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The Need of Education on Religious Tolerance Among The Buddhist Minority In Indonesia

Santacitto Sentot, Aryanto Firmadi

STAB Kertarajasa, Indonesia

santacitto@gmail.com, arieyan@gmail.com

Abstract

Throughout history, Indonesia has faced several violence out of which religious issues has most likely become the trigger for such violence. In attempt on building tolerance among religious communities, there are four questioning points that need to be dealt with: 1) what is the religious tolerance? 2) what are the causes for the arising of religious intolerance? 3) what is our response in facing intolerance acts from other religious communities? 4) what are our contributions in creating tolerance, unity, peace and harmony in the midst of religious diversity. This research attempts to discuss this subject matter comprehensively with reference to Buddhist's canonical literature, with its main aim for educating Buddhist minority in Indonesia on the importance of religious tolerance. The education is greatly needed for two main reasons. The first reason is to make Buddhists minority in Indonesia understand clearly the Buddhist attitude on religious tolerance, thereby they would behave themselves wisely towards followers of other religions. Secondly, it is an attempt to protect them from violence or harassment that might be assaulted from other parties. For, by knowing how to deal and act wisely towards other religious communities, besides that they have taken part in creating tolerance and peace, they are actually protecting themselves. The idea is that protecting others, they protect themselves. From the study it is found that the violence in the society on the name of religion often happens due to the lack of tolerance among religious communities. Education on religious tolerance should be given to Buddhists in Indonesia to prevent other religious communities from treating Buddhists with intolerance, violence or harassment.

Keywords: *Education; Religious tolerance*

Introduction

History on Religious Conflict in Indonesia

With diversity on ethnicity, race, culture and religion, Indonesia is very vulnerable to conflict. In fact, in the course of Indonesian history, several conflicts had happened on the name of different ethnicity and religion. With regard to religious conflicts, according to Muhammad in his book “*Agama dan Konflik Sosial (Studi Pengalaman Indonesia)*”, since 1960 several years after Indonesian independence, various religious conflicts started to happen, such as destruction on churches in Makassar, Celebes (1967), Slipi Jakarta (1969), Donggo, East Sumbawa (1969), Christian Hospital in Bukit Tinggi, Sumatera (1970), Catholic Hall Tarakanita Jakarta (1975). Act of religious violence continues even until 20th Century like violence and harassment towards Christian communities in Timor Timur, Situbondo, Borneo and Tasikmalaya (Arif, 2013:46-47). Perhaps, the most severe religious conflict that ever happened in Indonesia is that erupted in Ambon on 1999. It involves the Moslem community on the one hand, and the Christian – largely – Protestant – community on the other hand. It initially erupted from Ambon (Doom, Nelly Van and Fatimah Husein, 2007:8).

Religious conflicts that broke out in Indonesia until now mostly happened between Moslem and Christian communities. The reason is perhaps that they both are the first two biggest religious communities with regard to their followers in Indonesia. However, Muhammad in his work states that the reason for the conflict between these two communities especially which erupted after 1960 was caused by aggressiveness of Catholics and Christians in spreading their religion by establishing churches, schools, and hospitals in areas where Moslem communities predominantly settled (Arif, 2013:46). Mention is also made in the same book that the attitude of government in treating religions also becomes the cause for the conflict. Quoting from the book written by Vernon on “Sociology”, Muhammad views that government might treat religions in three ways: 1) The Government supports one religion and reject or discriminates against all others, 2) The government supports religion in general, but give no-marked preferential treatment to any one religion, 3) the government rejects all religion in general, and directly or indirectly engages in activities designed to eradicate religion from the society. The first could easily ignite religious conflict. The one which is being supported by the government might treat other religions arbitrarily, while those which are being discriminated might attempt to go against the government and its supported religions. The second seems to be wise, but it also could trigger the conflict at the time people were unsatisfied with the government treatment. The third type, being oppressed by the government, the religions would be like fire in the chaff, ready to burn out at any time (Arif, 2013:19-21).

Meanwhile, Nurcholis, a leading Indonesian Moslem religious leader, opines that democratic euphoria among Indonesians especially after the fall of *Orde Baru* (New Order in era of Suharto) becomes the cause for several religious conflicts. It is stated that in the era of *Orde Baru*, pluralism was in fact being encouraged for maintaining unity. However, at the same time, freedom of expression was also being suppressed. As a result, since the fall of the New Order, there has been a democratic euphoria where people can express their opinions everywhere. Unfortunately, this is not accompanied with the development of other aspects of political pluralism, thereby leading to open conflict and even physical clashes between social groups either on ethnicity or religious basis (Madjid, 2001:15).

