

Abstract

This study constitutes an inquiry into the Buddhist methods of meditation as reflected in the Pāli Nikāyas and post-canonical works and an examination of their relevance to the development of the potential capacity of the individual. Buddhism unlike any other established religion has laid great emphasis on the innate capacity of the individual to achieve perfection, through individual effort and initiative. The discourses in the Nikāyas relate that those who have accepted the teachings of the Buddha pursued the goal of '*arahantsip*' or '*nibbāna*', the goal of the Buddhist path of capacity development, attainable largely by abandoning family encumbrances and renouncing worldly pleasures. This path calls for the development of wisdom through a dedicated practice of mental concentration or meditation to achieve perfect mental purity. As regards laypersons, the explicit goal lies in moral consciousness in the accomplishment of worldly responsibilities in an ethically sensible manner. This helps laypersons develop potential capacity to accrue benefits in their present life as well as in the next.

In the Buddhist meditation practice as it is popularly understood and practised at present in Sri Lanka as well as the world over, the primary emphasis is given to mental concentration or mental culture with apparent neglect of the moral aspect. It is an obvious lapse in the efforts of social development, which negates the opportunity of reaping the full potential of human capacity. This lapse in the practice of meditation has been due to historical, philosophical and spatial reasons. The time is now opportune to take a critical look in order to propose a wider connotation as to what is to be understood by meditation practice in relation to human capacity development, the underlying goal of the Buddhist teaching and adopt it for the benefit of the current society. Thus, in the widest possible sense '*meditation*' should take into account a behavioural change in the life of an individual and employ it as a positive tool to build human capacities which enables him to address successfully the numerous individual and social ills widespread in the modern societies.