

**Between Idealism and Pragmatism  
A Study of Monastic Education in Burma and Thailand  
from the Seventeenth Century to the Present**

**Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (D. Phil)  
In the Faculty of Oriental Studies  
University of Oxford**

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**Trinity term 2004**

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**Abstract**

There has been in recent decades an increased academic interest in the *Sangha*, the community of monks, in Burma and Thailand. However, monastic education is still often misunderstood there, particularly in the context of the relationship between the *Sangha* and the monarchy. The introduction by the king of monastic formal examinations has simply been assumed to be evidence of royal devotion towards the Order, which was perceived to be in decline and was therefore in need of royal intervention. This thesis attempts to reveal the complex relationship between the *Sangha* and the kings on the question of monastic education, arguing that the need for a monarch to control his people during war led him to interfere in monastic education. It also examines the *Sangha's* inability to define the objectives of its education systems. A large part of the thesis is devoted to reconstructing the historical process by looking at the impact of geopolitical developments on teaching methods.

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One introduces monastic education, its current problems and the conflict between idealists and pragmatists within the *Sangha*. Chapter Two explores monastic education under two strong Burmese monarchs, Thalun (1629-1648) and Bodawpaya (1782-1819), who introduced formal examinations and used them for political purposes. Chapter Three examines the impact of the colonial threat on the *Sangha* and on the improved relationship between the *Sangha* and King Mindon (1853-1878) with regard to monastic education. Chapter Four looks at the impact of the instability under King Narai (1656-1688) at Ayutthaya on monastic education. Chapter Five investigates the process of standardisation of monastic education under Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). Chapter Six focuses on the current state of monastic education in both countries and analyses the *Sangha's* lack of proactive vision and its failure to reach a consensus on the aims of education.

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## Abbreviations

All Pāli texts cited are the Pāli Text Society editions, unless otherwise stated.

A	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
D	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
M	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
ROB	Royal Orders of Burma
S	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya-piṭaka</i>

## Chapter One

### Introduction

*Iti kho bhikkhave na-y-idaṃ brahmacariyaṃ  
lābhasakkārasilokānisaṃsaṃ, ..... Yā ca kho ayaṃ bhikkhave akuppā  
cetovimutti, etadatthamidaṃ bhikkhave brahmacariyaṃ etaṃ sāraṃ etaṃ  
pariyosānaṃ'ti.*

“Monks, the benefit of the religious life is not to gain material profit, nor to win veneration, ..... Monks, the purpose of the religious life is the unshakeable liberation of mind. This is the essence. This is the goal.”

*Mahāsāropama-sutta, M i 197.*

#### 1.1 Aims of the thesis

Scholars of traditional Buddhism in Southeast Asia<sup>1</sup> have rightly observed that the *Sangha*, the community of monks and nuns, as a national institution has long been under the control of the state. However, while considering the changes that have taken place over the centuries, those scholars have assumed that the current monastic education system, which is orientated to formal examinations, has been the universally accepted norm throughout, the examinations being intended to raise and maintain the standards of monastic learning. In fact, this is true even of Zack (1977), who has studied at length monastic education under Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan[warorot] (1860-1921) of Thailand (known as Siam until the 1930s). It is not therefore surprising that previous studies have also interpreted royal patronage of monastic education almost always as a sign of the monarchy's great devotion for the *sāsana*, the Buddha's teaching, on the one hand, and, on the other, as a sign of decline in monastic learning, or, as Ishii puts it, as

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Ray (1946), Brohm (1957), Smith (1965), Mendelson (1975) and Ferguson (1975) on Burma and Wyatt (1969), Ishii (1969), Reynolds (1972), Bunnag (1973) and Tambiah (1976) on Thailand.



evidence of the “serious concern over the scholastic level of the *Sangha*.”<sup>2</sup> These interpretations are, in fact, in line with the royal chronicles of the two countries.

However, it is the aim of the present thesis to question that assumption. To that end, we shall reconstruct the historical development of monastic education, and thus seek to reinterpret the native chronicles themselves in regard to royal patronage and monastic scholarship. This study is undertaken in the belief that an understanding of the problems currently facing monastic education would be of significance for the study of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia in general and the *Sangha* in particular, because, as we all know, the *Sangha* in both Burma and Thailand, as in India<sup>3</sup> and Ceylon<sup>4</sup>, has always been central to Buddhist learning and practice.

The focus of this study is how monastic education has been affected by the relationship between the *Sangha* and the rulers of each country since the seventeenth century. Over the centuries, there has been a change from an informal method of textual study, in which individual monasteries enjoyed academic freedom, to a formal, examination-orientated study system, over which boards of formal examinations, consisting of government officials or laymen, exerted control.

In that context, we shall deal with the various formal examination boards and their syllabuses as far as the historical reconstruction requires. As regards Burma, we trace back the development of the earliest form of centralised academic assessment, the *Pathamapyan* examinations. Since they came into existence in the seventeenth century, the *Pathamapyan* have always been conducted by the government and consequently been known as government examinations. Also considered are various formal examination

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<sup>2</sup> Ishii, “Ecclesiastical Examinations in Thailand” *Visakhapuja*, 2515 (1872), p.52.

<sup>3</sup> Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education*, p.394.

<sup>4</sup> Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p.287.

boards and their curricula, such as the *Sakyasīha* and the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*, introduced by non-governmental Buddhist organisations during the colonial rule towards the close of the nineteenth century; the *Dhammācariya* examinations, introduced by the colonial government in 1946, on the model of the degree course of the *Sakyasīha* and the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*, and the *Tipiṭakadhara* examinations, which were set up by the government of independent Burma in 1949, and, as the name suggests, test the candidates on the entire *Tipitaka*. Except for the *Tipiṭakadhara*, all degree courses are known as *Dhammācariya*, and in order to distinguish them we follow the popular names of *Sakyasīha Dhammācariya*, *Cetiyaṅgaṇa Dhammācariya* and government *Dhammācariya*. All the curricula of these examination boards, ranging from two to seven years, are purely religious. They are focussed on here, rather than any of the many other examination boards which conduct examinations each year, because the study of these earliest boards will suffice to reconstruct the history of the development of monastic education in Burma.

As for Thailand, we shall discuss the first ever centralised formal scholastic test, the *Parian* examinations, introduced at Ayutthaya in the seventeenth century. Also discussed are the *Nak Tham* examinations, conceived at the beginning of the twentieth century during the national integration process initiated by King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) and formally introduced during the reign of his son and successor, King Vajiravudh (1910-1925); and the *Sai Saman Suksa*, a religious-secular curriculum introduced in the 1960s when Thailand began its journey towards industrial development. At present, while the nine-level *Parian* give prominence to translation skills from Pali to Thai, and are thus known as *bae-bali* or, Pali translation, the three-level *Nak Tham* examine the knowledge of the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, “teaching and discipline” of the novices and monks in vernacular Thai and are considered the foundation for the *Parian*. The ten-level *Sai*

*Saman Suksa* was created primarily to meet the expressed needs of student-monks who would one day return to lay life. Unlike in Burma, there are no boards of examinations outside the control of the government, because Thailand has never lost its sovereignty.

## **1.2 Monastic Education and its Problems**

We have noted that in ecclesiastical scholarship there was, over time, a major change from the informal textual study method to the various formal examination boards. The earlier method can be called informal because there were no centralised syllabuses or forms of assessment. Instead, the syllabuses and method of assessment were in the hands of the abbots, who were also the principals. The schools exercised total freedom in designing their syllabuses and in assessing their pupils. No worldly rewards were given. Students would study the same text more than once with the same teacher or with a different one, until they knew the whole text thoroughly and also were familiar with as many interpretations as possible. The emphasis was to encourage students, who usually were to be ordained after a couple of years, to study the Buddhist texts thoroughly, for their moral and spiritual development.

But before the formal examinations became popular in the late nineteenth century, were all students spiritually committed to monastic ideals? Of course, not. Some went to the monastery not because they wanted to liberate themselves from suffering, as it should be, but because that was the only place where education was available in those days. For such student-monks, who intended to return to lay life after their study, there was a course in which both secular and religious subjects were taught. Every student had also to study some Buddhist scriptures. This general course at the primary and secondary levels was available at most monasteries. But at the higher level such a general course

providing more advanced knowledge of secular and religious subjects, was confined to certain royal monasteries. Towards the end of the general course, students made a decision whether they would like to continue their study and devote more time to fulfilling the aim of the religious life. Those who did proceed would go on to study “the great texts”, i.e. the *Pāli-nikāya*.

Most teaching monasteries using this method had always been in the capital and in other big cities, for material support was readily available there, and also the king usually invited learned monks to reside in the capital. There student-monks could also depend on the alms-round for their food, as they do now in Burma and Thailand. But it would be a mistake to conclude that learned monks were found only in the capital. As we shall discuss in Chapter One, even by the early twentieth century, when the teaching monasteries survived only in towns, many village monasteries still had learned abbots. For example, important figures in the twentieth-century Burmese monastic Order, such as, Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923) and Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-1983), received the best part of their education and training in their village monasteries.<sup>5</sup>

In both Burma and Thailand, the strength of this informal monastic education system was that it was flexible and diverse, and the abbot could design a syllabus or syllabuses tailored to the needs of his pupils. The monasteries were thereby able to take into consideration also the desire and future of those students who had worldly motives. By offering secular and religious knowledge, the monasteries served the educational needs of society as well as those of the Order.

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<sup>5</sup> See pp.50-54.

However, at present, the informal method of study has totally disappeared in Thailand and remains strong in Burma in only one small town, Pakhokku. Monastic education has been standardised, using formal examinations as an instrument. In different parts of Burma, apart from the major four examination boards, there are many others with different reputations, some of which operate nationally and some locally. But apart from these four main boards, all are run and sponsored by non-governmental Buddhist associations. To enter for as many examinations as possible, both local and national, is seen by his monastery and his lay benefactors as very important for a monk or novice and indeed he is under great pressure to do so.

In Thailand, the pressure on monasteries and students to acquire as many examination qualifications as possible is similar to that in Burma. Only monks with many examination qualifications can expect to be awarded royal titles, which in turn guarantee their progress in the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Although the examinations are not in themselves detrimental to the academic or spiritual development of students, they have in Burma and Thailand become problematic because of the constant social and political pressure on student-monks and novices, with the consequence that the students themselves come to focus only on past examination papers and neglect the study of anything else.

Therefore the Pali canonical texts that were studied thoroughly under the informal textual learning method no longer receive attention, and parts of these texts are studied only if they are likely to appear in the examination papers. Since many texts are prescribed at most levels, teachers and students are forced to do their own selection of

which part they should study. But here they may totally miscalculate, since the questions are set by the scholars appointed by the examination board and not the teacher.

In a wider context, the problems with the monastic education systems have been expressed as the *Sangha*'s gradual loss of cultural leadership; the inability of the majority of monks to relate the teaching to social problems; the excessive testing of students; the deterioration in moral standards; the decline of Pali study<sup>6</sup>; and the lack of knowledge of canonical texts of most students. Not all these problems will be discussed here, for most of them are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, problems related to the historical development of monastic education, and to a certain extent to pedagogy, will be explored.

Many of these problems have been articulated by leading present-day monastic educationists in both Burma and Thailand. In Burma, the founder of one of the leading teaching monasteries, Ashin Janakābhivamsa (1890-1977), pointed out the problem of students being excessively assessed when he said in 1971: "Nowadays monks and novices do not benefit spiritually from their study as much as they used to [because] the entire monastic scholarship is fixated only on formal examinations. The student's exclusive focus on the syllabuses of formal examinations takes place not only at the beginning of their monastic study, but also from halfway until the end of it."<sup>7</sup>

Janakābhivamsa's complaint was echoed by the newly formed Burmese State *Sangha Mahānāyaka* Committee, the highest ecclesiastical body, in its 1982 education report,

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<sup>6</sup> *Pali-tetgatho sonzanyay kawmiti-e asiyinganza 1941* (Report of the Pali University Enquiry Committee, 1941), p.11; Janakābhivamsa, "Nan net khin ovada mya (Records of Morning Speeches)" *Dhamma byuha sarsaung*, pp.23-24; *Naing gnan daw thangka mahanayaka aphwe pariyatti simankein* (The State *Sangha Mahānāyaka* Committee's Pariyatti Education Scheme), p.6; Thepwethi (Payutto), *Thit thang karn suksa khong khana song* (Directions of the Education of the *Sangha*), p.9; Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer*, p.200.

<sup>7</sup> Janakābhivamsa, "Nan net khin ovada mya", pp.23-24.

which referred to current monastic scholarship as belonging to “the epoch of formal examinations”. Part of the report reads: “In the present period, the government leads in holding [monastic] annual *pariyatti* examinations. The *Sangha* and the people also make enormous efforts to hold [monastic non-government/private] examinations. Therefore, this period may even be recorded in history as the era of formal examinations, *sarmeibwe khetkāla*.”<sup>8</sup> (*My translation*)

The report went on to spell out some of the academic and moral problems facing the monastic learning system: “However, despite the great efforts put in by the majority of the present generation of monastic students, current formal examinations [examination systems] do not contribute to improvement in their moral standards. Some of the students are even committing unwholesome deeds by cheating in the examinations; they do not have good knowledge of the *Tipiṭaka*, the words of the Buddha; despite studying the *Tipiṭaka*<sup>9</sup>, they do not appear to have benefited directly from the teachings of the Buddha; when they have to preach, speak or write, they are not able to locate necessary information easily; they are not good at Pali; despite being Myanmar *bhikkhus*, they cannot even write standard Burmese. Such situations have now arisen. Today we have not achieved the modern [education] standard desired by the *Sangha* and the people.”

In fact, even four decades earlier, while Burma was still under British rule, some of these same problems were found. One of the findings of the 1941 Pali University Enquiry Committee, which interviewed teachers at more than two hundred and ten leading *sarthintaik*, “teaching monasteries”, was that the top teaching monasteries did not take

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<sup>8</sup> *Naing gnan daw thangka mahanayaka aphwe pariyatti simankein* (The State *Sangha Mahānāyaka* Committee’s *Pariyatti Education Scheme*), p.6.

<sup>9</sup> By this it means the monastic curriculum as a whole, not necessarily the canonical texts.

the study of the Pali language seriously and that the Abhidhamma scholars could not understand simple Pali prose without the assistance of a dictionary.<sup>10</sup>

In Thailand, similarly, Phra Maha Prayud Payutto(1939- ), a well-known scholar, writer and preacher, gave a gloomy assessment of the *Sangha's* education when he said in 1984: “The present state of monastic education is similar to the sky, which, although with some spots of sunshine, is in fact full of cloud. The sky is not clear. When the monks themselves see the dull and overcast sky, they may feel disheartened, tired and might as well fall asleep”.<sup>11</sup> On specific points, the decline of Pali study has been noticed by scholars, such as Payutto himself<sup>12</sup> and Tambiah<sup>13</sup>. Swearer, who, on the one hand, acknowledges “an overall improvement in the educational level of monks”, particularly at primary and secondary level, following “the standardisation of monastic education”, also observes, on the other hand, that the “national monastic examination system controlled by Bangkok eventually served to discourage specialised textual expertise”.<sup>14</sup>

Today in both countries members of the *Sangha* spend a considerable part of their training acquiring qualifications from various formal examinations. These qualifications bring with them fame and material rewards; and are considered essential, even if worldly and not conducive to the goal of the religious life, by the monks themselves as well as their lay supporters. However, in spite of the numerous examinations to be passed in

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<sup>10</sup> *Pali-tetgatho sonzanyay kawmiti-e asiyinganza 1941*, p.11.

<sup>11</sup> As I have translated Payutto's speech freely I shall give the original Thai version here. “ว่าถึงทิศทางการศึกษาของคณะสงฆ์ทั้งหมดนั้น ผมได้เห็นสภาพดินฟ้าอากาศวันนี้ ตอนเช้าเมฆครึ้มมัวมาก มีเค้าฝน ก็เลยนึกถึงสภาพการ ศึกษาของคณะสงฆ์ของเราว่าคล้ายๆดินฟ้าอากาศวันนี้ เมื่อตอนเช้า คือพอตื่นขึ้นมา ก็เห็นครึ้มฟ้าครึ้มฝน สภาพที่ครึ้มฝน มีเมฆมาก มันก็ค่อนข้างมัวหน้อย ไม่สดใส ไม่สว่างจ้า ไม่โปร่งแจ้ง มันไม่โล่งไป การศึกษาของพระสงฆ์เราก็คคล้าย ๆ กับว่าตกอยู่ในสภาพอากาศเช่นนี้ นอกจากนั้น หลานท่านก็ อาจจะว่าง หงสนอนซึม ๆ แล้วก็อยากจะหลับ ซึ่งอาจจะคล้าย ๆ กับสภาพ การศึกษา ของคณะสงฆ์ที่ครึ้ม ๆ เฟลลิ่งๆ ทำให้เกิดเป็น ภาวะที่เรียกว่า เฉื่อยชาขึ้นมาได้มาก ...”. Phra Thepwethi (Payutto), *Thit thang karn suksa*, p.9.

<sup>12</sup> Thepwethi, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Tambiah, p.200.

<sup>14</sup> Swearer, “Centre and Periphery: Buddhism and Politics in Modern Thailand” *Buddhism and Politics in twentieth century Asia*, p.203.



order to gain those qualifications, the quality of their education is still, as the leading educationists have pointed out, academically and spiritually unsatisfactory.

Here it seems to me that, while both the Buddhist rulers and the *Sangha* in both countries have attempted to preserve monastic idealism since the late nineteenth century, what has in fact characterised monastic education, perhaps unknown to both the rulers or the *Sangha*, is secularization. This has been achieved, ironically, without the student-monks being allowed to study secular subjects. On reflection on the similar occurrence of secularization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, secularization of monastic education in Burma and Thailand has taken place since the late nineteenth century in at least two stages. The first is, as Gombrich puts it, “The most obvious form of secularization...the assumption by other institutions of functions that religious institutions used to perform”<sup>15</sup>, in this case, the control of monastic education itself. The other is the change of attitude in the student-monks at the higher level towards the objective of their monastic education, which has become somewhat worldly.

Although secularization has come about for many reasons, ranging from the impact of European colonialism to the “the arrival of modern knowledge and Western-type education”, from the availability of “printing and increased use of literacy” to the rise of a middle class<sup>16</sup> since the early twentieth century, we shall focus, for the purposes of this thesis, mainly on the relationship between the rulers and the *Sangha*, which antedates the arrival of European colonialism.

Ignoring the factors contributing to secularization, the problems of monastic education in both countries may be summarised in two simple questions: (a) why do the student-

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<sup>15</sup> Gombrich, *Secularization, Rationalism and Sectarianism: Essays in Honour of Bryan R. Wilson*, p.61.

<sup>16</sup> Gombrich & Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed*, p.203.

monks have to go through formal academic assessments and (b) why do there have to be so many formal examinations? The first question has already been touched upon and the second will be considered.

### **1.3 Historical Background**

The current system of monastic education in which formal assessments have become so important began in the late nineteenth century and coincided with the threat to the independence of the two kingdoms, Burma and Thailand, from European colonial powers. In Burma, it was under Mindon (1853-1878) that formal monastic examinations were accepted by both the monarch and the *Sangha*. Earlier, however, from the seventeenth century up to the mid-nineteenth century, it was only the monarch who favoured using formal examinations to promote monastic education, and the *Sangha*, for its part, had been vehemently against it. A formal examination system involved some organisational skill and bureaucratic procedures, practices which were at the disposal more of the monarch than of the *Sangha*. But the resistance to the formal examination system by the *Sangha* was not because of its lack of these skills, but rather because the *Sangha* resented the king's interference in ecclesiastical scholarship.

There were precedents for the king interfering in the *Sangha's* education and those had led to more control by the temporal power over the Order. For instance, in 1636 King Thalun (1629-1648) at Ava introduced, for the first time in the history of Burmese monastic scholarship, formal examinations to assess the knowledge of monks and novices of the holy scriptures. The motive of the king, this study will suggest, was to purge the Order of men who had fled to it to avoid conscription and forced labour, for members of the Order were exempt from royal services, and thus to control entry into the

Order. His successors at Ava, although they never forced the monks to be assessed for their knowledge, retained control over admission to the Order.

However, at Amarapura, the new Burmese capital, King Bodawpaya, also known as Badon Min (1782-1819), repeatedly made attempts to impose formal examinations as a tool to bring the *Sangha* under tighter monarchical control. Bodawpaya systematised the existing formal examinations, the *Pathamapyan*, and introduced new ones, the *Vinaya* examinations. Material rewards were given to all candidates: after their success and ordination, which followed success in the examinations, the candidates were appointed to posts in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, itself created and controlled by the king. Parents and close relatives of successful candidates were also rewarded: some were exempt from tax; some were elevated in their social status to become royal; and some were given employment in the royal service. But, despite all this monarchical persuasion and pressure, the education of the *Sangha* until the mid-nineteenth century was still by and large based on informal textual study, the traditional learning method.

In Thailand, likewise, the current system of monastic education began to develop towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century during the reign of King Chulalongkorn, or Rama V (1868-1910). That development coincided with the national integration process undertaken by the king, as in Burma, in response to the colonial threat. The main contributor was the king's half-brother, Prince Vajirayan, who became a monk and Pali scholar. Vajirayan was also the one who introduced primary education to the whole country. Having completed the introduction of universal primary education, he shifted his focus to the Pali examinations, called *Parian*. He wanted to modernise the *Parian*, which had been in existence for two centuries. However, because of his position as the deputy head of the minority fraternity, *Dhammayuttika*, the

majority of the *Sangha* seems not to have given their backing to his reform. He therefore experimented with his reform first in the monastery where he taught, and then at Wat Bovonives, the headquarters of the *Dhammayuttika*.

However, the greater contribution was his creation of a new board of monastic examinations to help implement the 1905 Military Law, which exempted *phu ru tham*, “one who knows the *dhamma*”, from military service. Since the law did not specify the qualification of *phu ru tham*, it was incumbent upon him, now the de facto *Sangharāja* of Thailand, to clarify what the qualification should be. The process of assessment for *phu ru tham* thus resulted in a new set of examinations, now known as *Nak Tham*. Almost all the *Nak Tham* textbooks were written by him and the medium of instruction was to be Thai, in contrast to the *Parian*, for which it had been bi-lingual, Pali and Thai. This was to popularise the *Nak Tham* in the provinces, where Pali was little taught in order to incorporate those provinces into the general life of the nation, controlled from Bangkok. The actual implementation of the *Nak Tham*, which had three levels, took place in the next reign, under King Vajiravudh (1910-1925). Prince Vajirayan, now the *Sangharāja*, went to different provinces to oversee the conduct of the *Nak Tham*. The *Nak Tham* helped influence the *Sangha* of different provinces and thus also their followers to integrate into the life of the Thai nation centred in Bangkok.

If the introduction of the *Nak Tham* was well organised and administered, its predecessor, the *Parian*, or at least the first ever formal academic tests that would develop into the *Parian*, had been introduced in a hurry and had to be imposed on the *Sangha*. It was introduced in the late seventeenth century under King Narai (1656-1688). As in Ava, the reason was to purge monks from the Order. Ayutthaya was at war with

her neighbours. King Narai therefore wanted to raise a big army to defeat his enemies; but many fled conscription.

#### **1.4 A Conflict between Idealist and Pragmatist**

We can now discuss briefly the theme of this thesis. When the monarchs in both Burma and Thailand introduced formal examinations in the seventeenth century and modified them in Burma in the eighteenth century, the objective of monastic education was solely based on idealism. Here idealism refers to the monastic ideal that one seeks ordination for the sake of salvation and, once ordained, a novice or monk should fully dedicate himself to the study and practice of the Buddha's teaching and monastic discipline, *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. When this idealism is applied to education policy, it means that the study of subjects which are not part of the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* or are perceived to be against the spirit of monastic idealism is forbidden.

However, there were people who became novices and monks, not because they wanted to achieve salvation, but because they wanted to receive that higher education available only to the ordained. Thus the monasteries, the only educational institutions in both Burma and Thailand until the end of the nineteenth century, attracted many seeking opportunities for education. Many of these candidates wished to study some secular subjects current at the time that would enhance their social status, or employment prospects, at the royal court, once they left the Order. In fact, the educational need of these candidates was that of the society and the kingdom itself. In response to their needs, the monasteries did not insist on all candidates studying only the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. Instead, the monasteries took a pragmatic view, based on the needs of the Order for monks competent in the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* and of society for men educated and

trained for various professions. Some of the Buddhist texts, though not the “great texts”, as well as current secular subjects, were prescribed in the syllabuses.

Generally the kings seem to have approved of the *Sangha*’s approach towards education as a whole. However, during times of political instability, this study has found, the monarchs appear to have assumed monastic idealism: they introduced and enforced examinations which prescribed only the “great texts” or “*balie* [Pali] books”, thus promoting idealism over pragmatism. King Thalun of Ava in his famous decree, dated 5 August 1636, said that “only those *yahan* [monks] with the intention of attaining *nibbana* will achieve happiness here and hereafter. *Yahans* who have been ordained for other reasons should be taught to aim for *nibbana*. Those with other motives must be disrobed.”<sup>17</sup> Bodawpaya also declared this monastic ideal in one of his decrees, dated 17 October 1787, quoting the *Mahāsāropama-sutta* and the *Cūlasāropama-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*<sup>18</sup>, in which the Buddha makes a compelling simile comparing a tree with heartwood to his teaching. Bodawpaya, who ironically gave various worldly rewards to examination candidates, said: “...Monks and novices, ordained with the aim of benefiting from this great tree (of the *Buddhasāsana*), should not indulge in material requisites or live heedlessly. Even if one is not able to enjoy the taste of the heartwood, sapwood and inner bark, one should take the opportunity to enjoy the taste of the outer bark; this enjoyment alone will make the *Sāsana* prosper...”<sup>19</sup> In Thailand, King Narai also was idealistic when he “caused them [monks and novices to be] examined from time to time as to their knowledge with respect [to] the *balie* language and its books”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Royal Orders of Burma (Henceforth ROB), III, p.255.

<sup>18</sup> M i 192-205.

<sup>19</sup> ROB, IV, p.625. (*My translation*).

<sup>20</sup> La Loubère, *The Kingdom of Siam*, p.115.

Here the need for the king to assume the moral high ground by claiming an idealist position, ostensibly to raise education standards and monastic discipline, should be seen in the context of why the king had to purge the monks from the Order. According to the king, getting rid of monks who had insufficient knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures was to safeguard Buddhism. In reality, however, the king affected an idealist stand in order to purge the monks who had fled conscription and been ordained because he wanted to raise a large army.

The idealist position was taken by the king, despite the fact that in those days the monasteries themselves were following a pragmatic approach by teaching a general curriculum of religious-secular subjects for the first few years, and then a specialised curriculum, which was in most monasteries purely religious in nature, for those who had shown commitment to the holy life. By assuming an idealist position on monastic education, the king, in fact, ignored the practical needs of his people for secular knowledge.

It is true that, ideally, monastic education should be dedicated to the study of the words of the Buddha, known as *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, by a *bhikkhu* or Buddhist monk for his own salvation.<sup>21</sup> In practice, however, successive governments over the centuries have requested from the *Sangha* help in providing education for the people, particularly, since the early twentieth century, the less privileged, which means that the monasteries need to include in their curriculum subjects not directly related to attaining salvation. This has been because the government could not by itself fulfil the responsibility of providing education for its citizens. For instance, even as late as the 1960s, in both Burma and Thailand, the government education programmes were unable to offer equal

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<sup>21</sup> See for instance, the *Cūlasāropama-sutta*, M i 198-205; the *Mahāsāropama-sutta*, M i 192-197; the *Alagaddūpama-sutta*, M i 130-142; the *Dhammavihārī-sutta*, A iii 86-89.

opportunities in education to the people, particularly those in rural areas, where the majority lived.<sup>22</sup> For many people, education within their reach existed only in their village monasteries or in a nearby town. So the people continued to send their children, mostly boys, to the monastery for education.

The *Sangha* for its part resisted the idealist position of the monarch until the late nineteenth century, after Lower Burma had been conquered by the British and Thailand was threatened by both France and Britain. Under those threats, the *Sangha* became nationalist and came to accept the king's idealism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. That was because Buddhism, of which monastic education was seen as the foundation, was linked to the identity of the Burmese and Thai nations, of which the monarch was the ruler and the head. When the nation and the monarchy were threatened by the external enemy, the *Sangha*, too, felt threatened, and became nationalist. Bechert writes: “.. [M]any Burmese thought the elimination of the dynasty would be a heavy blow to the religion itself.”<sup>23</sup> In Thailand, too, Bunnag observes that “to be Buddhist has been considered a badge of national identity”.<sup>24</sup> By the time the *Sangha* became nationalist, western secular education began to be made available by Christian missionaries and the colonial government in Burma and by King Chulalongkorn in Siam. Ironically, it was now the majority of the *Sangha* who adopted the idealist position, rejecting secular knowledge, but the government consciously adopted the pragmatic one for it had to modernise the kingdom and therefore promote western secular knowledge.

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<sup>22</sup> Dhitiwatana, “Buddhism and Thai Education” *Buddhism and Society in Thailand*, p.78.

<sup>23</sup> Bechert, “To be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist; Buddhism in Burma” *the World of Buddhism*, p.149.

<sup>24</sup> Bunnag, “The Way of the Monk and the Way of the World: Buddhism in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia” *the World of Buddhism*, p.159.



Furthermore, the acceptance in the late nineteenth century by the *Sangha* of the idealist position in monastic education proved unwise, as the monasteries would now decide to shun western secular subjects at the time when they needed to modernise their curricula by including those subjects. The monasteries would thus witness a decrease in the number of children attending monastic schools because secular subjects were not taught. Society, on the other hand, was still in need of help from the village monasteries to provide secular education. But the *Sangha* failed to consider at that point whether its education was just to produce competent members for the future of the *sāsana* or whether it should also look after the educational needs of society, particularly its lay followers.

The inability of the leading members of the *Sangha* to define the objective of its education has resulted in leading members of the *Sangha* being locked in a debate between idealism and pragmatism since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The lack of a common ground between the idealists, wishing to maintain a conservative position, and the pragmatists, proposing reforms, is evident in the fundamental weakness in the current monastic education system, which is its lack of flexibility in meeting the students' educational needs.

### **1.5 Sources**

We have primarily consulted in both countries royal orders; royal chronicles; chronicles of monastic lineages; historical records; and relevant contemporary and modern literature. For Burma, the main source is the extant royal orders, edited and published with an English introduction by Professor Than Tun, in ten volumes. These royal orders cover the Ava and Kon-Baung periods. For the late nineteenth up to the mid twentieth century, we rely on the records of various examination boards and those of monastic

lineages, for instance the *Mandalay thathanawin* (History of Buddhism in Mandalay) in five volumes. It is fortunate for us to have at our disposal materials that were not available to those previous scholars whose work on the *Sangha* remains otherwise standard in the field.

As for Thailand, our sources for the Ayutthaya period, in the absence of surviving royal orders, are the royal chronicles of Ayutthaya, written after the main period under discussion; and the records of travellers and envoys to Ayutthaya. The Ratanakosin period is better recorded, with extant royal orders published in various forms, for instance *phongsawadan* (chronicle) and *kotmai* (law). We also make use of well-known monastic records, for instance, that of Wat Bovonives, by different authors as well as the more recent excellent works of Professor David Wyatt and unpublished doctoral dissertations by Brohm, Ferguson, Moy Myint on Burma, and Reynolds and Zack on Thailand, all completed at Cornell University.

## **1.6 Summary of the Chapters**

The thesis is arranged in five chapters, with two separate chapters for each country. Monastic education in Burma and Thailand is dealt with separately because the treatment of the subject is primarily historical. Out of the first two chapters dealing with Burma, the first begins with the general characteristics of Buddhism in royal Burma from the earliest times to the late nineteenth century, when the last king, Thibaw, was deposed. It then proceeds to deal with the main subject matter, monastic education, from the Ava period up to the mid Kon-Baung period, by outlining in brief early monastic education that had two types of curriculum: general, with secular-religious subjects; and specialised, with only religious subjects, in the form of “higher texts”. In this chapter, we

argue that King Thalun (1629-1648) of the Ava period introduced formal examinations for political reasons; and that King Bodawpaya (1782-1819) of the Kon-Baung period attempted to use formal examinations excessively as a tool to control the *Sangha*.

Chapter Two continues the Kon-Baung period, giving particular attention to the reign of Mindon (1853-1878). In the prevailing political situation, characterised by fear and uncertainty, we discuss how Mindon used the precarious situation to his advantage and persuaded the *Sangha* to accept formal examinations as a way of promoting and perpetuating Buddhism. Also examined are the developments in monastic education from the fall of the Burmese monarchy up to the time of the Sixth Buddhist Council under the Government of U Nu (1948-1958, 1960-1962). Attention is especially given to two developments: the transformation of monastic examinations under Mindon and his legacy, in the form of newly established examination boards, this time by the *Sangha* and the community leaders who had become nationalist since the end of the Second Anglo-Burmese War, 1852-1854. In fact, what has taken place in monastic education since the end of the Burmese monarchy can be characterised as Mindon's legacy.

Chapter Three attempts to examine an unstable Siam at Ayutthaya under King Narai (1656-1688) and how that instability affected the relationship between the monarchy and the *Sangha*, and ultimately monastic education. The chapter describes the general characteristics of Buddhism in Siam before it discusses monastic education prior to the interference of Narai. Monastic scholarship after Narai until the reign of Rama I is also considered briefly in this chapter.

Chapter Four deals with the standardisation of monastic education in Thailand under King Chulalongkorn, or Rama V (1868-1910), who steered the national integration

process through, by which the many autonomous provinces were brought under the control of Bangkok. The emphasis is on how a new set of formal examinations, *Nak Tham*, was created in the light of the political integration process. Discussed also in this chapter are the 1902 Sangha Act and its subsequent amendments and the syllabuses of various examinations, namely the *Parian*, the *Nak Tham* and the *Sai Saman Suksa*, along with their historical development.

Chapter Five summarises the problems in monastic education in both Burma and Thailand through the theme of a conflict between idealism and pragmatism. In general, a criticism, focusing on the twentieth century, is made of the *Sangha* as a whole for lack of proactive vision in education. In particular, the discussion emphasises the debate between conservatives and reformists in the *Sangha* as to how to define the objective of monastic education.

## Chapter Two

### **The Education of the *Sangha* under Strong Monarchs Monastic Scholarship under Kings Thalun (1629-1648) of the Ava and Bodawpaya (1782-1819) of the Kon-Baung Period**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, we discussed in brief the problems in the current monastic education system in Burma. The rise of the various formal academic examination boards since the late nineteenth century has contributed ironically, not to the progress of the existing monastic education standards, but rather to their decline. As already noticed, some of those problems have been spotted by an education committee as early as the 1940s and acknowledged by leading members of the *Sangha* since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

The monastic education system has come to define education narrowly, along the lines of the syllabuses of various formal examinations, and does not encourage learning in a wider context. Students are condemned to repeating the same syllabus and sitting the examinations until they pass or give it up. Whereas the present generation of students spend almost twice as much time on education as their nineteenth-century counterparts, their study is not as effective as their predecessors'. The study of Buddhist scriptures is now being engaged in as a pursuit of prestige and fame for the monastic institutions concerned. The monasteries themselves are compelled to compete with one another by the government and the society. Unlike teaching monasteries that flourished until the end of the nineteenth century, current monastic institutions have no freedom to choose their own syllabuses or assess their own students; instead, the government and Buddhist associations, largely dominated by lay people who are devout Buddhists but are not

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<sup>1</sup> *Pali-tetgatho sonzanyay kawmiti-e asiyinganza* 1941, p.11; Janakābhivaṃsa, "Nan net khin ovada mya", pp.23-24; *Naing gnan daw thanga mahanayaka aphwe pariyatti simankain*, pp.6-7.

scholars in Buddhist scriptures, have come to exert real influence on these institutions. This development is partly, as far as this study is concerned, a product of historical developments; and partly, Chapter Six of the present thesis will suggest, due to the lack of a proactive vision on the part of the *Sangha*.

