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A Study Of The Role, Function Of Monks, And Nuns In Monastics: Education And Training

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Abstract

The study focused specifically on the historical, religious, educational, social, and institutional roles that Buddhist monasteries and monastic leaders have had throughout Cambodia's history. According to the findings, the monastic practice of Buddhism in Cambodia encompasses a wide range of activities that go much beyond its intended religious purpose. Monasteries are community-based institutions that offer chances for religious instruction, moral growth, cultural preservation, charity aid, youth involvement, peacebuilding, and community mobilization. Pagodas can be found in the smallest communities and the most rural of areas; they are the glue that holds Cambodian Buddhist society together. They are both a sanctuary for the poor and a place where traditions are upheld and knowledge is transferred.Gyallay-Pap notes that even after Cambodian society went through years of genocide and repression, “it was wat structures that spontaneously re-emerged to begin the reconstruction process, not state structures or even party structures.” Each element of the Wat plays an important role and provides opportunities for partnership with external development actors. Traditionally, Wat has been the center of the community, providing a space for community gatherings and worship while also acting as a shelter for the poor and a center of learning. It is typically made up of three basic buildings: the Vihear, the Sālā, and the Kuṭi. The Vihāra is the place of worship for Buddhists, where ceremonies are held. Monasteries also give opportunities for youth participation.Their contribution is especially essential due to the fact that monasteries are deeply rooted in the areas in which they are located and their relationships with laypeople have been developed for several years. This accessibility enables Buddhist organizations to react to social needs at the community level and to give support to populations who may encounter problems accessing formal institutions. The study sheds more information on the function that Buddhist institutions play in the process of constructing peace and fostering social cohesiveness.

Keywords: Role, Function, Monks, Nuns, Monastic, Education, Training

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INTRODUCTION

According to (Chandler, 1998), Cambodia is a Theravāda country; it is estimated that 96% of its population is Buddhist, and Buddhist monks play essential roles in the society. Thus, Buddhism is a part of the development of the social order, and it has played a significant role in the social well-being of Cambodia. However, social well-being is essential to the Cambodian Society and its people. However, unfortunately, from April 17, 1975, to January 07, 1979, social well-being in Cambodia was destroyed by the Khmer Rouge. Because the Khmer Rouge starved people to death and isolated the country from other countries, Cambodia and its population were suffering beyond one's imagination; millions of people died from this civil war. Many monasteries were destroyed, and monks were killed and forced to lead lives. In addition, both public and private schools were impressive. After the Khmer Rouge Regime, Buddhism was re-established and slowly began to help people in the areas of education, physical health, mental health, and moral development.

Both Cambodian Scholar Monks, Great Supreme Patriarch Choun Nāth, and his Holiness Mahā Ghosānandā had participated in the critical roles of rebuilding Buddhist Saṅgha and engaged Buddhism in the Cambodian Society. Their contributions were primarily concerned with the well-being of Cambodian society. In addition, Mahā Ghosānandā, from 1929 to 2007, was the founder of Cambodia's peace and social movement. His contributions were engaged in Buddhism throughout, such as the series of Dhammayātra and other attempts to utilize the influences of the Saṅgha to revolutionize the social aspects of Cambodian Society. Furthermore, he taught people how to cure physical and mental sufferings and brought Cambodia to a form of Engagement in Buddhism, which was not previously seen among Cambodian Religious Institutions (Harris, 2001b).

LITERATURES REVIEW

Early Influences and Spread of Buddhism

From the founding of the first kingdom of Funan until the fall of the Khmer Empire, nearly two thousand years have passed in this land of great glories and sorrows, and the brief discussion in the chapter before this one made it abundantly evident that religious ideals have been shaped by the realities of Khmer life, resulting in cultural beliefs and values unique to the Khmer people. Khmer Kings had embraced the successive beliefs of Buddhism and Hindu Brahmanism, combining them with their unique form of spirit worship. It is the ancient worship of fire, water, sky, and earth deities. With one exception during the terrible Khmer Rouge era, when religion was persecuted, pagodas were abandoned or damaged, and learned monks were murdered, these religious principles have been ingrained in Cambodian culture for almost two millennia.

