

The Concept of Violence in Buddhism

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Abstract

This paper came up to the surface of ethical confusion of why people tend to use violence to solve many problems. The method used in writing this article is library research. In this article, the author collects data from suttas, articles or journals related to the study of violence in Buddhism. The author analyzes this topic concerning violence in the perspectives of Buddhism generally, especially advices and stories that had been recorded in the Pali Canon and other sources. For the Examples are from the story of Angulimala, the dispute over water between the Sakyas and the Koliyas. In human relationships, it is impossible to avoid disagreement. People might have similar or totally opposite views. The disagreement can be solved by loving speech, deep listening, and understanding. It is not always the case that all disagreement can be solved. If the disagreement prolongs for a certain period of time, then disputes start to arise. People tend to be attached to their own view or collective view. For the next unpredictable phase, they may be using violence of body, speech, and mind to persuade other people. Violence pertained to the use of physical, speech, and ill will to harm others is to inflict fear. Human long history related closely to fear when making a decision, so no wonder inflicting fear can be one of the ways. Buddhism is a peaceful religion. This is a religion that is no violence in it. There is a key virtue of Buddhism that is the virtue of No violence. No violence refers to the action of non-harming, not to injure, or non-violence. It applies to all living beings. The teaching of the Buddha is clearly associated with non-violence or the principle of Ahimsa (non violence), therefore inflicting fear is inconsistent with the Ahimsa (non violence) which's teaching of the Buddha.

Keywords

violence; non violence;

Buddhism



I. Introduction

This paper came up to the surface of ethical confusion of why people tend to use violence to solve many problems. On one hand, our history has recorded so many violence done to human beings, ethnic groups, societies, and countries. Human Resources (HR) is the most important component in a company or organization to run the business it does. Organization must have a goal to be achieved by the organizational members (Niati et al., 2021). Development is a change towards improvement. Changes towards improvement require the mobilization of all human resources and reason to realize what is aspired (Shah et al, 2020). The development of human resources is a process of changing the human resources who belong to an organization, from one situation to another, which is better to prepare a future responsibility in achieving organizational goals (Werdhiastutie

et al, 2020). There are numerous cases of violence that to a certain extent, it has indeed solved many problems. On another hand, great sufferings caused by the violence inflict more sufferings from one generation to the next generation.

I would like to analyze this topic concerning violence in the perspectives of Buddhism generally, especially advices and stories that had been recorded in the Pali Canon and other sources. For the Examples are from the story of Angulimala, to the dispute over water between the Sakyas and the Koliyas, and up to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Wherever human beings exist there will be disagreements, then naturally disputes will arise. People tend to be over attached to their own views, each believing that his or her own view is the highest or the best. When other people refuse to adopt that particular view, violence will come into play. The forms of violence can be in physical harming actions, spoken words, and ill will.

Why do people use violence in the first place? The weakness of most people is fear. So, one tends to inflict fear in order to make other people submit. Violence is a type of harming action that is inconsistent with the Unviolence which's taught by the Buddha.

II. Research Method

The method used in writing this article is library research. Library research is research that is carried out based on written works, including research results, both published and unpublished (Melfianora 2019). In addition to the suttas as primary sources, the author collects supporting data by looking for sources in articles or journals related to the Study of Violence in Buddhism.

III. Result and Discussion

3.1 Disagreements Cause Disputes

I strongly believe that disagreement is a prominent attribute of human life, as people tend to disagree among one another on numerous issues. The existence of disagreement does not confirm the impossibility of attaining understanding, but it is indeed a challenge for human beings to find an effective way to settle down the controversies.

Disagreement is a kind of dissension, a difference between conflicting facts, claims or opinions. The argument or debate arises from conditions that are not concurring. Disagreements entailed conflicts of belief that is attributed to conflicted parties in relation to 'preferences'.

It is the (1) disagreements that cause disputes, a matter of conflicting or point of view. The dispute is closely related to controversy. The word controversy is derived from Controversial, which is from Latin. Contra means "against", and vertere or versus means "to turn against".

It was recorded in the Kintisutta, the Buddha advised his students to practice the teaching in harmony, appreciating each other without quarreling. The monks should not quarrel concerning the meaning and phrasing of certain teaching. It is not worthwhile to fight each other due to that reason.

