

New Strategies of Conflict Resolution in Social Work: A Consideration on Buddhist Social Work Approach Based on Sutta Pitaka

Omalpe Somananda¹, Josef Gohori²

¹Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka, Homagama, Sri Lanka

²Asian Research Institute for International Social Work, Shukutoku University, Chiba, Japan

Email: omalpes@bpu.ac.lk

How to cite this paper: Somananda, O., & Gohori, J. (2022). New Strategies of Conflict Resolution in Social Work: A Consideration on Buddhist Social Work Approach Based on Sutta Pitaka. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 12, 199-213.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2022.122013>

Received: January 20, 2022

Accepted: May 17, 2022

Published: May 20, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Buddhism has long been recognized as a religion of peace and non-violence. In today's world, various conflicts take place between nations, religions, and ethnic groups. Buddha saw that people can live together freely as individuals, equal in principle, and therefore responsible for each other. Buddha explains that every member of the human family, man and woman 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 own monasteries. The monks who belonged to different castes were given the opportunity to spend time together in the same monastery, which included holding meetings altogether, irrespective of ethnicity, caste, or religion, walking together in the Pindapātha, and holding Dhamma discussions together in the one Dhamma hall. The objective of this study is to identify Buddha's teaching on social and ethnic harmony throughout the Buddhist scriptures (Pāli Canon) and consider its application in conflict resolution. Special attention will be paid to the doctrine preached by the Buddha which can be applied to build mutual understanding, relationships, and peace. The study method in this study is historical texts (Sutta Pitaka) content analysis and is carried out using the library survey methodology.

Keywords

Social Harmony, Social Work, Buddhism, Sutta Pitaka, Conflict Resolution

1. Introduction

Buddhism has long been celebrated as a religion of peace and non-violence. In today's world, various conflicts are taking place between nations, religions, and

ethnicities. These conflicts can threaten the working of society itself. However, today's world has become interconnected. Buddha saw that people can live together freely as individuals, equal in principle, and therefore responsible for each other. The social aspect of Buddhism is based on the pursuit of social justice based on non-violence. Buddhism is a faith that was founded by Siddhartha Gautama ("the Buddha") more than 2500 years ago in India. With about 470 million followers, scholars consider Buddhism one of the major world religions. "Buddhism is sometimes presented as a religion interested in personal salvation only, without any considerations for the welfare of the society in general." This opinion was promoted, among others, by German sociologist, philosopher, and political economist Max Weber. Thus, in his book "The Religion of India" he writes in relation to Buddhist ideal of liberation: Salvation is an absolutely 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 (Weber, 1958: p. 213). Obviously, this is a gross misrepresentation of the facts, since there are a number of texts in the Pāli Canon¹ (*Tripitaka*) which clearly negate this claim. The image of the socially withdrawn character of Buddhism created by Weber was taken for granted by later sociologists, due to either the inability to read the original texts or lack of proper understanding of Buddhism in practice. Prof. P. Gñānārāma said that: 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 of the fact that early Buddhism held social service in high esteem (Gñānārāma, 2012: p. 4). This is a great 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.

2. 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 in various ways try to keep poor countries under their control. These can be

¹The Pāli Canon is the standard collection of scriptures [(Religious texts are texts related to a religious tradition. They differ from literary texts by being a compilation or discussion of beliefs, mythologies, ritual practices, commandments or laws, ethical conduct, spiritual aspirations, and for creating or fostering a religious community. The relative authority of religious texts develops over time and is derived from the ratification, enforcement, and its use across generations. Some religious texts are accepted or categorized as canonical, some non-canonical, and others extracanonical, semi-canonical, deutero-canonical, pre-canonical or post-canonical)] in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, as preserved in the Pāli language.

considered major barriers to bringing out peace in the world. As a result, precious human lives, as well as socio-cultural value systems, are being destroyed, and suspicion and animosity are spreading among nations.

In the meantime, the significance of peace and harmony is being recognized by more and more far-sighted people for the following reason: peace and harmony 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 certainly will 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.

