

Public Welfare in Buddhism

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Abstract: This article is about public welfare in Buddhism, the purposes of this study were divided into two issues, 1) to study the background of public welfare in Buddhism 2) to study the scope of the duty of monks' welfare towards society. The background of public welfare in Buddhism: It occurred from the feeling of people that they were in trouble. In the doctrine of Buddhism, the Lord Buddha said about Buddha's doctrine that the public welfare could be interpreted as follows; it was the service, happiness for angel (Deva) and humans. It also provided the facilitation of consumer products and created harmony. The scope of the duty of monks' welfare toward to society was found that there were different perspectives such as Dhamma was a contribution to society by giving Dhamma to have initial, mid and utmost beauty. Discipline (Vinaya Dhamma) was welfare that did not conflict with the discipline and did not have self-dealing. From the point of view of Thai society, there were two views which consisting of agreement and disagreement which had an interesting reason. However, public welfare must merely be for promotion to disseminate the Dhamma.

Keywords: Public welfare, the scope of the duty of monks

1. Introduction

Public welfare plays an important role for monks as community leaders for donations to help the victims. Because monks are the center who try to link between poor people and rich people. The money is donated, monks use it for public benefits and to help the unprivileged people. When people are in trouble, it is a duty that the temple will help them. Monks and temples should help people to have intelligence, to solve problems, to have morals, seeing with spiritual insight, to have a sufficiency economy, provide Dhamma rather than the object, to have strength. Giving between monks and laypeople is from the relationship to society. It is regarded that it is a duty to practice with the support and dependence on each other. Thailand suffers from natural disasters many times such as outbreaks, storms, floods, etc. causing victims to suffer from a shortage of consumer products and damaged housing. These are the cause of suffering. In each event, the government urgently helps them, but the procedure of government takes several times, therefore, it is a cause to delay to help the victims. With the common sense of humanity, who is still round of rebirth together, when people are in trouble, the foundation, independent agency, villagers nearby who do not suffer from disasters, including the monks will help them rapidly according to a supportive capability.

Particularly, the group of monks visits the area to distribute consumer products to the villagers to relieve the suffering. During helping the victims, monks also capture a photo to go viral on social media to make people know the suffering of victims. Some people agree what monks support this; some people disagree with it. This has been criticized widely until it is wondering that "Are monks and public welfare eligible to help the villagers?". If it is available to do that, what can the scope of public welfare be done by monks? Therefore, researchers try to present public welfare in Buddhism. The purpose of this research can be divided into 2 issues 1) to study the background of public welfare in Buddhism. This topic have to study the scope of the duty of monks' welfare towards society.

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this article can be divided into 2 issues 1) to study the background of public welfare in Buddhism 2) to study the scope of the duty of monks' welfare towards society.

3. Research Methods

This article aims to study the Public Welfare in Buddhist scriptures and study the duty of monks' welfare towards society. It aims to study the specific contents of the Buddhist scriptures in the understanding of the matter as follows;

1) Primary sources consisting of Thai Tipitaka Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Version 1996, Thai Atthakatha Tipitaka Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Version 2017, and Supreme court.

2) Secondary sources consisting of books, academic textbooks, articles, research documents related, and information related.

4. The Background Of Public Welfare In Buddhism

In this point, researchers define the essence to be presented, namely the concepts and principles regarding public welfare in Buddhism which is shown from Mahapadana Sutta and the relevant Sutta together with the concepts of the important person in Buddhism as an example in the study.

