

# **Buddhist Mindfulness Practices in Conflict Resolution**

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## **Abstract**

Conflict resolution management has become a prominent subject in the modern era, as conflicts can arise at various levels, from individuals to entire countries, involving issues of religion, race, and more. Currently, the world is grappling with two active wars, and these conflicts have a direct impact on the prosperity of nations, posing a threat to global sustainability. This study aims to find solutions for disputes through the spiritual teachings of the Buddha. This study is based on qualitative research using content analysis and reviewing various published and unpublished articles, journals, and digital and electronic sources including websites and social media. Buddhism addresses the root causes of conflicts, such as greed, hatred, and delusion. The ultimate goal of Buddhism is to eradicate these root causes. The foundational principles of Buddhism revolve around spreading peace, tolerance, and equity among all human beings worldwide. Buddha's teaching provides advice for resolving conflicts and wars. In essence, Buddhism promotes non-violence, encouraging individuals and societies to seek harmony and consensus through peaceful means. The overarching goal is the cessation of conflicts, fostering inner and outer peace, and contributing to the world's sustainability.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Conflict Management, Peace

## **1. Introduction**

The term conflict is derived from the Latin word "Confligave" which means fighting, warfare, incompatibility, and opposition (Simpson & Weine, 1989). Normally, Conflicts arise among people who have different beliefs, attitudes, customs, norms, and needs. Conflicts come to the surface in the form of disputes, quarrels, and sometimes even killing. In other words, conflicts mean resistance, disobedience, violation, persistence and objections that are visible in society. Conflict theory was first developed by Karl Marx (1818-1883) in the mid-nineteenth century to explain inequality and conflict resulting from struggle and competition between two antagonistic social classes (Hayes, 2022). Singer and Small's initiated Correlates-of-War-Project (COW) defines conflicts as violent disputes in which at least one of the

combatant parties is a state, and there are at least 100 battle deaths. (Antonio Milososki & Heinz-Jürgen Axt, 2006) Conflict is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e. individual, group, organization, etc.). Also, these conflicts can be assumed as: I) Community conflicts (Muslims are divided as Sunni Muslims, Sitthi Muslims, etc.) and ii) Diplomatic conflicts (India - Pakistan, Israel –Palestine). iii) Environmental resources iv) Ideological (Marxism – Imperialism) v) Religious (within and with other religions like Christianity Vs. Islam) vi) Inter-states (civil wars) vii) Organizational (within and with other communities) viii) Workplaces (between workers and masters- strikes) ix) Family (within the Family (Sirisudhamma, The Root -case of Arising Conflict, 2020).

Conflict means any contradiction or clashing interest between two persons or groups. It is an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, dispute, aggression, rivalry, and misunderstanding. So, conflicts may arise due to different perceptions, values, working practices, etc. Gandhi (1958-1994). too saw “*conflict as both positive and desirable*”. Therefore, it is better to work on the resolution of conflict rather than avoid it or keep suffering as a result of it. Thomas Hobbes (1985) believed that human beings are selfish by nature and “*that humanity is characterized by a careless, and indeed relentless, thirst for power.*” Edmund Burke (2005) “*saw humanity as inherently conflictual.*” Sigmund Freud (2002) contends that aggression “*is carried out in the name of self-preservation, and is inherent to humans.*” Aggression helps human beings to protect and enhance their existence. However, Gandhi (1958-1994). was in a different league altogether as he believed in the essential goodness of human beings. He had a very positive view of human nature and believed that humans could respond to “the call of the spirit” and rise above selfishness and violence.

In the Pāli literature, the word "conflict" is used as a synonym with Virodha, Viggaha, Sanghattana, VivāDa, Herein, the word “Raṇa” is used. In describing ideological conflicts, that were prevalent among various religious groups, three terms Kalaha (Contention), Viggaha (Dispute), And VivāDa (Debate) have been used quite often (Sirisudhamma, 2015).

