Buddhism, War, and Morality

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Abstract

This essay discusses how Buddhism as a non-Abrahamic faith has dealt with the moral and ethical issues surrounding 'organised violence' most noticeable in just war thinking stemming from Christian theological scholarship. In considering how Buddhism as a religion stands on questions of war and conflict we consider Buddhist ethics from doctrinal or scriptural perspectives as well as that of institutional and/or popular Buddhism. To this end, the article reflects on how followers of the Buddhist faith have responded to issues of war and militant conflicts and specifically considers how Sri Lankan Buddhists have responded to terrorism and to the war ideology arising from the recent civil war in Sri Lanka. In conclusion it is argued that the approach to war and conflict in many Buddhist countries is intimately associated with issues of religion and politics underlying statecraft in these countries which purports to be based on Buddhist principles of moral righteousness.

Key words: Religion, Ethics, Violence, Terrorism, Morality.

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I. Introduction

A much debated and controversial topic in Western social and political discourse relates to the moral justification of 'organised violence,'[1] or the ethics and legitimacy of state sanctioned violence (using aggressive force against human beings), or more specifically, waging war. Moral reflection on the deliberate causing of death and destruction has resulted in two streams of thinking, pacifism and the just war tradition in Christian theology. Pacifism in its religious or secular forms is mostly associated with Buddhism, Jainism, strands of Christian thinking associated with the likes of St. Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther King, and other notable pacifists like M. K. Gandhi. Both religious and secular forms of pacifism can be overlaid by a sense of idealism which, while rejecting any right to war, 'relies upon pragmatic arguments to advance the cause of peace [by] institutional means' (Murnion 2007, 33).

The other stream of thinking about organized violence is the just war tradition which draws mainly on Christian theological scholarship in defending the use of force. This, among other considerations, has brought to the fore questions of the moral limits of human savagery and acts of brutality in times of war (Johnson 1992). The notion of just and unjust wars gained currency in the West only after the fusion of religion and politics and the rejection of the notion of a *holy war* following the religious wars of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Johnson 1992, 1997; Murnion 2007). The just war tradition serves to draw attention to the longstanding moral unease felt not just among all religions about the killing of human beings and even the wanton killing of animals in the wild

The morality of war which straddles the gulf between politics and morality, it has been argued, revolves around two dimensions, *jus ad bellum*, *and jus in bello* (Walzer 2000). The former, *jus bellum*, relates to principles governing the right to war or the decision to wage war and *jus bello* is concerned with the conduct of war or how to fight the war. In short, the just war discourse straddles two related dimensions—the right to war or the causes

1 See Harvey (2000) and Harris (1994) for a useful discussion of Buddhist attitudes to violence, including issues relating to suicide, mercy-killing, euthanasia and abortion, etc.

of war and the lawful conduct of the war. There is an underlying concern among all faiths, ethicists and secular scholars about the need to control and limit war, 'even to forbid it and always to remember the adversary is humanity' (Guthrie and Quinlan 2007, 8).

In acknowledging that the morality of engaging in wars specifically refers to the rules of war there is 'a *prima facie* duty of acting justly and pursuing justice [while] engaging in particular actions' (Childress 2001, 217). However, it is mainly the Abrahamic faiths, particularly Christianity and Islam that have evolved 'moral values, rules, and understandings to govern and restrain the use of military force' (Regan 1996, 6). In this context, this article endeavours to examine how a non-Abrahamic faith like Buddhism deals with issues of war and morality raised by the just war tradition.[2]

II. War, Conflict and Buddhism

Where does doctrinal Buddhism, a non-Abrahamic faith, stand on the question of war and conflict and, more specifically, the 'just war tradition'? The basic tenets of Buddhism as found in all its main Schools or Traditions[3] condemn war unreservedly as an evil and attests to its utter futility in gaining a meaningful resolution of any conflict. This is clearly revealed in the Buddhist scriptures of the Southern School, the *Theravada* tradition, where it is stated that violence has to be avoided because it brings pain to beings with similar feelings (Harris 1994). This is clearly stated in the Buddhist scriptures of the Theravada Tradition in the Pali cannon[4] which recounts the Buddha's intervention in the conflict between two kingdoms for the right to use the waters of the River Rohini. In the words of the Buddha:

2 See Walzer (2000) for an overview of just war thinking in contemporary social and political discourse; also Jayasuriya (2010).

