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**THE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO SOCIAL WORK  
IN SRI LANKA**

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## THE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO SOCIAL WORK IN SRI LANKA

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### Abstract

Social Work in Sri Lanka has been slowly progressing and even after 68 years it is in its infancy despite the facts that the country needs productive social work. Research studies and social work scholars believe that the mismatch of the prevailing social work approach with the country's socio-economic culture is the reason for the slow progress. Western-rooted social work started in Sri Lanka in 1952 under the guidance of Western social work scholar Ms. Dorathy Moses, the Principal of the Delhi School of Social Work by setting up an institute to conduct social work education programmes. Social work education, which began with a certificate course in social welfare, now offers degree and postgraduate courses, but it has produced only 1,677 social workers over 69 years. Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. Its social culture encourages philanthropy based on Buddhist values inculcated in the philosophical background of Buddhism. However, the prevailing evidence indicates that western-rooted professional social work does not address the full scope of social work needs of the Sri Lankan society. Therefore, the present research hypothesizes that a friendly social work approach based on Buddhist values is a better fit and it can easily be internalized in the Sri Lankan society. The objective of this study is to identify a new approach to social work in Buddhism that is relevant to Sri Lanka. This paper is based on the study of relevant social work literature, analysing both, primary and the secondary sources (data). This study may be important for scholars who are interested in the field of social work, and also for social workers as well as for students of social work.

### Keywords

Buddhist Social Work, Social Work, Sri Lankan Culture

### Introduction

Sri Lanka is a Theravāda<sup>1</sup> Buddhist country and 72% of the population are Buddhist. It is recognized by the Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka and stated that "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the State to protect and foster the Buddha *Sāsana*..."<sup>2</sup> Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka are engaged in various social services and welfare activities. Almost every village in Sri Lanka has a temple and it is common to see groups of lay and/or ordained people gathered at the temple.

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Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka are mainly divided into two groups namely 'Village monks' (*grā mavāsi*) and 'Forest monks' (*araññavāsi*). The village monks, in particular, have been very deeply and extensively engaged in daily activities related to serving the people of the village or town where the temple is located. Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka have been always centres of village life and have fulfilled a variety of functions.

Social work is considered as a helping profession, which concept and field of work was developed in Western countries. Western-style professional social work was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1952. A closer view confirms that the western-style social work rooted in a western conceptual framework and designed for application to western societies, has encountered difficulties in finding a smooth application in its transition to Sri Lanka. In the past 69 years since its introduction to Sri Lanka only one bachelor's and master's degree program was able to be introduced up to the year 2019 and very recently another bachelor's and master's program were finally introduced in the country. Due to this lack of educational and training programs in Sri Lanka only 1674 people have been working as professional social workers so far. These numbers suggest the need for indigenization of the social work profession order to make it more relevant to Sri Lankan culture and the needs of the people and society.

Historically, Sri Lankan culture has grown under the direct influence of centuries of Buddhism and in close association with Buddhist values. Buddhism has permeated every aspect of traditional Sri Lankan culture. As a result, Sri Lankan social culture encourages philanthropy based on Buddhist values inculcated into society due to the philosophical background of Buddhism. However, the prevailing evidence indicates that western-rooted professional social work does not address the full potential of social work needs of the Sri Lankan society. Therefore, the present research hypothesizes that a friendly social work approach based on Buddhist values is a better fit and it can easily be internalized in the Sri Lankan society.

### **Research Question**

At the beginning of 1952, social work was introduced to Sri Lanka to promote child welfare and to develop the human capacity required to growth social welfare services in Sri Lanka. It is also to produce qualified professionals in the formulation of social welfare policies in Sri Lanka. A closer view confirms that the western-rooted social work education encounters rough surfaces during its journey in Sri Lanka. For the past 69 years period of time, only one bachelor's and master's degree program was able to introduce until 2019. The country does not feel the need for professional social work. The majority of the country has no idea about this and the state intervention has not paid any attention to this. It was able to recognize only 1674 have been working as professional social workers so far. This may have been due to the cultural influence of Sri Lanka. Focusing on all these issues, it is clear that there is a need for a new social work approach to Sri Lanka. Thus, the author has developed the following research question. How is the social work approach identified through Buddhist teachings?

