

Why Do We Need Buddhist Chaplains in Sri Lankan Universities? A Comprehensive Exploration of Their Role, Significance, and Impact on Student Well-being and Spiritual Support

H.M.L.M. Munasinghe *

University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, 20400, Sri Lanka

*leenamadhavi123@gmail.com

This research paper explores the necessity of introducing Buddhist chaplains in Sri Lankan universities, focusing on their role, significance, and impact on student well-being and spiritual support. The role of a chaplain is widely used across the world, notably in Europe and America, and it serves a purpose in many different contexts. This study looks into the potential benefits of integrating Buddhist chaplaincy for well-being, concerns faced by students, and ragging-related violence in Sri Lankan universities. The paper highlights the numerical roles that Buddhist chaplains can undertake, such as giving spiritual care, counseling, guided meditation, and community service. Despite the prevalence of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the role of lay Buddhists in religious activities has left a void in chaplaincy services, especially concerning youth-related challenges. This paper intends to examine how the integration of Buddhist chaplaincy within Sri Lankan universities contributes to the development of students' emotional resilience, spiritual growth, and propensity towards seeking support, in addition to fostering interfaith understanding, tolerance and societal harmony. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach, relying on textual analysis and theme exploration from relevant literature from the last decade. The study draws insights from renowned universities worldwide, such as Harvard and Yale, where chaplains have effectively contributed to student well-being and religious harmony. This research also identifies challenges in implementing chaplaincy, including language barriers and ethnic tensions. However, it also highlights the transformative potential of such a role in fostering understanding, resilience and well-being among students, thereby contributing to a harmonious society. In conclusion, the paper advocates incorporating Buddhist chaplaincy into Sri Lankan universities to address various student concerns, promote interfaith dialogue and enhance well-being. Adapting the chaplaincy role to the local context can catalyze positive change and contribute to holistic student development.

Keywords: Buddhist chaplains, Religious harmony, Sri Lanka, University, Well-being