THE IMPACT OF 'BURMESE' BUDDHISM ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BURMA: SUPPORTING OR HINDERING?

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analysed the impact of Burmese Buddhism on political and social thinking in Burma. It studied how the popular form of Burmese Buddhism impacts on peoples' understanding of human rights. In particular, it critically makes reference to the impact of the Burmese form of Buddhism on gender equality and individual freedoms regarding sexual orientation.

In the process of Burmanising Buddhism, the concept of Karma has been downgraded and re-interpreted into an apology, explanation or rationalisation for the poor economic and political situation in the country. The explanation and rationalisation of Karma is that no one can change the cause of Karma, and that one just has to take life as it comes. As long as Burmese Buddhists adhere to a Burmanised form of Karma, the equality of human beings will not be understood and valued, and realisation of human rights in Burma will still be elusive.

The thesis argues that the general public's understanding of human rights has been reduced because of the interpretation of Buddhism. The right to life, right to security of a person and right to freedom and equality have been extensively undermined by Burmanised Buddhism. The pacification of the Burmese people hinders human rights ideas and principles as instilled in the minds of the people.

KEY WORDS: BURMESE BUDDHISM/ *BURMANISED* CONCEPT OF KARMA/ IMPACT OF BURMESE BUDDHISM/ HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN BURMA

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