## **Research Methodology**

To understand a more appropriate form of social work adapted to the Buddhist culture of Sri Lanka we have examined the foundations of Buddhist culture as outlined in the early Buddhist texts with primary attention to the *Suttapiṭaka*. We have also availed ourselves of information about Sri Lankan culture available in a variety of contemporary sources, including books, papers and articles published by previous researchers pertaining to professional social work and Buddhist social work in Sri Lanka.

## **Buddhist Social work**

Buddhist social work begins as an extension of the Buddhist social welfare service. The Buddhist social welfare service dates back to the time of the Buddha in India of the sixth century BCE. It thus has a long history. It was only in recent times that Buddhist social work developed as an identifiable and distinctive field of social work. We can observe that it is a fairly recent introduction to the field of social work in this country. The term Buddhist social work had been previously used in the social work field but had a different meaning. Currently we favour using the term to describe social work used according to Buddhist cultural norms, as described above. Understanding the relatively new status of Buddhist social work will hopefully serve as a stimulus for interest in the field among researchers and students.

Prof. Tatsuru Akimoto initiated the educational discussion in the year 2012 on the subject of Buddhist social work as a parallel subject to social work. He started to discern a link between Buddhism and social work, and he gave voice to his important observation among the various international communities of social workers and researchers. He then defined for these communities his view of the defining characteristics of what Buddhist social work. According to his view, which has been further developed, the foundation of Buddhist social work is that Buddhist philosophy is based on altruism.

Buddhist social work is a newborn term to western professional social workers. It can be used as an alternative and distinctive method which is clearly different from the usual standards of social work. An excellent guiding definition of Buddhist Social Work comes from the words of the Buddha who said; –“Work for others’ wellbeing”<sup>3</sup> (*“parattaṃ paṭi pajjatha”*). Further, the Buddha has explained “I am practicing for the welfare and happiness of many people.”<sup>4</sup> The primary definition of Buddhist social work is as Buddha said; “Go forth, Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, for the good, for the happiness of gods and men...”<sup>5</sup>

From these quotes we can clearly understand the guiding philosophical principle of Buddhist social work. But there are no definitions to understand exactly what Buddhist social work is in practice. Consequently, the Asian Research Institute for International Social Work (ARIISW) also focuses on the definition of Buddhist social work as having an accurate working definition is vital in producing social work that is truly beneficial to Sri Lankan and perhaps other Buddhist societies.

In response to this need, the Hanoi International Expert Meeting of 2017 took on the objective to create an accurate and useful definition of Buddhist social work. Buddhist social work was defined through a long-term program based on an important research series which can be regarded as a turning point in Buddhist social work and a major contribution to the progress of Buddhist social work.

According to their conclusion, two definitions have been made which are termed Model "B" & "C". In Model B, "Buddhist Social Work is the social work based on Buddhist philosophy. It helps individuals, families, groups and communities which enhance social functions, and promote their wellbeing, peace, happiness and harmony. It is an academic inter-discipline and a profession; Buddhist Social Work professionals will demonstrate his/her knowledge, skills and values guided by the principle of Buddha nature"<sup>6</sup>, & Model - C, "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 human, or inner arena, working on both arenas in tandem. Its fundamental principles include compassion, loving kindness, mutual help, interdependency and self-reliance. The central value is the Five Precepts. The ultimate goal is to achieve the wellbeing of all sentient beings and peace."<sup>7</sup>

After the development of these two definitions, some social work scholars have started to comment on them. Prof. Gohori comments on the "Model C" as follows: "This model works with classical Buddhist terms such as loving kindness or compassion. It's clear that this model is deeply rooted in Buddhist teaching reflecting its core concepts. Asian Buddhist societies inherit these concepts from which some of them are compatible with principles. They underpin the Western-rooted social work definition; however, there is no need to translate them or to interpret them. People in Asia region are already familiar with them and their presence is automatically accepted in Asian Buddhist societies and cultures."<sup>8</sup> Comparing these two models (B model & C model), it is clear that model "C" is very similar to Buddhist social work. "The Buddhist welfare values should be the foundation of Buddhist Social Work by leveraging Buddhist concepts and practical knowledge."<sup>9</sup> Further, "Buddhist Social Work is based on the emancipation of mental and physical suffering of humans, protecting living beings, balancing social needs, sharing wealth and conserving nature."<sup>10</sup>

