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(1909830) Fatima Jiwani.

Buddhism and Islam; Understanding the Buddhist Concept of 'Emptiness' and its Interfaith Encounters.

"On truth 's path, wise is mad, insane is wise.

In love's way, self and other are the same.

Having drunk the wine, my love, of being one with you,

I find the way to Mecca and Bodhgaya are the same."

- Rumi, *Kulliyat-e Sham-e Tabrizi* , (No. 30)¹

Introduction;

Man is always on a journey, a quest which responds to his existential questions. Since time immemorial man has tried to comprehend the truth of his existence which has led to emergence of religions around the world. Teachings of enlightened men and faith scriptures suggest that in the final analysis, realization of self and love for brethren leads the path to spiritual development. Through the journey of this essay, the paper shall tour two religions; Buddhism and Islam. The essay attempts to theologically understand 'emptiness' as one of the core teaching of Buddhism. It tries to analyse the Quranic scriptural interpretations that challenge as well as perspectives that positively bond interfaith dialogues between both the religions. The essay juxtaposes few sublime understandings of Islamic scriptures and concepts, evidencing the positive narrative that is adopted towards the Buddha and Buddhist scriptures. In an effort to highlight the similarity in the two religious' leaders, the essay compares their struggles, purpose and impact of their journeys. The essay then continues to analyse the extension of the Buddhist core philosophy of emptiness with Islam's concept of God and its messenger albeit the criticisms that it evokes. The aim of this essay has also been to enhance the interfaith relations, in view of which the essay demonstrates shared practices and ethical outlooks through its comparison of Sufi Islam with Buddhism and Bhikkhu Bhuddhadasa's inclusive approach towards Abrahamic faiths through the understanding of the Buddhist doctrine and his interpretation of the Prophet in Buddhist ideology. Finally, as theory suggests practice, the essay reinforces the practical outlooks provided through doctrinal understandings of each faith to its practitioners which can be translated to ethical actions. The essay concludes attesting a few contemporary trends and interfaith initiatives instrumental around the globe.

The Mahayana philosophies and the varieties of emptiness:

The Mahayana philosophy emerges from the Mahayana doctrine which is expressed in both *Sutras* and many *Sastras* 'treatises' authored by known personalities. It encourages individuals to compassionately strive towards achieving Buddhahood. In India, the Mahayana school grew into two major philosophical institutions; The Madhyamika and Yogacara and influenced Northern and Eastern Buddhism. The Madhyamika school was also popular as 'Sunyata-vada'

¹ Yusuf, I. 2009. 'Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)', 48p. 367.

or the 'Emptiness teaching' for instruction on emptiness being its key concept and for its '*Prajna-paramita*' or 'Perfection of Wisdom' *Sutras*. (BT TA, 141-8)²

Emptiness:

According to the Sunyatavadin outlook, each occurrence is devoid of a basic nature. Thus all occurrences are seen to share an empty 'non-nature' as their 'nature'. Thus, it is challenging to ultimately differentiate one dharma from another. There is a concept of similarity of dharmas which their common nature of emptiness. The Heart Sutra has maintained that whatsoever is material or physical form is Sunyata (emptiness) and whatsoever is sunyata is, that is the physical form. This is also suggested to be the same for the four bunches that constitute a human being. However, Sunyata is not the final substructure or element as is understood by the Brahman in the Upanishads. It denotes that there is nothing in which it exists on its own. The world is a net of constant change, interdependent occurrence lacking substantiation. Nagarjuna has written prolifically on this matter. He associates emptiness with the proposition of 'Conditioned arising' which reasonably concludes to the following principle: "Whatever is conditioned arising, is to be understood as emptiness. That being a dependent designation, Is itself the middle path". Emptiness thus is attributive of 'dharmas'. It is their dependant, non-final, and a non-substance which it is made of. It cannot be known as thing nor as nothingness, but on the contrary, it can be indicated as 'essenselessness' of an existence (reality) which is impossible to be captured by an idea that generates materialization.³

Harvey references Wallace (2003) in his works on contemporary physicists identifying with this perspective of emptiness. According to them when material ('solid') physical objects of "common-sense existence" were initially investigated they were known to contain protons, neutrons, electrons, and empty spaces. Classical physicist understood these to be solid, inseparable, pieces which form the final component of a substance. However, further research demonstrated that they contained an entire range of odd fragments (particles) such as 'quarks', the attribute of which is to bound up with energies through which they collaborate with (interact). Matter becomes a secretive field of engagement (interaction) where fragments (particles) are not genuine (real), independent objects in existence, but rather contingent, abstract appellations.⁴

Critics' outlook in earlier institutions undermined Buddha's teachings. They perceived emptiness teaching to indicate that the four true realities for the spiritually exalted to be themselves empty. Nagarjuna responded with the thought that it is the concept of "dharmas-with-inherent-nature" which leads us to the intrinsic existence which in turn supersedes the teachings of four true realities. If sadness or *dukkha* has an implicit existence, it may then be without a cause and forever present (eternal) without a way to end it. If the Path has an implicit presence, it would never be able to grow and advance to perfection in an individual as the individual may either possess it or not possess it. In a sphere of beings with intrinsic presence (existence), all alteration and exercise would become unachievable and everything would cease to move and be in a similar state forever. Activity and spiritual growth are possible because all

² Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction to Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 114.

³ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction to Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 120-121.

