

THE SYNERGY OF SHARED RELIGIOUS ETHICS MORALITY AND VIRTUE FOR SOCIAL HEALING IN SRI LANKA*

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Abstract

Sri Lanka is a pluralistic society with identifications of multiple ethnicities and religions. Exploring the cause of the ethnic conflicts in Sri Lankan religion has been a seed for this presenting disharmony. This is not adequate for an ideology, in action, this has led to a thirty-year civil war and conflict between minorities. Therefore, the reconciliation process of Sri Lanka's religion plays a major role. Sri Lanka's community is representing the major religions faith of Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, and Islam. The teachings of each religious tradition represent several distinct features, but examining the teachings related to the ethics, morals, and virtue of each religious tradition presents a similarity of teachings. Considering this significance, this study has formulated a shared value framework based on the ethical teachings of Sri Lankan religious traditions of Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. The foundation of this framework was free will and the second layer was formulated with the common values of each religion which contributed towards peace and harmony. In the final stage, the individual is empowered to utilize the shared values of religion for reconciliation as their religious virtue. This framework reaches individuals with peace education and later it can be implemented in society. Thus, religion has a greater influence on the formation of individual personality, through this approach the individuals in Sri Lanka are able to reform their personalities to tolerate the diversity of their society within a viewpoint of the shared religious values system in Sri Lanka's major religious doctrines

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Introduction

Contemporary, religion plays a significant role in the social reconciliation in any nation. In many societies misidentification of their and others' religious identities has been influenced by discrimination, intolerance violence, and even racism. Empowering the values and role of religions is making a greater contribution towards reforming peace and reconciliation and disappearing conflicts of the diversity of any nation (Keddie et.al, 2019). Throughout the entire civilization, religion has made a significant contribution towards shaping human life with a positive outlook both in personal and social dimensions. While examining the teachings of the major religious philosophies and social applications of the religions, it has shared positive teachings and ideologies regarding the positive existence of the individual and society. However, during the Contemporary period due to the influence of cultural, social political, and technological factors the role of religion has been completely transformed into extremism and led to numerous conflicts in society (Ahmed, 2020).

This transformation of religions has been influenced by the shaping of the personality of the individual in the community. Since the individual personality development process occurs from childhood and under social development, the growth of morality is an essential task. The nature of the moral development of the individual from childhood and adolescence may shape peaceful social living and empower them to become free from conflicts (Carr, 2006). The essential psychological abilities for social harmonies, such as satisfaction, tolerance, violence, social values, ethical judgments, personal control, and self-actualization are developed within the religion. These abilities developed in the individual through religion significantly contribute to the development of social harmony (Delle et.al, 2022). Under the above-illustrated child development of social and moral developmental tasks, religion is playing a significant role in the present era. As highlighted by the literature, the growth of morality commenced from the pre-conventional development of the child or before the age of nine. During this period based upon the parental or family religiosity majorly affects towards development of the morality of the individual. The personality formatted with religion shapes the child's feelings, attitudes, decision-making, relationships, and behavior. Later, religious education will transform this nature more dynamically (Hardy

et.al, 2019). Therefore, according present transformation of religions, the moral growth of the individual has been influenced by the both positive and negative values of the respective religions.

Sri Lanka is a land of representation of multiple ethnicities and religions. The diverse community of Sri Lanka represents the religious doctrines of the Buddhist, Hindu Catholic, Islam, and other minorities. This ethnic and race-oriented religious identity in the Sri Lankan community has transformed the individual personality according to the above-illustrated framework. This religion-oriented faith and identity is been one dimension of each personality and the negative consequence was this faith and identity has formulated individual respect towards diversity in a more pathological manner and leads towards making conflicts with the other religious communities in Sri Lanka (Grant, 2009). As scholars highlighted this religious identity-oriented social and ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka has been emerged during the British colonial period due to the conflicts of the misidentification of the religious and cultural identities and sovereignty. This has not been adequate for ideologies within the actions of violence and discrimination have brought this into real society (Perera, 2001). The consequence of these paradigms was the propagation of the thirty years of the civil war and discrimination towards minorities. Exploring the cause of such circumstances has been highlighted by scholars as the negative interpretation of teachings and values of the religions has led the majority of Sri Lankans to discrimination and violence (Grant, 2009).

