

Abstract:

Youth Buddhist monks' role in modern society

This research is about investigating contemporary major challengers and problems of youth monks have in modern society. Further this research was to explore young monks' perceptions of the role of Buddhism in society and on radical Buddhist mobilization in Sri Lanka, protection of Buddhism and current duties and the responsibilities of youth monks towards community development.

Material was collected through interviews with young monks in Sri Lanka. Youths have an important role in any society in relation to social development as they constitute the future generation. It is important as well as interesting to explore what they reflect upon in relation to the current development in Sri Lanka. Especially young monks' views may tell us whether the world view of radical monks is shared by other, younger monks. Monks play an important role in the society as they are representatives of Buddhism and have influence among Sinhalese ethnicity.

Young monks are already representatives of Buddhism and soon they will have an even more pronounced role in the temples acting as consultants for the laity, and constitute the future. In Sri Lanka there are about 50 000 monks and 35 000 monks enrolled in pirivenas .A pirivena is the site for education at temples for monks although the higher education is also open for the lay community. The pirivenas are maintained by the Ministry of Education on a national level.

However according to outcome, youth monks seek more educational opportunities with foreign language fluency to spread the Buddhist philosophy, further they need to attract more youth generation from the society to mitigate the social problems .According their view , Some other youth Buddhist monks' asymmetric behavior also give a wrong perception to the society about Buddhism and Other religion like Muslim community's enrichment of the society has badly influenced to their temples due to lack of integration of Buddhist youths with culture of Buddhist temples. Moreover they need to establish the practical Buddhism throughout the society rather than focusing marketing Buddhism.

Key Words: Youth Buddhist Monks, Buddhist philosophy, Social development, Challengers

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Introduction:

Buddhism is believed to be perhaps the most non-violent religion among the major world religions .On the other hand youths have an important role in any society in relation to social development as they constitute the future generation. It is important as well as interesting to explore what they reflect upon in relation to the current development in Sri Lanka. Especially young monks' views may tell us whether the world view of radical monks is shared by other, younger monks. Monks play an important role in the society as they are representatives of Buddhism and have influence among Sri Lankans. Young monks are already representatives of Buddhism and soon they will have an even more pronounced role in the temples acting as consultants for the laity, and constitute the future clergy. An exploration of their views and discourses are thus relevant in relation to Sri Lanka's social development. This paper concerns the perceptions of young monks in relation to the role of Buddhism in society and radical Buddhist mobilization to social development with their duties and responsibilities and further here is exploring about contemporary challengers for youth Buddhist monks inn the society for establishing Buddhist philosophy in the society in national level as well as international level.

As an attempt to explore this issue, the paper will take its departure in discussions present within International Relations scholarship. Religion's role in International Relations scholarship has become more pronounced and more research is focused on religion's importance and its influence on local, national as well as international levels of politics. The theoretical discussions will take off in the once underlying belief that religion's role in society would diminish as a consequence of modernization (Svensson 2012). The Sri Lankan case is thus interesting even on a broader theoretical level.

Body:

Conclusion:

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This paper concerns the perceptions of young monks in relation to the role of Buddhism in society and radical Buddhist mobilization. As an attempt to explore this issue, the paper will take its departure in discussions present within International Relations scholarship. Religion's role in clergy. International Relations scholarship has become more pronounced and more research is focused on religion's importance and its influence on local, national as well as international levels of politics.

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I will thus focus on three research questions in order to explore the aim; How do young monks see and understand threats to Buddhism? How do young monks see and understand the need of protection of Buddhism in Sri Lanka? How do young monks see and understand cases of religious intolerance and violence?

When a boy enters a temple to do his education there, he moves in and spends all his time there, eating, sleeping and studying (Subramanian 2005).

The study carried out has been an exploratory one, with the aim to explore the views of young monks.

Likewise, the selection of young monks was a coincidence as well. The United Nations works with a definition of youth as those between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNDESA 2013).

