

²⁴ *The Sutta-Nipāta* (1990), Verse No. 281-282; Ed. by P. V. Bapat, published by Sri Satguru Publications a division of Indian Books Centre, 40/5, Shakti Nagar, Delhi-110007, India, First Edition Poona 1924, Second Edition, ISBN-81-7030-232-8, p. 29.

²⁵ *The Dhammapada, A Translator's Guide* (2009), Verses 264 & 260, p. 324 & 319.

²⁶ *Ibid.* Verse 265, p. 325.

who has quietened small and big evils is a monk.²⁷

One who is a real *Dharmācārya* (propounder of the Dhamma) clearly foresees the future and gives his teachings according to the real danger coming in future. In India there had been several religious poets and other *dharmagurus* (teachers of Dhamma) who have preached taking cognizance of the future danger by their own disciples. One such *dharmaguru* was kabīr who says that one who has taken birth in a higher caste but his acts are not so high, he is like a pot of gold which is full with wine.²⁸ This paper is related with Buddhism so quoting the Buddha would be better than any other saints. In the *Sutta-Nipāta* the Buddha says that by birth no one becomes an outcaste and by birth no one becomes a Brāhmaṇa. By action one becomes an outcaste and by action one becomes a person of higher caste. *Na jaccā vasalo hoti, na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo* I/ *Kammunā vasalo hoti, kammunā hoti brāhmaṇo* II.²⁹

Not only this but in the last group (*vagga*) of the *Dhammapada* there are about forty verses in which the Buddha talks about a real Brāhmaṇa and the author of this article without giving many verses just gives the gist of a verse in which the Buddha says- “One who is strong, noble, a here, a great seer, victorious, free from craving, has attained perfection in the Dhamma is awakened, him I call a Brāhmaṇa.”³⁰

In the *Kiṇṭhisutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* the Buddha advises monks for unity in the *Samgha* and teaches how it is possible. This can be applied in day to day life and unity in any society can be achieved.³¹ In fact the Buddha was staying at Baliharaṇa near Kusinārā (modern Kusinagar) in U. P. State of India. The Buddha asked monks Whether His Wayfaring with alms bowl and preaching were for robe material or for alms food and lodging or for success or decline of the Dhamma. Monks replied that His teachings were out of compassion for them. The Buddha says His teachings of four applications of mindfulness (*cattāro satipatṭhāna*), four right efforts (*cattāro sammappadhānā*), the four bases of psychic power (*cattāro iddhipādā*), five controlling faculties (*pañcaindriyāni*), the five powers (*pañca balāni*), the seven links in awakening (*satta bojjhaṅgā*), and Eight-fold path (*ariyo-aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*) are well proclaimed and you should train yourselves altogether in harmony and without contention each and all of these. But there might be two monks who would be speaking differently about the Dhamma. The Buddha further says that there may be differences in denotation and connotation. Solve in this way and try to

²⁷ Ibid. Verse 261, p. 320.

²⁸ The Kabīra Sākhi, Darpaṇa (2012), Devanagari, Ed. by Shri Kabīra Jñāna Prakāsha-na Kendra, Santa Kabīra Jñāna Marga, Sirasiyā, Giridiha-815301, Jharakhanda, First Edition-2009, ISBN No. 978-81-920824-7-9, p. 135.

²⁹ The *Sutta-Nipāta* (1990), verse-136, p. 19.

³⁰ The *Dhammapada*, A Translator's Guide (1990), verse. 422, p. 527.

³¹ The *Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima-Nikāya)* {1996}, Vol. III, Tr. by I. B. Horner, pub. by The Pāli Text Society, Oxford, First Edition 1959, Reprinted 1996, ISBN0 860130022 3, p. 25.

soothe the problems so that no one is harmed, and unity in the *saṃgha* should be maintained. In the case that any monk has transgressed some rules, then do not try to reprove him in haste, and the individual must be examined. A little ahead in the same *sutta*, the Buddha says that it may be possible, living and training together, a monk can speak with another monk with harsh speech. When he becomes normal, then ask him O brother, we were trained in the Dhamma together and we had been living in unity but you lost your temper and would this losing temper would help you in realizing *nibbāna*? In this way he would change his behavior as it was against the norm of the Dhamma.³²

Further, the discussion comes to an end narrating that if some monks do not behave well then some trained monks can say him like this. O brothers all of us have been trained by the Buddha and have become skilled in the Dhamma. But how you speak it will not yield you desired result. It will not lead you to ultimate goal and your goal would be eluded. After some times he would realize the mistake and would improve himself.³³

It is generally seen in the society that if some persons have any iota of quality then on persuasion he or she realizes their fault and improve themselves. Even during student days if above methods are applied results are sure to come. Therefore, above methods as described in the said *sutta* on application yield positive results. One thing is very clear how common masses of the society are trained. Regarding Buddhism and its followers in different countries are trained by monks and nuns and such training make the society restraint in several aspects. That is why it was this training which helped them during Covid 19 much and casualties in Buddhist countries was less in comparison to those of other countries.

This *sutta* is considered as pioneer in the *Tripitaka* to establish peace in the *Samgha* and tool for reconciliation in the case of dissension in the *Samgha* so that *Sāsana* can live long.

Here, a question can be asked that which type of congregation or company can attain lasting peace. In answer to this question, what the Buddha said in the *Aṃguttara Nikāya* is very pertinent and fit to the situation. The Buddha says that, O monks, I do not praise wrong conduct in either house-holder or home-leaver. To achieve any goal right method is necessary. Regarding this, the Buddha says that if wrongly conducted, neither house-holder nor home-leaver can win the true method, the true Dhamma.³⁴ Further, the Buddha says that there are two types of companies, e.g., I. Shallow II. Deep. About shallow company. He says that which company is frivolous, empty-headed, busy-bodies, harsh in speech, loose in talk, lacking concentration, unsteady, not

³² Ibid. p. 29

³³ *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhim-Nikāya)* {1996}, Vol. III, Tr. by I. B. Horner, pub. by The Pāli Text Society, Oxford, First Edition 1959, Reprinted 1996, ISBN0 860130022 3, p. 25.

³⁴ *The Book of the Gradual Sayings (Aṃguttara Nikāya)* {1954}, printed in Great Britain, First Edition 1932, Reprinted, p. 64 – 65.

composed, of a flighty mind, with senses uncontrolled- that Company is called shallow. In contrast to each of the above like which is not frivolous and is not empty-headed, so on and so forth, that company is deep. A little ahead in the same place, the Buddha enumerates two more companies, like discordant and harmonious. The Buddha goes on explaining different kinds of duet companies, like distinguished and ignoble; the Ariyan and un-Ariyan, dregs and cream; company trained in bluster and company trained in discussion by inquiry, etc. Here, all the companies have been elaborated by the Buddha through His experiences.³⁵ These companies are not the right companies and are to be avoided by house-holders and house-leavers for the sake of advancement on their path, unity achieved would not be long-lasting. After a little explanation on Unity, it is pertinent to say something about the Integrity.

III. INTEGRITY

Integrity is defined in various ways. Somewhere, it is defined as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. It is also explained as the state of being whole and not divided.³⁶ The life of the Buddha was a great embodiment of integrity, and after his *Mahāparinibbāna*, his teachings are full of examples of integrity. After taking a vow to leave the house-hold life He did not see back and for whole life he wandered and even after being the son of a king he kissed difficulties and attained *nibbāna* the *summum bonum* of his life and provided a fool proof system on which if any one treads he or she would get himself or herself liberated. During his lifetime time He liberated enumerable beings, and after His demise, enumerable would be liberated from the bond if they accepted His path. The following are some examples of integrity.

Amgulimāla was a dreaded dacoit and had become a nuisance for the king of Kosala and for people who were passing through the jungle of Kosala. He was waiting for his last prey. But he was won over by the Buddha when the Buddha passed through the jungle. Even after being forbidden by the guards the Buddha went on walking. The robber saw him from a distance and prepared his bow and arrow. He ran to catch the Buddha, but due to the supernormal power created by the Buddha he could not catch Him. For the first time, he started thinking that previously he was catching running elephants, horses, chariots, and deer, etc. but with a normal speed, this monk was going and he was not able to catch Him. Then he asked the Buddha to stop. The Buddha replied that he had stopped when would he stop - "*Thito ahaṃ, Amgulimāla, tvaṃ ca tiṭṭhā*".³⁷

Then it occurred to the robber that this *samaṇa* is walking and says that he is standing still. There arose in his mind that *samaṇas* were truth speakers and approvers of truth and he wanted to ask Him. This great conviction in the mind of a robber proves and shows how integrity was in the lives of monks

³⁵ Op. Cit. Ibid. P. 65 – 71.

³⁶ Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000), p. 676.

³⁷ . The *Majjhimanikāya* (1999), Ed. & tr. by Swamī Dwārikādās Sāstrī, pub. by Bauddha Bharti, Bauddha-Bharti Series-24-25 (Hindi Edition), Unique Edition, p. 855.

and nuns and how the Buddha and His wayfaring was full with integrity. Not only this when Aṃgulimāla was begging relatives of slain persons beat him with pelting stones and with staffs but Aṃgulimāla never reacted to anyone. Such was honesty and integrity of a robber who once turned was turned for life and never ever transgressed the vows which he or she took. Such integrity in personal life is rare in the present time. Climax of the story is when the king of Kosal Prasenjit became ready to catch the robber with five hundred soldiers he went to meet the Buddha in the Jetavana Monastery. When the Buddha knew that the king was going to catch the robber Aṃgulimāla he asked the king what if he could get the wanted person as donning yellow robe after saving off mustache and beard leading to life of a recluse. The king said that he would salute him and would offer him robe and food. But how was it possible to see such a robber of evil character would control in moral habit would live a moral life. After that the Buddha raised the right hand of Bhante Aṃgulimā and said to the king that he was Aṃgulimāla. Then on enquiry by the king venerable Aṃgulimāla said that clan of his father was Gagga and his mother was of Maṇṭāṇī clan. And the king when offered him robes and food as the ven. Aṃgulimāla was observing Austerity practices (*dhutaṃgāni*) refused to take as saying that he had sufficient for his practices.³⁸

There is a well-known story of the child Nāgasena being persuaded by Ven. Rohaṇa and ultimately he was initiated into the *Samgha* in the Milindapañho. When Mahāsena was conceived into the womb of the wife of Soṇuttara Brāhmiṇa in the village of Kajaṅgal in the Himalayas, ven. Rohaṇa started begging at the house of that Brāhmṇa as a child, and Nāgasena was to initiate him into the samgha. But Soṇuttara Brāhmiṇa was so miser that he never offers rice or pulse or vegetable to ven. Rohaṇa. Not only this but not a single word of salutation also he did not get. Instead of a soothing word, ven. Rohaṇa was always saluted with harsh, denigrating words. For a continuous seven years and ten months. Rohaṇa was going to beg alms at the house of Soṇuttara Brāhmiṇa, and he did not get anything or any good words ever. One day, someone from the house of Soṇuttara Brāhmiṇa told that ven. Please go ahead. Soṇuttara Brāhmiṇa was returning from some work being completed somewhere. In anticipation, he asked ven. Rohaṇa, in suspicion, did someone have given him something in his house? Ven. Rohaṇa said that today he got something, and Soṇuttara Brāhmiṇa inquired at his house of his wife why she gave anything to that Bhante. Her wife said that she did not give anything to Ven. Rohaṇa. On approaching the next day, Soṇuttar Brāhmiṇa asked Ven. Rohaṇa, no one gave you anything in my house yesterday, and even then, you said that you got something. Was it fair for a monk to speak untruth?

Here it is important to note that Brāhmiṇa Soṇuttara had great belief that a samaṇa always speak the truth. It was the high honor for monks and nuns that persons of the other faith had a great belief that monks and nuns do speak

³⁸ The Majjhimanikāya (1999), Ed. & tr. by Swamī Dwārikādās Sāstrī, pub. by Bauddha Bharti, Bauddha-Bharti Series-24-25 (Hindi Edition), Unique Edition, p. 858.

untruth. It was the high level of integrity and honesty of the *Samgha*.

This story has another facet of dedication, sacrifice and renunciation. When ven. Rohaṇa was asked to meet punishment as the *Samgha* Kamma he did not think otherwise and continuously did alms round and after that he became successful in his work of ordaining Nāgasena. Therefore, it can be said that such dedication and renunciation is difficult to find.

Integrity also means adherence to moral practices. It does not mean to become honest for some times and when he or she gets chance becomes dishonest and start doing immoral works. Therefore, the Buddha started morality from the entrance of the *Samgha* itself. Moment a person enters the *Samgha* either he or she, has to take ten moral precepts which is known as *Dasasikkhāpadāni*.³⁹ These moral precepts are also for house-holders. When a house-holder wants to walk on the path he at first takes five precepts which is known as *pañcasīla*. When he progresses on the path he further practice three more precepts and take three precepts more which is called as *aṭṭhasīla*. Such was arrangement made by the Buddha when he established *Samgha* and people in large number started becoming member of the Fraternity. And how these moral practices have to be kept has been told by the Buddha. As an ant keeps its egg, cow protects its tail, a mother protects her son, as a one eyed man protects his eye in this way morality has to be protected. It is narrated in Pāli as follows: “*Kikī va aṇḍaṃ camarī va vāladhiṃ, piyaṃ va puttāṃ nayanāṃ va ekakaṃ I / Tatheva sīlaṃ anurakkhamānakā supesalā hotha sāgāravā ti II*.”⁴⁰

Morality for House-holders: As the Buddha suggested morality or moral principles for monks He also prescribed moral actions for house-holders. These are Generosity (*dāna*) which yields wealth, Morality (*sīla*)-it gives birth in noble families and in state of happiness, Meditation (*bhāvanā*), which gives birth in Realms of Form (*rūpī brahma*) and Formless Realm (*arūpī brahma*) and which tends to gain higher knowledge emancipation. The next moral actions are Reverence (*apacāyana*) - it causes noble parentage; Service (*veyyāvāca*); Transference of merit (*patidāna*); Rejoicing in others’ merit (*pattānu modanā*)-which is productive of merit whenever one is born; Hearing the Doctrine (*Dhamma savanna*)-it promotes wisdom; Expounding the Doctrine (*Dhamma desanā*)-which promotes wisdom Strengthening of one’s own views (*Diṭṭhiujjukaṇa*)-it enhances confidence.⁴¹ These qualities are universal in nature and can be applied in any society and on application members would be benefited. These actions can also be termed as actions of

³⁹ *The Khuddakapāṭho* (1992), Ed. & Tr. by Bhikshu Satyapāla and Om Prakash Pathak, pub. by Bhikshu Satyapāla, General Secretary, Buddha Tri-Ratna Mission, B-129, Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi, p. 4.

⁴⁰ *The Visuddhimagga* (1977), Ed. by Swami Dwarikadas Sastri, Bauddha Bharti Series-12, Bauddha Bharti Varanasi, p. 30.

⁴¹ *A Manual of Buddhism* (1992) by Narada, pub. by Buddhist Missionary Society, Buddhist Vihara, 123, Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, ISBN 967-9920—58-5, p. 97 – 98.

Integrity.

Integrity includes honesty and uprightness too. In the *Samgīti sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* under set of two (*dukaṃ*) section it is said that there are set of two things that were perfectly proclaimed by the Buddha. Under this section there are various qualities mentioned in the above text and one of them is *ajjavaṇca lajjavaṇca*.⁴² It means straightforwardness and modesty. These two are well proclaimed by the Buddha so monks should recite these two. Here it is important to observe that some persons are straight forward but they are not moderate. Modesty is eluding them. But the Buddha says with straightforwardness modest should also be there.

The *Tripitaka* is full with integrity or honesty. Whole life the Buddha strove for honesty and integrity. It is not possible to narrate all of them. But the author of this article is unable to hold his temptation and gives the *Cūlapuṇṇamasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* in which the Buddha talks about *sappurisa* and *asappurisa*.⁴³ The Buddha starts discussion by asking a question to the monks as is it possible by a bad man to know about a bad man and monks replied in negative. Then the Buddha asked that was it possible by a bad man to know of a good man. Again monks replied in negative. The Buddha then says that a bad man possesses a bad state of mind, he consorts with bad men, he thinks like bad men, he advises as bad men he speaks like bad men, he acts like bad men, his views are like bad men and he gives a gift as bad men do.⁴⁴ The Buddha says there that a bad man lacks in faith, he has no shame, no fear of blame, he does not hear the Dhamma more, he is lazy, he is not mindful, and he is weak in wisdom.⁴⁵

Then the Buddha asked monks about good men that it was possible that a good man could know about a good man. At the same time monks also replied positively about a good man can know about a bad man. The Buddha further says that a good man possesses good state of mind, he consorts with good men, he advises like good men, he speaks like good men and he gives gift like good men. After this the Buddha elaborates about each quality described above.

Renunciation is also one meaning of Integrity. In the Eight-fold Path the second part is Right Aspiration (*sammā saṃkappo*). It has been explained as three types e.g. *nekkhamma saṃkappo*, *avyāpāda saṃkappo* and *avihiṣā*

⁴² . *The Dīghanikāya* (1998), Part III, pub. by Vipassana Research Institute, Dhammagiri, Igatpuri 422403, India, Co-pub. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 170.

⁴³ *The Majjhimanikāya* (1999), Part III, Ed. & tr. by Swamī Dwārikādās Sāstrī, pub. by Bauddha Bharti, Bauddha-Bharti Series-24-25 (Hindi Edition), Unique Edition, p. 1107.

⁴⁴ *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhim-Nikāya)* {1996}, Vol. III, Tr. by I. B. Horner, pub. by The Pāli Text Society, Oxford, First Edition 1959, Reprinted 1996, ISBN0 860130022 3, p. 71.

⁴⁵ *The Collection of the Middle Length Sayings (Majjhim-Nikāya)* {1996}, Vol. III, Tr. by I. B. Horner, pub. by The Pāli Text Society, Oxford, First Edition 1959, Reprinted 1996, ISBN0 860130022 3, p. 71.

saṃkappo. An author also translates *Sammā saṃkappo* as Right Thought.⁴⁶ *Nekkhamma saṃkappa* means to come out of the periphery of cravings. It is opposite to lustful desires. Here it is very important to note that coming out of periphery of *taṇhā* is very difficult. People long for this world and it is easy to say but difficult to be done. It is generally seen that several saints, various monks and other ascetics have just donned either yellow robes or brown robes but they are not able to bring themselves out from the periphery of *taṇhā*. In the Dhammapada it is said that if it rains gold coins from the sky even then desires of the human beings cannot be fulfilled. The wise man having understood that sensual desires give only little pleasure and are painful, either he or she does not find likings even in divine pleasures. A pupil of the Awakened One is completely devoted in destruction of desires. It is mentioned in Pāli as follow: “*Na kahāpana vasseyya titti kāmesu vijjati, / Appasādā dukkhā kāmaṃ iti Viññāya paṇḍito I / Api dibbesu kāmesu ratiṃ so nādhigacchati, / Taṇhakkhayarato hoti sammāsambuddhasāvako II.*”⁴⁷

Vyāpāda is explained as desire of others destruction (*para vināsa cintā*). Avyāpāda is opposed to it and it is opposite to ill will. Thoughts of Harmlessness (*avihiṃsā saṃkappa*) are not to harm others and it is opposite to cruelty. All these tend to purify the mind.⁴⁸

In the Aṅguttara Nikāya particularly in the Sikkhāpada Sutta the Buddha has used a method to observe on the five precepts to demarcate a person of no integrity from a person of Integrity. A person of no integrity involves himself in killing living beings (*pāṇātipātā*), taking what is not given to him (*adinnādānā*), sexual misdeeds (*kāmesu micchācārā*), telling a lie (*musāvādā*) and indulging in wine, arrack and other intoxicating hard dinks that makes a person inebriated (*surā-meraya- majjappamādā*) {*Katamo ca, bhikkhave, asappuriso? Idha bhikkhave ekacco pāṇātipātī hoti, adinnādāyī hoti, kāmesumicchācārī hoti, musāvādī hoti, surāmerayamajjappamādatthāyī hoti. Ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, asappuriso.*}⁴⁹ Here one thing is important to note that in the sexual misdeeds for monk a term is used and it is *abrahmacariya* but for a lay devotee *kāmesu micchācārā* termed is used. The Buddha says here a person of no integrity indulges in above mentioned acts and also involves or encourages other to do so. The Buddha says that he is worse than a person of no integrity. In contrary, a person who abstains from all these special and peculiar qualities is called as person of integrity and who does not encourage other to do so is better than a person of integrity.

In another *sutta* named the *Sappurisa Dhamma sutta* of the Aṅguttara

⁴⁶ A Manual of Buddhism (1992), p.132.

⁴⁷ The Dhammapada, A Translator's Guide (1990), verse No. 186-187, p. 231 - 232.

⁴⁸ A Manual of Buddhism (1992), p. 133.

⁴⁹ The Aṅguttaranikāyo, Paṭhamo Bhāgo (*Dutiyo khandho*), (1998) “*sikkhāpada suttam*” Devanāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 247.

*Nikāya*⁵⁰ the Buddha has enumerated ten unwholesome deeds and in opposition ten qualities of a person of no integrity and a person of integrity. In the list of a person of no integrity following marvelous qualities has been given: (1) Killing living being. (2) Taking what is not given. (3) Sexual misdeeds. (4) False speech. (5) Slandering. (6) Harsh speech. (7) Greed. (8) Ill-will. (9) Wrong view.

And in Pāli it is: (*sappurisadhammañca vo, bhikkhave, desessāmi asappurisadhammañca. Taṃ suñātha...pe...katamo ca, bhikkhave asappurisadhammo? Pāṇātipāto...pe...micchādittḥi-ayaṃ vuccati, bhikkhave, asappurisadhammo*). A person who commits above misdeeds is called by the Buddha as a person of no integrity and in opposition a person who refrains from the above qualities is characterized by the Buddha as a person of integrity.

In another *sutta* of the same name, *Sappurisa sutta* of the *Āṅguttaranikāyo*, the Buddha has narrated about a person of integrity and his qualities. The Buddha says that when a person of integrity takes birth in a family he becomes a helper and liberator of many persons, like parents, son, and wife, becomes a supporter of workers, of friends and relatives, and helps also Samaṇa and Brāhmaṇs. The Buddha further says that as a great cloud after raining satisfies most of people so in the same way when a man of integrity takes birth in a family help various persons (*Sappuriso, bhikkhave, kule jāyamāno bahuno janassa atthāya hitāya sukhāya hoti, mātūpitūnaṃ...pe...puttadārassa...pe...dāsakammakaraposisassa...pe...mittāmaccānaṃ...pe...samaṇabrāhmaṇānaṃ...*).⁵¹

Yet in another *sutta* of the same name of the *Āṅguttaranikāyo*, the Buddha has described the difference between a person of no integrity and a person of integrity based on good and bad qualities of their own and others. These are four distinct qualities of both of them. At first, He has given the characteristics of a person of no integrity, which are as follows:

(1) Even on not asking, he will reveal the bad qualities of other persons. When asked, he describes bad habits and qualities of another person in full and not in short form. (2) When asked, he will not reveal the good qualities of another person. Pressing hard expresses good qualities of others in short form but not in detail. In most cases, he conceals good qualities. (3) On asking about his bad qualities, he does not reveal. While pressing hard says only a few bad qualities about him. (4) Without asking, he explains his good qualities. When asked, he describes his good qualities fully without concealing anything.

⁵⁰ *The Āṅguttaranikāyo, Tatiyo Bhāgo (Dutiyo khandho)*, (1998), “*Sappurisa dhama suttaṃ*”, Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 247.

⁵¹ *The Āṅguttaranikāyo*, (1998), *Dutiyo Bhāgo (Pṭhamo khandho)*, “*Sappurisa suttaṃ*” Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 42-43

(*Catūhi, bhikkhave dhammehi samannāgato asappuriso veditabbo. Katamehi catūhi? Idha, bhikkhave, asappuriso yo hoti parassa avaṇṇo ...*)⁵²

The four distinct qualities of a person of integrity are as follows:

(1) On asking, he does not reveal the bad qualities of another person. When he is not asked, he does not express anything about a bad person. When he is asked to do so again and again, even then he does not reveal bad qualities fully or in detail. He generally eludes some bad qualities and holds back some. (2) When he is not asked, he reveals good qualities of another person. While he is asked, he narrates good qualities of others in full and does not omit or hold back anything. (3) When he is not asked about the bad qualities of himself, he reveals it. On asking he certainly narrated his bad qualities and when repeatedly asked he reveals his all the bad qualities of himself and does not hold back any. (4) On asking about his good qualities he does express it. When not asked he will not express his good qualities. On asking repeatedly, he describes his good qualities not in full or in detail. He can omit or hold back some.

(*Catūhi, bhikkhave, dhammehi samannāgato sappuriso veditabbo. Katamehi catūhi? Idha bhikkhave, sappuriso yo hoti parassa avaṇṇo taṃ puṭṭhopi na pātu karoti, ko pana vādo apuṭṭhassa! Puṭṭho kho pana pañhābhinito hāpetvā lambitvā aparipūraṃ avitthārena parassa avaṇṇaṃ bhāsitaṃ hoti. Veditabbametaṃ, bhikkhave, sappuriso ayaṃ bhavanti*).⁵³

There are various other qualities which can be said about a person of integrity on the basis of Pāli literature. Paucity of time does not permit the author of this article to do so.

Mindful efforts

In the Pāli literature mindful efforts have very exalted place. Not only Pāli literature but in any literature or in any religious domain Mindful actions have their own position.

Right Effort is the translation of *sammā vāyama* which is a technical term rather the sixth part of the Eight-fold Path which has been narrated as follows:

(1) Endeavour to not to arise evil qualities which have yet not arisen in anyone (*anuppannānaṃ akuslānaṃ dhammānaṃ anuppādāya vāyamo*). (2) Endeavour to discard evil qualities which have already arisen (*uppannānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya vāyamo*). (3) Endeavour to arise good qualities which have yet not arisen (*anuppannānaṃ kualānaṃ dhammānaṃ uppādāya vāyamo*). (4) Endeavour to increase whatever good qualities have arisen (*uppannānaṃ kuslānaṃ dhammānaṃ abhiviḍḍhiyā vāyamo*).⁵⁴

Above are real efforts which will bring good results in the life of anyone who wants to ameliorate one's life. Whether it is a life of a recluse or life of a

⁵² *The Aṅguttaranikāyo, Paṭhamo Bhāgo (Dutiyo khandho)*, (1998), p. 89

⁵³ *The Aṅguttaranikāyo, Paṭhamo Bhāgo (Dutiyo khandho)*, (1998), p. 90.

⁵⁴ *The Vibhaṅgapāli*, (1998), Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā-114, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 266.

house-holder in both cases above efforts would yield positive and prosperous efforts.

Mindful actions can also be narrated as actions done mindfully. It can also be elaborated as actions done with awareness. Awareness is translated in Pāli as *sati*. It has been elaborated four types: (1) Mindfulness regarding body (*kāyānupassanā*). (2) Mindfulness regarding feelings (*vedanānupassanā*). (3) Mindfulness regarding mind (*cittānupassanā*). (4) Mindfulness regarding Dhamma (*dhammānupassanā*).

Mindfulness regarding body (*kāyānupassanā*): Here, it is a matter of thinking that at first a man takes birth as a newborn baby and passing through different stages of Toddler (child of 1 to 3 years), child (3 to 9 years), Preteen (9 to 12 years old child), youth stage to middle aged adult and finally passing through Elderly stage one day reaches to final destination which is called death (*maccu*). Some biological reactions are happening every moment in our body. Therefore, to remain aware about one's own body is known as Mindfulness regarding body (*kāyānupassannā*) and the original Pāli is as- (*kāye kāyānupassī viharati atāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassam*).⁵⁵ Here the word *sampajāno* needs further explanation. In Pāli literature it is also explained as *sati sampajañña* which means remaining alert for every moment of every action with clear awareness. In the *Dīghanikāya* the Buddha explains it as while going forth and back, in looking ahead or behind him, in bending or stretching, in wearing outer or inner robes and carrying his bowl, in eating, drinking, chewing, in swallowing, in evacuating and urinating, in walking, standing, sitting, lying down, in walking, in speaking, and in keeping silent he acts with clear awareness.⁵⁶ It is in Pāli as - "*Bhikkhu abhikkante paṭikkante sampajānakārī hoti, ālokithe vilokite sampajānakārī hoti, samijjite pasārite sampajānakārī hoti, saṃghātipattacivaradhāraṇe sampajānakārī hoti, asite pīte khāyite sāyite sampajānakārī hoti, uccārapassāvakamme sampajānakārī hoti, gate ṭhite nisinne sutte jāgarite bhāsīte tuṇhībhave sampajānakārī hoti*."⁵⁷

Mindfulness regarding body is to ponder over head to feet and to see each part starting from hair, nails, teeth and skins etc. up to both feet one should survey one by one. This reviewing of the body is supplemented with an example in which it is said that as a farmer has a bag which is open from the two sides and he puts different seeds and is aware about each seed so a mendicant or a recluse should review his own body from top to bottom and from bottom to top. He reviews internal and external body independently. AT the same time,

⁵⁵ *The Vibhaṅgapāli*, p. 266

⁵⁶ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), by Maurice Walshe, pub. by Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, first published in 1995, Wisdom Publication, 361 Newbury Street Boston, Massachusetts, USA, ISBN 955-24-0154-2, p. 100.

⁵⁷ *The Dīghanikāyao* (1998), Part-I, Devnāgrī, Dhammagiri-Pāli-Ganthamālā-1, pub. by V. R. I. Dhammagiri, Igatpuri- 422403, India, Co-pub. by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 11th Floor, 55 Hang Chow S. Rd. Sec 1, Taipei, Taiwan R O C, p. 62-63

he reviews his body in terms of elements like earth – element, water – element, fire – element and air – element and in the text it is given with a simile of a butcher. This is known as to see the body as the body.⁵⁸

Mindfulness regarding feeling: When a monk or mendicant or lay devotee contemplates pleasant feeling as pleasant and unpleasant as unpleasant and indifferent feeling as indifferent then he is mindful regarding feelings. He is well aware about sensual-feelings. He abides internal and external feelings as they really are. In feelings whatever things arise and vanish, he is fully aware with that. This arising and passing away of *khandhā* in feelings provides intrinsic joy or satisfaction. In the *Dhammapada* it is narrated as-whenver one understands fully the arising and passing away of the aggregates one obtains joy and happiness. Whatever one knows is like the state of deathlessness (*amataṃ*).

“*Yato yato sammāsati khandhānaṃ udayavyayaṃ/ Labhati pītipāmojjaṃ amataṃ taṃ vijānataṃ*”II.⁵⁹ When a mendicant abides independently not clinging to anything, it is known as contemplating feeling as feeling.⁶⁰

Mindfulness regarding mind: When a monk contemplates on lustful mind as lustful, a mind free from attachment as free from lust or attachment, a hating mind as hating, a mind free from hate as free from hate, a deluded mind as deluded, undeluded mind as undeluded, a contracted mind as contracted, a distracted mind as distracted, a developed mind as developed, an undeveloped mind as undeveloped, a surpassed mind as surpassed, an unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed, a concentrated mind as concentrated and a liberated mind as liberated etc. He also contemplates on internal and external mind.⁶¹

Mindfulness regarding Dhamma: The Dhamma here means dhammas preached by the Buddha. At first he ponders over Five-fold-clinging to existence (*pañca-upādāna-khandhā*). Then he contemplates on six internal and external senses āyatana, seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*) and then he contemplates on truth. It is necessary here to describe five factors of hindrance (*nīvaraṇa*) as these create obstacle in the way of getting mind concentrate. These are five in number and there five *jhāna* factors. If *nīvaraṇas* are controlled other ingredients become easy to control. These are: (1) Desire for sensual please (*kāmacchanda*) It is sensual pleasure which arises due to all six – senses. (2) Ill-Will (*vyāpāda*) It is desire to harm others. (3) Sloth and Torpor (*thina-middha*) It is bruding over what has been done and what has not been done. (4) Wary and Flurry (*uddhacca-kukkuccaṃ*) It is distraction of mind. (5) Doubts (*vicikicchā*) It is doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṃgha.⁶²

⁵⁸ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 337 – 338.

⁵⁹ *The Dhammapada*, Verse no. 374, p. 466

⁶⁰ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 340.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *The Dīghanikāyo* (1998), Part-II, p. 222

In contrary to above there are five-factors of *jhāna* which are Vitakka, Vicāra, Pīti, Sukha and Ekaggatā: (1) Initial application of mind (*vitakka*). By this mind is directed on the objects of meditation. (2) Sustained application of mind (*vicāra*) It is to direct mind on the object again and again. (3) Joy (*pīti*) It is name of joy to know the state of mind. (4) Happiness (*Sukha*) It is happiness to celebrate fruits. (5) One Pointedness (*Ekaggatā*). It is the state when mind is concentrated.⁶³ Any action done with clear awareness would yield moral action and would bring positive result in the society and the society would be benefited.

V. SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The word sustainable means- “Involving the use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment. It also means that can continue or be continued for a long time.”⁶⁴ It is generally used with environment and economics.

Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations (UN) on September 25, 2015. On 1 January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SdGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were fixed by the member countries.⁶⁵ The aim of these global goals is “peace and prosperity for people and the planet”-while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests. For whole of His life the Buddha preached for peace and prosperity which can be seen in his teachings.

Sustainable Future is talked in various quarters but what should be done is not suffice. As far as sustainable future is concerned the Buddha was very much aware about this and His most of the activities and His teachings describe sustainable future or sustainable development for sustainable future.

In the *Brahmajāla sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* the Buddha says there are some monks and Brāhmiṇs who after receiving food from lay devotee are engaged in destroying various kinds of destruction of seeds as are propagated from roots (*mūlavijam*), from stems (*khandhavijam*), from joints (*phaluvijam*), from cuttings (*aggavijam*) and from seeds (*bījāvijam*) etc. The Buddha advises monks and nuns to refrain from destruction of seeds.⁶⁶

In the *Sūtanipāta* the Buddha describes animals as giver of food, strength, complexion and happiness. Regarding cow, the Buddha says that they give food and strength. Likewise, they provide good complexion and happiness. Then the Buddha advises that knowing all these cows should not be killed. “*Annadā baladā cetā vannadā sukhadā tathā* I/ *Etamatthavasam nātvā nāssu gāvo*

⁶³ *A Manual of Abhidhamma* (1979), by Narad Mahā Thera, pub. by Buddhist Missionary Society, 123, Jalan Berhala, 50470, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, First Edition-1956, Fourth Revised Edition, ISBN 967-9920-42-9 (1987) p. 48 – 50.

⁶⁴ *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2000), p. 1312.

⁶⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org>

⁶⁶ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 69.

*hanimsu te II.*⁶⁷

Not only the above the Buddha also says that cows are like our mother, father, brother and other relatives and like the best friends which gives us medicines. In the same sutta the Buddha advises not to kill cows in the sacrifices.⁶⁸ “*Yathā mātā pita bhātā aññe vāpi ca nātakā I/ Gāvo no parmā mittā yāsu jāyanti osadhā II*”.

Here one thing is very important that starting from the 6th Century BCE human being started developing a peculiar trait of killing environment and at the same time person like the Buddha come to the scene and preaches to save environment. Though, it was not for the first time when someone advocated preserving environment. Vedic literature, Upaniṣadic literatures are full of such instruction but that is not the subject matter here.

What is paramount here is greed (*lobha*) which has played major role in destruction of forests, green cover and texture of the mother earth. Greed has given dark side of globalization and consumerism has acted as giving fuel to the fire.

In the *Aggañña Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* the Buddha says that previously there was no husk in the paddy. What people had taken in the evening for supper had grown again and was ripe in the morning, and what they had taken in the morning for breakfast was ripe again by evening with no sign of reaping. These beings set to and fed on this rice, and this lasted for a very long time. And as they did so their bodies became coarser still, and difference in their looks became even greater. Females developed female sex-organs and the males developed male organs. In this way when women became excessively preoccupied with men and men became excessively preoccupied with women, owing to this occupation their bodies burnt with lust.⁶⁹

When men developed greed slowly-slowly husk grew in paddy as people started eating rice at field itself and started grabbing field of others. Even after repeated warnings when such people did not improve themselves then people started beating with staffs. Hereafter, stealing, despising, telling a lie and process of fixing punishment started. After that process of choosing kings started. Another message of the *sutta* is such- as men behave the nature starts acting accordingly. Summing up the Buddha says that the Dhamma is the best thing for people in this life and the next as well (*dhmmo hi seṭṭho janetasmim diṭṭhe ceva dhamme abhisamparāyaṇa*).⁷⁰

Now a question can be asked – above are the problems only what about solutions. Regarding this it can be said that the Path prescribed by the Buddha is well described and tested. The Buddha has given the Path after experiencing and realizing Himself. It is a practical Path on which followers can minimize

⁶⁷ *The Sutta Nipāta* (1990), “*Brāhmaṇadhammika Sutta*” Verse- 297, p. 41.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Verse-296, p. 41.

⁶⁹ *The Long Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (1996), p. 411

⁷⁰ *The Dīghanikāyo* (1998), p. 69

greed and can lead a happy life. Prosperity for both house-holders and monks and nuns are very essential and for this the Buddha has given the *Dīghajāṇu sutta*. This sutta is also known as Vyagghapajja sutta as it was family name of Dīghajāṇu as his ancestors were living in a forest which was infested with tigers. The crux of this sutta is as follows when asked by him about progress of this life and life after for a house-holder. Here the Buddha prescribes four Dhammas for a house-holder which are conducive for this life.

(1) The achievement of persistent effort (*uṭṭhānasampadā*) - In fact it is about skill which one is accepted for one's own survival. One should become able to manage his job whatever profession one chooses. (2) The achievement of Wariness (*ārakkhasampadā*) - It means protection of one's properties from the government, thieves, robbers, protection from fire, water and handing over to able successor. (3) Good Friendship (*kalyāṇamittatā*) - Here the Buddha suggests for talking with persons of different age groups with faith, virtue, charity and wisdom. Here the Buddha talks about level of persons and accordingly suggests talking with person of different levels with above levels. (4) Balance livelihood (*samajīvikatā*) - It is the name of living a life according to income. One should be aware of one's income should spend according to earning is called Balance livelihood.⁷¹

Further, the Buddha says that wealth amassed by a house-holder amassed in such a way has four sources of destruction. What are those four? (1) Debauchery (*itthidhutto*). (2) Drunkenness (*sutādhutto*). (3) Indulgence in gambling (*akkhadhutto*). (4) Friendship, Companionship with and intimacy with evil-doers (*pāpamitto pāpasahāyo pāpavñko*).⁷²

All these are simple terms so do not need explanation. Further, the Buddha prescribes four ways of doing spiritual progress which are as follows: (1) Achievement of Faith (*saddhāsampadā*). (2) Achievement of Virtue (*sīlasampadā*). (3) Achievement of Charity (*cāgāsampadā*). (4) Achievement of Wisdom (*paññāsampadā*)

When a mendicant believes in the enlightenment, wisdom and omniscient of the Tathāgata it is known as the Achievement of Faith. When a clansman abstains from killing living beings, stealing, unchastity, lying and intoxicating drinks which produce infatuation and heedlessness is called Achievement of Virtue. When a mendicant is free from avarice and is filled with generosity is known as Achievement of Charity. When a clansman strives for achievement of wisdom and insight it is called as Achievement of Wisdom.⁷³

For gender equality a lot has been told by the Buddha. In the Therīgāthā, Somā Therī says paeon and narrates whose mind has become pacified what femininity can do when mind is completely free from defilements and has learnt the Dhamma in a right way. "*Itthibhāvo no kiṃ kayirā, cittaṃhi susamāhite*

⁷¹ *A Manual of Buddhism* (1992) by Narada Thera, p. 168 – 170.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 168 – 170.

⁷³ *Ibid.* p. 171 – 172.

Iñāṇamhi vattamānamhi, sammā dhammaṃ vipassato II.”⁷⁴

It was by request of Ānanda the Buddha gave permission to women to become member of the *Samgha*. It was such a foresighted work of the Buddha that He did a great help to women and it was a revolutionary work of the time. What the Christianity has done in 1990s that work of women being priest was done by the Buddha 2550 years before.

As far as economy is concerned it can be said that nothing should be governed by the sole motive of profits. If altruism and helping of others are also taken as motto, then profit will automatically have reached up to essential limit and employee welfare would also be done.

There should not be a vast gap between salary structure of CEO and a maintenance staff. It produces avarice in mind merit become blunt.

Conclusion

When people of any society become compassionate and remain united, Integrity can be achieved in plurality. Integrity supported by mindful actions can provide sustainable future in posterity can also live happily. This is something like live and let live policy where everyone has equal right and everyone understands his duty. That society can become an ideal place to live in. Paucity of time is restricting the author of this article to stop here.

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⁷⁴ Therīgāthāpālī (2008), Ed. & Tr. by Swāmī Dwāriādās Śāstri, pub. by Bauddha Bharti Varanasi, Bauddha Bharti Series No. 51, p. 247.

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THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF HUMANITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY: MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHIST TEACHINGS FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

Universality, recognition, and inclusion, the symmetry between human dignity and humanitarianism, and a cross-polynomial of logical constructs hasten philosophy's response to sustainable solutions. This paper is based on the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination), which recognizes that all phenomena arise through the interplay of causal conditions (*paṭicca* "dependence") and arising (*samuppāda* "arising"). Two important concepts in this doctrine are *sādhāraṇa-karma* (collective karma) and *sāmūhika-karma* (group karma), which can be major contributors to human decency and good leadership, especially in the domain of global peace and sustainable development.

Based on a qualitative hermeneutical analysis of classical Buddhist texts, this study investigates how the principles of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, which are the substratum of interconnectedness, can inform contemporary leadership frameworks. This is relevant to anthropology, as many stages of our identities may be expressed as being one of many. Buddhism teaches the interdependent nature of dignity as well; therefore, some aspects of our being should not be subject to the individualistic views of social hierarchy, where we would look up to and serve those 'above' while ignoring the plight and humanity of those 'below'. Instead, dignity should be based on ascription —i.e., equality and well-being that is collective towards one another.

The findings in this study suggest that Mahāyāna Buddhist thought could

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offer solid ethical foundations for global governance, promoting models of leadership which support inclusivity, sustainability, and harmony, centered on improving world peace and achieving sustainable development goals. The research highlights the significance of Buddhist philosophical insights in informing modern leadership paradigms and tackling global issues in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: *Paṭiccasamuppāda, sādharma-karma, sāmūhika-karma, leadership, human dignity, sustainable development, organizational transformation, global peace.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is characterized by many of the most complex global challenges we have ever faced, which no single entity can address, highlighting the inadequacies of parochial approaches to problems and reiterating the need for holistic solutions to these challenges. Climate change, social inequality worldwide, and threats to human dignity are complex, interconnected challenges that cannot be met without integrated responses based on an understanding of our profound interdependence. But to meaningfully contend with the world's problems, they also need to be recognized and addressed, making room for new paradigm alternatives that have real potential to treat root causes and deliver sustainable outcomes.

In this eclectic landscape of traditions that offer improvements in these domains, Mahāyāna Buddhism offers a distinctive model that seeks to shift the interior condition of the participants involved with each other in service of addressing the underlying causes of conflict.

Many traditions offer insight into these issues, and one of these, Mahāyāna Buddhism, provides a unique lens, focused on shifting the inner states of participants and so addressing the root causes of conflict.

Both philosophically and as a practical strategy for world peace, Mahāyāna Buddhism can provide transformative insights into the interdependence of all life. While scholars have examined each of the components of Mahāyāna teachings, thus far, there has been no concerted effort to demonstrate how the entire body of these teachings could work together to address the contemporary challenges facing our planet.

Mahāyāna Buddhism, the largest of the Buddhist traditions, is grounded in principles of compassion, wisdom, and inclusivity. Such teachings have played an immensely important role in advancing unity, human dignity, and sustainable development. More importantly, they are across cultures and traditions and are inclusive. Based on a comparison between Mahāyāna Buddhist principles and current global problems, this article illustrates how Mahāyāna Buddhism can inspire routes to world peace.

Central to Mahāyāna Buddhism is the idea that transforms the way we think about conflict: interdependence. Everything is interconnected: every action, thought, and event. One unresolved conflict in the world weeps into

the next, politically and economically, but also emotionally. This graph links together the futility of solving problems in isolation and taking solely self-oriented approaches.

Interdependent co-arising, interconnectedness of all concepts as well as *sādhāraṇa-karma*, *sāmūhika-karma*, and collective *karma* lie at the heart of this tradition, arguing that all phenomena arise in dependence on multiple causes and conditions, which helps to embrace the interdependence within human existence, building the global leadership. When applied, it also provides a fresh perspective on the challenges of human dignity, collective responsibility, world peace, and sustainable development that face the modern day.

Mahāyāna Buddhism offers a uniquely holistic human dignity, rooted in the understanding of the core Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) shared among all beings. Grounding dignity in radical interdependence and mutuality makes sense of the phenomenon of dignity as something qualitatively larger than individual autonomy and articulation of individual rights characteristic of the majority of Western conceptions of human dignity. Moreover, bodhicitta - central to the Mahāyāna tradition as the aspiration to attain enlightenment to assist all sentient beings - offers a particularly compelling model for comprehending universal responsibility and collective action.

This investigation is particularly pertinent within the framework of the paradigm dynamic, where there is an impetus for innovative systems that can deal with the complexity, interrelation, and integrated features of contemporary problems, and create long-term viable solutions dependent on collective responsibility and action.

The paper is organized as follows: four major sections. After this introduction, Section II outlines the theoretical background, describing *paṭiccasamuppāda* and its nuances for understanding human dignity and collective karma. The section relates the concept of *paṭiccasamuppāda* to human dignity and explores *paṭiccasamuppāda* and collective karma through the metaphor of Indra's Net, looking into their bearing on universal responsibility. Section IV describes the practical application of leadership: Case studies and strategies. The synthesis draws together important conclusions and also has implications for future research and implementation.

II. UNDERSTANDING HUMANITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

2.1. Humanity and human dignity: An exploration of collective identity and intrinsic worth

Humanity and human dignity are related but by no means synonymous attributes of our moral legacy, occasionally overlapping concepts that serve as a cornerstone of much of our ethical and philosophical discourse. Humanity refers to the qualities common to all humans, such as compassion, empathy, and the ability for moral growth, while human dignity indicates that every human being has equal worth, regardless of their situation or behavior. The combination of these ideas ultimately serves as a more complete lens through which we can understand the nature of being human and our social connection to one another.

2.2. Humanity: Our shared identity

The term humanity is used to highlight our shared experiences and the characteristics that we, as a species, have in common with each other. This expresses itself as the ability to connect with other humans with empathy and compassion, generating a sense of unity. The celebration of being human is expressed most clearly through rituals and communal practices, another way of echoing collective identity across cultures. But such bonds can also establish hierarchies that fail to adequately acknowledge the equal dignity of all members.

The collective nature of humanity is pivotal in addressing global challenges. Climate change, technological advancements, and socio-political divides remind us that recognizing our shared humanity is essential for cooperative solutions. Humanity urges us to act not just as individuals, but as a united whole, working towards growth and transformation.

2.3. Human dignity: Intrinsic worth and ethical imperative

Human dignity goes beyond collective identity to affirm the intrinsic value of every individual. As Immanuel Kant posited, human beings are “ends in themselves”,¹ emphasizing that dignity is not conditional on societal roles or achievements. Martha Nussbaum further asserts that dignity is a recognition of the fundamental capabilities and entitlements of every human being.²

This inherent worth calls for respect and the establishment of systems that protect individual rights and justice. Addressing issues like discrimination, poverty, and violence requires the acknowledgment of dignity as a non-negotiable foundation for societal structures. Unlike humanity, which binds us through shared traits, dignity focuses on respecting each person’s unique value, making it essential for social justice and ethical governance.