In such a situation, Buddhist teachings on conflict and conflict resolution can be utilized in a more effective way in order 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 core values which underpin those strategies.

3. Research Methodology

This paper is based on a study of literature analyzing both primary and the secondary sources (data). The primary data is the Buddhist teachings (sutta) scripts and original texts, mainly Sutta Pitaka², while the secondary sources are academic articles written in this field, used in detail where analysis needs more in-depth concern. Through careful analysis of facts and information provided in these texts, the research focused on identifying how the Buddhist teachings could be utilized for conflict resolution in social work. The research methodology utilized in this paper was to read and analyze through content analysis the primary Buddhist teachings relating to the subject area.

4. Core Concepts: What Is Harmony?

The term “social harmony” cannot be defined in a single way. 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 explicate 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” the 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

²*Sutta Pitaka* (cf. Sanskrit: *Sūtra Piṭaka*) is a part of the Tripitaka (Pali Canon, a collection of Buddhist writings of Theravada Buddhism written in Pali language). The *Sutta Pitaka* contains more than 10,000 suttas (teachings).

musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions.

Social harmony can be simply defined as “a society or human being living together with other societies in a friendly or cordial manner” (Oxford Dictionary, p.937). 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 consistency motive (Heider, 1958), used and developed also in the social network theory.

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 (Valters, 2013: p.3). Thus, social harmony can be said to be the peace between ethnicities, castes, and religions and that it has an impact on the development of a country.

Buddha explains that every member of the human family, man 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 own monasteries. The monks who belong to different castes were given the opportunity to spend time together in the same monastery, which includes holding meetings altogether irrespective of ethnicity, caste, or religion, walking together in the *Pindapāṭā*³, and holding *Dhamma* discussions together in the single Dhamma hall. This shows that the Buddha practically contributed to the building of harmony between different ethnic groups, between the rich and poor, and between castes.

5. Core Concepts: Conflict Resolution

Even if a society seeks harmony, there are many conflicts which 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 are in 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” (Mayer, 2013). 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’s 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 sys-

³In Pāli *-pindapāṭikāṅga*, the practice of going for alms is one of the thirteen ascetic purification-exercises.

tem in order to add a new piece to a discussion on this diversity.

In the field of social work, conflict resolution strategy is represented by Thomas-Kilmann's five modes (Thomas & Kilmann, 1976). They identified avoiding, competing, accommodating, collaborating, and compromising as 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 (Mayer, 2000). 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 for conflict resolution.

6. 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 given advice about how to live harmoniously in societies that are not oppressing those of different religions or ethnic backgrounds, and are not savaging and exploiting themselves or others. His teachings provide a ground of liberation upon which each nation and person can build according to its own needs. In order to study the correct teachings of the Buddha, one must examine the *Sutta Pitaka*. The *Sutta Pitaka* is one of the *Pitakas*, a canon traditionally known as the *Tipitaka* (Pāli) or *Tripitaka* (Sanskrit). *Tipitaka* means "three baskets", which are *Sutta Pitaka*, *Vinaya Pitaka* (summarizing monastery rules) and *Abhidhama Pitaka* (summarizing detailed scholastic analysis). Out of these, the *Sutta Pitaka*, which includes the core texts of Buddhist teaching, has been selected for this study.

Buddhist texts (*Tipitaka*) are part of the Buddhist tradition. The first Buddhist texts were initially passed on orally by Buddhist monastics, but were later written down and composed as manuscripts in various Indo-Aryan languages such as Pāli, Sanskrit, etc., and compiled into various Buddhist canons. These were later translated into other languages such as Sinhala, English, and other languages. Buddhist historical texts are one of the most important sources for the students who study Buddhism. Therefore, it might be said that the original ideas of Buddhism exist in these materials. From the past to the present, these texts have been preserved in a way that does not harm the core values of the texts. The claim of this *Theravāda* school of Buddhism is to have preserved the original teaching of the Buddha, and these are good grounds for at least considering that the doctrine as found in the *Pali* scriptures comes as close as we can get to what Buddha actually taught. In any case the *pāli Tipitaka* is the only canon of an early school that is preserved complete (Walshe, 1995: p. 19).

