

Conflict resolution through religion

Koushik Barman

Independent Researchers, Alumni, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, West Bengal, India

Author E-mail – barmankoushik1996@gmail.com

Abstract: The objective of this paper is to focus on various conflict resolution methods through religion. Religion has remained important because it instills cultural norms and values that continue to influence people's identities and communities. This paper tries to explain religion and its effect on global affairs and establish the right to freedom of religion. This paper attempts to discuss conflict and conflict resolution. Conflict resolution is a field of study in international relations that analyzes political conflict dynamics and explores non-violent, mutually agreeable solutions. This paper also tries to highlight some cases, like Mozambique, Sri Lanka, and Punjab, where religious intervention has been successful in preventing conflict.

Keywords: Religion, Conflict, Conflict resolution, violence, Politics.

Introduction: This article's goal is to provide a conceptual framework for using religion to resolve conflicts. The foundation of all world faiths is peace. One can draw several conclusions about the unique role that religious actors and communities can play in conflict resolution by thinking back on positive religious peacebuilding initiatives such as the intervention of an imam and pastor team in Nigeria to stop Christian-Muslim violence, the involvement of religious leaders in South Africa's efforts at reconciliation, and the mediation of the Catholic lay group Sant Egidio to end the civil war in Mozambique. It is true that religion is a source of noble and harmonious teachings. The dissemination of morals, teachings, and religious symbols throughout the community through the use of physical and virtual public spaces that the community uses collaboratively to discuss and debate a range of concepts and interests, including opinions and religious pursuits, is indicative of the general presence of religion in public space. Religion must be viewed secularly and in accordance with reason while in a public setting.

Religion was viewed as a potential warring factor and the primary cause of numerous conflicts. However, a number of famous researchers attempted to dispute this concept. They have begun to investigate the underexplored field of religion and conflict resolution. Religion has a significant

impact on people's lives globally. It has enormous potential for assisting in conflict resolution, which has yet to be realized. Those who promote religion as a tool for dispute mediation. In this article, I mentioned about religion, conflict and conflict resolution and conflict resolution through the religion.

Religion: According to Hegel, religion is the knowledge possessed by the finite mind of its nature as absolute mind. He believes in the existence of God in this world. The God is just a belief originated from human imagination. But , of the nearly 8.12 billion people on earth as of July 1, 2024 , only about 16 percent say they don't believe in a God or do not believe in a specific religion. The rest of the world's population belongs to one of more than twenty different major religions. The world's major religions range in size from christianity with 31 percent of world's population(Worldometer, 2024).

Definition of religion are not neutral but rather serve some purpose or another (Schilbrack, 2013). Some are extremely broad and some are extremely narrow. Definitions can be so wide that they cover nonreligious belief systems like communism and atheism (the conviction that there is no God), or they can be so limited that they exclude all other types of religion and limit themselves to only one organized religion. A group's shared thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that provide an object of devotion—someone or something sacred to believe in, like a god or a spiritual idea—can be broadly characterized as religion. Religion also involves a set of moral principles or a code of conduct that people can use to assess the social and personal ramifications of their own and other people's activities. Religion most often deals with the spiritual or the supernatural, that is, forces and powers that are outside the realm of human control. In the latter domain, religion makes an effort to provide answers to issues like the meaning of life and what occurs after death that are not addressed by science.

Religion has remained important because it instils cultural norms and values that continue to influence people's identities and communities. It has also been a primary source of societal and individual morality that permeates people's daily lives. Religion plays a significant role in determining the political, social, and economic attitudes of the general public worldwide. As a result, it is challenging to overlook religion when it comes to important aspects of human existence. The idea of constructing peace and resolving conflicts through religion has limited applicability because, generally speaking, religion has never been able to address all of humanity's social and political issues.

