

War and death: A critical study with reference to Buddhism

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Abstract

The minds and the converse of men turn towards deferent areas according to the incidents which happen in certain times in the society. As we know, in the 18th may in 2009, ferocious war was won and saved the country from the L.T.T.E (enemies) by the Sri Lankan armed force. Hence the converse of the war was reduced with the death of Prabakaran. In that war, numerous enemies were also killed. That is a homicide. Therefore the talking about war is not finished totally yet. Because recently after ten years, few suicides blasted big bombs in the difference places in Sri Lanka. Specially, people are talking of invisible side of the war as homicide. So it cannot be thought that talking about war will be finished recently Because of intelligent Buddhists who are in Sri Lanka. Though we killed the enemies with leadership and won the war, most of the Buddhists ask questions who are the respondents to deaths and other victims, happened in the war with reference to the Buddhism. Are they demerits, if so, who did those demerits and who will be got sin in it etc. Actually that is a very controversial question. So we have to think and solve that puzzle with reasons with reference to the Buddha's teaching (Buddhism). I hope to clarify it with reference to the Buddhism under the topic which I have mentioned above.

Keywords: Buddhism, enemies, respondent, way

1. Introduction

In the face of various events taking place at different times peoples' mind and talks are inevitable drawn towards those directions. We all are aware that in the after-math of the death of the notorious man-killer Velupillai Prabhakaran on 18th May we have missed something in our gossips about the war. But talking about in visible happenings resulting from the war and their side-effects has not stopped and not likely to come to an end immediately. Recently I had to confront with such a discussion ensuing with a question. That was when I met one of my uncles, who was once a vice principal of a school. He posed this question.

"In the war, security forces attacked and destroyed the enemies. Have Military Forces committed the sin of killing?"

While discussing this matter to some extent, I felt that this was a complicated question. Therefore I thought of writing this type of article with a view to broaden the insight of the entire community. Lord Buddha has preached his doctrine to cover every aspect of human life and every section of social structure. Several Suttas preached by him testify to the effect that his teachings covered all sections such as economic, political, social matters etc. Among his teachings cakkavattisihanāda Sutta, Kū Tadantha Sutta and Aggañña Sutta are the most significant. These SuttAs have dealt with the origin of government, how the government should conduct administration, how the various problems arise and how handle them. One important feature seen on perusal of these SuttAs is the advice that the ruler should protect his subjects at any cost. There is no indication regarding the damages or destruction caused in the process of protecting the subjects. In Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta, He has pointed out that the ruler must be righteous and provide security to lives ^[1]. He does not go beyond this point. There is no

indication in these Suttas as to how to face a fatal rebellion, and whether such steps constitute sins, and if so what steps should be taken. His teachings are only that the ruler should govern the country righteously some way or other. There is no indication as to what should be done if the righteous government finds it impossible to do it. Therefore it follows that it is left for the ruler to decide or that it is left for the ruler to decide on action to be taken in such events. He frequently gave advice but refrained from unnecessary intervention, because the teachings of the Buddha have a different aim wide apart from the state functions of a ruler. A person basic aim should be proceeding on the path to Nibbāna which needs some emphasis, but this does not mean that state functions are less important.

India was a large mass of land consisting of sixteen states and there were wars between states due to various causes. Details of victories and defeats are recorded in history. In the time of Buddha King Ajāsatta of Maghada kingdom was preparing to annex in the State of Vajji and the Kosala State was conquered in a war. In such instances the Buddha's teachings were "*Jayam veram Pasavati*" ^[2] meaning victory begets enemies, and "*Sabbe tasanti da B Dassa*" ^[3] Meaning all dread punishment. Such words consoled them. Sakya-Koliya war ended on the advice of the Buddha. In one instance when the gods defeated by Asur As (The enemies of the gods) fleeing through the Simbali Forest their chariots his the trees and consequently nestlings of super Ba birds started falling into the sea from tree-tops and were being destroyed. When the army of gods saw this destruction, they stopped fleeing and started coming back to the place occupied by the enemy ^[4]. In another instance, when the chief of Asura Vepacitti held as a war prisoner after the defeat of AsurAs (The enemies of the gods) scolded Sakka the king of gods using harsh words, but Sakka remained silent and calm. When his charioteer Matali (The driver of the king of the gods) asked him why he was silent and patient

when being scolded he replied that he had the personal courage to be patient when being scolded by a fool. This shows that the on-going wars and imminent wars of that time were not so complicated as in the present day. It is seen that they have acted with a good understanding of what is good and what is bad and had been amenable to the advice of elders, but in the present day the situation is far different. The extremist groups of the present day have no regard to the concepts of what is good and what is bad and even do not respect the International laws on wars. Thus it is clear on which direction, the nature of wars in certain countries of the world may develop. In Sri Lanka too, war that existed till recently was one such war. The present day world does not appear to have a society with a mentality sufficiently developed to digest and apply the principles and courses of action recommended by the Buddha at times of on-going and imminent wars of that period. The present day situation is such that the world is unable to apply those concepts.

