

## **Engaged Buddhist Community as a Human Right Response: A Case of Buddhist Participatory Communication**

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ABSTRACT—Religions have played very important roles in resolving conflicts and problems for mankind in addition to providing the paths to happiness and salvations based on their uniquely defined traditions and frameworks. In the past several decades, where world problems have become more complex, including peace and conflict resolution, requiring more complex international standards and frameworks, the declaration of human rights was announced, promulgated, and implemented into governance and development policies adopted by many countries worldwide, in order to facilitate the ways that problems, conflicts, and various causes of suffering could be solved, with clear international standards and guidelines.

Religions, Buddhism included, have provided responses (pragmatism) to world as well as human problems in the face of human rights, which have been expanded to include communication rights, the right to livelihoods, and beyond. This paper utilizes the Buddhist pragmatism framework to connect to the issue of human rights including communication rights from historical, social, cultural, and development aspects. It also discusses case studies of well-known Buddhist spiritual leaders who have been involved in “interpretation and dissemination” of teachings by the Buddha for solving modern day problems.

Keywords: engaged Buddhism, engaged Buddhist community, human rights, Buddhist participatory communication

## **Introduction**

Buddhism has provided responses to development problems and concerns (Dukka) among Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist countries, at economic, social, and political levels, as well as to issues of human rights and peace at national and international levels. The Buddhist vital aspect enabling the application known as Buddhist pragmatism is well explained by scholars such as Rodloytuk (2005, 2007), Badge (2014), Gunaratne (2015), Roy and Narula (2017), Seneviratne (2021), Ward (2017), Etzioni (2020), and De Costa (2018), which can be found in the relevant areas between Loka and Dhamma (mundane and supra mundane worlds) (Perera 1991).

Buddhism has been applied for the study of human rights including communication rights as stipulated in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>1</sup> after the end of World War II and further by the UN global ethics<sup>2</sup> and the MacBride Report passed after 1980 and in the 1990s.

Named after the Nobel Laureate Sean MacBride, The MacBride Report of 1980 by UNESCO was written to promote peace and human rights through communication, mass media, news reporting and new communication technologies in developing as well as developed countries for development causes. The publication of the report was not well-received by UNESCO members who were the developed(western) countries at the time, but it became a pivot for creating the development as well as participatory communication model for "one world" with "many voices" (see MacBride, 1980).

While the MacBride Report provides a foundation for more balanced communication for development purposes, The UN global ethics declaration was made official for the first time in the Parliament of World's Religion in Chicago in 1993 contextual-

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1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. United Nations.

2 WHAT IS THE UN ETHICS OFFICE? UN Ethics Office.

izing the functions, roles, and implications of global ethics built on religious and philosophical teachings for global development purposes and governance, This declaration sets the tone for creating global ethical standards in the age of globalization (Kung, 2005).

Interestingly, the preamble to the UNESCO constitution<sup>3</sup> says, “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”, which is a very Buddhist concept, even though it is not clear if Buddhism influenced it when the constitution was written in 1945, as at that time the UN membership mainly consisted of western nations.

One of the major links between Buddhism and world issues and problems can be found in the concept of “Engaged Buddhism”, which was coined after 1950s to imply social, cultural, economic, and even political development and participation aspects through community engagement and empowerment projects. The movement was formed by Buddhists, who aspired and aspire to tackle the issues of world suffering, for example, violence, oppression, injustice, and environmental degradation, among others (Edelglass, 2009).

The framework of “Engaged Buddhism” to promote Buddhadharma (the teachings of the Buddha) to solve world suffering was laid down by the Dalai Lama (known as the 14 Guidelines), which made him one of the forerunners of this movement. It is as follows: openness; non-attachment to views; freedom of thought; awareness of suffering; simplicity; dealing with anger; dwelling happily in present moment; community and communication; truthful loving speech; protecting the Sangha; right livelihood; and relevance for life (Edelglass, 2009:421-426).

It is some of these aspects, including community and communication, protecting the Sangha, right livelihood, and awareness of suffering that have provided the basis for interpretation and application of Buddhadharma for Engaged Buddhist

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.unesco.org/new/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/history/constitution/>

movements in Thailand that this study will cover, to provide a Buddhist response to human rights.

