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Buddhism and Social Harmony – A Study of Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre Prashant Chaudhry

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Abstract

Buddhism is a world religion; the founder of Buddhism in this world was Buddha Sakayamuni. He lived and gave teachings in India some two and half thousands years ago. Since then millions of people around the world are following the path shown by him of spirituality, non-violence, compassion and social harmony. The teachings of Buddha reveal the step by step process of changing the state of mind for long lasting happiness. It makes the mind to become more positive and constructive so that the life experiences becomes more satisfactory and helpful for others. In this study, an attempt has been made to qualitatively analyse the functioning of Buddhist organizations working for the welfare of poor, marginalized, downtrodden and disabled people. The objective of present paper is to understand the norms, values and spiritual conscience followed by such organizations, working for human welfare and social harmony. The paper will also highlight the methods which they follow for spiritual healings and also developing the feeling of compassion and fraternity in the behaviour of individuals towards each other. Mahabodhi International has been chosen to conduct the present study. The organization is based in Leh, Ladakh and run various activities of welfare and spirituality around the world.

Key Words: *Buddhism, Spirituality, Compassion, Harmony, Welfare.*

Introduction: Buddhism is a world religion. The philosophy of Buddhism is based on moral codes and principles which originated around 2,500 years ago in Kapilavastu (now Nepal). The teaching of Buddhism offers a rational understanding of human suffering and also shows a path to diagnosis human suffering. The teaching of Buddhism is based on compassion, non-violence and understanding of self and offers a moral code for all people irrespective of their gender, caste, religion, region etc. Buddhism shows a way to reach in deeper insight of human nature of reality and spiritual insight through meditation. It promotes self-awareness to interact with in everyday life with others. Today, an estimated 500 million people in various parts of the world practice one of the many varieties of technique of Buddhism.

The Life of Buddha - The Awakened One: The story of Buddhism begins in the year 563 B.C in Lumbini, in Nepal near the present border of Northern India, where Siddhartha was born. The family name was Gautama and they were ruler of small feudal kingdom of the Sakya clan. At the birth he was visited by according to the custom by number of astrologer, sages and wise man, who attempted to predict the child's fortune. One of the sage, a master of 'Body Reading' announced that the child was not destined to become great ruler but would instead obtain the 'Enlightenment' and Buddhahood. The father of Gautama, greatly worried and stunned by the predictions, took every

care to shield his child from witnessing the four sign, which would trigger his son's realisation of the reality of life and would lead him to renounce the world in search of truth. From the age of seven, he was trained in athletic skills, Vedas and rituals. At the age of sixteen was married and soon had son.

At this point of time, he had everything it seemed possible to have in life, but despite all this affluence, Siddhartha in his early twenties developed discontent through witnessing the four signs. The story is told that, one day, Siddhartha saw an old man, bent and trembling, and discovered old age. On the second encounter, he saw a sick man suffering from disease and on the third journey he witnessed a funeral procession and corpse. Finally, on the fourth journey, he met a wandering monk who had an inner tranquillity despite living an austere life, and the attempt of the aesthetic to seek meaning and solution to it all.

Soon after seeing all the signs, Siddhartha left all pleasures, his wife and son and at the night of his 29th birthday, the young prince renounced his regal life and entered the real life in search of truth. He went from one holy man to other holy man and pursued his spiritual quest. For six years he punished his body and lived the most austere life. In the end, he vowed harder. However at the point of near death, he saw a three stringed lute, a musician's instrument. He saw shown that if the string is too loose, no sound is produced, too tight and it breaks and turned just right it would produce pleasant sound. He saw that the austere way would not take him to his quest of enlightenment. At this point, Gautama gave up his extreme life and began to eat normally again. He again decided to search for his quest and sat himself under the Bodhi tree at the place called Bodh Gaya and determined not to move until he had found the answers he sought. He meditates very deeply and on the night of the full moon in May, complete enlightenment (Nirvana - complete freedom from birth) came to him. His mind become calm and he understood the cycle of birth, death and wheel of life. He understood the true nature and that of all living beings. This was the end of his spiritual journey, and at the moment he became "the Buddha".