However, exploring the teachings of the major religious traditions that exist in Sri Lanka is, provides more values, ethics morals, and virtues related to making human life more prosperous and promoting social harmony in a more humanistic approach rather than the follower's misidentifications and misinterpretation of the pathological version of the religions (Chilufya et.al, 2020). Another significant feature is the compassion of the mentioned teachings of morality, ethics, and virtue are present in a similar nature (Coward, 2003). Empowering the potential of religion towards social reconciliation makes a greater contribution in many dimensions, such as motivating religious beliefs, adopting the prescribed harmonious lifestyle in the religions, engaging for social reconciliation with religious work, and intellectually facilitating social healing (Glazier, 2018). Further, the

cultivation of religious values within individuals in the personality development process can effective the reconciliation process, because individuals are more oriented towards accepting and valuing the religious teachings rather than the other mediums of the reconciliation (Auerbach, 2014). Therefore, considering this significant feature in the Sri Lankan major religions and utilizing this outcome towards social healing in Sri Lanka in a framework of shared religious ethics, morals, and virtue, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- To evaluate the teachings related to ethics, morality, and virtue in the major religious practices and cultures in Sri Lanka
- To recognize the potentiality of the religion-oriented shared ethics and value system for social reconciliation
- To adapt the Sri Lanka religious teachings on ethics, morality, and virtue for the shared value system
- To evaluate the contribution of the shared value system which is formulated on Sri Lankan religious teachings for social healing in Sri Lanka

This exploration is majorly focused on evaluating the teachings of ethics, morals, and virtue in the major religious traditions in Sri Lanka and recognizing the common nature of those teachings. Then, the study evaluated the contribution of the shared religious value system to social reconciliations. Combining these two approaches, this study has evaluated the potential of converting Sri Lankan major religious teachings of ethical, moral, and virtue into a shared value system and its benefaction towards social reconciliation or social healing in the Sri Lankan context. Inculcation of this approach to the Sri Lankan context will have a greater influence on developing the individual outlook more empathetically both internally and externally while respecting all religions. Therefore, within the individual, the ideology will formulated that all the religious teachings discuss shared values rather than see other religious values and beliefs in a perceptive of discrimination and intolerance. The consequence is under social reconciliation individual behavior will be formatted in a more peaceful and accepting manner with the promise of making heal Sri Lankan society towards conflict-free harmonious unity within the synergy of the Sri Lankan religious-based shared value framework of Sri Lankan religions.

Methodology

This study is qualitative and depends upon the literature review the study has formulated. The primary data acquisition was done through the examination of the literature related to the major religious texts of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Secondary data was collected through scholarly materials which are aligned with the objectives of the study. The collected data from the sources has been analyzed according to the objectives of the study with the use of analysis methods of the content and thematic analysis. Under the discussion the finding is presented with four themes according to the objectives of the study, those four themes namely, Teachings of ethics morality, and virtue in Sri Lankan Religions, the Potential of religion-oriented shared values and ethical system for social reconciliation, The potential of the Sri Lankan religious ethics and morals in shared value framework, and Contribution of the shared religious values and ethics for social healing in Sri Lanka.