Originating from the notion of “interpretation and dissemination of Buddhadhamma” through the traditional as well as contemporary teachings of Buddhism, Engaged Buddhism has been used in various contexts to mean different things (Dhammavanso, 2010). In the western Buddhist context, it is not necessarily connected to communities. However, in the eastern context, it is closely connected to community development and engagement as stipulated even by early teaching of the Buddha.

From the point of view of “interpretation and dissemination of Buddhadhamma”, in Thailand, for example, one could see attempts made by contemporary monks for the past few decades to make an effort to apply Buddhist teachings of, for example, the Four Noble Truths, to deal with modern-day problems of suffering (economic, social, political, environmental and so on). Attempts towards interpreting and applying Buddhadhamma to reach out to help people deal with their sufferings can be traced back to the time of the Sukhothai, Ayudhaya, and Rattanakosin periods in Thailand, with emphases that fell on different aspects (Dhammavanso, 2010).

## **Research Objectives**

This study will address the issue involving Buddhist pragmatism or the “interpretation and dissemination of Buddhadhamma” in order to carve out and provide a Buddhist response to human rights. It adopts the following research objectives:

1. To understand the form of “Engaged Buddhism for Buddhadhamma” in contemporary Thailand;
2. To know the role that Buddhist participatory communication plays in community development;
3. To find out about a Buddhist response to human rights.

## **Research Questions**

This study will gear to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the form of “engaged Buddhism for Buddhahamma” in contemporary Thailand?
2. What role does Buddhist participatory communication play in community development?
3. Based on the engaged Buddhist” models, what is a Buddhist response to human rights?

## **Research Framework and Methodology**

The study will expound on the notion of human rights, including communication rights, to build the framework for the arguments. Regarding human rights, various articles in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 are cited including Article 1 (born free and equal in dignity and rights); Article 2 (entitlement to rights and freedom unbound by race, color, sex, language, and religion); Article 3 (right to life and liberty); Articles 4 and 5 (no servitude, no torture, no cruel punishment). In so far as communication rights are concerned various articles were cited including Articles 19-22 (freedom of opinion and expression; peaceful assembly and association; political participation, and economic, social, and cultural rights) (Perera, 1991).

The study will use documentary research including books, journals, websites, broadcasts, and documentaries, on the one hand, and interviews with leading Buddhist monks, on the other.

The 1948 UN’s UDHR including communication rights has been translated into development policies, tools, and ap-

proaches for development projects in developing countries for the past 70 years, followed by UN global ethics declarations (1948, 1993, and 2016) built on religious and philosophical traditions from across the world to create peace and happiness along with wealth of the countries (Badge 2014, Sareo 2017, De Costa 2018, Ward 2017, and Mahinda Thero 2015).

Critiques and skeptics from outside and inside the Eastern countries that implement such development concepts and paradigms continue to point out that human rights from the perspective of the modernity development paradigm as well as the concept rooted in democracy as presented, are not being coherent with/relevant to traditional religions and philosophies such as Buddhism (Seeger 2010, Tomalin 2017, and Pandita 2012).

This study, however, argues, to an extent, that human rights, including communication rights, are theoretically and practically coherent with and relevant to Buddhism. This study proposes a Buddhist response to human rights including communication rights according to the nature of Buddhist pragmatism of Dhamma (Akaliko or unbound by time/historical context) (Seneviratne. 2021, Roy and Narula 2017, Honradarom 2014, Panisa et al. 2015, Phra MahaIndhapanyo 2017, Stocking cited in Wilkins et al 2009; Song 2020; Lotus Communication Network “Self-sufficiency Economics” broadcast 2021).

## **Literature Review**

### **Human Rights and Buddhism**

In a critical reflection of Buddhism from the perspective of law, Badge (2014) points to the aspects of teaching in Buddhism that can be applied to human rights as well as the aspects that are not compatible with human rights. Compared to the UDHR clauses, there is no precise wording for human rights in the Tripitaka, but Badge maintained that while some western philosophers like Locke and Hobbes were already talking about human rights in the 17th Century, human rights as a natural concept already

existed in Buddhist concepts. The Buddhist concepts of human rights include duties and rights and responsibilities.