Just as it is impossible to travel to Cambodia without coming across Buddhism and Hinduism—literally everywhere—it would be difficult to attempt to comprehend Cambodia without beginning with these two religions. Thus, it would be wiser to examine the religious history and trace the significant roles that Buddhism has played in Khmer society up to this point to gain a comprehensive understanding of its scope.

Only a small portion of the Empire, which approximately 800 years ago spanned into what is now Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, as well as the Malay Peninsula, remains in the modern-day Cambodian area (Kambuja), Srok Khmer. (1971). The origins of the Cambodian monarchy can be traced back to King Jayavarman II (802-850 AD), who established his capital near Angkor and declared himself a "universal monarch." Funan was a kingdom of Indian civilization in the Mekong Delta.

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Monasticism in Cambodian Society

Theravada Buddhism of the Sinhalese form probably began to penetrate Cambodia during the thirteenth century, carried there mainly by Mons, and perhaps to a lesser extent by the encroaching Thai. The historical records are not altogether clear as to the exact processes or chronology involved in the gradual supplanting of Mahayana, but by the mid-fourteenth century, Cambodia had been converted to Theravada Buddhism and was even proselytizing its neighbor, Laos. At present, Theravada Buddhism is the state religion of Cambodia and is practiced by 95 percent or more of the population, who are Khmer or Cambodians proper. At the national level, the king is the symbolic leader of the Buddhists and includes in his advisory Crown Council the heads of the two Buddhist Orders,(Ebihara, 1966, p. 175).

Two main institutions steer Buddhist affairs at the national level in Cambodia: The Saṅgha, which can be translated as ‘association’ or ‘community,’ and refers to a monastic community of monks and nuns; and the Ministry of Cults and Religions (MoCR). The Cambodian Saṅgha structure has various functions, but among the most important ones is its role in managing matters of monastic discipline. The MoCR is primarily responsible for the administrative dimensions associated with managing the country’s temple system and other Buddhist institutions, including the Buddhist educational system.

Role and Function of Monks and Nuns

To many Cambodians, the pagoda, or wat, refers not only to a physical structure, but also to the community—the lay people, pagoda associations, nuns, and monks—who live there. Pagodas can be found in the smallest communities and the most rural of areas; they are the glue that holds Cambodian Buddhist society together. They are both a sanctuary for the poor and a place where traditions are upheld and knowledge is transferred. Gyallay-Pap notes that even after Cambodian society went through years of genocide and repression, “it was wat structures that spontaneously re-emerged to begin the reconstruction process, not state structures or even party structures.” (Harris, 2007).

Each element of the Wat has an important role to play and provides opportunities for partnership with external development actors. Traditionally, Wat has been the center of the community, providing a space for community gatherings and worship while also acting as a shelter for the poor and a center of learning. It is typically made up of three basic buildings: the Vihear, the Sālā, and the Kuṭi. The Vihāra is the place of worship for Buddhists, where ceremonies are held. The sala is a structure, typically open on three sides, that provides a space for community meetings; in poorer, rural pagodas, it also serves as the monks’ dining room. Lastly, the Kot refers to the dorms or houses where monks and novices’ sleep. More elaborate pagodas may also include a Pachar, a cremation tower, and stupas, decorative towers in which the ashes of community members are placed. They may also include a sala chhan, a building where monks take their meals, and meetings may occur.

Monastic Education and Training

A. Buddhist Monks and Khmer Society

The main task of Buddhist monks in a community is to preserve and practice the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha himself had indicated that the survival of the teachings depended upon the existence of the Saṅgha community, whose members can devote all their time and energy to this important task. Having accomplished this, they can use their learning and wisdom to help societies. As the Buddha stated, “Go ye forth, monks, for the benefit of the many folks, for the happiness of the many folks, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the benefit, the happiness of gods and men (Horner, 1938).” This instruction was given by the Buddha to the 60 Arahants when he sent them out on their Dhamma mission. These words of the Buddha should be heeded by civil servants whose mission is to render service ‘for the benefit

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of the many folks, for the happiness of the many folks, out of compassion for the world.' Cambodian monks play many important roles and perform various functions in Khmer society, and I will discuss some of their roles and functions in the next section.

