

Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Recovery in Nepal: A Buddhist Case Study

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The present paper grows out of a case study being carried out in Nepal,¹ which investigates, documents, and evaluates the role and potential of religion in articulating, and achieving, the goals and purpose of justice and change, a cultural dimension that until recently has been excluded from policy design and decision-making both by the Nepalese Government and by international aid and development agencies. The Government has focused its reports on structural inequality, exclusion and discrimination and on the transition from a state pervaded by a single dominant religion to secularism, while international organisations see religion as too sensitive and complex

1. The Winchester Centre of Religions for Reconciliation and Peace has been carrying out participatory action research in Nepal for the last three years, building up a network of religious leaders and organisations, interfaith bodies, faith-based and 'secular' INGOs who are working to heal some of the ravages of the civil war. We have also developed a collaborative relationship with Tribhuvan University's Department of Conflict, Peace and Development Studies and the Nepal Government Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction.

an area for ‘outsider’ intervention.² Nevertheless, contrary to these perspectives, religion is not entirely sequestered to the private sphere; there are numerous international and national faith-based organisations, individuals and institutions in Nepal involved in peacebuilding.

This paper is a preliminary contextualisation and exploration of one strand of the project, Buddhist contributions to the Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Recovery in Nepal.³ In this paper I will set the context; examine the diversity of Buddhism in Nepal; explore how peacebuilding operates at different levels of society; argue that the picture is complex and problematise the idea that Buddhism is inherently peaceful. In conclusion I will suggest areas for further research and offer recommendations about how Buddhist peacebuilding can be enhanced in the Nepal context.

Recognition of the Role of Religion in Peacebuilding

Since the late 1990s ‘religious peacebuilding’ has become recognised as a distinct and significant field of research which comprehends all the elements of religious work for peace. Peace-building is not primarily concerned with conflict behaviour, but addresses the underlying context and attitudes that give rise to violence. It is a long-term, gradual process, understood in very broad terms as engaging with, and transforming, the societal relationships, interests, discourses

2. International ‘outsiders’ in the past have tended to be from rich, ‘democratic’ countries who often see their primary role as to enhance the effectiveness of ‘insiders.’ This has now changed somewhat as practitioners from conflict-affected areas in the world are now becoming competent to support colleagues in other parts of the world. Katrien Hertog notes, “for a variety of reasons, religion has largely been ignored in policy design and decision making relating to international politics or peacebuilding processes, often with negative consequences” (2010:xv; see also Gopin 2000:17).

3. *The Nepal Millennium Goals Progress Report 2013* states that Nepal has made significant progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and has received international praise for doing so. However, while highlighting progress, it also raises alarm over certain critical issues, such as growing disparity and the high level of exclusion within Nepali society (http://www.undp.org/content/dam/nepal/docs/reports/millennium%20development%20goals/UNDP_NP_MDG_Report_2013.pdf/)

and even the institutions of society that hinder the peacemaking process, or which support the continuation of violent conflict, injustices and inequalities. Advocates argue that large, often hidden or under-utilized capacities for action lie within the reach of religious communities, and that they possess significant assets and existing strengths which can build peace through the power of cooperation. This embryonic discipline has been inspired by several seminal figures: Scott Appleby who, in *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, argues that the ambivalence inherent in all religions creates the potential for both violence and peacebuilding, John Paul Lederach whose elicitive approach seeks resource and root in the cultural context itself (1996:55) and Johan Galtung (1996) who stresses the importance of 'soft' (persuasive or 'warm') dimensions of peacebuilding, rather than the 'hard' (coercive or 'cold') dimensions of peacebuilding i.e., governance, infrastructure, and job and wealth creation.

In the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon there was huge scholarly and media debate over the links between religion and violence. Many contemporary scholars noted, as a potential point for reflection and discussion, that Buddhism is often seen as a particularly peaceful religion in contrast to the more politically active, 'violent', religions like Christianity and Islam. However, academics specialising in the relationship between Buddhism, nationalism and militarism in different parts of Asia argue that Buddhism has often had a significant role in nationalist and militarist ideologies and in situations of war and insurgency (Brekke 2013: 247). Frydenlund (2013: 95-119) argues that essentialist arguments about Buddhism's pacifism are simply wrong, and Tikhonov emphasises that Buddhism, like most religions, tend to view the world and humans as inherently violent; 'in contrast to the modernist emphasis on reason, religion tends to prioritise power which it claims to obtain through a prescribed 'sacred' regimen of life, or contact with supernatural forces' (2013:10). 'Licit' violence on the battlefield is condoned while 'illicit' violence is subject to both religious condemnation and criminal punishment. This line of argument has been developed by many scholars, particularly 'outsiders' to the Buddhist tradition. However, 'insiders' tend to continue to argue that Buddhist violence is on the whole an aberration. This paper suggests that, in establishing the potential for "Buddhist peacebuilding" we

need not only to be looking at Buddhist precepts and morality and the normative statements of activists and insurgents, but at actual peacemaking practices and varieties of localised expressions and institutionalisations.