According to Sareo (2017), the guidance of dignity and freedom stipulated by the Dalai Lama emphasizes welfare and happiness of mankind using the Buddhist precepts, including dependent origination, compassion, eightfold path, and vihara (monastic code) concepts. Kawada (2011) elaborates further about the 1993 global ethics declaration that the concepts embrace peace and coexistence which is now seen as a global, ethical effort.

In later periods, as described by De Costa (2018: 412-413), the UN General Assembly in 2016 perceived peace as one important aspect of human rights. Buddhism serves as a vehicle to induce participation process with the teachings. Like other religious and philosophical traditions, Buddhism offers “non-discrimination”, “cultural values”, and “sustainable eco-socio development”. Peace in this regard requires human rights concepts as well as religious, philosophical concepts.

Another aspect of human rights and Buddhism, which contains similarities and differences, is offered by Mahinda Thero (2015), Ward (2017) and “Communitarianism”. Mahinda Thero (2015:69-75) discusses human rights based on the UDHR of 1948 as inherent by birth, dignity, and equal rights as foundations of freedom, justice and peace in this world. Along a similar line, Buddhism sees and values such qualities of freedom and rights for mankind from 2500 years ago. It can be aptly described as promoting the “eternal values of human rights” with the participation and application of the four groups of members in society, such as Bhikku (monks), Bhikkuni (female monks), Upasaka (male laity), and Upasika (female laity).

Ward (2017) discusses peace, happiness and sustainability in the 1990s and beyond as hinged upon mindfulness and communitarian concepts of Buddhism. Like De Costa, he used the term ‘communitarian engaged Buddhism’ bridging the concepts such as dependent origination, compassion, and the five precepts. Communitarian concepts of Buddhism strive to create communi-

ties with individuals pledging for community wellbeing, practicing the Dhamma.

Quite conversely, human rights can be used to critique Buddhist concepts from the modern perspective. Differences can be found between Buddhism and human rights in the concept of political orientations. Buddhism would not endorse any form of politics or polity. Quite unlike the democratic aspect of human rights as propounded by the western world, Buddhism's ultimate sovereignty rests in Dhamma or the ultimate truth, not in the form of government or state (Perera 1991:27-29).

The concept of "Law" is also another aspect of difference between the two traditions. Everybody has the right of recognition before law. When law is seen as the "rule of righteousness" (dhammachakra), it ought to be seen as the rule of metta or compassion as well (Perera 1991, p. 40, 44).

However, critiques of human rights interpretation of Buddhism explain that changes in the social structure that created an imbalance between gender roles in Buddhist moral education and ordination occurred after the passing of the Buddha. According to Dhammika (2006), a clear mark of human rights was clearly established in Buddhism with members of Buddhist communities being well-represented. But after the reformation period in the 5th Century, Theravada (Elder) Buddhism clearly separated the roles of monks and laity, only allowing men to be ordained as monks and not women as Bhikkunis.

According to the documentary titled "The Buddha's Forgotten Nuns" 2013, points of view and analyses have been made about the issues of women's ordination, gender equality, and the early Buddhist tradition from Thailand as well as from overseas. Early Buddhism has allowed for women's ordination and equality in the ways that men and women are equal in practicing Buddhist precepts and achieving enlightenment. However, due to the conservative monastic structure, especially in Theravada countries that prohibited the Bhikkuni ordination, the four groups of members of Buddhist communities became absent for several



hundreds of years.

## **Communication Rights and Buddhism**

A democratic, participatory form of communication rights for development and empowerment has crystallized into “participatory communication” after the 1980s. Based on UN and international frameworks for development and empowerment, participatory communication is grounded in the concept of participatory democracy. Participatory communication models have later been accepted as “multiplicity” communication in the development communication field. Latter day versions of participatory communication have added ethics and rights to communication dimensions to the early theory (Huesca, 2008).

Participatory communication for empowerment and development of communities has been used by international development agencies to promote social, economic, and cultural rights among citizens, following the declarations made by the UN, including the MacBride Report in 1980 (Servaes 2008: 21-22). Servaes and Verschooten (2008:45-46, 53,58) argue further that culture can be seen as a “creative and constructive force encompassing development and human rights”. Culture can be connected to religions, philosophies, and ethics.