Every disciple of the Buddha has the responsibility to see the deeper meaning of the teaching. No need to quarrel over the phrasing, because it is just a minor matter. If they see anybody who might have committed an offense, they should not instantly accuse him or

her. Instead, they need to use loving speech and skillful way to establish a friendly and appropriate communication in order to find out what had happened.

From the stories above, it is clear that the Buddha really hoped for peace in this world. but until now there are always acts of violence in every area. we can see the tragedy of violence on the highway that has been reported in various media recently. These incidents are no longer just disputes between road users, but are already criminal acts. Several incidents have constituted serious crimes, in the form of severe assault and murder. why all that happened? what is the cause? all of that is due to a lack of love between others and insensitivity to the suffering of others, so that people can act brutally.

On the other side we can see violence in the family, rape, starvation and even wars that never end and have taken many victims. if everyone practices universal love, there must be no violence, everyone will live in peace even though life in this country is equipped with religion, and every religion teaches love and peace, then why do things like the above still happened?

Agree to disagree is an ancient phrase referring to the effort of finding solution to a conflict, but it is still an unsolved issue. Both parties can tolerate but still do not accept each other's position. This is due to the awareness of both sides, that further conflicts would be not necessary.

Many people take negotiation for granted, while in fact it is the most widely recognized form used to reach the solution of disagreement. There is another method called mediation, which is a voluntary, non-binding, and confidential process by asking an independent mediator to assist both parties to reach a settlement.

There is an issue about capital punishment, it is a moral disagreement. The debate is still going up until now. People are questioning about the reliability of the legal system. It is not an easy answer like "black" or "white", or tossing a coin as a way to solve that particular issue. I think we probably need an empirical research, so that the result might give people a new perspective on capital punishment.

The Buddha stated clearly in the *Sāmagāmasutta* that there are six roots of disputes in a person, that is:

1. Irritable and hostile
2. Offensive and contemptuous
3. Devious and deceitful
4. Having wicked desire and wrong views
5. Attached to their own views, hold them tight, and refusing to let go.

A person who is lacking in respect and reverence for the teacher, the teaching, and the community, does not fulfill the training. They create a dispute in the community, causing suffering, harm, and hurt for other people.

Based on the six roots of discord in a person who has been taught by the Buddha, then as a Buddhist, it is obligatory to do it as best as possible. otherwise it means that we have neglected the efforts of the Buddha in searching for the formula to get rid of the prolonged suffering in various lives and it is difficult for us to reach nibbana immediately.

3.2 View of Attachment

There is a Pali term, *Upādāna* which means attachment, it is considered as the primary cause of suffering. The cessation of attachment will lead someone to realize Nirvana.

There are four kinds of attachment mentioned in the *Cūḷasīhanādasutta*. The first is attachment to sensual pleasure, the second is attachment to wrong views, the third is attachment to rites and rituals, and the fourth is attachment to theories of a self.

What is sensual pleasure? It is a repeated craving of worldly things such as enjoyment and clinging for wealth, reputation, sexuality, food, sleep, profit, etc. The sensual pleasure comprises all objects which can be experienced through our senses. Ajahn Pasano mentioned the fundamental desire for pleasure, gratification and stimulation. Attachment to sensual pleasure is also one of the obstacles that prevent us from being enlightened.

Wrong view is to believe about eternalism. The eternalism or nihilism. The view of eternalism is to believe that the world and self are eternal at the same time as everything changes from moment to moment. In the Metta Sutta it is mentioned about being free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing perfect understanding, those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death.

In the discourse on the Middle Way parallel to the Kaccānagottasutta, the Buddha mentioned to Venerable Kaccanagotta about the right view. (2) The disagreement arises as a result of people being attached to their own views, especially the wrong ones. They are not able to release or let go of their view. When a person really sees the origin and cessation of the world with the right understanding, then there will not be any notion of existence and non-existence regarding this world.

From four kinds of attachment which were mentioned in Cūḷasīhanādasutta, we should know that If we are attached to sensual desire we will not be able to stop all desires and all worldly desires. There are many examples of the consequences of attachment to sensuality that occur in various areas of our lives. like the incident that happened at few school in Indonesia which people are talking about nowadays. where the tragedy that happened to the school alumni and school students who always get violent sexual acts from the school owner but the person is still free outside because of improper legal protection. Many legal experts protect the person (the perpetrator) because he is one of the most well-know or influential person in the country. This happens due to attachment to sensual desire that makes a person unable to control his actions, even he doesn't know that what he is doing has damaged and destroyed the future of others.

