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From Conflict to Reconciliation: Buddhist Ethical Insights on the Kosambī Dispute

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Abstract

Global conflicts prove the ethical constraints upon power-focused peace and security thinking. Although international relations theory has developed sophisticated explanatory models of conflicts, it has manifestly downplayed the ethical and psychological aspect of these phenomena. This paper explores the resolution of conflicts from an ethical point of view of Buddhism by considering an interpretation of the Dhammapada with regard to the conflict at Kosambī (Dhammapada Verses 1-6). Using an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology grounded in humanities-based textual analysis, ethical interpretation, and comparative peace studies approaches, this paper examines Buddhist perspectives on conflict resolution through the narrative of the Kosambī dispute preserved in the Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā. The study explores how attachment to views (*ditṭhi-upādāna*), lack of restraint (*asaṃvara*), and ignorance (*avijjā*) contribute to conflict, while Buddhist ethical principles such as *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), *mettā*

(loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *sati* (mindfulness), and *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination) offer interpretive frameworks for understanding reconciliation and peacebuilding in contemporary contexts. This research establishes an ethical interpretation concerning the Dhammapada with regard to global conflict situations like Ukraine, Gaza Conflict, Indo-pacific region, Sudan conflict, Rohingya crisis cases, etc., illustrating the actual availability of Buddhist ethics as an interpretation model contemplating global conflicts from an ethical point of view by considering the internal aspects of conflicts as appropriate conditions fulfilling peace.

Keywords: ahiṃsā, Buddhist ethic, conflict resolution, Dhammapada, Kosambī dispute

1. Introduction

Conflict remains an important factor in the contemporary international system, as it was in past ages, despite the increased presence of international institutions, norms, and forums that aimed at the suppression of force as an interactional mode. International relations as an academic field of study had, as its main focus in the study of conflict, the aspects of material interest, the security dilemma, and institutional inefficacy. These paradigms explain very well the structural aspects of conflict, but they tend to ignore the ethical and psychological constituents of human aggression. The Buddhist approach to conflict offers a very useful analytical one, as it places the cause of conflict in the human psyche, specifically in the related activities of craving, aversion, and misperception. The application of the Buddhist philosophy does not provide a political theory of international relations but an ethical diagnosis of the conflict, which has its own analytical method, related to the concept of suffering (*dukkha*). The contemporary ongoing international conflicts show the ethical boundaries of the power-based approach to peace and security. The application of international relations theories resulted in the development of deeply insightful explanatory theories of conflict, but showed complete negligence of the ethical and psychological aspects of human aggression. The purpose of this paper is to analyze Buddhist ethical approaches to conflict through the narrative of the Kosambī dispute preserved in the Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, an important text of the Theravāda commentarial tradition, in dialogue with relevant canonical teachings from the Pāli Nikāyas. Although the Kosambī narrative is preserved primarily in the commentarial tradition, its ethical foundations are closely connected with canonical Buddhist teachings concerning restraint, mindfulness, non-violence, and reconciliation

found throughout the early Buddhist texts. The main focus of this research study will provide, through this narrative, an anchorage point to explore the conflict as an ethical failure instead of an ethically unconstitutional one. The application of this narrative to contemporary international conflict will show the contemporary necessity of the Buddhist approach to conflict, which, as in the past, represents an ethical approach to conflict instead of developing policy recommendations.

This paper presents a study on conflict resolution by taking a close reading of the Dhammapada and the commentary on the conflict between the monks at Kosambī, within the context of Buddhist ethics can be taken as a paradigmatic explanation regarding the rise and appearance of conflict based on factors such as view fondness (*diṭṭhi-upādāna*), unrestrainedness (*asaṃvara*), and ignorance (*avijjā*). Based on central philosophical themes such as ‘non-violence’ (*ahiṃsā*), loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), mindfulness (*sati*), and ‘interdependence’ (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), the paper defines a caregiving mode to define modern-day conflict. However, by engaging with modern-day scenarios such as the Ukraine conflict, Gaza, Indo-Pacific, Sudan, and the Rohingya crises, within a pragmatic mode, the paper tries to show the compatibility of making use of Buddhist ethics to make a significant impact on peace as a whole by providing a philosophical focus within modern-day scenarios regarding peace studies.