It is a fortunate that Indonesian Buddhist communities never engage in conflict with other religions. However, in few events, harassment happens to Buddhists. For instance, in 2012, Ekayana Buddhist temple in Jakarta became the target of terrorist and being bombed. Meanwhile, in 2016, several *Klentengs* (Chinese traditional temples which in Indonesia are identic with Buddhist temple) and also Buddhist temples in Tanjung Balai Sumatera were being attacked and burnt by Moslem communities. The reason for that act of violence accordingly started with a Chinese Indonesian lady named Meliana requested Moslems in Al-Maksum Mosque to turn down the volume of loudspeakers

while doing prayer. This brought about anger to them. Thinking that Meliana is a Buddhist, they attacked the house of Meliana, several Klentengs and Buddhist temples.

Taking these into considerations especially in the case of Meliana, it is important for Buddhists in Indonesia to act wisely towards other religious communities. The result of such unwise action could be very harming not only oneself but Buddhist communities as a whole. Thus, education on religious tolerance should be given to Buddhists in Indonesia with the purpose of creating harmony and peace among religious communities. Most importantly, it is to keep safe Buddhist minority in Indonesia from being harmed by others.

General Definition on Religious Tolerance

Tolerance is an attitude of mutual respect between groups of individuals in the society. In the case of religious tolerance, it is the willingness to recognize and respect the religious beliefs and practices of others. In the religious tolerance, there is no reason whatsoever for certain religious community to force others to change their beliefs. Everyone has the right to choose the belief that he feels comfortably without intimidation from other parties.

In the spirit of religious tolerance, it is also strictly prohibiting one to humiliate or look down others' beliefs. Act of humiliating others' belief happens due to the hatred. Hatred towards other religions arises because of non-understanding of the truth and goodness of other religious teaching. Therefore, one has to open his mind seeing the goodness in other religions as well.

It is believed that all religions teach love and compassion towards others regardless their ethnic, race and religion. The reason is that all people do not want any harm coming upon them. On the other word, all people wish to live in peace and harmony. In this regard, love and compassion are highly needed to create peace and harmony in the society. For this, religious tolerance should also address the importance of love and compassion to each other among religious communities.

It should be mentioned here that tolerance towards other religions does not mean that one should follow practically all the doctrines of others. Instead, one is just to have a willingness to recognize and respect other religious beliefs and practices. In other words, one should refrain himself from hating and despising their beliefs and practices, even though those might not be in agreement with his view. At the same time, with certain reason, one has to accept with open heart whatever goodness found in other religions.

Methods

This paper used library research method to collect datas. The data were collected from various research articles published in journals. Library research is a method in collecting data by learning and understanding data having a close relationship with the problem from theories, books, documents etc., (George, 2008). In addition, Sugiyono (2012) stated that library research is a method through collecting many references from many research results to evolve new theoretical framework in the social value, cultural, norm, and educational fields

Result and Discussion

The Causes for Religious Intolerance

According to Buddhism, the source of all evil things in the world derives from three unwholesome thoughts, namely greed, hatred and ignorance (A.i.201). All evil actions done by speech, body and mind including various conflicts on the name of religion result from these three unwholesome thoughts. Here, with regard to religious intolerance, these three manifest in various ways. Several points are mentioned in the following discussion.

Looking closer into the problem, we find that one of the main causes for religious intolerance is *an assumption that one's own religion is the only truth while others are wrong*. This assumption becomes the barrier for a person from willingness to understand and recognize the virtue of other

religions. One falls into narrow-minded, and views whatever doctrines other religions try to offer as a mistake. As a result, such a person most likely generates disliking to other religions. This unwise assumption in fact has existed even during the time of the Buddha. Pāli Canon reports several incidents where many religious people fell into dogmatic trap to the point that each of them strongly claimed that their only view which was true while all others were wrong (*idameva saccam moghamaññanti*). As a result, they engaged in quarrel and attacked each other with harsh speech (Ud.66).

Another cause for religious intolerance is *a blind attachment towards one's own religion*. It is not incorrect to say that one should attach to one's own belief and practices, for religion is a guide of life, a torch in the darkness. However, one should wisely use the religion as a way leading to a peaceful and healthy life both mental and body. Meanwhile, blindly attached to one own religion could create conflicts within oneself as well as environment. Hatred or anger will arise when other abuse what one blindly attaches to. It is for this reason as well, the Buddha even states that his teaching should be taken similar as a raft. As stated in the Alagaddūpamasutta of Majjhimanikāya, the Buddha reminded his disciples that his teaching should be used just like a raft, not for grasping it, but for crossing the suffering of the cycle of birth and death (*Kullūpamaṃ vo, bhikkhave, dhammaṃ desessāmi nittharaṇatthāya, no gahaṇatthāya*) (M.i.134).

