

Buddhist Monasticism: A Case Study of Improvement to Social Well-Being in Cambodia

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Abstract

Theravadas make up about 95% of the population of Cambodia, where the Buddha practices them and where monks are highly valued members of the public. Buddhism has contributed significantly to Cambodia's societal well-being and is a component of the social order's development. However, the people and society of Cambodia place a high value on social well-being. Regretfully, the Khmer Rouge ruined Cambodian society's well-being between April 17, 1975, and 07 January 1979. Millions of people lost their lives in this civil war in Cambodia because of the Khmer Rouge's starvation tactics and the isolation of the nation from the outside world. Monks were murdered and made to lay down their lives, and other monasteries were destroyed. Additionally, there needed to be more clarity in both private and public education. Buddhism was revived after the Khmer Rouge regime, and as monks who had fled from monasteries during the purges were reorganized, the religion gradually started to grow again. With lay Buddhists' help, they returned to the monasteries to reconstruct and reestablish them. After the Khmer Rouge era, Buddhism in Cambodia saw a significant rebirth thanks to the dedication of Buddhist monks, particularly Ven. Maha Ghosananda. There are two sects of Buddhism in Cambodia: Mahānikāya and Dhammayuttikanikāya. Buddhism in Cambodia has been expanding and changing throughout the nation under the direction of lay and monastic Buddhists.

Keywords: Theravāda, Well-being, Monasteries, Buddhists, and Monk

1. Introduction

In Cambodia, a country mostly Buddhist, monks have a significant role in the wider community, with an estimated 95% of the population being devotees of the Buddha. Buddhism has contributed significantly to Cambodia's societal well-being and is a component of the social order's development. However, the people and society of Cambodia today place a high value on social well-being. Regretfully, the Khmer Rouge ruined Cambodia's societal well-being between April 17, 1975, and January 1979. Millions of people lost their lives in this civil war in Cambodia as a result of the Khmer Rouge's starvation tactics and the isolation of the nation from the outside world. Numerous monasteries were demolished.

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Additionally, there was a deadlock in both private and public education. Buddhism was revived after the Khmer Rouge regime, and as monks who had fled from monasteries during the purges were reorganized, the religion gradually started to grow again. With the help of lay Buddhists, they returned to monasteries and rebuilt and reestablished them. After the Khmer Rouge era, Buddhism in Cambodia saw a significant rebirth thanks to the dedication of Buddhist monks, particularly Ven. Maha Ghosananda. There are two schools of Buddhism in Cambodia: Mahānikāya and Dhammayutanikaya. He received four nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize. Known by his moniker Samdech Sang Santipeap, he was regarded as the spiritual head of all Buddhists, including those in Cambodia.

2. Engagement Buddhism

Ven was a wonderful social worker who emulated the Buddha. Maha Ghosananda. Ven. Maha Ghosananda dedicated his life to sharing his teachings of compassion and loving kindness with Cambodians and everyone else on the planet. Many Cambodians, including the young and the old, the affluent and the poor, the ill and the well, were educated by Ven. Maha Ghosananda. He imparted life skills and knowledge of social sharing to the Cambodian people. He taught the people of Cambodia how to control their anger and prevent harm to others by practicing mindfulness and meditation. In lieu of social workers, Ven. Maha Ghosananda employed Dhammayātra to alleviate the suffering of the Cambodian populace.

The Venerable Maha Ghosananda transformed the preexisting Buddhism in Cambodia into an active Buddhist movement in the 1980s and 1990s. He restored and brought engaged Buddhism to Cambodia, enabling the people there to survive. His first acts of advocacy were rebuilding Cambodian Buddhism, imparting Dharma, leading by example in promoting peace, and being utterly impartial. He was also effective in offering his peace ministry to Khmer Rouge members.

Numerous Buddhist leaders in Cambodia were aware of Ven. Maha Ghosananda's engagement with Buddhism. The writings of Ven. Maha Ghosananda had a significant impact on rapprochement and peace in Cambodian society. He did not try to defend his work or explain why it had worked. He did not distinguish between social activity and conventional Buddhist practice. For him, conducting national peace walks, restoring the Saṅgha, and going on meditation retreats were all acts of peace. Ultimately, he and his supporters concluded that his important job as an activist was to set an example by being a really calm, nonpartisan presence in an explosive environment.