The Conflict and Post-Conflict Context

Nepal, despite a history of dynastic conquests, retained a predominantly tolerant and peaceful image which began to shatter in the later 20th century. In the civil conflict of 1996-2006 17,886 people were killed and an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 people internally displaced. The 'People's War' led by the CPN (Maoist) against the state aimed to establish a 'People's Democracy' in Nepal. The main fighting and support forces consisted of ethnic groups like the Magars, Tharus, Limbus, Tamangs and Dalits, Brahmins and Chhetris, the last two also providing the political and military leadership. Women were also prominent in the recruiting profile. The conflict caused large numbers of deaths, disappearances, dislocations, displacement, violence, damage to private and public property, and state infrastructure, and created socio-political and economic chaos in the country. However, it also made visible the hidden injustices, oppression and marginalisation that many Nepalis endured. The legacy of the conflict is one of violence (perpetrated by both sides), but also of challenge to élite caste dominance, the oppression of women and structural and social inequalities and exclusions. On 21 November 2006, Nepal's decade-long armed conflict ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) between the Government and the CPN (Maoist). Both sides agreed to renounce violence (by keeping their forces in camps and putting weapons beyond use), follow the rule of law, honour universal human rights principles and democratic norms and values.

Since the end of the conflict the country has been involved in a lengthy peace process, a process during which confidence in the ruling political classes has been eroded. Efforts to write a new constitution, part of the peace settlement, have been difficult and protracted. The context is therefore the decade-long armed conflict, poor governance, political instability, and preoccupation with major national political agenda, including peacebuilding,

constitution-writing, and state-restructuring. The challenges faced by peacebuilders include poverty, high levels of corruption, the entrenched hierarchy of the caste system and the multiplication of ethnicities and regional and religious identities. The failure to form a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Commission on Disappeared Persons means that the many violations of human rights in the war remain sources of anger, desperation and hopelessness.⁴ Not a single individual has been prosecuted for war-time atrocities, and many known perpetrators of heinous crimes are occupying high positions in government institutions including the military. Issues concerning women and children, the victims of the conflict, have also been left unaddressed.

Religious Peacebuilding: The Challenges

The transformation of Nepal from a Hindu elitist monarchy to a 'secular' federal democracy unleashed a scramble for rights, privileges and resources. Infighting has led to a proliferation of political parties and interest groups divided along primarily ideological, geographical and ethnic lines. The weakness of government means that pressure groups regularly use *bandhs* and other disruptive direct actions to advance their cause. Many groups⁵ are organised within international minority rights and indigenous peoples frameworks (Whelpton et al 2008: xxiii-xxvii). One of the problems for religious peacemakers is that it is not always recognised that religion should be seen as a positive force and resource for peace even if it is not necessarily part of the problem. There is also the misapprehension by many agencies and organisations that religious groups need only be engaged when

4. On 30 August 2013 Amnesty International delivered a joint public statement for the International Day of the Disappeared. 'The practice of enforced disappearance during Nepal's 1996-2006 armed conflict was among the worst anywhere in the world. The fate and whereabouts of more than 1,300 possible victims of enforced disappearance are still unknown. To date, not one person suspected of criminal responsibility for serious human rights violations or crimes under international law committed during the conflict has been brought to justice.'

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA31/004/2013/en/a6fc4f2c-65cf-4746-95ea-72e84d80eee6/asa310042013en.html>

5. Eg. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN))

overtly part of the conflict; and there seems little understanding of the potential religious actors have for preventing or resolving conflict in situations where they are not an obvious part of the problems or violence (Bouta et al. 2005).

However, despite the fact that religion in Nepal does not constitute an autonomous domain (Ramirez 1997: 52), there *are* factors causing religious tensions within and between religious and ethnic communities in Nepal both nationally and regionally. These include the debate over ethnic-based federalism; the issue of 'secularism'; the continuing political, social and economic dominance of élite Hindu groups; communal tensions, particularly between Hindus and Muslims, and Hindus and Christians,⁶ and China's one-nation policy as it affects Tibetan refugees. Hindu-Christian tensions are caused mainly by perceptions of aggressive missionary activity by Christian evangelists. There have also been riots which reflect an emerging bias against Muslims on the part of some conservative Hindu groups.⁷

The future of Hinduism in what was the world's only Hindu *rashtra* also causes dissension. In 2006, the newly re-instated parliament's declaration that Nepal was officially secular mobilised pro-Hindu, pro-monarchist organisations, particularly affiliates of the India-based Hindu political party Shiv Sena, locally known as Pashupati Sena, Shiv Sena Nepal, and Nepal Shivsena, and the Hindu fundamentalist organization, Ranbir Sena. Several organized violent protests, both in Kathmandu and near the Indian border, demanding

6. The Christian Church in Nepal is perceived to be growing steadily and while the development work on educational and health service projects of INGOs like the United Mission to Nepal is widely recognised, many Nepalis are wary of proselytizing and conversion by Christians and view the growth of Christianity with concern. The law prohibits converting others and proselytizing; these activities are punishable by fines, imprisonment, or, for foreigners, expulsion.

