Social Cohesion and Education: A Buddhist Approach

Dr. W.K.D. Keerthirathne

Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka,Mihintale

Wkdk1974@yahoo.com

Abstract

Though some critics argued that education system in Sri Lanka was ethnically and linguistically segregatedpeace and Social cohesion were not new subject matters for the education system in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government had taken considerable steps to protect the rights of every human being irrespective religious, ethnic and cultural differences. Especially, the government had acknowledged young generation regarding the peaceful living through education.But, it was seen in this research that there were many lessons that could be taken by educationists, policy makers, curriculum developers and administrators from Buddhist teachings in developing policies and curriculum they prepared relevant to peace education and social cohesion. And also administrators could practice these teachings so that they could implement social cohesion and peace in the society where multiculturalism appeared.The main aim of this paper was to discuss how Buddhist teachings couldbe practised with modern educational aims to empower social cohesion in the present society.This research has been compiled through critical and comparative perspectives in combination withhistorical methodfrom the study of teachings in *SuttaPitaka*as primary source. Further, research works of sociologists, educators and other scholars have been examined as secondary sources to direct the research paper towards a more critical approach.

Keywords: Buddhist approach, Buddhist teachings, education, social cohesion, peace

Introduction

Social cohesion is defined as the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper. The Sri Lankan government has initiated to build and sustain a culture of peace and nonviolence through its educational system in order to find answers to ethnic disharmony and national disintegration which hadbeen prevalent in the ancient history of Sri Lanka. The author hypothesize that There are lessons that can be taken from Buddhist teachings to establish sustainable peace through social cohesion not only in Sri Lanka but also all over the world since Buddhism is a teaching that can be matched with any society located in any geographical location.

Methodology

This research has been compiled through critical and comparative perspectives in combination withhistorical methodfrom the study of teachings in *SuttaPitaka*as primary source. Further, research works of sociologists, Educators and other scholars have been examined as secondary sources to direct the research paper towards a more critical approach.

Aim

The main aim of this paper was to discuss how Buddhist teachings couldbe practised with modern educationalaims to empower social cohesion in the present society.

Introduction to Social Cohesion

Cohesion is divided into two types: task cohesion andsocial cohesion. Social cohesion is a dynamic process reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and or for the satisfaction of member affective needs(Carron et al., 1998). Members of a society where social cohesion is dominated have willingness to act in solidarity. They share the group goals and have common interests. Members in cohesive society touch with each other constantly and have very effective interpersonal communication. Group loyalty is very high. Needs of the members are satisfied by the group. Connectedness, social relations and focus on the common good are three important aspects of the social cohesion.
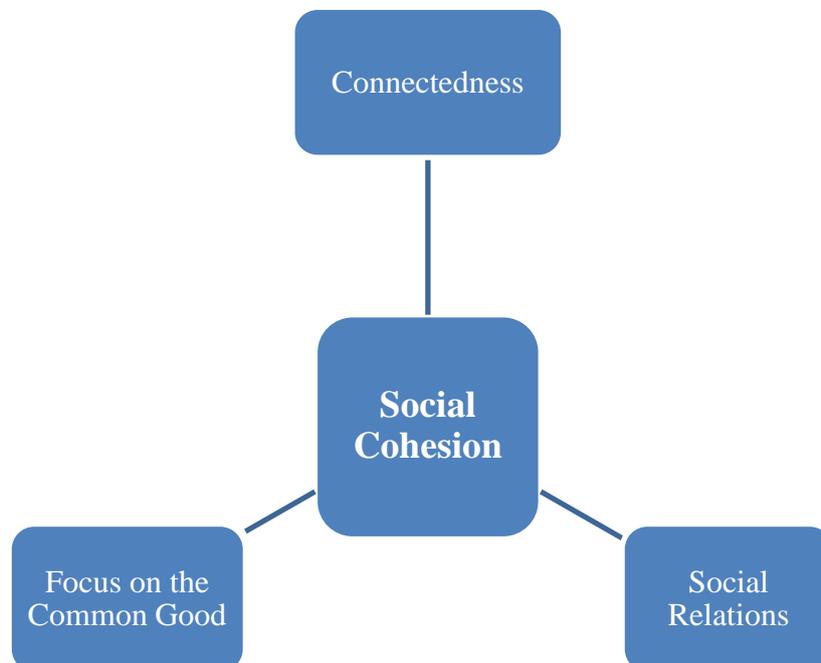
Social cohesion can be strengthened under political, social, economic and cultural aspects. According to research findings of Emile Durkheim (1858), Talcott Parson (1902), Putnam (1993), Wooly (1998), Lockwood (1999),Alaluf (1999) Kearns (2000), Forrest (2000), Begger (2000) Schmitt (2000) Amin (2000) and Jomaney