The Vedic “Raṇa” means both enjoyment and battle. The word “Raṇa” in Pāḷi bears many meanings. It means being in seclusion from people (araṇ + yu) and being free from the mist of defilements (kilesā) (a + raṇa). It also means intoxication and desire. Besides that, it can mean war, battle, sin, or fault. Over time, various wars have erupted globally, including historical events like the First and Second World Wars, as well as recent conflicts such as the Israel-Palestine war, the Afghanistan war, and the civil war in Sri Lanka. These conflicts often arise between different nations and

are exacerbated by religious differences. Religion, with its primary aims of fostering happiness and peace among human beings, paradoxically becomes a central factor in some conflicts. Despite religious teachings emphasizing peace, love, and compassion, certain instances reveal that religion can be a catalyst for the initiation of wars. This raises questions about the interpretation and application of religious principles in the context of global conflicts. Interestingly, it has been observed that conflicts involving religious nations are more prevalent than those in secular countries. This paradox underscores the need to explore the reasons why, despite the peaceful messages conveyed by religions, some conflicts are rooted in religious differences. Addressing this paradox becomes crucial for achieving a harmonious global coexistence. The impact of wars extends beyond the immediate participants, affecting the world economy, global peace, and overall sustainability. Wars disrupt international trade, strain diplomatic relations, and divert resources away from addressing pressing global challenges such as poverty, climate change, and healthcare. In the contemporary world, finding genuine solutions to prevent and resolve conflicts is imperative.

This study seeks to explore solutions to war and conflict by delving into the spiritual teachings of Lord Gautama Buddha. The primary focus is on Buddhist spiritual teachings that center on peace, emphasizing an understanding of the root causes of war and conflict and exploring resolutions based on the principles found in Buddhism. During the period under investigation, two prominent active wars have taken center stage: The Israel-Palestine war that erupted on the 7th of October 2023, spanning over 70 years, and the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2022. These conflicts have resulted in the breakdown of essential human needs, leading to the tragic loss of lives daily. Nations affected by these wars have plunged into poverty, causing immense hardships for their populations, who struggle to meet fundamental human necessities such as food, water, healthcare, and clothing. This research is dedicated to identifying viable solutions aimed at mitigating and ultimately eliminating war and conflict worldwide. By doing so, it aspires to contribute to the restoration of global sustainability. The focus of this study is particularly relevant to the ongoing conflicts in the current year, seeking to address the pressing issues that have arisen due to these wars.

## **2. Literature Review**

This literature review examines the insights and principles drawn from Buddhist philosophy and practice that can inform and enrich the field of conflict resolution.

Conflict can be identified as three types, namely Individual level conflict, Interpersonal conflict, and Group level conflict. Individual-level conflict is when all individuals have conflict within themselves. An individual may have conflicts when his motives or drives are blocked, or he is facing competing roles and goals and is unable to make decisions. The reasons behind these conflicts may be uncertainty about roles and goals, inability to compare various alternatives available, and unacceptability of the decisions of the company. Most individual conflicts may arise within an employee. Frustration is when an employee is unable to do as per own desires, he/she becomes frustrated. It is the highest level of dissatisfaction which in turn gives rise to conflict within the individual. Frustration arises due to the blockage of the individual's drives or motives before reaching his/her goal. These blocks may be physical or mental/social-psychological. Interpersonal conflict refers to conflict between two or more individuals and is the most common type of conflict. When we live the society, we have to deal with several relations such as parents, friends, family members, teachers, employees, and religious leaders (Sigala Sutta of Diga Nikaya). Therefore, the conflict can arise between the above relations. Group-level conflict can happen mostly within business organizations. Group refers to two or more persons working for some common goals with a predefined structure of role and status relations and having a defined system of values and behavior norms. Groups affect the behavior of their members along with affecting the behavior of other groups and the organization as a whole (Bansal, (n.d.)).

