

A Synoptic View of Buddhism and Social Work Education in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) defined professional social work as to promote the social change, solve the problems of human relationships and the empowerment and liberation help the lives of people more comfortable and pleasant. Despite the fact that Western countries recognized and developed social work as a profession, its origins can be traced back to antiquity. The seeds of the evolution of social work could be explored in world ideologies such as secular humanism, protestantism, rationalism, welfare, liberalism, democracy, and utilitarianism. The notion of welfare stemmed from the roots of Dharma. History speaks volumes of initiatives taken by various kings, almoners, property owners, and foreign conquerors. The social work profession has traveled a long way from welfare to empowerment and development, and the present emphasis of the profession is protecting and promoting people's rights.

In Buddhism, social welfare is measured as the work done in different forms intended for the benefit of humankind. Such work ranges from simple individual acts of charity, teaching and training, to organized service in different forms for the betterment of the community, which are common areas of social work intervention. Buddhism is a very pragmatic religion. It believes that the world in which we live is sorrow-laden and that it is possible to transcend it. With reference to this context, the idea of social service in terms of Buddhism becomes important. Social work originates from the concept of charity, helping the oppressed community and social welfare. Hence, this paper is intended to examine the Buddhist perspectives on social work education and its development in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

For this research, Buddhist discourses, annotations, other Buddhist literary sources, Buddhist encyclopedias, essays on Buddhist studies, Dhamma speeches

delivered by eminent Buddhist monks and lay people, Social Work booklets, articles, various journals, and selected authentic sources on the Internet were used in this research. A descriptive method has been adopted to analyse the gathered data.

Findings and Discussion

Social work was formed and has been developing in the world for many decades. After a lot of changes, its values have remained and improved positively, in which human beings are always the essence. Personal and social values are the main foundations of this pedagogy. In Sri Lanka, though professional social work seemed to have started recently, in fact, it had begun in traditional Sri Lankan society a long time ago. Even in the post-modern era, the basic values of social work, such as humanity, justice, charity, and respect for social and human values, have always been appreciated and considered the direction for all activities.

Buddhism and Social Work Education

Social Work education commenced in 1952 when some leading citizens, a few non-governmental organizations and representatives of some government departments made a combined effort to establish the Ceylon Institute of Social Work. It was re-named as the Sri Lanka School of Social Work and commenced Diploma in Social Work in 1964. In 1987 the University Grants Commission informed that Sri Lanka School of Social Work should be upgraded and re-named as the National Institute of Social Development and since 2005 it started awarding the Bachelors in Social Work and it is the premier social work education institute in the country.

The foundation of Social work is the compassion of every human being, but Social work depends on social viewpoints, values, standard, lifestyle, geographical characteristics of community that shaped basically on national culture. Buddhism always gives prominence to mercy and compassionate. This is the important cause that help Buddhism always stick and companion with Sri Lankan people along the history. Buddhism believe that human need to have metta, karuna, mudita, upekkha (loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity- four infinite states of mind) those are key factors to develop heart of mercy, free from suffering that orient every action of Buddhism to human beings and for human beings, that's not only Buddhism's criterion but also foundation of compassion and companion of resources take part in Social Work.

Social welfare

All civilized societies throughout the globe continue to work for the wellbeing of humankind. In both social work and Buddhism, social welfare is considered as the work done in different forms intended for the benefits of

humankind. Such work ranges from simple individual acts of charity, teaching and training to organized services in different forms for the betterment of the community, which is also common areas of social work intervention.

Social service

The Buddhist monks and nuns from the monasteries are doing social service along with and for the common people. Both Buddhism and social workers provide social services to the members of the society to enable them to develop optimally and help them to function effectively and to lead a life of decency, dignity, and liberty. These services have been rendered to all the members of the society, irrespective to their religion, caste, race, language, culture etc.

Social work Philanthropy

Philanthropic social work is the process of bringing various resources to meet the needs of helpless. Philanthropic Social Work individuals and groups and disadvantaged communities by the application of systematic means of helping them to be self reliant to the extent possible. Philanthropic social work deals with helpless individuals, groups and communities such as the orphan, the destitute, the aged, the incurable, the infirm and the disabled individuals, the refugees' groups and the poorest of the urban and rural poor communities. Social Work values and conditions in Buddhism.

Buddhist Social Work

“Buddhist Social Work is human activities to help other people solve or alleviate life difficulties and problems based on the Buddha nature. Buddhist Social Work always finds causes to work on in both the material, and social arena, as well as in the human, or inner arena, working on both arenas in tandem. Its fundamental principles include compassion, loving kindness and mutual help, and interdependency and self-reliance.” (Akimoto 2017: 3) When considering this definition, it could be suggested that Buddhist social work could be promoted to establish social work education in the country as it is not popularized or well established yet in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

1952 marked the beginning of social work education in Sri Lanka, which was transformed into a formal education system in 1964 with the introduction of the Diploma in Social Work. Today, Social Work education has evolved from certificate and diploma courses to bachelors and master's degrees in social work. However, the social work profession and education are not yet as common in Sri Lankan society. With regard to this, the major reasons could be the welfare state and charitable activities that are rooted in society. Therefore, in order to popularize

the social work profession and education in Sri Lanka, it must be designed to be integrated with the Sri Lankan culture. Activities associated with Buddhism are cultural values rooted in Japanese society. This discourse implies that the philosophy and values of Buddhism can be applied to the development of social work education and adapted to the Sri Lankan culture.

Key Words : Buddhism, Social Work Education, Social Welfare, Social Service, Buddhist Social Work

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