6.1. 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.

⁴(MN.p.110/MLDB.p.132-133).

In the *Sammāditthi Sutta*⁴, Buddha has explained three types of causes of immorality (unwholesome roots). They are.

- 1) Greed (*lōbha*⁵).
- 2) Hate (*dōsa*⁶).
- 3) Delusion (*Mōha*⁷).

The Buddha explains that the person who controls their senses and has eliminated craving does not tend to quarrel or cause harm to others or abuse others, or steal or despoil another's wealth. The Buddha points out that there is no end to human wants and desire⁸ and people are slaves to their cravings. They are difficult to give up.⁹ As the *Madhupīṇḍika 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) *Dīṭṭhi*—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 craving to continue existence.
- 7) *Avijjā*—the latent tendency to ignorance.

These seven kinds of tendencies lead to taking up rods and bladed weapons, to arguments, quarrels, disputes, and accusations, divisive tale-bearing and false speech. When people eliminate these tendencies through cultivating their minds properly, gradually they can stop taking up rods and bladed weapons, stop arguments, quarrels, disputes, and accusations, divisive tale-bearing and false speech. *The Sutta* further clarifies that the people normally experience the world in two ways, either by attraction and repulsion. They try to have ownership of attractive things and create quarrels and conflicts to take those things. On other hand they try to put away their dislikes. They are repulsed by dislikes. These also generate conflicts. Buddhism mainly focuses on the causes of conflict. It does not suggest temporary solutions for conflicts.

In the *Sangīti Sutta*¹⁰, 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. 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 (*agata-gamanini*¹¹): One goes wrong through

- 1) Desire (*chanda*¹²).
- 2) Hatred (*dosa*).

⁵*lobha*, “greed”, is one of the three unwholesome roots (*mūla*) and a synonym of *raga* and *tanhā*.

⁶*dosa*: “hatred”, anger, is one of the three unwholesome roots, *citta*: hate consciousness.

⁷*moha*: “delusion”, is one of the three unwholesome roots. The best known synonym is *avijja*.

⁸*kāmesu loke na hi atthi titti*—*The Majjhimanikāya-2, The Raṭṭhapāla Sutta*. p. 420.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰(DN-3.p.358-360/LDB.p.481-482).

¹¹*Agatā*: the four “wrong paths” (DN-3.p.386/LDB.p.491).

¹²Intention, desire, will, as evil quality it has the meaning of “desire”, and is frequently coupled with terms for “sensuality”, greed.

3) Delusion (*mohaya*).

4) Fear (*baya*¹³).

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, economic and political power are all factors that contribute to this. Buddha also taught about issues that could lead to arguments and quarrels (Table 1). There are ten reasons for increasing arguments, quarrels, contention, and disputes which are mentioned in the *Viwāda Sutta*.¹⁴

Table 1. Ten reasons for increasing arguments, quarrels, & disputes.

Bhikkhus explain non-Dhamma as non-Dhamma	Others say “Dhamma as Dhamma”
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> ¹⁵ 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 practiced by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as not having been practiced by him	Others say “what has been practiced by the <i>Tathāgata</i> as having been practiced 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 (Vinaya¹⁶), and the redefinition of the doctrine were the causes of disputes. Some *Bhikkhus* said, this is non-Dhamma as non-Dhamma, but some other groups said that Dhamma as Dhamma¹⁷. The *Vepacitti Sutta*¹⁸ describes that acting tolerantly on such a conflict situation is a quality of an individual personality. If individuals do not act wisely on such situations, conflicts will arise. The *Paṭhamasaṅgāma Sutta*¹⁹ says that victory generates the maturing of hatred; the

¹³As 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.

¹⁴AN-6., *Viwāda Sutta* P. 138.

¹⁵Tathāgata: 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 (Nyānatiloka, 2016: p. 208), Buddhist Dictionary.