Dissanayake theorized that Buddhism as a religion has an interesting approach to human communication. The Buddha used language that can be related to people from all walks of life. Among effective communication strategies are: use of rhetorical styles; exchange in conversation on material things, spiritual emancipation, illusion, and reality (Wimal Dissanayake cited in Seneviratne 2021:14-15).

Seneviratne (2021:20-24) emphasized that a pivotal aspect of Buddhist pragmatism is the concept of Engaged Buddhism, combining development with communication concepts and aims. Among those in the forefront are Thich Nhat Han, Buddhadasa and Sivalaksa who tried to reform Buddhist society by addressing

issues using communication for grassroots actions, known also as Engaged Buddhism.

Another recent movement concerning Buddhist pragmatism is Buddhist mindful communication. Buddhist mindful communication can be better understood from a journalism/broadcaster perspective as applying the teachings of “non-harm” in Buddhism (involving the five precepts and awareness). According to Pipope Panichapakdi in a Lotus Communication Network broadcast titled “A New Approach to Journalism in Thailand”, while a reporter/journalist is making sense of the news, there ought to be time to reflect, to be mindful of the consequences of the reports.

### **Framework for Engaged Buddhist community as a Human Right response**

In order to face difficulties and challenges brought by ultra-modernity, including economic, and social problems, Buddhism in Thailand has seen a number of movements in the past few decades that adopt Engaged Buddhism strategies for community development in rural areas.

Buddhism at one time was an important institution that declared these values, including moral values, behavioral values, all of which have been reflected in 12 values as propounded by the Thai government for the past 7-8 years on issues such as morality, sustainability, and mutual benefits. The traditional values of Buddhism have been challenged by state-sponsored and commercially oriented Buddhism. While that is happening, there is a contention between old and new liberal theories about issues such as rights and equality (Saisaneg, 2019).

In one aspect, human rights as clauses have been made into declarations and constitutions for Thailand in 1997 and 2007. The frameworks in the constitutions placed Buddhism in the context of human rights, including communication rights, based on democracy models. One can connect them through aspects of humanism and rationalism (Kwonsmakon, 2020).

After 1997, King Bhumibol theorized and promoted self-sufficiency economics, which has now become a vital Engaged Buddhism idea, and approach for development and empowerment of communities (Seneviratne 2021).

Among concrete forms of Engaged Buddhism communication for community development, health communication by development monks presents as a strong example. This communication approach focuses on Buddhism for rural community development. Based on the 2017-2021 plan for Buddhist development and reform in Thailand, it stipulates four areas: security for Buddhism; management; learning organization; and self-sustainability to integrate and find good practice (Phra MahaIndhapanyo 2017).

## **Case Studies**

The following four case studies are vibrant examples of moral and spiritual leaders who provide clear examples for Buddhist pragmatism as a response to modern day problems and suffering (dukka).

Information and insights about the four Buddhist spiritual leaders were gathered partly from personal interviews and mostly from documentary research, including thesis, journals, websites, books, and media broadcasts.

The four spiritual leaders have driven the agenda and promoted the causes of Buddhist pragmatism for development of various kinds, starting from moral education, community development to communication rights, human rights development using the Buddhist teachings and meditation/mindfulness practices (moral precepts, loving kindness, nonviolence/nonharm, and the Middle Path through the right speech, right act, and right view), for the past three to four decades.

PhraPayom Kalayano and Phra Somkid Jaranadhammo are well known at local and national levels for promoting communication rights, right to community livelihood, human rights from the Buddhist perspective, self-sufficiency economics, Buddhist ecology, and Buddhist integrating farming models.

Phra Paisal Visalo and MaecheeSansanee Satiersut are well known for local, national, and international levels for promoting communication rights, right to community livelihood, self-reliance, human rights from both eastern and western perspectives, peace and conflict resolution, Buddhist ecology, as well as Buddhist interpretations of gender and equality.

### **Phra Paisal Visalo**

Phra Paisal Visalo, residing in Chaiyaphum province in the Northeast of Thailand, is known for Buddhist pragmatism approaches and Buddhism for social development with thoroughly insightful perspectives of Eastern and Western paradigms of development. He insists that democratic development still requires community building in addition to fairness and individual freedom. According to Phra Visalo, participatory communication is necessary for creating good society (Saisaneg, 2019:195).