The Buddhist tradition has a long history of grappling with the nature of human suffering, the root causes of conflict, and the pathways to inner peace and social harmony Karl Marx (1818-1883). One of the central tenets of Buddhist thought is the interdependence of all phenomena, which underscores the interconnected nature of individuals, groups, and nations (Galtung, 1996). This perspective challenges the notion of absolute, fixed identities and encourages a more fluid, relational understanding of the self and the "other" in conflict situations. By cultivating a sense of mutual understanding and shared humanity, Buddhist-inspired approaches to conflict resolution can help diplomats and negotiators move beyond adversarial mindsets and work towards more collaborative solutions (Lederach, 2005). Furthermore, the Buddhist emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and non-attachment offers valuable insights for managing the emotional and psychological dimensions of international conflicts (Goleman, 1995). By training diplomats in practices such as breath awareness, loving-kindness meditation, and the recognition of impermanence, these approaches can enhance their ability to remain centered, empathetic, and open-minded in the face of complex, high-stakes negotiations (Berceli & Napoli, 2006; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009).

This literature review suggests that the integration of Buddhist principles and practices into the field of conflict resolution, particularly in the context of international diplomacy, has the potential to contribute to more sustainable and transformative approaches to conflict de-escalation and resolution.

Aparekke Sirisudhamma and Wimalasara (2015) explore the various facets of conflict emergence, attributing the primary reasons to unwholesome emotions like greed, hatred, and delusion within the context of Buddhism. The authors emphatically argue that the complete elimination of conflict is achievable through the eradication of these negative emotional states. While the research sheds light on the root causes of conflicts and their resolution, it falls short of delving into other teachings of Buddha related to conflict resolution and prevention. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining additional aspects of Buddha's teachings on conflict resolution and prevention. By doing so, it aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Buddhist perspective on addressing conflicts and exploring methods beyond the removal of unwholesome emotions.

Ven. Lien Vein (2019) delves into the introduction of violence and its root causes, examining how conflicts may arise between different parties. The author extensively explores the Buddhist perspective on the crucial role of leadership or rulers in building peace. It specifically addresses the teachings of Buddhism related to conflict resolution, emphasizing the model role that leaders can play in mitigating violence. While the article comprehensively covers the principles of good governance in Buddhism as a means to promote peace, it falls short of encompassing other teachings of Buddha about conflict resolution. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining both resolution and prevention methods for mitigating conflicts, providing a more holistic understanding of Buddhist approaches to handling violence and fostering peace.

Daniele Mazza (2021) examines the sources of conflict, particularly drawing from the Pali Canon, a significant Buddhist scripture. The research delves into the root causes of conflict according to Buddhist principles and explores the methods prescribed by Buddhism for conflict resolution. Notably, the article sheds light on the Buddha's approaches, emphasizing arbitration, mediation, and communitarian decisions as effective means to control disputes among parties.

### **3. Methodology**

This research primarily uses a qualitative research method through content analysis of written related materials on conflict and peace. These sources are considered as key documents for the study. Additionally, data is collected from Pali Canon sources.

Some of the main teachings of the Buddha related to peace are highly regarded and form a significant part of the data collection. The methodology involves a thorough examination of these texts to identify and interpret themes and patterns relevant to the study's objectives. This comprehensive content analysis helps in understanding the perspectives and teachings on peace as presented in both traditional and contemporary literature.

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Root Case of Conflict**

The non-fulfillment of basic human needs is the cause of conflict. John Burton (1990) propounded the basic human needs theory. Needs refer to basic human requirements for the continuation and propagation of life: material (food, shelter, health care, employment- freedom from want), cultural (right to religion, language), and social needs (respect, dignity, and freedom from fear). The need for life to be perceived as being predictable and safe is extremely important. These needs are non-negotiable and universal, and their satisfaction is essential for human development and social stability. These universal needs must be satisfied if protracted social conflicts are to be resolved. Buddha put the conflict in the context of the first noble truth and traced the root cause of every conflict to some unwholesome states of the human mind (Vijitha, 2019). According to the Buddhist explanation, the conflict arises through the mental factors of the mind called the unwholesome roots; greed can be eliminated through generosity, helpfulness, and cooperation, hatred can be eliminated through kindness, tolerance and forgiveness and delusion is a potentially harmful consequence.

