Religious Harmony in the Union Territory of Ladakh: A Buddhist Perspective

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The present article is about the Buddhist perspective of religious harmony in the Union Territory of Ladakh. Religious harmony refers to the peaceful coexistence of various religions and their followers. Because of India's unique religious landscape, peace and religious harmony have long been important issues. Racial and religious conflicts have occurred on occasion throughout the nation's history. Religions should promote togetherness rather than divide individuals. To prevent misunderstandings among religions, all followers of different beliefs should convene for a discussion. People of all faiths work together to foster interreligious cooperation and strive to promote interfaith cooperation. Buddhism can strengthen interfaith ties by bringing individuals of different religions closer together. Buddha has been an excellent role model for interreligious collaboration. Buddhism should play a role in interfaith efforts to bring people of different religions together. Therefore, an effort is being made in the present article to highlight the Buddhist Perspective of Religious Harmony and the coexistence of different religions in the newly formed Union Territory of Ladakh. It also highlights the ongoing historic translation work of the Holy Quran into Ladakhi language using Tibetan script.

Keywords

Religious Harmony, Interfaith Relations, Buddhist Perspective, UT Ladakh, Holy Quran

"Regardless of contrary religious philosophies, every religion preaches compassion and truthfulness and hence, it is of utmost importance to respect each other's religion to forge peace and harmony"

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

Introduction

India is an excellent example of unity in diversity, as it is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual country. The preamble of our Constitution indicates that India is a secular republic. It allows its residents to practice any religion of their choice. People from all cultures and religions use a shared platform to comprehend each other's cultural and religious views, which develops a sense of mutual trust and community cohesion.

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There are several religions and cultures around the world, and each has evolved to fit its people. As a result, it is usually encourage sticking with the religion you were born into. The majority of people in the West are Christians, although there are also Jews and Muslims. It is difficult for them or anybody else to change religions, and it can sometimes lead to misunderstanding. To appreciate the harmony and disharmony between religions, we must first understand their true meaning. Prof. R. Panikkar defines religions as: "Religions. This word includes three aspects: Religiousness or the human dimension concerning ultimacy, wherever we may believe this ultimacy to be; Religiosity or the social institution (not necessarily an organization) that embodies the religious dimension of human life; Religionism or the more or less closed system of ultimate beliefs applicable to one specific collectivity."¹

Leonard Swidler stated: "At the heart of each civilization is what is traditionally referred to as religion, which is an explanation of the ultimate meaning of life and how to live accordingly. Normally, all religions include the four C's: creed, code, cult, and community structure, and they are founded on the concept of transcendence." Creed refers to a religion's cognitive part; it encompasses all that contributes to the "explanation" of life's ultimate purpose. A code of behaviour or ethics encompasses all of the rules and norms of action that stem from one component or another of the religion. Cult refers to all ritual acts that connect followers to one part or another of the transcendent, either directly or indirectly; prayer is an example of the former, as is specific formal behaviour toward agents of the transcendent, such as priests. Community structure refers to the relationships among the followers; this can vary widely, from a very egalitarian relationship, as among Quakers, through a "republican" structure like Presbyterians have, to a monarchical one, as with some Hasidic Jews vis-à-vis their "rebbe".²

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama emphasizes religious harmony by expressing his affection for all faiths and condemning religion-based communalism. "Regardless of contrary religious philosophies, every religion preaches compassion and truthfulness and hence, it is of utmost importance to respect each other's religion to forge peace and harmony," according to His Holiness. Furthermore, he praised India's capacity to maintain religious unity despite its large population of diverse faiths. He stated that India's religious unity serves as an example to the modern world in promoting secular principles, adding that "humanitarianism is eventually the ultimate life goal for both theists and atheists." Especially in recent times, there have developed "explanations of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly" that are not founded on a notion of the transcendent, such as secular humanism, Marxism, and so on. Although these "explanations" function in every way that religions have traditionally functioned in human life, because the concept of the transcendent, however, it is defined, plays such a central role in religion but not in these "explanations," it is best to give these "explanations" that are not based on the concept of the transcendent a separate name; the term ideology is frequently used.

The two most recent perspectives on religion have been stated by eminent modern scholars. It is evident to us that there can be no disharmony in religiousness, faith, or code. But it does appear in cults or communities. In other words, disharmony and conflict arise in the minds of those who are unaware of the essence of religion and code and are instead carried away by intense group feelings of connection. Such individuals, motivated by self-interest and entrenched interests, cause strife among themselves and exploit the name of religion to obtain political power or for other ulterior objectives. It is conceivable for a state to be non-secular while simultaneously tolerating all religions. Problems emerge when rulers have a restricted understanding of religion. They thus fail to grasp the fundamental concepts of their various religions. Instead, taking advantage of their community's religious sensitivity, they implement policies that become oppressive in nature. As a result, their country's long-term development suffers. For, in this age of interconnectedness, it is critical that the rights of all members of the community, as well as those of other countries, be valued and protected.

