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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF FUNCTIONS AND SUBSTANCE OF BUDDHIST  
TEMPLES: DEVELOPMENT AND PRESERVATION IN CAMBODIAN SOCIETY**

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**Abstract**

Buddhism has been a primary part of Cambodian society since ancient times. With approximately 95% of the population adhering to Buddhism the religion has been promoted as the state religion of Cambodia. The number of pagodas, which are intrinsically essential to the Buddhist religion, has increased to about 4,932, including 563 ancient temples across the country. Therefore, this article investigates and identifies the functions and substances of Buddhist temples in Cambodia, focusing on their development and preservation. A qualitative approach was used to collect and interpret the data, and the secondary data were collected from various sources. The first finding indicated that Buddhist pagodas are highly significant for Cambodia's societal development, particularly in education, social work, and economic advancement. Secondly, Buddhist monasteries play a vital role in conserving Khmer literature, culture, traditions, and ancient records. Finally, given the multiple functions and immense significance of Buddhist temples in societal development and in the preservation of cultural and traditional heritage in Cambodia, it is recommended that the government enhance educational programs within pagodas, strengthen the collaboration with NGOs to expand social welfare initiatives, and promote cultural preservation and heritage projects within the pagoda.

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**Introduction:-**

Buddhism has developed in Cambodian society since the Funan era in the 5th century A.D. and has gradually become established and influential since the Angkor era during the Khmer Empire, when most Khmer people respected and practised its teachings as part of their lives and beliefs (Buddhism, n.d.). During the reign of Jayavarman VII (1181-1219), he promoted Theravada Buddhism as the state religion. Therefore, Cambodian people have had a profound connection with Buddhism through culture, spiritual beliefs, traditions, social values, and social affairs (Varman, 2024). Even though Cambodia has undergone traumatic and unstable historical events, including invasions from neighbouring countries, colonisation, and chronic civil wars, the belief and spirit of Buddhism do not fade away from the Cambodian people. Especially during the Khmer Rouge regime, it was the worst and most miserable time for Buddhism and Cambodia as a whole under the leadership of Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979. The Pol Pot regime was forced to disrobe the monks, destroy monasteries, and deconstruct Khmer Buddhist institutions

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(Buddhism, n.d.). However, Buddhism was restored in the early 1980s after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge. The number of monks has been increasing, and many Buddhist pagodas have been reconstructed and newly built. Moreover, Buddhism was re-established as the official state religion in accordance with the Cambodian constitution in 1993 (The Constitutional Assembly, 1993). In Buddhism, a pagoda is an indispensable place for monks and Buddhist followers to serve religious purposes. Furthermore, over 95 per cent of the population practices Theravada Buddhism and a large number of Buddhist temples across the country (Rethea, 2024). It is observed that the number of pagodas has steadily increased as Cambodian people, particularly Buddhist followers, have collectively sponsored the construction of monasteries in their villages and regions. When local people and villagers want to build a new pagoda for worship, the government and local authorities grant land for its construction in Cambodia. Furthermore, the Cambodian government has allocated the national budget to repair and renovate hundreds of Buddhist temples through the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (Nhean, 2024). It is evident that the Cambodian people and governments have considered monasteries a significant part of their society and the country as a whole. Also, from the perspective of the Khmer people, Buddhist temples have been strongly connected with them and their society. Historically, these monasteries have served beyond being sacred places; they have played a central role in the broader development and conservation of the nation. Therefore, this article delves into the historical, educational, social, and cultural contributions of Buddhist temples, highlighting their continued roles and vitality in contemporary Cambodian society.

### **Research Questions:-**

To guide the study: Two research questions are established as follows:

1. What are the roles of Buddhist monasteries in societal development in Cambodian society?
2. What are the contributions of Buddhist monasteries in cultural and traditional conservation?

### **Literature Review:-**

This research is a significant and beneficial input for general scholars, experts, and academics who wish to broaden their knowledge and profoundly understand the role of the region and the great contribution of religious institutions in society. Historically, Buddhism has significantly influenced broader aspects of Khmer society, from governance to personal ethics, shaping the perspectives and core values of Khmer people (Buddhism, n.d.). Buddhist pagodas, a substantial part of this religion, have performed a vital role beyond religious practice; these temples have been incorporated into the preservation and transmission of knowledge. In the past, pagodas were merely educational institutions for Khmer people to access education, meaning that Buddhist pagodas played a role not merely as holy place but as pivotal contributors to human capital development (World Faiths Development Dialogue, 2012). Besides, Buddhist monasteries have a significant function in protecting the Khmer's vigorous culture and traditions. It is a repository of Khmer art, literature, and rituals that describe Khmer culture. Throughout history, Pagoda has preserved traditional practice, religious philosophy, and artistry that might have been completely destroyed during the turbulent period. These historically literary and cultural treasures have been inscribed and stored within temples (Nguyen et al, 2021).

