ABSTRACT

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING: A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

According to David Barrett et al, editors of the "World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions - AD 30 to 2200," there are nineteen major world religions which are subdivided into a total of two hundred and seventy large religious groups and many smaller ones. Thirty four thousand separate Christian groups have been identified worldwide. These religions and faith groups teach very different belief systems. This naturally raises a question that where religious truth is to be found. Many people regard their own denomination or faith group within their own religion to possess total religious truth; other denominations are seen to exhibit some error; other religions are often considered to be in serious error and are sometimes viewed as in opposition to the truth.

The present study has been completed in seven chapters including Introduction and Conclusion. The very first chapter introduces the topic and methodology adopted by the scholar in doing this work. It also briefly delineates some of the teachings of Lord Buddha which are still relevant and appropriately addresses the modern day problems of humanity.

The second chapter titled “Paradigm of Inter-religious Relations” discusses the most common methods of viewing other religious denominations. These are Inclusivism, Exclusivism and Pluralism.

The proceeding three chapters, i.e., chapters three, four and five elaborately discuss the Buddhist perspective on Inclusivism, Exclusivism and Pluralism respectively. Here it would be suffice to quote some specific examples from the teachings of the Buddha which appropriately represent the above mentioned paradigm of viewing other religious denominations.

The sixth chapter “Interfaith/Inter-Religious Dialogue in Buddhist Perspective” discusses in detail the Buddhist way of dialogue and its relevance. The word ‘dialogue’

---

consists of two terms ‘dia’ and ‘logue’. ‘Dia’ means ‘two’ and ‘logue’ is derived from the Greek – ‘logos’ (Latin ‘logus’), meaning "a (specified kind of) speaking or writing"\(^2\). Thus the word ‘Dialogue’ means two way communications or communication between two persons or party, i.e., speaker to listener to speaker. Dialogue involves a face-to-face conversation in which all the participants listen patiently to those with different religious backgrounds and personal convictions and present a picture of their own religious community and their own faith in terms that the other participants might be able to understand and appreciate. Dialogue will obviously be easier if the participants already have some knowledge of the other religious community before they meet, which in practice is not always the case. Ideally, the conversation should lead to a fuller and deeper understanding, but with dialogue as well as with understanding we would do well to be modest and realistic in our expectations. Both may try to overcome previous misunderstandings and disagreements. Both seek in different ways to increase knowledge and understanding, but they do not have to reach agreement on the most important differences.

The last chapter, ‘Conclusion’ presents a summary of the work done in the previous chapters of the thesis. It also discusses Lord Buddha's teachings on inter-religious understanding in order to address the problems like: How to defuse interfaith conflict? How to overcome differences in theology and belief? How to get religious literalists and liberals to co-operative? How to distinguish a religion from cult? How to deal with current political and social crises? Etc.

The present work analyzes and expresses the theme in the fittest way that a modern reader requires to know and comprehend. It is mainly based on the Buddhist literatures along with their respective translation in English. Other available texts on inter-religious understanding in English language have also been utilized so as to make the work more copious and comprehensive.

In carrying out the work, sincere efforts have been made to follow various methods of Social Science research such as Historical method, Analytical method, and Comparative method. The study is fully documented from the original sources as the

humble researcher proposes to derive his ideas from the Buddhist Scripture and other related sources.

The present study is not an empirical study. It is not intended to provide a shortcut solution of all religious conflicts of the world. This is, of course, a humble attempt to analyze and understand what the Buddhists texts say on the question of Inter-religious relations and how a true Buddhists should behave in the pluralistic situation of the modern times. The study presents interpretation and explanation of the Buddha’s sayings uttered twenty six centuries ago. It is obvious that while interpreting and explaining some theories heavily depend upon the person who does it. In more clear terms it means that the interpreter’s upbringing, educational background, the values, philosophical thinking, worldview so on and so forth partly or fully have an influence on his interpretation. The result of this is that two persons give different interpretations to the same issue. They may or may not be conscious of it. In the present work all efforts have been made to avoid the personal prejudices while explaining the various themes. However, it may be confessed here that being a common man (Pali, Puthujjana) one may find inaccuracy in this work.