Some contemporary thinkers believe that in many ways, non-religious and religious people are the same. Anti-religious people are typically less unethical than religious people. However, this viewpoint does not demonstrate that religious traditions had no impact on the culture of harmony. We must discern between true religious teachings and mixed religious teachings, between true religious mind and senseless dogmas, and between true religious faith and religious extremism. Only in this way can we prove the fact that violence and criminality committed in the name of religion are not religious activities, and the perpetrators are not religious. The Indian Constitution was adopted on November 26, 1949, and went into effect on January 26, 1950. The Constituent Assembly, which was indirectly elected by the people in 1946, was the driving force behind it. The Constituent Assembly reflected India's numerous ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities. Dr. Ambedkar remarked in the Constituent Assembly: "What does fraternity mean? Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians-of Indians being one people. It is the principle which gives unity and solidarity to social life. It is a difficult thing to achieve...How difficult it is for Indians to think that they are a nation. I remember the days when politically-minded Indians, resented the expression 'the people of India'. They preferred the expression 'the Indian nation'. I think that in believing that we are a nation, we are cherishing a great delusion...... For fraternity can be a fact only when there is a nation. Without fraternity, equality and liberty will be no deeper than coats of paint."³

An Overview of Communal Harmony in Ladakh

Ladakh, a region in India, has a history of peaceful coexistence between different religious and cultural groups. Until 2019, Ladakh was part of Jammu And Kashmir State. Since then, it has become a Union Territory, with Buddhism and Islam are its two main religions. Buddhism first arrived in Ladakh in the first century CE, under the reign of the Kushan Empire. For centuries, Buddhism thrived virtually unopposed by other religions. However, in the 15th century, Muslim traders from Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Central Asia began migrating to Ladakh, causing Islam to spread there. They began travelling to Ladakh, residing there, and marrying local Buddhist women. Today, Muslims account for 46% of Ladakh's population, while Buddhists make up 40%, Hindus 12% and other religions 2%. However, the Ladakhi culture of peaceful cooperation endures. Even as anti-Muslim sentiments have grown in India, Ladakh remains a beacon of religious tolerance.

There are transcendent things in every religion that our minds and speech cannot comprehend. For example, the concepts of God in Christianity and Islam, as well as the knowledge and truth body in Buddhism, are metaphysical in nature and cannot be understood by ordinary people like us. This is a frequent problem encountered by all religions. Every religion, including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, teaches that faith is the source of ultimate truth. It is necessary to emphasize how crucial it is for practitioners to truly believe in their religions. Typically, it is also necessary to emphasize the importance of distinguishing between "belief in one religion" and "belief in many religions". The former clearly contradicts the latter. As a result, we must overcome these contradictions decisively. This is only conceivable if you consider it in contextual terms. A contradiction in one context may not be the same in the other. In the context of one individual, a single truth is strongly linked to a single source of shelter. However, in the context of society or with more than one person, it is vital to have several sources of refuge, religion, and truth.

Previously, it was not a huge issue because nations maintained their different religions. However, in today's tight and interconnected world,

there are several variances across religions. We must resolve these issues. For example, there have been many religions in India throughout the last thousand years. Some were brought from outside, while others were cultivated in India. Despite this, various religions have managed to coexist, and the Ahimsa precept has thrived in this country. Even now, this principle has a significant impact on all religions. This is extremely valuable, and India should take great pride in it. Ladakh has been largely Muslim and Buddhist for generations. However, other religions like as Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism have thrived here. Although it is natural for the inhabitants of Ladakh to be attached to and love their respective religions, this region enjoys a highly peaceful environment with no major concerns of religious persecution. People from all religious backgrounds in Ladakh are in close contact and coexist peacefully.

Muslims are expected to demonstrate full devotion to Allah while praying in mosques. This is also true for Buddhists who are entirely devoted to the Buddha and pray in Buddhist temples. A community with various religions should have many prophets and places of refuge. In such a community, harmony and respect among the various religions and their practitioners are essential. We need to distinguish between belief and respect. Belief is defined as entire faith in one's religion. At the same time, you should show respect for all other religions. The custom of believing in one's faith while respecting others has been there in Ladakh since the forefathers. The most essential thing now is to preserve and develop this legacy.