It is clear that academics, practitioners, and policy makers alike are becoming more conscious of the impact of religion on global concerns. The appointment of the first-ever Special Envoy by the European Union in 2016 to promote religious freedom outside of the EU serves as a paradigm for

this. This appointment represents the understanding of the connection between public concerns like stability and peace and the right to freedom of religion, conscience, and opinion. The European Parliament demanded that the “EU establish a permanent Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief” in response to the so-called “ISIS” systematic mass slaughter of religious minorities. As part of the mandate, missions to assist in addressing the problem and creating reaction strategies included trips to some of the most violently persecuted religious nations worldwide. After being found not guilty of blasphemy, Asia Bibi was able to safely depart Pakistan with the assistance of the Special Envoy.

The debate therefore shifts from whether religion contributes to societal change processes to what kind of contributions it makes and what are its particular potentials and issues. Western countries becoming more secularized, national governments have begun to set up specialized divisions to better investigate how religion affects common concerns. For instance, the United States established the “Office of Religion and Global Affairs” within the State Department; the United Kingdom established the CONTEST (counter terrorism strategy) within the Home Office. The objective of CONTEST is to lessen the threat of terrorism to the United Kingdom, its nationals, and its interests abroad so that people can live in freedom and confidence. The Human Security Division of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in Switzerland established a task force focused on “Religion, politics, and conflicts.”

Conflict and conflict resolution: A conflict situation arises when two or more persons are interdependent, undergoing intense emotional states, and seeming to hold incompatible views or outcomes. At least one of the parties must acknowledge this incompatibility and consider it to be problematic. Perception is a factor in conflict. Conflict does not occur if none of the persons engaged in an interaction believe that the circumstances will not work out or if none of the parties believe that the circumstances are problematic.

Religious intolerance and discrimination exist on a worldwide scale. Religious war, intellectual disagreement, and intolerance of other religions and discrimination against their adherents are examples of religious conflict. Conflicts like those in the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and Cyprus can lead to religious apathy or disintegration, which is detrimental to the credibility of religion overall. Political strife can lead to religious conflict. Any disagreement, dispute, or struggle resulting from differences in political ideas, views, or interests between individuals, groups, or nations is referred to as a political conflict.

Since the United Nations was established 79 years ago, the nature of conflict has undergone significant change. These days, conflicts are mostly fought between domestic groups rather than between states and are less commonly fatal. Concerns over deadly autonomous weapons, hacking, weaponization of bots and drones, and livestreaming of extremist assaults have been sparked by technological advancements. Moreover, there has been an increase in criminal activities involving ransomware and data breaches. Since 1946, the total number of war casualties has been falling worldwide. Conflict is now mostly caused by unresolved regional tensions, a collapse in the rule of law, the absence or appropriation of state institutions, illegal economic gain, and resource shortages made worse by climate change. With the decline of the East-West confrontation, few of the Conflicts that remain will have ideological roots and most will derive from clashes of communal identity on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion (Johnston, 2014).

The process of resolving a disagreement and coming to a decision that is acceptable to all sides is known as conflict resolution. Effective conflict resolution is not intended to prevent disputes because conflict is a necessary aspect of being human. Rather, talks are facilitated, comprehension is increased, and emotional reactions are controlled through the application of conflict resolution techniques. Conflict resolution is a field of study in international relations, which analyzes the dynamics of political conflict which explores non-violent, mutually agreeable, solutions to longstanding, intractable disputes. Faith, religion, spirituality and the sacred has a place in the conflict resolution process (Goldberg & Blancke, 2011).

International conflict resolution has been dominated by the realism school of thought since the end of the Cold War. Its basic points are as follows: states are the only important actors in international relations, self-interest governs them, sovereignty is the yardstick by which states are compared to one another and states will use force to preserve their standing among other states. Maybe this approach of resolving conflicts made sense when the state held the ultimate authority during the Cold War. The complex theological, cultural, psychological, economic, and geographic realities that lie at the heart of today's conflicts, however, have eluded the realist school. Within the framework of the realism school, diplomacy was one of the most widely used strategies for fostering cordial relations between states. Policymakers were government officials who communicated with other government officials in order to resolve conflicts amicably and adopt diplomatic solutions in international relations. The United Nations became one of the leading organizations involved in conflict resolution.