2. Literature Review

In academic literature, the study of conflict in Buddhism has conventionally been more concerned with the derivation of general ethical principles rather than closer expository examination of conflictual instances in the Buddhist canon. In more general literature

related to Buddhism in the West, the focus of academic commentary had been permissible in terms of its coherence within a soteriological agenda. But more recent academic literature suggests an increased recognition of the potential of Buddhist ethics in general for addressing conflict at a personal and community-level. Core works in Buddhist ethics by authors such as Peter Harvey and Damien Keown lay down the parameters of ethics in which any account of conflict in Buddhism necessarily resides. In *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, for instance, non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), self-restraint (*saṃvara*), and compassion (*karuṇā*) are presented in terms of an integrated vision of moral causality in general (*kamma*), through which compassion in particular is clearly made dependent upon a general understanding of mental conditionality. Indeed, key to this account is the recognition of the fundamental interdependence of ethics with mental cultivation in general. In similar vein, Keown highlights the fundamental importance of mental intention (*cetanā*) in any account of ethics in Buddhism, pointing out the impropriety of ethics in terms of intentional mental distortions rooted in ignorance of the forms of greed, hatred, and delusion.

Textual analyses of the Pali Canon and its commentaries can further elucidate Buddhist views on conflict. The writings of Rupert Gethin also tend to emphasize mental control and understanding of impermanence (*anicca*) for maintaining a sense of communal balance and harmony in society (Gethin). The *Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, with translations by Eugene Watson Burlingame, is where stories are collected that meter out ethical teachings in terms of concrete examples, with that of Kosambī being especially pertinent to this discussion that can thus be seen specifically to encapsulate a deep sense of intra-Saṅghic conflict for Buddhist society at that particular point in history

(Buddhaghosa; Burlingame). Although this particular anecdote is regularly mentioned in literature that seeks to caution against splits and divisions that can result from Buddhist group conflicts, little actual ethical textual interpretation has actually occurred in this particular aspect that is contemporary to anthropological theory on conflict studies. The actual interpretation of the Dhammapada teachings, in particular that achieved by Walpola Rahula and Acharya Buddhharakkhita in their translations, also rather uniformly suggests that this Buddhist text expresses ethical truths that are universally applicable because they adhere to invincible truths that can communicate ethical teachings to humanity at any particular point in history, regardless of cultural nuances that need to be addressed in advance and according to particular demands of human verification that are part and parcel to this discourse because this is the Dhammapada (Verse 6) that is specially pertinent to this discussion that can regularly communicate teachings on control and awareness and that is specially declarative on issues relating to human control and awareness during a point in history that actually sees intra-Saṅghic conflict in Buddhist society that can regularly seek to emphasize human control and awareness for instigating movements.(Ma1.1)(D1.2)

Despite the growing interest in Buddhist ethics as a philosophy of conflict studies in the past few decades, there has been a widening of the scope of discussion through interdisciplinary conversations between Buddhist ethics itself and the study of peace. The concept of structural and cultural violence in Johan Galtung gives a relevant comparative framework within which the embedding of ethics in structural violence could be studied. Though Galtung has not been rooted in the Buddhist tradition, the creed of Galtung about non-violent transformations fits well within the Buddhist tradition of opposition to the effects of hatred

(*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). The approaches of John Paul Lederach to the problem of conflict study have further been relevant in enhancing the Buddhist ethics of conflict studies through the views of Lederach about psychological transformations of conflicts in comparison with the demand of the Kosambī tradition about the transformation of conflicts through Buddhist ethics. The views of scholars like Herbert C. Kelman and Howard Zehr are further relevant here about the psychological transformations of conflicts required in the context of modern-day conflicts. These approaches of scholars are in conformity with the approaches of Buddhist ethics about the role of mindfulness (*sati*) in approaches towards conflicts. However, this issue has been addressed in the modern context in ways which are almost absent in Buddhist ethics. Despite the various studies about this issue in the modern context, it has been noticed here in this paper through the literature survey about the fact that a large gap has been created in the context of Buddhist ethics of conflicts through interdisciplinary studies of conflict research. The paper aims to fill this gap through the introduction of the concepts of restraint, impermanence, and self-control about the context of conflict research.

Existing scholarship on Buddhist ethics has extensively discussed concepts such as *ahiṃsā*, compassion, mindfulness, and moral intentionality in relation to ethical conduct and peacebuilding. Likewise, modern peace and conflict studies scholars such as Johan Galtung, John Paul Lederach, Herbert Kelman, and Martha Minow have explored structural violence, reconciliation, trauma, and conflict transformation from interdisciplinary perspectives. However, comparatively limited scholarly attention has been devoted to close ethical analysis of specific Buddhist conflict narratives, particularly the Kosambī dispute preserved in the Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, as a

framework for interpreting contemporary conflicts and peacebuilding processes. This study seeks to address that gap by integrating textual analysis of Buddhist canonical and commentarial literature with contemporary discussions in peace and conflict studies. Rather than presenting Buddhist ethics merely as abstract moral philosophy, the paper demonstrates how the Kosambī narrative offers a concrete ethical model for understanding the psychological, relational, and moral dimensions of conflict transformation. In doing so, the study contributes to interdisciplinary conversations between Buddhist ethics, peace studies, and conflict transformation theory.