Result and Discussion

Sri Lanka is a community representation of dynamic religions and faiths. The cultivation of morality is a major task of religion and all the major religions in Sri Lanka have significantly illustrated the teachings related to ethics, morality, and virtue. All these teachings highlight a shared value system regarding the development of a positive outlook on human nature. This positively contributes to the social healing of any community and the specific interpretation related to the Sri Lankan perspective has been elaborated under the following headings:

Teachings of ethics morality and virtue in Sri Lankan Religions

Sri Lanka is a nation that, represents the diverse belief and faith. The ethnic identity of Sri Lankan communities has been a relative follower of the religions of Theravada Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, and Islam (Caldarola, 2011). Culturally, it may represent the diversity of faith and enrollment, but as a life philosophy individual and communities accept the major teachings of their religion. The teachings of Buddhism regarding moral secularity instruct individuals to live with qualities of loving kindness (*metta*), sympathy (*muditha*), compassion (*karuna*), and equanimity (*upekha*). These virtues direct individuals towards developing more positive emotions and

behaviors within individual sustainability of the social value (Whitehill, 2000). Considering, the diversity of human nature, in the *Vasala Sutta*, Buddha has emphasized that no one becomes higher or lower regarding birth, caste, or social status. Depend upon the actions performed by the individual may lead to the divine or the evil nature. Through these teachings, Buddhism has stressed that being free from discrimination is a virtue (Narada, 2017).

Further, Buddhist teachings have promoted the cultivation of the values or virtues of the dignity of life, equality, self-restraint, and self-fulfillment in a path of non-violence. According to these teachings, the individual has the potential to bring life into the higher values within their potential concerning themselves and others. Because as emphasized in the Buddhist society every individual in society is equal and leads to the prosperity of life only within a harmless path (Mun & Green, 2006). The Hindu religion has given the ethical movement with a devotional pathway directed towards god. Individual morals or virtues fulfill the betterment of the aesthetic (*kama*), economic (*artha*), and ethical social (*dharma*) spectrum. The ancient religious text of Hinduism prescribes individuals adopt the qualities of perfection (*nihisreyasa*), non-attachment (*nirvitti*), and achieve prosperity (*abhyudaya*) according to the right path and devotion (Mishra, 2013). Moreover, the yoga philosophy prescribes individuals eliminate the unethical behavior of non-violence (*ahimsa*), and non-stealing (*asteya*), and cultivate patience (*kshama*), compassion (*daya*), honesty (*arjava*), and endurance (*dhriti*) under the concept of yama. In niyama, it prescribes to promotion of the virtues of modesty (*hri*), contentment (*santosha*), charity (*dana*), and faith (*astikya*) within the inner to outer self (Seiberling, 2018).

In Christianity, religion performs morality as a sin or virtue that has been prescribed by god. Individuals need to adopt the qualities of faith, consequence of actions, empathy, compassion, and freedom of action, which have been prescribed for self-fulfillment (Curran, 1999). In addition, the Ten Commandments elaborated in Christianity highlighted that when a person is keeping faith in their divinity, such a person needs to be away from non-violence, respect the religions and all the beings associated, and away from stealing and killing and share the compassion within the all living beings (Williams, 2012). Quran the major religious textbook of the religions of Islam

has majorly inculcated the *birr* or the rightness in the individuality. According to this concept, the individual major focus is to fulfill rightness by adapting the qualities of humanistic values, interfaith, interpersonal relationships, and non-violence. Further, this has been highlighted as the inner morality of the individual (Fazaluddin, 2022). Under the teachings of Islamic virtue individuals towards the development of the qualities of kindness and gentleness in social aspects. This may lead Individuals to the establishment of positive social interaction with the qualities of compassion, and responsibility covering all the values of humanity (Al-Kaysi, 2015). According to the ethical teachings of each religion, it is mentioned that to perform these morals and ethical judgments free will is essential or without proper orientation of free will individual can't perform such virtue. Therefore, commonly all religions have established this code of ethics and virtue based on the moral principle of free will or self-choice (Benett, 2023)

The potential of religion-oriented shared value and ethical system for social reconciliation

