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The concepts of Love and Mettā
in Christian and Buddhist traditions
as a basis for a new social order in Sri Lanka.

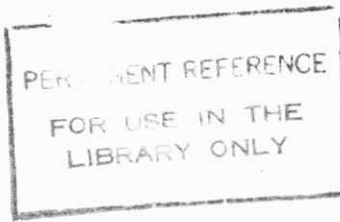
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THE STATEMENT OF SCOPE

The pearl of the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka, is blessed with the four major religions of the world namely, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. But a close look at today's Sri Lankan society suggests that it is not rooted and based on the message of these great religious teachings.

A country known as *Dhammadeepa* has been experiencing social conflicts resulting in gruesome loss of human life and property in the North and South. As a result, the so-called *Dhammadeepa* is slowly but steadily bleeding to death. Many are the reasons that led to this unfortunate situation and human agony.

In this exercise the socio-political *mārga* recommended, envisaged by Christian and Buddhist traditions will be highlighted. Further it will be shown that Love and *Mettā* had been the launching pads in admonishing just social orders in these two traditions respectively. Hence this will be an attempt to demonstrate that social order based on Love and *Mettā* upheld respect for man and human dignity. (Love in Hinduism and Islam is also dealt with here since these traditions also form part of Sri Lankan society).

The Christian perspective will be based on Scriptures, the Old and the New Testament. Yahweh saves the people of Israel from the oppressive clutches of Pharaoh out of His love. Inspired and animated with love the people of Israel start a new journey towards a promised land with a new social vision. It will be argued that the history of

salvation was a reconstruction of a social order based on love. But when the kings of Israel deviated from these social values, the Prophets came to the forefront to uphold this social system based on love which warranted justice, peace, fellowship and equality.

The Old Testament message of love ends up with the personification of this love in Jesus. The life of Jesus presented in the Synoptics (the three-fold tradition of Mark, Matthew and Luke) and in the gospel of John depict a person who not only showed and shared this love but by a pedagogy of love invited the people for a just and a noble society. The Epistles and the Letters in the New Testament will be brought into focus to demonstrate the struggle the new-born Christian communities experienced in maintaining the social order envisaged by their great Teacher, Jesus, the expansions and new orientation that took place in making these communities, communities of communion and sharing.

According to Buddhism the miseries of an individual is due to the deficiency in the spiritual quality of the individual concern. Further greed (*loba*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) are considered as the roots of evil which create suffering in society. In the *Cūlamalunkya sutta* of the *Majjimanikāya* Buddha teaches the concern He has for the present predicament of man with the simile of the man shot with an arrow. *Nibbidā* - initial shock which has to be treated. Buddhism has been misinterpreted by Western scholars as 'other worldly' and 'life-denying'; for example, Max Weber described Buddhism as mystical and a-social; Spiro believed that Buddhist salvation can only be achieved by a total and radical rejection of the world in all its aspects. But Buddha in his message has clearly illustrated that moral and spiritual concerns are closely linked up with socio-political patterns in the *Aggaññasutta*.



Unjust political and social arrangements are the results of greed (*loba*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*), where human dignity is not upheld. For Buddha nothing but a person's moral virtue and wisdom was important. So this exercise basing itself on *Mettā* and inspired by *Brahmaviharas and Sangahavatthu* will examine the transformation and orientation that is demanded of a person to re-interpret present social structures for a just social order.

A comparative study of Love and *Mettā* in relation to social order in Christian and Buddhist traditions will be carried out to expound the mental attitude and composure that is recommended by these traditions to work for a just social order. A critique of the Sri Lankan social order will be made to illustrate the inequalities and shortcomings that exist at present. Further it will be highlighted the extent to which present social arrangements and patterns have isolated themselves from the social virtues of these religious traditions.

Various attempts are being made to instil scientific knowledge and technological skills into our society. These new programmes have benefitted only a handful of people, on the other hand ruining and devastating the socio-cultural patterns, thus bringing about tension and conflict in our society. Hence it is the aim of this exercise to exhibit, that, with a mature mental attitude based on Love and *Mettā*, human beings can completely change and re-arrange the present confusing social pattern to bring about a just and new social order in Sri Lanka.

METHODOLOGY

A hermeneutical and a comparative method will be mobilized throughout this exercise to avoid falling into exclusivism and making value judgements with regard to interpreting Scriptures of both traditions.