By a historical product we refer to certain geopolitical circumstances that the monastic education system has had to face over the centuries. In order to carry out their teaching activities, monasteries needed the support of kings and governments. Thus the monasteries always had a close relationship with the monarchy. However, this mutually beneficial link in the history of Buddhism in Burma experienced, every now and then, some testing times, which left a long-lasting impact on the *Sangha* as a whole and on its education in particular. This was more so under strong monarchs, such as Thalun (1629-1648) and Bodawpaya (1782-1819), who were known as ardent supporters of the *Sangha* and its education; ironically, these monarchs also forced or attempted to force a large number of monks to leave the monkhood, allegedly in the name of “the purification of the Order”.<sup>2</sup> However, despite these claims, it seems that “purification” of the Buddhist Order was not the only reason, if it was one at all, for the kings to take stern action against the monks.<sup>3</sup> We will argue that geopolitical circumstances, which required the king to have more control over the population of young males in the kingdom for war expeditions and construction, played a greater part in King Thalun’s purging of the monks in large numbers from the Order and in also King Bodawpaya’s excessive use of academic examinations in an attempt to force monks to leave the Order.

In this chapter, divided into four sections, we shall first discuss some general features of Buddhism in Burma from its beginnings in the second century AD, to the end of the

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<sup>2</sup> ROB, I, pp.254-256, 395-396; IV, pp.625-626; Than Tun, “Administration Under King Thalun, 1629-1648” *Essays on the History and Buddhism of Burma*, p.130.

<sup>3</sup> ROB, IV, pp.610 & 626.

nineteenth century, when the last king, Thibaw (1878-1885), was deposed. Three particular characteristics, Buddhism being a monastic religion, receiving royal patronage, and being an educational institution will be discussed. Second, we shall give a brief account of how the monastic education systems before the twentieth century flourished through informal textual study, in which the academic freedom of the teacher and the monastery was upheld. In this, the student career of a famous scholar-monk, Ledi Sayadaw, will be used as an example of the informal textual study system. Third, we shall look at how informal textual study was gradually replaced by formal examination-orientated study from the beginning of the twentieth century. Our study of the changing process in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will be confined to education in this chapter; more of the historical development related to this process will be dealt with in the next chapter, in chronological order. To demonstrate the gradual change in ecclesiastical pedagogy, the student careers of four other monks will be considered briefly. Finally, in an effort to unearth some of the factors behind the process of change in the monastic education system from informal textual to formal examination-orientated study, we shall look at how formal examinations were introduced in the seventeenth century. In so doing, geopolitical circumstances during the reign of Thalun (1629-1648) at Ava will be examined; then how Bodawpaya (1782-1819), under similar circumstances, used formal examinations in order to control the *Sangha* will be analysed; and finally the resistance by the majority of the *Sangha* to formal examinations will be discussed.

## 2.1.1 Some General Features of Buddhism in Burma

### 2.1.1.1 A Monastic Religion

The general features of Buddhism<sup>4</sup> in royal Burma can be described in three important terms: it was a monastic religion; enjoyed royal patronage; and was an educational institution. First of all, the Buddhism that became the religion of the people of Burma, then known as Śrī Kṣetra or the Pyu Kingdom, at least “from about the second century AD”,<sup>5</sup> was a monastic religion. By monastic religion we mean that the *Sangha* was (and still is) at the heart of the Buddhist religion. Gombrich thus remarks: “The fortunes of Buddhism as a historical phenomenon, then, are the fortunes of the Order.”<sup>6</sup> There are two reasons why the *Sangha* has occupied such an important place in Buddhism. Firstly, as Gombrich states: “Buddhists have traditionally believed that for a layman to attain salvation is virtually impossible”.<sup>7</sup> That is because there are more hurdles for him: he lives in a sensual world (*kāmaḥogino*,<sup>8</sup> *rajoḥpatho*<sup>9</sup>); and as a householder his life is so busy with family and social commitments that he can hardly make any real effort to purify his mind so as to eradicate desire (*taṇhā*).<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the life of a “renouncer” is, according to a well-known passage in the *Sutta-piṭaka*, free as an open space.<sup>11</sup> A renouncer can therefore devote his time to achieving Enlightenment, the purpose for which he left home.

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<sup>4</sup> By this we mean Theravada Buddhism, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>5</sup> Stargardt, *The Ancient Pyu of Burma*, I, p.192. We follow Stargardt’s date here because all the extant chronicles of Burma tell of the history of Buddhism only from the Pagan period (1044-1287). These chronicles, composed only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by the now dominant Burman scholars, are silent on the history of Buddhism not only in the Pyu kingdoms of Beikthano and Śrī Kṣetra but also in the Mon kingdom of Thaton that was devastated by King Anoratha (Aniruddha) of Pagan. Both the Pyu and the Mon kingdoms preceded Pagan.

<sup>6</sup> Gombrich, “Introduction: The Buddhist Way” *The World of Buddhism*, p.10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>8</sup> *Kāmaḥogī-sutta*, A v 177. See also A ii 6.

<sup>9</sup> D i 63; *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī* i 180-181.

<sup>10</sup> *saṃbādhō gharāvāso rajoḥpatho....., na idaṃ sukaraṃ agāraṃ ajjhāvasatā ekantapariḥpūṇaṃ ekantaparisuddhaṃ saṃkhalikhitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ caritaṃ*. D i 63.

<sup>11</sup> *abbhokāso pabbajjā*. *Ibid*.



A layman, for his part, takes responsibility for providing the material needs of the monks, whom he sees as a fertile soil in which to grow the seed of his generosity, in the belief that his action will accumulate for him the merit necessary not only for betterment in *saṃsāra*, the circle of life, but also help him ultimately to achieve *nibbāna*. In return for his generosity, the monk teaches him the basic moral teachings of the Buddha and ways to improve his *kamma*. To go beyond these practices, however, he needs to join the monkhood, which is open to all. Here although the general description applies equally to the Order of nuns, *bhikkhunī-sāsana*, we speak only of the order of monks, *bhikkhu-sāsana*, because the *bhikkhunī-sāsana* in Theravada countries had disappeared long before the seventeenth century, the beginning of the focus of this study.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, “the Order preserves the scriptures”, usually considered synonymous with the Doctrine.<sup>13</sup> The teaching has been, since the Buddha passed away, the guide to the Eightfold Path leading to emancipation. The profession of maintaining the Doctrine has given the Order an unparalleled position in the history of the Buddhist world. It is believed that the need to study and safeguard the Doctrine was emphasised by the Buddha himself, who said that if the monks did not engage in study and teaching, the result would be the disappearance of the *Saddhamma* [true Doctrine].<sup>14</sup> And the Order has taken this task very seriously. The need for the preservation of the scriptures, remarks David Wyatt, a historian of Thailand, requires of the monkhood “a relatively high degree of scholarship and wide distribution of literacy”.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The *bhikkhunī-sāsana* disappeared in the eleventh century in Sri Lanka. For more information see Skilling, *A Note on the History of the Bhikkhunī-saṅgha* (II): *The Order of Nuns after the Parinirvāṇa*, WFB Review, XXX, IV; Gunawardena, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka*, p.39; Bartholomeusz, *Women Under the Bo Tree: Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka*, p.21.

<sup>13</sup> Gombrich, “Introduction: The Buddhist Way”, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> A iii 176-180..

<sup>15</sup> Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform in Thailand*, p.6.

This emphasis on scholarship in Buddhist monasticism, according to Walpola Rahula, began in the first century BC. That was indeed a turning point in the history of Theravada Buddhism, as study became more prominent than practice.<sup>16</sup> In the first century BC, after “a foreign invasion” and “an unprecedented famine”, two schools of opinion in Sri Lanka debated whether “learning” or “practice” was the basis of the *sāsana*, “the Buddha’s dispensation”. “Ultimately it was decided that learning was the basis of the *sāsana*, and not practice.” This decision, which went against the fundamental position of early Buddhism, strengthened the separation between the two vocations, *gantha-dhura*, “vocation of books” and *vipassanā-dhura*, “vocation of meditation”, and created two separate groupings.<sup>17</sup>

Both vocations were probably present in the Pyu kingdom of Burma, although there is so far no direct evidence of the *vipassanā-dhura* there. However, we can conclude with a degree of certainty that those following the “vocation of books” were present, particularly at Śrī Kṣetra. The archaeological findings between 1897 and 1929 at Prome (now Pyi), the old Śrī Kṣetra, have re-written not only the early history of Buddhism in what is now Burma but also unearthed evidence of the excellent state of monastic learning, unknown to us before. Twenty gold-leaf Pali manuscripts, all excerpts from the Pali canon, were found at pagodas and mound hills in and around three villages, namely Mawza, Kalagangon and Kyundawzu, situated a few miles from the present Prome.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, pp.157-160.

<sup>17</sup> Gombrich literally translates *gantha-dhura* as “book-duty” and *vipassanā-dhura* as “meditation-duty”. Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept and Practice*, p.368. A more complete discussion on the two *dhura* can be found in Cousins, “Introduction” in Ananda Maitreya *Nine Special Qualities of the Buddha and Other Essays*, pp.i-ix.

<sup>18</sup> A summary of the findings was given by Stargardt “The Oldest Known Pali Texts ... from Śrī Kṣetra”, *Journal of the PTS*, XXI (1995), pp.199-213. Details also have been reported by various scholars over the years. They include Finot “Un Nouveau Document Sur Le Bouddhisme Birman” *Journal Asiatique*, XX, 1912 and XXI, 1913; Duroiselle, “Excavations at Hmawza” *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report*, 1926-1927, pp.171-181 & 1928-1929, pp.105-109; Lu Pe Win, “The Pali Text from Khin Ba-gon” *Report of the Superintendent of Archaeology*, Rangoon, 1940, pp.12-22. The Pali passages inscribed on those gold plates are from the *Vinaya-* and *Sutta-piṭaka*. The question

These were indeed evidence that the “vocation of books” was very strong at Śrī Kṣetra.<sup>19</sup> All native chronicles, on the other hand, are silent on the question of the history of Buddhism before the Pagan period (1044-1279).

At Pagan, the *Sangha* was generally divided into two fraternities: the village-dwellers, known as “monks living in monasteries” or *kloṇi niy so sangha*, and the forest-dwellers, known as “the lords dwelling in the forest”, *taw mlat kri*, *taw skhin* or *taw kloṇi sangha*.<sup>20</sup> Among the village-dwellers, the students, or *cāsaṇi*, were perhaps the most important group. We do not know their exact number but we learn from an inscription dated 1101 AD that there were a great number of monks in Pagan. In a house-building ceremony “all the four thousand and one hundred and eighty monks” were invited “with our lord Chief Monk Arahan, who was the leader in reciting the *Paritta* blessing”.<sup>21</sup> Arahan, a Mon monk from Thaton (Sudhammapura), was credited in the Burmese chronicles with introducing Theravada Buddhism to Pagan.<sup>22</sup> The number of monasteries, libraries and schools dedicated to the monks following the “vocation of books” also suggests that they were more numerous than those following the “vocation of meditation”, usually taken to refer to the forest-dwellers. In an inscription dated 1236 “a donor built five school buildings for students and a monastery for the *thera* in one compound”.<sup>23</sup> Another inscription mentions that seven years later, in 1243, the Queen “built as many as twenty monasteries encircling a hollow pagoda, a library, a monastery and a hall of law, and dedicated three hundred *pay* of land, thirty slaves and fifty cattle for students of the Most

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surrounding the language of those passages has also been settled by modern Pali scholars: the language is now known to be pure Pali, not Pyu-Pali as previously considered.

<sup>19</sup> Than Tun, *History of Buddhism in Burma*, pp.52-53.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp.91& 96.

<sup>21</sup> Duroiselle, *Epigraphia Birmanica*, II, Rangoon, p.38, cited in Than Tun, cit., p.56.

<sup>22</sup> Maung Tin, trans. *The Glass Palace Chronicle*, pp.71-75.

<sup>23</sup> Than Tun, pp.96-97.

Reverend Vinayadhara”.<sup>24</sup> And there were many other donors who supported the students in this way.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile the forest-dwellers, *cañ araṇ*, at Pagan were by no means living as recluses.<sup>26</sup> Instead, they had monasteries of their own “with hundreds of monks living in them under *taw mlat kri*, the Most Reverend Lords of the Forest”.<sup>27</sup> They also received donations from the royals, who provided slaves and lands to them.<sup>28</sup> During the Pagan period the majority of the forest-dwellers lived in areas far away from Pagan, such as Minnathu, Pwazaw, Myinmu and Monywa, where there were centres of forest monasteries. But “some of them” also lived in Pagan.<sup>29</sup> According to John Ferguson, who has studied the Burmese *Sangha*, the forest-dwellers at Pagan were also known as *panthaku* (*paṃsukūla*) *gaing* or the fraternity of ragged robes.<sup>30</sup> At Pagan, the forest-dwellers were powerful only under King Alaungsithu (1112-1167); otherwise the village-dwellers were dominant.

However, during the periods of Sagaing (1315-1364) and Ava (1364-1555 and 1605-1752), there was a less clear distinction between the two professions of the monks, “books” and “meditation”. Certainly it was no longer possible to state that the village-dwellers followed “the vocation of books” and the forest-dwellers that of “meditation”. From the Ava period onwards a particular lineage would usually trace its roots to more than one tradition of ordination, and often its roots might go back to both professions.<sup>31</sup> This is likely to explain how the concept of an ideal Burmese monk developed. It is said

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p.96.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, pp.97-99.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.120.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> Ferguson, *The Symbolic Dimensions of the Burmese Sangha*, p.167.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p.164-165; Than Tun, “The Shwegyin Sect” *Essays on the History and Buddhism of Burma*, pp.152-153.

that a monk should study for ten years, then teach for another ten years, after which he should become a forest-dweller.<sup>32</sup> However, after ten years of teaching, if he did not choose to become a forest-dweller, he usually took a twin role by continuing as a teacher and at the same time also becoming an administrator, as an abbot.

The convergence of the two vocations is described by Ferguson as one of the “type[s] of adjustive mechanisms” through which interaction took place between different monastic lineages over the centuries.<sup>33</sup> Here, to illustrate the cross-over between the two vocations, we cite a famous story of two monks. In Sagaing, there was a famous forest-dweller, Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw, also known by his ordained name, Shin Jambudhaja, whose *nissayas* on the *Vinaya-piṭaka* and its commentaries are still in use today.<sup>34</sup> One of his contemporaries was Taung-bi-lar Sayadaw, also known by his ordained name as Munindaghosa and by his title, Tipiṭakālaṅkāra, for his fame in learning.<sup>35</sup> The encounter between these two learned monks tells us about the fusion of the two vocations. It is said that Taung-bi-lar Sayadaw visited Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw at his forest hermitage on the Sagaing Hills and saw the latter sweeping the compound of a pagoda nearby. Not knowing who the sweeper monk was, the former asked to meet Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw to consult him over a work on the *Vinaya* that he, Taung-bi-lar Sayadaw, was in the process of writing. It seems the ragged robes worn by Shwe Oo Min did not help to identify him as a scholar known for his thorough knowledge of the *Vinaya-piṭaka*.

On learning who the sweeper monk was, Taung-bil-lar Sayadaw introduced himself and found that both of them had been ordained on the same day. Tradition dictates that the junior should pay respect to the senior by bowing to him three times and letting him walk

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<sup>32</sup> Saṃvara, head of the Sasana Mandaing Pali University, Pegu. Personal communication.

<sup>33</sup> Ferguson, p.165.

<sup>34</sup> *Pitakatthamaing*, pp.181-183; Paṇḍitasirī, *Shwegyin-nikāya thathanawin*, (History of the Shwegyin-nikāya), pp.83-85.

<sup>35</sup> *Pitakatthamaing*, pp.182-183.

ahead if both were to go the same way. So, there was a decision to be made: who would walk in front when they were to leave the pagoda for the hermitage of Shwe Oo Min? Taung-bi-lar offered the privilege to Shwe Oo Min for his virtue of being a forest-dweller. In fact, Shwe Oo Min himself had been a village-dweller and indeed a royal tutor. But he declined and said that Taung-bi-lar should walk in front because he was now the royal tutor. Upon learning in subsequent discussions that Shwe Oo Min was writing a commentary on the same work and that it seemed to be of a better quality, Taung-bi-lar is reported to have stored his own version away in a purpose-built pagoda, without making it available to any reader. He did so in honour of Shwe Oo Min.<sup>36</sup> Soon, “weary perhaps of royal *viharas*”, Taung-bi-lar Sayadaw “withdrew to the *tiriyapabbata* to live in the quiet of the forest”.<sup>37</sup> Ferguson mentions that both *sayadaws* had studied under the same teacher but it must have been at different times as they do not seem to have known each other well.<sup>38</sup> Here we can see pursuit of scholarship by forest-dwellers, and retreat to the forest by village-dwellers.

From the beginning of the Pagan period, contact was maintained with Ceylon, the centre of Theravada Buddhism. An inscription in Pagan dated 1233 AD “mentions the presence” of a monk, Buddharaṃsī, from *sinkhuih*, Ceylon, “who was then the head of a monastic establishment [in Pagan] to which the donor gave land and slaves”.<sup>39</sup> Buddharaṃsī must have been one of the Sinhalese monks who were settled in Pagan. One inscription mentions many Sinhalese monks witnessing a donor’s “deeds of merit”.<sup>40</sup> Monks from Pagan looked to Ceylon for authority. Many of them, indeed, went to the island for ordination and study. One of the famous scholars of Pagan, Chabada, for example, received his education and ordination in Ceylon. On his return to Pagan in

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Bode, *The Pali Literature of Burma*, p.53; Paṇḍitasirī, pp.83-84. Also Ferguson, p.169.

<sup>38</sup> Ferguson, p.167.

<sup>39</sup> Than Tun, p.119.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

1180, after ten years in Ceylon, he founded a new fraternity, the Sinhalese Mahāvihāra tradition, *Sīhaḷasangha*, for which the king, Narapatisithu or Narapatijayasūra (1167-1202), came to have “a feeling of great esteem and reverence”.<sup>41</sup> Chabada wrote some commentarial works in Pali. These included the *Suttaniddesa*, on *Kaccāyana*’s Pali grammar, and the *Saṅkhepavappanā*, on the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* of Anuruddha.<sup>42</sup> The trend continued even during the unstable political situation towards the end of the Pagan period: an inscription of 1268 tells us of an educational mission, “under the leadership of Dhammasirī and Subhūticanda to Ceylon probably between 1237 and 1248”.<sup>43</sup>

An even more far-reaching event in the contact between the Burmese and Sinhalese *Sangha*, however, came during the reign of a Mon king at Hamsavati, Pegu era (1287-1539). Dhammaceti (1472-1492), himself an ex-monk, sent twenty-two monks to “Sīhaḷadīpa” [Ceylon]... “to receive at their (“the spiritual successors of the priests of the *Mahāvihāra*”) hands the *upasampadā* ordination in the *udakukkhepasīmā* consecrated on the *Kalyāṇī* river, where the Fully Enlightened One enjoyed a bath”.<sup>44</sup> On their return, the king had all the old chapter halls, *Sīmā*, re-consecrated and all other monks in his Rāmañña kingdom re-ordained in the “pure form of the *Sīhaḷa upasampadā* ordination”.<sup>45</sup> Altogether 15, 065 monks were re-ordained.

By the eighteenth century, however, the monastic Order in Burma was stronger than the Sinhalese. During the reign of Bodawpaya, it was the Sinhalese who came to Amarapura, the capital, for ordination. After their ordination, they took back with them “a number of Pali texts either of Burmese authorship or better known to the Burmese fraternity than to

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, p.119 & Kalyāṇī Inscriptions, pp.8-12.

<sup>42</sup> Bode, pp.17-19.

<sup>43</sup> Than Tun, p.119.

<sup>44</sup> *Kalyāṇī Inscriptions*, p.19.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p.34.

the Sinhalese”.<sup>46</sup> Those Sinhalese monks who had received ordination at Amarapura in 1800 came to be known as the *Amarapura-nikāya* in their own country.<sup>47</sup>

With regard to the administration of the *Sangha*, the main administrative work was the responsibility of the abbot. However, there were ecclesiastical offices such as *sāsanāpuin* (old spelling of *thathanabaing*), supreme leader of the *Sangha*, and *wineñdhuir* (old spelling of *vinayadhara*), ecclesiastical judge. *Sāsanāpuin* was usually appointed the preceptor of the king but Than Tun thinks that the *sāsanāpuin* at Pagan was not as significant as the *thathanabaing* during the Kon-Baung period.<sup>48</sup> Every monarch had at least one learned monk as his tutor, to advise him on educational and religious affairs. Syaṇ Disāprāmuk (Disāpāmokkha), a *sāsanāpuin* in the reign of the last king of Pagan, however, advised the king also on political affairs and was despatched to China by the king on a peace mission.<sup>49</sup> An ambitious king might appoint more than one tutor. At Ava, King Thalun had at least five tutors: Taung-bi-lar Sayadaw of Ava, already mentioned, and Shin Ariyālankāra from Sagaing, Shin Nandadhaja, Anuruddha Sayadaw and Bamei Sayadaw.<sup>50</sup> However, one of them, Taung-bi-lar Sayadaw, rejected the capital and retreated to the forest just three years after Thalun ascended the throne.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Bamei Sayadaw, a Mon monk who had fled to Ava, was so knowledgeable in astrology and magic that the king invited him and his eleven pupil-monks to march with him, the king, on all his military expeditions. The *wineñdhuir* or *Vinayadhara*, for his part, was an ecclesiastical judge, usually a senior monk, well-versed in the *Vinaya*. He was elected and authorised by the *Sangha* to decide on disputes among its members.

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<sup>46</sup> Bode, p.78.

<sup>47</sup> Malalgoda, *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society*, pp.97-98.

<sup>48</sup> Than Tun, pp.116-117.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.126.

<sup>50</sup> ROB, II, pp.365, 467.

<sup>51</sup> Ferguson, p.169.



However, during the Kon-Baung period (1752-1885), the administration of the *Sangha* became more highly organised, particularly at the highest level. Selected royal tutors were appointed to a newly created council, called *Sudhamma*. *Sudhamma* had been the name of the royal religious hall (*zayat*) since the Ava period. At Amarapura, the fourth capital of the dynasty<sup>52</sup>, Bodawpaya appointed in 1783 four *sayadaws* to the council. He called them *thathanahsein*, “the guardians of the *Sāsana*”.<sup>53</sup> He divided the kingdom into four territories and gave ecclesiastical jurisdiction in each to one of the *sayadaws*, calling for them to convene a meeting of the council to discuss matters that any one of them could not solve alone. While this concept of collective leadership through a *saṅghakamma*, “ecclesiastical act”, had been the main characteristic of early Buddhist monasticism, such collective responsibility was new to the history of the *thathanabaing* in Burma.

Kelatha, in his work, *Mandalay Thathanawin* (History of Buddhism in Mandalay), says that Bodawpaya expanded the *Sudhamma* Council a year later with another eight *sayadaws*, to a total of twelve.<sup>54</sup> However, according to the royal order dated 24 May 1784, in which is mentioned the appointment of the *sayadaws*<sup>55</sup>, eleven in total, not twelve, the four-member *Sudhamma* Council was neither expanded nor were its members included in the eleven. The eleven *sayadaws* were, in fact, appointed as examiners in the *Pathamapyan* examinations, which we shall discuss later in this chapter<sup>56</sup>, and not as members of the *Sudhamma* Council. Two years later, on 27 June 1786, the king replaced the four-member *Sudhamma* Council with one *thathanabaing* when he appointed Guṇamuninda to take charge of appointing *gaing ok* and *gaing dauk*,

<sup>52</sup> Shwebo, Sagaing and Ava were used as capital by the early Kon-Baung rulers.

<sup>53</sup> ROB, IV, p.252. They were *Ñāṇavilāsa*; Mingala Shwebon; Mahā Mingala Shwebon; and Bonkyawweiyān Sayadaw.

<sup>54</sup> Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin* (History of Buddhism in Mandalay), I, pp.258-259.

<sup>55</sup> ROB, IV, p.338. They were: Ma-le; Palaing; Hmundaw; Me-htee; Hanlin; Hsonhtar; Taung lay lone; Shwe Taung; Maung Taung; Sinte; and Katoe Sayadaw. *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> See pp. 85-88.

and of religious activities in the kingdom.<sup>57</sup> The same order also appointed twelve other *sayadaws* as *vinayadhara*, ecclesiastical judges.<sup>58</sup> However, in the following year, 1787, Guṇamuninda was himself replaced by one of the twelve *vinayadharas*, Maung Taung Ñāṇābhivaṃsa, who, as one of the eleven examiners appointed in 1784, had been in charge of copying the *Tipiṭaka*.<sup>59</sup>

Mindon (1853-1878) revived the *Sudhamma* council, consisting of a *thathanabaing* as its head and eight other members.<sup>60</sup> U Ñeyya, the second Maung Taung Sayadaw, who was *thathanabaing* during the reign of Pagan (1839-1847), was appointed the *thathanabaing*.<sup>61</sup> After the *thathanabaing* died in 1866, Mindon did not appoint a successor. So the *Sudhamma* Council was in charge of the whole ecclesiastical administration until the next reign. Thibaw, the last king of Burma, appointed two *thathanabaings*, one for the new fraternity, the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, and the other for the majority, now called *Sudhamma-nikāya*, a name derived from that of the royal religious office. However, only the *thathanabaing* for the *Sudhamma-nikāya* agreed to be on the *Sudhamma* Council and thus became its head. As we shall see in Chapter Three, the *Shwegyin thathanabaing* refused even the title of *thathanabaing*. Nevertheless, he was in sole charge of the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, of which, in any case, he was himself the founder.

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<sup>57</sup> ROB, IV, pp.501-502.

<sup>58</sup> They were: Taung Lay Lone; Mahadanwun Kyaung; Ein Shyay Kyaung; Palaing; Hmundaw; Shwe Taung; Bagaya; Mehtee; Sinte; Katoe; Maung Taung; and Nyaung Kan Sayadaw. *Ibid*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p.414. See also pp. 91-92.

<sup>60</sup> Than Tun, "The Shwegyin Sect", p.156; Shwe Gain Tha, *Mandalay hnit taya pyi (The Centenary of Mandalay)*, p.231.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid* & Kelatha, I, p.99.

### 2.1.1.2 Royal Patronage

As a spiritual institution, the Order attracted royal patronage. In Burma, the rulers saw it as their duty to use temporal power to protect the *Buddhasāsana*.<sup>62</sup> The king might sometimes purge insincere monks or prevent them from exploiting the Order and the generosity of devotees<sup>63</sup>; but he also supported the *Sangha* with material requisites, and led the people in merit-making, in order to instil Buddhist morality<sup>64</sup> and enhance their *kamma* with final release, *nibbāna*, in mind.

As far as discipline was concerned, royal attention was given to the maintenance of the unity of the *Sangha* and strict observation of the *Pātimokkha* rules by individuals. In practice, this meant the backing of the authority of the good monks by royal temporal power. On the grounds of poor discipline, many monks were forced by rulers to leave the Order from time to time. There will be further discussion later of the purging of the Order by the monarch, in the context of the introduction of formal examinations. As already briefly discussed, to maintain the unity of the Order and strict adherence to the *Vinaya*, a system of ecclesiastical hierarchy was created by the king.

As to the generosity of the king and his role in leading his Buddhist subjects to support the *Sangha*, it has been noted by many that most of the celebrated pagodas and monasteries throughout the country were built by kings.<sup>65</sup> The king and other wealthy donors even donated lands and slaves for the maintenance of the pagodas and

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<sup>62</sup> Alaungpaya considered himself to have a “destined role of the defender of the faith. He had to do everything in his power to promote Buddhism as it was believed in Burma”. Than Tun, *Introduction* to ROB, II, p.xvi.

<sup>63</sup> ROB, VII, pp.i-ii.

<sup>64</sup> In his royal order dated 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1782, a month after ascending the throne, Bodawpaya spelled out his moral concerns to the people. He also asked people to observe the Five Precepts in the order dated 10<sup>th</sup> March 1782. ROB, VII, pp.i.-iii. Mindon encouraged lay people to observe *uposatha-sīla* (eight/nine/ten precepts) on four Sabbath -days each month (Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin* I, pp.69-70).

<sup>65</sup> Yule, *Mission to the Court of Ava*, p.36; ROB, I, p.163, 286; II, pp.x-xiv, 86-89; Than Tun, *History of Buddhism*, p.9; *Kon-Baung set mahayazawindagi*, pp.548-9.

monasteries.<sup>66</sup> Here one thing worthy of notice is that in ancient Burma only the king and some members of the royal family had the authority and resources to donate a complete set of the *Tipiṭaka* because “a copy of the *piṭaka* was more costly than erecting a hollow pagoda. In fact for less than one and a half times the cost of the *piṭaka* a big monastery with ‘flame pediments’ could be built”.<sup>67</sup> The king also asked the people, sometimes by order, to look after the monasteries and feed the monks.<sup>68</sup>

### 2.1.1.3. An Educational Institution

However, the Order received royal patronage not only because it was the spiritual focus of society but because it was also an educational institution. Indeed, as has been noted, the measures taken by kings over the centuries were also intended to promote monastic education.<sup>69</sup> This tradition continued until the time of the last king, Thibaw (1878-1885). In addition, learned monks would usually be invited to live in the capital, where the king could support them and at the same time benefit from their service; it was one of those monks that the king usually appointed to the post of *sayadaw*, royal tutor. Nearly all of the *sayadaws* were authors.<sup>70</sup>

Indeed, providing education for society was the major means of recruitment into the Order. This was because ordination was a pre-requisite for higher study. During the time of the Buddha, ordination was motivated by a desire for salvation; but, centuries later, when Buddhism had been established outside India, study became the primary motivation. This was true in the Pyu kingdom from the time of the arrival of Buddhism,

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<sup>66</sup> For more information see Than Tun, *History of Buddhism*, chaps. IX (Religious Buildings) and X (The Slaves and Medieval Burma).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, p.135.

<sup>68</sup> ROB, I, pp.239, 369, 377,381, 431- 432.

<sup>69</sup> See also p.16.

<sup>70</sup> See Bode, pp.16, 32, 45, 53, 55, 74; Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin* in 5 volumes.

perhaps at Beikthano, and certainly at Śrī Kṣetra, right up to the early twentieth century. Monasteries were the only places to which people could send their children for education.

Education at that time in principle meant the study of morality as understood in the Buddhist religion; it was about “the development of moral and spiritual character”<sup>71</sup> here and hereafter. “Mere learning devoid of this purpose was considered worthless”.<sup>72</sup> Throughout Buddhist education the dominant theme was therefore *kamma*, the teaching on the intention behind our actions. *Kamma* taught one about good and bad actions and taking responsibility for those actions. Education in the monastery was to instil a sense of that responsibility in the student. *Kamma*, being the law of causality, also applied to the whole existence of living beings. People in the higher strata of society had accumulated much good *kamma* in the past and their present privileged position reflected that. Those in the lower strata, on the other hand, had not accumulated much good *kamma*, or perhaps may have even done some bad *kamma*, which was now reflected in their life. To get to a higher level in society, one had to increase one’s good *kamma*, and the conventional means for doing that was to follow the Five Precepts<sup>73</sup>; to be generous; and to cultivate respect towards the *Sangha*, teachers and elders.

Those who were considered to have accumulated more wholesome *kamma* than even those in the higher strata of secular society were members of the *Sangha*. This was reflected in their spiritual gifts, in receiving ordination, which made them holy (*monmyat*), and in studying the words of the Buddha. Admiration for members of the Order also came from the fact that the ordained committed themselves to following the

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<sup>71</sup> Rahula, p.290.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> An undertaking to abstain from killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, telling a lie and taking intoxicants.

*Vinaya*, numerous and far superior codes of conduct to those of laymen, and that they sought to liberate themselves from the mundane world. This soteriological way of life was seen as hard to follow, for it involved not only avoiding immoral and degenerate actions but also the rejection of all worldly pleasure. Members of the *Sangha*, therefore, led an exemplary life and, with their knowledge of the *Tipiṭaka*, were ideal teachers in the eyes of the lay society.

Parents sent their sons, usually aged between eight and ten, to a monastery to receive education; these boys were known as *kyuang tha*, “students” (though this term applies only to “temple-boys” nowadays). They received instruction in reading and writing in Burmese, and served their masters. Shin Mahāsīlavamsa, a poet monk at Ava, recorded this tradition in his famous poem, *Shin Mahasīlavamsa Sounmasar* (The Admonition of Shin Mahasīlavamsa).<sup>74</sup> From this poem we also know that some of the students were residential while others came to classes only during the daytime. After one or two years those in residence were ordained. Many spent a few years in the Order studying, and then left. This temporary ordination became a part of Burmese Buddhist culture. As in all other Theravada countries, a boy was normally initiated as a novice, *sāmaṇera*, if he received ordination before he was twenty. A young man of twenty and above would be given a full or higher ordination, *upasampadā*.

## 2.2 A Description of Monastic Education before the Twentieth Century

The entrance into the Order of those seeking education, rather than salvation, forced monasteries to include in their curriculum subjects which were not directly related to attaining *nibbāna*. These subjects were later to be called secular subjects (*lawki phinnya*

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<sup>74</sup> “သားတို့မှာလည်း၊ ပညာလိုချင်၊ ကျောင်းကန်ဝင်သော်၊မသင်တခါ၊သင်တခါနှင့်၊ မလာတနေ၊ လာတနေလည်း၊ ဆို၍မခိုင်း...” “*Shin Mahasīlavamsa Sounmasar*” (paragraph, 58) *Thammata se zaung dwe* (A Collection of Ten Texts), p.267.

in Burmese). The point here is that the *Sangha* had had to redefine their curriculum. The aim was now not only to educate those who wished to free themselves from suffering but also those who had a worldly motive. The Order did well before the end of the nineteenth century: it produced a curriculum for general education that took account of the needs of both the Order and society. In essence, this curriculum included lessons or texts on basic moral and monastic training as well as on vocational subjects current at the time. Occasionally secular arts and sciences were integrated into the monastic curriculum, to fulfil the needs of the wider society.<sup>75</sup> This type of curriculum was designed and modified by individual abbots to suit the needs of their students, and never adopted nationally, despite similarities in curriculum between monasteries. But we do not know for certainty what texts were actually used to teach monks and novices in individual monasteries.

However, the fact that there existed some common needs in training students, many of whom went on to become monks, suggests that in ancient Burma there was some standardization of the curriculum even before the introduction of formal examinations. This can also be deduced from the fact that some texts were more popular and widely used than others and therefore may have been widely studied. Here, through a careful study of the biographies of leading *sayadaws* in their early years during the Kon-Baung period, we may learn of the texts they studied and thus conclude that the following texts may have usually formed a foundation syllabus in Burma, at least from the thirteenth century onwards.

The syllabus included a devotional formula; accounts of the Buddha's victory over *Māra*, "the devil"; some selected *suttas*; *Lokaṇīti*; *Paritta*; rules and regulations for *sāmaṇera*,

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<sup>75</sup> Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform*, p.4. Also Rahula, p.161.

“novices”; the *Jātakas*, and three further texts considered to be essential for the study of the *Tipiṭaka*. A devotional formula was generally known as *awkatha* (Pali, *okāsa*) because it always began with the word *awkatha*. The word *okāsa* in the Pali canon has several meanings, including “permission”<sup>76</sup>, the one that was adopted in this formula. Permission was asked by one who recited the *awkatha* from the Triple Gem, namely the Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Sangha*. The devotional formula was also called *paya shikho* (ဘုရားရှိခိုး = worship of the Buddha) because that was how the Burmese worshipped the Buddha. Contained in the formula are a request for forgiveness from the Triple Gem for unmindful actions; praise of the Buddha; paying homage to the Triple Gem; and an expression of wishes (ဆုတောင်း) by the worshipper, in which he usually asks to be freed, by virtue of his humility and devotion, from all the woeful states. The *awkatha* was usually in Burmese and ran from half a page to a full page. But, in addition, a learned teacher might teach his students another formula in Pali, always in verse, for instance, the famous *namakkāra gāthās* and the *sambuddhe gāthā*. While the *namakkāra gāthās* run to seven pages in thirty-three verses<sup>77</sup>, the *sambuddhe gāthā* is only one verse. They were composed locally by eminent monks. The *awkatha* was recited by every Burmese every time he paid homage to the Buddha or observed the Five Precepts. This tradition is still alive and is unique to the Burmese.

Not unlike common prayer in Christian culture, the tradition of the *awkatha* formula provided a way for the common folk to maintain contact with the Buddha. As common prayers may differ from one diocese to another, so did, and still does, the *awkatha* in Burma. A Burmese saying has it that “each *kyaung* (monastery) says a different *gatha*

<sup>76</sup> For instance, *okāsaṃ karoti pañhassa-veyyākaraṇāya* (D i 51; M ii 142; S iv 57; Vin i 114); *okāsaṃ yācati* (M ii 123). See also Pali-English Dictionary, p.163.

<sup>77</sup> *Se zaung dwe* (A Collection of Ten Texts), pp.49-55.