⁴ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction to Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 121.

things are empty. One analogy that Nagarjuna applies is of the decimal zero – that decimal number system would not be able to function or breakdown completely in the absence of number zero.⁵

Self-emptiness and other- emptiness:

The connotation of both self -emptiness and other-emptiness can be seen in two types of in the Mahayana traditions. They are called as ‘rang stong’ and ‘gzan stong’. Self-emptiness is propagated by the Gelugpa school which stems from the institution of Prasangika-Madhyamaka. For them, emptiness teaching is perceived as a “non-affirming negative” which is the absence of intrinsic (inherent) nature/existence in anything. As beings are devoid of their permanent (fixed) self and their consciousness (mind) devoid of an inherent attribute (nature), they are competent to bring about final transformation which is not fundamentally distinctive from *Nirvana*. Their degradation (which includes; contempt, an attribute of clinging (attachment), misconceptions, or disbelief) which maintain *samsara* (prolong the cycle of birth, death, and mundane existence), are also deplete of intrinsic existence, and thus can be overcome. This can be perceived at the start through rational interpretation, later as the outcome of this logical interpretation becomes the focal point of contemplative centralization, it further leads into a straight intuitive awareness into emptiness, at the commencement of the path of perception of the distinguished *Bodhisattva*. As the individual moves on the Path, he gradually perfects himself and the accustomed manner of perceiving things in a way of non-emptiness is over time cleansed.⁶

The outlook of other-emptiness is adhered to by disciples of the Nyingmapa and Kagyupa schools. It has built on the ideas of Jonangpa school which is now extinct. It is also known as the ‘Great Madhyamika’ perspective. According to this perspective, the highest significant denotatum of the term ‘emptiness’ is a self- prevailing constant and permanent reality that permeates all occurrences. Similar to *Nirvana* as perceived by the initial Buddhist schools, it views emptiness as being devoid of defilements which is empty of anything other than itself. (empty of what other than what it is) . But, this does not imply that is devoid of its own positive characteristics, instead, it is completely filled with Buddha- qualities. Understanding the absoluteness of notions does not only express the absoluteness of common truths, but it discloses the real fundamental complete reality which is acknowledged in an abstract manner: emptiness, the incandescent, single consciousness of a Buddha. The effort of individuals then is not to ‘accomplish’ a particular thing that they do not have, but rather to disclose and recognize their own Buddhahood. The effort of the *Bodhisattva* is to efficiently support them in their task. This perception acknowledges final emptiness as the Tathagata- garba.⁷

In the self-emptiness outlook, the final reality is affirming the fact that it is no ultimate reality. There does not exist a reality consisting of an intrinsic nature or existence. The only thing that does exist is non-ultimate common realities. Recognising *Nirvana* is recognizing emptiness, where recognizing that everything is empty of its eventuality. In the other-emptiness view, as common realities are yet perceived as empty of eventuality, there is yet a perception of ultimate

⁵ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction to Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)p. 121.

⁶ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 127.

⁷ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 126-127

reality, emptiness which is a positive reality, but it is devoid of negative befolements. This is understood as the foundation of everything. Thus, the outlook of self- emptiness is connected to the thoughts of early Buddhism which believed in accepting that there is no eventual foundation (ultimate basis) which is the basis of everything else. The other-emptiness outlook is also connected to the thoughts of early Buddhism which perceives *Nirvana* as an ultimate reality in its own true sense, but dissimilar to perceiving this reality as the foundation of everything.⁸

The Yogacara school:

Thoughts of the Yogacara school were mostly indicated *Yogacara-bhumi-sastra* credited to Asanga (310-90), but according to William (2009), as quoted by Harvey, these thoughts have been known to precede him. They are based on concepts emerging out of certain Sutras in the third century C.E.⁹

Asanga and Vasubandhu advanced these distinctive concepts. While Vasubandhu was a theoretician and the school has been known to derive its classical form through his efforts, Asanga's literature developed the practice of meditative trance also known as *Dhyana* (Pali-Jhana).¹⁰

The world as 'Thought-only'

The Yogacara outlook is commonly articulated as a philosophical idealism that rejects the existence of a material world and affirms that existence (reality) as a mental phenomenon. The objective of this institution is not only proposing a philosophical ideology but enhances a mind-set that will promote awakening.¹¹

The three natures:

The Madhyamika philosophy asserts the concept of 'two levels of truth', the Yogacara philosophy promotes the notion of 'Three apparent natures' also known as the three '*svabhavas*' (EB.4.3.2). Every particular nature is an outlook on an experience that involves two things; a kind of real or assumed information (knowledge) as well as an extent of reality that this understanding correlates to. According to the Madhayamika's philosophy, the objective is to advance from one's common, corrupted experience to the zenith of truth and reality. Whereas the Yogacaras philosophy believes in an intermediate level of reality which is rejected by the Madhayamikas considering it to be an inconceivable combination of reality and unreality.¹²

Among the three natures, the first is *parikalpita* which is the '(mentally) constructed' or the 'imagined'. It is made by the subject/object discrimination. It constitutes the general (common-sense) world of self, other individuals, and belongings (things). I t also includes 'objects' of thoughts, for instance, mental psychological (mental) and material *dharmas* which are

⁸ Ibid, p. 127.

⁹ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)p. 127

¹⁰ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)p. 128-129

¹¹ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)p. 133.

¹² Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)p.134-135.

inaccurately perceived to possess actual eternal essences (own nature). However, it has no reality and is only a delusion. It is a sphere of general usage mediated by words and communications. (language).¹³

Paratantra is the second nature and the ‘other-dependent’. It constitutes a standard (Level) of relative reality which can be witnessed in the mode of alternating mental occurrences (namely: *dharmas*). According to the principle of conditioned arising, it relies upon another thing for its emergence as in the order of types of *Citta* and its following mental states. It is not the supreme of all realities, but it is the procedure that gives rise to the subject/object duality, and thus it eight discharges the ‘constructed’ nature which in truth is the ‘construction of the unreal’.¹⁴

The topmost of the three nature is the ‘*parinispanna*’ which means the ‘ absolutely accomplished’. This is the completely real state. Without any issues of duality between the subject and the object. In this state, an individual is aware of his understanding that the world is only a representation. This is perfected knowledge at the highest state. An analogy is the first state is compared to the non-existential hair-like object perceived by an individual who is suffering from cataract, the next state can be compared to that which brings about these illusions and the final state can be symbolized as that clear objects perceived by an individual with perfect eyes.¹⁵

The absolutely accomplished possesses the knowledge of all the above states, it is aware of the ‘emptiness’ of the phenomena. This ‘nature’ is also acknowledged as ‘thus-ness’ (*tathata*) or the inconceivable ‘as-it-is-ness’ of reality.¹⁶