If cultures and religious views can coexist peacefully in today's multiethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural globe, it will undoubtedly provide a good example for others. However, if both parties become irresponsible, there is a risk of major issues. In a multi-ethnic society, the most serious issue is the divide between the majority and the minority. For example, in the capital, Leh, Buddhists make up the bulk of the population, while Muslims are a minority. The majority must treat the minority like invited guests. The minority, on the other hand, should be able to raise awareness among the majority. In other words, both parties should live in peace. To maintain this unity, both sides must treat the delicate topics between them seriously. Indeed, the majority should listen to and value the minority's viewpoints and opinions. Both sides should talk and clearly communicate their thoughts on the other's point of view and viewpoint. The minority, on the other hand, should exercise caution when it comes to the majority's sensitive subjects and communicate any reservations they may have. If difficulties are settled nicely, both parties will benefit. Suspicion of one another will hurt both communities. As a

result, it is critical to live in harmony and understand each other's perspectives. The most effective approach to accomplish this is to engage in dialogue after dialogue. Everyone must work together to create a peaceful society, and prayers alone will not be sufficient. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama emphasizes that all seven billion people in the globe desire happiness. In this regard, all major world religions stressed the importance of love, compassion, forgiveness, and tolerance. "Religion should not be a source of separation and violence," he remarked. He said the people of Ladakh should further enhance communal harmony in the region. "Wherever I go, I give the example of Ladakh where communal harmony still exists. And all should work for it so that it can be passed on to the generations to come".⁴

During the 2009 Communal Peace Award Ceremony, the then-Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh emphasized the importance of national integration and communal peace. He said "India has been home to all the great religions of the world. While some were born here, others took root in this ancient land of ours. The subcontinent has for centuries provided a unique social and intellectual environment in which many distinct religions have not only co-existed peacefully but have also enriched each other. It is the sacred duty of each one of us to carry forward this great tradition. I believe that both the government and civil society groups must continuously watch and raise our voices against groups and individuals who use violence in the name of religion. No religion sanctions violence. No religion preaches hatred. No religion endorses animosity towards another human being. Those who use religious symbols and forums to talk about violence, sectarianism and discord cannot be said to be the true spokesperson of their respective religion. However, we also know that all societies, including ours, have to contend with such preachers of disharmony and disagreement. That is why it is all the more important to recognize and applaud those - who work selflessly for communal harmony and national integration. It is our obligation to nurture such voices of sanity".⁵

Buddhist Perspective of Religious Harmony

According to Buddhist philosophy, happiness is the product of an enlightened mind, whereas suffering is generated by a distorted mind. This is quite crucial. A distorted mind, as opposed to an enlightened mind, is one that is out of touch with reality. The world is entering the twenty-first century, but it is nevertheless facing more critical difficulties than ever before. The twentieth century has been a century of challenge and development, and we are proud of our accomplishments, particularly the amazing scientific and technological advances. At the same time, the power of destruction has grown, resulting in an imbalance that is disproportionate to the expansion of so-called "civilization," "modernity," and "postmodernity," among other things. The essential illnesses of humanity, such as wrath, hatred, greed, and desire, have not altered; rather, they have become more intense. Conflicts, wars, and destruction are still ongoing. In primitive human culture, people used to fight each other with bows and arrows, and then as time passed, they used guns and machines for fighting.

According to Buddha's teachings, each sentient being is unique and distinct from the others. Each has a unique capacity, likes and dislikes, taste, and temperament. As a result, no single theological doctrine will fit everyone. Therefore, Buddha taught a variety of Buddhist doctrines. We have three Yanas (vehicles) and four philosophical schools, each of which has multiple sub-divisions. All of these appear to have several differences and contradictory concepts. It is said that the Buddha taught 84,000 concepts to different followers. However, despite their seeming differences and opposing viewpoints, all systems lead to emancipation and enlightenment. In contemporary society, most of the adjustment problems faced by people in their personal and social environment are the result of ignorance, greed and stagnation. The four Nobel truths of Buddha and the moral code of conduct (Pancha Sila) given by him facilitate the process of understanding the different facets of human life, where everything is a consequence of one's behaviour and conduct. It teaches the followers to adopt the middle path for living life and practice a moral code to bring peace, harmony and justice into the society.⁶

