The Buddha, Martha Nussbaum and Sympathetic Imagination

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Abstract: The 'Sympathetic Imagination' is introduced to the cultural literature in 90th decade by Martha Nussbaum, an American philosopher and the current Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago. To elucidating it further, according to Nussbaum, Sympathetic Imagination is "the possibility of an individual to lend ears for others, especially those who are of different genders, races, classes, religions and national origins". Before 2500 years ago, the Buddha, the founder of Buddhist Philosophy, has taught and proclaimed this theory through many concepts. In Buddhism 'Sympathetic Imagination' is parallel to the concept of **'Samānattatā'** (Impartiality, feeling towards others as towards oneself). For an instance, *"attanaµ upamaµ katvā"*, 'putting oneself in another's place' which can be clarified as everybody should think about others. Among the special characteristics of the Buddha, 'the Sympathetic Imagination' is highlighted because he could convey properly his teaching to the people who are related to multi-cultures and religions, without any quarrel. When paying attention to the current social system not only in Sri Lanka but also in the world, it is clear that communities related to manifold cultures, races, classes, religions etc., are trying to illustrate that only their own view is the truth but others are false. Here, my chief endeavour is to discuss how far the 'Sympathetic Imagination' is discussed by Nussbaum and the Buddha and the issue I'm going to clarify is how far we are aware of Sympathetic Imagination and use it for the alleviation of social disorders and crimes. The conclusion I illustrate is 'the doctrinal factors related to the Sympathetic Imagination in Buddhism are more helpful to make an interconnected peaceful world system. To prove this fact I use several texts of Martha Nussbaum and Buddhist canonical texts.