Once again sensual pleasures are seen as the root cause of every conflict. As per the Buddha's teaching disputes may occur at different levels such as among kings (Rājānopi Rājūhi Vivādentī), religious groups (Rāhmaṇāpi Brāhmaṇehi Vivadanti), among villagers (Gapahatīpigahapatīhi Vivadanti) and within the same family (Mātāpi Puttena Vivadati) (Mazza, 2021). As per the Buddhist teaching there are six roots of conflict. Namely;

1. Angry and aggressive
2. Contemptuous and insolent
3. Envious and misery (Issa – maccariya)
4. Fraudulent and deceitful
5. Evil wishes and wrong views

## 6. Hold his own view tenaciously

Buddha explains the two concepts that need to be practiced in our lives. This concept is very important to protect peace in society. The conflict arises due to the lack of two characteristics of mind; first one is Kāmehivisamyuttam that is departing from the sensual pleasure and the second is Vitatanham means eliminate the craving.

It could be argued that the main cause of ongoing conflicts (ex: Russia and Ukraine, Palestine, and Israel) and the previous war in Sri Lanka are due to the sensual desires of the people. As per the Buddha's teaching, when we eliminate desires, war does not arise in the world. Conflict means a serious disagreement or clash, generally a protracted one, among individuals or groups of people. Sometimes this clash arises out of incompatible and different goals among the parties that see the other as an obstacle or a competitor in achieving their own goal (Digvijaysinh, 2013). Other times it arises out of a different thought process, attitude, priorities, perception, and interests even though both parties aim at the same goal (Dean, 2006). Conflicts can happen at a macro-level (i.e., among nation-states, ethnic groups, etc.) or at a micro-level (within a family, an organization, etc.). Mahakaccānathere explains when people have wrong views and cravings it will be the reason for the occurrence of self-identification or ego. because of self-identification or ego there are another seven kinds of latent causes of conflict.

- Kāmaraga - the latent tendency to sensual pleasure
- Patiga - the latent tendency to aversion
- Ditti - the latent tendency to speculative opinion
- Vicikiccā - the latent tendency to speculative doubt
- Māna - the latent tendency to conceit and pride
- Bhavarāga - the latent tendency to crave continuous existence.
- Avija - the latent tendency to ignorance

Due to these 7 kinds of latent there arise taking up rods and bladed weapons, arguments, quarrels, disputes, accusations, divisive tale-bearing, and false speech. When people eliminate this kind of latent and cultivate minds in a righteous way, gradually conflict can be stopped. Madhupindikasutta of Majjima Nikaya the Buddha's teaching pointed out the people experience normally two ways, attraction, and repulsion. People try to take ownership on attractive things and make quarrel and conflict to get everything. On the other hand, they repulsed unlike things. Through these dislikes, arise the conflict (Madhupindikasutta , Majjima Nikaya). People go battle and kill each other because of desire lust or craving. Buddhism does not admire

temporary solutions for conflict or war (Madhupindikasutta of Majjima nikaya).“Unoloke Atiththo Thanha Daso” the people of this world are slaves of the craving and it is difficult to give up (Rattapala Sutta – Majjima Nikaya ) that leads to a situation of conflict. However, as per the Budha's teaching, until someone attains the status of Nibbana, the craving could be eliminated.

Diga Nikaya Cakkawatti Sihanada Sutta and Kuta Dantha Sutta mention about conflict and war. According to this Sutta, the major causes of the conflict or trying to maximize resources and material wealth. When people try to collect material wealth automatically competition between people or groups of people or countries. The completion gradually turns into the conflicts. However, as per the Buddha’s teaching, people should think about the impermanence of material things, and when people think about the impermanence of everything, they do not engage in any conflict. (Cakkawatti Siha Nada Sutta, Diga Nikaya), (Kutadhantha Sutta, Diga Nikaya) Sakka Pahana Sutta of Sanyuktha Nikaya, King of God Sakka came to the Buddha and asked Gods and men always to plan to live without quarrelling and fighting each other. But they always tend to quarrel and fight. Buddha explained that two kinds of psychological reasons that are related to the generated conflict; 1) “Issa” that means envy, dislike, aversion, jealousy, and 2) “Maccariya” that means misery.