The following are the three important elements for Buddhist social workers according to Ishikawa:<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 1: Three important elements for Buddhist social workers**

Akimoto writes, “The Buddhist Social Work initiative is still in the infant stage within the scientific professional social work landscape. One of the key factors for this situation is that Buddhists themselves do not use the term ‘social work’ or even they do not identify a category called ‘social work’. It does not matter to Buddhists whether people translate or name such activities as ‘social work’ or whether the Western-rooted professional social work side approves them as social work or not. It only matters whether Buddhist temples, monks and followers can address the difficulties and problems of life people face-how effectively and how much.”<sup>12</sup>

Based on religious sources, social work practice has offered an alternative to clients and social workers, despite the fact that research examining the practicality of Buddhist based social work is very limited. However, a study of these limited definitions makes it clear that Buddhist social work is based on the compassion (*karuṇā*) – driven social approaches to relieve the others from distress or suffering and strengthening inter-dependency among individuals which is deeply based on the teaching of unity in Buddhism. Related to this, Buddhist social work needs to be done through working together and empowering people, caring for each other and stimulating self-motivation through Dhamma. Consequently, this leads to the welfare of others and results in improving happiness in people. Finally, the wellbeing of all sentient beings will be enhanced.

### **Professional Social work**

Social work is a profession that helps people by developing their strengths to find solutions for individual and community problems. Further, “Social work is a helping profession” is a very common definition. It is functioning in the areas of social service,

social welfare and social development. Consequently, this professional approach helps people with problems to solve activate their resources. It is believed that in social work, any person has the power to solve those problems. Every person is capable. Social work interventions are known to help these people solve their problems by giving them the opportunity to identify these possibilities.

The evolution of social work began with scientific inquiry into philanthropy and social service. People came to understand that indiscriminate philanthropy and social service had led to an increase in the number of dependents in the society. They explored how best the individuals in the society could be helped by empowering them to become independent. It was reported that at the First International Conference on social work held in Paris in July 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>, 1928, the new approach to improving the technique of philanthropy was proclaimed as social work and key to its development was seen as social work education. Therefore, since the first International Conference social work has a relatively long history, of nearly a century.

Previous to this conference there were a number of events that created an awareness of the budding field of social work. For instance, the Charity Organization Society movement was introduced in the United States by two men from Buffalo, New York who were deeply concerned about the reducing destitution caused by the Long Depression of the 1870s. One was an Episcopal rector, Rev. Stephen Humphreys Gurteen, and the other was T. Guilford Smith, a young successful business man and a parishioner at St. Mary's Church where Rev. Gurteen served. Along with a circle of friends, they discussed the social and economic problems of their community, the proliferation of private charities, and what more could be done to alleviate poverty. A plan emerged and as part of that plan, Rev. Gurteen traveled to England and spent the summer of 1877 learning about the London Charity Organization Society. On his return, the two men drew up plans to adopt a COS in Buffalo.

Various scholars who have studied social work have come up with ideas about social work based on the experience of Smith and Gurteen. They have considered that social work is an art rather than a science. This is largely due to the fact that individuals are unique and differ from each other. Therefore, there is no universal theory applicable or that could be developed to apply equally to all the individuals in the society. Thus, although social work is considered a part of the social sciences and has a rational basis, it has an 'artistic' component due to the many unique factors that must be accounted for.