3. Research Methodological Orientation

In the present work, an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology is being applied in the realm of Buddhist Studies by utilizing methods predominantly from the humanities-based approach in addition to ethical and comparative peace studies. Due to the fact that Buddhism studies do not employ one single fixed methodology, this study is employing a combination of textual interpretation of key texts, including the Dhammapada, the Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, and associated Nikāya literature, in connection to the Kosambī dispute in addition to normative ethical interpretation of certain concepts and comparative peace studies in selected contemporary conflicts. Textual analysis will be employed to analyze and interpret selected verses from the above texts. The second methodological approach in use includes normative ethical interpretation of terms such as *ahimsa*, *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *sati*, and *saṃvara* in the context of transforming conflicts. Lastly, comparative analysis of select contemporary conflicts will be undertaken in a selective manner to highlight the importance of Buddhist ethics in contemporary contexts without venturing into empirical political analysis and policy making.

4. The Kosambī Dispute: Conflict within the Saṅgha

The Kosambī incident, as recorded in the Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā, or Commentary on the Dhammapada, offers one of the most instructional instances of conflict within the early Buddhist *Saṅgha*. Unlike other instances of conflict, such as those with kings, members of other sects, or external political influences, the Kosambī [Ma2.1][D2.2] incident is purely internal, thus bringing into sharp relief not just institutional or ideological aspects of conflict, but instead its moral and psychological aspects. The conflict occurred among a body of monks living at Kosambī, a region of ancient India, over a matter of monastic rule, or Vinaya. Notably, even this conflict involved a rather trivial matter of interpretation of a rule of ritual decency. However, instead of remaining as such, this conflict escalated into a deep division, such that the body of monks split into hostile camps, all of whom held the absolute rightness of their stance. According to the text, as a result of this conflict, the body of monks increasingly held onto these positions as they were increasingly bound up by their opinions, or *diṭṭhi*. Instead of beginning as what might have been seen as a disputed point, instead what began as a disputed point devolved into something much more factional, involving blame, a lack of listening, and a lack of harmony within the *Saṅgha* (Buddhist community). None of these individuals approached the disputed point as they might have been encouraged by the Buddha's message, instead approaching what they were considering with a certain arrogance. All of these individuals sought instead not just agreement, but majority rule, showing instead that sometimes moral positions can simply provide a specific individual with a moral high ground.

A significant improvement in analyzing the problem of the Kosambī dispute may come from studying directly the Kosambakakkhandhaka of the Mahāvagga in the Vinaya Piṭaka, which is the oldest and only available text dealing with the subject in question. Although the Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā narrates the dispute only as an illustrative example, the canonical version gives the reader more information on the process of its rise and solution. It states that at first the conflict had a very insignificant origin – it began from one small violation of monastic rules (Vinaya), but soon it transformed into a full-fledged schism among the community members who were proud of their position and not willing to take into consideration other points of view (Horner, 1881, pp. 340-345). In fact, the real reason for the conflict consisted of the psychological aspects rather than its apparent reasons. In order to resolve this dispute, the Buddha made numerous efforts to be an arbitrator between both sides and urged the monks to establish amity among themselves. At this juncture, Buddha taught the Six Rules of Friendship (*cha sāraṇīyā dhammā*), which consist of loving bodily actions, loving speech, loving thought, equal distribution of material goods, moral behavior, and harmonious thinking regarding Right Understanding (Rhys Davids & Oldenberg, 1951, pp. 238-40). It clearly signifies that the maintenance of harmony within the community is not dependent on disciplinary laws alone, but on ethical actions as well.