(2000) social solidarity, prevalence of collective social welfare and egalitarian aspirations, existence of shared loyalties, continuous distribution of the different human tasks and voluntary association, existence of community of shared, existence of community of equal, reduction of disparities, reduction of social exclusion, are some characteristics of a society where social cohesion is appeared as the dominant feature. Moreover, in such societies citizens oweto each other,owe to state, share values and norms, identify and support common aims and objectives, share a set of common moral principle and code of behavior, recognize the disquieting effects of rapid social change, give more rooms to consensus, adaptation, norms and values, balanceattitudes than to the opposition of interests and antagonism, strengthen primary and secondary network, strengthen social relations, interaction and ties, strengthen social capital of society.And also this type of society is free from civic corruption, free from social dissolution, free from traditional crimes and free from family disorganization.

Literature Review

Education is an important means to develop and promote social cohesion (GID, n.d.). In 2008, the umbrella program for Social Cohesion and Peace Education was implemented by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and it was considered as a big positive advancement in peace education in Sri Lanka (Duncan, Cardozo, 2017)."In many ways, Buddhism was a social protest movement against the *Hindu* caste system with its superstitious obedience to the *Brahma* and its sacrifices of humans and animals. In his sermons about the right way to live, the Buddha refuted the caste system; claiming that all people were equal and that government should be democratic and just. The Buddha preached that there are no superhuman Gods or kings, that man is his own master and that no higher deity sits in judgment over his destiny. He spoke out against human and animal sacrifices, superstition, and beliefs in magical ceremonies. …Buddhism, the emphasis is upon individual self-reliance: observing, knowing, understanding and doing"Carrison (1987). Buddhism is a religion of peace and non-violence (Yeh, 2006). The Buddhist analysis of the causes of violence and conflict is arrayed along three domains: the internal,the external, and the root (Shih Yin-shun, 1980).

Educational System and Social Cohesion

The Sri Lankan government which believes that social cohesion enable children, youth, their families and communities to live together peacefully in a multi ethnic and multicultural society has taken number of steps with the experience of thirteen years war to implement conducive living environment for all citizens through education. In this effort, the Buddhist teachings which promotes mutual respect, mutual understanding, social harmony, and social cohesion has positively influenced in many ways for implementing a human friendly society in Sri Lanka. As the author believes, still there are many more lessons that can be taken from Buddhism to develop human friendly environment through education in all levels: primary, secondary and tertiary.

To some critics, education system in Sri Lanka is ethnically and linguistically segregated. It does not promote the peaceful living together of one multi ethnic or multilingual society (Interim Evaluation, 2010). Teacher training curricula in National Colleges of Education and Teachers Training Colleges does not concerns of social cohesion (de Silva, n.d). To author,provision of learning experiences relevant to peace education and social cohesion is a part of the curriculum in Teacher Training colleges and National Colleges of Education in Sri

Lanka. According Education for Social Cohesion Committee (ESC), Sri Lanka is one of the only countries in the world to have specific movement policy on education for social cohesion. In policies relevant to peace education the Sri Lankan government has introduced seven focus areas: curriculum, teacher education, second national, whole school culture, integration, curriculum and research. The main purpose of introducing these focus areas are creating a child who admire social cohesion and peace (MoE, 2008).