Quite unlike other Buddhist scholars in Thailand who focus mainly on local adaptations of Buddhadhamma, Phra Visalo looks at the issue of rights and equality from the point of view of capitalism, Dhamma, and love (compassion). In terms of capitalism, he places emphasis on consumption and consumerism. He critiques liberal democracy for not focusing sufficiently on human rights, but focusing too much on consumption and consumerism (Saisaeng 2019: 211-213).

Phra Visalo has been well known for using Buddhist participatory communication approaches for social development purposes to bring balance to answer modern needs. He is able to use innovative media including Dhammayatra (walking Dhamma propagation/activity), as well as contemporary media, mixing

religious and civic issues (Praditsin 2014).

When Phra Visalo looks at another important dimension of human rights nowadays, he places strong emphasis on nonviolence and reconciliation of conflict as key answers to those problems. He tries to implement Buddhist concepts to help alleviate problems caused by harm and violence. Buddhist pragmatism approaches can shed light on these issues using peaceful means, nonviolence, mutual understanding, and acceptance of groups (Lokitsathaporn 2016:29-34).

### **Maechee Sansanee Satierasut**

Another moral leader in Thailand who has been vital in pragmatizing Buddhist values for social development is Maechee Sansanee Satierasut from Satien Dhamma Sathan (Satien Dhamma Place) in Bangkok. Quite similar to Phra Visalo, she presents as an example of Buddhist moral leadership along with understanding about western concepts of development (including democracy, human rights, and communication rights) and Buddhist concepts. She is especially clear-sighted about women's roles in Buddhism for development for both maechee (nuns) and female laity.

One study conducted about nuns' social status and other aspects, looks at women's development as evident in Buddhism from the traditional past, to find out whether Buddhism helped to evaluate and enhance the roles of women. The study discusses Maechee Sansanee as emphasizing the roles of women as peace-makers of the world. In addition, she has rhetorical styles that could lead people to understand Dhamma. She rhetoricizes that "the world has Dhamma as their mother" (Tantivanichanon 2017).

Furthermore, Maechee Sansanee is seen as promoting the various issues of rights, livelihood, and peace. She uses skilful means to teach dependent origination, the ways of peaceful co-existence and living ecology, nonviolence and understanding of rights. Landmarks and symbols for achieving these goals at Satiendhammasathan are: Bridge of Awareness; Bodhi tree; foyor or

area; Dhamma Pavillion, and trees in the Dhamma garden, built to emphasize rights, roles, and responsibilities (Seettabut 2016).

## **Phra Payom Kalyano**

Phra Payom Kalayano, of Wat Suan Kaew in Nonthaburi province, in the suburb of Bangkok, exhibits strong characteristics of Buddhist pragmatism approaches for community development regarding: integrating Dhamma into people's lives, propagating Buddhist morals to implant honest livelihood, using the Buddhist teachings and Buddhist sustainability development to solve social problems (Sangpanya et al. 2021).

Phra Payom has placed emphasis on roles of Wat (temple) and Phra (monk) for social welfare, empathy, development, and integration, as well as sustainable development. The paradigm used by Phra Payom involves the roles of monks, welfare, empathy, development, and integration, and sustainable development (Sangpanya et al 2021).

What brings Phra Payom closer to the issue of human rights, including communication rights and democracy, is his very strong style of political communication, blending Buddhist and Thai models. Phra Payom's political communication style involves senders (Phra) who can explain the connection between politics, values, and ethics (Athiputpakin 2018).

Phra Payom's persuasive style of communication, which empowers communities to deal with environmental issues, leads to problem solving and decision making. Besides, Phra Payom's approaches to teaching and preaching help to strengthen communities and people. He focuses on issues like social development, career development, and education development while teaching discipline, honesty and nonviolence (Athiputpakin 2018).

## **Phra Somkid Jaranadhammo**

Phra Somkid Jaranadhammo, residing in Pong Kham village, Nan province in the North of Thailand, was described as a development monk who propagates Dhamma while promoting issues and activities such as self-reliance, agriculture, community forest, and ecology through various community development projects. He uses the Four Noble Truth and other Dhamma concepts to work with people.