The concept of “Issa” defines as the dissatisfaction of other’s achievement of goals. Today, many people are very jealous of other’s improvement. “Maccariya” is unlike in sharing knowledge with others (Sakkapahna Sutta,Sanyutta Nikaya). When considering about reason for the war or conflicts craving and pride are the basic reasons. Buddha's advice to his followers eliminates pride from their lives. Many social conflicts, civil conflicts and armed conflicts arise due to bad leadership of the rulers. The Buddha’s teaching for the leaders is to take away from prejudices.

“Ababbo Candāgatimgantum, Dosa Agatimgantum,Bhaya Agatimgantum, Moha Agatimgantum” means , Lotus, Hatred, Fear, Illusion. The leader should not be concerned with facts such as gender, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, and nationality when they are going to make decisions. They always should get right decisions without considering any other facts. Normally, in society, we can see powerful people who engage in the wrong business. They take political security and evade the law. Then normal people do not trust in court, police, and political leaders. Sometimes they get political power and do illegal things. In many countries, war arises due to the unreasonable treatment of other nations and religions. When one nation or religion takes more facilities based on their nation and religion and another puts away without giving any respect because of their nation or religion at the kind of occasion civil conflict arises.



## 4.2 Buddhist Perspective of Preventive Conflict

The prevention of conflict is the wish of all people. According to the present global issue is a conflict which the Buddha's teaching can provide suitable action for prevention of the conflict or war. Dhammapada mentioned that;

*“Nahi verani verani – sammanthida kudachanam  
Averenaca samnithi – esa dhamma sananthano”*

Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world but it is appeased only by loving-kindness that is an ancient law (Dhammapada, Yamaka waggaya, 05). Hatred is never appeased by hatred. Hatred is appeased by non-hatred. That is the Buddhist teaching about hatred. If all people practice this attitude, people will not have conflict with others. Buddha advises followers to practice “*samacariya*” harmonious behavior with others which leads to inner peace among the others. The Buddha's teaching is specially for preventing and stopping war and conflicts that occur inside of the human mind in society. What does the ascetic teach? What does he explain? (Kimvādisamano, kimakhāki' ti ). Asked by the King Dhandapali (Majjima Nikaya, Madhupindika sutta, 2006). This teaching is such that one does not have conflict with anyone in this world with its gods, Māras, and Brahmās, this population with its ascetics and brahmins, its gods and humans, and also it is such that perceptions do not underlie the Brahmin who lives detached from sensual pleasures, without doubting, stripped of worry, and rid of craving for rebirth in this or that state. In the Sāmagāma Sutta the Buddha speaks about seven ways to settle disputes: “Ananda, there are these seven kinds of settlement of litigation. For the settlement and pacification of litigations whenever they arise: removal of litigation by confrontation may be provided, removal of litigation on account of memory may be provided, removal of litigation on account of past insanity may be provided, the effecting of acknowledgment of an offense, the opinion of the majority, the pronouncement of bad character against someone, and covering over with grass” Rattapala Sutta – Majjima Nikaya Diga Nikaya Cakkawatti Sihanada Sutta And Kuta Data Sutta mention that conflict and war. According to this sutta, the major cause of the conflict or war is natural resources and material wealth; when people try to collect material wealth automatically competition between people or groups of people or countries arise. The completion gradually turns into a conflict. However, the Buddha advice to people is to think about the impermanence of material things. When people think about the impermanence of everything, they do not engage the any conflict. Dhammapada says that:

*“Yo sahasam sahasena – sangame manuse jine  
Ekanca jeyya attānam – sace sangamauttamo”*

The man who won himself from the craving is the greater winner than the one who won the thousands of war against the others (Dhammapada ,Sahassa Wagga,103.4). Buddha always advises people to search about themselves not about others. When people search for others, they tend to start to conflict with others. Buddha always advises people to search for themselves and eliminate weak points. Once the Buddha was under a tree and meditating. Suddenly, a group of princesses (Bhadda Waggiya) came to the Buddha and asked “bhanthe, did you see the women who ran from here.” Buddha preached to them to search themselves not about others (Vinaya Pitakaya 1 Mahakhandakaya, 2006), Further Dhammapada:

*“Naparesam vilomāni – naparesam katākatam  
Attanāwa awekkeyya - katani akatanica”*

“Do not think about what others have not done or done, think about what you did or did not do.” In normal life, people always think about the other 's responsibilities and duties which we have to do to others. It is also the reason for conflict. So, the Buddha advises people to identify their responsibilities and duties and do them properly (Dhammapada,Puppa wagga,50,7). In Buddhism, the advice to Buddhist followers is to spread loving kindness without hating their enemies. In the Kakacupama Sutta of Majjima Nikaya Buddha admires a monk who spreads loving kindness to thieves who cut his body parts and severely tortured him (Kakacupama Sutta - Majjima Nikaya ).

### **4.3 Buddhist Perspective of Conflict Resolution**

In order to permanently solve conflicts, Buddhism would suggest that these unwholesome states be uprooted through mindfulness of our habitual behavioral patterns (Vijitha, 2019). Buddha tried to solve conflicts both by inviting people to analyze their mind process and by using external means of conflict resolution such as arbitration, mediation, and discussion to reach a consensus (Mazza, 2021).

*“Jayamveram pasahathi, Dukkham sethi parājito”*

The winner gets the hatred from the others, the loser suffers due to his loss. Both parties of the war suffer in their mind. According to Buddhism through battle, no one wins. The Buddha emphasizes the importance of winning their mind from defilements. Buddhism is essentially a peaceful tradition; nothing in Buddhist scripture gives any support to the use of violence as a way to resolve conflict.