The Madhyamika’s apply the term ‘emptiness’ to only indicate the lack of inherent nature or existence in a phenomenon, while the Yogacaras also perceive the term ‘emptiness’ denoting a thing that exists in a positive way which is the condition of a non-dual nature of the ‘other - dependent’ nature. The reality, comprehended through the true Middle path, is devoid (empty) of duality, but it is not devoid (empty) of existence; it is truly that which is empty. The ‘other-dependent’, ‘construction of the unreal’ is not completely unreal, but it continues to subsist ‘within’ emptiness. It does not differentiate from it neither it is similar to it. It continues to exist similar to impermanent things which are neither identical to, nor separate from impermanence. (Mvkb. Ch.I, vv.3 and 14). It possesses an ‘ineffable’ (*anabhilapya*) nature’ which is comprehended only by the Buddhas (*Vrtti.v.10*).¹⁷

The initial two natures are the foundation of befolements and thus lead to pain and agony. Yogacara's way thus aims to be ultimately cleansed of the first two states to become ‘absolutely accomplished’. In a deep meditative calm, the mind experiences a transcendent knowledge that consists of an undifferentiated unity that transgresses any subject/object duality, idea, or even any thought. When this realization of the absolutely accomplished comes through it is

¹³ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 135

¹⁴ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)p. 135

¹⁵ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)p. 135.

¹⁶ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 135-136.

¹⁷ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.136.

then acknowledged to be the consciousness of the ‘unlimited-ness’ of the *Dharma*-dimension (realm) , awakening (*bodhi*) (Tsn.vv.37-8).¹⁸

The way (path) towards Nirvana is a progressive advancement of virtue, meditative concentration, and an intuitive awareness in the emptiness of the other-dependent phenomena. The ultimate realization is achieved suddenly like a momentous spiritual transformation, a fragmenting transformation that occurs at the root of the mind- in *alaya* in its form as *manas*. *Nirvana* is ‘the *alaya*-consciousness which is realized within. It is then not annulment (abolition) of *samsara* rather it is its modulation. In the Madhayamika thought, ‘there is no difference between the *samsara* and *Nirvana*’. (Lanka. 61).¹⁹

Emptiness and perfection of wisdom:

The Mahayana sutras assign a great deal of significance to an arhants acquisition of great compassion (*maha-karuna*) of a buddha and to attaining of perfect wisdom. Together wisdom and compassion develop into two major components of Mahayana thought. The literature on the perfection of wisdom (*prajnaparamita*) dates back to the first century BCE, its academic study was pioneered by Edward Cruz. Its oldest text is known to be *Astasahasrika prajnaparamita* (perfection of wisdom in 8000 lines). The principal guidance of perfection of wisdom is that every account of the way things is eventually arbitrary.²⁰

Perfect wisdom is what is perceived through the mechanisms of the mind's abstract creations and is not corrupted by fastening to any belief or opinion. Particularly it abstains from being attached to the theoretical constructs of the Buddhist ideology: unwholesome and wholesome characteristics, the stages of meditation (*Dhyana*), the levels of intuitive awareness (insight), the acquirement of the Buddhist path, the nirvana itself and the common theory of the dharmas. From the outlook of the perfect wisdom, all these are perceived for what they ultimately are-empty. Even the theoretical constructs of the Buddhist ideology are not real entities. However, it is possible for the mind to attach itself with the concept of dharmas, thus the Large Sutra states;

“There is no ignorance and no cessation of ignorance No suffering and no knowledge of suffering, no cause and no abandoning of the cause, no cessation, and no realization of the cessation, and no path and no development of the path... It is in this sense, Sariputra, that a *bodhisattva*, a great being who practices perfect wisdom, is called one devoted (to perfect wisdom).”²¹

Thus, as individuals are basically evasive objects, it is similar for dharmas too. The notion that anything exists of and in itself is a deception of the mind and language. Thus the significance of perfection of wisdom is emptiness (*sunyata*) – the emptiness of all entities that might give us the disillusion to assume that they truly and ultimately exist of or in themselves.²²

¹⁸ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 136.

¹⁹ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 136-137.

²⁰ Gethin Rupert. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 230-231.

²¹ Gethin Rupert. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 236.

²² Gethin Rupert. 1998. *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p.237.

Wisdom and Compassion:

The Mahayana Sutras were composed around the start of the common era, however, contemporary characterizations of these huge texts are frequently found concentrating on two areas: the wisdom of emptiness (*sunyata*) and the compassion of the bodhisattva. These discourses are derived from the Kasyapa Chapter (*Kasyapaparivarta*) found within the corpus of Mahayana Sutras named as the 'Great Pile of Jewels' (*Maharatnakuta*). The name of the chapter is derived from one of Buddha's interrogators and popular disciple Kasyapa. The chapter focusses on the qualities of the bodhisattva and nature of emptiness. The text characterizes the bodhisattva to be a common disciple of the Buddha and not a celestial liberator, but yet the one who has pledged to attain Buddhahood so that he is capable to emancipate all beings from their ordeal. This pledge from the Kasyapa chapter (and in other Mahayana sutras) is exceptional as it encourages all bodhisattvas to pursue it.²³

The bodhisattva is thus not one stray person in an age who would work towards the salvation of all others while other individuals strive only towards the ending of their own agony, but it is for all who seek the journey of Buddhahood. They all are encouraged to develop exceptional compassion and wisdom. However, there is a distinction cited between these two attributes. Compassion brings forth commitment to assist other individuals, while wisdom brings forth the understanding that ultimately as there is no self, as there exist no individuals. The Kasyapa chapter affirms this but expounds that there is harmony in the relationship between compassion and wisdom. It asserts that though everything is empty, actions are productive.²⁴

The Kasyapa chapter proclaims four attributes of a genuine bodhisattva; (1) He is thoroughly convinced of emptiness, yet he believes in the rule of the fruition of actions. (2) He is tolerant and accepts his non-self, and yet possesses immense compassion for all living beings, (3) Though he intends to acquire nirvana, yet his acts concede towards *samsara*, and, (4) He contributes to developing other beings with no expectation of a return of fruition of the action for himself.²⁵

An analysis of the understanding of 'emptiness' in the Mahayana philosophies:

A reflection derived from the varied perspectives expressed through the texts, authors and institutions, a range of meanings assigned to the idea of 'emptiness', Predominantly,

For the Madhyamika outlooks, all phenomena are assigned the attribute of emptiness. They are assumed to be devoid of inherent nature and basic existence without any fundamental shared element to them.

