

Religious Coexistence in Thailand: Perspective from Two Religious Communities

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Abstract

The religious harmony and tolerance of Buddhists and Muslims in Thailand is the necessary condition for the ever lasting peace in this religion. It should be based on the mutual respect for the diversity of pluralistic harmony between two religions. This article shows the similarities and differences between the two religions. Broadmindedness is the essential condition of accord in Buddhism as well as in Islam. People have increasingly become accommodative in allowing such a fusion of multi-ethnic living. Furthermore, this article tends to make comparative study of religious values of both Thai-Muslims and Buddhists to underline the effectiveness of strategies pursued by Thai government in reducing the religious tensions. Tolerance as the essence of sustainable harmony can be conducted through open-minded approach. Therefore, both Thai-Muslims and Buddhists who have been living together for many decades and have built their trust through delay life activities in the course of traditions or customs based on their religious doctrine of acceptance. In addition, the Thai government and representative bodies have been working so hard to resolve the unrest in southern Thailand and promoting peaceful coexistence in the society.

Keywords: Religion, Coexistence, Islam, Buddhist, Thailand.

Introduction

The attempt in this article is to explore the role of religious coexistence in mollifying all types of conflict happening in Thailand in order to express the spirit of Islam and Buddhism in supporting peace throughout the country. The objective is to strengthen the relationships between two religious communities in this society. This article is not intended to discuss elaborately the details of the conflicts between the Buddhists and Muslims in the deep southernmost provinces of Thailand, but just wants to highlight some religious coexistence in this religion.

According to (Buddhadasa, 1989) the modern thinker of Thai Buddhism, cautions us to not stick too much to mere names of our religions for fear of being an obstacle for mutual understanding, as he puts it thus: "The ordinary, ignorant worldly person is under the impression that there are many religions and that they are all different to the extent of being hostile and opposed. Thus one considers Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism as incompatible and even bitter enemies. Such is the conception of the common person who speaks according to the impressions held by common

people. If, however, a person has penetrated to the fundamental nature (dhamma) of religion, he will regard all religions as essentially similar. Although he may say there is Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and so on, he will also say that essentially they are all the same. If he should go to a deeper understanding of dhamma until finally he realizes the absolute truth, he would discover that there is no such thing called religion, that there is no Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam. The Buddha says: “Acquaintance is the best relatives.” (Pramono, 2008).

Furthermore, Buddhadasa points out that one can be a good Buddhist and a good follower of other religions, such as Islam and Christianity, at the same time. Why did he say so? Donald Swearer in the admiration of Buddhadasa’s pioneering mission of dialogue wrote: “The thought-provoking nature of Buddhadasa’s point of view is suggested by the titles of his talks—“No Religion” (Mai MiSasana), “A Good Buddhist Should be a Good Christian” (Chaw PhutThi Di Yom Pen KhritThi Di) to name only two. Buddhadasa’s purpose was to encourage both Buddhist and Christians to recover the deepest principles of their religions, to delve beyond the other, superficial coverings that hide the true core, and in doing so to discover a common ground. For Buddhadasa this enterprise was nothing less than discovering the truth about the nature of things (Swearer, 2004). Buddhadasa’s idea thus: A good Buddhist should be a good Muslim. Ghazzali shows the manner in which others should be respected based on the Tawhid (the belief in the Oneness of God). He emphasized mutual respect and love on others. He says; “Know that the world is one stage of the stages of the journey to God Most High. All in this station are travellers. Since the destination of journey of this caravan of travelers is the same, they are all as one. There must be friendship and unity among them and mutual aid.” (as cited in Schlubach, 2005). Ghazzali views that tolerance is suitable for pluralism and excludes harsh restrictions or fanaticism. Everyone should be offered freedom for worship and thoughts. Similar to Ghazzali explains tolerance metaphorically as: “We all live in this world and we are passengers on the same ship” (Erol, 2012). Further Quran provides the importance of tolerance as; “O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another”. (Alquran, Al-Hujurat: 13). These verses emphasize the development of peace and the elimination of conflicts among others and show the inherent nature of diversity and pluralism in creation and the purpose of human beings of interacting and learning from others. Further, Islam accepts freedom of other religions or beliefs, which contradicts with Sayyid Qutb’s view. The following verse verifies as; “There is no compulsion in religion.” (Al Quran, al-Bagara: 256).

Concept of Peace in Islam

To comprehend fully the concept of peace in Islam one has to keep in mind the following basic facts of Islam: The Arabic word for peace and *Islam* are derived from the same root. The etymology of *s-l-m* is to submit, accept or surrender. From this comes Islam’s conventional definition of surrender to God. One of God’s names is *salam*, meaning peace. The formula of greetings of every Muslim is *AssalamuAlaykum* meaning may peace be upon you; the name of the abode a Muslim aspires for in Heaven after death is *Darussalam* meaning house of peace. The Prophet Muhammad May peace be upon him whom this religion is revealed has been described in the Quran as *rahmatullilalamin*, meaning a mercy for the dwellers of all the people of the world. The love, brotherhood, and mutual respect are the basic teachings of Islam which