For instance, relationship building depends on how both the client and the social worker relate to each other. "Social work skills or competencies developed by the social worker with the art of relating to the client enable him or her to make the service effective."<sup>13</sup> Social work is a practice profession and the social worker plays its main role. The audiences for the performance are people with problems and needs. Therefore, a skill-based methodology has been developed. Thus, the term "social work art" is based on logical reasoning. The relationships between art and science in the "practice of social work" are an art based on scientific method.<sup>14</sup>

The traditional state of the world began to change with industrialization. The ancient social security and welfare system started changing its role in relation to these needy individuals as well. The Industrial Revolution created problems that were of a different quality than in previous ages and these were threatening society by creating great social and political change and even upheaval. Due to the fact that malfunctioning appeared in the area of interaction between the individuals, families, group, and their environment, these problems compelled the society to create social welfare agencies. Later on, when it was observed that these problems required a scientific outlook for developing proper and permanent solutions, a new system of rationally-based (scientific) social assistance came into existence which became known as social work.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, the social work is a method of intervening to solve people's problems through scientific intervention. Social Work, unlike an early charity practice, attempts to help the individuals, groups and communities to get a clear insight into the problems that strengthen their individual capabilities to face conditions as reality and then try to improve them. At the same time social work attempts to mobilize social forces to resolve those social and economic situations that lead to ill health, mental suffering frustration and social behavior.<sup>16</sup>

Although social work when performed by religious organizations such as church or temple is aimed at helping others with the help of religious teachings it is not a purely charitable service. It is a method that helps people gain independence by studying the situation of problems of people by applying knowledge of subjects gained through rational analysis. It helps the individuals, groups and communities to get a clear insight into the problems and the skills needed to improve them. S.C. Kafula expresses it in the following manner,

Social work is a profession that aims at helping those who cannot help themselves. Being a caring profession, it is the duty of the social worker to find out the root cause of vulnerability of the clients, while striving hard to promote dignity and worth of all people regardless of their political and economic status and religious affiliation. The profession is committed to the enhancement of the quality of life and the development of the full potential of the clients by addressing the barriers, inequalities, and injustices that exist in society<sup>17</sup>

or from Akimoto: "Social work is human activity to help others alleviate or eradicate difficulties and problem in their life."<sup>18</sup> Thus, it is clear that social work is a process made up of all the human and materials resources that the individual needs to succeed in his life.

The Social Work Dictionary published in 1987 by Robert L. Barker, focuses on social work as the professional activity of helping individuals, groups, or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to this goal.



Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values, principles and techniques to one or more of the following ends: helping people obtain tangible service; providing counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families and groups; helping communities or groups provide or improve social and health service; and participating in relevant legislative processes. Further, the practice of social work requires knowledge of human development and behavior of social economic and cultural institutions; and of the interaction of all these factors.<sup>19</sup>

According to this definition, two main points have been delineated. One is 'Social work' and the second is 'Social work practice'. Thus, it is clear that social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups or communities to enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and creating societal conditions favorable to this goal. It is clear that social work is a "professional activity" in which the main task is to help individuals, groups, or communities to enhance their capacity for social functioning. In focusing on social work practice, it becomes clear that it is based on social work principles and ethics. It is a good aspect of this profession.

These social work practices intend to achieve the following:

1. Helping people obtain tangible service
2. Providing counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families and groups
3. Helping communities or groups providing or improving social and health service
4. Participating in relevant legislative processes

Today social work is a highly developed field of professionalism. It consists of a process which guides the clients to the problems they face and identifies the resources required based on a scientific analysis and guides them to reach the resources. Connected to this idea;

Social work is committed to the enhancement of the quality of life by protecting client's dignity and worth and it can play a fundamental role in building resilience, support and constructive social relationships at both individual and institutional levels in an effort to develop peaceful communities.<sup>20</sup>

Helping people to be independent helps to preserve their dignity and enhances the dignity of those who may feel degraded by their life circumstances. Through this it helps to develop harmony and peaceful communities.

With the spread of social work around the world, various educational discussions have taken place and sub-branches of social work have been formed.

## Social Work Situation in Sri Lanka

Despite the fact that social work has its European origin with a missionary educational background, social work education has been expanded all over the world including in Sri Lanka. This concept was practised in 1952 with the contribution and the guidance of Ms. Dorothy Moses, then the principal of the Delhi School of Social Work by setting up an institute to conduct social work education programmes. This project was initiated by Y.M.C.A. Ceylon. A committee was appointed and this committee decided to name the institute The Institute of Social Work. Apart from the training courses, the institute organized seminars to promote awareness of social work as well as to meet the needs of welfare organizations in the country. Ariyasena observes, in 1955, Mr. J.F.X. Paiva was appointed as a part time staff assistant and Mr. D.S. Sanders was appointed as a full-time staff assistant. Later both become eminent social work educators in the international field and pioneered the social development concept.<sup>21</sup>