The age group for this study is 17 – 26 years of age, which is a result of the availability of young monks in the chosen *pirivenas* (see appendix B for a list).

research to show some contributions of this study. 6.1 How do the young monks see and understand threats to Buddhism? How the monks talked about threats varied; some regarded threats as natural while others suggested actions to be taken against them. Taking off in Lausten and Waever's categorization of threats posed to religion from (1) non-religious global forces and actors and (2) other religious discourses and actors, the latter will firstly be discussed. Among some monks the most pronounced threat to Buddhism stemmed from other religions. In line with previous literature (CPA 2013), the Muslim community, and to some extent the Christian community, were perceived to pose a threat to Buddhism. The threats mentioned during the interviews were similar to the once mentioned in the CPA report; territorial threats, economic threats, threats of conversions, and also threats of attacks. The most pronounced threat stemmed from a perception of a growing Muslim community. The feeling of threat stemming from a growing Muslim community in Sri Lanka can at a first glance seem exaggerated when looking at the population numbers of the religious communities where Buddhists constitute over 70 %, while Muslims make up 10 % of the population. However when speaking to the young monks they tend to see the problem in a larger context, 36 referring to a threat that the number of Muslims are increasing in the world and changing some countries into Islamic countries. A few monks feared that Sri Lanka at some point will be converted to Islam. Thus, the interviewees refer to a global context when arguing for the importance of a Sinhala Buddhist majority in Sri Lanka; they see themselves as a minority in the world. Furthermore, the fact that the perceived threats from minority religions concern numbers, population growth, can be crucial in future conflict dynamics. When the conflict is about how many of the others there are, one might assume that anti-Muslim sentiments will address Muslims as individuals rather than their cultural, religious practices. Muslims by their very existence are seen as a threat and as a result, measures taken aimed at solving the perceived problem might be directed at restricting or getting rid of numbers; that is individuals. Moving on, none of the interviewees explicitly mentioned a threat from non-religious global forces or actors, which according to Lausten and Waever (2000) is the most common way through which religion is involved in international politics. Instead, a third source of perceived threats to Buddhism was found which has not been found in the previous literature, namely that of threats posed from within the religion itself; by Buddhists themselves, including both lay and monastic Buddhists. This understanding of what threatens or weakens a religion suggests that it is in fact the believers of a faith that are the strength of it. One could argue that there are always threats and that they can be perceived differently at different times and in different contexts. For instance, if the Muslim population is increasing, it can be seen as a fact by some and by others as a threat. It shows more about oneself, about what is important and/or what one feels insecure about, for instance about a loss of something which may be because of completely other reasons than the perceived threats. Such an interpretation is strengthened by the fact that some monks perceived the Muslim population to be growing and perceived threats to Buddhism, but understood the facts as natural which did not engage them in a special way. We have now clarified where the perceived threats stem from. A note will also be made on what exactly it is that is perceived to be threatened. A growing Muslim population is perceived to threaten the dominance of Buddhist faith in Sri Lanka. While a decrease in the religiosity among lay people challenges the need for the religious institution of Buddhism; the monkhood and the temples. In relation to this many of the monks referred to the need of protecting Sinhala Buddhists, mainly by assuring a majority. Sinhala

Buddhism refers to the ethno-religious ³⁷ identity held by many Buddhists. This reflects the discussion by Lausten & Waeber (2000) who claim that religion is existential by nature and thereby threats towards for instance sacred objects are perceived as destroying faith and thereby abolishing being; it concerns both the survival of the faith and of the religious identity of believers. This is similar to what the CPA report (2013) concludes, that there is a perceived threat to Buddhist faith, and also to Buddhists religious identity.

