

A Religion-based Framework of Risk Governance – The case of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka

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The aim of this paper is to examine how Buddhist religious concepts can be used in risk governance. Most approaches to risk governance adopt Western frameworks and are based on scientific, technocratic and economic paradigms regardless of their contextual appropriateness. Therefore, this paper addresses a significant gap in risk governance literature through its examination of how religious resources can be used to find solutions to the problems encountered in governance. In this regard, the paper looks at how the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, a religion-based grassroots movement in Sri Lanka innovated Buddhist concepts and methods in a socially, economically and politically appropriate way to address some pressing governance challenges it faced in its fifty-year lifespan. This analysis is done by looking at the Movement in four developmental phases from 1958-present where each phase is identified according to a main governance challenge faced by the Movement. The analysis is conducted based on the review of literature for my PhD thesis.

Keywords: risk governance; culture and religion; religion and grassroots movements, the Sarvodaya Movement; sustainable development innovations.

As Huber (1989, p.365, p.369) observes, “Social movements are a phenomenon of modernization” where they arise to respond to the “social question” or the “ecological question” of industrial development. In this regard, the social movement prioritises the social and environmental welfare over the requirement of the industrial system (Huber 1989, p.369). The social movement carries out this role by pressuring the States and the markets to periodically review their performance in terms of their cultural and environmental impacts (Huber 1989).

Arguably, however, there are a few significant reasons why the social movement cannot engage effectively with current processes of environmental governance, which are based mostly on technological and scientific frameworks. From planning to the implementation of a development project, decisions are made through scientific and engineering models, including risk estimations (Fischer, 2000). The scientific and technological orientation of these risk governance paradigms reduces the ability of the social movement to alter worldviews and values in favour of the

environment or the marginalised communities (Rajkopal, 2011, 2014). Furthermore, although Mol (2000) holds that the social movement should develop a collaborative language with the other governance actors who are the State and the private sector, the social movement's attempts to develop a collaborative language can become ineffective due to the largely growth oriented nature of these risk governance paradigm. The governments tend to prioritise economic growth over the concerns related to the environment or the society (Rajkopal, 2014). Further to this, the social movement itself faces difficulty in its early stages for mass mobilisation. Issues represented by grassroots movements are in many cases perceived as Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) arguments (McCormick, 1995). Government policy campaigns and dominant media usually succeed in glossing over the social injustices faced by grassroots communities using the rhetoric of national interests. Often the social movement does not possess the financial wealth to run well organised campaigns or mass mobilisation programs to raise a mass against such injustices.

In this paper, through looking at the case study of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, I will demonstrate how religious resources can be used to find solutions to these prevalent problems the social movement encounters in governance. Gardner (2002, pp.11-12) maintains that religions can have five potential powers to create a constructive form of engaged religion in the society-environment relationship. These are, the capacity to shape cosmologies (worldviews); moral authority; a large base of adherents; significant material resources; and the community-building capacity. The Sarvodaya Movement is a living example of a social movement which created this engaged form of religion using Buddhist concepts. I will provide an analysis of the work of the Movement in relation to four phases of its significant developments, which are:

Phase 1: 1958-1967 – *Initial collaboration* with rural communities to combat their social and economic marginalisation.

Phase 2: 1968- 1982 – *Becoming a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO)* and expanding collaboration beyond rural communities.

Phase 3: 1983 – 1993 – *Self-evaluation* and the return to the rural masses.

Phase 4: 1994 – present – *Self-assertive consolidation* and reestablishment of collaborative networks beyond rural communities.

My categorisation of the Movement into four phases of development is inspired by Bond's (2004, pp.7-42) work yet is different. In this research I suggest four phases of the Movement, from 1958 - to the present (2015) focused primarily on changes in its priorities and model of governance.

Method

The argument of this paper that religion can be used to create an innovative religion-based framework of environmental risk governance is based on an in-depth review and an analysis of literature on various relevant areas. These are, the history of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement and the Movement's development over a period of fifty years; the Sri Lankan political, economic and social developments during these fifty years; and the literature on environmental and social risk governance. The analysis is done by looking at the Movement in four developmental phases from 1958-present where each phase is identified according to a main risk governance challenge faced by the Movement.