Since all of a person's verbal and physical actions originate from their mental state, Ven Maha Ghosananda believed that consciousness is the foundation of social ethics.³ Each person bears personal responsibility for the well-being of their community. Thus, when talking about social activity, Ven. Maha Ghosananda invariably began and ended with one's mental state. For instance, he claimed that in order to eliminate land mines, one must first remove the symbolic land mines of avarice, rage, and illusion when speaking about the land situation.⁴ The social teachings of Ven. Maha Ghosananda served as the foundation for modern education and experiences in Cambodian society. His main goals were promoting peace and social

contact for all. His traditional Buddhist schooling probably influenced his emphasis on non-violence and inward change. He received the same instruction in meditation.

In addition to attending religious conferences, he built refugee centers and temples along the Thai border. Ven. Maha Ghosananda established Dhammayātra Centers and other Buddhist educational facilities, as well as constructed monasteries and refugee camps near the border. In addition, he established numerous Buddhist institutions that continue to have an impact on society. Furthermore, Engaged Buddhism has emerged as one of the most potent movements in contemporary Cambodian society. Buddhist monks are integrated into the community and play a significant role in reviving Buddhism and creating Cambodian society with Dharma activists. As a result, engaged Buddhism practically functions within society and has an impact on societal harmony and well-being.

3. Contributions to the Welfare of Society

3.1 Activities Peace

The path to societal well-being is peace. Ven. Maha Ghosananda was well-known for his peace initiatives, such as the Dhammayātra he led, which saw laypeople and monks in Cambodia walk together through still-dangerous and unstable areas of the nation. The pilgrimage's roots can be found in the legends that the Buddha took his disciples to various locations, including battlegrounds, to preach the Dharma. The Dhammayātra was the Indigenous approach to promoting peace in Cambodia.

Khemacaro (1998) asserts that dharma is a way to create a wave of calm. He made the point that Dharma was a method of social engagement and reform aimed at bringing about more harmony and serenity for the populace as well as society. He also brought up Ven's actions. Through Dhamma's teachings and peace walk, Maha Ghosananda applied those methods to address the issues facing Cambodian society and maybe usher in peace. For a better living in society, Cambodians must actively participate in the development of loving-kindness, compassion, and wisdom.⁷ The Dhammayātra movement, founded by Ven. Maha Ghosananda originated from a deeply painful event. He prayed a lot because of the intense sorrow that Cambodia has experienced, which has led to a tremendous deal of compassion. He thought that the anguish of such.⁸

Cambodia has experienced deep pain.

The source of Great Compassion is this pain.

A heart at peace is made of great compassion.

A person who has serenity in their heart is peaceful.

A peaceful individual leads to a peaceful household.

A harmonious family fosters a harmonious community.

A nation is made up of peaceful communities.

A world at peace begins with a peaceful nation.

May there be joy and tranquility for all living things.⁹

3. 2 Mental Health

Even after Cambodia was saved from civil war and massacre, the people of Cambodia continued to suffer from mental illness and sadness. Ven. Maha Ghosananda began guiding a group of individuals to walk Dhammayātra for mind-training and mind-strengthening as a result of these historical disasters. Ven. Maha Ghosananda helped the Cambodians living near the Thai border by erecting a modest camp featuring a Buddha statue. They came to chant the Buddha's Dhamma and to pray. Every morning and evening, he imparted to the populace the Buddha's Dhamma, which teaches how to educate the mind through meditation gradually. There may be ramifications for Cambodian peace and harmony from this mental training. When Cambodians engaged in intense

3. 3 Physical Health

Those who endured these consequences of body torture after the Khmer Rouge were defeated developed disabilities and decaying bodies. Ven. Maha Ghosananda taught the people of Cambodia how to focus and develop their minds and bodies through walking meditation and meditation. In addition to advocating for harmony and peace, Dhammayātra's walking practice reduced stress and improved mental and physical well-being. The functioning of the body is crucial to day-to-day living. The attachment element to the mind is the body. The mind gets disorganized when the body is fractured. As the intellect disperses, the body also divides.