7. Nepal Shiva Sena, the Nepali edition of India's Hindu fundamentalist party took responsibility for the mayhem and violence in Kathmandu in 2004 in reaction to the killing of 12 Nepali hostages in Iraq by a Muslim terrorist outfit. Kiran Singh Budathoki, the head of this group, admitted that his organisation carried out attacks on the Muslim mosques and madrasas in the capital and other parts of the country <http://nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=2265>. For a fuller account see Harvard University *The Pluralism Project* Research Report (<http://www.pluralism.org/reports/view/12>)

the reinstatement of Hinduism as the state religion. But support was initially limited, with Nepalis seemingly attracted by the Maoist promise of a secular, but pluralistic state. In the 2013 elections Kamal Thapa's Rastriya Prajatantra Party-Nepal (RPP-N), campaigned on a platform of 'democracy with monarchy' and a Hindu state, becoming the Constituent Assembly's fourth largest party. Today reports suggest that political instability, economic crisis and the lack of a permanent constitution have rekindled support for the Hindu monarchy. There is also widespread feeling that Nepal's plight is due to the machinations of foreign powers, including pro-*rashtra* forces in India and anti-Tibetan Buddhist forces in China. (http://www.telegraphindia.com/1131120/jsp/frontpage/story_17590989.jsp#.Us6WZtJ_uq8).

Mapping Buddhist Diversity

Nepali society is extremely diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture and language, with over 100 different ethnic groups. The 2011 census, recorded 81.3% of the Nepalese population as Hindu, 9.0% as Buddhist, 4.4% as Muslim, 3.0% as Kirant/Yumaist, 1.4% as Christian, and 0.9% follow other religions or none. There are also small groups of Jains, Sikhs and Baha'is. Although the majority of people identify as Hindu, Buddhist influences are pervasive in most aspects of Nepali culture. 'Buddhism' as practised is diverse, often Hinduised, and ethnic and regional in character.⁸ The history of exclusion coupled with poor prospects for improvement created grievances that encouraged some members of Buddhist ethnic communities to support the CPN (Maoist) and various other armed Maoist opposition groups such as the JTMM during and after the civil war. So that at a purely factual level the idea that Buddhist ideology cannot be allied to military violence, in a similar way to the experience in Sri Lanka and Burma, cannot be sustained without careful qualification.

Buddhism in Nepal has taken two forms: Firstly, Tibetan Buddhism,

8. Even the Nepali equivalent for Buddhist, 'Bhote,' traditionally has a very different connotation. Bhotiya/Bhote connotes geographical and cultural closeness to Tibet and the north with the additional connotation of eating meat which is beef or close to beef (Allen 2008: 314).

mainly of the Nyingma tradition, found among the ethnically Tibetan peoples along the northern border plus the Tamangs. Secondly, the Buddhism of the Newar people of the Kathmandu Valley (LeVine and Gellner 2005: 11-13). This is also Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism, but with direct links to the ancient Indian tradition. It has been described as the “only surviving community of Indian Buddhism” (LeVine and Gellner 2005). Newar Buddhism has therefore become of world-historical importance, and the ancient royal cities of Nepal – Kathmandu, Lalitpur (Patan), and Bhaktapur – which form its centres are UNESCO-designated World Heritage sites. In twentieth century Nepal a Theravada Movement developed which contrasts sharply with the highly ritualized Tantric Buddhism traditionally practiced in the Kathmandu Valley. It traces its origins back to the 1930s, but which has grown considerably since the overthrow of the Rana government in 1951.⁹

In general the country’s many religious groups coexisted peacefully; partly because Hindu rule and the dominance of Bahuns and Khettris meant that they had little choice, and partly because the reality of syncretism means that there is a blurring of the Hindu-Buddhist divide both in Newar and Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups. However, in the late 1980s and 1990s some Newar intellectuals and those who saw themselves as exclusively Buddhist resented the state’s special recognition and protection of Hinduism (LeVine and Gellner 2005). Newar activists sought out counterparts among Magar, Tharu and Garung ethnic activists in order to build an alliance for secularism and against a Hindu state (2008: xix). Buddhist activists also protested that Buddhism was not a branch of Hinduism, as it had been declared to be under the Panchayat system (Raeper and Hoftun 1992: 154-163).