1. **The Monks as Spiritual Leaders:** The monks maintain close day-to-day relationships with all sorts of people. They are the refugees and meritorious fields of the lay people. They can give good advice and find ways to solve the problems in the Khmer society. As the monks are devoted to spiritual development, their duties and responsibilities are centered on spirituality (Sovanny, 2010, p. 58).
2. **The Monks as social workers:** The monks often act as social workers; they work for the promotion and propagation of Buddhism to help people and society find peace and happiness (Rajavaramuni, 2007). They have also been working towards the development of a peaceful society and the benefits of the lay people. Most of the time, they look for new ways to enhance the Cambodian society by establishing various projects to help the Cambodian people. They are especially focusing on the poor, the sick, and orphans. This tradition is said to have originated at the time of the Buddha, and over time, the monasteries have become places where the destitute, orphans, and students live, obtain sufficient food, and receive moral and educational training from the monks (Sovanny, 2010, p. 62).
3. **The Monks as Educators:** The monks have been playing significant roles in promoting, developing, and solving social problems by following the Buddhist teachings. They have their duties to do at their temples, but besides this, they are also involved in helping the laity. Nowadays, many Buddhist projects are performed by the monks to educate people to understand the Buddhist teachings (Hsin, 2008).

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study on monastic education and training: the educational system has been strongly related to the old Indian (Brahmanical and Buddhist) educational system for the entirety of Cambodia's history, beginning with the Funan and continuing through the era of French colonial governance. During the Vedic Period, parents would provide their children with the opportunity to obtain an education at gurukuls, which were places where they resided with their professors. These educators were held in extremely high esteem by individuals from all walks of life, including the upper-class families and royal individuals. The students' guardians and rich families would provide them with food and materials, despite the fact that they did not get a salary for their work. The monks have been playing significant roles in promoting, developing, and solving social problems by following the Buddhist teachings. They have their duties to do at their temples, but besides this, they are also involved in helping the laity.
2. To study on role and function of monks and nuns: Pagodas can be found in the smallest communities and the most rural of areas; they are the glue that holds Cambodian Buddhist society together. They are both a sanctuary for the poor and a place where traditions are upheld and knowledge is transferred. They are the refugees and meritorious fields of the lay people. They can give good advice and find ways to solve the problems in the Khmer society. They have also been working towards the development of a peaceful society and the benefits of the lay people. Most of the time, they look for new ways to enhance the Cambodian society by establishing various projects to help the Cambodian people.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research proposes to use documentary research. It will adopt qualitative data collection methods. In

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addition, it will employ to collect data from people who have extensive experience with Buddhism's contributions to social well–being in Cambodia. Furthermore, it will collect data from other sources such as journals, articles, and internet services.

Thus, I propose collecting data from documents related to Buddhist contributions to Cambodia's social well–being. As the primary data, I will gather documents from the Ministry of Cults and Religions, Buddhist University, Buddhist Organizations, Buddhist Associations, and NGOs. I will also collect data from other sources such as journals, articles, reports, internet sources, and other local news.

The study of Cambodian Buddhist monasticism and its contribution to social well-being requires a comprehensive methodological framework capable of examining religion not merely as a spiritual institution, but also as a dynamic socio-cultural force embedded within the everyday realities of Cambodian society. In Cambodia, Theravāda Buddhism has historically functioned as the moral backbone of national identity, shaping ethical norms, educational systems, community relations, and social welfare structures. The Buddhist monastery, commonly referred to as the *Wat*, occupies a central place in Cambodian social life, serving simultaneously as a religious sanctuary, educational institution, counseling center, community hall, and cultural repository. Consequently, the investigation into the socio-economic and psychological contributions of Cambodian Buddhist monasticism necessitates a methodological approach that transcends conventional theological analysis and instead adopts an interdisciplinary perspective integrating sociology, anthropology, psychology, religious studies, and development studies.

