

The Role of Religious Leaders in the Light of Buddhism to Prevent the Perpetration of Violence against Women and Children

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Abstract

Nowadays Buddhism is perceived as a religion that aims at eradicating discrimination against women and children. This research paper explores the Buddhist perspective towards women and children in family and society. Buddha's teachings for women and children to attain equality in the light of spiritual and intellectual aspects are worthy and very positive. The paper explains violence as sin and describes ways to prevent violence against women and children by following the five precepts (moral code of conduct), loving-kindness and the noble eightfold path. This study also explores the necessity of legal and social reforms. This paper also highlights policies and guidelines to prevent violence against women and children.

Keywords: Buddhism, women, children, family, society and violence

1. Background of the Study

Sirimanne (2016) discussed the Buddhist attitude to prevent child abuse and found out the ways/paths to achieve sustainable development goals. In his research paper child protection is emphasized from a Buddhist perspective. Furthermore, he explored the path to Nibbana. Barua (2011) explores the position of women in Buddhism from different perspectives; especially in light of spiritual and cultural aspects. She discussed the position of women in society by quoting various examples found in the Buddhist scriptures and Jakata. However, attitudes towards women in society and in religion is the focus of this paper.

Gender-based violence is a common phenomenon across the world at present. This sort of violence affects women as well as children psychologically, socially, and physically. MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) aim to prevent any kind of violence against women and children and guide towards ensuring gender equality. In Buddhism gender equality is a must and moral ethics are taught to prevent against abuse and violence in society, in families and the workplace (Edirisinghe).

According to Keown (1995) Buddhism has focused on women's issues and their conditions. However, women had limited rights to get education and to practice religious norms (Hakias, 2013). Kumari (2014) in a paper highlights the ordainment process for monks, especially women in Thailand, and gender discrimination in early Buddhism. This clearly indicates discrimination against women, which is not good for society.

2. Research Gap

Many papers have been published at national and international levels focusing on Buddhism, peace, harmonious society and sustainable development. But few papers have been published on violence against women and children in Buddhism. So, there are a lot of opportunities to further research on related topics. That is why this study is an attempt to address the gap in research. Furthermore, this research article will significantly contribute to further literature review as well.

3. Objective

The objectives of this paper are to explore the role of religious leader for prevention of violence against women and children. Moreover, some policies and guidelines have been highlighted to prevent violence against women and children.

4. Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature. It has been conducted based on secondary data. For collecting secondary data many journal articles, book chapters, newspapers, conference papers, and Internet search engines have been utilized intensively.

5. Discussion

5.1. Violence is an offence

Violence is a sin and this is clearly defined in every religion. This violence against women or children could be physical, mental or psychological. However, in this aspect, personal violence against any person destroys trust within them. The action of committing violence is seen as an offense in every religion and every state (Fortune & Enger, 2006). The culture of violence on women and children is also regarded as illegal in every state or religion. For this reason, it could be concluded that, any sort of violence against women and children is a sin. For example, in Khullodharmopall Jataka, the cruel father killed his son due to anger but he got into hell as punishment. These cases are rarely found in Buddhism (Ghosh, 1391). The universal teaching of Buddha is to keep away from all types of evil deeds. In this regard Buddha uttered: Not to do any sin, to cultivate good, to clean one's mind, this is the novel teaching of the Buddha (Narada, 1993).

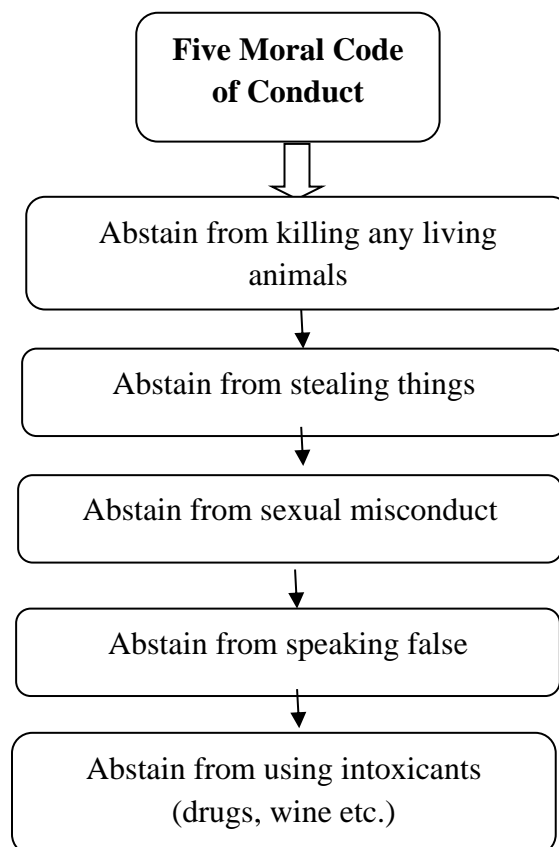
In his philosophy to bring wellbeing and prosperity in the family and social life, Buddha explained by using six directions. According to Buddha parents are the east, teachers are the south, wife and children are the west, friends and companions are the north, servants and workmen are the below and monks are the above (Walshe, 2012).

There is a close relationship between parents and children. Parents strive for the wellbeing of their children. They will guide and provide advocacy for the welfare of their children. These positive

actions work as inspiration and create intimate relationships between children and parents. In addition to that, children also have the duty to look after their parents in old age. They have to carry physical, mental, and financial responsibilities, so that parents never feel alone and get hurt when they get feeble and weak.

5.2 Five Moral Code of Conduct

Five precepts or moral code of conducts are the fundamental discipline in Buddhism. For the well-being of living beings these principles are very essential. These notable principles will help to purify one's mind and foster to lead a peaceful life in the society. The teachings of Buddha in five precepts are not killing any living being; not stealing any material; not conducting unlawful sexual conduct; not lying to anyone and not using any intoxicants (Nyanatiloka, 1996).



