A Study of Conflict Management in Buddhism with special reference to Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta of Majjhima Nikāya

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Introduction

As long as we encircle in *Samsāra* by the dint of *Tanhā* and *Avijjhā*, we cannot live in isolation but has to be part of the community and social environment. In the social environment, we should live with both amity and harmony, yet in reality, we often live with enmity and conflicts by engaging in contention with beings of incompatible positions. With regard to the *Aggañña Sutta*,[1] the peacefulness on this earth in the very beginning was broken by a dispute over the delicious edible earth. The tendency towards conflict in the human psyche which started then has become the norm, ubiquitous and unavoidable to all beings till now and will continue into the future. It is difficult to conceive of a situation which is conflict-free as an inherent feature of human existence.

The term, "Conflict" refers either to a violent dispute or to an incompatibility of positions according to the Webster Dictionary. Not to lose sight of the initial reasons why the dispute arose or came to violence as well as what are the ways to end the dispute are the most important aspects of conflict management. We need to find ways to manage and to resolve conflicts to reduce violence; and its impact on human, economic, social, and political losses. At this juncture, conflict management has become a broad and fast growing academic field.

Although it is a relatively young field of study, having begun to emerge as a specialized field only in the 1950s, when conflict among the superpowers threatened the very existence of humanity, it has rapidly grown into an independent, vibrant, interdisciplinary field.[2] Therefore, Conflict Management as a field of study has progressed and many research projects are conducted in the universities, independent centers and institutions throughout the world. There are many ways and means of managing conflicts in collaboration with the different fields of

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[1] Aggaña Sutta, Pāthikavagga, Dīgha Nikāya.
[2] B.Jacob, K.Victor and I.William Zartman, *Introduction: The Nature of Conflict and Conflict Resolution*. SAGE Publication. London. 2009. p-1.

study such as science, psychology, philosophy and religion to resolve the variety of situations and conditions of human beings and their problems.

In the perspective of Buddhism, many scholars are carrying out Buddhist researches on Conflict Management and peacekeeping based on the Buddhist Sacred Texts from different schools as a contribution of Buddhism to society. As a learner and devotee of Buddhism, this article aims to contribute some insight on Conflict Management with special reference to the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya* for its practical guidance and philosophical depth on this matter.

Analysis of the Term Conflict

The Buddha's teachings are meaningful *(sattha)*, together with well sounding letters *(sabyañjana)*, complete in its entirely *(kevalaparipuṇṇa)*, deep *(gambhīra)*, difficult to understand *(duddasa)*, just not a theory *(atakkāvacara)*, and known by the wise *(paṇḍitavedanīya)*. Without knowing the right meanings of the words in the *sutta* that one wants to study, one cannot lead to right understanding. Hence, it is very important to know the meanings of the words correctly and also one should be careful on finding out the meaning of the teachings of the Buddha.

In the *Pali* literature, the word "conflict" is used as synonyms with *virodha, viggaha, sanghattana, vivāda,* herein, the word *"raṇa"* is used. In describing ideological conflicts, that were prevalent among various religious groups, three terms *kalaha* (contention), *viggaha* (dispute), and *vivāda* (debate) have been used quite often.

The Vedic *"raṇa"* means both enjoyment and battle. The word *"raṇa"* in *Pāḷi* bears many meanings. It means being in seclusion from people (aran + yu), and being free from mist of defilements (*kilesā*) (a + raṇa).[3] It also means intoxication and desire. Besides that it can mean war, battle, sin, or fault.[4] Sometimes, it refers to papa and raga. In the *Tika* of *Dhammasaṅganī Aṭṭhakathā*, it means dust, mist of dust, fight, war (against path), pain, anguish and distress, and cause of grief or harm. In the PTS *Pali* dictionary, it bears the meanings as the cause of grief by *rāga, dosa, moha*; ten kinds of defilements and fourteen unwholesome mental factors (*akusala*

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[3] U Hote Sein. Pali- Myanmar Dictionary. p-124.
[4] Concise Pali-English Dictionary.

cetasikas), as the fruit of unwholesomeness, wage a battle, the dhamma such as *raga*, etc., that torture beings, the fault of dispraise, the mist of defilements, and a battle field.