clearly indicate that peaceful living is the very nature of Islam. The concluding words of the daily prayers of every Muslim are also *AsssalamuAlaykum*, meaning peace be upon you. In this way the word 'peace' is part and parcel of every Muslim which in turn encourages him to adopt peaceful environment in society. The Quran is replete with exhortations of love, kindness, brotherhood, forgiveness; mutual respect and fraternity which bring peace and harmony in the society. Similarly, hatred, selfishness, jealousy and enmity have been forbidden. The ethical and moral virtues are recommended whereas abominable vices are disdained. In short, doing well and refraining from evils have been preached all through the Quran. Acting upon these teachings of the Quran bring peace and harmony in multi-racial society. The above principles are laid down in the traditions of the Prophet. The pages of the books on Islamic history and the Prophet's biography (Sire) are filled with the practical examples of preferring peace over war. The best example of this demonstration was the Peace Treaty of Hudaibiyya. It was a mutual; no-raiding; pact for a period of ten years. Although at the time of signing the agreement it looked a unilateral pact where the enemies have the upper hand, in the long run it brought peace in the region. The reason was that this peace agreement gave ample time to decide which of the two alternatives- wars and peace- is conducive to safeguard human killings. The Quran calls it *fathmubin*, meaning; clear victory (Qur'an:48:1). By signing this agreement the Prophet showed to warring tribes of Arabas that the solution of the conflicts between two groups lie in peaceful atmosphere and not in fighting. The same attitude was shown by the Prophet in the Charter of Medina which guaranteed protection to the Jews and Christians living in the newly Islamic State of Medina.

Peace means absence of war but war being existence right from the beginning of humanity it cannot be completely annihilated. At the most ways and means have to be sought to avoid war and establish peace. Violence begets violence, hence it should be avoided, and the diversity of religions across the world demands tolerance and respect to the other from every one. The holy Qur'an says, And had Allah willed He would surely have made you one nation (united in religion) He ;(Instead gave each of you a Law and a way of life) in order to test you by what He gave you, so race to all that is good" (Quran 5:48).

Thus the Quran encourages co-ordination and discourages disharmony and war. This has been preached in the words: *lakumdinukumwaliyya din*, meaning ; for you is your religion and for me is my religion (Quran 109) In fact this entire chapter of *alkafirun* fully explains the Islamic concept of noninterference in other people's affairs which is the key to established peace and harmony among different cultures and civilizations. The whole chapter is given here to show the Islamic principle of establishing peace in the world; the verses read as follows: "Say O disbelievers. I do not worship what you worship. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship. Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship. For you is your religion and for me is your religion. (Quran 109:1-6)

The above verses describe the real philosophy of peace preached and practiced in Islam. This is a golden rule to bring harmony in society: It applies not only to rival religion but also in different sects of the same religion. It clearly indicates that peace in Islam a rule, war and exception.

Differences between Islam and Buddhism

As much as one sees a commonality between these two great religions of Thailand, there are some distinct differences that color their unique characteristics. Among the most significant differences are: 1. Universality: The Islamic ethics, everyone is equal in the eyes of Islam. It does not allow for some people and prevent others, while the ethics in Buddhism is stage and grade. It makes difference between those who are in the houses, civilians, monks, and temples. 2. Comprehensive: The morality in a comprehensive Islam for all the affairs of life has not let human being behind unless it states, while the ethics in Buddhism confined in one hand, a psychological, spiritual and moral strictly speaking, it is not exposed to the aspects of economy and transactions, or politics and government. 3. Factual: Islam realistically suits all mankind as human beings, their motives and the desires, hopes, interests and needs, has placed its approach suitable for men, while the ethics in Buddhism has not observe this realism, so I drew a number of ethics puritanical, it is not estimated by the general public to perform it with great difficulty. 4. Balance: The morality in a balanced Islam between material and spiritual, and between idealism and realism, between this world and the Hereafter, in the coherence and consistency, without excess or negligence, not exaggeration or shortening, while the ethics in Buddhism does not show where this equilibrium, because they focus on the psychological and spiritual aspects alone without the others (World Religious, 2005). However, there is an important difference between two religions in terms of the sources; the source of ethics in Islam is from the Almighty Allah that was sent down through revelation, while the source of ethics in Buddhism is based on human endeavors and experiences.

Religious Pluralism in Thailand

The religious teachings regarding tolerance and harmony are found in Islam and Buddhism. Islam teaches Muslims to tolerate and cooperate with non-Muslims. Islamic teachings on tolerance are found in the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an (Baqarah 2: 256) states, "Let there be no compulsion in religion; Truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy bond that never breaks and Allah hears and knows all things." The Qur'an (Baqarah 2: 256) clearly prohibits Muslims from forcing or compelling non-Muslims to convert to Islam since Islam wants people to voluntarily and willingly convert to Islam; their conversion to Islam must solely depend upon their wills and faiths in Islamic beliefs and practices or in Islamic teachings in general. Islam asks Muslims to invite people to Islam using one of the three persuasive and non-violent methods depending on their situations, skills and educational or intellectual levels. The three prescribed methods of inviting people to Islam are the wisdom method, the advice method and the debate or dialogue method. The Qur'an (Nahl 16: 125) explains these three methods or ways to call or invite people to Islam or the way of Allah. Neither compulsion nor force method is prescribed by Islam when Muslims would like to convey Islamic teachings to non-Muslims. If these three methods of calling or inviting any non-Muslim to Islam do not work, the Muslims have to adhere to another command or principle found in the Qur'an (Kafirun 109: 6) stating "for you is your religion and for me is my religion". This means that the Muslims who have invited any non-Muslim to embrace or accept Islam and they have failed to convince him, they should let him remain in his own religion of his choice. Religious tolerance and harmony in Buddhism and Islam are also part and parcel of their religious teachings. In Buddhism, the Buddhists are demanded not to hurt or do harm to other human beings and animals.