¹⁶Vinaya: The ethics taught by the Buddha to bring about the unity of the monks. Taught about “how you should behave”. Eg. how to act at the time of eating.

¹⁷This denial mode reflects so-called “tetralema” a product of Buddhist logic, different from the Western thinking based on Aristotle.

¹⁸SN-I., *Vepacittisutta*, pp. 222, 223.

¹⁹SN-1., *Paṭhamasaṅgāma Sutta*, pp. 154, 156.

defeated lies in sorrow. One who is at peace lies at ease having abandoned both victory and defeat. Buddha points out the nature of defeating and winning of wars in the *Dutiyaṅgāma Sutta*. He says that a person may plunder as he pleases, but when others too plunder, the plunderer will be plundered. The fool thinks it is his turn until his evil has not matured, but when his evil has matured he comes to distress. The killer encounters a killer in turn. The victor in turn encounters a vanquisher. The abuser encounters an abusing; one who acts with anger encounters one who retorts with anger. Thus, with changing tides the plunderer becomes the victim of plunder.²⁰

6.2. 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 (compassion²¹) and kindness²² instead of violence. War and peace have been the fundamental concern 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 at creating 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 who 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 *Pathamasangāma Sutta*, Buddha has shown results of war namely:

- 1) Victory breeds enmity.
- 2) The defeated one sleeps badly.
- 3) The peaceful one sleeps at ease, having abandoned victory and defeat.²³

This also shows that war causes a 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

²⁰SN-I, *Dutiyaṅgāma Sutta* P. 157.

²¹Recognized as Karuṇā in both, Pali and Sanskrit.

²²*Mettā* (Pali) is generally translated as loving-kindness is one of core values in Buddhism (called Maitrī in Sanskrit).

²³SN-1. *Pathamasangāma Sutta*. p. 154.

²⁴Samsāra: "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.

Buddhism as an unavoidable part of *samsāric*²⁴ misery. The Buddha speaks of unrest in the form of quarrels (*kalahā*), disputes (*viggahā*), and contentions (*vivāda*) which occur at different levels of social interaction. The *Madhupīṇḍika 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*) and sat under a tree and started to rest. At that time an *Sākyan* named *Daṇḍapāṇi* also came to that park in the morning for exercise. He went where Buddha sat and worshiped and asked Buddha one question: “What is the contemplative’s doctrine? What does he proclaim?”²⁵

Buddha answered: The nature of doctrine, friend, is where one does not keep quarreling with anyone in the world with its Devas, Maras, and Brahmas. These are the teaching of the Dhamma. Then the Buddha explains the two concepts which 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 mind due to following the teachings as Buddhism maintains. These two concepts are:

- 1) Departing from the sensual pleasures (*kāmehivisaṃyuttaṃ*).
- 2) Eliminating craving (*vītataṇhaṃ*).

The *Sāriputtasihanāda Sutta*²⁶ explains—how Buddha resolved the conflict. According to this Sutta, Venerable *Sāriputtha* 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 *Sāriputtha* left, he fell on my body and left without apologizing.” Buddha recalled Venerable *Sāriputtha* back to the temple. The two met together and discussed many issues. Venerable *Sāriputtha* spoke in detail. In the end, the other monk confessed to the Buddha that he had lied. Buddha asked Venerable *Sāriputtha* to forgive the monk, and Venerable *Sāriputtha* apologized. The 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 to the social organizations. Reluctance to respect the opinions of another person, personality traits, social status, 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

²⁵ *Kiṃ vādī samaṇo, kimakkhāyī tī?*

²⁶ AN-5-*Sāriputtasihanāda Sutta* p. 402.