6.2 How do the young monks see and understand the need of protection of Buddhism in Sri Lanka? Concerning the monks' understandings of protecting Buddhism, what the monks chose to talk about varied more than for instance concerning threats. Some monks did not consider Buddhism to be in need of protection, while others saw a protection of the faith as something which could call for the need of violence. According to Patterson there are different ways through which religion can inspire conflict. The two mentioned in this paper can be applied to the Sri Lankan case; Religious leaders can tell followers to engage in conflict as seen in Sri Lanka by monks calling for Buddhists to become unofficial policemen towards Muslims. The other way is when a specific place or thing is sacralised, which can also be seen in Sri Lanka where the island is believed to have been sanctified by the Buddha as the island where the Dhamma should be fostered, consequently leaving the monks with a perceived duty of protecting the faith (DeSilva & Bartholomeusz 2011). Some of the monks referred to this but mentioned the government as a key actor in the protection of Buddhism; strengthening my understanding of their view of Buddhism as a religion which should be prominent (even protected) in Sri Lanka. Concerning the importance placed on the state as an actor for protecting Buddhism, Gould's (2011) discussion concerning the relationship between a perceived weak state and religious mobilization could be used to make sense of the monks' thoughts. Gould holds that mobilization can be a means to protect where state intuitions have failed. Such a climate makes it easier for religious leaders to incite hatred (Kadayifci-Orellanda 2009: 266f). Two of the monks held similar understandings of the importance of the state structures, explaining that Buddhism is not protected sufficiently by the government and therefore radical monks take action. One can thus conclude that radical mobilization essentially suggests the failure of the state to establish a system that is both socially and culturally inclusive as well as politically secular and democratic. If the state fails to provide security to groups, whether of the same or different ³⁸ ethnicities or religions, it can thus be a breeding point for mobilization, even a radical one. This stresses the need of a stronger state and suggests that the mobilization in Sri Lanka might say something about the political system as well. When discussing the protection of Buddhism none of the monks expressed a view that radical actions or violence can be a way of protecting Buddhism. Some would bring up radical groups as having been formed to protect Buddhism, without placing a value on the fact. It was only when discussing Buddhist mobilization that some would say that more radical forms may in fact be necessary for the protection of Buddhism, if there is a threat to it. This could suggest that the use of discourses of threat and victimization are used to justify the use of violence, it serves to portray violent acts as defensive rather than offensive (CPA 2013, Ramanathapillai 2012).

6.3 How do the young monks see and understand cases of religious intolerance and violence? The two perceptions concerning the intrinsic nature of religion mentioned in the theory chapter (Strenski 2010) can be used to categorize some of the monks' answers: the mainstream perception sees religion as peaceful and the other one sees religion as also worldly, political and violent. One of the monks explicitly said that the radical mobilization by monks are in fact nothing of Buddhism.

He saw and understood the conflict between Buddhists and Muslims as about cultural and ethnic issues, not religious ones. He talked about Buddhist mobilization in terms of nationality and said that radical monks act as if it is a nationalist question. In his view Buddhism should not be connected to these events. That the Buddhist mobilization might in fact be a nationalistic issue follows Helbardt et al. (2013) who suggest that it can be seen as a continuum of a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. This viewpoint could be a reflection of religion as peaceful, and when seen to act 'bad' it cannot be religion and must be used for other purposes. Furthermore the monk labels the conflict after the issues he perceives to be the driver of it rather than with a basis of the religious identities between the parties; Buddhists and Muslims. Perhaps this monk's take on the events can in fact enhance our understanding of the current Buddhist mobilization. Perhaps the mobilization has more to do with a national identity, stemming from the interconnectedness of the Sinhalese ethnic group, the Buddhist religion and the Sri Lankan island which was stressed by deSilva & Bartholomeusz (2001). Following the line of Abeysekara (in Gould 2011) it is however not fruitful for our understanding of the events 39 to distance such events from 'true Buddhism'. The reality is that monks can be witnessed acting violently and we need to understand religion as also political. The viewpoint which accepts religion to also be political and violent can be used to highlight the understanding of two of the monks. One monk said that times have changed and in today's context Buddhism can and may have to be violent. Another monk explained how there can be a limit to Buddhists compassion and patience toward others. These two monks illustrate an understanding of Buddhism as also political, and violent. Strenski's discussion can thus help us understand the monks' viewpoints along a distinction of religion as peaceful or as also political. However, one could also suggest that religion is foremost cultural, and that culture can be violent. Following the monk who understood the mobilization of monks as about culture and ethnicity, perhaps cultural Buddhism could be a useful analytical category. Sinhala Buddhism could be seen as a cultural 'strand' of Buddhism, a product of the role Buddhism had in creating and uniting the Sinhala ethnicity. Rather than being understood in relation to the Dhamma, Buddhism in Sri Lanka is understood in relation to tradition, rituals, and identity. Lastly, some of the interviewees held the view that the motivation for Buddhist mobilization determines if they find it acceptable or not; if it is done with the good initial thought of protecting Buddhism or not. In other words, the motivations justify the means. This can have severe consequences if it get to the point when harming innocent people is seen as a good deed. References to the protection of Buddhism when committing radical actions can thus serve to justify them. If the motivations justify the means, religion can easily be used as a 'tool'. However, as Waever (2006) argues, seeing religion as a tool, as an effect of something, regards the view that committed believers will go to extreme lengths in order to protect their religion from a perceived threat, as seen in the case of Sri Lanka.