The Buddhist holy book named *Udana-Varga* (5: 18) says, “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.” The Buddhists are asked to live in harmony and peace in any locality and community by avoiding the ten courses of unwholesome action namely: “1. Destroying life, 2. Taking what is not given, 3. Wrong conduct in regard to sense pleasures, 4. False speech, 5. Slanderous speech, 6. Harsh speech, 7. Idle chatter, 8. Covetousness, 9. Ill will, 10. Wrong view” (Bodhi, 1994). The Buddhists stress on ending suffering. Hence, they do not want to suffer as well as they should not make others suffer. There are five precepts found in Buddhism intended to maintain peace and harmony with oneself and others. They are: 1. Do not kill or do not do harm or do not commit violence, 2. Do not steal including fraud and economic exploitation, 3. Do not lie, 4. Do not misuse sex. For monks and nuns, they have to live in celibacy. For ordinary Buddhists, adultery and sexual harassment are forbidden, 5. Do not consume alcohol or other drugs. The virtue, good conduct or morality in Buddhism is known as *Sila* based on two fundamental principles namely the principle of equality that all living entities are equal, and the principle of reciprocity that do not do onto others what you do not want them do onto you (Robinson, 2007).

In Malaysia, there has been no resurgence of Hindu fundamentalism or Muslim fundamentalism or Christian fundamentalism. The Government of Malaysia always looks after and goes after the religious extremists in order to avoid the clashes among the religious groups due to their religious fundamentalism and extremism. Dr. Mahathir as reported on 28th April 2005 stated that Malaysia would not be ruled by the religious extremists (Shamshul, 2005). During his meeting with Mr. Lee Kuan Yew from Singapore at his office at Perdana Leadership Foundation located in Putrajaya, Dr. Mahathir said that Malaysia would not become an extremist Islamic state or ruled by the religious extremists because the Muslims in Malaysia are rational and they would not be easily influenced by the religious extremist group.

The majority of Muslims in Malaysia know the true Islamic teachings and they would not be easily influenced by the religious extremist group propagations (Samshir, 2005). Based on the religious tolerance and harmony found in Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism, it is very clear, evident, reasonable and sound to deduce that the Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Hindus in Malaysia have preferred the religious tolerance and harmony found in their respective religions instead of their opposites because they indeed cherish peace and harmony as well as stability in Malaysia for Malaysian multiethnic and multi-religious societies. Hence as an independent modern nation state Malaysia has been able to enjoy the fruits of religious tolerance and harmony such as a peaceful life and economic growth and stability. The religious tolerance and harmony found in their respective religions are able to be maintained, nurtured and operative because they are strongly supported by the constitutional and legal provisions on the religious freedom and rights as well as by some policies implemented by Malaysian ruling political party. Islam’s message of universal brotherhood is harbinger of peace in society. According to Islamic teachings other people’s religion should also be given equal respect. In a well-known *hadith* reported by the Prophet (pbh) stood up out of respect to a funeral of a Jew. When asked why he rose up for the deceased of a non-Muslim his historic answer was he not a human being. ‘The Prophet’s behavior shows the universal brotherhood of Islam. If we follow this precept of the Prophet in this modern age all the differences between people of other faiths are removed and universal brotherhood will prevail. The Quran considers killing of one soul as tantamount to killing all human beings, (Qur’an 5:32) in other words all human beings are to be respected no

matter to what religion he or she belongs. Muslim's God is the God of all religions, killing of people of other faiths is totally forbidden, instead no discrimination should be made between Muslims and non-Muslims hence the respect of all is obligatory. It was this broad mindedness which made the Prophet rise as mark of respect to the funeral of a Jew. If this example of the Prophet is followed in the modern times the atmosphere of peace and tranquility will prevail.

Freedom of Religious Practices in Thailand

Muslims in Thailand are able to live peacefully in accordance with Islamic teachings because Thailand has always allowed its citizens freedom of worship, be they Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Hindus or others, all of them have their right to partake in politics and the election process in general. Such attributes of equality and freedom are referred to in Section 37 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand which clearly stipulates that "a person shall enjoy full liberty to profess a religion, a religious sect or creed, and observe religious precepts or exercise a form of worship in accordance with his or her belief; provided that it does not contradict his or her civic duties, public order or good morals (O. Farouk, 1987).

The Arabic phrase "*As Salamu Alaykum*" is a greeting which means "Peace be upon you". This word is used by Thai Muslims. Particularly in the South, millions of Thai Muslims are familiar with this Arabic Phrase since it is their everyday greeting. Looking to Thai Buddhist culture of "*Sawadi Krap*" is used by Thai Buddhists and Thai Muslims alike without any distress. Even Muslims use this gesture when they meet different people by avoiding shaking hands with women then they put their figures into noise. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), of the more than six million Muslims in Thailand representing almost ten percent of Thailand's nationwide population, about two million live in the three Southern Border Provinces (SBPs), namely Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat (A. Suhrke, 1970).As these figures clearly point out that Muslims are no longer the minority, I think it is time to pay more attention to the controversial issues relating to the liberty, right, opportunities, roles, duties and livelihood of the fellow Muslims. It is necessary to confront the social issues regarding the equality of Muslims and how they are treated and take a careful look at their standard of living, happiness and welfare in the society as a whole. The idea of freedom and equality are also evidence in other aspect of everyday life. In the financial matters, the Islamic bank has been officially established under the subsidy of cooperation with the Thai government. In accordance with Islamic principles, the bank has provided financial services such as Loans without gaining profit as it is against Islamic teachings to charge any interest. Once a Muslim open a savings account, the Bank acts only as a place to secure money and nothing more (M. Gilquin, 2010).

