PREFACE

Buddhism is not merely a religious order, but also a set of ideas and ideals and, above all, a time tested way of life. It has been elicited during the long course of history in different forms of the Buddhist precepts and ideals such as Sikkhapadas, stages of Purisa-puggala-hood, Brahmavihara-s, Bodhisattva-cariya-s, Bodhisattva-bhumi-s, and so on. Socially Engaged Buddhism is a new term which essentialises the contemporary incarnation of all these elements fused together under one broad rubric.

The Socially Engaged Buddhism is a topic which has attracted worldwide attention. Because of its immense relevance in the contemporary world, the present study is a humble attempt to develop insight into the authoritative texts and their interpretations centered on the concept in different perspectives. In the proposed research, the concept of Socially Engaged Buddhism has been discussed with special reference to Australian society.

Engaged Buddhism is, in fact, not only an answer to the scholars who depict Buddhism as passive, other-worldly or escapist religion, but also a solution to the problems and challenges of the contemporary society.

It is quite apparent from the foregoing discussion that the concept of Socially Engaged Buddhism and its practitioners have been able to find ways and means to overcome the so-called modern day menace of social, political and economic crises and therefore, it is gaining popularity day by day, particularly in the west. Apart from the scholars affiliated to the Socially Engaged Buddhist movements, a good number of
modern scholars of Buddhism have produced volumes of literatures on Socially Engaged Buddhism and its practicing methods. But the bibliographical catalogue of modern works on Socially Engaged Buddhism in general and Buddhism in Australia in particular, readily demonstrates these studies, with very few exceptions, have not concentrated on historical development of Buddhism in Australia and its engagements to the society for the welfare of the common masses. They have peremptorily excluded these significant objects of research on those aspects. The present attempt has been made by the researcher to prepare a systematic history of origin, development and contribution of Buddhism to Australia.

The following objectives have been kept in mind while doing the study:

a. To present a brief description of the advent and development of Buddhism in Australia.

b. To present a brief analysis of the Concept of Socially Engaged Buddhism.

c. To present an analytical discussion of the contents of the different Buddhist Sutta-s which discuss the concept of Socially Engaged Buddhism.

d. To present an over view of the Engaged Buddhist Movements and Welfare activities undertaken in the area of the study.

e. To critically evaluate the Socially Engaged Buddhism as a solution to the present day problems.
f. To study various intervention approaches and practices adopted by the Engaged Buddhists for improving the quality of life of the people.

g. To analyze the perception of the people regarding the welfare activities of the Engaged Buddhists.

In the proposed thesis an attempt has been made to prepare a comprehensive treatise on the concept of Socially Engaged Buddhism and its contribution to the Australian society not only on the basis of the textual studies but also on the survey work. Thus the proposed work would be based on available literary sources, primary and secondary, as well as the empirical data collected from the fieldwork.

The views of the common people regarding various aspects of the social movements and welfare activities undertaken by the Buddhists have been collected by an exhaustive questionnaire. The questionnaire have been prepared keeping in mind the objectives of the study and have included questions on varied aspects of Buddhist movements and welfare activities. The proposed questionnaire would be administered on 200 monks/ nuns and 200 lay people beneficiaries. Appropriate statistical tools have been used for the analyses of the perception of the sampled respondents.

While writing the thesis sincere attempt have been made to follow various methods of social science research such as Historical method, Analytical method, Comparative method and Critical method.

The proposed thesis has been titled as ‘The Role of Socially Engaged Buddhism to Social Welfare: A Study with Reference to Australian Society’ and will consist of
six chapters including Introduction and Conclusion. These chapters are summarized as below:

The first chapter introduces 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 points out the Conceptualization of “Socially Engaged Buddhism” during the time of the Buddha and in contemporary world.

The second chapter with a titled "Approaches of the Socially Engaged Buddhists" has been further sub-divided into many sub-titles which helped in studying in detail the ways and means of giving training to untamed mind and Buddhist Welfare Movements.

The Engaged Buddhist Welfare Movement has been playing a leading role in Australia, particularly in the areas of environment, peace and human rights. Wherever these Buddhist organizations are involved, it is easy to identify their contributions. However, it is difficult to quantify the scope because it is the cumulative result of the actions of individuals, many of whom are not associated with formal Buddhist organizations but whose actions and styles of social intervention have been profoundly influenced by the Buddhist philosophy.

In chapter three deals with the social and historical background of the advent of Buddhism in Australia, whereas Buddhist Cultures of Peace in Australian Society is the subject matter of the fourth chapter of the thesis.
Australia is a developed country, with a prosperous multicultural and multi-religious society. It does not accord the status of state religion to any religion. According to the 2006 census, 64% of Australians were listed as Christian. 19% of the population was listed as “No Religion” which included humanism, atheism, agnosticism, and rationalism. The second largest religion in Australia is Buddhism (2.1%), followed by Islam (1.7%) and Hinduism (0.8%). Overall less than 6% of Australians identify with non-Christian. As Australian constitution does not recognize any religion as state religion, religion does not play a central role in the lives of a large portion of the population.

Since Buddhism as mentioned above, the second largest religion in Australia country, it is obvious that many scholars would have been attempted to record the history of the origin, nature and development of Buddhism in Australia. However, all such writings have mainly focused its attention on demographics, ethics identity and the migrant experience. Very few scholars, like Patricia Sherwood, Michelle Spuler, so on and so forth, have attempted to discuss the engagement of Buddhists and various Buddhist organizations of Australia in social welfare activities.

The fifth chapter titled “Buddhist Contributions to the Australian Society”. By "social action" we mean various 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, to various kinds of community development as well as political activities in working for a better society.
The study done on the Buddhist welfare activities in Australia by Patricia Sherwood, completed in the year 2003, divided it 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.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to discuss and delineate the Buddhist contributions to Australian society in all the above areas in a greater detail.

The last chapter “Conclusion” presents a summary of all the previous chapters. In this chapter it has been pointed out that Buddhism with its two pillars of wisdom and compassion necessarily engages human well-being both individually and socially. Modern forms of Buddhism are essentially 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.