Phase 1: 1958-1967 – Initial collaboration with rural communities to combat their social and economic marginalisation.

Phase 1 of the Sarvodaya Movement comprises the Movement's initial collaboration with rural societies. This phase is important to understand how religious concepts could be used to alter worldviews at the individual and community level. The main aim of the Movement was to create right methods and incentives to encourage rural community participation in governance through

altering their values. Religion played a central role in the local culture. Therefore, the Movement drew upon the communities' religious values to alter worldviews at the individual, as well as at the community level, to motivate social action to address the risks faced by these societies. Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism played a main role in this regard. Ariyaratne used the Buddhist concepts of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path to motivate rural social engagement through an underlying framework of spirituality.

The first Noble Truth – the existence of suffering – was translated in the village development context as the prevailing underdeveloped conditions of the village. Underdevelopment prompted the social and economic hardships faced by the community. The second Noble Truth – the origin of suffering – was interpreted as the conditions that cause inaction in the local community, be it the problems found in the social fabric such as the disintegration of various groups, a lack of social capital, or the prevalence of negative individual qualities such as jealousy, selfishness and a lack of interest in others. The Third Noble Truth - the cessation of suffering - was realised as the villagers developed an awareness that the potential to overcome the risks lies within themselves. The Fourth Noble Truth – the path to the cessation of suffering was the creation of the right methods that could help to overcome village under-development. (Macy, 1983). (See Table 1).

Table 1: The Socially engaged form of the Buddhist Four Noble Truths

The Four Noble Truths	The Socially Engaged Form of the Four Noble Truths
The existence of suffering	Contemplating on the prevailing under-developed conditions of the village.
The origin of suffering	Individual traits (jealousy and selfishness) that affect the wider social fabric to create social disintegration therefore a lack of social capital and social cohesion.
The cessation of suffering	Beginning to be aware of the mind's potential to overcome undesirable traits that create individual and community suffering.
Path leading to the cessation of suffering	Cultivating mindfulness and detachment from excessive desires. Cultivating loving kindness towards others and initiate action towards better and holistic governance.

Author's table based on Macy (1983, pp. 36-37).

Arguably, the Four Noble Truths affected reforms at the individual level, while another concept called the Noble Eightfold Path addressed changes at the societal level (see Table 2). Right understanding and Right Intention were realised when the community understood the nature of interdependence and co-existence between them and the others. Right Speech consisted of the characteristics of honesty and compassion. Right Action, Right Livelihood, and Right Effort meant conducting collaborative work for village development. Right Mindfulness was staying open to the needs of the village and Right Concentration was seeing this holistic picture of village development (Macy, 1983, pp.37-38).

Table 2: The Socially engaged form of the Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path	The Socially Engaged Form of the Noble Eightfold Path
Right Understanding	To realise the dependence between the self and the other.
Right Intention	
Right Speech	For honesty and compassion
Right Action	Living in harmony with others and the nature. Establishing common values for coexistence and collaboration.
Right Livelihood	
Right Effort	
Right Mindfulness	To stay open to the needs of the village.
Right Concentration	To transcend self to see the holistic picture of development.

Author's diagram based on Based on Macy (1983, pp.37-38).

According to Macy (1983), contemplating on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path in its socially engaged form as advocated by the Movement prompts a process of 'awakening' firstly at the individual level, followed by the household level, community level, national level and ultimately, at the global level. Hence, awakening simply meant the awareness that arises within an individual that social change starts at the individual level, which then flows to the community. Once the individual is awakened to the fact that they should work together to achieve progress for their village, they came together in what is called shramadana (donation of labour). Donation of labour or shramadana was used as a method by the Movement to create physical infrastructure of development, including sources of potable water, houses, latrines, roads, community halls and temples. The installation of these infrastructure addressed many risk issues faced by the village community such as water scarcity and health hazards. Further the availability of community halls and temples provided spaces for information sharing, planning and bonding towards risk mitigation.