It is worth highlighting that the other notable part in the traditional account of the event is when the Buddha leaves the disputing group and moves to Parileyyaka forest. Rather than using force to solve the problem, the Buddha lets the monks suffer the effects of their actions. With the persistence of the conflict, lay people begin to lose trust and faith in the monks leading them to understand their wrongs (Horner, 1881, pp. 350-52). Consequently, they are able to come to

terms with one another and repent before Buddha. Hence, reconciliation in this case is not only associated with the overcoming of an opponent but also a spiritual transformation on the part of the monks. Thus, the Kosambakakkhandhaka provides a comprehensive study of the nature of disputes which is especially topical at the present moment. First, it shows how disputes are sustained not just because of differences of opinion but because of such things as passion, pride, and blindness of mind. Second, this event reveals the necessity of restraining oneself, being mindful, compassionate and responsible for the well-being of the community in order to establish sustainable peace (Horner, 1951, pp. 345-52; Davids & Oldenberg, 1881, pp. 238-42).

The Buddha, learning about the conflict, made many attempts to mediate among the conflicting parties. He exhorted the monks to contemplate about the aim of monastic existence, reminding them that the Saṅgha was established not only as an institution but also as an embodied assembly of practice in restraint and compassion and the development of wisdom. However, despite his efforts to guide them, the monks remained stubborn about letting go of their positions. The failure of the Buddha to resolve the conflict among them through instruction alone illustrates an integral point about Buddhist ethics: that insights cannot simply be imposed, and ethical maturation has to emerge from within, not from without. In view of the continued unwillingness of the monks to resolve among themselves, the Buddha took an extremely drastic step. He abandoned the community of Kosambī and isolated himself in solitude. His withdrawal from society at that point was not an abandonment or an avoidance of responsibility but remained an ethical statement that conveyed the gravity of an unresolved conflict among members of the religious community. By stepping aside, the Buddha made the manifestation of the consequences

of the monks' act palpable to them. Without the direct influence and guidance of the Buddha, their inevitable crisis presented another consequence to them. Their own boon and sustenance, due to the conflict observed among the religious members, were withdrawn by the laity, who refused to give them further alms. The failure of ethical living among the members of the Saṅgha presented the first consequence of an interruption of communion between the religious members and the laity. Put in a state of hunger and lack of what world and material society value, the members had to actually think about and reflect upon their own acts. Their retrospection among them presented remorse and subsequently led to mutual forgiveness and reconciliation. Realizing the stumbling block that attachments and pride presented to them, the monks asked forgiveness from each other and subsequently went to the Buddha to apologize and confess that they went wrong. It was at this point that the Buddha related Dhammapada Verse 6, which gave a succinct yet deep explanation about the reality of conflict and conflict resolution that if others did not realize the importance of exercising restraint among them, this practice would dispel all conflict among them.

The significance of the Kosambī dispute consists in its practical application of ethics since it reinterprets controversy in terms not of irreconcilable difference but of the lack of insight and control. As interpreted in the commentary, the reason why there are still arguments is that persons in general cannot penetrate the truth of *aniccā* and *marāṇa-saññā*, or the impermanence and transience of life and self. This lack of understanding leads to pride, stubbornness, and attachment to views, which are incompatibles of reconciliation. When monks lose sight of the truth that their own life and personality are transient, they are necessarily attached to justifying and validating their views as if

they were part of their own personality. Controversy becomes a tool of self-affirmation rather than truth-seeking. In this respect, the Buddha's teaching of *saṃvara* or control in Dhammapada Verse 6 assumes particular importance. Control or *saṃvara* is not suppression and passivity but an active and voluntary regulation of ethics in thought, words, and deeds. Persons who "do not understand" the importance of control are controlled by their reactive emotions of anger, ill will, resentment, and competitiveness in their behavior. But those who grasp the significance of *anicca* are in effect persons who recognize that there is no point in holding firmly to something and therefore be able to effect reconciliation. As an application of Buddhist ethics, control is spontaneous to wisdom and is the action of understanding of the provisionally real and transient character of all phenomena.

Notably, the Kosambī episode corroborates the observation that the presence or continuation of a conflict is sometimes unrelated to the subject matter of the dispute. The monks' disagreement was not based on a difference in ethical beliefs but a type of engagement with the disagreement. The progression towards a more acute form of conflict was more a consequence of unethical behavior with respect to self-perception and treatment of each other. This is especially important for modern models of conflict mediation and resolution, who often address the problem with a focus on interest mediation or power balancing, with disregard for ethical predispositions. The possible model advocated by the Buddhist religion points out that a lack of self-regulation with respect to these matters would mean that institutional strategies would be irrelevant for creating a permanent state of peaceful coexistence. The example provided by the withdrawal of the Buddha is also a part of that permanent model. The Buddha chose not to use power or direct regulation towards requiring compliance with a specific behavior but

chose instead to let the situation develop according to the principles of unethical behavior. The second component is based once again in the principles of causality, and it points towards the fact that pain and suffering do have a specific type or level of education. The Kosambī dispute was resolved with a type or method that is not punitive but transformative. The Kosambī dispute is a powerful inspiration for the more modern world that is fraught with a lack of institutional confidence. The Kosambī dispute is a direct inspiration for a world that is increasingly drawn towards a lack of institutional confidence.

