

Impact of Globalization on Sri Lankan Buddhist Culture

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Introduction

Globalization has given rise to various new trends in contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. The impact presents both challenges and opportunities for the growth of Buddhist culture. One distinctive characteristic of Buddhism is its ability to adapt readily to globalization. In the globalization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the primary driving force has been the significant efforts of Buddhist monks and scholars in spreading the Dhamma. Additionally, numerous literary works have been produced, highlighting the various changes and adaptations of Buddhism across different areas during the globalization process. Some of the most notable and distinctive works in this regard include the following. One of the key works in understanding the transformation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is “Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka” by Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, published in 1988. This book examines the impact of globalization and modernization on Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka, focusing on how the religion has adapted to societal and political changes (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988). Another significant contribution is Stephen Batchelor’s “The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture”, which explores how Buddhism has evolved as it spread to the West, shaped by global culture, philosophy, and science, while also addressing the challenges posed by Western interpretations of Buddhism (Batchelor, 1994). Equally important is “Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition”, edited by Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish in 2003. This book delves into how Buddhism has adapted to modernity and globalization, examining various aspects of Buddhist thought and practice and the responses of different schools to contemporary challenges (Heine & Prebish, 2003). The collection of articles “Buddhism, Power, and Political Order”, edited by Ian Harris in 2007, is also of great importance. This compilation explores the relationship between Buddhism, political power, and globalization, shedding light on how Buddhists have participated in global socio-political discussions and reacted to global pressures (Harris, 2007). Similarly, “The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Buddhism” by Michael Jerryson (2016) and “Globalizing Asian Religions: Buddhism,

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Hinduism, and Islam in the Modern World”, edited by Thomas J. Csordas (2019), offer key insights into the spread and adaptation of Buddhism in the world today (Jerryson, 2016; Csordas, 2019). Another noteworthy work is “Buddhism in the Global Eye: Beyond East and West” by John S. Harding, Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy. This book uniquely addresses how Buddhism navigates the tensions between its traditional forms and the global forces of modernization and secularization, analyzing the religion’s roles in both Eastern and Western contexts (Harding, Hori & Soucy, 2020). The motivation for this literature review stemmed from information gathered through modern social media, including comments and news announcements. The central research problem focuses on examining the challenges and opportunities that globalization presents for Sri Lankan Buddhist culture in the modern context. Based on this problem, three key research questions emerge: What is globalization? What challenges does Sri Lankan Buddhist culture face due to globalization? What opportunities does globalization present for Sri Lankan Buddhist culture? The objectives of the study are to define globalization, to identify the challenges and opportunities for Sri Lankan Buddhist culture, and to recognize the trends within Sri Lankan Buddhism in response to globalization. The significance of the research lies in understanding these evolving trends in the context of globalization.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive approach, relying on textual analysis as the primary method. It is categorized as qualitative research, focusing on gathering data from primary and secondary sources.

Data analysis

This draws conclusions through deductive reasoning based on analyzed facts.

Results and Discussion

Globalization is defined in the Oxford Dictionary ‘as the process by which different cultures and economic systems around the world become interconnected and increasingly similar due to the influence of large multinational companies and improved communication.’ Consequently, every aspect of an individual’s social life is influenced by globalization. This has led to the perception of the world as a “global village.” In this context, it becomes essential to identify the challenges and opportunities that globalization presents for modern Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka.

1. Challenges Encountered by Sri Lankan Buddhist Culture Due to Globalization:

Number of challenges posed by globalization are apparent in modern Sri Lankan Buddhist culture. One significant issue is the commercialization of Buddhism, where Buddhism is increasingly treated as a commercial product, affecting its traditional values and authenticity. Additionally, the evolving roles of monks present a challenge, as traditional Bhikkhus' roles are being redefined, particularly with younger monks introducing new interpretations and practices. Another concern is syncretism, where integration of Buddhism with global spiritual trends risks blending with other belief systems, potentially leading to a dilution of core teachings and misinterpretations. The spread of Buddhist teachings through technology also poses a challenge, as it can reduce the depth of meditation and mindfulness practices to mere trends, especially on platforms that promote instant gratification. Furthermore, the global capitalist focus on consumption and growth often clashes with Buddhist values of non-harm (ahimsā), and sustainable living, creating ethical dilemmas for practitioners. Despite these challenges, Sri Lankan Buddhist culture is also finding unique opportunities as it navigates the complexities of globalization.

2. Opportunities Encountered by Sri Lankan Buddhist Culture Due to Globalization:

Globalization presents not only challenges but also significant opportunities for Buddhism. It has facilitated the widespread adoption of Buddhist practices such as mindfulness and meditation, integrating them into health, education, and corporate wellness programs globally. For instance, the emergence of Buddhist psychology highlighted the role of meditation in psychotherapy. Additionally, the global Buddhist community now has the chance to engage in interfaith and cross-cultural dialogues, enriching Buddhist thought and global spirituality through the exchange of ideas and practices. Moreover, global issues like climate change, social injustice, and conflict offer Buddhists the opportunity to apply compassionate action (e.g. engaged Buddhism) by addressing these problems with principles of nonviolence, compassion, and inter-dependence. The rise of digital platforms further enhances Buddhism's reach, allowing the dissemination of teachings (Dhamma) worldwide, transcending geographic barriers, and making Buddhist scriptures and discussions more accessible to a global audience. And globalization also prompts Buddhism to address contemporary issues such as gender equality, rights, and environmental justice, helping the tradition stay relevant while preserving its core teachings. This interaction extends to other fields, including psychology, neuroscience, and ecology, where research on mindfulness and compassion fosters collaborations between Buddhist scholars and scientists. Additionally, the development of global Buddhist networks, such as international organizations and online communities, has bolstered cooperation across various Buddhist traditions, Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna

promoting harmony and mutual learning. These networks also present Buddhists with a unique opportunity to contribute to global peace-building efforts, applying teachings on nonviolence and mindfulness to promote reconciliation in politically or ethnically conflicted areas.

Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned facts, it can be concluded that globalization has introduced both significant challenges and opportunities for Sri Lankan Buddhist culture.

Keywords: Challenges, Globalization, Opportunities, Sri Lankan Buddhist Culture

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