For more than six decades, the late of His Majesty King Bhumibol Abdulyadej has initiated hundreds of royal projects in various fields throughout the country such as irrigation, agriculture, medical services, public welfare, public transportation and communication services. Along with other members of the royal family, His Majesty has often paid visit to the Thai Muslim communities in the south to look after the welfare and livelihood of southern locals. His Majesty emphasized that "in order to develop the whole nation both material and mental collaboration are required to achieve maximum success" His Majesty the King has instructed that "the process of understanding, reaching out and developing the Muslim communities must first come from the precise and accurate comprehension about the Muslims; by the way they live and think. When

the local communities are adequately educated, all fear, misunderstanding and prejudice will be dispelled. As matter of fact, both their quality of life and mental conditions should be lifted (Student, 2008).

Consequently, the Thai government has taken new measures, such as raising educational standards at schools with poor curricula, establishing high level academic institutions that focus on Islamic studies, as well as providing deserving students with scholarships to study abroad in Muslim countries (Joseph, 2009). Moreover, many researchers consider education as the most significant aspect of Thai Muslim issue as current conflicts and violence in the SBPs are mainly caused by people's lack of educational opportunities, which easily leads to misconceptions. As such, they believe that any government policy in regard to strengthening education to provide better educational opportunities for Muslims will gradually subdue the ongoing violence. In addition to that, Children are the future of the nation. Muslim youth also have a duty to concentrate on their academic and religious studies so that they will be valuable resources for the development of the country in the future. Restoring peace within the nation is a priority. There have been attempts by the government to adhere to peaceful approaches.

Thai government established the National Reconciliation Committee with the purpose of restoring people's trust and confidence; along with reuniting the SBPs communities (Worawit, 1995). The current situation of Sothern Border Provinces, in the view of many researchers, is not caused by religious differences but rather by lack of understanding. Thai Buddhists must have an understanding of Muslim values, culture and tradition. Understanding the Muslim way of life will assist in mending the relationships between both cultures. Thai Muslims should accept the differences in each other's way of life will lead to what both Thai Muslims and Buddhists are seeking for peace within the nation. I believe that differences in race, culture, custom, and religion are superficial. If we strip away our differences, we can follow a path which will allow us to live our lives in harmony. If we lend a helping hand and work together to our fullest potential, things will gradually become better. Therefore, together we can overcome the troubles of today and create a happier tomorrow for ourselves and fellow human beings.

Universal Ethical Principles of Islam and Buddhism

If we compare between Islam and Buddhism as an ethical morality here, we find common similarities and differences between the two religions. The joint portion is to the positive morality which aims to recommend the souls of defilements sins and learned all religions situation and the heavenly, such as compassion, love, kindness, generosity, honesty, chastity, modesty, loyalty, forgiveness, patience, justice, stay away from hatred, and selfishness, greed, lying, injustice, murder, theft, gambling, betrayal, adultery, arrogance, hatred, gossip, the damage and harm on others. These are called universal morality that Buddhism focused on many of these ethics benefit Muslims who live with them as a minority to practice religious rites and advocacy (Buddhist Holy Book, 1982).

Religious Beliefs and Commonalities in Thailand

Since 1998, Thailand, a nation closely associated with Buddhism, has been one of the observing members of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), with mostly Muslim senior

governmental figures in the present and previous administrations leading the Thai delegations to attend the OIC meetings (D. Carment, 1995:16).

In addition, His Majesty also encouraged and supported the translation of Qur'an from Arabic into Thai. On the occasion of the completion of translation, His majesty made the following address at the provincial Islamic Committee of Narathiwat: "I therefore strongly wish to promote Islamic education, which in other words would mean the promotion of a wider study of the Qur'an. The study of the Qur'an today is not an easy undertaking because one has first to study Arabic language fully, which in itself is a difficult endeavor that consumes much time. Those who do not have an opportunity to learn Arabic, therefore, are unnecessarily deprived of the benefit of reading the Qur'an. But if the Qur'an was translated into our language, all would have an opportunity to study it with more ease. I therefore wish to present the Thai-version Qur'an to you, and may you take this Qur'an for use in your studies and as a symbol of the continuing spread of the study of Islam in our country in the years to come." Thai Muslims have not been denied the study of Islam, and many of them have significantly contributed to Thai society.

A good number of Thai Muslims have assumed many influential posts. Examples include Mr. Lek Nana and SurinPitsuwan, former Ministers of Foreign Affairs; Mr. AreeWongaraya and Mr. Wan Muhammad Nor Matha, former Ministers of Interior; Mr. Areepen Uttarasin, former Deputy Minister of Education; General SonthiBoonyaratglin, former Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Thai Army and Head of the Council for National Security; MrImron Maluleem and Mr. Dumrong Pudtarn, former Bangkok senators; Mr. Den Tomeena, former Pattani senator and Dr. Wallop Suwantee, a Deputy Governor of Bangkok. Tira Mintrasak governor of Pattani; Dr. Ismail Lutfi Kapakiya, and Dr.Yusof Talek Director of CIS Moreover, Muslim women in Thailand have also played significant roles in Thai society in the areas of education and human rights such as Thanphuying Samorhn Phuminarong, Khunying SaengdaoSiamvala, and Mrs Ungcarua Neelapaijit (A Collection, 2008:16).