Morality ethics or virtue is the judgment of the right and wrong behavior or performing the prescribed good behavior for the betterment. Contemporary the major challenge represents is the dynamic nature of morality or virtue (Turiel, 2002). Depending upon the cultural and social needs virtue and morality may be dynamic. At present, to deal with such conditions, the ideology of shared values and ethics. This system of ethics can be recognized as collective morality or virtue which represents the essence or potential of all ethical values applicable to any cultural or social context (Bok, 2002). Scholars have explored that, individual potential or ability towards the sustained commonly shared values or virtue positively influences the social reconciliation of any society. The distinction between negative and positive peace lies in the faith and beliefs of the respective society (Philpot & Powers, 2010). Applying such a value system with a synthesis of the religion is making a greater contribution toward the development of a shared value system and positive social reconciliation. Many of evidence has shown that meditation of religion can make a significant contribution towards social reconciliation. For example, during the period of 2012, the reconciliation process in the Sudan religion played a significant role.

Further, during the reconciliation in countries like South Africa, Bosnia and Herzegovina, religion has made a positive contribution (Steele et.al, 2023; Shore, 2008; Wettach, 2008). Exploring the role of religion within its framework of values influences people's thinking, acting, and motivating and building relationships with the inner self and outer world. Collectively formulating all the major religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam illustrated their values in a humanistic perspective within the qualities of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect and shared responsibility non-violence, and non-discrimination (Donovan, 1986). Therefore, establishing this shared faith in all religions and strengthening the positive aspects of religion may lead to uniting the religious groups into one community within the tolerance to live in harmony and the peaceful behavior of individuals can be indicated as a sacred virtue and duty.

Under the peace and social reconciliation process empowering the shared values of the religion can be utilized as a source of peace-making and individual peaceful behavior can be motivated by the religion and develop the sharing the harmony and compassion with all individuals in the respective society as a sacred priority (Kollontai, 2016). Bringing this potential of shared values of the religion into the pragmatic level of social reconciliation, contemporary peace education has represented a major role. Throughout the peace education process, cultivating the commonly applicable and shared values of the religion within the individuals contributes to the development of the individual orientation toward preventing social conflicts within minorities or the unprivileged due to the religious acceptance of compassion and tolerance. Further, with the promotion of this commonly agreeable ethical practice individuals move towards recognition and acceptance of the diversity in multicultural thinking and insight (Cairns & Salomon, 2011). Therefore, contemporary humans have transformed as global citizens, and acknowledging the diversity of society can be fulfilled through a common agreeable moral system and accepting a shared value system may enrich these needs and direct them towards a more acceptable peaceful society.

The potential of the Sri Lankan religious ethics and morals in shared value framework

Sri Lanka is a pluralistic society with a presentation of multiple ethnicities and religions. It has given recognition of the four major religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, and Islam inhabited to the Sinhalese, Tamil, Catholic, Islam, and other minorities. From the post-colonial period of Sri Lanka, the intolerance towards the diversity of religions and ethnicities has been directed towards Sri Lankan society towards the violence and extremism with both majority and minority. In the Sri Lankan context, religion has been a cause of inter-communal conflicts for centuries. Individual personalities in Sri Lanka are majorly shaped by the religious experience they have and the existing religions in Sri Lanka play a major role in the social values of the community of Sri Lanka (Harris, 2018).

However, considering the philosophical perspectives of the respective religions, the existing religious traditions have shared their teachings related to ethics, morals, and virtue within the non-violence and empathetic foundation representing similarities in the teachings. Therefore, scholars who have explored ethical teachings have highlighted this significance as the teachings of the above religion have been given the recognition for the human potential of cultivating morality or virtue and indicate that individuals are directed towards positive living in their secular living. Whether the religious belief system is theistic or atheistic this has been the common theme (Baumeister, 2010). Therefore, in a comparative nature looking into the above-highlighted virtue in Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam can be recognized in a common nature and within a framework of the shared values system. All the religious traditions majorly highlighted the individual psychological potential of free will and indicated that the individual is not a victim of any circumstance. This virtue has empowered the individual to perform without any influence, which means the individual has his or her responsibility to be non-violenced and make non-harmful actions for the peace in their community (Kane, 2011). Then, each religious tradition have highlighted the positive values individuals cultivate within him or herself and shared the community. All the religious traditions commonly have prescribed such values as compassion, kindness sympathy, and loving kindness. Further, the Buddhist teachings have demotivated the discrimination and instructed