2.4. The interplay between humanity and dignity

Understanding the relationship between humanity and human dignity requires acknowledging their complementary roles. While humanity promotes unity and cooperation, dignity insists on the respect and recognition owed to each individual. Together, they demand a holistic approach to ethical and societal challenges. Fostering a just society means not only recognizing our shared humanity but also safeguarding the dignity of every individual.

2.5. Insights from Mahāyāna Buddhism

Mahāyāna Buddhism offers profound insights into the interplay between these concepts. In this tradition, humanity is seen as an expression of universal existence, deeply intertwined with compassion and the alleviation of suffering. The practice of *bodhicitta* – the aspiration for enlightenment for the benefit of all beings – illustrates humanity’s potential for growth and transformation.

¹ Kant, I. (1785/2017). *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Earlymoderntexts.com, p. 9.

² Nussbaum, M. C. (2000). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press, p. 241.

Human dignity in Mahāyāna Buddhism arises from the recognition of interconnectedness. Every individual possesses the intrinsic potential for awakening, emphasizing their worth not as a societal construct but as an essential truth. This perspective encourages active cultivation of compassion and mindfulness, creating a framework where dignity is not only acknowledged but celebrated.

2.6. Building a compassionate and just society

Ultimately, humanity and human dignity are guiding principles for fostering a world rooted in compassion, justice, and respect. Humanity reminds us of our shared bonds and collective responsibilities, while dignity urges us to protect and honor each person's unique worth. By aligning these principles, we can build systems that enable individuals to thrive and communities to flourish.

The teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism echo this dual recognition, advocating for a society where compassion and mutual respect guide our actions. In embracing both humanity and dignity, we transcend societal divisions, addressing challenges with empathy and ethical resolve. Only through this balanced approach can we create a world where all individuals are empowered to contribute meaningfully, underscoring that our true measure lies in the dignity we extend to one another.

III. UNDERSTANDING PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA

The concept of *paṭīccasamuppāda* is discussed in several major Mahāyāna texts, but I have listed the most prominent and well-documented sources. Here are the specific chapters/ sections focusing on *paṭīccasamuppāda*:

2.1. *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*

The concept of *paṭīccasamuppāda*, or dependent origination, is a pivotal theme in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* - *Flower Garland Sūtra*, which presents a profound exploration of the interconnectedness of all phenomena. The vision of interdependence or dependent origination originated from Buddhist philosophy, holds a very important point in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, and that is that all phenomena are interdependent with each other for their arising. A prime illustration of this can be seen through the descriptions of the universe within the sūtra, where all the interactiveness of everything with everything is highlighted. This sūtra uses the metaphor of a massive network, in which every node is a phenomenon that can influence and be influenced by others. Along with this vision, there is an implication that what befalls one being affects all beings, which brings forth an ethical aspect to how we lead our lives, and thus the importance of compassion in a Buddhist practice. Then *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* emphasizes wisdom as key to understanding *paṭīccasamuppāda*. By teaching practitioners to cultivate insight into the nature of reality, it guides them to recognize the impermanent, interconnected nature of all things. This is key to freeing ourselves from ignorance, which is regarded as the deepest source of suffering. The realization that all things arise dependently and are not inherently existent can lead to detachment from desire and aversion, ultimately freeing them from *saṃsāra*. Similarly, according to the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Huayan

Jing), the individual and the universal are one; the one arises from and cannot be separated from the many. This angle expands the notion of our awakening being interlinked, just as one person's liberation is tied to the liberation of all.

This idea creates a sense of community and shared responsibility among practitioners, motivating them to uplift each other in their pursuit of enlightenment.

The key aspects of *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* can thus be summarized as the interdependence of all phenomena relationships, their significance for the unfolding of time, and their ceaseless flow from one moment to the next, as well as the moral implications of actions rooted in this understanding. The sūtra is a deep reminder of the interdependence of all beings and that liberation comes from realizing and cultivating this interdependence.

To comprehend *paṭiccasamuppāda* in this section, I concentrate on the concept of Indra's Net (*Indrajāla*) of *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (Huayan Jing, 華嚴經), particularly in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* section, to elucidate the fundamental principle of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*,³ which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of human dignity globally and demonstrates how this ancient wisdom remains relevant to modern organizational and social challenges. In Chinese traditions, particularly through the interpretations of Fazang (法藏, 643-712), this metaphor became central to Huayan philosophy.⁴

2.2. *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras*

2.2.1. *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* - Heart Sūtra

The *Heart Sūtra*, a central text in Mahāyāna Buddhism, emphasizes that all phenomena are interdependent, highlighting that nothing exists in isolation. This is encapsulated in the phrase: "form is emptiness, and emptiness is form," illustrating the interconnectedness of all aspects of existence.⁵

All phenomena are interdependent and in their essence lack existence and nothingness; this is what this saying teaches us. The *sūtra* stresses that all forms are contingent, reliant upon conditions, and do not have independent, permanent essence, which corresponds to the Buddhist doctrine of *śūnyatā* (emptiness).

The pages of the *Heart Sūtra* illuminate the relationship between interdependence and emptiness. The sūtra declares that there is "no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind," and even the full existence of these faculties relies on a tangled web of interdependent causation. The whole connection between the different senses demonstrates that nothing is solid by perceiving

³ Cleary, Thomas (1993). *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, Boston: Shambhala, 925. See also: Thiele, L. P. (2011). *Indra's net and the Midas touch: living sustainably in a connected world*. MIT Press.

⁴ Wei, D., & Cavayero, M. (2023). *All is One: The Profound Influence of Huayan Buddhism on Chinese Philosophy, from the Past to the Present*. *Yin-Cheng Journal of Contemporary Buddhism*, 1(1), p. 133-148.

⁵ Lopez, D. (1996). *The Heart Sūtra. In Elaborations on Emptiness: Uses of the Heart Sūtra* (p. vii-viii). Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400884513-001>

the self. The claim that “form is emptiness” reinforces the concept that what we experience in material, solid form is predicated on many factors which, ultimately, are empty of intrinsic reality. Additionally, emptiness as covered in the *Heart Sūtra* applies not only to things but the concepts and even the emotions we use to describe them, which do not have inherent existence. It manifests in the sūtra’s discourse on the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness), which it states are empty of self-nature. It is a non-disposition to be in a nihilistic void, yet a fluid condition of interdependence: the existence of each element is dependent on others. The implications of these lessons are philosophical, as they radically challenge dualistic thinking, inspiring practitioners to experience reality as an interplaying flow of related components. From this standpoint, we cultivate a compassionate view of being, a realization that a fundamental sameness of others emerges when we look into the emptiness of self and other, and when we realize that we all share in suffering and joy. Thus, the *Heart Sūtra* is an essential source for grasping the complex intertwinement of interdependence and emptiness in Buddhist philosophy.

All in all, the *Heart Sūtra* expresses the interdependent nature of all phenomena through the concept of emptiness, a powerful insight into the true nature of reality beyond dualistic thinking. This text is still a must-read for anyone wanting to understand Buddhist philosophy and what this means for the world: “Inner peace, world peace.”⁶

2.2.2. Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra - Diamond Sūtra

The *Diamond Sūtra*,⁷ one of the most important texts in Mahāyāna Buddhism, stresses the meaning of dependent origination, which is the idea that nothing exists on its own. It suggests that every form, idea, and experience are shaped by many influences, creating a nuanced interconnectedness within every aspect of life. This mindset fosters compassion and awareness, understanding that actions reverberate widely due to this deep web of interdependence. The teachings contained within the sūtra pose a challenge to our habitual tendencies to establish concrete definitions of reality – rendering it fixed and unchanging – in that they direct practitioners to recognize that all things are in constant flux and are contingent. Meditation and mindfulness practices help us connect with the experiential elements of these teachings, and develop qualities of compassion and wisdom, and cultivate skills of acting in alignment with the world. The instructions set forth in the Diamond Sūtra invite people to relearn their place in the universe – and live into the practice of not clinging to beliefs, ideas, and identities. These teachings, if understood and applied, will lead one to cultivate a fluid, open-minded lifestyle that promotes building harmony in both living and leading. Therein lies the journey towards the cessation of suffering and, ultimately, enlightenment.

⁶ Kraft, K. (Ed.). (1992). *Inner peace, world peace: Essays on Buddhism and nonviolence*. SUNY Press.

⁷ Pine, R. (2002). *The Diamond Sutra*. United Kingdom: Catapult.

In terms of what the teachings mean in practice, it is necessary to understand a deeper level of both non-arising and dependent nature through the experiential aspects of the path including meditation and mindfulness. The sobering perspective of all things, seen as interdependent, can only be born by cultivating a sense of awareness beyond what is obvious. This realization can become experiential compassion and wisdom, and one learns to act as part of the world and not through the paradigm of separation.

Voidness and dependent nature in the *Diamond Sūtra* are not only an intellectual seminar but a call to adjust the characters of our being to align with those profound truths of interconnectedness. By connecting with all sentient beings, this path may lead to all the compassion and enlightenment in the world.

2.3. *Āryaśālistamba Sūtra* - The Rice Seedling Sūtra⁸

Paṭiccasamuppāda, meaning “dependent origination,” is a key concept in Buddhist philosophy, highlighted in the *Āryaśālistamba Sūtra* (The Rice Seedling Sūtra). Using the metaphor of rice seedlings, this sūtra demonstrates the interconnectedness of all things regarding the causative process from suffering to liberation.

A central message of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as introduced in the *Āryaśālistamba Sūtra*, is that all phenomena arise dependent on conditions. This is akin to how rice seedlings grow based on specific environmental factors such as soil quality, water availability, and sunlight. The sūtra illustrates that just as rice seedlings cannot thrive without these conditions, sentient beings cannot escape the cycle of *samsāra* without understanding the interdependent nature of existence.

The teaching emphasizes that ignorance leads to the formation of karmic actions, which in turn leads to suffering, thus highlighting the cyclical nature of existence. Furthermore, the sūtra posits that understanding *paṭiccasamuppāda* is essential for achieving liberation. The realization of this principle allows individuals to see the transient nature of all things, which is crucial for overcoming attachment and aversion – two primary causes of suffering.

The sūtra teaches that by comprehending the nature of reality as interdependent, practitioners can cultivate wisdom that leads to enlightenment. This aligns with the notion that the ultimate truth transcends conventional truths, as seen in various Buddhist schools, including Tibetan Buddhism, which emphasizes the importance of understanding emptiness as a path to liberation.

The *Āryaśālistamba Sūtra* also uses the metaphor of rice seedlings to demonstrate the nurturing/ raising aspect of dependent origination. As with

⁸ Sastri, N. A. (1950). *Ārya Śālistamba sūtra; Paṭiccasamuppādavibhaṅga nirdeśasūtra; and Paṭiccasamuppādagāthā sūtra*. (No Title); Schoening, J. D. *The Śālistamba Sūtra and its Indian Commentaries*. 2 vols. 1995; Barrett, T. H. (1998). *The Śālistamba Sūtra*, Sanskrit Reconstruction, English Translation, Critical Notes (including Pali parallels, Chinese version and ancient Tibetan fragments). N Ross Reat. *Buddhist Studies Review*, 15 (2), p. 225-227. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1558/bsrv.v15i2.14705>

rice seedlings, which need special care and conditions in order to germinate and grow, individuals ultimately require the right environment – encompassing ethical conduct, meditation and wisdom – in order to grow spiritually.

This nurturing part highlights the vital role of community and supportive surroundings in the practice of Buddhism, where such environments offer the best soil to grow towards enlightenment.

Generally, there are three main features of *paṭiccasamuppāda* as viewed through the *Āryaśālistamba Sūtra*, which are the interdependence of all phenomena, cyclical nature of existence and understanding of these concepts is essential to achieve liberation. The development of rice seedlings is a vivid metaphor for dependent origination that reveals its underlying principle at work in both the world of living things and the spiritual path of individuals.

2.4. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

The Root Verses on dependent origination are largely contained in the first chapter of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. The key concept at the heart of this chapter is dependent arising, which serves to undermine more traditional ideas of causation, which plays a large part in Madhyamaka philosophy. The verses express these ideas: how all phenomena come into being in dependence on causes and conditions, and therefore, how all phenomena are dependent-arisen.

This highlights how while one should have a basic grasp of dependent origination as outlined in the first chapter, there are deeper considerations and implications to be examined in subsequent chapters where, for example, Chapter 6 of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* would demonstrate this.⁹

Nāgārjuna's arguments in Chapter 24:18 of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*:

“Yaḥ paṭiccasamuppādaḥ śūnyatām tām pracakṣmahe sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā.

Whatever is dependently co-arisen, that is explained to be emptiness. That, being a dependent designation, is itself the middle way.”¹⁰

Nāgārjuna's reasoning in this verse focus on what is reality, while emphasizing ideas of *śūnyatā* and *pratyaya*. His revision of the reason argues that no phenomenon has any intrinsic nature ultimately, leading to the conclusion that nothing is ultimately real.

This radical perspective challenges conventional views and underscores the interdependent nature of existence. Conceptual interdependence is a profound philosophical exploration of the fundamental nature of reality, challenging traditional metaphysical assumptions through a sophisticated understanding of the relational existence of phenomena. In Nāgārjuna's framework, no entity exists in absolute isolation but emerges through complex, dynamic networks of

⁹ Xuezhong, L. (2015). *Madhyamakāvatāra-kārikā chapter 6. Journal of Indian philosophy*, 43 (1), p. 1-30.

¹⁰ Garfield, Jay L, (1995) *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, New York, Oxford University Press, p. 304.

interconnected conditions that continuously shape and transform one another.

III. UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE KARMA

This section traces the origin and doctrinal development of collective karma in Mahāyāna Buddhist and contextualizes its relevance within theories which are very much in fashion today in the field of global leadership. The synthesis of Buddhist ethical principles and leadership models emphasizes that qualities such as compassion, shared responsibility, and interdependence represent values that help leaders navigate the systemic challenges mentioned above. In short, collective karma is not just a religious idea but also a philosophical and moral approach to transforming leadership in this globalized world.

From the major sūtras, traditional commentators, and present applications, it is evidenced that this formulation clears up the applicability of this very concept with regard to building inclusive, sustainable, and virtuous communities, particularly its implications on leadership theory.

Mahāyāna doctrine of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is a prerequisite for understanding the functional intention of collective karma. It means that everything is interconnected, things are not hewn off from everything else but reverberate in this rather huge causal network. In Mahāyāna, an individual's welfare is not distinguished from the welfare of the whole.

Influencing its philosophical roots in *paṭiccasamuppāda*, to its scriptural expressions in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, and the *Lotus Sūtra*, collective karma is constructed as an important structure for spiritual and social concerns. Later doctrinal and commentarial texts reflect some of the core ideas of collective karma, though the concept is discussed explicitly in early Mahāyāna teachings themselves. It hints at some strategies with which collective karma application could contribute to inducting social cohesion and handling systemic maladies.

Currently, the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition provides essential insights for encouraging a peaceful and just global community. Through the lens of the global leadership framework, this article advances how a global leadership mindset could promote transformational leadership concerning 21st-century crises such as climate crisis, social inequality, and global conflicts. From its ethical perspective, it makes the case that the communal viewpoint of collective karma is a guiding philosophy for leaders, who aspire to realize inclusive and sustainable global progress.

Etymology and doctrinal development of collective karma

In Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, karma is not just an individual phenomenon but also has a collective dimension. These two concepts offer nuanced perspectives. In Buddhist scholastic literature, there is indeed a nuance in the interpretation of these terms:

- (1) *Sādhāraṇa*-karma (साधारणकर्म) - collective/ shared karma
 - *Sādhāraṇa* (साधारण): common, shared, universal
 - *Karma* (कर्म): action, deed, consequence
 - Etymologically means “common” or “shared” karma

- Refers to collective or universal karmic experiences
- Linguistically: *sādhāraṇa* = common/shared, *karma* = action/deed
- (2) *Sāmūhika-karma* (सामूहिककर्म) - group karma
- *Sāmūhika* (सामूहिक): collective, aggregate
- A later interpretative term in commentarial literature
- Literally means “group karma”
- Less standardized in classical Buddhist philosophical texts

Chinese translations

- 共業 (gòng yè): shared/ collective karma
- 衆共業 (zhòng gòng yè): mass collective karma
- 共同業力 (gòngtóng yèlì): collective karmic force

The key distinction is that individual karma operates at a personal level, while collective karma explores how individual actions interact with and shape communal experiences. This perspective underscores the Buddhist understanding of interdependence, *paṭiccasamuppāda*, where no action exists in complete isolation.

These concepts invite reflection on both personal ethical conduct and our broader social responsibilities, suggesting that individual choices have ripple effects beyond immediate personal consequences.

Early Mahāyāna sources

- (1) *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (華嚴經, Huayan Jing)

Original passage in Sanskrit (from *Gaṇḍavyūha* section):

“Sarva-jagad-dhitāya karma kurvanti

sarva-sattva-samata-citta karma kurvanti

Those who act for the welfare of all beings

Those who act with a mind of equanimity towards all beings.”

Literally means: “They perform actions for the benefit of all beings, they perform actions with a mind of equality toward all beings.”

- (2) *Saddharmapuṇḍarika Sūtra* (妙法蓮華經, Lotus Sūtra)

The *Lotus Sūtra* is one of the most influential texts in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It emphasizes the importance of universal salvation and includes teachings about the shared karmic responsibility of the community.

For instance, in chapter 7, it explains shared karmic conditions (共因緣) and gives teachings that illustrate this: the idea of group karma. This chapter exemplifies what a “magic city” established by a kind ruler might look like, leading weary wayfarers on the path to enlightenment.

This story is a metaphor for the *bodhisattva*’s motivation to liberate sentient beings and embodies the interconnectedness of all beings and how the karmic actions of one contribute to others. Central to collective karma is the concept that an individual’s action can affect the group as a whole.

Abhidharma Sources

(1) *Abhidharmakośa* (阿毘達磨俱舍論) by Vasubandhu

Chapter 4 discusses:

“Sādhāraṇaṃ jagat karma janayati

Collective karma generates the shared world.”

- Discusses how individual actions generate collective consequences.
- Shows karma as a complex system of mutual influence.

(2) *Mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra* (大毘婆沙論)

Introduces the concept of *bhājana-loka* (器世間)—the container world created by collective karma.

Yogācāra Development

(1) *Mahāyānaśāstra* (攝大乘論) by Asaṅga

Discusses *ālayavijñāna* (阿賴耶識) as the repository of both individual and collective karmic seeds (種子, *bīja*).

(2) *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* (瑜伽師地論)

Elaborates on:

- *vipāka-vaśitā* (異熟自在): karmic ripening
- *sādhāraṇa-phala* (共相果): collective results

Doctrinal Development

(1) *Madhyamaka* texts emphasize the interconnected nature of karma:

From *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (中論):

“Sanskrit

Karma pratyaya-sambhūtaṃ na svabhāvena vidyate

Karma arising from conditions does not exist by its own nature.”

(2) Tiantai School (天台宗) systematized types of collective karma:

- 正報共業 (zhèngbào gòngyè): shared karmic retribution of beings
- 依報共業 (yībào gòngyè): shared karmic retribution of environment

Traditional commentarial classifications

The concept was systematized in various ways:

(1) By Scope (from *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*):

- *sarva-sādhāraṇa-karma*: universal collective karma
- *prakṛti-sādhāraṇa-karma*: group-specific collective karma
- *asādhāraṇa-karma*: individual karma

(2) By Function (from Chinese commentaries):

- 引業 (yǐnyè): projecting karma
- 滿業 (mǎnyè): completing karma
- 共業 (gòngyè): collective karma

Summary

Mahāyāna Buddhism teaches that all entities are interconnected, a concept is known as “interbeing” or “radical interdependence”.¹¹ These primary sources provide essential insights into the concept of collective karma within Mahāyāna Buddhism, focusing on the interconnectedness of all beings, the shared consequences of actions, and the communal nature of spiritual progress and building leadership for world peace and sustainable development.

IV. INTEGRATING THE PRINCIPLES OF PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA WITH HUMAN DIGNITY

4.1. Introduction: Bridging philosophy and human rights

The Buddhist principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, or dependent origination, offers profound insights into human dignity, presenting a framework rooted in interconnectedness. Unlike Western traditions that often emphasize individual autonomy, this principle locates dignity within the intricate web of relationships that define human existence. Integrating *paṭiccasamuppāda* with the concept of human dignity enriches our understanding of humanity and establishes an ethical foundation for addressing systemic challenges.

4.2. Interdependence and human dignity

Paṭiccasamuppāda demonstrates that all beings exist through interdependent relationships and conditions. This relational view challenges the notion of individualism by emphasizing that respecting one person’s dignity enhances the collective dignity of humanity. In contrast to frameworks that perceive human dignity as an inherent, isolated trait, this perspective underscores its dynamic and evolving nature, shaped by cultural, social, and environmental contexts.

This understanding aligns closely with human rights discourses, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declares, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”¹² Here, the acknowledgment of dignity as a relational principle reinforces mutual respect and responsibility across social divides.

4.3. Empathy, compassion, and ethical responsibility

Dependent origination also highlights the root causes of suffering, fostering greater empathy and compassion – qualities integral to upholding human dignity. Realizing our interconnectedness, we find that we must behave ethically; that is, we not only treat people with dignity, but we also have an obligation to enrich the dignity of others. Not only is shared human flourishing an attainable, if not perfect end in the course of that shared journey, in which the flourishing of each and all is intrinsic to the other, but it also affirms the idea that human dignity is impossible outside the broader experience of humanity.

Moreover, the emphasis on conditionality found in *paṭiccasamuppāda*

¹¹ Long, W. (2021). *Radical Interdependence: Buddhist Philosophical Foundations for Social Theory. A Buddhist Approach to International Relations*, p. 19 - 27.

¹². Assembly, U. G. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights*. UN General Assembly, 302 (2), p. 14 - 25.

changes how we view systemic inequity, discrimination, and bias. It encourages a nuanced understanding of inequality as determined by context rather than inherent traits, fueling compassion and a calling toward social justice.

4.4. Framework for social harmony and justice

The thread of *paṭiccasamuppāda* offers a nuanced theoretical foundation for seeing and addressing systemic inequities. It shows how structural factors interact to contradict or support dignity, thereby offers a holistic way to analyse social problems. This will enable you to build synergy around all its causes since these interconnected root causes affect the whole community.

The principle also highlights the tension between agency and responsibility. It acknowledges both the power of external circumstances and the ability of people to create new ones. This recognition of interplay invites individuals to transcend beyond the despair of current situations, towards hope to positively uphold the dignity of others.

4.5. Psychological and educational implications

It trains emotional resilience by allowing people to position where suffering comes from as a consequence of conditions, not as an inherent fault. This curtails unwarranted self-blame, honors self-dignity, and creates communal empathy, which can help human beings psychologically at both the individual and community levels.

What does this framework suggest we do educationally: Let's move from teaching rights as a concept in abstraction to understanding how we are born from the earth, in relationship with it – its plants, animals, trees, soil, water and our human family, and the responsibility we all share to protect and sustain our world? Awareness of mutual dependence and our relationship with one another and the natural world will help to nurture ethical and sustainable behaviours that not only shape our societies but also serve to address the challenges that we now face together in a connected world.

4.6. Human dignity and environmental stewardship

More than ever, human dignity depends on environmental conditions, and ecological destruction endangers the essential conditions for a dignified life. Dependent origination also emphasizes the importance of environmental sustainability for the dignity of future generations. Tackling ecological problems, therefore, becomes necessary to ensure common welfare.

The combination of *paṭiccasamuppāda* with human dignity as represented by the Torah provides a strong framework for inferencing that will be none other than an analysis around the human value concept for the society at present time.¹³ The covenant of dignity is the foundation of our interconnectedness and emotional bonds. It brings us together as a community, rather than

¹³ Friedman, Hershey H., *Essential Core Values for Individuals and Organizations, as Derived from the Torah* (October 30, 2011). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1951522> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1951522>

isolating us as individuals, and encourages us to be ethically responsible in our interactions with one another. This unity fosters understanding, social harmony, and sustainable progress, ultimately leading to a more compassionate and connected global society.

In this context, human dignity is not something fixed or unchanging; it is a fluid state shaped by our relationships and environments. As social beings, when we become aware of our shared existence and the obligations we have towards others, we can pave the way for sustainable systems that address deep-rooted problems and ensure that everyone can live with dignity.

By examining these issues holistically, we can deepen ethical discussions and guide practical approaches towards creating a fairer and more just world.

V. PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA THROUGH THE LENS OF INDRA'S NET

The metaphor of Indra's Net offers unique insights into *paṭīccasamuppāda* that extend beyond traditional linear explanations of dependent origination. In contrast to the twelve-link chain of causation commonly used to explain *paṭīccasamuppāda*, Indra's Net presents a multidimensional model where causation operates simultaneously in all directions. Each jewel's reflection of all other jewels demonstrates how every phenomenon contains and depends upon all others, creating a web of mutual causation that more accurately represents the complexity of reality. The *Śālistamba Sūtra*,¹⁴ a foundational Mahāyāna text, resonates with this perspective, stating: "Because this exists, that exists; because this arises, that arises."

This understanding defies simple notions of cause and effect, instead advancing a model of mutual conditioning wherein each element in the network acts simultaneously as cause and effect to all the others. The infinite regression of reflections within each jewel illustrates how mutual conditioning extends infinitely, taking in all phenomena across space and time. This aspect of the metaphor explains how *paṭīccasamuppāda* works not only on an individual level but also, more importantly, as a universal principle governing all existence.

VI. COLLECTIVE KARMA: FROM INDIVIDUAL TO UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Buddhist view of collective karma, as in the concepts of *sādhāraṇa-karma* (shared karma) and *sāmūhika-karma* (group karma), holds important lessons about shared responsibility and universal interdependence that speak to some of the most important contemporary global challenges. *Sādhāraṇa-karma* emphasizes how actions by individuals are inescapably part of larger collective outcomes and create ripple effects that move outward from the actor, forming social structures and systems that produce shared karmic effects. These effects can ripple through generations, weaving themselves into the very fabric of society, lingering and defining outcomes long after the

¹⁴ Reat, N. R. (1993). *The Śālistambha Sūtra: Tibetan Original, Sanskrit Reconstruction, English Translation, Critical Notes (including Pali Parallels, Chinese Version, and Ancient Tibetan Fragments)*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishes, p. 5 - 13.

deeds themselves. Moreover, in association with this, *sāmūhika-karma* can be established as the field of karma which is rooted in the dynamic of the groups where groups through group choice-making creates a distinct flow of karmic energy; and with that it reinforces how the groups are a unique field of karmic energy capable of intervening on the individual karma especially when we approach the fields of organizations and institutions.

This relationship between individual intention and group action highlights the importance of collective agency in shaping outcomes that affect both participants and broader society.

The metaphor of Indra's Net, given as an introduction in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, further clarifies this interconnection with the reality as gigantic world networks of jewels that reflect each other; it is a metaphor that currently resonates across modern network theory, social media dynamics, and ecological systems. In this sense, the framework retrieves how personal and collective responsibilities interconnect in facing environmental challenges, releasing sustainable development, and building global citizenship. This understanding of collective karma also speaks to the issue of environmental and social responsibility, revealing how current actions shape future conditions and how it needs to be collective response mechanisms. The shift from individual to collective responsibility demands a move away from entrenched individualistic cultural paradigms and toward the establishment of institutional structures that foster collective awareness and action.

This framework is crucial for social justice in which it can show how social structures and practices create collective consequences that support the better development of more just, inclusive, and equitable systems. Collective karma as applied in educational systems, organizational practices, policy development, and global governance becomes a rich and practical approach toward creating sustainable, ethical, and interconnected social and environmental systems.

VII. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: *PAṬICCASAMUPPĀDA* AND MODERN LEADERSHIP

The complexities of today's world faces, from social injustice and geopolitical tensions to political instability, are more interdependent and urgent than ever before. This situation calls for leadership that enhances human dignity, promotes sustainable practices, and paves the way toward peace. Existing leadership paradigms provide valuable understandings but often fail to offer the integrated perspective required to tackle these global issues effectively. In this context, the teachings of *Mahāyāna* Buddhist, particularly the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, provide a timeless perspective on achieving harmony. Emphasizing compassion, interconnectedness, collective karma, personal transformation, and the bodhisattva ideal, *Mahāyāna* Buddhism offers both philosophical guidance and practical tools for resolving discord and building a more peaceful society. The vision of interdependence inherent in this tradition furnishes a profound framework for understanding global collaboration and sustainable peace.

Successful implementation at the community level calls for adaptation to local contexts while retaining the fundamental principles of interconnectedness and collective responsibility. Initiatives that adopt participatory forms of leadership and collective decision-making have gained ground as hybrids often combine traditional wisdom with modern organizational practices to respect the cultures prevailing in the local settings while paving the way for sustainable development.

Future directions would include the development of more sophisticated measurement tools to assess the impact of Buddhist-inspired leadership practices. Research into the relationship between mindful leadership practices and organizational outcomes would provide valuable insights for refining implementation strategies. Another promising frontier for exploration is the integration of these principles with emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence and decision support systems.

The role of education in shaping future leaders capable of implementing such principles cannot be overstated. Traditional leadership education must be rethought to focus more on systems thinking, ethical decision-making, and awareness of interconnectedness. Some business schools have recently started incorporating mindfulness and sustainability principles into their curricula; however, a holistic integration is still required to prepare the leaders for current challenges.

In summary, the *Mahāyāna* Buddhist principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is a sophisticated theoretical framework that meets all these demands. It offers practical guidance for leadership development and organizational management. The implications of this research go beyond immediate organizational applications to more general questions about leadership in an interconnected world. Integrating *paṭiccasamuppāda* into leadership practices will allow organizations to develop more effective, ethical, and sustainable systems that will ultimately benefit both individual enterprises and the broader social and environmental contexts within which they operate.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This research study shows how modern struggles in leadership may be seen through the lens of Buddhist philosophical thought as leading to holistic leadership and sustainable development. Essentially, the investigation into *paṭiccasamuppāda* demonstrates that the knowledge of deep interdependence changes the way leaders relate with the world, shifting away from traditional hierarchical approaches toward fundamental and systematic practices of including others. The sociality of human existence, emphasized by the biblical and theological approaches, shows how human dignity is rooted in relationships and contexts of dependence rather than autonomous self-realization.

Furthermore, the discussion of collective karma adds more depth to our understanding by showing the entangled nature of individual action and collective results. It offers an adhesive – like methodology for understanding how organisational decisions trickle down to affect customers, staff, other stakeholders, and the wider community through concepts of *sādhāraṇa-karma*

and *sāmūhika-karma*. Such realization can be particularly relevant to issues of environmental problems and sustainable development, in which what is done has an obligatory by-product that harms both generations-struck-present as well as future.

These principles have practical implications that show their feasibility in today's organizational contexts. Examples of successful Buddhist-inspired leadership approaches are drawn from sectors such as national policies, organizational practices, and how such experiences lead to increased stakeholder engagement, improved decision-making processes, and more sustainable outcomes. These pragmatic illustrations support the high-level structure for the foundation of good use cases and key insights for forecasting implementations.

Moreover, this research gives insight into the transformative potential of weaving together insights from Buddhist wisdom with modern leadership theories. Understanding that every single phenomenon is interlinked with each other that helps the leaders in forming better solutions to the complex problems surrounding the globe. This integration fosters leadership practices that juxtapose efficiency with ethical consideration, individual agency with collective well-being, and immediate outcomes with long-term sustainability.

The research also places much emphasis on education to inform future leaders about the principles so that they can implement them effectively. The more organizations experience complex and interrelated problems, the more value the leadership development initiative has in teaching a systems-conscious, ethical, and appreciative worldview. There is no such thing as merely formal education. Rather, education is needed in terms of the culture and practices of the organisations that should facilitate shared accountability and sustainability.

Add to that new research insights into the impact of mindfulness and hypno-leadership in corporate performance, and the fusion of Buddhist principles with contemporary leadership practices offer promising new directions for tackling pressing global challenges. It conveys the wisdom of interconnectedness and universal responsibility which will prove even more relevant as societies deal with environmental sustainability, social justice and economic equality. The cross-cultural applicability of these principles suggests their potential in creating more sustainable, ethical, and effective approaches to leadership across organizational and cultural divides.

The overall findings of the study, therefore, conclude that Buddhist principles help with not only theoretical enlightenment but also practical blueprints for formulating leadership approaches that are effective in responding to or addressing contemporary issues for the common good. Our world has now become overwhelmed with the business practices of globalization, crisis of climate, response to conflict, eradication of poverty, smartphones, cyber-vulnerability, and losing the passion for reflection and contemplation.

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THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A STUDY AMONG UNDERGRADUATES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

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Abstract:

This study evaluated the impact of an eight-week mindfulness meditation program on academic performance and emotional well-being among 72 undergraduates from the Institute of Human Resource Advancement, University of Colombo. The research aimed to explore the mediating role of emotional well-being in the relationship between mindfulness and academic achievement. Participants attended the program in May and June 2023, and academic performance was measured by comparing cumulative grade point averages (CGPA) before and after the intervention. Emotional well-being and mindfulness were assessed using self-reported questionnaires. The study found that emotional well-being partially mediated the relationship between mindfulness and academic performance, with mindfulness improving CGPA. No gender differences were observed. The findings suggest that integrating mindfulness into education could enhance student performance and well-being, with implications for educational policies and classroom practices.

Keywords: *Mindfulness meditation, academic performance, mental health, undergraduates, Sri Lanka.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important factors affecting university students' future employment opportunities and general well-being is their academic achievement. The possible advantages of mindfulness exercises for various aspects of student life, including academic achievement, have drawn more attention in recent years. Numerous psychological and cognitive advantages have been demonstrated for mindfulness, which is the practice of sustaining a nonjudgmental awareness of one's thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the present moment.¹ University students may benefit most from mindfulness techniques since they frequently face stress levels as a result of social pressures, personal struggles, and academic demands.² This study aims to investigate the impact of mindfulness on both short-term and long-term academic performance of university students in Sri Lanka using a quasi-experimental approach.

According to earlier studies, mindfulness can enhance cognitive abilities such as memory and attention, which are critical for academic performance.³ Furthermore, mindfulness exercises have been linked to lower levels of stress and anxiety, which are common challenges faced by university students.⁴ While long-term academic achievement includes cumulative metrics like overall grade point averages and retention rates, short-term performance usually refers to immediate results like semester grades.⁵ According to research, mindfulness can improve these aspects by promoting emotional balance, lowering stress, and improving concentration.⁶ Studies conducted all around the world have shown how effective mindfulness treatments are in educational settings. The mindfulness training enhanced undergraduate students' attention and cognitive function.⁷ Similarly, mindfulness techniques enhanced overall academic achievements and decreased academic-related stress.⁸ However, there remains a limited number of studies on mindfulness and how it directly

¹ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hyperion.

² Sharma et al., (2014). Mindfulness-based stress reduction as a stress management intervention for healthy individuals: A systematic review. *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine*, 19 (4), 271 - 286.

³ Zeidan et al., (2010). Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training. *Consciousness and cognition*, 19 (2), 597 - 605.

⁴ Shapiro et al., (2008). Toward the integration of meditation into higher education: A review of research. *Teachers College Record*, 110 (2), 394 - 426.

⁵ Zins et al., (Eds.). (2007). *Social and emotional learning: Promoting the development of all students*. Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation.

⁶ Brown et al., (2007). Mindfulness: Theoretical foundations and evidence for its salutary effects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 18 (4), 211 - 237.

⁷ Tang et al.,(2007). Short-term meditation training improves attention and self-regulation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 104(43), 17152-17156.

⁸ Dawson et al.,(2020). From <https://doi.org/10.1111/aphw.12188>. Accessed date 08.10.2024.

affects academic performance over the long and short terms, especially in non-Western environments. Financial limitations, cultural expectations, and competitive academic settings are some of the particular difficulties faced by university students in Sri Lanka.⁹ A useful perspective for analyzing the applicability and efficacy of mindfulness techniques in improving academic achievement is provided by Sri Lanka's cultural and educational setting.

This study aims to fill the gap by using a quasi-experimental methodology to examine the effects of mindfulness on both short-term and long-term academic performance among university students in Sri Lanka. It specifically looks at whether organized mindfulness exercises might enhance both short-term academic results (like midterm scores) and long-term academic accomplishments (like cumulative GPAs). This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on mindfulness and education while providing practical recommendations for policymakers and educators by integrating international research findings with local cultural specifics.

II. DEFINITION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The idea of mindfulness, which has its roots in Buddhist meditation techniques, has been modified and extensively researched in educational and psychological contexts. Mindfulness is "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally".¹⁰ According to this concept, active engagement with one's experiences without judgment is fostered by consciously focusing attention and awareness on the present. Although mindfulness originated in ancient traditions, it has since been modified and incorporated into contemporary psychological study and practice.

Self-regulation of attention and orientation to experience are the two primary components that make up the conceptual framework of mindfulness.¹¹ Together, these elements foster a state of mindfulness. Self-Regulation of Attention: This element involves keeping attention on the present. It consists of the ability to keep one's attention on a certain thing or event for a long time, which is known as sustained attention. The capacity to flexibly switch focus between various experiences or things is known as attention switching. The capacity to stop secondary elaborative processes in the mind, including concern, is known as inhibition of elaborative processing.¹²

Orientation to Experience: This element describes a person's attitude toward experiences, which is marked by acceptance. It consists of an open attitude regarding one's experiences, whether they are neutral, bad, or

⁹ Wickramasinghe et al., (2023). From. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15427-y>. Accessed date; 01.09.2024.

¹⁰ Kabat-Zinn, (1994). *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. Hyperion.

¹¹ Bishop et al., (2004). From <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bph077>. Accessed date: 12.10.2024.

¹² Ibid.

pleasurable, which is known as curiosity. According to Bishop et al., acceptance is the readiness to experience ideas and emotions without trying to alter them.¹³ The conceptual framework of mindfulness shows how self-regulation of attention and orientation to experience combine to promote a mindful state. By strengthening these elements, mindfulness exercises can result in several psychological advantages, such as less stress, better emotional control, and an improvement in general well-being.¹⁴

Mindfulness is viewed in higher education as a cognitive and affective strategy that helps students manage the demands of their studies. Shapiro et al claim that mindfulness training promotes *reperceiving*, a change in viewpoint that enables people to react to difficulties more calmly and clearly.¹⁵ For university students who deal with both short-term pressures like examinations and long-term difficulties like sustaining academic motivation, this change is especially pertinent. Empirical research has demonstrated positive impact of mindfulness on academic achievement. For instance, Rahl et al discovered that mindfulness training increased students' working memory capacity, leading to higher short-term academic performance.¹⁶ Similar findings were made by Bellinger et, who found that mindfulness exercises improved long-term academic results by lowering test anxiety. Additionally, studies have found that mindfulness therapies improved goal-setting and self-regulation practices, both of which are critical for long-term academic performance.¹⁷ According to Tang et al, mindfulness exercises improve the brain networks linked to executive functioning, which helps students better organize, prioritize, and complete their academic work.¹⁸ In psychological study, mindfulness has been operationalized in several ways. One popular tool for measuring mindfulness is the Five-Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), which evaluates five aspects of mindfulness: describing, acting with awareness, observing, non-judging of inner experience, and non-reactivity to inner experience.¹⁹ This operationalization aids in measuring mindfulness and researching its impact on cognitive and mental health. These findings support the integration of mindfulness practices into educational curricula to enhance students' cognitive and emotional outcomes.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Baer, R. A. (2003). Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 125-143.

¹⁵ Shapiro et al., (2006). From <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20237>. Accessed date: 10.11.2024.

¹⁶ Rahl et al., (2017). From <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000250>. Accessed date: 11.12.2024.

¹⁷ Bellinger et al., (2015). Mindfulness, anxiety, and high-stakes mathematics performance in the laboratory and classroom. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 37, 123-132.

¹⁸ Tang et al., (2012). From <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00250.x>. Accessed date: 09.12.2024

¹⁹ Baer et al., (2006). Using self-report assessment methods to explore facets of mindfulness. *Assessment*, 13 (1), 27 - 45.

The use of mindfulness in the classroom is becoming more popular in Sri Lanka, especially when it comes to tackling the distinct socioeconomic and cultural difficulties that university students encounters.²⁰ Research has indicated that mindfulness therapies can result in enhancements for students' academic performance, emotional control, and attention.²¹ According to Kariyawasam et al, mindfulness-based therapies provide a culturally aware method of enhancing academic achievement and mental health in South Asian settings.²² Their results highlight how mindfulness might help lessen the negative impacts of stress and provide a positive learning environment. The conceptual framework of mindfulness incorporates behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects, It is a flexible tool for improving academic achievement. Through cultivating awareness and acceptance of the present moment, mindfulness gives university students the tools they need to successfully manage the short- and long-term demands of higher education.

III. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICES

Mindfulness has its roots in the ancient Buddhist and Hindu traditions, which date back more than 2,500 years. The foundation for mindfulness practices in Hinduism was established by the Vedic teachings and the practice of dhyana, or meditation.²³ In Buddhism, mindfulness, also known as sati in Pali, is a key component of the Noble Eightfold Path, which serves as a roadmap for achieving enlightenment and putting an end to suffering.²⁴ The Buddha's teachings promoted a nonjudgmental awareness of the present moment and emphasized the value of mindfulness in gaining insight and wisdom.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mindfulness started to gain popularity in the West. In 1881, British scholar and magistrate Thomas William Rhys Davids, who lived in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), used the phrase "mindfulness" to translate the Pali word sati.²⁵ The recognition and study of mindfulness techniques outside of their traditional Eastern contexts began with this introduction. Through the efforts of academics and practitioners who aimed to modify these age-old practices for a secular audience, mindfulness rose to popularity in the West during the 20th century. Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen master who popularized mindfulness as a lifestyle that

²⁰ Kariyawasam et al., (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-022-02041-z>. Accessed date: 20.12.2024

²¹ Zenner et al., (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 603.

²² Kariyawasam et al., (2023). Ibid

²³ Singh, (2023). Sakshi and Dhyana: The origin of mindfulness-based therapies. *BJPsych Bulletin*, 47 (2), 94 – 97.

²⁴ Thera, (1962). *The heart of Buddhist meditation: Satipatthana: A handbook of mental training based on the Buddha's way of mindfulness*. Kandy, Sri Lanka : Buddhist Publication Society; York Beach.

²⁵ Harris, (2006). *Theravāda Buddhism and the British encounter: Religious, missionary, and colonial experience in nineteenth-century Sri Lanka*. Routledge.

prioritizes compassion and peace, was one important figure.²⁶ Because of Jon Kabat-Zinn's work, the modern mindfulness movement saw tremendous growth in the second half of the 20th century. The technique known as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was created in 1979 by Kabat-Zinn, a medical professor at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.²⁷

Through mindfulness meditation techniques borrowed from Buddhist traditions, MBSR was created to assist patients in managing stress and chronic pain.²⁸ The secularization of mindfulness and its incorporation into conventional psychology and medicine were greatly aided by Kabat-Zinn's work. This indicated a dramatic change as mindfulness evolved from a mostly spiritual practice to a therapeutic approach supported by science. By the early years of the twenty-first century, mindfulness had spread around the world and found use in corporate, educational, and medical contexts. Neuroscience findings that connected mindfulness to both structural and functional alterations in the brain further confirmed its effectiveness.²⁹ Presently, mindfulness is acknowledged as a flexible technique that extends beyond its Buddhist foundations and has advantages for a range of people and situations.

IV. RELEVANCE OF MINDFULNESS TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Over the past several decades, mindfulness, which has its origins in ancient spiritual traditions, has experienced substantial growth and scientific support. The work of Jon Kabat-Zinn was largely responsible for the late 20th-century extension of mindfulness into the modern day. MBSR was created to use mindfulness meditation to assist people in managing stress, chronic pain, and other medical issues.³⁰ Other mindfulness-based interventions, like Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), which combines mindfulness exercises with cognitive behavioral therapy to prevent relapse in people with recurrent depression, were developed as a result of MBSR's success.³¹

Additionally, there has been an increase in the incorporation of mindfulness techniques into educational environments. Mindfulness programs have been implemented at schools and colleges throughout the globe to assist students with stress management, focus, and general well-being. Mindfulness programs in schools have been found to increase kids' academic achievement, social

²⁶ Hanh, T. N. (1975). *The miracle of mindfulness: An introduction to the practice of meditation*. Translated by Mobi Ho. Beacon Press.

²⁷ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delacorte.

²⁸ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Ibid*

²⁹ Davidson, R. J., & Lutz, A. (2008). Buddha's brain: Neuroplasticity and meditation. *IEEE Signal Processing Magazine*, 25 (1), 171 - 174.

³⁰ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delacorte.

³¹ Segal et al., (2002). *Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression: A new approach to preventing relapse*. Guilford Press.

skills, and emotional control.³² These results have sparked curiosity about how mindfulness could improve kids' mental and intellectual well-being.

The psychological and physiological impacts of mindfulness techniques have been the subject of an expanding body of scientific studies. In addition to improving cognitive abilities, including attention, memory, and executive functioning, mindfulness therapies have been shown in several studies to dramatically lower feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression.³³ Strong evidence for the effectiveness of mindfulness-based therapies in a variety of situations and populations has been presented by meta-analyses and systematic reviews.^{34, 35} For instance, MBSR and related mindfulness-based treatments have moderate to substantial effect sizes in lowering stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms, according to a meta-analysis.³⁶ Zeidan et al. showed in another study that short mindfulness meditation training might enhance cognitive function, particularly in working memory and attention-related domains³⁷

Research has demonstrated the beneficial effects of mindfulness on students' academic performance in educational contexts. According to a comprehensive study done by Zenner et al., found that mindfulness-based treatments in schools were linked to significant improvements in classroom behavior, control of emotions, and cognitive performance.³⁸ These results indicate that mindfulness exercises can improve students' capacity for focus, stress management, and learning. The potential of mindfulness for improving mental health and cognitive performance is highlighted by the development of mindfulness practices into clinical and educational contexts, as well as by thorough research in science. As the advantages of mindfulness therapies become more widely acknowledged, there is a demand for evidence-based strategies to promote people's well-being in a variety of settings.

High levels of stress are common among university students because of the demands of their coursework, tests, and the adjustment to independent living. Mindfulness exercises have been demonstrated to dramatically lower students' levels of stress and anxiety. For example, mindfulness therapies successfully lowered stress levels in college students, improving their emotional control

³² Zenner et al., (2014). From. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603>. Accessed datae 20.10.2024

³³ .. Zeidan et al., (2010). Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training. *Consciousness and cognition*, 19(2), 597-605.

³⁴ Baer, R. A. (2003). Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 125–143.

³⁵ Grossman et al., (2004). Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 57(1), 35-43.

³⁶ Grossman et al., (2004). Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 57(1), 35-43.

³⁷ Zeidan et al., (2010). Ibid.

³⁸ Zenner et al., (2014). From. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603>. Accessed datae 20.10.2024

and resilience.³⁹ The university experience includes important relationships as well as academic challenges. By promoting empathy, active listening, and clear communication, mindfulness exercises can improve students' interpersonal relationships and social skills.⁴⁰ Students' growth as learners and individuals may benefit from a collaborative and supportive learning environment, which is facilitated by improved interpersonal abilities.

V. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

University undergraduates face significant challenges in maintaining academic performance due to stress, emotional difficulties, and inadequate coping mechanisms.⁴¹ Reduced cognitive functioning, poor decision-making, and decreased academic accomplishment are frequently the results of these pressures, which are made worse by societal expectations and a lack of mental health supports.⁴² Around the world, mindfulness is a successful technique for improving stress reduction, emotional control, and cognitive capacities.⁴³ Research has demonstrated that mindfulness training can have a positive impact on long-term well-being as well as short-term academic performance.⁴⁴ However, little is known about the effects of mindfulness in Sri Lankan higher education, especially about undergraduate students at Colombo University. To close this gap, this study assesses the impacts of mindfulness interventions on Sri Lankan university students' academic performance.

5.1. Conceptual framework and hypothesis

The proposed study investigates the connection between undergraduate students' academic achievement, emotional well-being, and mindfulness at the University of Colombo in Sri Lanka. The relationship between mindfulness and academic performance is mediated by emotional well-being. The basic concept is that mindfulness enhances mental well-being, which in turn promotes better academic achievement.

Practices of mindfulness enhance cognitive functions, including working memory and attention control, which are essential for crucial tasks in academia. For example, mindfulness meditation and focused breathing techniques help students stay in the now, which lowers distractions and enhances understanding

³⁹ Regehr et al., (2013). From. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2012.11.026>. Accessed Date 12.10.2024

⁴⁰ Schonert-Reichl et al., (2010). From. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-010-0011-8> Accessed Date 20.12.2024

⁴¹ Wickramasinghe et al., (2023). Prevalence of depression among students at a Sri Lankan university: A study using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) during the COVID-19 pandemic. *BMC Public Health*, 23 (1), 528.

⁴² Deng et al., (2022). From. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.869337>. Accessed Date 11.12.2024

⁴³ ..Shapiro et al., (2008). Toward the integration of meditation into higher education: A review of research. *Teachers College Record*, 110 (2), 394 - 426.

⁴⁴ Zeidan et al., (2010). Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training. *Consciousness and cognition*, 19 (2), 597 - 605.

throughout class and exams. Lower stress levels and increased work efficiency are linked to these short-term benefits, which promote academic performance.^{45, 46}

According to research, mindfulness trainees have greater attention, memory, and cognitive flexibility, all of which are linked to higher academic achievement.⁴⁷ Mindfulness can have a direct impact on student performance by promoting better attention and regulation of emotions, particularly in the demanding setting of university life.⁴⁸

It's widely accepted that mindfulness contributes to psychological well-being. It makes individuals more mindful of their feelings, which improves their emotional regulation and reduces emotional suffering.⁴⁹ According to Diener et al., emotional well-being in this context refers to the psychological functioning, emotional resilience, and balance that enable students to effectively cope with both personal and educational challenges.⁵⁰

As it influences students' motivation, engagement, and coping mechanisms, emotional well-being is crucial for academic performance.⁵¹ In addition to having greater connections with their teachers and peers, students who are emotionally well are better able to handle stress, which improves their academic performance.⁵² According to research, sustained mindfulness practices enhance problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, and emotional regulation, all of which are critical for long-term academic success and gradually build emotional well-being, which helps students manage academic pressures more effectively. These advantages may also help students perform consistently over several semesters and be better equipped to face challenges in the future.⁵³

Focusing on the relationships mentioned above, the framework proposes that the relationship between academic achievement and mindfulness is

⁴⁵ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delacorte.

⁴⁶ Singh, (2023). Sakshi and Dhyana: The origin of mindfulness-based therapies. *BJPsych Bulletin*, 47 (2), 94 – 97.

⁴⁷ Mrazek et al., (2013). Mindfulness training improves working memory capacity and GRE performance while reducing mind-wandering. *Psychological Science*, 24 (5), 776 - 781.

⁴⁸ Goyal et al., (2014). From. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.13018> Accessed Date 18.12.2024

⁴⁹ Schuman-Olivier et al., (2020). Mindfulness and behavior change. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*, 28 (6), 371 - 394

⁵⁰ Diener et al., (2009). From. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.2.276>. Accessed Date 15.12.2024

⁵¹ Schaufeli et al., (2002). From. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015630930326>. Accessed Date 16.12.2024

⁵² Huppert, & So., (2013). From. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9966-7> Accessed Date 02.12.2024

⁵³ Kariyawasam et al., (2023). From. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-022-02041-z>. Accessed date: 20.12.2024

mediated by emotional well-being. Students’ academic performance may increase as a result of mindfulness’s capacity to improve their psychological regulation and overall well-being. Research demonstrates that emotional well-being serves as a crucial connection between psychological treatments and academic performance.⁵⁴ In another way, although mindfulness has a direct impact on academic achievement, its benefits may be enhanced by better mental well-being, which facilitates greater academic functioning. The ability to successfully control emotions, sustain positive affect, and handle stress in both personal and academic situations is all components of emotional well-being, which is a multifaceted concept. By supporting the psychological and cognitive processes required for long-term learning and success, emotional well-being acts as a mediator in the relationship between mindfulness and academic performance.^{55, 56}

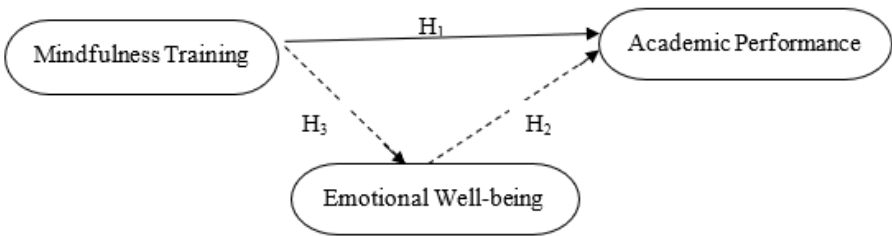


Figure 01: Conceptual Framework of the study

H1: Mindfulness Training is positively impact on academic performance.

H2: Emotional Well-being positively impacts academic performance.

H3: Emotional Well-being mediates the relationship between Mindfulness Training and academic performance.

5.2. Significance of the research

The mental health, academic achievement, and personal growth of university students are all possible to be enhanced by incorporating mindfulness activities into the curriculum. Students can develop emotional resilience, focus more effectively, and manage stress with the help of mindfulness treatments. The larger objectives of developing well-rounded people who can manage obstacles in both their academic and personal lives are in line with a comprehensive approach to education.^{57, 58}

⁵⁴Gallagher et al., (2009). From. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2009.00573.x>. Accessed date: 08.11.2024

⁵⁵ Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95(3), 542–575.

⁵⁶ Ryff, & Keyes, (1995). From. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.719> Accessed date: 05.11.2024

⁵⁷ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. Delacorte.

⁵⁸ Singh, (2023). Sakshi and Dhyana: The origin of mindfulness-based therapies. *BJ-Psych Bulletin*, 47 (2), 94 –97.

Policymakers may address the growing mental health problems university students experience by implementing mindfulness into educational programs. Better classroom conditions and more involved students can be beneficial to teachers. Students who practice mindfulness can develop lasting skills like emotional control and resilience, as well as useful coping mechanisms for academic stress. All of these advantages work together to improve student outcomes and the standard of higher education.⁵⁹

VI. METHODOLOGY

6.1. Sample and procedure

This study adopted a quantitative research design to assess the impact of mindfulness meditation training on the academic performance of undergraduates. Data were gathered using a self-administered questionnaire and investigated with participants' Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) to assess changes before and after the mindfulness intervention. First semester CGPA was compared with the second semester CGPA after the mindfulness meditation intervention. A sample was selected from the students of the Bachelor of Labor Management program at the Institute of Human Resource Advancement (IHRA) of the University of Colombo. As this program has only 185 undergraduate students, the Entire population was invited to fill out a Google form and give their consent to participate in this research. Out of 185 undergraduates, only 126 undergraduates registered giving their consent. However, out of 126 undergraduates, only 72 completed the mindfulness training program, 59 female and 13 male. During the second semester of the academic year in May and June 2023, the study was carried out. They were given an eight-week mindfulness meditation training. Additionally, their consent was taken to use and access their CGPA data, as well as to link it to their responses to the questionnaire with CGPA data.

6.2. Measures

The measurement tools used for each construct in this study were developed from the previous research. Before the research started, pre-test and pilot tests were carried out to make sure the measures were reliable and had content validity. The Sinhala language was used to develop the questionnaire, since it is the main language of instruction and communication of the degree program.

6.2.1. Measuring mindfulness with the FFMQ

A self rating scale called the Five Factors of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) is used to measure mindfulness developed by Baer et al⁶⁰. 39 items, spread across five aspects, observe, describe, act aware, non-judgment, and non-react with inner sensations make up the FFMQ. The words "observe" and "describe" refer to the capacity to pay attention to both internal and external

⁵⁹ Kariyawasam et al., (2023). From. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-022-02041-z>. Accessed date: 20.12.2024.

⁶⁰ Baer, R. A. (2003). From. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg015> Accessed date: 03.12.2024.

experiences; “act aware” denotes conscious actions; “non-judgment” denotes the lack of evaluative judgments of inner experiences; and “non-reacting” denotes the capacity to allow thoughts and feelings to come and go without becoming consumed by them. A five-point Likert scale, from “not completely applicable” to “completely applicable,” is used to answer the FFMQ questions. Both positively and negatively worded items are included in the questionnaire; higher scores suggest greater awareness⁶¹.

6.2.2. Measuring emotional well-being

The Emotional Well-Being Scale (EWB Scale) is a tool used to assess the level of negative emotions like sadness and dissatisfaction, as well as the frequency and intensity of positive feelings like happiness and satisfaction. It is frequently used in studies on mindfulness and interventions aimed at emotional well-being. It includes 15 items focusing on emotional experiences during the previous week or month, with a Likert scale response format, 1 = never, 5 = always.^{62, 63}

6.2.3. Measuring academic performance

The cumulative grade point average (CGPA) was used to measure undergraduates’ academic performance. Richardson et al. claim that, when compared to grade point average (GPA), CGPA is the most accurate indicator of undergraduate educational achievement. In the questionnaire, students had to provide their CGPA⁶⁴.

VII. RESULTS

7.1. Reliability and validity analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to assess each study variable’s construct validity. It assists in developing the measurement model and the identification of things that are not relevant⁶⁵. The factor loading value should be below 0.4. All three variables, Mindfulness, Emotional Well-being, and Academic Performance have factor loading values that are much higher than average. GFI, AGFI, CFI, NFI, and TLI values should be greater than 0.90 or closer to 1 to be able to show a better model fit⁶⁶. All of the above index values are above the average level and closer to 1.00, as shown in Table 01. Data is therefore perfect for further analysis. According to Table 01, the

⁶¹ Baer, R. A. (2003). *Ibid.*

⁶² Tennant et al., (2007). From. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7525-5-63> Accessed date: 09.12.2024

⁶³ Watson et al., (1988). From.1063-1070. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.6.1063>. Accessed date: 09.12.2024

⁶⁴ Richardson et al., (2012). From. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026838>. Accessed date: 05.08.2024

⁶⁵ Byrne, B. M. (2010). *Structural equation modeling with AMOS: Basic concepts, applications, and programming* (2nd ed.). Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

⁶⁶ Bentler, P. M. (1990). Comparative fit indexes in structural models. *Psychological Bulletin*, 107 (2), 238 – 246.

model fit values in this study are nearly 1.00, suggesting a good model fit. For a better model fit, the Chi-square (χ^2/df) value should be less than 4.5 and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value should be less than .05⁶⁷. Both the RMSEA and Chi-square values are above the average level, as shown in Table 01, indicating a better fit for the model. A good model fit is demonstrated by all of the measurement values being above the average level.

Table 01: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Variables	Chi-square	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	NFI	RM R	AVE	CR
M	3.770	0.038	0.851	0.954	0.874	0.822	0.822	.015	.52	.81
EW	3.965	0.050	0.943	0.933	0.931	0.843	0.813	.032	.53	.82
AP	4.230	0.042	0.852	0.911	0.852	0.944	0.914	.023	.54	.81

Notes: M= Mindfulness, EW= Emotional Well-being, AP= Academic Performance

Figure 02 shows how emotional well-being serves as a mediator in the relationship between school performance and mindfulness. Academic achievement is the dependent variable, emotional well-being is the mediating variable, and mindfulness is the independent variable in this model.

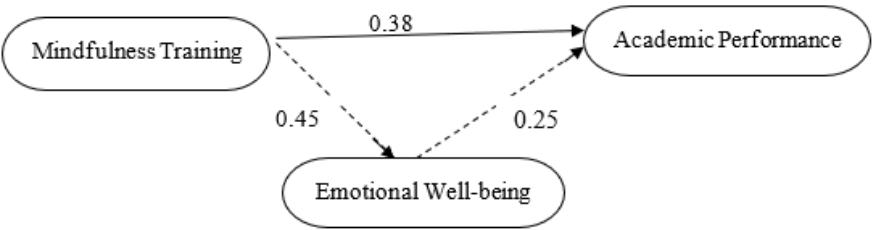


Figure 02: The Mediating Role of Emotional Well-Being between Mindfulness and Academic Performance

Table 02: Correlation for Emotional Well-Being, Mindfulness, and CGPA

⁶⁷ Kline, R. B. (2016). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (4th ed.). Guilford Press.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Emotional Well-Being (EWB)						
2. Acting with Awareness	0.45**					
3. Observing	0.32*	0.29*				
4. Describing	0.41**	0.35**	0.27*			
5. Nonjudging	0.56**	0.47**	0.21	0.39**		
6. Nonreactivity	0.38**	0.33*	0.25*	0.30*	0.44**	
7. CGPA	0.48**	0.42**	0.31*	0.37**	0.50**	0.36**

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to investigate the connections among Academic Performance (as determined by CGPA), Emotional Well-being, and Mindfulness (as assessed by the FFMQ). All mindfulness indicators demonstrated a significant positive correlation with emotional well-being, and the highest correlation was found with nonjudging ($r = 0.56, p < 0.01$). Acting with Awareness ($r = 0.45, p < 0.01$) and Describing ($r = 0.41, p < 0.01$) are two further significant correlations that show a positive relationship between emotional well-being and mindfulness levels. All aspects of mindfulness had a positive relationship with CGPA, with the largest correlation found with nonjudging ($r = 0.50, p < 0.01$). Additionally, there was a strong correlation between academic performance and Describing ($r = 0.37, p < 0.01$) and Acting with Awareness ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$). Participants with higher emotional well-being indicated better academic performance, as evidenced by the strong positive correlation between emotional well-being and CGPA ($r = 0.48, p < 0.01$).

Table 03: Means and standard deviations for FFMQ

Variables	Mean*	St deviation
Acting with Awareness	3.02	0.97
Observing	3.49	1.11
Describing	3.31	0.84
Nonjudging	3.39	0.86
Nonreactivity	2.92	0.88
Total	3.54	0.87

**(1–2.33) low level of mindfulness, (2.34–3.66) moderate, and (5–3.67) high.*

Table 03 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for the five dimensions of mindfulness measured by the Five Factors of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), along with the overall total score. As shown in Table 03, the averages for the mindfulness classifications were all moderate, with values ranging from 2.92 to 3.49. The Nonreactivity domain had the lowest mean score (2.92), while the observation category had the highest mean

score (3.49). With a mean total score of 3.54, the scale's overall assessment of mindfulness indicated that its effectiveness was moderate.

Table 04 Hotelling and Wilkes Lambda test for Gender and Performance level

	Domains	Sum of squares	df	Means of squares	F	p
Gender Hotelling's Trace = 2.898 p = 0.008*	Acting with Awareness	1.456	1	1.456	1.643	0.174
	Observing	1.335	1	1.335	1.243	0.162
	Describing	0.992	1	0.992	0.542	0.431
	Nonjudging	4.521	1	4.521	5.172	0.015*
	Nonreactivity	0.942	1	0.942	0.529	0.412
	Total	0.581	1	0.581	1.314	0.231
Performance level Wilks' Lambda = 2.190 p = 0.001*	Acting with Awareness	29.952	4	7.812	8.632	0.001*
	Observing	10.363	4	2.648	2.642	0.042*
	Describing	11.846	4	2.843	3.754	0.003*
	Nonjudging	17.314	4	4.152	4.521	0.001*
	Nonreactivity	5.312	4	1.221	1.231	0.315
	Total	9.612	4	2.215	7.538	0.001*

* $p < 0.05$.

As given in Table 04, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out using Wilk's Lambda test for academic performance and Hotelling's Trace test for gender at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ to look at the significant differences by gender and performance. Table 04 shows that there were no statistically significant differences in the total degree of mindfulness due to the gender variable at the significance level (0.05). The p-value of 0.015 indicates that gender has a significant effect only on the "Nonjudging" dimension in favor of males. This suggests that gender differences do influence this particular dimension of mindfulness. For assessing whether the Performance Level is significant, Wilks' Lambda test was employed. At the 0.05 significance level, the p-value of 0.001 indicates that performance level significantly influences the mindfulness aspects. The p-value of 0.001 shows that the overall effect of performance level on all mindfulness dimensions is highly significant except Nonreactivity dimension. Students' academic performance has been positively correlated with mindfulness. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness training can improve working memory, attention control, and cognitive processes all of which are essential for successful learning and

academic achievement^{68,69}. Additionally, research have shown that mindfulness interventions help students manage stress and lessen exam anxiety, which enables them to concentrate better and perform at their best in class.^{70,71}

VIII. DISCUSSION

The results indicate that academic performance and mindfulness are strongly correlated with emotional well-being. The elements of mindfulness (such as acting with awareness and nonjudging) that have the largest relationships with emotional well-being suggest that they may be especially important for promoting emotional stability. Furthermore, the strong correlations demonstrated between CGPA and mindfulness components emphasize the possible advantages of mindfulness training for academic success. Since emotional well-being has a strong correlation with both mindfulness and CGPA, it seems to have a mediating effect. These findings provide validity to the idea that mindfulness practices improve mental well-being, which in turn has a positive impact on academic performance.

Students who obtain mindfulness training perform better on CGPA because it improves their capacity to concentrate and process information effectively. According to research, mindfulness-based therapies enhance working memory and attention management, two skills that are essential for short-term academic activities⁷². Higher grades are the outcome of improved cognitive functioning, which enables students to take in and apply knowledge more successfully. Active participation in class activities is encouraged by mindfulness, which cultivates present-moment awareness. Short-term academic performance is enhanced and learning outcomes are significantly impacted by this interaction⁷³.

Self-regulation, resilience, and stress management are all enhanced through mindfulness practices, and these skills are necessary for long-term achievement in a variety of academic settings⁷⁴. These abilities help students successfully manage their studies and other responsibilities, which raises their CGPAs. The capacity of students to remain enrolled in an academic program until it is finished is known as retention. According to Lindsay and Creswell,

⁶⁸ . Rahl et al., (2017). From <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000250>. Accessed date: 11.12.2024

⁶⁹ Goyal et al., (2014). From. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.13018> Accessed Date 18.12.2024

⁷⁰ Zeidan et al., (2010). Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training. *Consciousness and cognition*, 19 (2), 597 - 605.

⁷¹ Bellinger et al., (2015). Mindfulness, anxiety, and high-stakes mathematics performance in the laboratory and classroom. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 37, 123 - 132.

⁷² Graham, A., & Truscott, J. (2019). Meditation in the classroom: supporting both student and teacher wellbeing? *Education 3-13*, 48 (7), 807 - 819.

⁷³ Schonert-Reichl et al., (2010). From. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-010-0011-8> Accessed Date 20.12.2024

⁷⁴ Bellinger et al., (2015). *Ibid*.

mindfulness lowers academic stress and burnout, two significant variables that increase student dropout rates⁷⁵. Mindfulness assists students overcome obstacles by encouraging coping mechanisms and emotional resilience, which raises retention rates. Students' capacity to successfully manage their time and create reasonable goals is usually required for long-term academic achievement. By improving executive functioning and self-awareness, mindfulness improves students prioritize their work and maintain motivation to meet their educational objectives⁷⁶.

The findings of this study empirically support the hypothesis that emotional well-being (EWB) mediates the positive impact of mindfulness on academic performance. The implications of these findings are examined with existing literature. The variables of the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) and EWB showed strong positive relationships, suggesting that mindfulness is essential for promoting emotional stability. The attribute that demonstrated the largest correlation with EWB was nonjudging ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$), which is consistent with earlier studies that emphasize the importance of nonjudgmental acceptance in reducing emotional discomfort⁷⁷. The idea that mindfulness promotes emotional regulation through improved present-focused awareness and articulation of internal experiences is further supported by the significant positive correlations that were found between Acting with Awareness ($r = 0.45$) and Describing ($r = 0.41$) (Baer et al., 2008).

The correlation between EWB and cumulative grade point average (CGPA) was significant ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating its role as a mediator between academic performance and mindfulness. This result is in line with other research that links emotional health to improved motivation, resilience, and cognitive functioning of which are linked to improved academic performance⁷⁸. Students who are more emotionally healthy are probably less stressed and more focused, which helps them do better in school. Strong associations were found between CGPA and the mindfulness dimensions, specifically Nonjudging and Acting with Awareness ($r = 0.50$ and $r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). These findings correspond with studies that show mindfulness exercises improve academic performance through promoting adaptive coping strategies, decreasing procrastination, and increasing concentration⁷⁹. Additionally, the noteworthy connections between the various aspects of mindfulness indicate

⁷⁵ Lindsay, E. K., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Mechanisms of mindfulness training: Monitor and Acceptance Theory (MAT). *Clinical Psychology Review*, 51, 48 - 59.

⁷⁶ Tang et al., (2015). The neuroscience of mindfulness meditation. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 16 (4), 213 - 225.

⁷⁷ Kabat-Zinn, J. (1990). Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness. Delacorte.

⁷⁸ . Keyes, C. L. M., & Haidt, J. (Eds.). (2003). *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived*. American Psychological Association.

⁷⁹ Shapiro, S. L., Brown, K. W., & Astin, J. A. (2008). Toward the integration of meditation into higher education: A review of research. *Teachers College Record*, 110 (2), 394 - 426.

that they function in harmony to affect academic performance as well as emotional health. The discovered correlations support the idea that EWB mediates the link between mindfulness and CGPA. According to Brown et al., this study complements theoretical frameworks that propose emotional well-being as the pathway through which mindfulness improves academic achievement⁸⁰. Mindfulness interventions may help students overcome academic obstacles with greater success by promoting emotional well-being, which would improve their performance overall.

8.1. Implications

These findings have significant implications for higher education and mental health practices. Academic achievement and emotional well-being may be enhanced by the use of mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) in educational settings. Programs that highlight important aspects of mindfulness, such acting with awareness and nonjudging, may be highly beneficial. In order to promote students' overall development, the research also suggests the possibility of incorporating mindfulness training into university curricula.

8.2. Limitations and future directions

The study includes limitations though it offers valuable data. The results might not be as broadly applicable because the sample was limited to University of Colombo undergraduates enrolled in a specific course of study. Future studies might examine at these relationships over time and across a variety of student populations to investigate the long-term impacts of mindfulness on academic performance.

8.3. Recommendations

Based on the research findings of this study, incorporating mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) into university curricula to improve academic attention and emotional resilience can be recommended. To promote an encouraging and dedicated learning environment, faculty members can also receive training on how to integrate mindfulness practices into their teaching strategies. No gender differences, indicate the universal applicability of mindfulness interventions across genders. By improving students' focus and involvement, mindfulness-based teaching techniques can quietly improve their academic performance. Further, Students may be motivated to participate in mindfulness practices by awareness campaigns highlighting the relationship between mental well-being, academic achievement, and mindfulness.

⁸⁰ Brown, K. W., Ryan, R. M., & Creswell, J. D. (2007). From. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10478400701598298> Accessed date 11.12.2024

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“CREATING MORE SPACE, SHARING MORE RESOURCES”: REIMAGINED EDUCATION APPROACHES FOR TODAY’S DIGITAL LEARNERS AND SUSTAINABLE DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This paper proposes a solid and contemplative approach based on objective conditions currently occurring in the contemporary world. The increasing tensions between countries and the escalation of war, conflict, and hostility with economic and resource motives indicate that the education system adopted and implemented in the world still has shortcomings, especially in producing profiles of educational institutions that are not only intelligent but also have social sensitivity and concern for the world. With the increasing degradation of the world’s resources currently in various parts of the globe, a new approach to the principles of education is needed that can be adopted into a new pedagogical formulation. The principle “creating more space” and “sharing more resources” is a twofold approach that can be an alternative pedagogy. Several practical implications are also reviewed in this paper so that it can be a reference for students, teachers, policy-makers, and stakeholders of education worldwide to reflect on, so that the purpose of making the world more advanced, prosperous, and harmonious can be achieved.

Keywords: *Space, resource, education, reimaged, global citizenship.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ryan Hickman, a three-year-old kid, went viral in 2012 after successfully recycling bags of cans and bottles. Ryan has been inspiring his family, neighbors, friends, and many people to take care of their disposal.¹ Today, with the assistance of online propagation, Ryan can broaden his movement to a bigger scale and has been followed by thousands of members. Apart from his efforts, Ryan actively engages in environmental education and outreach by giving presentations at schools, events, and conferences to inspire others to take action and make a positive impact on the environment. Ryan's story serves as a powerful reminder that even one person can make a significant difference in the world. His passion, dedication, and enthusiasm serve as a testament to the potential we all have to create positive change in the world around us. Another inspiring story is William Kamkwamba, a teenager from Malawi who struggled for his village and was having trouble irrigating their farms. William, with all his limitations, studied and was finally able to make a tool in the form of a windmill to produce water. This story is well-documented by the New York Times in a book entitled "*The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*".²

Ryan's and William's stories are two factual examples of education that each of us should reflect on. Intelligence that aligns with real challenges and requires a real contribution by creating more space and sharing more resources. Sharing and taking action are not privileges for the rich or people with high social and academic status, but rather, are a right for everyone to be developed in multi-faceted situations in their respective environments, regardless of their background. The efforts to integrate expected outcomes like Ryan and William have been pioneered and must be integrated into today's educational system. Our education deserves a more suitable outcome for the sake of sustainability and continuity. This paper will discuss some principles that are labeled "creating more space, sharing more resources" as a proposal for reimagined education for sustainable, developed, and harmonious global citizenship. Three overarching questions, i.e., (1) why should we rely on education?, (2) what principles are underlined in "creating more space" and "sharing more resources", and (3) what pedagogical implications can be made from this principle? It will be elaborated on in the following parts.

1.1. Methodology

This paper is research-based. The study employs a qualitative approach with a critical literature review. This method is conducted by analyzing case studies, existing data, publications, and references that are relevant to the questions being investigated. Additional data was gathered from educational reports, teacher interviews, and student reflections that I conducted several months before this conference (in 2024). A thematic analysis is conducted

¹ Ryan's Recycling Company, "About," - <https://ryansrecycling.com/about/>, accessed December 2024.

² William Kamkwamba, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* - <https://greennetwork.id/figur/william-kamkwamba-pemuda-afrika-yang-menjaring-angin/>, accessed January 2025.

to identify patterns from the readings as well as best practices to reach the objectives of this study.

1.2. Literature review

Buddhism does not see an individual as a separate entity from their ecological and environmental landscape. Five precepts, for example, are practiced and devoted by Buddhists to avoid doing wrong to other people. Buddhists must refrain from killing, stealing, engaging in sexual misconduct, telling falsehoods, and consuming intoxicants. The prevention of oneself from breaking the five precepts every day is an ethical intention for social welfare. Obviously, in Buddhism, both personal and social development are important for worldly life. More specifically, in the *Vyagapajja Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya*, four things are worth practicing: (1) *Unnhanasampada* (vigilance), (2) *Arakkhasampada* (protection), (3) *Kalyanamitta* (friendship), and (4) *Samajavikata* (balanced life).³ With these four qualities, a person living in the group or community should have a peaceful heart and yet the ability to break ignorance (Priya, 2008: 44). Moreover, in the Four Noble Truths (*catur ariya satiyani*), reality must be revealed as being unsatisfactory and unpleasant that lead us to suffer. With this in mind, understanding that all we have are temporary and subject to decay, we have to start making an effort to use this body for good deeds (*parami*) as many as we can.

Thus, the character of being Buddhist should develop four accomplishments that include faith (*saddha*), virtue (*sila*), charity (*cagga*), and wisdom (*panna*). Having this path will lead to well-being, development, and harmony. When Buddha gave sermons to Kutadanta, a poor man came and said, “Ekam Namam Kim? Ekam Nama aharatthitikam! “All living beings need food to sustain themselves”. The meal is a resource; people need food to survive, besides other needs such as clothes, houses, air, water, and land. It is our responsibility to share and keep away from greed and any bad intentions. When this action is taken, people will never have any reason to be harmed and abandoned. Buddha’s teaching always put the training of the mind as a basis for all practices (*manopubbangama dhamma*) that lead to the production of intentions (*cethanam bhikkave kammam vadami*). These basic doctrinal frameworks in Buddhism are legacies from Lord Buddha that are still relevant today, awaiting to be actualized in various dimensions of life and manifested in our efforts to maintain this life, one of which is through education.⁴

II. RESULTS

2.1. Why should we rely on education?

The outbreak of war in various parts of the world indicates that there is still a tendency to control certain resources by conquering other parties or hurting other people. The struggle for resources, whether territorial, mineral, natural, power, or sovereignty, is still the cause of suffering for many modern

³ Priya, 2008, p. 44, as cited in the paper’s Literature Review section.

⁴ Hsing, Y. (2016). *Humanistic Buddhism: Holding to the Original Intents of Buddha*.

people and has been plaguing the world recently. War is the most escalating form of individual or group driven by unlimited and insatiable lust and desire. Stopping restless conflicts and eliminating all forms of violence is the shared responsibility of all global communities to protect this planet from destruction and extinction caused by human actions and greed. This shared responsibility can be realized through education for the next generation that accommodates humanity's values, and non-violence, respects human dignity, and leads to the sustainability of life and its entire existence.

Thus, education should be reformulated as the 'factory of compassion' and should be redefined as the 'house of mindfulness'. More importantly, as a place to grow to hone sensitivity and develop the potential to better understand increasingly complex world problems and establish oneself to be part of the solution, not the other way around, as a troublemaker and becoming the cause of the problem. Therefore, the profile of education graduates needed is those who become agents of welfare, happiness, and prosperity, who not only consider themselves as individual beings but also realize themselves as part of social beings. If possible, every student must be equipped with moral and ethical values that lead them to become better people. Thich Nhat Tu's five principles (2019) include having a global vision, prevention of cultural conflict, adaptive behavior, communication for overcoming obstacles, and understanding external forces are for consideration as key to imparting global awareness.⁵

Education is a key to shaping students' mind-body-world formation, which enables them to foster awareness and inspire others to become responsible global citizens. The output of education should not be based on the acquisition of static knowledge and neglecting social and environmental problems faced by the community. Marked with many global constraints that occur around the globe, the world should be viewed as a big home for all inhabitants of the planet, rather than an isolated place scattered by differences such as national sovereignty and formal identity that border our collective union and action. Although each country has a different education policy system, format, and platform, it is important to reflect that in the constellation of modern society, the values needed to be achieved must be the same outcome, considering that the global world has become a place that does not recognize the boundaries of sovereignty. It has been proven that transcontinental crimes that occur in every country are caused by the spread of extreme ideologies and various other pejorative ideologies that are very far from the spirit of peace, inclusivity, and reconciliation.

For example, the product that is the so-called educated society will increase in number, and they will be those who will inhabit this world in the future. It can be imagined that with the decrease in limited natural resources, such as food, energy, land, air, water, clothing, houses, and other forms of war, conflict will be waiting for the time to happen.

⁵ Thich Nhat Tu. (2019). *Five Principles of Global Leadership*, in *Mindful Leadership for Sustainable Peace*, Hong Duc Publishing House.

2.2. Principle “Creating more space”

Following the recent publication on ‘quality of education’ as part of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), we can assume that the crucial indicator for all levels of education is to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture’s contribution. If we commit to using this framework, there is no reason for every school or educational institution to ignore the main goal of learning, which is for the sake of shared principles for a decent, prosperous, and sustainable life for a long and lasting life.

One of the most prominent cases is the rampant corruption cases in various countries. This corruption indicates that there are still many “educational products” that fail to control themselves over their selfish desires and the loss of compassion for the suffering of others. This extraordinary crime is not only a form of greed but also an unwillingness to share. It will get worse and worse if the instillation of moral values from school age fails to be carried out as an initial milestone for forming a generous, empathetic, and noble moral character. Thich Nhat Hanh’s ‘interbeing’ approach is one of the most suitable frameworks for today’s educators to instill global ethical values because this approach not only focuses on students’ learning experiences but also on how educators cultivate the benefits in their pedagogical adventures. However, Waistell (2019), underlined that implementing Hanh’s view of global ethics faced challenges in how it can transcend systemic barriers such as education systems, curricula, policies, and skepticism that views ethics as Buddhist properties or terminologies.⁶

Contemporary challenges and complexities have brought yawning gaps of social and economic disparities that have caused massive displacement of people. Intense competition rises to arrogance and ignorance of the suffering of another being. It requires global and coordinated efforts for peaceful change and reconciliation. Students must be educated in the ability to cultivate feelings so that they have a greater sense of concern for others and move themselves to share and care more about humanity, the world, and their environment. The educational outcomes that have been long pursued should be redefined not only about chasing intelligence and cognitive skills, but also should be balanced with the awareness to see the world as a common home for all humanity, regardless of ethnicity, country, race, religion, and other differences. Ghosh (2022), explicating Mahatma Gandhi’s ‘global citizenship’, explained that the need to empower youth to be responsible, innovative, and fully engaged as critical citizens is a tremendous responsibility for education. Children spend almost half of their time engaging in the educational system at schools or campuses, this golden time must be their task to socialize them with

⁶ Waistell, J. (2019). *Thich Nhat Hanh’s Approach to Global Education*, in *Ethics in Buddhist Approach to Global Education and Ethics*, Hong Duc Publishing House.

serious intercultural competence and an understanding of differences.⁷

In doing that, spatial knowledge, a term introduced by Kuipers (1976), should be understood as territorial knowledge that is a reference for seeing geographical boundaries, but humanity certainly goes beyond these normative boundaries. One of the efforts made by teachers is to actively engage in collaborative learning as a pathway to embrace world unity. Seeing the sadness and suffering of other creatures is an inner calling to help, or if they cannot, they can withdraw so as not to cause the suffering of other creatures.⁸

In an increasingly interconnected world, education plays a pivotal role in fostering global unity and a balanced life. This entire world deserves more collaborative learning outcomes that can develop students' global citizenship competencies, which emphasize the importance of intercultural understanding, mutual understanding, critical thinking, cooperation, and willingness to create more space for others. Drawing upon Ryan and William, this study examines how ancient Buddha's teaching is still relevant to equip students with the principles that are necessary to promote global harmony and sustainability.

2.3. Principle "Sharing more resources"

Global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and political conflicts require collective action and cooperation. Education has the power to cultivate a sense of global responsibility among students, enabling them to engage in meaningful collaborations that contribute to global harmony. Collaborative learning – an approach that encourages students to work together in diverse teams – has been identified as an effective pedagogical strategy to nurture global citizenship. Michael Fullan's 6Cs is a framework that fulfills efforts in fostering unity and aligns with today's global issues and challenges.⁹

Education serves as a crucial mechanism for preparing students to navigate and address global challenges. Scholars such as Banks (2017) and Reimers (2020) argue that global citizenship education (GCE) cultivates empathy, cultural awareness, and social responsibility. Collaborative learning, as a pedagogical strategy, enhances these skills by exposing students to diverse perspectives. The essence of 21st-century learning requires collaborative learning to foster communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills – key competencies for global engagement. Johnson & Johnson (2014) highlight that students engaged in cooperative learning environments demonstrate higher academic achievement and improved social skills. When embedded in curricula, collaborative learning promotes the development of Fullan's 6Cs, preparing students to contribute to global harmony.¹⁰

⁷ Ghosh, 2022, *Gandhi and Global Citizenship Education*, <https://www.globalcommonsreview.org/article-2-gandhi-and-global-citizenship-education.html>.

⁸ Kuipers, B. (1976). *A Theoretical Framework for Spatial Knowledge*.

⁹ Fullan, M. (2014). *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact*, Jossey-Bass.

¹⁰ Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2014). *Cooperative Learning in 21st Century Education*, Cambridge University Press.

III. FULLAN'S 6CS AND DEEP LEARNING ARE AS FOLLOWS

Each component contributes to global unity: (1) Character: Instills empathy and ethical responsibility. (2) Citizenship: Encourages active participation in addressing global issues. (3) Collaboration: Enhances teamwork and cross-cultural understanding, (4) Communication: Promotes dialogue across diverse backgrounds, (5) Creativity: Encourages innovative solutions for societal challenges, (6) Critical Thinking: Develops the ability to analyze and address complex global issues.

Schools that integrate project-based learning and peer collaboration into their curriculum report increased student engagement in social and environmental initiatives. Case studies from international schools demonstrate that collaborative activities, such as model United Nations simulations and cross-cultural projects, help students develop a sense of shared responsibility and interconnectedness.

In response to the issues of digital natives in education, it is crucial to promote humanistic Buddhism in a multi-religious and diverse Buddhist landscape. Humanistic Buddhism, as a practice and a very basic value in Buddhism, needs to be developed and strengthened through discourse. Sciffrin (2001) defines discourse as an interactive process that requires speakers to draw upon several different types of communicative knowledge that complement more code-based grammatical knowledge of sound, form, and meaning. Building discourse today is very different from when there was no internet and social media tools. Momentarily, human conditions and civilization are increasingly complex with problems demanding a harmonious and consistent integration of how to continue to maintain this Buddha's legacy so that it continues to be relevant and useful for humans themselves.¹¹

Social media such as Facebook, YouTube, X (before known as Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok are very massive nowadays, especially for young people to get connected with the world and beyond. The interaction is rapidly moving forward from the physical landscape of communication to unlimited, borderless, and infinite modes. The advent of digital platforms has increased "screen time" for people to consume news updates, data, and entertainment every day. Surprisingly, as reported by a research agency, namely Millward Brown, Indonesia (besides the Philippines) is one of the top-ranked countries with heavy screen time (CNBC website). Surfing the internet and scrolling up and down are the most common activities during the daytime and evening. Eyes, fingers, and minds attached to cellphones, laptops, tablets, or any devices seem to be their daily habit. With this in mind, any propagation of the agenda will be easier to deploy and deliver to the public space, aimed at inserting public memory in the form of an influx stream of social media content. Meanwhile, the production of the information and discourse can be creative, productive, responsive, and adaptive to win the public trust. Public discourse should be made cognizant of the emergence of updates appearing in the timeline anytime and anywhere.

¹¹ Sciffrin, D. (2001). *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Blackwell.

As a continuous movement, humanistic Buddhism has been an inseparable value within society from the past until now. The essence of the values carried out in humanistic Buddhism cannot be seen as a separate entity from the development of the humanities with its multifaceted dimensions, such as social, economic, political, and cultural. Thus, Buddhist stakeholders, including youths, should take part and role in modern society for the spirit, agenda, and insight in humanistic Buddhism to be sustained. One of the remarkable characteristics of today's society is the emergence of social media. In the Indonesian context, Buddhism has been growing fast as a formal religion embraced by more than five million people out of the total population. Moreover, a third of them are of productive age (also known as young age). Although Buddhism is a minority religion, the freedom of religious expression and awareness is preserved by the constitution and law. These privileges are expressed in the freedom to promote, mainstream, and revitalize the teaching of the Lord Buddha (also known as Dharma) in digital platforms.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be assumed that they have emphasized their entity among other religious institutions that exist in Indonesia. In other words, the propagation of humanistic Buddhism should take part in a diverse context of religious community. It becomes the strategy to develop collaboration and co-creation to achieve the noble objectives of the values of Buddhism. By doing this, the organizations can preserve the essence of being humanistic and at the same time raise awareness to cultivate peace and religious tolerance. Consequently, the discourse developed in their social media always aims at attracting more engagement and embodiment among youths from a variety of religious groups or communities. Secondly, the organizations used common and casual terms to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings. Although they understand that such terms are very crucial and deeply rooted in Buddha's teaching for public information, they narrow down the definitions to become more comprehensible and easier to understand. This is probably the most common linguistic tactic to offer insights and persuasive humanistic messages for public attention by reducing rare religious terms and vocabulary. From these two strategies, it can be concluded that the determination of the movement among Buddhists is conducted through strategic discourse that invites more mutual respect and unity.

Furthermore, since Indonesian Buddhists are very diverse and have multi-sect backgrounds, the propagation of humanistic values should not be monolithically segmented in one Buddhist tradition. The language choice should be written in the national language (Bahasa Indonesia) rather than using one language code that represents one Buddhist sect, such as Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, or Chinese. Local languages, on the other hand, are used only when explaining local expressions or phrases that cannot be replaced with the national language. However, the organization has already measured the comprehensible degree of using those local terms.

Media platforms such as social media and websites are central in determining how religious propagation, including humanistic Buddhism in Indonesia. The

findings indicated that the movements promoting the practices and values of the Buddha’s teaching have never been surrendered due to the label of “minority”. It showcases that the intention and determination performed by Indonesian Buddhist youth organizations have been accelerating through the upscaling of the usage of social media. It is consistent with the message by Venerable Juewei (2019) by restless endeavors to make truth great again. She avers that everybody has a responsibility to awaken the world to value the Buddha’s teachings by pointing to the purity, virtues, and beauty of all beings as unexceptional. Taking this noble mission into action, Indonesian Buddhist youth organizations seek to amplify the fragrance of humanity through social media using several strategies.¹²

While pursuing engagement and public attention on the internet, the organizations made the content the basis for displaying their virtues effectively. Thus, making the information easy to digest and eye-catching is very crucial as it has to be a source to present the essential part of humanistic Buddhism. Multimodal text then becomes the most effective design to promote such intentions. Discourse was made to create appropriate content using text, images, hashtags, emojis, links, and captioned words. It is shown that the efforts of making humanistic Buddhism flourish in the Indonesian context cannot be separated from the use of social media propagation and campaigns. This strategy is used to reach a wider audience and promote their message of humanistic Buddhism by sharing their educational content, organizing online events, and connecting with other Buddhist youth organizations around the world. A recent study shows that social media allows a novel space to create a gateway between individuals or religious groups interconnectivity through fast updates of internet connection (Agarwal & Jones, 2022).

Humanistic Buddhism, as clearly explained by Venerable Hsing Yun (2006), focuses on human aspects as the basic principles for carrying out Buddhist teachings in this life. Seeing ourselves as humans and other humans in one place of life gives a sign that Buddhism should be carried out in a basic humane way. Training ourselves in morals, love, and wisdom is an effort so that we can all live usefully for our fellow humans. The emptiness of this understanding will certainly have an impact on the emergence of suffering for other humans, which is far from the essence of Buddhist teachings themselves. However, practicing humanistic Buddhism in a pluralistic religious context is certainly not easy.

As Buddhism also grows amidst other religions, it must be able to contribute to continuing to maintain Buddhist religious values for all humans without exception. More than that, you must also be able to maintain harmony and peace to avoid conflicts of interest because almost all religions also have their specific missions. The emergence of Buddhist youth organizations in Indonesia has had a major influence on the representation of Buddhism in

¹² Juewei, V. (2019). *Humanistic Buddhism in the Digital Age: Make Truth Great Again*. Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism.

modern societal culture. The ability to adapt and accelerate with the digital world and technology is the main key to achieving the main Buddhist goal, namely, liberation. In a worldly context, Buddhism must also be a way of thinking and acting in advancing civilization and solving problems in human life, such as poverty, ignorance, and backwardness. The main requirement for prosperity is the fundamental aspect, namely love and compassion, which is the main foundation for creating a peaceful and harmonious world. Therefore, Buddhist youth organizations have been able to get out of their comfort and individualistic zones, leading to the transformation of religious institutions to make them more socially engaged. All in all, according to Yonghai, Buddhism is in line with the fundamental spirit of an act by both truth and capabilities, adapted to the trend of development in this age.

Promoting humanistic Buddhism can be segmented depending on the context and circumstances in which Buddhism exists and develops. Based on the humanistic discourse built in the narrative of Buddhist youth in Indonesia, it can be understood that Buddhist religious propaganda is carried out in a situational and strategic way. Namely, by presenting Buddhism as a universal idea that can be reached and practiced by anyone without having to abandon their beliefs. For example, the relationship between Buddhism and Islam in Indonesia can be mutually positive for the development of many aspects of life. Putra (2010) has pointed out that Buddhists must be able to contribute by taking their roles in every aspect of life. He emphasized that the impacts can be observed from a political point of view, socio-economic, cultural, and spiritual aspects. Furthermore, the process of blending acculturation between Buddhism and modern Islam, and among other religions, spreads from cities to rural areas in the land where Buddhism exists has indicating a well-established engagement. Buddhist religious messages also do not have to be conveyed in the religious language found in our sacred writings. This method, especially when used by young people, will be more effective and appropriate because it suits their interests, lifestyle, and interaction patterns. This contemporary activity not only fosters a strong belief in Dharma but also awakens a young generation that has long been asleep and has not contributed anything to the development of Buddhism and humanity. In line with Master Hsing Yun's affords to attempt to let more people get in touch with religion. He confidently introduced basketball, soccer, gymnastics, and other sports to promote Fo Guang Shan, which certainly topples public stereotypes around sedentary Buddhism (Yu, 2011).

One of the obstacles in maintaining the existence of humanistic Buddhism in Indonesia is the ability to survive in winning the attention and attention of the public on social media pages. Yun-Ciang's (2015) views on discourse and power can be suitable to justify this finding. He claimed that using language, creating meanings, and making inferences in social contexts are affected by how social actors convey and interpret one another's intentions in everyday communicative practices. Participation and power in social media texts are characterized by a high degree of participation and interaction among the users,

who can create, share, comment, like, or react to the texts. Participation and interaction can create new forms of engagement and empowerment, but also new forms of domination and manipulation. The administrator of the account should be able to raise more participation and interaction to shape the discourse and the power. Relations among the users as well as how the users resist or challenge the dominant or oppressive discourses depend on the influence of the discourse and the power dynamics, by managing the rules, algorithms, and affordances that enable or constrain the audience's reactions and expressions.¹³

Apart from that, the organization must ensure that the discourse it builds does not have the potential to damage the order and good relations between religions in Indonesia. Social media content can sometimes be a trigger for social segregation, which causes the breakdown of national unity and integrity. Moreover, Indonesian law already regulates that blasphemy and religious blasphemy can be punished and processed according to the level of the violation. Since social media text is a language product, it needs to follow the virtues of language respect. The organizations reported that the host of the account has to be well-educated in cultural knowledge and diversity. The host has to be keen on different religions, especially when it comes to linguistic issues such as prayer recitation, terminologies, salutations, preferred pronouns, proper calling, iconic, and other linguistic or non-linguistic objects that represent a particular religion. This study also proved that language respect is highly scrutinized, not just about avoiding offensive language but also about using language in a way that is inclusive and affirming of all religious groups. The representation or writing an articles, captions, posts, and messages should offer a respectful manner to all religions. This means avoiding language that is specific to any one religion and using language that is accessible to people of all faiths. By following these strategies, Buddhist youth organizations can maintain religious harmony through harmonious discourse.

O'Keefe (2011) has reminded us that media discourse is manufactured. Thus, we need to consider how this has been done both in a literal sense of what goes into its making and at an ideological level. Humanistic Buddhism is both an abstract and a concrete concept. When attempting to expose its concrete element, it will be much easier than the abstract. The host of social media organizations should be very creative in producing updates to depict the deep message of humanity. Social media texts are subject to constant variation and change, as they adapt to the evolving needs, preferences, and trends of the users and the platforms. Variation and change can create new opportunities and challenges. Hence, the success of social media propagation and promotion of humanistic Buddhism is very dependent on the creativity and imagination of youth organizations to continue to innovate and carry out research on how to adapt to the needs of netizens.¹⁴

¹³ Yun-Chiang, S. (2015). *Power and Discourse*, *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, DOI: 10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi149.