(verse) and each village has its own *awkatha*".<sup>78</sup> In fact, it was an argument over different wordings of the *awkatha* between the people of two villages, who met on a full moon day at a pagoda in Prome in 1856, that led to a debate between two great monks of the time<sup>79</sup> and contributed to the founding of one of the modern *nikāyas*, *Dvāra-nikāya*, in Burma. The dispute centred on whether to say *kāya-vacī-mano-kamma* or *kāya-vacī-mano-dvāra*. No common ground was achieved and thus they were unable to join together for their recitation.

The accounts of the Buddha's victory over *Māra* were poetical translations of the *jayamaṅgala-gāthas*, common also in Ceylon and Thailand. The translations were made by different authors through the ages. The eight victories were interpreted as victories against the enemies within oneself as well as without. To the Burmese, therefore, there were sixteen victories, half of which were achieved internally and half externally. This explains how *Māra* is interpreted in Burma, both as a real god and as a personification of defilements within oneself. Together with the *awkatha*, these victory stanzas were the first lessons a Burmese learnt about the Buddha.

Next, the student learnt the *Maṅgala-sutta*, followed by the *Sigālovāda-sutta*. He memorised the *Maṅgala-sutta* in Pali, and then the *nissaya*, before learning their meaning as expressed in a few Burmese poems.<sup>80</sup> The learning of the *Maṅgala-sutta* must have been very significant, as parents usually celebrated the day their son began the *sutta* and the teacher would choose an auspicious day for it.<sup>81</sup> The *sutta* teaches the thirty-eight kinds of practice, usually known as *blessings*, covering, by means of explanation, every aspect of Buddhist culture: education, family, vocation, moral and mental development.

<sup>78</sup> တစ်ကျောင်း တစ်စာတစ်ပုဒ်ဆန်း။

<sup>79</sup> Ok Po Sayadaw, the founder of the *Dvāra-nikāya*, and Kyee Thee Lay That Sayadaw, famous for his poems on the Life of the Buddha, *Jinathapakāsānī*.

<sup>80</sup> *Se zaung dwe*, pp.274-286.

<sup>81</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Anagat thathana yay* (Future of the Sāsana), p.320.

Once the student had learnt the *Maṅgala-sutta*, he would be taught the *Sigālovāda-sutta*, in which the Buddha gives advice to a young man, Sigāla, who took his father's dying wish literally and worshiped different directions every morning. In this *sutta*, the Buddha explained what was actually meant by worshipping different directions: the way to worship different directions was to fulfil one's duty and responsibility towards different people in society.<sup>82</sup> As this *sutta* is composed in the form of poems and long, and the student had not yet learnt Pali at this point, it was learnt only in Burmese. Obviously, this *sutta* was chosen to instil in the student a sense of duty and responsibility, whatever way of life he chose to lead. After this, the student had lessons on the *Lokaṇīti*, a text composed by a minister, Anantasūriya Amat, during the Pagan period. Arranged in seven chapters, the text itself is an expanded version of a Sanskrit work and deals with "prudential rules and principles of morality".<sup>83</sup>

Then the rules and regulations for a *sāmaṇera*, novice, called in Burmese *shin kyint wut*, were taught. *Shin kyint wut* is a collection of rules from the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya-piṭaka* and is basically an equivalent for the *sāmaṇera* to the *Pātimokkha*. It includes the reflections on the four requisites, namely robes, food, shelter and medicine; ten rules, for the breaking of which a *sāmaṇera* is to be expelled from the Order (*linga-kamma*)<sup>84</sup>; ten other rules, for the transgression of which a *sāmaṇera* has to undergo some form of punishment (*daṇḍa-kamma*)<sup>85</sup>; the seventy-five rules on decorum (*sekhiyā dhammā*); and the fourteen communal rules (*khandakavatta*). The text has the original Pali passages as well as their *nissaya*. It also includes explanations for each rule. The *nissaya* has been re-written many times over the centuries; and the explanations exhibit differences as to their

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<sup>82</sup> D iii 180-193.

<sup>83</sup> Gray, *Ancient Proverbs and Maxims From Burmese Sources Or, Nīti Literature of Burma*, pp.viii-x, 1-36. For more complete information on the *Lokaṇīti* see Bechert & Braun, "Introduction" *Pāli Nīti Texts of Burma*, pp.xxxviii-liv.

<sup>84</sup> Vin i 83-84.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

comprehensiveness; thus there have been many versions of *shin kyint wut*. Among those currently in use the most comprehensive was written by Shwegu Sayadaw in Pegu in 1956. This version, reprinted 57 times in 48 years, explains all the rules with the help of not only the whole *Vinaya-piṭaka* but also the various *Vinaya* traditions.<sup>86</sup> Some versions, for example, the *Mahagandhayon shin kyint wut*, first published in 1852, include pictures to illustrate rules on decorum.<sup>87</sup>

Following the *shin kyint wut* was the *Paritta*, a set of eleven discourses selected from various Pali *Nikāyas*. The *Paritta* was memorised only in Pali; its *nissaya* and meaning were not studied, except those of the *Maṅgala-sutta*, which we have already discussed. The study of the *Paritta*, used to ward off evil and bring blessings on appropriate occasions, was intended to train the students to perform rituals once they were ordained. Monks had to perform simple rituals, such as chanting, on a regular basis in return for the material support they received from lay people. The chanting of the *Paritta* was popular because people believed that it not only dispelled evil but also brought good luck.

The *Jātakas* also formed part of the syllabus in many monasteries. Since the fifteenth century onwards there have been numerous works on the *Jātaka*. At Sagaing Ariyavaṃsa wrote in Pali a guide to the study of the *Jātaka*, the *Jātakavisodhana*.<sup>88</sup> But from the seventeenth century, the *Jātaka* came to be studied in the vernacular language. At Ava, Taung-bi-lar Sayadaw wrote a commentary in Burmese verse (*byo*) on the *Vessantara-jātaka*. Thalun's successor, King Pindale (1648-1661), had some 430 *Jātaka* painted at a pagoda at Sagaing in 1649.<sup>89</sup> The king ordered that the captions for the paintings were to

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<sup>86</sup> *Shwegu shin kyint wut*, pp.i-iii.

<sup>87</sup> *Tatbhava thathana* (One Life in the *Sāsana*), p.608.

<sup>88</sup> Bode, p.100.

<sup>89</sup> ROB, I, pp.467-471.

be written in four languages, “Burmese, Mon, Shan and Yon (Lanna Thai) so that the paintings would please them when they came to the pagoda”.<sup>90</sup> The *Jātaka* as a whole began to inspire more moral debate from the beginning of the Kon-Baung era (1752-1885), featuring, for instance, in the correspondences between the kingdoms of Ava and Hamsavatī, dealing topics such as with war and peace.<sup>91</sup> He learnt the *Jātakas* from his teacher, Than Htun Sayadaw, in his village, Mok soe pho.<sup>92</sup> Bodawpaya had most learned monks in the capital compose *nissaya* on many *Jātakas*.<sup>93</sup> However, the *Jātaka* as a text became accessible to lay people only in the early nineteenth century, when it was translated into Burmese by three scholar monks, U Obhāsa, Shin Nandamedhā and Shin Paññatikkhā during the reign of Bodawpaya (1782-1819).<sup>94</sup> Up to this point in the syllabus, the foundation course was aimed only at the moral and spiritual development of the student. It was at this stage that some students, aged between fifteen and seventeen, whose parents were poor, often had to return to lay life to work with their parents.

Those who continued their study would now be taught some important texts, three altogether, which could be called the core texts that form the architecture of the Burmese monastic high school level curriculum. They were Kaccāyana’s Pali grammar, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* and the *Pātimokkha*. Kaccāyana’s grammar was to provide a good knowledge of Pali grammar, while the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* was to give him a summary of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*. The *Pātimokkha*, on the other hand, was taught as a preparation for the *Vinaya-piṭaka*. These three texts, known simply in Burmese as *thatda* (grammar), *thingyo* (compendium) and *vinee* (discipline) respectively, were thus considered a preparation course for higher study. At the end of this course, the student

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, p.467.

<sup>91</sup> ROB, III. pp.32-34, 162, 167-168. Some of the *Jātakas* referred to in the correspondence are the *Bhūridattha Jātaka* (no. 543), the *Samvara Jātaka* (371), the *Mahasīlava Jātaka* (51) and the *Dīghāvu Jātaka* (462).

<sup>92</sup> Myat Thu, *Alaungpaya*, pp.37-38.

<sup>93</sup> *Pitakathamaing*, pp.194-197.

<sup>94</sup> Obhāsa, *Vessantara zat taw kyi*, pp.3-5.

might choose to follow entirely the canonical texts and their commentaries, known as *kyan-gyi* (great texts); or he might choose to focus equally on these great texts and some secular subjects. The latter option might be taken by students who intended to pursue a career at the royal court, if they were to leave the Order at the end of their higher study, mostly aged between twenty-three and twenty-five<sup>95</sup>.

Some of the secular subjects taught at the time were, for instance, astrology (*sūryasiddhanta* / *laghugraha*), medicine (*dravyaguṇa*), mathematics, magic (*tantraśāstras*) and law<sup>96</sup>, though they may have been available only in selected monasteries. For instance, the Lokuttara Kyaung in Taungoo during the Ava period<sup>97</sup> and the Bagaya Kyaung at Amarapura<sup>98</sup> during the Kon-Baung period were two of the few institutions where such specialised subjects were available. Men with expertise in these subjects were in such great demand at the royal court that even if they were in the monkhood, their service would still be required by the king. We have already mentioned the Mon monk, Bamei Sayadaw, who was an expert in the Atharvaveda and who served King Thalun in his expeditions. But *Vedasattha* (Sk. *Vedaśāstra*), “Veda scriptures”, was not confined to Mon monks, like Bamei Sayadaw, who volunteered to bless soldiers in the front lines. In fact, during the reign of Thalun’s predecessor, Anauketlun (1605-1628), three *sayadaws*, whom the king summoned from Ava to debate with the monks of Rāmañña at Pegu, were all learned not only in the *Tipiṭaka* but also in the *Vedasatthas*. The debate was arranged by the king, who had overheard Rāmañña monks saying that “[a]s for the monks in Burma, there are none expert in the sacred texts and learned in the *Vedasatthas*”. The debate brought deserved recognition for the monks of Ava from their

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<sup>95</sup> Andrew Huxley, (Reader in Politics, School of Oriental and African Studies, London), speaking at the conference on “Buddhism, Power, and Political Order in South and Southeast Asia”, Harris Manchester College, Oxford, 14 April 2004.

Bode, pp.50-52. See also Huxley, Andrew “Buddhism and Law: The View from Mandalay” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1995.

<sup>97</sup> ROB, I, pp.467-471.

<sup>98</sup> Huxley. Personal communication.

hosts.<sup>99</sup> Another secular subject greatly in demand at the royal court was law. In the thirteenth century, a Mon monk, Sāriputta alias Dhammavilāsa, wrote the oldest law book in Burma, *Dhammasattha*.<sup>100</sup> Based on Dhammavilāsa's work, the tradition of monks studying and teaching continued to develop. For example, in the Kon-Baung period (1752-1885), two famous law texts in Burmese, the *Manuyin* (1756) and the *Manu Kyay* (1758-1760), were written.<sup>101</sup>

There was another type of curriculum for those who stayed in the monastery longer as monks and were thus more committed to the religious life. This second category of curriculum was specialised, focusing entirely on the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, and it was presumed that those who studied this curriculum were committed to serious spiritual practice and would themselves one day become leading members of the Order. The aim of this curriculum was to preserve the doctrine, as the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* are known.

In this purely religious curriculum, the chief objective for which the students had to strive was to see the Buddha in his own words, as found in the Pali *Nikāyas*. While one may question whether the texts were studied academically in the modern sense of modern academic study, those trained by this method had nearly every single piece of information from the *Tipiṭaka* at their fingertips after an average of ten years' study. They learnt no *sutta* by heart. Their main concerns were going through every sentence of the Pali *Nikāyas* and consulting information from different parts of it. The point was to become familiar with the Pali canonical, commentarial and sub-commentarial texts, known as "great texts", by going through them thoroughly and as quickly as possible.

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<sup>99</sup> *Sāsanavaṃsa*, p.106; Bode, pp.50-51; Ferguson, p.170.

<sup>100</sup> Bode, p.33.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, pp.86-87.

In brief, the method employed in this informal textual study primarily consisted of two elements: reading a text through a paraphrasing exercise, which usually went with syntactical exercises; and philosophical analysis of each passage from the text. Paraphrasing, also known as *nissaya*, was done initially by the teacher, and was repeated aloud by all students. Every sentence and paragraph was studied. After some weeks or months when most of the students were considered competent, the teacher would delegate the task of paraphrasing to the best student in the class. He would then be known as *zar-so*, “reciter of the Burmese paraphrase”, and was treated as an assistant teacher. He needed to prepare himself well, reading related texts, including commentaries and sub-commentaries to each *sutta*, in advance.<sup>102</sup> For a *zar-so*, study was more intensive than for others. Appointing a student as *zar-so* was one of the various ways the teacher assessed his students. In the course of a paraphrasing exercise, philosophical expositions were usually given. Students were not usually allowed to read the *nissaya* by others in their preparation for the class because that would misled the teacher when he assessed the competence of his students in Pali and comprehension; instead, students were required to work on the original text itself and a new paragraph would only be studied when the current one had been well digested (*sar-kyay*).

Students usually studied a text several times, under either the same teacher or a different one, until they mastered it. This was called digging through the same great texts again and again, so that one became a real master of them. Once regarded as having dug through the great texts, a student became known as ကျမ်းကြီးပေါက် (*kyan gyi pauk*) “one who has dug through the great texts”, and in fact this term was the recognition of a scholar.

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<sup>102</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Tatbhava thanthaya*, p.144.

It is this method that we shall call informal study in the subsequent discussions because it had no standardised curriculum; it offered no formal qualification; and there was no formal assessment. Another method of study, which would over the centuries replace informal study, is termed formal study simply because it offered qualifications thorough assessment conducted regularly first at the instigation of the monarch and later also by the *Sangha* and Buddhist community leaders. As already discussed, the former emphasised the thorough study of a text page by page and retained the academic freedom of the teacher. The latter, on the other hand, as we shall see, had a standardised curriculum, on which students were assessed and qualifications awarded to successful candidates. While formal study seems more practical for an institution, like the Buddhist monastic community, to train its members, it would nevertheless lead to the decline over the years of a specialised curriculum, which values mastery of the great texts.

In the absence of formal examinations, in the informal tradition of study a student's qualification was assessed in many ways: he might be measured as a *zar-so*<sup>103</sup>; or he might be asked to help teach some basic texts to his juniors; or he might write or be asked to write a book<sup>104</sup>, and sometimes a commentary in Pali on any text he saw fit or one chosen by his teacher<sup>105</sup>; or he might be asked to preach on full moon days.<sup>106</sup>

The teachers, especially those who were famous for teaching the great texts, were often requested by the king to reside in the capital, where the king and his ministers could look after them and their numerous students for their material needs. Lessons on the great texts were therefore mostly available only in the capital. But despite such strong royal patronage, abbots were in total control of the administration and also of education in

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, pp.133-134.

<sup>104</sup> Sobhanasirī, *Mahadvāra-nikāya sāsana-dīpanī*, pp.134-136, 323-324.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>106</sup> Kelatha, cit., II, pp.23-24, 124-125, 128, 131-132, 172-173, 184.



their monasteries: they selected their own candidates for ordination and designed their own syllabuses. There was total academic freedom on the part of the teachers.

This informal textual study, which formed the central part of Burmese ecclesiastical pedagogy until the end of the nineteenth century, then began to give way to the practice of focusing entirely on syllabuses for formal examinations. Novices and young monks started to come under pressure to sit formal examinations. Here, in order to demonstrate how monastic education systems have changed over the centuries, we shall briefly look at the student life of three leading monks, Ledi Sayadaw and two of the other four, in the twentieth century.

First, we shall look at the life of a well-known scholar and meditation master, Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923), whose education was obtained exclusively through informal textual study. Ledi Sayadaw, also known as Shin Ñāṇadhaja before he set up a monastery at a place called Ledi, began his study at his village monastery<sup>107</sup> at the age of ten. The abbot, U Nanda, taught him Burmese and gave him basic moral and monastic training similar to what we have described earlier as a curriculum for general education. Following his ordination at fifteen, Ñāṇadhaja studied from the same teacher Kaccāyana's Pali grammar, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, the *Vithi let yo* (a text in Burmese on the thought process), the *Mātikā*, the *Dhātukathā*, the *Yamaka* and the *Paṭṭhāna*. In 1869, three years after he had received *upasampadā*, he went to a famous teaching monastery, San Kyaung, in Mandalay, for higher study. There he studied under the abbot, San Kyaung Sayadaw, all the *Vinaya* canonical texts and their commentaries. He repeated not only the same texts but also the Abhidhamma canonical texts and their commentaries under two other famous teachers, Makuṭārāma Sayadaw and Salin

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<sup>107</sup> His village was called Zaing Pying Ywa and situated in Depeyin, near Mon Ywa in Upper Burma.

Sayadaw (a member of the Sudhamma Council during the reign of Mindon, 1853-1878). Under Salin Sayadaw, Ñāṇadhaja became a *zar-so*. At twenty-eight Ñāṇadhaja was appointed a teacher by San Kyaung Sayadaw.

We can see here how Ñāṇadhaja chose to study the *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* several times, undoubtedly following the norm at the time and all under the informal textual study system. While teaching at San Kyaung monastery, he also continued to study with other *sayadaws* in Mandalay, probably some of the *Sutta-piṭaka*. In this system we see not only the absolute freedom enjoyed by the teachers in managing their own syllabuses but also the depth of study to which the student was willing to go. As a result, the system produced scholars such as Ñāṇadhaja. He compiled in Pali works on important Buddhist tenets, such as the *Patīccasamuppāda* (Dependent Origination), the *Aṭṭhaṅgika-magga* (Noble Eightfold Path), the *Bodhipakkhiya dhammā* (Factors of Enlightenment). He also engaged in an academic debate through his writing. In his work, the *Paramatthadīpanī*, also composed in Pali, he pointed out what he considered to be mistakes in 245 places in the highly respected work on Abhidhamma, the *Abhidhammaṭṭhaviḥārinī-ṭīkā*. His criticism of this twelfth-century work sparked a series of debates among Burmese Abhidhamma scholars, who then wrote works in Pali in defence of the *Abhidhammaṭṭhaviḥārinī-ṭīkā*. Ledi Sayadaw was also one of the best scholars in the Burmese language. He pioneered writing on essential Buddhist topics in the vernacular language, criticising author-monks of the time for compiling work “full of quotations in Pali from the *Sutta*, the commentaries, the sub-commentaries and learned words from the *nissayas*, which are useful only for monks [for they knew Pali], but leaving ordinary lay people with no Pali knowledge unable to taste the Buddha’s teaching...”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ledi Sayadaw, *Ledi Dīpanī Paung Chok* (Collection of Ledi Sayadaw’s Dīpanīs), I, pp.c-d.

However, as noted earlier, by the turn of the century such informal textual study began to lose ground to formal study, focused on examination syllabuses, due to the increasing pressure faced by teaching monasteries and their students. This shift will be evident when we briefly examine the student life of Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa (1899-1977), the founder of one of the most famous teaching monasteries, and Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-1983), one of the foremost *Vipassana* meditation masters, in recent Burma. Both were well trained in textual study in the early part of their training but came increasingly under pressure to sit formal examinations.

Janakābhivaṃsa's monastic education began when he was nine, at Mahāvisuddhārāma, the headquarters of the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, in Mandalay. According to his autobiography, at the Mahāvisuddhārāma he was taught only some but not all of the traditional curriculum for general education, which Ledi Sayadaw had been taught before he was fifteen. Instead, Janakābhivaṃsa, from the age ten, was taught Pali grammar and the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, which were parts of syllabuses for formal examinations, called *Pathamapyan*, which we shall discuss later in this chapter.<sup>109</sup> Although he was also taught twice, through the informal textual study technique, the *Dhammapada* and its commentary, which were not part of formal examination syllabuses, it was clear that the aim of his teacher, as well as his own, was that he sit formal examinations and this motivated him to focus on those syllabuses. At fifteen he passed the first level of the *Pathamapyan* examinations.

It is interesting to note that at fifteen Ñāṇadhaja began to study the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, whereas Janakābhivaṃsa began his examination career without having been through the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* or any other *piṭaka*. Although he completed the textual study of the

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<sup>109</sup> Janakābhivaṃsa, *Tatbhava thanthaya*, pp.70-71.

whole *Dīgha-nikāya* and its commentaries at seventeen, he would thereafter pursue his studies, until he was twenty-seven through the syllabuses of two boards of formal examinations, the *Pathamapyan*, and the *Sakyasīha* [an examination board created to support the study of Buddhist scriptures in British-ruled Burma,] which we shall discuss in the next chapter. During his student career of almost two decades, Janakābhivamsa seems to have been inspired by an education system based on the syllabuses for formal examinations. He repeatedly sat the *Pathamagyī*, the highest level in the *Pathamapyan*, until he achieved the highest marks in the whole country, a condition for attaining a special grade called *Pathamakyaw*. Even when engaged for six years in the study of the great texts at the *Mahāvisutārāma* monastery, in Pakhokku, at the request of his teacher, Ñāṇābhivamsa, Janakābhivamsa came back to Mandalay to sit the *Pathamapyan* and *Sakyasīha* examinations, despite the effort of his teachers at the Mahāvisuddhārāma in Mandalay and the Mahāvisutārāma in Pakhokku to prevent him.<sup>110</sup> Janakābhivamsa said that by the time he came back to Mandalay to sit the examinations, most of his contemporaries there had already passed them and he certainly felt the pressure of having to do the same to win recognition as a competent teacher in the *Dhamma*.<sup>111</sup>

Janakābhivamsa's contemporary, Mahasi Sayadaw (1904-1983), also known as Shin Sobhana before he became a well-known meditation teacher, equally felt the pressure of having to pass examinations. Sobhana had most of his monastic training and study at his village monastery and two other nearby village monasteries. He began school at his village monastery, Seik-khun, Shwebo, at the age of six and was ordained as a novice at twelve. Under the abbot he studied the curriculum for general education, described earlier, and by the time he was seventeen he had also learnt through informal textual study the whole *Vinaya-piṭaka*, which was considered a part of the specialised

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, p.160.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p.161.

curriculum. By nineteen he had completed, under the abbots of two nearby village monasteries, Shwetheindaw and In-gyindawtaik, the whole *Tipiṭaka*, its commentaries and sub-commentaries.

Although he had completed the textual study of the whole *Tipiṭaka* under two teachers in eight years, Sobhana would not feel competent for his future monastic career without having passed formal examinations. This was because “monks were considered learned only if they passed formal examinations”.<sup>112</sup> Without particularly studying the syllabuses for the *Pathamapyan* examinations, Sobhana would sit all the three levels within four years, 1924-27, while travelling back and forth between Upper and Lower Burma.<sup>113</sup> He then went to Mandalay to repeat, for nearly two years under famous *sayadaws*, such as Khyanthagyi Sayadaw and Khinmagan Sayadaw, some of the texts he had already learnt. For the next ten years or so, Sobhana busied himself with teaching novices and intensive meditation. At this point, one would think that Sobhana would not sit any more examinations, for he had become a well-known meditation teacher in Shwebo. But when the colonial government introduced degree examinations, called *Dhammācariya*, in 1940, Sobhana decided he would sit the degree examinations, which he did a year later, in 1941, and passed with honours. This time his intention in sitting the examinations was to gain the trust of the meditators as a competent teacher, not only in meditation but also in the scriptures.<sup>114</sup>

Here we can see the beginning of “the era of formal examinations” through the perception of two leading monks, Ashin Janakābhivamsa and Mahasi Sayadaw. They decided to sit examinations, the *Pathamapyan* and the *Sakyasīha* for Janakābhivamsa,

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<sup>112</sup> Silānandābhivamsa, *Mahasi Sayadaw payagyi e atthokpatti* (Biography of the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw), p.13.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, pp.13-14. He missed the examinations for one year, in 1925, due to his travels. *Ibid*, p.13.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, pp.35-36.

and the *Pathamapyan* and the *Dhammācariya* in the case of Mahasi Sayadaw, simply because of the prestige brought by success in the formal examinations. Many, including monks, considered passing examinations synonymous with being a learned monk. The change in monastic education in Burma may also be noticed by comparing the two Buddhist councils in Burma held over eight decades apart. The Sixth Buddhist Council, *Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyanā*, held between 1954 and 1956, was dominated by the *Dhammācariya* degree holders, who had not only been trained in textual study but had also gone through formal examinations; but, in contrast, the Fifth Buddhist Council, *Pañcamasaṅgāyanā*, held in 1871, was led purely by scholars trained intensively in the system of informal textual study. Ledi Sayadaw was one of the few who recited parts of the *Tipiṭaka* from memory before more than six hundred members of the Council read it aloud together.<sup>115</sup> Both Janakābhivaṃsa and Mahasi Sayadaw became prominent during the Sixth Buddhist Council. Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa was on the editorial committee and was also one of the patrons, while Mahasi Sayadaw was the questioner (*pucchaka*).

But a more radical change, not necessarily for the better, was to take place in the next half century. This will become clear as we discuss the life of a student monk in Burma today.

### 2.3 Study for Formal Examinations

We mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter that the *Sangha Mahānāyaka* Committee, the highest ecclesiastical administrative and education authority in Burma, described the existence of many formal examinations and the emphasis on them by novices and monks as “the era of formal examinations (*sarmeipwe khet*)”. The highest *Sangha* authorities have also concluded that “... they [students] do not have good

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<sup>115</sup> He recited the *Kathāvatthu*.

knowledge of the *Tipiṭaka*. . . . . [W]hen they have to preach, speak and write, they are not able to locate information easily to do so.” Even monks who have passed the *Dhammācariya* examinations have not read some basic texts, such as the *Dhammapada* and the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, or *suttas*, such as the *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* and the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*. This is because the whole monastic education system is defined only by syllabuses for formal examinations and these texts are not in them.

The majority of the “great texts” which are not part of the examination syllabuses are no longer studied. The teachers and the institutions themselves are under pressure to have as many students as possible pass examinations, to attract material support from the government and devotees. However, within one academic year it is impossible to complete, through the textual study method, the syllabus of each level. Therefore the monasteries no longer teach the whole text; instead, only selected chapters or paragraphs are studied, leaving students unable to contextualise what they study. Besides, since students do not read through of the texts, their Pali knowledge has deteriorated considerably. This has led to many students failing examinations. A quick answer to this problem has been to focus more on examination papers, for if a student fails examinations more than a certain number of times – and there is at present no limit to the number of times a candidate can sit the same examination - he should be expelled from teaching monasteries. Nowadays in Burma students who do not wish to sit examinations, but wish instead to go through the great texts which are not a part of the syllabuses, are not admitted to top teaching monasteries any more. The teaching is focused entirely on the syllabus.

Here we will briefly describe the teaching at one of those top monasteries, Sasana Mandaing, in Pegu, Burma today. However, first we should give some general

information on how a student joins a teaching monastery. If the student is of tender years, say ten to twelve, the normal age of entry, parents or guardian(s) have to take him in person to the head teacher, *taik-oak*, of the teaching monastery, to request admission, usually in June, a month before the rains-retreat begins. If the student is older and currently under a teacher, it is his teacher who will take him to the *taik-oak*. The interview takes place only between the two teachers, his current one and the *taik-oak*. Once he is accepted, the two teachers will usually discuss how they will jointly look after the academic and spiritual progress of this pupil.

Then at the teaching monastery the student will be supervised every day in his learning and practice. The supervision is carried out by just a single teacher-monk in the monasteries affiliated to the *Sudhamma-nikāya*, which accounts for over eighty percents of the *Sangha* population; but in the *Shwegyin* monasteries, which has just under ten percents of the *Sangha* population, the role is split into two. An example is the Sasana Mandaing, where one who supervises moral training is called *ah-ma-khan saya*, literally meaning a guarantor-teacher. He is a moral tutor. The request on the part of the student to his prospective moral tutor to accept him into his care, and the acceptance on the part of the moral tutor, have to be formally made in front of all the *Sangha* in the monastery on the day the academic year begins. There is a special formula for both request and acceptance. The formula is rather long but in essence the student asks his moral tutor to admonish him on both worldly and spiritual matters; and the tutor, for his part, accepts that responsibility to admonish the pupil and announces it formally to the entire *Sangha* of the monastery. The point of announcing the request and the acceptance in front of the whole *Sangha* in the monastery is to involve the other members of the monastery in the relationship between the moral tutor and his pupil.



In the Shwegyin monasteries, as part of his academic training, the student is each day given Pali passages to memorise by his supervisor, who in some monasteries may be also his moral tutor. He reads the passage and will have to recite it by heart in front of his supervisor the next day. If he does it well, he will be given a new passage or passages to read. The tutor keeps a record sheet of every recitation made by the students assigned to him and has to send a report to the *taik-oak*. In the evening, the student is encouraged to recite on his own what he has learnt. There are lessons during the day. These lessons, on different texts, are given in a class where the teacher dictates either the *nissaya* or standardised comments related to parts of the text. The students spend most of the time taking down the dictation. The standardised answers generally run to just three or four lines.

In the usual lesson there is no discussion of the contents: the most important task is to understand what each Pali passage means. And there is usually no homework, except in lessons on Pali grammar and on the *Abhidhamma* canonical texts. Of course, the teacher explains the meaning of the Pali passages. In addition, there is also no essay writing on any subject. These classes may number two to five a day, depending on the level: the higher the level, the more the classes. In between, generally about three times a day, all the students are assembled in a large building to learn by heart texts prescribed for their level. Only students studying for a *Dhammācariya* degree are exempt from this gathering, called *sar-ahn-kyaung*, or recitation class; this exception is to give them more time for reading. There is a teacher to supervise the recitation class. This teacher does not pay attention to any particular student; he is there to preserve order and keep the time.

The concern of the teacher in his teaching is to cover some past questions but a more dedicated teacher may also identify passages on which new questions could be set in the examinations. All the questions and answers are standardised, and teachers in the whole

country would dictate the same question and answer to their students, who would copy them in class or buy a printed book containing these questions and answers. Below is how the teacher dictates a standardised question and answer on the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* to his students.

Q. List the phenomena that can condition result.

A. The phenomena that can condition result are the 12 unwholesome consciousnesses + the 21 wholesome consciousnesses + 52 *cetasikas*.<sup>116</sup>

Students are prepared for many examinations each year. Central to all of them are the examinations conducted by the government, called *Pathamapyan* and *Dhammācariya*. The *Pathamapyan*, which offer a foundation in Buddhist scriptures, have three levels, and the *Dhammācariya*, which are for higher study, have one general degree course and six honours degree courses. Both the *Pathamapyan* and the *Dhammācariya* are conducted annually throughout the country. A large majority of monasteries follow the syllabuses of these two examinations. But there are also other examinations, conducted locally and open only to local students. Their syllabuses are closely modelled on those of the *Pathamapyan* and *Dhammācariya*. On the other hand, there are also other examinations held locally but open to students nationally.

Before a novice is entered for the *Pathamapyan* examinations in April, he is taught a basic course. And in Pegu this course includes basic *vinaya* training for novices, for which there is a local examination set for all the monasteries in Pegu. The examinations, known as *Vinaya Tankhun* (The Banner of the *Vinaya*), are held in December and are set by hundreds of novices. After the examinations, the novices begin immediately to study Kaccāyana's Pali grammar and the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*. They will sit no more

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<sup>116</sup> Tilokābhivamsa, *Abhidhamma let saung* (The Gift of the Abhidhamma), p.186.

examinations for that year. But by July, when the new academic year begins, those novices who have passed their *Vinaya Tankhun* examinations are expected to study the syllabus of the *Pathamagne*, the first level of the *Pathamapyan* examinations.

All the candidates for the *Pathamapyan* examinations are expected to complete the syllabus and sit the examinations for each level every year. It is in order to help them to do so that standardised answers are prepared by the teachers on different subjects. The *Pathamapyan* candidates are entered for local examinations, called *Vinayādhika*, in December and then the *Pathamapyan* examinations in April. It is important to enter these examinations as the big monasteries compete with one another for prestige, both locally and nationally. The examinations require students to understand the questions and provide standardised answers for them. Mock examinations are held every week in each monastery and a fail in them incurs a punishment. The marks scored by all the students in the mock examinations are revealed to all on the same day, putting pressure on the students to study even harder for the examinations.

Big monasteries may choose to prepare their students for all the most famous examinations in the country, such as the *Sakyasīha* in Mandalay, the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*, a sister examination board of the *Sakyasīha* in Rangoon, the *Tipiṭakadhara*, which has the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* and the *Dīgha-nikāya* as its syllabus in Rangoon. This is to confer more prestige on the monastery and, indeed, on the students themselves. Apart from the *Tipiṭakadhara*, the different examinations have similar syllabuses and, apart from the *Pathamapyan* and the *Dhammācariya*, almost all the examination syllabuses can be and are pursued through self-study. But, ironically, despite similarities in the syllabuses, the success rate in these examinations is relatively low, for several reasons. First, the students themselves do not have time to digest all the texts because too

many texts are prescribed for each level. Second, the similarity in the syllabuses has led to a situation in which question-makers avoid setting questions from the original text but focus on auxiliary ones, which students have not studied. For instance, instead of setting a question directly from the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, the question would be set from the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-ṭīkā*. This is again to increase the prestige of the examination board itself, because the board which sets the hardest questions and has the fewest successful candidates is considered to be of high standard, and thus receives high esteem among fellow scholars.

The pressure on each monastery to get as many students through the most famous examinations in the country as they possibly can has increased over the years. In the 1920s, Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa entered all the examinations held in Mandalay, the *Pathamapyan* and the *Sakyasīha*. But fifty years later, monks would go for more examinations, to get recognition as a competent *dhamma* teacher. A bright monk from the Sasana Mandaing, Ashin Sīvali (1956-), studied the syllabuses of four examinations boards, the *Pathamapyan*, the *Sakyasīha*, the *Cetiyāṅga*, and the *Susamācāra* (of Mawlamaying) for over twenty years. That was because he had to sit them again and again, until he passed them. Unfortunately, he passed only the *Pathamapyan* and the *Cetiyāṅga*. Another bright monk, Sūriya (1962-), who came either first or second in the whole country in all the three *Pathamapyan* levels, went to Mandalay to pursue the *Sakyasīha* and *Cetiyāṅga* examinations for ten years, but failed in all of them. He spent ten years pursuing that recognition, but ended up reading the same syllabuses time and again. By the time they stopped their study in their mid-thirties, the two bright students at the Sasana Mandaing, Sīvali and Sūriya, despite having been in monastic education for about twenty years, had not read the *Dhammapada*, the *Dhammacakkapavattana-sutta* or the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya-piṭaka*. This is simply because, as noted earlier, these texts

and *suttas* are not part of their examination syllabuses. Some less gifted students repeat the *Dhammācariya* examinations for several years but in the end give up. For in the *Dhammācariya* examinations system only approximately five or six sentences from the prescribed Pali commentaries, namely the *Atthasālinī*, the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* and the *Samantapāsādikā*, are selected each year as the subject of questions. If a student has no idea where these sentences belong, he will not be able to contextualise them and thus will not be able to answer the majority of the questions. The relatively high marks required for a simple pass, 65%, makes it even harder for students to pass the *Dhammācariya*. Many are also stuck at the *Pathamagyī*, the highest level of the *Pathamapyān*. They are condemned to repeat the same syllabuses until they have passed. However, these students could not turn their backs on the examination-orientated method of study and instead pursue the study of “great texts”, because the majority of the monasteries are not teaching those texts any more.

However, competition between the monasteries is not the only reason behind the situation in which the Burmese monastic education systems have become so “fixated with formal examinations”. Examinations have been consciously promoted by the government over the centuries. In the next section in this chapter, we shall explore how formal examinations came into existence in Burma. In the next chapter we shall discuss how the Burmese ecclesiastical education system has come to have so many formal examinations.

## 2.4 The Beginning of Formal Examinations: Geopolitical Circumstances in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century

Formal examinations began in the seventeenth century in Burma. So far it has been held that they were introduced by “King Thalun [who] held examinations every year for the *shin laung* [candidates for novicehood] and *pazin laung* [candidates for monkhood] in the month of *nayon* [June or July] to select royal candidates for ordination”.<sup>117</sup> The reason for that, according to some noted historians on Burma, for instance Than Tun, was the decline of monastic discipline and scholarship.<sup>118</sup> The abuse of people’s generosity by members of the Buddhist Order was also blamed for King Thalun’s actions. However, although they show the *Sangha* in a negative light, the measures have put the king in a very favourable context. King Thalun has come to be seen as one of the “great righteous kings”(*min-taya-gyi*/ မင်းတရားကြီး)<sup>119</sup>.