Community Development Initiatives

Although Cambodian Buddhist monasteries have traditionally been viewed primarily as custodians of religious teachings and conservators of the *Dhamma* (Buddhist law), the findings of the present study reveal a significant transformation in the social role of the Sangha. Contemporary Cambodian monks increasingly function as pragmatic agents of community development, engaging directly in educational support, public health promotion, poverty alleviation, environmental awareness, disaster relief, and psychosocial assistance. This transition reflects the broader global movement of "Engaged Buddhism," in which spiritual practice is closely linked with social responsibility and humanitarian action. Engaged Buddhism emphasizes that monks should not remain detached from worldly suffering but should actively participate in improving social conditions and reducing human suffering through compassionate action (Queen & King, 1996).

Gender Equality and Inclusivity

An examination of social well-being in Cambodia remains incomplete without a critical analysis of gender relations within Buddhist monastic institutions. Although Cambodian Buddhism serves as a foundational source of morality, social cohesion, education, and psychological support, the benefits and opportunities generated by the monastic system are not distributed equally across genders. Theravāda Buddhism in Cambodia continues to operate within a predominantly patriarchal institutional framework in which religious authority, educational access, ritual leadership, and symbolic prestige are largely concentrated in male monastic structures. Consequently, women often occupy subordinate religious positions despite their central role in sustaining the daily functioning and social outreach activities of Buddhist monasteries. The findings of the present study reveal a significant contradiction within Cambodian Buddhist monasticism. On one hand, Buddhist teachings emphasize compassion, moral equality, non-violence, and the universal potential for spiritual liberation. On the other hand, institutional practices within the Cambodian Sangha continue to reflect deeply rooted gender hierarchies that restrict women's participation in religious leadership and decision-making. This structural imbalance has important implications for broader social well-being because religious institutions significantly influence social attitudes, cultural norms, family

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dynamics, and community organization within Cambodian society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Prominent Monastic Institutions and Leaders

1. **Wat Uṇṇālom, Phnom Penh**

   Due to the fact that it has historically been the seat of the Mahā Nikāya (Mahānikāya) Buddhist order, Wat Uṇṇālom holds a particularly significant position within the annals of Cambodian Buddhist history. The monastery is one of the oldest and most significant Buddhist institutions in Phnom Penh, and it can be found on Sisowath Quay, which is located close to the Royal Palace. It is described as the center of Cambodian Buddhism, and the patriarch of the country has historically resided there. According to documents provided by the Cambodian government, its beginnings may be traced back to the fourteenth century. The complex is made up of a considerable number of buildings that are used for residential, educational, and religious functions.

   Instead of relying solely on its architectural or historical value, the social relevance of Wat Uṇṇālom is derived from the institution's role within the surrounding community. In addition to serving as the traditional house of the Mahānikāya patriarch, it has also served as a center from which Buddhist scholarship, monastic discipline, and religious authority might be organized. Prior to the time of the Khmer Rouge, the monastery was connected to a sizable monastic community as well as a significant library. It has been said by several sources that the complex was once home to over five hundred monks and a library that had over thirty thousand books. This intellectual and religious heritage was badly impacted by the destruction of religious institutions that occurred during the Khmer Rouge regime; nonetheless, the monastery was eventually restored.

2. **Wat Botum, Phnom Penh**

   The Wat Botum Vatey Reachavararam, more often referred to as Wat Botum, is yet another monastery in Phnom Penh that holds significant historical significance. It is considered to be one of the oldest pagodas in the capital city, and it has a long-standing association with King Ponhea Yat. The temple, which is situated to the south of the regal Palace, has been associated with Cambodia's religious and regal history for as long as anybody can remember. Based on historical reports, its beginnings may be traced back to the fifteenth century. Subsequently, the monastery underwent substantial reconstruction and structural changes, which established a connection between it and the development of Cambodia's Buddhist traditions.