Social Work in Sri Lanka developed slowly. Sixty eight years after the commencement of social work in Sri Lanka, it is still in its infancy. As previously mentioned, some research studies and social work scholars believe that the reason for this is the lack of a suitable social work approach to the Sri Lankan culture. Thus, social work problems, solving methods, scientific tools, and techniques developed in line with Western culture are often not applicable to solve human problems in the Sri Lankan context. In connection with this, Ranaweera writes;

Social work is a profession. There is a difference between an unskilled labourer making the garden and a landscaper doing the same job.... professions require mastery of systematically organized body of knowledge and demonstrated skills in applying this knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, the social worker is a professional whose service depends on the salary. Their service is performed within a specific time frame, program, and code of ethics.

The main objective of initiating social work in Sri Lanka is to achieve social work objectives through the creation of a skilled workforce. Based on the statistics of National Institute of Social Development (NISD) there have been only 1677 trained social workers throughout the history of 68 years in Sri Lanka, many of whom have since retired or otherwise left the field. So, the current number of social workers must be considerably less than that number.

Also, many large-scale social welfare projects in Sri Lanka have failed. For instance, the '*Samurधि* welfare project' which was started with the aim of uplifting the poor has become a 'social service project' that makes people dependent while the purpose of social work is to empower people. The aim must always be to empower people to stand on their own without outside intervention or assistance.

Although Buddhists are in the majority, there are a variety of religions practiced in the nation of Sri Lanka. According to the 2012 census, 70.2% of Sri Lankans were Theravāda Buddhists. Furthermore, Buddhism is considered as the state religion of

Sri Lanka and has been given special privileges in the Sri Lankan constitution such as government protection fostering Buddhist Dharma. However, the constitution provides freedom of religion and right to equality among all its citizens, not only to Buddhists. Buddhist social work may not always be relevant in all ways to the non-Buddhist population, although the altruistic philosophy of Buddhism has much in common with similar elements in the other religions.

Among the Buddhist majority, Buddhist social work holds much promise due to its harmony with the tenets of the religion. As Narada observes;

Buddhism explains a social system to its followers from the very beginning, in which the Buddha himself, and monks were also involved in. The first social work of the monks was to make people aware of the ethical path.<sup>23</sup>

The Buddha believed that society could be healed by guiding people living in suffering from undesirable conditions to get out of that situation. Therefore, giving guidance or instruction to a person for their welfare by words alone was insufficient without the acts of the monk. Buddhism highly emphasizes helping each other and therefore when people help monks, they also tend to help laypeople. Buddhism with such a background and philosophy came to Sri Lanka from India in ancient times and through the centuries this attitude of action based on compassion has become deeply rooted in Buddhist society.

As the Sri Lankan chronicles report, Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC by Venerable Mahā Mahinda<sup>24</sup> through the sponsorship of Emperor Ashoka<sup>25</sup> in India. As a result, Sri Lankan monks have been working for social welfare since the third century BCE. Under the influence of Buddhism, it may be that Sri Lankans have maintained a closer relationship with each other than is typically found in western countries. They have excellent qualities such as a mutual help system within their own community and a sharing and caring system. This philanthropic value has been developed through Buddhist teachings.

For example, elderly parents are typically taken care of within their family home. In addition, there is a strong mechanism within the family to care for the disabled children and helpless family members. This and many other functions often assumed by institutions in the western world are still largely performed within the family structure in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lankan culture, the family has a deep spiritually inseparable bond. The Buddhist philosophy which has been inspired by Buddhist culture has positively affected this bond. Therefore, the family itself has their own mechanisms to share their support among family members and mutual understanding is very high. Hence, the family tie is very strong. From childhood Sri Lankans are encouraged to share their thoughts with their parents and seek for their direction, counseling and advice. Further, husband and wife work together and co-operate in raising children. Each has different assigned duties and responsibilities. While father acts as an authoritarian figure, mother takes the major role as a mediator between children and their father in communication. They are admonished to be good because any disgrace that is committed is a disgrace to the family. In times of misfortune, they are assured of the

family's support, sympathy and love. In connection with this, Gamage observes, "This background of sharing and caring with responsibility and accountability creates commitment, trust and strong work ethics within the family."<sup>26</sup>

So far, the Sri Lankan community has not sought the support of voluntary organizations or institutions to care for their family members on a payment basis. We can arrive at the conclusion that in Sri Lankan society, the needy especially are being supported by Buddhist social work, and owing to that, the people have not yet recognized professional social work to be required.

