



The Relationship Between Internal and External Conflict: A Buddhist Way to Discover Peace

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Abstract

The term 'conflict' is used for both people and groups who debate, and even kill each other, as a result of having different beliefs, attitudes, needs and benefits. On the other hand, the term 'peace' connotes as an antonym word of conflict. The purpose of this paper is to draw a brief account from the scholastic and Buddhist perspective, how the conflict appears in the mind (internal) and comes into external world through the behavior (five aggregates), what is the relationship between internal and external conflict, and what are the ways to discover inner rapture or peace through avoiding conflicts both internally as well as externally.

Keywords: Conflict, Peace, Buddhism.

Introduction

Conflict can occur between people or groups who have different beliefs, attitudes, needs and benefits, so that they debate, and even kill each other as a result. Peace, however, connotes as an antonym word of conflict. The purpose of this paper is to draw a brief account from the scholastic and Buddhist perspective, how the conflict arises in the mind (internal) and comes to external world through behavior (five aggregates). A relationship between internal and external conflict will be examined as well. Finally, the author will point out the ways to find inner peace by avoiding conflicts, internal and external.

Notion of Conflict and Violence in Buddhism

The word ‘conflict’ emerged from the Latin word ‘*Confligere*’, which connotes fighting, warfare, incompatibility, opposition and contradiction¹. People and groups who have beliefs, attitudes and needs that are absolutely different tend to debate and even engage in armed conflicts as a result². On the other hand, in accordance to the Oxford Dictionary, the word ‘conflict’ refers to a serious disagreement or argument, which turns into violence³. Moreover, In the Pāli English dictionary by Mrs. Rhys Davids, conflict or violence is known as ‘*Virodha*’, ‘*Viggaha*’, ‘*virūjjhati*’, ‘*Ghatana*’⁴. Investigating the several Pāli discourses and early Buddhist canon, another Pāli word ‘*daṇḍa*’ also connotes as conflict or violence⁵. According to the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha said, ‘*Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa*’, which means that ‘all trembles at violence or conflict’⁶. However, non-violence is at the heart of Buddhist thinking and behavior. The first of the five precepts that all Buddhists should follow is “*avoid killing, or harming any living being*”⁷. Buddhism is essentially a peaceful tradition.

¹Mack, W. Reymond and Peace, John, *Sociology and Social Life*; New York : D Van Company, 1973. P. 68.

²Ibid.

³Oxford Dictionary. Access on Date:3rd January, 2018. (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/conflict?q=conflict>)

⁴Davids, Rhys, *Pali-English Dictionary*; London : Pali text Society, 1923.

⁵Malalasekera, G.P., *Dictionary of Pāli proper names*. Access on Date : 3rd January, 2018. (http://what-buddha-said.net/library/DPPN/index_dict.ppn.htm)

⁶Cf- Dh. V. 129, PTS, p. 19. ‘*Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa, sabbe bhāyanti maccuno, Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye*’ & Dh. V. 130, PTS, p. 19. ‘*Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa, sabbesaṃ jīvitaṃ piyaṃ, Attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā, na haneyya na ghātaye*’

⁷Pañca-sila : ‘*Panātipata veramani sikkhapadam samādiyami*’. Access on date: 23rd January. (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sila/pancasila.html>)

Nothing in Buddhist scripture gives any support to the use of violence as a way of resolving conflicts.

Relationship Between Internal And External Conflict

Buddhist doctrine is based on the working of the mind. In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha proclaims, ‘*Mind is the forerunner of all evil or good states*’⁸. Moreover, in terms to illustrate the root of the conflict, John Galtung, a Norwegian peace-maker, mentioned that ‘Conflict is related to the mankind’s behavior. Conflict arises because people are concerned or understand that there are some groups who are working against their advantage’⁹. Thus conflict, in his definition, goes together with attitude and behavior, per the following diagram:

Conflict → Attitude → Behavior

On the other hand, the term ‘conflict’ is viewed as ‘dispute’, ‘debate’, or ‘quarrel’ as regarding to the Buddhist doctrine¹⁰. Moreover, in order to ascribe the root of conflict, Elizabeth J. Harris, a prominent Buddhist scholar, precisely states two reasons of the arising conflict; one is an individual’s maladjustment and another is unsatisfactory social and environmental conditions¹¹. Buddhism strictly claims that conflict arises from the mind because of *papañca* (mental fabrication)¹². In the *Madhupiṇḍikasutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, Venerable Mahakaccayana states, “*Cakkhum ca paṭicca rupe ca cakkhu viññānam upajjāti ṭinnam saṅgiti passō*”; which means ‘when the agent sees (perceive) anything (object), the object arises in the mind, and creates consciousness - these three contacts make mind

⁸Cf- Dh., Verse no. 1, *PTS*; Page no. 1 ; “*Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā , Manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā, Tato naṃ dukkhamanveti cakkam’va vahato padaṃ*” & Dh., Verse no. 2 , *PTS*; Page no. 2; “*Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā , Manasā ce pasannena bhāsati vā karoti vā, Tato naṃ sukkhamanveti chāyā’va anapāyini.*”