Public welfare or social work derives from caring in society between humans and humans who suffer from things until they cannot help themselves. In the early stages, the term social work is not shown clearly, it is just the thought of devoting to the public. It is influenced by the doctrines of Buddhism. Therefore, social work is started. In Buddhism, The Buddha used to speak to public welfare in Mahapadana Sutta as follows;

“caratha bhikkhave carikam bahunanahitaya bahunasukhaya lokanukampaya atthaya hitaya sukhaya devamanussanam ma ekena deva agamittha bhikkhave dhammam adikalyanam majjhekalyanam parisosanakalyanam satathamsabayanjanam kevalapipunnam parisuddham prommacariyam pakasetha santi satta apparajakkhajatika assavanata dhammassa parihayanati bhavissanti dhammassa annataro....” (Ti.Ma. (Pali) 10/52/51-52, Vi.Ma. (Pali) 4/32/39-40). (1)

“All bhikkhu! You must roam around to relieve the suffering of the villagers, to help humans, to provide benefits to Deva and humans. You do not need to go 2 persons in the same way. You provide Dhamma which consists of initial, mid, and utmost beauty. You spread my doctrine together with good speech and texts. In this world, there are a lot of people who have roots of bad actions, those who cannot listen to the Dhamma. But other people can attain Dhamma...” (Ti.Ma. (Thai) 10/86/46-47, Vi.Ma. (Thai) 4/32/40). (2).

In the words of the Buddha, it can be seen that he wishes to provide social welfare to society which consists of 3 issues as follows;

Atthaya means the benefit that is Dhamma is mentioned about the truth of world and lifestyle in this world. It is the truth that the monks attempt to convey Dhamma by guiding, telling, showing the audience to understand, life practice. Dhamma is practiced, it will result in the practitioner to get benefit from practicing Dhamma until the quality of life can attain in 3 aims respectively which consist of 1) Ditthadhammikattha means benefits is seen by sight, benefits obtainable here and now which is called “human prosperity” 2) Samparayikattha means spiritual welfare, it is called heavenly prosperity 3) Paramattha means the highest good that is; access to the state of the removal of the cold of defilement, it is called “successful attainment of Nibbana”. This is a goal that is unique only in Buddhism.

Hitaya means the support that is Dhamma is practiced in a way of life until the practitioners receive the benefit initially by having a good way of life directly. In other words, Dhamma supports practitioners to get benefits more and more. Besides, they also need to support other people too. The way of life of practitioners is therefore to support the surrounding people and community both in-depth and width. Dhamma is also the community that receives benefits from the Dhamma too.

Sukhaya means happiness that is people who follow the way of life in the right way, it will support them and the community to get a better way of life and expand the outcome of lifestyle both in-depth and width. This can lead them to attain goodness. It is happiness that comes from the benefits of Dhamma. Then it supports themselves and others and expands the initial happiness called “human prosperity” to all people in society while the journey of life before the life will achieve the goals to a higher level is called “heavenly prosperity” and “successful attainment of Nibbana”. (The Buddha and public welfare, [online]. Source: phansons.blogspot.com [1/08/60]). (3).

Public welfare management of monks comes from the duty and social relationships that monks need to have four requisites offered by laypeople. It is stated that in society, there is always an effect on the practicing Dhamma and virtue that is; loving-kindness and compassion will support others from the cessation of suffering, it focuses on donation and welfare of Dhamma or mental development.

In Singhalaka Sutta, The Buddha talks about the duty of Bhikkhu in welfare to children of the family (Kulabutara) who support them with 6 duties 1) do not do evil 2) to do good thing 3) support by heart 4) to hear things that have not been heard 5) explain clearly what has been heard 6) tell the way to heaven (Ti.Pa. (Thai) 11/272/216). (4). Public welfare also means spiritual anchor to convey to the community to unite the group or society gathering each other. Therefore, the aim of social work is not just to bring them things, not service them, not provide money to them but it means making people unite and stay together (Phradepvedi, Prayudh Payutto: 1983: 32). (5).

It can be seen that public welfare or social work derives from caring in society between humans and humans who suffer from things until they cannot help themselves. In the early stages, it is influenced by the doctrines of Buddhism. Therefore, social work is started. Social work is to help fellow humans without expecting anything return, accept “merit” is required. Public welfare can be divided into 2 meanings 1) It provides the facilitation of consumer products 2) It creates harmony.