3 Following the death of the Buddha, there arose many divisions or groupings within the Buddhist clergy. This formed the basis of several Schools of Indian Buddhism which subsequently evolved into different Traditions such as the Theravada, Mahayana, and the Vajrayana or Tibetan (see Gethin 1998).

4 See Norman (1982) for an account of the Theravada Tradition in the Pali Canon. For a translation of the scriptural discourses in the Pali canon, see Walshe (1987) and Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Nanamoli (1995).

> Why on account of some water of little worth would you destroy the invaluable lives of these soldiers, [and the Buddha goes on to caution that] 'victory arouses enmity and the defeated live in sorrow.' (quoted in Jayatilleke 1969, 43)

Accordingly, violence has to be eschewed because it brings pain to beings with similar feeling (Harris 1994) or as stated in the Buddhist scriptures:

> All trembles at violence. Life is dearest to all; one should neither kill nor cause others to kill. (*Dhammapada* Verse 130)[5]

Non violence or *ahimsa* as a cardinal Buddhist moral principle originates from the first of the five Precepts in the Buddhist ethical code. This moral dictum relates to the non-injury of living or 'sentient' beings and imposes a firm commitment to abstain from intentional harm or killing any other sentient being directly or by the agency of another person is strengthened by compassion as a motive underlying this precept (Saddhatissa 1970). Furthermore according to the Buddhist ethic the moral blame or the degree of unwholesomeness or fault or the gravity of an act varies with the degree and nature of the volition/intention behind the act (Harvey 2000, 52). Hence it is more grave, serious, or unwholesome to kill or injure a human being than an animal.

The central importance attached to the principle of non-violence in the understanding of the Buddhist attitude to war and organized violence is evident in the fact that non-violence and peace are 'strongly represented in its value system [which is] endowed with rich resources for use in resolving conflicts' (Harvey 2000, 239). For this reason it is suggested that Buddhism as a religion may justifiably claim to be unique for not engaging in violence for its propagation or proselytization through the use of force or coercion of any form. The only sense in which there is any notion of a righteous war is a

5 See Bhikkhu Bodhi (1996) for a translation and commentary of the *Dhammapada*, meaning the 'path of dharma, of truth of righteousness of the central law.' It is in short a collection of vivid practical verses on the Buddha's teachings arranged by theme−anger, fear, happinessand thought (Easwaran 1985).

war fought with ideas, the message of peace without bullets or military armour but with love, compassion, tolerance and benevolence. The doctrine of non-violence as practised by monks like Thich Nhat Hanh of Vietnam and Maha Ghosananda of Cambodia stands out as exemplars of contemporary Buddhism. In Vietnam Thich Nhat Hanh 'reflecting on the futility, emptiness and destruction of war which he experienced, presented the message of the Buddha in healing the wounds of Vietnam war veterans' (de Silva 2002, 214). Similarly in Cambodia Maha Ghoshananda (1992) as an activist Cambodian Buddhist monk dedicated himself to restoring national pace and harmony after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge in 1978, and the legacy of the 'Killing Fields.'

However, Buddhist pacifism needs to be understood in the light of the principles of Buddhist ethics and social philosophy in the exposition of good and evil, right and wrong and 'what is justice and are our duties, obligations and rights' (Jayatilleke 1972, 13). Buddhist ethics grounded very much in the doctrine of moral autonomy or individual responsibility is well expressed in the dictum: 'By oneself alone is evil done, by oneself is evil avoided and by oneself is one saved' (quoted from the Buddhist texts in Jayatilleke 1972, 49). Accordingly, while soldiers directly involved in warfare bear the full responsibility for their actions; others who are not directly involved are not entirely free of guilt or wrongdoing.

Moral responsibility is not overridden by any notion of 'military necessity' which would seriously impinge on the morality of conduct. Besides, such a view would vitiate the basic principles of international law as well as *jus bello* criteria of morality, that is, acceptable conduct in warfare which justifies the means used to achieve the objectives of war. The just war tradition, insists that the conduct of war is governed by independent standards or criteria, the most prominent of which 'concerns the treatment of innocent persons against the intentional killing of such persons' (Holmes 1992, 224).