Examination of the Yogacara thought suggests that the intellectual phenomena belonging to the other-dependent nature, which is altogether one, directly known to exist, are all individually empty in the order of the Madhyamika's. However, there exists an additional sense of emptiness which can be understood as the lack of the real subject/ object duality in the mental flow. This kind of emptiness is also known as a positive reality, not empty of itself, which lacks this.²⁶

²³ Anonymous 2004. *Buddhist Scriptures* (London: Penguin Classics).p 351.

²⁴ Anonymous 2004. *Buddhist Scriptures* (London: Penguin Classics) p. 351.

²⁵ Anonymous 2004. *Buddhist Scriptures* (London: Penguin Classics) p. 352-353

²⁶ Harvey Peter. 2013. *An Introduction To Buddhism; Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.150.

Interfaith 'Dialogue'; Islam and Buddhism:

Historical encounters and seemingly contradicting theological perspectives make interfaith dialogue between Buddhism and Islam seem problematic. However, there also exist evidences of many historical positive encounters and mutually shared theological philosophies. Also, to bridge the gap between both faiths many contemporary philosophers have attempted analysis and alternate interpretations of scriptures and ritual practices which the paper will further explore.

Scott cites a historical account of the 14th-century post-Mongol era where the Uighur Buddhist *Insadi-sutra* expresses disapproval towards Islam characterizing Muhammad as an evil messianic figure. The sutra further expresses hope towards *Maitreya* – the future Buddha to return soon and take over even the kingdom of Baghdad (Bagdat). Conversely, even Islam perceived Buddhism to be anguished from twin evils; One, idolatry as it engaged in rich embellished statues and works of art, and second supposedly atheism - as Buddhists did not believe in having a theistic God at the apex of their religion. Condemnation of the Buddhist faith was so forceful among the early Islamic authors that the very word 'Budh' was furthered into the Persian language as 'but' its generic word meaning as 'idol'. They were considered among the 'kafirs' or unbelievers as opposed to the title assigned to the Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians to be among the 'people of the book'.²⁷

Buddhism too may not agree with Islam's faith in the divine revelation and The Quran as a complete and an authentic doctrine. Further, there are contrasting views among Muslims concerning the traditions of faith predating Islam. One tradition negates all other previous faith traditions citing verses of Quran which supports the principle of '*Naskh*' or abrogation;²⁸

"We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that we bring forth (one) better than it or similar to it. Do you not know that Allah is over all things competent?" (Quran 2.106).²⁹

However, a different perspective cites another verse of the Quran to suggest that after all Quran does approve of all previous faiths and treats those religious heads as prophets and the predated faiths to be ones revealed by the same creator (Allah)

"And unto thee, We have revealed the scripture with the truth, as a confirmer of whatever Scripture was before it, and as a protector thereof." (Quran 5:48)³⁰

An explanation of the above verse suggests that The Quran affirms itself as the confirmer and protector of all scriptures which have been revealed before the revelation of the Quran itself. Shah Kazemi believes this verse to be the starting point to engage in interreligious hermeneutics. He believes that if this principle is made operational and effectual, then in many ways' traditions will be able to study their own scriptures in light of the truth, insights, and precepts derived from the study of other scriptures. He mentions that even The Quran can be

²⁷ Scott, D. 1995. 'Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons on JSTOR', JSTOR, 42, (No.2)p.144-145.

²⁸ Scott, D. 1995. 'Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons on JSTOR', JSTOR, 42, (No.2)149

²⁹ Anonymous Surah Al-Baqarah [2:106] ()

³⁰ Cornille Catherine, and & Conway Cristopher (eds.). 2010. *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Oregon.: Cascade Books) p. 116.

better understood in light of the earlier scriptures. He uses the verse “Light upon Light” (Quran 24:35) to stress the point that different religious scriptures are “characterized by reciprocal confirmation and mutual Illumination”³¹

Shaha Kazemi cites two obstacles that dissuade scriptural hermeneutics and religious traditions to interact with each other. One reason being a modern barrier. According to him, scriptures are dichotomized based on their extrinsic context which is their historical, cultural, literary view. Secondly, scriptures rather than being appreciated for their spiritual affirmation, are refuted based on the approach of their interpretation with the religious ‘Other’. He affirms that in Islamic tradition most Muslims encountering Scriptures predating the Quran have met with polemical refutation which is seen seriously by some as a challenge to their own scripture. In this sense, the perspective of the Quran as a protector of the scripture is largely underdeveloped.³²

Quran confirms Buddha as a messenger and Buddhist Scriptures!

Shah Kazemi further cites a few more verses of the Quran which suggests the Quran as a confirmer of other scriptures;

*“The Messenger believeth in that which hath been revealed unto him from his Lord, and so do the believers. Every one believeth in God and His angels and His scriptures and His Messengers- we make no distinction between any of His messengers” (2:285)*³³

*“Say, I am not something original among the messengers.” (46:9)*³⁴

*“To each of you, We have prescribed a law and a method. Had Allah willed, he would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what he has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ. (5:48)*³⁵

*“Unto each community, We have given sacred rites which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with thee about the matter, but summon them unto thy Lord” (22:67)*³⁶

*“And for every nation is a messenger. So, when their messenger comes, it will be judged between them injustice, and they will not be wronged” (10:47).*³⁷

In analyses, the above verses Shah- Kazemi asserts that interreligious hermeneutics is nurtured by an encompassing perception of revelation which embraces all scriptures. It can be comprehended that this perception enhances the knowledge that instead of contradicting each other, the scriptures are mutually confirming each other, also in the criteria of being more promising and advantageous than just being accidental. According to the verses, it is evidenced

³¹ Cornille Catherine, and & Conway Cristopher (eds.). 2010. *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Oregon.: Cascade Books) p. 116.

³² Cornille Catherine, and & Conway Cristopher (eds.). 2010. *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Oregon.: Cascade Books) p. 116.