Religion and conflict resolution : The term religion and conflict resolution might seem an oxymoron and indeed to many social scientists will remain so (Marsden, 2012). It was anticipated by

secular theorists like J.S. Mill, Max Weber, and Karl Marx that religion would decrease. Vested interests that go into and on behalf of religion teachings are typically the cause of violent and persistent religious conflicts. If this element of hidden interest has entered into a conflict with a religious face, it cannot be expected that the conflict will end (Syarif, 2019).

For many groups that are at odds, religion plays a significant role in defining characteristics. A contentious topic among social scientists is the relationship between religion and conflict. Religious conflicts are a type of conflict that is not easy to resolve, but that does not mean that the conflict cannot be managed properly(Syarif, 2019). There continues to appear in the literature considerable skepticism regarding the role of religion as either a cause of conflict or a cause of peace(Little, 2006). The point was that, as was the case in Sri Lanka, Sudan, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and other cases, religion frequently contributes significantly to the escalation of ethno-national conflicts. Of course, religion is not the only thing that matters; politics, the economy, oil, and other factors are also quite significant, but religion is still very essential.

The dissemination of morals, teachings, and religious symbols throughout the community through the use of physical and virtual public spaces that the community uses collaboratively to discuss and debate a range of concepts and interests, including opinions and religious pursuits, is indicative of the general presence of religion in public space. Despite the ideological claim that no religion promotes animosity and conflict, historical and factual records demonstrate that tensions and violent confrontations have frequently characterized interreligious relations. It is true that religion is a source of noble and harmonious teachings. Religious traditions that are used to legitimize violence and war have also been sources of inspiration for establishing peace and resolving conflicts over the centuries.(Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009).

Religion has been used by political and religious leaders to excuse violence, intolerance, and hatred in the majority of conflicts (such as those between Israel and Palestine, India and Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, and Nigeria, among others).At the same time, religious actors and faith-based organizations (e.g. Quakers, Mennonites, St Egidio Community, Interfaith Mediation Center in Nigeria, among others) are becoming more involved in conflict resolution, mediation and interfaith dialogues to transform the conflictual relations between parties (Little 2006).Indeed, virtually all religious traditions incorporate ideals of peace and promise peace as the outcome of their application. (Kadayifci-Orellana , 2009)

They all represent a wide range of moral and cultural resources that form the cornerstone of individual and group ideals that avert confrontations. The Dalai Lama's nonviolent resistance is heavily

influenced by his understanding of Buddhism and Buddhist values like compassion, while Ghaffar Khan of the Pathans built a nonviolent army based on Islamic principles of peacebuilding, forgiveness, patience, and compassion. Similarly, Gandhi's nonviolent resistance was influenced by Hinduism, and Martin Luther King Jr. found inspiration in Christianity for his civil rights movement.

Because politics and religion are opposing forces, their relationship is inherently unstable. Many Western commentators question why religion has turned into a lethal tool in the numerous political conflicts that are fought around the world. There are many examples. Consider Nigeria, where religiously motivated riots have claimed hundreds of lives, India, where numerous lives have been lost in violent clashes between Muslims and Hindus, or Northern Ireland, where Protestants and Catholics have been engaged in a bloody and protracted conflict for many years. Another thing that comes to mind is the involvement of Buddhist monks in the most recent political and military conflict in Sri Lanka. In such circumstances, religious justification for political violence frequently arises, if necessary with appropriate reference to the founding documents of the relevant religious traditions.

It is common today to consider religion as a source of conflict rather than a resource for peace. (Ter Haar, 2005). It is critical to recognize and then disseminate certain components (holy text and custom) within a specific religious tradition that has the capacity to significantly aid in the resolution of social and political disputes and, consequently, in the establishment of peace. Some case situations from around the globe in which religious or spiritual intervention has contributed to the successful prevention or resolution of actual conflict (Johnston, 2014). These include the role played by the churches in South Africa in helping to end apartheid, the Quakers' advocacy for a peaceful end to a bloody civil war in Nigeria (they upheld the principles of equality and conscience), the Catholic Church's leadership in the Philippines' orderly transition to democracy, and more. We can observe that religious intervention has been successful in preventing conflict in the cases of Mozambique, Sri Lanka, and Punjab.