However, these explanations are unsatisfactory. We have found no evidence to support these claims. In fact, far from holding examinations every year to select candidates for ordination, King Thalun, as we shall show shortly, did not even allow any ordination service to take place from 1638 until the end of his reign, in 1648. The formal examinations that did take place were, therefore, all held before 1638, and most certainly within three years, between 1636 and 1638, with the particular aim of purging monks from the Order. The use of formal examinations was necessary for the king because it was hard to screen and prove the motives of a monk according to Thalun’s six categories, which we shall deal with in the next section. The examinations were purely an academic rather than a spiritual measure and could be used as a more direct method,

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<sup>117</sup> *Pariyatti pyinnya yay ci man kain*, p.5.

<sup>118</sup> Than Tun, “Administration Under King Thalun”, p.125.

<sup>119</sup> ROB, III, p.286. See also Koenig, *The Burmese Polity*, pp.76-89.

albeit still artificial, for assessing motives. This indeed would be the case in the Kingdom of Ayutthaya, half a century later. We discuss this at length in Chapter Four.

We will now examine the circumstances surrounding the introduction of formal examinations under Thalun (1629-1648) and the misuse of formal examinations by Bodawpaya (1782-1819), in order to reduce the number of the *Sangha*. We will suggest that the principal reason for their introduction was not any major decline in monastic study or discipline, but rather political.

#### **2.4.1 War and Reconstruction in Seventeenth Century Burma**

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries especially, South-east Asian nations were at war with one another, consolidating their empires. In Burma, then known as Taung-oo (Ketumatī), the building of an empire began in the sixteenth century with the conquest of territories by King Tabin Shwehti (1530-1551), such as Pegu (Hamsavatī), Arakan (Dhaññavatī), the Shan States (Kamboja), Martaban, Prome and Ayutthaya.<sup>120</sup> He made the Mon capital, Pegu, the seat of his power. His brother-in-law and successor, Bayin Naung (1551-1581), attacked the Siamese empire of Ayutthaya, capturing Lanna, a principality of Ayutthaya<sup>121</sup>. However, in the reign of Nandabayin (1581-99) many of the territories gained earlier were lost.<sup>122</sup>

Nandabayin's brother and successor, Nyaungyan (1599-1605), who, as a commander, had earlier resided at Ava, ruled from both Pegu and Ava and his reign was characterised

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<sup>120</sup> Than Tun, 1984, "Ayut'ia Men in the Service of Burmese Kings, 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries" *Tonan Ajia Kenkyu (Southeast Asian Studies) Journal*, XXI, IV, pp.401-402.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid*; Wood, *A History of Siam*, pp.117- 119; Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp.100-101.

<sup>122</sup> ROB, II, p.xv.

by wars in an attempt “to re-establish the empire of Bayingnaung”.<sup>123</sup> It was during this reign that the Portuguese, who became powerful in Pegu under Tabin Shwehti, were defeated; many of them were led to Shwebo, the heartland of the Burman people as slaves.<sup>124</sup> Nyaungyan’s brother and successor, Anaukpetlun (1605-1628), waged wars to regain the lost territories as far as Arakan in the west and Chiangmai and Ayutthaya in the east. He was killed by his son, Minyedipa (Minredeippa), who was soon in turn put to death by one of his uncles and an army commander, Thalun (1629-1648). It is interesting to note that in his last hours, Minyedipa made a plea to Thalun to be allowed to become a monk, which was sternly rejected.

Thalun himself faced a revolt when his first coronation took place at Pegu in 1629. The rebels were “the men in charge of building and... Moulmein Talaings”, who had been traditional rivals of the Burman people, to whom Thalun belonged. The rebellion, which was not successful, “led to a Talaing exodus into Siam”.<sup>125</sup> This instability in Pegu and other parts of the Mon country must have contributed to Thalun’s decision to move his capital permanently to Ava in 1635, where he crowned himself for the second time<sup>126</sup>.

To expand and maintain the empire that had begun to be re-established from the time of his father, Nyaungyan, King Thalun built up very large armies. In 1635, Thalun ordered his army to be increased by 20 times, from 20,000 men to 400,000. Than Tun estimates the population of Burma under Thalun at two million. So one in five people were in the army. The target was to have 100,000 guns, 10,000 canon, 50,000 bows, 6,000 boats, and

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<sup>123</sup> Scott, *Burma*, p.131.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, pp.132-133.

<sup>125</sup> Harvey, *History of Burma*, p.193.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, pp.193-194.



100,000 shields.<sup>127</sup> However, it is very unlikely, in my opinion, that Thalun achieved this target; but the immense strain his policy placed upon the populace was beyond doubt.

Furthermore, during his reign Thalun oversaw major reconstruction, at least in the first years. As soon as he came to power he caused monasteries to be built in Pegu. Indeed, it was “the men in charge of building his monasteries” who “plotted” the first rebellion, during his first coronation. In their efforts to promote the religion as well as to earn recognition for their *pāramī*, here meaning power, in the eyes of their subjects, it was the practice of Burmese kings to build pagodas and monasteries and to donate them to great monks, who were requested to come and reside in the capital. In 1635, as he moved his capital to Ava, Thalun also built a new palace there.<sup>128</sup> In every construction undertaken by the king, everyone except novices and monks was obliged to provide free labour, or rather, forced labour.

It was therefore during these periods of war and reconstruction that a large number of able-bodied men joined the *Sangha*; for members of the *Sangha* were exempt from conscription and forced labour. Although some may have left home after seeing no end to the suffering brought by successive wars, the main reason was to escape conscription and forced labour. The *Sangha* was accorded several privileges: no corvée obligation; no taxes; and in many cases offenders in the yellow robe were not punishable by the law of the land. These privileges had been afforded to members of the *Sangha* from the early days of the Order. This was evident in the conversation in the *Dīgha-nikāya* between the Buddha and King Ajātasattu, in which the king said to the Buddha that he would not

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<sup>127</sup> Than Tun, “Administration Under King Thalun, 1629-1648”, p.119.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, p.117.

force anyone, a former servant, a farmer or a householder, who had joined the *Sangha*, to leave their religious life but would offer them homage and material support.<sup>129</sup>

So if conscription was indeed the main reason for the deterioration in relations between the monarch and the *Sangha*, this raises a question: was it right for the Order to admit those fleeing conscription as members?

The Buddha forbids the Order from ordaining anyone who is *already* “in the king’s service” (*abhiññātam rājabhaṭam*), military or civil. This rule was laid down by the Buddha at the request of one of his main supporters, King Bimbisāra, the father of King Ajātasattu.<sup>130</sup> According to the account in the Vinaya, one day King Bimbisāra ordered his generals to suppress a rebellion in a remote part of his kingdom, Magadha. On hearing the news, some soldiers, realising that war was about killing, did not want to commit that “evil and sin” but rather wanted to do good. On seeing that the Buddhist Order was where one could achieve that object, they became monks. The generals found out and reported this to the king, who then asked the Buddha not to ordain soldiers. So it is clear that a soldier, conscript or voluntary, or even someone not on active service but on the list of reservists for service, cannot be ordained. This is to balance the traditional privileges afforded to the *Sangha*. The Order was a means of social mobility, because slaves and other underprivileged people could free themselves from their unfortunate lives by becoming monks. This was acknowledged by King Ajātasattu, who asked the Buddha to detail the benefits of being ordained.

As far as conscription in Burma under Thalun is concerned, particularly in the first six years of his reign, from 1629 to 1635, there may have existed confusion. There was no

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<sup>129</sup> For more, see the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, D i 60-62.

<sup>130</sup> “...na bhikkhave rājabhaṭo pabbājetabbo. Yo pabbājeyya, āpatti dukkaṭassa”. Vin i 73-74.

official reserve list, nor was there any conscription law or any other law specifically barring people of a certain age from ordination. This confusion was the reason why he issued royal decrees, which we shall discuss later, dealing with the above questions. As a result of these decrees, the *Sangha* was prohibited from admitting new members, as all un-ordained young men were now royal servants. In fact, the absence of such laws could create not only confusion but also tension, as we shall see happened at Ayutthaya under King Narai, the subject of our discussion in Chapter Four.

Under the absolute monarchy the people faced extreme hardship. Under Thalun, the men had to fight for the king. During the time when they were not at war, they also had to look after themselves by growing their own food or returning to their trade. It is interesting to note that on the day he ordered the purification of the monastic Order, 5 August 1635, the king also issued another order to his senior officials to check that his servicemen were ploughing their fields and trading goods for their own income.<sup>131</sup>

Under such circumstances, the monasteries would be attractive to more people than they would otherwise have been, not least because the monasteries provided not only shelter for those fleeing danger but also education and enhancement of social standing for individuals who were ordained. It seems, as we shall see shortly, that officials and servicemen, both of whom were regarded as မင်းကျွန် (min kyun), “slaves of the king”<sup>132</sup>, were the first to exploit this loophole, by sending their sons to monasteries, partly to be educated and partly to escape a life of extreme hardship.<sup>133</sup> Given the good education that was provided at the monastery, a man could attain a high position in the royal court once he left the Order, or even receive royal status, which seems to have happened under

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<sup>131</sup> ROB, I, p.259.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, I, p.395.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, p.257.

Thalun. So the king again issued a decree, not only barring such a short cut to high positions and royal rank but also condemning those who attempted to do so because “they were not of real royal blood”.<sup>134</sup>

There were two social classes in Burma at the time: the ruler and the ruled. The ruled were again divided into three groups: royal servicemen, freemen and slaves. What is interesting is that one belonged to these three categories by birth. The son of a royal guard, for instance, would be regarded by the king, as we shall see shortly<sup>135</sup>, as belonging to the department of royal guard. Freemen were also liable to be in the king’s service, particularly in times of great instability, but they were not usually considered servicemen. Ironically, slaves were exempt from the king’s service. Monks were considered to be outside these categories; they did not belong to the group of freemen, for they were not subject to royal service, even in times of political instability. Any man could become a monk, although those from two groups, the servicemen and the slaves, required the consent of the king and their master respectively.

For those whose children were not bright enough to gain admission to a monastery, their only alternative way to avoid potential conscription was to send their children to become slaves of some officials. A royal order dated 5 August, 1636, reads: “The guards shall not keep their children among the slaves. Do not hide your children. Investigate those who evade conscription.”<sup>136</sup> Under Thalun, there were two kinds of slaves: those who were born slaves; and those who became slaves through marriage (to a slave). On getting married to a slave, a free person would become a slave if he or she decided “to follow his or her spouse to the village of slaves. [Therefore their children would be born slaves.] However, if he or she decided to remain with free people, not only he or she but also the

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, pp.395-396.

<sup>135</sup> See pp.75-76.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, I, pp.257&393.

offspring would be regarded as free people, although his or her spouse would remain a slave.”<sup>137</sup> The king was therefore very keen to liberate the descendants of servicemen who had become slaves through their marriage, so that they could be enlisted into the royal service.<sup>138</sup> The problem of fleeing conscription through voluntary slavery or through marriage into a slave family, as we shall see, was not unique to the reign of Thalun, but was common under all rulers for the next one hundred years.

To retain manpower for war expeditions and for reconstruction, therefore, Thalun took several measures. First, as noted, he issued an order on 5 August 1636 allegedly under the guise of the purification of the *sāsana*. We have also mentioned earlier that Thalun focussed his attention on the monasteries in the more populated Taung-oo district, which were in one way or another supported by and connected to the officials.<sup>139</sup> The abbots were ordered to “weed out” (*hnin le kon*) undesirable monks. The royal order divided monks into six categories: (1) those who wished to be teachers and therefore became monks; (2) those who sought the good life of a *yahan*, (*bhikkhu*); (3) those who had run away from debt or starvation; (4) those who had fled slavery; (5) those who wanted to look after their parents (using the privilege of the *Sangha*); and (6) those who had been ordained through faith in the Buddha. Only the monks deemed to belong to the last category were to be allowed to stay.<sup>140</sup> However, the king did not provide ways and means of assigning monks to these various categories.

Next, the king made a list of the sons of servicemen, to make sure they did not abuse the position of their fathers and, as noted earlier, evade royal service.<sup>141</sup> That was why a separate order was issued on 5 August 1635 to this effect. In fact, the king made one

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, I, p.258. The royal order is dated 14 January 1636.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, p.256.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, pp.254-256.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, p.257. See also *ibid*, p.392.

other announcement on the same date, asking his officials to update the list of servicemen.<sup>142</sup> The purification order, itself issued on the same day, was therefore to be read out first in the monasteries in Taung-oo. For it was from that area that most of the senior hereditary officials, who occupied most of the senior ranks in the royal guards, had originated and had maintained contact since the time of King Mingyinyo, the founder of Taung-oo and the father of Tabin Shwehtee.

Another measure taken by Thalun was to increase the birth rate of the population. He ordered that unmarried women aged below “forty-five or forty-six” should be made to marry soldiers who were widowers. And from the day the order was issued, 28 September 1638, no young man or young woman of marriageable age “shall remain single”. The same order also had a provision for officials to make a list of the unmarried people in the kingdom.<sup>143</sup>

The third act was to prohibit the ordination service. This order was also dated 28 September 1638, three years after the purification order had been announced. Under the order, a list of young males was to be compiled. Part of the order prohibiting ordination reads: “I have been in this golden capital i.e. Ava, for four years. Do not allow *yahan* [*bhikkhu*] ordination. Do not allow *shin* [*sāmaṇera*] ordination. Call the parents and inform them...”<sup>144</sup>

However, more than two years later, although the monasteries in one of the old capitals, Taung-oo, and the current capital, Ava, seem to have followed the royal order, the monasteries outside the capitals were still defying the order and continuing to ordain men. These men were descendants of war captives from Ava’s neighbours, such as the

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p.387.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, pp.294, 391-398; Than Tun, “Administration under King Thalun” p.130

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, p.294.

Shan States, Lanna, Ayutthaya, Manipur and Mon; these ethnic communities had been relocated to populate the Ava kingdom; and some of them were located in Panya, near Ava, where they were made to serve in the royal guards. The king, therefore, had to issue two directives, one in April 1641 and the other in May 1644, to implement the order prohibiting ordination strictly among these ethnic people. Following the first directive, the king asked his officials to interview the monks from the minority ethnic backgrounds. Part of the order reads: “when interviewing the *yahans*, leave out the Myanmar *yahans* [The native and majority ethnic group of Ava had been covered by the order dated 28 September 1638, which banned all ordination ceremonies.]. Interview the Shan, Yon [Lanna], Yodaya [Siamese of Ayutthaya], Dawei [people from Dawei Province], men from Tanessarim, Talaing, Kala [Indians] *yahan* and *thamane* [monks and novices], [from whose communities] men still become ordained”.<sup>145</sup> When, however, the officials first began to summon the monks to their offices for interview instead of going to the monasteries, the king cautioned them that this would damage the image of *Myanmar naing ngan* (Myanmar Kingdom) in the eyes of outsiders in that the “Myanmar people did not trust even their monks”.<sup>146</sup> This was because traditionally monks and novices had nothing to do with the administrative offices run by laypeople, as they were answerable only to their abbot. For the monks and novices to go to the laymen’s administrative offices would certainly arouse curiosity and suspicion among ordinary people. As a result, the monks and novices were now to be interviewed in their monasteries, not in the offices of the officials.

The second directive was also aimed at “Mon, Yun, Shan, Kathe [Manipuri], Yodaya, Dawei who became *yahan* and *thamane*”. But what is unique to this directive is the king’s expressed doubt about the motive of these monks, whom he called “*thila thadin*

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<sup>145</sup> ROB, I, p.427.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, p.427.

*the* [those who observed precepts] and the servants of ministers. The king said that “although these *thila thadin the* were under the instruction of a teacher, most of them were not interested [in instruction].” It was therefore “reasonable to interview them”. Apart from the monks, “the people who had been asked by the ministers to do various jobs and thus entered or left the capital” were also questioned.<sup>147</sup> This shows that the monasteries and some high officials were suspected by the king of aiding some people to evade conscription.

It was thus primarily to prevent the able-bodied from fleeing conscription and forced labour in the reconstruction of his kingdom that King Thalun introduced for the *Sangha* the formal examinations. However, we have no record of any syllabuses or texts on which the monks were supposed to be examined. This was because it was hard to develop a proper curriculum in the three years, between 1635 and 1638, during which the examinations may possibly have been held. In fact, the examinations, as we have noted, did not proceed after 1638, due to Thalun’s earlier dictates.

After the death of King Thalun, the kingdom of Ava began to decline, due partly to the political instability resulting from the overthrow of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) in China, and partly to some weak rulers at Ava. When Pintale (1648-1661) succeeded his father, (Thalun), Yunhli, the last of the Ming dynasty, and his defeated army were exacting levies from Mong Mao and Senwi in the Shan States and preparing from Nankin to make a last stand against their enemy, the Manchu Tartars. When they did attack the Tartars in 1658, they were defeated and sought refuge at Ava. It was when they were on their way there that Yunhli’s followers destroyed Burmese garrisons and frightened the people. But when he and his men arrived at Ava three years later, Yunhli

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, p.440.



apologised to King Pintale for the deeds of his men and gave him a hundred *viss* of gold. Meanwhile the Mon at Hamsavatī, who had earlier been summoned to aid Ava when Yunhli's men ransacked parts of it, deserted and fled to Siam. To recapture the Mon, Pintale sent an army to Siam but it was repulsed. It was the instability and the increase in population at Ava resulting from the arrival of the Chinese, and the consequent scarcity of rice, that led to the downfall of Pintale.<sup>148</sup>

His successor and brother, Pyi (also spelled Pye) (1661-1672), was suspicious of Yunhli and his followers at the outset and soon arranged a ceremony for them at a pagoda, *Thūpārāma*, at Sagaing, to take an oath of allegiance. This turned into a battlefield because the Chinese thought they were about to be slaughtered by the new king. Yunhli and some of his men survived, only to be handed over to the Tartars when they came a year later to demand Yunhli's head.<sup>149</sup> By the end of the next reign under Minrekyawdin (1673-1698), Ava had become so weak that the Manipuris, who had once paid tribute to Bayin Naung (1551-1581), began to raid and loot many areas of Ava, and this was to continue until 1749.<sup>150</sup> Meanwhile the Mon, whose kingdom had been destroyed by Tabin Shwehtee a century earlier, had re-established their kingdom at Hamsavatī, and eventually were strong enough to conquer Ava itself in 1751.

On the other hand, during these waning decades that followed Thalun, successive kings showed signs of piety by building pagodas and monasteries in the capital. For example, Pintale built Ngathatgyi [five spires] pagoda and shrine, containing a large Buddha image. He also completed the construction of a huge Sinhalese style pagoda, Kuanghumdaw, near Sagaing, started by his father, Thalun.<sup>151</sup> King Sane (1698-1714)

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<sup>148</sup> Phayre, *History of Burma*, pp.136-138; Harvey, *Burma*, pp.196-199 & Scott, *Burma*, pp.138-139.

<sup>149</sup> Phayre, p.139 & Harvey, pp.198-201.

<sup>150</sup> Phayre, p.139.

<sup>151</sup> ROB, I, pp.467-471.

built the Manaung pagoda, also in Sagaing district. His successor, Taninganwe (1714-1733), built the Lawkamanaung pagoda at Ava. The monasteries they built were mostly for the Sayadaw, the royal tutor, and a few other learned monks.<sup>152</sup>

However, despite expressing their piety by building pagodas and monasteries, these kings also continued to prohibit ordination ceremonies for servicemen and their sons. But there is no evidence so far to suggest that the ban in the post-Thalun period went as far as Thalun's (dated 28 September 1638), when the ban was applied to all men. Instead, Thalun's successors focussed on prohibiting ordination ceremonies for "royal servants" or "slaves of the king" (မင်းကျွန်), because once ordained they would no longer be in royal service.

In this connection, there are three surviving royal orders, each issued by a different monarch. The first order was issued by Pyi (1661-1672), the second son of Thalun, dated 14 June 1666. Pyi said that "royal servants are the slaves of the king, and must not marry people who are not in the royal service." This was because there was the likelihood of losing the offspring of the royal servants to social groups such as ordinary slaves, who were exempt from conscription. The king also modified the social rule on marriages that had already taken place between a slave and a free person (*alutthu*/အလွတ်သူ) as defined earlier by his father, Thalun. Thalun left the decision to the couple of a mixed marriage between a slave and a free person whether or not their children should become free people or be born slaves, depending on which social group the couple joined after marriage. Pyi, however, overrode that decision and ruled that regardless of which social group, free or slave, the couple chose, "two thirds of the children would be free and only one third would remain slaves", apparently to increase the population of free persons and

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<sup>152</sup> *Pitakathamaing*, pp.158, 171, 206 & 209.

thus also of servicemen.<sup>153</sup> The king, however, did not say how that numerical definition would work if the couple had only one or two children.

The second decree, dated 10 April, 1679, was by Minrekyawdin(1673-1698).<sup>154</sup> He categorised royal servants into twenty-six types. They included not only guards of different kinds but also physicians, astrologers, gardeners, all youth of Shan origin and all war captives from Chiangsen.<sup>155</sup> This decree refers to men from these groups who had not received ordination and said that “they must not become *shin pazin* [novice and monk]. But those who had already been ordained may stay in the monastic Order.”<sup>156</sup> As to marriage between various social groups, Minrekyawdin allowed intermarriage between his twenty-six types of royal servants. The status of the offspring in royal service, however, was to be decided by which group their parents had chosen after their marriage. This meant that when a son of educated parents, whose learning automatically made them royal servants, married a daughter of a guard, and decided to live in the village of the royal guards, their offspring would be enlisted in the royal guards. However, if a royal servant married a slave and had children, Minrekyawdin, like his predecessor, Pyi, said that two thirds of the children would be born free and one third as slaves. It is interesting to see the relationship between poverty and slavery and how popular it was to be a slave, because the king warned: “without actually being in debt, royal people must not pretend and live a life of dependence on a creditor. Even with some debt, people should afford to pay and free themselves. And if a royal servant is in debt, he should be helped to pay his debt from the royal exchequer.” The last decree was issued by Taninganwe (1714-1733), who by and large re-inforced his predecessors’

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<sup>153</sup> ROB, II, p.152.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, pp.176-178.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, p.176.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*.

decrees.<sup>157</sup> On mixed marriage, Pyi's definition was reaffirmed, and on ordination Minrekyawdin's order was restated. Tanninganwe also warned all royal servants against seeking ordination. But those already ordained were allowed to stay in the monkhood.<sup>158</sup>

As far as monastic education in the post-Thalun period is concerned, at royal monasteries in the capital and the surrounding areas, learning seems to have continued. The *Pitakathamaing* (History of the *Piṭaka*) by Maingkhaing Myosa, the chief librarian under Mindon (1853-1878), mentions a number of works written during this period.<sup>159</sup> The fact that works on the *nissaya* literature were produced in almost all the reigns from the time of Thalun indicates that there were students learning religious texts, because a *nissaya* was mainly and still is for students rather than scholars.

With regard to formal examinations, we can infer from the limited evidence that there must have been some changes after the death of Thalun. Instead of employing formal examinations as an instrument to purge the Order, Thalun's successors seem to have come to use them as a means of gaining merit. A royal order issued in 14 March 1674 (?), by Minrekyawdin (1673-1698), a year after he came to the throne, reads: "Do meritorious deeds such as holding annual examinations and ordinations of monks and novices as usual."<sup>160</sup> This change in the use of formal examinations resulted from the fact

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, II, pp.337-341.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, p.337.

<sup>159</sup> *Pitakathamaing*, pp.158, 171, 173, 180-181, 198-199, 204, 212 & 223.

<sup>160</sup> ROB, II, pp.108-109. The date of this order in the ROB, II, is approximate. A different date is given by Than Tun as 14 March 1574, which means the order was issued by Bayin Naung (1551-1581). But Than Tun himself expresses doubt over the date he has given because the language does not seem to belong to that period. However, it is clear to us that this royal order certainly belongs to one of the reigns of Thalun's immediate successors, namely his two sons, Pintale (1648-1661) and Pyi (1661-1672) or even Minrekyawdin (1673-1698). This is because the order contains the names of two monks. One of them is "Lokuttara Sayadaw", a famous astrologer from Taung-oo, who refused to come to Ava in 1648 when invited by Thalun (1629-1648), but agreed to come and supervise the celebration of the Kaunghmudaw Pagoda in 1649 when invited by Pintale. (ROB, I, pp.467-471) The other is "Akyaw [A]lankā Sayadaw". This could be Aggadhammālankāra, the author of the *Mātikā ayakauk* (Analysis of the *Mātikā* of the Dhammasaṅgaṇī), mentioned in the *Pitakathamaing*. Elsewhere Aggadhammālankāra is also known by his title as Tilokālankāra. Pintale converted the palace of his father into a monastery and donated it to this learned monk. So, Aggadhammālankāra is

that during Thalun's time, as already explained, ordination ceremonies were banned and even after him the ban continued to be imposed on people from a large number of professions. So there was no need to purge the Order any more. Instead, the kings seem to have turned their attention to bright students already in the monasteries and to have sponsored their ordination ceremonies.<sup>161</sup> Thus candidates who had been ordained in simple ceremonies had temporarily to leave their robes because all the candidates for the examinations were required to be candidates for ordination as well. This meant that they disrobed just before the examinations and were re-ordained immediately afterwards. This must have been how the terms *pathama shin laung* and *pathama pazin laung* or "excellent"<sup>162</sup> candidate for royal examination" came into existence. It is to this modified tradition of formal examinations that the Kon-Baung kings such as Bodawpaya would refer as Nyaung-yan dynasty examinations.

#### **2.4.2 Attempts to Popularise Formal Examinations and their Excessive Use under Bodawpaya (1782-1819)**

In this section we shall discuss how Bodawpaya (1782-1819), another strong monarch, made excessive use of formal examinations during his rule as a tool to control the *Sangha*, whose resistance frustrated the king. We shall first give a brief overall view of the geopolitical situation during his reign.

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also known as Nankyaung Sayadaw or Palace Monastery Sayadaw. *Pitakathamaing*, pp.185-186. See also Ferguson, cit., p.172.

<sup>161</sup> For more information see Sirisobhana, *Mahādvāra-nikāyavaṃsadīpanī*, p.195-197.

<sup>162</sup> *Pathama*, a Pali word in origin, means in Burmese first or excellent and can be employed as an adjective, as in *pathama-dansar*, "excellent quality". We doubt that it indicates "first" in its normal sense, for the examinations were not to select a candidate for the first prize nor does the system seem to place emphasis on competition among candidates but selected any one who met the required standard. Until the present day, the name of this state sponsored examination is *Pathamapyan samaybwe*, "The Excellent Examinations"; the word *pyan* retains its old meaning of oral test, making it clear that the system gives learning by heart an important role.

The kingdom of Burma in the second half of the eighteenth century was not different from the Burma that we have seen in the early seventeenth century: the king and, by his command, his subjects were constantly at war. Ava, the capital, was overrun in 1752 by the Mon from Hamsavatī, though they were soon driven out by Alaungpaya (1752-1760), the father of Bodawpaya and the founder of the Kon-Baung dynasty (1752-1885). In fact, Alaungpaya, who rose from being a village headman in Shwebo through his courage and military ability to become the leader of the ethnic Burman people, in 1752 not only successfully drove out the Mon who only a few months earlier had overrun Ava, but within five years also conquered, indeed ended, the Mon kingdom of Hamsavatī once and for all.<sup>163</sup> Alaungpaya then began to attack Ayutthaya, the Siamese capital, a mission that was unsuccessful because of a shortage of food and other logistic supplies.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, it was during the Ayutthaya campaign that Alaungpaya himself was killed in 1760. His eldest son and successor, Naungdawgyi (1760-1763), continued his mission to subdue Ayutthaya, but it was his second son, Hsinphyushin (1763-1776), who fulfilled his father's ambition when he ransacked and ended the kingdom of Ayutthaya in 1767.<sup>165</sup>

Bodawpaya, from the day he came to the throne through a coup in February 1782, seems to have been determined to follow in the steps of his father and brothers. But before embarking on his military conquest he had to crack down in the capital, Ava, on the remaining supporters of his predecessors, Singu (1776-1782) and Maung Maung, who succeeded Singu, his father, for just seven days.<sup>166</sup> Both Singu and Maung Maung were executed. The executions were part of the succession problem of the house of Alaungpaya. However, although Bodawpaya was able to suppress these remnants in the

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<sup>163</sup> ROB, III, p.xxiv & Phayre, pp.149-166.

<sup>164</sup> ROB, III, p.xxxii; Letwe Nawratha, *Alaung mindayagyi ayaydawpon* (The Conquests of Alaungpaya), p.141; Dwinthin Taikwun Mahasithu, *Alaungpaya ayaydawpon* (The Conquests of Alaungpaya), pp.226-28. See also Phayre, p.169.

<sup>165</sup> ROB, III, p.xxxv; & Phayre, p.190.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid*, IV, p.xxiv; Harvey, p.264; Phayre, p.209.

capital, at least for the time being,<sup>167</sup> in a matter of weeks, it took him eight months to defeat his enemies outside the capital, who were also attempting to overthrow him.<sup>168</sup>

However, even before the total elimination of these internal enemies was achieved, preparations for major campaigns against neighbouring kingdoms had already begun. Two months after assuming power, in April 1782, Bodawpaya started to organise his fighting forces, summoning all able-bodied men to centres where they were formed into units. This was because at that time there was no standing army. Fourteen months later, in June 1783, the organisation of the armed forces was completed. The forces, in addition to more than two hundred officers, consisted of 21,769 men, divided into 31 regiments and four divisions, three-quarters of which were the army and the rest the navy.<sup>169</sup>

The troops were ordered to march under the leadership of the crown prince, Bodawpaya's son, to the kingdom of Rakhaing, also known by its classical name as Daññavatī. This first major campaign was motivated, according to Bodawpaya, by the need "to suppress the unjust and the criminals in the Rakhaing, Daññavatī country, where the *sāsana* was in decline and where there existed several autonomous minor rulers; to establish [that country] in the right belief; and to cause the *sāsana* to prosper".<sup>170</sup> The kingdom of Daññavatī was crushed and its last monarch and his subjects, numbering around 20,000, were led away in February 1785 by the triumphant troops to Amarapura, the new capital built by Bodawpaya a year after he came to the throne.<sup>171</sup> The biggest trophy carried to Amarapura, however, was the famous bronze statue of the Buddha,

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<sup>167</sup> In July 1785, Prince Pindale and one of the king's secretaries, Kyaw Saw Nawratha, rebelled but were arrested and given a death sentence. ROB, IV, p.456.

<sup>168</sup> ROB, IV, p.xxiv. On 4 October 1782, two commanders, Min Ye Myat Hpone and Gamani, attempted to seize the palace but were captured and executed.

<sup>169</sup> ROB, IV, pp.388-395; Harvey, pp.267-267.

<sup>170</sup> ROB, IV, p.329. [*My translation*]

<sup>171</sup> Harvey, p.268.

called Mahāmuni.<sup>172</sup> (The temple in which the Mahāmuni is now enshrined in Mandalay is one of the most famous places of worship in Burma.)

Barely five months after the Rakhaing campaign had ended, another major military expedition began. In July 1785, Bodawpaya sent troops to annexe Siam, now with its new capital in Bangkok, to the Burmese empire. This Siam campaign, which lasted 26 years, from 1785 to 1811, was a failure not only at the first attempt but also in successive endeavours, despite the king leading his troops in person on some of the expeditions.<sup>173</sup> It was during one of these attempts in 1809 that the crown prince, who led the expedition, was killed.<sup>174</sup> In this long campaign against Siam, we have no record of the total number of troops. However, in the last despatch, in 1811, the number of troops was mentioned as 80,000.<sup>175</sup>

After the unsuccessful campaign against Siam, Bodawpaya began to turn his attention to Assam and Manipur. Unlike the earlier two major campaigns against Rakhaing and Siam, a military expedition to Assam and Manipur was first undertaken, in 1813, at the request of one of the two parties in the power struggle between the Assamese Shan and the Manipuri princes, who wanted Burmese help to defeat their rival.<sup>176</sup> For Burma, the request by a Manipuri prince was an opportunity to expand her influence. From the 1813 intervention, Burma therefore came to regard Assam and Manipur as a tributary state and would continue to intervene in all further power struggles; this led to “clashes with the British Indian empire”<sup>177</sup> that came to be known as the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-

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<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p.268.

<sup>173</sup> ROB, IV, p.xxvi – xxviii & Harvey, pp.271-272.

<sup>174</sup> ROB, p.xxix.

<sup>175</sup> Harvey, pp.272-3.

<sup>176</sup> Letwe Nawratha, *Alaungpaya*, pp.136-141; Dwinthintaikwun Mahasithu, *Alaungpaya*, pp.226-231.

<sup>177</sup> Scott, p.188.



1826) in the next reign, that of Bagyidaw (1819-1837), the son and successor of Bodawpaya.

When engaging in these military campaigns, all able-bodied men, as noted earlier, were conscripted, always in haste, just before the order to march arrived. Regarding the conscription of men into the fighting forces, Sangermano, an Italian missionary at Ava during the time of Bodawpaya, said that men left “their sowing, reaping, and whatever occupation they may engage in” when ordered to march to war.<sup>178</sup> For those military campaigns, the first to be conscripted were men in the capital. Even the scribes who were employed by the king to copy the *Tipiṭaka* were taken into the service. That can be seen from at least three royal orders in which the king asked his officials to exempt the scribes and return those of them who had been conscripted.<sup>179</sup> One of the orders was prompted by the *thathanabaing*, who complained of the scribes being forced to enter the armed forces.<sup>180</sup> Men from as far as the Shan States under different Saophas, the ruling princes, and the old Mon kingdom<sup>181</sup> were also conscripted. Even after the war had begun, recruits from various towns in all parts of the kingdom were taken and sent to the front lines.<sup>182</sup> Recruits fleeing the battlefield or men fleeing conscription were condemned to death and were burnt alive with their families.<sup>183</sup> Provincial governors were ordered to find men who might have fled and hidden in the area under their control. A failure to find a runaway would bring the governors the same fate.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Sangermano, *Burmese Empire A Hundred Years Ago*, p.99.

<sup>179</sup> ROB, IV, pp.414, 482-483.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, p.414.

<sup>181</sup> Mon recruits were taken from towns such as Hamsavatī, Martaban, Sittang, Yunzalin, Dala and Bassein. ROB, VI, pp.776, 804, 838, 849, 851.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid* & p.836.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, IV, pp.652 & 855.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid*.

The war caused enormous hardship to the people at large. There was therefore unrest among the poor. The first outbreak of this took place in the old Mon kingdom in September 1783, when the attack on Rakhaing was under way.<sup>185</sup> But the unrest was by no means confined to the Mon people. Less than a year later, according to Bodawpaya's own account, in August 1784 some Burman people also revolted. The king ordered ruthless suppression. But the unrest seems to have continued for at least several years, for we see that the king ordered in September 1787 any headman who could not suppress those public disturbances to be sent to "Chiang Mai war zone and made to go in front" as punishment for his failure.<sup>186</sup>

It is in these circumstances that we should examine the *Sangha* and its relationship with Bodawpaya; and the latter's excessive use of formal examinations as a tool to control the former. The *Sangha* was strong when Bodawpaya ascended the throne: there were five thousand monks and novices in the capital alone.<sup>187</sup> Their number was recorded when the king invited them in October 1782 for seven days to receive alms and robes in the palace. The number was very high given that the population of the capital and its surroundings was estimated at only 200,000.<sup>188</sup>

But what may have been more worrying for the king than the high number was the potential involvement of some monks in conspiracies against him. Two months after the king seized the throne, in 30 March 1782, four monks were forced to leave the Order and then exiled to different forests "for not practising towards achieving *magga* [the path] and *phala* [fruit] and for befriending lay people and engaging in political discussion".<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Harvey, p.265.

<sup>186</sup> ROB, IV, p.593.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, p.xxiv.

<sup>188</sup> Sangermano, p.68.

<sup>189</sup> ROB, IV, p.233. The monks were Kyaik-bhandaing yahan [yahan is *bhikkhu* in Burmese]; Thawutthi yahan; Sipar yahan; and Htantapin yahan.

These monks are not identified by their ordained names, but by the names of their villages, indicating that they were abbots of their village monasteries. The involvement of abbots in a plot against the king can, therefore, indicate the existence of some considerable political opposition among the people.