⁹Dhammaso, Phramaha Hansa, Article on : “*Buddhist Values towards Conflict and Peace*”: *Buddhist Virtues in Socio-Economic Development, ICDV Conference Volume*. Bangkok: MCU press, 2011. Page no. 382.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Harris, J. Elizabeth, *Violence and disruption in Society: a study of Early Buddhist Text*. Kandy : Buddhist Publication society, 2002. Access on Date: 5th January, 2018. . (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/harris/wheel392.html>)

¹²Bhikkhu Tannissaro, *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta: the Bell of honey*. Access on Date: 5th January, 2018. (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.018.than.html>)

consciousness'¹³. Furthermore, for a more clear understanding of state of consciousness arising, Venerable Thannissaro Bhikkhu provides a visual map as follows:

Contact → Feeling → Perception → Thinking → The perceptions and categories of *papañca* ¹⁴

In terms to the Buddhist perspective, conflict connotes as *papañca*; when the agent (mind) perceives something (object) from external world through *pañcaskhandha* (five aggregates - eye, ear, nose, tongue, body), the object arises in the mind internally; through analyzing the perceived, object transmits into *papañca* (conflict) and flourishes as an external conflict. Therefore, from the Buddhist point of view, we can merely accept that there is a close relationship between the internal and external conflict; and the process by which external conflicts arise based on thinking.

The Value of Conflict

Buddhism would argue that evil sometimes occurs from conflict through a logical sense of curiosity. On the other hand, in many situations, conflict also leads to many benefits for human beings and societies, such self-development and disintegration of inner values of human beings. Moreover in a subjective sense, conflict leads to establishing the *Vinaya*, the first sanctioned Buddhist council, and the development of the economy as well. So, conflict in Buddhism can be both a good and bad thing¹⁵. According to the *Buddhavamsa*, if we look at the biography of the Buddha, before he renounced the worldly life, prince Siddhartha had seen four signs, i.e. old age, a sick man, a dead body and an ascetic, which created conflict (pain) in the prince's mind and prompted him to make a decision to renounce the family. Moreover, in accordance to *Aggañña Sutta*, establishing a system of monarchy is closely related to conflict due to most people have physical needs, such as land for subsistence and agriculture¹⁶. The *Vinaya*, or monastic code for the monks, was established to reduce conflict

¹³Madhupiṇḍikasuttaṃ : MN I, *Pali Text Society*; page no. 108.

¹⁴Bhikkhu Tannissaro, *Madhupindika Sutta: the Bell of honey*. Access on Date: 5thJanuary, 2018.. (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.018.than.html>)

¹⁵Dhammhaso, Phramaha Hansa, Article on : “*Buddhist Values towards Conflict and Peace*”: *Buddhist Virtues in Socio-Economic Development, ICDV Conference Volume*. Bangkok: MCU press, 2011. Page no. 382 -385.

¹⁶Aggañña Sutta- DN 27. Access on Date: 5th January, 2018. (<http://www.urbandharma.org/pdf/AggannaSutta.pdf>)

and create harmony among monks. However, during the meditation period, conflict plays an important role. For an instance, before entering into *jhāna*¹⁷, *vitakka* (questions, disturbance or conflict) arises into yogi's mind. When the yogi receives a correct answer through right investigating (*vicāra*), the yogi must be an ease *vitakka* (conflict). Then, upon knowing the *vitakka*, a *yogi* can enter into first *jhāna*; gradually the *yogi* can develop his meditation skills within each *jhāna* level even while the yogi enters into the stream. To understand the value of Conflict, His Holy Eminence Ajahn Chah states, "When you don't let yourself do what you want to do, it is a conflict, and it creates more conflict and confusion"¹⁸.

Seeking for the Peace

Peace is an antonym word of the word 'Conflict', and the Buddhism is one that based on Peace; in Pāli which is familiar as 'Santi', 'Sāma', 'Sāmaggi'¹⁹. According to Buddhism, Ones who practices the Dhamma by following the way of the Buddha, he may understand the nature of conflict and can gain a true peace. Again, Venerable Tannissaro Bhikkhu states, "staying with bare mind is the way of ignore the conflict both internally and externally"²⁰. Bare mind is the strong mind for those who do not receive any object (including conflict) from the external world, never give any opportunity to fabricate the mind (*papañca*) and always stay with an inner rapture. Moreover, to avoid any kind of conflict and find an ease in the mind, the most respected Venerable Bana Bhante recites one *gātha* (verse) in his *dhamma* speech as follows:

*“As you have eyes, but you should stay as like as a blind one,
As you have ears, but you should stay as like as a deaf one,
As you have an ability to speak, but you should act as like as a dumb one,
As you are a wise one, but you should stay as like a foolish who knows nothing”*.²¹

¹⁷Jhāna – *Jhāna* is an advanced state of concentration or Samadhi, wherein the mind becomes absorbed into its meditation subject. It is divided into four levels, each level progressively more refined than the previous one.

¹⁸Chah, Ajhan; *A Collection of Talks Ajhan Chah*. Ubon Ratchatani: Wat Non Pah Phong, 2009. Page no. 49-62.

¹⁹ Davids, Rhys, *Pali-English Dictionary*; London : Pali text Society, 1923.

²⁰ A dhamma Talk by Ajhan Tannissaro Bhikkhu. 3th March, 2003 at Wat Metta.

²¹ Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury's noble conversation with the Noble Venerable His Holy Eminence Bana Bhante on 7th May, 2011 at Rajbana Vihara Complex, Rangamati, Bangladesh.

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