them to share compassion in society (Sujatho, 2021). In comparison to this other theistic religions have a direct individual to perform their duty ethics for the social empowerment as a service or *seva* towards the god. As evidence teachings of the Bhagavad Gita in Hinduism prescribe selfless service to society and Christian and Islamic teachings also prescribe away from evil action and perform divine duties for the betterment of the community (Debroy, 2005; Mathewes, 2010). Moreover, the fundamental texts of each religion have elaborated the positive values of tolerance, injustice, compassion, faith, and other norms and values governed by the religion (Shehu, 2009). Bring the philosophical teachings into one framework work its significantly can be recognized that the ethics, morals, and virtue that have been highlighted in each tradition are common and similar in nature. Therefore, all these teachings can be collectively formulated into the shared value system with the potential of utilizing this framework towards the cultivation of moral values towards social healing and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

Contribution of the shared religious values and ethics for social healing in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has suffered from thirty years of civil war due to the unacceptance and recognition of the social cultural and religious diversity. Later, conflicts with minorities have led both the majority and minority of Sri Lanka towards violence and racism. One of the causes for all these violent acts was misidentifications of the values of their religions and other religions (Holt, 2016). Therefore, building social reconciliation establishing peace in Sri Lanka, and healing the wounds of the conflicts in the religions of Sri Lanka is essential (Pannilage, 2015). In addition, sociological perspective the dilemma related to reconciliation is the significant diversity of cultural religion and ethnicity (Fernando, 2019). To address these challenges and heal the society of Sri Lanka individual perceptive and reactions to diversity need to be positive in the interaction of the morals and virtues of their respective religion. Therefore, a commonly formulated religion-based shared value system is effective in fulfilling this need. Since, Sri Lankan has a closer relationship with their religion in their socialization process (Frestad, 2009). According to the above-highlighted religious teachings in the Sri Lankan major religions is a similarity between ethics, morals, and virtue. Based on those a framework related to the shared values of Sri Lanka can be formulated as follows:

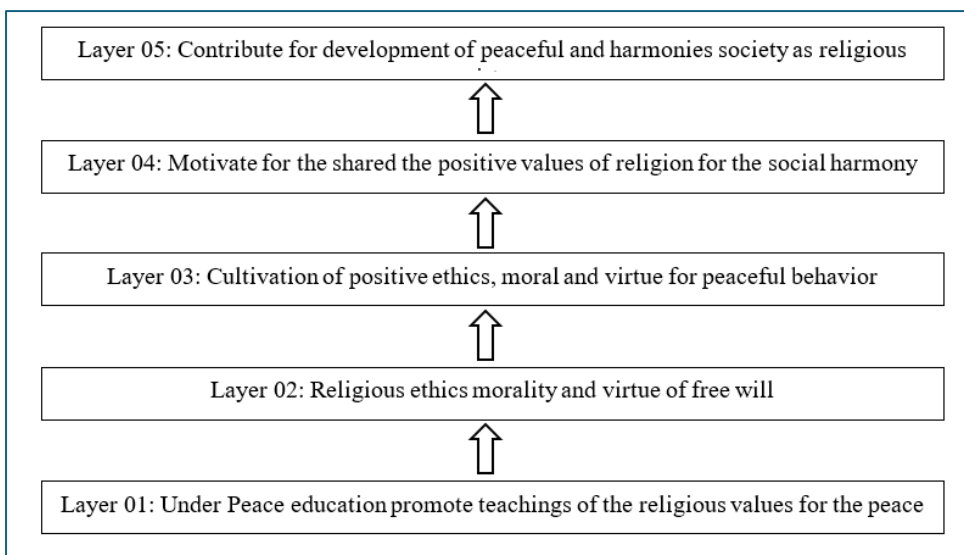


Figure 1: The shared value framework of Sri Lanka for the reconciliation
Source: Author Created.