In short, irrespective of the *jus bellum* status of the war or the right to war, soldiers are morally responsible for acts which, researchers say, clearly fall 'within their own sphere of activity' (Walzer 2000, 38). These pertain to

such acts as how soldiers treat innocent civilians by protecting their rights as well as taking care of the well-being of any prisoners they may take into their custody.

This, above all, presents the moral problematic of ends and means which, according to the Buddhist moral code, is readily resolved by emphatically asserting that ends such as the reasons for going to war alone do not justify the means employed in the conduct of the war. Thus, contrary to other moral philosophies such as utilitarianism which maintains that violence may be justified if it brings greater benefit or happiness to people, the *jus bello* criteria in the just war tradition deals with the conduct of war.

In this regard, the Buddhist ethic also agrees that 'soldiers are morally responsible for their acts' (Walzer 2000, 38). Furthermore its underlying rationale requires that the consequences of actions are relative to the motives and intentions, and the nature of acts performed on whom and how. This incidentally reiterates the *jus bello* criteria of discrimination and proportionality (Guthrie and Quinlan 2007), and stands out as a presumption against the use of indiscriminate and/or excessive force. Thus, the Buddhist scriptures identify several conditions that need to be considered in determining whether the act of killing or injuring is wrongful or immoral.

First and foremost, is that the act should relate to a sentient being and the person committing the act should be aware of this fact. Other factors pertain to intention or resolve to kill or harm by some appropriate means (Saddhatissa 1970). This, as in the *jus bello* criteria of the just war tradition, relating to the conduct of war, the Buddhist ethic too agrees that soldiers are morally responsible for their acts (Walzer 2000, 38). As in just war thinking not only must combatants in warfare confine their intentional acts to legitimate acts (i.e., discrimination) but also they must ensure that the harm done is not unreasonably heavy (i.e., proportional).

The rationale of the Buddhist moral code reflects the teleological and relativistic nature of the Buddhist ethics which, unlike the deontological and absolutist ethical traditions, evaluate and appraise the moral consequences of any act or deed and its rightness or wrongness by motive and intention. While

intention is only a necessary condition in evaluating the rightness or wrongness of any action, the sufficient conditions pertain to the nature of the act, whether it is appropriate and relevant. The distinction here between necessary and sufficient conditions highlights the need, in Buddhism, to distinguish between ultimate long-term benefits and immediate pragmatic outcomes when one acts wrongfully but out of good intentions (for example, abortion to save the life of the mother) (Jayatilleke 1972).

III. Buddhism and Just War Thinking

Turning to the question of how Buddhism deals with the *jus bellum* dimension of just war thinking, there is no place in Buddhism for a *holy war* or a just war. In a succinct analysis of the ethical principles and moral code of conduct found in canonical literature in the *Theravada* tradition, it is shown that the 'idea of a just war or a righteous war involving the use of weapons of war and violence is conspicuously absent in the Buddhist canon' (Premasiri 2003, 6). While affirming strongly that abstaining from harming or depriving the life of a sentient is a cardinal tenet of the Buddhist moral code, the Buddhist teaching nevertheless testifies to the reality of conflict in human society and the extensive pain and suffering that such conflicts engender.

More importantly, Buddhist social philosophy highlights the need to understand how such pain comes to be inflicted, by identifying the root causes of conflict, violence and attendant suffering (Nyanaponilka 1978). Within the overarching framework of the basic motivational forces or causal conditions underpinning the dynamics of human behaviour, namely, *greed*, *hatred*, *and delusion or ignorance*, the roots of violence pertain to two mutually interdependent conditions, namely individual maladjustments and unsatisfactory social circumstances (Harris 1994). This is clearly stated in the *Kutadanta Sutta* of the Pali canon (Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2002a) where it is acknowledged that material deprivation leading to various forms of craving is seen as a critical factor in the unfolding of conflict and violence in society (Ling 1973; Harvey 2000). More specifically this text notes that much violence and misery

results from the blindness to the realities of poverty (Harris 1994).