The One China Policy and the Fate of the Tibetan Refugees

In terms of international profile and attention, the identity issue most associated with Nepal is that of the Tibetan people. The

9. Theravada religious activities were banned during the time of Rana government which ruled Nepal from 1846 to 1950, and several monks were banished for preaching Buddhism in 1926 and 1944.

presence and status of Tibetan refugees in Nepal complicates the ability of Buddhism to be a unifying peacebuilding force. Nepal is home to 120,370 refugees officially recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Tibetan and Bhutanese refugees account for the great majority.¹⁰ In the years following the 1959 Tibetan uprising and exile of the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, Nepal played a key role as a transit point for asylum-seekers on their way to India, the home of the Dalai Lama and seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile. While a significant segment of Tibetan refugees semi-integrated with the Nepali host population, albeit focussed in areas around Tibetan religious sites, other refugees are settled in refugee camps.¹¹ In 1986 the Nepalese government's *laissez-faire* approach towards Tibetan refugees began to tighten. In 1989, pressure from the Chinese government and the growing number of new arrivals led Nepal to initiate a strict border-control policy. Nepal has not signed the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and considers all asylum seekers— with the exception of the pre-1989 Tibetan population and certain Bhutanese— to be illegal immigrants. Those who arrived before 1989 were issued with refugee ID cards and benefited from economic integration and entrepreneurship, but more recent arrivals have no legal status and cannot own property, businesses, vehicles, or be employed lawfully.¹² Tibetans face

10. In the early 1990s, close to 106,000 Bhutanese refugees settled in seven U.N. supervised camps in eastern Nepal after being evicted from their homes in Bhutan when the government introduced a new law removing citizenship and civil rights due to ancestry. Since the start of its Bhutanese refugee resettlement initiative in 2007 the UNHCR has relocated over 20,000 refugees. (<http://www.unhcr.org/4aa641446.html>).

11. Set up by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Government of Nepal, the Swiss Government, Services for Technical Co-operation Switzerland, and the Australian Refugees Committee.

12. Mikel Dunham argues that 'After 20 years of close association with the refugee community, I can say, without hesitation, that – except for the infirm and elderly, who are too feeble to start new lives -- I do not know of one Tibetan stranded in Nepal who would remain in Nepal, if he or she were given the opportunity to move elsewhere. Ironically, few Nepalis -- even those Nepalis who live in close proximity to the Tibetans -- really understand this. The international community is similarly misguided.... Nepal is a dead end from which the refugees see no escape.'

<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/732122400/caught-in-nepal->

restrictions from Nepalese authorities, particularly during Tibetan anniversaries and festivals, with activists accusing Beijing of using aid and investment in Nepal to ensure the government contains “anti-Chinese” activity.¹³ Nepal’s support for the ‘one-China policy’ that views Tibet as an integral part of China has resulted in a progressive change in the tenor of protests, with the Nepalese government and its support for the one-China policy also becoming a focal point for activists. In 2013 it was reported that a Tibetan man set himself alight in Kathmandu in protest against China’s occupation of Tibet (<http://www.freetibet.org/news-media/na/full-list-self-immolations-tibet>).

Buddhist Peacebuilding: International, National and Regional Levels

In this section I argue that Buddhism is often perceived as a philosophy that emphasises worldly renunciation and non-violence. The precept of abstaining from taking life is frequently referred to, by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, as one of the key concepts of Buddhism. This normative discourse on non-violence with its single underlying ethical theory is promoted by Nepal’s leaders as an aspect of national peacebuilding.¹⁴ Firstly, there is great national pride in

photographs-by-tibetan-refugees

13. China has significantly increased its engagement in Nepal since the signing of the CPA in 2006, with a particularly marked increase in 2011. China’s engagement in Nepal takes a variety of forms: economic investment, trade, aid, infrastructural development, military assistance, diplomatic exchanges, as well as cultural and educational initiatives. China is determined that Nepal should not become a breeding ground for activists campaigning for an independent Tibet. It fears that Tibetan refugees, who enjoy considerable sympathy and support in India and the West, will use Nepal as a base to protest against the Chinese occupation and to carry out ‘anti-China activities,’” said a 2012 report by Safer World, an independent international organization working to prevent violent conflict. UNHCR - Over 20,000 Bhutanese refugees resettled from Nepal-<http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/tibetan-refugees-nepal-crying-out-documentation>;
<http://www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/FAB%20Nepal.pdf>

14. In an address to Asian Buddhists in 2011 Nepali President Baran Yadav stressed the crucial role played by religion in bringing about peace and solidarity in the world:

The spirit of Buddhism is to spread peace. The creation and development of a society where there is no fear and the message of the Buddha have had a

Nepal's Buddhist history — particularly that the historical Buddha was born in Lumbini in what is now Nepal, and that bodhisattvas and previous Buddhas appeared here. The Buddhist emperor Ashoka is believed to have made a pilgrimage to Lumbini. His example as an early peacemaker who renounced war as an instrument of government has been influential up to this day (Jones 228-231). Nagarjuna, the greatest monk scholar of Indian Mahayan Buddhism, is also supposed to have visited Nepal, teaching the politics of enlightenment (Jones 231-233). Great Tibetan and Indian Buddhist philosophers and Vajrayana Mahasiddhas are also said to have visited Nepal, transmitting Vajrayana Buddhism.¹⁵

