

THE FACTORS DETRIMENTAL TO THE PEACE OF BUDDHISM IN CEYLON

By L. H. Mettananda

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To my mind, there are three principal factors detrimental to the peace of Buddhism in Ceylon. The first obstacle is the Christian Missionary movement. Ceylon is predominantly a Buddhist country. In spite of numerous influences to turn the people away from Buddhism, the vast majority of them even at the present day remain in the faith of their ancestors. Since the year 1505 Ceylon has been under European influence; first the Portuguese, secondly the Dutch and lastly the British.

The Buddhists suffered persecution at the hands of Roman Catholic Missionaries during the time of the Portuguese, who exercised every form of compulsion to convert the so-called 'heathen' into Christianity. The Dutch who came after the Portuguese were more tolerant; but nevertheless they propagated Protestantism by reserving all loaves and fishes of office to the members of their own faith. The British have been the most tolerant of all European rulers in Ceylon. There is freedom of worship under British rule.

But the danger to the peace of Buddhism creeps in a most surreptitious manner. This happens through the influence of the Christian missionaries in Ceylon. They assume the role of instructors in areas which are entirely inhabited by the Buddhists. They have ample funds at their disposal. They have the moral support of officials of their own persuasion. So they establish schools in Buddhist areas against the wishes of Buddhists. The Buddhists who inhabit these particular areas are too poor to run their own schools. Nor will the Government establish state schools when the Christian Missionaries have opened their schools, on the ground that they supply the educational needs of the locality. At last the Buddhists give in and with great reluctance send their children to the Christian school. As result, you have a school run by Christian Missionaries but attended wholly by Buddhist children.

In the Christian atmosphere of the school, the plastic mind of the Buddhist child is misled into the belief that his father who is a Buddhist is a heathen, a worshipper of idols and trees and whatnot, that Buddhism is not the religion for educated people. This is what I was made to feel in the Missionary School, which I attended for some time.

The child who chooses to remain Buddhist is severely handicapped. Every inducement is offered to the Buddhist lad to become Christian. Prizes, studentships and good situations are open to him only if he gives up the religion of his father. I know of several missionaries who have used their influence with the Government to secure good situations for their favourite converts in Public Service. So you will see how Buddhist lads under Missionary influence nourish contempt for the ways of their fathers, for the religion of their fathers, for the art, music and literature of their country.

A lad of seventeen years known to me who was receiving his education in a missionary school, one day, wrote to his mother who was a Buddhist: "Mother, you are silly folks; you say you are Buddhists. You go to your temples with flowers and offer them at what you call images. These are foolish actions. Up-to-date people don't do such things. I am ashamed that I was born your son. I am ashamed that I have a dark skin. I like you only if you change your silly ways. If you don't change, I shall leave you." This boy separated himself from his parents.

This sort of hostile attitude on the part of missionary trained lads towards their parents who are Buddhist has brought disunion and disharmony in families. For this reason, Buddhists strongly protest against missionary propaganda, which produces such disastrous results.

Buddhists strongly object to missionary bodies setting up schools in areas where Buddhists predominate. Buddhists desire to educate their children in Buddhist schools. If, however, they cannot afford to set up their own schools in particular areas, they wish the Government to establish state schools.

The mischievous influence of some missionaries is not confined to Ceylon. It is also seen in countries like England from where they obtain funds for their missionary activities. One English friend of mine asked me whether there are cannibals in Ceylon. Another English friend confessed to me that he was under the impression that the Ceylon people are savages, that although spicy breezes blow over Ceylon's isle, only man is vile. A third friend said to me in confidence that until he saw me with my wife, he was under the belief that Ceylon's natives keep harems. During their conversations with me, they agreed that these false notions are spread by Christian missionaries who paint the natives as black as possible in order to obtain the support of well meaning sympathisers for their enterprise of converting the 'heathen'.

The second obstacle to the peace of Buddhism in Ceylon is the attitude of the Government towards Buddhist education. Buddhists who form the largest majority of the population are most inadequately represented in the Board of Education and on the District Education Committees, whereas the representatives of missionary bodies are out of all proportion to their numerical strength, so that the missionaries rather than the Buddhists have a controlling voice in the educational system of the country.

There are Buddhist societies carrying on educational work in Ceylon. When they open new schools they find it extremely difficult to get recognised for state grant owing to the opposition of Missionary bodies whose representatives form a majority on the Educational Committees, whose recommendation is necessary for state recognition.

The indifference of the Government towards Buddhist education is clearly shown by the scandalous manner in which vast tracts of lands dedicated to the Buddhist shrines by the kings of old are allowed to be robbed and

plundered by the trustees appointed by the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance. These valuable endowments have been established by the kings of old for the upkeep of the shrines and for the spread of Buddhist learning.

In accordance with treaty obligations, the British Government passed the Buddhist Temporalities Ordinance by which trustees were appointed to take charge of the temple lands. But these trustees have misappropriated the income from them at the connivance of the authorities. This sort of wholesale plunder must not be allowed in an enlightened country. There has been incessant agitation against this plunder of the lands. But the Government puts off action on flimsy grounds.

Third obstacle to Buddhism in Ceylon is the existence of that type of mentality which refuses to see anything good in a person whose colour is different, or whose religion is different and therefore despises and hates him. The Buddhist priest has to renounce the pleasures of the world. He is therefore not rich in material goods. But very often he is despised by persons steeped in gross materialism.

Once in Ceylon, a European gentleman entered a railway compartment in which a distinguished Buddhist priest was travelling. The European could not bear to see the 'blackie' as he was called travelling in the same compartment, a 'blackie; as it happened who practised a heathen religion. The European gentleman, in a fierce rage, kicked the harmless Buddhist priest, called the railway guard, and insisted that the priest be ejected at once. I do not want to multiply instances of this sort. When things like this happen in their own country, can you blame the Buddhists if they feel they are strangers in their own land. How deep seated must be religious hatred when it is exhibited even by educated people?

I hold in my hand a cutting from a newspaper published in the Hawaiian Islands, where the Buddhists form the largest religious group. It gives harrowing details of a deliberate insult hurled at a Buddhist priest by a Roman Catholic Bishop and a protestant clergyman. The incident took place at a luncheon gathering of the leaders of all the religious denominations called by a Rev. Henry P Judd for the purpose of discussing certain educational problems from a non-sectarian standpoint. The Roman Catholic Bishop, when the Buddhist representative was presented to him, is reported to have displayed deep anger, raised his voice, and almost shouted "I love Protestants, but I hate the Buddhists. If he is a guest here, I will leave. I refuse to eat at the same table with Mr. Hunt." (Mr Hunt was the Buddhist priest).

Well, Ladies and Gentlemen, this incident speaks for itself. There can be no religious peace unless there is a change of heart. Buddhists never waged war in any time of their history for the spread of their religion. Buddhists never exercised any kind of compulsion for making converts. In Ceylon we have to remain on the defensive, to prevent Buddhist children from being smuggled into Christian Schools. We want Buddhist children to be taught in Buddhist Schools. If Buddhist Schools are not available in any locality, we do

not mind sending our children to state schools to receive secular instruction, care being then taken to provide religious training in the home and the temple. But we do not want Missionary schools in Buddhist areas. The Missionary school in a Buddhist area hangs like Damocles' sword over the family and social life of the community. It must be said at the same time that we wish to see Christian children educated in Christian Schools. Our policy is, Live and Let live. We cherish loving kindness and not hatred; harmony and not discord; peace and not war. The Buddhist in his daily exercise recites the formula:

Sabbe Satta bhavantu sukkhitatta!

May all beings be happy!