In the *Pali* grammar, when added the negative prefix "a", the meaning of *"raṇa"* becomes its opposite. Therefore, *"araṇa"* refers to the state of non-war or free from the mist of defilements. Thus, the name of the *sutta "Araṇavibhaṅga"* literal rendering is an analysis of peace or the discourse of non-war. Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi translate *"araṇa"* as "non-conflict".

Causes of Conflict

Despite the miraculous achievements made by science and technology, the suffering and sorrow of humanity has not decreased. On the contrary, violence and aggression, manifested through wars and conflicts, hatred and mistrust have increased at an alarming rate. The world is intermittently afflicted with chaos, conflict, tension and fear. Most people cannot live or move peacefully without fear and insecurity. Humans are responsible for creating the suffering, troubles, and the tense situation of the present world. Most of the miseries in the world are created by human beings; therefore, every human being has to stand up and work to change the world by finding the origin of such conflicts to solve them. This is possible as humans are the captain of our own destinies.

Human beings are divergent according to emotions, mental states, behaviors, thinking patterns, upbringing etc., at the individual level. At the global or collective level, they differ in nationality, religions, belief systems, culture, traditions, etc. Thus, it is not easy to search for a common identity in diversity. Being drowned in egotism *(attadiṭṭhi)*, however, people tend to forcefully make that diversity into one identity or suppress others' opposing views. As a result of this, several conflicts and wars have occurred consequently.

Another conspicuous reason for conflicts and wars is the huge profits earned through the sale of firearms and wars' paraphernalia. This is man-made conflicts by dint of greed. The war industry with its large and powerful corporations all over the world are instigating conflicts between peoples, races, religions, classes; and in due course pocketing huge earnings. Apart from these, there are several conflicts with various causes in different areas both natural and

created by humans such as social conflict, political conflict, economic conflict, religious conflict and the like.

According to the Buddhist perspective, all the chaos and destruction we witness around the world is the direct result of the pollution of the human mind by excessive greed, hatred, and delusion; and the false notion that we are different from others. The greater importance placed by Buddhism upon inner reflection stems from its doctrinal basis that the roots of violence and conflict is within the mind. Thus, in the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* the Buddha instructed that the origin of various conflicts is the psychic statutes of **ten defilements** *(kilesā)*[5]**.** They are known as '*raṇa*" which cause the conflicts. When one is able to remove these defilements, it is called "*araṇa*", free of conflict. Hence, the cause of any conflict lies internally in the mental operations within each human being.

Modes of Conflict

Conflict can be categorized according to its related fields. Herein it will be divided into two main modes. They are internal conflicts and external conflicts. Internal peace is an intrapersonal peace; it is a state of mental calm, tranquility, mental balance, spiritual contentment, harmony, purity, and bliss in which there are no mental disturbances, conflict, worry, anxiety, restlessness, mental corruptions, grief, and sorrow. It is not only the absence of negative mental states and internal conflicts but internal peace also denotes the presence of the positive mind states.

External peace is an interpersonal peace which involves interpersonal relations in society; it is a state of social harmony, peaceful co-existence, co-operation, and friendly relations between man and his fellow beings as well as with nature. In its negative sense, external peace means the absence of external conflicts such as war, hostility, agitation, social disorder, disturbances, social injustice, social inequality, violence, violation of human rights, riots, terrorism, and ecological imbalance. In its positive sense, external peace means a state of social

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[5] *Moha* (ignorance), *Lobha=Tanhā* (desire, craving, attachment), *Dosa* (anger, hatred, aversion), *Māna* (pride), *Diṭṭhi* (wrong view), *Vicikicchā* (sceptical doubt), *Uddacca* (restlessness), *Thina* (sloth or laziness), *Ahirika* (lack of moral shame) and *Anotappa* (lack of moral dread)

harmony, social justice, social equality, friendship or friendly relations, concord, public order and security, respect for human rights, and ecological balance.

How to deal with military conflicts of the 21st Century with threatening global impact like those that are going on in Syria, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Yemen, Iraq, and Libya? How to negotiate peace, when nuclear weapons are in the possession of a growing number of countries that could destroy the human race, in case they feel offended or plundered? *Bhikkhu Bodhi* said, "If we trace external conflicts back to their source, we will find that they originate not in wealthy positions or possessions, but in the human mind itself."[6] Due to this fact, external conflicts can be ended only when there are no internal conflicts within one's mind.

