



Buddhist peace psychological concepts

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Abstract

Peace psychology examines the psychological, social, and environmental dimensions that influence conflict, violence, and peacebuilding. This study explores Buddhist psychological concepts as a valuable theoretical and practical framework for understanding the root causes of conflict and promoting sustainable peace. Drawing upon early Buddhist teachings, particularly the analysis of mental defilements such as greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha), the paper argues that conflict originates primarily within the human mind and manifests externally through violence, disputes, and social unrest. Using key Buddhist discourses, including the Madhupindika Sutta and the Mahānidāna Sutta, the study highlights how ignorance, craving, and conceptual proliferation give rise to interpersonal and collective conflicts. The paper further distinguishes between inner peace and outer peace, emphasizing that lasting social harmony is unattainable without inner psychological transformation. Buddhist principles of nonviolence, compassion, dependent co-arising, and mindfulness are presented as effective tools for conflict resolution, mediation, and peacebuilding. By integrating Buddhist psychological insights into contemporary peace psychology, this study contributes to alternative, nonviolent approaches for addressing modern conflicts and fostering long-term reconciliation at both individual and societal levels.

Keywords: Peace psychology, buddhist psychology, conflict resolution, inner peace, outer peace, nonviolence

Introduction

Peace Psychology as its name implies operates in the realm of human perspectives, societal civilizations and environmental factors which control the conflict and peace dynamics. It covers the different peace concepts, each of which are necessary to gain at least some understanding of the mechanisms behind peace building and conflict resolution. Peace psychology can be defined as "the study of mental processes that lead to violence, that prevent violence, and that facilitate nonviolence as well as promoting fairness, respect, and dignity for all, for the purpose of making violence a less likely occurrence and helping to heal its psychological effects" (MacNair, 2003). Another definition is that "peace psychology seeks to develop theories and practices aimed at the prevention and mitigation of direct and structural violence. Framed positively, peace psychology promotes the nonviolent management of conflict and the pursuit of social justice, what we refer to as peacemaking and peacebuilding, respectively" (Christie, Wagner, & Winter, 2000).

Though peace psychology has links within all branches of psychology, there are especially strong links to social psychology, political psychology, community psychology, and positive psychology. Peace psychologists have developed a number of themes over the years. This terming involves a broad range of psychological, societal, and environmental dimensions as an illustration of equalness of all three dimensions that of course peace cannot be achieved when there are components not working such as individual well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability. (Christie, 2008) [3] The peace specialists through the lens of Conflict Resolution have broadened our understanding of conflict as well as its resolution with non-violent measures. In order to achieve this, techniques of mediation, negotiation, and conflict reconciliation apply and are used to help people resolve their differences, understand one

another, and reach solutions that will be good for both parties. Through the initiation of dialogue among antagonized parties, and encouraging the cooperation among their opposing perspectives, conflict resolutions aim at quieting the situation and preventing violence, hence, laying the way for long-term peace.

It is a universally and objectively accepted fact that either the peace or war roots in the mind of man as the United Nations also explain the origin of such social phenomena in relation to mind. Being an old religious tradition in the world, Buddhism values the impact of mental phenomena on almost all social conditions. There has been an everlasting conflict between two binary human affections of love and hate. Unfortunately, most of the occasions love had been defeated by hate and consequently the human history is full of wars, conflicts, unrests, intolerances, struggles, battles etc. Now it is the high time to look back at the human history and learn lessons from our past experiences to create a peaceful world for the sake of the younger generation. Thus, religions at this point of time can spread their spiritual and intellectual teachings to succeed this mission.

For instance, love has been interpreted and depicted at varied degrees and dimensions in Buddhism. Affection of love roots in the mind as a tiny seed of mental condition. Yet the spread of love among others in the social condition is being blocked due to many reasons. Buddhist Psychology discusses means and ways to spread the affection of love at the universal level with the hope of a peaceful globe. As an alternative and traditional knowledge system no doubt Buddhist teachings can be utilized to resolve modern day human unrest occurred due to war, violence and disputes. This current research paper expects to elucidate some of the important Buddhist psychological teachings which can be implemented in areas such as conflict resolution and peace studies.

Discussion

According to Buddhism, disputes and conflicts arise due to the lack of insight into the true nature of things. All humans are subject to the ignorance and therefore perceive and project onto ephemeral phenomena qualities such as “everlasting,” “independent,” “desirable,” and “undesirable.” (MN) We come to regard these phenomena as substantial aspects of our “selves.” The wrong views push the average personality to seek sensory fulfillment through them, or to deny others. According to Buddhist teachings all self-destructive attitudes and hostilities can be said to stem from the defilements, or *kilesa*: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). These three types of defilements have become deeply engrained in the human consciousness. These are mutually reinforcing unwholesome roots that condition human emotional and cognitive habits. Due to greed, humans pursue objectives through aggression, coercion, and threats. Due to hatred, humans perpetrate violence against those we dislike. And because of delusion, humans conform to conventional and unenlightened ideas about what constitutes peace.