The report of National Education Commission, (1992) has allocated three of nine National Goals in Education relevant to social cohesion and peace in order to build a peaceful uman friendly environment. They are:

- The achievement of national cohesion, national integration and national unity
- The establishment of a pervasive system for social justice
- The active partnership in nation-building activities to ensure the continuous nurturing of a deep and abiding concern for one another (SCPE Unit, 2008)

Introduction of Life Competences and Citizenship Education for grades 6&9 students and the Citizenship Education and Governance for grades 10 and 11 students is an important occasion in Peaceeducation in Sri Lanka which promotes social cohesion. Preparing manuals and other materials relevant to peace education ensure that every teacher is exposed to education for social cohesion. This environment has promotedvision of Education for Social Cohesion and Peace. Strengthening of the provision of Second National Language (2NL), development of a clear policy on 2NL, and the establishment of a specific National College of Education for 2NL are some other services rendered by Sri Lankan government in the land mark of the peace education in Sri Lanka.This second language teaching process has motivated children to see the country as an important resource which treat everyone irrespective of their ethnicity and language (Interim Evaluation, 2010). And also learning Second National Language contributes directly for living peacefully together in a multi lingual society. Developing whole School culture and ethos, integration, and research are some other areas have been developed by the Sri Lankan government to implement the social cohesion and peace in the Sri Lankan society(Ibid). Following cycle can be produce as a conclusion of the above discussion.

Buddhism and Social Cohesion

The fundamental goal of Buddhismis peace. When people have peaceful minds social cohesion appears in such societies since peaceful mind leads to peaceful speech and peaceful actions. Understanding the causality of peace is the best way for implementation ofsocial cohesion. Buddhist teachings which relate tosocial, political & economic aspects show us how the Buddha's teachings have been contributed to empower social cohesion throughout a longperiod of2500 years.

One who studies the *SuttaPitaka* with analytical mind can find many Buddhist teachings that can be compared with the above mentioned research findings of modern sociologists. As it is explained in *VasettaSutta*, there is no any other division among human beings except gender differences: male and female. The Buddha rendered his services without considering the gender, ethnicity, and other socio-cultural factors such as caste. People who belonged to all castes: *Brahmin, Kshastriya, Vaishya, and Kshudra* could be seen among disciples of the