On the other side, too many people are attached to wrong views. sometimes a person defends against his wrong words, wrong thoughts and wrong actions but they still defend it as if what they are doing is an absolute truth that cannot be changed anymore. Wrong views can also give rise to emotions and problems and this will trap the person in prolonged karma. actually it is caused by a misunderstanding of the meaning of the wise view or the perfect view which is called samma ditti which is defined as right view, not the fully enlightened view, this is what causes one to enter into the understanding of right and wrong. For example, the cases that occur today in our life, such as bumping their cars because they don't want to budge on the highway, even this can lead to fatal accidents and even death.

Problems also occur because they want to be win themselves. so that there was a war like the case of the war between Russia and Ukraine, where each country only thought of its own interests and felt that its interests were disturbed and only held its own principles so that they did not see the consequences that occurred widely. This has not only damaged the mentality of the people from both of the countries, but more than that, many bad things have happened to the people of the countries. poverty, fear, anxiety and even death occur every second without being stopped. where an action should be based on positive thinking, respect for people around so that national peace is formed.

Thich Nhat Hanh was slightly different in using the terms. Instead of existence and non-existence as used by Ajahn Sujato, he used the terms being and no being. The parallel discourse was recorded in the Samyutta Agama 301. The right view was being described as

the direct understanding or insight concerning being and non being, the internal formation of discrimination and preference, grasping and attachment. When they are no longer bound to those internal knots, that is the right view. Another way of saying, it is the middle way.

There are people who believe that rites and rituals alone can bring liberation, which is the opposite according to the teaching of the Buddha. There are passages in the *Old Path White Clouds* by Thich Nhat Hanh which retell the conversation between Kassapa and the Buddha about worshipping the fire that lead to liberation. The Buddha shared about the interconnectedness of all phenomena in the universe.

The last is the attachment to the theory of self-atman. There is a strong sense of “I”, “Me”, and “Mine”, the urge to have this and that, this is for me. This is also an assumption that when one dies, then he or she will disappear completely. People believe that there is a “self” that is unchanging, permanent, or a soul. The Buddhist doctrine shares an opposite view, that all phenomena are impermanent included the self, and it does not have a separate self. The existence of the self also depends on many other elements.

But the fact happened that until now the Buddhists are still very attached to the ritual and very confident that the ritual will be able to save it, the evidence is still there are burning paper in the Chinese tribe, releasing chickens in the Indian tribe, offering rituals in the early Buddhist Sundanese and many other tribes

3.3 The Attachment Leads to Violence

Buddhism in fact is a peaceful tradition. I have studied the Buddha’s teaching for many years, during which I have not found any part of the teaching that gives any support to violence, especially one that can solve conflicts or disputes.

The Buddha in the early discourses often advised his disciples to check and recheck about the views that they have been holding, especially the speculative or fixed views, dogmatic opinions, even the correct views if not verified by direct verification, those views can give negative impact. The most famous discourse of the Buddha is given to the Kalama Clan, which was recorded in the *Kalamasutta*. It is a powerful message of the Buddha, not to believe whatever views we are given, before we verify them by using many ways (*ehipassiko*).

A follower of Buddhism must understand everything carefully, not only based on written references, or what we hear, but must be practiced in life so as to get a reality and correct results.

The *Sāmagāmasutta* mentioned about people who are attached to their own views, holding them tight, and refusing to let go. They thought that it was the paramount view that needed to be adopted by all. It is easy for them to fall into the trap of being over obsessive to a certain view, then try to ignore other people’s point of view. That is why, (3) attachment to one’s own views can lead to violence.

There is an example in the *Tebijja Sutta*, the Buddha gave an advice to a young Brahmin called Vasettha about how to be reborn in the realm of the Brahma. There will be a bad consequence in one indulging in the sensual pleasure because the attachment will strengthen. People will be tempted to commit actions that harm others in order to experience that particular pleasure.

The first precept of the lay practitioners is to avoid killing, even under any circumstances that require them to take up arms for war, in which they might be hesitant to do so. Of course, the Buddhist ethics permit themselves to do it for self-defense, but it is clearly stated that it is forbidden to kill.