When we look at the various kinds of conflicts, violence and wars with different captions, it can be vividly seen that humanity is not ready to live on a common platform with dissimilarities. People are not able to hold mutual acceptance and respect for each other amidst their diversity. They are not able to acknowledge each other's trauma and pain. Thus giving economic opportunities to those who profit from war, arms selling, violence fostering, and discrimination. Hence, it is assuredly unable to evade conflicts and difficult to conceive of a globalized situation which is conflict-free as an inherent feature of human existence. Although everyone is vociferating peace, still it is mission impossible up to the present time. Even though we cannot evade global conflicts, we can always try to confront and resolve personal conflicts through conflict management.

Scheme of Conflict Management

In a true sense, peace comes not from the absence of conflict in life but from the ability to cope with it. To cope with conflicts by way of avoiding conflicts and living free from the mist of defilements is a sixfold method as taught by the Buddha in the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta*. They are –

1. Living in accordance with the middle way, avoiding the two extremes.[7]

2. Teaching the Dhamma through understanding the concept of praise and blame.

3. Pursuing joy within.

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[6] Bhikkhu Bodhi. *Dhamma Reflections*. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy. Sri Lanka. 2015. p-81.
[7] self-indulgence (Kāmasukhalikānuyoga) and self-mortification (Attakilamathānuyoga).

4. Not uttering covert and overt speech.

5. Speaking without hurry.

6. Not rejecting conventional language.

Living in accordance with the Middle Way, avoiding the two extremes

Living in accordance with the middle way *(majjhimapaṭipadā)* means living according to the Noble Eight-fold path by avoiding the pursuit of sensual pleasure which is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble, and unbeneficial; and by avoiding self-mortification, which is painful, ignoble, and unbeneficial. This can be considered as the first conflict management statement mentioned in the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta*. It is not a new one because it was originally preached in the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta.* Hence, living in accordance with the middle way is a state of non-conflict.

The Noble Eightfold Path is constituted with right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. The eight path factors are divided into three groups: (i) the moral discipline group *(silakkhandhā)* of right speech, right action, and right livelihood; (ii) the concentration group *(samadhikkhandhā)* of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration; and (iii) the wisdom group *(paññakkhandhā)* of right view and right intention. These three groups represent the three stages of training: the training in higher moral discipline, the training in higher consciousness, and the training in higher wisdom.

Teaching the Dhamma through understanding the concept of praise and blame

The Buddha said that if one were to censure those who practice the two extremes or extol those who avoid them, it is not how to teach the Dhamma. The teaching of the Dhamma by understanding the concept of praise and blame or in the proper manner is neither to censure nor to extol those who practice them but to show the right and wrong path of practice itself.

Herein, *Subhuti Thera* was given as an example. When *Subhuti Thera* preached the Dhamma, he did not preach "This person is not following the path, this person is not pleasing others. He did not preach "This person is virtuous, possessing good qualities, one shameful of

sin". He only preached "This is a wrong practice, and this is the right practice.[8] In such a way, he preached according to *Dhammadhiṭhāna* not by *Puggalādhiṭhāna*. Because of this quality, he was kept in the foremost position of those who lived in non-conflict without the mist of defilements *(araṇavihārīnaṃ aggo).* Normally, people are used to judge the person *(Puggaladhitthāna)* rather than judge the action *(Dhammadhitthāna).* To illustrate this point, suppose a policeman says to a thief, "You are a thief, you are a bad guy". According to psychology, this is hard for a person to bear when he hears someone making comments like that about himself even though it is true. He is likely to get upset, perhaps angry, and defensive. It is not suitable to lock an individual into a negative self-image. Instead of speaking thus, the police man should say, "Stealing the properties of others is not good thing to do". It makes alot of difference to a thief upon hearing these two kinds of speech. The first type of speech easily arouse anger in him and maybe he will take revenge on the policeman for saying that to him. But in the case of the second type of speech, it makes him get the idea that stealing is not good, so he should not steal next time.

Pursuing Joy Within

The third statement of non-conflict stresses on defining pleasure not as lowly ordinary pleasure but on the more exquisite jhanic states. There are fourfold each of *rūpa jhāna*[9] and *arūpa jhāna*.[10] One should practice such higher form of pleasure with the reason that pursuing sensual pleasure is low, vulgar, coarse, ignoble and unbeneficial.