Moreover, with in comparison to the west where the psychological profession has become indispensable to large numbers of people, in Sri Lanka there has been a tradition that the devotees are open about their needs and problems with the monks of their temple rather than counsellors who are new to their culture.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in this cultural context, it will be easier to promote Buddhist social work in Sri Lanka which will provide a reliable service.

On the other hand, the Sri Lankan woman has built her cultural identity on Buddhist values and ethics. Since there is a conventional image of women sharing personal problems openly, Sri Lankan women tend to be reluctant to openly discuss their personal issues, but many studies have reflected the need to ventilate women's unexpressed issues. At present, a conducive environment has been created in which the services of these ordained women are increasingly needed for them to receive advice and counseling.

### **Sri Lankan Culture**

Buddhism is the main religion and the culture that has kept all communities together, and the way of living based upon Buddhism which has been practiced over many centuries in Sri Lanka can be identified as the main factor for the specific texture of the Sri Lankan society. In other words, the influence of Buddhism has acted as the key contributor and has brought out the matching aspects of the other religions such as helping the needy, valuing the peaceful living etc. along with some more aspects that have strengthened bonds with other religious communities. Social Work and Buddhist teachings have much in common and it is apparent that Buddhist teaching can be precisely introduced to form a consistent social work component that is more acceptable to the communities in Sri Lanka.

The quality of compassion and making others' lives easy is at the core of Buddhist teaching. Therefore, the essence of Buddhist teaching promotes and motivates all human beings to help fellow humans when they are in distress. Not only Buddhism but also all the religious beliefs, available in Sri Lanka, motivate people to commit themselves to provide services to fellow beings.

Philanthropy was originally motivated by religious teachings. A charity such as an almsgiving and volunteer work, considered as Social Philanthropy, mainly focuses on providing basic needs such as food, and shelter for the people who are deprived. Individuals also engage in Social Philanthropy. Organized services provided by the

government and non-governmental organizations, which directed towards meeting the needs of the poor are called social service.

People who follow the Buddhist philosophy and believe in the teachings of the Buddha, believe they will have another birth after passing from this life and hence strive to gain merit by engaging in various charity and social service activities in the society. This merit will ensure a favorable next birth. Not only Buddhist people but also Christians, Hindus and Muslims also follow the same method as their respective religious institutes encourage them to do so, although their belief in the next life may not be exactly the same as that of the Buddhists. For instance, followers of Islam give charity to the mosque in order to help those who are in need similar to how Christian followers offer dry rations or other things to the church during the mass to distribute them among the needy people in the community. These deep-rooted cultural activities encourage social services, helping people and looking after needy, vulnerable ones in our own community. Unfortunately, due to these concepts people do not see the need of a scientific way of helping people and they do not see that these traditional ways of charity often encourage dependency whereas social work encourages independence.

Social harmony is greatly promoted by Buddhist teaching. In contrast, professional social work emphasizes on rights-based approaches<sup>28</sup> in unleashing the potential of the needy in providing solutions. This is a rather different approach. But the harmony-based approaches<sup>29</sup> of Buddhist teaching in unleashing the potential of humans can enrich the social work approaches. The policymakers and strategic managerial personnel are not aware of the importance of social work in improving the quality of life of people in the country. In addition, the Buddhist monks whose guidance is considered respectfully by the community in solving their problems are not motivated to learn social work. However, if Buddhist social work is nurtured with teachings in Buddhism, the trend of learning social work and applying it in a broader setting will improve. This requires analytical studies of this nature, pooling of adequate literature and encouragement to do further research in this regard so that Buddhist social work education will be developed at a sustainable pace.

