

## A PATTERN OF INTER-RELIGIOUS RECONCILIATION BY BUDDHIST PEACEFUL MEANS: AN ANALYTICAL CASE STUDY OF ANTI-BUDDHIST VIOLENCE IN RAMU 2012, COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

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### ABSTRACT

This research consists of three main objectives: 1) To analyze the contexts, causes, and impacts of the anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu 2012, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, 2) To synthesize the Buddhist Peaceful Means for inter-religious reconciliation between Buddhist and Muslim communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, 3) To present the pattern of the inter-religious reconciliation by Buddhist peaceful means in anti-Buddhist violence area in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The methodology of this research applied a qualitative approach comprising documentary-based and in-depth interviews method. The research has been conducted over the 18th month through primary and secondary data collection and fourteen in-depth interviews with the main actors from this field and synthesized data to present the interreligious reconciliation pattern in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Buddhism was one of the early religions in Bengal of Bangladesh, and the cause of anti-Buddhist violence were interest-based conflicts and cultural identity-based violence related to internal and external factors. The impacts of violence were social and communal harmony destroyed, misunderstanding and anger, and trust and social cohesion distanced and de-escalated Buddhist-Muslim relations in Ramu, Cox's Bangladesh. Further, this research explained the concept of peace and inter-religious reconciliation from a Buddhist point of view. It deliberated on the relevant teachings of Buddha for conflict resolutions and the inter-religious reconciliation pattern. The sum of the accumulated idea of this research is that reconciliation is a symbol and a path to peace and friendship in the communities and build trust and live as relatives in a good neighborhood through reconciliation, conflict resolution processes, social engagement activities, and practical actions. Buddhist Peaceful means four sublime minds, Eight Noble paths, Karma, interfaith dialogue, Negotiations, compromise, inquiry and forgiveness, and tolerance applied for the inter-religious reconciliation pattern in the Buddhist and Muslim communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

## Introduction

Bangladesh is a country of “religious harmony, heritage endowed, cultural diversification<sup>1</sup>” and constitutionally secular and tries to maintain communal harmony. However, sometimes it is tough to protect the rights of the minority communities of Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and other ethnic and indigenous groups. The Buddhist community is one of the significant minorities in Bangladesh, with less than 0.061% of the total population. Bangladesh has experienced several bitter incidents of violence with religious minorities, including killing, vandalism, torture, extortion, abduction, eviction, proselytization, etc.<sup>2</sup> Buddhism was the earliest religion in Banga or Vanga<sup>3</sup> (Bangladesh). Bangladesh was rooted in ancient Buddhist culture and civilization.<sup>4</sup> Buddhism supported a democratic process and relationship with different cultures to promote peace, harmony, and religious tolerance in this region.

End of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Sena King supported the Brahminical doctrines from south India and destroyed the social structure of equality created during the Pala periods. In the 12-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Moghul dynasty ruled in ancient Bangladesh and gradually supported Islam; Buddhism declined in Bangladesh and later started the Dark Age of Buddhism in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country where less than 0.61% of Buddhist minority communities live. The Muslims and Buddhists have lived together in Bangladesh from century to century to maintain communal harmony. Human beings have become the most violent beings in this world.<sup>5</sup> All conflict and violence are connected to the human mind and human nature.<sup>6</sup> Extremist and fundamentalist Muslims organized communal conflicts and violent activities against the minority of the Buddhist community by using social media Facebook to post and tag religious objects, fake news & hate speech. Such as, i.e., Anti-Buddhist violence Ramu2012, anti-Hindu violence in Pabna2013, Nasirnagar (Brahmanbaria) Violence in 2016, Rangpur anti-Hindu violence in 2017, and 2021 Bangladesh Cumilla communal violence.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhupon C. Biswas, *Bangladesh: The Land of Exquisite Beauty & Heritage*, Accessed October 21, 2019, <https://egov.eletsonline.com/2019/10/bangladesh-the-land-of-exquisite-beauty-heritage>.

<sup>2</sup> Saud Mohammad and Adibah A. Rahim, *Peaceful Co-existence Among the Religious Minorities of Bangladesh: an Analytical Study*, (Selangor: Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin UniSA, 2017), 341-348.