³³ Cornille Catherine, and & Conway Cristopher (eds.). 2010. *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Oregon.: Cascade Books) p. 119.

³⁴ Anonymous *Surah Al-Ahqaf* [46:9] ()

³⁵ Anonymous *Surah Al-Ma'idah* [5:48] ()

³⁶ Cornille Catherine, and & Conway Cristopher (eds.). 2010. *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Oregon.: Cascade Books) p. 120.

³⁷ Anonymous *Surah Yunus* [10:47] ()

that the differences that they do have are aligned at the state of the essence. The verses also support the concept of uniqueness in each of the revealed religions, as uniqueness, which is decree inclined by God, as he asserts; “For each of you communities We have established a Law and a Way”.

He further explains, that one particular dispensation indicates uniqueness, which further signifies difference. Here he asserts, that instead of being a reason for contentious antagonism (alienation), it can be cause for creative encouragement. An individual is encouraged to engage with the guidance bestowed to the Other so that one can enhance one's own comprehension of oneself in light of the scriptural understanding of the other as well as gain knowledge of the Other, where ultimately both the channels of knowledge are one.

*“And of His signs is the creation of the Heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colours. Indeed, in the that are signs for those of knowledge” (30:22).*³⁸

In yet another verse God reveals the reason for his creation of the world; “I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known.” The notion that different scriptures are identical in essence, but diverse in form thus allows us to appreciate a perception of revelations which enlighten each other, each scripture serving not as a mirror as compared to the other, but as a versatile exclusive crystal, acquiring the Light from one essence (God) and dispersing this Light as a varied ray of the color of Light and forming exquisite patterns as in a kaleidoscope. In terms of this image, each shade of color signifies a different meaning, insight, and a different outlook. But, every color regardless can be viewed in all the crystals. Thus the idea that even if a different thought is expressed in Buddhist scripture, it would be reflected in the Quran, it does not mean that all the ideas assume a similar operation, emphasis, or implication but may possess similar “shades” of comprehension (meaning).³⁹

The Buddha and Prophet Muhammad; exploration of the prophetic element;

In an Islamic perspective, God mentions his mercy as sending guidance to mankind. This guidance was sent through prophetic figures in human history. In the Quran, God has mentioned the names of twenty-five prophets, including Muhammad (peace be upon them) and all of them belonged to Semitic faith traditions. Additionally, The Quran also mentions a total number of 1,40,000 prophets that have been sent by God in various nations and communities. It would have been challenging if God were to give all the names and addresses of all the prophets to all the Arabs who lived in a small part of the middle east with limited connection with the rest of the world. Further, it is important to understand that The Quran is a book of guidance and not a historical encyclopaedia of faiths. But it can be unquestionably derived that prophethood has been God’s universal endeavour.⁴⁰

³⁸ Anonymous Surah Ar-Rum [30:22] ()

³⁹ Cornille Catherine, and & Conway Cristopher (eds.). 2010. *Interreligious Hermeneutics* (Eugene, Oregon.: Cascade Books) p. 121-122.

⁴⁰ Yusuf, I. 2009. 'Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)', 48p. 374.

“And indeed, [O Muhammad], We have sent forth apostles before your time; some of them We have mentioned to thee, and some of them We have not mentioned to thee.” (Qur'an 40: 78, Qur'an 4: 164) ⁴¹

“And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state [Our message] clearly for them” (14:4). ⁴²

Also, creating diversity among people was a part of God's scheme and thus judgment was to be accorded as per the community law and practices.

“To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed He would have made you a single people but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.” (Qur'an 5: 48) ⁴³

Thus, we can perceive Buddha's spiritual comprehension of nirvana and the Prophet Muhammad's comprehension of revelation (*wahy*) as significant provenience of theological and religious moderation. The Buddha and Muhammad (peace be on him) are perceived as significant enlightened figures teaching spiritual and social attitude which defeated the challenges of prejudice and ignorance. For Buddha, the vicious cycle of samara stems from ignorance human attachment which leads to agony (*dukkha*). For Prophet Muhammad, (peace be upon him) ignorance is caused by committing the mistake of ‘*kufr*’ (which means a non-believer, and also one who does not thank God for his benevolent mercy) or ‘*shirk*’ and engaging in polytheism (ascribing god-like qualities to any other being except God). ⁴⁴

Similarities between Buddha and Prophet:

Both, the Buddha and the Prophet were seeking answers to life's suffering. The Buddha exasperated with human suffering left his world and achieved enlightenment as meditated under a Bodhi tree, whereas the Prophet frustrated with human injustice and prevalent unjust social conditions and polytheistic nature of his society sought refuge in a cave in the mountain named ‘Hira’ where he achieved revelation.

Both defeated the forces of evil understood as ‘*mara*’ in Buddhism and characterized as ‘*Iblis*’ /*shaytan* in Islam. The Prophet becomes *Insan al Kamil* or the perfect man, while the Buddha realizes his ‘*Buddha-dhattu*’ (pure nature or Buddha-nature) through nirvana. The Buddha taught man about the emptiness of the living being and to realize the latent original nature which leads to enlightenment, while the Prophet taught man to overcome his lower instincts through fighting an internal *jiḥād* (fight against lower instincts). Both the Buddha and Prophets teachings liberated their societies from the clutches of ignorance and restored peace from

⁴¹ Yusuf, I. 2009. 'Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)', 48.p. 374

⁴² Anonymous Surah Ibrahim [14:4] ()

⁴³ Yusuf, I. 2009. 'Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)', 48 p. 374-375.

⁴⁴ Yusuf, I. 2009. 'Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)', 48p. 375.

excruciating social customs directing pathways towards eliminating suffering and acquiring peace and enlightenment.⁴⁵

The Buddha as a prophet al-Khidr?