In Sri Lanka, one of the instruments utilized for reconciliation was peace education. Throughout the establishment of peace education, several educational approaches have been utilized timely (Cardozo, 2008). However, considering the pluralism society in Sri Lanka it has provided less attention to implementing a shared values framework for the fulfillment of the purpose of social reconciliation and healing (Lee, 2013). Considering this limitation the above-mentioned shared value system will be effective in the social reconciliation process of Sri Lanka. According to the above diagram, the possible way to establish the promotion of the shared value framework of religion is peace education. Then, need to develop free will according to the respective religious tradition and promote the common value of religion. The consequence of this process is the individual will develop free will according to their religious faith and see that humanistic values have been highlighted in all religions commonly. Final phase individuals need to be motivated to share harmony and compassion within themselves and others in the community as a religious virtue and responsibility according to the above shared religious value framework. First, this can be formulated among the children and later can be shared among the community. The utility of religion in peace and reconciliation has been highlighted by several real cases. For example during the reconciliation process of countries such as Kenya, Philippines, and

Colombia intervention of religion has provided positive outcomes (Omer, 2020; Bowler, 2014). Therefore, through the above-shared value system of religion the reconciliation process enables the humanistic values of empathy, compassion, faith, and unity within free according to their religious faith and the consequence was the closer association with religion in the Sri Lankan community will lead to give recognition for their religious values and build the harmony and peace in Sri Lankan society as a religious prescription (Cox, 2007).

Conclusion

Sri Lanka is a pluralistic society with representations of diverse ethnicities and religions. Centuries back, the lack of identification in the ethnic and religious diversities in the Sri Lankan community several conflicts may occurred. Later, this has led to an extremism and racism between the majorities and minorities. The cause of these negative movements in Sri Lanka, the role of religion has been significantly influenced. Considering these incidents there is a serious need to heal the wounds of the communities in Sri Lanka through reconciliation. Evaluating the several approaches that are utilized for reconciliation in the contemporary period shared religious values have been an effective way for the reconciliation. Several countries have achieved the prosperity of social reconciliation through the utility of religion. Adapting this potential in the Sri Lankan community is making a greater significant effort. The Sri Lankan community gives high value to their rigorous faith and formulating the shared religious values in Sri Lankan led individuals in Sri Lanka towards a peaceful nation. Evaluating the major religions in Sri Lanka, the teachings of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam have indicated many positive teachings related to ethics, morals, and virtue and all these teachings highlighted positive values for establishment of the peace and harmony in a humanistic perspective. Then, the unique feature of all ethical teachings of each religion was the teachings related to ethics, morals, and virtue shared common values. All these common values can be concluded in one framework. Further, these values have a high potential for the promotion of peace within individual and social interaction. Implementing this in the Sri Lankan context can be employed with peace education. During this process, there is a high potential to shape the individual personality and moral development with the shared values of all religions and can promote the

adoption of the peaceful behaviors of non-discrimination and tolerance as a religious virtue. Later, this can be promoted in the community. Thus, establishing a religious-based shared value system in Sri Lanka will contribute to social healing in Sri Lanka, through the above-mentioned approach individuals will adopt the potential of free will according to their religion and cultivate the shared values in all the religions, and will lead to the promote the tolerance towards the diversity of Sri Lankan community and utilize the religious values in the Sri Lankan community for a better society free from the violence and racism. Future studies have the potential to implement and evaluate the efficacy of the above framework for establishment of the social reconciliation in the Sri Lankan context.

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