All of the teachings are equally holy and spiritual. Neither is superior nor inferior to the other. Similarly, the Buddha recognized that each of the other noble traditions was essential and sacred to their respective adherents. One type of food or medicine does not fit everyone; thus, variety is essential. However, this does not imply that any of these kinds are inherently greater or worse in value. This fundamental fact should be understood by all religious adherents who sincerely appreciate each religion. The underlying temptation to regard one's faith as superior to other religions must be overcome. This is only feasible if one really practices their religion and is determined to safeguard the teaching in its purest form. For example, the core teaching of Buddha is to destroy mental defilements like hatred, rage, and attachment while cultivating virtues like love, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, and generosity. If a Buddhist practitioner receives criticism of Buddha or Buddhism and reacts with hatred and rage because his religion or religious sensibilities are hurt, it demonstrates that such a person is not a real practitioner of Buddhism. He is just physically attached to the name of Buddhism. In truth, the Buddha's doctrine can never be undermined by a critic, but it can be harmed by oneself via rage and hatred. I believe this principle applies to other religious systems as well. As a result, when opponents criticize the doctrine, it is critical to protect its true practice in one's life. Reacting with hatred and rage toward opponents is accepting loss and the destruction of one's own religion. However, replying with love and compassion results in victory and defence of one's own religion.

Instead of looking for parallels between religions, we should look for differences and learn to respect them. Otherwise, the tendency to seek similarities frequently leads to imposing one's religious interpretations on the other religion in the process of making things similar and thus incorporating various traditions into one tradition, which violates the fundamental principles of religious traditions. Whenever there is disharmony or a threat to harmony among various religious communities, every genuine religious practitioner should have the courage and willingness to condemn such happenings and particularly one's coreligionists who are found indulging in acts of disharmony should be effectively condemned rather than blaming the other community and attempting to justify one's co-religionists.

Genuine religious leaders from other faiths should meet as often as possible to establish personal relationships, eliminate misunderstandings, build genuine understanding, and set positive examples for their followers. Interfaith discourse, interreligious prayers, and pilgrimage to diverse religious sites and holy places should all be promoted. Above all, all sincere religious practitioners should stand together to protect their beliefs and convictions. They should strongly resist any misuse or exploitation of religion by politicians in the name of "divide and rule," including the formation of groups or vote banks based on the religious sentiments of innocent people. If religions are unable to bring humanity together, I believe it would be preferable if all religions vanished from the face of the earth to reduce divisions among men; thus, power-mongers and wealth maniacs will no longer find religion so useful in achieving their selfish goals.

Translation of the Holy Quran into Ladakhi

Islam is a religion that values universalism, tolerance, peace, and reconciliation. Islam believes that life is sacred and that believers have a responsibility to protect truth and justice. Social justice is the fundamental precept of Islam. Communal harmony is a feeling of goodwill and affection for people from all communities. Islam is a religion that promotes peace and cooperation. Because Islam seeks societal peace and social harmony, it has nurtured this relationship and proclaimed that all human beings, including solitary males and females. Allah, the Highest one, says, "O mankind! Indeed, we have created you from male and female." (Surah al-hujurat ayat: 13). Qur'anic teachings and Prophetic paradigms provide the path for interfaith communication, as we can see many historical occurrences that occurred during the Prophet's (PBUH) life and are recorded in Qur'anic verses. For instance, Allah declares, "Your religion is yours, and mine is mine." According to Moulana Wahidudheen Khan, this chapter encourages us to tolerate and appreciate non-Muslims. The great classical jurist, Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi (d.620H), declares, "It is not permitted to compel a non-believer to adopt Islam. Such a person would not be deemed a Muslim unless it is proven that they accepted the Islam of their own free will." He claims, "The reason for the prohibition of any coercion or duress is the Qur'anic verse, "There is no compulsion in religion."" (al baqarah ayat: 256)."

Muslims have regarded the translation of the Quran into languages other than Arabic as valuable because it allows non-Arabic speakers to understand its messages. The process of translation not only involves transference of meaning from a source language into a target language but it also includes the socio-cultural aspects of two languages/communities. Therefore, it is imperative for the translators to be familiar with these aspects as this familiarity facilitates better translation. Muhammad Omar Nadwi (Imam Jama Masjid, Leh, UT-Ladakh) and Khanpo Konchok Phanday, two well-known scholars, have translated the Holy Quran into colloquial Ladakhi using Tibetan script. Both are contemporary Ladakhi scholars. The translation of the Holy Quran into the colloquial Ladakhi language using Tibetan script will undoubtedly strengthen religious and communal unity in Ladakh. This would also assist ordinary men from all walks of life belonging to different sects and communities in understanding the gist of the Holy Quran, hence fostering a harmonious society. Reading or listening to the Quran with translation provides a deeper grasp of Allah's message. It helps you learn about Islamic beliefs. Incorporating the Quran into your evening ritual strengthens your bond with Allah. The Holy Quran is considered the last Book revealed to Prophet Muhammad. It has thirty parts. It is in the Arabic language. Islamic law is based on the Holy Quran and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Some examples from the translation are provided below: Sura Nissa Ayat 10