In this context the Buddhist texts, specifically identify ways of handling conflicts in human society by generating a correct understanding of how these adverse conditions have come into being and the skilful actions needed to resolve them, such as ensuring a greater sense of social and economic justice. There is in the *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta*[6] a clear statement that the 'nourishment of violence is the State's neglect of the poor' (quoted in Harris 1994). These modes of conflict resolution also make specific reference to the importance attached to 'conciliatory methods of resolving conflicts before embarking on war' (Premasiri 2003, 10), and also that these various modes of conflict resolution have to be appropriate and adaptable to the particular circumstance.

These strategies of conflict resolution, as argued elsewhere (Jayasuriya 2008), have become a part of the armoury of Buddhist politics and statecraft. Nevertheless, even though 'the timeless message of Gautama, the warrior prince [had been] for non violence' and that there was no concept of a *holy war*, at times, Buddhism has appeared 'to legitimize the recourse to violence and just war' (Faure 2002). A classic instance of this is the defence of the honour and justice of military aggression offered by the illustrious Zen Roshi, Shaku Soen.[7] Tolstoy, in an anti-war essay published in 1904, quotes Soen as saying that:

> Even though the Buddha teaches not to take another's life, he also teaches that all sentient beings through the exercise of infinite compassion will be united and thereby obtain final and ultimate peace. As means towards harmonizing of the incompatible, killing and war are necessary. (quoted in Sharf 1995, 149)

Interestingly, in justifying Japanese military aggression, Soen identified the ethics of Zen Buddhism as being consistent with the spirit of Japanese culture embodied in the legend of the Samurai. This was, of course, Soen's justification for claiming that after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904, Zen[8] was

6 See Walshe (1987), also Bhikku Thanissaro (2002b).

7 Shaku Soen was a Japanese Buddhist housewife and a proponent of the 'New Buddhism' movement that arose in Japan during the Meiji period (1868-1912).

'the ideal doctrine for the rising generation of modern Japan' (Sharf 1995, 113). Similarly, the association of Buddhism with xenophobic sentiments arising from a national consciousness was also evident in Sri Lanka during the recent civil war between the majority Sinhalese community and the minority Sri Lankan Tamils (Swearer 2009).

The tacit support and endorsement of the war by a sizeable section of the Buddhist clergy and laity presented many Sri Lankan Buddhists with a moral problematic of justifying violence and intolerance in the context of a normative presumption of peace and non-violence in the Buddhist scriptures. It is this moral dilemma which is examined by Bartholomeusz (2002) in an empirical study of how some segments of the Sinhalese Buddhist community—monks and laity—have sought to defend the civil war in terms of a religious ideology (Little 1999).

This study, following Tambiah's study of religion and politics in Sri Lanka (Tambiah 1992) endeavours to show how the Sinhalese have sought to characterize the long drawn out civil war in Sri Lanka which ended in 2009. Bartholomeusz, in her study employing a narrative analysis based on the work of Hauerwas (1986), documents the ways in which the Sri Lankan Buddhists have sought to provide a moral justification of the war. This research draws on interviews with politically oriented monks and Sinhalese nationalists of the post-colonial state (Jayasuriya 2010), who have sought to defend their approach and attitudes to the civil war primarily in religious terms, bordering on a holy war or national crusade.

The anthropological research methodology of this study seeks to construct 'Buddhism' exclusively in terms of the practice of Buddhist religion or 'Sinhalese Buddhism as depicted by Gombrich and Obeysekera (1988). This mode of anthropological discourse, aptly termed the 'anthropology of Sinhala Buddhism' (de Silva 2006), seeks to construct 'Buddhism' exclusively in terms of the practice rather than precept or doctrine. This focus on popular Buddhism concentrates on the analysis of religion as a social and cultural phenomenon in a specific context and generates such concepts as 'Thai

8 See Ives (1992) and King (1993) for the association of the concept of the warrior in Japanese society and culture with the spiritual values of Zen Buddhism.

Buddhism' or 'Sinhalese Buddhism' (de Silva 2006; Jayasuriya 2008).