The Buddhist Doctrine (Buddha's teachings) emphasises that if any loss of life is problem by any action of any person to achieve some end, what-so-ever, such action constitute a grave crime and should not to taken. Buddhism does not approve killing of human beings. When we speak of killing of human beings we refer to the killing of those who are born. But in Buddhism even destruction of life at the stage of embryo is a killing ^[5]. This clearly indicates that Buddhism has focused attention on life with a sharp eye. But we are aware that large scale loss of life is caused in present day wars. We shall try to find out what sort of sin befalls on whom and how.

The Buddhist Scriptures (the Thripitaka) do not define the sort of sin that befalls on whom and how in the context of the present day war situation. Therefore it has to be resolved on the basis of general teachings of the Buddha on what is good and what is bad, merit and demerit. The teachings of the Buddha and also in commentaries of well-versed, Theras clearly analyse what action ensue more merits and less merits, and how the effects of merits enhance. In the same way the Scriptures define how the consequence of demerits increase or decrease.

Merits and demerits function on ethics. The two basic ethics can be shown as what is good and what is bad. The term good may different from religion to religion, race to race and country to country. In certain religions killing of cattle is not an offence. In certain religions killing of human beings on certain grounds is allowed. But Buddhism does not approve such killings at all, as evident in Ahinsa Niggaha Issue of Milinda's Question ^[6] (Milinda Pañha). Buddhism emphasise that these matters should be viewed by drawing a similarity to one-self ^[7]. Maha Niddase Commentary points out that the demerit befallen by killing a bad person in less than that of killing a pious person ^[8]. Accordingly, the sin of killing a bigger animal is more than that of killing a small creature. Moreover, the state of repence fluctuates according to the size and value of the animal. The time, labour and device and anger involved in killing a bigger animal is more than that of killing a small animal. For example, if a cattle is killed in place of a man the sin accrued thereby would be less than that of killing a man. A greater sin befalls on committing the five extreme since (Pañcanantarya Actions) killing of mother, killing of father, slaying of Arahant, and shedding blood of the Buddha's body and causing split of Sangha ^[9]. Buddhism rejects taking of life, and some killings are more sinful than

others in consideration of the benefits achieved by the society from such respective lives.

In going through these considerations it is hardly necessary to stress that the terrorist is a great nuisance that causes evils to the entire country and the whole world at large. Thus it follows that the sins befallen on military persons in killing the terrorists in the interest of the sovereignty of the country and in the interest of majority people of the country should be less than that of killing a human being under normal circumstance. Even if a soldier kills a terrorist who lacks in human values and is a menace to the entire world the sinful effect will be low. On the other hand the soldier performs an act assigned to him by his commander and he is bound to carry-out it irrespective of whether he likes it or not.

It is true that it amounts to a killing, but the sin does not befalls on him as he carries out an order from his immediate superior who in turn acts on the orders of higher authorities. Finally all of them carry-out orders of the Commander-in-Chief who is the head of state, channelled through the Defence Secretary and the Army Commander. Thus the sin of killing done by a soldier would be shared by a series of authorities. The president and Commander-in chief are elected by the people.

That was the same even at the origin of Royal administration. The people elect the head of state with a mandate to control various corruptions and irregularities occurring in the country. Accordingly people expect to earn the right of living peace fully and in harmony without fear. In order to ensure that right the people elect the king or head of state with a mandate to grant that right. Therefore it is the responsibility of the ruler to grant that right. The sin accrued in killing in the course of action to grant that right will be shared by the people who elected the ruler, and therefore the sin accrued to the soldier will further decrease.

In going through this situation as a whole it will be seen that since the soldier kills an enemy who is an enemy to the people, to the country and to the entire world at large, the sinful effect that befalls on the soldier would be less than that of killing an innocent man. The soldier assumes that position on the instructions issued by a series of high-ups. Therefore the sin of taking life will be shared by all such authorities up to the head of state and also to the people who gave the mandate to the head of state. Thus it will be clear that the soldier who commits the sin of killing will get accrued only a small share of the sin.

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