²⁷ Sensual pleasure, (Bhikkhu Bodhi translation). (*kāmahetu* (sensual pleasures as the cause), *kāmanidānam*, (sensual pleasures as the source) *kāmadhikaranam*, (sensual pleasures as the basis) *kāmanamewa hetu*, (the cause being simply sensual pleasures): *Kāma*; two kind of *kāma* are called 1. *Kīlesa-kāma*, (*kāma* as a mental defilement) [e.g.: *The restlessness of mind. Occurrence of lustful thoughts.*]. 2. *Vatthu-kāma*, *Kāma* as the object-base of sensuality. *A liking for material things* (e.g., *Lands, houses, wife, husband/and children...*) (*Buddhist dictionary* (Nyānatiloka, 2016: p. 87)).

due to sensual pleasure²⁷. Buddha speaks of conflicts in the form of quarrels (*ka-laha*), disputes (*vigghaha*), and contentions (*vivāda*) at different levels of social interaction. They occur between nations or states as large-scale wars when one head of state disputes with another (*rājānopi rājūhi vivādentī*). They also occur between religious and ethnic groups within the same nation. They occur also between members of the same family. The root cause for conflict is sensual pleasure. The *Mahādukkhakkhandha* Sutta draws attention to how conflicts take place due to sensual pleasure.

“Again, Bhikhu’ s²⁸ 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, weapons, and even face death or come to deadly unpleasantness. This is the danger here the mass of unpleasantness owing to sensual pleasure.”²⁹

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**).”

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.”³⁰*

6.3. Application in the Context of Social Work/Conflict Resolution Strategies

Ahimsa³¹ is the principle of non-harm. Most Buddhists try to practice ahimsa in their everyday lives and believe that it is wrong to show violence at any time. This means that it is possible that a Buddhist may therefore refuse to fight under any circumstances. In the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, the Buddha describes how we should behave when others blame us. If someone blames us and if we blame him again, there is a conflict. Therefore, the Buddha has explained the steps required to avoid a conflict. Buddha states that if there are conflicts while you are at home, you should remember (to meditate) as follows: My mind will be unaffected, I shall utter no evil words, I shall abide compassionately for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate³². Further, if anyone strikes

²⁸Bhikhu means Buddha’s followers, Buddhist monks.

²⁹*Mahādukkhakkhandha Sutta, MN-1 P.204. (MLDB. P.181).*

³⁰MN-3., Punnovāda Sutta p. 548.

³¹The Buddhist principle of total non-violence, in thoughts, words & action (c.f. five precepts).

³²MN-1., kapacūpama Sutta P. 312.

Table 2. Dialogue with Punna Bhikkhu: Patience is the main way to solve conflicts.

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 for it

with his hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife in your presence, we have to remember that my mind will be unaffected, shall abide compassionate for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. Buddha said:

*"If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife, you should abandon any desires and any thoughts based on the household life. And herein you should train thus: My mind will be unaffected, and I shall utter no evil words, I shall abide compassionate for his welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. That is how you should train, Phaggunā."*³³

According to *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

³³Ibid. P. 312.

to Buddhist virtues.³⁴ In the *Ambalathikārahulowāda 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.” a) Action with the body should be done after repeated reflection; b) Action by speech should be done after repeated reflection; c) Action by mind should be done after repeated reflection.³⁵ *Rahula Bhikkhu* was instructed by Buddha to inquire into the outcome of an action before committing it.

7. Conclusion

In the above analysis, it is clear that the Buddha focused on social and ethnic harmony and has 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 in the Buddhist perspective of social harmony, we can summarize the following resolutions: Refusing violence, affirmation of friendship, focusing on negotiations, respecting diversity, true understanding of humanity, bad results of using weapons, the 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 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. 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 to rescue them and provide for basic human needs. It is a “therapeutic approach” which may include and 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 upon 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

³⁴MN-1., *Kosambiya Sutta* pp. 752-455.

³⁵MN-2., *Ambalathikārahulowāda Sutta*, p. 132.

condition for right motivation, for intentions governed by non-attachment, benevolence, and compassion (Bodhi, 2016: p. 29). 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 under the "four divine abodes" (*brahmavihāra*³⁶) which are loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity.