The logic and rationale of this mode of analysis, that is, the characterization of Buddhism in terms of the 'Great and Little Tradition, or doctrinal/historical and lived/practiced' (de Silva 2006) is grounded in terms of binary categories first proposed by Redfield (1956). This differentiation goes back to Max Weber's well known distinction made in his study of Early Indian Buddhism between the 'otherworldly mystic' arena and the practical goals of popular institutional Buddhism (Swearer 2009). Accordingly it is assumed that 'real Buddhism' is to be found in Buddhist practices, that is, Buddhism as 'experienced on the ground [rather than on] how Buddhism is regularly presented' (Bartholomeusz 2002, 20). Without entering into the finer points of this theoretical controversy about 'what can count as Buddhism,' we would be well advised, following de Silva (2006), to leave Buddhists to say what Buddhism is and allow social scientists to explain how the Buddhist tradition gets mobilized in various social and political projects.[9]

The research data analysed by Bartholomeusz is based on information obtained from a select group of respondents, including monks and laity. In addition—though to a lesser extent—this research also draws on archival and library material in documenting how some Sri Lankan Buddhists have, as in the just war tradition, sought to defend the nation by engaging in an armed conflict with the rebel Tamil group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who were fighting for a separate state. In locating her research broadly within the 'just war tradition' Bartholomeusz concentrates on one facet of just war thinking, namely, the right to war (*jus bellum*), and regrettably excludes consideration of important issues pertaining to the conduct of the war or *jus bello*.

This study of Bartholomuesz identifies two broad approaches in documenting evidence relating to the moral justification of the war in Sri Lanka by the Buddhist clergy and the laity. Whereas one approach is based on a reading of the *Theravada* Tradition of Buddhism as revealed in the Pali

9 See Ling (1973) for a succinct account of how Sinhalese Buddhism has been analysed from the viewpoint of the social sciences; see also Holt (1990) for a critique of the notion of 'Protestant Buddhism' found in Gombrich and Obeysekera (1988).

canon, the other leans heavily, if not exclusively, on the analysis of historical documents, in particular the *Mahavamsa* (The Great Chronicle), a mytho-historical narrative dating from the sixth century BCE, which is analysed as a post-canonical historical narrative (Greenwald 1978). Importantly, the data obtained from both approaches as 'embodying' Buddhist stories is examined in the language of narrative discourse along the lines of 'narrative-analysis' used by Hauerwas and Jones (1989).

Those who leaned on the doctrinal texts drawn from the Buddhist canon sought justification of armed aggression and/or war by referring to texts such as the *Sangama Sutta*.[10] The latter which is often quoted refers to the struggle of King Pasenadi, a devout follower of the Buddha, in confronting the army of King Ajatasattu, his nephew. Pasenadi fought a battle in which he defeated Ajatasattu but spared his life, while confiscating all his armaments etc. On the basis of this information, some Buddhist scholars contend that this textual account despite affirming the doctrine of non-violence, offers qualified endorsement of violence as a protective or defensive measure. Thus for instance Harris (1994) who, in a probing analysis of the canonical texts on the question of violence, maintains that Buddhism, while not approving defensive violence, nevertheless seeks to understand its occurrence by evaluating the motives for such actions. As observed earlier, from the point of view of moral consequences, it is suggested that 'defensive violence is less bad than aggressive violence' (Harvey 2000, 254).

Another Buddhist scholar, Bhikkhu Khantipalo (1986), reflecting on the complexities of the actions of the peace loving King Pasenadi as depicted in the *Sangama Sutta* states that the Buddha 'saw how fruitless would be Pasenadis's actions in confiscating the army of his troublesome nephew [as it only served] to harden Ajatasattu's resolve to conquer (Pasenadis's kingdom) Kosala' (Khantipalo 1986, 14). This suggests that aggression often leads to defensive counter-violence as for instance in the case of the victory of the allies in World War I over the Germans who then went on to seek reparations by the counter-violence of World War II. In short, as the

10 See Bhikkhu Thanissaro (2002c) for a translation of this text.

Buddhism texts put it, 'victory breeds hatred [but] the defeated live in pain' (quoted in Harvey 2000, 250).

The other line of argument of Sri Lankan Buddhists, which is fully documented by Bartholomeusz, consists of religious stories drawn from historical chronicles such as the *Mahavamsa*. This post-canonical historical narrative refers extensively to the legend of a warrior king Dutugemunu, revered not only for his victory over an alien Tamil, King Elara, but also for taking possession of the scared relics of the Buddha and fortifying them. The latter only served to confirm the historical legend relating to the Buddha's visit to Sri Lanka. According to this legend it is believed that the Buddha decreed that Sri Lanka should always be cherished as the home of Buddhism and also that the sacred island of Sri Lanka belonged to the Sinhalese (Greenwald 1978). From the days of this historic legend it was understood that a monarch or government defending the territorial integrity of the country was in fact also seeking to defend the Sinhala-Buddhist nation.