Secondly, the non-violent resistance of the Dalai Lama against Chinese occupation has contributed to the widespread understanding of Buddhism as non-violent (Frydenlund 2013: 95). While there is international recognition of Buddhist peacebuilders in conflict situations – Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam, Sulak Sivaraksa in Thailand, A.T. Ariyaratne in Sri Lanka, Daisaku Ikeda in Japan, Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma — the most influential peacemaker in Nepal because of his global stature is the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama, who in 1989 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, has always taught that non-violence and dialogue are the way forward to resolve the Tibetan struggle.¹⁶ His example is extremely powerful in Nepal especially among Tibetan refugees and the Tibeto-Burman nationalities. However, while the Tibetan leader is almost universally revered, the younger generation of refugees questions their movement's long-time commitment to nonviolent resistance. Many argue that this policy has failed, and

fundamental role in the democratic constitution of Nepal. However, even if the Buddha was born in Nepal, the country is not yet at peace... For this, we must continue to work to achieve it.

15. They include Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) in the 8th century CE, Marpa (1012-1097), Nāropā (1016–1100) and Milarepa (c. 1052—c. 1135).

16. A number of countries have called for China to respect Tibetan human rights and the UN Commission on Human Rights often points out the plight of Tibet. Nothing has come of these initiatives, for "constructive engagement" is politically preferred - at least by business interests trading with China. And anyway, international pressure alone probably is not enough. It needs to be matched by domestic nonviolent resistance on the part of the Tibetans and pro-democracy Chinese.

reference China's growing influence in Nepal. In seeking to engage in a struggle against either Chinese policy itself or the position of the Nepalese state, Tibetan refugees tend to distance themselves from internal Nepali politics, and look to the wider Tibetan Buddhist and international community for support.

National Sites of Peace: the Ambiguous Case of Lumbini

This strong identification of Buddhism with peace and non-violence can be seen in Government attempts to promote Lumbini, one of the four holy places of Buddhism for the world's 500 million Buddhists, as the "city of world peace." Ram Kumar Shrestha, the Newar Minister for Culture, Tourism, Civil Aviation and Reconstruction and Peace in an interview with me in June 2013 identified Nepal's international promotion of peaceful co-existence with the development of Lumbini. The major development plan for Lumbini envisaged that it would play a significant role in transnational peacebuilding and the Nepali peace process. In fact there were attempts by Buddhist monks to use Lumbini as the venue for Government talks with the Maoists during the insurgency. Yet despite the fact that non-violence is perceived as fundamental to Buddhist teachings the complex social realities surrounding Lumbini mean that conflict has surrounded its development.¹⁷ Nyaupane (2009) notes that over recent decades, misperception and conflicts between the monastic communities from a variety of Asian countries, the Lumbini Development Trust, and the local population have resulted in tensions and delayed progress on the development of Lumbini as a spiritual and World Heritage site.¹⁸

17. Sangeeta Lama in 1998 described Lumbini as a place where 'Buddhist religious sects compete with poured stupas and monasteries, and where nationalistic Buddhism divides up plots among Burmese, Thais, Japanese, Sri Lankans, Taiwanese and Beijing-backed Tibetans...' Lama commented, 'It is part of Lumbini's lore that UN Secretary General U Thant shed a tear for the place when he visited it in 1967. Today, seeing the Sakyamuni's birthplace as little more than a tin shed under a tarpaulin shroud, he would weep uncontrollably'

<http://www.himalmag.com/component/authors/articles/Sangeeta-Lama.html>.

18. Nyaupane points out that Lumbini is surrounded by a population of different faiths, mainly Hindus and Muslims. Locals, who are predominantly non-Buddhist, see the local patrimony more as an economic resource than spiritual one, whereas the government uses the site for building national pride, garnering international support and promoting tourism.

There have also been demonstrations against its politicisation and commercialisation. In 2011 several hundred Buddhists, including monks and nuns, demonstrated in Kathmandu against the appointment of the head of UCPN-Maoist and the Maoist guerrilla leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda,' as director of the Lumbini Development Committee. Demonstrators demanded that political involvement in the project should be ended, and protested that politicians were transforming a sacred site into a tourism destination.¹⁹ There were also international repercussions. Burma's U Thant, the first Asian Secretary-General of the UN, took a personal interest in the development of Lumbini as a major world pilgrimage site. There were national protests when his successor, Ban Ki-moon, accepted an invitation to co-chair an international conference on Lumbini with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the Chairman of the ruling Maoist Party. Ban Ki-moon was accused of giving legitimacy to a party whose officially declared policy glorifies violence.²⁰

Lumbini Bauddha University

The strong normative discourse about nonviolence within Buddhism

19. The protestors put forward five demands (http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=39,10612,0,0,1,0#.UurUadJ_uq8):

1. Lumbini development area must be declared as an autonomous peace zone.

2. Marauding of Buddhist cultural heritage, historical sites and archeological treasures by unlawful acts must be deemed as crime against cultural heritage and must be stopped immediately.