<sup>3</sup> Banglapedia, *Vanga Was an Ancient Janapda or Human Settlement in Eastern Bengal*, Accessed September 10, 2021, <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Vanga>

<sup>4</sup> Bulbul Ahmed, *Buddhist Heritage of Bangladesh*, (Dhaka: Nympha Publication, 2015), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Sri K. Dhammananda, *How to live without Fear & Worry*, (Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1989), 145.

<sup>6</sup> Phrabrahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto), *Buddhadhamma: The laws of nature and their Benefits to life*, (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2017), 1482.

The anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu 2012, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, is one of Bangladesh's most violent acts against Buddhist communities. Anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu 2012, Cox's Bazar had destroyed Buddhist traditions, heritage, and social harmony in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Attackers of the violence looted and burnt the temples, Buddhist houses, Buddha statues, cars, the holy ancient palm leaf Tipitaka, and other materials of Buddhist communities in the affected area. The anti-Buddhist violence impacts the Buddhist communities in the personal life, social, religious, economic, and material. The social and communal harmony was distanced, and misunderstanding, fear, anger, and tension developed between Buddhist and Muslim communities. "The Buddha succeeded in establishing a religion that has been a genuine force for peace and harmony because of the high-value practices through forgiveness and reconciliation in Buddhism."<sup>7</sup> The Buddha showed humanity a new world of peace, prosperity, and goodwill.<sup>8</sup> Peace is the best alternative way, essential to human beings and societies, to manage conflict for civilization. Peace brings loving-kindness and happiness to humans and can be achieved.<sup>9</sup> Reconciliation is the process of preserving or restoring amicable relations between opponents in the event of a dispute or conflict.<sup>10</sup> Inter-religious reconciliation is the personal spirit and humanity strengthening work towards other faiths and being reconciled to others for social justice, empathy, and solidarity. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have witnessed the increase of wars, violence, and conflicts in several parts of the world in the name of religion and by hateful propaganda for their desires, interests, powers, and impurity of mind. In Buddhism scriptures, all forms of mental, verbal, and physical abuse, whether directed toward oneself or others, are possible examples of 'violence'.<sup>11</sup>

This research paper explores the contexts, causes and impacts of the anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu 2012, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The researcher explained the Buddhist peaceful means for inter-religious reconciliation pattern for the Buddhist and Muslim communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. for building inter-religious reconciliation to establish communal harmony, trust, and social cohesion in divided societies.

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<sup>7</sup> Bhikkhu Thanissaro, *Reconciliation, Rights & Wrong*, Accessed July 18, 2022, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/reconciliation.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Sri K. Dhammananda, *How to live without Fear & Worry*, 147.

<sup>9</sup> Phramahansa Dhammadasa, *Peace in Buddhism: An Analytical Study, Wisdom for a Harmonious and Awakening Society*, (Bangkok: Century Printing, 2014), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ananda W. P. Guruge, *The Buddha on Reconciliation*, (Bangkok: WBU, 2013), 34-48.

<sup>11</sup> Mahinda Deegalle, "Is violence Justified in Theravada Buddhism?," *The Ecumenical Review* 55 (2003), 122-131.

## Research Objectives

1. To analyze the contexts, causes, and impact of anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu2012, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.
2. To synthesize the Buddhist Peaceful Means for interreligious reconciliation of the Buddhist and Muslim communities.
3. To present the pattern of interreligious reconciliation by Buddhist Peaceful Means on anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu2012, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

## Research Methodology:

The study used the qualitative research method and the documentary research strategy associated with historical research for the particular data collection and analysis based on the research objective. The researcher's data was collected from primary and secondary sources and in-depth interviews. The researcher analyzed and synthesized data according to the research objectives.

## The Populations

The research consists of a qualitative base. There 14 participants joined the in-depth interviews with Buddhist religious leaders, civil society members, academicians, witnesses, journalists, NGO workers, and politicians.