¹⁴ O'Keefe, A. (2001). *Media and Discourse Analysis*.

IV. CONCLUSION

Creating more space and sharing more resources are twofold components that need to be further clarified in the practical zone. In an era of global interdependence, fostering unity through education is essential. Grounded in the principles of Fullan's 6Cs, provides a robust framework for developing globally competent citizens and is relevant to avoid selfishness and individualism. By promoting intercultural dialogue, awareness, and critical thinking, collaborative and impactful education can catalyze global harmony. Future research should explore scalable strategies for integrating collaborative learning in diverse educational settings to maximize its impact on fostering unity and harmony. It concludes that the strategy to promote and preserve the virtues of humanistic Buddhism is through measuring its local context and circumstances. The discourse built and managed in social media is also important to acquaint the social and cultural background that shapes the way humanistic Buddhism develops. One to keep in mind is that the continuation of Humanistic Buddhism relies on the efforts made by the young generation who call themselves digital natives. Utilizing technology such as social media campaigns and promotion is one of the most effective ways to achieve this noble agenda for the sake of humanity.

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DHARMA AS CULTURE

Märt Läänemets*

Abstract:

In this paper, the meaning and understanding of the central concept of Buddhism -Dharma - will be discussed in light of contemporary humanities and cultural theories, with an emphasis on ethical and humanistic aspects. The author's position is that, despite the multitude of interpretations of Dharma in modern Buddhology and the lack of consensus on how to correctly and uniformly translate this word, we ought to follow the path of traditional Buddhism and strive to develop a comprehensive theory and understanding of Dharma that aligns well with our cultural concepts. Following the semiotic theory applied by the Estonian scholar Linnart Mäll in the 1970s-80s in Buddhist studies, a new approach is proposed. This approach suggests how the Western concepts of text and culture, with their multiple aspects yet a single core meaning, can be implemented to create a working model for better understanding and practicing Buddhist Dharma in modern times, particularly in traditionally non-Buddhist societies.

Keywords: *Dharma, text, culture, semiotic theory, Linnart Mäll, Buddhology.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dharma¹ is undoubtedly the central and most important concept of Buddhism - its core and foundation. We can even say that Dharma is Buddhism and Buddhism is Dharma - more precisely, BuddhaDharma or BauddhaDharma, meaning "the Dharma of Buddhists," as it is sometimes distinguished, in the broader Indian context, from other Dharmas or thought systems that originated and spread on Indian soil. Dharma is the central component in the Triratna and Trisharana formulas: Buddha - Dharma - Saṃgha.

The importance of Dharma dates back to the very beginning - the starting point of Buddhism. When the Buddha delivered his first sermon on the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the cessation of suffering, he declared

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¹ Thorough the text, I use the Sanskrit form of the word - Dharma.

that everything he had taught pertained to entirely new, previously unheard Dharmas: “The eye arose, knowledge arose, understanding arose, cognition arose, light arose in me regarding these Dharmas not heard before. (*ti me ... dhammessu pubbe ananussutesu cakkhum udapādi, ñānaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.*)”²

At that very moment, the first-ever transmission of the new Dharma took place when the disciple Koṇḍañña received it and immediately understood it, as described in the text:

And while this explanation was being given, the dustless, stainless Dharma eye arose in Venerable Koṇḍañña: “Whatever is subject (Dharma) to origination is also subject (Dharma) to cessation.” (*Imasmiṃ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmim bhaññamāne āyasmato Koṇḍaññassa virajaṃ vitamalaṃ dhammacakkhum udapādi: yaṃ kiñci samudayadhammaṃ, sabbaṃ taṃ nirodhadhammaṃ ti.*)

In the Buddhist tradition, it is known as the act of setting in motion the Wheel of Dharma (*Dharmacakrapravartana*):

At Varanasi, in the Deer Grove at Isipatana, the Bhagavant set in motion the supreme Wheel of Dharma, which cannot be set in motion by any recluse, *brahmin*, god, devil, God Brahma, or anyone else in the world. (*Etaṃ bhagavatā bārāṇasiyaṃ miga-dāye anuttaraṃ dhamma-cakkaṃ pavattitaṃ appativattiyaṃ samaṇena vā brāhmaṇena vā devena vā māreṇa vā brahmunā vā kenaci vā lokasmiṃ ti.*)

The importance and fundamental meaning of Dharma were again emphasized by the Buddha in his very last teaching. According to Buddhist tradition and scripture, just before his passing into Parinirvāṇa, the Buddha gave his final instruction to Ānanda: “That, Ānanda, which I have taught and made known to you as the Dharma and the Vinaya will be your teacher after my passing (*Yo vo, Ānanda, mayā dhammo ca vinayo ca desito paññatto, so vo mam-accayena satthā*).”³

These few excerpts from the Buddha’s very first and very last lessons are presented here to introduce the following discussion on how the concept of Dharma is understood, interpreted, and transmitted in modern Buddhological discourse, and to explore a possible approach that may contribute to further deepening and generalizing the understanding of this fundamental concept, which has no valid and generally accepted equivalent in Western thought and cultural tradition. In the author’s view, without the creation of such a universal and widely accepted interpretative model, we cannot be certain that the core message of Buddhist doctrine and its method of transmission will be realized in contemporary culture and thought, free from distortion and misunderstanding.

When the Buddha began to proclaim his exploration of how the human

² SN 56. 11. Here and below, excerpts from the scripture are in my translation unless otherwise noted.

³ DN 16.

mind and all of existence fundamentally work and how to eliminate existential distress, he had to make himself understood within his own time and cultural environment. In this situation, he had no choice but to use the philosophical and scientific vocabulary of ancient India that was in use at the time. He chose the word Dharma, which had long been widely used in Indian culture and society, bearing meanings such as “order,” “norm,” “law,” and “truth,” perhaps making it familiar and understandable to all, and made it the central concept of his teachings. By adopting Dharma, however, the Buddha infused the word with new content and meaning, allowing him to claim that the Dharmas he was exploring were new and previously unheard of. Everything he taught was the Dharma, or Dharmas in the plural, meaning that every word he uttered was a Dharma.

The Buddha himself probably did not consider it important to define what Dharma is or to philosophize about it. What mattered to him was using it to guide people on the path to freedom from distress and True Awakening. It was only later, in the abhidharmic systems, that Dharmas became subjects of definition, classification, systematization, and theorization regarding their meaning and nature. However, this also led to the diversification of the meanings of the concept of Dharma and its ambiguity. Nevertheless, this one central word and concept – Dharma – remained, and for Buddhists, there was no contradiction in its multiple uses.

When Buddhism came to the West in modern times, first through casual contacts, then through academic research and translations, and eventually as a new (in the Western context) religious movement, intercultural dialogue became necessary to make Buddhism understandable to Western people through the conceptual system and mindset of Western culture.⁴ Essentially, the same or a very similar process that had occurred during the arrival and adaptation of Buddhism in Asian cultures (Southeast Asia, China and the Far East, Tibet, and Inner Asia) was repeated. The crucial challenge, then, as now in the West, was and still is how to translate the conceptual system of Buddhism into another language within a cultural environment vastly different from the original Buddhist one. In China, for example, the translation process took nearly a millennium; in Tibet, several hundred years. In this light, we can acknowledge that the cultural translation of Buddhism in the West is still at a relatively early stage, and a standardized conceptual system and terminology are still emerging. The problem is even more complex due to the linguistic diversity of the West. Although English is the dominant language - the *lingua franca* - in Western Buddhism, as it is in communication in general in the contemporary world, many other languages are also being used for Buddhist scripture translation. In each of these languages, conceptual systems must be developed that accurately convey the content and meaning of Buddhist teachings - the Dharma - while also being interlinguistically compatible.⁵

⁴ On this, see Batchelor (1994).

⁵ It is important to note that Linnart Mäll (1938 – 2010), a Buddhist scholar from Estonia

All of this also applies to the translation and interpretation of the concept of Dharma and the understanding of its meaning and usage, both in the Western academic tradition of Buddhist studies and in Western Buddhism in general. For more than a century, Western scholars have sought a solution to the “mystery of Dharma”: how the same word and concept can appear in so many different contexts and meanings, and how to adequately translate it into English and other Western languages. Is it even possible to understand it in a single, unified way, or is such polysemy inherently encoded into it from the very beginning? If so, wouldn't it be entirely justified to translate this word in different ways, using various terms in our languages to convey its content and meaning? Yet the question remains: why does the same word, Dharma, appear in different contexts in the original Buddhist languages? Is it truly impossible to find an equivalent term - or if not a single word, at least a coherent interpretative model - to express and present what Dharma ultimately is?

This paper discusses these issues and attempts to introduce a possible solution to the question of the content and meaning of the concept of Dharma. The first part provides an overview of speculations on Dharma by a few authors from the last century. The second part presents the basic tenets of Linnart Mäll's semiotic theory of dharma, along with some elaborations by the author, which could serve as a roadmap for addressing the controversial question of whether the term and concept of dharma should be understood as plural or unified in meaning.

II. OVERVIEW OF SOME COMMON THESES ON DHARMA IN MODERN BUDDHOLOGY

Apprehending the true meaning of the concept of dharma has been - and remains - a crucial issue in modern Buddhology. The generally accepted view today seems to be that dharma is an ambiguous, polysemantic term that must be understood differently in different contexts. This has led to a situation in which modern translations and studies present a multitude of different words to render the original Buddhist term dharma, such as “mental event,” “thing,” or “phenomenon” in the abhidharmic context, and “law,” “truth,” “doctrine,” or “religion” when referring to the Buddha's teachings and normative rules. The translation and interpretation of compound words where Dharma appears as the initial element, such as *dharmatā*, *dharmakāya*, and *dharmadhātu*, make the situation even more obscure. The unresolved question is whether this ambiguity of meaning is inherent in original Buddhism or whether it reflects modern interpreters' inability to grasp the true and singular meaning of dharma. The fact that ancient translators, such as the Chinese and Tibetans, strictly adhered to the rule of translating dharma consistently with a single word - 法 (*fǎ*) in

- whose thoughts on the understanding and interpretation of dharma will be explored later in this paper - strongly expressed in one of his last short papers that Buddhism in Europe should develop in multiple national languages, each with its own terminology. Despite English serving as a lingua franca, he argued that it should not be the sole or dominant language of Buddhism in the West (Mäll, 2012).

Chinese and མོས་ (*chos*) in Tibetan - further raises doubts about the correctness of understanding dharma as an inherently polysemantic entity.

Modern interpretations of Dharma vary greatly, depending firstly on the specific part of Buddhist doctrine or text being studied, and secondly on the background and preferences of each scholar. As a result, contemporary Buddhology suffers from a lack of a comprehensive theory of Dharma. Although some attempts have been made to generalize the modern understanding of the concept, these efforts are still in their early stages, and a consensus on the matter has yet to be reached.

If any consensus can be found in the discourse of contemporary Buddhist studies, it lies in the recognition by most scholars that the word dharma has different meanings in various usages within the vast Buddhist text corpus, with each meaning strongly depending on the context in which Dharma appears - whether in a full text, a paragraph, or even a single sentence. Such an approach is justified by arguments that maintain that the polysemy of the word Dharma is inherent in original Buddhist thought and that the ancient Buddhist thinkers, both the authors and compilers of the texts, consciously employed this word to denote quite different things.

One of the earliest studies in which the polysemy of Dharma as a fundamental philosophical concept in Buddhist Abhidharma was identified is the seminal work *The Problems of Buddhist Philosophy* by Otto Rosenberg (1888–1919), a brilliant young Russian scholar of Baltic German origin who passed away at the early age of 31, soon after publishing his book.⁶ Rosenberg distinguished seven principal meanings of Dharma: quality, attribute, predicate; substantial carrier, the transcendental substrate of a single element of conscious life; element, i.e., a component of conscious life; *nirvāṇa*, i.e., Dharma, the object of the Buddha's teaching; absolute, truly real, etc.; Buddha's teaching, religion; thing, object, or phenomenon.⁷

In his further analysis, however, he mainly focuses on the second and third meanings as the central ones in the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu, which was the primary source of his research. Although his study was largely based on this single text, such an understanding of dharma remained the orthodox one for decades, at least in Russian/Soviet Buddhology. Rosenberg's division of the meanings of dharma circulated from work to work as a proven framework and was not subjected to further discussion.

Rosenberg's teacher, Fyodor (Theodore) Stcherbatsky (1866–1942), who outlived his student, continued the latter's research on the philosophical interpretation of the concept of dharma. In 1923, he published a seminal work, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma"*, in which he acknowledged the great variety of meanings attributed to dharma but concluded that only one truly mattered: Dharmas (in plural)

⁶ On Rosenberg's life and work, see Kollmar-Paulenz (1998), p. 56.

⁷ Rosenberg (1918), p. 83.

as the “elements of existence” governed by strict causal relations. He stated: “Although the separate elements (Dharmas) are not connected, either by pervading stuff in space or by duration in time, there is, nevertheless, a connection between them; their manifestations in time, as well as in space, are subject to defined laws, the laws of causation. Thus, it is that the fundamental idea of Buddhism - the conception of a plurality of separate elements - includes the idea of the most strict causality controlling their operation in the world process.”⁸ He understood Dharmas metaphysically as ultimate, indivisible elements, but ultimately, he was unable to fully define dharma, admitting: “What is Dharma? It is inconceivable! It is subtle! No one will ever be able to tell what its real nature is! It is transcendental.”⁹

In Western European Buddhist scholarship, from its early stages, the tendency to understand dharma as a multi-semantic and context-dependent concept took root. Following this approach, both early and contemporary scholars have developed various categories and lists of meanings for Dharma. Below, the key works on this topic are referenced.

In their 1920 study, Magdalene and Wilhelm Geiger categorized the meanings of Dharma or Dhamma in Pāli texts into four sections: Dhamma as “law” (*gesetz*), “teaching” (*lehre*), “truth” (*wahrheit*), and “thing” (*dinge*).¹⁰

One of the first attempts to establish a universal definition of the concept of Dharma was made by Walter Liebenthal (1886–1982). In a 1961 article, Liebenthal contributed to the modern understanding of Dharma, stating that it could be interpreted as “elements of image” and proposing the term “position” as a suitable equivalent in European languages. He explained: “Position is also a word in the Scripture (or image) of a Teacher and may be rejected by other Teachers when it does not fit in their Scripture. Thus, Gotama Buddha rejected the position of God (*Īśvara*), as it does not lead one to Liberation.”¹¹

Ten years later, Anthony Warder, reflecting on a Pāli source, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, concludes: “It could, of course, be suggested that any Dhamma could be regarded as a thought-content insofar as it could be conceived as an idea or concept, including physical phenomena.”¹²

In 2004, Rupert Gethin summarized the scholarly consensus on the meanings of Dharma and provided a list of six fundamental interpretations: (1) the Buddha’s teaching; (2) good conduct or behavior aligned with the Buddha’s precepts and cultivated through meditation; (3) the truth realized through the Buddhist path; (4) the intrinsic nature or quality that something possesses; (5) the natural law or order of things as discerned by the Buddha; and (6) a fundamental mental or physical state or entity, the plurality of which -

⁸ Stcherbatsky (1923), p. 28.

⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁰ Geiger and Geiger (1920), p. 98.

¹¹ Liebenthal (1961), p. 20.

¹² Warder (1971), p. 280.

especially in *abhidhamma* texts - is conceived as constituting the “reality” of the world or experience.¹³ He further defines Dhammas as follows: “We can define Dhammas in this final sense as basic qualities, both mental and physical. When we consider this particular understanding of what a Dhamma is alongside the definition of the world or experience in its entirety (*sabbam*) through the five aggregates or the twelve sense spheres, we can take this one step further and say that Dhammas are the fundamental qualities - both mental and physical - that, in some sense, constitute the totality of experience or reality.”¹⁴

Most recently, in 2011, Alf Hiltebeitel compiled a list of the most common translations of Dharma in the plural - though far from exhaustive - including: “truths,” “laws,” “states,” “merits,” “practices,” “phenomena,” “things,” “elements,” “conditions,” “factors,” “data,” “qualities,” “forces,” “regularities,” “identifiabls,” “noeta,” “irreducibles,” “mind objects,” and “ideas.”¹⁵ He further notes that Dharma in the singular is typically translated as “truth,” “teaching,” or “doctrine.” Finally, he summarizes: “One of the more fundamental abhidharma classifications divides Dharmas into physical and mental categories. Some of these emphasize one dimension over the other, while others attempt to integrate both. A particularly useful translation that bridges these aspects is mental events, as it applies across all Buddhist schools in the examination and clarification of Dharmas (*plural*) during meditation.”¹⁶

The following conclusions can be drawn to summarize this section: (1) The ambiguity of the term Dharma in Buddhist doctrines and sources remains a widely accepted consensus among scholars. (2) In the context of *Abhidharma*, however, there is a tendency to identify a central or common meaning of Dharma, primarily related to the content of the mind and human cognition. Various scholars have proposed interpretations such as “a component of conscious life” (Rosenberg), “(transcendental) elements of existence with strict causal relations between them” (Stcherbatsky), “position” or “elements of image” (Liebenthal), “thought-content” (Warder), “basic qualities, both mental and physical, that in some sense constitute experience or reality in its entirety” (Gethin), and “mental event” (Hiltebeitel). (3) However, current scholarly approaches have yet to establish a conceptual “bridge” that connects the epistemological abhidharmic meaning of Dharma (Dharmas in plural) with its doctrinal and moral significance as the Buddha’s teaching (Dharma in singular).

III. TOWARDS A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF DHARMA

In the late 1960s, Estonian Buddhist scholar Linnart Mäll (1938–2010) formulated his research credo in the field of Oriental studies in general and Buddhist studies in particular, which he believed should serve as a guiding principle for contemporary Oriental studies: “The dialogue between East

¹³ Cited from Gethin (2009), p. 93 – 94.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁵ Hiltebeitel (2011), p. 126.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

and West that has reached synthesis leads us to understand what it is that the Orient can tell us, so that we can use its achievements as an important component of our own culture.” Furthermore, he emphasized: “Oriental studies should therefore attempt to create models enabling a new approach to the understanding of Western phenomena.”¹⁷

In Buddhist studies, he saw the primary concern as the creation of “central meta-concepts which can be used to describe Buddhism in strict compliance with original ideas of the East.”¹⁸ In the same article, Mäll proposed two such meta-concepts - lysiology for the “doctrine of liberation” (*mokṣa* Dharma) and zerology for *śūnyavāda* - which, he assumed, could serve as key concepts in the descriptive language of future Buddhist studies. Although he rarely used these terms in his later works, his fundamental credo remained unchanged: to develop a working methodology for studying and explaining Buddhism, making it comprehensible to modern audiences, and integrating it into contemporary culture as a functional cultural factor.

Being in close contact and collaborating with the emerging Tartu-Moscow school of cultural semiotics - led by the distinguished literary and cultural scholar Yuri Lotman (1922–1993), a professor at the University of Tartu,¹⁹ Mäll found the innovative semiotic approach, with its key concepts of “text,” “context,” and “secondary modeling system” as core elements of culture, to be highly suitable for Buddhist studies as well.

The main theoretical position and methodological foundation of the semiotic school is the assertion that “text is an operational basis of culture”²⁰ and that “text and context are mutually dependent.” This perspective is crucial for understanding how culture functions, how different cultures interconnect, and the mechanisms of intercultural translation and communication. As Lotman stated:

Context is co-text (con-text); it cannot exist before text, and just as every text depends on context, context is also dependent on text. The act of communication is an act of translation, an act of transformation: text transforms language and the addressee, it establishes contact between the addresser and the addressee, and it even transforms the addresser. Moreover, text transforms itself and ceases to be identical to itself.²¹

We can summarize the semiotic approach in the following way: A text, as understood and treated within the semiotic paradigm, is not merely a physical object with a limited scope (such as a paper or a book) and a fixed form (such as a written text), but rather any cultural phenomenon - a sign system arranged in

¹⁷ . Cited from Mäll (2005), p. 16–17. The original version of the paper was published in Russian in 1967.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁹ About the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, see, e.g. Velmezova (2015); Pilshchikov and Trunin (2016).

²⁰ Pilshchikov and Trunin (2016), p. 388.

²¹ Pilshchikov and Trunin (2016), p. 388.

a particular way and continuously interacting with other texts and the human mind, which itself can only be expressed in the form of texts. Human culture as a whole is inherently a dynamic network of texts, with Buddhist Dharma being one among them. At certain times and in certain regions, an unexpected symbiosis of cultures may occur, creating entirely new conditions for further development. As Lotman stated:

An aggregate of cultures with certain common codes forms a cultural area, where intra-areal exchange is always more intensive. Particularly significant for comparative studies are geographic regions where cultures of different types have coexisted and maintained close spatial communication over extended periods.²²

In a later work, Yuri Lotman elaborated on the concept of the semiosphere and provided an extensive definition of it:

The fundamental unit of semiosis, the smallest operational mechanism, is not an individual language but the entire semiotic space of a given culture - what we refer to as the semiosphere. This semiosphere both results from and enables cultural development. At every stage of its evolution, it interacts with texts from external cultures that previously lay beyond its boundaries. These intrusions, whether individual texts or entire cultural layers, influence and reshape the internal structure of the culture's "world picture." Within any synchronic section of the semiosphere, different languages at varying stages of development come into conflict. Some texts exist within languages not their own, while the necessary codes for their interpretation may be absent. To illustrate, imagine a museum hall displaying exhibits from various historical periods, accompanied by inscriptions in both known and unknown languages, decoding instructions, curatorial explanations, tour plans, and visitor guidelines. In this hall, tour guides and visitors engage with these elements, forming a single interconnected system. This serves as a metaphor for the semiosphere. Crucially, all elements within the semiosphere exist in dynamic, ever-changing relationships rather than static ones. This is particularly evident in traditions that have persisted over time. Unlike biological evolution, cultural evolution does not follow a straightforward, linear trajectory; the term "evolution" itself can be misleading in this context.²³

Building on semiotic theory, which adopts a broad and functional understanding of "text" as a central concept, Linnart Mäll proposed a new approach to the concept of Dharma in Buddhism. His model sought to unify the two fundamental meanings of Dharma - *Abhidharmic* (Dharmas as elements, qualities, or mental events) and doctrinal (Dharma as the Buddha's teaching, Truth, or Law) - while resolving the contradictions between different interpretations.

²² Cited from Pilshchikov and Trunin (2016), p. 373.

²³ Lotman (1990), p. 125 – 127.

He found that, much like how semiotic theory redefined the interaction between culture and text, viewing culture as a compendium of interacting texts of varying scope, level, and modality that integrate human consciousness and its content, the Buddhist theory of Dharma could be interpreted similarly. The semiotic approach aligns well with the *Abhidharmic* understanding of Dharmas as intertwined elements within the mind-reality continuum, as well as with Dharma as the Buddhist doctrine, which is represented in individual texts and, collectively, in all Buddhist texts. Together, these texts shape Buddhist culture, which, in turn, influences the adept's mind and its content.

Mäll stated:

If a term that has had a specific meaning in a particular cultural context cannot be interpreted unambiguously, meaning we cannot find an adequate equivalent to translate it, one possible explanation is that our culture has never possessed a word corresponding to it. However, another explanation is also possible: while the word may exist, the cultural context necessary for transforming it into a precise term does not. We believe that, as a result of the work of the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, such a context has now been established, and within this framework, there exists a term that functions in a way similar to Dharma in Buddhist texts. That term is text. A Buddhist teaching is a text, which may manifest in written form, as speech, an inner monologue, gestures, facial expressions, or even objects in nature. However, a phenomenon in itself is not a text; for instance, a book only becomes a text when someone reads it.²⁴

Mäll's early research and analysis of Buddhist terminology were rooted in an in-depth study of the *Mahāyāna* foundational text, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, which provided the basis for his later discoveries in this field and shaped his new integrated approach to the concept of Dharma.²⁵ In essence, according to his refined interpretation, Dharma is both an element of consciousness and a word of scripture - an element of a text. The following is Mäll's elaborated definition:

In my view, Dharma is both a text and an element of a text, which, in turn, is also an element of the mind, since the mind manifests itself solely through acts of text-generation. This idea can be extended even further: Dharma can be regarded as a text of any length, ranging from a single sound or letter (such as "a"), a pause, major *sūtras* like the *Avatamsaka* or *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, to the entire body of Buddhist literature, encompassing the Buddha's teaching as a whole.²⁶

According to Linnart Mäll's approach, a defining characteristic of Dharma-as-text is its ability to generate new texts, a tendency he describes as a text-

²⁴ Mäll (2005), p. 172 – 173.

²⁵ Mäll (2005), p. 30 – 53; Läänemets (2012), 67 – 8.

²⁶ Mäll (2005), p. 9.

generating mechanism. This inherent mechanism is also reflected in the title of the Buddha's first recorded sermon - *Dharmacakrapravartana*, which Mäll interprets as follows:

The title *Dharmacakrapravartana* is a compound word consisting of three stems: Dharma (Pāli: Dhamma), cakra (*cakka*), and pravartana (*pavattana*). One possible translation is "Putting the Dharma wheel into motion" or "Starting up the Dharma wheel." However, given that the word "wheel" in many languages - including Pāli and Sanskrit - also signifies a moving mechanism, and considering that Dharma can also mean "text," the title of the *sūtra* could alternatively be translated as "Starting up a text-generating mechanism."²⁷

In this context, Mäll highlights two aspects of Dharma-as-text: the external text, which refers to a text fixed in some written form (e.g., a book), and the internal text, which represents a state of mind.

Since the mind in Buddhism - more precisely, states of mind, as the "pure" mind is considered indescribable - is also regarded as a text, an "internal text," the formation of a new state of mind can be understood as the creation of a new internal text. In this process, the external text, which encompasses not only written texts but also oral teachings, gestures, and facial expressions of the Teacher, serves as a stimulus that activates the text-generation mechanism of the internal text. Occasionally, an internal text becomes fixed, either through mnemonic techniques or in written form, leading to the creation of a new external text.²⁸

He summarizes his reasoning as follows: Interpreting Dharma as both a text and a text-generating mechanism allows for the integration of all its meanings, which have traditionally been considered separately, such as an element of existence, *nirvāṇa*, or the Buddha.²⁹

In the final stage of his interpretation of Dharma, Mäll reaches an even higher level of generalization, viewing Dharma as culture. He asserts that this new interpretation does not exclude or invalidate previous definitions, stating, "...because culture can also be considered as a text in its broadest sense."³⁰ To further support this claim, it is necessary to reproduce a longer passage from Mäll's original text:

Everything that I previously interpreted as the smallest element of a text - and that most Buddhist scholars, after Stcherbatsky, still regard as an element of existence - can now also be understood, simply put, as an element of culture. Modern psychology has widely recognized that a person's outer shape (*rūpa*), feelings (*vedanā*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*) are, to some extent, shaped by a specific cultural state. When

²⁷ Mäll (2006), p. 181.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 182.

²⁹ Mäll (2005), p. 9.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

influenced by Buddhist culture (BuddhaDharma), these aspects manifest differently than when shaped by another culture (Dharma). If a person grows up in an environment entirely devoid of culture (*adharmika*), such as among wild animals, it would not be logical (*yukti*) to refer to their rūpa, vedanā, etc., as Dharmas, meaning elements of culture.³¹

Linnart Mäll's final analysis finds strong support in a stanza from Nāgārjuna's well-known verse treatise, The Staff of Wisdom (*Prajñādaṇḍa*): Eating, sleeping, fear, and sexual intercourse/ are common to men and animals./ *Dharma* is the distinguishing feature of men,/ without *Dharma*, they would equal animals. (*āhāranidrābhayamaithunaṃ ca/ sāmānyam etat paśubhir narāṇām/ dharmo narāṇām adhiko viśeṣo/ dharmena hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ*)³²

IV. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we can distinguish three levels of Dharma as a text: (1) Dharma as an element of a text (such as a word, concept, or symbol); (2) Dharma as a structured text in a specific form and scope (such as a letter, book, or speech); and (3) Dharma as a system of texts or as culture itself. At the first level, Dharma corresponds to the abhidharmic presentation of lists and definitions of fundamental terms in the Buddha's teaching. At the second level, Dharma refers to Buddhist texts and scriptures, including *sūtras* and other writings. At the third level, Dharma represents Buddhist culture as a whole or Buddhist discourse - Buddha-Dharma in its entirety - embodied in the *Dharmakāya*, the body of texts (corpus scriptorum).

Dharma(s) can be understood as both an external text, represented through signs and symbols, and an internal text, manifesting as states of consciousness, thoughts, or mental events. Furthermore, Dharma can be defined as both a text and a text-generating mechanism - *Dharmacakrapravartana* - signifying the setting in motion of the wheel of Dharma or the activation of its functioning.

We can also trace the evolution of the meaning(s) of Dharma as follows:

Buddhist discourse (Buddha's gospel, *buddhavacana*); Every particular discourse (*sūtra*); Every significant word within the discourse (Abhidharmic usage); Thoughts (on Dharma), mental events arising from contemplation of Buddhist Dharma(s); *Dharmatā* - "Dharmaness" - the perception of all existence as Dharma (Buddhist semiosis); *Dharmakāya* - the collective body of all Buddhist Dharmas (texts, elements of Buddhist culture); *Dharmadhātu* - the sphere of Dharma (Buddhist semiosphere); The contrast between *Dharmadhātu* (realm of Dharma) and *lokadhātu* (realm of phenomena) - not as objective realities but as different states of consciousness and levels of understanding.

In the Buddhist system, we find a comprehensive and functional theory and method - closely analogous to modern semiotic theory and method -

³¹ Mäll (2005), p. 9.

³² *Prajñādaṇḍa*, p. 98.

for describing culture through its elements, or Dharmas. Thus, Dharma can be understood and applied universally as an “element of culture,” bearing a certain resemblance to Lotman’s theory of the semiosphere. Within Buddhism (Buddhist culture), this system was fully developed, with its elements (Dharmas) clearly defined, described, evaluated, and classified. Moreover, universal guidelines were established on how to apply them in Buddhist training (meditation) and education for soteriological or lysiological purposes.

The question remains open: could modern semiotics and cultural theory also evolve - or be developed - in a direction similar to the Buddhist Dharma theory, incorporating the element of awakening or liberation?

Buddhas appear from the Dharma; / and the Dharma bodies (text corpora) are the guides. / But the Dharmaness is not comprehensible; / It is not possible to comprehend it. (*Dharmato buddhā draṣṭavyā Dharmakāyā hi nāyakāḥ / Dharmatā ca na vijñeyā na sā śakyā vijānitum*).³³

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APPLICATION OF SEDAKA SUTTA FOR FOSTERING HARMONY

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Abstract:

This paper examines the application of the Sedaka Sutta to foster both internal and external harmony in the modern world. It emphasizes five key virtues derived from Buddhist teachings: mindfulness (*sati*), patience (*khanti*), non-harming (*avihiṃsā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and compassion (*anudayā*). These qualities collectively cultivate a foundation of ethical conduct, mental clarity, and emotional resilience, counteracting the forces of greed, hatred, and ignorance that lead to conflict and disharmony. Through the development of these virtues, individuals can achieve inner peace and contribute to more harmonious interpersonal and societal relationships. The study highlights the relevance of the Sedaka Sutta's teachings in addressing contemporary challenges, promoting sustainable peace, and nurturing a compassionate, interconnected global community. Practical applications are discussed to demonstrate how these timeless principles can be integrated into daily life for personal growth and societal well-being.

Keywords: *Mindfulness, patience, non-harming, loving-kindness, compassion.*

I. INTRODUCTION

As globalization connects nations and cultures, peace and harmony in the world and among people are vital for humanity's survival and progress. Lack of peace and harmony could lead to global disorder and destruction of human civilization. On the other hand, harmony fosters stable societies and vibrant cultures, personal growth, and economic development. Societies that have promoted harmony have historically flourished, while those that neglected it have often faced decline. Therefore, peace and harmony are indispensable for building a united, peaceful, and prosperous future for humanity.

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The Buddha's teachings offer a profound and holistic approach to fostering peace and harmony. Their immediate aim is to guide individuals toward living wholesome lives rooted in moral conduct. This moral foundation is essential for purifying the mind through the development of concentration. Finally, the moral practice and concentration form the basis for the practice of insight, which leads to the abandonment of all defilements. When one attains such a state, one is said to attain the ultimate state of peace and harmony. In daily life, Buddha's path provides practical means to cultivate inner peace, achieve true happiness, and avoid conflicts.

II. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL HARMONY

In Buddhism, harmony is twofold: internal and external. Internal harmony refers to inner peace, achieved through positive states of mind such as a one-pointedness (*cittassa ekaggatā*), mindfulness (*sati*), wisdom (*paññā*), and ethical conduct (*sīla*). Practices that develop these and other qualities reduce negative states such as craving and hatred and strengthen wholesome thoughts and actions, ultimately leading to liberation (*nibbāna*).

External harmony pertains to peaceful relationships with others and the environment, achieved through the foundations of four 'divine abodes' (*brahmavihāra*): loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy in others' happiness (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

These two forms of harmony are interconnected: inner peace facilitates harmonious relationships, while external peace supports personal well-being. Together, they create lasting peace for individuals and society.

III. CAUSES LEADING TO HARMONY AND DISHARMONY

Buddhism teaches that disharmony between individuals and communities stems from unwholesome mental states and ethical misconduct, primarily driven by the three poisons: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and ignorance (*moha*). Greed leads to selfishness and exploitation, hatred fosters discord and animosity, and ignorance creates misunderstanding and disconnection. When these mental states manifest in harmful actions, such as lying, harsh speech, gossip, divisive talk, violence, and theft, they disrupt relationships and undermine societal peace.

The *Sedaka Sutta* (Discourse on the Bamboo Acrobat) presents the path to harmony by cultivating five essential qualities. This paper attempts to examine the meanings of five key concepts identified in the *Sutta* about harmony: *sati* (mindfulness), *khanti* (patience), *avihiṃsā* (non-harming), *mettacitta* (loving-kindness), and *anudayā* (compassion). By exploring their practical applications, this research demonstrates how these qualities contribute to fostering harmony. This paper highlights that developing the five qualities strengthens qualities such as self-control, friendly attitude, positive influence on others, and so on, that are essential for fostering harmony.

IV. THE FIVE FACTORS IN *SEDAKA SUTTA*

4.1. Mindfulness

'*Sati*' (mindfulness) is a vital tool for fostering harmony and societal

well-being. In traditional texts, it is described as a non-wobbling state of mind (*apilāpana*).¹ In practice, it represents wakefulness to the experiences, cognitions, and actions in the present moment. This refers mainly to the states within oneself. Without full awareness of one's inner states of mind, it is difficult to keep the mind in a positive state.

Negative states of mind trigger destructive actions and behaviors that are detrimental to harmony. One of the important aspects of mindfulness is recognizing positive states as positive and negative states as negative. The practice of mindfulness aids in abandoning negative states, which undermine harmony. The awareness and wakefulness developed through the practice of mindfulness are crucial in keeping the mind in a positive state. Furthermore, strong mindfulness itself is a deterrent to negative states. It also helps in cultivating positive states that counter negative states.

To foster harmony, it is essential to detect not only one's own states of mind but also those of others. Hence, in the Pāli texts, the awareness developed through mindfulness practice extends to circumstances external to oneself as well.² Often, fostering harmony requires responses that are measured based on the other person's state of mind and the surrounding circumstances.

When mindfulness is developed, one's reactions and responses are no longer thoughtless reflexes. With mindfulness, a person gains conscious control over thoughts and actions. This enables one to maintain a positive attitude and a positive state of mind. Consequently, actions and behavior also become positive. Mindfulness empowers a person to act consciously and deliberately to cultivate harmony.

4.2. Patience (*Khanti*)

'*Khanti*' (patience) can be translated as 'patience' or 'forbearance'. It is a very important virtue in Buddhism. The Buddha himself declared that patience is the highest spiritual practice.³ It is also one of the essential spiritual qualities essential to be developed to attain liberation. Hence, it is included among the perfections (*pāramitā*).⁴ In the well-known Maṅgala Sutta, *khanti* is pointed out as one of the qualities essential for success and prosperity.⁵

One who has *khanti* develops a mind comparable to the earth, which bears all that is cast upon it, whether pure or foul, without generating aversion.⁶ In Buddhist practice, *khanti* represents the ability to maintain mental calmness

¹ *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā*, "Sā panesā apilāpanalakkhaṇā ca sati upaggaṇṇanalakkhaṇā ca", p. 165.

² *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya II*, "Ajjhattabahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati", p. 233.

³ *Dhammapada*, verse 184 (*Khanti paramaṃ tapo titikkhā*)

⁴ *Buddhavaṃsa Pāli*, verse 141-144 (*Vicinanto tadā dakkhiṃ, chaṭṭhamaṃ khantipāramiṃ*)

⁵ *Maṅgala Sutta, Suttanipāta*, "Khanti ca sovacassatā, samaṇānaṇca dassanaṃ; Kālena dhammasākacchā, etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ", p.319.

⁶ *Buddhavaṃsa Pāli*, verse 141-144 (*Yathāpi pathavī nāma, sucimpi asucimpi ca; Sabbhaṃ sahati nikkhepaṃ, na karoti paṭighaṃ tayā*)

while enduring undesired, painful, hostile, or difficult circumstances.

A person with *khanti* can prevent the generation of negative states of mind, such as anger and hatred, even in adverse situations. On the other hand, a person lacking *khanti* becomes easily irritated and displeased when faced with minor discomforts and unfavorable conditions. Slight provocations can trigger anger and lead to irritable behavior.⁷

In daily life, a Buddhist practitioner develops *khanti* by patiently enduring difficult circumstances and refraining from annoyance at undesirable conditions such as cold and heat, hunger and thirst, badly spoken words, bodily pain, and so on.⁸

There are many ways to develop *Khanti*. Primarily, the practice of *khanti* involves developing a non-retaliatory attitude. The practice of *khanti* involves seeing the good sides and reflecting upon the positive outcomes it brings.⁹ The *Visuddhimagga*¹⁰ outlines several methods for developing *khanti*. For example, one can develop *khanti* by contemplating how the Buddha practiced *khanti* as a Bodhisatta. Additionally, one can develop *khanti* by reflecting on the Buddha's teachings on *khanti*. Another way is to reflect on the virtues of having *khanti* and the faults of lacking it.

The nature of human life is such that difficulties and unpleasant experiences are inevitable. Furthermore, as unenlightened beings, most people are not flawless and have shortcomings. In such a circumstance, the only viable option to avoid annoyance and conflict is to develop *khanti*. In day-to-day life, one often encounters situations that do not align with one's wishes. Reacting with annoyance to each of them not only disrupts one's inner harmony but also undermines external harmony.

Destructive states such as anger and hatred are flaws in human nature. It represents an intense dislike, often coupled with impulses to harm oneself and others. When strong, hatred can drive a person to inflict unimaginable harm. Hence, it must be restrained. One of the effective methods to restrain and overcome the overflow of hatred is through the practice of *khanti*. *Khanti* helps neutralize hatred, which is a major disruptor of harmony.

4.3. Non-violence (*Avihimsā*)

The term 'avihimsā' (*na + vihiṃsā*) means 'non-harm' or 'non-violence'. In a positive sense, it signifies 'kindness' or 'having pity'. In some texts, it is referred to as 'ahimsā', with the same sense. This term and the practice represented by it

⁷ Vajirūpama Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya I, "Appampi vutto samāno abhisajjati kuppati byāpajjati", p.121.

⁸ *Majjhima Nikāya* I, "8. Khamo hoti sītassa uṇhassa, jighacchāya pipāsāya. Ḍaṃsamakasavātātapasarīṃsapasamphassānaṃ, duruttānaṃ durāgatānaṃ vacanapathānaṃ, uppannānaṃ sārīrikānaṃ vedanānaṃ dukkhānaṃ tībbaṇaṃ kharānaṃ kaṭukānaṃ asātānaṃ amanāpānaṃ pāṇaharānaṃ adhiṃvāsakajātiko hoti", p.13

⁹ *Majjhima Nikāya* III, "Bhaddakā vatime sunāparantakā manussā, subhaddakā vatime sunāparantakā manussā, yaṃ me nayime leḍḍunā pahāraṃ denti", p. 312.

¹⁰ *Visuddhimagga* I, (paragraph number 243) p. 290.

are also used in many Indian religions in the sense of ‘non-violence’. In simple terms, the practice of *avihiṃsā* is corollary to becoming kind. In the ultimate sense, it is also related to ‘compassion’ (*karuṇā*),¹¹ which is the next factor discussed below.

In Buddhist practices, the principle of ‘*avihiṃsā* (non-harming)’ is incorporated in many teachings.¹² It extends beyond verbal and bodily actions to include thoughts as well. Moreover, the act of going forth as a monk and nun is inherently tied to *ahiṃsā*, as those who renounce worldly life commit to avoiding harm to others.¹³

This principle of non-violence fosters a compassionate attitude, promoting mutual respect and understanding. The practice of nonviolence is central to many aspects of Buddhist practices. For example, the Buddhist moral precepts, such as the Five Precepts, emphasize abstaining from harming others through one’s speech and bodily actions. Similarly, in the Noble Eightfold Path, the mental aspect of *avihiṃsā* is highlighted as a critical factor leading to liberation and freedom from suffering. It is referred to as ‘right thought’ and encompasses ‘thoughts of non-violence’.¹⁴ The moral precepts are also integral parts of the Noble Eightfold Path. Hence, one of those who follow the path naturally abstains from thoughts and actions involving violence.

As unenlightened beings, ordinary humans may occasionally feel annoyed and angry. The teachings of *avihiṃsā* emphasize refraining from hurtful or destructive actions even when one is annoyed. This includes hurting oneself and others. By abstaining from hurtful or violent acts, one commits to strong ethical behavior, thereby contributing to social harmony. Through the practice of *avihiṃsā*, individuals and groups can avoid physical and verbal actions that lead to discord and create a foundation for lasting peace and harmony. This practice plays a vital role in fostering harmony between individuals and groups by highlighting the importance of refraining from actions, words, or thoughts that cause harm to others and oneself.

A society committed to non-violence contributes to a peaceful and supportive environment, where individuals can be free from the fear of violence. This encourages cooperation and unity. Among groups, the practice of *avihiṃsā* promotes harmony by discouraging violence, hostility, and divisive actions. It emphasizes resolving conflicts through dialogue, fairness, and understanding, rather than aggression or domination.

4.4. Mind filled with Loving-kindness (*Mettacitta*)

‘*Mettā*’, which is often translated as ‘loving-kindness’, is one of the four

¹¹ *Dīghanikāya Aṭṭhakathā* II, “*Avihiṃsāti karuṇāya pubbabhāgo*”, p. 48.

¹² *Dhammapada* verses (20-30, 225); *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1); *Cakkavatti-Sihanāda Sutta* (DN 26); *Sigalovada Sutta* (DN 31); *Karaniya Metta Sutta* (*Sutta Nipāta* 1.8)

¹³ *Dhammapada*, verse 184 (*Na hi pabbajito parūpaghātī, na samaṇo hoti paraṃ viheṭṭhayanto*).

¹⁴ *Dīghanikāya* III, “*Tayo kusalavitakkā – nekkhammavitakko, abyāpādavitaṅko, avihiṃsāvitakko*”, p. 180.

‘divine abodes’ (*brahmavihāra*) or sublime states, also referred to as ‘boundless states’ (*appamaññā*).¹⁵ They are termed ‘divine abodes’ because they are pure or excellent practices. In another sense, they are called so because they are practiced by divine beings residing in the Brahma planes.¹⁶ They are called ‘boundless states’ because they are meant to be radiated universally towards all beings without limit.¹⁷

The four divine abodes nurture peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding. They help individuals lead lives free from negative states such as hatred, envy, and jealousy.¹⁸ A person who is devoted to the practice of these sublime states leads a life resembling that of the Bodhisatta. Such practices help diminish negative traits like anger, cruelty, jealousy, and attachment.¹⁹

The mind filled with loving-kindness is called ‘*mettācitta*’. Loving-kindness involves a genuine wish for the happiness and well-being of all beings. It represents the attitude and feelings that one has towards a dear friend.²⁰ As a practice, *mettā* primarily involves thoughts of welfare and happiness. However, it also manifests through speech and physical actions. When one’s speech and action are guided by loving-kindness, they too become expressions of loving-kindness.

In his discourses, the Buddha frequently emphasized that loving-kindness is the harbinger of peace and harmony within communities. For instance, on one occasion, a group of monks was living in a forest in perfect harmony. When asked by the Buddha how they achieved this, they attributed it to their diligent practice of loving-kindness.²¹

The Karaṇīya Metta Sutta, which is a well-known Sutta on *mettā*, illustrates the power of these qualities to create a peaceful, harmonious, and respectful society.²² Loving-kindness helps individuals get rid of negative emotions like anger, hatred, and jealousy. It encourages treating others with kindness, reduces conflict, and strengthens relationships, ultimately fostering a harmonious and friendly community.

4.5. Compassion (*Anudayā*)

Like *mettā*, ‘*anudayā*’ is also a ‘divine dwelling’ and ‘immeasurable state’. In

¹⁵ D-a.III, “Catasso appamaññā brahmā vihāro”, p.188

¹⁶ Visuddhimagga I, “Sattānaṃ dukkhābhibhavaṃ disvā vā sutvā vā sambhāvetvā vā dukkhāpanayanākarappavattivasena, dukkhāpanayanākarappavattilakkhaṇā ca karuṇā”, p. 314.

¹⁷ Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā, “Pamāṇaṃ aggahetvā sakalapharaṇavaseneva pavattāti”, p. 241.

¹⁸ Ashin Janakābhivamsa, Abhidhammā in daily life, p. 96.

¹⁹ Mettā byāpādabahulassa karuṇā ahiṃsā bahulassa muditā aratibahulassa upekkhā ragabahulassa (Abh-a.I. 241

²⁰ Khuddakapāṭha Aṭṭhakathā, “Mittassa bhāvo mettam”, p. 212.

²¹ Vinaya Mahāvagga, “Tassa mayhaṃ, bhante, imesu āyasmantesu mettam kāyakammaṃ paccupaṭṭhitam āvi ceva raho ca; mettam vacikammaṃ... mettam manokammaṃ paccupaṭṭhitam āvi ceva raho ca”, p. 498.

²² Piyadassi Thera, trans., Karaṇīya Metta Sutta - The Discourse on Loving-kindness (Sn 1.8) PTS.

Buddhist texts, the term *karuṇā*, often translated as ‘compassion’, is commonly used to represent this quality of mind. It means being affected by the suffering of others.²³ Synonyms for *karuṇā* are ‘*dayā*’, ‘*anudayā*’ and ‘*anukampā*’. While *mettā* involves the genuine wish for all beings to be happy, *anudayā* involves the wish for all beings to be free from suffering. This practice emphasizes attentiveness to the suffering experienced by others and cultivating attention to alleviate it.²⁴

In everyday terms, ‘*anudayā*’ is the aspiration to prevent beings from suffering. At the verbal and physical levels, it manifests in actions aimed at alleviating others’ pain and difficulties. Psychologically, a mind imbued with this state is naturally inclined to refrain from causing harm or inflicting suffering, as compassion fosters a profound interest in not seeing others suffer.

Kindness and compassion are the foundations of human flourishing. These qualities are among the traits that make humans distinct from other animals, as humans possess a unique capacity for empathy and intentional acts of compassion. While other animals may exhibit care and kindness for their offspring or members of their group, humans possess the capacity to generate it towards all beings.