Teaching of Buddhism: Buddha first sermon was sharing of his insight. He said that there were two extremes of life; one was over indulgence and attachment to the luxuries of life, of wealth, food, drink and the flesh, while the other was the masochistic indulgence in self-denial. Both to be avoided in their place one should strive for the middle path. This, he said, leads to spirituality, calmness and an insight into life, leading to higher knowledge, Enlightenment and ultimately Nirvana.

The Middle path consists of understanding of Four Holy Truths and the Noble Eight Fold Path.

The Four Holy Truths may be expressed as follows:

1. Existence is unhappiness
2. Unhappiness is caused by desire and selfishness
3. Desire and craving can be overcome by
4. Following the Eight Fold Path

The steps of the Eight-fold Path are –

1. Right Understanding
2. Right Purpose
3. Right Speech
4. Right Behaviour
5. Right Vocation
6. Right Effort
7. Right Alertness

8. Right concentration

His famous sermon is known as the ‘Setting in motion of the Wheel of Existence’. It is known as the ‘Wheel of the Doctrine’ and the ‘Wheel of Law’, for the Buddha compared the spokes of the wheel to the rails of pure conduct, justice being the oneness of their length, wisdom the rim, while the axle of the truth is attached to the hub, which is modesty and thoughtfulness. His explanation of doctrine was based on this conception of a metaphorical wheel.

Rationale of the Present Study: The present study is an attempt to understand the significance of religion like Buddhism in spreading spirituality, social harmony, peace and compassion among the people. As we all know that in human society, religion plays a significant role in shaping society. Almost all people in the world follow certain religion, which help them to bring peace and harmony in their personal and social life. The spirituality helps them to understand their soul and also encourage them to develop feeling of compassion and harmony towards all living beings.

Social work is a process concerned with adjustment and development of the individuals towards more satisfying human relations. It promotes self-awareness among individuals about their behaviour, actions and reactions. The spiritual sensitive social work practice promotes sense of mutual responsibility. It encourages that one must take responsibility for the effects of one’s action. Spirituality also promotes fostering of ethical codes for mutual relations among the people for bringing social justice and social harmony in the society.

The objective of present study is to understand the functioning of Buddhist organizations working for the welfare of poor, marginalized, downtrodden and disabled people. The study may be useful for the social work community to gain insights of norms, values and spiritual conscience followed by such organizations, working for human welfare and social harmony. This study may also be useful in conceptualising the role of spirituality in social work practice through gaining insight of interconnectedness of all and generating compassion for all.

Methodology: The present study is a descriptive work to gain insight of the functioning of Buddhist organization working for human welfare. For conducting the above study Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre (MIMC) – A Buddhist organization working for the welfare of people is selected to understand the methods which they follow for spiritual healings and also developing the feeling of compassion and fraternity in the behaviour of individuals towards each other. The data for the present study have been collected through interacting with personals of MIMC and also reviewing the available secondary data about their work.

Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre–An Introduction: Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre (MIMC) is spiritual organization established by Ven. Sanghsena Mahathera. The organization offers both spiritual instructions as well as desperately needed humanitarian services to impoverished people in the remote land of Leh, Ladakh. Since the inception the organization has been involved in spreading the teaching of “Buddhism” through organizing various Meditation camps classes of long and short duration at Mahabodhi campus, Devachan, Ladakh. Many tourists from India and abroad time-to-time visits Mahabodhi for attending Meditation courses throughout the year.

The efforts of Mahabodhi have been recognized by many dignitaries like Dr.A.P.J Abdul Kalam Azad former president of India and many leaders of the states, nationally and internationally. Currently MIMC is running Meditation classes with the objectives like helping people for physical and psychological relaxation, training and disciplining the mind for tranquillity, serenity and clarity,

for getting practical solutions of day-to-day problems, learn the art of living for peaceful, harmonious, friendly and caring attitude toward each other etc. MIMC has also open a dedicated centre Mahabodhi Sambodhi Retreat Centre for teaching people Meditation and Yoga at campus, Devachan campus, Leh, Ladakh.

MIMC has also been involved in running various social projects for the welfare of poor, destitute and economically weaker Ladakhi families like School, old age home, hostel for disable children, nunnery, hospital and environment related projects on water, agriculture and solar energy.