Islamic missionaries, comprising Muslim scholars, travel regularly to the Southern border Provinces (SBPs) Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Satun to give instruction on correct teachings of Islam. The expenses of the missionaries are fully supported by the government. Attempts have also been made by Thai government to encourage the studying of the Qur'an, which the government finance an annual contest in Qur'an recitation at provincial and national levels. The government has also provided opportunities for Thai Muslim students to have full freedom in pursuing Islamic education, especially in the SBPs, with many private Islamic schools.

In 1966, the government initiated a program to promote and modernize "Pondoks," traditional Islamic education institutions, by adding courses on secular subjects in the curricula of the schools (H. Madmarn, 2002). The purpose of this was to provide students in these schools with adequate general knowledge in order for them to have greater opportunities to obtain higher education and seek employment. The government has also set up College of Islamic Studies at the Prince of Songkla University where courses in Islamic education and Arabic language are offered in addition to general studies. Moreover, higher degrees in Islamic Studies are also offered at some colleges and universities, especially those located in the southern region. The Ministry of Education is currently trying to include more Islamic subjects into the curricula of public primary and secondary schools in the SBPs. The government has also allocated funds for

the construction of central mosques in each southern border provinces to enable Thai Muslims to conduct their religious worship more conveniently. Additionally, the Royal Act of 1946 on Mosques promotes the registration of qualified mosques as well as the appointment of each mosque committee which consist of at least seven individuals to act as an administrative board in charge of the activities and properties of the mosque. In Thailand, more than 3,100 mosques have been registered with government funds provided for renovation. This is the same practice the Thai government has done with Buddhist temples (A Collection 2008:26).

General Ethical Doctrines and Five Precepts in Buddhism

The issue of ethics in Buddhism focused on importance issues. We can say that the prodigality is a part of doctrine in Buddhist ethics. Buddha, founder of Buddhism has declared that his doctrine of the medial discovered after great efforts and experiences of physical and psychological differences, and named this doctrine centrist "MashiYama Patty Bata" any central behavior, Buddha explained that courses are not to injustice in the business but it is in the eight ways which discovered and included in many of his speeches and sermons, also he called the eight people or East corridor between pleasure and asceticism (World Religious, 2005). It consists of the followings: 1. Right View: right understanding of the origin of suffering, right understanding of the cessation of suffering, right understanding of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. 2. Right Intentions: intentions of renunciation, intentions of goodwill, intention to do no harm. 3. Right Word: to refrain from lying, to refrain from slander, to refrain from harsh speech to refrain from gossip. 4. Right Action: to refrain from killing living beings, to refrain from what is not given, to refrain from immoral love life. 5. Right Livelihood: to earn one's living by legal means and without violence. 6. Right Effort: the effort of the will, not to allow coming into being unwholesome things which have not come into being, to make unwholesome things which have not come into being disappeared, unwholesome things which have not come into being unfold. 7. Right Mindfulness: developing awareness of the body so that greed and hatred are reduced. 8. Right Concentration: to enter deep levels of mental calm through developing one-wontedness of need (Buddhist, 1982).

The five virtue commandments in Buddhism have included against which the five virtues, which is to show mercy, and right earning, and honesty, and full awareness, and chastity, that this degree of ethics put to the general civilian Buddhists, any living homes, but those who aspire them to lead monasticism, they are on top of these five (Buddhist Holy Book, 1982) 1. Do not kill anybody nor eliminate the neighborhood life of the animal. 2. Do not take money not given to you. 3. Do not lie and do not say a word incorrectly. 4. Do not drink wine or toxic. 5. Do not initiate a sexual relationship prohibited.

History and its Important Collisions in Thailand

The Muslims dynasty became part of Siam in 1786 during the reign of King Rama I, the central administration did not have much control over the area until the 1890s, when King Rama V sent governors and bureaucrats from Bangkok to the SBPs as part of his administrative reform, since officials might have carried non-Muslims beliefs, the local Muslim residents probably adopted a negative attitude towards Siam. Moreover, the ultranationalist policy under the administration of Prime Minister PlaekPibulsonggram, in 1938 aims at assimilating minority cultures into

mainstream Buddhist Thai society. This has intensified the negativity among Muslims in the south (Syukri, 1985).

History is always ambiguous, therefore, we may know who, what, when, and where, but the why is often left to the interpretation of subsequent generations. Even if we know the exact reasons about events in the past, we should never use them merely to incite hatred and seek retaliation. Instead, those reasons should serve as lessons for the present, from which we can learn how to prevent similar loss or agony from happening. Thailand was invaded by Burmese and forced to give up some of its territories by Western imperialists. It would be completely useless for us today to refer to the past and take revenge upon those countries. In fact, we have left these grievances and started relationships anew with the countries that used to be our enemies. We share knowledge, economic cooperation, technology and cultures, which have helped achieving a win-win outcome, from which all parties can benefit. However, because of social diversity, no policy or culture is able to accommodate all of the differences. Some policies may affect our way of living, but others will likewise affect others.