Two philosophers have drawn parallels between the Buddha and the prophets mentioned in the Quran. First, a Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (479-548/1086-1153, in his book, '*Kitab al-Milal wa 'l-Nihal* (Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects) suggests that the historical figure of the Buddha could be the Prophet al-Khidr as identified in the Quran as one who sought enlightenment.⁴⁶

Another contemporary scholar late professor Muhammad Hamidullah (d. 1423/2002) also suggests a similar view. He evidences the mention of a fig tree in the Quran (95:1). Referring to the commentaries of the Quran, Professor Hamidullah suggests that the verse may be referring to the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha achieved his revelation. The Bodhi tree is understood as a wild fig tree (*ficus religiosa*) and assumes that the Buddha's birth city Kapilavastu can be mentioned as *Dhu 'l-Kifl* in the Quran. He evidences as the Buddha achieved revelation under a fig tree and none of the other prophets mentioned in the Quran have a significance of fig tree ascribed to their lives, he concludes that Gautama Buddha could have been one of the prophets as mentioned in the Quran.⁴⁷

The concept of emptiness and Islam:

The essay shall further discuss the concept of emptiness informed by the Mahayana doctrine where the notion of *trikaya* of the Buddha is extended to accommodate Islamic theological framework, along with the conflicts arising through its comparisons.

The discourse on emptiness can be found to be practically expressed through means of skill also known as '*upaya*'. The Mahayana doctrine encourages context-specific employment of its various approaches and symbolism. Thus, the doctrine suggests that everything is relative in truth and refuses to legitimize any one authoritative approach or path towards the realization of dharma or enlightenment. The theory of *trikaya* suggests an explanation of the varied manifestations of the Buddha and through skilful means, it supports to make dharma as an accessible repository for those on different stages of spiritual growth.⁴⁸

Yusuf quotes Makransky where he explains the three bodies which can be perceived as dharmakāya (the Truth Body), sambhogakāya (the Enjoyment Body), and nirmānakāya (the Emanation Body). Dharmakāya leads to the realization of the ultimate reality of emptiness and Buddhahood, while Sambhogakāya symbolizes its manifestations which many times come in being as celestial Buddhas. Nirmanakāya applies to its manifestation in human form as one who teaches dharma to others. Sakyamuni Buddha is the Buddha of the contemporary age. At times the dharmakāya may take on a semi-personal role and is also known as Adi Buddha (the primordial Buddha) as in Kalacakra tantra. Philosophers have identified this form of universal

⁴⁵ Yusuf, I. 2009. '*Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)*', 48p. 377.

⁴⁶ Yusuf, I. 2009. '*Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)*', 48 p. 376.

⁴⁷ Yusuf, I. 2009. '*Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)*', 48 p. 376.

⁴⁸ Obuse, K. 2015. '*Finding God in Buddhism; A New Trend in Contemporary Buddhist Approaches to Islam*', 62 (No.4)p. 412.

Buddha to be equivalent and comparable to the notion of God as understood in Abrahamic traditions. Also similar to this is the Buddha Amitabha (Japanese- Amida)who is worshipped in Pure Land schools. He is symbolized through his compassion and as a saviour.⁴⁹

But it should be noted the role of creation and judgment is not ascribed to Amitabha as it is for God in Abrahamic traditions. As a compassionate Buddha Amitabha plays a salvific role-taking with him to Pure Land all the people who have not committed serious errors against their dharma.

Yusuf affirms Makransky's thought on another parallelist view between Buddhism and Islam through the same Trikaya doctrine with *Tawhid* (In Islam depicting one-ness of God) which allows for re-interpretations of many Buddha's and bodhisattvas to Islamic characterizations.

The proposed model suggests that the non-personal being which is also perceived the ultimate reality in Islam be compared to *dharmakaya*. The personified form of god which is manifested to his believers can be recognized as *sambhogalaya* as he portrays qualities like wisdom, compassion, and power to save his believers. Further, the Prophet can be compared with *nirmanakaya*, as just like Sakyamuni Buddha, he existed as a human being in this world guiding others.⁵⁰

Few Criticism;

Such parallelisms can only be extended if the essence of both the faiths is similarly understood. However, these comparisons do not completely justify the concept of God and the Prophet in Islam. *Dharmakaya* and God both are understood as ultimate realities, but there exist philosophical differences in the way each is understood in their respective religions. Dharmakaya is empty of any existence, but God is supposed to inherently exist in his creations. God in Islam possesses and exercises his positive attributes of justice, wisdom, etc however it is not the same for the Buddhist concept of *sambhogakaya* which does not engage in any such exercise. Finally, the Prophet is recognized for his role of bringing revelation to people of Islam, but this understanding cannot be accommodated through the *trikaya* concept of Mahayana Buddhism as there is no external source. Realization in Buddhism is generated from predispositions that already exist. Even in another Theravada tradition, enlightenment occurs to the would-be Buddha's from within themselves.⁵¹

Sufi Islam and Buddhism:

Sufi Islam is a mystical tradition in Islam. They deal with many concepts and philosophies which may not be acknowledged with the mainstream Sunni Islamic notion of practicing faith. However, their traditions of interpretation of faith can be seen extending, resembling, and acknowledging many Buddhist concepts.

⁴⁹ Obuse, K. 2015. 'Finding God in Buddhism; A New Trend in Contemporary Buddhist Approaches to Islam', 62 (No.4) p. 413

⁵⁰ Obuse, K. 2015. 'Finding God in Buddhism; A New Trend in Contemporary Buddhist Approaches to Islam', 62 (No.4). p. 412-414.

⁵¹ Obuse, K. 2015. 'Finding God in Buddhism; A New Trend in Contemporary Buddhist Approaches to Islam', 62 (No.4). p. 415

Similarities in doctrines and practices;

Emptiness, 'fana' and 'itlaq':

Scott in his paper reveals a resemblance between two Islamic Sufi concepts and Buddhism. He compares the notion of the Buddhist theme of 'enlightenment' with that of 'itlaq' in Sufism. The resonance between the two is enhanced with the parallels drawn across the Mahayana Buddhist thought on 'emptiness' (sunyata) and the Sufi notion of fana or annihilation. Further, the concept of 'itlaq' in Sufi philosophy is comprehended as an annihilation of the ego which can be extended to the Buddhist philosophy of 'anat-man' or 'no-soul'.⁵²

Belief in the philosophy of impermanent world:

Another intriguing exemplar cited by Scott is from Cleary. He suggests that doctrinally both the faiths may look dissimilar, however, there are many underlying similarities. He quotes philosophies of Sufi mystics, Idris shah, and Ibn al Arabi and Mowlana Rumi and theologians like al- Gazali which correspond to the Buddhist understanding of the world. A prevalent Sufi outlook purports that our perceptions are coloured with our acceptance of facts through our mind and sense perceptions. The universe is in a constant state of flux as it is continuously created and destroyed and re-created. There exist an inter-connectedness and interrelationships and dependencies between things.⁵³

Engaging in Practice of Meditation for spiritual development:

Another ritual that both the faith converge on is the practice of meditation. In both Islam and Buddhism, Meditation is perceived as a means of spiritual development. Both religions acknowledge the powerful perceptions and insights gained through its practice like recognition and acceptance of being powerless, non-existence of self, death as an inevitable phenomenon, alteration and instability of a phenomenon, and inconceivability of reality (truth). Additionally, both traditions partake in varied types of meditations like silent meditation, recitations, the rhythmic chanting of sacred literature, invocations, litany, and use of mnemonic formulae in their ritualistic practices.⁵⁴

Buddhadasa's inclusivist view of incorporating non-Buddhist worldview in Buddhist traditions

Obuse quotes Kiblinger through his work on a Buddhist monk of the Theravada tradition, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (1906-1993) actively promoted interreligious dialogue. He contends the oneness of all religions through the concept of Buddhist 'two-truths' theory as comprehended in the religious ('dhamma') language and that all religions accept the emptiness as an essential truth which has otherwise been acknowledged as a uniquely Buddhist concept. He contends that as soon as an individual acknowledges the truth of 'dhamma', he becomes a good individual be it a Buddhist, Christian, or Muslim. He asserts that all religions share the same essence which is expressed in different forms in each religion. Applying the 'ekayana' (one-vehicle) theory from the Lotus-sutra, he contends that religions (Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism) administer different paths on which leads to a 'shared objective'. The individual's

⁵² Scott, D. 1995. 'Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons on JSTOR', JSTOR, 42, (No.2) p. 147.

⁵³ Scott, D. 1995. 'Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons on JSTOR', JSTOR, 42, (No.2) p. 150.

⁵⁴ Scott, D. 1995. 'Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons on JSTOR', JSTOR, 42, (No.2) p. 150-151.

willpower predominates his journey which provides wisdom, faith, trust, etc, and according to an individuals particular temperament, the individual chooses his/her own path.⁵⁵

Buddhadasa invokes the verses of the Quran to acknowledge his theory. He cites the Quranic verse *“And for every nation is an apostle (messenger). So, when their messenger comes, it will be judged between them injustice, and they will not be wronged” (10:47)*⁵⁶

He interprets the verse such that the word apostle to be a ‘man of God who teaches the truth’ which is present in all religions while he recognizes God as something which is of hierarchy in the various religious conceptions of God. Thus, according to him, the verses are read as between the apostles and God, all doctrinal matters will be sorted. He asserts this as a ‘motto of goodwill’.⁵⁷

According to Buddhadasa, a personified and material God exists at lower levels of comprehension, whereas conventional attributes as not conferred to God at its higher levels of conceptions. Though his own conception of God is not very clearly expressed by him, it can be derived from his theory that he considers the Buddhist conception of to be of a superior ideology than other religions. His conception of the theory of dhamma as the highest form of truth also suggests that different religious leaders who came in different eras also were sent by the same god. In a similar theory based on the *trikaya* doctrine, he affirms that religious figures like the Gautama Buddha and Jesus Christ proceeded from ‘Adi Buddha’. Thus, it also suggests that Prophet Muhammad could also be considered as one of the emanations of ‘Adi Buddha’.⁵⁸

Contemporary Trends in Buddhist Discussions of Islam

There have been substantial deliberations on interreligious issues between Buddhism and Islam especially after the destruction of the Bamiyan statues of the Buddha in 2011. Also, due to the increasing impacts of globalization contemporary Buddhists have started to focus on initiatives that stress enhancing moral and ethical values, eradicate tensions, engender harmony, strengthen religious unity between the two communities.

‘Socially- Engaged’ Islam;

Islam promotes Muslims to make Islam as ‘their way of life’ which means it should not only be limited to their prayers and ritualistic practices but extend to incorporate the teaching of the faith in as ethical actions in their lives. A statement on religious engagement reads that behavioural issues lead to social inequality and political and economic imbalance which cannot be overcome only through institutional measures. Each individual needs to arbitrate his/her own actions and interest and consciously pursue the concern and welfare of others by an attitude of care and sharing his/her own possessions with others.

This statement also affirms the fundamental principle of ‘tawhid’ which asserts the unity of God as well as the unity of all mankind. It requires its believers to practice social justice and take responsibility for living in solidarity and caring for all of mankind as his fellow brethren

⁵⁵ Obuse, K. 2015. *‘Finding God in Buddhism; A New Trend in Contemporary Buddhist Approaches to Islam’*, 62 (No.4)p. 417-418.

⁵⁶ Obuse, K. 2015. *‘Finding God in Buddhism; A New Trend in Contemporary Buddhist Approaches to Islam’*, 62 (No.4)p. 417-418.

⁵⁷ Obuse, K. 2015. *‘Finding God in Buddhism; A New Trend in Contemporary Buddhist Approaches to Islam’*, 62 (No.4)p. 417-418.

⁵⁸ Obuse, K. 2015. *‘Finding God in Buddhism; A New Trend in Contemporary Buddhist Approaches to Islam’*, 62 (No.4) p. 418-419.

in this interdependent macrocosm. Thus, socially engaged Islam infuses ethical Islamic values deliberating progressive change in society. Values that Muslims are encouraged to adopt are justice, compassion, peace, wisdom, and benevolence to eliminate suffering, injustice, and misery and work towards the betterment of humanity. Socially engaged Islam stresses on the acquisition of knowledge as a remedy to overcome the social disorder, political crimes, and ignorance. In this regard many Islamic traditions stress on the following Quranic verses;⁵⁹

“My Lord! Increase me in knowledge”. (Qur'an 20: 114)⁶⁰

“Read! for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One, Who teaches by the pen,

Teaches man that which he knew not.” (Qur'an 96: 3-5)⁶¹

“You are indeed the best community that has been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and you believe in God.” (Qur'an 3: 110)

These verses stress on educating oneself and engaging in ethical practices that bring about the good of mankind.