5. Buddhist Diagnosis of Conflict

Buddhist ethics start with a diagnostic analysis that examines the mental conditions that give rise to suffering (*dukkha*) and conflict. Early Buddhist teachings identify the three root unwholesome roots (*akusala-mūlā*), namely greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), as the root sources that drive destructive behavior (Gethin, 1998, pp.73-75). These root sources condition perceptions, intention (*cetanā*), and behavior driven by destructive activities that cause collective as well as individual suffering. Greed (*lobha*) not only includes material desire, but it also encompasses more fundamental desires related to power, self, and dogmatic views. Hatred (*dosa*) includes feelings of aversion and hostility toward things perceived as a danger or a threat. On the other hand, delusion (*moha*) refers to a misunderstanding concerning reality, including the concepts of impermanence, no self, and interconnectedness. According to the repeated teachings of the Buddha, delusion conditions the other two root sources that perpetuate suffering and conflict (Saṃyutta Nikāya 12.2). These three root sources are not separate instances of moral deficiency. Greed increases attachment to self and group, hate arises from the existence of the former attachment that has been threatened, while delusion ignores the fact that self and its

oppositions are construct. From the Buddhist perspective, conflicts a predictable outcome of undiagnosed mental conditioning. Buddhist ethics move the locus of conflict resolutions from external coercion to internal moral transformation. On the collective level, the root sources of conflict are manifested institutionally and ideologically. Greed is expressed economically as exploitation and politically as domination, hate as xenophobic and sectarian violence, and delusion as dogmatic ideological absolutism. These collective forms are more pronounced on the individual ones. The root sources of conflict are also driven by other related mental factors such as attitude, fear, lack of trust, and dehumanization (Galtung, 1996, pp. 14-16), as highlighted by the peace scholars (Lederach, 1997, pp. 73-75).

The Kosambī dispute is a quintessential example of this phenomenon. The monks' obsession with right views is indicative of view eccentricity (*diṭṭhupādāna*), divisive hostility, and delusion, which are precisely the internal, structural issues identified by Buddhism as unwholesome (Buddhaghosa, 1921, pp. 83-85). The monks' dispute is also reflective, in many ways, of the modern phenomenon in politics and society, wherein granularity in views is automatically regarded as the hallmark of virtue, and disagreement is perceived as an existential challenge, as evidenced in studies on conflicts involving identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986, pp. 60-62). Rather than viewing conflict as traceable, in whole, to external societal, cultural, or structural causations, as in the resultant explanations in secular ethics, Buddhism's analysis of conflict relies on greed, hatred, and delusion for etiological purposes. Indeed, in so doing, Buddhism's ethics on conflict defy the resultant explanations in secular ethics, which posit conflict as attributable, in whole, to societal and structural variables. Rather, the presence in conflict of greed, hatred, and delusion

assumes structural oppositions in conflict can only be rectified if the internal, motivational, and perceptual structural issues are first addressed. Needless to say, in advancing this position, the resultant ethics in Buddhism defy structural explanations in secular ethics, where conflict's resultant explanations can never point beyond structural inequality. Rather, in advancing this position, conflict, in Buddhism's ethics, invariably assumes structural oppositions in conflict, wherein conflict in societal and structural oppositions can only then truly end if the intrinsic motivational structural issues in conflict, given in greed, hatred, and delusion, are first altered. Moreover, in advancing this position, every conflict in opposition, in Buddhism's resultant ethics, assumes inherent structural inequality, wherein conflict's resultant opposition in societal and structural inequality can only then end if the intrinsic motivational structural issues regarding conflict, given in greed, hatred, and delusion, are first altered.

The teaching of dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) refutes this ignorance with a vision of reality in which all phenomena arise in a network of dependent origination. As the Buddha teaches, "When there is this that arises. The arising of this is the arising of that" (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 12.61). For conflict in particular, dependent origination subverts the tendency to reduce conflict to simple causality, placing the blame squarely on the heads of discrete individuals or groups, in order to make conflict vividly dependent in this way on history, emotion, and cognition. Dependent origination upends the zero-sum thinking that has been so prevalent in the ideological and political conflicts of the modern age. As we have seen, the logic of zero-sum conflict presumes the existence of objective and discrete interests and of discrete agent centredness in which the winning of one side necessarily entails the losing of the other.