Noticeably, during the Khmer Rouge regime, even if Buddhism was forced to perish, it was still restored and fruitfully regrown after peace and national stability. With cooperation and sponsorship from the government and Cambodian people, there has been a sharp rise in the number of pagodas in Cambodia (Buddhism, n.d.). According to a survey by the Ministry of Religions and Cults in 2018, there are about 4,932 pagodas in Cambodia, including 563 ancient temples, and approximately 95 per cent of the Cambodian population is adherents to Buddhism (Rethea, 2024). These phenomena draw scholars and academics to conduct research on Buddhism in Cambodia, focusing on the distinguishing areas related to Buddhism and Cambodian society. While the majority of researchers and scholars have studied the history and revolution of Buddhism over a period of Cambodian history, fewer studies have critically examined research on the contemporary roles of Buddhist temples in Cambodian society. Some scholars have investigated the intersection of animism and Buddhist temples, noting that Buddhist temples are considered a sacred place to pray for harmony, good luck, and traditional practices, such as Khmer medicine (Chouleang & Saint, 1988). However, it merely touches upon the surface of the extensive contribution of Buddhist pagodas to the advancement and preservation of Cambodia. To comprehensively understand the importance and characters of monasteries in Cambodian society, this article expands upon the literature by exploring Buddhist monasteries' role in national development, including their contribution to education, their involvement in social work and in economic development through tourism, and their roles in conservation and cultural identity.

**Methodology:-**

This study used a qualitative data collection approach, which was necessary for answering the research questions. The qualitative approach was employed to collect and present the data. The secondary data were mainly sourced from reports, publications, books, official government websites, and newspapers.

**Buddhist Pagoda's role in Education:-**

Since primaeval times, Buddhism has played a vital part in education in Cambodian society. Particularly during the periodical regime of King Jayavarman VII, the education system was established within the pagodas, and mathematics, astrology, public health, art, and traditional culture were taught by the king or priests in the temples (Roerum, 2023). Indeed, after the appearance of the French educational system, the role of Buddhist temples in supporting education in Cambodia has remained pivotal. After the first ultramodern academy, called the French Language School of the Protectorate, was erected in 1873, further seminaries have been developed in Cambodia. Based on the record issued by the Ministry of Education and Sport, there are 12,889 public schools, including primary, secondary, and high schools, that have been constructed in the Kingdom (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports [MOEYS], 2017). Even though the number of schools is significantly high, Buddhist monasteries remain important. It is evident that Buddhism has been depicted in various forms in Cambodia. By closely linking Buddhism to Khmer culture and society, monks have played an important role in Cambodian education. During festivals or ceremonies, people invite monks to preach the Dharma to impart knowledge of social morality, moral values, culture, and religious beliefs.

Although this form of education is informal, it is convenient for older generation people to absorb the knowledge. The majority of Cambodian older people could not access any form of education during the Khmer Rouge regime, which had killed scholars, knowledgeable people, and high-class people and forced people to work in the fields to do farming (Chigas&Mosyakov, n.d.). Providing they pay full attention to the monk's valuable lesson, they will free themselves from arrogance, greed, and worldly desire, finally becoming enlightened. Moreover, during religious festivals and ceremonies in the monasteries, people go to the pagoda to listen to monks preach the dharma and understand the consequences of good and bad deeds; some monks have also preached on history, culture, and social values. It has regarded Buddhist pagodas as schools that provide both informal and formal education to students and young monks. In the past, Cambodian leaders and scholars received their education and training in the pagoda. Pagodas would offer training in literature, mathematics, and several areas of general knowledge essential to everyday life. Many famous authors and artists of past generations in Cambodia were first trained and mentored under the roof of pagodas. The former prime minister of Cambodia, Hun Sen, for example, also stayed and studied with monks at the pagoda (Varman, 2024).