Buddha. Rev *Kassapa*was a *Brahmin*. While Rev *Ananda* belonged to the *Khastriya* caste*Suneetha* and *Sopaka* belonged to the *Shudra* caste.
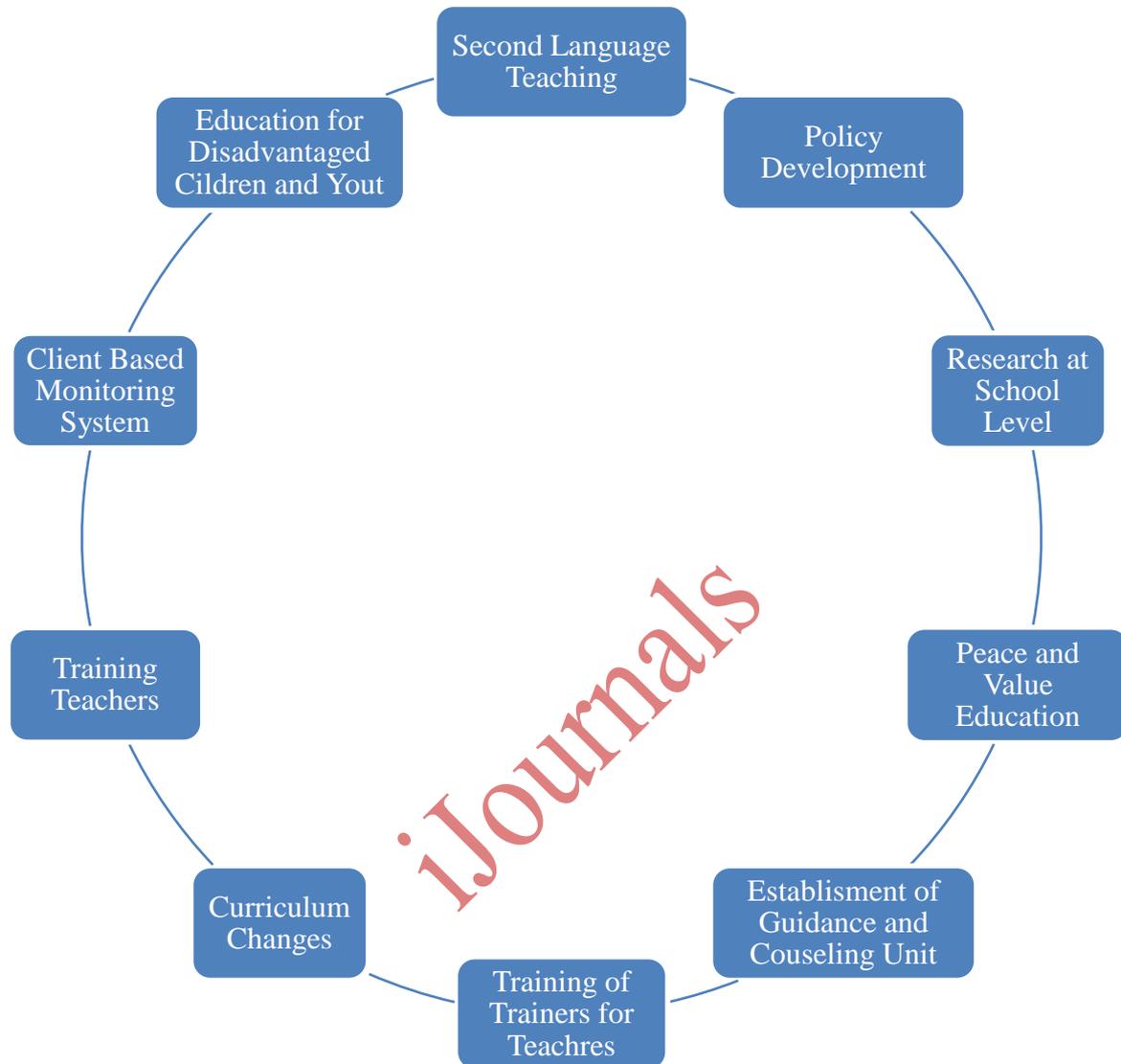
Both male and female were allowed to robe and these males and females represented *BhikkuSasana*and *Bhukkuni*Sasana. Not only that, they were given leadership positions according to their capabilities without considering caste and gender differences as explains in *EttadaggaPali* in *AnguttaraNikaya*. Moreover, everyone was treated equally. e.g. *Rahula* who was his son in lay life and *Sopaka* who belonged to *Kshudra* were treated alike.

UpaliSutta in *MajjimaNikaya* illustrates how the Buddha exhibited his flexibility regarding other religions and religious leaders. In this *Sutta,* the Buddha admonished *Upali* to treat *Nighanthanathaputta*as he did*Nighanthanathaputta*early though he embraced *Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha*(MNI: 371). Furthermore, the Buddha asked *Upali*to offer alms and open the door for alms to *Nighanthanathaputta* without ignoring him. The

Buddha was venerated by other religious leaders and their followers without religious differences due to the socio-friendly attitudes he had (MNII:352).

SingalovadaSutta(DN:180) provides a sound frame work for building social cohesion with frequency of social solidarity, social interactions and duties by avoiding social exclusion. Society in which family disorganization can be seen as a feature,is able to pracrise teachings of *SingalovadaSutta* as a social system of ethics.If people live with social solidarity they strengthen the primary and secondary network. *ChakkavattiSeehanadaSutta*(DNII:56)*,KutadanthaSutta*(DNII:127) *and AggannaSutta*(DNII:80) illustrate how rulers can govern a country with political empowerment where diverse communities live. This type of ruling pattern supports for democracy and strengthening collective social welfare. Furthermore,*ChakkavattiSeehanadaSutta,KutadanthaSutta and AggannaSutta*presentprofound teachings for promoting political and economic cohesion by treating all civilians alike. No traditional crimes in such societies since rulers find cause and effect for crimes. People owe to the state and owe to each other with egalitarian aspirations.

According to *WeludwaraSutta*, if someone dislikes something, in the same way he or she should think others dislike it too (MNV). All tremble at the prospect of becoming the target of violence, all fear death, one should placehim/herself in the position of others, one should not cause harm to others,one should not kill (Dhp: 129). It is the Buddhist view that people are well secured in a society where sustainable peace is available.

