

The Social Enhancement Empowered by Buddhism

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### Abstract

Social work running parallel to human rights is a subject in which the ways thorough which the well-being of humans could be achieved. This is applicable not only to professional welfare services but also to professions. Social work found in Buddhism combines all the duties and obligations performed by the individual in different roles of the state, society, institution and family as a child, parent, student, teacher, husband, wife, friend, employer, employee, clergy, laity, ruler and the ruled. Simply, the duties and obligations are named as a social contract or of mutual obligations. Though, in the West, social work is named as a profession, such an interpretation is not found in Buddhism. When one performs social work, one achieves according to Buddhism, happiness, detachment and finally liberation. The mission of the Buddha began with the attainment of Enlightenment. Since he has perceived the world as a lotus, he categorizes them into groups. However, this process has also been neglected when relatives are considered where the parents, brothers, and sisters, wife, children, relatives, etc., should be prioritized respectively. Priority is given to teachers since the Buddha himself first searched for his teachers to preach the dhamma. Generally, the Buddha asks his disciples to propagate the Dhamma in cities and villages for the benefit of individuals to enhance their wisdom with compassion towards the world. Not only did he ask the followers to practise the four sublime abodes, to experience happiness in this life and the next, and to achieve the final extinction, *Nibbāna*. The purpose of the paper is to show how in Buddhism, social enhancement is found in reference to social work referred to in the Social Sciences.

*Keywords:* Social work, Duties and obligations, Individual

The social work is such a field that discusses how the well-being of the human beings could be performed. The Human Rights, in this regards, says that "social work always runs with the human rights" ranging from welfare services to the professions (Elisabeth, 2007, p. 1). Elisabeth also states that the social work profession, by any standard, has a commonality with human rights that should guide the profession in both policy and practice.

Social Work, as a profession, is defined as "A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on the individual well-being of society" (Elisabeth, 2007, p. 2). Even though, in the West, the social work is being taken in a professional perspective, in Buddhism such interpretation is not found. As far as one performs the social work, he obtains happiness, detachment and finally liberation. Even to the Universal Monarch, the Ten Rules of Good Governs are given with no purpose of introducing affiliated rules to the kingship but to govern the county for the benefit of the civilians (David, DN.III, 1976, pp. 57-68). Until he governs the country with the Tenfold Practices of the Universal Monarch (*cakkavattivuta*), he could experience the Seven Treasures (*saptaratana*) viz. *cakkaratana*, *hatthiratana*, *assaratana*, *maṇiratana*, *itthiratana*, *gahapatirathana* and *parināyakaratana* (DN.III, p. 58). National Association of Social Work states,

A primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help people to meet all their basic human needs, attending particularly to the needs and empowerment of those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (Elisabeth, 2007, p. 2).

Buddhism is a religion and a philosophy where all the human rights and dignity are protected. It deals not only with the rights of the individual but also with the rights of the relative people placing the final aim in attaining *Nibbāna*. In this regard, or to be achieved the liberation, one should perform individual endeavours.

Generally, it is accepted that one who wishes to attain *Nibbāna* should leave the householder life and practice meditation staying in forest or any other place where no worldly attachments is allied. Considering the currier of the meditational practitioners or the ascetics, the Sociologists are in the opinion that in Buddhism no social work is found since it is an ascetic religion. When the practices found in Buddhism are considered, it is evident that Buddhism always expects the well-being of others, even after the attainment of *Nibbāna*. This is applied with the address made by the Buddha before first sixty disciples. He says,

Monks, you should preach the Dhamma by wandering from village to village for the happiness and wellbeing of the many with the compassionate mind directed towards the world of beings such as humans and gods (*Caratha, Bhikkhave, cārikaṃ bahujana hitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāya atthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanussānaṃ*) (DN.II, p. 45).

Not only that, even the practice of meditation is applied when one follows the Noble Eightfold Path. Noble Eightfold Path is the path which could escort the individual towards the Liberation. The interesting point, here, is that when someone follows the path from the beginning to the end, he should practice the social work. It is stated in Mahācattārīsaka Sutta;

One should practice Right Thought with the wish of non-hatred cultivating loving-kindness, non-injury spreading compassion and without the worldly attachments hoping to leave the householder's life (Chalmers, MN.III, 1977, p. 71).

Therefore, when someone follows the Noble Eightfold Path, all the social consequences are to be practiced.