إِنَّ الَّذِيْنَ يَآكُلُوْنَ آمَوَالَ الْيَتْمَى ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُوْنَ فِي بُطُوْنِهِمْ نَارًا «وَ سَيَصْلَوْنَ سَعِيْرًا ﴿/١٠﴾ع

Sura Hadid Ayat no 20

اِعْمَامُوَّا اَنَّمَا الْحَيْوةُ الدُنْيَا لَعِبَّ وَ لَهَمِو وَ زِيْنَةٌ وَ تَقَاخُرُ بَيْنَكُمْ وَ تَكَاثُرُ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَ الْأَوْلَادِ . تَمَتَلُ غَيْثِ اَعْجَبَ الْتُفْارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيْجُ فَتَرْدِهُ مُصْفَرًا ثُمَّ يَحُونُ حُطَامًا . وَ فِي الْأَخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيَدٌ روَ مَغْفِرَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَ رِضْوَانَ . وَ مَا الْحَيْوةُ الدُنْيَا اللَّهُ عَنْوَرَ (٢٠) نوب جان ركموكه دنيا كى زندگى صرف كُميل تما شا زينت اورآ لا متاع الْغُرُور (٢٠) ايك كا دوسر ب س اين آلار واولاد ميں ايك كا دوسر ب س اين آلي وزير كارور تحقيل تما شا زينت اورآ له ميں فخر (و خرور) اور مال واولاد ميں ايك كا دوسر ب س اين آلي معلوم معلوم موتى ہے بھر جب وہ ختك ہو جاتى ہے توزرد رنگ ميں اس كو تم ديكھے ہو پھر وہ بالكل پورا پورا ہوجاتى ہوتى ہے تار آخرت ميں سخت عذاب اور اللہ كى معلوم معلوم ان كو ور مين كى زندگى مرف كُميل معلوم ما مان كے اور كچھ بھى تو نہيں ۔ (٢٠)

ધુંગાયા વયા પ્રભાષા પ્રાપ્ત કરી છે. સુવાયા તથી તે છે. સુવાયા તથી તે છે. સુવાયા સ્વયા સ્વય સ્વયા સ્વય સ્વયા સ્વય

وَ قَالَتِ الَّيَهُوَدُ عُزَيَّرُ وابِّنُ اللَّهِ وَ قَالَتِ النَّصْرَى الْمَسِيِّحُ ابِّنُ اللَّهِ وَذَلِكَ قَوْلَهُمْ بِأَقَوَابِهِمْ وَ يُصَابِقُوْنَ قَوْلَ الَّذِيِّنَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبَلُ وقَتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَ الَّهُ وَ اللَّهُ وَ اللَّهُ وَ ٣٠﴾ يهود کہتے ہیں حزیر اللہ کا بیٹا ہے اور نصرانی کہتے ہیں میح اللہ کا بیٹا ہے یہ قول صرف ان کے منہ کی بات ہے ۔ الگے منکروں کی بات کی یہ بھی نقل کرنے لگے اللہ انہیں خارت کرے وہ کیے پائل کے جاتے ہیں (٣٠)

Surah Al-Imran Ayat 8 & 9

رَبِّنَا لَا تُرْغُ قُلُوَبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ بَدَيْتَنَا وَ بَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَّدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً وإِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَيَّابُ ﴿٨﴾

שישו בותר הקת הקתו המשקו יש אב אב המק ותחורות משב מ הצימי שומש במצימי מושב במצר מתקו יו ותחורות אארית מקמ צו שמ מקן מתיימיקת הקק הקקייניונד אביד בי לא היו מקמי בי מגימו אבר יו הפקיותי מאמי אליון (ה)

Sura Anfal Ayat no 28

Conclusion

To sum up, religious harmony plays an important role in ensuring political and global stability. Internationally, it is critical to maintain a nonviolent and harmonious environment, particularly in a society comprised of believers of various races and religions. Religious relations are usual. Interfaith involvement brings individuals together across religious and ideological barriers, promoting mutual trust, shared ideals, and understanding. Religious freedom and tolerance play a crucial role in creating a better world. Therefore, it's best to keep your religion and respect all other religions.

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