This phase of the Sarvodaya Movement is therefore exemplary of how the Movement used spiritual values to assist environmental and social risk governance in rural Sri Lankan communities, working mostly at the community level. Towards the end of this phase, in 1966, the Movement initiated a hundred village development scheme. Twenty two Districts in Sri Lanka were selected and from each District an average number of five villages were picked to be developed as Sarvodaya Villages (Sarvodaya, 2014). The Sarvodaya Movement expanded its operations with outstanding success in the 1960s and reached its second Phase in the late 1960s. By 1968, the development framework of the Movement attracted international attention due to its success. Hence the Movement started receiving external funding for their work from international donors. The government also became interested in collaborating with the Movement for national development. These developments led to the Phase 2 of the Movement.

Phase 2: 1968- 1982 – Becoming a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) and expanding collaboration beyond rural communities.

The second phase of the Movement, from 1968 to 1982, is the period in which the Sarvodaya Movement evolved as a large Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) (Bond, 2004). In this phase, the Movement extended its collaborative networks beyond rural communities to cooperate with the government in government-led national development programs. Further to this, the Movement also received funding from many international developmental organisations. Therefore this phase of the Movement is important in understanding how religious concepts could be used to create networks of collaboration with various other actors – at the local level

with individuals and the communities; at the national level with the government; and globally with international donors.

The Sarvodaya Movement, using a spiritual ideal, established common values for development with these various actors. Values are the central guiding principles that underlie each actor's behaviour (Barr, 2008). Values of the Sarvodaya Movement were spirituality, equality, simplicity and the dialogue with the grassroots aimed at rural community development. Values of the donors were economic growth and income generation. Values of the government were national development and the expansion of governmental influence over the nation. The Movement established development to be the common value between all actors. However, the Movement equated excessive growth and consumerism to the Buddhist concept of *kamasukallikanuyoga* (too much into worldly pleasures) and excessive poverty to the other extreme *attakilamatanuyoga* (the complete denial of the world). The Movement picked the Buddhist concept of *Majjimapatipada* (The Middle Way) for its model of development – which meant simple living and no desire. In order to go along the Buddhist path of Middle Way, the Movement established Ten Basic Needs for village development: a clean environment, clean and adequate water supply, minimum clothing requirements, balanced diet, simple housing, basic healthcare, simple communication facilities, minimum energy requirements, total and continuing education for all, and cultural and spiritual needs.

Therefore, the Phase 2 of the Sarvodaya Movement provides important insights into how spiritual value systems can be used for multi-actor collaboration and to develop a collaborative language. The Sarvodaya significantly expanded its operations in village development since 1967. The “Hundred Villages Development Scheme”, which began in 1967, ran throughout this Phase (Bond, 2004, p.23).

Phase 3: 1983 – 1993 – Self-evaluation and the return to the rural masses

Phase 3 of the Sarvodaya Movement focuses on the large-scale disruption that occurred to the collaborative relationship between the Movement, the government and international donors. This period began in 1983 and lasted till 1993. Disparities occurred between the Movement and the government in relation to their use of Buddhism for community mobilisation, creating a political conflict between these two actors. During this ten year period, the Movement faced political as well as financial instability as the donors withdrew a large percentage of their funding from the Movement. The Movement had to mobilise its own mass to carry on with its unique objectives – to reinstitute its identity to a *shramadana* (donation) based Movement, instead of a finance-based one; and to reinstitute its philosophy based on engaged Buddhism. Therefore, this phase of the Movement is exemplary of how religious concepts could be used for mass mobilisation among communities.