Further, the Buddha imposes the more reliable Vinaya Rules for the betterment of the society. In contrast to this, an especial *vinaya* rule in Rāhula Vatthu is imposed by the

Buddha, "There requires the permission of the parents for the ordination of a child" (Mahavaggapāli, p. 82).

Moreover, on the one hand, as a religion, Buddhism offers the confidence for cultivating good deeds or merits (DH., Verse. 2) and the fear for refraining from the bad deeds or demerits (DH., Verse. 1). Merits (*puñña*) always bring happiness to oneself and the others while demerits (*pāpa*) bring unhappiness to oneself and the others. Buddhism, on the other hand, as a philosophy, expects the knowledge to take the right decision at the ground where it is necessary. If someone does not possess the knowledge of right conduct, he would experience the unexpected disasters in those grounds because it is like taking the snake from the wrong place. Therefore, Dasuttara Sutta notes that Buddhism is only for the wise and not for the foolish (*paññāvato ayaṃ dhammo nāyaṃ dhammo duppañña*) (DN.III, p. 287).

The mission of the Buddha has been started with the attainment of Enlightenment. In his mission he does not consider the country, clan, colour, etc.,<sup>1</sup> to help the individuals but the morality or the spiritual strength. In this sense, all the beings are not equally qualified to be the aid receivers even though the gifted aid receivers are available. Since he has perceived the world of beings as a pond of lotus (MN.I, p. 168), he categorizes them into groups. Number of classifications of human beings is, therefore, stated in Buddhist teaching. Accordingly, the best receiver is the person who fulfils in morality; the morally perfected individual but not in ethics. The next is the one who is with such a vision. Third is the one who is not morally enriched but is not someone who brings the worst to the society. Finally, even the one who brings the worst to the society or the one who does the damage to the society with whatever the heinous crimes should be given (MN.III, p. 255). However, this process has also been neglected when the relations are considered where the parents, brothers, sisters, wife, children, relatives, etc., should be prioritized respectively

(Mahaniddeśa, I, p. 125). Not only that the priority is given even to the teachers (Mahaniddeśa, I, p. 177) since the Buddha himself first search for his teachers to preach the Dhamma (MN.I, p. 169).

Therefore, the social work found in Buddhism combines with all the duties and obligations performed by the individual in different status of the state, society (DN.III, p. 92), institution and family; a child, parent, student, teacher, husband, wife, friend, employer, employee, clergy, laity (DN.III, p. 91), ruler and ruled (DN.III, pp. 65-80). Simply, all the duties and obligations are named as social contract or mutual obligations.

The interpretations given by certain individuals are to be appreciated in Buddhist perspectives since Challenges in Human Rights has been stated "The roles of social workers are numerous: they protect children and other vulnerable populations; they perform various counselling roles; they carry out international relief work and occupy the front lines of disaster assistance; they assist in delivering social services to all populations - in other words, without social workers, the world would enjoy a less hopeful and welcoming environment" (Elisabeth, 2007, p. 2). When the Human Rights mentioned here are taken into consideration, we can summarize up to some extent with reference to Mahāpadāna Sutta that they follow the Buddha's expectations also, because, after the Enlightenment, Buddha asks his disciples to beat the drum in the cities and villages for the benefit of the individuals to enhance their wisdom with compassion towards the world (DN. I, p. 45). Not only that in Cūla Assapura Sutta he asks the followers to practice the Four Sublime Abodes always to experience the happiness in this life and the next, and to achieve the final extinction, *nibbāna* also (MN.I, p. 183).

Therefore, the Social Works should be based on not only the human rights but also on the morality, compassion and wisdom. It is not because of neglecting the humanity or human

rights but because of accepting value of protecting the noble persons who could direct the world into a situation where no war, disharmony or any disagreement among the people and where the peace and harmony could be available.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Read Ambhaṭṭha Sutta, D.N. Vol. i, PTS, 87 ff / Sonadaṇḍa Sutta, D.N. Vol. i, PTS, 111 ff / Madhura Sutta, M.N. Vol. ii, PTS, 83-90 / Kannakatthala Sutta, M.N. Vol. ii, PTS, 125 ff / Assalāyana Sutta, M.N. Vol. ii, PTS, 147 ff / Vaseṭṭha Sutta, M.N. Vol. ii, 196 ff / Vasala Sutta, Sn. PTS, 21 ff.