3) The scope of duty of monks’ welfare

The second objective, researchers define the issues as follows; 1) The duty of the monks in Buddhism 2) The duty in public welfare of the monks in Dhamma and Vinaya (discipline) 3) Monks and public welfare in Thai society 4) Is the duty of public welfare of the monks appropriate or not? The details are shown below;

1) The duty of the monks in Buddhism

The duty of the monks who ordain in Buddhism can be summarized into 3 issues.

1) The duty along Vinaya (discipline), Buddha talks to Mahabala Thera when he comes to ask about Dhura (burden) that “what is Dhura in Buddhism?” The Buddha says that there are only 2 Dhura (Burdens) in Buddhism consisting of Gantha-dhura (burden of study) and Vipassana-dhura (burden of insight development. Mahapala Thera asks again that how is Gantha-dhura? and how is Vipassana-dhura? After that the Buddha explains Dhura is learning other Nikaya (sect), two sects, finish learning Buddhavacana (the word of the Buddha) or Tipitaka, depending on one’s intelligence. He also says that Buddhavacana is Gantha-dhura. For the beginning to set the end and the deterioration in personal circumstance and practicing insight development, and the power of connection is regarded that Buddhist saint is good behavior, good practicing is called Vipassana (Khu.Dha. Vol. 1/4). (6).

2) The duty along with the king's offering, derives from the commissioned symbol which is signed by the king. He is appointed as Phra Khru or Phra Raja or over and says that “please burden in Buddhism, teaching Dhamma, settling a legal question that has arisen, support monks and novices in temple”. This is a duty that the king requests to monks who can deserve the burden in this duty (Somdejphrabuddhacarya (Sanit Chuanpanyo): 2017). (7).

3) The duty of Sangha Act and sangha supreme council law is issued by the government and Sangha supreme council in chapter 3 is explained by Sangha government as follows;

Section 20 The Sangha must be under the rule of Sangha supreme council, the Sangha government management is according to the rule of the Sangha supreme council law.

Section 20 bis, for the benefit of the Sangha government of the central and the region. The chief superintendent occupies Sangha administrative area. The appointment and determination of the authority of the chief superintendent shall be according to the rules and the methods in Sangha supreme council law.

Section 21, regional Sangha government can be divided as follows; 1) Region, 2) Province, 3) District, and 4) Sub-district

The number and government area shall be according to the Sangha supreme council law.

Section 22, regional Sangha government allows monks as ruler in the following order;

- 1) The ecclesiastical regional governor
- 2) The ecclesiastical provincial governor
- 3) The ecclesiastical district officer
- 4) The ecclesiastical commune-chief (The ecclesiastical sub-district head)

When Sangha supreme council can consider appointing deputy of the ecclesiastical regional governor, deputy of the ecclesiastical provincial governor, deputy of ecclesiastical district officer and deputy of ecclesiastical sub-district head. And the burden of the abbot is to follow the rules according to section 37 which is explained as follows;

1) maintaining the temple, organizing the Buddhist activity, save the property in the temple well.

2) Government and take care monks, novices, and laypeople who stay in the temple, teach them to follow the Dhamma Vinaya, respect to Sangha supreme council law, rules, regulations, the order of Sangha supreme council.

3) to engage in the provision of education, training, and teaching Dhamma and Vinaya (Discipline) to monks and laypeople.

4) to provide convenience as appropriate in charity.

If we analyse the duty in item 1, the word “Organizing is a duty that will be made in the temple. A form is laid into 6 parts that are; 1) government 2) education 3) dissemination 4) construction 5) public welfare 6) educational welfare (textbook of the meeting of an ecclesiastical official: 2010; 10-11). Only public welfare is meant to help both in the temple and outside the temple, in the temple such as to facilitate laypeople who come to make merit or who are in trouble and stay in the temple, outside the temple such as helping the villagers who are suffering as much as possible, do not let it pass.

The scope of public welfare or social work can be summarized into 8 parts (Temple and community welfare, [online], source: www.buddhismth.com [2/08/63]).

