

Educating for Critical Disability Studies within a Sri Lankan Context: An Exploration into a Problematic

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There is a paucity of research (both conceptual and applied) that explores Buddhist engagements with the neologism 'disability', aside from rather simplistic and moribund reiterations of the doctrine of karma and merit. More significantly, the complex and rich tapestry of interpretations of dukkha and the ways that the Buddha's teachings can prompt a revisioning of disablement remain under explored. In the Sri Lankan context, approaches to meeting the needs of disabled people through service delivery and more recently in policy development and law reform, have been shaped and influenced by the nation's Judaeo-Christian colonial heritage (including models of welfare and charity) and global, liberal (western) conceptual frameworks instigated through the United Nations. Although there have been debates within Sri Lankan studies about the conceptual efficacy of the notion of Protestant Buddhism and the extent to which this notion drives critical responses to welfare provision in society, this debate has not been extended to the realm of critical disability studies (CDS).

This paper explores the legacies of colonial understandings of welfare, in particular the seemingly uncritical adoption of crypto-medical and functionalist formulations of disability. Dr. Campbell considers this inheritance in the light of increased pressure on the Sri Lankan government by both the United Nations and international financial sources, to conform to the universal project of disability standards, definitions of disablement and externally imposed models of service delivery, legal and policy frameworks. The author concludes that the emphasis on bio-medical functionalist models of disablement obscures the possibility of exploring alternative conceptualisations of disablement, which maybe more suited to the Sri Lankan context. The final aspect of the paper contains a discussion of the challenges of education for CDS in an environment where a critical mass of home growth scholar is largely absent.

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