Phra Somkid uses Buddhadhamma for conflict resolution for community and villagers. He further promotes Buddhist ecology to community members. He also uses integrated agriculture and self-reliance agriculture as well as ritual ceremonies and communication. Good ecology leads to good livelihood, happiness, and good economics. He builds civic consciousness and awareness and widens networking among villagers, thus proving the value of Buddhism for social development.

Phra Somkid integrates all the aspects through establishment of the Learning Center for Pong Kham area. He uses compassion, moral precepts, the right view, non-harm, including the right speech. Examples are provided about how monks and networks of schools and people work together on the forest conservation project (Phra Dhirapatto 2014).

Phra Somkid engages in various roles, including liaison networks for research and development for monks who groom and mentor other junior development monks as well as support development research projects and institutes. Phra Somkid aims at engaging monks and communities in solving economic and social issues, and dealing with poverty, using values such as rights, honesty, empathy, collective action, awareness, and consciousness (Phra MahaApakaro, 2013).

## **Findings and Discussion**

All in all, this study explores three research questions using

qualitative research and has found the following:

1 - In terms of the form of Engaged Buddhism in Thailand, it is closely connected to community, as can be seen in the cases reviewed in the literature documents as well as by interviews. This applies to the cases of Phra Somkid Jaranadhammo (Ban Pong Kham); PhraPayom Kalayano (Wat Suan Kaew); PhraPaisal Visalo (Wat PahSukato); and Maechee Sansanee Satirasut (Satien Dhamma Sathan); they operate their engaged Buddhism development programs in connection with communities or from their solid communities and networks. Community consists of monks, maechees, and male and female laities. Community is driven by the Buddhadhamma including the Four Noble Truth (problem solving using the middle path); Brahmavihara (compassion, loving kindness, and equilibrium of mind); the six directions (rights, duties, and responsibilities towards others); Sappurisadhamma (the seven kinds of knowledge), which provide ground rules for common, peaceful living and harmonious living with the environment.

2 - In terms of Buddhist participatory communication and its roles in community engagement, the Buddhist style of communication is participatory in nature, as it is dialogic, and stresses ethics and the Middle Path. As can be seen in the cases of the four leading moral leaders discussed herewith, they emulate the Buddha's style of communication. All four deal with real difficult issues facing communities and people's lives, including poverty, injustice, degradation, economic hardship and more. Buddhist participatory communication can be engendered effectively only when Dhamma awareness and practice and ethical guidance are provided.

3 - The term 'engaged community' can be better understood in the context of members practicing Dhamma and observing Vinaya (code of conduct) rules to cope with human suffering, including economic, social, and environmental problems. The Four Noble Truths begin with the right view, right speech, right concentration, and right effort. The four cases studied reveal that members of community, through the expounding of Dhamma, for example by Phras and Maechee (male and female laities) have



grown to be familiar with and aware of these teachings. As a result, their thoughts, speeches, and acts could steer them from harming others, animals, and the environment.

Phra Paisal Visalo, for example, has promoted sustainable living communities in many rural areas with development projects. Similarly, Phra Payom Kalayano teaches the value of perseverance and self-reliance in dealing with complex problems that society brings. He often teaches that one has the right to one's own destiny and one's own aspirations. Furthermore, through Engaged Buddhist projects, he teaches the importance of non-anger, non-harm, truthful speech to control oneself from within and not to misbehave towards others.

In addition, Engaged Buddhism community provides a response to human rights in regard to a peaceful living environment that is wholesome and not detrimental to the environment. For example, Phra Somkid Jaranadhammo has been involved in the ordination of trees, reforestation in Nan, reduction of bushfires caused by villagers, which affect lives of animals and people. Maechee Sansanee Satiersut has been promoting the green living environment in Satien Dhamma Sathan and other places to create a good practice. Satien Dhamma Sathan has provided a good example for site visits by many research students, observers, Thai and foreigners each year.

Further interviews with Phra Payom Kalayano and Phra Somkid Jaranadhammo reveal the following points about the issue as follows:

“The interpretation and dissemination of Buddhadhamma today is easier than before, but the problem facing people today remains far more complex than in the past. The use of social media is crucial in today's interpretation and dissemination of Buddhadhamma. It is through community and project management that people learn about rights, equality, peace, respect, reconciliation, and other issues. Monks as moral leaders have an important role in interpreting and disseminating Buddhadhamma to explain these concepts to laity.”