Therefore, the problems of Southern Thailand are caused by people who have little knowledge about Thai politics and history as well as lack of understanding of different cultures in Thailand. Thai Muslims have a greater potential to improve the nation's economic growth and social development. Interestingly, Thai Muslims possess a fine set of character that has helped bringing the greater good to society. For centuries, our fellow Thai Muslims have significantly contributed to success of the nation. Cultural diversity and social harmony will further strengthen if we take action to alleviate the occurring problems. In the light of the guarantees of freedom equality preserved in the current constitution, research shows that most local Thai Muslims think that they are just written words that have not been fully implemented in practice. Major problems concerning socioeconomic conditions and stability have long been recognized even before the change of political systems from absolute monarchy in 1932. From 1932 to 1973, the government announced the use of uniform administrative policies all over the country. For provinces along the southern borders, the government set up an Ad Hoc committee to adjust these policies to suit the local administrative conditions, but did not pay enough attention to the cultural uniqueness of the area, resulting in the local dissatisfaction against the government (S. Choenphiban, 1975).

According to a study done by Chulalongkorn University, many Thai Muslims of various backgrounds in the SBPs complained about their limited opportunities and suggested some measures to increase their opportunities in order to assist in developing the nation economically and socially. The study also shows that the Thai Muslim communities were sometimes looked down upon by other Thai citizens as "an obstacle" to development. This exacerbated the situation because some Thai Muslims in the area did not accept the sincerity of the government in carrying out its development plans in the area. Recently, the Thai Government has provided economic opportunities to many people in the South. By encouraging the unique characteristics of Thai Muslims, development schemes in three main areas have been proposed and implemented (Education Statistics, 1992).

The state sector needs to actively provide its officials sent to work in the SBPs with true insight about the local culture as well as lessons in Yawi, the local language. Education should be improved by promoting and supporting the studies of secular subjects in addition to religious

ones as well as providing career development guidance that enhances job prospects for students. Public health can also be improved by the use of the local network to propagate the knowledge of public health. The majority of Thai Muslims are responsible and hard-working, and their attributes are very distinct from other Thais in many ways. Thai Muslims have a passion for learning and abiding by religious disciplines and ethics as well as the social structure that clearly defines the roles and duties of each person in the society (S. Choenphiban, 1975).

Muslim fathers are family leaders, always the one in charge of taking care of the whole family. Mothers usually stay at home to do house chores and look after children as it is preferable for female Muslims not to work outside. Understanding these attributes is the key to bringing promising economic growth and social development for Thai Muslim society, hopefully, subsequently leading to a successful collaboration between the state and the people. The state should hold seminars and conferences, training, dialogue more frequently for those Thai Muslims leaders so that they express and exchange their views and suggestion their recommendations to the state. As seen in many countries around the world. Example, Switzerland, with citizens of various origins such as German, French, and Italian, diversity can exist and thrive in the country, due to the understanding and respect that everyone has for one another (D. Carment, 1995).

Religious Traditions and Rituals in the Thai Society

Thai people do not deny Muslims the right to follow their own customs or religious rituals. For instance, Thai Muslim women from different professions, such as students, bank clerks, and nurses are allowed to wear hijabs – the veils they wear to cover their hair and face in public. More devout Muslims are welcome to alter their clothing to meet their religion's requirements. Some Muslim females, for examples, wear a burka, a long piece of clothing which covers their face, head and body, with only a small square to see through. Similarly, wearing Islamic hats in public is completely acceptable for Muslim males. In weddings, for example, wedding studios provide Islamic wedding dresses for Muslim brides and grooms and arrange wedding ceremonies that strictly conform to Islamic principles. The freedom with which Thai Muslims accommodate their religious conventions clearly illustrates the respect that Thai society has for non-Buddhist religions (Andrew, 1982).

While maintaining their religious customs and rituals, Thai Muslims can also enjoy the same educational opportunities as adherents of other religions. The Ministry of Education allows Muslim children to attend Muslims schools. Currently, there are more than 200 high schools offering secular and religious lessons. In tertiary education, the College of Islamic Studies at the Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus, offers courses in Islamic economics, Islamic Jurisprudence and Arabic language. High school graduates may choose to continue their Islamic studies in Muslim countries. Beside these educational opportunities, many Ponoh schools, most of which are located in SBPs, provide secular courses, offer religious lessons, and allocate time so that students can perform religious rituals during the day (Surin, 1982). If they wish; Muslim students may also attend secular even Christian schools. Thus, the educational opportunities that Thai Muslims are having by no means inferior to Thai people of other religions.

Thai Muslims in the SBPs mostly are governed under Islamic laws, specially designed to accommodate their religious beliefs. In 1945, the Islamic patronage Act, B.E. 2488, authorized the government to form a National Council for Islamic Affairs, which serves as an Islamic advisory committee to the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education. The committee also supervises mosques and provincial committees and manages the finances of those organizations. In cases pertaining to inheritance and marriage where all of the concerned parties are Muslims, not only will special Muslim laws be used, but the judge will have to be Muslim as well. Thai politics always listens to and welcomes the participation of Muslims. Ever since Thailand transformed into a democracy, Thai Muslims have always been integrated into the political parties. Moreover, they have the right to run for general and senatorial elections. In fact, there have been a large number of Muslim politicians who have played an important role and made significant contributions to Thai politics.

