

## Does soldiering fall under wrong livelihood in Theravada Buddhism? A critical analysis

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It has been a hackneyed question behind the majority of the studies on Buddhism and war that ‘how does Buddhism justify the warfare? Seemingly, scholars have reiterated this issue in pursuit of solving the burning conflict between the values that are expected to uphold via following the first precept of Buddhism and the active engagement of Buddhists in warfare. This study examines another dimension of the same problem pertaining to soldiering as a livelihood, in the light of Theravada Buddhism. Soldiers confront with grave ethical dilemmas in the battlefield as they are entrusted to take certain measures and decisions in order to accomplish their mission. Kent quotes one such dilemma of the Sri Lankan soldier thus; ‘Will I receive negative Karma if I kill the enemy on the battle field?’ Apparently the modern day scholarship perceives such dilemmas as mere ethical challenges that soldiers are expected to overcome with the help of an accurate ethical reasoning process. Nowhere in the *Pāli* Canon has Buddhism identified the soldiering as an unethical livelihood or *Micchā Ājīva*. Furthermore, except the ‘five banned trades’ mentioned in the *Vanijjā Sutta*, Buddhism does not present a clear-cut definition for the wrong livelihood of the laity. However, Lord Buddha does not deny the negative consequences a soldier has to endure in his livelihood. At this juncture, it seems that the approaches like ‘prima facie just-war theory’ tend to surface for the rescue of the soldier. Prima facie obligations refer to ethical obligations that can be overridden when they come to conflict with each other. The present study reveals that the apparent ethical predicaments that servicemen are duty-bound to face, are indeed ethically insoluble dilemmas that provides no single panacea via an ethical reasoning process. However, I argue that it is impossible to deny the necessity of soldiering for a healthy governance of a state as expounded by the Buddha. I also challenge the notion that ‘soldiering is a wrong livelihood according to Buddhism’, but it is nevertheless a profession that entails a fair amount of negative consequences in this world, as well as in the world to come.

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