There are different levels of precepts (*Sila*) that are observed by the monastics and lay practitioners. The monastic Buddhist codes are called *Vinaya*, and the ones for lay

practitioners are the five precepts (Pancasila). The lay practitioners can also practice the 8 precepts (Atthasila) from time to time.

All human lives are equal in intrinsic value according to the bioethical literature, except in the cases of self-defense. When one inflicts harms or violence, it is the direct cause of suffering upon others.

The teaching of the Buddha propounds the idea that life is precious, that cultivating loving kindness and compassion is a must in every daily life. Since life is precious, then it will only be natural to protect the lives of people, animals, and plants.

3.4 The Way of Violence

The Buddhist ethics encourage all practitioners to overcome greed (irsia), hatred (lobha), and ignorance (moha), which are also known as the three poisons. The actions of using violence to harm others are based on these three poisons. (4) Violence pertains to the use of physical, speech, and ill will to harm others.

The law of cause and effect is of great importance in Buddhism. By understanding the law of cause and effect, it can be the basis for transformation of our actions of body, speech, and mind. All people wish for happiness but still go to the wrong direction, unable to differentiate what is virtuous and what is not.

There are 10 non-virtuous or harmful actions that we need to abandon, they are: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct which are the three kinds of actions performed by the body. Lies, divisive speech, insulting words, and gossips are the four kinds of speech. The three kinds of mind are covetousness, harmful intentions, and wrong views.

Each of these non-virtuous actions has four components: the basis, the intention, the deed, and the final step. The basis means the clearly identified object. The intention is either one of the three delusions. The deed is the actual action. And the final step is the action being successfully performed.

When people devote themselves in sustained attention to the contents of the mind, those many mental formations that may have been previously unnoticed will become very clear. The Buddha advised his disciples to continue to reflect this way, so that they can see clearly the actions of body, speech, and mind which are harmful to one self and others, and should not be performed.

3.5 Harming to Inflict Fear

The teaching of interconnectedness stated clearly “this is because that is”. Every phenomenon always has some contribution factors, nothing can be by itself, everything has to interbe with everything else.

Harming others using violence through body, speech, and mind also has many reasons behind that. One of the reasons of (5) Harming others is to inflict fear, so other people or groups are willing to submit or to follow the perpetrator’s view.

In this case, anyone should not commit acts of violence just because they want to subjugate someone, even if it's an old person. Strict action should be avoided as much as possible, preferably using directed, polite language with wise and loving direction and understanding so as to produce a clear understanding for a person and he can do it happily, responsibly and not by compulsion. If it is done in a benevolent manner, it will definitely have a positive impact on the person for a long time.

There are fears of financial dependence, fear of nobody loves and wants us anymore, fear of sickness and pain, fear of seeing failures in life, fear of losing respect, all kinds of fear that cause suffering. Human beings suffer from physical and mental pains. For example, the physical pain as the pain intensifies, is partly due to the fear that manifests in

our mind, the previous memory that has already been there, the past experience. Pain can also be accepted or overcome with the urgency of life's purpose and feelings.

All phenomena that we perceived are mere visions, mere illusions, and do not reflect any really existing objects. We shall cultivate non fear and non-attachment, to look at all phenomena with equanimity, free from likes or dislikes.

Fear is a mental formation that needs to be understood. To understand fear is to be liberated from fear. The practice of stopping (samatha) and looking deeply (vipasyana) can help us realize the way to non-fear.

Piya Vagga of the Dhammapada mentioned several elements that give rise to fear. They are endearment, affection, attachment, lust, craving. When a person is completely free from those elements, then they will have no more fear.

3.6 No violence in Buddhism

Buddhism is a peaceful religion. This is a religion that is no violence in it. There is a key virtue of Buddhism that is the virtue of No violence. No violence refers to the action of non-harming, not to injure, or non-violence. It applies to all living beings.

All beings are precious, including the plants and minerals. All beings want to live a peaceful life, to hurt others also mean to hurt one self. One of the prominent figures is Mahatma Gandhi who strongly believed in the principle of Ahimsa (Non violence). Other figures are H.H. The Dalai Lama, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh.

The Majjhima Nikaya recorded a discourse with Angulimala. He was a robber, bloody-handed, bent on death and destructions, merciless to living creatures, killing people and wearing a garland of fingers. Angulimala tried to kill the Buddha, but ended up being converted to a monk. The Buddha himself had prevented a war between the Sakyas and the Koliyas. Both sides fought over a river in order to gain control of the source of water. The Buddha raised a question whether water was more worthy than the blood of fellow human beings. The question struck them and brought back the peace among them.