## Research Results:

### The Anti-Buddhist Violence

Violence is the expression of conflict in a way that threatens human life or the quality of human life. Forms of violence include physical, verbal, psychological, sexual, economic, political, and institutional violence. Every religion clearly denoted that violence is a sin and forbidden. "Violence " is used broadly to include a wide range of negative human actions harmful to other living beings, organisms, ecosystems, and the environment—physical assault and minor verbal abuse, also including violence. The Pali term *himsā* refers to violence. "In Bangladesh, Islamist politics and religious violence have a long history that predates its independence.<sup>12</sup>" Violence is often the outcome of misinformation, lack of understanding, demonization, and

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<sup>12</sup> Mubashar Hasan and Geoffrey Macdonald, "The Persistent Challenge of Extremist in Bangladesh," *Special Report, United States Institute of Peace* 511 (2022): 1.

dehumanization of others. The anti-Buddhist violence refers to violence against minorities of Buddhist communities in Ramu 2012, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. The Ramu 2012 anti-Buddhist violence was the first major Facebook-inspired attack in 2012 in Ramu, Cox's Bazar in Chattogram Division in the Southeast. The perpetrator burned and destroyed the 200-300 years old more than 21 monasteries, 100 houses, ancient leaf palm Tripitaka, and Buddha statues. According to the Buddhist point of view all conflicts and violence arise from craving (*tanhā*, conceit (*Māna*), false view (*ditthi*), greed (*lobha*) hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). External and physical wrongdoings and social injustice, causes, conflict, and violence originate from the state of the human mind. P.D Premasiri agreed that in all contexts of violent conflict occurs, human behavior exhibited under the root of all unwholesome. Anti-Buddhist violence of Ramu was well-planned and interest-based conflicts and direct violence because the wrongdoers/perpetrator directly attacked the Buddhist community's monasteries and houses. Many newspapers, mass media, and world media covered this violent news with headlines as they wished. Some headlines include; communal riots in Bangladesh, Anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu 2012, Cox's Bazar. Rioters torch Buddhist temples, home in Bangladesh (Japan Today), Bangladesh Accuses Rohingya Muslims of Attacking Buddhists (Voice of America),

### Definition of Reconciliation

Reconciliation means different things to different people; its significance varies from culture to culture and changes with time.<sup>13</sup> Reconciliation can happen in many contexts- between wife and husband, offender and victim, and nations and communities.<sup>14</sup> Reconciliation is the behavior process in which we take actions to restore a relationship or create a new one following forgiveness.<sup>15</sup> David suggested that reconciliation enables victims and perpetrators to establish a civilized political, cultural, and religious interfaith dialogue at the level of life and society and move forward with fair power-sharing.<sup>16</sup> Govier & Verwoerd argue for societies that survived violent past, the most suitable form of reconciliation is the one based on cooperation. Reconciliation as collaboration requires an amount of trust that will make large

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<sup>13</sup> David Bloomfield, *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook Series*, (Stockholm: International IDEA, 2003), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Cahn and Abigail, *Managing Conflicts through Communication*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, (USA: Pearson Education, 2014), 207.

<sup>16</sup> David Bloomfield, *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook Series*, 12.

groups, previously fighting in the country, cooperate.<sup>17</sup> Reconciliation as a parallel and central process that includes searching for truth, justice, forgiveness, healing, and non-violent action/coexistence. “Reconciliation can thus be understood as both a focus and a locus. As a perspective, it is built on and oriented toward the relational aspects of a conflict. As a social phenomenon, reconciliation represents a space, a place or location of the encounter, where parties to a conflict meet.<sup>18</sup>

### **Definition of Inter-religious Reconciliation**

Inter-religious reconciliation means two or more religious faiths and beliefs of people or groups connected. Inter-religious reconciliation is a parallel process that redesigns the relationship between two communities, groups, spiritual, with former enemies, for their mutual understanding, repair or restoration of relationship, friendship, amicable, mediation, harmony, settlement, and compromise. Jeremy Jones AM defined "Inter-religious Reconciliation involves followers of different faith traditions meeting together in an honest, open and respectful atmosphere, developing trust and finding agreement on common concerns and areas for cooperation.<sup>19</sup> Interreligious reconciliation is not only that. Through interreligious reconciliation, peace, respect, unity, and honor are shown to the great people of different religions in the same way respect and respect are also offered to the various festivals of that religion. The Buddha says six conditions are conducive to amiability that engender feelings of endearment, engender feeling of respect, leading to sense of fellowship, a lack of disputes, harmony & a state of unity.<sup>20</sup> This this is one of best tool of inter-religious reconciliation.