Apart from that, *jealousy and stinginess* are also mentioned to be the cause for religious intolerance. This point has been stated by the Buddha on answering a question of Sakka, a king of Tavatimsa deities, of why people still engages in quarrel, violence, and harming to each other although they actually wish to live in harmony and peace. The Buddha replied that it is due to jealousy and stinginess (*issāmacchariya*) such act of violence still happens (D.ii.275). These two unwholesome thoughts will always go hand in hand. Where there is jealousy, there will be stinginess. It is a common fact that several conflict and violence that occur on the name of religion originate from jealousy and stinginess. The jealousy and stinginess could be due to territory, followers or material profits. It is possible that one harbors jealousy on seeing the territory, followers and material profits of adherents of other religions are bigger than his. On the other hand, it is also possible that one does not want to share to others the territory or material profits he possesses, and it is possible as well that one harbors a grudge against those who attempt to convert people of the same faith as him to another religion (A.iii.271).

Buddhist Way on Facing Religious Intolerance

According to Buddhist perspective, hatred will never cease by treating with hatred. On the contrary, only by love and compassion, such hatred will come to end. Based on this reason, in response for an act of intolerance from other parties, and for the sake of unity and harmony, one should firstly calm down his anger, and thereafter act in loving way to those who treat him unfavorably.

In relation to this attitude, an incident reported in the Brahmajālasutta of Dīghanikāya should be taken into consideration. Here, a wanderer named Suppiya is informed to have insulted in many ways the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. The Buddha in this occasion advised his disciples not to harbor any anger, hatred and disliking to others who insulted Him, Dhamma and Saṅgha (*Mamaṃ vā, bhikkhave, pare avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, dhammassa vā avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, saṅghassa vā avaṇṇaṃ bhāseyyuṃ, tatra tumhehi na āghāto na appaccayo na cetaso anabhiraddhi karaṇīyā*) (D.i.3). That should be so as such anger, hatred and disliking will be a hindrance for one's mind (D.i.3). Moreover, the purpose of practicing Buddhism is to put an end of defilements of mind including hatred. Therefore, there is no any reason whatsoever in Buddhism to develop hatred toward anyone including to those who treat Buddhism unfavorably.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the same discourse, calming down one's mind from anger is greatly needed in this situation owing to the fact that being overwhelmed by this thought, one could not think properly what is right and wrong. Being confused with anger, one will not understand whether other speaks truth or not (D.i.3). Besides that, with anger overwhelms one's mind, whatever speech or

bodily actions one does, it only brings more destruction. As it is understood, quarrel, violence and even war only happen when two parties go against each other with hatred and anger.

Instead of hatred, one should treat other with love and compassion. Treating others in such a way does not mean that one let others to do evil things by humiliating or condemning his belief. Instead, in order to bring peace upon others, one should first make peace within oneself. Only then, with peace within, one should give an explanation to the condemners that what they say is not according to the fact. By doing so, one will not bring conflict within one's mind, and in the same time, one will not create any unwise action to others.

Building up Religious Tolerance

In response for religious intolerance in Indonesia, several organizations both non-governmental as well as governmental make various effort to build up awareness on the significance of religious tolerance. Nurcholish Madjid as Indonesian Islamic leader in his work for instance, encourages religious communities to hold interfaith dialogue as well as cooperation with each other (Madjid, 2001:18). He furthermore states that in order for tolerance could be achieved, people should compete to each other to show and spread the teaching of their religions in accordance with its universal virtues, so that it can come to an agreement to the point that there is no any religion which tolerate hostility and all kinds of violence (Madjid, 2001:18).

Furthermore, as stated in the book *"From Radicalism towards Terrorism (the Study of Relation and Transformation of Radical Islam Organization in Central java and D.I. Yogyakarta)"*, a work of Hasani, Ismail and Bonar Tigor Naipospos, especially in relation with a growth of radicalism among Indonesian Muslims, the Mainstream Islamic Groups have stepped to prevent radical Islamic influence to grow, such as 1) providing tolerance education, 2) increasing people's welfare, 3) breaking down the radical Islamic groups, 4) to provide religious-tolerance teachings. Such steps are also encouraged by government (Hasani dkk, 2012:159-150). Meanwhile Indonesian Social Media also try to prevent the increase of radicalism by 1) covering news and writings about religious-life tolerance, 2) broadcasting the facts, 3) not covering any actions with certain religious views, 4) not covering any violent actions under any kind of religious view with diplomatic manner (Hasani dkk, 2012:151).