Guiding Principles of Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre: The norms and values are the guiding force for any institution working in the society. It helps them to formulate their goals and objectives, which an institution aspires to achieve. Now a day's most of the organizations working in the area of social and public welfare are focusing on their normative approach, while planning their policies, programmes and activities. It helps them to conceptualize their mission, motto and goals.

Mahabodhi International Meditation Center is one such social welfare organization working for the welfare of marginalized and downtrodden people living in Leh, Ladakh. The philosophy of the organization is based on principles and teaching of Buddhism. MIMC uphold the humanistic, scientific, rational and non-sectarian principles contained in the Buddha's teachings based on right understanding and right view. The Buddha's teaching of right view is the understanding of the things as they really are and to realise the four noble truths. The principle of right view is based on Karma and Karmic conditioning. The principle helps them to make their beneficiaries realise the intuitive insights that all beings are subject to suffering and it ends with developing true understanding of the nature of things.

MIMC strongly believe Buddha's teaching of developing right intention among the individuals. It promotes a kind of ethical commitment towards one's own action. There are two important aspect of ethical commitment 1) Right speech 2) Right action. While right speech abstain from telling lies and promotes friendly talk, warm and gently taking to others. The right action abstain people from taking such action which may harm or hurt others and promotes thoughtfulness of one's action and compassion towards others. MIMC also promotes other ethical commitment of Buddhism 1) Right Livelihood 2) Right Effort 3) Right Mindfulness and 4) Right Concentration. The right livelihood promotes people to earn their wealth legally and peacefully. The right effort promotes rightfully utilizing the mental energy in positive way. The right mindfulness promotes observing and perceiving things as they are. It is a controlled cognitive process which helps us in conceptualizing and processing our thoughts in a controlled way. The right concentration promotes developing the power of mind.

MIMC also follows and promotes Panca Sila among its beneficiaries, the five Buddhist moral precepts and Vipassana for the eradication of ignorance and defilements, to thereby enjoy real peace, happiness and harmony. The Panca Sila are the principles of moral conduct as following:

1. No Killing
2. No stealing
3. No sexual misconduct
4. No lying
5. No intoxicants

It promotes respect for life, respect for other's property, respect for our pure nature, respect for honesty and respect for clear mind. It prohibits its followers from certain misconduct and misbehaviour that may affects the society at large. Panca Silas are the guiding principles of

Buddhism and Social Harmony - A Study of Mahabodhi International Meditation ... Prashant Chaudhry
Buddhism for developing feeling of compassion, harmony and interconnectedness among the individuals.

Programme and Activities of Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre: MIMC run programmes and activities at two levels. At the primary level they run various welfare and development programmes for the local inhabitants of the region like school for both boys and girls, old age home, home for disabled, educational programmes, nunnery for Buddhist training etc. MIMC has involved a component of orienting all its beneficiaries towards the moral teaching of Buddhism at all levels of programme implementation and management. The organization has trained staff along with Buddhist monks and Nuns, who time to time orients all its beneficiaries towards the supreme principles (Panca Sila) and teaching of Buddhism. The programme and activities of the organization not only benefit the people in fulfilling their needs but also help them to give a guidance and training of life orientation based on morality, ethics and principles. The component of spiritual orientation helps the beneficiaries to understand a deeper insight of life and existence. It also help them to stronger their mind power so that they can observe the day-today problems, changes and issues with complete neutrality.

The other level of MIMC programmes includes orienting the beneficiaries towards Meditation. MIMC has a dedicated centre for organizing the meditation camps and programmes at Devchan campus, Leh, Ladakh and other parts of the world. According to MIMC meditation' is the accepted translation of the Buddhist term 'Bhavana' which more accurately means mental culture or mental development. Buddhism is primarily about gaining insight into the true nature of reality and bringing an end to dissatisfaction and suffering in life. The immediate benefits of the practice of meditation are minimising of restlessness, discontent, fear, aversion and a cultivation of equanimity, acceptance and tranquillity. The practice of meditation consciously cultivates and develops the mind to rise above the stresses and insecurities that burden our lives, and generates a richer and deeper experience of life. The highest goal of the practice, however, is gaining permanent release from the unsatisfactory cycle of life. At MIMC, the practice and teaching of meditation is one of the main programs. Meditation is introduced to all students and staff of Mahabodhi Devachan. Each year, during the summer months, the MIMC organizes several mediation activities targeting visitors. Meditation classes are also conducted at Devanchan campus and other parts of India and world.