1) Build school or other institutions.

2) Establish health center, hospital, or priest hospital.

3) Establish library, museum, book center, broadcasting.

4) Allow having district council for the meeting of villagers and government office.

5) Provide water, freshwater, water supply for village, the water source for agriculture.

6) Allow to have public activities as much as possible, do not obstruct to practice Dhamma and Vinaya, and do not lose the image of monkhood.

7) Relieve natural disasters such as fire, flood, etc.

8) Help when people face problems, that is when they are dead, monks will organize everything.

Therefore, Monks in Buddhism have several duties, it can be summarized into 3 things: 1) duty of Vinaya (discipline) is *Gantha-dhura* (burden of study) and *Vipassana-dhura* (burden of insight development) 2) duty of appointed from the king, this will be written in honorific rank credential and 3) duty of Sangha Act. Duty of Vinaya (Discipline) is monks' duty, but the rest duties are legal duty which is only available to certain monks.

2) The duty in public welfare of the monks in Dhamma and Vinaya (Discipline)

Social work in Buddhism, since the time of Buddha has been conducted on the basis of charity (*Dana*) along bases of sympathy (*Sangahavattu* 4) and bases of meritorious action (*Punnakiriya-Vattu* 10). The Buddha and his followers give *Dana* in the form of *Dhammadana* (spiritual gift) in order to help people through spiritual to relieve their selfishness. For lay people give *Dana* in the form of objects in order to worship, to support Buddhism, to help human in society, particularly when they are in trouble. In Thailand today, there are many monks who have started doing social work continuously. It is to help fellow human who are in trouble in the society together with dissemination in Buddhism. This action is from a sense of social responsibility, to have volunteer and spirit by spending money from the devotees' donation. It is partly beneficial in helping to solve the life problems of fellow human in society for a better quality of life. As the Buddha's doctrine is said to remind followers to think of benefactors who support them by four requisites, and try to repay those people by providing Buddhist sermon consisting of initial beauty (*Sila*), mid beauty (*Samadhi*) and utmost beauty (*Panna*) as follows;

“All Bhikkhu! All Brahma, wealthy person who support you by the eight requisites of a Buddhist monk, medical equipment is regarded that they support you a lot. You spread my doctrine to be initial beauty, mid beauty and utmost beauty together with good speech and texts to them. It is believed that all Brahma, wealthy person will receive from what you have done for them. “All Bhikkhu! Bhikkhu and lay people must help each other...” (*Khu.Iti. (Thai)* 25/107/486). (8). This is a view of Dhamma, therefore monks will have social work, but the welfare must be in the scope, that is welfare by Dhamma in order to be initial beauty, mid beauty and utmost beauty as mentioned.

If it is the part of Vinaya (Discipline) or *Sila* of monks, it is found that there are a lot of *Sila* (Precepts) both from *Tipitaka* and others. But there are some *Sila* that are considered to be the obstacle to social welfare or not. It is known that the attention of obtaining the precepts is to develop oneself in the basic level or develop verbal level to a higher level. Particularly, the monks who ordain in Buddhism need to attain *Nibbana* (the extinction of all defilements and sufferings), therefore they are framed by their conduct with strict discipline to lead them to attain *Nibbana* quickly. Hence, any actions are made by monks without attaining the *Nibbana*, they will be forbidden by Vinaya (Discipline) such as right livelihood of monks. In Buddhism, monks are not allowed to have the right livelihood, that is they will be supported with four requisites by villagers or society. That is because monks will