3. **Wat Laṅgkā, Phnom Penh**

   One other significant facet of Cambodian Buddhist monasticism is represented by Wat Laṅgkā, and that is the relationship between monastic institutions, Buddhist research, and meditation. The establishment of the monastery, which is considered to be one of the oldest pagodas in Phnom Penh, took place during the reign of King Ponhea Yat. According to historical records, it was associated with the preservation of Buddhist scriptures as well as gatherings between monks from Cambodia and Sri Lanka. The very name of the monastery is a reflection of this historical relationship with Lanka, which is a significant center for Theravada Buddhist religious education. Due to the fact that it reveals that Cambodian monasteries have traditionally acted as knowledge institutions, the original role of Wat Laṅgkā is particularly pertinent to the study of social well-being. Both the preservation of the Tripitaka and the contact between monks from Cambodia and Sri Lanka established a connection between Cambodian Buddhism and the more extensive Theravada Buddhist intellectual networks. The transmission of Buddhist books, teachings, and

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practices inside Cambodia was made possible by monastic study, which also facilitated linkages with other Buddhist civilizations.

Community Projects and Outreach Efforts

When we have a better understanding of the reasons behind executing meritorious actions, our merits will attain a significant portion of the components that are necessary for meritorious fruition. In the Puññakiriyāvatthu, it is said that Puñña refers to the moral state of the name that manifests itself in the process of mental phenomena. According to the Buddhist perspectives on Abhidhamma, it places a strong focus on three wholesome roots: non-attachment (Alobha), non-hatred (Adosa), and non-delusion (Amoha). These three roots are regarded as lovely roots, also known as Sobhāṇacetasika. It goes without saying that all of nature's moral principles are in a state of continual and rapid change in regard to the three roots. Preah Saṅghatthera Oum Sum illustrates "Lobha eradicated by giving a charity (dāna), dosa eradicated by observing moral conduct, and Moha eradicated by mental development to access wisdom or knowledge (Paññā) is known as the cause of meritorious deeds" (Oum Sum, 1990, p. 16). Furthermore, a researcher from Cambodia who is a Buddhist explains that there are three different kinds of causes that lead to wholesome deeds. These causes are as follows: (i) having complete faith or a strong belief in their good action (Pasādo), (ii) having a sense of urgency toward the importance of conditional things (Saṃvego), which means that all living beings in the world are occupied by three universal characteristics – suffering, impermanence, and non-self, and (iii) having their performance purified by the three good conducts (Tesucaritā), which include good bodily action, good verbal action, and good mental action (Phlech Meas, 2014, page 63).

The Ways of Making a Wish and Merit

The spiritual discipline of modern Buddhism frequently involves the act of transferring one's spiritual merit to other entities, such as one's ancestors, deities, or all sentient beings. The transfer of mental merit is said to be conceivable, and the recipient may frequently acquire the good acts of the giver if they demonstrate happiness with the donor's accomplishments. Within the context of contemporary Buddhist practice, the act of sharing good acts has developed into an essential component, serving an essential function for society (Thou, 2022). After executing a meritorious deed, Buddhists in Cambodia and other Theravāda countries should express a wish and distribute merit in order to improve the quality of their moral activities. There are three different methods that a moral doer might seek to be granted, as stated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Myanma (1997, pages 199-200).:

1. The phrase Pali "**Idaṃ me puññaṃ āsavakhayaṃ vahaṃ hotu**" means "May these meritorious deeds lead me to the cessation of moral intoxicants."
2. The phrase Pali "**Idaṃ me puññaṃ nibbānapaccayo**" means "may my deed of this merit be supported to nibbāna."
3. The phrase Pali "**Addhā imāya paṭipattiya jāti, jarā, byādhi maraṭamhā parimuccisāmi**" means "I pray that I am liberated from rebirth, age, illness, and death as a result of my moral practice."