Moreover, Buddhist pagodas also function as refuges for underprivileged students and youths from rural areas who seek education or training in urban centres but cannot afford housing. Pagoda has provided a comfortable place of shelter for undergraduate students pursuing their education in the city. For poor students from the countryside, it is very difficult for them to find houses, and rental rooms are unaffordable for them. So, the pagoda is the only place that provides them shelter to continue their higher education. According to Chea Ly, the secretary general of the Khmeng Wat Association, approximately 4,000 students are currently residing at the pagoda while pursuing higher education (Titthara, 2024). These days, even though there are many schools, pagodas continue to play a pivotal role in teaching Khmer, English, Pali, and psychological education to the new generations of Cambodians. Younger monks and poor youngsters from vulnerable families in remote areas have difficulty accessing education, so they can seek their education within the pagoda.

Many boys from low-class families have been sent to the pagoda to get education and training until they grow up. Many pagodas serve as schools, offering part-time classes in various subjects, especially English. In Siem Reap, for instance, many pagodas offer educational programs for students. Wat Damnak pagoda, located on Wat Bo Road, has played a vital role in education for more than 100 years. Some pagodas have been granted sponsorship and assistance by NGOs and hired some teachers to run English classes for those students who can't afford private school (Roerum, 2023). Located in Battambang town and supported by the NGO Buddhism for Education of Cambodia (BEC), VibolTharam pagoda, Wat Kamphaeng Primary School, Kampong Seima Primary School, and Wat Kor Secondary School have provided the students and children in the community with the knowledge of language, Buddhist knowledge, and day-to-day life skills (Rethea, 2022).

Overall, Buddhist pagodas are undeniably crucial in supporting Cambodian education in distinguishing images, even though there is a rise and decline of Buddhism in Cambodian society. During the Angkor era, pagodas were primarily used as a school. Until the middle ages, basically the French colonisation and the People's Socialist Community era, Buddhist education provided by pagodas grew and developed. Even though the Khmer Rouge Pol Pot regime was forced to disrobe the monks, destroy monasteries, and deconstruct Cambodia's Buddhist institutions, Buddhism was restored in the early 1980s after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge (Buddhism, n.d.). The number of monks has been increasing, and a lot of Buddhist pagodas have been reconstructed and newly built, and the role of Buddhist pagodas in supporting education in Cambodia remains pivotal until day.

#### **Buddhist Pagoda in Social Work:-**

Buddhist teachings promote peace, nonviolence, and harmony among humankind worldwide. Following the doctrine of Buddha brings peaceful, stable order to society and creates loving-kindness, a sense of solidity, and community unity (Kimpicheth, 2017). The involvement of Buddhism in Society has been seen in different ways and activities, including caring and service, social and environmental protest, climate change, social justice, and conflict resolution. Cooperating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other development organizations, Buddhism, specifically pagodas, actively engages in community development across the nation. Pagoda has contributed to social work and other social activities to enhance national development and reduce famine in Cambodian society. Buddhist pagodas and communities are closely connected, as villagers, monks, local authorities, and village chiefs consider the pagoda a place to gather and discuss challenges and development in their communities. If there is any need for infrastructure and a shortage of funds to construct public utilities in the community, the village chief and the Buddhist priest will announce it publicly throughout the village.

The villagers and generous people donate money to the pagoda, which is then used to build roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, water wells, water reservoirs, and plantations that provide food and medicine (Rethea, 2022). Since social capital has grown around the pagoda, it has led to the creation of associations and committees. Then, the appearance of the Pagoda Association aims to concentrate on community development and poverty reduction. The Pagoda Coordination Committee (Pacoco) was formed to organise associations and serve as a facilitator between associations and donors. The main task of Pacoco is to provide opportunities for vulnerable people to become increasingly capable of assisting themselves in fighting poverty, and to promote member associations that improve and rehabilitate appropriate infrastructure for the benefit of both civil society and religion in their own areas (Pellini, 2004). These associations, the pagodas, and relevant institutions cooperated closely to assist and develop their communities and social activities. Meanwhile, inside the pagoda, priests, monks, and nuns are the most essential elements for operating it effectively. The priests manage budgets and resources in the pagoda; they are authorized to delegate and facilitate finance, community development projects, and other activities (Yumiko, 2018). Another actor is a monk. Monks are the most prominent figures in Cambodian Buddhist pagodas, but other important social actors spend significant time there and control their affairs. In fact, Monks have long been engaged in helping the community, but there is no clear, systematic way to do so. Monks have cooperatively worked with villagers to build schools and hospitals, and roads in the community, but nobody realized that this was social engagement (World Faiths Development Dialogue, 2012).