have the full time to study, develop themselves, help society. The principle of Santosa (contentment) is taught by the Buddha to support the way of life of monks. Therefore, any actions are made by monks to the right livelihood or working, it is regarded that they misconduct the precepts. There are two reasons; 1) doing the right livelihood as laypeople 2) to act as laypeople, not monkhood who want to stay a simple life. There is one example is called “Mahasila” (Great precepts), there are 7 items, this group of Sila is told about the monks obtain the right livelihood and a bestial subject such as predictions, fire worship, calculate an auspicious time, horoscope symbols, pledge, votive offering, exorcism, compounding pharmacy, etc. These actions are considered to be a bestial subject and the right livelihood in the right way. Examples are shown that “Bhikkhus who have the right livelihood is considered to be a bestial subject such as monks who are invited to have foods to be offered by laypeople and support them by a bestial subject that is telling them auspicious ceremony, auspicious wedding, worshipping the sun and Brahma, fire, blessing ceremony...” (Ti. Si. (Thai) 9/210/71). (10). Interestingly, the way of the right livelihood of monks by using a bestial subject, even though monks do not have the right livelihood is considered to be wrong. But it is interesting with the message is written that “Monks who are invited to have foods to be offered by laypeople and support them by a bestial subject”. This message is being told that the way of life of monks can be lived by the villagers. No need to have the right livelihood by a bestial subject at all. This is the view of Vinaya (Discipline).

In conclusion, The Buddha and his followers give Dana in the form of Dhammadana (spiritual gift) to help people through spirituality to relieve their selfishness. For laypeople give Dana in the form of objects to worship, to support Buddhism, to help humans in society, particularly when they are in trouble. Monks in Thailand work in social work along with the dissemination of Buddhism. It can be seen that Dhamma means to give Dhamma to society to be initial beauty, mid beauty, and utmost beauty, Vinaya (Discipline) means welfare must not be to take advantage for oneself in the right livelihood as laypeople, but it must be simple way, does not obstruct practicing the way of life of monks.

3) Monks and public welfare in Thai society

The work of public welfare in Thai society is rooted in Buddhism. It is social work that is unconsciously natural and supports by giving without expecting anything return. Temple is part of society, the temple will be supported by the village, and the village will be supported by the temple. Temple is the center of society. The monks are a refuge for people. When they are in trouble in one matter, it is the duty of the temple need to support them. Public welfare is, therefore, the duty of temples and abbots to conduct public welfare management for people in the scope that the temple can be organized (Phrarajaratnamuni (Chaiwat Pannasiri): 1995:14) (11). without obstacle to Dhamma Vinya, respect to Sangha supreme council law, rules, regulations, the order of Sangha supreme council and the laws. The outstanding monks of social work in Thailand could be spotted from the past to the present for an example, like a case of road construction to Doi Suthep (Mountain in the north of Thailand) by Kruba Sriwichai (The devotee of Lanna), Chiangmai province, rice cooperation project by Phrakhubidhprajanath (Luangphor Nam), Surin province, people living with HIV/AIDS by Phraadonprajanath (Lungphor Longkot), What Phrabat Nam Phu, Lop Buri province, rehabilitee care project for patients with cancer by herbs by Phra Paphonpat, What Kam Phramong, Sakon Nakhon province, truth money-saving project by Phra Subin Panito, Wat Phai Lom, Trat province, vocational career project for unemployed people by Phra Payom Kalyano, Wat Suan Kaew, Nonthaburi province, etc. (Phramahasomboon Vuddhikaro: 2011:1). (9).

In conclusion, the temple is part of society, the temple will be supported by the village, and the village will be supported by the temple. Temple is the center of society. The monks are a refuge for people. When they are in trouble in one matter, it is the duty of the temple need to support them without obstacle to Buddha’s doctrine and related laws.

4) Is the duty of public welfare of the monks appropriate or not?