Following Hauerwas and Jones (1989), Bartholomeusz applies the 'idea of narratives' in the context of religious stories to show how Sinhalese Buddhists use historical narratives such as the *Mahavamsa* in shaping their attitudes towards the war and defending Buddhism. It is argued that this historical document posits a conjunction of race, nation and culture/religion, and contains 'the seeds for a war ideology,' which resonates strongly to this day. Importantly this is what purports to lay the foundations of a national and religious consciousness built on the assumption that the 'island of Sri Lanka and its inhabitants [are] the guardians of Buddhism [and accorded] divine protection' (Seneviratne 1997, 8).

It is assumed that the compelling logic and power of this historical narrative overrides any normative doctrinal prescriptions against engaging in violence or warfare. Juxtaposing two competing normative prescriptions—non-violence and the injunction to protect the *dhamma* (Buddhism)—several respondents in this study felt that they had *prima facie* duty to protect both the *dhamma*, i.e., Buddhism, and the Sinhalese nation. Accordingly, Sinhalese Buddhists such as those quoted in this study are not just supportive of the

government in conducting the civil war, but are personally and morally committed to engage in this war as 'a *prima facie* duty,' overriding any moral commitment such as to non-violence, peace and harmony. This reference to *duty* incidentally prompts Bartholomeusz to conclude erroneously that the Buddhist ethics can be characterized in deontological terms. In Buddhism, duties are not prescriptive modes of conduct; they are rather morally desirable ways of acting to be followed by an individual.

There is no doubt that the Sri Lankan national consciousness implicit in the culture of the majority Sinhalese community embodies the belief that Sri Lanka is the designated sanctuary of Buddhism which belongs to the Sinhalese Buddhists (Seneviratne 1997). This conflation of religion and ethnicity has been central to the notion of Sinhala-Buddhist identity and an authentic *self*, which is differentiated from the other, the inauthentic Sri Lankans. Interestingly, in the process of indigenization, the Sinhalese Christians, Anglicans and Catholics alike have sought to bring the Christian culture closer to the Sinhalese culture (Bartholomeusz and de Silva 1998). But the Tamils, like all the others, live there 'only by the good grace of Sinhalese Buddhist sufferance' (DeVotta 2007, 1). Hence, the threat to territorial integrity refers not only to the nation and the unique standing of Sri Lanka as the home of Buddhism but also to the authenticity of Sri Lanka, that is, its culture and a sense of national identity.

According to the respondents in this study, the Tamil rebels were not just challenging Sri Lanka as a nation but more importantly were questioning the integrity of the Sinhalese nation and its culture by disparaging the sense of a Sinhala-Buddhist identity. Therefore the action of the Tamil rebels was seen as an attack on the integrity of the Sinhalese nation and taken to be the just cause of the civil war and the pursuit of a just order as posited by just war theorists (Bartholomeusz 2002). The civil war in this sense bears comparison with the historical narrative of *Mahavamsa*, where Dutugemunu, the King of the Sinhalese, who fought against Tamil invaders, did not go to war for glory but for a just order to protect Buddhism and the Sinhalese nation. However, the scope and validity of these historical narratives not only

in legitimizing the just war thesis but also in accounting for the complexities of the ethnic conflict remain highly contested issues in the scholarly literature (Abeysekera 2002; Brekke 2009). Admittedly, Bartholomeusz's analysis merely underlines 'an often repeated theme in contemporary Sri Lankan political and religious rhetoric about the war and its justification' (Bartholomeusz 2002, 4).

But from an analytical point of view, this conceptualization and mode of analysis has limited utility as it serves to draw attention to only one facet of this conflict, namely, an ethno-religious dimension of identity politics (Little 1999). This dimension may well include the role played by cultural and religious narratives or stories in shaping the moral decisions of individuals when confronted with ethnic identity predicaments. However, these ethno-religious factors cannot be considered in isolation and need to be placed in relation to a variety of other socio-political factors to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Tamil–Sinhalese political turmoil. As Olsen (1993) rightly observes, the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has been analysed from a variety of perspectives, including identity politics and the revival of both Sinhalese and Tamil nationalisms in the post-colonial era.