However, if there existed a conflict between the *Sangha* and Bodawpaya, it was due not so much to the *Sangha*'s interference in politics, for there is no other evidence than the above mentioned, but rather to the king's own interference in monastic education. Four months after ascending the throne, Bodawpaya asked the senior monks to examine the knowledge of the monks on religious texts,<sup>190</sup> although it is not clear how, why and on which texts the monks were examined. Two years later, on 12 March 1784, the king asked the *sayadaws* "to continue to examine novices and monks who had not been examined". The king also said that, among those already examined, some knew the *sikkhāpada*, "monastic rules and regulations" well, but some did not, and he inquired "who built monasteries for those who do not know the *sikkhāpada*; it is no use," continued the king, "to either the monk or the donor if the monks do not know anything and live in the monastery." <sup>191</sup> Despite the king's mention of *sikkhāpada*, there is again no mention of what texts were used to examine the monks.

In the meantime, Bodawpaya revived the robe controversy between the "one-shoulder" and the "two-shoulders". The controversy has been studied by many scholars and so we have no reason to repeat it here.<sup>192</sup> However, three points which have so far been overlooked should be made here regarding the robe controversy. First, the controversy focussed only on the novices (*sāmaṇera*), and not the monks (*bhikkhu*). Second, the controversy was more than an argument about covering the shoulders. In fact, those who

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<sup>190</sup> ROB, IV, p.xxiv.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid*, p.316.

<sup>192</sup> See *Thathanalinkara sardan*, pp.186-233; Ferguson, pp.176-199; Mendelson, pp.58-61.

believed in covering one shoulder also asked the novices who were their pupils to tie round their waist a *saṅghāṭi*, one of the three pieces of robe usually reserved for *bhikkhus*, and to wear a hat. This led to those who argued for covering both shoulders to point out that a *saṅghāṭi* was not for novices but only for *bhikkhus*. These distinctions have been overlooked by western scholars such as Bode, Mendelson and Ferguson, although the relevant royal orders and the native chronicles clearly pointed to them. The last point is related to Bodawpaya and the robe controversy. We should bear in mind that the one-shoulder party had been weakened twice already by two predecessors of Bodawpaya. Hsinpyushin (1763-1776) exiled the leader of the group, Atulayasa Sayadaw; and Singu (1776-1782), who revived the debate, had also backed the two-shoulder party and banned the one-shoulder. Moreover, the champion of the two-shoulder party during the reign of Bodawpaya was Bagaya Sayadaw<sup>193</sup>, the same scholar who had already defeated Atulayasa Sayadaw in the previous reign. Now there was nothing new to be said or banned any more and it was therefore unnecessary for Bodawpaya to revive the debate. In fact, Bodawpaya needed only to implement the order passed by Singu, whom he had executed.

Returning to monastic education, Bodawpaya took several measures to attract candidates to enter formal examinations. They were called *Pathama sar taw pyan*, “excellent candidate for royal examination”, which soon came to be known by its abbreviated form *Pathamapyan*. The first of the measures was to appoint twelve examiners, as we mentioned earlier<sup>194</sup>, in 1784. The twelve *sayadaws* were to examine only one candidate at a time. But the *sayadaws* may have thought it unnecessary for so many examiners, most of whom were learned and had been royal tutors, *rājaguru*, since the previous reign, to be examining just one candidate. Some of the *sayadaws* may have also regarded

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<sup>193</sup> See also p. 92.

<sup>194</sup> See also p. 34.

formal examinations themselves as unnecessary. So many of them did not turn up. The king, therefore, in his royal order dated 8 July 1785, rebuked the *sayadaws* when he said: “*Sayadaws* must not absent themselves. Examinations are the affair of the *sāsana*. I have heard that they did not come, even when summoned. Unless ill, do not evade the duty. It is the business of the *sāsana*.”<sup>195</sup> This decree is extraordinary for the three points it contains. First, Bodawpaya made a point that formal examinations were “the affair” and “the business of the *sāsana*”. Second, the king was so desperate that he decreed that all the *sayadaws* must enter at least one pupil of their own for the *Pathamapyan* examinations.<sup>196</sup> And, lastly, a Buddhist monarch treated the senior and learned *sayadaws* with little respect. In fact, the king made no secret of his disrespect for the *sayadaws* when he asked the commissioner of religion, *mahadanwun*, “to report every six months if the *sayadaws* were free from corruption in their assessing of the candidates”.<sup>197</sup>

The second measure was designed to popularise the formal examination, by rewarding candidates for entering the examination.<sup>198</sup> The system of rewarding successful candidates with materials and positions in the hierarchy, argued King Bodawpaya, “was intended to benefit both teacher and pupil not only in this life but also in the next”.<sup>199</sup> We will first describe the rewards the king bestowed upon the candidates for the monkhood or *pazin laung* levels. On their way to the examination hall, *Sudhamma*,<sup>200</sup> all candidates were dressed in royal costume, wearing jewels and rings; anyone who entered for the preliminary *pazin laung* level had thirteen people to carry him on a palanquin and to

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<sup>195</sup> ROB, IV, pp.447-453.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, p.447.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>198</sup> ROB issued on 8 July 1785. *Ibid*, IV, pp.450-452.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p.447.

<sup>200</sup> *Sudhamma* was the headquarters of the ecclesiastical administrators appointed by the king. It is from this word, *Sudhamma*, that the largest *nikāya* in Burma now derives its name.

bring royal requisites associated with his status. In addition, the parents of the candidates for the preliminary level of *pazin laung* were exempted from royal service.

The requisites and the allowances increased with the level entered for. At the intermediate *pazin laung* level, not only the parents but also the brothers and sisters of the candidate were exempted from royal service; and the candidate had 20 people to carry him and his belongings. For the higher *pazin laung* level, there were thirty attendants to carry him and his personal belongings, while seven generations of his relatives were elevated to royal status and given titles. A successful candidate would receive royal patronage for his ordination. After his ordination, he received certain allowances from the palace: a monthly food ration and a pair of robes annually. However, the personal allowances for the *pazin laungs* granted after their ordination were given only if they lived in the capital, an incentive for them to remain near the king.

The candidates for the *shin laung* levels, or the candidates for royal sponsored novicehood, were honoured with the same royal status just before they sat for the examinations. At the preliminary level, the candidates had seven attendants to carry them and their belongings on their way to the examination hall, while at the intermediate and the higher levels the candidates had ten and thirteen people respectively to attend them. But only the higher *shin laung* candidate's parents were exempt from royal service.

After ordination, these royal *bhikkhus* would be closely monitored with the *mahādanwun* reported to the king every six months on the "religious activities". And patronage for the ordination of successful candidates was provided for not only by the king but also by the crown princes, princesses, ministers and mayors who were asked by the king to do so. Usually after his ordination, and as long as he remained in the monastic order, the monk one supported would become one's tutor, thus creating mutual patronage. At a mundane

level, this practice of mutual patronage between such a learned monk and a high ranking official was to maintain an inner circle for the king loyalty to him.

The third measure was to expand the examination system by introducing four more levels, making six altogether. He reasoned that people were born with different levels of intelligence and should not be made to compete by the same criteria, as that would not be fair to the less intelligent.<sup>201</sup> Clearly, this was to make the *Pathamapyan* appealing not only to the highly intelligent but also to the average and below. With the introduction of the preliminary, intermediate and higher level,<sup>202</sup> each level of the *Pathamapyan* under Bodawpaya was expanded into three. Here it is interesting to see Bodawpaya's choice of words. He used the words *ayok* (အယုတ်), *alat*(အလတ်), and *amyat* (အမြတ်), meaning “lower”, “medium” and “higher class” respectively. The word *ayok* nowadays does not mean preliminary, nor is *amyat* used to mean higher. Instead, *ayok* now means low quality or inferior while *amyat* means noble or superior, and these terms may be considered repugnant by many. In fact, even in those days they must have carried some awkwardness with them and this must be the reason why King Mindon (1853-1878) decided to abandon these terms and chose more neutral ones i.e. *gne*, *lat*, *gyi* (ငယ်၊ လတ် ၊ ကြီး) meaning “junior”, “middle” and “senior” respectively.<sup>203</sup>

#### 2.4.3 Resistance to the *Pathamapyan* Examination

However, despite the encouragement and promotion of successive kings, the *Sangha* for its part did not show much interest in the examinations. The general response of the *Sangha* to these encouragements over the following two centuries could be described as,

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*, IV, p.447.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, pp.448-449.

<sup>203</sup> See also p.128.

at best, passive. The main reason for the *Sangha*'s resistance was the desire to retain full freedom in educational management. By and large, teaching monasteries were not persuaded to adopt the centrally prescribed texts for their students.<sup>204</sup> This was because studying for examinations that provided qualifications and worldly awards, the *Sangha* believed, would inevitably corrupt the young minds of the student-monks. Instead, the teachers, who were usually also abbots, created their own syllabuses. Students could choose which teacher they went to for the study of a particular text, the main reason for the choice being the reputation of the teacher as a scholar. And it was normal for students to repeat more than once a certain text under the same or a different teacher.

It may be asserted here that by and large the monastic scholastic tradition was maintained outside the formal examination system. As a result, in Burma, within an average of ten years, students became well versed in Pali, including both the *Tipiṭaka* and the commentarial works. Some became grammarians and some specialised in *Abhidhamma*.

The continuing resistance on the part of the abbots, who saw formal examinations as having potential to corrupt the monks, may also have been due partly to how the *Pathamapyan* curriculum was received in the monastic community, and partly to how the *Pathamapyan* examination was introduced and then conducted. The *Pathamapyan* curriculum, from what we see in Bodawpaya's reign<sup>205</sup>, was rather more of an academic training than a spiritual one. The abbots, who were also the principals in the teaching monasteries, could thus argue that the *Pathamapyan* curriculum was not essential for candidates wishing to join the monastic order. This may have been one of the reasons, or

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<sup>204</sup> For more information, see Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin; Mahāvisutārāmika gaṇavācakanikaya thamaing hmatdan*, (Records of the *Mahāvisutārāma* teaching tradition), & biographies of prominent monks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Burma. Mendelson also discusses the subject briefly in *Sangha and State*, pp.150-157.

<sup>205</sup> See Appendix A.



rather excuses, for the abbots' lack of enthusiasm for entering their students for the *Pathamapyan*. More importantly, though, a reason for continued resistance to the *Pathamapyan* may have been the resentment felt by the ecclesiastical scholars at interference in the *Sangha's* affairs by the monarch. The *Sangha* felt particularly humiliated by the fact that candidates for ordination had been forced to take the examinations under Thalun. The *Pathamapyan*, which continued to be held after Thalun, thus carried with it, at least from some ecclesiastical scholars' point of view, the stigma of their candidates being suspected by the secular authorities of fleeing conscription.

As the abbots continued to insist on their freedom to assess their pupils on their own terms, Bodawpaya was therefore prompted to take stern measures to force the *Sangha* to enter the examinations. We have noted earlier that some of the *sayadaws* who were the recipients of royal titles (*ta seik ya/ တံဆိပ်ရ ဆရာတော်*), and some examiner-*sayadaws*, failed to attend the examinations held at the *Sudhamma* hall.<sup>206</sup> Possibly to counter the argument that the *Pathamapyan* focused only on the academic aspect of the monastic training, King Bodawpaya introduced in October 1787 another set of examinations and this time forced not the candidates for ordination, but those who were already ordained to sit them.<sup>207</sup> This new examination was called the *Vinaya* examination, as its curriculum consisted mainly of some basic *vinaya* texts describing essential monastic rules and regulations.<sup>208</sup> Every *sāmaṇera* (novice) who had been ordained for two years and every *bhikkhu* (monk) who had been in the monastic Order for five years was required to sit the *vinaya* examination if they wanted to remain in the religious life.

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<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. p.453.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p.615.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

In the *Vinaya* examinations, the *sāmaṇeras* were required to recite from memory, but not yet required to know the meaning of, the *Pātimokkha*, the monastic rules for the *bhikkhus*. However, they had to learn by heart and explain the meaning of 75 rules of training in propriety (*sekhiya*)<sup>209</sup> and some *khandhaka* rules, such as the 10 rules for the expulsion of *sāmaṇeras* (*līṅganāsana*)<sup>210</sup>, and the 10 offences by *sāmaṇeras* which were punishable (*daṇḍakamma*)<sup>211</sup>. The syllabus also included the *Aggikhandhopama-sutta* of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*.<sup>212</sup> The *bhikkhus* who had been ordained less than five years were required not only to recite from memory the *Pātimokkha* and the *Aggikhandhopama-sutta* but also explain their meaning; if he failed, a *sāmaṇera* or *bhikkhu* had to leave the Order with a tattoo mark on his ribs to show that he was a failure.<sup>213</sup> However, since the prescribed texts were essential for the spiritual life of a novice and a monk, and would have been widely taught in almost all the monasteries, there were not many monks who failed the test.

Such an extreme measure did not please the *Sangha*, not even the senior monks appointed by the king. Indeed, the resistance to formal examinations by the leading *sayadaws* was one of the many reasons why the king dismissed the *thathanabaing* Guṇamuninda and the twelve *vinayadhara sayadaws*.<sup>214</sup> The king argued that he had to dismiss the *sayadaws* because, being still *puthujjana*, “ordinary” in their spiritual attainments, the *sayadaws* were prejudiced in their judgement, even though no evidence has been recorded to support this claim.<sup>215</sup> Contrary to his claim, in fact, the reason for

<sup>209</sup> *Sekhiya* is also a part of the *Pātimokkha* but it was mentioned separately.

<sup>210</sup> Vin i 83-85, 119.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>212</sup> A iv 128. In this *sutta*, the Buddha said that it was better to embrace and lie down upon raging flames than to live in the guise of a monk and accept generosity from the faithful while guilty of evil conduct.

<sup>213</sup> ROB, IV, pp.615.

<sup>214</sup> See also pp.34-35.

<sup>215</sup> Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin* I, pp.258-259.

the removal of the *sayadaws* from their office was because they resisted the king's excessive use of formal examinations to control the *Sangha*.

This is evident in two of Bodawpaya's orders, one dated 17 and the other 28 October 1787. Part of the first order reads: "the Buddha *sāsana* is purified only when supported by a *thathanapyu* king who punishes and teaches through the wheel of power and the wheel of law... So *all* the monks, both those who have received titles and those who have not, must go to the *Sudhamma* Council and enter the *Vinaya* examinations twice a month; then report the list to the Sayadaw [Guṇamuninda before he was dismissed], who would send it to the king. The [*thathanabaing* and the *vinayadhara*] *sayadaws* wrote to me that they discussed in concord..." [My translation] It is clear here that the king used his absolute power unnecessarily to force the monks, including the most learned ones, to enter the *Vinaya* examinations. It must have been a humiliation for the most learned ones to have to enter examinations with such a very basic syllabus. The last sentence of his order also shows that the king blamed the *sayadaws* for not working in concord. The other order, dated 28 October 1787, also makes it clear that the *sayadaws* were not interested in the *Vinaya* examinations. Part of the decree reads: "The order for the *Sangha* to enter the examinations was not carried out. From 28 October 1787 they must carry it out every day."

Another reason behind the dismissal of the *sayadaws* was the rejection by them of a new calendar, created by the king, called *pondaw*. The *sayadaws* were independent and did not hesitate to reject even a royal proposal. One of them, Bagaya Sayadaw, who was

specially asked by the king to comment on the new calendar, paid the highest price. He was forcibly disrobed for his refusal to endorse the *pondaw* calendar.<sup>216</sup>

However, Bodawpaya retained the youngest of the twelve *vinayadhara sayadaws*, Maung Htaung Sayadaw, whose ordained name was Ñāṇa, also Ñāṇābhivamsa (1752-1831). When appointed *thathanabaing* on 19 March, 1787, he was only 35, while those dismissed were in their 70s and 80s. The appointment of Ñāṇābhivamsa, first as one of the *vinayadharas* and afterwards as the sole guardian of the *sāsana* in the kingdom, also owed much to the former tutor of Bodawpaya, U Htun Nyo, an ex-monk, who was now a minister with a title *twin thin taik wun mahasithu*. Not only did he come from the same village as Ñāṇābhivamsa, but he was also his teacher while he was still in the monkhood. With those connections, Ñāṇābhivamsa was therefore more likely than any of the other *sayadaws* to support the king and his new ideas.

Indeed, it was Ñāṇābhivamsa's unquestioning loyalty to the king that had caused discord within the ecclesiastical hierarchy, namely the *thathanapyu sayadaw* and the *vinayadhara sayadaws*. Many monastic establishments boycotted Ñāṇābhivamsa, and they became known as the *visabhāga* group, while the monastic establishments which continued to associate with Ñāṇābhivamsa were called the *sabhāga* group. *Visabhāga* is a technical term in the *Vinaya*, denoting "monks who were not in association with each other through their refusal to participate in a Pātimokkha ceremony"; *sabhāga* is the opposite. It seems the king wanted to make sure that no disassociation or boycott was supported by any of the *sayadaws* and accordingly made them promise that they would be "in *sabhāga* with the Sayadaw [Ñāṇābhivamsa]". However, a year after the appointment of Ñāṇābhivamsa as *thathanabaing*, in March 1788, one of the *vinayadhara*

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<sup>216</sup> Htun Mayt, "Bagaya Sayadaw" *Maynma zwe zone kyan (Encyclopaedia of Myanmar)*, VIII, pp.303-305.

*sayadaws*, Taung Lay Lon, rescinded his promise and joined the *visabhāga* group. His move angered the king, who prohibited people from supporting Taung Lay Lon Sayadaw and his two monastic establishments. The order reads: “No one shall visit or support with requisites the Taung Lay Lon phongyi [monk], *Taung lay Lon Taik* and *On-In Taik*. Anyone who visits or makes donations to them shall have his feet cut off.”<sup>217</sup> But this ban was lifted the next day at the request of Ñāṇābhivamsa himself.<sup>218</sup>

However, the discord between Ñāṇābhivamsa and the *visabhāga* monks continued for another seven years until the king forced all the *visabhāga* monks to leave the Order. Their leader, Kyaw Aung San Htar Sayadaw, who was not a member of the *vinayadhara*, and all the *visabhāga* monks were falsely accused by the king of having been bogus monks and, as a result, forced to disrobe. Part of the king’s order reads: “Kyaw Aung San Htar Sayadaw and the *visabhāga* [monks] have no *nissaya* [teacher] and *upajjhāya* [preceptor] but pretend to have them, and thus claim to be *yahan*, although they are not. They should not be in the monkhood. Kyaw Aung San Htar and all *visabhāga* monks must be disrobed.”<sup>219</sup> The king’s resorting to this desperate measure in his attempt to get rid of monks showing any sign of dissent shows how divisive the king’s approach towards the *Sangha* and its education was. Contrary to the king’s claim, Kyaw Aung San Htar Sayadaw’s monastic lineage was well-known; his teacher and preceptor, the first Kyaw Aung San Htar Sayadaw, or Ñāṇavara (1705-1753), was the *thathanabaing* during the reign of Mahādhammarājādhipati (1733-1752). Since the death of his teacher, Ñāṇavara, in 1753, Kyaw Aung San Htar Sayadaw, or rather the second Kyaw Aung San Htar Sayadaw, had become the leader of the Kyaw Aung San Htar scholarly tradition and

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<sup>217</sup> ROB, IV, p.406. ROB dated 17 March, 1788.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*, p.408. ROB dated 18 March, 1788.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, p.565. ROB dated 28 June, 1895.

had lived through the reigns of Alaungpaya and his successors up to Bodawpaya himself.<sup>220</sup>

On the other hand, despite being the subject of boycott by the *Sangha* for his unquestioning loyalty to the king, Ñāṇābhivaṃsa, apart from his connection with the king's former tutor, was a very learned monk himself. At 25, he wrote a sub-commentary in Pali on the *Sīlakkhandhavagga*, the first thirteen *suttas* of the *Dīgha-nikāya*.<sup>221</sup> He composed many other works in both Pali and Burmese, and two of his pupils, *thathanabaing* U Ñeyya and the author of the *Sāsanavaṃsa*, Paññāsāmi, were to become famous in the next reigns. And, it was during his tenure as the *sangharāja* that Ambagahapitiye Ñāṇavimala of the Ambarukkhārāmaya at Vālitara and five novices from Ceylon arrived in 1800 at Amarapura “with the aim of obtaining higher ordination”.<sup>222</sup> Ñāṇābhivaṃsa gave them ordination, a proper training and also, on their return, many texts no longer available in Ceylon. However, for some reason not documented anywhere, Ñāṇābhivaṃsa himself left the Order in 1814, and served Bodawpaya as a minister, with the title Yazathingyan Amat. He was to lead a commission of learned men and monks in compiling the now famous Burmese chronicle, *Hamnnan Yazawin*, in 1829 at the request of King Bagyidaw (1819-1837).

Let us return to the *Vinaya* examinations. The king now threatened to punish any monk who failed the *Vinaya* examination. And, in fact, in the first ever *Vinaya* examinations held four months after the dismissal of the *thathanabaing* Guṇāmuninda and the *vinayadha sayadaws*, there was a monk from a monastery called Shwe Myin Mi who had to leave the Order with a tattoo on his ribs on 11 October 1787 when he failed the

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<sup>220</sup> Sobhanasirī, *Mahādvāra-nikāya sāsana-dīpanī*, pp.192-197.

<sup>221</sup> This work is known as *Sīlakkhandha abhinava-ṭīkā*.

<sup>222</sup> Malalgoda, pp.97-98. For more on the *Amarapura-nikāya*, see *Ibid*, Ch. II, pp.87-105; Ch. III, pp.139-143 & Ch. IV, pp.144-172.

examination.<sup>223</sup> He was sentenced to jail for seven days<sup>224</sup> but was released after five days by the king, who warned the monks that they faced the same fate as Shwe Myin Mi if they failed.<sup>225</sup>

The king also decreed that a *saya*, “preceptor”, had himself to leave the Order if his pupil did not pass the examination.<sup>226</sup> So, the preceptor of the monk Shwe Myin Mi must have been disrobed, to take responsibility for his pupil’s failure. The Shwe Myin Mi incident led the king to form a perception that such ignorance of the *Vinaya* must have been widespread among senior members of the *Sangha*. Therefore, the senior monks, namely *Gaing Ok*, those in charge of monks in a district, and *Gaing Dauk*, assistants to *Gaing Ok* and responsible for a smaller area, had to sit the *vinaya* examinations twice a month for eight months (28 October 1787 to 18 July 1788). All other monks were also compelled to enter the *vinaya* examinations.<sup>227</sup>

The severe actions taken by the king might suggest that there was a general decline in the study and practice of the *Vinaya*. However, there is no clear indication that that was the case. Apart from the Shwe Myin Mi monk (who had earlier earned the king’s displeasure for having houses in the compound of his monastery and for befriending with political dissents<sup>228</sup>), there is no record of any other monks failing the *vinaya* examinations, although every monk had to enter them. In fact, during the reign of Bodawpaya there were learned teachers and authors such as, to name a few, The-Inn Sayadaw, Pyi Sayadaw, Bagara Sayadaw, Maung Htaung Sayadaw, Saling Sayadaw,

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<sup>223</sup> ROB, IV, pp.615, 619.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, p.619.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, p.626.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, p.615.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, p.606. The order dated 23 September 1787.

Taung lay Lon Sayadaw and Minbu U Awbhatha, whose works remain standard up to the present day.<sup>229</sup>

As to the number of candidates, we have not been successful in our efforts to estimate how many entered for the different levels of the examinations each year during Bodawpaya's reign, in order to determine the success or failure of his initiatives. We can say with certainty, however, that there were never candidates for all levels every year. In the examination held in May 1801, after the king asked the senior monks to enter their pupils for the *Pathamapyan*,<sup>230</sup> there were only two sitting and they were for the *pazin laung* levels; these two candidates, both pupils of Ku-gyi Sayadaw, were appointed *vinayadhara*, "experts on the Discipline", after the completion of the examination.<sup>231</sup> In 1806 there were only twenty-eight candidates entered for the preliminary *shin laung* level, and there were no candidates for other levels.<sup>232</sup>

The examinations were in theory conducted by the *thathanabaing*, the *Sudhamma sayadaws*, the examiners and observers, all with titles bestowed by the king. In practice, however, only a handful of *sayadaws* examined one candidate at a time while the rest listened. The examinations were entirely oral. There was no paper for writing at that time. Even the royal court used only palm leaves for writing. All the *sayadaws* were also given palm leaves that bore royal insignia for their official use. The examinations were conducted in *Nayon*, the third month of the lunar calendar (June), which falls a month before the beginning of *vassāna*.

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<sup>229</sup> *Pitakathamaing*, pp.189, 212.

<sup>230</sup> ROB, V. p.643.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, p.645.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, p.865.



Despite Bodawpaya's efforts to widen participation in the formal examination, the abbots were still not yet persuaded of the merit of examination. Even when ordered by the king, as we have seen, not many came forward to enter their pupils for the *Pathamapyan*. Instead, they continued to ignore the *Pathamapyan* examination and focused on the traditional method of education, which has been discussed earlier, by which students were tutored in their textual study and then assessed in the way the teacher favoured.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter we have discussed how monastic education was affected from the seventeenth century up to the early nineteenth century by strong monarchs who busied themselves with war and the construction of their capital. One of the most visible signs was the introduction of formal examinations by the kings. Despite the claim by some historians and the official view that the severe actions by the kings reflected a decline in monastic study and discipline, we have shown that the main cause of those actions was in fact the military ambition of the monarch.

## Chapter Three

### **A Threatened Buddhist Kingdom and a Nationalist *Sangha* The Education of the *Sangha* under King Mindon (1853-1878)**

In the previous chapter we discussed how the informal textual study, the core ecclesiastical pedagogy for centuries in Burma, had been replaced by an education system defined narrowly by syllabuses for formal examinations. We have argued that formal examinations were the results of geopolitical circumstances under war-like monarchs, namely Thalun (1629-1648) and Bodawpaya (1782-1819) who attempted to control the Order.

However, the use of formal examinations as a tool to control the *Sangha* was not confined to strong kings. In fact, a weak king used as much ecclesiastical education to control the *Sangha* as did the strong ones. This happened particularly in times of political instability, for example, in Burma under Mindon (1853-1878), whose position was weakened at the outset by circumstances following the loss of Lower Burma to the British in first and second Anglo-Burmese wars (1824-1826 & 1852-1854). But unlike many of his predecessors, Mindon was a diplomatic and “enlightened” monarch and as a result his use of formal examinations was not seen by the *Sangha* as interference in their academic freedom but rather as a promotion of Buddhism itself. In this chapter we consider monastic education under Mindon’s reign, particularly how the *Sangha*, who once resisted using formal examinations, came to be persuaded of the merit of formal examinations by Mindon. We shall argue that the *Sangha* became nationalistic<sup>1</sup> after the end of the second Anglo-Burmese war (1852-1854), in which Burma lost the whole of Lower Burma to the British, and that that nationalistic sentiment, coupled with Mindon’s

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<sup>1</sup> See pp.121-124 for more on the *Sangha*’s nationalism.

tactful approach, had led the *Sangha* to the weakening of its resistance to formal examinations and thus the loss of academic freedom in the monasteries.

First we shall briefly discuss the personality of Mindon, described as a tolerant monarch. Second, we shall analyse in detail the rise of different fraternities, namely *Shwegyin* and *Sudhamma*, in the context of Mindon's modernisation programmes. Third, we shall consider how, in the threatened Buddhist kingdom of Mindon, the *Sangha* became nationalistic. Fourth, monastic education under Mindon, particularly the transformation of formal examinations, both *Vinaya* and *Pathamapyan*, will be explained. Fifth, we shall discuss the legacy of Mindon in the birth of various monastic examination boards set up by the *Sangha* and its lay followers. Sixth, we shall describe the fate of the remaining force of resistance to formal examinations within the *Sangha*. And, lastly, a brief account will be given of the development of monastic education under colonial rule and in post-independent Burma.

### **3.1 King Mindon (1853-1878): A Tolerant Monarch**

King Mindon, who as a senior prince held the post of president of the council of state under his half-brother and predecessor, Pagan (1846-1853), came to the throne in 1853 in "a bloody struggle"<sup>2</sup> in the middle of the second Anglo-Burmese war (1852-1854). "Grown up in the shadow of British power", he represented a "forward-looking and modernising" faction, which was against "a continued prosecution of the war", as opposed to "the conservative and militant wing surrounding [King] Pagan".<sup>3</sup> On ascending the throne, Mindon was "anxious that the war should come to an end".<sup>4</sup> He

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<sup>2</sup> Thant Myint-U *The Making of Modern Burma*, p.104.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.104-105.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

quickly sent a message to the British “agreeing a comprehensive ceasefire”.<sup>5</sup> Considered to be a diplomatic and enlightened monarch, even British colonial officials, such as Sir James Scott, described him as “tolerant” and “the best king Burma ever had”.<sup>6</sup>

Mindon, indeed, displayed a great degree of tolerance towards ministers who disagreed with him or even refused to obey his orders. One of them, Po Hlaing, better known by his title and penname Yaw Mingyi U Po Hlaing, for example, once had a public argument with the king on whether drinking *htanye* (botanical name: chireta) juice from a coconut-like plant, from which jaggery (Hindi, *jāgrī*) was produced, infringed the fifth precept of a lay Buddhist.<sup>7</sup> The king believed it broke the precept, while his minister held a different view. Despite threatening to punish Po Hlaing both for his views and indeed for actually drinking it himself, the king in the end took no action against Po Hlaing. (Alaungpaya ordered anyone drinking alcohol “to be cut off at his neck” and Bodawpaya also passed the death penalty on those who drank alcohol.<sup>8</sup>) The king was also tolerant of his ministers on more serious issues. He gave in, for example, to another minister, Pakhan, who refused to introduce a new tax to be used entirely for religious purposes. Pakhan is said to have also protested to the king for ignoring Hlutdaw, the cabinet, on important issues, and at one time disregarded the king’s order to annex the Karenni State to Burma.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Scott, *Burma*, pp.298-300.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>8</sup> Alaungpaya “ordered that there shall be no killing of cattle for meat nor consuming any kind of intoxicant drinks or drugs, in his kingdom. Animal sacrifice at the time of harvest was strictly prohibited.” Than Tun, *Introduction* to ROB, II, p.xv. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1760, he threatened anyone breaking his order not to drink with capital punishment. Bodawpaya spelled out his moral concerns to the people in his royal order dated 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1782, a month after ascending the throne. He also asked people to observe the Five Precepts in his order dated 10<sup>th</sup> March 1782. ROB, II, p.229; III, pp.229; ROB, VII, pp.i-iii. Mindon ordered people not to eat meat (ROB, IV. p.442) and encouraged lay people to observe *uposatha-sīla* (eight/nine/ten precepts) on four *uposatha* -days each month (Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin*, I, pp.69-70).

<sup>9</sup> Kyan, “Mindon’s Councillors” *Journal of Burma Research Society* (henceforth JBRS), XLIV, i, pp.54-55.

Mindon was also “known to be tolerant and charitable towards other religions: he built churches, missionary schools for the Christians<sup>10</sup> and helped the Muslims to build mosques in Mandalay”.<sup>11</sup> He also gave money to some Burmese Muslims to build a rest house at Mecca<sup>12</sup> just as he repaired one for Buddhists in 1877 near Buddhagaya, which had been built by a Burmese king in 1105-06; he erected an inscription about the repairs at Buddhagaya, and this became one of the physical marks which convincingly identified Buddhagaya in the dispute between the Buddhists led by Anagārika Dharmapāla of Ceylon and the Hindu Mahants.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.2 The Rise of Different Fraternities and Mindon’s Modernisation of the Kingdom**

Concerning different traditions within the Order, Mindon was also far less despotic, a significant contrast to how his predecessors dealt with quarrels among members of the *Sangha*.<sup>14</sup> Mindon recognised the right of members of the *Sangha* to defy the *thathanabaing* and to live outside the authority of the *Sudhamma* Council, of which the *thathanabaing* was head, as long as they lived by the *vinaya*. Thus it was during his reign that the *Sangha* became divided into two separate groups: *Sudhamma* and *Shwegyin*. Mendelson, however, lists along with these two groups also the *Dvāra*, the *Ngetdwin-nikāya* and the Pakhokku scholarship tradition, and calls them “Mindon’s sects”. However, the inclusion of the latter three can be misleading.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, before dealing with the major groups, we shall first show why identifying the *Dvāra* , the *Ngetdwin-nikāya* and the Pakhokku academic tradition as “Mindon’s sects” is inappropriate.

<sup>10</sup> See also Marks, *Forty Years in Burma*, p.4; Scott, *Burma*, pp.300-301; Thant Myint-U, p.114.

<sup>11</sup> Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma*, p.15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.15.

<sup>13</sup> Dharmapāla, “The History of the Maha-Bodhi Temple at Buddha Gaya” *Return to Righteousness*, pp.602-603.

<sup>14</sup> See pp.91-95.

<sup>15</sup> Mendelson, *Sangha and State in Burma*, pp.84-88.

The *Dvāra-nikāya* developed in 1852<sup>16</sup> in British Lower Burma from a local dispute on the validity of a *sīmā*, “chapter hall” where all the *bhikkhus* of Okpo town performed an *uposatha* ceremony. Okpo Sayadaw (1817-1905), the future leader of the *Dvāra-nikāya*, argued that the *sīmā* in question, built in a lake, was not a valid *udakukkhepa sīmā*, “an ordination hall built in a river or in a lake”, for it had a permanent bridge linking it with the land, and thus all the ordination ceremonies performed in that particular *sīmā* were invalid. The dispute remained local for some time. Indeed, after this argument, Okpo Sayadaw continued to associate with members of the *Sangha* from other parts of the country because many other *sīmās* in those areas were still acceptable to Okpo Sayadaw and he did not consider ordination ceremonies in those *sīmās* invalid. It is held by the followers of the *Dvāra-nikāya* that when this dispute reached the court of the *thathanabaing* in Upper Burma in 1857, the *thathanabaing*’s judgement on the *sīmā* in question coincided with the opinion of the Okpo Sayadaw.<sup>17</sup>

However, Okpo Sayadaw and his followers in Lower Burma became of wider concern later, not for the dispute over a *sīmā*, but for a disagreement with other Buddhists from their neighbourhood on the wording of *awkatha* (*okāsa*), a formula commonly recited by Burmese Buddhists to pay homage to the Buddha.<sup>18</sup> Okpo Sayadaw and his followers argued that people could only pay homage to the Buddha through three “doors” (*dvāra*), and not *kamma*, and thus the traditional *awkatha* formula which had *kāya*, *vacī* and *mano-kamma* in it was incorrect. Instead, it should read *kāya*, *vacī* and *mano- dvāra*. But this quarrel began among the laity in Lower Burma, followers of Okpo Sayadaw and their Buddhists neighbours, not between members of the *Sangha*. No one in Upper

<sup>16</sup> Sirīsobhana, *Mahādvāra-nikāya sāsanaṇaṇṇasādīpaṇī*, pp.334-335.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.334.

<sup>18</sup> See pp.41-42.

Burma disagreed with Okpo Sayadaw, nor did they see any point in doing so.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, leading Sayadaws in Upper Burma, such as the *thathanabaing* Sayadaw U Ñeyya, Ledi Sayadaw and Shwegyin Sayadaw, made desperate attempts to calm the situation.<sup>20</sup> Mendelson, however, failed to recognise the issue at the beginning of the development of the *Dvāra-nikāya* as a local dispute rather than a matter of national concern. This led him not only to look for *kan gaing*, or the *nikāya* that advocated *kamma* as against *dvāra*, in Mandalay, which he did not find, but also to consider the *Dvāra* as a Mindon sect, which was incorrect historically because Mindon himself did not contribute to the emergence of the *Dvāra-nikāya*. However, the term may be applicable in a broader sense if the *Dvāra-nikāya* is included among the Mindon sects simply because it developed during the reign of Mindon, albeit in Lower Burma, then no longer under his rule.