(Interview with Phra Payom,2021).

“Human rights concepts and Buddhist concepts are closely related, and geared to answer human problems and needs, so when monks teach laities about basic issues and concepts of human rights, they can make connections to Buddhist teachings. However, more difficult concepts and issues about human rights need further explanation, and monks need to explain these issues and concepts using local, cultural contexts of people in different areas to make sense of them. Networks of development monks from previous and present generations are essential in this aspect, but they need to tackle present-day issues and problems using critical thinking and problem-solving methods to solve more complex issues and problems.” (Interview with Phra Somkid, 2021).

## **Discussion with Reviewed Theories and Concepts**

Engaged Buddhism can be achieved through community engagement and empowerment projects, as the four case studies have revealed. Furthermore, out of the Fourteen Guidelines provided by the Dalai Lama, some are highlighted as vital and crucial to Thailand’s Buddhist communities, including awareness of suffering; community and communication; and right livelihood. It is in this very context that a Buddhist response by the four case studies reviewed can be provided in a meaningful way.

Concerning human rights, it involves equality, dignity, rights, right to communication and right to livelihood, as stipulated in the UDHR according to Perera (1991). Human rights became much more clear when expounded using ethics in connection with the issue of peace, happiness of community and sustainability, which the four cases experienced. This is in accordance with Badge (2014), Sareo (2017), Kawada (2011), De Costa(2018), Ward(2017), Mahinda Thero(2015), Seneviratne (2021), Roy and Narula (2017), Honladarom (2014) and Stocking (2009).

Moreover, the concept of human rights is better put into perspective by the Dalai Lama as described by Sareo(2017). The

four case studies found that through the international discourse of peace, coexistent living, sustainability and cultural rights, human rights is found to be related to Engaged Buddhism, especially in line with Buddhist community movements and communication. The four case studies also reflect a close link between the concept of human rights and the eightfold path through the notion of right, starting from the right view, to the right speech, and the right livelihood. The notion of community involving engaged Buddhist community, in a similar way that Ward(2017) wrote, can be understood in the context of communitarianism, especially the contemporary type which is known as responsive communitarianism.

In terms of Buddhist participatory communication, it has a resonance with what Servaes (2008) wrote about multiplicity communication. Buddhist participatory communication takes shape of dialogic communication with a meaningful process of communication. As Huesca(2008) suggests, multiplicity communication when in contact with new social movements advance its form and deepen its impact on society.

Further to what Servaes and Verschooten (2008) wrote about culture and human rights, the discussion about and the involvement in engaged Buddhist communities show a blend of cultures and religions. This can be found in the four case studies reviewed, with heavy emphasis falling on community development that hinges upon culture that could induce participation and empowerment. To this end, one can see that Buddhist participatory communication, similarly, provides opportunities to develop at individual, community, and societal levels as Roy and Narula (2017) suggested.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, this study aims to understand the ways in which engaged Buddhist communities can provide a response to human rights issues in today's world. It poses three questions

that relate to the form of engaged Buddhism; the role of Buddhist participatory communication in community development; and an engaged Buddhist model of response to human rights, which all have been answered in varying degrees. The study finds that, by and large, Buddhism has been coherent with and relevant to the western concept of human rights, comprising human dignity, equality, communication rights, among others, from the early tradition of Buddhism until the present.

It is through the lens of examining these four case studies that aspects of the form of engaged Buddhist community; the role of Buddhist participatory communication (which is dialogic in nature) and community development; and engaged Buddhist community as a response to human rights can better be understood.

Regarding points of recommendations, the study proposes that future research looks at engaged Buddhist community in the urban and cosmopolitan context like Bangkok and major cities in Thailand by examining and interacting with the issues of human rights, namely dignity, equality, and communication, and trying to find out how these communities can provide a response to human rights. Also it is important to observe whether the gaps still exist in terms of what appears to be gender inequality and social inequality in specific frameworks.

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### **Interview**

- Interview with Phra Payom Kalayano. 3 June 2021.
- Telephone interview with Phra Somkid Jaranadhammo, 26 June 2021