Conflict and discord often arise from a failure to recognize or understand the suffering of others. When individuals overlook or dismiss or ignore the pain experienced by others, divisions grow, and mutual understanding diminishes. The practice of *anudayā* encourages one to consciously attend to the suffering of others. Furthermore, the practice of *anudayā* encourages proactive efforts to build a harmonious society rooted in empathy and care.

V. CONCLUSION

The *Sedaka Sutta* emphasizes five crucial qualities that contribute to both internal and external harmony: mindfulness (*sati*), patience (*khanti*), non-harming (*avihiṃsā*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and compassion (*anudayā*). Mindfulness cultivates awareness and clarity, allowing individuals to observe their thoughts and actions without impulsivity, fostering calmness. Patience enables one to endure difficulties and challenges without succumbing to negative emotions, thus maintaining inner peace. Non-harming is the ethical principle of refraining from causing harm, promoting respect, and peaceful coexistence in relationships. Loving-kindness is the genuine wish for all beings to experience happiness and well-being, fostering a sense of connection and empathy. Compassion, closely linked to loving-kindness, involves actively seeking to alleviate the suffering of others. Together, these qualities lead to the reduction of conflict, cultivate positive relationships, and contribute to the development of a peaceful and harmonious society, both internally within individuals and externally among communities.

²³ Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā, “Paradukkhe sati sādhuṇaṃ hadayakampanaṃ karotīti karuṇā. Kiṇāti vā paradukkhaṃ hiṃsati vināsetīti karuṇā. Kiriyati vā dukkhitesu pharaṇavasena pasāriyatīti karuṇā”, p. 237.

²⁴ Dhammasaṅgaṇī Aṭṭhakathā, “Kiṇāti vā paradukkhaṃ hiṃsati vināsetīti karuṇā. Kiriyati vā dukkhitesu pharaṇavasena pasāriyatīti karuṇā”, p. 237.

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BUDDHIST RESPONSE TO SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract:

Conflicts, violence, and wars are very common to humankind in every corner of the world. History records a great number of wars that have cost lives and shattered the natural environment. The world has become a battlefield witnessing quarrels, contentions, political insurgencies, religious intolerance, racism, ethnicity, fundamentalism, and terrorism, which have brutally cost human life, displaced people as well and created a big challenge for social wellbeing. The 21st century arose with a lot of scientific innovations, and man thought that by inventing new technologies, peace would flourish in the world. It is ridiculous to say that these have sarcastically and tragically failed to bring solutions and address the serious problems in the world. Such innovations, instead of providing solutions and improvements, have doubled tension and the production of massively destructive instruments, including weapons, which have created fear in society. And now, it's obvious that these developments cannot lead man to peace, only dissatisfaction and disappointments. What could indeed be barring man from achieving peace is lying within him. Only through understanding himself and the occurrences surrounding him could he realize and achieve peace within and in society.

Buddhist Teachings, unlike other religious teachings, have been discussed and accepted by many at different levels as a way of living exemplifying a profound theoretical and practical platform that investigates peace within man.

Some notable attempts are made in this paper to contribute to social wellbeing, particularly in the Buddhist perspective on what could lead to conflicts in society, its approach, and a brief elucidation of the Noble Eightfold path is presented to emphasize the Buddhist ethical and spiritual path towards final liberation, peace, *Nibbāna*.

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Keywords: *Conflicts, Noble Eightfold Path, wellbeing, peace.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts, violence, and wars are very common to humankind in every corner of the world. History records a great number of wars that have cost lives and shattered the natural environment. The world has become a battlefield witnessing quarrels, contentions, political insurgencies, religious intolerance, racism, ethnicity, fundamentalism, and terrorism, which have brutally cost human life, displaced people as well and created a big challenge for social wellbeing. The 21st century arose with a lot of scientific innovations, and man thought that by inventing new technologies, peace would flourish in the world. It is ridiculous to say that these have sarcastically and tragically failed to bring solutions and address the serious problems of the world. Such innovations, instead of providing solutions and improvements, have doubled tension and the production of massively destructive instruments, including weapons, which have created fear in society. And now, it's obvious that these developments cannot lead man to peace, only dissatisfaction and disappointments. What could indeed be barring man from achieving peace is lying within him. Only through understanding himself and the occurrences surrounding him could he realize and achieve peace within and in society.

Buddhist Teachings, unlike other religious teachings, have been discussed and accepted by many at different levels as a way of living exemplifying a profound theoretical and practical platform that investigates peace within man. And where there seems to be no peace, many people have sought refuge in Buddhism. Peace being its noble goal, Buddhism throughout its long history of over 2600 years has maintained itself as a religion of peace.¹ Buddhism, as a teaching by a spiritual leader who developed his mind to a superior level, examines the cause of all forms of violence and very clearly illustrates lasting solutions to man's problems associated within and outside. The question of peace, according to Buddhism, lies within the individual's mind. The mind that creates violence is more than capable of creating lasting peace in the world. Therefore, to have peace, man is required to develop his mind to cease and abstain from mental proliferations, known as *papañca* in *Pāli*, which create false views, vanity, and craving in the mind of man. Accordingly, the desire and effort for peace has been put forth by different scholars throughout the world, but it is of great significance to understand the subtleties of social conflicts, violence, and roots and then adopt practical solutions that could acceptably produce lasting peace in the world.

II. CAUSES OF CONFLICTS FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

The traditions deal with that even the entire religious, social and political climate before, during and after the rise of Buddhism, conflicts and violence were prevalent. Conflicts existed among leaders, quarrels, discrimination

¹ Mark Owen. UNDV (2014); p. 43.

based on caste, contentions, and disputes in society. The Buddha, on many occasions, is read in many discourses intervening, resolving conflicts, and stopping wars. Through a self-reflexive search, the Buddha examined why and how conflicts and violence could arise within social institutions. The Buddha's Response to stress and these influences is emphatically seen in the teaching of the Dependent Origination, which is known as the *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the *Pali* Canon and the Law of Kamma. These consistently explain how every circumstance relates to one another and how natural causal laws are interconnected with moral degeneration and deterioration. These activities emerge from both internal and external angles. And besides, there are inherent causal factors that make conflicts inescapable and unavoidable. These are inseparably interdependent and interconnected with one another.

2.1. External causes of conflicts and violence

From the external point of view, the Buddha states that conflicts are due to physical, economic, and political constraints amongst individuals in society. The very fact that no one desires to experience any physical pain makes it more striking to the point that many try to engage in different ways of avoiding such physical sufferings. Living beings experience numerous kinds of physical sufferings, such as birth (*Jāti*), decay (*Jarā*), sickness (*Byādhī*), aging, and death (*Marāṇa*). In attempting to avoid these constraints, they adopt coercive ways that oppress and cause harm and violence to others bodily and verbally. They use harsh words and invoke harmful actions, and consequently, they result in quarrels, fights, and excessive conflicts. People can attain happiness only if they understand that all living beings are subject to these physical constrictions. And one who gains such understanding does not have or cause any form of harm or violence to others. The Buddha says that: "All tremble at violence; All fear death./ Putting oneself in the place of another,/ One should not kill, nor cause another to kill."... "Speak no harshly to anyone,/ For those thus spoken to, might retort./ Indeed, angry speech hurts, and retaliation may overtake you."

Furthermore, the general economic imbalances in human societies are very traditional in modern social conflicts. In the *Cakkavattisihanādasutta*² in the *Dīghanikāya*, the Buddha draws attention to poverty as an agitating cause of human conflicts and moral degeneration. It is when the authorities fail to establish mechanisms to eradicate the pervasive poverty that drives people into social misfortunes. Conversely, this leads to atypical lust from which jealousy, greed, ill will, and wrong views arise. Thus, immoral conduct such as theft accompanied by killing, lying, slander, sexual misconduct, and so on become inevitable in the society. And when moral degeneration triumphs, people behave worse than beasts; greed, hatred, and violence take up the leadership of society.

It is important to remember that poverty could arise as a result of inept and corrupt governance on the other hand. Corrupt leadership has adverse penalties on social fellowships and the physical environment as well. It manifests the

² D. III. 58.

depravity of people's accessibility to basic needs, which creates tension and clashes as people adopt unskillful means of livelihood to fulfill their needs. In order to form a peaceful society, leaders have to grant and create equal opportunities and justice for all individuals so as to contain suspicions and material imbalances and their adverse effects. Various striking views of such possibilities are indeed defended in the canonical literature. In the *Kuṭadantasutta* in the *Dīghanikāya*, the Buddha stresses that rulers promote economic development through rightful means as a way of combating poverty and social crimes. This may be through embarking on poverty alleviation schemes such as agriculture and animal husbandry, sensitizations, and maintaining fair prices for traders. Governments or rulers may try to suppress crimes through punishment, but it cannot stop crimes and violence in society. It only engenders dissatisfaction and intimidation within the people in the society.

Similar views are also decidedly presented in the *Adhammikasutta*³ and the *Dhammarājasutta*⁴. Leaders are called upon to incorporate righteousness, known as Dhamma in Pali, in their governance by way of observing precepts, *Sīla*, and providing the basic needs to their subjects; this would be an assured sign of peace and harmony, and contentment. In fact, from the Buddhist political point of view, governance is conceived as a consequence of human need. It is the people themselves who enter into a social contract in a democratic manner by electing a suitable individual to avail them equity and equality. Democracy as an institution is given immense recognition as a way of supporting satisfaction and equal civil rights. Leaders are called leaders derived of the people's will to be served. Such leaders are called upon not to rule on the basis of their individual military or physical power, but the understanding of their people's needs, their righteous conduct, and incorporating such understanding into the nature of inter-being.

2.2. Internal causes of conflicts and violence

Buddhism maintains that social conflicts could arise as a result of inner contradictions or psychological tendencies. In the *Madhupiṇḍikasutta* in the *Majjhimanikāya*, the Buddha identifies *papañca* (mental proliferation) as the most remarkable psychological source of social conflicts and violence. It is when one's mind is full of contradictions and confusion that he responds violently to each situation that surrounds him.

Depending on the eye and material objects arises visual consciousness. The coming together of these three is sense contact. Depending on the sense, contact gives rise to sensation. What one senses, one recognizes (conceptualizes). What one recognizes, one thinks about it. One gets obsessed with what one thinks about. As a result of this, thoughts of conceptual obsession (*papañca saññāsāṅkhā*) assail the person with respect to material objects cognizable by the eye, belonging to the past, present, and future.

³ A. II. 74.

⁴ AN 5.133.

The Commentaries explain three sources of mental proliferation namely; craving (*taṇhā*), views (*diṭṭhi*) and conceit (*māna*) and it is because of this 'conceptual proliferation' as Bhikkhu Nāṇananda (1971) puts it, that we are always deep-rooted in these three elements which generate unwholesome concepts in the human mind that cause us suffering and construe our experiences in terms of "I", "Mine", "Myself".⁵ Depending on what we perceive, we cling to such views, which causes dogmatism. According to Buddhism, dogmatism is the worst disease, which hinders our spiritual liberation and the understanding of the true nature of existence as it triggers intolerances, disintegrations, and disputes. Buddhism encourages that happiness can only be achieved if we face reality and our difficulties with an open mind. The *Maṅgalasutta* in the *Khuddakanikāya* presents a very beautiful stanza central to our discussion. It goes: "If a man's mind is sorrowless, stainless and secure, and does not shake when touched by worldly vicissitude is the highest blessing." What we conceive as peace can only be bred in the human heart and mind. Not even economic progress or technological incentives, but our reflection on moral values as well as mind transformation. And this has to begin with oneself as Buddhism maintains we are the composites of the world.

The Buddhist Understanding, however, goes beyond identifying the external and psychological explanations of human conflicts. Buddhist Teachings name greed or attachment (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) as the underlying causes of violence and moral deterioration. To him, society cannot escape immoral actions if these three roots of evil are not checked. Even modern scientific innovations are motivated by greed and confusion. It has led to the manufacture of harmful nuclear and bio-weapons. Leaders fighting in wars, religious fanaticism, and international and national ideological diversities are simply because human beings are naturally confused and clinging to worldly pleasures.

In the *Kalahavivādasutta* of the *Suttanipāṭa* in the *Khuddakanikāya*, the Buddha considers greed or attachment to things that are dear as a striking cause of violence. The passage presented in the *sutta* reads:

Fights, disputes, wailings, grief, selfishness, measuring, conceit, and slandering, where these are abundant may it be told. With loved things are fights, disputes wailing, grief, selfishness, measuring, conceit, and slandering abundant, yoked to selfishness are fights and disputes and from disputes arise slandering. To those wandering greedily in the world, how do loved things arise? How do longings and familiarities arise for humans to follow up to the next world? From interest arises loved ones to those wandering greedily in the world. Longings and familiarities arise here, and humans follow them to the next world.⁶

The views recapped in the preceding passage relate centrally to a proper interpretation that it is when human beings strive to protect what is dear to

⁵ D. II.425; M. IV.167.

⁶ The *Suttanipāṭa*, *Kalahavivāda Sutta*, p. 169, PTS.

them that conflicts and violence become inescapable. As one struggles to dearly protect what belongs to him, such a process might also be standing in the way for another person to fulfill his desires. This perpetually and deeply impels unwholesome behaviours among people.

Buddhism teaches that one should contemplate to dispel the forces of attachment, greed and replace them with generosity (*Dāna*) and love towards others. On the other hand, one who needs to fulfill his desires may adopt non-harming or non-violent ways of fulfilling his needs. One has to contemplate on the means he is adopting to achieve his goals. If the means one benefits three kinds of people (i.e., oneself, others, and the mutual benefit), the action is considered wholesome and peaceful because it is non-harming. Thus, to build a peaceful society, Buddhism invariably urges that human beings should overcome exploitative greed, hatred, and delusion by replacing them with generosity, goodwill, cooperation, tolerance, forgiveness, and understanding.

In the analysis of the Buddhist perspective on social problems, Buddhist Teachings directs us to examine the roots of problems, the Four Noble Truths, the fundamental teaching of the Buddha, reveals the truth of *dukkha*, the root of *dukkha*, the cessation of *dukkha*, and the path leading to cessation. The first truth “affirms that the law of *dukkha* applies to the human condition.” The Buddha describes the *Dukkha* in the *Samyuttanikāya* as follows: “Now this, monks, is the Noble Truth of *dukkha*: Birth is *dukkha*, aging is *dukkha*, death is *dukkha*; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, & despair are *dukkha*; association with the unbeloved is *dukkha*; separation from the loved is *dukkha*; not getting what is wanted is *dukkha*. In short, the five clinging aggregates are *dukkha*.”

From the above definition, this *Dukkha* applies to all human conditions, and it is personal *dukkha*. But when social problems are taken into account, the personal *dukkha* cannot be separated from personal *dukkha* as “there is an inter-relationship between the *dukkha* that manifests in us as individual, which support and co-creates the collective problems of our societies, and, conversely, how the structures in society that manifest these collective problems impinge us in so many ways, therefore contributing to the personal or inner *dukkha* that torments us.

Buddha’s teaching is more relevant than any other approach towards the prevention of social problems and conflict resolution. Buddhist teaching of Four Noble Truths, problem of social conflict, causes of social conflict, solution of Social Conflict and the way towards social conflict resolution can be achieved. With the Four Noble Truths problem is clearly understood, and the cause of the problem is eradicated. With the eradication of the cause of problems, the solution is experienced and witnessed. The experienced and witnessed solution is practiced and followed. That way, too, is a prevention of conflicts.

The solution of Social conflict based on the Theory of Dependent Origination, *paṭiccasamuppāda*, can also be utilized to understand the interconnectedness of cause and effect of such problems. The circle of causes of social conflict and the effect of social conflict should be abolished. Social conflict can be resolved in the following way.

First, the causes of social conflict should be understood. The social conflicts are due to ignorance of understanding self, social structure, and social survival ethics. Once the cause and effect are understood, remedies must be provided in order not to allow the same thing to happen in the future. Then, it is the prevention of conflicts from happening again.

Second, to resolve social conflict, first, to understand the Social Conflict “Cause and Effect Theory” based on Buddha’s theory of Dependent Origination.

Third, the cause of social conflict is through right action, and abolishing ignorance is the prime aim of Buddhism. Also, developing interfaith dialogue is very important. Buddhist teachings lay great stress on self-realization. Five precepts are targeted at the good conduct of followers. It starts with the self and moves further.

The Buddhist approach towards conflict resolution is completely different from the theories of modern society. It first starts with the “self” and extends to the society and to the World. Social conflict Problem Causes Solution Way to solution Elimination of greed is most important and most practical approach to resolve social conflict. Minimum desire will give maximum satisfaction, which gives happiness; in the meantime, it will also give sustainability to sustainable development and to attain the ultimate pinnacle of freedom of humanity. And also, it always becomes early prevention of conflicts, and it doesn’t allow the same things to happen again and again because of the understanding of the danger, *ādinava* of them, and always looks for the cessation, *Nissaraṇa*, of problems.

The Buddha’s teaching is full of intricate views aimed at the attainment of peace. In Buddhism, the word ‘Peace’ (*santi*) is translated as the attainment of total liberation – *Nibbāna*. This notion is sometimes represented as the extinction of all cankers (*āsavakkhaya*) – the three roots of evil: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) – the total end to all forms of suffering (*dukkha*). The emergent conflicts and wars in society are perceived in Buddhism as an inescapable part of samsaric misery. The Buddhist emphasis is primarily enthralled on the inner roots of conflict, violence, and war. The main root of war is the lack of peace in the human mind. We always have conflicting ideas, and this is common to every individual. Even the Buddha himself had difficulty with conflicting views and opinions.⁷ What is ahead of us is to realize the ineffectuality of those views and their adverse effects on us. Buddhism proclaims solutions that can promote peace and resolve conflicts within and amidst human beings.

In the *Madhupindikasutta* in the *Majjhimanikāya*, Dandapani the *Sakyan* once approached the Buddha, and he said to him, “What is the contemplative’s doctrine? What does he proclaim?” The answer given by the Buddha indicates that his teaching is of non-violence in which one dissociates oneself from sensory perceptions, sensual pleasures, and conflicting views. The passage would be of great importance. It says:

⁷ Kim Them Do (2014): 278.

The sort of doctrine, friend, where one does not keep quarreling with anyone in the cosmos with its devas, Maras, & Brahmas, with its contemplatives & brahmans, its royalty & commonfolk; the sort [of doctrine] where perceptions no longer obsess the brahman who remains dissociated from sensuality, free from perplexity, his uncertainty cut away, devoid of craving for becoming & non-. Such is my doctrine, such is what I proclaim.⁸

Buddhism conceives society as a composite of individuals capable of transforming from bad to good, violence to peace. The Buddhist approach, above all, centers on individual behavioral and mind transformation through a self-reflective process. Intrinsically reflecting on the deep-rooted causes of human suffering is what Buddhism asserts as the most substantive and operative approach towards peace. To be an agent of peace, one has to start by reflecting on the nature of his physical body (aging, sickening, decaying, etc.) to have a comprehensive view that every living being is subject to all these physical constraints. Secondly, if a problem arises, one has to reflect upon it accordingly to understand its nature: (1) the existence of the problem, (2) the Cause of the problem, (3) the Solution to the problem, and (4) Ways to the solution.⁹

Self-reflection – one has to while in some cases, may not only be swayed by the result, but also the intrinsic quality or character of the act morally count. Considerably, reflecting on the nature of life as explicitly expounded in the Four Noble Truths – impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and selflessness (*anattā*) will substantively play a significant role in promoting inner peace. It is suggested that “The primary aim for the practice is to guard the mind carefully to develop wisdom and increase mindfulness.”¹⁰ Additionally, it creates a sense of inner peace as one contemplates the Four Noble Truths and walks the path identified as the Noble Eightfold Path.¹¹

Albeit self-reflection is a very effective and substantive approach in realizing inner peace and societal peace-building, it is very unlikely that it will work where people are in the middle of a war or a fight. In such occasions, a dialogue-based approach guaranteed at group levels or external conflicts is a high-profile system of promoting reconciliations and peace. The Buddha demonstrated his might at resolving conflicts between opposing parties on several occasions while he was still a *Bodhisattva*. Once, a dispute broke out between the Sakyans and the Koliyas. The two groups were unable to reach an agreement over the distribution of the waters of river *Rohini*, the two parties were on the verge of war. The Buddha settled the dispute by challenging both parties on what they considered more precious – water or human life.

The mediator’s enthusiasm should inspire the conflicting groups to understand the adverse effects of violence as well as underline the value of forgiveness and

⁸ MN 18.

⁹ Kazal Barua, (UNDV, 2014), p. 184.

¹⁰ Kim Them Do, *Buddhist contribution to global peace-building* (UNDV, 2014), p. 278.

¹¹ See the following discussions.

trust. Such people will change their behaviors and think differently. However, although this approach is very effective, it only has an impact when the two parties are willing to come to a round table in the form of dialogue. Secondly, it is also very hard to change the mind of an individual deeply creased in internal contradictions. This may not seem to be an easy task. This challenges peace actors to be able to model new attitudes and behaviors and develop abilities in training and decision-making to facilitate the dialogues and assess the differences among the parties involved in conflicts as this would underline the idea that reconciliations matter. The values of collaboration and interdependence should be duly emphasized, and the cultivation of qualities such as Loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*Karūṇā*), sympathetic joy (*mudītā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) are of great significance from the Buddhist teaching. The cultivation of such qualities is a sure sign that behavior is moving in the intended direction. Shared values and the culture of peace will ultimately evolve in societies.

III. THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH AS A MEANS OF PREVENTING AND OVERCOMING CONFLICTS

This is known as the path leading to the liberation of beings. Buddhism unconditionally asserts that due to lack of knowledge of the true nature of phenomena, human beings hold selfish views of 'I' and do things motivated by craving, hatred, and delusion, which produce karmic forces that regenerate unwholesome experiences of the past. The only way to escape this *samsāric* cycle is the practice of this path to attain higher virtues and gain insight (*Vipassanā*) into the true nature of life as impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and selflessness, and motivate the idea of dependent origination (*paṭīccasamuppāda*).¹² The path is indeed associated with both social ethics and the final purity – *Nibbāna*. It is often expressed that it restrains one from unwholesome activities of the mind, speech, and body. The fulsome practice of this path and its division into three cardinal stages – virtue (*sīla*), mental composure (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*)¹³ represents a traditional transformation of individual and social behaviors, beliefs and attitudes, and views. The path is as follows: (1) Right Understanding; (2) Right Thought; (3) Right Speech; (4) Right Action; (5) Right Livelihood; (6) Right Effort; (7) Right Mindfulness; (8) Right Concentration.

Right Understanding/ View (*sammā diṭṭhi*) holds an important position, basically the first step of the Noble Path. One is expected to have a correct viewpoint of the natural phenomena and all things that surround them. It is ideologically when people cling to dogmatic ideas that generate tensions above which it hinders moral reflection. Looking back at his life, the Buddha encouraged his followers not to cling to any idea, even his teaching; we have to reflect upon the Dhamma he taught. It is to come and see for yourself, for those who are seeking the meaning of life. Absolutely, in many cases, religious intolerance, disintegrations, and extremism have been due to dogmatic clinging

¹² M. II. 32, D. III. 243.

¹³ M. I. 63.

and confusions where one apprehends that his view is the 'only truth, and others are wrong.' Ideological dispositions may take the form of politics, religion, ethics, or even philosophy. Cautioning his followers not to metamorphose his teaching into dogma, the Buddha maintains that his teaching is a means to achieve a desired purpose, and it should be practiced carefully.

Right Understanding/ View includes the understanding of the three cardinal characteristics of existence (impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and selflessness (*anatta*)), the practice of the Four Noble Truths, and the cognition of wholesome and unwholesome mental factors, including their inherent causes and effects. The comprehension of these elements will act as a platform not only for individual behavior transformation but also for social institutions and organizations.

In Right Thought (*sammāsaṅkappa*), we are expected to accrue thoughts of compassion, loving-kindness, generosity, sympathetic joy, and equanimity-thoughts that oust greed, hatred, and confusion. If we want to cross over to the island of peace, we have to face reality with a pure mind. It is from the thoughts that we construct within our mind that actions of the body and speech arise. They are nurtured by repeated forms of behavior in a protracted process of recurring existence without a beginning. To tame these thoughts, it is very significant that we have to prompt restraints to guide the mind that always sustains and nurtures them.

Buddhism fundamentally considers these three steps of the Noble path to guard one's physical and verbal behaviours. They are the basis of a virtuous life and mental purification from defiling impulses. One needs to develop wholesome actions and speech, a process after which the right thoughts have been developed. The Buddha laid down moral guidelines to help individuals develop a concern and engage themselves into actions, speech that benefits all individuals in society.

In Right Speech (*Samma vāca*), one is supposed to refrain from falsehood speeches – speeches which incite violence and break up friendly groups, empty and worthless idle words which adversely have a bad effect on oneself, others and society. Falsehood speech, according to Buddhism, is the most dangerous weapon that can devastate human life. Right speech, however, is one of the most important components in developing sound social relationships, and additionally, it deters inclinations to commit wrongful actions. Right speech aims at inculcating a respect for 'truth' in the mind, implying both one's obligations as well as the rights of other people to truth. The Buddha advised his followers not to indulge in such speeches because they bring conflict and destabilize united and friendly groups.

In the practice of Right Action (*Sammā kammanta*), one is expected to refrain from injury to life, from violence and acts of terrorism, laying aside all weapons that cause injury to living beings.¹⁴ This step of the Noble path is very

¹⁴ Prof. P. D. Premasiri (2006:257), *Studies in Buddhist Philosophy and religion*, Buddha

elemental in the Buddhist moral cultivation and social dealings. It consists of fulsomely (re)locating the morality of an act in the consequences and the state of the world that it creates. In the *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovādasutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, the Buddha stresses emphasis on the importance of reflection to Venerable Rahula: So, too, Rahula, an action with the body should be done after repeated reflection; and action by speech should be done after repeated reflection; an action by mind should be done after repeated reflection.

It also involves examining the intention of the action and the cultivation of thoughts filled with compassion, love, generosity, and wisdom. This could begin with the integration of the five precepts: refraining from killing living beings, abstention from stealing, restraining from falsehood speech, sexual misconduct, and consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs. This step is derived from the transformation of verbal and bodily behaviors as well as cultivating equanimity, love, kindness, and sympathetic joy.

Right Livelihood (*Sammā ājīva*) refers to the rightful and skilful ways of living. It is where one occupationally adopts morally acceptable means of livelihood (without any coercion or violence). Right Livelihood restrains one from engaging in any wrongful kind of livelihood such as conducting businesses in weapons, living beings, meat production and butchery, business in poisons, and intoxicants.¹⁵ Also, the practice of right livelihood requires one to refrain from cheating with false weights and measures, from bribery and corruption, deception and insincerity, from wounding, killing, imprisoning, highway robbery, and taking goods by force¹⁶ because these cause harm and violence amongst people. Positively, one is expected to attend to his duties and responsibilities at all times and acquire wealth in ways that do not oppress and exploit others. And that wealth is expected to benefit oneself, others, and the whole society.

Right Effort (*Sammā vāyāma*) is the sixth step. It is the hard work required to attain peace, to exterminate all the mental defilements that cause suffering. It also involves the effort of guarding the wholesome cultivations from mental proliferation (*papañca*). It is expected to overcome impulses that nurture repeated moral and mental unwholesome actions. But this is only possible if one is not obsessed with those impulses.

The seventh step of the Noble Path is right mindfulness (*Sammā sati*). It involves overcoming feelings and thoughts that could cause habits that are harmful. One ought to be mindful of every occurrence that surrounds him and be aware of its causes and effects. Right mindfulness is correspondingly built upon the cultivated right thoughts of joy, love, and goodwill, and so on.

Right concentration (*Sammā samādhi*) is the eighth and last step of the Noble Eightfold Path. It is where concentration and tranquility of the mind are cultivated. It is not overstating that the world is on fire due to the fact that our

mind is full of agitations, especially from the struggle for material needs and perceptions that create the illusion of reality. The practice of Sammā *samādhi* is aimed at eradicating all mental falsifications such as ill-will, confusion, craving, and clinging by replacing them with goodwill, friendliness (*mettā*), tranquility, serenity, peace, and happiness. When unwholesome mental factors such as greed (*lobha*), anger (*dosa*), restlessness (*uddhacca*), and remorse (*kukkhucca*) are mindfully pacified, the mind is undisturbed, peaceful, and friendly. Additionally, for the attainment of liberation, Buddhism considers concentration as a precondition that precedes wisdom, the final emancipation.

The Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path is the path that leads to the realization of peace and happiness. We cannot attain peace through our struggle for material gains; they only breed frustrations, dissatisfactions and continue nurturing the roots of evil, greed, hatred, and delusion. We cannot sustain our material wealth without spiritual self-control; there should be balance whilst we gradually walk the Noble Path.

IV. CONCLUSION

Buddhism is a practical philosophy and guiding ideology, as most scholars have expressed. The founder's vision has been kept throughout its long history. The Buddha's vision of emancipation has been the groundwork of inspiration for numerous successful civilizations, great cultural achievements, and lasting and meaningful guides to the very purpose of life for millions of people. The teaching has fostered within the social institutions a creditable way of life and a joint spirit marked by attempts towards peace. It has been at the forefront of human happiness. This is what Buddhism is seriously committed to promoting. Its potential contribution has immeasurably remained in art and literature, and mostly among the elites. Serious commitment is certainly needed if we are to explore the Buddhist aptitudes in creating peaceful and harmonious societies.

Buddhist teachings, rather than a religion, have always been regarded as a very practical way of living. It always sees and takes a very straightforward look at our human condition that the Buddha taught was based on his observation of the way things are. The Buddha himself was compared to a lotus that bloomed and was not soiled by mud and water. Therefore, a conclusion can be made there that with the teachings of the Buddha, a practical approach can be adopted to prevent conflicts from happening over and over again by understanding its nature, its danger. Buddhist teachings always suggest the escape of all problems by understanding their consequences properly.

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BUDDHAYĀNA SPIRIT MOVEMENT: PROMOTING PEACE AND HARMONY IN BUDDHIST COMMUNITIES TO ADDRESS RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN INDONESIA AND BEYOND

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Abstract:

The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement represents a transformative initiative to foster peace and harmony within the Buddhist community and beyond. This study examines its principles, practices, and impact, focusing on its potential to address religious conflicts in Indonesia and globally. The movement promotes inclusivity, pluralism, and universalism as foundational values by integrating Buddhist teachings on compassion and mindfulness with practical strategies for social cohesion. These principles create harmonious communities, transcending religious and cultural boundaries. The research highlights its effectiveness in promoting interfaith understanding in Indonesia and its potential as a scalable model for global peacebuilding. The study employs a literature study and bibliographic analysis to systematically analyze the principles and practices of the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement. Relevant academic and non-academic sources, including journal articles, historical texts, and reports, were reviewed to provide theoretical insights. Bibliographic analysis identified key authors, institutions, and influential works, contextualizing the movement within broader peacebuilding efforts. The research reveals that the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement effectively fosters unity by focusing on compassion, inclusivity, and universalism. It has reduced interfaith tensions in Indonesia by promoting dialogue, collaboration, and understanding among religious groups. Globally, it offers a scalable framework for addressing conflict and division, integrating

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spiritual principles with actionable social strategies. To enhance its impact, future research should include field studies and interviews for richer insights. Comparative studies with similar global movements are recommended to refine best practices. Policymakers and educators should collaborate with the movement to integrate its principles into peacebuilding initiatives and educational programs, fostering a culture of mindfulness and inclusivity in diverse societies.

Keywords: *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement, peacebuilding, mindfulness, interfaith dialogue, inclusivity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious diversity, while enriching, often poses challenges, especially in societies such as Indonesia, where interfaith tensions arise periodically. Interfaith conflicts, locally and nationally, are usually triggered by misunderstandings, stereotypes, or a lack of communication between religious communities.¹ Conflicts often stem from differences in beliefs and practices, leading to tension and misunderstandings. Indonesia, as a country with cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, faces significant challenges in maintaining social harmony and peace. Religious conflicts and social tensions remain some of the most pressing issues in contemporary society, particularly in diverse and multicultural nations like Indonesia². Despite its reputation as a country with deep Spiritual and cultural roots, Indonesia has witnessed various instances of interfaith conflicts and misunderstandings that challenge the harmonious coexistence of its diverse religious communities.³ The Buddha emphasized the importance of harmony and unity in society. In the *Saṅgīti Sutta*, he teaches, “Thus, monks, those monks who dwell in harmony, appreciating each other, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes, will dwell in happiness.”⁴ This passage underscores the necessity of mutual respect and understanding in societies where religious diversity prevails. Indonesia, known for its diversity, is home to six officially recognized religions alongside various indigenous belief systems. The state promotes religious tolerance through the philosophy of *Pancasila*, which embodies pluralism and inclusivity. However, religious tensions have occasionally surfaced due to doctrinal differences, socio-political factors, and misunderstandings. Buddhism, with its emphasis on non-violence (*ahimsā*) and wisdom (*paññā*), offers valuable insights for addressing these tensions. In the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, the Buddha teaches patience and non-retaliation in the face of conflict, “Even if bandits were to sever you limb from limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not

¹ Nelwan, G (2024), p. 137 - 154.

² Ibrahim et al., (2023), p. 1925 - 1929.

³ Mazya et al., (2024), p. 7 - 32.

⁴ DN 33, (trans.) Walshe (1987), p. 486.

be following my teaching.”⁵ This teaching is particularly relevant in pluralistic societies where religious intolerance can escalate into violence. Cultivating patience, compassion, and wisdom is crucial for sustaining interfaith harmony. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement emerges as a transformative initiative to address these challenges by promoting peace, harmony, and interreligious understanding within and beyond Buddhist communities. Rooted in the timeless teachings of compassion (*karuṇā*) and mindfulness (*sati*), the movement seeks practical solutions for mitigating religious conflicts and fostering social cohesion in local and global contexts.⁶ In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha’s last words emphasize the importance of self-reliance in moral and ethical conduct, “So, Ānanda, you should live as islands unto yourselves, being your refuge, with no other refuge; with the *Dhamma* as an island, with the *Dhamma* as your refuge, with no other refuge.”⁷ This principle aligns with the core philosophy of the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement, which encourages individuals and communities to actively engage in interfaith dialogue, community service, and compassionate action. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement integrates fundamental Buddhist principles that support peaceful coexistence, including right speech (*sammā vācā*), which encourages truthful and kind communication to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts, right action (*sammā kammanta*), which promotes ethical conduct and non-violence in interfaith relations,⁸ loving-kindness (*mettā*), which cultivates goodwill toward all beings regardless of religious differences,⁹ compassion (*karuṇā*), which extends empathy and support to those who suffer due to religious tensions,¹⁰ and wisdom (*paññā*), which encourages understanding and insight to dissolve prejudice and stereotypes.¹¹ The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement represents a viable model for interfaith harmony, offering a path grounded in Buddhist teachings that transcend religious boundaries. By integrating Buddhist wisdom into contemporary peacebuilding efforts, the movement addresses religious conflicts in Indonesia and provides a framework for global peace initiatives. As the Buddha advises in the *Dhammapada*, “Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone, hatred appeased. This is an eternal law.”¹² Applying this principle to interfaith relations can transform religious diversity from a source of conflict into a foundation for mutual respect and coexistence. Indonesia, known for its diversity, is home to six officially recognized religions, alongside various indigenous belief systems. While the state advocates for religious tolerance through the philosophy of *Pancasila*, tensions have occasionally surfaced due to differences in beliefs,

⁵ MN 21, (trans.) Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 129.

⁶ Chia (2018), p. 24 - 63.

⁷ DN 16, (trans.) Walshe (1987), p. 245.

⁸ SN 45.8, (trans.) Bodhi (2000), p. 1528.

⁹ Kp 9, (trans.) Thanissaro (2013), p. 56.

¹⁰ MN 31, (trans.) Bodhi (2005), p. 357.

¹¹ Dhṛp 282, (trans.) Narada (1978), p. 98.

¹² Dhṛp 5, (trans.) Buddhārakkhita (1985), p. 2.

socio-political factors, and misunderstandings. In such a pluralistic society, initiatives like the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement hold significant potential for fostering unity and harmony.¹³ Advocating from Buddhist teachings and principles, the movement integrates the values of inclusivity, pluralism, and universalism to create a framework for peaceful coexistence. This introduction explores the significance of the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement as a peacebuilding model and outlines its broader implications for addressing religious conflicts in Indonesia and beyond. As illustrated in Figure 1, the number of intolerance cases in Indonesia displayed notable fluctuations from 2019 to 2023, reflecting both periods of relative stability and significant escalation. In 2019, there were seven recorded cases of intolerance, marking a baseline for the period. This number doubled in 2020, reaching 14 cases, indicating a significant rise in tension. By 2021, the number decreased moderately to 11 cases, suggesting a temporary improvement. A remarkable decline occurred in 2022, with only 3 cases reported, representing the lowest point in the five years. However, 2023 saw a dramatic resurgence, with cases spiking to 30, the highest level recorded during the period, highlighting a severe setback in efforts to curb intolerance. The internal dynamics within religious communities often contribute to such conflicts. Key factors include differing interpretations of religious doctrines, competition for leadership roles, and friction between factions within the same faith community. These internal divisions, compounded by external pressures and societal dynamics, exacerbate the frequency and intensity of intolerance cases. Understanding these patterns is crucial for developing targeted strategies to address religious intolerance's root causes and foster a more harmonious social environment¹⁴. Externally, conflicts are influenced by identity politics, economic inequality, ideological globalization, and discriminatory state policies, which are often accepted by interreligious relations.¹⁵

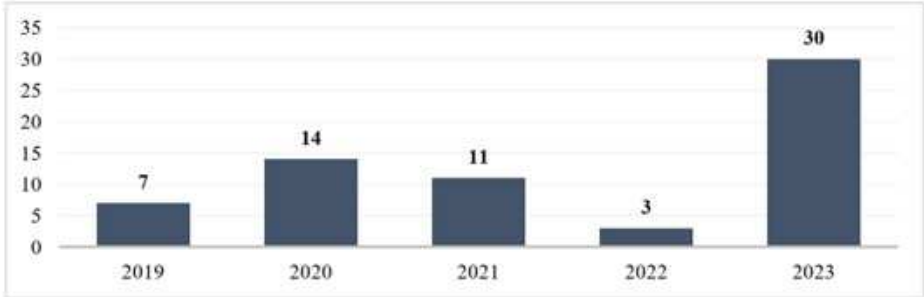


Figure 1. Picture of Intolerance Cases in Indonesia (data source: retrieved from kbr.id)

Indonesia, the world's largest archipelagic nation, is renowned for its remarkable diversity. In 2024, the country's population reached 282.48 million, encompassing over 1,300 ethnic groups and around 700 regional languages,

¹³ Eko & Putranto (2019), p. 341 - 369.
¹⁴ Asmara & Noho (2022), p. 46 - 60.
¹⁵ Maksimus (2020), p.1 - 22.

showcasing its extraordinary cultural richness and regional uniqueness. Religiously, Indonesia is predominantly Muslim, with 87.08% of the population adhering to Islam, followed by Christianity (7.40%), Catholicism (3.07%), Hinduism (1.68%), Buddhism (0.71%), Confucianism (0.03%), and other traditional beliefs (0.03%). This diversity serves not only as a defining characteristic of Indonesia but also as a fundamental social and cultural force, promoting unity in the face of globalization's challenges. Buddhism in Indonesia has a profound historical legacy. It flourished during the golden age of powerful kingdoms such as Srivijaya and Majapahit, prominent centers of Buddhist learning and influence. However, the religion faced a significant decline in the 16th century following these kingdoms' collapse and Islam's rise as the dominant faith in the archipelago. Despite this setback, Buddhism experienced a remarkable revival in the 20th century, mainly due to the efforts of Ashin Jinarakkhita. His leadership and initiatives were instrumental in restoring Buddhism, solidifying its status as one of Indonesia's officially recognized religions. Today, Buddhism plays a vital role in Indonesia's pluralistic society, contributing to its rich cultural tapestry and serving as a testament to the resilience of the nation's religious diversity. In the development of Buddhism in Indonesia, each school of Buddhism has its viewpoint and wisdom, manifested through various wise ways.¹⁶ Despite the shared foundational principles of Buddhism, differences in the interpretation of teachings, ritual practices, and traditions among various schools, such as Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, have not always coexisted harmoniously. Historically, these differences have occasionally led to tensions within Buddhist communities, mainly when misunderstandings arise, or efforts to preserve each tradition's distinctiveness overshadow the larger goal of unity. These challenges are often exacerbated by limited knowledge of each school's practices and philosophical frameworks, creating barriers to fostering cohesion among Buddhists in Indonesia. The *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (*Lotus Sūtra*) offers profound guidance on transcending these divisions by emphasizing the ultimate unity of all Buddhist paths. The *Lotus Sūtra* introduces the concept of the One Vehicle (*ekayāna*), asserting that all teachings and paths are skillful means (*upāya*) devised by the Buddha to lead all beings to enlightenment. In Chapter 2, the Buddha explains, "I have implemented wise ways to make it easier for them to enter the wisdom of the Buddha. But I have never said, 'You will all attain the path of Buddhahood. The reason why I have never said so is that the time for revealing has not yet come. But now is the time.'"¹⁷ This passage underscores that while various paths - the Three Vehicles (*Triyāna*): *Śrāvakayāna* (the Vehicle of Disciples), *Pratyekabuddhayāna* (the Vehicle of Solitary Buddhas), and *Bodhisattvayāna* (the Vehicle of *Bodhisattvas*) - are presented to accommodate different capacities and inclinations, they ultimately converge toward the same goal: Buddhahood. The *Lotus Sūtra* further states,

¹⁶ Burmansah et al., (2023), p. 75 - 106

¹⁷ Watson (1993), p. 56.

“The reason why the Tathāgata teaches a single vehicle is that all beings can become Buddhas.”¹⁸ By embracing the principle of *Ekayāna*, Buddhist communities in Indonesia can recognize the shared ultimate purpose underlying their diverse traditions. This understanding fosters mutual respect and unity, encouraging practitioners to appreciate the different skillful means employed across schools as complementary approaches leading to the same enlightenment. However, the sutra reveals that all these paths lead to a singular ultimate goal, the One Vehicle (*Ekayāna*), which transcends the distinctions of the Three Vehicles and represents the essence of Buddhism.¹⁹ The *Buddhayāna* movement, a groundbreaking initiative that integrates the teachings and practices of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism, played a transformative role in shaping the development of Buddhism in Indonesia during the latter half of the twentieth century. Under the visionary leadership of Ashin Jinarakkhita, the movement established a holistic and inclusive approach to Buddhism, bridging the doctrinal and ritualistic differences between these major schools. Central to this effort was creating a nonsectarian monastic community where *Sanghas* from diverse Buddhist traditions were united under the shared principles of the *Dhamma*. This inclusive framework fostered harmony among Buddhist practitioners and revitalized Buddhism’s relevance in Indonesia’s pluralistic religious landscape, positioning the movement as a cornerstone for inter-sectarian unity and Spiritual growth.²⁰ *Buddhayāna* is the core of Buddhism, the essence of Buddhist wisdom that encompasses all traditions, so its approach is non-sectarian, not prioritizing Buddhist sorting over Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.²¹ *Buddhayāna* needs to be understood as a form of unity of all Buddhist teachings and spread in inclusive Buddhism that receives views from Buddhist schools.²² *Buddhayāna* is a unifying force within Buddhism, transcending sectarian boundaries to foster harmony among its diverse traditions. By promoting mutual acceptance, the cultivation of universal wisdom, and a shared commitment to unity amidst diversity, *Buddhayāna* creates a community that values inclusivity and interconnectedness. Its emphasis on these principles makes it a profoundly relevant movement for strengthening diversity and tolerance within Indonesia’s Buddhist community. In a multicultural and multi-religious society, *Buddhayāna* reinforces solidarity among Buddhists and contributes to the broader vision of fostering interfaith understanding and societal harmony. Buddhism supports the creation of social harmony through teachings such as interconnectedness and the principle of non-violence.²³ The Buddha emphasized the importance of harmony and unity in society. In the *Saṅgīti Sutta*, he teaches, “Thus, monks who dwell in harmony, appreciating each other, without disputing, blending like milk and water,

¹⁸ Kubo & Yuyama (2007), p. 34.

¹⁹ Chia, J. M. T. (2018), p. 24 - 64.

²⁰ Chia (2018), p. 24 - 63.

²¹ Chia, J. M. T. (2018), p. 24 - 64.

²² Kimura (2003), p. 53 - 73.

²³ Danai et al. (2024), p. 301 - 319.

viewing each other with kindly eyes, will dwell in happiness.”²⁴ This passage underscores the necessity of mutual respect and understanding in societies where religious diversity prevails. The relationship between Buddhism and socio-political dynamics emphasizes the importance of preserving tradition amid rapid social change and globalization, thus ensuring that Buddhism continues to play a unifying force. In modern society, Buddhism is a guideline to create peace, tranquility, and happiness. This effort is realized through various thoughtful approaches that encourage individual transformation, social change, and environmental conservation at the personal, group, and global levels. Although the methods and techniques may differ, all share the goal of attaining liberation according to Buddhist teachings. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* guides social duties and ethical conduct, highlighting the importance of fulfilling responsibilities to maintain social harmony. The Buddha outlines various relationships and their reciprocal obligations, emphasizing that such adherence fosters a cohesive and harmonious society.²⁵ The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement, rooted in Buddhist principles, aims to bridge divides and foster unity within and beyond Buddhist communities. This movement addresses intra-religious cohesion and interfaith harmony, leveraging Buddhist teachings as a foundation for dialogue, understanding, and peacebuilding. By promoting the practice of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), the movement encourages individuals to cultivate goodwill towards all beings, thereby contributing to societal harmony. In the *Karaṇīya Metta Sutta*, the Buddha instructs practitioners to develop loving-kindness, “Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.”²⁶ This teaching underscores the transformative potential of loving-kindness in fostering social cohesion and resolving conflicts. This study investigates the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement’s contributions to promoting peace and harmony amidst religious diversity. It explores how the movement applies Buddhist principles to address religious conflicts, its strategies for community engagement, and its broader implications for global peace initiatives. By integrating traditional teachings with contemporary approaches, the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement exemplifies how Buddhism can actively contribute to creating a peaceful and harmonious society. As one of the world’s oldest religions, Buddhism offers profound teachings on compassion, mindfulness, and nonviolence, making it a valuable resource for addressing modern challenges of conflict and division. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement draws inspiration from these principles, emphasizing that peace begins at the individual level through self-awareness and mindfulness. By fostering individual equipped to contribute to harmonious relationships within their communities and beyond. In cultivating inner peace in Indonesia, where Buddhism constitutes a minority religion, applying values

²⁴ DN 33, Walshe (1987), p. 486.

²⁵ DN 31, Walshe (1987), p. 461 - 469.