Overall, what the narrative-analysis highlighted by Bartholomeusz presents is, not just the conceptualization of an ethical dilemma confronting the Sinhalese Buddhists, but also the complex socio-political dynamics in restoring peace and harmony for a divided nation. Put differently, the subtext of this study is to 'free Buddhism from romantic ideas about South Asian religion, South Asian pacifism and South Asian non-violence' (Bartholomeusz 2002, 67). Bechert (2003) for one emphatically rejects this language of discourse, which he claims is based on a flawed narrative-analysis of texts and chronicles in framing our understanding of the religious consciousness. Accordingly, Buddhists are urged to return to the values as taught by the Buddha himself and found in the ancient canonical texts (Bechert 2003).

IV. Religion and Politics in Buddhist Countries

It is clear from the foregoing analysis of the Buddhist discourse on

issues of war and conflict that 'the Buddhist law' of many Buddhist countries of South and Southeast Asia has had 'to bow to reasons of state' (Faure 2002; Swearer 2009). This highlights the interaction between religion and politics which has been 'central to an archive of literature in South Asia' (Abeysekera 2002, 67). The Buddhist approach to 'organized violence' and in particular to the just war thinking implicit in the Buddhist canon has therefore to be located more generally within the broad discourse on religion and politics (Wuthnow 1998). For this reason, it is imperative that the approach to war and conflict in Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, or Thailand be understood in terms of the principles of Buddhist statecraft, all of which in a way purport to be based on moral righteousness and extol 'the virtues of forbearance, tolerance, forgiving and non violence' (Guruge 2005, 186).

Furthermore, these Buddhist countries derive much of their thinking in this regard from Emperor Asoka's exposition of statecraft on such issues as the relation between church and state (Ling 1973). This, among other considerations, spelt out a clear demarcation of two realms of responsibility, one for the State or the Monarch and the other for the Church of institutional religion. In the Buddhist scriptures this pertains to what is described as the 'Two *Wheels of the Dhamma*,' that is the mundane or *lokiya* and the transcendent or other-worldly or *lokuttara*. The former or lokiya which concentrates on proximate goods allowed the worldly ruler to work in concert with the monastic hierarchy immersed in the sphere of ultimate goods (May 2003; Swearer 2009). This demarcation of the respective responsibilities of the state and church reflect the Buddhist understanding of secularism. This was framed strictly within the Buddhist compendium of social and moral philosophy built around the concepts of moral righteousness and the cardinal tenets of ahimsa or non-violence (Jayasuriya 2008).

The Buddhist approach to statecraft, originating from Emperor Asoka and considered as the 'Asokan paradigm' (May 2003), serves to clarify the nature and character of the relationship between religion and state evident in the Southern School of *Theravada* Buddhism and exemplified in the *Cakkavatti Sihanada Sutta* (Harvey 2000; Kalupahana 1995). The Buddhist principles of

statecraft were clearly framed within the spirit of humanism and an adherence to the principles and practices of the rule of law and deliberative democracy (Jayasuriya 2008). The Asokan paradigm maintained that the ruler and the state were closely linked with the monastic order (the *sangha*) and the people in not only sustaining religious institutions but also, more importantly, the ruler. While 'religion was not separate from the state, it was not only closely identified with it, supporting but also supported by it; unlike Christianity, however, Buddhism as a whole does not have any central doctrinal authority' (Harding 2007, 2).

A striking feature of this triangular relationship of the ruler or state, the *sangha* or the clergy and the community was that the *sangha* and its institutions did not have a formal relationship with the state. This skilfully engineered model which helped to promote reciprocity between the state and the church helped to legitimize the authority of the ruler or state. Interdependency for mutual benefit was the guiding and compelling principle underlying this reciprocal relationship. In simple terms, the *sangha* could not survive without any political support, be it in a Kingdom, or a Republic, the favoured form of government in the Buddhist texts (Harris 1994).