The Movement's leader, Ariyaratne, introduced a new political process in 1992, which he named the critical mass of spiritual consciousness and consensus politics. As Ariyaratne argued, the core of all religions is spirituality, and includes a message of peace, love and harmless coexistence. Ariyaratne used this notion of ecumenical spirituality to create a community of likeminded people who uphold the values of peace and justice, which he called the critical mass of spiritual consciousness. As Ariyaratne believed, the critical mass of consciousness once generated would transfer power to the community to take action against the political structures that create inequality and injustice (Bond, 2004). Consensus politics would arise from amongst the spiritual community who would choose what is right for them in mutual agreement and would replace party politics which leads to separatism (Bond, 2004). As Bond (2004) describes, Ariyaratne initiated this political system by forming a network of village republics as a bottom-up command to challenge the top-down power of the government and multinational corporations.

The Movement expanded its influence to 10,000 rural villages in 1994 ending almost a decade of political and financial struggles.

Phase 4: 1994- present – Self-assertive consolidation and reestablishment of collaborative networks beyond rural communities.

A decade long political oppression endured by the Movement ended in this phase and a collaborative relationship was established once again with the government. This is an interesting phase of the Movement as they have adopted technologies and modern sciences in their governance strategies alongside the use of spiritual infrastructure. The Movement is also currently administered by a modern management structure incorporating A.T. Ariyaratne's ideology. This phase of the Movement is important in environmental governance to examine how spiritual frameworks and technological frameworks can be merged in governance in locally appropriate measures.

In order to keep up with the modern developments in Sri Lanka, the Sarvodaya has adopted a 'modern' management structure. Its founder Dr. Ariyaratne plays the role of providing the "ideological and inspirational leadership to the organisation" (Sarvodaya, 2014) even at present. However, the Movement is now also based on modern management models and leadership (Sarvodaya, 2014). Also, the Movement operates on three broad strategic goals, which is detailed in the Sarvodaya Strategic Plan 2005-2010 as the consciousness goal, economic goal and power goal (Sarvodaya, 2013).

As shown in Figure 1, the Sarvodaya Movement has a consciousness sphere at the top, which aims for the spiritual development of Sarvodaya communities. Spiritual development provides religious and spiritual inputs (derived from Buddhism and Gandhian concepts) to the economic and power processes of Sarvodaya projects. According to the most recent publication of the Movement, Sarvodaya (2013, p.14), consciousness domain contains the principles of "Individual Awakening (Loving Kindness, Compassionate Action, Selfless Joy, Equanimity) and the Principles of Group Awakening (Dana, Pleasant Speech, Constructive Action, Equality)". Consciousness also consists of the awareness of inter-religious and inter-ethnic tolerance. Under the economic domain, Sarvodaya aims for its projects to satisfy basic, secondary and tertiary needs of communities with an intention of delivering production that is sustainable. The ideal economic development model of a Sarvodaya community intends to satisfy Ten Basic Human Needs (which were mentioned above), aiming at a society with neither affluence nor poverty. The economic sphere also aims at the "development of cultural, moral and spiritual values" (Sarvodaya, 2013, p.14). The 'power' sphere contains the ideals of good governance and ultimately people's control over governing institutions. The power sphere aims for bottom-up grassroots participation in decision making and project management where "power is really with the people at community level" (Sarvodaya, 2013, p.14).

At present, the Movement is spread to over 15,000 villages in Sri Lanka. One third of these villages are not supported by outside funding but based on "self-sustaining development activities" (Sarvodaya, 2014).

Conclusion

The paper looked at how the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, a religion-based grassroots movement in Sri Lanka innovated Buddhist concepts and methods in a socially, economically and politically appropriate way to address some pressing governance challenges it faced in its fifty-year lifespan. Through this examination, the paper also demonstrated how the Sarvodaya Movement's use of religious concepts in these four phases addressed three major issues faced by social movements in environmental governance. These are, the difficulty in altering worldviews and values; difficulty to create collaborative networks; and the difficulty in mass mobilisation. Therefore, this paper addressed a significant gap in risk governance literature through its

examination of how religious resources can be used to find solutions to some significant problems encountered by social movements in governance. Also, additionally, the work of the Movement in Phase 4 demonstrated how religious concepts could be used resourcefully to generate a fusion between ideology and modernity.

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