### **Contexts, causes, and impacts of the anti-Buddhist violence:**

In the context studies, the researcher found that Buddhism arrived in Bangladesh when the Buddha began preaching Buddhism in the sub-continent of India. Buddhism had golden and rich cultural periods and flourished during the Pala Empire dynasty from the 5-10<sup>th</sup> centuries. It played an essential role during their rule in Banga (Bangladesh) regions for about 400 years.

<sup>17</sup> Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd, “Trust and the Problem of National Reconciliation,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 32 (2002): 178-205.

<sup>18</sup> John P. Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1997), 30.

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Jones, Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council, Director of International and of Community Affairs, Sydney, Australia, Interview, September 15, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Bhikkhu Thanissaro, *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, Accessed December 20, 2022, [http:// www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an06/an06.012.than.html](http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/an/an06/an06.012.than.html).

Bangladesh was a flourishing country of Buddhism during the Buddha's time until the 12<sup>th</sup> century. King Asoka and the Pala dynasty had given a good democracy, architecture, education, arts, culture, and a great shape of inter-faith and harmonies relations in Bengal of Bangladesh. After Buddhism declined in Bangladesh, Hindu Kings, and the Islamic kingdom came to power in Bengal of Bangladesh. Religious conflict and violence are the natural part of social life in every corner of the world. Interreligious conflicts and violence had started in India and Pakistan since the partition of the Indian subcontinent when it was divided by region theory. Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan in 1971 with a secular mentality movement. But still, many Pakistani Islamic mentality ideologies and the military were in Bangladesh.

The Islamic mentality military governments have promoted Islam as the state religion. They were leading to the formation of Islamic nationalist extremism in the country. According to Buddhism, all violent context conflict occurs due to the roots of unwholesome behavior, greed, hatred, and delusion. Discrimination, weak law, injustice, corruption, poverty, human rights violations, intolerance, hate speech, Rohingya crisis, property miscreant, economic, social, and cultural differences, differences of opinion, and belief, dogmatism, superstition, and fanaticism those external causes had promoted the anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. Conflicts arise due to objects that people desire to acquire.<sup>21</sup> These factors are related to the human mind's impurity qualities, hatred, delusions, selfishness, ignorance, desire, unskillful actions, and immoral behavior, which are internal causes. The anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu 2012 also occurred due to the dogmatic clinging to beliefs, ideologies, and individual opinions.

The impacts of the anti-Buddhist violence found that Buddhist and Muslim social relations and communal harmony collapsed. Indeed, the anti-Buddhist violence impacted personal, physical, and mental issues such as tension, mistrust, misunderstanding, fear, individual trauma, insecurity, and hatred developed between Buddhist and Muslim communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. Additionally, the anti-Buddhist violence impacted Buddhism materially and religiously, such as the lost Buddhistic culture, identity, and history in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

The researcher found that the Buddha was a peacemaker, and his attitude toward other religious followers was amicable, respectful, and tolerant. The researcher identified that the conflict and

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<sup>21</sup> Premasiri, "Buddhist Response to Social Conflict: Some Practical Buddhist Suggestions for the Resolution of the Problem of Social Conflicts," *Vesak* 2558/2015 1 (2015): 13-22.



violence occurring in the modern world were and will continue to exist not only at this time but also at the time of the Buddha.

The researcher found the relevant teaching of four noble truths, the Eightfold Path, nonviolence, the four sublime states of mind, forgiveness, meditation and mindfulness, and interreligious dialogue that Buddha taught, how their practice and application in our daily life potentially and practical solutions to solve the problems. Buddha used his peaceful means, actions, and strategy to solve inner and outer conflicts and develop inner and outer peace. Applied equality with looking-kindness and fixed it as a peaceful reconciliation between victims and wrongdoings. The Buddha pointed out that Nibbana is often referred to as peace (santi), preventing conflicts among adherents of different religions, and the truth of Nibbana is the single truth, realizing that people could put an end to all disputes.