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 (2018) identified Buddhist roots of impunity in post-war Cambodia and showed how Buddhist teachings affect relationships between former perpetrators and victims in avoiding social conflicts. As proved in Buddhist social work projects, social work theories and methods should be based on the local context (Gohori, 2017). 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.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Bodhi, B. (2016). *The Buddha's Teaching on Social and Communal Harmony, An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon*. Wisdom Publications.
- Eisenbruch, M. (2018). The Cloak of Impunity in Cambodia I: Cultural Foundations. *International Journal of Human Rights*, 22, 757-773.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2018.1454905>
- Gñānārāma, P. (2012). *An Approach to Buddhist Social Philosophy*. Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association.
- Gohori, J. (eds.) (2017). *From the Western-Rooted Professional Social Work to Buddhist Social Work*. Gakubunsha.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mayer, B. (2000). *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practitioner's Guide*. Jossey-Bass.

³⁶The four "sublime" or "diving abodes"-also called the four boundless states (*appamaññā*) – are living kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), altruistic (or sympathetic) joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) (Nyānatiloka, 2016: p. 42).

- Mayer, B. (2013). Conflict Resolution. In *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.80>
- Nyānatiloka (2016). *Buddhist Dictionary—A Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines*. Buddhist Publication Society Inc.
- Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (1976). Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. *Group & Organization Studies*, 1, 249-251.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/105960117600100214?journalCode=goma>
<https://doi.org/10.1177/105960117600100214>
- Valters, C. (2013). *Community Mediation and Social Harmony in Sri Lanka for Manuscripts Submitted to Justice and Security Research Programme (JSRP)*. London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Walshe, M. (1995). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha—A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*. Wisdom Publication.
- Weber, M. (1958). *The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism*. The Free Press.

Abbreviations

- AN: Aṅguttaranikāya
DN: Dīghanikāya
MN: Majjhimanikāya
SN: Saṃyuttanikāya
Sn: Suttanipāta

Appendix: Sri Lankan Case: Border Village

*This text reflects author's own experience:

The child development projects in the Welikanda D. S Division of the Polonnaruwa district from the years 2001 to 2003 is important in this regard. Seven children's societies were formed by me in the Welikanda D. S Division (recognized as a border area of Sri Lanka) in the villages of Nagasthenna, Kurulu Bedda, Mahindagama, Kadawathmaduwa, Aselapura, Puunanni and Ransarathenna. The Puunanni Children's society consisted of Muslim children and had 27 members. The children's society of Ransarathenna (a predominantly Tamil Village) consisted of 36 members. The other 5 villages were predominantly inhabited by Sinhalese and in order consisted of 48, 37, 58, 18, and 40 children. Accordingly, the numbers of Sinhala, Muslim and Tamil children in these societies totaled 264. The main aim of this program was peace building via the development of racial and religious harmony.

The concept of peace in that era was a necessary and vital factor. During the times of the war, a divided and segmented environment had been created due to the misunderstanding and mistrust between the different ethnic communities caught in the midst of the conflict. Focusing on children in order to build peaceful and harmonious relations between the different ethnic groups proved a successful step.

The activities conducted under this project involved the creation of seven libraries for children, seven children's societies, seven early child development centers, and seven parent societies, and through these, the organization of sporting events, discussions, seminars, religious festivals, folk games, exchange programs, awareness programs, income-generation programs, recreational tours and educational programs took a foremost place. The results gained from the above programs and activities are as follows.

- The development of peaceful and harmonious relations amongst children belonging to different ethnic communities.
- The development of religious harmony.
- The eradication of mistrust between the members of different ethnic communities.
- Respect towards religious beliefs, rituals and practices.

See: Somananda, O. (2011) Role of Social Work in Building Ethnic Harmony through Religions Practice. In *International Conference Proceeding on Religious Tolerance and Harmony*. (eds.) Yasassi, P., Chandasiri, W. Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka. Available at:

<https://docplayer.net/41254534-Role-of-social-work-in-building-ethnic-harmony-through-religions-practice-ven-omalpe-somananda-introduction-historical-background-of-ethnic-harmony.html>.