Wholesome Deeds in Abhidhamma Perspective

Abhidhamma, which is also referred to as Ahidhamma, is a word that is exclusive to Buddhist literature and is not present in Indian literature that is not part of the Buddhist tradition. It is a term that is used to describe the precise manner in which the Dhamma, which are the teachings of Buddhism, are elaborated upon in the third collection of Buddhist canonical texts or in later writings (Vyas, 2017, p. 9). The study of abhidhamma is of utmost significance in order to effortlessly comprehend and evaluate the notions of

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kamma (activity) from a Buddhist viewpoint. This is because abhidhamma enables us to recognize the principle of nature, known as sabhāvadhamma, from a daily life perspective. How come it is referred to as abhidhamma? It is said by Nandamālābhivaṃsa (2005).:

> *Buddhists are the only ones who have the abhidhamma. This work is considered to be one of the tipiṭaka Pāḷi writings, which provides a comprehensive and analytical explanation of the dhammas. When it comes to the explanation of dhammas, it provides a more in-depth explanation than the sutties do. Because of this, the text is referred to as "abhidhamma."(p 9).*

Monastery Service as a School

In Cambodia, the educational system has been strongly related to the old Indian (Brahmanical and Buddhist) educational system for the entirety of Cambodia's history, beginning with the Funan and continuing through the era of French colonial governance. During the Vedic Period, parents would provide their children with the opportunity to obtain an education at gurukuls, which were places where they resided with their professors. These educators were held in extremely high esteem by individuals from all walks of life, including the upper-class families and royal individuals. The students' guardians and rich families would provide them with food and materials, despite the fact that they did not get a salary for their work. On occasion, kings would even consider donating land to them so that they may construct homes. According to Sorn Samnang and Yorng Thy (1999, page 5), the custom of sending children to temples and honoring instructors by ancient Cambodians was not a culture that was exclusive to the Khmer people. On the contrary, it was a custom that had been passed down from Brahmanism. According to the edict of Manu, which is found in the texts of Brahman society, Brahman children who were between the ages of 10 and 12 were sent to Ṛashi, a teacher, in order to acquire knowledge of the Vedas.

CONCLUSION

The current research investigated the ways in which Cambodian Buddhist monasticism has contributed to the improvement of social conditions. The study focused specifically on the historical, religious, educational, social, and institutional roles that Buddhist monasteries and monastic leaders have had throughout Cambodia's history. According to the findings, the monastic practice of Buddhism in Cambodia encompasses a wide range of activities that go much beyond its intended religious purpose. Monasteries are community-based institutions that offer chances for religious instruction, moral growth, cultural preservation, charity aid, youth involvement, peacebuilding, and community mobilization. Monasteries also give opportunities for youth participation. Their contribution is especially essential due to the fact that monasteries are deeply rooted in the areas in which they are located and their relationships with laypeople have been developed for several years.

This accessibility enables Buddhist organizations to react to social needs at the community level and to give support to populations who may encounter problems accessing formal institutions. The study sheds more information on the function that Buddhist institutions play in the process of constructing peace and fostering social cohesiveness. An illustration of how Buddhist values such as nonviolence, compassion, forgiveness, and reconciliation may be transformed into community-level peacebuilding is provided by the example of Preah Maha Ghosananda. By demonstrating that monastic leadership may expand beyond the realm of religious teaching to encompass larger processes of societal healing and reconciliation, his peace endeavors are particularly noteworthy.

Within the historical setting of Cambodia, where violence and social instability have had long-term repercussions on communities, this study is especially relevant because of the historical backdrop. Another

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significant contribution is the preservation of cultural traditions. The Buddhist monasteries are responsible for the preservation of religious rites, celebrations, holy places, texts, teachings, and cultural techniques. Buddhist study, Pali education, and the preservation of Khmer linguistic and cultural traditions were all areas in which influential leaders such as Supreme Patriarch Chuon Nath played a significant role.

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