## **Discussion:**

### **1. Conflict Resolution for Inter-Religious Reconciliation**

#### **A) Negotiation**

Negotiation is a systemic process for managing and resolving conflict. In this process, conflict resolution involves debates, arguments, disagreements, compromise, and cooperation. *In the Kosambīya Sutta found that Bhikkhus were arguing, quarreling, and disputing, continually wounding each other with barbed words. The Blessed One advised two groups of Monks to understand the facts of disputes and maintain acts of loving-kindness by body, speech, and mind in public and private to live a holy life and six principles of cordiality to live in the monastery peacefully, but they didn't accept of Buddha's advised then Buddha went to the forest and the quarreled monks understood to their faults as the villagers of stop to offering alms to monks". The villagers helped negotiate an end to this conflict.*<sup>22</sup> Negotiation refers to the proceeding of expression related to a proposition that the parties want to get a mutual agreement based on mutual interest according to their conflicts.<sup>23</sup> Whether the anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu 2012, Cox's Bazar, was short-term or long-term planned and prepared, no one can say yet, but many believe the violence was well-planned. Hence, there was no prior negotiation between the Buddhist and Muslim communities to solve the conflict. However,

<sup>22</sup> Majjhima Nikaya, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, (USA: Wisdom Publications, 2009), 419-423.

<sup>23</sup> Phramahahansa Dhammadasa, *Buddhist Peaceful Means: The Integration of Principles and Tools for Conflict Management*, (Ayutthaya: IBSC Peace Class, International Buddhist Studies College, MCU, 2017).



when Islamic fundamentalists and religious extremists were going to attack Buddhist monasteries and burned houses, many say that there was an attempt by the police administration to prevent it, but it was a delicate attempt. After the incident, the Bangladesh Buddhist organization's leaders were seated in a negotiation process with many sectors of high-level government leaders.

## **B) Inquiry**

Issue Identification is exploring the issues underlying the conflict. In the process of identifying, what are the issues and motivates? How do feel about the issues? What are the root causes, relationship, resolved methods, solution generation, solution evaluation and selection, and implementation.<sup>24</sup> The Blessed One teaches the Four Noble Truths, which can be applied to benefit one's life and direct benefit people's lives.<sup>25</sup> It solves problems and finds its source through human ingenuity by dealing directly with the causes and conditions.<sup>26</sup>

Inquiry is essential to find the facts of causes, drive, and obstructive forces and link with any local, national, and regional issues related to the anti-violence of Buddhist communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. The inquiry supports solving the problems and finding the proper solution which can be applied to both communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. The inquiry derives the benefit of the interreligious reconciliation process to lead to utter safety and complete happiness and social bond in the community through applying suitable solution methods. The Kalamas (Kalama Sutta) is justly famous for its encouragement of free inquiry; where the Kalamas of Kesaputta ask for guidance from the Buddha, and the Buddha advised Kalams how to free of greed, hate, and delusion that is exempt from fanaticism, bigotry, dogmatism, and intolerance.<sup>27</sup>

## **C) Mediation:**

A group of intellectuals offered the process of negation by mediators, who viewed this process as an alternation. The interest-based procedure is mediation, in which a third party assists the disputants in reaching an agreement. There was no trained and certified mediator center in

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<sup>24</sup> Joseph P. Folger, *Working Through Conflict: Strategies for Relationships, Groups and Organizations*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, (USA: Pearson Education, Inc, 2009). 241.

<sup>25</sup> Phrabrahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto), *Buddhadhamma: The laws of nature and their Benefits to life*, 1453.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 1483.

<sup>27</sup> Soma Thera, *Kalama Sutta: The Buddha's Charter of Free Inquiry*, Accessed November 30, 2013, <https://www.accesstosight.org/lib/authors/soma/wheel008.html>.