Cambodians learned how to develop their mind and body through inhaling and exhaling from Ven. Maha Ghosananda. Breathing represents the present moment, not the past or future. Additionally, he stated that we should make an effort to live in the present because the past is gone, and the future is not here. Being fair and leading moral lives is how we must carry out the task correctly. In order to prevent our civilization from devolving into a dark culture or conflict, as it did for many years prior, we must work to keep it secure, advanced, and stable. We shall experience happiness, harmony, and tranquility if we can train our minds and bodies to function in sync with mindful living. This will have an impact on our society.¹⁰

3. 4 Compassion

Ven. Maha Ghosananda extended his boundless compassion to everyone, regardless of their Cambodian heritage. His kind disposition and enormous compassion captured the hearts and minds of Cambodians suffering from the civil war up to this point. He imparted greater compassion to the Cambodian people through Buddhist meditation techniques. Through meditation, one can train one's mind to focus intently on showing compassion and love to others. He imparted self- and other-love lessons to the people of Cambodia. According to him, when we make love, we spread that love to other people. When it happens, we will always be happy and at peace. Hence, in order to reap the rewards of victory, we must fight back with a battle of hatred and delusion.¹¹

The path of awareness and compassion leads to peace, and the Dhammayātras were a path towards that. According to the Dhammayātra movement, developing compassion is the most

crucial skill for preparing oneself for a walk or social action because it is the only thing that can sustain a long-term, nonviolent battle. Buddhism views compassion as its primary virtue, and it is both a means and an end in the journey toward both individual and societal emancipation.¹² The Khmer Rouge could once more learn to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, and peaceful coexistence if they were once more offered the warmth of virtue and love.¹³

4. Impact on the Cambodian society

One may say that Ven. Maha Ghosananda's contributions to peace were felt anytime there was a decrease in or an end to strife and bloodshed. Ven. Maha Ghosananda sought peace in Cambodia and put an end to the conflict. He demanded peace in Cambodia by following the Dhammayietra route, which involved traversing numerous perilous pathways. But the Dhammayātra's actions alone were insufficient to bring about peace in Cambodia; compassion was also required. Peace and pleasure come when all individuals and path-walkers possess compassion in their inner and outer minds. A society will grow more empathetic when it is working toward the creation of stability.

The constructive development of Cambodian society and peacebuilding are the outcomes of Ven. Maha Ghosananda's efforts. Ultimately, the perspective on peacebuilding and the formation of a post-Khmer Rouge national identity shaped Cambodian society. Buddhist monks were instrumental in fostering harmony and progress in Cambodian society both before and during the Khmer Rouge regime. After a bloody civil war destroyed Buddhism and caused a national genocide, Ven. Maha Ghosananda, a Buddhist scholar, rebuilt it and brought about peace. His most well-known contributions were Dhammayātras, also known as Engaged Buddhism, which aimed to bring about harmony and peace in Cambodian society. Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, the approach was nonviolent and developed into.

The teachings of the Buddha, such as the Five Precepts, Eight Precepts, Ten Precepts, general education, etc., are being imparted to lay and dedicated students alike by the Cambodian Buddhist Saṅgha today. In addition to those above, teaching moral principles to laypeople and devotees alike—such as honesty, patience, and filial piety—is one of the most significant responsibilities of Buddhist monks. Furthermore, they aid in the distribution of human resources and support Cambodian society through the establishment of Buddhist centers, schools, and organizations in addition to spreading Dhammas. Moreover, monastic education has been made available for a variety of purposes, including preparing the monks to educate and serve as defenders of society's moral and ethical standards. Consequently, monastic education involves more than only teaching Buddhist monks life-cycle.¹⁴

5. Conclusion

Ven. Maha Ghosananda has made numerous contributions to the welfare of society and its citizens. To do this, his efforts have gained traction among the nation's citizens. His teachings greatly impacted Cambodian society and advanced global peace. He was particularly involved in a number of nonviolent initiatives that supported the nation's reconstruction, provided assistance to refugees, and encouraged peace and reconciliation among the Cambodian people after their civil war. He is known as the Gandhi of Cambodia because of his kind nature and

immense compassion. Peace walks, Buddhist education, Dhamma discussions and preaching, acts of compassion, mental and physical health, and moral development were some of his contributions to the betterment of society. His efforts have had a positive impact on society.

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