Thai Muslims have been able to maintain their religious identity within an overwhelmingly Buddhist country. The Thai Buddhist majority understands and accepts religious differences and would like to provide Thai Muslims with ample opportunities to express their own religious beliefs. Because the distinction between differentiation and discrimination can be very restrained, violence in the SBPs might have originated misunderstandings among Thais (H.E, 1982). The solution to this problem is therefore to promote the correct understandings of the status and roles of Thai Muslims in the society.

Mutual Respect and Non Interference in Other's Affairs

They are the basic principles for peaceful co-existence in multiracial societies .It applies not only between two individuals, between two religious groups of one particular religion or between different religions and between different cultures and civilizations. The prerequisite for this is peace.

That Islam is the religion of peace is evident from the fact that the formula of greetings of every Muslim is *Assalamu Alaykum* meaning literally may peace be upon you. Moreover, the name of the religion a Muslim professes is Islam, literally meaning peace. The name of the abode a Muslim aspires for in Heaven after death is Darussalam meaning house of peace. The Prophet Muhammad upon whom this religion was revealed has been described in the Quran as *rahmatullilalamin*, meaning a mercy for the dwellers of all the people of the world. The mercy, love, brotherhood, and mutual respect are the basic teachings of Islam which clearly indicate that peaceful living is the very nature of Islam. It is no denying the fact that the present age is the age of strife, rivalries, and race for supremacy over other nations. This results in hatred and enmity between individuals and groups at both national and international levels. The two world wars and the 9/11 incident bespeak the prevalent animosities between different groups of people. Despite existence of UNO and ISESCO, and pacts and treaties between different nations, killings of innocent human beings through suicide bombings are rampant not only in battle grounds but in mosques, in cities and on tombs and holy shrines. As such despite utmost efforts of the government organizations the loss of innocent lives does not cease .It is therefore the need of the day to find a workable device to save the lives of men. This workable device is to implement the concept of peace as recommended and experimented by Islam. This concept should be clearly understood. If understood correctly and faithfully implemented with full convictions the

differences between religious groups and different cultures will be minimized if not eradicated completely. This will ensure peace and harmony in the world, Let us see how the Quran and Sunnah elaborate this principle.

There are misinterpretations of the word such as Jihad, Suicide bombing and Interfaith Dialogues.

1. **Jihad/Terrorism:** It is utterly wrong to equate *Jihad* with terrorism. It is due to wrong interpretation of the word Jihad ., traditionally meant as waging war against non-Muslims and inciting Muslims on physical encounter against the people of other faiths. In order to prove supremacy of Muslims over non-Muslims. A corollary to this interpretation is to seek pleasure of Allah in engaging oneself in fighting with the non-Muslims. Fed with this interpretation, the minds of innocent youths can go to the extreme of even killing in the name of religion. This perhaps led to the idea that if a Muslim is killed in the name of religion he or she goes to Heaven which is at the back of a suicide bomber. Islam has diametrically opposite to this thinking. The actual teaching of Islam is to respect all human lives .The Quran has clearly stated that taking one man's life is tantamount to killing the whole humanity. Similarly the Prophet has said that if a Muslim fighting from the Muslims side against non-Muslim army commits suicide his abode is in the hell. This clearly shows the prohibition of committing suicide. *Jihad* in the real sense is the peaceful struggle rather than of any kind of violent action. Literally it means exerting utmost efforts. But these efforts should not be to fight against non-Muslims but for promotion of peace and harmony among the Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

2. **Suicide bombing:** Despite the fact that suicide is forbidden (*haram*) in Islam, suicide bombings in present times are taking place in battle grounds, in market places, in mosques, in holy shrines, in clubs and restaurants, .The justification behind this unlawful act is the wrong belief that the person committing this act will become a martyr and he will get a place in Heaven. In this way this forbidden act is legitimized and encouraged. So the need of the hour is to condemn and discourage it forcefully. This is the duty of the Muslim religious scholars who have not yet issued a religious ruling (fatwa).against suicide bombing. Unfortunately, the students of traditional religious institutions are being fed xenophobic literature in the name of Islam. They are taught extremism according to which killing non-Muslims will guarantee their entry into Paradise. Brain washed with this wrong notion the suicide bombers is produced. Immediate attention ought to be paid to stop this practice. It can be done by revising the syllabi of these schools and *madaris*.

3. **Interfaith Dialogues:** The term interfaith dialogue refers to co-operative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, spiritual or humanistic beliefs at both individual and institutional levels .The dialogue is particularly encouraged amongst the people of the Book- the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. Islam has all along encouraged dialogue to reach truth In order to bring peace and harmony among different cultures and societies. It is through interfaith dialogue that peace can be achieved .All sensible and cultured people must avoid clashes. For this purpose meaningful dialogues and fruitful interactions are necessary .Political and intellectual efforts having been failed the only way left is the religion. There will be no peace among the nations without religion and there will be no peace among the religions without interfaith dialogues. Islam has all along encouraged dialogue to reach truth and peace. The Quran states," O people of the scriptures, come to a word that is

equitable between us and you – that we will not worship except Allah and not associate anything with Him and not take one another as lords instead of Allah. But if they turn away, then say, “bear witness that we are Muslims (submitting to Him) (Quran 3:64). Interfaith dialogue has been an integral part of Islam. The Quran supports it; the Prophet has practically done it, the Muslim rulers have shown it. To cite a glaring example for the last mentioned is the period of Muslim Spain in the 9th and 10th century is the city of Cordova where the Christians and Jews were involved in the Royal court and the intellectual life of the city.