Ramu, Cox's Bazar. The anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu 2012 was the religious conflict and violence against peace-loving Buddhist communities, and the Buddhist community was the minority and had a lack of power-sharing abilities. Therefore, the government of Bangladesh and the Buddhist Leaders of "Surakkha Committee" offered to facilitate mediation with Buddhist and Muslim communities. The community-based mediator group offered mediation by arranging many courtyards meeting to resolve disputes and to discuss interpersonal issues such as rumors, misunderstandings, friendship issues, and post-breakup disputes after the anti-Buddhist violence in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. His Holiness Satyapriya Mahathero worked as a neutral mediator even though he had no decision-making power there, but his strong personality built him a good mediator. He was bringing the behaviour change under social control and increasing the likelihood of social justice. He did not curse and anger but told them to follow the right path.<sup>28</sup>

#### **D) Compromising**

Compromise plays a pivotal role in the negotiation strategy. It is the process whereby each group levels its standpoint and turns to talk about its actual need. The Buddhist communities lost their cultural objects and four hundred ancient wooden monasteries. Buddhist communities selected a committee that selected leaders participating in the negotiation process with the government of Bangladesh and victims and wrongdoings. The Buddhist communities of Ramu peoples understood it was impossible to regain the victim's properties and old temples could not be returned and "should be protected future generation<sup>29</sup>." The Buddhist communities must continue their religious and ritual life in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, and could not leave for other countries. "The Buddhist leaders were compassing with the Bangladesh government. It was essential to depend on the government as a small community and keep the existence of Buddhism in Bangladesh. In this case, for inter-religious reconciliation and conflict resolution, both community peoples need to compromise themselves self-according to their religious beliefs and actions (karma) and understand the reality of situations and their rights and orders of country, local and cultural norms. Buddha prevented a war between the Sakiya and the Koliyas and called for a peaceful settlement between the two parties.<sup>30</sup> The Buddha said in Kosambiya sutta, "to treat each other with physical, mental and verbal acts of loving-kindness

<sup>28</sup> Ali Jinnah, Staff Correspondent the Daily Star, Interview, May 06, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Kushlayan Mahathira, Bishwajoti Mission Kalyan Trust, Interview, May 10, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Dhp verse No 197-199, 173-174.

and to keep the unity in the community otherwise this would lead to long-lasting suffering.<sup>31</sup>” The Hadith says, “whoever does not love human beings, God will not love him' and teaches Muslims to be friendly with neighbors irrespective of their faiths.

### **E) Inter-religious Dialogue**

Inter-religious dialogue is one of the methods to build inter-religious reconciliation between Buddhists and Muslims in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. Inter-religious dialogue is referred to as interfaith dialogue. It helps to understand their mutual knowledge and respect to live and cooperate despite their differences. Inter-religious dialogue is essential for Buddhist and Muslim communities to interact and build relationships with each other. “The most common form of inter-religious discussion is when two individuals, friends, neighbors, or acquaintances, discuss their religious beliefs casually.<sup>32</sup>” Government, NGOs and University and religious and social organizations can support and facilitate a Buddhist and Muslim inter-religious dialogue in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. It could provide a safe space, create common ground to connect people and achieve the multiethnic and multinational tolerance needed for social cohesion. Government, NGOs, civil society, religious leaders, and universities can arrange seminars, conferences, and symposiums where Buddhists and Muslims can exchange their experiences and discuss possible solutions to anti-Buddhist violence impacting Ramu 2012, Cox's Bazar<sup>33</sup>. Because inter-religious dialogue can be a valuable tool for establishing tolerance. Calvin Shenk calls it “living dialogue,” which is very valuable in promoting a better understanding of the different religions that make up a pluralistic dialogue.<sup>34</sup> The government and other civil society organizations must organize seminars, conferences, and inter-religious dialogue for public awareness of coexistence and peacebuilding. After a dialogue, Buddhist and Muslim participants can communicate directly. The Buddhist community leaders participated in the inter-religious reconciliation process by showing respect for others' life and resources and preserving the Buddhist culture, tradition, and history. They built up a stage for exchanging, learning, and negotiating the need of Buddhist communities.

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<sup>31</sup> Majjhima Nikaya, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 419-423.

<sup>32</sup> Zoran Brajovic, “The potential of Inter-religious Dialogue,” *Lessons from Bosnia-Herzegovina* (2007): 150.

<sup>33</sup> Kushlayan Mahathira, Bishwajoti Mission Kalyan Trust, Interview, May 10, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin Shenk, *Who Do You Say That I am?: Christi Tians Encounter Other Religious*, (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1997), 15.