6.4 Reaching the aim: Exploring young monks' perceptions on the role of Buddhism in society and radical Buddhist mobilization

The three research questions will in this section be the starting point for shedding light on the aim by shortly presenting how some understandings of them tell us something about the aim. Firstly, threats perceived to Buddhism are seen to lead to the declining role of Buddhism in society. This is true for threats perceived from the outside, in this case minority religions, as well as from the inside, for instance by lay people becoming less religious. Secondly, the viewpoint that Buddhism should be prominent in the society is highlighted by the fact that the 40 religion should be protected by the government. Likewise, the emphasised importance on a

Sinhala Buddhist majority suggest that Buddhism should have a prominent role. Thirdly, the perception of protecting Buddhism from perceived threats and from a perceived decline as the sole legitimate reason for uprisings, even violent ones, shows us how the ideal (a prominent role of Buddhism in society) and how the current role of Buddhism (Buddhism is in decline in the society) are perceived and that such a view impacts, and leads to, religious mobilization. This line of thought shows how all the questions are interrelated and highlights the aim of this paper. However, it is important to note that among the results we also find alternative viewpoints and explore the perceptions that Buddhism cannot be threatened, that Buddhism does not need to be protected, it tells the truth and nature of things and this will sustain, and that violence should never be used. None of the monks had a positive outlook on Buddhism future in Sri Lanka which may reflect a common understanding among the monks that the role of Buddhism in the Sri Lankan society is in decline. However, how a decline was viewed differed; some thought that the government should take steps to protect the prominence of the religion, others saw the decline as a natural outcome of the nature impermanence which governs the world, while yet others said it would decrease the morality of society. While International Relations research assumed a decline of religion to be the outcome of globalization and modernization, the monks mainly highlighted two reasons for Buddhism's decline in society; the presence of other religions in society and the fact that Buddhist lay people are becoming less religious. A fear that Buddhism is becoming less prominent in society at the expense of the expansion of Islam, mainly due to the perceived growth of the Muslim population was expressed. It is thus only Buddhism which is perceived to be in decline in the Sri Lankan society, not religion in general. However, the impact of modernization on religiosity in Sri Lanka can be seen as the reason that the lay community is becoming less religious. The monks that talked about a decrease in the religiosity among the lay people said it was at the expense of people becoming more occupied with their modern lives and striving for economic goals, which suggests an impact of modernization. Haynes & Hennig (2011) write that a decrease of religiosity on the individual level is accompanied by religious leaders having an increasingly vital role in the public sphere. Such a connection was also mentioned among the interviewees; that some monks are reacting to the feeling that Buddhism is in decline. One monk explained that groups like the BBS were formed in order to fight this decline and the group has attacked both those outside of the 41 religion, for instance the Muslim community, as well as Buddhist monks as in the example presented under section 3.3. An active role of monks in society by engaging in politics or engaging violently, was by some monks perceived as potentially harming the good name of Buddhism and leading to a decrease of the respect for the monkhood. Attempts to protect the faith from a decline may end up hurting the religion even more, especially when violent means are involved. The young monks' understandings of the role of religion in society and radical religious mobilization can thus help us illustrate a debate within International Relations scholarship. The debate I am referring to is that of the once dominating underlying belief that religion's role was in decline following modernization at the same time as religion's importance on influencing societies and policies on all continents of the world are very evident today. The analysis above can help us highlight what processes are at work in such a relationship; for instance how a modern life style can lead to a decrease of religiosity accompanied by a threat perceived to the role of religion, a perception that religion is in decline is turning some religious representatives to take up a fight for it. This is of course a simplified picture and in reality many other factors are involved