²⁶ SN 1.8, Bodhi (2017), p. 143.

to conflict resolution is particularly significant.²⁷ As a movement deeply embedded in the Indonesian Buddhist tradition, the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement highlights the role of spirituality in promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. By incorporating meditation practices, community outreach, and education, the movement demonstrates that Buddhism is not merely a spiritual path but also a practical tool for creating sustainable peace in society. Religious conflicts in Indonesia often arise due to misunderstandings, prejudices, and socio-political dynamics. Incidents of tension, though not representative of the entire population, underline the need for proactive measures to prevent such issues from escalating. The complexity of these conflicts lies in their intersection with issues of identity, cultural differences, and historical grievances.²⁸ This context calls for innovative approaches to conflict resolution that prioritize dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement responds to this need by providing a platform for interfaith engagement and collaborative problem-solving. The movement seeks to dismantle stereotypes and foster understanding among different groups by emphasizing shared values and promoting dialogue.²⁹ This approach aligns with the broader goal of national unity, as envisioned in Indonesia's guiding principles. The Buddha's teachings on nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*) are foundational to the movement's philosophy. In the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, the Buddha advises, "Even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who entertains hate in his heart on that account would not be one who carried out my teaching."³⁰ This profound commitment to nonviolence is a guiding principle for the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement in addressing conflicts. Moreover, loving-kindness (*mettā*) is central to fostering social cohesion. The *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* encourages practitioners, "Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings."³¹ Individuals can transcend personal biases and contribute to a more harmonious society by cultivating boundless compassion. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement also emphasizes the importance of mindfulness (*sati*) in personal and communal transformation. Mindfulness fosters self-awareness and emotional regulation, enabling individuals to respond to conflicts with equanimity and understanding. This aligns with the Buddha's instruction in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, where he outlines the four foundations of mindfulness as a path to liberation.³² The movement promotes interfaith dialogue and reflects the Buddha's approach to engaging with diverse communities. Historical accounts, such as those in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, depict the Buddha engaging in discussions with people of

²⁷ Icon, M. R. (2024), p. 329 - 348.

²⁸ Hutabarat (2023), p. 6 - 13.

²⁹ Yana et al (2024), p. 68 - 82.

³⁰ MN 21, (trans.) Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 129.

³¹ Sn 1.8.

³² MN 10, (trans.) Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (1995), p. 145.

various beliefs, emphasizing respect and understanding.³³ This inclusive attitude is mirrored in the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement's efforts to create inter-religious dialogue and cooperation platforms. By integrating these traditional teachings with contemporary approaches, the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement exemplifies how Buddhism can actively contribute to building a peaceful and harmonious society. Its meditation, education, and community engagement initiatives are practical applications of Buddhist principles, addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering a culture of peace in Indonesia and beyond. This study examines the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement and its role in promoting peace within Indonesia's Buddhist community and the broader religious landscape. While interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding are well-researched, the movement's specific contributions remain largely unexplored. This research fills that gap through a descriptive analysis using a qualitative approach with the literature study method, analyzing how the movement applies Buddhist teachings to address religious conflicts. Indonesia's religious diversity fosters unity and tension, making interfaith dialogue essential for national stability. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement is a unique initiative that blends local traditions with global Buddhist networks. It emphasizes inclusivity and universalism, aligning with humanistic Buddhism and playing a key role in Buddhist education by promoting values that transcend religious boundaries. Despite increasing studies on religious peacebuilding, research on this movement remains limited. This study explores how it applies Buddhist principles to foster inner peace, interfaith understanding, and social harmony. Creating platforms for dialogue demonstrates how spiritual values can aid conflict resolution. Using a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis and literature study, this research highlights the movement's unique peacebuilding strategies and offers practical insights for policymakers, educators, and community leaders. Its focus on inclusivity and universalism provides a valuable framework for addressing religious conflicts in today's interconnected world. By integrating Buddhist traditions with modern peace efforts, the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement proves that Buddhism remains relevant in tackling contemporary social challenges, actively fostering religious harmony in Indonesia and beyond.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Buddhist principles of peace and harmony

Buddhists emphasize peace and harmony, rooted in mindfulness, compassion, and non-violence.³⁴ The path to peace in Buddhism is not merely an external pursuit but an inward journey of cultivating mental and ethical discipline.³⁵ The fundamental principles of *sīla* (precepts), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom) form the cornerstone of Buddhist ethical and Spiritual practice, guiding individuals toward a harmonious

³³ Walshe (1987), p. 461 - 469.

³⁴ Barua (2023), p. 1 - 23.

³⁵ Bawa (2024), p. 363 - 378.

life while fostering interconnected relationships.³⁶ The *sīla* aspect refers to moral discipline,³⁷ encompassing lay practitioners' five precepts (*pañca-sīla*): refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants that cloud the mind. In the *Siṅgālovāda Sutta*, the Buddha instructed, "A noble disciple, abandoning the destruction of life, abstains from killing beings. Abandoning the taking of what is not given, he abstains from stealing. Abandoning sexual misconduct, he abstains from such misconduct. Abandoning false speech, he abstains from falsehood. Abandoning intoxicants, he abstains from taking intoxicating drinks and drugs."³⁸ These ethical guidelines promote non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), respect for others, and integrity, forming the foundation of a peaceful society. *Samādhi* or concentration³⁹ is cultivated through meditation practices such as *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing) and *mettā bhāvanā* (loving-kindness meditation), helping individuals attain inner tranquility and emotional resilience.⁴⁰ The Buddha states, "*Bhikkhus*, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness."⁴¹ This practice sharpens the mind and fosters inner peace, which is essential for resolving external conflicts. *Paññā* or wisdom, arises through deep contemplation and insight (*vipassanā*), leading to the realization of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). The *Dhammapada* states, "All conditioned things are impermanent - when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification."⁴² By understanding reality as it is, one transcends ignorance and desires, which are the root causes of suffering. These three factors - morality, mental discipline, and wisdom - are mutually supportive in fostering peace at both individual and collective levels. The Buddha elaborates on interpersonal harmony in the *Sārāṇīya Dhamma Sutta*, highlighting six qualities essential for communal harmony: acts of loving-kindness (*mettā-kāya-kamma*); speech rooted in loving-kindness (*mettā-vacī-kamma*); thoughts of loving-kindness (*mettā-mano-kamma*); generosity and sharing (*sādhāraṇabhogī*); observing common ethical precepts (*sīla-sāmaññatā*); and holding shared views (*diṭṭhi-sāmaññatā*). The Buddha states, "*Bhikkhus*, when these six qualities are cultivated and developed, they lead to affection, respect, welfare, harmony, and unity."⁴³ These principles foster community goodwill, trust, and unity, preventing discord and conflict. Moreover, in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha states that the highest service one can provide to society is nurturing the virtues of faith (*saddhā*), morality

³⁶ Chakrapol & Thepa (2022), p. 5961 - 5972.

³⁷ Greenberg & Mitra (2015), p. 74 - 78.

³⁸ DN 31, Walshe (1995), p. 461.

³⁹ Phong (2024), p. 1 - 29.

⁴⁰ MN 118, (trans.) Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (2005), p. 941.

⁴¹ Dh 277-279, (trans.) Buddhārakkhita (1985), p. 82.

⁴² Hartmann (2024), p. 2093 - 2113. & Viengsavanh (2024), p. 94 - 109.

⁴³ AN 6.11, (trans.) Bodhi (2012), p. 894.

(*sīla*), generosity (*cāga*), and wisdom (*paññā*). “Monks, there are these four ways of serving others. What four? By instilling in them faith, by instilling in them morality, by instilling in them generosity, and by instilling in them wisdom.”⁴⁴ This reinforces the idea that personal transformation leads to social harmony. The Buddhist worldview of interdependence (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), or dependent origination, teaches that all beings are interconnected. The Buddha declared, “When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with this cessation, that ceases.”⁴⁵ This understanding fosters empathy and nonviolence (*ahimsā*), making it a vital principle for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. These teachings transcend sectarian boundaries in contemporary society, offering practical tools for fostering coexistence and resolving conflicts. By incorporating Buddhist principles into social initiatives, interfaith dialogue, and community development programs, a sustainable framework for peace and harmony can be established. In conclusion, Buddhist teachings provide a comprehensive approach to peace - both internal and external - through ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom. The emphasis on compassion, mindfulness, and interdependence ensures that individuals cultivate inner tranquility and contribute to a more harmonious world. Buddhism significantly promotes global peace and understanding by integrating these timeless teachings into daily life and social structures.

2.2. Religious diversity and conflict in Indonesia

Indonesia is renowned for its rich religious diversity, encompassing six officially recognized religions alongside numerous local beliefs and customs. However, this pluralism is a testament to the nation’s cultural wealth and challenges to maintaining harmony and resolving conflicts arising from differing beliefs and practices. Blinken (2022) notes, “Indonesia’s religious diversity is a double-edged sword - both a source of national pride and a challenge for social cohesion.”⁴⁶ Disputes over places of worship, religious conversion, and divergent interpretations of Spiritual teachings have historically been sources of tension.⁴⁷ These tensions, often exacerbated by socio-political and economic factors, require effective strategies to ensure peaceful coexistence. Buddhist teachings offer profound insights into fostering harmony and resolving conflicts in diverse societies. Central to Buddhism is the cultivation of the Four Immeasurables (*Brahmavihāras*): loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).⁴⁸ These qualities serve as foundational principles for interpersonal and communal relationships. The *Mettā Sutta* emphasizes the practice of loving-kindness, advocating for an all-encompassing benevolence: “Let one cultivate

⁴⁴ AN 4.364, (trans.) Bodhi (2012), p. 1146.

⁴⁵ SN 12.61, (trans.) Bodhi (2000), p. 552.

⁴⁶ Blinken (2022), p. 112.

⁴⁷ Soekarba, S. (2018), p. 230 - 247.

⁴⁸ Fowler, M. (1999), p. 45.

a boundless love towards all beings. Let one radiate boundless love over the entire world, above, below, and across, unhindered, without ill will, without enmity.”⁴⁹ By embracing such universal goodwill, individuals can transcend personal biases, fostering an environment conducive to mutual respect and understanding. Cultivating loving-kindness can be a fundamental step toward reducing prejudices and misunderstandings in societies with diverse religious traditions like Indonesia. In addressing conflicts, the Buddha highlighted the importance of patience and non-retaliation. The *Kakacūpama Sutta* illustrates this principle vividly: “Even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who harbors ill will on that account would not be following my teaching.”⁵⁰ This teaching underscores the necessity of maintaining inner peace and refraining from retaliation, even in the face of provocation. Applied to the Indonesian context, this principle suggests that religious leaders and communities should adopt a non-aggression stance and patience in the face of religious disputes. Many religious conflicts escalate due to retaliatory actions or inflammatory rhetoric, making this Buddhist principle a crucial tool for conflict resolution. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* provides guidance on social ethics and the maintenance of harmonious relationships. It outlines reciprocal duties between individuals, such as those between parents and children, teachers and students, and friends: “In five ways should a clansman minister to his friends and associates by generosity, courtesy, benevolence, equality, and by being true to his word.”⁵¹ By adhering to these principles, communities can build trust and reduce misunderstandings that often lead to conflicts. Ethical conduct and respect for others’ beliefs are essential for religious harmony, ensuring that different faith communities do not view each other as threats but as partners in a shared society. Modern Buddhist scholars continue to advocate for these teachings in contemporary contexts. Sulak Sivaraksa, a prominent engaged Buddhist, emphasizes the role of interfaith dialogue: “True peace can only emerge when different religious communities sincerely listen to one another and engage in mutual understanding.”⁵² This aligns with Indonesia’s foundational philosophy of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), demonstrating that religious diversity can be a source of strength rather than division. In practical terms, this could mean fostering regular interfaith discussions, promoting education that includes teachings from multiple religious perspectives, and encouraging collaborative community initiatives that bring different religious groups together for shared social projects. While Indonesia’s religious diversity presents challenges, applying Buddhist teachings offers valuable strategies for fostering harmony and resolving conflicts. Individuals and communities can contribute to a peaceful and cohesive society by cultivating inner virtues and engaging in ethical interactions. When religious leaders and policymakers incorporate such wisdom into governance and social structures, the potential

⁴⁹ Sn 1.8, p. 56.

⁵⁰ MN 21, (trans.) Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi (2005), p. 112.

⁵¹ DN 31, Walshe (1987), p. 463.

⁵² Sivaraksa, S. (2005), p. 67.

for a more harmonious Indonesia becomes achievable. The Buddhist emphasis on compassion, patience, ethical conduct, and dialogue provides a practical and Spiritual approach to ensuring that religious diversity enriches rather than divides the nation.

2.3. *Buddhayāna* spirit movement in peacebuilding

The *Buddhayāna* movement in Indonesia emerged as a unifying force among Buddhist practitioners, addressing the need for cohesion in the face of social and cultural challenges. Central to this movement was the late Venerable Ashin Jinarakkhita, who played a pivotal role in the revival of Indonesian Buddhism during the 1950s and 1960s. Recognizing the country's fragmented state of Buddhist traditions, Jinarakkhita emphasized the importance of unity in navigating the complexities of the modern era.⁵³ He founded the *Buddhayāna* movement, which sought to transcend sectarian boundaries by fostering mutual respect and collaboration among various Buddhist communities.⁵⁴ This inclusive approach revitalized Buddhism in Indonesia and served as a model for resolving societal conflicts. Several previous studies have explored the influence and impact of *Buddhayāna* in Indonesia. Scholars have noted the movement's strategic alignment with *Pancasila*, the state ideology, by incorporating the Sang Hyang Adi Buddha concept to conform to Indonesia's national religious framework.⁵⁵ Research also indicates that *Buddhayāna* ritual adaptations helped integrate Buddhism into local cultures, preserving indigenous traditions while maintaining Buddhist doctrinal integrity.⁵⁶ Additionally, scholars have examined the sectarian tensions within the movement as different Buddhist factions debated its theological foundations. Buddhist texts provide a strong foundation for the principles upheld by the *Buddhayāna* movement. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* records the Buddha's final advice to his disciples: "Monks, I have taught the *Dhamma* without making any distinction of 'inner' and 'outer' teachings. The *Tathāgata* has no 'teacher's fist' concerning doctrines."⁵⁷ This statement emphasizes openness, inclusivity, and non-sectarianism, values central to the *Buddhayāna* movement. By uniting Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions, *Buddhayāna* embodies the Buddha's teaching that the *Dhamma* is universal and should not be confined by rigid sectarian distinctions. The movement's emphasis on inclusivity aligns with the *Kālāma Sutta*, where the Buddha encourages critical thinking and openness in Spiritual practice: "Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor rumor; nor upon what is in scripture. But when you know for yourselves: 'These things are wholesome, these things are blameless, these things are commended by the wise,' then, having undertaken them, abide in them."⁵⁸

⁵³ Icon, M. R. (2024), p. 329 - 348.

⁵⁴ McDaniel (2015), p. 314 - 335.

⁵⁵ Chia (2018), p. 204.

⁵⁶ *Buddhayāna* Association (2012), p. 78.

⁵⁷ DN 16, (trans.) Walshe, 1995, p. 245.

⁵⁸ AN 3.65, (trans.) Bodhi, 2012, p. 173.

This teaching supports *Buddhayāna*'s pluralistic and pragmatic approach, encouraging practitioners to seek truth beyond sectarian boundaries and focus on the essence of Buddhist practice rather than doctrinal differences. The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, a key Mahāyāna text, highlights the integration of different Buddhist traditions and the importance of non-duality. *Vimalakīrti* states, "All *Dharmas* are without distinction. There is neither high nor low in the *Dharma*. Therefore, those who practice should not discriminate between teachings."⁵⁹ This directly resonates with *Buddhayāna*'s aim of harmonizing various Buddhist traditions, ensuring that it unveils division. The movement's commitment to interfaith dialogue and social harmony can be further reinforced by the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, which provides ethical guidelines for peaceful coexistence. The Buddha advises, "A noble disciple respects all faiths and does not revile others. He should cultivate loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity towards all beings."⁶⁰ This underscores *Buddhayāna*'s role in fostering religious tolerance and harmony in Indonesia's multi-religious society. In conclusion, the *Buddhayāna* movement, grounded in core Buddhist principles, is a model for unity within diversity. Promoting non-sectarianism, inclusivity, and interfaith dialogue aligns with the fundamental teachings of the Buddha. As Indonesia continues to embrace religious pluralism, *Buddhayāna* remains a vital force in peacebuilding, demonstrating that Buddhist wisdom can be a guiding principle for societal cohesion.

2.4. Research methods

This research combines literature study and bibliographic analysis to examine the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement's role in promoting peace and harmony within Buddhist communities and addressing religious conflicts in Indonesia and beyond. The literature study systematically collects and analyzes academic and non-academic resources to understand the movement's principles, practices, and impacts. It fosters religious harmony, resolves conflicts, and contributes to peacebuilding in Indonesia and globally. Data sources include academic publications, historical texts, government reports, and case studies. Bibliographic analysis complements this by examining key contributors, institutions, and publications, providing valuable insights, and identifying gaps in the research. By integrating these methods, the study offers a holistic understanding: the literature study provides detailed insights into the movement's practices, while bibliographic analysis contextualizes them within broader academic discussions. This dual approach offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement as a model for peacebuilding, offering theoretical and practical perspectives and situating the movement within global discussions on religious harmony and conflict resolution.

III. DISCUSSION

3.1. Philosophical foundation of the *Buddhayāna* spirit movement

The teachings of Buddhism are based on love, compassion, and correct

⁵⁹ Thurman, 1998, p. 102.

⁶⁰ DN 31, (trans.) Walshe (1995), p. 456.

understanding, and they reject all forms of discrimination and violence. Buddhism teaches us to stay away from all kinds of violence, both verbal and mental.⁶¹ Since its inception, Buddhism has been an approach to providing solutions to various problems and social phenomena that occur in people's lives.⁶² The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement is important in fostering peace and harmony in the Buddhist community, addressing religious conflicts in Indonesia, and offering a model for interfaith coexistence globally. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement is reflected in its commitment to promoting non-sectarian values, inclusivism, pluralism, universalism, and belief in the One Godhead (*Dharmakaya* or *Sang Hyang Adi Buddha*).⁶³ The movement emphasizes the Buddhist values of tolerance, compassion, and non-discrimination, essential for fostering harmony among various traditions and communities.⁶⁴ These principles serve as the basis for individuals' spiritual growth and a philosophical foundation for social harmony and peacebuilding. The philosophical basis of the movement lies in integrating Tripitaka teachings, which advocate the Middle Way (*Majjhima Patipada*) as a unifying path to overcome sectarian differences.⁶⁵ The *Buddhayāna* seeks to transcend the boundaries of Buddhism's various schools of thought, such as Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, by focusing on common principles rather than doctrinal differences. In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha advised individuals not to accept teachings blindly but to evaluate them critically based on their merits and alignment with wisdom:

“Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor the consideration, ‘The monk is our teacher.’ But when you yourselves know: ‘These things are good; these things are not blameworthy; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,’ then, having undertaken them, abide in them.”⁶⁶

This principle aligns with the *Buddhayāna* approach, which values open-mindedness and the synthesis of various Buddhist traditions. The *Mettā Sutta* underlines the importance of fostering loving-kindness (*mettā*) towards all beings without discrimination:

“Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings. Radiating kindness over the entire world: Spreading upwards to the skies, and downwards to

⁶¹ Mazza (2020), p. 10.

⁶² Kumar (2011), p. 65 - 78.

⁶³ Chia, J. M. T. (2018), p. 24 - 64.

⁶⁴ Abdullah & Akhtar (2023), p. 71 - 90.

⁶⁵ Ba (2023), p. 214.

⁶⁶ AN 3.65, (trans.) Thanissaro (1994), p. 12.

the depths, outwards and unbounded, freed from hatred and ill-will.”⁶⁷

This universal compassion aligns with the *Buddhayāna* philosophy of inclusivity and interdependence, reinforcing that harmony in diversity is crucial for individual and collective well-being. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement, which focuses on the harmonious coexistence and common practice of various Buddhist doctrines and scriptures aimed at the one path of enlightenment, can be strategically aligned with Indonesia’s national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*.⁶⁸ Both concepts emphasize the importance of unity in diversity, where differences are seen as a source of strength rather than division, supporting a common goal in spiritual and national contexts. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement is deeply rooted in the Buddhist tradition’s philosophical principles of inclusivity, unity, and universal wisdom.⁶⁹ It blends traditional Buddhist principles with modern strategies for fostering community harmony. Emphasizing inclusivity across diverse Buddhist traditions is a unifying force within the Buddhist community. Furthermore, the movement promotes interreligious dialogue, creating a platform for understanding and cooperation among different faiths. This dual focus on internal cohesion and external engagement positions the *Buddhayāna* movement as a powerful model for building peace and harmony in religious and multicultural contexts.

3.2. Practical strategies for promoting peace

One of the main strategies used in the *Buddhayāna* Movement to promote peace is through education. Education is vital in spreading peace, social awareness, and understanding among religious communities. The learning environment serves as a platform to foster understanding, tolerance, and collaboration.⁷⁰ In Indonesia, the Jinarakkhita Buddhist College of Lampung has taken an essential step in making the *Buddhayāna* movement part of academic and practical learning for students. Thus, education aims to teach Buddhism and form a character oriented toward peace and harmony.⁷¹ This approach aligns with the Buddhist teachings in the Sutta Piṭaka, where the Buddha emphasized the transformative power of education in shaping moral and ethical individuals. In the *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta*, the Buddha states, “Just as an elephant’s footprint is said to be the largest of all footprints, and all other footprints fit into it, so too, all wholesome states are rooted in the right view.”⁷² The right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*), an essential element of the Noble Eightfold Path, begins with education and learning, fostering peace and understanding. By incorporating topics related to peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and interfaith dialogue into their academic programs, Buddhist

67 SN 1.8, (trans.) Bodhi (2005), p. 56.

⁶⁸ Chia (2018), p. 55 – 79.

⁶⁹ Hubbard (2017), p. 168 - 171

⁷⁰ Werdiningsih & Nursanty (2024), p. 115.

⁷¹ Zakiyuddi (2013), p. 87. & Zamroni et al. (2020), p. 133.

⁷² MN 27.17, (trans.) Bodhi (2005), p. 236.

institutions actively contribute to a culture of peace.⁷³ Similarly, the *Sigalovada Sutta* describes how education nurtures ethical conduct and social harmony, “In five ways, young householder, a teacher should be ministered to by a pupil: by rising to greet him, by attending on him, by eager obedience, by personal service, and by learning his teaching respectfully.”⁷⁴ Following such principles, Buddhist educational initiatives, including international seminars and research publications, spread the core values of compassion, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. Ultimately, education serves as a transformative force, empowering individuals to become agents of peace in their communities.⁷⁵ In addition to education, community involvement is an important strategy to promote peace. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement has successfully leveraged the active participation of Buddhist communities to foster social harmony, understanding, and cohesion.⁷⁶ The Buddha encouraged communal harmony, as stated in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*: “So long, Ānanda, as the monks hold regular and frequent assemblies, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.”⁷⁷ By empowering Buddhist communities to participate in initiatives that bridge religious and cultural divides, the movement creates an environment where peaceful coexistence becomes a common goal.⁷⁸ The involvement of Buddhist communities in peace-oriented programs plays a transformative role in shaping peaceful societies.⁷⁹ The monastery is also a Spiritual and social activity center and is vital in engaging the Buddhist community.⁸⁰ This is reminiscent of the Buddha’s guidance in the *Dhammapada*: “Not by birth does one become an outcast, not by birth does one become a Brahmin. One becomes an outcast; by deeds alone, one becomes a Brahmin.”⁸¹ The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement, through its community outreach and public programs, inspires Buddhists to embody core values such as compassion, inclusivity, and mindfulness. These initiatives strengthen harmony within Buddhist communities and foster respectful and meaningful interactions with people of other faiths. By encouraging the practical application of these principles, the movement contributes to the broader goal of promoting peace and mutual understanding in diverse and multi-religious societies. As *Mettā Sutta* beautifully states, “Even as a mother protects with her life, her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings.”⁸² This teaching is a guiding principle for *Buddhayāna* peace initiatives, reinforcing compassion and non-discrimination as the foundation for social harmony.

⁷³ Abu-Nimer & Smith (2016), p. 192.

⁷⁴ DN 31.10, (trans.) Maurice Walshe (1995), p. 461.

⁷⁵ Adriana (2016), p. 78.

⁷⁶ Tsomo (2015), p. 211.

⁷⁷ DN 16.1.6, (trans.) Walshe (1995), p. 232.

⁷⁸ Le Duc (2023), p. 158.

⁷⁹ Arai (2015), p. 267.

⁸⁰ Dona (2021), p. 142.

⁸¹ Dhṛp 393, (trans.) Narada (1978), p. 109.

⁸² Sn 1.8, (trans.) Thanissaro (2013), p. 56.

3.3. Impact on religious harmony

The dynamics of religious conflicts, both internal and external, are influenced by a combination of doctrinal differences, social disparities, and political agendas.⁸³ In Buddhist communities, for example, differences in the interpretation of religious teachings and practices among the Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna schools sometimes result in tension. However, the emergence of the *Buddhayāna* Spirit championed by Ashin Jinarakkhita is a significant step toward overcoming this division. *Buddhayāna* advocates an integrated approach that embraces the core teachings of Buddhism while respecting the peculiarities of each tradition. This aligns with the Buddhist teachings in the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (*Lotus Sutra*), which emphasizes the essential unity of all paths to enlightenment: “Just as the different rivers, though they wander, all eventually merge into the great ocean, so too do all teachings ultimately lead to the one *Dharma*.”⁸⁴ Handling religious tensions and conflicts requires efforts from various stakeholders, including government agencies, religious leaders, civil society organizations, and the community. Promoting interfaith dialogue, fostering mutual understanding, and ensuring the protection of religious freedom and minority rights are essential steps toward resolving religious conflicts.⁸⁵ The principles of non-violence (*ahimsā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) encourage individuals to adopt peaceful and collaborative behavior, helping reduce social conflicts and create a harmonious and supportive community environment.⁸⁶ The Buddha himself emphasized this in the *Kakacūpama Sutta*: “Even if bandits were to sever you limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gives rise to a mind of hate towards them is not a follower of my teaching.”⁸⁷ Indonesia’s constitution, *Pancasila*, emphasizes the One Godhead (Belief in the one and only God), providing a framework for religious tolerance.⁸⁸ The principle of harmony in diversity, which is deeply ingrained in Buddhist philosophy, resonates with the concept of *Pancasila*, ensuring peaceful coexistence among various religious groups. This is reinforced in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, where the Buddha advises, “So long as the monks remain united and do not dispute over doctrine, they shall prosper and not decline.”⁸⁹ On the other hand, exclusivism asserts that only one religion has absolute truth and provides the only path to salvation or enlightenment. In contrast, pluralistic universalism proposes that all religions share the same spiritual insights and truths, forming the foundation of universal wisdom.⁹⁰ The *Brahmajāla Sutta* warns against the dangers of dogmatic exclusivism, stating,

⁸³ Mayer (2000), p. 114.

⁸⁴ Kern (1884), p. 45.

⁸⁵ Ulfaturrohmatiririn et al. (2021), p. 201.

⁸⁶ Pham & Nikolaeva (2021), p. 134.

⁸⁷ MN 21, (trans.) Bodhi (2005), p. 198.

⁸⁸ Pulhehe & Robandi (2024), p. 87.

⁸⁹ DN 16, (trans.) Walshe (1995), p. 232.

⁹⁰ Mavridis (2015), p. 172.

“Some teachers, trapped in their views, declare: ‘Only this is true; all else is false.’ They grasp at their beliefs, unable to see beyond them.”⁹¹ Embracing the Spirit of unity in diversity through consistent policy actions, community engagement, and education reform is key to realizing a more harmonious, inclusive, and tolerant Indonesian society.⁹² The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement is a powerful model for fostering religious harmony by uniting diverse traditions, promoting mutual understanding, and cultivating a sense of togetherness. Its efforts demonstrate how Buddhist teachings can effectively address modern interfaith challenges, catalyzing the building of a more inclusive and harmonious society. The *Mettā Sutta* encapsulates this vision: “May all beings be happy. Let them be joyous and live in safety. Let none deceive another nor despise any being in any state.”⁹³ The movement provides a framework for sustainable peace and unity in a multicultural world by bridging differences and emphasizing shared values. This reflects the Buddha’s ultimate teaching on harmony in the *Mahāsamaya Sutta*: “Let no one harm another. Let no one put another’s life in danger. Let no one out of anger or resentment wish suffering upon another.”⁹⁴ By integrating these Buddhist principles, the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement exemplifies the practical application of Buddhist teachings to promote peace, social integration, and religious tolerance in contemporary society.

3.4. Challenges and opportunities

Buddhism in Indonesia has undergone significant development, starting from the introduction of this religion in the royal era, through the colonial period, the independence period, the organizational period, and finally developing into various schools or sects until now. In addition, Buddhism in Indonesia also faces political challenges as a minority religion.⁹⁵ Another challenge is navigating the complexity of Indonesia’s diverse religious landscape, where religious differences can sometimes lead to tension and misunderstanding.⁹⁶ As a minority religion, Buddhism must continue to work to build trust and understanding with other religious communities.⁹⁷ In addition, cultural and social barriers can hinder the full implementation of peace initiatives, such as deep-rooted stereotypes or misconceptions about Buddhism and its values. However, these challenges present significant opportunities for growth and impact. Indonesia’s diverse religions and cultures provide a unique platform for the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement to lead in fostering interfaith dialogue and cooperation. By promoting the values of compassion (*karuṇā*), nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), and mutual respect, the movement can create a more inclusive and

⁹¹ *DN* 1, (trans.) Bodhi (2012), p. 54.

⁹² Hutabarat (2023), p. 94.

⁹³ *Sn* 1.8, (trans.) Thanissaro (2013), p. 56.

⁹⁴ *DN* 20, Walshe (1995), p. 289.

⁹⁵ *Buddhayāna* Association (2012), p. 78.; Kimura (2003), p. 154.; Mukti (2004), p. 112.

⁹⁶ Hutabarat (2023), p. 198.

⁹⁷ Tomalin & Starkey (2017), p. 67.

harmonious society.⁹⁸ This approach aligns with the Buddhist teaching in the *Mettā Sutta*: “Even as a mother protects with her life, her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings.”⁹⁹ The growing recognition of the importance of interfaith understanding offers new avenues for collaboration with other religious groups and government organizations.¹⁰⁰ This is reflected in the *Sigalovada Sutta*, where the Buddha teaches how harmony and respect between spiritual and social groups foster a peaceful society: “Just as the dawn heralds the rising of the sun, so does harmony lead to the prosperity of the community.”¹⁰¹ These essential elements guide individuals in cultivating inner peace, which contributes to the peace of society at large.¹⁰² The *Dhammapada* further reinforces this principle: “Hatred is never appeased by hatred in this world. By non-hatred alone, hatred is appeased. This is an eternal law.”¹⁰³ With its inclusive philosophy and emphasis on unity, the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement holds significant potential to expand its influence and play a transformative role in peacebuilding efforts within Indonesia and globally. This is following the teaching of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, where the Buddha instructed his followers to remain united: “So long, Ānanda, as the monks hold regular and frequent assemblies, they may be expected to prosper and not decline.”¹⁰⁴ The movement offers a practical and sustainable model for addressing religious conflicts and fostering harmony by promoting interfaith dialogue, mutual respect, and collaboration across diverse traditions. The *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (*Lotus Sutra*) emphasizes this vision of unity: “All teachings are but different paths leading to the One Dharma, just as various rivers merge into the great ocean.”¹⁰⁵ Its ability to bridge differences and inspire collective action underscores its relevance as a guiding force in creating a more peaceful, cohesive, and understanding society in an increasingly interconnected world. The *Mahāsamaya Sutta* encapsulates this principle: “Let no one harm another. Let no one put another’s life in danger. Let no one out of anger or resentment wish suffering upon another.”¹⁰⁶ The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement exemplifies the practical application of Buddhist principles in addressing modern religious and social challenges through its engagement in interfaith dialogue, social harmony initiatives, and peace education.

IV. CONCLUSION

Religious diversity in Indonesia enriches its culture but presents challenges, including interreligious conflicts rooted in differing beliefs, stereotypes, and

⁹⁸ Quiroga, (2023), p. 219.

⁹⁹ *Sn* 1.8, (trans.) Thanissaro, (2013), p. 56.

¹⁰⁰ Bowling (2022), p. 178.

¹⁰¹ *DN* 31, Walshe (1995), p. 461.

¹⁰² Stewart & Stewart (2024), p. 203.

¹⁰³ *Dhp* 5, (trans.) Narada, (1978), p. 10.

¹⁰⁴ *DN* 16, (trans.) Walshe, 1995, p. 232.

¹⁰⁵ Kern (1884), p. 45.

¹⁰⁶ *DN* 20, (trans.) Walshe (1995), p. 289.

social inequalities. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement, grounded in inclusivity, non-sectarianism, and pluralism, provides a valuable model for fostering peace and harmony within Buddhist communities and across interfaith lines. By emphasizing compassion, wisdom, and mutual respect, the movement advocates for unity in diversity and promotes social harmony. Its core principles - precepts, *Samādhi*, and *Paññā* - encourage inner peace and positive relationships, creating a foundation for sustainable coexistence. Education and community involvement, focusing on character development and interfaith understanding, are essential strategies in the movement's efforts to mitigate conflicts and strengthen unity. The *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement demonstrates how Buddhist values can effectively address religious conflicts and promote global peace through dialogue and collaboration. This research is limited by its reliance on secondary data through literature study, which may not fully capture the real-world complexities of the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement's initiatives. Additionally, the lack of primary data, such as interviews or field studies, restricts a deeper understanding of the personal experiences and challenges faced by individuals involved in the movement. Without further comparative analysis, the study's focus on Indonesia may also limit its applicability to other cultural or religious contexts. To enhance the impact of the *Buddhayāna* Spirit movement, future research should include primary data collection, such as interviews and field observations, to provide richer insights into its practices and effectiveness. Comparative studies with similar movements in other countries can help identify best practices for promoting peace and harmony globally. Moreover, policymakers and educators should collaborate with *Buddhayāna* leaders to integrate its principles into broader peacebuilding initiatives, fostering institutional interfaith understanding and character development.

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BUDDHIST INSIGHT FOR WORLD PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – A REVIEW IN THE LIGHT OF UNITED NATIONS CHARTER

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Abstract:

The world is beautiful, and humans have made progress in all walks of life. With the advancement of technology, life has become more comfortable. We are getting education at the tip of our fingers. Spirituality also becomes a part of our lives. However, presently, the world is undergoing various phases. There are several issues that need to be resolved. Everyone is urging for sustainable development and world peace. There are conflicts among nations on one or the other grounds. Even though the conflicts are between two states, it is affecting the neighbouring States and impacting the people across the globe. It is quite an alarming situation. While the United Nations aims to uphold global peace and security, its success in achieving this goal remains questionable. The nations are trying their best under the guidance of the United Nations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to look towards the Buddhist insight for world peace and sustainable development. World peace begins with Individual peace, hence Enlightened One proposes for the observance of some ethical principles in life, i.e., *Pañcasīla*, Eightfold Path, ten *pāramī*, etc. It will be helpful for the individual's mental health. Individual peace leads to societal peace and ultimately to world peace. Similarly, Buddha also guided on sustainable development.

Keywords: *Buddhist insight, world peace, sustainable development, un charter.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The world is the beautiful gift of Nature, where living beings enjoy their lives as per the law of nature. Flora and fauna are interconnected and dependent on each other as per the law of nature. However, human beings considered themselves superior among all creatures and even started ruling overall. Nature has provided us with all that is required to live a sustainable life. In spite of that, humans are facing several problems in life. It is because of cravings of all types. We have developed discrimination, hatred, attachment, selfishness, etc., and it has resulted in sorrow (*Dukkha*) in life. We have lost the responsiveness and sensibility towards fellow human beings, resulting in stress, diseases, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness in spite of technological advancement. To deal with such human problems of life, enlightened one already explained through His teachings the way to live a joyful and satisfied life. The ethical principles of Buddha are equally useful in the contemporary world. *Pañcasīla*, Eightfold path, ten *pāramī*, etc., are the keys to open the gateways of a successful life. Everything is impermanence (*Anicca*), temporary and transient in the world, so Buddha suggested living life by following ethical principles. Buddha stated in the verse of Diamond Sutra (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*), that:

“All the world’s phenomena and ideas
Are unreal, like a dream,
Like magic, and like a reflected image.
All the world’s phenomena and ideas
Are impermanent, like a water bubble,
Like dew and lightning.
Thus, should one observe and understand
All the world’s phenomena and ideas.”¹

So, understanding the law and nature of the Universe is important to live a healthy and peaceful life. Extremism in any matter is detrimental to progress and a peaceful life, Buddha suggested the Middle Path (*Majjhimāpatipadā*), i.e. sustainable way of life.

II. U.N. FOR WORLD PEACE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It is an accepted truth of human society that, even though there are various spiritual ideologies that speak about love and respect for all, there is hatred, differences, and disputes among people. The reason is the quest for more and more power, property, and land. It resulted in disputes between people in society and nations. We are neglecting nature also. We are exploiting the natural resources of the earth over our requirements. It also creates a race among nations to capture and conquer the territory of other nations. It resulted in disputes and war. Hall states that “When differences between States reach a point at which both parties resort to force or one of them does acts of violence which the other chooses to look upon as a breach of peace, the relation of war

¹ Shen, C.T., *Mayflower II*, On the Buddhist Voyage to Liberation, p. 4.

is set up, in which the combatants may use regulated violation against each other until one of the two has been brought to accept such terms as his enemy is willing to grant.”²

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas advanced the concept of just war by asserting that the focus should be on the subjective culpability of the offender rather than merely the objectively wrongful act itself. He posited that a war could be deemed justifiable only if it was initiated by a legitimate sovereign authority, pursued a just cause (i.e., the retribution for wrongdoing), and was undertaken with righteous intentions by all participating parties.³ The doctrine of just war emerged alongside the growing influence of Christianity and waned with the commencement of inter-Christian religious conflicts and the subsequent formation of a system of secular sovereign states. While war transitioned into a legally sanctioned state of affairs, permitting the use of force and acknowledging a set of regulatory conditions, various alternative methods of employing force existed that did not constitute full-scale war, thereby avoiding the associated legal ramifications concerning neutrals and conduct. Reprisals and pacific blockades serve as illustrative examples of the utilization of force outside the formal framework of war, ‘hostile measures short of war’. According to Kelsen: “War is, in principle, an enforcement action involving the use of armed force performed by one State against another constituting as it does an ultimate interference in the sphere of the interest of the other State”. All kinds of disputes and wars bring only disasters for humanity, therefore, it is in the interest of all to avoid the use of force and war.

Following the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson spearheaded an initiative to unite the world’s influential powers in a collective effort to promote peace, security, and global well-being. This ambitious undertaking culminated in the Covenant of the League of Nations. The League’s progress, however, suffered an early impediment when the United States declined membership. Nevertheless, for approximately fifteen years, people across the globe viewed the League as a crucial mechanism for establishing international peace and stability and for aiding humanity’s uneven journey toward greater liberty and prosperity.⁴ The catastrophic global economic downturn of the late 1920s and early 1930s, coupled with the burgeoning popularity of anti-democratic and nationalist ideologies and a demonstrable reluctance among peace-loving nations to shoulder the necessary responsibilities for preserving peace, ultimately led to the disintegration and ultimate failure of the League system. The void created by this lack of foresight and decisive action on the part of the world’s peace-loving populations was swiftly filled by the assertive and expansionist forces of Italian Fascism, German Nazism, and Japanese

² Driefontein Consolidated Gold mines V. Janson (1900) 2 Q. B. 339, p. 43.

³ Shaw, M. N., *International Law 1119*, Cambridge University Press, 6th Edition, 2011.

⁴ On the work of the League, see Ray, Jean, *La Politique et la Jurisprudence de la Société des Nations*, 4 Vols., Paris, 1934 - 35; Myers, Denys P., *The Handbook of the League of Nations*, Boston, 1935.

Militarism.⁵

The present-day world is full of many issues, including conflicts among individuals, internal disturbance among nations as well and disputes among different Nations. The reasons for these conflicts are manifold. Individual persons are facing several issues due to various reasons, it may be due to family disputes, work stress and pressure of targets, financial burdens, psychological disturbances, etc. Similarly, intra-country disputes are because of caste and class differences, racism, religion, natural resources, political superiority, etc. So far, disputes among nations are due to reasons like control of natural resources, boundary disputes, financial crunch, and many more reasons. Presently, there are disputes on the issues of Refugees, Transborder smuggling, geographical controls, terrorism, and arms race. We are witnessing these issues, which are detrimental to world peace.

The two devastating world wars and their effects on mankind and nature have compelled us to thoughtful introspection regarding our future and the existence of the human race on the planet. Human rights were violated during that period. Considering that phenomenon, the world leaders decided to form an association that can control the disputes among States and protect human rights. The establishment of the United Nations in 1945 marked a pivotal moment in global history, its fundamental purpose being the preservation of international peace and security across the world. Before that time, the global advocacy for human rights had already been eloquently championed, as early as 1941, by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In his famous “Four Freedoms” speech, he called for “a world founded upon four essential human freedoms.” These are identified as “freedom of speech and expression,” “freedom of every person to worship God in his way,” “freedom from want,” and “freedom from fear.” Roosevelt’s vision of the moral order, as he characterised it, became the clarion call of the nations that fought the Axis in the Second World War and founded the United Nations.⁶

The Charter’s Preamble declared the United Nations’ resolve to safeguard future generations from the devastation of war, a scourge that has twice in our lifetime inflicted immeasurable suffering upon humanity. Furthermore, the UN aimed to:

- (i) Reaffirm its unwavering belief in fundamental human rights, the inherent dignity and value of every individual, and the equal rights of all people, regardless of gender, and all nations, irrespective of size.
- (ii) Create an environment conducive to upholding justice and respecting commitments stemming from treaties and other sources of international law.
- (iii) Foster social progress and elevate living standards globally within a

⁵ Goodrich L. M. and Hambro E., *Charter of the UN - Commentary and Documents*, p. 104 (Published under the auspices of The London Institute of World Affairs, Stevens & Sons Limited, London, 1949).

⁶ Buergental, T., *International Human Rights*, West Publishing 1995, p. 21.

framework of greater liberty. To achieve these objectives, the UN resolved to:

(iv) Cultivate tolerance and peaceful coexistence among nations as amicable neighbors.

(v) Guarantee, through the adoption of guiding principles and the implementation of effective mechanisms, that the use of armed force is restricted to situations serving the common good.

(vi) Utilize international mechanisms to advance the economic and social well-being of all populations. In pursuit of these goals, the United Nations committed to unifying its efforts.⁷

The preamble vehemently insists on the protection of human rights and equal rights of men and women for establishing a just society. Moreover, social progress and the call for tolerance to live together in peace prohibited the use of armed force. It is all for the economic and social advancement of all people without any kind of discrimination. These guiding principles are enough to establish a just society free from any conflict and lead a sustainable life on this beautiful planet.

The fundamental objectives and guiding tenets of the United Nations, as articulated in Article 1, are as follows:

(vii) The maintenance of international peace and security. To this end, the UN shall employ effective measures to prevent and eliminate threats to peace, suppress acts of aggression and other breaches of the peace, and facilitate the peaceful resolution of international disputes or situations with the potential to disrupt peace. These resolutions shall adhere to principles of justice and international law.

(viii) The fostering of friendly relations among nations predicated upon the principles of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. The UN will also undertake additional suitable actions to bolster global peace.

(ix) The attainment of international cooperation in addressing international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian nature. Furthermore, the UN will promote and safeguard respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all individuals, irrespective of race, sex, language, or religion.

(x) The UN shall serve as a central coordinating body for the harmonization of national actions in the pursuit of these shared goals.⁸

(xi) Furthermore, Article 2 explicitly outlines that the organization and its constituent members, in striving to achieve the objectives detailed in Article 1, shall adhere to the following fundamental principles:

i. The organization's foundation rests upon the principle of sovereign equality among all its members.

⁷ Haris, D., *Cases and Materials on International Law*, Sweet & Maxwell, South Asian 7th Edn, p. 885.

⁸ Dr. S. K. Kapoor, *International Law and Human Rights*, 16th Edition, CLA, p. 944.

ii. Each member state, to guarantee the enjoyment of all rights and privileges inherent in membership, shall diligently fulfill the obligations undertaken under this charter.

iii. All member states shall resolve their international disputes through peaceful means, ensuring that international peace, security, and justice are not jeopardized.

iv. All member states shall abstain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state in their international relations, or in any other manner contrary to the aims of the United Nations.

v. All member states shall provide full support to the United Nations in any action it undertakes by this charter and shall refrain from assisting any state against which the United Nations is implementing preventive or enforcement measures.

vi. The organization shall endeavor to ensure that non-member states act by these principles to the extent necessary for maintaining international peace and security.

vii. Nothing in this Charter shall authorize the United Nations to interfere in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state, nor shall it compel members to submit such matters to settlement under this Charter; however, this principle shall not impede the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.

The U.N. Charter is very clear about the Settlement of International disputes through peaceful means. Article 2(3) of the United Nations Charter provides that 'All members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered. The 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States develops this principle and notes that, States shall accordingly seek early and just settlement of their international disputes by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means of their choice.

The same methods of dispute settlement are stipulated in Article 33 (1) of the UN Charter, although in the context of disputes the continuance of which are likely to endanger international peace and security. The 1970 declaration, which is not so limited, asserts that in seeking an early and just settlement, the parties are to agree upon such peaceful means as they see appropriate to the circumstances and nature of the disputes.⁹

There would appear, therefore, to be no inherent hierarchy concerning the methods specified and no specific method required in any given situation. States have a free choice as to the mechanism adopted for settling their disputes.¹⁰ This approach is also taken in several regional instruments, including the American

⁹ Shaw, M. N., *International Law*, Cambridge University Press, 7th Edition 2016, p. 734.

¹⁰ Article 33 (1) of the U.N. Charter and Section 1 (3) and (10) of Manila Declaration.

Treaty on Pacific Settlement (the Pact of Bogota), 1948 of the Organization of American States, the European Convention for the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes, 1957 and the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1975. In addition, it is to be noted that the parties to a dispute have the duty to continue to seek a settlement by other peaceful means agreed by them in the event of the failure of one particular method. Should the means elaborated fail to resolve a dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, the parties are under.¹¹ It is to be noted that the International Court of Justice in *Nicaragua v. US* referred to the principle that parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, should seek a solution by peaceful means, as the principle of customary international law.¹²

As world leaders failed to act following the principles enshrined in the Charter, we can see that the disputes among nations continued, e.g. Russia-Ukraine conflict, Palestine - Israel conflict, the Situation in Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar conflict, Sudan Conflict between Sudanese Armed Forces and Paramilitary Rapid Forces, Syrian conflict, etc. Though the disputes are inter-country or internal civil war, but ultimately affect humanity in general.

III. BUDDHIST INSIGHT FOR WORLD PEACE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In the present era, man wants to exploit the natural resources for his own without caring for future generations. Hence, the concept of sustainable development emerged in the modern era. "Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."¹³ As man has become selfish and ignored the claims of future generations, it has resulted in conflict among individuals and nations. However, Buddha explained sustainable development through his teachings and sermons. Buddha appeals to common people to follow the path of "*Dhamma*" for sustainable development and world peace. He taught the world about peace and Non-violence. His discovery of the four noble truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*) is the essence of his Teachings.

- (1) Life inevitably involves suffering (*Dukkha saccā*),
- (2) Suffering originates in desires (*Samudaya saccā*),
- (3) Suffering will cease if all desires cease (*Nirodha saccā*),
- (4) Ceasing of desire is possible by engaging in the noble eightfold path (*Aṭṭhaṅgika Magga*).

As the cravings of man make him unhappy and the consequence is suffering, it is because of unwanted desires. However, Buddha stated that suffering will cease if all desires cease, and the ultimate answer to cease desire

¹¹ Article 37 (1) of the Charter, shall refer it to the Security Council.

¹² ICJ Reports 1986, p. 14, 145.