3. Lumbini, Bouddha, Swayambu, Namabuddha and other important Buddhist religious sites must be declared as "peace zone".

4. A separate Ministry for the development of Buddhist concerns in relation to religion, culture and its resources must be established under the representation of Buddhists only.

5. All Buddhist organizations, committees and functions under the Government of Nepal for Buddhist concerns which is affiliated with party politics without our consent will not be honored by its stake holders.

20. If Ban Ki-moon is to co-chair a high profile meeting with Dahal, he must insist that Dahal's party officially renounce the use of violence in politics in the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations. Otherwise, the Secretary-General co-chairing a conference with a leader who refuses to renounce violence would be contrary to the UN Charter, and to do so at a holy religious site would be a sacrilege insulting not just peace-loving Nepalis but millions of Buddhists around the world. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2012/03/questionable-wisdom-of-ban-ki-moons-visit-to-lumbini/>

in Nepal is implicit in the founding of Lumbini Bauddha University. The first World Buddhist Summit held in Lumbini in 1998 proposed the establishment of a Buddhist university there. The University's Objectives are to propagate the teachings of Gautam Buddha for the promotion of peace, brotherhood, amity and understanding in the world, to preserve and protect Nepali Buddhist culture and values, and to explore the ways and means of developing LBU as 'the Fountain of World Peace and the Centre for inculcating the Buddhist way of life.' LBU is to become an international Centre of Buddhist scholarship 'for the welfare of humanity at large.' The University now offers graduate courses in all major Buddhist traditions, and in Buddhism and Peace Studies. The Nepal Buddhist Federation (NBF) similarly identifies Buddhism with a universal culture of peace, at the same time seeking to promote and preserve Lumbini and all Buddhist sacred places.

The Gautam Buddha International Peace Award

In 2002 the Government of Nepal established the Gautam Buddha International Peace Award. Its aim was to recognize and honour individuals and institutions around the world that have made a significant contribution to peace and nonviolence inspired by the teachings and messages of the Buddha. Announcing the award the Nepal Government identifies concepts of nonviolence with Nepal's national and international interests:

Responding to the call of the First World Buddhist Summit held in Lumbini, the Government of Nepal took the initiative to establish the Award, as Nepal takes great pride as the birthplace of Shakyamuni Siddhartha Gautam Buddha, known to many as the Prince of Peace. Nepal's consider Gautam Buddha as a great national luminary, and Asia's guiding light as well as a messenger for peace in the world. An Award named after Gautam Buddha, would enhance Nepal's position in the international arena, and encourage Nepal to follow the path of peace in its domestic policies as well as in its international relations. It would also be helpful in developing Lumbini as a major global Buddhist pilgrimage site. Most importantly, the Award would promote Buddha's message of peace, non-violence and human solidarity,

values that are so essential in our world today. <http://www.buddhaintpeaceaward.gov.np/>.

To mark the 2555th Buddha Jayanti, birth anniversary of the Buddha, the Government of Nepal conferred the first Gautam Buddha International Peace Award on two Japanese cities— Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Peacebuilding and Interfaith Organisations

While these state-wide initiatives are couched in a global language that assumes a universal cultural heritage, thousands of international and local NGOs are working at regional and grassroots level to heal the deep divisions in society around gender, ethnicity, disability, caste and religion. Many operate with a human rights approach, often with a special focus on the rights of **women, children, and marginalised groups**. Others work to support peacebuilding processes with conflict-affected and internally displaced people or to raise awareness of indirect, 'structural' violence. If we turn to religious-based NGOs we find that hundreds are active in Nepal – for example, the Inter Faith Council, National Inter Faith Committee, Global Network of Religions for Children, Religions for Peace-Nepal, United Religions Initiative, and Parliament of World Religions. Among the largest are the Inter-Religious Council Nepal, consisting of representatives of the Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, and Bahai communities <http://www.pluralism.org/reports/view/12>,²¹ and Religions for Peace (WCRP) which promotes peace by coordinating the efforts of various local religious groups. These interfaith organisations are largely Kathmandu-based and provide an opportunity for religious leaders

21. Members organize symposia and conferences intended to spread the message of peace. They have also met with senior government and international leaders (including senior Maoist intellectuals), lobbying for peace on religious grounds. In addition to its peace advocacy, the IRCN has taken up a variety of social causes. In 2007, for example, the IRCN teamed up with The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to hold a week long conference where religious leaders and advocates for women's rights discussed the acute problem of domestic violence in Nepal. Members of the Nepal Interreligious Council also visited Gorkha and met religious and district leaders. They convinced local leaders that since the country is a secular state, they should not impose restrictions on freedom of religion.

to discuss issues of common interest and combine to demonstrate support for various causes. For example, in 2013 religious leaders came together in an event organized by UNCIEF and UNFPA in collaboration with National Interreligious Network, to express their commitment to make Nepal 'a child marriage free country.' Religious leaders have also used their combined influence to counter rising Hindu extremism (<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Nepal's-religious-leaders-and-political-leaders-to-defend-secular-state-25445.html>), to work together against the suppression of religious minorities (particularly Muslims) by the state (<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Islamic-leaders-in-Nepal%3A-religious-minorities-unite-against-extremism-and-repression-23186.html>), to fight AIDS, and to show solidarity in cases of religiously motivated violence against Muslims or Christians. Many individually head institutions which are involved in the teaching of peace values, the empowerment of women, education for girls, the ending of early marriages and of violence against women and children.