However, dependent origination subverts the validity of this reasoning in pointing out the interconnectedness of all action in which intentions and goals and outcomes ineluctably impinge on one another in an unbreakable series of conditioned events. The realization of interconnectedness thus has deep and profound implications for ethics in which the imperative of self-control and the importance of other-control and forward-thinking can be advocated to an extent that is simply unrecognizable in the bald assertions of zero-sum conflict resolution (Keown, 2013, pp. 98-100). Dependent origination also refutes the mythology of absolute freedom in which moral disengagement and the right to do harm in the name of higher goals becomes easily conceivable. Dependent origination makes it apparent that the assumption is simply fallacious in which goals and intentions and outcomes impinge one another in an unbreakable nexus that has deep implications for ethical action in which the moral agent is not neatly or simply separated from the ends in which they take an interest. Ethical action from the Buddhist position necessarily has to take into account the long-term implications of action in which dependent origination makes evident the so-called conditioned nature of action.

Under these conditions, conflict itself ceases to be the, by definition, necessary and inevitable consequence of difference. Diversity is destructive only when mediated by ignorance and attachment. Here, differences are viewed through the lens of ignorance and conditionality, and they themselves become potential sites of dialogue and transformation, rather than conflict, when and if they are so used. Under these conditions, the interpretation of conflict by Buddhist ethics becomes its misperception or misinterpretation, rather than its pluriform or diversified nature, and so offers a critical corrective to the end goal of all conflict models, namely the exercise of power, and

to models of conflict resolution based upon the exercise of that same power in the currently conflicted and highly political contemporary world (Minow, 1998, pp. 98-101).

5. Buddhist Ethical Way to Resolving Conflict

Buddhist ethics: Instead of viewing a conflict situation mostly in terms of conflicting interests or a need for adequate mechanisms, a Buddhist ethic views it in relation to unwholesome mental dispositions that need to be made known, checked, and changed. The absence of a conflict (*vivāda-nirodha*) itself is thereby thoroughly connected to ethics (*sīla-bhāvanā*) and wisdom (*paññā*). The example of the dispute in Kosambī shows that in a group of people following moral principles, a conflict condition may persist. The answer of Buddhist ethics in such a situation exists in a group of interrelated principles working preventively, interruptively, and restoratively. Here are a few major principles of Buddhist ethics that are mentioned below:

A. Restraint (*Samvara*)

Samvara is another basic category of Buddhist ethics. It signifies the wise control of body action, word action, and mental action, according to the results anticipated rather than adherence to rules (Harvey, 2000, pp. 33-36). In the Dhammapada, restraint is cited again and again as a means of avoiding suffering, with unchained behavior described as the cause of conflict (Dhammapada 6, 231). In the Kosambī story, the lack of restraint enabled what began with a disagreement over monastic norms to progress from there to deep-seated division. The fault of the monks was not in their regard for ethics but in their lack of control over their speech, emphasizing pride, accusation, and contempt (Kosambī Sutta). In Buddhist ethics, speech itself (*vācā*) is declared the major means by which conflict escalates; angry words, hinting at criticism,

and refusal to listen result in a situation in which reconciliation becomes more and more unlikely (Bodhi, 2000, p. 21).

Ethical restraint is a type of preventive discipline. It helps break the cycle of escalation through the cultivation of pause, awareness, and humility. More specifically, Gethin makes the crucial point that *saṃvara* as a form of restraint is not a question of repression or disengagement but of informed ethical decision. According to Gethin: “The roots of restraint are not rooted in the fear of punishment but in insight into impermanence and interdependence. It is this insight which brings about restraint” (Gethin, 1998, pp. 84-86). Contemporary studies of conflict offer further correlates of these arguments in the concepts of de-escalation and conflict transformation. These pinpoint the management of reactive behavior or self-control as a condition of dialogue (Lederach, 1997, pp. 55-58). The Buddhist model of restraint supplements these notions by basing self-control on ethical awareness rather than strategic calculation. Through the practice of restraint in relation to negative speaking and acting, one creates the moral space required for understanding.