## **2. Social Engagement Activities for Inter-Religious Reconciliation**

Supporting, Participation, and Collaboration are the most important to building inter-religious reconciliation and relationships between wrongdoers and victims in Ramu Cox's Bazar. Every community must participate in various social and cultural functions to reduce the distance between Buddhist and Muslim communities.<sup>35</sup> Some cultural sources can be used as peacebuilding initiatives for conflict resolution and interfaith reconciliation to build trust and relations between Buddhist and Muslim communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar. Art, literature, music, poetry, drama, and film are all essential parts of culture and can be a great way to deal with complicated feelings in times of conflict and build Peace where there is violence. We need to use human capital in the interfaith reconciliation process because interfaith relationship building is full of work and actions; It should be passed from generation to generation between the Buddhist and Muslim communities to build mutual relations. "The Buddhist and Muslim communities need to gather together in social events, Weddings, New Year, victory day, and family functions to protect against conflict and violence in the future."<sup>36</sup> There were some pragmatic programs and activities such as sports, eating, attending social and cultural festivals, working together for the common good, and building a healthy community. Those initiatives can establish inter-faith communication and create communal and social harmony in the Buddhist and Muslim communities in Ramu, Cox's Bazar.

## **3. The Roles of Participators Inter-Religious Reconciliation in Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh**

The government, non-government, political leaders, religious leaders, and traditional peacemakers, as well as civil society, NGOs, UN agencies, and other international bodies, academicians, journalists, and social and religious organizations, were required to collaborate and cooperate in organizing many social engagement activities and programs such as various seminars, symposiums, discussion meetings among Buddhists and Muslims community. The participant parties can share and exchange and develop an inter-religious reconciliation process and conflict resolution for solving disputes, preventing violence, promoting peace, and contributing to long-term peace in societies. Politicians and religious leaders, civil society, and mass media can play great in building public social awareness and social harmony to create a

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<sup>35</sup> Abdul Haque, Principal, Ramu Government College, Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Interview, April 26, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Abdul Haque, Principal, Ramu Government College, Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, Interview, April 26, 2022.

platform of inter-religious dialogue to remove the social distance and lack of understanding. Media plays an explosive role in preventing violence and disputes and can play a role in reconciliation and coexistence by building awareness and publishing authentic and genuine news and socially harmonious related articles and information. Two Buddhist religious leader monks, His Holiness Sanghanayaka Suddhananda Mahathero and His Holiness Satyapriya Mahathera, played a significant role in restoring harmony and building trust and harmony in the communities to play their vital functions.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **1. Interfaith or inter-religious dialogues**

Interfaith-religious or interfaith dialogues should be increased. It will help Buddhist and Muslim communities to know each other personally and understand their religious beliefs, faiths, and culture. It will reduce and break down the barriers and stereotypes which lead to distrust, suspicion, bigotry, fear, anger, and hatred. Thus, dialogues may help to reduce tensions and build understanding and confidence to overcome or prevent violence.

#### **2. Ensure Rule of Justice**

Perpetrators and wrongdoings should be brought to punishment, and justice should be ensured so the Buddhist communities get a positive message and can change their psychology toward the majority. The government and law enforcement agencies should play a major role in this context.

#### **3. The message of Tolerance to others' beliefs**

The message of tolerance to others' beliefs should be disseminated during the sermon in mosques and temples. These initiatives also build empathy among people of different religions. Tolerance is essential for mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and positive relationships among individuals and communities.

#### **4. Role of State and its agency**

Government, civil society, and international organizations must organize seminars, conferences, and meetings among members of different religious communities and new generations. There might be less fear and anger toward each other when they know each other. Encourage and teach the community people and new generations to respect people not based on religion and to respect as human beings, accept diversity, and be aware of humanity by providing interfaith-based peacebuilding education.

## 5. Promote social engagement activities commonly

Politicians, religious leaders, and educational institutions should be responsible for building social harmony and creating awareness by commonly taking various pragmatic programs and activities. The government, local community, and individuals based can do social engagement activities among the Buddhist and Muslim communities, such as blood donation, financial assistance for the development of education of poor and disadvantaged students, assistance during various natural disasters, building library and sports and cultural club so that people from both communities can come together closely and know each other personally and attend the interfaith everyday suitable social engagement activities. Those social engagement activities promote respect, understanding, appreciation and compassion towards others and help create a world where everyone can coexist and flourish despite their differences.

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