Furthermore, Pagoda has been actively involved in promoting environmental protection and reducing climate change, with the support and facilitation of non-governmental organisations, including the Association of Buddhist for the Environment (ABE), governments, and relevant institutions. The majority of pagodas encourage people to plant trees and grow vegetables to create a green, friendly environment. Also, some pagodas have become good examples, attracting people across the country as green spaces with diverse plants and vegetables. Moreover, the Ministries of Environment and of Religions and Cults have organized competitions and forums to promote and develop pagodas into cleaner, greener, and more appealing places. For example, SereiSakorDaunSdoeung pagoda was named one of the best Buddhist centres out of 500 pagodas in Prey Veng province. The monks have planted over 3,000 trees and grown vegetables and rice surrounding the pagoda. They practice an environmentally-friendly routine and are strictly forbidden from using plastic bags (Rethea, 2024).

In other ways, a pagoda can alleviate social obstacles and burdens by ordaining people as monks. Because of economic circumstances, some people have chosen to become monks. The monkhood is one crucial means through which youngsters have traditionally overcome social challenges, particularly poverty and famine. Most young monks are from poor families, and some have lost their parents. Many young men use the monkhood as a springboard to other opportunities once they disrobe. Some monks have pursued education throughout their

monkhood and shaped their futures brightly (World Faiths Development Dialogue, 2012). Furthermore, pagodas have offered a social safety net, particularly for orphans, elderly widows, and the homeless. According to the Ministry of Cults and Religions spokesman Seng Somuny, approximately 23590 orphans, homeless people, poor people, elders, and students have resided under the roots of pagodas across the country (Sunly, 2022). That means pagodas are multifaceted places; they can be schools, homes, food providers, and care centres for poor people and students living far from conventional schools.

Moreover, pagodas serve as psychological and emotional support centres without any formation of racial discrimination in terms of skin colour, nationality, or social class. As Cambodia has undergone massive clashes and a catastrophic event known as the Khmer Rouge (1975-1979), people continue to suffer from painful mental symptoms. The majority of the population has been challenged with high prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety symptoms in the population (Agger, 2015). Buddhist practice and understanding are extremely helpful for healing trauma. The Cambodian people always enter the temple to learn deeply about the Dharma taught by the monks and to practice meditation, following the Buddhist doctrine, in order to release all suffering and anxiety. During the fieldwork, there was samadhi, in which people still the mind through mental concentration and vipassana (insight) meditation, which involves the acquisition of self-knowledge and insight into the true nature of reality.

In short, a pagoda can be described as a pivotal factor in developing and strengthening communities by fostering participation in social work and activities, and by serving and caring for citizens without religious discrimination or racism. It provides basic needs and comfort shelter for the homeless, orphans, vulnerable people, and even students, thereby reducing the social burden of poverty and famine. Additionally, by maximising violence, anxiety, depression, and suffering, Buddhism is regarded as a mental centre to educate mental issues and bring peace and harmony in society.

#### **The Contribution of Buddhist Temple to Economic Development:-**

Beyond social work and educational mandates, Buddhist pagodas have significant contributions to the nation's economy, although they are implicit. This impact is not merely seen through the lens of tourism but also through the generation of job opportunities for local businesses and citizens in the community (Prabnok, 2019). Storing the Khmer architectural, historical, and religious heritage, these temples are intriguing to both domestic pilgrims and international cultural tourists. Tourists have targeted Cambodia as a tourist destination to explore historical and cultural landmarks, and Buddhist pagodas are included among the most attractive sites. The magnificence and serenity of the temples inspire travellers to be more curious about the Khmer's rich cultural heritage and religious practice (Neth, n.d.). This influx of tourists provides advantages for the local community, as tourists spend money on accommodation, food, and souvenirs. Regions such as Siem Reap, home to Angkor Wat, the most famous temple, and other Buddhist temples, such as Wat Bo temple and Wat Preah Prom, attract millions of visitors each year, contributing to creating job opportunities and supporting a range of workers from hotel staff to tour guides, local artisans, drivers, and food vendors (Gupta, 2024). Consequently, the temples serve as a catalyst for fostering economic development.