Buddhism, Spirituality and Social Harmony: The concept of spirituality is often used by various religious beliefs to establish a connection with GOD. That helps the individuals to gain insights of their soul and also help them to develop faith and belief in certain practices to remediate their problems. However, in social work practice the concept to spirituality is used in more universal way that respects diverse religion and nonreligious forms of spirituality. It aspire both the social worker and the clients system that spirituality is the basic feature of human existence and experience. Hence, in the social work literature spirituality signify promoting sense of life purpose, meaning and mutual relationship among the individuals in society at large. Some of the renowned writers and thinkers consider spirituality as an integral aspect of human personality along with biological, psychological and social aspect. They consider that spirituality is more than an aspect of understanding the different faces of human nature. The concept of Spirituality aspire us to achieve the integration of all aspects of human nature in connection with all other beings.

Buddhism is a way of living. The teachings of Buddha about the noble truth and the moral code of conduct shown by him is available for all human beings irrespective of their sex, caste, region and religion. It helps individuals to understand the true nature of human personality. It promotes understanding of self along with moral code of conduct that help all individuals to generate respect

for others, honesty and also help them to develop clear and strong mind power. In order to understand the significance of practicality of Buddhist philosophy in changing the orientation of life, we can quote the example of Emperor Ashoka, the one moment that changes his life and made him a legend in the history. During the war of Kalingas, he was so distressed with the bloodshed and distress caused by his campaign. He converted to Buddhism, a philosophy of compassion, he left violence and used all his energy in spread of Buddha' teaching in India and other parts of the world. Thereafter, non-violence, respect for life, tolerance, compassion and peaceful coexistence were the cornerstone of his administration. During his period, the earliest know bans on slavery and capital punishment as well as environmental regulations came into place.

In the contemporary society, most of the adjustment problems faced by people in their personal and social environment are result of ignorance, greed and stagnation. The four Nobel truth of Buddha and the moral code of conduct (Pancha Sila) given by him facilitate the process to understand the different facets of human life, where everything is a consequence of one's behaviour and conduct. It teaches the followers to adopt middle path for living the life and practice moral code to bring peace, harmony and justice in the society.

Conclusion: From the above study, we can analyse the relevance of spiritual sensitive social work practice is the need of the hour. The spiritual path shown by Buddha is very important to keep the individual behaviour and society in harmony with each other. We strongly believe that in the contemporary social work practices; the spiritual path shown by Buddha is significant for both social workers and clients system. As it promotes commitment towards the problem solving process and enhances mutual support system for rehabilitation and reformation of the clients in his/her environment.

The work of MIMC is unique in nature as it provides both the social welfare services and also a perspective to beneficiaries to understand the nature of human life and their sufferings. Through spirituality it strengthens their mental power and wisdom so that they become more self-reliant and encounter any problem of their personal and social arena with complete compassion, commitment and courage.

The model of spirituality and social worker applied by MIMC should be promoted in the social work literature and in such organizations working for the welfare of poor and underprivileged people because the goal of social work is make the clients aware about their problems and encourage them to strengthen their self and mutual support system to bring necessary changes and behaviour modification for more satisfying life experiences.

Buddhism is such a religion which generates equality, compassion and fraternity towards each other. It teaches us to live happily with less desires and luxury through adopting the middle path and if such happens in the lives of the individuals, then our society rather our whole world would be a happy place to live in with complete fraternity, harmony and compassion. However, Buddhism is preached and practiced in a very smaller portion of the world. If we look at the constitution of India, the same of goals of Buddhism are enshrined in preamble of the constitution. We suggest that the teaching of Buddhism and spiritual path shown by him should be preached at every level of our socialization process so that love and affection would prevail and all individuals could realize their potential and worth.

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