Religious tolerance is given emphasis in Buddhism. The reason for this is because every human being regardless religion he or she believes in basically wants to live in peace and harmony (Dhp.129-130). Therefore, it is a duty for every human being to contribute oneself in creating religious harmony and tolerance among religious communities. On the basis of above given explanation, here we can mention several points that help us especially Buddhists to act in a such way to take part in creating religious harmony and tolerance.

1. *Eliminate hatred towards anyone regardless the ethnicity or religion they have.* Hatred will always be destructive. It leads to conflict and violence. All kinds of religious intolerance happen because of hatred. Therefore, an attempt should be made by us that loves peace and tolerance to eliminate hatred within each of us.
2. *Avoid debate with other religious communities.* Here, debate should be distinguished from Dhamma discussion. In debate, there is an intention to defeat others with any means. It very often leads to defilements of mind. They who win in debate will develop arrogance within themselves and in the same induce hatred from others. Meanwhile, those who lose will get sadness. On the other hand, discussion on Dhamma is highly recommended in Buddhism for it leads to the development on wholesome states. For this reason, the Buddha avoids any debate though some people came to him for debate on doctrinal points. As stated in Dhammacetiya sutta, King Pasenadi uttered his admiration to the Buddha. The reason is that there were clever Samanas, Brahmanas, Khattiya and Householders who came to the Buddha

with intention of demolishing his doctrine by first formulating questions thus: 'We will go to the recluse Gotama and ask him this question. If he is asked like this, he will answer like this, and so we will refute his doctrine in this way; and if he is asked like that, he will answer like that, and so we will refute his doctrine in that way.' However, after meeting the Buddha, they could not refute his doctrine, instead they got a talk on Dhamma and had no much questions to ask, let alone to refute (M.ii.122-123).

3. *See that the truth is also possible in other religions.* What it means by the truth is that of moral teaching and spiritual values. As mentioned above, one of the causes for the religious conflicts is an assumption that only in one's own religion which is true while all others are wrong. In order to avoid such dangerously assumption, one should be open-minded and ready to accept any moral or spiritual truths that others religions might also teach on it. If for instance certain religion emphasizes on giving, moral conduct, loving kindness, and the like, then one should accept them as the truth and beneficial. Opening one's heart to see in such a way will bring a person to more tolerance towards anyone for whatever religions they believe in.
4. *Do not teach the Dhamma just for the sake of getting followers.* Many conflicts and violence happen due to an attempt of certain religious community to forcefully convert others to follow their religion. Here, as shown by the Buddha, Dhamma is taught not for getting as much as possible followers, but it is just for the sake of happiness, prosperity and benefit of people. When Upāli wants to be a disciple of the Buddha at the end of conversation, the Buddha did not in hurry accept him. Instead, He reminded him to think first before deciding to become *upasaka* for he was a respected person in the society (M.i.378). Furthermore, to Nigrodha and his disciples, after delivering his talk, the Buddha emphatically stated that he talked on Dhamma not to be wrongly apprehended that He wanted to make them his disciples. On the contrary, He just wanted to show that there were unwholesome states that should be abandoned for they brought about suffering (D.iii.56-57).
5. *Use Dhamma wisely.* As explained earlier, one of the reasons for the arising of religious intolerance is because of a blind attachment towards one's own religion. With regard to the Dhamma (the teaching of the Buddha), such a blind attachment is also possible to happen. As a result, one might harbor anger or disliking to those who refute the Dhamma. For this reason, the Buddha himself reminds his disciples to use his teaching just like using a raft. It is just a means for crossing, and not for holding (M.i.134-135).

Conclusion

Conflict and violence in the society on the name of religion often happens due to the lack of tolerance among religious communities. For this reason, it is highly important especially for Buddhist minority in Indonesia to understand the significance of religious tolerance. This must be urgently given for two reasons. The first reason is to make Buddhists minority in Indonesia understand clearly the Buddhist attitude on religious tolerance, thereby they would behave themselves wisely towards adherents of other religions. Secondly, it is to prevent other religious communities from treating Buddhists with intolerance, violence or harassment. The idea is that if Buddhists treat other religious communities with love, compassion and tolerance, then others certainly would treat Buddhists in the same way. Owing to this very reason, education on religious tolerance should be given to Buddhists in Indonesia with ideas as already explained in this paper.

Abbreviation

A	<i>Aṅuttaranikāya</i>
D	<i>Dīghanikāya</i>
Dhp	<i>Dhammapada</i>
Ud	<i>Udānapāli</i>

M *Majjhimanikāya*
S *Samyuttanikāya*
trans translation

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All words in Pāli are taken from Chatṭha Saṅgayana CD that has been published by Vipassana Research Institute, India, 1999.

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