As to the *Ngetdwin-nikāya*, which called itself *Satipaṭṭhan gaing* or *Satipaṭṭhāna-nikāya*, Mendelson writes that “he [U Paṇḍava, the future Ngetdwin Sayadaw] had to leave Upper Burma on account of his difficulties with the king there and the council [*Sudhamma*]. But he found that British rule in Lower Burma gave greater freedom of expression”.<sup>21</sup> These two factors may have been taken into account by Mendelson as historical background to his assessment of the *Ngetdwin* as a Mindon sect. But this version of events is inaccurate. The records of the *Ngetdwin* show that U Paṇḍava (1831-1910) left Sagaing for Konkhyankone, a town in Lower Burma, in June 1886. That was more than seven months after the fall of King Thibaw (1778-1885).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, when U Paṇḍava left Mandalay for the Minwun Hills in 1867, he did so with the permission of

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<sup>19</sup> The debate on the right wording between *dvāra* and *kamma* reached Mandalay only when two lay men, Nga Thit and Nga Pawlar, each representing a party in the dispute from Lower Burma went to Mandalay for a decision. For detail see Sayadaw U Ñāṇavamsa's letter conveying the message from the *thathanabaing* to his teacher, Okpo Sayadaw. Sirīsobhana, *Mahādvāra-nikāya sāsanaṇṇasādanī*, p.345.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, pp.344-351.

<sup>21</sup> Mendelson, p.107.

<sup>22</sup> Hla Paing, *Catubhūmika matgin thathanawin thamaing*, (History of the Catubhūmika lineage), pp.69-70.

his teacher, Thingazar Sayadaw, a member of the *Sudhamma* Council; and the purpose of his departure to the Minwun Hills, where he meditated in a cave called *Ngetdwin*, by which he would come to be known, was “to practise *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation himself more seriously”.<sup>23</sup> Far from having “difficulties with the king”, U Paṇḍava, the future Ngetdwin Sayadaw, while in his early thirties, was promoted by Mindon to First Class Tutor (*pathama sar khya*) and received a monthly allowance from the king.<sup>24</sup> U Paṇḍava was also honoured by Mindon with a title, *tipiṭakālaṅkāra*, for his role as the tutor of the chief queen and for his preaching at the palace, where he is said to have consoled the king and his followers after the assassination of the Crown Prince, Kanaung, in 1866.<sup>25</sup> The royal support for U Paṇḍava continued even after he left Mandalay to practise meditation in *Ngetdwin* cave at the Minwun Hills, where one of “Mindon’s junior queens”, Kyay Myint Myo Sa, and her daughter, Hteik Su Kyi Princess, built a monastery for him.<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to Mendelson’s statement that he (U Paṇḍava) left Sagaing in search of “greater freedom of expression”,<sup>27</sup> U Paṇḍava went to Lower Burma to meet and perhaps enlist the help of a friend in promoting his way of practice.<sup>28</sup> In Lower Burma in a small town called Konkyankone there was a monastery called Lepaw, where the abbot, U Ukkaṭṭha, had been a classmate of U Paṇḍava, at Thingazar monastery in Mandalay. On his arrival there U Paṇḍava was asked to help with the teaching. A year later, in 1887, he was elected by all the *Sangha* in Konkyankone, 300 monasteries altogether, to become their leader. In 1888, the abbot, U Ukkaṭṭha, died and U Paṇḍava succeeded him. It was when

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p.58.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p.55.

<sup>25</sup> Hla Paing, pp.46-49.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.61. The princess was one of those captured and taken by the British to India in 1885. On her release and return to Burma in 1892, she went to learn meditation under Ngetdwin Sayadaw. *Ibid*, p.51; Ngetdwin Sayadaw, *Sāsanavisuddhi*, pp.196-232.

<sup>27</sup> Mendelson, p.107.

<sup>28</sup> Hla Paing, pp.46-49.



arranging the funeral ceremonies for the late abbot that U Paṇḍava and other members of the *Sangha* in Konkyankone began to disagree with each other. U Paṇḍava wanted none of the grand rituals that traditionally went with the funeral of a senior Burmese monk; instead, he wanted a simple funeral for his friend and urged the laity who came to the funeral to practise daily “*satipaṭṭhāna* meditation” and observe *ājīvaṭṭhamaka-sīla*, i.e. Eight Precepts that include right livelihood as the eighth,<sup>29</sup> in place of the normal Five Precepts. But the others wanted to retain the traditional ceremony, usually very grand, for the late abbot and the Five Precepts for the laity. It was on this issue that U Paṇḍava and his pupils became distinct and thus a *nikāya*.<sup>30</sup> It can therefore be seen that it was incorrect to include the *Ngetdwin* among the Mindon sects.

Mendelson, in his view of the *Ngetdwin*, is probably influenced by Htin Aung, who considers “the *Ngetdwin* Sayadaw [U Paṇḍava] to have been ‘the first challenge to Mindon’ and the *Sudhamma* Council.”<sup>31</sup> Htin Aung perhaps overstates some of the distinctive features of the *Ngetdwin*, such as the *nikāya*’s insistence on the *ājīvaṭṭhamaka-sīla*; on making offering to the *Sangha* only as community property (*saṅghika-dāna*); on only accepting candidates for ordination that have been trained in meditation; and on monks residing no more than two or three years in one place. However, not only are these practices not against the early teaching of the Buddha, they also provide an alternative training for those who might otherwise not benefit from current prevailing practices.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ājīvaṭṭhamaka-sīla* was not directly recommended by the Buddha. It is only recorded in some Pali commentaries. This *sīla* differs from the Five Precepts in that it expands false speech, *musāvāda*, into four, instead of one. It does not include the last of the Five Precepts, refraining from taking intoxicant. However, it integrates right livelihood, one of the eight constituents of the middle path.

<sup>30</sup> Hla Paing, pp.71-75.

<sup>31</sup> Mendelson, p.107; Htin Aung, *Burmese Monk’s Tales*, pp.24-25.

As to the more important point that Htin Aung raises that Ngetdwin Sayadaw denounced the offering of food, flowers and light to the pagodas as a practice that “dirtied shrines and encouraged rats”,<sup>32</sup> this has to be taken in the right context. Let us describe how an offering is currently made at a pagoda in Burma, which possibly was also common during the time of Mindon, so that we may appreciate Ngetdwin Sayadaw’s condemnation of offerings at pagodas. The Burmese usually offer food, flowers and light to a pagoda, a very important religious custom. The more famous the pagoda, the greater the offering. But the problem is that people leave the offering behind in the shrine. Since, unlike in Sri Lanka or Thailand, the pagodas in Burma in most cases are not situated in monasteries, the monks and novices do not go and clean the offering. If a pagoda has no keeper, the shrine is bound to become dirty and breed rats. This is why Ngetdwin Sayadaw in the 1860s criticised the offerings at pagodas in Mandalay. We should remember that he did not comment on making an offering to a Buddha image at home or in a monastery. And his criticism of the offerings at pagodas should not be taken to mean that he accepted only meditation as Buddhist practice, and excluded acts of generosity. In fact, Ngetdwin Sayadaw praised the virtue of *dāna*, acts of generosity, as a whole, in many ways.<sup>33</sup>

Concerning Mendelson’s labelling of those following the Pakhokku scholarship tradition as Mindon sect,<sup>34</sup> it will become clear when we discuss later in this chapter the development of monastic education after the fall of the Burmese monarchy that Mendelson has not understood the history of monastic education in late nineteenth century Burma; and when we analyse the development of monastic education after the fall of King Thibaw, the origin of the Pakhokku will also be discussed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.90-91.

<sup>34</sup> Mendelson, p.111.

<sup>35</sup> See pp.143-146.

Now let us turn to the actual “sects”, or rather fraternities, of Mindon: the *Shwegyin* and *Sudhamma*. The *Shwegyin-nikāya* came into existence in 1861. Its origin is usually attributed, both by the followers of the *Shwegyin-nikāya* and by their opponents, to a special royal order called *gaṇavimutti*, “liberation from the gathering of a *sangha*”, issued by Mindon in 1860. A *gaṇavimutti* order was not an innovation by Mindon; in fact it had been issued by some of his predecessors to highly respected and senior forest monks so that they could devote more time to meditation. Always to benefit individual monks, as against a group, a *gaṇavimutti* order exempted the monk referred to in the royal order from all ecclesiastical administrative business; even the *thathanabaing* could not summon him any more. Mindon’s *gaṇavimutti* order was passed to free U Jāgara (1822-1894), later to be known as Shwegyin Sayadaw, from the jurisdiction of the *thathanabaing*. However, unlike previous *gaṇavimutti* orders, there were two unique points, so far not noticed by scholars, to Mindon’s royal *gaṇavimutti*. First, Shwegyin Sayadaw was not, at the time the order was issued in 1860, a forest monk, although he used to study meditation under a well known meditation teacher and forest monk, Thilon Sayadaw<sup>36</sup>, himself a beneficiary of a *gaṇavimutti* order by King Thayawadi (1837-1846).<sup>37</sup> In fact, at that time Shwegyin Sayadaw had just moved to Mandalay, the capital, to take charge of four monasteries built by Mindon for him and his pupils. Second, because the *gaṇavimutti* was issued to a town-dweller monk, as Shwegyin Sayadaw was, it gave rise to the opportunity for the followers of Shwegyin Sayadaw to interpret the royal order as covering not only Shwegyin Sayadaw but also, by extension, all his followers.

The reason for the issue of this royal order, a conflict between the *thathanabaing* and Shwegyin Sayadaw, has been interpreted along the sectarian lines. The followers of

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<sup>36</sup> He passed away in 1860. Than Tun, *The History of Shwegyin-nikāya*, Appendix, p.3.

<sup>37</sup> Paṇḍitasirī, *Shwegyin-nikāya thathanawin*, p.94.

Shwegyin Sayadaw have maintained that their leader, on being invited by the king to reside in Mandalay, in 1860, made a courtesy call on the *thathanabaing* three times, but was ignored. Consequently, Shwegyin Sayadaw refused to call on the *thathanabaing* again even when summoned. The opponents of the *Shwegyin*, however, argued that Shwegyin Sayadaw had never called on the *thathanabaing*; in fact he refused to do so even after being summoned by the *thathanabaing* three times.<sup>38</sup> However, the two groups seem to agree on one point: when the *thathanabaing* asked the *mahadanwun*, the commissioner for religion, to produce him by force, Shwegyin Sayadaw planned to escape to Lower Burma or Ceylon. At that point, the king intervened: “let the *thathanabaing* summon Shwegyin Sayadaw no more in the future, and let the latter remain in the capital”.<sup>39</sup> This order has been taken by the *Shwegyin* monks to mean that the king had granted them a separate *nikāya*.<sup>40</sup> As far as we are concerned, the above encounter and the subsequent *gaṇavimutti* royal order are only a partial explanation for the origin of the *Shwegyin-nikāya*. In fact, the *gaṇavimutti* order following the story of the encounter between the two *sayadaws* order raises more questions than it answers. As Myo Myint, who studies the survival tactics of Mindon, notices, the reason for the *thathanabaing* to summon Shwegyin Sayadaw has never been established.<sup>41</sup>

However, before we provide a fuller explanation for why the *Shwegyin-nikāya* came into existence, let us first look at some of the previous interpretations regarding the birth of the *Shwegyin-nikāya*. Mendelson, in his analysis of the rise of the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, pays attention to Mindon’s actions. Mendelson says: “The *Shwegyin* sect thus clearly retraces its origin to Mindon’s actions and plans.” According to Mendelson, Mindon divided the *Sangha* in order to rule. This divide-and-rule policy was “to play off various monks on

<sup>38</sup> Than Tun, “The Shwegyin Sect”, p.158; Mendelson, pp.96-97

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* Also, *Shwegyin-nikāya se nga kyaing myauk aci away ji hmattan* (Records of the 15h Shwegyin-nikāya Convention), p.21.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Myo Myint, *The Politics of Survival in Burma*, p.182.

his council against each other and to use the *thathanabaing's* position to create antagonism among the great monks of the time..." Mendelson also asserts that Mindon's championship of the *Shwegyin-nikāya* was to compensate for the situation in lower Burma, now lost to the British and, therefore, where the king's religious policies no longer applied: Shwegyin Sayadaw was not a member of the politicised *Sudhamma* Council and would therefore be acceptable to the people and the British rulers if he were to be sent to British territory in Lower Burma to carry out the king's *Sangha* purification programme.<sup>42</sup>

Than Tun, who studies the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, however, focuses on Shwegyin Sayadaw's behaviour. He says: "Obviously U Jāgara [Shwegyin Sayadaw] had no respect for the *Sudhamma sabhā*, though he took care that there was no *adhikaraṇa* – trouble that would lead to an open schism."<sup>43</sup> He does not believe the account that when Shwegyin Sayadaw first arrived in the new capital, Mandalay, he went to pay his respects to the *thathanabaing* three times, because it is hard to believe that the *thathanabaing*, not known for his arrogance, would treat the Shwegyin Sayadaw so coldly. Than Tun also claims that Shwegyin Sayadaw had worked out a compromise before agreeing to the king's request to come to reside in Mandalay. He says: "He [Shwegyin Sayadaw] would not mind helping the king in his programme [purification programme] if the king allowed him and his group to remain separate from all other *Sangha*."<sup>44</sup> Than Tun's position has been taken up by some Burmese scholars, for instance, Tin Maung Maung Than.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Mendelson, p.101.

<sup>43</sup> Than Tun, "The Shwegyin Sect", p.158.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, p.156.

<sup>45</sup> Maung Than, "Sangha Reforms and Renewal of Sāsana in Myanmar" *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, p.9.

In the light of new research and evidence, however, these interpretations are unsatisfactory. It is necessary to appreciate Mindon's style of administration in order to comprehend the rise of the Shwegyin-*nikāya*. As Thant Myint-U has demonstrated, Mindon's was "a period of sustained innovation and attempts at adaptation to rapidly changing local and global conditions"<sup>46</sup>; centralising the kingdom's administration; bureaucratising "royal agencies"<sup>47</sup>; and modernising the tax system.<sup>48</sup> He passed a law for press freedom<sup>49</sup>; sent at least seventy students to India, Italy, England and France for education<sup>50</sup>; made an attempt to send a delegation to participate in the World Fair, a trade exhibition held in Paris in 1867<sup>51</sup>; and despatched his chief minister, Kinwun Mingyi, in 1871 to study developments in other parts of Asia and Europe<sup>52</sup>. Mindon thus concentrated more on modernising the country than on engaging in expansionist wars, the tendency of most of his predecessors. Scott, the first British political commissioner in colonial Burma, remarks: "The king started factories of all kinds and bought all manner of machinery".<sup>53</sup>

In his modernisation programme, considered crucial for his survival, Mindon appreciated any one, monk and lay alike, who could advise him. Myo Myint, remarks: "... King Mindon, more than his predecessors, tapped the social and moral authority of the monkhood for the good of his administration".<sup>54</sup> As far as this study has been able to uncover from surviving royal orders, one of those important advisers was Shwegyin

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<sup>46</sup> Thant Myint-U, pp.9-10, 104-129.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pp.105, 115. The king was usually in consultation with his principal ministers. See also Kyan, "Mindon's Councillors" *JBRS*, XLIX, pp.50-58.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, pp.118-125.

<sup>49</sup> Mindon saw the benefits of media on education, communication, trade and culture. He foresaw that his country would soon be known to the whole world. *ROB*, IX, pp.840-843.

<sup>50</sup> That was between 1859-1875. Among those sent included one to Turin and one to Sorbonne. Thant Myint-U, pp.113-114.

<sup>51</sup> Ba, "King Mindon and the World Fair of 1867 Held in Paris" *JBRS*, XLVII, ii, pp.18-23; Thant Myint-U, pp.113-114.

<sup>52</sup> For more see Kinwun Mingyi, *Kinwun mingyi London khayee thaw nayzin hmatdan* (Diary on the London trip).

<sup>53</sup> Scott, *Burma*, p.300; Thant Myint-U, p.113.

<sup>54</sup> Myo Myint, p.193.

Sayadaw.<sup>55</sup> For example, before introducing a new system of taxation, *thatthamedha* (သဿမေအန္တိတေဝိ), in 1860, the king consulted Shwegyin Sayadaw, who gave his opinion on some trade and tax policies. Awarding a monopoly to anyone was against the second Buddhist precept, Shwegyin Sayadaw wrote to the king, because “it would prevent poor people from acquiring wealth”.<sup>56</sup> “The ruler owned [or had the right to] only the tax already collected, not that which had yet to be collected” (*my translation*), and therefore the king should not pass a law that could affect the creation of such wealth. In addition, tax must not be levied at more than 10% of income.<sup>57</sup> Shwegyin Sayadaw made it clear that failure on the part of the king to follow the ten Buddhist ideals, in this case also raising tax to more than 10%, would be a cause of decline for both the country and the religion. Therefore the king “should make every effort to accept the advice of the *Sangha* without any excuse when sent through a *sangha*’s petition (သံဃာ့မေတ္တာစာ)”.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, under Mindon the tax rate was 10% (ဆယ်ပို.တပို. ဆယ်ခိုင်တခိုင်ကျသာ ကောက်ခံဆက်သွင်းစေ။).<sup>59</sup> Mindon’s decision to stick to a 10% tax was very significant in the context of the economic situation in the country. Because of the control of all the sea-ports by the British since 1826, and because of the recent war (1852-1854), the kingdom’s treasury was in a very depressed state. Therefore the king’s decision to retain this tax policy showed the influence and close involvement of Shwegyin Sayadaw in Mindon’s modernisation programmes.

However, Shwegyin Sayadaw was not the only high profile monk of his time to be involved in Mindon’s administrative matters. For example, the *thathanabaing* himself

<sup>55</sup> See the two letters from Shwegyin Sayadaw to Mindon in February 1864. Collection of *Upade*, I, pp.1-10.

<sup>56</sup> Shwegyin Sayadaw, “*akhun bandadaw hnit satlyin ywe mae lyauk ya phyay so daw mu chet* (An Answer to the Royal Question on Taxation and Treasury)” *Collection of Upade*, II, pp.5-10.

<sup>57</sup> Shwegyin Sayadaw, “*Thathanawithodani sardan* (On purification of the *sāsana*)” *Collection of Upade*, II, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, I, pp.1-5.

<sup>59</sup> ROB, IX, p.596.

supported the king in his controversial decision to move the capital from Amarapura to Mandalay<sup>60</sup>, and in 1862 urged the reluctant king, at the request of the British envoy Sir Arthur Phayre, to conclude the Anglo-Burmese Commercial Treaty of 1862. The *thathanabaing* also edited the *sittan* [royal gazette] and inscriptions.<sup>61</sup>

Mindon also needed the assistance of the *Sangha*, in particular the *Sudhamma* Council and the provincial ecclesiastical governors, known as *gaing ok* (provincial governor) and *gaing dauk* (assistant provincial governor), to persuade people to return to Upper Burma under his rule. This was because a sizeable number of his subjects had fled upper Burma in the period leading up to and during the war, to take refuge with the British, because of the heavy taxes levied by Mindon's brother and predecessor, King Pagan (1846-1853), to fund the war efforts, and also because of threats from the corrupt officials who collected tax. Even during the reign of Mindon, especially after the 1866 rebellion, in which the crown prince was killed, many people fled to Lower Burma. Indeed, three extant decrees issued within the period of nine months from May, 1867 to January, 1868, one each from the king, the cabinet and the *Sudhamma* Council, show that *Sudhamma* Council, at the request of the king and his ministers, agreed to persuade those who had fled to Lower Burma after the 1866 uprising to return.<sup>62</sup> The ecclesiastical council agreed to urge the people to return to Upper Burma on the condition that the king would grant them an amnesty and that no tax was to be collected from them for five years. But we have no evidence whether the *Sangha* did, in fact, persuade those who had fled in the earlier reign to return.

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<sup>60</sup> *Kon-Baung set yazawin* III, p.242.

<sup>61</sup> Win Maung, *Mandalay khet Buddha thathanawin* (History of Buddhism in the Mandalay Period), pp.154-155.

<sup>62</sup> For detail see orders of the king, the cabinet and the *Sudhamma* Council dated 15 May, 1867 and 19 January 1868. ROB, IX, pp.640-641, 655.



Mindon also needed help from the Buddhist clergy in his attempts to rein in corrupt officials<sup>63</sup>, for “the monks... were occasionally the only checks on the tyranny and exploitation of powerful officials”.<sup>64</sup> In this regard, the provincial ecclesiastical governors wielded enormous power in the provinces under their control. They confirmed the royal appointment of *myothugyi* (administrative head of a town) and *ywathugyi* (village headman), and in certain cases the ecclesiastical leaders in a province would request the king to appoint their chosen candidates to those positions. Every quarter of a year, the provincial ecclesiastical governors reported directly to the king on both religious and political affairs in the provinces. These monks were asked for their opinions on whether the people could pay tax and supply rice to the royal granary.<sup>65</sup> They also submitted to the *Hlutdaw*, the cabinet, lists of people who should be exempted from taxation.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, these powerful ecclesiastical chiefs, using their moral and social status, also intervened on behalf of the people. Apart from ensuring safety for the people at different levels and the fair and just taxation described above the ecclesiastical governors also convinced, for instance, in 1859 and 1873, the king to return to their owners the lands which had been confiscated for the army in Mandalay and Meikhtila respectively.<sup>67</sup>

A few years earlier, in 1856, there had been a turning point in the history of the *Sangha* under Mindon, when he issued the purification order, သာသနာပြု ဂုဏ်အမိန့်တော်.<sup>68</sup> In the declaration, containing 22 points, so far noted by scholars such as Than Tun only for its

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Scott, p.382.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid* & Collection of *Upades*, IV, pp.9-13.

<sup>66</sup> Win Maung, p.138. See also Myo Myint, *The Political survival in Burma*, pp.194-195.

<sup>67</sup> *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and Shan State*, No. I, Vol. I, p.2.

<sup>68</sup> ROB 15 February 1856. ROB, IV, pp.433-438.

impact on the *Sangha*<sup>69</sup>, Mindon asked his ministers and officials to follow the examples of minister-*bodhisattas*, such as *Mahosadha*, *Vidhura* and *Nandisena*, who are portrayed in the *Jātaka*, the stories of Buddha's former lives. In brief, the officials were urged to cultivate three qualities, namely “*rāja*, *dhamma* and *loka*”, or loyalty to the king; righteousness (i.e. Buddhist practices); and concerns for the worldly development of the kingdom. The king himself promised to follow the path of a *bodhisatta*, a Buddha-to-be, and of a *thathanapyu min*, “missionary king”, like kings Ajātasattu, Kālāsoka and Asoka in India, who had done so much for the *Sāsana*. The author of this declaration, according to Than Tun, “was U Nanda”, better known as Shankalaykyun Sayadaw, who was a senior colleague of Shwegyin Sayadaw and a fellow-reformer.<sup>70</sup>

Both U Nanda and Shwegyin Sayadaw had been invited to the new capital Mandalay to propagate the *dhamma*. They were invited because their teacher, Thilon Sayadaw, had declined a similar invitation to come and reside in the capital. Here it seems Mindon had been inspired by and determined to use Thilon Sayadaw as an exemplary monk in his kingdom. The king saw the three of them as reformers who followed the *vinaya* strictly and had a good administrative system in their monasteries.

But U Nanda died in 1858, before the construction of Mandalay was completed, and Shwegyin Sayadaw, who was the next in line, accepted the royal invitation to come and reside in the capital. At only 36 and not a member of the *Sudhamma* Council, Shwegyin Sayadaw's influence on the king may have now caused irritation among some senior *sayadaws*, especially the *thathanabaing* Sayadaw. After the death of Shankalaykyun Sayadaw, it was Shwegyin Sayadaw who had become the target of the conservative. Indeed, tension may have arisen between the *thathanabaing* and the associates of the late

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, pp.151-179; Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin*, I, pp.79-83.

<sup>70</sup> Than Tun, “The Shwegyin Sect”, p.154.

Shankalaykyun Sayadaw immediately after the declaration of the purification order. The *thathanabaing*'s uneasiness had delayed the issue by the *Sudhamma* Council (of which he was the chairman) of a string of edicts to back up the 1856 purification order to local monks.<sup>71</sup> Such orders, when they were issued, came only after the death of the *thathanabaing*, who himself never took any measures to strengthen the purification order.

The *thathanabaing*, despite being one of the most learned monks of his days (he was the forefather of the now famous Pakhokku academic tradition) and strict in *vinaya* practice, does not seem to have taken a keen interest in administrative matters. This is evident in the only three orders of his extant today: they were short; all were issued on the same day; and at least one of them was prompted directly by the king. All the three orders were issued on 25 March 1856. One required the *Sangha* not to hold *pārisuddhi uposatha*, “a brief ceremony for confession without recitation of the *Pātimokkha*”, but to perform *sutt-uddesa uposatha*, that includes confession and recitation of the whole *Pātimokkha*. The second urged some monks involved in arranging festivals to refrain from such unholy business. If they refused to follow this order, the *gain-ok* were asked to expel the miscreants from the *gaing*, the local group of the *Sangha*. The third order concerned monks picking meat from dead animals such as elephants and horses. This order mentioned that the people had complained about the behaviour of monks who took meat from dead animals. Unlike *Sudhamma Sayadaws*' orders issued after his death (1865), the *thathanabaing*'s did not refer to the purification order of 1856, which had been issued more than a month earlier.<sup>72</sup> In his orders, the *thathanabaing* usually asked *gaing-ok*, “monastic governors”, to expel the rule-breaking monks, indicating further his lack of interest in rehabilitation, whereas Shwegyin Sayadaw's orders required the *gain-*

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<sup>71</sup> *Collection of Upade*, II, pp.169-204, 227-234.

<sup>72</sup> ROB, IX, pp.440-442.

ok to bring the miscreants to the Shwegyin *taik* (monastery) for rehabilitation and training, after which they were to be sent back to their own monasteries.<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, as we have seen, the office of the *thathanabaing* seems to have been bypassed in the drafting, issuing and implementing of the purification order of 15 February 1856.<sup>74</sup> Neither the purification order nor another royal order, issued on the same day, to ensure the implementation of purification programmes, mentioned the *thathanabaing*. This suggests that Mindon was determined to put the *thathanabaing* aside from the beginning, or that the *thathanabaing* himself had refused at the outset to participate in the purification programmes, something he would continue to do until he passed away in 1865. Either way, there seems to have been a deterioration in coordination between the king and his *thathanabaing*. So far, we do not know if Shwegyin Sayadaw, and his senior colleague, Shankalaykyun Sayadaw, were partly responsible for this breach of protocol. What we can be sure of, however, is that the breach of protocol must have been a major cause of tension, and may explain why the *thathanabaing* gave a cold reception to Shwegyin Sayadaw when he came to Mandalay for the first time.

The refusal of Shwegyin Sayadaw in 1860 to appear before the *thathanabaing*, if this account is true, should not be seen as a disrespectful act towards the *Sudhamma* Council as a whole, but a manifestation of the tension that existed between two individuals, the *thathanabaing* and Shwegyin Sayadaw. This is because, despite Than Tun's claim that Shwegyin Sayadaw "had no respect for the *Sudhamma Sabhā*", Shwegyin Sayadaw had, in fact, had a good working relationship with and even shown respect for the *Sudhamma*

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<sup>73</sup> Shwegyin Sayadaw, "*Talok myo nay thanga to nai athetkaing nayakawithodaka saya to hma ca ywe kyint saung yan upade* (Rules for the *sāsanasodhaka sayadaws* resident in the Talok area.)" *Collection of Upade*, II, 205-226.

<sup>74</sup> ROB dated 15 February 1856.

*Sayadaws*. In one of the royal orders issued only a year after the *gaṇavimutti* order was passed, in 1861, we learn that Shwegyin Sayadaw was one of the five senior *Sayadaws* – the others being members of the *Sudhamma* Council- who jointly issued a directive to all the *gaing oks* and *gaing dauks* in the provinces to help oversee tax collection by the four tax commissioners sent from the capital.<sup>75</sup> These commissioners, all lay people, were also asked by the five *sayadaws* to observe and report the way the *gaing oks* and *gaing dauks* trained the monks under their care.<sup>76</sup> The *Shwegyin-nikāya* records show that a member of the *Sudhamma* Council during the time of Mindon, Thingazar Sayadaw, had great respect for Thilon Sayadaw, the teacher of Shwegyin Sayadaw.<sup>77</sup> In fact, Than Tun himself claims that “Thingazar and Thetpan [two members of the *Sudhamma* Council] were, like Shwegyin, former disciples of Thalon [Thilon Sayadaw]”.<sup>78</sup> The relationship between Shwegyin Sayadaw and the *Sudhamma Sayadaws* seems to have become even better in the next reign. Shwegyin Sayadaw, on being appointed a *thathanabaing* by King Thibaw in 1881, sent a letter to some of the *Sudhamma Sayadaws*, reaffirming his respect for them, and asking them for exhortation and guidance in his missionary work.<sup>79</sup>

Mendelson, on the other hand, claims that “Mindon’s support of Shwegyin Sayadaw” was to fill the vacuum resulting from the loss of Lower Burma to the British: he sent Shwegyin Sayadaw to Lower Burma to implement the purification order, because Shwegyin Sayadaw, not being a member of the *Sudhamma* Council, would not arouse the suspicion of the British authorities. However, this claim is not logical, because there is no evidence that Shwegyin Sayadaw was appointed by Mindon to implement the

<sup>75</sup> *Collection of Upades*, III, pp.1-2. The four members of the *Sudhamma* Council were Mattaya Sayadaw, Maung Htaung Sayadaw, Hla Htwe Sayadaw and Salin Sayadaw. Maung Htaung Sayadaw was a pupil of the *thathanabaing* and he is better known as Paññāsāmi, the author of the *Sāsanavaṃsa*. *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Paṇḍitasirī, *Shwegyin-nikāya thathanawin*, p.p.100, 108-110.

<sup>77</sup> Than Tun, “The Shwegyin Sect”, p.157.

<sup>79</sup> Five Sayadaws to whom the letter was addressed and sent through *wungyi* were Parakkama Sayadaw, Mangalarāma Sayadaw, Sankyaung Sayadaw, Thetpan Sayadaw and Mahāvijitārāma Sayadaw – all members of the *Sudhamma* Council under Thibaw. For the letter from Shwegyin (and Taung-daw) Sayadaw and responses from the addressee Sayadaws, see, *Collection of Upade*, II, pp.272-277.

purification order in Lower Burma; and Thingazar Sayadaw, a member of the *Sudhamma* Council, himself frequented Lower Burma on his preaching tours and did not incur any suspicion from the British authorities.<sup>80</sup>

As far as Mindon was concerned, a king should be neutral in ecclesiastical disputes. Mindon was not a strict authoritarian like his predecessors such as Alaungpaya and Bodawpaya.<sup>81</sup> When he issued a decree preventing Shwegyin Sayadaw from being summoned by the *thathanabaing* Sayadaw, he was attempting to mediate. As explained above, Mindon did not intervene in the *Dvāra* dispute nor did he take any action when the future Ngetdwin Sayadaw started to criticise Buddhist rituals. Mindon's attitude towards building a unified order was different from that of his predecessors.

To Mindon, the Order should and would be unified only through peaceful means. His patronage on a grand scale of the fifth Buddhist Council and the *Pathamapyan* examinations, which we shall discuss later, should be seen against this background. Mindon made every effort to smooth relationships within the *Sangha*. He attempted to bring Shwegyin Sayadaw into the establishment, by offering him membership of the *Sudhamma* Council or even the post of the *thathanabaing*. Though such efforts were not successful, the king certainly succeeded, as already described, in making the *Sudhamma sayadaws* work together with Shwegyin Sayadaw.

We can now see that the origin of the *Shwegyin-nikāya* was linked not to a single but to several factors. In the context of his modernisation programmes, Mindon put to use all human resources, monks as well as lay. This intention was clear when Mindon, instead

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<sup>80</sup> “*Maha Yen Sayadawpayagyi e atthokpati akyin* [A Brief Biography of Maha Yen Sayadaw]” *Mahayin gaing lo saingyar yayphay sarmaypwe hnint dhammavinaya sarpyan pwe tawgyi hnit yarpyi* magazine (*Centenary Magazine of the Mahayin-nikāya and Dhammvinaya Examinations*), pp.8-9.

<sup>81</sup> See also pp.83-86, 91-97.

of following the tradition of appointing his own tutor, U Candimā as the *thathanabaing*, chose U Ñeyya for the top post on the grounds that the latter was knowledgeable in worldly affairs.<sup>82</sup> However, U Ñeyya, who had also been the *thathanabaing* during the reign of Mindon's father, Thayawadi, was too elderly and proved inadequate for Mindon's ambitious modernisation programmes. It was Shwegyin Sayadaw who, at the age of only 36, had under him around one thousand monks in five large monasteries, who became the favourite adviser of the king for his administrative skills. Despite, as Than Tun observes, his desire for a "strong and united" *Sangha*,<sup>83</sup> Mindon made, in my opinion, a mistake in issuing a *gaṇavimutti* order to a town-dweller monk with a large following. Had Mindon found a way to solve the tension between the *thathanabaing* and Shwegyin Sayadaw without resorting to a *gaṇavimutti* order, the followers of Shwegyin Sayadaw would have been just another distinct lineage, like that of Bagaya or Maung Htaung, and not a separate *nikāya*. Mindon's successor, Thibaw (1878-1885), contributed further to the establishment of the *Shwegyin-nikāya* by appointing Shwegyin Sayadaw as a *thathanabaing* for his followers, although the Sayadaw declined the position. But not until the deposition of Thibaw by the British that the *Shwegyin-nikāya* acquired the identity of a separate *nikāya*, with its own constitution and administration.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.3 A Threatened Buddhist Kingdom and a Nationalist *Sangha*

However, despite causing some tension within the *Sangha*, Mindon did achieve strong cooperation between the *Sangha* and the monarchy. This strengthening cooperation may have resulted from a shared sense of imminent danger. In other words, the cooperation was achieved because the *Sangha* now perceived the British threat to the Burmese

<sup>82</sup> Shwe Kaing Tha, *Mandalay hnit tayapyi*, p.126.

<sup>83</sup> Than Tun, "The Shwegyin Sect", p.157.

<sup>84</sup> See also Than Tun, *History of [the] Shwegyin Nikaya (Shwegyin Sect in the Order of Buddhist Monks)*; and "The Shwegyin Sect".

kingship as a threat to Buddhism itself because royal patronage had been so important to the Order. As Bechert observes, this was also because the British, who now ruled Lower Burma, belonged to a different religion, Christianity.<sup>85</sup> It is in this sense that the *Sangha* became nationalistic.

This nationalistic feeling among members of the *Sangha*, who saw the British colonialists as a danger to both the Burmese monarch and the Buddhist religion, can be seen, for instance, in the famous poem, *The Deposition of Our Lord* given below.

**The Deposition of Our Lord** (ပါတော်မူတမ်းချင်း, *par taw mu tan chin* )

.....

Did you, Ministers, undermine your Lord?

You have coerced your monarch;

What fools you are!

Did you secretly plot with your enemies?

You have become depraved;

Traitors indeed you are!

Our Lord, aged only twenty-seven,

In the eighth year of his reign,

Exiled was he from Mandalay, his birthplace of magnificence,

To the Kala country<sup>86</sup>, fraught with wrong views and ignorance.

No sooner has he spent all his good karma,

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<sup>85</sup> Bechert, ““To be a Burmese is to be a Buddhist”: Buddhism in Burma” *The World of Buddhism*, p.149.

<sup>86</sup> India.



Even a *Sakka* falls from celestial existence.  
 Alas! What a sudden and devastating loss;  
 And, so it was with our Lord's disappearance!

Gotama's religion in our kingdom  
 Shines no longer anywhere.  
 The Myanmar are being made slaves;  
 They live desolate, in fear and despair.

.....<sup>87</sup> (*My translation*)

In these verses, the fate of Buddhism is perceived to be closely related to that of the monarchy. This famous poem was composed by Seepanni Sayadaw (1817-1894), who was the abbot of Seepanni, a royal monastery, during the reigns of Mindon (1853-1878) and Thibaw (1878-1885). It blames the “senior and junior ministers” for the fall of the last Burmese kingdom in 1885, and sheds light on the reaction of the *Sangha* to the political developments in nineteenth century Burma. In this poem, Seepanni Sayadaw criticised corrupt ministers and officials for the fate that the king, the kingdom and the Buddhist religion were now suffering. On hearing this, Kinwun, who had toured Europe as a senior minister under Mindon and was the prime minister under Thibaw, responded with a poem, in which he placed the fault with the monarch himself for not adhering to righteous rule. Seepanni Sayadaw, however, wrote another poem, as a response to Kinwun, arguing that the king entrusted the administration of the kingdom to his cabinet, and so the responsibility was that of the ministers.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> သီပေါနိဗ္ဗာန်သုတေသီ၏ ပါတော်မူတမ်းချင်း။ ... မှားမှီကံလှစွာ၊ ကိုယ်မှီကံကို၊ ကိုယ်သာယူကံသီ၊ ဖိကားစီသည်၊ မှူးကြီးမတ်ငယ်၊ မာလာနွယ်သို့၊ ဂုဏ်ကွယ်လှည့်တိုက်၊ သူ့ဘက်လိုက်၍၊ စရိုက်စောင့်ငဲ့၊ သစ္စာမဲ့ကြောင့်၊ နှစ်ဆယ်ခုနှစ်နှစ်၊ နန်းစံရှစ်တွင်၊ ကာသံဘုံနေ၊ သိကြားကြေသို့၊ ချက်ရွှေသိုလှ၊ မနိပြည်သာမှ၊ မိစ္ဆာမောဟ၊ ပွင့်ပွင့်မိတ္တသည့်၊ ကုလားနိုင်ငံ၊ လွှဲပြောင်းစံရှင်၊ လောကဓံအဉ္စ၊ သဘာဝကြောင့်၊ ဂေါတမာနုန်းခေါင်၊ သာသနာရောင်လည်း၊ မပြောင်မရွှန်း၊ အမှောင်စွန်းခွဲ၊ ကျွန်ုပ်သပြေဒီ၊ ဓရဏီထက်၊ ခိုမှီနေရိုး၊ မြန်လှမျိုးတို့၊ လန်ဇီးထိတ်လ၊ ... Kelatha “*Seepanni thathanawin* (The Lineage of Seepanni)” *Mandalay thathanawin*, IV, p.359.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, pp.358-361.