Socially Engaged Buddhism

Socially engaged Buddhism attempts to purposefully engage with the social, economic, political, and environmental issues of the world. Buddhist philosophy is based on concepts of Karma, non- violence, the practice of the four noble truths, and the theory of dependant origination. In addition to their efforts towards spiritual enlightenment, socially active Buddhist individuals also dedicate themselves to eliminate world issues while devoting themselves to their doctrines of non-attachment with the world. Since, engaged Buddhists affirms the view that human agony exists in the mind rather than in the world, the path to enlightenment does not necessitate an individual to renounce the world. Rather, it encourages Buddhists to engage themselves with actions of selfless compassion and which help decrease human suffering.⁶²

Practical initiatives towards Interfaith endeavour;

According to Scott, mystical and ethical methods are two practical and most effective bridges to connect people of both the faiths. Initiation like ‘engaged- Buddhist’ and Islam’s egalitarian group named ‘this-worldly’ serves as a practical bridge between people of both the faiths. Sophie Gilliat perceives the social-ethical challenges as “hidden doctrines” which both groups are working commonly to overcome. Another humanitarian group of London Buddhist Vihara has initiated the campaign ‘Faith, Asylum, Refugees’ is an endeavour of cooperative efforts between the two groups. Initiatives are underway which now focuses on constructing a truly Global Ethic in which popular individuals from different faiths like Hasan Askari, John Hick, and Hans King have come together in a more organized interfaith setting. On the state and

⁵⁹ (Yusuf 2009p. 388-390).

⁶⁰ (Yusuf 2009p. 388-390).

⁶¹ Yusuf, I. 2009. 'Dialogue between Islam and Buddhism through the Concepts Ummatan Wasatan (The Middle Nation) and Majjhima - Patipada (The Middle Way)', 48p. 388-390

⁶² (Yusuf 2009p. 388-390)1

national levels there exist many interfaith groups and 'interfaith network' which directly connects people of both these traditions.⁶³

Considering the interfaith dialogue movement, there have been interesting implications. Two expressions, one by a Muslim scholar and other by a Buddhist monk sums up the significance of this movement. As expressed by Badawai in 1991, "when you come to moral values and practical projects you find common ground". Another message is delivered through an open letter at the Parliament of the world religions, in Feb 1994 by Venerable Samu Sumin where he appealed to the gathering,

*"Today we religious leaders and teachers of the world are facing unprecedented new opportunities for our future together in a global village as well as severe challenges from the secular world. To seize upon these opportunities for our common future, we must change. We would have to depart from our traditional religious attitudes and open our hearts to introduce to the world community a new religious consciousness and vision for peace, happiness, and ecological justice."*⁶⁴

Summary and Conclusion:

Both the faiths, Islam and Buddhism may believe in different doctrines and philosophies on 'God' or subscribe to 'nothingness' or 'emptiness' as its ultimate reality, but it can be affirmed that religions have played a role in bringing answers to man's divine quest giving him spiritual direction and peace. The paper at its initiation discusses the theology of emptiness in Buddhism through the detailed comprehension of emptiness as understood in the Mahayana tradition's two schools of interpretation; the Madhyamika school and the Yogacara school, their interpretation of perfection of wisdom and role of compassion as a path to spiritual enlightenment.

Wisdom and peace can be extended when the doctrines and philosophies of one's faith are extended to help understand the concepts of the other, as well as evidenced in the paper, it helps comprehend one's own faith in a larger construction. Thus, essay further moved on to understand the obstacles that assumed to divide the two faiths, but, has effectively demonstrated that the 'gap' between the two faiths is more psychological than doctrinal; the perspective adopted to interpret scripture can either widen or bridge the gap between Buddhism and Islam. Thus, through various exemplars, it is evidenced that efforts have been made by both the groups to comprehend, extend, accommodate the 'other's philosophy in the light of their own faith. The compares the two most influential historical role models, their life experiences and impact to suggest equity in their role, struggle and accomplishment of their purpose. The essay delves into the scriptural analysis of both faiths, where interpretations of the Quran prove to assert the acceptance of Buddhist scriptures and historical Buddha as a prophet and probable evidence of it being Prophet al- Khidr. Similar extensions are seen through the Buddhist efforts of accommodating the Islamic theory of God and the Prophet through Buddhist conceptual extensions on the theory of emptiness also allowing for the criticisms it evoked. Using

⁶³ Scott, D. 1995. 'Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons on JSTOR', JSTOR, 42, (No.2).p. 151-152.

⁶⁴ Scott, D. 1995. 'Buddhism and Islam: Past to Present Encounters and Interfaith Lessons on JSTOR', JSTOR, 42, (No.2).p. 152-153.

Buddhadasa's parallelist outlook, the essay brings forth the view that even Prophet Muhammad could be considered as an emanation of 'Adi Buddha'.

The paper recognizes, that the objective of each faith is to support the man in his discovery of himself and move towards his/her own spiritual development. It is also believed that it is through the understanding of the 'other' that one understands himself or herself better. The objective of this paper to move forward its interfaith initiative, thus the essay demonstrates shared practices and ethical outlooks through its comparison of Sufi Islam with Buddhism. Bhikkhu Bhuddhadasa adds another feather through his doctrine 'two- truth' theory of '*dhamma*' and 'one-vehicle' theory which adopts an inclusive approach to express Islam as part of other Abrahamic faiths in the understanding of Buddhist doctrine. The essay ends with the belief that scriptural adherence can be translated from ritualistic worship to expression in ethical action through the concept of 'socially engaged Islam' and 'socially-engaged Buddhist'. It moves on to cite the contemporary trends and practical interfaith initiatives by various groups throughout the world. Through this endeavor, the paper hopes to serve the aspirational endeavor of supporting, enhancing, encouraging interfaith understanding, dialogue, and harmony between practitioners of both the faiths.

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