Does the work of public welfare of the monks currently be considered a bestial subject according to the principle of 7 Mahasila (Great precepts)? It cannot easily be judged along with the texts. We should know that the Buddha legislates Mahasila by protecting the monks who need to bring the bestial subject as a tool for livelihood. Because the monks’ life is designed to provide livelihood by four requisites that the villagers offer, to save time and energy to be used in the study of Dhamma practice and Dhamma is used for society. Even though a bestial subject is a magic subject that is useful in helping the villagers, but it is not a duty of the monks to interfere with those subjects. It will waste time and obstacles to attaining the Dhamma. The monks help the villagers by offering food and survival bags in the registration spot in the event of a natural disaster such as an outbreak, flood, which are natural disasters that have occurred in many provinces in the past. Is it wrong? Is it a duty of the monks? If the action is considered to be wrong or not, it should be considered what the monks exactly help the villagers by intention or doing welfare for their own business. If it is done in intention, relaxation, and the cause of Dhamma dissemination, it is not considered to misconduct the precepts. Otherwise, they misconduct the precepts. Because

it is considered to be wrong in the right livelihood of the monks. The next issue is, is it a duty of the monk or not? If it looks at the surface situation, it is not a duty of the monks because the ordained monks must study the Dhamma Vinaya and understanding both Dhura (Burdens) consisting of Gantha-dhura (burden of study) and Vipassana-dhura (burden of insight development), and follow to Sikkha (the threefold learning) consisting of Sila-sikkha (training in higher morality), Citta-sikkha (training in higher mentality), Panna-sikkha (training higher wisdom). Then let it be, face the problems that happen as a matter of the law of Kamma. If it is considered along the Buddha doctrine “caratha bhikkhave carikam bahujanahitaya bahujanasukhaya lokanukampaya atthaya hitaya sukhaya devamanussanam...” “All bhikkhu! You must roam around to make people happy, to help humans, to provide the benefits to Deva and humans...”. It is regarded as the Buddha orders to Bhikkhu who roam to places for relieving the suffering of the villagers that occur in both physical and mental suffering. In case of an outbreak or natural disaster is physical suffering because they lack living, food, consumer product. Therefore, monks are helping people that should not be anything wrong and it is a duty along with the Buddha’s doctrine. However, the action must be considered by the intention of the monks who work in public welfare in many ways. If monks only help them without Dhamma dissemination, it is not appropriate. But if they help them as a bridge in Buddhism dissemination, then it is considered to be appropriate. The right or fault of the monks depends on one point of view.

In conclusion, the duty of public welfare of the monks should be judged in intention to release the cause of suffering to the villagers, not for their benefit. It is regarded that it is directly duty along Buddha’s doctrine said “caratha bhikkhave carikam...” and most importantly, the welfare is to a base for the Buddhism dissemination.

5. Conclusion

The concept of social work derives has been taken place for a long time, it starts from caring in society between humans and humans who suffer from things until they cannot help themselves. In the early stages, social work is influenced by the doctrines of religions including Buddha’s doctrine. Particularly, the Buddha’s doctrine is said that “caratha bhikkhave carikam...”. It is also shown in Mahapadana Sutta regarding social work as well. The Buddha said that “All bhikkhu! You must roam around to make people happy, to help humans, to provide the benefits to Deva and humans...”. It is regarded as the Buddha orders to Bhikkhu who roam to places for relieving the suffering of the villagers. It emphasizes providing the Dhamma that is suitable for the situation. It emphasizes relieving mental suffering. Some scholar interprets the social work that it is to help fellow human without expecting anything return, accept “merit” is required. From the point of view of Thai society, there were two views which consisting of agreement and disagreement. The agreement, monks should be praised by others as full of compassion for a fellow human, who does not abandon society that supports four requisites. For example, in the era of the dissemination of communist in the society, monks who do not have social work are often criticized for being parasitic society because they are only a consumer not productivity.

6. Acknowledgement

Public Welfare in Buddhism had to durned a crisis of political violence, there is some group calling for the Sangha to make sure which side they will stand. Those are some examples of social work that are to be expected by society. Social needs monks to do social work. Disagreement, they claim that monks should not relate what is not concerned with monkhood. It means monkhood avoids doing any activities that belong to the world. The monks who ordain in Buddhism need to attain Nibbana (the extinction of all defilements and sufferings). It can be said that the expectations of Thai society to the work of social work of the monks stand on the opposite side. It is difficult for the monks to act in favor of both sides because no matter where they turn to any side, they will be criticized

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