Root Causes of Conflicts

The *Madhupindika Sutta* (Discourse on the Ball of Honey) of the *Majjhima Nikaya* demonstrates how the unenlightened persons have been entangled in innumerable impulses to conflict since beginningless time. According to this text, conflict arises due to two factors. First, worldly individuals who are uninstructed in the Buddha’s teaching become entangled in unwholesome and ignorant thoughts. Second, these thoughts lead to conceptual proliferation, which leads to jealousy and avarice when a party perceives another to possess a quality or thing that the party desires intensely and sees the other as undeserving of possessing. A misplaced sense of injustice arises from the same processes that lead to sense-perception. In this sense, all self-destructive attitudes and hostilities can be said to stem from the defilements, or *kilesa*: greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). These three types of defilements have become deeply engrained in the human consciousness. These are mutually reinforcing unwholesome roots that condition our emotional and cognitive habits, driving us to engage in unwholesome activities. Due to greed, we pursue our objectives through aggression, coercion, and threats. Due to hatred, we perpetrate violence against those we dislike. And because of delusion, we conform to conventional and unenlightened ideas about what constitutes peace.

Inner and Outer Peace

Peace is one of the central teachings of Buddhism and it is regarded as a religion of peace by both insiders as well as outsiders unanimously. Moreover, Buddhism is praised and commended for its doctrine of love and compassion for all sentient beings. Buddhist moral principles centered for the peace of all. In the early Buddhist tradition, the concept of peace was expressed with the word “*santhi*” (tranquility, peace) (Turner, Gregory and Vesselin, 2009). The primary goal of Buddhism is the attainment of perfect inner peace and it is reckoned as the ultimate happiness. The practice of a good life involves a harmonious living together with one’s fellow human beings including with all living or sentient beings plus the nature. In the outset, then, we can identify Buddhist universality perspective on peace and harmony.

Peace means different things to different people, but as a result of divergent opinions due to defilements, we develop an “ill-directed mind” with “inappropriate attention” (*ayonisomanasikara*), which leads us to justify and rationalize our prejudices and biases as absolute truths. All disputes are seen as inevitable ways of advancing a dogmatic viewpoint while ignoring one’s own misconceptions.

External disputes, battles, and wars reflect the inner wars between people. Jealousy and avarice contribute to personal insecurity, which affects the balance of peace in society. They are the core causes of conflict in individual’s factors of personality and interpersonal relationships. According to the Buddhist theory of dependent co-arising, jealousy leads to the conditions for conflicts, particularly in the mind. Jealousy is the mental state in which an individual is dissatisfied with another’s well-being, and believing that other person is not deserving of happiness. In this regard, conflict in the eyes of Buddhism is understood as predominantly psychological, a manifestation of physical, verbal, and mental acts.

In the *Mahānidāna Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya*, the nature of conflict is discussed through the theory of dependent co-arising as: “Feeling conditions craving, craving conditions seeking, seeking conditions acquisition, acquisition conditions decision-making, decision-making conditions lustful desire, lustful desire conditions attachment, attachment conditions appropriation, appropriation conditions avarice, avarice conditions guarding of possessions, and because of the guarding of possessions there arise the taking up sticks and swords, quarrels, conflicts, disputes, arguments, strife, abuse, lying and other evil unskilled states.”

As can be seen from the First Precept, Buddhist teachings strongly oppose the use of violence, considering violence as the result of greed (*rāga*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Many Buddhist writings contain numerous references to war. The Buddhists are not allowed to fight in wars because a war involves killing, and killing is a breach of the First Precept, it is morally wrong to fight in either offensive or defensive wars. That is one of the reasons that Buddhism did not develop a just defense war theory. According to Buddhism, warriors who die in battle do not go to heaven but to a special hell because at the moment of death their minds are intent on killing living beings. Killing causes a bad karma, even in the case of self-defense and even defending family and friends is not allowed. A real Buddhist must not kill, in time of resistance for oneself; he/she must allow himself to be slaughtered rather than breaking the First Precept. *Dhammapada* 405 says, “He who has renounced violence towards all living beings, weak or strong, who neither kills nor causes others to kill him do I call a holy man.” However, the question is how many Buddhists are really following his teachings. Unfortunately, conflicts, hidden violence and even wars are going on even in Buddhist countries. The fact is that humankind is weak by nature and lacking in self-control. There are many teachings in Buddhism. One of the basic teachings of Buddhism are The Four Noble Truths, which are *Dukkha*, meaning all existence is suffering, *Samudāya* which means suffering, is caused by craving, *Nirodha* meaning suffering can have an end, and *Mārga*, meaning the way to end suffering as the Noble Eight-fold Path.

Buddhism’s most important contribution to peace lies in overcoming deluded impulses in the inner life of the

individual. Because the effects of the “three poisons” spread from the individual to families and groups, communities and nations, values and culture, the land and the era, transforming this negative energy into enlightened wisdom is the essential starting point on the Buddhist path to peace.

Buddhist spiritual leader Dalai Lama (1999) termed this approach internal disarmament, wherein

...you try to reduce negative emotions such as hatred, anger, jealousy, extremism, and greed, and promote compassion, human affection, tolerance.... Through education and training, the amount of ignorance can eventually reduce, and similarly hatred, anger. Through proper education we can increase human compassion, human tolerance.

This process of inner transformation is also termed human revolution by international Buddhist leader and United Nations Peace Award recipient Daisaku Ikeda (2001). Achieved through Buddhist meditative practice, it leads to the cultivation of character, wisdom, courage, and compassion, to take action for both one's personal development and for the betterment of society. “Only when efforts to reform society have as their point of departure the reformation of the inner life—human revolution—will they lead us with certainty to a world of lasting peace and true security”

(<http://wpb.stanford.edu/oldsites/gki/gkiikeda.html>).

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12. (All Pāli references in this work are from the Pāli Text Society Buddha Jayanthi Tripitaka Series Volume (reprint in Nedimala)editions unless otherwise mentioned)