## **Conclusion**

Sri Lanka is a Theravāda Buddhist country and it has recognized by the Constitution of the Republic of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Buddhist monks are engaged in various social services and welfare activities which are similar to social work. Social work is a profession that helps people with problems by developing their strengths to find solutions for the above. Further, "Social work is a helping profession" is a very common definition. It is functioning in the areas of social service, social welfare and social development. There are various debates about the definition of social work. Professional social work which is originated in western countries does not fit Sri Lanka well. This is because Sri Lanka has an encouraging background of values and philanthropy built on Buddhist culture. Also, there are already existent culturally built mechanisms for people to help each other. The teachings of Buddhism have influenced this, as evidenced by sayings such as, "Work for others wellbeing or

welfare (*parattam paṭi pajjata*)". Buddhist social work is more important to Sri Lankan culture than Western social work. It can be defined as; Buddhist Social Work and is based on the emancipation of mental and physical suffering of humans, protecting living beings, balancing social needs, sharing wealth and conserving the nature.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Theravāda; "Doctrine of the Elders", is a name of the oldest form of the Buddha's teachings, handed down in the Pali language. According to tradition, its name is derived from the fact of having been fixed by 500 holy elders of the Order, soon after the passing away of the Master. Theravāda is the one of the old schools of Buddhism that has survived among those which Mahāyānist have called 'Hīnayāna'.  
Nyanatiloka, 2011: p. 209
  - <sup>2</sup> (Articles 10 & 14 (1). Sāsana- (massage): The Dispensation of the Buddha, the Buddhist religion; teaching, doctrine.  
Ibid.: p. 193
  - <sup>3</sup> or 'welfare'
  - <sup>4</sup> NDB: p. 424 /AN II: p. 74
  - <sup>5</sup> MV I: p. 42
  - <sup>6</sup> Akimoto 2017: p. 7
  - <sup>7</sup> Akimoto 2017: p. 3
  - <sup>8</sup> Gohori 2019: pp. 112-113
  - <sup>9</sup> Ishikawa 2017: p. 96
  - <sup>10</sup> Wickramasinghe 2020: p. 140
  - <sup>11</sup> Ishikawa 2017: p. 97
  - <sup>12</sup> Akimoto 2017: p. 2
  - <sup>13</sup> Ranaweera 2003: p. 3
  - <sup>14</sup> Pincus 1973: p. 3
  - <sup>15</sup> Bhattacharya 2006: p. 53
  - <sup>16</sup> Hamilton 1947: p. 192
  - <sup>17</sup> Kafula 2016: p. 116
  - <sup>18</sup> Akimoto 2017: p. 28
  - <sup>19</sup> Barker 1987: p. 154
  - <sup>20</sup> Kafula 2016: p. 120
  - <sup>21</sup> Ariyasena 2003: p. 137
  - <sup>22</sup> Ranaweera 2003: pp. 6-7
  - <sup>23</sup> Narada 2020: p. 154
  - <sup>24</sup> Maha Mahinda (son of King Ashoka and Buddhist Monk) was sent as a Buddhist missionary to the Anuradhapura Kingdom in Sri Lanka. Resided at Mihintale
  - <sup>25</sup> Ashoka: King Ashoka was an Indian emperor of the Maurya Dynasty, who ruled almost the entire Indian subcontinent from c. 268 to 232 BCE. A grandson of the dynasty's founder Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka promoted the spread of Buddhism across ancient Asia.
  - <sup>26</sup> Gamage 2012: p. 68
  - <sup>27</sup> Thennakoon & et al. 2020: p. 73
  - <sup>28</sup> Strength-based practice is a social work practice theory that emphasizes people's self-determination and strengths. It is a philosophy and a way of viewing clients as resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity. Harmony based approach in social work means response to varied social and cultural perspectives on common problems in human development and enhances peace and harmony.
  - <sup>29</sup> Harmony based approach in social work means response to varied social and cultural perspectives on common problems in human development and enhance peace and harmony.

## Abbreviations

AN	<i>Āṅuttara-nikāya</i>
BCE	Before Common Era
Et al.	And Others
Ibid.	Ibīdem (In the Same Source)
MV	<i>Mahāvaggapāḷi</i>
NDB	Numerical Discourses of the Buddha
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