Although the poem specifically refers to the deposition of the last king, Thibaw, and his subsequent exile to India by the British, the sentiment it expresses had been widespread since the end of the first Anglo-Burmese war, 1824-1826. However, the second Anglo-Burmese war is taken as a turning point because the territories lost at the end of the first Anglo-Burmese war traditionally belonged to non-Burman people, such as the Mon and Arakan, and had been annexed to the Burmese empire less than a century earlier. Their loss was not felt as much as the loss of those territories inhabited by the Burman people at the end of the second war. The change of attitude on the part of the *Sangha* towards formal examinations, which we will discuss shortly, justifies our point that nationalism began soon after the end of the second Anglo-Burmese war.

Trager, on the other hand, sees Burmese nationalism as arising at the end of the Burmese monarchy.<sup>89</sup> Mendelson agrees with him when he says that nationalism began “as colonialism entered the scene”, meaning after the fall of Thibaw or the third Anglo-Burmese war,<sup>90</sup> and concludes that the *Sangha* did not involve itself in nationalism<sup>91</sup>. However, it seems to me that these scholars have overlooked the way in which the *Sangha* reacted to the political development that occurred immediately after the second Anglo-Burmese war and before the third Anglo-Burmese war.

In contrast to Trager and Mendelson, Smith thinks that the Burmese, including the *Sangha*, had been nationalist for centuries, long before the British occupation, and therefore Burmese nationalism, which he calls “traditional Burmese nationalism”, was not “a reaction to British rule”. But Smith seems to contradict himself because the only evidence he quotes is Thibaw’s proclamation of 1885, issued just before the outbreak of the third Anglo-Burmese war, in which the king denounced the British as “heretic

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<sup>89</sup> Trager, *Burma*, p.43.

<sup>90</sup> Mendelson, pp.173-235.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p.173.

barbarians” and promised to “uphold the religion, [...] the national honour [...], and the country’s interest [...]”.<sup>92</sup> Thibaw was born and bred in the shadow of the British, and was in this proclamation rallying his subjects to defend the religion, the national honour and the country. However, although similar proclamations had been made by previous Burmese kings who had conquered their neighbours, there is no evidence that the *Sangha* itself had become nationalist before the end of the second Anglo-Burmese war. In other words, the *Sangha* did not see any danger to the religion when earlier monarchs invaded the neighbouring kingdoms; but it was the British advance that was seen as a threat to Buddhism.

One of the examples of good cooperation between Mindon and the nationalist *Sangha* is the holding of the fifth Buddhist Council, *pañcama saṅgāyanā*, in 1871.<sup>93</sup> In this Buddhist Council, which lasted five months and three days, all the Pali canonical texts and their commentaries were recited, inscribed both on palm-leaves and on 729 marble slabs, by 2400 *bhikkhus* and some learned officials; and the marble slabs are now preserved in the *Kuthodaw* Pagoda, next to the Sudhamma Hall and the Palace in Mandalay.<sup>94</sup> So enthusiastic was the king that at one point he, his queen and the crown prince took charge of the transcribing of the *Suttanta*-, *Abhidhamma*- and *Vinaya-piṭaka* respectively.<sup>95</sup> Their participation – certainly they did not transcribe the texts themselves - was primarily aimed at accruing merit for themselves and providing public affirmation of the good work itself. The tradition has it that the decision to inscribe the scriptures on marble, despite the cost, was taken to ensure the future of the Buddhist scriptures in the event of the whole kingdom falling under the British. This decision was significant in

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<sup>92</sup> Smith, *Religion and Politics*, pp.81-86.

<sup>93</sup> ROB, IX, p.748. This recognition is by no means universal even among the Theravada countries. The history of Buddhist Council in Thailand differs from that of Burma. Thailand does not recognise the Fifth Council held in Mandalay and Burma recognises none of the Buddhist councils held in Chiang Mai, Ayutthaya and Bangkok.

<sup>94</sup> Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin*, I, p.99.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, p.86.

that it meant the *Tipiṭaka* in print book form would not be produced, although a printing press was already available in Mandalay. Marble slabs were considered stronger and more lasting. This could be interpreted as demonstrating that both the king and the *Sangha* felt besieged by the British who had already occupied Lower Burma.

There was a precedent for a Burmese monarch forging a closer relationship with the *Sangha* after a defeat in battle. One of his predecessors, Bagyidaw (1819-1837), who succeeded Bodawpaya and who led the kingdom in the first Anglo-Burmese war, also took calculated steps to bring the monarchy closer to the *Sangha*. Presumably in bad times, the king wanted to exploit the moral authority of the *Sangha*, who wielded great influence over the people in the kingdom.

King Bagyidaw began to busy himself, even while he was in the midst of settling compensation demanded by the British<sup>96</sup>, with work that he considered would help the *sāsana* survive longer, such as moving old Buddha statues from place to place for the people to worship them<sup>97</sup>; making new big marble statues of the Buddha<sup>98</sup>; building pagodas and *sīmās*<sup>99</sup>; copying the *Tipiṭaka*<sup>100</sup>; and holding the *Pathamapyān* examinations<sup>101</sup>. It is noteworthy that after losing the war, the king, who now boldly claimed to aspire “to become omniscient” in the future<sup>102</sup>, made every effort to turn people’s attention to cultural and religious matters. He made sure that people celebrated all the festivals<sup>103</sup> and ordered one person from every household to attend the “rejoicing ceremony” when he donated a bell to a pagoda.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Harvey, p.302; ROB, VIII, pp.579-580.

<sup>97</sup> ROB, VIII, p.514-517, 536.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, pp.538, 540-542, 545, 547-561, 564-565, 570.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p.537, 609.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, pp.530-531, 610.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, pp.576, 612-615.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, pp.518-519, 528-529, 588.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p.559.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p.548.

### 3.4 Monastic Education during the Reign of Mindon:

#### The Transformation of the Examinations

In order to show how Mindon set out to forge closer ties with the *Sangha*, we shall now focus on his patronage of monastic education. Despite the difficult political situation he faced, Mindon put an enormous effort into promoting monastic education by transforming the formal examinations, namely the *Vinaya* and the *Pathamapyan* examinations; but, unlike Bodawpaya, he did so with diplomacy and shrewdness. In fact, Mindon transformed these examinations so shrewdly that the *Sangha* came to change its thinking on monastic education drastically, embracing the formal examinations it had once so vehemently opposed.

Mindon transformed the *Vinaya* examination, started under Bodawpaya (1782-1819), from a basic *Vinaya* examination into a specialised pursuit. Earlier, under Bodawpaya, the *Vinaya* examination syllabus had been too basic<sup>105</sup>, a training which novices had acquired soon after their initiation; and to test any monk on that elementary syllabus amounted to humiliation. Although the old syllabus of the *Vinaya* examinations introduced by Bodawpaya continued to be taught during the time of Mindon, it was not included in the new syllabus. Indeed, Mindon no longer asked the *Sudhamma* Sayadaws to assess the monks and novices on that old syllabus; instead the abbots used the old syllabus as a foundation course to teach their students in their own monasteries. This acceptance modified use of the old *Vinaya* syllabus also suggests a shift in opinion on the part of the abbots.

During Mindon's time, the *Vinaya* examinations had all the *Vinaya* canonical texts as its syllabus, which was designed to encourage students to specialise in the *Vinaya*. These

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<sup>105</sup> See p.90-91.

texts were regarded as the golden words of the Buddha and were the highest authority in monastic discipline. A candidate might sit for part or the whole of the *Vinaya* canon, which was divided in Burma into five books. This change apparently satisfied the scholarly pride of the monks and also had the effect of raising self-esteem in the monastic community.

An increase in the number of candidates in the *Vinaya* examinations showed the psychological effect the change had on the *Sangha*. In 1860, a year after the founding of the capital, Mandalay, there were as many as 60 *bhikkhus* reciting from memory different portions of the *Vinaya-piṭaka* in the *Vinaya* examinations. The *thathanabaing* and other *Sudhamma Sayadaws* conducted the examinations, while the king and his queen and consorts respectfully listened to the recitation in silence.<sup>106</sup>

To strengthen the new concept of specialisation-orientated examinations, Mindon introduced another examination for those who wished to study the *Abhidhamma* in depth. This examination included in its syllabus all the *Abhidhamma* canonical scriptures, seven texts in total. This further move delighted many leading abbots because the *Abhidhamma* had long been considered in Burma as the most difficult and most important subject of the Buddhist scriptures. In fact, as tradition has it, the study of the *Abhidhamma* was so vital to the perpetuation of the Buddhist religion itself that the first sign of the decline of Buddhism was thought to be signalled by the disappearance of the *Paṭṭhāna*, the last book of the *Abhidhamma*. Indeed, in line with this belief, there was in 1870 a three-months-long discussion of the *Paṭṭhāna* led by the *Sudhamma Sayadaws* at a specially built hall called *Paṭṭhāna Hall*.<sup>107</sup> In the *Abhidhamma* examinations, the candidate could choose to enter for a part or the whole of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*. This development can be

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<sup>106</sup> Kelatha, cit. I, p.95.

<sup>107</sup> ROB, IX, pp.729-730.

considered as the first attempt by the *Sangha* to encourage memorisation of a collection (*piṭaka/nikāya*) on a massive scale.

For the *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma* examinations held in November 1861 there were 350 candidates. Some recited from memory the whole *Vinaya-piṭaka*; some memorised parts of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*. The comprehension test was based on what one had recited in the oral examination. Mindon came to listen to the recitation with his mother and queen in order to accumulate merit. The candidates were not only from the capital, Mandalay, but also from nearby cities such as Ava, Sagaing and Amarapura.<sup>108</sup>

The modification of the *Pathamapyan* under Mindon, however, lay not so much in the total transformation of its syllabuses, but rather in that of its format. The earlier format, as already mentioned, comprising two levels before Bodawpaya and six during his (Bodawpaya's) reign, was divided into two categories: one for candidates for the novicehood; and the other for the monkhood. Their design into two levels was obviously linked, as discussed in the previous chapter, to the purging of monks and novices by Thalun. Recognising the resentment on the part of the *Sangha* of these two categories and the stigma attached to them, Mindon dropped the words *shin laung* (would-be-novice) and *pazin laung* (would-be-monk), thus removing the need to keep Bodawpaya's old *Pathamapyan* system of two categories and six levels. The decision to drop these two derogatory terms also showed that the king had now decided to abandon the *Pathamapyan* as an instrument to control the *Sangha* in general, and those wishing to enter the Order in particular. Instead the new system, comprising four levels, signalled a purely religious and academic pursuit, relatively free of any political agenda on the part of the monarch. For its part, the *Sangha* was pleased with this move, as it enabled it for

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<sup>108</sup> Kelatha, cit., I, p.96.

the first time in two hundred years to set aside the unhappy past and its associated stigma; and to see the *Pathamapyan* in a new context.

With some minor changes to the curriculum, the new set-up of the *Pathamapyan*, as noted, had four levels; in fact, only three levels, as we shall see, in terms of its syllabuses. The first three levels, called *pathamagne* (ပထမဇာတိ), *pathamalat* (ပထမလတ်) and *pathamagyi* (ပထမကြီး), were respectively the “primary”, “intermediate” and “advanced” levels. The highest level, *pathamakyaw* (ပထမကျော်) had no separate syllabus. *Pathamakyaw* was the title awarded to the candidate who passed and scored the highest marks in the *pathamagyi* level examinations; so there could be only one *pathamakyaw* a year. A candidate might attempt the *pathamakyaw* more than once, even though he had passed the *pathamagyi* level.

The new *Pathamapyan* syllabuses were designed so that a student who passed the primary level had a solid foundation in Pali literature and the *Abhidhamma*, and was able to read by himself the *suttas* in Pali, although no *sutta* was actually a part of the syllabuses. However, Sanskrit was dropped from the new syllabus. Generally, Sanskrit was an expertise of the Brahmins, usually from India, at the Burmese court, rather than that of monks. Although selected monasteries had studied the subject since the Pagan period, only during the reign of Bodawpaya was it introduced, perhaps at the request of his *thathanabaing*, Ñāṇavaṃsa, a Sanskritist, who sent several missions to India to bring back Sanskrit works.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Between 1808 and 1815, no less than seven missions were sent to India to bring religious and non-religious texts from there. ROB, VI, pp.xxvi-xxxi. This shows how India was the main source of intellectual development for both Bodawpaya and the *thathanabaing*.



The reason for the withdrawal of Sanskrit from the syllabuses is not recorded anywhere in the royal orders or in the chronicles of monastic lineages; it can only be inferred here. Burmese monastic scholarship had advocated what it considered to be the pure orthodox Theravada tradition. Part of this tradition was the preservation of the Pali language, in which the Theravada scriptures have been handed down, as against Sanskrit, in which the Vedas and the early scriptures of the Mahayana school were written. This sentiment famously became a sticking point between the Burmese and Sinhalese learned monks who were members of the final editorial committee during the Sixth Buddhist Council, *chaṭṭha saṅgāyanā*, held in Rangoon between 1954 and 1956. The argument, which was on which reading of one particular Pali word to choose<sup>110</sup>, took place between Mahasi Sayadaw, also known as U Sobhana, of Burma, and Venerable Ānanda Maitreya, the deputy leader of the Sinhalese *bhikkhus* at the Council and the only representative of the Sinhalese *Saṅgha* on the final editing committee. Mahasi Sayadaw rejected the preference of Venerable Ānanda Maitreya, who backed his argument with a Sanskrit text. Mahasi Sayadaw said: Buddha *dhamma* [the Buddha's teaching] does not need Sanskrit books ... [and] it was wrong to seek the help of Brahmanic texts to edit the Buddha *dhamma*.<sup>111</sup> Ānanda Maitreya, however, explained that Sanskrit was but a language and not a doctrine; and the Pali language itself had borrowed many words from Sanskrit. Neither side gave in. But the committee, which had four Burmese representatives, voted by a majority to reject the variant reading that was backed by the Sanskrit text.

The Burmese Theravada monks view Mahayana school of Buddhism as being corrupted by Brahmin beliefs and Sanskrit, in which the early Mahayana scriptures were written and preserved, has thus been seen as not suitable for monks to study, lest it corrupts their

<sup>110</sup> *patthapattamūlakam/patthapattapulakam*. Vin iii 6. The Committee chose *patthapattamūlakam*. It is also the choice of the PTS version (1881).

<sup>111</sup> Dhammalaṅkāra, *Venerable Ānanda Maitreya*, pp.41-43.

Theravada doctrine. This view on Sanskrit language is, however, not shared by every Burmese scholar monk. From their biographies, it seems that the minority *nikāyas*, such as the *Shwegyin* and the *Dvāra*, favoured the study of Sanskrit.<sup>112</sup> The second head of the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, the Visuddhārāma Sayadaw of Mandalay, was an expert in Sanskrit. He quoted Sanskrit works extensively in his writing. One of his prominent pupils, Abhayārāma Sayadaw of Mandalay, wrote a *nissaya* on the *Abhidhānapadīpikā*, a Pali dictionary, using Sanskrit works as his authority. The Abhayārāma Sayadaw was famous for his teaching of classical Sanskrit grammar, Pāṇini's.

No information we have found so far indicates the year in which the changes in the *Pathamapyan* examinations took place. We only know that, towards the end of Mindon's reign, the new *Pathamapyan* syllabuses had gained momentum and witnessed a substantial increase in the number of candidates. It can be assumed that the transformation of the *Pathamapyan* examinations under Mindon took place only after the Fifth Buddhist Council was held in 1871. Before that, the old system modified by Bodawpaya must have been in practice. About three years after the Fifth Buddhist Council in Mandalay, in 1874, there is evidence that the new system of the *Pathamapyan* examinations had been introduced. There were almost one thousand candidates for the examinations according to the new system, including one for the *pathamakyaw*, and 19 for the *pathamagyi*.<sup>113</sup> The examinations were also conducted at various halls at Sandamuni Pagoda, as Sudhamma Hall, the usual venue, could no longer accommodate all the candidates. This clearly shows that the majority of the *Sangha* had now accepted formal examination as a means to promote and perpetuate Buddhism, and resistance at this time had thus decreased considerably.

<sup>112</sup> See Janakābhivamsa, *Tatbhava thanthaya*; Paṇḍitasirī, *Shwegyin-nikāya thathanawin*; Sirīsobhana, *Mahādvāra-nikāya sāsanaṇvamsadīpanī*.

<sup>113</sup> Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin*, I, p.113.

Mindon also encouraged his sons to study and enter the examinations. Mindon himself, as a prince, had studied in a monastery in Amarapura until he was twenty-three years of age and knew the monastic scholastic community in the capital well. He “had the best education the Buddhist monasteries could give”<sup>114</sup> and was “decidedly” the “best Burmese monarch of the house of Alaungpaya”.<sup>115</sup> We do not know if Mindon ever sat the *Pathamapyan* examination. However, Mindon’s son and his successor, Thibaw, completed the *pathamagne* level in 1875, after which he was ordained as a *sāmaṇera* and continued his study. In the following year, he passed the *pathamalat* and in 1877 the *pathamagyī*.<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, although we know of princesses being taught by nuns in the palace, we have no record of their taking part in the *Pathamapyan* examinations.

Syllabuses of the *Pathamapyan* under Mindon are as follows.

**Preliminary (Junior) Level, (ဝေဇ္ဇာတိ/Pathamange)**

1. Eight chapters of the Great Grammar (i.e. *Kaccāyana*): Pali, Burmese paraphrase and morphology.
2. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: the whole text.
3. *Vuttodaya*
4. *Subodhālaṅkāra*
5. *Abhidhanappadīpikā*: Pāli and Burmese translation.
6. *Mātikā*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.
7. *Dhātukathā*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.
8. The first five chapters of the *Yamaka*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.

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<sup>114</sup> Scott, p.204.

<sup>115</sup> Marks, *Forty Years in Burma*, p.145.

<sup>116</sup> Kelatha, cit., I, pp.114-115.

### Intermediate Level (ဝဏ္ဏလိပ်/ *Pathamalat*)

1. Eight chapters of the Great Grammar (i.e. Kaccāyana's): Pali, Burmese paraphrase and morphology.
2. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: the whole text.
3. *Vuttodaya*
4. *Subodhālaṅkāra*
5. *Abhidhānappadīpikā*: Pāli and Burmese translation.
6. *Mātikā*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.
7. *Dhātukathā*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.
8. The whole text of the *Yamaka*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.

### Advanced (Senior) Level (ဝဏ္ဏလိပ်/ *Pathamagyī*)

1. Eight chapters of the Great Grammar (i.e. Kaccāyana): Pali, Burmese paraphrase and morphology.
2. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: the whole text.
3. *Vuttodaya*
4. *Subodhālaṅkāra*
5. *Abhidhānappadīpikā*: Pāli and Burmese translation.
6. *Mātikā*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.
7. *Dhātukathā*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.
8. The whole text of *Yamaka*: Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis.
9. *Paṭṭhāna*: the whole *kusala-tika*.

### 3.5 Mindon's Legacy and the Birth of Various Examination Boards

Mindon's legacy in his successful persuasion of the *Sangha* to accept formal examinations was to continue during and after the reign of his son, Thibaw (1878-1885). Under Thibaw the *Pathamapyan* examinations continued to be held with some changes. For the *pazin laung* levels, some works of Burmese authors were added: for example, on Pali grammar the *Saddatthabhedacintā* and the *Saddatthasāratthajālīnī*, and on the *Abhidhamma*, the *Sanḁhepavaṇṇanā* and the *Maṇisāramaṇjūsā-ṭikā* were added.<sup>117</sup> For the first time in history, Thibaw also introduced written examinations while also retaining the recitation of text from memory and the interview which usually followed it.<sup>118</sup> The examinations were conducted up to 1884, a year before Thibaw was deposed by the British.<sup>119</sup>

After the deposition of Thibaw, Mindon's legacy became even stronger. The growing legacy of Mindon is also manifest in the fact that the *Sangha* itself now took a leading role in the promotion of monastic study through formal examinations. The sections of the *Sangha* who continued to resist were now a minority and eventually had to move out from Mandalay. This shows that the *Sangha's* cooperation with Mindon in promoting formal examinations was genuine. In other words, the change of attitude on the part of the *Sangha* towards formal examinations resulted not only from Mindon's shrewdness in his transforming the syllabuses and more importantly the formats of the examinations, but also from the fact that the *Sangha* itself had become nationalist, as discussed earlier, since the end of the second Anglo-Burmese war.

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<sup>117</sup> "The *Pathama sartaw pyan upade* (Regulations for the royal *Pathamapyan* Examinations)" *Collection of Upade*, II, pp.363-380.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.381-384.

With the capture of King Thibaw, there came the suspension by the British authorities of the *Pathamapyan* examinations, indeed, of all forms of monastic examinations that had been held under the patronage of the Burmese king, despite the *thathanabaing*'s request to the British for their continuance. This was because the British adopted a policy of so-called neutrality towards religion, as stated in Queen Victoria's proclamation of 1858, part of which reads: "...we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects on pain of our highest displeasure."<sup>120</sup> The British also rejected from the outset the traditional protection afforded by a Buddhist ruler,<sup>121</sup> and ended all support for the *Sangha*. In addition, the judicial power of the *thathanabaing* was taken away.<sup>122</sup>

Therefore the *Sangha*, the people and the old bureaucrats at the Burmese court feared that under British rule the end of Buddhism was now a real possibility. During the reign of the last Burmese king, Thibaw, there were 1166 monks teaching in Mandalay alone; but that number was reduced to less than half in four years.<sup>123</sup> The lack of state support for the *Sangha* was considered to be the main factor contributing to this decline as the monks left the capital for villages where they could support themselves on alms. But there were not many advanced students in the villages, and the villages were not big enough to support a big teaching monastery. So, scholar-monks retired to a quiet meditative life, leaving their teaching behind. The leading *sayadaws* in Mandalay were one in their opinion that "the *sāsana* of the Lord Buddha should no longer be neglected as it is now, or the *sāsana* will gradually decline and disappear; even if one cannot support the *sāsana* with material requisites as the Burmese kings did, good Buddhists should

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Kaye *Christianity in India*, pp.391-2. Also cited in Smith, p.42.

<sup>121</sup> Bischoff, *Buddhism in Myanmar*, p.58.

<sup>122</sup> Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia*, p.623.

<sup>123</sup> *The Pariyatti Sāsanahita hnit taya pyi thahmaing* (History of Centennial Pariyatti Sāsanahita), p.14.

come together to carry out this duty as far as they could, and if the *sayadaws* were also to promote the *sāsana* through the teaching, the *sāsana* would certainly prosper".<sup>124</sup>

This view helped bring the leading members of the *Sangha* and prominent community leaders together in 1898 in Mandalay to consider measures that would help the *sāsana* endure, for the *sāsana* was the symbol of the Burmese kingdom.<sup>125</sup> The prominent *sayadaws* included the *thathanabaing* Moe Htar *Sayadaw* U Sujāta and the abbots of the seventeen largest monasteries<sup>126</sup>, fourteen of whom had once been royal tutors. Among the community leaders were thirteen traders from Mandalay, two barristers, one senior government servant, seven Shan *Saophas* (Sawbwas) from the Shan States, two traders from Rangoon, some businessmen from the ruby-town, Mo Gok, and Moulmine and Hinzada<sup>127</sup> and a former minister for marine transportation, a former commander of Mong Pai and the son of Kinwun Mingyi, who had been the last prime minister under Thibaw.<sup>128</sup>

It may be noted here that these community leaders came together to support to save their religion but ended up becoming influential decision makers in how the textual-orientated monastic education system would gradually lose its grounds to the one based on the syllabuses for formal examinations. Their support to teacher-monks who taught the syllabuses for the *Sakyasīha* examinations and the student-monks who passed those examinations meant they were now the real promoters of formal examinations. But few of them seems to have realised that this promotion, despite its good intention, would

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p.24.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p.13.

<sup>126</sup> The 17 largest monasteries were Moe Htar, Maing Khaing, Moe Gaung, Dakkhinārāma, Kinwun, Mahāvisuddhārāma, Dok Hlan, Taung Khwin, Laṅkāra, Kyuak Pan Daung, Akauk Wun, Anaukh Taik, Allakappa, Anauk Tai Daw Mauk Kyo, Anauk Taik Paung Koo, Bay-me and Khemathivan. *Ibid*, pp.13-4.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, pp.16-9.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*.

achieve its result at the expense of the centuries-old informal textual study method. The community leaders would continue to play a prominent role in promoting the existing and also the newly introduced formal examination boards after independence.<sup>129</sup>

One of the measures taken “to promote the *sāsana* through the teaching” so that “the *sāsana* would certainly prosper” was the introduction of a board of examinations. This was to be established without the support of the state. Its aim was to produce competent teachers of Buddhism (*ḍhammācariya*) and support them in their teaching. The examination board was formally called the *Pariyatti Sāsanahita* association and was formed in Mandalay in 1898. The first ever examinations were conducted four years later, in 1902.<sup>130</sup>

This *Pariyatti Sāsanahita* association in Mandalay was, however, by no means the first of its kind. Four years earlier, in 1894, in Rangoon a similar examination board had been founded in a similar way, and for the same reason, by leading members of the *Sangha* and the trustees of the Shwedagon pagoda in Rangoon. It was called *Cetiyaṅgaṇa Pariyatti Dhammānuggaha* Association, “the Association of (Shwedagon) Pagoda for the Promotion of Buddhist Teachings”. The important position of the Shwedagon pagoda in the very heart of the Burmese Buddhists was the key factor in the launch there of the Buddhist examination soon after the end of native rule. Shwedagon was neither a monastery nor a university but the oldest, the biggest and the most revered place of worship; it thus provided much needed authority and support for both lay and monastic communities. No doubt the influence of the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* was evident in the formation of the *Pariyatti Sāsanahita*, for at least one of the trustee members of the Shwedagon was also a founder member of the *Pariyatti Sāsanahita* association. The two boards of

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<sup>129</sup> See also pp.153-155.

<sup>130</sup> See Appendix B for syllabuses of different examinations of the *Pariyatti Sāsanahita* Association, later also known as the *Sakyasiha*.



monastic examinations became known by the names of the places where the examinations were conducted. The *Pariyatti Sāsanaḥita* became known as *sakyasīha* because its examinations were held in the Sakyasīha Pagoda in Mandalay. The *Cetiyangaṇa Pariyatti Dhammānuggaha* became known as *Cetiyangaṇa*, meaning the pagoda campus. After 1895, when the colonial government changed its mind and decided to support the holding of the *Pathamapyan* examinations, the examinations of the two boards, the *Sakyasīha* and the *Cetiyangaṇa*, became known as *amyotha sarmeibwe*, or national examinations, in contrast to the *Pathamapyan* examinations, now no longer under the auspices of the Burmese king.

The cooperation between the prominent members of the monastic Order and those of the lay communities, first in Rangoon and then in Mandalay, in the 1890s thus proved not only the change of attitude of the *Sangha* during the reign of Mindon, but also heralded the birth of a Buddhist nationalist movement in the next decade. Since the founding of the two associations, the *Sakyasīha* and the *Cetiyangaṇa*, many more associations inspired by Buddhist and nationalist objectives have come into existence. They include the Buddha *Sāsana-nuggaha* of Mandalay (1897), the *Sāsanaḍhara* of Moulmein (1899), the Asoka Society of Bassein (1902), The YMBA of Arakan (1902), the Rangoon Buddhist Association (1904) and the Rangoon College YMBA (1906).<sup>131</sup> The theme uniting these associations was the preservation of *amyo, bhatha, thathana*, or [Burmese] race, language and Buddhism.<sup>132</sup>

The two associations, the *Sakyasīha* and the *Cetiyangaṇa*, followed the traditions of the Burmese kings. Both adopted Mindon's reform by retaining, with some minor changes, the *Vinaya* syllabus as a specialised examination. However, in place of the

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<sup>131</sup> For more see Maung Maung, *From Sangha to Laity*, pp.1-8.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.

*Pathamapyan*, they introduced an examination to produce competent teachers, and this would become the most popular of their initiatives. But only the candidates who observed the “rains retreat”, in Mandalay in the case of the *Sakyasīha*, in Rangoon in the case of the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*, were eligible to enter this examination. The reason for not continuing to hold *Pathamapyan* examinations and for limiting the eligibility of the candidates was mainly financial. The king was no longer there and it was the Buddhist devotees who had to finance the examinations and to support the qualified teachers afterwards. A recognised teacher would receive food allowances on a monthly basis from the board; but these allowances were not offered to a successful candidate in the *Vinaya* examination, as they were under the Kon-Baung kings.

On the other hand, earlier, during King Mindon’s rule, the teachers who did not follow the *Pathamapyan* syllabuses were under no obligation to teach according to a set syllabus, and, in fact, each monastery offered its own syllabus. We have discussed in the previous chapter that U Ñāṇadhaja, known also as Ledi Sayadaw went to Mandalay to learn all the major commentaries, *aṭṭhakathā*<sup>133</sup>, from well known *saydaws*. U Ñāṇadhaja studied the same text under different teachers. However, when these two associations came along, they changed the way Burmese monastic education was run. The right of monasteries to choose their own syllabus was to be de-emphasised, as the associations now conducting examinations were to determine which texts were prescribed. The academic freedom and authority were to be taken over from the large monasteries by those associations who now held institutional power.

The *Sakyasīha* (and *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*) qualification examination for teachers consisted of two levels, the Special Student Grade (*sarthin-tan*) and the Special Teacher Grade (*sarkhya-*

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<sup>133</sup> We have already noted that none of the Pali commentaries formed a part of the Kon-Baung syllabuses, however, all the commentaries were vigorously studied throughout the dynasty.

*tan*), with the first level open only to a *bhikkhu* below 7 years of ordination in the case of *Sakyasiha*, and 10 years in the case of *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*; and the other level to one below 15 years of ordination. The minimum mark for a simple pass was very high 70%. The examinations conducted by these two examination boards were therefore hard to pass, with less than five percent of the candidates succeeding each year.<sup>134</sup>

Those successful in the Teacher Grade, also known as *dhammācariya* level, were and still are awarded a *dhammācariya* degree recognizing them as teachers of the *Dhamma*. The *dhammācariya* degree holders from these two associations add the word *abhivaṃsa*, “higher lineage” to their name, thus *Janaka* becomes *Janakābhivaṃsa*.<sup>135</sup> With the suffix *abhivaṃsa*, the two associations have created an “ivory” class of teachers in the *Sangha*. Here again, the title *abhivaṃsa* suffixing the name of a successful candidate indicates how important the examination board considered it to be to produce and support teachers who would ensure the perpetuation of monastic scholarship, which was obviously deemed to be in danger under British rule. For the last one hundred years, the holders of the *dhammācariya* degree from these two examination boards have been the most influential in monastic education in Burma. They were to become the leaders in the revival of Buddhism once Burma regained her freedom from Britain in 1948. Moreover, the two examination boards would inspire the *Sangha* and the people in other cities, such as Moulmein, Thaton and Myingyan, to follow them, by setting up similar boards of examination to preserve and promote the study of the words of the Buddha during colonial rule.

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<sup>134</sup> The *Sakyasiha* proudly announces in its centenary anniversary that in the first 36 years of its existence, there have been only 138 *dhammācariya* recipients, and between 1947-70 the *dhammācariya* degree has been awarded only to 112. *Pariyatti Sāsanahita hnit taya pyi thahmaing*, p.147.

<sup>135</sup> The *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* adds *abhivaṃsa* to the name of the successful candidates after he completed the Student Grade but the *Sakyasiha* confers the title *abhivaṃsa* only after the candidate passed the Teacher Grade.

The *Mandalay* method as it is seen in the *dhammācariya* examinations may be briefly described here. This is the way the questions are set: a passage of usually not more than ten lines from the prescribed text would be selected, which is then divided into several fragments. Ten questions are set from those fragments to examine the students' ability in translation, Pali grammar, Buddhist philosophy, syntax, *Abhidhamma*, text connection, verse compilation, the use of *upasagga* and *nipāta*, “particles”, and other commentarial methods such as ways of determining the nature of sentences (*vākyattha*).

The *Mandalay* school has developed numerous treatises on methods of mastering the *Tipiṭaka*. It takes two years for an exceptionally capable student to read them and up to 12 years for a less able one. An auxiliary work called *Payagyi Niyam* is an example of how one could study writing in Pali and commentarial methods. Written in Burmese poetic language, it is a summary of all Pali grammatical rules, with the length of each rule usually two lines, and the whole runs to around 254 sentences or 15 pages of A4 size.<sup>136</sup> One has to study it under guidance in order to comprehend it fully. This *Payagyi Niyam* is widely used throughout the country and was written by *Payagyi Sayadaw*, the abbot of the *Payagyi* monastery. This is how *naywa*, “day-lessons”, are taught in Mandalay, and thus we have *Mandalay-nee* or the Mandalay method.

Apart from its emphasis on grammatical study, the *Mandalay-nee* studies the *Abhidhamma*, both exegetical and canonical works, through tables. For example, one can study *Mūla Yamaka* and *Khandha Yamaka* with only three tables each. One is taught how to produce the original Pali passages in the canonical text without ever having seen the original. And there are many different interpretations of a passage, not so much of a text, in the Mandalay method. So a student may spend as much as several months

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<sup>136</sup> Khantīcāra, *Question and Answer on Payagyi Niyam*, pp.1-33.

studying only a few passages in a Pali text from various teachers. Therefore it is essential to the *Mandalay* method that one lives in Mandalay and follows lectures by a particular teacher, who may be one of those who set the questions. This is known as *saya-abaw*, “teachers’ opinions”, that are final in interpreting any passage of the prescribed texts. Mandalay teachers often make literary criticism of each other, although a student is not encouraged to present his own interpretation. To study a *sutta* in the Mandalay method one has to have studied some Pali grammar and basic Buddhist philosophy. These basic courses are in theory found in the *Pathamapyan* syllabuses, which follow the *Mandalay-nee*. In practice, however, the *Pathamapyan* syllabuses themselves are no longer adequate for students to grasp Pali grammar and basic Buddhist philosophy. Generally, the Mandalay method consists of two stages: primary and advanced. This is evident in the *Sakyasīha* main examinations, which have two levels, the Special students’ Grade (*sarthin-tan*) and the Special teachers’ Grade (*sarkhya-tan*). All the necessary foundations are given at the students’ level, while three commentaries<sup>137</sup>, one from each *Piṭaka*, are extensively studied at advanced level. In the case of the *Sakyasīha*, at both levels questions and answers are short and not always found in printed books.

Despite having learnt many techniques for mastering the *Tipiṭaka* in a shorter time, a student in the Mandalay method does not become well-read. He may still have to read half of the *Vinaya-piṭaka* at the end of his training. This makes him less well-informed and does not enable him to develop a general understanding of a certain topic, for instance, about the development of the early monastic community, because he has not read the whole *Vinaya-piṭaka*. But the good students of the *Mandalay-nee* are known for their thorough knowledge of Pali grammar and for their skill in explaining the hidden

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<sup>137</sup> *Samantapāsādikā*, *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* and *Aṭṭhasālinī* – traditionally all by Buddhaghosa.

meaning of the Pali passages in a canonical text. This is particularly true of the *Sakyaśīha* students in the first half of the twentieth century.

