Understanding “the Others”: Buddhist-Islamic Dialogue for Peace with Particular Reference to Moderation: Article Review
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ABSTRACT
UNDERSTANDING “THE OTHERS”: BUDDHIST-ISLAMIC DIALOGUE FOR PEACE WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ‘MODERATION’ is a scholarly journal article which focuses on the similarities between Islam and Buddhism in religious dimension. However, to present this theme the authors unfortunately engrossed into some irrelevant points which the reviewer tried to rectify in this article review.

The article titled “UNDERSTANDING “THE OTHERS”: BUDDHIST-ISLAMIC DIALOGUE FOR PEACE WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO ‘MODERATION’” by Golam Dastagir and Mohammad Ismath Ramzy that published in the Journal “Al-Shajarah”, vol.24, No.1, 2019, pages 25-47 deserves to be considered an excellent one in its genre, no doubt this is a highly scholarly work and very informative to the area of encounter between Buddhism and Islam and a presentation of well-structured argumentations where the authors directed attention to not only the similarities between Islam and Buddhism in religious dimension but also, –to the surprise of many ones perhaps–, to the fact that Buddha was a messenger of Islam too whom Prophet of Islam Muhammad (pbuh) succeeded. In this article the authors arranged the historical points of view so nicely that show that Buddha is not a personal name as the Prophet is not a personal name too; and it is well-known that these two names always have been venerated with high esteem and respect by their followers.

The main concern of this paper is that in both Buddhism and Islam there are enormous elements, principles and common grounds that draw each other closer, seek their friendship and harmony, the lion’s share of both religions is replete of similarities and commonalities, not only in scriptures but rather in their practices too –like love, humility, justice, truth, honesty and sincerity which are cardinal common values found in both religion–, and practically we find Ummah and Sangha, two different words of Islam and Buddhism respectively meaning the same–community–, similarly we say Sawm and they say Upasotha for the same meaning of fasting, and Islam’s Hijab is for the same purpose that Buddhist’s Kasaya came forth, and so on.

Unfortunately, despite having all these commonalities in these two religions violent conflicts are also committed by both Buddhists and Muslims against each other in the name of religion in the South Asian region, particularly in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh as newspapers and other print and electronic media bear myriad of witnesses which is against every norm of the respective religions. Taking into account all these incidents and violent conflicts the authors, –to curb them– are suggesting an important characteristic –which is one of the fundamental commonalities of both Buddhism and Islam – Majhima Patipada in Buddhism and al-Wasatiyyah in Islam –both meaning the moderation, as the remedy.

Since there is common ground between these two faiths, so, it is an imperative for scholars, researchers, academics and religious leaders of both religions to promote peace and harmony engaging in meaningful interreligious dialogues based on the principles of faith, core beliefs, religious laws, truths and ideals that provide guidelines for human action.
If Buddhists and Muslims adopt *Majjhima Patipada* and *al-Wasatiyyah* respectively in their everyday life, religious extremism and violent conflict will diminish for sure if not completely rooted out at least.

However, as a Bangladeshi born and raised in Bangladesh, I have one observation about one point mentioned in this paper, page number 27, where the authors pointed out about Ramu tragedy in Bangladesh that took place on 29th September 2012 when Muslim youths attacked the Buddhist community in Ramu, a small town in the district of Cox’s Bazar of Chittagong division, setting fire to more than fifty houses and damaging as many as eighteen Buddhist temples. No doubt this incident, a heinous act, pushed back the reputation of religious harmony—an innate characteristic of Bangladeshi people—at stake. They mentioned “Investigations show that they were engaged in such detestable communal violence because of the Buddhist persecution of Muslims in Myanmar and Sri Lanka in recent years, which triggered their anger”—this is the point of disagreement because this is actually far apart from the actual fact; It is really surprising that a man of letters like Golam Dastagir—a Bangladeshi too—is not aware of what every Bangladeshi knows; the cause he described here for the Ramu tragedy is totally against the factual phenomenon.

In the current world, Dr. Sheikh Hasina is merely a well-known figure who is ruling the country, Bangladesh, with an iron hand for more than a decade establishing herself as a very powerful dictator and who is second to none in manipulation, no institution or organization is left un-manipulated with her charismatic (!) leadership, so, nothing happens there without her nodding, let alone the investigation. No one can escape her wrath if wishes to go against her will, or tries to disobey her instruction, 21st Chief Justice of Bangladesh Surendra Kumar Sinha is the best example of her scapegoat who resigned in November 2017 and was bound to flee from the country because of not having been loyal to Dr. Sheikh Hasina’s immoral instruction. So, almost every investigation during her dictatorship is generally considered nothing but merely an eye wash.

In the said investigation mentioned in the paper, it was so because she tried to defend the image of her party men, Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) who were engaged in that heinous acts of Ramu tragedy which was in counter of and to divert the public attention from the misdeeds they committed before; and now it has become a common norm of the BAL government to stage a more grievous occurrence to shroud an earlier gruesome one, committed by themselves.

In her long dictatorship dissenting opinions are not tolerated at all, crackdown comes with an iron fist immediately after a mere pretense of dissent, opponents are put in jail massively simply for antagonism or even for no reason; Khaleda Zia, the three times Prime Minister of Bangladesh even not spared from her oppressing hand who is biting the dust in Dr. Sheikh Hasina’s prison. So, why the culprits accused in the Ramu tragedy are not facing any trial yet, after seven long years? Here lies the clue who were behind the scene of Ramu attack, the hand of law cannot reach them simply because they are affiliated with BAL.

So, firmly I am of the opinion that Ramu tragedy took place by the unruly men of the BAL to gain their political end, not by the common men; people of Ramu and the people of Bangladesh in general, are not communal as portrayed in this paper, albeit they are religious, not fanatics.

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