Many Nepali organisations work with international partners. Among Buddhist organisations working for peace are **the USA-based Karuna Center** which began working in Nepal in the 1990's, leading workshops for women focused on women's equality and empowerment, and for indigenous communities concerned with issues of cultural preservation, human rights, and political representation. Shanti Sangha is a Nepali organisation affiliated with United Religions Initiative, a global organisation which promotes interfaith cooperation and peace, and aims to create cultures of peace and justice. Sarvodaya Nepal is affiliated with the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement of Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka this Buddhist affiliated organization, by far the country's largest NGO, has helped thousands of villages improve their situations through mutual cooperation and understanding. Additionally, Sarvodaya Shramadana has been a leading advocate of religious tolerance in Sri Lanka. Sarvodaya Nepal aims to take this organization's principles of grassroots social activism and apply them to Nepal.

The great majority of NGOs receive funding by western governments, organizations and donors. Some of this funding is directed towards peacebuilding and reconstruction, and towards issues of importance

to Buddhist communities. There is great international interest in Buddhism as represented in national centres like Swayambhath and Boudha, and many INGOs and individuals fund schools and hospitals, and centres of Tibetan refugee culture. The international climbing and trekking community has also been extremely active in supporting villages in the Solu-Khumbu region of north-eastern Nepal. Few international or national I/NGOs admit any kind of direct proselytising aim, and many have moved from a prescriptive towards an elicitive approach to peacebuilding. The actual impact of all these projects is cumulative.

Key Considerations for the Future of Religious Peacebuilding in Nepal

In the last decades Nepalese citizens have taken on the massive task of rethinking the characteristics of their national society as it struggles to transform from insurgency to a peaceful and democratic society. Nepal continues to experience political instability, weak law and order and low-level insecurity, so building peace and stability remains a priority. There are diverse stakeholders in this process — Nepali politicians, current and former diplomats, military officials, business people, journalists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as foreign embassy officials, representatives of multilateral agencies, international NGOs (INGOs) and think tanks. Nepal is of strategic importance as a fragile state in its own right and as a building block for stability in the region, positioned between China and India. The role of other major international players in Nepal is significant. India has always been a major donor, but the growing role of China, and the consequent shifting boundaries of what constitutes aid and development assistance, are fast changing the context in which Western donors try to support development and peacebuilding in Nepal.

This paper has tried to draw a broad picture of the context of Buddhist contributions to peacebuilding at international, national and regional levels. It has argued that despite its relatively more marginal status than Hinduism the state employs Buddhist symbolism and a strong normative discourse regarding Buddhist pacifism as part of the processes of nation building. The state has

invested in Buddhism's religious and cultural capital, and its ability to attract international patrons and donors. Government schemes have also aroused accusations that Buddhism is being exploited for economic purposes. Buddhist leaders and organisations have played a significant role in the public sphere by strongly promoting a variety of perspectives favouring peace, reconciliation and human rights. In particular Buddhist mindfulness training emphasises the importance of dialogue, sense of compassion for others and an ethical commitment to social harmony. Among internationally recognised peacebuilding leaders or models in Nepal the Dalai Lama's commitment to dialogue in response to state violence stands out as having resonated in the domestic peace discourse. Political considerations have resulted in the Dalai Lama's exclusion from Nepal and pressure for Tibetan refugees living in Nepal to avoid asserting their national identity as their host country moves closer to its powerful northern neighbour China. Nevertheless there have been persistent anti-China protests.

Partly as a result of Tibetan lamas and religious leaders going to the West international interest in, and funding for, Buddhist educational institutions and other projects has been strong in Nepal. As the Tibeto-Burman communities move towards a 'high,' monastic understanding of religion (see Fisher 1992, 2002; Ortner 1989) this influence will only become stronger. Many Buddhist leaders are inspired by deep spiritual devotion and faith in the wisdom of the Buddha to pursue the path of reconciliation and peace, and have publically combined with leading NGOs and representatives of civil society to demonstrate opposition to Hindu extremism, religious violence and social ills. One notable leader is the Tibetan Buddhist nun, Ani Choying Drolma (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22612227>) who is an internationally reputed singer of Buddhist chants and hymns. She has toured extensively in North America, Asia and Europe and with the help of proceeds from her concert tours, CD sales and donation has devoted herself to the welfare of Buddhist nuns and the education of girls, especially from poorer backgrounds. The daughter of a Tibetan refugee she continues to bring the plight of Tibetan refugees to the world's attention.