Source: Mahastvir (2007) p.105

Among the five precepts, sexual misconduct to women and children are a great offence. Due to committing misconduct people suffer in hell (Bodhi, 2000). Misconduct never produces ethereal happiness rather it creates suffering and sorrow. So, Buddha preached to avoid such activities (Mahastvir, 2007). That is why Buddha taught his followers to avoid misconduct to women and children for bringing peace in society. Thus, all kinds of misconducts to women and children or violence on them are serious offences. By following these moral principles everyone can live a

happy and prosperous life and keep one's self distant from immoral activities. For developing good human life everyone needs to respect each other and should abide by these principles. In this context, Professor Dr. Durgadas Battacariya mentioned: "five precepts are not only for the followers of Buddhism, it is as well an excellent tool for all to make an ideal civil society across the world" (Barua, 2000).

This virtue is significant to reduce corruption and violence from the country. However, the precepts are not only useful for Buddhists but also for all castes, races and creeds, too. Human life will be truly happy and society would become a safer and more peaceful place to reside in, if these precepts are followed regularly (Sunthorn, 1991). The five moral precepts are useful to build a sustainable society where there will never be violence. These precepts are called as the treasure of virtue (Bodhi, 2012). For a peaceful society Edmond Holmes (1949) uttered: five precepts are the tool for the Buddhist to self-control.

Moreover, the five precepts provide social norms for maintaining social order. Gender equality is discussed in Buddhist philosophy. Moreover, all human beings are born free and all are equal in society – Buddha explained many ideas about the freedom of women. Furthermore, everyone needs to follow the five precepts and thus prevent violence occurring in society.

5.3. Loving-kindness

People desire to live without fear, anxiety and worry in society. In addition to that, people who love themselves will never commit any evil against others. Thus, for a peaceful life violence should be reduced in every aspect of society, including in the aspect of oppression of women and children. In the *Dīgha Nīkāya* of *Sutta Pitaka*, loving-kindness is one of the essential elements to form a moral and ideal life in human society (Nanamoli and Bodhi, 2009).

Buddha said everybody should love everyone else like a mother loves her children (Mahastvir, 2007). Among the Four Sublime, loving-kindness (*Mettā*) will help all in obtaining happiness and peace. Buddha advised to love everyone equally irrespective of background (Bodhi, 2000). He further stated that if you think you are pure, then never involve yourself in bad deeds (Bodhi, 2000). True love to all human beings across the world is necessary. Boundless compassion should be showed towards all living beings without any discrimination (Mahastvir, 2007). Buddha preached to respect, honor and revere women, and protect them from misconduct, harassment and ill-treatment in the Seven Rules or *Satta Aparihaniya Dharma* (Walshe, 2012).

5.4. The Noble Eightfold Path

Another important Buddhist philosophy for building a peaceful society is the middle way preached by Buddha. This is equally important as the five precepts for reducing violence in society. There are eight factors of the middle way such as right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. If these are practiced properly, mutual respect, universal brotherhood and compassion for others will automatically be created. Thus, these noble virtues will significantly contribute to prevent the perpetration of

violence against women and children in every sphere of life. This eightfold path has been presented in the following figure:



Source: The Eightfold Path: Adopted from Nanamoli and Bodhi (2009), pp.934-940/1097-1101.

6. Policies and guidelines for the prevention of violence against women and children

Some policies and guidelines for the prevention of violence against women and children are discussed below:

- Paying attention towards women and children so that they are safe from mental and physical pressure/abuse.
- Giving awareness among different local and governmental levels to make them alert about violence against women and children.
- Law enforcement bodies should be more active and should concentrate on violence.
- Family counseling for building awareness to prevent violence against women and children.
- The teachings of Buddha should be practiced in order to safeguard children and women from abuse.
- Counseling to practice meditation to prevent violence against women and children.
- Counseling to practice the code of conduct (moral conduct) to be compassionate towards women and children.
- Awareness development programmes should be encouraged in order to protect women and children from any kind of violence.
- Developing relations among family members.
- Decreasing discrimination towards female children in the family.

According to Fortune and Enger (2006), religious leaders should offer training and support to the victims of violence against women and children. Religious leaders can play a central role as community leaders to build awareness on the issue of violence against women and children. Moreover, religious teachings are fruitful for preventing violence against women and children. Appropriate policies as well as mental and financial support are necessary to provide counsel in case of violence committed against them. Moreover, conferences and seminars can provide important platforms to heighten awareness and finding solutions.

Recommendations for the ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) can expand its humanitarian work to better prevent the violence against women and children and can facilitate assistance to the victims.

The ICRC can also provide financial aid to arrange frequent seminars and conferences on different violence issues and work to resolve problems in collaboration with Buddhist monks and religious leaders.

The ICRC can continue to increase awareness of violence against women and children.

The ICRC can involve the government and other welfare organizations to work together to prevent violence against women and children.

The ICRC can distribute dissemination materials among all classes of people. Moreover, the ICRC can arrange training sessions among Buddhist leaders and monks who have influence in society.

7. Conclusion

For ensuring sustainable development in societies, the physical and mental peace of women and children are very significant. Without preventing mental and physical abuse against women and children, sustainable development is impossible. This paper discussed the role of religious leaders to prevent violence against women and children. Buddhist attitudes and teachings are also highlighted in this paper to prevent any kind of violence against them. A central aspect is that Buddhist teachings should be practiced and taught by religious leaders. Moreover, Buddhism is applicable in every sphere of life and answers can be found for the peaceful life of all human beings and its principles can be practiced anywhere in society.

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