King Ashoka was one of the great Indian kings of the Maurya Dynasty. King Ashoka waged many destructive wars against many states, conquered over many small kingdoms. He was converted to Buddhism after witnessing a large number of dying people. King Ashoka sent many Buddhist monks to other countries in Central Asia and Sri Lanka, sending the message of peace and non-violence across the countries.

The atomic bombing that incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been stirring endless debates concerning the aspect of ethical, legal, and military controversies. The decision to blast two atomic bombs resulted in the death of more than 200,000 people, mostly civilians.

The Japanese army had advanced fiercely to many Asian countries, at the same time also killed so many civilians. The atomic bomb was to force the Japanese army to stop their invasion and surrender, at the same time killed so many civilians and created sufferings that haunted the survivals.

The incorporation of Tibet into China was also another case of violence. The Tibetan Government in Exile called it the Chinese invasion of Tibet, and People's Republic of China (PRC) called it a "peaceful liberation of Tibet". PRC gained control over Tibet since 1959, at that time H.H. The Dalai Lama has been leading a peaceful approach and many ways, but up until now, both sides have not reached any agreements.

The way of peaceful approach lead by H.H. The Dalai Lama is a manifestation of Ahimsa (non violence) teaching of the Buddha, the practice of loving kindness, compassion, and patience. In 1989 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent struggle for liberation of Tibet.

IV. Conclusion

In human relationships, it is impossible to avoid disagreement. People might have similar or totally opposite views. The disagreement can be solved by loving speech, deep listening, and understanding.

It is not always the case that all disagreement can be solved. If the disagreement prolongs for a certain period of time, then disputes start to arise. People tend to be attached to their own view or collective view. For the next unpredictable phase, they may be using violence of body, speech, and mind to persuade other people.

Violence pertained to the use of physical, speech, and ill will to harm others is to inflict fear. Why is fear? Human long history related closely to fear when making a decision, so no wonder inflicting fear can be one of the ways. The teaching of the Buddha is clearly associated with non-violence or the principle of Ahimsa (non violence), therefore inflicting fear is inconsistent with the Ahimsa (non violence) which's teaching of the Buddha.

To conclude this paper, I would like to give a summary of my points as below:

- (1) Disagreements cause disputes.
- (2) Disagreements arise as a result of people being attached to their own views.
- (3) Attachment to one's own views can lead to violence.
- (4) Violence pertained to the use of physical, speech, and ill will to harm others.
- (5) Harming others is to inflict fear.
- (6) Inflicting fear is one type of harming actions which is inconsistent with the ahimsa teaching of the Buddha.
- (7) be wise and understand what is important to do in this life for development awareness and which ones are bad to avoid in living a mindful life
- (8) all actions must be based on love.

Therefore, disagreements cause disputes when people are attached to their own views, and that leads to violence by inflicting fear which is one type of harming actions which is inconsistent with the Ahimsa (non violence) which 's teaching of the Buddha.

4.1 Postscript

Violence is an interesting topic for our modern times. The Ahimsa teaching of the Buddha is still relevant up to now. How as citizens of the world, we respond to the many violence that had been caused to our world and humanity.

Buddhists are just humans. Humans keep evolving, up until a few decades ago when we were facing so many wars among countries. There were times when the Japanese army invasions were seen as a dangerous threat for Asian countries, so that the U.S. decided to drop the atomic bombs to force the Japanese Army to withdraw their invasions.

The two bombs had killed more than 200,000 people, most of whom were civilians. The debate over the atomic bombs concerning ethical, legal, military controversies is still going on. And many other examples such as the uprising in Myanmar, the conflict of the Rohingya moslems that somehow related to Buddhism in Rakhines.

There are many stories from ancient Buddha's time such as Angulimala the murderer, the war between the Sakyas and the Koliyas over water, and then the Great Emperor from Mauryan Dynasty, King Ashoka. They are parts of the history to show us that non-violence is important.

H.H. The Dalai Lama also used the same approach of non-violence when dealing with the disagreements among Tibet and China. His non-violent approach had lead him to be awarded with the Nobel Peace Prize.

As Buddhists, we follow the advice of the Buddha. We respect him and well understand the deep meaning behind the teaching of Ahimsa or non-violence.

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