

RURAL RELIGION IN TRANSFORMATION: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF A BUDDHIST VILLAGE

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Religion has played a significant role in individual and community life since the very beginning of human civilisation. Religion is deeply embedded in rural society and is an integral part of day-to-day life in that context. The objective of this study was to identify the changes in Buddhism and also to identify the reasons behind the change in the context of the Pandeniya village. A qualitative study was conducted in the Pandeniya village where Buddhism is the prime religion. Ten respondents were selected through purposive sampling. The data collection was done using 10 in-depth interviews and the data were analysed thematically. According to the findings of the study, changes have occurred in several aspects of life: the temple as an institution, the role of the Buddhist monks, power and control, infrastructure facilities, religious education, religious beliefs, norms, festivals and celebrations, rituals, worshipping of gods and goddesses, daily religious practices, recreation and leisure, use of mass media, etc. The temple as a religious centre has undergone change. The temple as a physical building, as well as the way it is organised in the rural setting, has changed. The role of the Buddhist monk in the context of the village has also changed. Shifts in their lifestyle have decreased the time that they can allocate for religion. The norms governing the preparation of alms have changed over time. Similarly, the norms related to offerings and the norm of not questioning what the monk says have changed. Due to media influence, people go in search of “popular temples” and “popular monks”. Therefore, the bond they had with the village temple is declining. Furthermore, different developments like the increase in the use of technology and communication and the changes in lifestyle and urbanisation could be identified as the main factors which have led to changes in Buddhist practices. Based on this study, it can be concluded that the changes in Buddhist practices in the Pandeniya village have occurred in numerous ways. The change in the lifestyle and the attitudes of the individuals were identified as the developments, which have resulted in changes in Buddhist practices in this village.

Keywords: Buddhism, Transformation, Lifestyle