



THE SCOURGE OF POVERTY AND PROSELYTISM
Socio-Economic and Cultural Challenges Facing
Buddhist Communities in Asia: A Case Study of Sri Lanka
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This recently published book is based on research funded by the Bangkok-based World Buddhist University (WBU) focusing on socio-economic and cultural challenges facing Buddhist communities in Asia with a case study of Sri Lanka. This book is designed to give an insight into the challenges facing grassroots Buddhist communities in Sri Lanka which the regional and international media is ignorant about at best and wishes to ignore or misrepresent at worse.

Buddhists may be numerically superior within Sri Lanka with 70% of the population designated as Buddhists, they also make up a majority of the poor especially in rural areas.

In the 21st century, Buddhists' (and also Hindus') poverty has become a huge reservoir for two religious forces to exploit – Evangelical (or Pentecostal) Christians from the West and South Korea, and Wahhabi Islamists mainly supported by Saudi Arabia. Both these movements have huge financial resources at its disposal.

These two powerful forces have been rapidly infiltrating Buddhist communities across Sri Lanka (Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand as well) who are feeling helpless because their own government is not helping them economically.

It has become fashionable for the international media and some Buddhist leaders and Buddhist groups in East Asia and the West to criticise Buddhists in these countries when they take direct action to defend their communities, without trying to understand the socio-economic situations that are giving rise to this.

This report also shows how Buddhist groups such as Bodu Bala Sena was exploited by countries like Norway, and Sri Lanka's own government at the time and they ended up being misled into violent street actions and labelled as "extremists".

The report's conclusions and recommendation includes an urgent need for a well coordinated international Buddhist charity - to help empower these grassroots Buddhist communities; strict monitoring of NGO funding from overseas; need for a Community Harmony Bill (not an Anti-Conversion Bill) and strict zoning laws to control 'illegal' construction of churches, mosques and temples.

This report will be a good resource, especially for media practitioners to understand the socio-economics of religious conflicts in Asia today, and to understand that religious conflicts are not necessarily based on statistics.

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