B. Non-Violence (*Ahimsā*)

Ahimsā is an important component of Buddhist ethics but in a form quite different from moral absolutism suggested by the label. In Buddhism, the practice of *ahimsā* comes from an understanding of the linkage of vulnerability, through enlightenment about the interdependence of all conscious beings (Keown, 2013, pp. 97-99). Violence is opposed in Buddhism because it leads to dukkha (suffering) and increases ignorance, rather than for the moral absolutist reason of contradicting a rule of right living. *Ahimsā* (non-violence), in Buddhism always has its roots in fear of loss, ignorance, and love of

self (Saṃyutta Nikāya 1.8). Violence occurs in conflict situations when the other is reduced to an obstacle rather than being acknowledged as a fellow-was-maker. While non-violent, the Kosambī episode illustrates how words of aggression can inflict a similar damage to ethics as non-verbal violence. The reluctance of the monks to find forgiveness between those who caused *dukkha* to each other undermined the ethics of the Saṅgha.

Thus, the principle of *ahiṃsā*, based on Buddhism, is a form of non-violence extending to refraining, apart from physical violence, from worded violence such as abusing, humiliating, or excluding others. In modern peace ethics, there is a need to address structural and cultural violence, apart from physical violence, to achieve more effective peace-making, as argued by Galtung (Galtung, 1996, pp. 14-16). In Buddhism, as long as hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) are left untreated, despite the lack of weapons used, violence continues to exist. However, *ahiṃsā* defies the retaliatory principle as well because, according to the Buddha, hatred can never be overcome by hatred but by non-hatred alone, as found in the Dhammapada (Verse 5). While this does not overlook the existence of injustices, it warns against the fact that reactions provoked by aggression lead to further suffering only.

C. Loving-Kindness (*Mettā*) and Compassion (*Karuṇā*)

Restraint and non-violence curtail problematic behavior, while loving kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) cultivate ethical behavior.

The intention for other people's happiness is *mettā*, and *karuṇā* is sensitivity to pain and a wish to remove it. These can resist and undo aversion, ill will, and both kinds of apathy, which are the emotional roots of conflict (Bodhi, 2000, p. 7). Most salient, Buddhist ethics make

clear that approval of other people's beliefs and behavior is not a condition for compassionate response. One can condemn problematic behavior while acknowledging that all human beings are human and suffer. This is especially important in highly polarized conflicts, where ethical disagreement frequently reduces to dehumanization. The truths taught by the Buddha emphasize that all beings are likewise determined by causes that lie beyond their control (Saṃyutta Nikāya 12.61).

In Kosambī, reconciliation was made possible after the monastery recognized the pain caused by their actions and reacted in a penitent and forgiveness-filled manner. Compassion in this case was made practical, not in terms of empathy but in terms of righteousness. Modern thinkers on peace also support that forgiveness in order for a reconciliation process to be lasting must include not just the end of fighting but the healing of moral bonds too (Minow, 1998, pp. 72-75). Regarding this, *mettā* and *karuṇā* in Buddhism negate a zero-sum concept of a conflict. These virtues include reflecting on common weakness. Therefore, compassion in this perception serves as a moral resource that enables continued interaction despite a lack of understanding.

D. Mindfulness (*Sati*)

Mindfulness (*sati*) is the principle that integrates the effective operation of self-regulation, non-violence, and compassion. *Sati* is the continuous observation of physical phenomena, such as the sensations in the body, and the observation of ideations and mental states as they originate and pass away. In the context of conflict, an individual can attend to anger, fear, and pride and control it before it leads to destructive behavior (Rahula, 1974, pp. 68-70). The Buddha states mindfulness as the foundation for ethics (Bodhi, 2000, p. 10). In the absence of

mindfulness, ethics are mere ideas and ineffective. In the Kosambī dispute, the inability of the monks to attend to their own attachment and defensiveness made it difficult for them to adjust until it was confronted by an outside consequence.

Mindfulness intervenes in impulse strikes back by inserting a pause between stimulus and response. This ability correlates with modern psychological research about the regulation of emotion and de-escalating conflict, in which the element of awareness plays an important role in nonreactive aggressive behaviors (Kelman, 1991, pp. 23-25). The Buddhist mindfulness approach to conflict, however, embeds this ability in an ethical system of liberation from suffering. Sati application in conflict changes conflict into an object of meditation instead of an impulse to act.