NGOs have emerged as important actors in development,

especially in countries like Nepal where there is political instability and weak governance. Issues of social exclusion and inclusion and caste, regional, gender and cultural disparity have been the focus of peacemaking initiatives. There are Buddhist NGOs working with interfaith and international partners to address humanitarian issues regardless of faith affiliation. Others work to facilitate reconciliation and the resolution of ethnic tensions. Nevertheless criticisms of peacebuilding programmes are widespread. There are complaints that elite NGOs do not benefit the people most affected by violence and have little contact with grassroots communities, with remote groups and with those who have been damaged and uprooted by the civil conflict. There are allegations that development programmes reinforce the social and political inequalities that are at the root of the violent, armed conflict,²² that funding arrangements do not always provide stability and predictability in the long term, and timeliness and flexibility in the short term. There are few aspects of Nepal's new political system that have not been shaped by donor input and political aid, and the close identification of NGOs with foreign donors leads often to perceptions of hidden interests guiding development. There has been growing resentment in recent years about the approach taken by Western donors and their perceived proxies, NGOs and INGOs. There is a perception that much Western aid ends up in the pockets of élite Nepalis and Western NGOs and consultants, with little benefit or ownership by Nepali people. A perceived lack of monitoring and evaluative studies on the effectiveness of NGOs challenges claims of success made in their reports.

Some commentators have expressed surprise that Buddhism has not played the significant peace-making role that it should globally, and have questioned the effectiveness of the Buddhist approach to nonviolence. Christian-based organisations are often perceived as having greater impact and better organisation. They tend to be funded from the USA and the West, to be in touch with international sponsors and government departments, and are very anxious to be seen as service rather than evangelical bodies. Dor Bahadur Bista, still Nepal's best-known anthropologist, argued (1991: 84-87)

22. 127 Risk Management Office – Nepal, A guidebook to safe and effective development in conflict (2005)

that Nepal is backward because the culture of fatalism (*bahunbad*) devalued the country's productivity.²³ Bista also argued that the aid pouring into Nepal continues a long tradition of patronage, and that the system of *chakari* which gave rise to nepotism and favouritism has continued till this day —from the Rana patrimonial system to the present republican system.²⁴ Buddhist engagement in the peace process has also been critiqued as value-based rather than action-oriented, encouraging harmony and peace at the expense of a countervailing impulse toward justice. Special priority is assigned to personal rather than systemic transformation, and less stress on the task and priority of integrating into Buddhist practice a political awareness that includes global human rights and justice.

Tentative research findings suggest a number of broad areas in which Buddhist peacemakers could strengthen their public engagement with issues of peace and stability in Nepal. First, priority could be given to developing a culture of resistance to injustice, a capacity for critical analysis and encounter with the realities of context and the worldviews and cultural norms of rural Nepal. Second, accepted channels for the expression of disagreement and mechanisms for handling disagreement could be developed. Third, activists could support the peace process by seeking and sustaining processes of dynamic change, and promoting the vertical and horizontal integration of people and processes.²⁵

23. Bista located the root cause of conflict in Brahmin-Chhetri minority values, fatalism and the caste system, linking Hindu (and Buddhist) concepts to fatalism and an anti-developmental thrust.

24. Leaders or patrons support the people as clients of their constituency by providing them with jobs, money and other favours. It is then natural that leaders appropriate the state's resources through corruption, a small part of which is used to support the patronage system and a large part for personal enrichment.

25. Alan Clements in an interview with Aung San Suu Kyi once questioned the effectiveness of the Buddhist approach to nonviolence. He distinguished between two paradigms of nonviolence - one rooted in a belief in God, as in the movements led by Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Vaclav Havel, and Nelson Mandela. The other version is rooted in the Buddhist belief in inter-relatedness, without a god. The Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Daw Suu take this approach. Clements pointed out that these non-theistic Buddhist movements have not been successful in bringing about political change. (<http://>

Further Research

In the next phase of our research we will select particular areas of conflict in Nepal (for example, the tensions over Tibetan refugee rights, and those surrounding the development of Lumbini) and explore in detail what it might mean to apply Buddhist principles of social action and dialogue to ethnic conflict, and community and societal change, and whether it makes any sense to talk of 'Buddhist' peacemaking. The violent history of countries that are predominantly Buddhist has been increasingly recognized by scholars over the last few decades. Nevertheless, to maintain that the teaching of the Buddha has no efficacy socially or communally, and can only represent an individual path cannot be justified by the Nepal experience. Further research will anchor emergent theory in careful exploration of peoples' local experiences and meaning structures (See Van der Riet 2008). It will offer a detailed evaluation of religious peacebuilding in Nepal, taking into account that this is part of a much broader international and national effort. The evaluation will provide Nepal-specific conclusions, discuss wider lessons for religious peacebuilding in fragile and post conflict states, and present the evaluation's recommendations.

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