The problems facing the world today can easily be solved if the scholars involve themselves in inter faith dialogues.

Resolutions and Recommendations of Establishing Peace in Thailand

A) Policy of reconciliation: Living in society differences between two individuals and two groups are quite natural. If not handled properly they give rise to clashes culminating sometimes in violence thus disturbing peace and harmony. The best way to resolve these difference is to adopt the policy of reconciliation, by accommodating towards each other, Dealing with differences between husbands and wife the Quran states :”If a woman fears ill-treatment or indifference on the part of the husband , it shall be no offence for her to seek a reconciliation” (Qur’an 4:128) Although the above verse relates to resolution of husband-wife difference, it is a general guidance to resolve all issues arising among groups in a given society.

B) Mutual non-interference: Peace in a society can be established when individuals and groups refrain from interfering in other’s affairs. A clash occurs when contending parties try to confront each other to show one’s superiority over the other. This applies in the families, in rival groups, among political parties at national and international levels. If the policy of noninterference is applied, no clashes will occur and the peace will prevail.

C) Accommodating with the ruler: The main cause of the clashes between two groups of people via the rulers and the ruled is the lust for power. This greed for power becomes the root cause of unrest in the society. Islam demands the ruled to be contented with the rulers even if they belong to different faith. Not only this, even the corrupt and oppressive ruler has to be tolerated. The Quran’s clear injunction is to ‘obey the ruler ‘(Qur’an4:59) “Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you “says the Qur’an. The words “those in authority.” enjoin the obedience of a ruler, not necessarily a Muslim ruler. If one acts upon this commandment of Allah, no clash will occur. The Qur’an in this verse has taught the best lesson of retaining peace and harmony in society. The Prophet gives the same lesson when it advises to the subjects to obey the ruler even if he is corrupt or oppressive. Bukhari has devoted a whole chapter in his *Sahih* under the heading *Kitabulfitan* where he has collected a large number of Prophetic sayings regarding abstain from confrontation with the rulers so as to avoid confrontation thus maintaining a peaceful atmosphere here in the society. It does not mean that Islam takes away a person’s right to protest against undesirable rulers; there are other peaceful ways to lodge a protest or bring reforms; but in no way Islam allows violence and open confrontation .Thus the best way to keep peace in society is to refrain from confrontation with the rulers.

D) Retaining long standing status quo: The best way to avoid violence resulting even in war is to leave the existing political situation undisturbed. The problems normally arise when an individual or a group of people like to change the existing set up of the society in the name of reform. In order to bring any change in the existing set up one has to wait for appropriate time. If this change is desired all of a sudden the clashes are bound to erupt. In order to have peaceful environment in the society one has to bear the status quo till a wise planning is done and an opportune time arrives. The best example we see in the Prophet's life was the presence of hundreds of idols kept in the Kaba 'Saudi Arabia'. The Prophet waited for long to destroy them till he was politically powerful. Till then he preferred to maintain status quo, keeping thereby peace and harmony in the society. Any attempt to change the status quo results in forceful opposition.

E) Reinterpretation of the word *jihad*: The extremist's scholars interpret the word *jihad* in the sense of militancy, very often considered tantamount to terrorism, and legitimized killing. This interpretation has brought a bad name to Islam and has put the lives precarious. The fact is that Islam has never allowed taking one's life neither the lives of others nor his own life. Hence prohibition of suicide thus the word *jihad*, instead of interpreting it as fighting against non-Muslims should be correctly taken to mean as exerting utmost efforts to promote peace and brotherhood among the Muslims and non-Muslims.

Conclusion

Religious coexistence can be used to promote both peace and violence. The approaches should be kept gently and firm even though peace should be both the means and the end in achieving harmony in this religiously diverse Kingdom of Thailand. Actually, there is no such thing as inherent aggression, and only if people would try to understand history from a different perspective and accept social diversity. Nonetheless, there is growing recognition of the need for interreligious understanding, appreciation and acceptance which are the prerequisite to interfaith cooperation. People might have adopted this viewpoint for generations. Without doubts, Thailand as a unified nation will be able to establish a long-lasting peaceful coexistence, hence, and durable development. Disagreement can be corrected throughout the history if equal opportunities, mutual respects, tolerance. Faith and religious leaders and clergies can also play an educator role. Hence capacity-building of faith leaders and clergies as well as lay educators is required. The interfaith community needs to be proactive in reaching out to the conservatives and extremists who tend to avoid this type of effort. They can also become the spoilers, since the process of interfaith education and dialogue encourages children, youth and people to express their views and have deep reflection on religious which can be perceived by the conservative religious authorities as threat to status quo. There should be a cultural exchange of views on peaceful coexistence among different religiosities and communities to extensive caring out balance, excellence and moderation and minority rights in a multi-cultural society. The solution to the existing problem of disharmony between religious and racial groups is to propagate and implement Islam's concept of peace as mentioned in the Quran and exemplified by the Prophet and early Muslims. In modern context the bad name brought to Islam by violent culture depicted through suicide bombings should be effaced by correctly interpreting the word *jihad* in the sense of exerting utmost efforts to promote peace and harmony among different groups of people both nationally and internationally. The interfaith dialogues between religious scholars will play the

major role in this direction. It is heartening to note that mosques and Islamic centers as well as Temple and Monk centers are actively engaged in holding these dialogues and they have proved fruitful in bringing the Muslims and Buddhists closer.

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