6. Ethical Resonances

Although Buddhist ethics have evolved in a context worlds apart from ours, they still have value in regard to our conflicts. The following cases explain how Buddhist ethics can help us recognize our current patterns of attitudinal attachment, fear, and dehumanization underlying our violence in our era.

a. Ukraine: The Ukrainian conflict is rooted in narratives of identity, sovereignty, and historical experience. In Buddhist ethics, this expresses *lobha* when clinging to enduring territory, as if this were the sole definition of a fixed and absolute nationality, when in fact this is a function of *anicca*. Rarely does *dosa*, or ill will rooted in fear, make itself felt, but when sentiment turns hostile, *vyāpada*, ill will, is encouraged. In Buddhist ethics, one does not deny issues of security, but both *lobha* and identity as fixed cannot be maintained as inviolable.

b. Gaza: The cyclical violence in Gaza illustrates how historical trauma and retribution reinforces *dosa* and every act of violence conditions the next, creating a moral economy of vengeance. Buddhist ethical views highlight the role of compassion in an ethical break with the cycle of toxic revenge in the way that Jewish ethical views highlight the role of the Hebrew Bible. Compassion here does not imply moral equivalence but refusal to reduce human beings to embodiments of threat. From a Buddhist perspective, unresolved suffering becomes the seed of future violence unless acknowledged and addressed. This insight resonates with peace ethics emphasizing trauma-sensitive approaches to conflict (Minow, 1998, pp. 98-101).

c. Indo-Pacific Rivalries: The relationships between states in the Indo-Pacific are characterized by a combination of mistrust, security dilemmas, and zero-sum thinking. Conditionality (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) highlights the problematic effects of unilateral approaches to security, which can actually configure an increased insecurity for all actors. Because ethics and mindfulness encourage awareness of the effects of fear-driven behavior, they may provide the means to identify the self-reinforcing dynamic of increasing tension. Here, Buddhism does not argue for or provide geopolitics but critiques the absolute approach to the ideology of security, which equates strength and vulnerability.

d. The Situations in Sudan and the Rohingya Crisis: The humanitarian crises in Sudan and the Rohingya community illustrate the implications of exclusion and dehumanization as far as ethics are concerned. Buddhist ethics place primary emphasis on the moral accountability of populations regardless of their identity, status as citizens, or functionality. Dehumanization is the manifestation of a collective form of *moha* in these situations; it facilitates violence through the process

of moral disengagement. The Buddhist ethic of compassion or *karuṇā* challenges the notion of exclusion as it emphasizes the moral relevance of suffering in itself.

6. Conclusion

Buddhist ethics challenge the premise that violence occurs necessarily in human affairs. Peace (*santi*) is conceptualized not only in terms of the lack of war but also in terms of the presence of ethical insight and the values of restraint and compassion. Inner change alone hinders the efficacy of organizational or institutional change. The Kosambī story shows that religious orders founded upon lofty ethical ideals are no less prone to conflict and war when lacking mindfulness and humility. Instead, peace calls for purificatory ethical work in all human contexts and cannot depend upon rules or authority alone. This is consistent with peace-building theory in contemporary contexts that conceives transformation in terms of relationships and stability that is coercive rather than ethically transformational (Lederach, 1997, pp. 83-86). This study has examined the Kosambī dispute narrative within the Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā as an ethical framework for understanding conflict in Buddhist thought. Through qualitative textual and ethical analysis, the paper demonstrates that Buddhist approaches to conflict emphasize restraint, mindfulness, compassion, and the transformation of mental dispositions rather than coercive or purely institutional modes of resolution. The Kosambī episode illustrates that conflict arises not merely from structural disagreement but also from attachment to views, reactive emotions, and failures of ethical self-regulation. The study further shows that Buddhist ethical concepts such as *ahiṃsā*, *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *sati*, and *paṭiccasamuppāda* provide interpretive resources for reflecting upon the psychological and ethical dimensions of

contemporary conflicts. However, the paper does not propose direct political or policy solutions to modern geopolitical crises. Instead, it argues that Buddhist ethical thought may contribute meaningfully to contemporary peacebuilding and conflict transformation discourse by foregrounding ethical self-awareness, relational responsibility, and the cultivation of non-violent dispositions.

The Dhammapada commentary on the Kosambī dispute provides an enduring ethical message in which conflict is brought to an end not by victory or forceful suppression, but by the substitution of the control exerted by attachment for the control exerted by understanding. In an age in which conflict has been characterized both by polarization and violence, the ethics of Buddhism bring an informative voice to conflict studies, speaking in unique ways to conflict's inherent causes. Rather than propounding conflict resolution as either politics or strategic action, ethical theory in Buddhism provides tools for conflict resolution as transformative ethics, transforming oneself in the qualities of control, nonviolence, compassion, and mindfulness in order to bring an end to cycles of violence and establish the possibility for reconciliation. The Kosambī narrative therefore remains significant not only as a historical episode within Buddhist literature but also as a philosophical and ethical resource for examining the moral conditions necessary for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

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