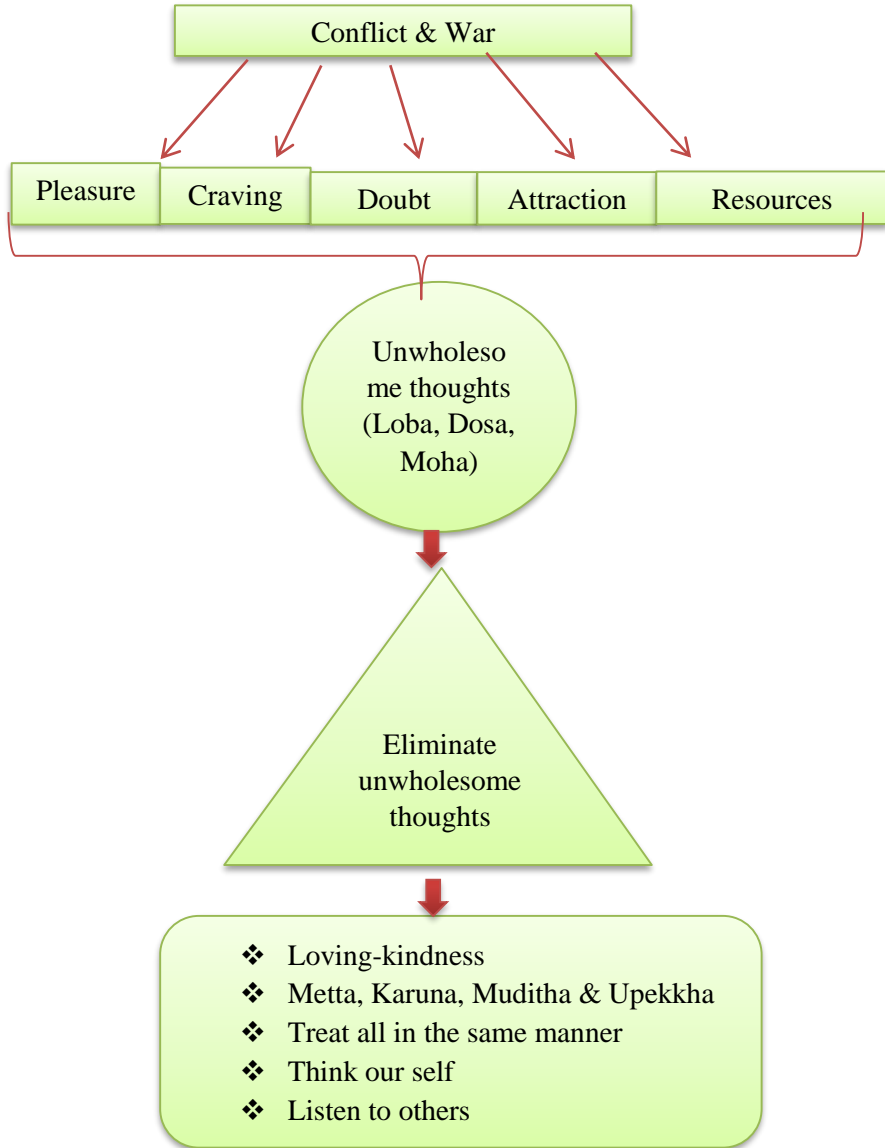
Buddha points out, I do not make conflict fight with others “Na Kenaci Loke Viggayha Tittati” (Majjimanikaya, Madhupindaka Sutta Majjima Nikaya B J T. 2006 P .275, 2006). This is a very philosophical idea. Buddhism spread throughout the world very peacefully. There is no bloodshed in the history of Buddhism compared to other religions (Rāhulavāda Sutta -Majjima Nikaya, 2006). “ Pacca Vekkhithwa Paccavekkithwa Kāyena Kammā Kātabbam, Pacca Vekkhithwa Paccavekkithwa Vācāya Dhammam Kātabbam, Pacca Vekkhithwa Paccavekkithwa Manasā Dhammam Kātabbam”. If a person or group of persons can protect their words, activities, and minds, there will never be conflict. So according to Buddhist teaching, we should protect the above three doors carefully. Then we have to eliminate the conflict in the world.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, conflict is a pervasive aspect of human existence, arising from differences in beliefs, needs, and values. It manifests in various forms, from individual and interpersonal conflicts to broader societal and international disputes. Buddhism offers valuable insights into conflict prevention and resolution by emphasizing inner peace, mindfulness, and the elimination of unwholesome mental states. The key principles include practicing loving-kindness, understanding impermanence, and focusing on one's responsibilities rather than others. Buddhism promotes non-violence and encourages individuals and societies to seek harmony and consensus through peaceful means, ultimately aiming for the cessation of conflict and the cultivation of inner and outer peace. In addition, the researcher has recommended a Diagram which is “The Diagram of Conflict Process of Buddhism”. This diagram will help to easily understand the proses of conflict, the cause of conflict, and how it can be solved according to the Buddhist teaching of conflict and resolutions of the conflict.

Based on the above discussion, Figure I presented how to understand conflict processes, causes, and resolutions according to Buddhist teachings.

**Figure 01: Understanding conflict processes, causes, and resolutions according to Buddhist teachings.**



## 6. Limitations and Further Research

While numerous religious doctrines offer teachings on peace and conflict resolution, current research predominantly leans towards leveraging Buddhist principles for conflict resolution. The focus is primarily on delving into the Pali Canon to unearth resolutions related to conflict. Researchers identify key areas for future exploration in conflict resolution, including how various religious teachings address conflicts, the diverse peace messages within religions, the commodification of religious practices on a global scale, the burgeoning religious tourism industry, and the potential integration of artificial intelligence in conflict resolution.

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