In Mozambique, FRELIMO (25 June, 1962) was founded to free Mozambique from Portuguese colonial rule. However, within six months, the insurgent Resistencia de Nacional Mocambicana (RENAMO) emerged, with South Africa and Rhodesia backing it. The FRELIMO leadership adopted Marxism-Leninism and signed treaties with Cuba and the Soviet Union. The civil war in Mozambique has cost over a million lives and caused extensive destruction. Joaquim Chissano, who became president in 1986, moderated FRELIMO's program, believing negotiations could end the conflict. In 1990, both sides agreed to talks in Rome, mediated by the Catholic Church. However, violence persists, and Church leaders remain confident in facilitating a negotiating process.

In Punjab, India, conflict between the Sikhs and Hindus is a significant issue. A Sikh separatist movement has attempted to establish an independent state in the region, with the central government feared that granting Punjab independence would unravel India. In 1986, Jain monk Guruji, dedicated to nonviolence, toured the affected areas and issued an appeal for peace. He met with Sikh leaders and initiated a gathering at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, resulting in a four-point plan. However, the Punjab government sabotaged the peace process, fearing religious leaders' prestige. Guruji's peace initiative demonstrates the potential for honest dialogue between people with differing opinions and world views.

In Sri Lanka, we see that Sri Lanka's civil war has divided the island into two regions, with Hindu Tamils resisting Buddhist Sinhalese in the North. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are the largest rebel group, supported by Tamil Nadu. In 1987, the Indian government pressured Sri Lanka to accept a peace agreement, but the rebels refused. In 1989, India and Sri Lanka agreed to withdraw Indian forces, but violence continues. A religious group has attempted to mediate the conflict, serving as message carriers. The situation has become more complex with the formation of a new Sinhalese Marxist insurgency. The mediators emphasize that parties alone can achieve peace.

Conclusion: Using examples from Mozambique, Punjab, and Sri Lanka, this study aimed to provide an overview of the role of religion in conflicts, conflict resolution, and peace-building in the developing world. Although the situations, problems, actors' religious beliefs, and circumstances varied from nation to nation, they all had one thing in common: religious connections to conflict are usually the subject of significant public attention. It may be shown that followers of many religions are inspired and encouraged to use overtly religious principles to settle disputes and promote peace. Faith-based organizations will inevitably find themselves in a conflict situation where their primary focus is on trying to address its immediate manifestations.

Reference: 1) Abu-Nimer, M. (2001). Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding. *Journal of Peace Research*, 38(6), 685–704.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038006003>

2) Brewer, J. D., Higgins, G. I., & Teeney, F. (2010). Religion and Peacemaking: A Conceptualization.

Sociology, 44(6), 1019–1037. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510381608>

- 3) Goldberg, R., & Blancke, B. (2011). God in the process: Is there a place for religion in conflict resolution? *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 28(4), 377–398. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.20032>
- 4) Haynes, J. (2009). Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peace-Building: The Role of Religion in Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 47(1), 52–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662040802659033>
- 5) Johnston, D. M. (2014). Religion and Conflict Resolution. *Notre Dame Law Review*, 67(5). <http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndlr/vol67/iss5/10>
- 6) Kadayifci-Orellana, S. A. (2009). Ethno-Religious Conflicts: Exploring the Role of Religion in Conflict Resolution. In SAGE Publications Ltd eBooks (pp. 264–284). <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857024701.n15>
- 7) Little, D. (2006). Religion, Conflict and Peace. *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 38(1). <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol38/iss1/6>
- 8) Marsden, L. (2012). *The Ashgate Research Companion to Religion and Conflict Resolution* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315613505>
- 9) Syarif, F. (2019). Religion in the Conflict Flows. *Addin*, 13(2), 337. <https://doi.org/10.21043/addin.v13i2.6452>
- 10) Ter Haar, G.(2005). Religion: Source of Conflict or Resource for Peace? In Ter Haar, G., & Busuttil, J. J. (Eds.), *Bridge or barrier : religion, violence and visions for peace*(pp 3-34). In BRILL eBooks. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA70499059>
- 11) Worldometer – real-time world statistics. (2024). Worldometer. <https://www.worldometers.info/>