#### **Buddhist Pagoda in Khmer Literature and Cultural Museum and Traditional Preservation:-**

The profound connectivity of Buddhism to Khmer literature, tradition, and culture is practically inseparable, and there is a sense of solidity in Cambodian society. Buddhist pagodas have taken a significant part in conserving and practising Khmer literature, customs, traditions, and culture. Pagodas are depositories for the country's culture and knowledge accumulated over centuries, serving as both museums and libraries to store material, books, historical records, and ancient doctrine, which have been kept without involvement by politics (Varman, 2024). Having undergone internal and external conflict, invading war, civil war, and recurring social upheaval over centuries, if there were no pagodas, then Khmer literature would have disappeared. In this sense, pagodas are rationally considered as places for safeguarding a literary culture that could be preserved from destruction and then reintroduced into regular Cambodian life (Kuntheart, 2022). In addition, Buddhist monasteries also conserve valuable artefacts, fundamentally, books created with the material of the Buong (also known as the SlacTreng). Those books are made with leaf material, which has lasted for a long time. Also, they were inscribed or written by Khmer artists or written in Sanskrit (Pali) or ancient Khmer; they include articles in Buddhist scriptures, idioms, history, proverbs, teaching law, customs, and horoscopes. The cultural and traditional values hidden in these volumes have been cautiously preserved within the pagoda. Despite having been over a few hundred years, it still preserves and becomes valuable ancient records of the Khmer people (Nguyen et al., 2021). These treasured

heritages have been kept and conserved in monasteries located in Khmer Krom, which belongs to Vietnam. Also, they can be found in some ancient temples in Cambodia. Therefore, the pagoda is a very valuable place for collecting and conserving knowledge, ancient books, inscriptions, and historical records for the Cambodian new generation and scholars to research, study, and know deeply about the Khmer.

A pagoda is not only the place to keep the ancient books and doctrine, but it is also the place to conserve cultural museums. Located in Siem Reap, Wat Bo pagoda is considered one of the Buddhist museums and culture centres. Venerable Pin Sen, a chief pagoda of Wat Bo, is passionate about collecting ancient objects and preserving Khmer traditional dancing and cultures. He started gathering artefacts when he was twenty years old. Unfortunately, it was destroyed due to the Khmer Rouge. He started again in 1980, and since then has built up a huge number for a museum. His purpose in constructing this museum is for the public to research, study, and understand these objects. In this Buddhist museum, there is a display of ancient artefacts and paintings, including objects made of stone and copper, deities, and Buddha and God statues. Moreover, due to civil wars and aggressive wars over centuries, many arts, including Sbek Thom shadow theatre, have almost become extinct. Venerable Sem wants to conserve this traditional art, Sbek Thom shadow, by attempting to research and re-establish it (Rohany&Sopich, 2022). Similarly, Pogada is regarded as the symbol of Khmer culture. The Silver Pagoda, covering a land of 27,000 m<sup>2</sup>, for example, consists of several structures, including the Royal Palace and the National Museum. Located in the landscaped garden surrounding the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, there are other structures, including a library, stupas, shrines, monuments, and galleries of the Reamker. There is also an equestrian statue of King Norodom that was created by the French artist Eude in 1875 and erected in the garden in 1892. This temple illustrated the sacred place where the king worshipped, prayed, and practised Buddhist rituals and elegance in the Khmer culture, and it is the place where many priceless Buddhist and other historical objects, such as gold, silver, gemstones, and ivory ritual and ceremonial objects, have been stored and preserved in significant quantities.

The Wat PreahKeoMorokat, the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, is deemed the perfect place to observe and admire the spectacular craftsmanship of Khmer art (Tourism of Cambodia, n.d.). The marvellous architecture and traditional design of the pagoda have interpreted Khmer culture and ancient arts. The intricate curving on the wall of the pagoda showcases the cultural heritage and spiritual history; that means all elements of the pagoda underscore the symbolism and purpose. Buddhist monasteries in Cambodia are a vital place for traditional preservation and practice. While pagodas in Cambodia are primarily religious sites, they are also viewed as practical, traditional, and cultural sites. Cambodian people gather inside temples when there are festivals and ceremonies held at pagodas, such as the Khmer New Year and Pchum Ben. It offers a glimpse into the rich cultural traditions of Cambodia. For instance, the Khmer New Year (CholChnamThmey festival), the most important and cherished holiday in Cambodia, is annually celebrated for three days in mid-April after the end of the harvest season and the beginning of a new year full of hope and renewal (Narayan, 2023). During this ancient ceremony, there are traditional events and activities inside the monasteries.