This foundational Buddhist model of church and state relations based on the Asokan paradigm, as Tambiah (1976) observes, has been subject to change in countries of South East Asia such as Thailand (Swearer 2009). More importantly, Tambiah (1976) makes the valid point that the *Theravada* doctrine of kingship in the Southern School of Theravada Buddhism, as in Thailand, has been highly resilient, in that it has sought to integrate the spiritual and mundane in matters of statecraft. This was achieved by considering the ruler or king as a bodhisattva, an aspirant Buddha, or cosmic liberator and a *chakravatti* or terrestrial emperor. This amounts to a variant of the Asokan paradigm, a subtype, which May (2003) identifies as the *Kanishka* paradigm.

In this model of statecraft associated with Emperor Kanishka the 'Two Wheels of the Dhamma' (the mundane and the transcendent) of the Buddhist doctrine 'become one.' 'What eventuates is the total incorporation of the *sangha* and *dhamma*, i.e., the clergy (sangha) as an institution and the doctrine

of the Buddhist church, (*dhamma*) into the state ideology' (May 2003, 142). In other words, as previously noted, there was an amalgam of the spiritual and the mundane represented as a linking of individual acts and application by a monarch King and the absolute moral law (Tiruchelvam 1993). This integration has gained tangible expression in Thailand's recent constitutional reforms with the 'use of Buddhism to create legitimacy [and even on occasion] moulded Buddhism itself...to suit the purposes of the state' (Harding 2007, 4).

A unique and commendable feature of this model of statecraft was the absence of any claim for Buddhism to be regarded as a state religion. Emperor Asoka himself made no such claim but on the contrary strove steadfastly to ensure 'religious freedom by supporting not just the Buddhist monks but ascetics of other religious sects' (Harvey 2000). Perhaps, more remarkable was Asoka's predisposition to espouse what is now referred to as an interfaith dialogue by endeavouring at all times to negotiate differences between various faiths and religious orders through participation and consensus-building. This political philosophy underlines that in conflict resolution central to the elimination of violence, the Asokan paradigm sought to achieve peace and social harmony by giving visible expression to Buddhist principles and practices. Thus this provided an opportunity in the public space for scrutiny and critical discussion of diverse viewpoints and arguments that constituted public opinion.

What this suggests is that the socio-political ideas, implicit in the Asokan model of statecraft and also in the dynamics of the separation of church and state, warrant comparison with the secularization of religion in the Western social and political discourse. The latter is regarded as a post-Enlightenment phenomenon which embraces the principles and values of the European Enlightenment, such as equality, tolerance of dissent, freedom and justice. But, as Sen (2005) rightly observes, the Asokan model too as in the legacy of the European Enlightenment was firmly committed to 'public communication and discussion' in an 'open society.'

Democracy in the Asokan paradigm, understood as a way of thinking

and acting, implies a rational commitment to freedom, equality and tolerance in a plural society, profoundly open minded, if not agnostic. This form of democracy and social theorizing is fundamentally a secular ideal which served as an 'ideal type' mode for many Buddhist countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand. It was, as previously noted, resilient in the manner in which Thai Buddhism adapted to the monarchy and the state. Elsewhere, as in Sri Lanka, the Asokan paradigm generated a kind of pragmatic 'accommodative secularism' (Bartholomeusz 1989) in determining States' compliance with some forms of religious practice. At the same time, the Buddhist clergy, the Sangha, was readily available to act as the moral conscience of the community, thereby ensuring the accountability of the rulers. This was also visible in the recent protest action of many Burmese (Myanmar) Buddhist monks against the authoritarianism of the Army Generals at the helm of the state (Hudson-Rodd 2012; Fink 2007).

This demonstrates the extent to which Buddhism stands out as a religio-philosophical system, which eschews all forms of violence and is deeply committed to peace and harmony. Admittedly this may be 'relative' by virtue of having to bow to reasons of state, but on the whole Buddhism 'remains more tolerant than other great ideologies' (Faure 2002) and is able to incorporate much of just war thinking especially of *jus bello* or justice in the conduct of warfare. Furthermore, the Asokan paradigm, as in the Western democratic model, sought to build mutual trust and confidence by engaging in negotiations and pursuing democratic codes of conduct, including conflict resolution. It is astonishing to note how the principles of Asoka's statecraft are as valid today (for Buddhist countries) as when they were first propounded about two thousand years ago.

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