¹³ <https://www.iisd.org/mission-and-goals/sustainable-development>.

is to follow the eightfold path. Buddha suggested that Moral Purity is possible through Right Conduct or *Sīla*. The practice of *Sīla* forms a most fundamental aspect of the Buddha's teaching. It consists of the practice of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood to purge oneself of impure deeds, words, and thoughts. Together with the commitment of the Threefold Refuge, i.e., *Buddhaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi* – I take refuge in the Buddha; *Dhammaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi* – I take refuge in the *Dhamma* and *Saṅghaṃ Saraṇaṃ Gacchāmi* – I take refuge in the *Saṅgha*; a lay disciple observes the five precepts by making the following formal vow:¹⁴

- (1) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from killing.
- (2) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from stealing.
- (3) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from sexual misconduct.
- (4) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from telling lies.
- (5) I undertake to observe the precept of abstaining from alcoholic drinks, drugs, or intoxicants that cloud the mind

The five precepts are to be always observed by lay disciples. These observations of *Sīla* are the bedrock for living a sustainable life and serve as a foundation for the next stage of progress, *Samādhi* – purity of mind through concentration meditation.

To lead a good life for sustainable development, Mental cultivation for spiritual uplift consists of two steps. The first step is to purify the mind from all defilements and corruption and to have it focused on a single point. A determined effort (Right Effort) must be made to narrow down the range of thoughts in the wavering, unsteady mind. The attention (Right Mindfulness or Attentiveness) must be fixed on a selected object of meditation until one-pointedness of mind (Right Concentration) is achieved. In such a state, the mind becomes freed from hindrances, pure, tranquil, powerful, and bright. It is then advanced to the second step, by which *magga* insight and fruition may be attained to transcend the state of woe and sorrow.

IV. A REVIEW OF WORLD PEACE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Maintenance of International Peace and Security is the primary object of the United Nations. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibition the use of force. It clearly says, "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations." This paragraph is comprehensive in its reference to 'threat or use of force', and it will be suggested subsequently that one of the principal exceptions - the reservation of the right of individual and collective defense in Article 51 - should be given a narrow interpretation. The other principal exception, action authorized by an organ of the United Nations.

¹⁴ U Ko Lay, *Essence of Tipitaka*, Vipassana Research Institute Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri, 2014, p. 28.

The obligation of Article (2), paragraph 4, is complemented by paragraph 3 of the same Article, which provides that members shall settle their disputes by peaceful means, and Chapter VI of the Charter on 'Pacific Settlement of Disputes', particularly by Article 33.¹⁵

Article 33 is very important and says that the parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall first, seek a solution by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements or other peaceful means of their own choice.

The object of the U.N. Charter is to be achieved with the help of United Nations Organs. The functioning of these organs is as under.

4.1. General assembly

The Charter of the United Nations grants broad rights to the General Assembly to consider any issues within the scope of the Charter and to make recommendations to both Member States and the Security Council. Till today, under Chapter IV of the Charter, the General Assembly has engaged in a wide range of peace and security-related activities: the deployment of mediators, the establishment of peace operations, the mandating of special envoys, recommendations for the use of force or sanctions and the creation of accountability mechanisms such as fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry.

4.2. The Security Council

The Security Council has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It has 15 Members, including five permanent members, and each Member has one vote. Under the Charter of the United Nations, all Member States are obligated to comply with Council decisions. The Security Council can call upon the disputant parties to settle their disputes through peaceful means. The Security Council sometimes authorises the use of force to restore or maintain international peace and security.

4.3. Economic and social council

The Economic and Social Council is the principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue, and recommendations on economic, social, and environmental issues, as well as implementation of internationally agreed development goals. It is the United Nations' hub for contemplation, discussion, and groundbreaking ideas on sustainable development.

4.4. The international court of justice

The principal judicial organ of the United Nations plays a crucial role in the international legal system. Its primary function is to adjudicate legal disputes submitted to it by states, ensuring that these disputes are resolved by established principles of international law. Furthermore, the Court provides advisory opinions on legal questions, offering its expertise and interpretation of

¹⁵ Ian Brownlie, *International Law and The Use of Force by States*, Oxford, 1963, p113.

international law to authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies when requested. In addition to its other functions, the International Labour Organization (ILO), a significant specialized agency of the United Nations, is dedicated to advancing social justice and internationally recognized human and labor rights. The ILO actively pursues its founding mission, which asserts that social justice is fundamental to achieving universal and lasting peace. It has worked to provide social justice to millions across the globe hence also been awarded the Nobel Prize.

4.5. Historic importance of arbitration

In today's era, we are following Arbitration as a mechanism to resolve disputes. So far as the U.N. Charter is concerned, it has provision for settlement of disputes through Arbitration. Before that, the League of Nations also made provisions for the settlement of disputes through Arbitration before waging war. It is noteworthy that even before his enlightenment, Prince Siddhattha, the future Buddha, advocated for the resolution of disputes through arbitration. Eight years after joining the Śākya Saṅgha, a conflict arose between the Śākya and Koliya states concerning the distribution of water from the Rohini River. The Shakya commander intended to launch a war against the Koliyas. Gautama, however, vehemently opposed this course of action, asserting that war would not resolve the issue but instead would only generate further conflict and sow the seeds of future wars. He proposed a solution whereby the Śākya and Koliya states each select two representatives; these four individuals would then jointly select a fifth person to act as an arbitrator and settle the dispute.¹⁶ This demonstrates that even prior to his enlightenment, the Buddha was a staunch opponent of war and a strong proponent of peaceful dispute resolution through arbitration.

Historical accounts indicate that a righteous and sagacious monarch should conquer the four directions through virtuous conduct and the diligent fulfillment of their responsibilities. The *Buddhacarita* (Taisho, Vol. 17, p. 515a) specifically praises King Suddhodana, the father of Sakyamuni, for overcoming his adversaries through benevolent actions, eschewing warfare entirely. To prevent the outbreak of conflict, a strategy outlined in the *Dhammasaṅcaya Sutta* suggests: "Even if an army of another country should invade and plunder, a king should know first whether his soldiers are brave or cowardly, and then conclude peace by means of expediency."

Maintaining peaceful negotiations between two territories always presents challenges requiring resolution. The realization of such ideals is essential. Buddhist philosophy posits that conflict, intolerance, and disharmony stem from desire, hatred, and ignorance. Cultivating shared values and universal ethics is paramount to fostering confidence, tolerance, and harmony. Consequently, promoting education, dialogue, and social and economic development contributes to the sustainable development of global peace. The Buddha embraced teachers from

¹⁶ Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taipei, Taiwan, p. 24 - 25.

other religions, yet he never sought to convert anyone or encourage a change in their beliefs, traditions, or spiritual guides. This inclusivity is evident throughout the *Pāli Canon*, which records instances where wandering ascetics, sophists, and philosophers engaged with the Buddha, discussing and exchanging diverse perspectives on spiritual practice and liberation.¹⁷

The Buddha emphasized the importance of *ahimsā* and condemned *himsā* (killing). However, he acknowledged that violence might be a necessary last resort to prevent the destruction of good by evil. While *ahimsā* was a fundamental teaching of the Buddha, it was not absolute. He advocated for overcoming evil with good but never condoned allowing evil to triumph over good. Similarly, the United Nations Charter permits the use of force in self-defense if a state is attacked by another state. The inclusion of collective self-defense as an exception to the prohibition on the use of force is crucial for maintaining global peace and security.

4.6. Sustainable development

The 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development serves as a comprehensive plan of action designed to improve the lives of people, protect the planet, and foster prosperity. It also aims to strengthen global peace and expand freedom for all. The Agenda acknowledges that eliminating poverty in all its forms and manifestations, including extreme poverty, constitutes the most significant global challenge and is an essential prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. It is expected that all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. A comprehensive action plan has been adopted to liberate humanity from the oppression of poverty and deprivation and to restore and safeguard our planet. We are firmly committed to undertaking the bold and transformative actions urgently required to steer the world onto a sustainable and resilient trajectory. In this shared endeavor, we vow that no individual will be left marginalized or forgotten. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social, and environmental.¹⁸

The Sustainable Development Goals encompass a comprehensive agenda for global improvement, detailed as follows:

Goal 1. Aims to eradicate poverty in all its forms worldwide.

Goal 2. Strives to eliminate hunger, ensure food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

¹⁷ https://archives1.dailynews.lk/2017/05/12/features/115666/buddhist-contribution-world-peace-and-sustainable-development#google_vignette.

¹⁸ <https://sgds.un.org/2030agenda>.

Goal 3. Focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4. Seeks to guarantee inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for everyone.

Goal 5. Dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

Goal 6. Aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Goal 7. Ensures access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all people.

Goal 8. Promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

Goal 9. Focuses on building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and fostering innovation.

Goal 10. Seeks to reduce inequality within and among countries.

Goal 11. Works towards making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Goal 12. Aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Goal 13. Calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14. Focuses on conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.

Goal 15. Prioritizes the protection, restoration, and promotion of the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainable forest management, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation, and halting biodiversity loss.

Goal 16. Promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provides access to justice for all, and builds effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Goal 17. Strengthens the means of implementation and revitalizes the global partnership for sustainable development.

If we look at the Sustainable Development Goals, it reveals that poverty, health, hunger, equality, sanitation, water, peace, etc, are the subjects on which Buddha has explained in his teachings to balance these issues to live a sustainable life. If we had given due importance to these teachings by following them in our societies, there need not be any requirement to make any kind of Agenda for achieving it. Buddha's teaching is instrumental in achieving sustainable goals. For hunger, Dhammapada Verse 203 says:

"Jighacchāparamā rogā, saṅkhāraparamā [saṅkāra paramā (bahūsu)] dukhā; Etaṃ ñatvā yathābhūtaṃ, nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ."

Hunger is the greatest disease. Aggregates are the greatest ill. Knowing this as it really is, (the wise realize) *Nibbāna*, bliss supreme.

Similarly, regarding 'Health' Dhammapada stated in a verse 204, that

“Ārogyaparamā lābhā santuṭṭhiparamaṃ dhanam
Vissāsaparamā nāti nibbānaparamaṃ sukham.”

Health is the highest gain. Contentment is the greatest wealth. The trusty are the best kinsmen. *Nibbāna* is the highest bliss.¹⁹

To deal with the issues of sustainable development goals, *Dhammapada* mentions the teachings of Buddha. The ethical guidelines are given for humanity to live a better life. To live happily, the Buddha proposed the four types of happiness for a householder partaking of sensuality (*Gihī kāma-bhogī*): 1) the happiness of possessing wealth by just and righteous means (*atthi-sukha*), 2) the happiness of using wealth liberally on family, friends and meritorious deeds (*bhoga sukha*), 3) the happiness of debt-free (*anaṇa sukha*), that is, to be free from debts, and 4) the happiness of blamelessness (*anavajja-sukha*) to live a faultless and pure life without committing evil in thought, word, and deed. They are the happiness in Buddhism, which every Buddhist should work hard and endure to obtain.²⁰ “The Buddha suggested a financial strategy to succeed in economics in this very life such as: 1) the accomplishment of persistent (*uṭṭhāna-sampadā*), 2) the accomplishment of watchfulness (*ārakkha-sampadā*), 3) good friend (*kalyāna mittatā*) and balance livelihood (*sammā-jīva*). When the four parts of economic strategy are fulfilled, both business and economics will be turned up. This is the evidence of how the Buddha focused on economic development.”

According to Buddha, individuals are accountable for their happiness and suffering (*dukkha*). Therefore, he advocates for ethical conduct within society, achievable through adherence to the five precepts, the eightfold path, and the ten *pāramī* (moral principles). He asserted that attachment or craving for material possessions leads to unhappiness, while virtuous actions (*kamma*) yield positive results in this life. Buddha never speaks about Heaven or Hell. According to Him, our deeds will give results in the present life only: “The relationship between Buddhist enlightenment and the central moral concept of *kamma* is historically complex and invariably important. From the earliest Buddhist writings forward, it is maintained that only those who live lives of a certain karmic quality approach the status of enlightenment. Those whose *kamma* has not been assiduously cultivated are thought to be incapable of even forming an authentic “thought of enlightenment,” much less living up to it. On the other hand, it is often the case in Buddhist thought that the concept of *kamma* is set in juxtaposition to the attainment of enlightenment. Those few who attain the highest status of awakening no longer accrue *kamma*, it is claimed; they live in a reality beyond the tragic gravitational pull of karmic action and repercussion.”²¹

¹⁹ Anandjyoti bhikkhu, *Dhammapada* Dhamma Verses, p. 85.

²⁰ Kittisaro, K. & Dammithsara, N., *Buddhist Sustainable Development*, Global Interactive Journal of World Religions and Cultures Volume 1 No. 1. 2021.

²¹ Wright, D.S., *What is Buddhist Enlightenment?*, Oxford University press 2016, p. 73.

“Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo
 sandiṭṭhiko akāliko
 ehipassiko
 opanayiko
 paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhīti.”²²

Bhagwan’s words are said to be ‘well-spoken’, as asserted in the canonical verse: “The Dhamma is well spoken by the Bhagwan, visible here and now, timeless, inviting one to come and see, leading forward, and to be experienced by the wise for themselves” (Mi.37; A.iii.285). It asserts that the Buddha teaches a teaching beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle, and beautiful in the end with meaning and phrasing, and makes known the entirely perfect and pure religious life.” Buddhism is based on rationality.²³ It is not like other religions or philosophies wherein things are obeyed for fear of God. Hence, Buddha stated that: “Do not believe in traditions merely because they have been handed down for many generations and in many places; do not believe in anything because it is rumoured and spoken of by many; do not believe because the written statement of some old sage is produced; do not believe in what you fancied, thinking that because it is extraordinary, it must have been implanted by a deva or a wonderful being. After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.”²⁴

V. CONCLUSION

In the present-day world, many religions and ideologies are in existence. Everyone is teaching about love, compassion, peace, etc. However, man has lost his senses in the technological era and is running from pillar to post in search of happiness and inner peace. All kinds of cravings result in selfishness, stress, and hatred and ultimately tend towards sorrow. Hence, Bhagwan Buddha’s four noble truths are the essence of sorrow in the world as well, and they pave the way to eliminate the sorrow. To overcome it, Buddha suggested the observation of *pañcasīla* (Five Precepts) as well as the Eightfold Path for one’s satisfaction as well as benefit of humanity. Buddha added ten paramitas to strengthen karmic behaviour. If we follow His teachings, then only individual peace, as well as the establishment of world peace, is possible.

The United Nations was established to maintain international peace and security in the world. Its Organs and specialised agencies are devoted to the said cause. However, it seems that the State Parties sometimes neglect the instructions of the United Nations and indulge in disputes and war. It resulted in violations of human rights.

²² *Dhammaguṇa, Saṃyutta-nikāya.*

²³ Maria Heim, *Voice of The Buddha- Buddhaghosa on the Immeasurable Words*, Oxford University Press, p. 223.

²⁴ P. Lakshmi Narasu, *The Essence of Buddhism*, Buddha Bhumi Prakashan, Nagpur, 2017, p. 21.

In these circumstances, the Teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha are like a lighthouse in the ocean for all human beings and the State to live in a friendly and healthy manner to achieve the desired goal of Peace in society and sustainable development for a happy and vibrant universe. Dhammapada verse 201 is noteworthy to conclude, it says: "Victory breeds hatred. The defeated live in pain. Happily, a peaceful life, giving up victory and defeat."

Jayaṃ veraṃ pasavati dukkhaṃ seti parājito

Upasanto sukhaṃ seti hatmā jayaparājayaṃ.

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BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS ARE AN EXCELLENT PHILOSOPHY FOR GLOBAL HARMONY

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Abstract:

Man's excessive greed has brought the world to such a situation where there is a danger of destruction. Peace, altruism, and harmony are vanishing from human life. The contractors of all religions, rulers, sects, faiths, etc. have set up shops of peace and harmony everywhere where there is altruism and harmony in appearance, but at their core, there is hatred and animosity towards others. To take the society out of such a ritualistic environment, Tathagata Buddha's Dhamma philosophy seems to give the right path to the world. Gautam Buddha is the Tathagata Buddha who teaches the world compassion, kindness, forgiveness, hatred for sinful deeds, freedom from love-hatred, peace, and goodwill, and tells what sorrow is and what is the remedy for its elimination. The teachings of Tathagata Buddha and his practical life have such an impact on the human world that a wicked person like Aṅgulimāla bowed down before him and started walking on the path of goodwill. The complete knowledge of Tathagata Buddha is contained in the Buddhist literature *Tripitaka*, the Dhammapada, and the Jataka tales. Tathagata Buddha said that there is only sorrow in the world. The period from birth to death is full of sorrows. Maya, attachment, jealousy, love-hatred, bitterness, narrow-mindedness, etc., are non-human behaviors that give rise to unrest in human behavior. Their destruction is possible through the Eightfold Path. Unrest leads to revolution and revolution leads to destruction, while peace and goodwill are life-enhancing, and this tendency paves the way for proper development. Today, every person in the world who is moving towards proper development through peace and goodwill wants to find solutions to their problems through the path of Buddha and not war. Our subject of reference is to investigate how effective the thoughts of Tathagata Buddha are for world peace.

Keywords: *Tathagata Buddha, eightfold path, peace, goodwill.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tathagata Buddha was born in India. Who is Tathagata Buddha, and what is his religion is a matter of great discussion. In the Buddha Charitra, Siddharth Gautam Buddha is called Tathagata Buddha. Siddharth Gautam was the son of the ancient Magadh King Shuddhodhan, who attained enlightenment and was called Tathagata Buddha. After gaining knowledge of the power of controlling the mind, suffering, and the path to its prevention, Siddharth Gautam was called Tathagata Buddha. In Tathagata Buddha, Tathagata and Buddha are two meaningful words, of which Tathagata is a word in the Pali language. In Buddhist literature Tripiṭaka Pali Canon, the word Tathagata has been used for Gautam Buddha or other Buddhas. Yathachari or Tathachari are synonyms of Tathagata, whose literal meaning is exactly the way it has been implemented. The word Buddha has been used for such a Shastra who has attained Samyak Gyan. The principles that Tathagata Buddha implemented in his life and attained Nirvana, the same principles became his religion, and in Buddhist literature, it has been called Dhamma.

II. DISCUSSION

At the time of the Tathagata Buddha, there were the Brahmin and Jain religions in India. The religious philosophy of both was theistic. The followers of both believed that only God is the liberator of life. People who believed in Ishwar Dharma used to perform Puja-Paath, Yagya rituals, religious ceremonies, etc., to please their God for attaining salvation in life, while the followers of Jainism followed the *Triratna*,¹ such as Samyak Gyan, Samyak Darshan, and Samyak Charitra. The Brahmin religion believed that by offering sacrifices in Yagyas, performing religious rituals, etc., God or deities are pleased and the Yajaman attains salvation. The right to participate in or get the Yagya or religious ritual performed was of the upper three classes. It was considered a sin for Shudras, women, and Chandalas to participate in religious rituals; the priests used to call it divine law. Shudras and Chandalas had to suffer severe punishment for violating divine law. In the sixth century B.C., Indian society was classified into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, and Chandalas. The Brahmin religion and the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were the owners of wealth and land, and the rest of the society were slaves or servants. Slaves and Shudras were not entitled to salvation in the Brahmin religion.

In the sixth century B.C., many pioneers of the era were born in many countries of the world. Surprisingly, they were unknown to each other, but their thoughts were similar. The names of the great saints Confucius and Lao-Tse of China, Zarathustra of Iran, Pythagoras of Greece, Mahavir Swami, Tathagata Buddha, etc. of India are mentioned in history. These pioneers of the era spread the knowledge gained from their hard penance for the welfare of mankind in the world, which became the philosophy of life with the change of time. For example, Confucius propounded Confucianism, Zarathustra propounded Mazdayasnian and Daivasnianism, Pythagoras propounded

¹ Three jewels.

polytheism², Mahavir Swami propounded theism or Jinism, and Tathagata Buddha propounded rationalism or realism. This principle or philosophy of life is established in the world society today as a religion.

The Realism of Tathagata Buddha is a great religious philosophy among contemporary religious philosophies, whose relevance is worldwide. Except for Tathagata Buddha, all the contemporary religious founders of Buddhism have accepted the existence of God. According to theists, God is omnipotent, creator of the universe, and giver of salvation, whereas Tathagata Buddha, denying the existence of God, propounded atheism and also said that salvation can be achieved by the method of stopping suffering.

Study reveals that just before the birth of Tathagata Buddha, the entire society of China, Iran, Greece, and India was divided into four to six classes. Chinese society was divided into four classes of government (elite), society (farmers), education (craftsmen), and family (business). Through the Confucian system, any social class could go into the elite class. The elite class had special privileges, and along with this, slave service was made hereditary. The Confucian system kept the influence of the elite class under control, due to which the economic inequality between different classes remained narrow. More than half of the population of China did not believe in any religion. The philosophy of Confucianism and Tao-Tse was not religious. The principles of Confucianism included a worldview, social ethics, scholarly tradition, reverence for ancestors in their behavior, and human-centered religiosity. There is no mention of God in Chinese religious philosophy. There were four classes in the social structure of Greece: slaves, metics, women, and citizens, but there was social mobility among them. There was a democratic government in Greece around 460 BC, of which there is historical evidence. The age of superannuation to become a citizen was 18 years. The religion of the Greeks was Pythagoreanism, and their philosophical tradition was Pythagoreanism³. There is no mention of God in Chinese and Greek religious philosophy. At the time of Buddha's birth, Iran did not have a social structure like the Indian society, but in India, except Buddhism, all the sects/religions agreed on theism of the Iranian religion. Zoroastrian philosophy of Zarathustra is monotheistic. Zoroastrians consider Ahura Mazda as their supreme deity and the creator of the universe. Yima, or the king, acted as the representative of Ahura Mazda, who destroyed Ahriman and infused a good soul into humans. At the time of Buddha's birth, Indian society was divided into many castes such as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Along with the lack of social mobility among the various castes, the feeling of high and low among castes was a natural thing. The elite class had control over wealth, land, and governance powers, and the division of wealth and governance powers among the castes was systematic.

² Charles H. Kahn (2001). *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*. Hackett Publishing. p. 21. ISBN 978-1-60384-682-0.

³ Charles H. Kahn (2001). *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*. Hackett Publishing. p. 21. ISBN 978-1-60384-682-0.

The king and his close priestly class acted as the representatives of God in human society and had the power to determine punishment and all judicial powers. On one hand, he was preparing the legal basis for making the upper class system of India strong and permanent, on the other hand, he was frightening the labourers and independent farmers with false and hypocritical stories related to God to make them live in slavery, bondage and helplessness, which was the main reason for unrest in the society.

The entire knowledge philosophy of Tathagata Buddha is centered on human life and the sufferings affecting his life, and the prevention of suffering. While giving the true philosophy of life, Buddha told the bhikshus in Srushipatan that birth is suffering, death is suffering, disease is suffering, destruction is suffering, meeting with the unpleasant is suffering, and separation from the beloved is suffering. That is, suffering is true. The experience of making life sad is suffering. According to yoga practice, suffering is a type of distraction of the mind that causes disturbance in meditation. In other literature, three types of suffering are described: first, spiritual suffering, second, supernatural suffering, and third, physical suffering. Sorrow is not a permanent phenomenon of life, rather, it is the result of some unpleasant actions. Sorrow of the mind is spiritual sorrow. Sorrow of the body is physical sorrow. Whereas the sorrow of karma is supernatural. The nature of sorrow, the cause of sorrow, the removal of sorrow, and the method of removal of sorrow can be understood through the four noble truths. The four noble truths are the basic principles of Buddhist philosophy. According to the Majjhima Nikaya,⁴ detachment, destruction of desires, end of sorrows, mental peace, knowledge, wisdom, and nirvana are possible in life through the principle of the noble truth. In the Pali language, these are called Chattari Ariyascaani. Four Noble Truths according to the Pali Canon-

1- Dukkham Ariyaschaam (Suffering is true) - There is suffering in the world.

2- Dukkhasamudayam Ariyaschaam (The cause of suffering is true) - There is a cause of suffering.

3- Dukkhanirodham Ariyaschaam (Suffering cessation is true) - There is a cure for suffering.

4- Dukkhanirodhagamani Patipada (The path of suffering cessation is true) - The method of cure for suffering is the Eightfold Path.

Dukkham Ariyaschaam: According to Tathagata Buddha, life is full of suffering. Everything in the world is temporary. The coming or going of someone in life, meeting, or being affected, is suffering. Disease is suffering, physical deterioration is suffering. The coming and meeting of unpleasant people in life causes suffering to the mind. When a person with pure conduct meets an evil tendency or a Kaliki, the mind becomes sad. Leaving, getting lost, leaving being affected by a loved one is also suffering. Death causes pain to everyone, the

⁴ Majjhima Nikaya -The Middle-length Discourses. <https://www.accesstoinight.org/tip-itaka/mn/index.html>

survivor becomes homeless due to this event, which is suffering. The purpose of the concept of suffering is not just to express a negative viewpoint in Dhamma philosophy, but it is a practical viewpoint that sees the human world in its true form and tries to improve it. Suffering and happiness are two such aspects of life that remain as an alternative form of life. In Buddhist philosophy, the concept of happiness has not been denied, but it has been accepted here as ephemeral. Tathagata Buddha also described happiness as sorrowful, he said that there is pain in attaining pleasant experiences. Buddha does not stop even after saying this; he goes further and says that even if one gets the thing that represents a pleasant experience, the fear of losing it and its worry always remain in the mind, which is suffering. Three forms of suffering are described in Sankhya philosophy. In the first type of suffering, there is an absence of happiness. In this, the person suffers physical or mental pain. Viparinama Dukh is the second type of Dukh, This Dukh occurs when someone was happy earlier but is not happy now, for example, the end of a happy situation and death is Dukh. The third type of Dukh is the short-term Dukh; birth, old age, illness, and death are examples of this, it affects all living beings.

That is, every person in the world is afraid of the thought of death; they remain sad thinking that they will die one day or the other. There is no such place in the known world till now where he can live and escape death, there is a shadow of sorrow in every moment of life. A person has to struggle not only with disease, body defects, etc., but also to maintain his existence. Therefore, where there is struggle, there is sorrow. According to Buddha's saying, "The amount of tears shed by the unhappy people in the world is more than the water in the ocean." Buddha's first noble truth has been accepted by most of the philosophers of India.

Dukkhasamudaayam Ariyashcha: Explaining to the monks about the community of sorrow, Tathagata Buddha says that there is a reason for the coming or creation of an object in the world, hence it is also the reason for suffering. Buddha has propounded the theory of cause and effect to explain the cause of suffering. The theory of cause and effect is called Pratityasamutpada. In the theory of cause and effect, it is said that in the presence of one, the other is created, just as there is a mutual relationship between a lamp and the flame; here, the lamp is the cause and the flame is the effect. According to Pratityasamutpada, there is not one but many causes of suffering; excessive desire, birth, death, disease, and ignorance are at its root. Tathagata Buddha called suffering as old age and death, and said that its cause is caste. Taking birth again and again is a caste. This tendency of taking birth is called Bhava. The cause of Bhava is Upaadaan. This type of attachment to worldly things is called Upaadaan. Buddha has considered desire as the cause of material things, and desire is the root of suffering. It is because of desire that man blindly runs towards worldly things. When the cause is attained, desire increases, and on the contrary, in the absence of the cause, pain arises. The cause of pain is ignorance, which is the root cause of suffering. Tathagata Buddha did not tell the cause of ignorance; that is, he is silent on the cause of ignorance. Desire

is called the community noble truth, and destroying all the parts of desire is called the Niroddha noble truth. All the creatures of the materialistic world are becoming subject to desire. Desire is a human deformity due to which there is a possibility of unrest and deterioration of goodwill in society and the world community. Under Pratityasamutpad,⁵ 12 causes of suffering have been mentioned- 1. Birth 2. Being 3. Production 4. Craving 5. Pain 6. Touch 7. Sensation 8. Name and form 9. Science 10. Sanskar 11. Ignorance and 12. Physical, mental, old age, disease, etc.

Dukkhanirodham Ariyaschaam: Tathagata Buddha said that the elimination of suffering is possible. The direction of work is determined based on the cause, so if the causal tradition is stopped, then the work will automatically end because work is in the sense of stopping or eliminating. Buddha has considered ignorance to be the root of suffering. If ignorance is stopped by knowledge, then suffering is stopped. Stopping suffering by knowledge is called Nirvana. Nirvana is also called Moksha. Tathagata Buddha said that man can achieve Nirvana in this very life. Nirvana does not mean the end of life, but achieving such a state in the lifetime in which there is happiness and eternal peace. A man achieves the state of Nirvana by conquering the passion, hatred, infatuation, attachment, ego, and fear that are inside him. Buddha says that even after attaining Nirvana, if a man gets bound by karma, then such karma of his will create the world, and at the same time, he will remain free from the cycle of birth and death. Buddha has described two types of karma, out of which the first karma is that which remains free from passion, hatred, and attachment, Chitta karma, and the second binds all human beings with friendship, it is called Asavat karma.

The Tathagata Buddha is silent on the form of Nirvana, hence, scholars are not unanimous on the meaning of Nirvana. Supporters of the emotional view have said that Nirvana means coolness. According to some scholars, Nirvana means the cooling of the fire of desire and sorrow. According to Royce Davids, "Nirvana is similar to the sinless peaceful state of mind which can best be described as purity, complete peace, divinity, and wisdom. There are three benefits to man by attaining Nirvana. Nirvana ends all sufferings, the cycle of birth and death ends, man becomes free, and the whole life of man passes in nectar-like bliss. Buddha has said in Ratnakutasutra: Nirvana is achieved by the destruction of attachment, hatred, and delusion."⁶

Dukkhanirodhangamini Patipada Ariyashcha: What is the method of ending suffering, or what is called Dukkhanirodhangamini Patipada? The methods of eliminating the causes due to which sufferings arise are called Dukkhanigamini Patipada. Tathagata Buddha has called the path of ending

⁵ Bucknell, Roderick S. (1999), "Conditioned Arising Evolves: Variation and Change in Textual Accounts of the Paticca-samupadda Doctrine", *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 22 (2).

⁶ Pederson, K. Priscilla (1980). "Notes on the Ratnakūṭa Collection" in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 3 (2), 60 – 66.

suffering the Eightfold Path. By adopting the Eightfold Path, Buddha attained enlightenment. According to him, other people can also follow this path and attain nirvana, whether they are householders or ascetics. Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right non-living, right memory, right exercise, and right meditation are the eight sutras which are called the Eightfold Path. In the Eightfold Path, the word right is important, whose analysis of the word is “whole” or “all” or “complete” or “appropriate” while the analysis of the action is “well” or “completely”. The description of the eight sutras of the Eightfold Path and their correct order is as follows-

1- Right View: In Right View, the word similar to view is Darshan. Here, Drishti and Darshan mean to see, understand, or know, so Samyak Drishti means to see the object well, or understand the mind well, or know yourself completely, etc. That is, Samyak Drishti means to know or understand the qualities, characteristics, and nature of the object in the world as it is. Presenting exaggeratedly, twisting the matter, or not saying the right thing, etc., are the defects of Samyak Drishti.

2- Samyak Sankalp: In Dhamma literature, Samyak Sankalp means to pledge for mental and moral development. In other words, “firmness in decisions” is Sankalp. Tathagata Buddha has talked about such Sankalps, which are for mental and moral development. I will not steal, I will not lie, I will not commit adultery, I will not commit violence, I will not use intoxicants.

3- Samyak Vaani: The flow of words and language, which is sweet, soft, and controlled, is Samyak Vaani. Samyak Vaani includes: practising speaking the truth, practising speaking in a controlled and sweet manner, etc. There are two meanings in speech, truth and falsehood; trueness is the cause of stopping suffering and is by Dhamma, whereas falsehood is unpleasant and destructive. In Buddhist philosophy, four types of falsehood have been described, viz. 1- not speaking the truth, 2- speaking harsh words, 3- speaking meaningless words, and 4- speaking mean words.

4- Samyak Karma: Actions done with a pure mind, speech, and action which give happiness and peace to self and others are called Samyak Karma. In Pali literature, all types of skillful and unskillful actions have been divided into the following categories and explained, viz., skillful physical actions, skillful verbal actions, and skillful actions of the mind. Not committing violence (*praṇipāta veramani sikkhapadam samadhiyāmi*), not stealing (*adinnādāna veramani sikkhapadam samadhiyāmi*), and not committing adultery (*kāmesumikṣacharā veramāni sikkhavādāṃ samadhiyāmi*) are physically skillful actions. Among verbal skillful actions, there is a description of not telling lies, not gossiping (Moosavada Vermani Sikkhapadam Samadhiyami), not making pishunvacha, farusvacha, samphalapvacha. And the efficient actions of the mind include Abhigya, Avyapad, and Samyak Drishti. There is also a description of ten unskillful actions in the literature, and eliminating them is the right action.

5- Right livelihood: Living with the money earned by good conduct is called right livelihood. Livelihood is a means of human survival. It would be appropriate to call it karma or business, or trade. Tathagata Buddha has

prohibited the five trades for earning a livelihood. 1- Weapon trade, 2- Animal trade, 3- Meat trade, 4- Liquor trade, and 5- Poison trade. Apart from this, earning a livelihood through bad means like pressure, cheating, bribery, harassment, tyranny, fraud, robbery, ungratefulness, etc., has been condemned. This kind of business harms other beings and makes life painful.

6- Samyak Smriti: Being aware of the sensations coming into the mind and brain every moment and remembering the real form of things after knowing them is called Samyak Smriti. In the Pali language, the word “Sammāsati” comes from Samyak Smriti and “Sati” for memory. Sammāsati means right memory. It is special that the realization of memory is done by consciousness, apart from the mind and body. Consciousness takes itself to that state of witness where one can just observe the thoughts and feelings arising in the mind along with the ever-changing sensations of the body.

7- Samyak Vyayam: Exercise done to remove weakness of mind and disorders of mind is Samyak Vyayam. In Dhamma literature, the practitioner has been asked to stay away from all types of unskillful mental actions and engage in skillful mental actions. The act of controlling the senses and controlling bad feelings, and continuously maintaining the production of good feelings, is called Samyak Vyayam. Body and mind are kept fit and healthy by Samyak Vyayam, that is, it is the mind that inspires good or bad deeds. Here, the explanation of Chitta and the mind is the same. In Pali literature, Abhidhamma Pitaka, Samyak Vyayam has been described in four ways, such as 1- Samvar Pradhan, 2- Prahaan Pradhan, 3- Bhavana Pradhan, and 4- Anurakshan Pradhan. Samvar Pradhan: When a practitioner tries, works hard, or controls the mind for the non-production of unproduced sinful unskillful dharmas, such effort goes in vain. Such effort is called Samvar Pradhan Samyak Vyayam.

Prahaan Pradhan: When a practitioner desires, tries, or controls the mind for the removal of unproduced sinful unskillful karmas and does not accept the effort for all unskillful dharmas, it is called Prahaan Pradhan Samyak Vyayam.

Bhavana Pradhan: Such an effort of a practitioner in which he applies himself, desires, or tries for the production of unproduced skillful dharmas or moves towards it by controlling the mind is Bhavana Pradhan Samyak Vyayam.

Anurakshan Pradhan: When a practitioner desires and tries for the abundance and perfection of generated skillful dharmas or controls the mind for that purpose, it is called Anurakshan Pradhan Samyak Vyayam.

8- Samyak Samadhi: The stability of concentration of the mind is Samyak Samadhi. In this state, greed, lust, and unskillful deeds end, and the mind becomes pure. Four stages have been described to achieve the state of Samyak Samadhi-

First stage - In this state, the seeker calms the concentrated mind of the restless mind by contemplating on thoughts, love, happiness, and the four noble truths, and in the state of positivity, he joins the second stage.

Second stage - In this state, the mind of the seeker, with calm and concentration, gets absorbed in the depths of the four noble truths and experiences happiness. Along with this, the mind attains the third stage of meditation.

Third stage - In this state of Samyak Samadhi, happiness starts getting neglected from the mind of the seeker, and the memory gets purified. The fourth stage arises with the purification of memory. Fourth stage- In this stage, the mental tendencies of the seeker are completely controlled, the mind becomes peaceful, and wisdom is born. The state of a peaceful mind full of wisdom is Samyak Samadhi.

Reasons for the popularity of Buddhism: Buddhism is called the religion of humanity. At the time of Buddha's birth, many inhuman and complex religious rituals were prevalent in Indian society. Ashvamedha Yajna, Gau-Megh Yajna, Naravali Yajna, and blind faith in theism obstructed the proper development of society. Due to the decline in agriculture and trade, hunger and forced labour had taken a terrible form. The contemporary society needed such a miracle that could bring prosperity to human society by taking the society out of the inhuman tragedy of poverty, hunger, and forced labour. Tathagata Buddha was born in the form of humanity, he awakened humanity in society with his knowledge. From that time till now, the acceptance of Buddha and his Dhamma has increased so much in the minds of the people that today the whole world is moving towards Buddha. Along with the contemporary religious and social system, there were other reasons for the popularity of Buddhism such as; the influential personality of Tathagata Buddha, principle of equality, royal patronage, the role of the Bhikkhu Sangha and Buddhist musicians, the role of education centers, less expensive and simple principles of Dhamma, support of the newly developing economy, opposition to the inequitable Vedic rituals, contribution of foreign travelers etc.

Siddhartha Gautama was the son of a king who was called Tathagata Buddha after attaining enlightenment. His life was full of happiness, comfort, and luxury, but he used to focus his attention on the inhuman system of society and the poor and suffering. Due to this tendency, a special kind of affection was being developed in the people towards him. He was becoming such a jurist of the violent and inhuman system, due to which every problem of life and society ends peacefully. The dreaded dacoit Āṅgulimāla was influenced by his aura and changed his path, and from a dacoit he became a bhikkhu. The five-fold Brahmins accepted Buddha as their Guru at once. This is the personality of Tathagata Buddha.

Tathagata Buddha considered the entire human race as one family, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', and treated everyone equally. At the time of his birth, the entire Indian society was divided into many classes in the Brahmin caste system, between which there was a deep gulf of high and low. Tathagata Buddha connected all classes like Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, women, and Chandalas with his ideology and provided equal opportunities for them. He said that everyone can attain salvation through the path shown by me.

All the kings and emperors could not remain unimpressed by the constructive changes taking place in the Indian psyche due to the campaign of social transformation of Tathagata Buddha. The names of Magadh King Bimbisara and Ajatashatru, Kosala King Prasenjit, etc., can be taken who

accepted the principles of Buddha and protected them in their kingdom. Later, Emperor Ashoka, Kanishka, Harshvardhan, and Pal rulers protected Buddha and his religion and also spread Buddhism in many countries of the world, including India, such as Ceylon, Myanmar, Nepal, Cambodia, Bhutan, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Mongolia, Japan, Korea, etc.

After attaining enlightenment, Tathagata Buddha formed the Dhamma Sangha to spread his important thoughts among the people and sent the monks of the Sangha to different countries. Buddha first preached Dhamma to the five Brahmins of Sarnath and made them his disciples. Later, the ministers of Emperor Ashoka, who included his son Mahendra and daughter Sanghamitra, went to Ceylon, China, Japan, and many other countries of the world to spread Dhamma. Emperor Ashoka's ministers first became enlightened by the Buddha Dhamma, and only after that did they start spreading Dhamma.

The thoughts of Tathagata Buddha became so relevant for human life that they became part of the subject matter of many degree courses. In ancient times, centers of education like Nalanda, Takshila, Vikramshila, etc. were opened to spread Buddha's life principles among the common people. Students from all over the world used to come here to learn the language and Dhamma. After gaining knowledge from here, the learned scholars were engaged in the work of propagating Buddha's Dhamma in their own country and other countries, due to which the Buddha Dhamma education got widespread.

At the time of the emergence of Dhamma, the priests had a monopoly over the complex process of Vedic rituals and Yagya rituals in Indian society. Due to Bali Vidhan, the said rituals had taken a violent form, due to which agriculture and trade were moving forward, and doubt, anarchy, and restlessness were prevalent among the entire public. Tathagata Buddha gave an easy way to attain salvation in which violence has been completely prohibited. The followers of Buddha not only opposed the ancient Vedic rituals and traditions but also provided such a simple and easy Dhamma to the society in which any person could attain Nirvana without any caste distinction. In the Buddha Dhamma, good conduct has been considered the biggest capital of life, by following which a human can achieve the ultimate goal of life. The sixth century BC can be considered the century of economic development based on iron technology. Iron was a harder metal than bronze, and tools and agricultural implements were made from it. Economic development got a new dimension. Along with sea trade, agricultural work became easier. In this Iron Age, the track of economic development was being laid, along which the train of development policies had to run. The beliefs of the Vedic religion, like sea trade, loan system, security of personal property, urban life, etc., were against fast economic development, due to which the wheel of the train of economic development was not able to move. In such a transitional period of the economy, the economic philosophy of Tathagata Buddha established new beliefs in place of Vedic economic beliefs, such as encouragement of sea trade, system of interest and loan, protection of personal property, prohibition on violence, etc., which got state recognition.

Buddha's economic philosophy is based on the principle of simplifying the

desires of life, as opposed to the desire encouragement principle. According to Neville Karunatilake, "The foundation of the Buddhist economic system lies in the development of cooperative and harmonious efforts in collective life. Man has to develop and eliminate selfishness and the tendency of acquisition." Driving principle, right livelihood, shared prosperity, and sustainability are the main principles of Buddhist economic philosophy. Apart from this, Buddhist economics works with it to reach a common goal of social, personal, and environmental sufficiency.

Buddha's economic philosophy gave the rich a path they were looking for. Due to the ban on animal sacrifice, while animal power was available for agriculture and trade, the priests who performed the sacrificial rituals started being criticized. Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras rejected the opinion of the priests, due to which the Buddhist religion grew. It is said in Suttanipata that, influenced by Buddha's economic philosophy, rich Brahmins also started coming under the shelter of Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. The teachings of non-violent Buddhism were against imperialist wars, due to which it was accepted in other countries outside India.

Vedic religion is also called the priestly religion; its social outlook was based on inequality. The literature that establishes the principles of Vedic religion is called Vedic literature. Vedas, Puranas, Brahmins, Smritis, Upanishads, etc., are its texts, which are now called Hindu religious texts. In the sixth century BC, the Vedic religious system divided the Indian society into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Chandals, etc., and rituals were determined based on these classes. Shudras and Chandals were not allowed to participate in Vedic rituals or perform them. They were not entitled to attain salvation, due to which they opposed the Vedic religious system.

III. CONCLUSION

Foreign travellers have played an important role in making Buddhism a popular religion. Huen Tsan, Shantarakshit, and Fa Hien are the main foreign travellers who took Buddha and his teachings from India to other countries. Huen Tsan was a Chinese traveller who came to India, became a Buddhist monk, and learnt Dhamma⁷. After receiving education from the ancient Buddhist educational institution Nalanda University, Huen Tsan returned to his country, where, with the help of the emperor, he established a translation institute in the big city of Chang in China, which he named Jian. Here, he translated Buddhist philosophy into Chinese and wrote commentaries. These were published under the name of "Cheng Vaishi Lun". After the Chinese traveller Huen Tsan⁸, Fa Huan came to India to visit Buddhist pilgrimage sites. He took manuscripts of Buddhist literature from India to his country and wrote a book named "Fagyu Ji," in which he described Buddhist Dhamma

⁷ Garma C.C. Chang, trans. (1983). *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*. ISBN 978-0-271-03428-7

⁸ XUANZANG'S TRAVELS IN BIHAR (637 - 642 CE) - Google Arts & Culture. <https://encyclopediaofbuddhism.org/wiki/Xuanzang>

philosophy. In this way, the basic philosophy of Buddha and his Dhamma became worldwide. Buddha and his Dhamma are becoming more popular in the modern world.

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THE MEKONG RIVER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

The Mekong River flows through six countries, including China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. It is home to over 65 million inhabitants who are mainly poor fishermen living off the river fish catch, or poor farmers using the river water and rich silt to grow rice. Most residents are Buddhists from all traditions, and, hence, the Mekong is called “River of Buddhism”. Their daily life is constantly threatened by floods, deforestation, drought, pollution, as well as ill-planned development projects. The biggest threat to their livelihood is the gigantic hydroelectric dams in Yunnan Province and the smaller dams in the Lower Mekong. These projects cause serious economic and environmental consequences in downstream countries, such as reduced water flow, fish catch, and soil fertility. All these environmental effects are worsened by climate change in the coming years. It is estimated that 40% of the rich Mekong Delta in South Vietnam will be submerged by the year 2100. For sustainable development, several measures are proposed based on the principles of Buddhist economics that focus on the happiness and well-being of residents instead of GDP. Measures are discussed for all levels, from individuals to the government. In particular, full trust and cooperation between the peoples and countries are highly emphasized for a peaceful and sustainable future of the Mekong River.

Keywords: *Mekong River, sustainable development, Buddhist perspective, hydroelectric dams, climate change.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

From its origin in the high plateau of Tibet, the Mekong River is 4500 km long and the 12th longest river in the world, flowing through six countries that include China, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Throughout its long course, the river is known as Lancang in China, Mekong in Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand, and finally as the River of Nine Dragons (Sông Cửu Long) because it flows out to sea through nine estuaries in South Vietnam. True to its name (Mekong means Mother River in Laotian), the Mekong River is the lifeline to more than 65 million inhabitants, mainly in downstream countries of Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The majority of these inhabitants are Buddhists, and all three major Buddhist traditions are practiced: Theravāda in Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia; Mahāyāna in China and Vietnam; and Vajrayāna in Tibet. Hence, the Mekong is called the “River of Buddhism”. Most residents along the river are poor fishermen living off the river fish catch, or poor farmers using the river water and rich silt to grow rice. They also use the river as their principal means of transportation. In the next two decades, the number of basin inhabitants is expected to increase to over 100 million. Their daily life is constantly threatened by floods, deforestation, drought, pollution, as well as ill-planned development projects. The biggest threat to their livelihood is the gigantic hydroelectric dams in Yunnan Province and the smaller dams in the Lower Mekong. Moreover, the Chinese have cleared and enlarged the river as a navigation channel for large commercial boats, including oil transport vessels. These projects cause serious economic and environmental consequences in downstream countries, such as reduced water flow, fish catch, and soil fertility. All these environmental effects are worsened by climate change in the coming years, and they threaten the survival of the River of Buddhism¹. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has reported that 40% of the rich Mekong Delta in South Vietnam would be submerged by the year 2100, in which 55% of the local population, close to 20 million, will be directly affected². Since 2015, Buddhist leaders from various traditions have called attention to the dangers of climate change and have advocated for sustainable measures based on Buddhist teachings to minimize its impacts³. The remaining sections will explore in more detail the economic and environmental challenges facing the Mekong River and the Buddhist approach to its peaceful and sustainable development.

¹ Tran, Khanh T., 2015. Death of the Mekong, River of Buddhism. Presented at the 2015 United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) Conference, Bangkok, Thailand. <http://giaodiemonline.com/daitangvietnam/Cai-chet-cua-Mekong.pdf>

² UNDP, 2021. <https://www.undp.org/vietnam/55-mekong-delta-population-affected-climate-change-2100>

³ Plum Village, 2015. Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders. <https://plumvillage.org/articles/buddhist-climate-change-statement-to-world-leaders-2015>.

II. ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL EXPLOITATION

2.1. Hydroelectric dams



In the last thirty years, there has been an active program to build several dams for hydroelectric power on the Mekong River. As shown in the map, there are 26 dams on the mainstream, 14 on the Lancang River (the name of Upper Mekong in China) in the Yunnan Province, and 12 on the Lower Mekong. China has built a cascade of large dams on the Lancang, beginning with the Manwan in 1993, with an electrical output of 1500 MW. The Dachaoshan dam was completed in December 2002 with an output of 1350 MW, a height of a 30-story building, and a water reservoir of 88 km in length. Next was the Xiaowan dam, with an output of 4200 MW and a reservoir of 169 km in length and a cost

of 4 billion USD. This dam is the tallest in the world, with a height of 300 m, similar to a 100-story building. The largest and most expensive dam (about USD 10 billion) on the Mekong so far, the Nuozhadu, was completed in 2014 with a height of 261 m, a reservoir of 226 km long and an output of 5850 MW. At least eight other big dams are also planned by the Chinese.

Starting in 2006, feasibility studies have been conducted for 12 run-of-river dams in the Lower Mekong Basin. Among these dams, Xayaburi is considered to be the first mainstream dam located in Laos with an output of 1260 MW and a total investment of USD 3.5 billion. In October 2013, the Lao government notified the Mekong River Commission (MRC) of its decision to build the second mainstream dam, Don Sahong, with a small output of only 260 MW, with a height of 30m and a width of only 100m. These Lower Mekong dams are very small compared to the huge dams in Yunnan, yet their impacts are still significant, especially on fisheries as discussed below.

Furthermore, China has completed the dredging of the river and cleared the underwater rocks and rapids on a 300-km stretch of the river, from the Burmese-Chinese border to Laos, to facilitate travel by large boats. Commercial boats larger than 100 MT can travel from the port of Simao in Yunnan to other ports in neighboring countries. A risk analysis by MRC noted that the oil transport vessels pose severe dangers of oil spills, which can quickly devastate the entire Mekong ecosystem⁴.

Contrary to the findings of the builders, hydroelectric dams cause severe economic and environmental disasters, affecting the lives of millions in countries downstream. Mekong floods occur annually from June to October, and hundreds have lost their life. Most of the flood victims are children who

⁴ Mekong River Commission, 2012. Carriage, Handling and Storage of Dangerous Goods along the Mekong River – Volume 1: Risk Analysis.

die of drowning due to a lack of supervision by older members of their family. There are signs that the Yunnan dams have increased the flood intensity. With full water reservoirs, the dams have released excess water that further raising the floodwater level of the Mekong. Flood victims and damage to crops and homes have increased in recent years in Cambodia, Vietnam, and elsewhere.

During the dry season, the Mekong water level is markedly low because only the glaciers in Tibet and Yunnan remain the water sources. The average flow rate decreases from 50000 m³/s during the rainy season to only 2000 m³/s during the dry months. The dry season normally lasts from November to May. If the upstream dams do not release water because of drought or water needs of the reservoirs, serious consequences can occur downstream. All downstream countries will be affected by saltwater intrusion, and rice fields in many places will have to be abandoned because of saltwater or lack of water for growing crops.

In addition to changing the water levels and the natural cycles of the Mekong, water reservoirs at the dams retain the rich sediment. Lacking water and rich silt will render the rice fields downstream less fertile. Rice production will decrease drastically, especially in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. In the first ten years of operation, the annual mean sediment trapped by the Manwan Dam alone was estimated to be about 35% of the total sedimentation transported from the Lancang Basin to the Lower Mekong. The amount of rich silt may decrease up to 50% because of the dams. This will cause large crop losses since the Mekong Delta is the main rice-producing area of Vietnam. It accounts for 50% of the total annual production of 28 MT and 90% of the export of 7 MT. The delta also accounts for 60% of fish and seafood exports from Vietnam. This will affect millions of people in the Lower Mekong Basin and elsewhere, as far as Africa, due to reduced rice and fish exports.

While rice fields downstream lack the rich sediment, the dams in Yunnan are silted up. The rate of silt flowing into the Manwan dam has doubled compared to initial estimates. One of the reasons that the Chinese have used to justify the building of the Xiaowan dam is that this dam is upstream of the Manwan dam and, therefore, can reduce the amount of silt flowing into the Manwan dam. Nevertheless, the Xiaowan dam and all other dams will be filled with silt in the next few decades. All water reservoirs will become vast and useless wastelands! On average, the useful life of each dam will be shortened to about 20 years, compared to the initial estimate of 70 years.

With 1245 fish species, the Mekong is the second river in the world with the most fish species, just behind the Amazon in South America. Among these are rare species like the giant catfish weighing up to 300 kg and the river dolphin. Each year, about two million metric tons (MT) are caught in downstream countries. Lake Tonle Sap in Cambodia alone has produced 400000 MT. The Lower Mekong dams are small in terms of power output relative to the Chinese dams, yet their ecological effects may even be larger. The section of the Mekong at the Khone Waterfall, where the Don Sahong dam (with a tiny output of 260 MW) will be located, is considered the vital point of the entire ecosystem of

the Mekong basin. Right at the foot of the Khone Waterfall, one can find a congregation of the largest variety of freshwater fish not only in Southeast Asia but also in the whole world. Many independent fisheries experts conclude that the dam would have a serious impact on fish migration as the channel is the only one within the Khone Falls complex that is passable to migratory fishes in the dry season, and the major migration channel year-round.⁵ Of particular note are the risks to the survival of the Irrawaddy dolphins that only 85 are known to survive along this stretch of the river.

All the above dams modify the water levels, temperature, and cycles of the Mekong River. All these changes adversely affect the birth and growth of all fish species. Dredging the river also makes its water flow faster and causes the erosion of the river banks. Underwater rocks that are currently prime breeding sites for fish have been destroyed. Several fish species will disappear because they cannot adapt to the unnatural changes. Fishermen in several locations along the Mekong have already complained that their fish catch has drastically reduced in recent years. This is an adverse impact affecting the livelihood and health of millions of people in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, since fish is their primary source of protein.

The Chinese government initially stated that the Upper Mekong dams are to provide power and economic prosperity to the Yunnan Province, which is a relatively poor area. Contrary to this initial statement, electrical power generated by these dams is used by large cities and industries on the Eastern coast. Similarly, electricity from the Lao dams is to be sold to Thai users. In addition to the serious ecological effects shown above, dams and their reservoirs can cause earthquakes. They also emit large amounts of greenhouse gases, which cause global warming, mainly methane from decaying vegetation and soil. Methane is known to be about 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide (CO₂). According to scientific studies, e. g. those from the Brazilian National Institute for Amazon Research (INPA)⁶, a hydropower plant has a greater global warming impact per kWh than a coal-fired power plant! Costing about USD 10 billion, the new Nuozhadu dam only replaces 9 million tons of coal burned per year, a tiny amount compared to the 3 billion tons of coal used by China in 2010. Even the smaller Xayaburi dam is estimated to cost around USD 3.5 billion, a large financial investment for the small economy of Laos (2013 GDP is USD 11.14 billion). Thus, contrary to popular beliefs, HYDROPOWER IS EXPENSIVE and also NOT CLEAN! This important finding is consistent with a study completed in November 2000 by the World Commission on Dams⁶. This study has found that most big dam projects in the world have not resulted in any economic benefits when compared to the construction costs, the resettlement of people, and adverse environmental impacts.

⁵ International Rivers, 2007. Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Dams. <http://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/greenhouse-gas-emissions-from-dams-faq-4064>

⁶ INPA, 2008. Greenhouse gas emissions from Brazil's Amazonian hydroelectric dams

2.2. Climate change

Vietnam and neighboring countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand do not emit a significant amount of greenhouse gases, which cause climate change. Yet they suffer largely adverse impacts. The worst impacts happen in the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam⁷. It is one of the largest deltas in the world, currently home to 17 million people and supplying more than half of Vietnam's rice production. The region is facing several threats: some arise from ongoing climate change, and others from human activities in the delta or upstream. Global climate change will drive rising temperatures and precipitation changes in the delta, just as in other regions of Vietnam, but the very low elevation of the delta makes it a hotspot for another threat: rising sea level. Indeed, the average altitude of the delta is only about 80 cm above present sea level. Projections of future sea-level rise for the end of the century range between +24 cm to +84 cm, depending on the climate scenario, which means that large parts of the delta could fall below sea level by the end of the century, or even earlier, should worst-case scenarios of polar ice-sheet destabilization become reality.

However, in the short to mid-term, parts of the delta may fall below sea level not because of climate change but because of human activities in the delta. The delta is losing elevation at a rate much higher than global sea-level rise. Groundwater over-extraction is driving subsidence, which is the gradual lowering of the land surface because of sediment compaction. Subsidence rates can reach several centimeters per year in some places. The current rate of sea-level rise is about 3.6 mm/year, while the rate of subsidence reaches up to 5 cm/year.

In addition, the delta also faces increasing saline water intrusions in surface waters during the dry season, with negative impacts on agriculture and aquaculture. The phenomenon is mainly driven by riverbed level erosion, caused by sediment starvation from upstream dams and sand mining. In the coming decades, riverbed erosion will appear as the greatest factor that could drive large increases in saline water intrusions. In a worst-case scenario, areas affected by salt intrusion could increase by nearly 40% by midcentury, decreasing fresh water availability and the area suitable for rice cropping during the dry season. In these extreme scenarios, we found that about 140,000 ha (10%) of the current winter-spring rice cropping area would no longer be suitable for rice cultivation. It is estimated that 40% of the rich Mekong Delta will be submerged by the year 2100, in which 55% of the local population, close to 20 million, will be directly affected⁸.

2.3. Buddhist economics and sustainable development

The Mekong River is facing serious economic and environmental challenges that threaten its survival. These challenges are caused by economic

⁷ World Commission on Dams, 2000, Dams and Development, A new Framework for Decision-Making - Final Report. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CNpMrtQryIsd3yHH-vyCBaBRc1MBGGpVV/view>

⁸ UNDP, 2019. <https://www.undp.org/vietnam/adapting-mekong-delta-green-future>

development, such as upstream dams and environmental impacts of these dams, and climate change, such as frequent droughts and floods, sea level rise, and saltwater intrusion. Fortunately, Buddhism can offer clear and concise solutions to these problems as outlined below.

Conventional economics, especially in Western countries, encourage excessive consumption and development at all costs. Gross National Product (GNP) is used to measure progress. Buddhist economics, as opposed to conventional economic models, emphasizes well-being, simplicity, and sustainability over material accumulation and consumption. Instead of GNP, a Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index has been used in Bhutan to measure the happiness and well-being of its population⁹. This index is constructed based on 33 indicators covering nine GNH domains of human life, namely psychological well-being, health education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, cultural diversity, and living standards. The GNH framework values each of these domains equally, emphasizing their collective contribution to overall well-being and happiness”.

Buddhist economics is based on basic teachings such as the three poisons, the Middle Way, the Eightfold Noble Path, and the Dependent Origination. Its core principles include: Non-Attachment to Material Goods: Emphasizes the importance of reducing desire and attachment to physical goods. It's less about consumption and more about satisfaction.

1) Simplicity and Sufficiency: Encourages living simply and taking only what one needs. It rejects overconsumption and waste.

2) Human Well-being over Profit: Prioritizes the well-being and happiness of individuals over mere profit maximization. It's about quality of life, not just economic growth.

3) Interconnectedness and Mutual Aid: Recognizes the interconnected nature of all beings and encourages cooperation and mutual support within communities.

4) Sustainable and Mindful Use of Resources: Promotes the mindful use of natural resources, emphasizing sustainability and the protection of the environment.

In essence, Buddhist economics seeks a balance between material needs and spiritual well-being, advocating for an economy that nurtures both people and the planet. In 2015, Buddhist leaders from various traditions and organizations published a Declaration on Climate Change¹⁰. The Declaration

⁹ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2024. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/well-being-knowledge-exchange-platform-kep_93d45d63-en/bhutan-s-gross-national-happiness-gnh-index_ff75e0a9-en.html

¹⁰ Yale University, 2015. The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change. https://fore.yale.edu/files/buddhist_climate_change_statement_5-14-15.pdf

states, “Our present economic and technological relationships with the rest of the biosphere are unsustainable. To survive the rough transitions ahead, our lifestyles and expectations must change. This involves new habits as well as new values. The Buddhist teaching that the overall health of the individual and society depends upon inner well-being, and not merely upon economic indicators, helps us determine the personal and social changes we must make”. The above principles of Buddhist economics can be directly applied to the Mekong’s sustainable development strategies at all levels, from individuals, the community, to business and government¹¹.

As individuals, we should educate ourselves and fully understand the causes and effects of those economic and environmental problems (right understanding) through our best efforts (right concentration), intentions (right intent), and wisdom (right view). We should investigate the wasteful habits and practices in our own lives (right livelihood) and then apply the best solutions (right effort) and care for others and all forms of life on this planet (right mindfulness). In our daily life, we should commit to the 3R (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle) principle. Simple measures include replacing light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs, planting shading trees around the house for absorbing CO₂ and cooling effects, driving less, using public transportation more, riding a bicycle or walking whenever possible, and recycling newspapers and other materials. Eating less meat or becoming a vegetarian not only prevents the killing of animals but also reduces CO₂ from raising cattle and other farm animals. These simple measures are not only environment-friendly but also good money savers. They only require a minimal change in the existing lifestyle and are consistent with a simple and frugal lifestyle recommended by the Buddha. Finally, we have to realize that we live in an interdependent world where anyone’s actions, however small, will affect everybody else and the planet as a whole.

Similar to individuals, there are practical measures that a business can take to be a good corporate citizen, saving money while helping the environment. Given the high prices of energy, it makes good sense for every business to review its energy uses and improve its efficiency whenever possible. Old factories that use outdated technologies should be replaced with new ones that are more energy efficient and, hence, more profitable in the long run. A “benefit” of recent high oil prices is to make the costs of renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and biofuels more competitive.

In recent years, there have been efforts to minimize the use of fossil fuels that emit greenhouse gases. For individuals, electric vehicles are more readily available and gaining popularity. Renewable wind and solar plants offer good investment opportunities. Moreover, some sustainable initiatives have been

¹¹ Tran, Khanh T. et al., 2008. A Buddhist Perspective on Global Warming: Causes, Effects and Solutions. Presented at the 2008 United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) Conference, Hanoi, <https://daitangvietnam.giaodiemonline.com/A%20Buddhist%20Perspective%20on%20Global%20Warming.pdf>

adopted in the Mekong Basin:

1) Community-Based Fisheries Management: Several communities in the Mekong Delta have adopted sustainable fishing practices based on Buddhist principles. These include restricting fishing during breeding seasons, using eco-friendly fishing gear, and sharing resources equitably.

2) Organic Farming Initiatives: Inspired by the Buddhist practice of mindfulness and respect for all life forms, some farmers have shifted to organic farming. This reduces chemical use, preserves soil health, and produces healthier food.

3) Waste Management Programs: Local temples and Buddhist organizations have initiated waste reduction and recycling programs, encouraging communities to adopt more sustainable waste management practices.



Furthermore, the conflicts caused by the dams between upstream and downstream countries remind us of the dispute over water rights of the Rohini river between the Sakya and Koliya clans in Buddha's time. According to Dhammapada Chapter XV, Kapilavatthu, the town of the Sakyans, and Koliya, the town of the Koliyans, were situated on either side of the Rohini River. The farmers of both towns irrigated their fields from this river. One year, due to severe drought, their paddy and other crops were threatened, and the farmers on both sides wanted to divert the water from the Rohini River to their fields. Those living in Koliya wanted to divert and channel the water to irrigate their field. However, the farmers from Kapilavatthu protested that they would be denied the use of the water and their crops would be destroyed.

Both sides wanted the water for their use only, and as a result, there was much ill will and hatred on both sides. The quarrel that started between the farmers soon spread like fire, and the matter was reported to their respective rulers. Failing to find a compromise, both sides prepared to go to war.

The Buddha came to know that his relatives on both sides of the river were preparing for battle. For their well-being and happiness and to avoid unnecessary suffering, he decided to stop them. All alone, he went and appeared in the middle of the river. His relatives, on seeing him, laid aside all their weapons and paid homage to him. Then, the Buddha admonished them, "For the sake of some water, which is of little value, you should not destroy your lives, which are of so much value. Why have you taken this unwholesome course of action? If I had not been here today, your blood would have been flowing like this river by now. You are living with hatred, but I live free from hatred. You are ailing with moral defilements, but I am free from moral defilements. You are striving to develop selfishness and enmity, but I don't strive for the development of selfishness." Both sides then became ashamed of their foolishness, and thus,

bloodshed was averted¹².

Thus, governments can play a major and beneficial role in fighting climate change. Policies of “enlightened” leaders must be environment-friendly and for sustainable development. Forest deforestation should be strongly forbidden, and tree-growing programs should be encouraged. Clean coal technologies and renewable energies should be encouraged through research funding and economic incentives. It has been estimated that replacing some old and inefficient coal-fired power plants in China, which do not have any emissions control, can significantly reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. China has recently surpassed the US as the largest CO₂ emitter in the world, and thus, it will need to largely reduce its emissions.

Compared to China, the Lower Mekong countries do not emit significant amounts of CO₂. However, they should take measures to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases from the transportation sector, such as building mass transit, encouraging their use, raising vehicular mileage, and sponsoring the development of vehicles using alternative fuels such as electric, hydrogen fuel cells. They should build wind and solar power plants instead of coal-fired plants. All these measures will allow for a sustainable economic development while reducing air pollution in big Asian cities, and enhancing people’s health and welfare. They will also enhance national security through the reduction of imported oil and energy use¹³.

Moreover, conflicts created by dams between upstream and downstream countries can lead to serious disputes and even wars. Countries in the Lower Mekong should unite in applying pressure on Chinese authorities to properly regulate the flow of the Mekong, especially during the dry months, to minimize drought. Enlightened leaders should work together through international organizations such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC) to balance the economic interests and environmental impacts of all countries. The MRC has several key initiatives for promoting sustainable management:

1) Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM): It’s a holistic approach ensuring that water resources development is sustainable across various sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and hydropower.

2) Sustainable Hydropower Development: The MRC developed a basin-wide strategy to ensure that hydropower projects are environmentally and socially responsible.

3) Trans-boundary Cooperation: Countries work together to monitor and manage the river sustainably, addressing challenges such as flood and drought forecasting.

¹² Suttanta, 2000. The Dispute over Water. <https://suttanta.tripod.com/khuddhaka/dhammapada/dha156.html>

¹³ Tran, Khanh T., 2014. Beyond Coal Campaign: A NGO/Grassroots Movement to Stop Global Warming. Presented at the 2014 United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) Conference, Hanoi, Vietnam.

Currently, MRC does not have enforcement authority, and it should be given regulatory powers to be effective. Thus, environmental impacts from dam construction and other economic development should be minimized, and their assessment should consider their impacts on downstream countries. The assessment should include the participation of affected communities and also be made public. Only in this manner can total cooperation between countries create a harmonious and peaceful environment for all citizens.

III. CONCLUSION

Sustainable development in the Mekong Basin is necessary for the river's survival and the well-being of millions of its inhabitants. By drawing on the rich traditions of Buddhism, the region can develop in a way that respects both people and the planet. The principles of Buddhist economics offer a holistic approach that can guide the Mekong River towards a more sustainable and peaceful future. This bright future is threatened by adverse economic and environmental challenges. The governments, private sector, academia, development partners, and communities, as well as individuals, all need to take urgent action. Only through coordinated joint action and full cooperation will it be able to build a system of environmental protection and sustainable development in which nobody in the Mekong is left behind!

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BUDDHIST TEACHINGS IN STRENGTHENING AND REINFORCING INTERRELIGIOUS UNITY

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Abstract:

This article provides an understanding of the Buddhist concept of strengthening religious harmony. Inter-religious harmony is a condition in which all religious groups can live together peacefully without compromising the right of individuals to follow their religion. Harmony will be achieved if each religious group has the principle of agreeing on their differences. Agreeing on differences means that individuals are willing to accept and respect others. This article uses the literature review method by taking references from books, journals, and articles related to the title. This study was prepared to determine what obstacles can be obstacles to inter-religious harmony. The results of this study use a literature review taken from several journal references regarding Buddhist teachings in strengthening and strengthening inter-religious harmony. Buddhism always emphasizes the importance of harmony as the basis for justice and peace in society. This article discusses Buddhism to teach how to strengthen inter-religious harmony with universal principles such as love (*mettā*), compassion (*karuā*), and tolerance. Buddhism provides a strong foundation for creating a harmonious and peaceful society. Using meditation media can also foster awareness.

Keywords: *Buddhism, inter-religious harmony, universal principles, tolerance, meditation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Religion is an integral part of human life that influences the behavior, values, and worldview of individuals and society. It is one of the main pillars shaping individuals' norms and values. Religion is a form of human belief in something supernatural that seems to accompany humans throughout life.

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Religion has values that are important for the life of humanity in society.¹

1.1. Buddhist contributions to religious harmony in Indonesia

In Indonesia, Buddhism has become an integral part of the diversity of religions embraced by society. With values such as love, compassion, patience, and tolerance, Buddhism promotes peace and harmony among religious communities. The meditation practices conveyed in Buddhism have also influenced various aspects of people's lives. Buddhism is also closely related to the concept of peaceful living. Buddhists are encouraged to find happiness by practicing meditation and strengthening moral values. In addition, Buddhism also emphasizes the importance of caring for environmental peace, which encourages contributing to building a peaceful and just society for everyone. Thus, Buddhism not only affects the spiritual side but also helps to realize harmony and prosperity in society.²

1.2. The importance of interreligious harmony

Today's globalization era exposes religious communities to a new set of challenges that are not too different from what has been experienced before. Religious issues that exist in Indonesian people's lives are a problem that is very often encountered. Some social problems that occur in Indonesia are that if they already contain ethnicity, religion, and race, then the problem will become more complicated. Religious diversity in Indonesia, at least disharmony between religious communities, is motivated by two factors, namely internal factors and external factors that sometimes make Indonesian people offend several other religious communities, given the diversity of religious communities in Indonesia.³

II. CHALLENGES TO INTERRELIGIOUS HARMONY

Realizing this, every religion must play a significant role in creating unity, integrity, and peace in society, nation, and state. In shaping religious harmony and peace in Indonesia, Buddhists have always played a role in realizing this. Religious harmony is achieved by understanding each other between religious communities so that all religious groups can work together in peace without reducing the rights or freedoms of each adherent of a religion. With the emergence of an awareness of this kind, the author examines how to strengthen religious harmony through a Buddhist approach. By focusing on what factors pose a threat to religious harmony. Buddhism teaches that everything in the world has a cause and effect. Nothing can stand alone in this universe without a causal relationship, and everything is always dependent.

¹ Sukandarman Sukandarman et al., "Harmoni Dalam Keberagaman : Toleransi Dan Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama Berdasarkan Al- Qur ' an Dan Hadits," 2024.

² Retnowati Retnowati, "Kehidupan Beragama Di Indonesia : Belajar Dari," *Sangkep: Journal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan*, 2018, p. 34.

³ Dharmaji Chowmas et al., "Pendekatan Ajaran Buddha Dalam Memperkokoh Kerukunan Beragama Di Kota Pekanbaru," *Journal Pendidikan Tambusai* 8, no. 1 (2024), p. 1 – 13.

III. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN BUDDHISM

Inter-religious relations are often formulated in the concept of inter-religious harmony. However, inter-religious harmony still often occurs in conflicts that damage harmony in Indonesia. Harmony is not a new thing in Indonesia. Harmony is a noble value inherited by the ancestors since the middle of the first millennium from the Mataram era, which continued until the Majapahit era and continues until now. A dynamic religious life with the creation of religious harmony through interaction and good communication, mutual respect and appreciation, and building a culture of “gotong royong” will undoubtedly bring enormous benefits to social life.⁴

Religious life in the community is reflected in attitudes, behaviors, and actions by religious values that emphasize religious life, tolerance, and appreciation of plurality, which has recently experienced a significant challenge. Plurality means differences, such as differences in language, ethnicity, culture, and religion. There are many religions worldwide, and each religion sees its beliefs as unique and universal. Assuming to be the true religion, rejecting the truth of other teachings. In addition, most religions must attract other people to become their followers. In the era of globalization, the absence of tolerance makes the world lose its harmony. Therefore, harmony is considered very influential in the community environment.⁵

Inter-religious harmony is one of the most important parts of harmony in Indonesia, a religious nation. Realizing a peaceful life without harmony in Indonesia is very difficult. In social life, religion is a value reference system that can lead to conflict and social disintegration unless religious people can develop religious interpretations that bring together the similarities of each reference system. Conflicts related to inter-religious tensions in Indonesia have resulted in the threat of inter-religious harmony. Fostering inter-religious harmony is not just about maintaining a static state but also about preventing conflicts and tensions. The expected harmony of life is a condition of the emergence of awareness among religious people. The harmony of religious life cannot be realized from the attitude of fanaticism and ignorance of the feelings of others but from the attitude of respect for one another. This is our attitude and principle as a nation that agrees with differences. All problems within the religious community should be resolved with harmony.⁶ Maintaining the harmony of life between religious communities is one of them with interfaith dialogue. One of the conditions for realizing a society that respects the plurality of societies and nations and realizes it is a necessity. For this reason, we must

⁴ Retnowati Retnowati, “Kehidupan Beragama Di Indonesia : Belajar Dari,” Sangkep: Journal Kajian Sosial Keagamaan, 2018, p. 34.

⁵ MHD. ABROR, “Moderasi Beragama Dalam Bingkai Toleransi,” *RUSYDIAH: Journal Pemikiran Islam* 1, no. 2 (2020), p. 137–48, <https://doi.org/10.35961/rsd.v1i2.174>.

⁶ Moh Khoirul Fatih, “Dialog Dan Kerukunan Umat Beragama Di Indonesia Dalam Pemikiran a. Mukti Ali,” *Religi Journal Studi Agama-Agama* 13, no. 1 (2017), p. 54 – 55.

maintain inter-religious harmony.

IV. CASE STUDIES OF RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN INDONESIA

At this time, there is one conflict that has become the centre of attention related to harmony between religious communities, namely the incident in Sidoarjo, East Java. (Kompas.id. 2024). The conflict began because a video was widely spread on social media. The narrative in the video was that there was a ban on Christian worship, which triggered debate in the community. This incident has been in the spotlight because inter-religious harmony in Sidoarjo has become divisive due to this issue. However, this is considered unusual in Indonesia, as there are also many regions in Indonesia where inter-religious harmony is still well established. For example, the Religious Communication Forum (FKUB) in various regions of Indonesia plays a role in resolving conflicts between religious communities. To resolve the conflict of interfaith harmony in Sidoarjo, the acting regent of Sidoarjo gathered the parties related to the conflict. As a result, the Deputy Regent of Sidoarjo asked for the dispute to be stopped by prioritizing religious harmony. The conflict in Sidoarjo reminds us how important it is to maintain interfaith harmony.

It is right that everyone has the right to protect their beliefs, but that does not mean we can arbitrarily make rules and feel that only our beliefs are correct. The Buddha once advised a young man, Kapatthika⁷. For a wise man who must protect righteousness, it is not appropriate to conclude. "This alone is right, and everything else is wrong." This alone is right, and everything else is wrong. King Asoka's edict has been carved on the Batu Cadas inscription, which reads:

Let us not only respect our religion but also criticize the religion of others without a firm basis. On the contrary, the religion of others should also be respected on specific grounds. By doing so, we have helped our religion to develop and benefit others. By doing the opposite, we have harmed our religion, in addition to harming the religion of others. Therefore, whoever respects his religion and criticizes the religion of others is solely driven by a sense of devotion to his religion by thinking, how can I glorify my religion? By doing so, he harms his religion. Therefore, harmony is recommended with the understanding that everyone should listen and be willing to hear the teachings of others.⁸

Buddhism was developed with love, not violence. The Buddha also carefully managed the flow of religious conversions. Buddhism's teaching of universal love can be used as a reference to strengthen religious harmony in Indonesia. Each religion has its own beliefs, especially Buddhism, and each religion can be used as a foundation for its people to strengthen religious harmony so that mutual respect and harmony between people are strong. During the Magha

⁷ MHD. ABROR, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Bingkai Toleransi," RUSYDIAH: Journal Pemikiran Islam 1, no. 2 (2020), p. 137–48, <https://doi.org/10.35961/rsd.v1i2.174>.

⁸ Dhammika (2006), p. 25 - 26.

period, King Asoka was a Buddhist king who was in leadership in the country of Magadha in South Asia in the 400s BC. The Buddha is famous for the teachings of love and compassion that can build tolerance towards others. In realizing the harmony of religious life with the Batu Kalinga inscription no. XXII King Asoka, which contains.⁹

If we honor our religion,/ Do not then denounce and insult other religions./ We should respect other religions./ Thus, our religion will grow,/ On the other hand, we also assist other religions./ If we do otherwise, we have dug a grave for our religion,/ On the other hand, we bring disaster to other religions./ Someone who respects his religion but insults other religions./ Thinking that what he does is good for his religion,/ Likewise, it will impact his religion./ Therefore, tolerance, harmony, and cooperation are expected./ By listening to the teachings of other religions as well,/ Not only the teachings of their religion.

Saddened by the war, King Asoka said he would spread the Dhamma of morality and goodness and not use violence. Respecting one's own and other people's religions to maintain harmony and peace with others. Therefore, harmony is encouraged in society. Through the Stone Inscription, King Asoka shows that the teaching of love encourages people to respect and appreciate each other.¹⁰

In Buddhism, there are four noble traits (brahmavihāra) consisting of mettā (Love), karuā (Compassion), muditā (Sympathy), and upekkhā (Inner Balance). The four noble traits can make a basis for tolerance and Buddhism. In the spirit of Buddhism is mettā, the teaching that firmly adheres to love without comparing human values such as solidarity and tolerance with violence or crime. Buddhism also teaches about brahmavihāra. Practising can foster a sense of tolerance. Every religion must be taught about tolerance and mutual respect, which is taught to strengthen inter-religious harmony. Harmony is a condition of peace, in which every religious believer respects and respects each other. The purpose of harmony is to minimize conflicts that divide the harmony of society. The importance of harmony in Buddhism can be seen in the Cakka Nipāta and the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta.¹¹ A fragment of a text on Buddhist harmony was found in the Tripiaka.

Dīgha Nikāya I: 3

“Bhikkhus, if someone insults me, the Dhamma, or the *Sagha*, (3) ‘you should not be angry, offended, or disturbed by that. If you are angry or displeased by that insult, that will be an obstacle for you. If others insult me, the Dhamma, or the *Sagha*, and you are angry or displeased, can you tell whether what they say is true or false?’ ‘No, Bhagavā.’ ‘If others insult me, the Dhamma, or the *Sagha*, then you should explain what is untrue as untrue, with what is

⁹ Maryani (2019), p. 23.

¹⁰ Maryani (2019), p. 67.

¹¹ Salim (2017), p. 34.

not a teaching, saying: “That is untrue, that is wrong, that is not our way, that is not found in us.”

Upāli Sutta: 16

“Investigate carefully, householder. It would be good if famous people like you investigated thoroughly.’ ‘Venerable sir, I feel even more satisfied and pleased with the blessed one for telling me that. As for other sectarian groups, when they had me as their disciple, they would have carried banners all over *Nālandā* and announced: ‘Upāli householders have become disciples under us.’ However, the Blessed One told me, ‘Investigate carefully, householder. It would be good if famous people like you would investigate carefully.’ So, a second time, venerable sir, I went to Master Gotama for protection and to the Dhamma and the *Saṅgha* of monks. From today on, let Master Gotama accept me as a devotee who has gone to Him for protection throughout my life.”

Maintaining harmony in Buddhism can strengthen its followers. Everyone has the same rights and needs to be treated equally among fellow believers. With the basis of love and a proper understanding of the teachings of Buddhism, one will not prioritize personal interests. The effort taken by Buddhists to create and preserve the triune harmony is to implement moral, ethical, and ethical values called *sīla*. *Sīla* is morality or decency, an important aspect of Buddhist practice relating to ethical behavior and moral discipline. Morals are teachings concerning human behavior and actions concerning good and evil. It manifests rules and principles, right and good, praiseworthy and noble.

Harmony in Buddhism is characterized by the qualities of ‘*pāramitā*,’ namely, *dāna pāramitā*, the noble qualities that exist in the human conscience such as charity, sacrifice, and sharing, and *sīla pāramitā*, the noble qualities to do good moral deeds..., *nekkhamma pāramitā*, a trait that avoids weak, sensual desires, *pāra pāramitā*, being wise in thought, speech, and action, *vīriyā pāramitā*, a noble trait as an encouragement to humans to work more diligently, actively, creatively, and innovatively, *khanti pāramitā*, which is an encouragement to a person to have calmness and patience in facing life’s challenges, *sacca pāramitā*, a noble trait that always encourages humans to develop the truth both in thought, speech, and action, *adhihāna pāramitā*, which is a steady determination to decide something promptly, *mettā pāramitā*, a noble trait of love for all beings without discriminating race, ethnicity, and religion. Moreover, *upekkhā pāramitā* encourages someone to have a mind that is not easily shaken by the stimulation of sensual desires so that they have a mind directed by the Dhamma of Buddhism.¹²

Buddhists develop the perfections (*pāramitā*). According to the Buddha, the destruction or division of unity results in conflict. The Buddha said in *Dhammapada* verse 6, namely: “They do not know that in conflict or fighting, they will be destroyed and destroyed, but those who see and realize this are peaceful and calm.” The source of division, according to the Buddha, is

¹² Ralph Adolph, “濟無 No Title No Title No Title,” 2016, p. 1 – 23.

explained in *Dhammapada* verse 5, namely: “In this world, hatred never ends if it is answered with hate, but hatred will end if it is answered with love. This is the eternal law.”

The Mahāparinibbāna Sutta tells the story of the Buddha’s lifetime of living in peace and harmony. King Ajatasattu asked Prime Minister Brahma Vassakara to ask the Buddha’s opinion about his intention to attack the Vajji tribe. On that occasion, the Buddha asked his disciple Yiyu Ananda, ‘Do you Vajjis like to deliberate to reach consensus?’ “Thus, we have said to you, Bhante, that the Vajjians hold discussions and always reach a consensus and end their discussions in peace and harmony.” “If so,” said the Buddha, “the Vajjians will endure and will not fall”.¹³ In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, there are seven principles for the prosperity and progress of a nation, namely, Frequent meetings and deliberations, Deliberation to promote peace, not making new rules by changing old rules or continuing the implementation of rules by the teachings of truth, showing respect for devotion as well as respect for others or elders, prohibiting evil, Respecting and honoring holy places, Taking proper care of holy people. (Dhammapada.II.73 - 5).

In the *Aguttara Nikāya*, *Tika Nipāta*, *Mahāvagga Sutta* No.56, it is mentioned that once a group of young men from the Kalama tribe came to the Buddha and asked:

“Some bhikkhus and *brahmins*, venerable ones, also came to Kesaputta. They also expound and explain only other doctrines they despise, oppose, and destroy to smithereens. Your Majesty, there is doubt in us regarding that matter. Which of these venerable monks and *brahmins* is telling the truth, or which is wrong?” “It is fitting for you, Kalama tribe, to doubt, hesitate, doubt has arisen in you about that which is doubtful. Well, the tribe has been heard many times, or based on tradition or based on hearsay, or those in the holy book, or based on conjectures, or those based on axioms, or that appears to be based on one’s abilities, or based on a direction that has been considered many times. ‘The monk is our teacher.’”

The Buddha taught the importance of living in harmony and respecting each other. At the time of the Buddha, a dispute was finally resolved. That is the story of the dispute between the Bhikkhus in Kosambi. At one time, the Bhikkhus in Kosambi were formed from two groups: The first group of followers of *Vinaya* expert teachers and the second group of experts in Dhamma. Often at odds, causing disputes and quarrels between the *Vinaya* and Dhamma groups, they never heeded the Buddha’s advice when he repeatedly advised them, even though the Buddha knew they would eventually realize their own mistakes. So the Buddha left and spent his *vassa* in the Rakkhita forest near Palileyyaka, assisted by the elephant Palileyya. At the end of the *vassa*, Yang Ariya Ananda and many monks delivered the Anathapindika message and begged the Buddha to return home. The Buddha returned to Jetavana Monastery in Savatthi, where the monks knelt and confessed their

¹³ Dhpa 73 – 4.

mistakes. They were then reminded that one day, they would experience death, so they should not fight. Then the Buddha recited verse 6: “Most people do not know that in quarrel-ling they will perish; but those who can realize this truth will immediately put an end to all quarrel-ling.”

Buddhism teaches us to always live in harmony so that harmony between religious communities can be tightened and strengthened. The Buddha said in several *Suttas*, namely, “King Pasenadi of Kosala asked the Buddha about the various virtues of the views and beliefs in this world. The Buddha explained, “Everyone has their own beliefs and views and lives a righteous life, does not belittle the beliefs of others, and does well to all beings.”

Found in the *Kosala Saṃyutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 3.9)- a *Sutta* on kindness and diversity. “The Buddha taught not to immediately accept teaching just because there is a tradition, scripture, or authority, but to test the truth through personal experience and common sense. That followers must have a spirit of tolerance and an attitude of respect so that there is no conflict.” Found in the *Kālāma Sutta* (*Aguttara Nikāya* 3.65) – freedom of belief. “The Buddha taught that various groups often consider their beliefs the only true ones and belittle others. The Buddha said that true wisdom is not tied to extreme views but understands the reality of life broadly and deeply.” There are the *Cūḍavvyūha Sutta* and *Mahāvvyūha Sutta* (*Sutta Nipāta* 4.11 & 4.12) about different beliefs. Buddha said, “Hatred will not end in hatred, but must end in love. This is the eternal law of life.” It is in *Dhammapada* verse 5-avoiding hatred. “The Buddha explained that the benefits of living a spiritual life wisely will lead to goodness and prosperity, so we should do good, tolerate each other, respect each other, and live in harmony in religion.”

Found in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 2) – Mutual respect for spiritual diversity. So maintaining harmony to strengthen interfaith is very important because it will maintain the harmony of the people. Being a harmonious society will have a positive impact on everyday life. Strengthening life can be done by respecting each other and not a disputes between people, making a harmonious and peaceful life. Buddhism is one of the positive guidelines if appropriately applied in social life. Buddhism and other religious teachings can also be good examples of strengthening interfaith harmony.

V. MEDITATION AS A TOOL FOR STRENGTHENING HARMONY

Improving religious harmony with Buddhism can be done through the use of meditation. Meditation is training the mind or body to achieve a state of consciousness and calmness¹⁴. Using the object of meditation can give a person a level of awareness, especially when pursuing a harmonious social life. The meditation method can use the ānāpānasati object (Breathing), which will train patience and concentration to increase awareness. The purpose

¹⁴ Fendy Fendy et al., “Memahami Konsep Meditasi Dalam *Kajian Sutta-Sutta Dalam Sut-tapiaka*,” *PATISAMBHIDA : Journal Pemikiran Buddha Dan Filsafat Agama* 4, no. 2 (2023), p. 84–96, <https://doi.org/10.53565/patisambhida.v4i2.1040>.

of meditation is to help a person feel happier and improve the ability to concentrate in everyday life. In general, meditation has many benefits, such as making physical and mental health suitable and well-maintained and improving the quality of life in a person.¹⁵ One type of meditation is Mindfulness, which means focusing on observing thoughts, feelings, and body sensations without judgment. Transcendental Meditation uses mantras to achieve a state of deep relaxation. Compassion Meditation develops feelings of love and compassion towards oneself and others – walking meditation focuses on sensations in the body or nature and body movements. Yoga meditation combines body movement, breathing, and meditation. Writing an article using the literature review method summarizes the information about inter-religious harmony in the previously listed sources, provides deeper insight, and increases the reader's understanding.

This article is prepared using the literature review method, which is a part of research that contains reviews or reviews of various reference sources that are relevant and related to the topic discussed so that they can support research, such as taking references to books, journals, articles related to the title of the article to be written. Using the literature review method by collecting and analyzing data can be applied to relevant and credible research to what will be discussed. The research method using literature review can expand the sources of various things that can be used as references for making journal articles.

Indonesia is diverse in ethnicity, race, religion, and language. Its diversity, especially in religious differences, requires harmony and a high tolerance attitude. Maintaining religious harmony can strengthen a religion even though it is different and still become a society that respects and respects each other.

In this section, the author briefly discusses the description of Buddhism in the context of interfaith harmony. Buddhism teaches us to respect each other by practicing brahmavihāra, such as loving and kindness towards all beings. Developing an attitude of tolerance will strengthen religious communities. Buddhism has principles that are relevant to strengthening religious harmony. Applying mettā, karuā, muditā, and upekkhā can help create a harmonious and tolerant society. Buddhist teachings in strengthening and strengthening inter-religious harmony generally discuss how the principles of Buddhism are applied in the community environment to create tolerance and mutual understanding between religious communities.¹⁶

The context of mettā Compassion known as mettā teaches us to develop a sense of compassion, wisdom, and love towards all beings. In inter-religious harmony, the Buddhist teaching of mettā is very influential in daily life because it emphasizes the importance of respecting each other regardless of differences.

¹⁵ Fendy et al.

¹⁶ M. Pd. B Sugandi, mettā Puspita Dewi, S. Pd. B., M. Pd Suharno, "Etika Komunikasi Dan Citra Dharmaduta Dalam Upaya Menumbuhkan Moralitas Umat Buddha (Studi Kasus Di Desa Tegal Maja Kecamatan Tanjung Kabupaten Lombok Utara)," *Journal Agama Buddha Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan*, 2019, p. 112 – 32.

This teaching must be applied to build a harmonious life. The aspects of mettā, namely, strengthening tolerance according to Buddhist teachings, can strengthen the sense of tolerance between religious communities so that a more tolerant environment can be created towards different beliefs. Keeping away from hatred, mettā also teaches us not to be prejudiced against others who can trigger conflicts between religious differences. Having an empathetic attitude when learning mettā will generate feelings of empathy in us to understand the feelings of others. Thus, mettā is a very relevant Buddhist teaching that teaches love and compassion that can create harmony, mutual understanding, care for others, and respect for differences in the community.¹⁷

Context of the Four Noble Truths (Cattāri Ariya Saccāni) The Four Noble Truths, or Cattāri Ariya Saccāni, are Buddhist teachings about the suffering of dukkha, the cause of dukkha, the end of dukkha, and the path to the end of dukkha. Although these Four Noble Truths are not directly about religious people, their principles can build harmonious relationships. There are several contexts in the four noble truths that can be applied to inter-religious harmony: The existence of dukkha (suffering). This truth recognizes the existence of dukkha in life. In the inter-religious context, the existence of dukkha means recognizing that conflict and division are forms of suffering that naturally occur to all people. The cause of dukkha, cause of dukkha is what shows that suffering is caused by lust or desire and attachment to worldliness. In the inter-religious context, dukkha occurs due to attachment to one's beliefs that can control others. The End of dukkha can be achieved by eliminating feelings or high passions and attachments to something. In the inter-religious context, the end of dukkha can be ended by adopting an attitude of peace and harmony and a mindful attitude towards something to avoid conflict. The path to the end of dukkha indicates that this is the path to the end of suffering. In the inter-religious context, the principles of the Noble Eightfold Path, such as Right View, Right Speech, and Right Action, are the guidelines for life to build a more harmonious relationship.¹⁸

The middle way (majjhima paipadā) The middle way or majjhima paipadā in Buddhism is a teaching that teaches balance to avoid fanaticism. In the context of interfaith, this means avoiding radicalism in interfaith harmony and choosing a path that supports interfaith peace. I want to apply the middle way in daily life with several aspects such as maintaining a diet, sleeping at a specified time, maintaining balance, getting enough rest, maintaining mental health, and establishing good relations between differences. The goal of the middle way is to achieve ultimate liberation, or nibbāna, to be free from rebirth

¹⁷ Feishal Adam, "SKRIPSI Diajukan Kepada Fakultas Ushuluddin Untuk Memenuhi Persyaratan Memperoleh Gelar Sarjana Agama (S.Ag)," 2017.

¹⁸ Tejo Ismoyo, "Konsep Pendidikan Dalam Pandangan Agama Buddha," *Journal Pendidikan Buddha Dan Isu Sosial Kontemporer (JPBISK)* 2, no. 1 (2020), p. 56 – 63, <https://doi.org/10.56325/jpbisk.v2i1.19>.

that causes suffering.¹⁹ The middle way is one of the principles of Buddhism that emphasizes the importance of moderation, trust, and equality to avoid suffering and achieve ultimate liberation.

Being a Buddhist who coexists with other religions, it is necessary to strengthen one's faith. Faith plays an important role in inner development²⁰. The Buddha explained that belief in the teachings of the Dhamma is one of the qualities of being a Buddhist. Establishing harmony between religious communities can strengthen and strengthen between religious communities and maintain a sense of togetherness. The government and the community encourage them to deepen the teachings of religion and practice it in everyday life. Maintaining harmony can strengthen religious communities. If religious adherents are in harmony, then they will be able to realize national stability that is increasingly stable. Religious harmony is important for today's young generation as they are the nation's future leaders. The younger generation must understand inter-religious harmony well to appreciate differences and coexist peacefully. The younger generation can feel part of the Indonesian nation with religious harmony. Therefore, it is important to instil the values of harmony and tolerance early on in today's young generation.

Tolerance and respect are two words that must be remembered in a community environment at every opportunity. One must always practice hospitality and tolerance because hospitality and tolerance are very helpful in creating an atmosphere of life that leads to a peaceful and serene life. Attending religious services or ceremonies of other faiths may not be possible. Similarly, other people may be unable to follow or respect the ceremonies of other faiths. If you do not want the ceremony of your belief to be laughed at, then never laugh at others. Flow to understand the ceremonies or customs of other faiths. This can help create a good understanding and increase tolerance among other religious communities.²¹ Without exercising tolerance and mutual respect, hatred and conflict will destroy peace and tranquility in the community. There are several facts that there are many countries where there is no tolerance and mutual respect between religious communities, so there are murders, arson, and bombings²². Such actions cause the loss of precious lives. All religious communities should be united and have a good relationship to achieve harmony in society.

VI. CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, Buddhism is important in strengthening

¹⁹ Parjono Parjono, "Ariya Atthangika Magga Sebuah Metode Jalan Tengah Untuk Mengatasi Ekstrimisme: Kajian Dalam Bingkai Agama Buddha," *Journal Pendidikan, Sains Sosial, Dan Agama* 8, no. 1 (2022), p. 1 – 12, <https://doi.org/10.53565/pssa.v8i1.383>.

²⁰ Abdul Manap, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Bingkai Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia," *Widya Genitri : Journal Ilmiah Pendidikan, Agama Dan Kebudayaan Hindu* 13, no. 3 (2022), p. 229 – 42, <https://doi.org/10.36417/widyagenitri.v13i3.503>.

²¹ ABROR, "Moderasi Beragama Dalam Bingkai Toleransi."

²² Adolph, "濟無No Title No Title No Title."

interfaith harmony. The conclusion of the role of Buddhism: The foundation of love and tolerance, Buddhism emphasizes how important love and compassion are for all beings regardless of differences. The principle of tolerance taught by Buddha is a strong basis for building interfaith harmony. In society, Buddhists are always involved in community social activities that involve people of other religions. This involvement can strengthen interfaith relations and build trust and cooperation. Buddhism teaches that it is important to hold deliberations to resolve various problems. This is considered very important in maintaining inter-religious harmony because, through deliberation, problems will be resolved peacefully.

Overall, Buddhism makes a significant contribution to strengthening and enhancing inter-religious harmony. By emphasizing love, tolerance, and deliberation, Buddhism helps to create a peaceful society. The experience of Buddhist teachings can strengthen religious harmony and the national spirit, which can be pursued through education and by fostering people. The guidance of Buddhist teachings will make inter-religious harmony stronger and stronger. All conflicts within religious communities should be resolved with harmony, by the noble values of each religion.

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