Abstract

THE ROLE OF SOCIALLY ENGAGED BUDDHISM TO SOCIAL WELFARE: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

Apart from being a religious order, Buddhism is also a set of ideas and ideals and, above all, a time tested way of life. This fact has been vividly exemplified and profusely illustrated centuries after centuries in the form of the Buddhist precepts and ideals like Sikkhapada-s, stages of Purisa-puggala-hood, Brahmavihara-s, Bodhisattva-cariya-s, Bodhisattva-bhumi-s, and so on. A newer and contemporary incarnation of all these elements has come up in the form of Socially Engaged Buddhism.

The Socially Engaged Buddhism is a topic which has attracted worldwide attention. Because of its immense relevance in the contemporary world, the researcher proposes to develop insights into the authoritative texts and their interpretations centred on the concept in different perspectives. In the proposed research, the concept of socially engaged Buddhism will be discussed with exclusive focus on Australia. The term “Engaged Buddhism” appears originally to have been coined by the venerable Thich Nhat Hanh in 1963, and the expanded term, “Socially Engaged Buddhism,” emerged during 1980s.1 The term “Socially Engaged Buddhism” refers to an active involvement by Buddhist members in society and its problems, practitioners in this nascent movement seek to actualize Buddhism’s traditional ideals of wisdom and compassion.

Drawing on traditional Buddhist ethical and social teachings, Engaged Buddhism seeks to apply them to social life as well as to social issues.2 It is in fact a movement of “engaged Buddhist” which is comprised of a wide range of individuals from

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diverse cultural backgrounds. Inspired by Buddhist values, they are united by a common drive to lessen the suffering of the world, in particular by “engaging” (as opposed to renouncing) the various social, political, economic, etc, institutions, structures and systems in society.

This present study has been completed in all chapters consist of seven chapters which has been listed in the previous synopsis. The first chapter introduces about the topic and methodology to work on the topic entitled “The Role of Socially Engaged Buddhism to Social Welfare : A Study with Reference to Australian Society”. It also pointed out the Conceptualisation of “Socially Engaged Buddhism” in both times of the Buddha and contemporary world.

The second chapter with under the titled "Approaches of the Socially Engaged Buddhists" has divided into many sub-titles of differences an approach to train untamed mind and if we learn and put into practice the Teachings of Lord Buddha, we can avoid the evil speech, evil action, and evil thought and may have the opportunity to practice generosity, and loving kindness to other. In this chapter, also briefly mentions about the Buddhist Welfare Movements in Australia in all dimensions to help each other.

In chapter three and chapter four, have pointed out are all about the social and historical background of the advent of Buddhism in Australia along with Buddhist Cultures of Peace in Australian's Society. Since the early 1970s the numbers of Buddhists in Australia have increased greatly, and Buddhism has turned to some considerable strength through immigration from South, South-East and East Asia. Buddhism now forms a significant part of the religious mosaic of Australia.

The chapter five under with the title "Buddhist Contributions to the Australian Society". By "social action" it mean many different kinds of action intended to benefit mankind. These range from simple individual acts of charity, teaching and training, organized kinds of service, "Right Livelihood" in and outside the helping professions, and through various kinds of community development as well as to political activity in working for a better society.
Hence here, there are nine categories had searching out by Patricia Sherwood completed in the year 2003 that the Buddhist welfare contribution in Australia could be divided into nine different areas as below:

1. Education of the adult public
2. Education of children;
3. Working with the sick in hospitals and hospices;
4. Working with the sick and dying in the community and in palliative care;
5. Visiting prisons;
6. Working with drug addicts;
7. Fundraising for the poor and needy (both in Australia and overseas);
8. Speaking up for human rights and against oppression;
9. Compassionate activities on behalf of non-human sentient beings.  

The last chapter "Conclusion" present a brief of main points of all chapter has pointed out that Buddhism with its two pillars of wisdom and compassion necessarily engages human well-being both individually and socially. Socially Engaged Buddhism are essentially contiguous with traditional forms despite different social arenas and cultural contexts. It is the position of the traditionalists that is strongly supported by the Buddhist practitioners in Buddhist organizations in Australia. Their view is strongly emit and very supportive of the view that social welfare activities have always been integral to Buddhism, although the cultural forms may vary.

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