The pleasures of the senses are evanescent, transient and of no real taste *(appāsādā)*; they do not give permanent satisfaction; the happiness which they yield is only a deception, or a dream, from which the dreamer awakens with sorrow and regret. Therefore the Buddha says "Even though the pleasure is great, the regret is greater: *ādīnavo ettha bhīyyo". Kāmato jāyatī soko kāmato jāyatī bhayaŋ kāmato vippamuttassa n'atthi soko kuto bhayan ti "*, of pleasure is born sorrow, of pleasure is born fear".[11] With regard to it, one should not pursue sensual pleasure but the higher form of pleasure through *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* meditation.

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[8] Uparipannāsa Aṭṭhakathā. CSPitaka.
[9] first, second, third and fourth jhāna.
[10] ākāsānañcayatana, viññānañcāyatana, ākincinñayatana and nevasaññānāsaññayatana jhāna.
[11] Dhammapada verse. 215. Kuddaka Nikāya.

Not uttering covert and overt speech

On covert and overt speech, one should avoid covert speech which is untrue, incorrect and unbeneficial by all means. Even if such speech is true, correct and beneficial, one should try not to utter it at an inappropriate time. If one really has to say such true, correct and beneficial covert speech, one should know the right time for it. The overt speech which is untrue, incorrect and unbeneficial should not be spoken on any reason and occasion. The harsh overt speech which is true and correct but unbeneficial, one should try not to speak. But when it is true, correct and beneficial, one should know the proper time to say it. Overt speech should also be practiced according to the above way of covert speech.

According to this analysis, it is highlighted that speech has to be true, correct and beneficial and not otherwise. Harsh speech is allowable only when it is true, correct and beneficial. Moreover, a speech can be true and correct but still be unbeneficial. Thus, according to this view of the Buddha, both truthfulness and correctness are not the criteria of acceptable speech but it needs the add-on value of being beneficial.

Speaking without Hurry

> "Here, bhikkhus, when one speaks hurriedly, one's body grows tired and ones' mind becomes excited, one's voice is strained and one's throat becomes hoarse, and the speech of one who speaks hurriedly is indistinct and hard to understand."[12]

This statement of non-conflict is a practical advice regarding hurried and unhurried speech. One should speak slowly so that it is clear and not tiresome for the listener. Not only one's speech should be conducive towards harmony, but the manner in which one speaks should itself be peaceful and gentle, clear and distinct.

Not Rejecting Conventional Language

> 'One should not insist on local language and should not override normal usage… How is there insistence on local language and overriding of normal usage? In different localities they call the same thing a "dish" (*pati*), a "bowl" (*patta*), a

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[12] Araṇavibhanga Sutta, Uparipannāsa, Majjhima Nikāya.

"vessel" (*vittha*), a "saucer" (*serava*), a "pan" (*dharopa*), a "pot" (*pona*), a "mug" (*hana*), or a "basin" (*pisila*). So whatever they call it in such and such a locality, one speaks accordingly, firmly adhering and insisting: "Only this is right, everything else is stupid."[13]

Language has been a bone of severe contention; many conflicts in the modern world have their origins and reasons for continuation in language. Not insisting on local language and not overriding the normal usage is the last statement of this *sutta* on non-conflict. One should avoid any tenacious attachment to one's own language as better or higher. From the Buddha's perspective, language is only an instrument to be used for communication and not meant for egoistic attachment leading to conflict.

Conclusion

Globalization is enclosing us all together, whether we like it or not, whatever our religion, measure of military power, political interest or economic priority. Thus we ought to think together and act together with true intentions to save the world from conflicts through means of non-conflict. "Indeed, whatever the outcome of conflict may be, whether victory or defeat, the result itself is ultimately detrimental for both victor and victim alike."[14] Thus, by a daily practice of the above sixfold means of conflict management according to the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* will yield the peacefulness which leads to the realisation of the simple fact that the quality of one's life is the same as the quality of the moment-to-moment thoughts and feelings of oneself.

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[13] Araṇavibhanga Sutta, Uparipannāsa, Majjhima Nikāya.
[14] Bhikkhu Bodhi. *Dhamma Reflections*. Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy. Sri Lanka. 2015. p-80.

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