These teachings provide an acceptable guidance for policy makers, curriculum developers and administrators to absorb lessons presented in Buddhism in developing peace education and social cohesion under a human friendly ruling pattern.

- How to be vigilant about ones action in a society were multi religious, and multi ethnic groups are living
- How to neglect class and cast system which damage peace and social cohesion in a society
- How to ignore gender differences which damage the peace an social cohesion
- How to treat everyone alike byprotecting rights of the people in a country
- How to practice religious flexibility in a multi religious society
- How to build social cohesion with frequency of social solidarity, social interactions and duties by avoiding social exclusion
- How to rule a country with political empowerment where diverse communities live
- How to securehuman rights in a society where sustainable peace is available

Conclusion

Peace and Social cohesion are not new subject matters for the education system in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government has taken considerable steps to protect the rights of every human being irrespective religious, ethnic and cultural differences. Especially, the government acknowledges young generation regarding the peaceful living through education. The Buddhist teachings testify thatthe peace breaking incidents is a continuous struggle exists in the society from the ancient time.The Buddha has provided a good approach for

eradication of such crisis with more effective solutions. Strategies followed by the Buddha to establish social cohesion and peace are very strong. Hence, present sociologists, economics, politicians and anthropologists can study these Buddhist teachings deeply to provide a meaningful approach to overcome present burning issues which damage the social cohesionthrough their theories and principles for sustainable peace. Educationists, policy makers, curriculum developers and administrators can include these Buddhist teachings in policies and curriculum they prepare. And also administrators can practice these teachings so that they can implement social cohesion and peace in the society where multiculturalism appears.

Keywords: Buddhist approach,Buddhist teachings, education, social cohesion, peace

References

Primary Sources

AnguttaraNikaya. (1888). PaliText Society. London

DeegaNikaya. (1888). PaliText Society. London

MajimaNikaya. (1888). PaliText Society. London

Secondary Sources

Amin, A. &Tomaney, J.(1995). A framework for cohesion. In A. Amin and j. Tomaney(Ed): Behind the myth of European union. London

De Silva, Pindi Graham. (n.d). Social Cohesion, Teacher Training and Ethnic Relations in Post-War Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Retrieved from: https://educationanddevelopment.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/final-thesis-da-silva-docx-2-1.pdf

Duncon, Ross., Cardozo. Mieke Lopes. (2017). Reclaiming Reconciliation through Community Education for the Muslims and Tamils of Post- War Jaffna Sri Lanka. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499917696425

Interim Evaluation-Brief Report.(2010). Education for Social Cohesion, Sri Lanka. Retrieved from: https://www.oecd.org/countries/srilanka/48885009.pdf

Lockwood, D. (1999). Civic integration and social cohesion. In I. Gough and G. Olfsson(Ed) Capitalism and Social Cohesion. Basingstoke: McMillan.

MoE Sri Lanka (2008).National policy and a comprehensive framework of actions on education for social cohesion and peace (NPESCP). Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit

Putnam, R. (1993). The prosperous community - social capital and public life'.*American Prospect,*13, 35-42.

Research Cluster of Governance and Inclusive Department. (n.d). Sri Lanka:studying Education for peace building. Retrieved from: https://educationanddevelopment.wordpress.com/rp/sri-lanka-studying-education-for-peacebuilding/

Shih Yi n-shun. 1980. "Fofayurenleiheping (Dharma and Human Peace)" In Fojiaoyuzhengzhi (Buddhism and Politics). Taipei: Dashengwenhua

Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit.(2008). National policy and a comprehensive framework of actions on education for social cohesion and peace. Ministry of Education: Colobmbo

Team building and group cohesion. (2015). Retrieved from: https://meshhypno.com/blogs/sport-and-performance-psychology/posts/team-building-and-group-cohesion

Woolley, F. (1998, October). Social cohesion and voluntary activity: making connections.Paper presented at the CSLS Conference on the State of Living and the Quality of Life of Canada. Ottawa Canada.Retrieved August 27thfrom:http://www.csls.ca/oct/wool.pdf.

Yeh, Theresa Dr-Lan. (2006). The way to peace: a Buddhist perspective. International Journal of Peace Studies, Volume 11, Number 1, Spring/Summer 2006