Cambodian people go to pagodas in order to collectively perform different traditional activities. They liberate birds and fish as acts of merit, a Buddhist belief, while monks chant blessings. People also flock to temples to pray for prosperity, fortune, and good health. Also, they sprinkle water on Buddhist statues and shrines to honour their faith. However, there are performances of traditional Apsara dance and traditional games, namely tug-of-war, hacky sack, and shuttlecock (Asiatica, 2024). In addition, a variety of religious festivals and celebrations presenting Khmer spirits and traditions, such as the Water Festival, Harvest Festival, and Flower Festival, take place inside the monasteries. In this sense, it is undeniably acceptable that pagodas contribute significantly to conserving and practising Khmer traditions, customs, and cultures by gathering and encouraging Cambodian people to play and perform Khmer traditional games, dances, and arts.

Above all, it is generally acknowledged that the Buddhist temple is an important site to house priceless Khmer literature, language, ancient books, proverbs, antiques, and fantastic artefacts. The pagoda is the identity of Khmer traditional architecture and the symbol of the Cambodian spirit and lifestyle. Also, it has played a remarkable role in maintaining Khmer traditional preservation, and it is a protective and practical place to play and perform Khmer traditional dance, arts, and folk games.

### **Results:-**

The study shows that Buddhist temples have played multifaceted roles in Cambodia, particularly in education, social work, economic development, and the preservation of cultural and traditional heritage. First finding, the Buddhist

pagoda is significant not merely for providing formal and informal education to the young generation but also for the older citizens who were denied education during the Khmer Rouge. Second finding: a Buddhist monastery also serves as a humanitarian centre for social welfare, providing assistance to vulnerable groups, including orphans, the homeless, and the elderly. The third finding, the role of Buddhist temples in economic development, is associated with tourism, as their attraction to tourists helps stimulate the local community by creating job opportunities. The last finding is that the Buddhist pagoda largely contributes to the conservation and promotion of Khmer culture and tradition.

### **Discussion:-**

The findings of this study have extended beyond existing literature on the functions and substance of the Buddhist pagoda. The existing literature has acknowledged the significant role of Buddhist pagodas in providing spiritual guidance and practical service to the community. This study provides additional detail, illustrating the modern impact of pagodas on education and society. Also, while tourism grows Cambodia's economy, the study shows the link between Buddhist monasteries and local jobs, which helps community development.

### **Conclusion:-**

To sum up, Pagoda, a holy place for Buddhist followers and monks to practise and to sacrifice to the religion, has been closely associated with the Cambodian people and has played a significant role in fostering communities and society across numerous sectors. Pagodas play a crucial role in Cambodian daily life, serving as places of worship, community centres, and repositories of culture and history. Each pagoda in Cambodia tells a unique story, reflecting the nation's soul and resilience. In the education sector, Buddhist monasteries have made significant contributions to both formal and informal education. Pagodas are considered schools and educational centres that educate laypeople through insightful Buddhist teachings and provide education for students and monks. Besides, Pagoda is described as a museum centre and a repository to conserve Khmer literature, culture, customs, and traditions. To avoid the loss of valuable ancient norms, principles, customs, and lessons, as well as priceless antiques, artefacts, and artworks, Cambodian ancestors have stored these precious items inside the pagoda. The intricate architecture and the complex, stunning curves on temple walls illustrate Khmer identity and culture. It presents Cambodian lifestyles, values, and traditions. In terms of social work, monasteries are places where a sense of spiritual unification and cooperation is created to bring people together. It plays an important part in social work and activities, including caring and service, social and environmental protest, climate change, social justice, and conflict resolution.

### **Limitations of the study and Implications:-**

Even though this study is a valuable contribution, it still has limitations and room for improvement. It is observed that the informal education provided in pagodas remains inadequate compared to the formal education system. Government support is needed to incorporate Buddhist education into the broader national educational framework. Furthermore, the Buddhist pagoda's role in social work is significant, but it is constrained by limited resources and official assistance. There is an appeal for more structured social welfare programs within the pagoda that could more effectively alleviate poverty and famine. As the roles and significance of Buddhist temples are numerous and priceless in developing Cambodian society, it implies that the Cambodian government should transform this significant traditional institution into a modern hybrid institution rather than a purely religious place, treating it as a significant part of the nation's social infrastructure. Hence, the government needs to expand financial support and resources for Buddhist pagodas to enhance educational and social initiatives. Institutionalising the educational role of pagodas in the national curriculum would expand their influence and scope in education. Furthermore, the collaboration between the government and NGOs should focus on strengthening social welfare programs within pagodas, especially in rural areas, to tackle the poverty and inequality that Cambodia faces. Moreover, the government should expand the role of Buddhist pagodas in safeguarding traditions and culture by providing training in traditional arts, dance, and martial arts. To do so, a pagoda does not present only national identity but also serves as a primary place to protect and develop traditions and cultures.

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