### **3.6 The Remaining Resistance to Formal Examinations at Pakhokku**

After the teaching method based on formal examinations had come to be known as the Mandalay method at the close of the nineteenth century, the other teaching method, which had been the main system of monastic pedagogy in Burma until then, came to be called the Pakhokku method, and represented the remaining force of resistance to formal examinations. As noted earlier, after the fall of Mandalay the resistance became confined to a minority within the *Sangha* in Mandalay. So distinct had those who continued to resist become that they came to be seen as a separate school of thought. It is this school, the *Pakhokku* academic tradition, that Mendelson mistakenly calls a Mindon sect. The origin of the *Pakhokku* tradition is linked to the popularity of formal examinations in Mandalay. As a reaction to the ever-growing examination-orientated tradition, the leader of this school of thought, *Sayadaw* U Gandhasāra, also known as Yezagyo *Sayadaw*, set up a monastery in Pakhokku, and hence the name *Pakhokku nee*, “Pakhokku method or school of thought”. This school of thought believed that the formal examination system that had been introduced by the kings could corrupt candidates, due to rewards in the form of material benefit and positions in the hierarchy. It also considered the royally sponsored examination a measure designed to take away the freedom of a teacher to assess his pupils as he saw fit.

A senior pupil of the *thathanabaing* U Ñeyya, Yezagyo *Sayadaw* named the new monastery after his teacher’s royal monastery in Mandalay, *Mahā Visutārāma* (great

famous monastery)<sup>138</sup>, retaining its emphasis on learning. The *Mahā Visutārāma* monastery in Pakhokku was founded in 1901, three years after the founding of the *Sakyasīha* association. Within eight years of its founding, the number of students at the *Mahā Visutārāma* in Pakhokku rose from fifty to three hundred.<sup>139</sup> The *Mahā Visutārāma* has since established many branches in Pakhokku as well as in other parts of the country.

Away from both ancient and present seats of governments such as Mandalay and Rangoon, Pakhokku was a small town situated on the bustling Irrawady River in central Burma. While its economic conditions were generally hard, as “a city of learning” Pakhokku has, in the words of some European travellers, “great religious foundations akin to the colleges of Oxford or Cambridge”, and was “famed across the land for its tradition of philosophy and scholarship”.<sup>140</sup> The hundreds of monks attracted to learning the “great texts of the Pali *Nikāyas*”<sup>141</sup> from the famous teachers were too many to find accommodation in such a small town.

In Pakhokku, there was no particular syllabus for students; it held no examinations of its own, and did not enter its students for examinations held in other places. Just as in the ancient monastic learning tradition, the emphasis in the Pakhokku teaching was to become familiar with the great texts i.e. Pali canonical, commentarial and sub-commentarial texts, by going through them thoroughly and as quickly as possible; hence the name ကျမ်းကြီးဖောက်, (*kyan gyi phauk*) “digging through great texts”. Also encouraged in Pakhokku was to “dig through” the same text again and again so that one becomes a real master of it. Once regarded as having dug through the great texts, a student became

<sup>138</sup> Built in 1854 AD by Mindon. Kelatha, *Mandalay thathanawin* I, p.88.

<sup>139</sup> By 1980 it had branches in 123 towns and cities with over 2200 teachers. Kelatha, *Mahā Visutārāma gaṇavācaka-nikāya thahmaing hmattan kyan* (History of the *Mahā Visutārāma gaṇavācaka-nikāya*), pp.1, 15& 28.

<sup>140</sup> Strachan, *Mandalay*, p.111.

<sup>141</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Tatbhava thanthaya*, p.235.

known as ကျမ်းကြီးပေါက် (*kyan gyi pauk*) “one who has dug through the great texts”, and in fact this term was a recognition of being a scholar. U Koṇḍañña, the first abbot of the *Payagyi* monastery, a branch of the *Mahā Visutārāma*, in Rangoon, was reported to have said that “following the instruction of the Pakhokku *sayadaws*, we have to cover all the five *nikāyas* and [therefore] have no time to teach examination syllabuses”.<sup>142</sup> The Pali *Nikāyas* formed a central part of the curriculum, and they were studied with commentaries and sub-commentaries under a teacher.<sup>143</sup> The *Pakhokku* disapproved of the *Mandalay* method for wasting time on auxiliary works that do not help one directly to “see the Buddha”. Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa acknowledged that in Pakhokku he was taught “higher texts (*athet-kyangyi*) of the Pali *Nikāyas*, which were not usually taught [even] in Mandalay<sup>144</sup>”. Like any ancient informal textual study, the method of study was to paraphrase Pali passages into Burmese. According to *Pakhokku sayas*, “*Pakhokku* masters”, this was the way one could master both Pali and the *Tipiṭaka* at the same time. The Pakhokku method also retained the tradition of a *zar-so*, “reciter of Burmese paraphrase”, who was treated as an assistant teacher.<sup>145</sup> A *Pakhokku zar-so* was well respected in any part of the country.

Up to the 1950s many students went to both Pakhokku and Mandalay for their education, indicating the popularity of both schools and their place in the Burmese monastic education. Leading Shwegyin *sayadaws*, such as Ashin Aggadhama (1878-1943) (also known as Abhayārāma Sayadaw), Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa (1890-1977) and Ashin Vimalābhivaṃsa (1911-2003), the thirteenth head of *Shwegyin-nikāya*, had been trained in Pakhokku. However, given the impracticality for the majority of the students of

<sup>142</sup> Shwe, *Pariyatti thathana kodwe hmatdan* (Personal Experience with Pariyatti Sāsana), pp.40-41.

<sup>143</sup> Kelatha, *Māhā Visutārāmika gaṇavācaka*, pp.76-8.

<sup>144</sup> Janakābhivaṃsa, *Tabhava thanthaya*, p.23. & *Bhatha-thwe*, p.89. He had a *dhammācariya* degree from the *Sakyasiha* examinations, the highest qualification offered in the Mandalay tradition and at 22 was also a lecturer at the Mahāvisutārāma, Pakhokku. Janakābhivaṃsa, *Patimok Bhathatika*, p.iii.

<sup>145</sup> Janakābhivaṃsa, *Tatbhava thanthaya*, p.144.



having to stay in both Pakhokku and Mandalay for many years, the number of the *Sangha* trained in both schools, though influential, must have been relatively small. And neither of the two traditions committed to memory the *suttas*, although some basic texts, such as Kaccāyana's Pali, the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* and the *Pātimokkha*, were learnt by heart in both schools.

Being a higher study centre, the Pakhokku tradition did not teach a foundation course. It also lacked any formal examination in a way that lay supporters and patrons could be convinced that the monks had made progress in study. Because of these two factors, the Mandalay method has become more popular throughout the country. With oral and written tests, and the award of certificates, it was easier for other parts of the country to adopt Mandalay teaching method as standard. The most important factor was, however, that since the Ava period, as we have discussed so far, the Mandalay method has been favoured by successive governments for it had formal examinations.

Each tradition had its own excellence and, perhaps, shortcomings. The *Pakhokku* student was valued for his mastery of a wealth of information, and for the ease with which he could locate any reference within the canon. The *Mandalay* student, however, was marked by his mastery of grammar and logic. It was felt that any deficiencies of a particular method were remedied when one came to teach: the one who had a lot of information at his fingertips learnt coherence and logic through his teaching; the one who was skilled in grammar and logic found out how to apply them practically by acquiring more information. The problem would, however, be that, as qualifications from various formal examination boards became increasingly important, the teachers would not get to teach "great texts" which would bring them a wealth of information for students had no time to study these texts because, as mentioned in Chapter One, they were not a part of

the syllabuses for examinations. Although both methods were highly regarded in the Order, nevertheless, successive governments, as we shall see in the next section, have ignored the *Pakhokku* method, and thereby caused damage to both methods, and indeed, in the long run, to the study of Buddhist scriptures.

### 3.7 Monastic Education under the British

If the *Sakyaśīha* was the direct legacy of Mindon on the structure of monastic education during the colonial rule, that legacy would also be maintained by the colonial government, who had initially refused, as noted earlier, to accord traditional support to the *Sangha* but later sought to limit the damage caused by their decision. In fact, the promotion of formal examinations was no less of a success under colonial rule than Mindon. In this section, we shall briefly describe monastic education in Burma under the British, focussing mainly on the *Pathamapyan* examinations.

Ten years after their conquest of Mandalay, in 1895, the British authorities, who had suspended all formal examinations earlier, revived the *Pathamapyan*, “as a means of winning the goodwill of the Buddhist monks and securing their cooperation in the general work of education”.<sup>146</sup> The colonial authorities wanted to encourage the monasteries to teach not only their traditional faith-based curriculum but also the curriculum prepared by the Department of Public Instruction, which was secular in nature.<sup>147</sup> Efforts to induce the monasteries to include some form of secular curriculum would be made over the next two decades. Although these efforts, as we shall see in Chapter Six, were generally not successful, by 1916, only 3416 out of 19,416 monastery

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<sup>146</sup> *Report on Public Instruction in Burma, 1895-1896, Resolution, p.5.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid, 1891-1892, Upper Burma, p.2.*

schools were registered with the Department of Public Instruction as incorporating some secular subjects in their curriculum.

Meanwhile, the revival by the British authorities of the *Pathamapyan* examinations came during the period when the leading members of the *Sangha* and the community leaders expressed, as noted earlier, anxiety over the future of the Buddhist religion. Indeed, when the colonial authorities took the decision to support the *Pathamapyan*, an independent board of monastic examinations, namely the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*, had been founded and, another, the *Sakyaśīha*, was in the process of being formed. It was a timely good gesture by the British authorities to revive the *Pathamapyan* in the name of promoting Pali scholarship, without necessarily abandoning their own policy of neutrality towards Buddhism.

Under colonial rule the conduct of the *Pathamapyan* examinations was no less successful. Indeed, the colonial authorities did better in some cases because of their capable administration. For example, under the Burmese kings the examinations were held only in the capital. However, under the colonial government the *Pathamapyan* were conducted concurrently in four cities, namely Mandalay, Rangoon, Moulmein and Akyab, and were open not only to monks but also to nuns, laymen and laywomen (at the suggestion of Taw Sein Ko, the Commissioner of Archaeology, in 1903). The travelling expenses of successful candidates for the journey from their home to the examination centres and back were paid by Government. The number of the candidates was, therefore, substantially higher than under the native rulers. In 1905 the number of candidates was over four hundred, and by 1912 it was 1,200. Though in the early 1920s the number of candidates decreased, owing to the pressure of the nationalist movement,

throughout the 1930s over 3,500 candidates entered the *Pathamapyan* examinations each year. Between one-fourth and one-third of them were successful.<sup>148</sup>

The number of the levels in the *Pathamapyan* examinations remained the same as during the reign of Mindon and Thibaw. There were four levels: *pathamange* (preliminary); *pathamalat* (intermediate); *pathamagyi* (advanced) and *pathamakyaw*. Every successful candidate, except the one who passed the highest level, was given a certificate, signed by the president of the examination committee; and the *pathamakyaw*, the candidate who gained the highest marks at the *pathamagyi* level, was presented a certificate signed by the Lieutenant-Governor, then the highest colonial official in Burma. Although rewards given by the Burmese kings to those who were successful in the *Pathamapyan* were not restored, the colonial authorities introduced a new kind of reward in the form of money. It was 50, 75, 100 and 150 Rupees respectively for the four levels. To laymen, rewards were given in money; and to monks an option was given to choose the form of their reward.<sup>149</sup>

The colonial government also wanted to update the syllabuses of the *Pathamapyan* and set up a modern higher institute of learning for monks. Although the *Pathamapyan* curriculum was not altered in anyway, the government announced in 1939: “The Governor of Burma desires to expedite the formulation of a scheme for the establishment of a Pali University and Colleges”. A committee of five men was therefore appointed to inquire into the possibilities of setting up such institutions.<sup>150</sup> But despite a favourable report by the committee, the plan to set up institutes of higher learning was abandoned due to the advance of World War II. But after the war, the colonial government, which

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<sup>148</sup> *Report on Public Instruction in Burma*, Quinquennial Report, 1917-1922, p.22.

<sup>149</sup> *Education Code*, pp.172-173; Taw Sein Ko, “Pali Examinations” *Burmese Sketches*, I, pp.248-249.

<sup>150</sup> *Report of the Pali University Inquiry Committee*, p.12.

had returned after the defeat of the Japanese in 1943, introduced a set of examinations for higher study.

This degree course was, in fact, not a new creation by the colonial government but rather an adoption of the degree course from the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* and the *Sakyasīha*, which had been in existence for half a century.<sup>151</sup> The *Sakyasīha dhammācariya* degree holders, such as Janakābhivamsa, were asked to set questions, ensuring further the legacy of Mindon in the wider monastic community, because the government *dhammācariya* would be held in Rangoon and Mandalay, and then expanded to many big cities throughout the country. The highest level in the *Pathamapyan* examinations, the *pathamagyī*, was recognised as an entrance qualification for the *Dhammācariya* degree course. Following the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* and the *Sakyasīha*, the degree course was called the *dhammācariya*, “the teacher of *dhamma*”. However, there was a new dimension added to the government *Dhammācariya* degree course. There were six honours degree courses, the syllabuses of which belonged to what had been known as the “great texts”, namely the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, the *Dīgha-nikāya* (from *sutta* no. 14 as the first 13 *suttas* were part of the *dhammācariya* degree syllabus), the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, the *Samyutta-nikāya*, the *Majjhima-nikāya* and the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.<sup>152</sup> There were still, however, some texts

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<sup>151</sup> *Pariyatti Sāsanahita hnit taya pyi thahmaing*, p.33.

<sup>152</sup> Although the government *dhammācariya* was created after the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* and the *Sakyasīha* model, the wording of the title of the government *dhammācariya* degree was modified. The wording in the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* and the *Sakyasīha dhammācariya* degree was *pariyatti-sāsana-hita-dhammācariya* (the teacher of *dhamma* who benefits the learning of the scriptures) whereas in the government *dhammācariya*, the degree was worded as *sāsana-dhaja-dhammācariya* (the teacher of *dhamma* who is the banner of the *sāsana*). For the degree in Honours Course in Burmese medium was called *sāsanadhaja-sirīpavara-dhammācariya* (the glorious teacher of *dhamma* who is a distinguished banner of the *sāsana*) and for one in the Pali medium is *sāsana-dhaja-dhammācariya Aṅguttara-nikāya -Pāli-Pāragū* (the teacher of *dhamma* who is the banner of the *sāsana* and an authority on the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and the Pali language), if the paper was the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*. The word *Aṅguttara -nikāya* changed if it was another paper, for example, the *Dīgha-nikāya*, and the degree would be worded as *sāsana-dhaja-dhammācariya-Dīgha-nikāya-Pāli-pāragū*.

from the *Khuddaka-nikāya*, for instance the *Apadāna* and the *Suttanipāṭa*, which were not included in the syllabuses.<sup>153</sup>

In any case, this was the first ever attempt to bring most of the “great texts” into the syllabuses for formal examinations. If these Honours Degree courses, arranged in two mediums, Burmese and Pali, became popular, the study of the “great texts” would not, at least in theory, be confined to bookshelves in the monasteries. In practice, however, as the practice of textual study gradually lost grounds to the formal examinations orientated form of study over the years, these Honours Degree courses came to exist almost merely on papers because even in all the six courses there had been less than ten successful candidates each year. The number of successful candidates was low. Another reason for the drop in the number of successful candidates was the high marks required for an ordinary pass, which was 75%. The situation in the Pali medium was even worse because of excellent knowledge of Pali that one had to demonstrate in the art of commentary.

Since then, in Burma a monk with a *Dhammācariya* degree from all these three separate examination boards, namely the *Sakyasīha*, the *Cetiyangana*, and the government, would simply be known as sa.ca.a (ဆ.ဇ.အ)<sup>154</sup> in brief and be highly respected among monastic scholars. The *Dhammācariya* degree holders would in turn transform the attitude of younger members of the *Sangha*. Almost all members of the *Sangha* in Burma would come to see formal examinations as vital to perpetuating and promoting the words of the Buddha.

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<sup>153</sup> In the *Khuddaka-nikāya*, the *Dhammapada* was a part of the *Pathamapyyan* syllabuses for nuns and lay people. The *Jātaka* was also included in the *Pathamapyyan* syllabuses in all levels. The *Vimāna*- and *Peta-vatthu* were considered similar to the *Jātaka* commentary from literary point of view and were not studied as a part of examinations. The *Milindapañhā* and the *Peṭakopadesa* had never been part of monastic curriculum even before formal examinations became popular. The *NettipakaraBa*, which had been studied by many for the sixteen categories of analysis (*hāra*) was made a part of the *Dhammācariya* degree course.

<sup>154</sup> ဆ is a Burmese abbreviation for the *Sakyasīha*, ဇ for the *Cetiyangana*, and အ (အစိုးရ) for government.

However, despite its successful introduction of the *dhammācariya* course, the colonial government faced persistent problems in its attempt to set up a Pali university based on western university model. The attempt to found a western style higher institution for the *Sangha* was first made in 1924, four years after Rangoon College, affiliated to Calcutta University, was established. The plan, devised by Professor Pe Maung Tin, the principal of the Rangoon College, was to form a Pali university in Mandalay with existing eminent teaching monasteries as its affiliated colleges as Oxford University. This proposal was made by Maung Tin following his return from Exeter College at Oxford where he translated the famous Burmese historical work, *The Chronicle of the Glass Palace* and *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*.

Monastic scholars in Mandalay, on the other hand, saw no reason why such a university should be created as they were doing their job perfectly. While the influence of nationalism, already begun in Rangoon, played a part in the *Sangha's* rejection of the proposal is not known, many members of the *Sangha* in Mandalay at that time considered the proposal as patronising, especially as it came from lay people, albeit scholars. The mistake, however, seems, in my opinion, to have occurred during the consultation process. The colonial authorities and Maung Tin went to discuss the plan with the *Sangha* only after it had been devised, not at the beginning. Besides, instead of using Nalanda, the Buddhist University in India, which was known to the monks, as a model, the planners made Oxford, which the monks did not know. The failure also resulted from the fact that the plan was purely educational, understandably due partly to the neutral policy of the British on religion in their colony, and partly to the fact that no whatsoever missionary objective was attached to the plan. The importance of the inclusion of missionary zeal would become evident when we look at how U Nu, the first

prime minister of independent Burma was successful in persuading the *Sangha* to agree to his *Sangha* university plan in Chapter Six.<sup>155</sup>

After Burma had won independence from Britain in 1948, Mindon's influence in persuading the *Sangha* to accept formal examinations was to continue as three important agents, the *Sangha*, the state and the community leaders, came together to promote a shared cause. This was unprecedented because during the reign of Mindon, the king was the only driving force and had to persuade the *Sangha*, which was finally won over. Under Mindon, although the royals and ministers participated, the community leaders were not involved. Under the colonial rule, first it was the *Sangha* and the Buddhist community leaders, as we have discussed, who promoted formal examinations but when the *Pathamapyan* was revived in 1895 it was only the state and the *Sangha* working together because the community leaders chose to confine themselves to the non-governmental boards of examinations, such as the *Sakyasīha*. After the independence, however, the three main players were involved together in promoting formal examinations as the way to revive and advance the *Buddhasāsana*. A good example was the creation of a new board of examinations called the *Tipiṭakadhara* Selection Examinations, TSE (*Tipiṭakadhara ywe che yay sarmeibwe*).

A mere glance at the composition of the board of the TSE would show that the promotion of formal examinations in post-independent Burma has been unprecedented. Out of the three main components of the TSE, the state was led by two highest politicians, President Sao Shwe Thaik, who also held the position of the Shan Saopha of Yawnghwe in Shan State, and Prime Minister U Nu, both of whom were known to the *Sangha* for their piety. The Buddhist community was led by Sir U Thwin, a successful

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<sup>155</sup> See also pp.291-296.



businessman, who was also a senator during the colonial time. Members of the *Sangha*, nine altogether, were all the learned *sayadaws* from Rangoon; none of the famous *sayadaws* from Mandalay was invited to join the Board of TSE because leading monastic scholars from there would not have supported any move to form a new board of examinations that would challenge what they considered to be the superiority of the *Sakyasīha*. Not until 1983, more than three decades after the TSE had begun that the *Sangha* from Mandalay started to accept the TSE and participate in its promotion.<sup>156</sup>

As indicated by its name, the main purpose of the TSE was to produce “heroes in the Buddhist Order”, *thathana a-za-ni*, “who could recite the whole *Tipiṭakadhara* from memory”.<sup>157</sup> These “heroes”, it has been explained by successive governments, would be able “to promote Buddhism in a way that was more advanced” than what others have been able to do. The urgent need to set up the TSE, however, was the intention on the part of the Burmese government to claim a leading role among the Theravada countries in reviving Buddhism after the World War II. To that end, the government wanted to hold a Buddhist council, *saṅgīti*, to mark the 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buddha’s *mahāparinibbāna*, in which governments and learned monks from all other Theravada countries would participate. However, when a mission was sent to those countries as a part of preparation for a Buddhist council, the *Sangharāja* of Thailand expressed scepticism if Burma, a country that had been under a foreign rule for a century, would have enough learned monks to hold a Buddhist council. It is said that a similar reservation was communicated by the leading Sri Lankan monks, whose nation had been colonised even longer than Burma, to their Burmese counterparts. However, Prime Minister U Nu and Sir U Thwin, and indeed also the Chief Justice, U Chan Htoon, who

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<sup>156</sup> See *Tipiṭakadhara shweyatu sarzaung* (The Golden Jubilee of the *Tipiṭakadhara* Selection Examinations), pp.124-131.

<sup>157</sup> Sobhita (Chairman of the State Sangha Mahanāyaka Committee) “*Uyyojanakathā* (Preface)” *Tipiṭakadhara Shweyatu sarzaung*, p.5; General Sein Htwa (Minister for Religious Affairs), “*Ohnyawzin katha* (Preface)” *ibid*, p.9.

became another member important member of the TSE board, believed that the Burmese *Sangha* had the ability to lead a Buddhist council but at the same time accepted that Burma had to win over the sceptical Thai and Sri Lankan *Sangha*. To achieve that objective, the board of TSE was created by the government who had a bill passed through parliament. Through this *Tipiṭakadhara* Act (1949), a body called *Sāsanānuggaha* was also formed to assist the TSE. Smith thus observes: “The decision to convene another great council to re-edit the scriptures, only eighty-odd years later, derived from both religious and non-religious considerations.”<sup>158</sup>

The syllabuses of the TSE, in theory, covered the whole *Tipiṭaka*, *Vinaya*-, *Sutta*-, and *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, for oral examinations, and for written tests the commentaries and sub-commentaries were also included. In practice, however, only half of the *Tipiṭaka* syllabus was included for the *Sutta-piṭaka* in the syllabuses included only the *Digha-nikāya*. In the first two years, there were few monks who entered even for one part of the syllabuses. To ensure the continuity of the TSE, one of the founders, Sir U Thwin, asked a monk, Ashin Vicittasārābhivaṃsa, whom he was a *yahandakā* (lay supporter during the *Upassampada* ordination), to enter the TSE. Ashin Vicittasārābhivaṃsa was an exceptionally bright young teacher, who had had the *pathamakyaw* and *Sakyasīha* dhammācariya degrees, with a gold seal for completing the two levels, *sarthin-tan* and *sarkhya-tan*, of the *Sakyasīha* consecutively.

Five years later, in 1954, just before the start of the Sixth Buddhist Council, Vicittasārābhivaṃsa completed the whole syllabuses of the TSE in both oral and written examinations. With his achievement, the government of Burma was able to win over the sceptical *Sangha* from Thailand and Sri Lanka. One of the two leaders of the Sri Lanka

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<sup>158</sup> Smith, cit., p.158.

*Sangha* at the Sixth Buddhist Council, Venerable Balangoḍa Ānanda Maitreya said that he was very impressed with the *Tipiṭakadhara* of Burma, Ashin Vicittasārābhivamsa.<sup>159</sup> Since then, successive governments have sponsored the TSE annually and by 1999, at the golden jubilee celebrations, Burma had only six successful candidates in the TSE. They were held in the highest esteem by the government, the *Sangha* and the Buddhist population as model monks. Many young monk-scholars have followed their footsteps but it is the prestige that being a *Tipiṭakadhara* brings that seems to have inspired most of the candidates. This is well expressed in an article by one of the TSE candidates, Ashin Indapāla, who has himself completed more than two-thirds of the syllabuses. He writes: “People from around the country honour a *Tipiṭakadhara* with generous donations. These donations can then be used [by the monks] for hospitals and schools. People wish to listen to the preaching of a *Tipiṭakadhara*. They pay more attention to his advice.”<sup>160</sup> The material benefits from the success in the TSE has been very attractive. For candidate who has passed one third of the syllabuses, one *piṭaka*, he is given a VIP ticket for unlimited travel on air, by sea and on land within the country. His parents, if still alive, will be looked after by the government. The honour brought by a success in the TSE among the people is even higher. The *Tipiṭakadhara* monks are described as “heroes of the *sāsana*” and are worthy of honour.

However, there has been some negative impact of the TSE felt in many ways. Since the TSE candidates prepare for the examinations only by themselves and in special monasteries where they are well looked after, the study of the whole canon has not become wide spread. On the contrary, it has declined for the way in which the TSE candidates are encouraged to prepare for their examinations and because of the impression that the “great texts” can be pursued through self-study and are thus no

<sup>159</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>160</sup> Indapāla, “*khet yew tan phoe shi thi, tan phoe shi ywe khet thi* (Worthy Because It is Difficult, It is Difficult Because It is Worthy)” *Tipiṭakadhara Shweyatu sar-zaung*, pp.236. See also *ibid.* pp.227-235.

longer taught in most leading monasteries. Moreover, those who continue with informal textual study of the “great texts”, for example, in Pakhokku, have come to be overlooked. The monasteries in Pakhokku are not well supported as those which teach the syllabuses for formal examinations because the government would not promote them and thus the people from other parts of the country would not know them. As for as well-to-do lay Buddhists, on whose generosity the teaching monasteries depend, are concerned the Pakhokku monasteries are local concerns and, not national as the TSE.

The promotion of formal examinations in post-independent Burma was also intensified by the government when it set up, in 1950, a Pali University through the Pali University and Dhammacariya Act. The Pali University had no campus but consisted of member monasteries from all over the country, whose representatives might sit on the central committee. From the central committee the executive committee was formed. In order to qualify as a member college, a monastery must have a minimum of ten monks studying for the *dharmācariya* level. The running of each college and the appointment of lecturers were made the sole responsibility by the principal. Membership of the Pali University would lapse if, within six years of its enrolment, less than thirty percent of its candidates passed or if the number of students was below the required total. A member monastery was annually granted fixed financial support of five hundred Kyats. In addition, each lecturer received sixty Kyats.<sup>161</sup> The impact of the financial assistance on member monasteries was, as John Brohm, who has studied the Buddhist revival after independence in Burma, notes, minimal; but the prestige of being a member college was high, especially in the eyes of the wealthy urban Buddhist laymen, who provided more assistance than the government did.<sup>162</sup> The government, on the other hand, used the

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<sup>161</sup> *The Pali University and Dhammacariya Act*, 1950, Paragraphs, 5-7.

<sup>162</sup> Brohm, *Burmese Religion and The Burmese Religious Revival*, p.390. For more information on the Pali University, see *ibid*, pp.379-389.

affiliation of influential monasteries to the government-controlled Pali University programme to assert its influence over the *Sangha* itself.

Monasteries were eager to have as many *pathamagyi* successful candidates as possible because that was the only way to qualify as a member college of the Pali University. Some monasteries attempted to succeed in a way that was against both the law and the *Vinaya*. In 1950, the year the Pali University and Dhammācariya Act was passed, there was a leakage of the *pathamagyi* question papers and one monastery, with more than eighty students, was found to be at fault and banned for two years from entering the *Pathamapyan* examinations.<sup>163</sup>

### 3.8 Conclusion

In the Burma that faced colonial threat in the mid-nineteenth century under Mindon and his successor, Thibaw, the two most powerful institutions, the monarchy and the *Sangha*, became united in the interest of preserving the Buddhist religion, the *Buddhasāsana*. The result, as we have seen, was that the *Sangha* adopted a nationalistic stance and came to accept what they had once resisted: the use of formal examinations as an instrument in preserving Buddhist learning, *pariyatti*. Those who were not persuaded to side with the king on the issue became a minority and had to flee the capital to maintain their identity, which was embroiled the centuries-old scholarly tradition of the *Sangha*. Mindon's legacy on promoting formal examinations was then followed by successive administrations, including the colonial government.

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<sup>163</sup> New Times of Burma, August 30, 1950, quoted in Brohm, cit., p.384.

## Chapter Four

### **The Instability in Siam and its Impact on the Education of the *Sangha* from the late Seventeenth to the early Nineteenth Century**

“The monastery, seemingly shut off from the world by its  
compound walls, is in fact the very hub of village life.”<sup>1</sup>

Lester’s observation explains the position in Siam, known as Thailand since the 1930s,  
of “Buddhism’s central institution, its monastic Order”<sup>2</sup>.

Being at its centre, Buddhism in Siam has influenced society and in turn been influenced  
by it. However, from 1569 to 1809 there were periods of great instability, in which the  
monarchs, if they were strong enough, felt, as at Ava, the need to apply greater control  
over the Order. One of those periods that has drawn our attention is some critical years  
during the reign of King Narai (1656-1688). Towards the end of his reign, now famously  
known as “the 1688 Revolution”<sup>3</sup>, King Narai is reported by La Loubère, the French  
ambassador to King Narai’s court, to have defrocked “thousands” of monks at Ayutthaya  
on account of their “not being learned enough”.<sup>4</sup> The King employed an instrument,  
formal examinations, later came to be known as *Parian*, to assess monks’ the knowledge  
of Buddhist scriptures. Traditionally, this incident has been interpreted as one brought  
about mainly by the failure of the *Sangha* who neglected their duty of study (and to a

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<sup>1</sup> Lester, *Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia*, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> Gombrich, “Introduction: The Buddhist Way”, p.11.

<sup>3</sup> Hutchinson, trans. *1688 Revolution in Siam: The Memoir of Father de Bèze, s.j.* pp.63-103; Desfarges, de La Touche & des Verqjains, *Three Military Accounts of the 1688 Revolution in Siam*; Smithes, *A Resounding Failure: Martin and the French in Siam 1672-1693*, pp.88-98; de Forbin, , *The Siamese Memoir 1685-1688*, pp.177-181; Van Der Cruysse, *Siam and the West 1500-1700*, pp.427-467; Wyatt, *Thailand*, p.117.

<sup>4</sup> La Loubère, *The Kingdom of Siam*, p.114.

certain extent of the earlier Ayutthayan kings who ignored their royal patronage).<sup>5</sup> In fact, after the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767, King Taksin (1767-1782) of Thonburi and Rāma I (1782-1809) of Bangkok also took measures that were resulted in the Order being placed under greater control of the monarchy. This change of balance in the relationship during those periods had a profound impact on the Order. In this paper we will look at how the great instability from the late Ayutthaya period (1569-1767) up to the early Ratanakosin period (1782-1809) affected the Buddhist monastic Order in general and its education in particular. The analysis will be undertaken, in the absence of well documented ecclesiastical records of the relevant periods, mainly through the available sources on Siamese history in both Thai and English. This paper will suggest that the Order, for the most part, was not responsible for King Narai's uncompromising stand, nor, for that matter, for the measures taken, on a smaller scale, by Kings Taksin and Rāma I; instead, they were rather due, as in Burma, to the circumstances, namely geopolitical, by which the two most powerful institutions in Siam, the *Sangha* and the monarchy, were brought into a conflict.

We shall first consider some important characteristics of Buddhism in Siam, with a particular focus on its role in education and its relationship with the monarchy in Sukhothai and early Ayutthaya. Next, changes in ecclesiastical administration and pedagogy in late seventeenth century Ayutthaya will be discussed. After that, the interpretation, currently accepted as the official version, of why those changes were seen as vital will be analysed; and a new interpretation of those changes, with particular attention paid to the period of instability in the latter half of the seventeenth century, will then be given. In these contexts, we shall explain one of the changes introduced at that time, the introduction of the formal examination, *Parian*. We shall, finally, discuss the

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<sup>5</sup> *Prawat karn suksa khongsong* (The History of the *Sangha*'s Education) , pp.14-16.

failure of the king of Thonburi (1767-1782) to revive the Order and the standard of its education after the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767; and the subsequent successful revival by Rama I (1782-1809).

## 4.1 Some Important Features of Buddhism in Siam

### 4.1.1 A Monastic Religion

As in royal Burma, which we discussed in Chapter Two, Buddhism in Siam has three very important characteristics: it is a monastic religion, an educational institution, and enjoys royal patronage. First of all, the Buddhism that became the religion of the Siamese in the 13<sup>th</sup> century at Sukhothai (1240-1438) has been described by scholars, for instance Ishii, as a monastic religion.<sup>6</sup> The description of the central position of the monastic Order is, as already described earlier, reasonable for two reasons, namely the belief by the Buddhists that *nibbāna* is unachievable for a layman; and that the life of a monk is free from social commitments and a monk can therefore dedicate his time to achieving *nibbāna*. Secondly, the *Sangha* in Siam has until recently solely preserved the *Tipiṭaka*, which is usually considered identical with the *dhamma*.<sup>7</sup> This profession of preserving the *Tipiṭaka* has given the Order an unparalleled position in the history of the Buddhist world.

In Siam, from the evidence of inscriptions we can deduce that soon after the founding of Sukhothai in the mid-thirteenth century, there were two fraternities of monks: the “village-dwellers”, *gāmaṇḍasīn*, and the “forest-dwellers”, *araññavāsīn*. Generally the former followed the vocation of the “books” and the latter of meditation. However, this distinction between them was by no means clear-cut: there were forest-monks who were

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<sup>6</sup> Ishii, *Sangha, State and Society*, p.xiii.

<sup>7</sup> Gombrich, “Introduction: The Buddhist Way”, p.9.



learned and wrote commentaries. Here for the sake of preserving chronological order, let us first describe the “forest-dwellers”. The fraternity of the forest-dwellers was established in Siam by a group of Sinhalese monks who came to Sukhothai via Nakhon Sri Thammarat during the reign of Ramkhamheang (1275-1317).<sup>8</sup> This fraternity was strengthened during King Lithai (also Lidaiya)’s reign (1347-68), when Sumana Thera, “return[ed] [from Ceylon] to” his native Sukhothai at the King’s request.<sup>9</sup> This fraternity, which developed within the Mahāvihāra school of Theravada Buddhism, was later established in parts of Lanna, namely Lamphum and Chiang Mai, by Sumana Thera himself.

These fraternities were officially recognised by the king. His recognition was reflected in the appointment by the king himself of the leaders of the fraternities to three highest ecclesiastical posts. Two of the three posts were known by their corresponding royal titles (*ratch-thinnarm/rājadinna-nāma*) namely *phutthkhosāchan* (Buddhaghosācarya) and *phutthāchan* (Buddhācarya). However, there does not seem to have been a royal title, particularly at Sukhothai and early Ayutthaya, for the post of the *sangharāja*, which was the most powerful and the head of all the fraternities as well as of all the Buddhists in the kingdom. At Sukhothai, the post *phutthkhosāchan* was generally occupied by the head of “the village-dwellers” while the position of *phutthāchan* was taken up by the chief of “the forest-dwellers”. The post of *sangharāja* was usually occupied by the *gāmaṇḍasī*, “the village-dwellers”. The “village-dwellers” thus held two of the three posts, *phutthkhosāchan* and *sangharāja*. But Suchao Ploichum, a former secretary to the present *Sangharāja*, argues that the top post was appointed from either “the forest-“ or “the

<sup>8</sup> na Nagara & Griswold *Epigraphic and Historical Studies*, p.424-425.; Udomsri, *Karn bokkhrong khanasong thai* (The Administration of the Thai Sangha), pp.66-67; Bidyalabh, *A History of Buddhism in Siam*, pp.5, 12.

<sup>9</sup> Jinakālamālī, pp.82-85; Tambiah, *World Conqueror*, pp.73-77. Udomsri suggests that Sumana was from “Lanka” (Ceylon), which contradicts the Jinakālamālī. Udomsri, cit., p.66.

village-dwellers”. The one who was senior in years of ordination would actually hold the post.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the Ayutthaya period, contact with Ceylon was maintained. Monks continued to look to Ceylon for authority. Many of them, indeed, went to the island for re-ordination and study. A group of ten *bhikkhus* came back from Ceylon to establish a new fraternity, this time of *gāṃavāsīn*, that became known as *gāṃavāsī khwa*, “village-dwellers of the right”. The “village-dwellers of the right” are reported to have been ordained on a raft in the Kalyani River in Ceylon in 1423, with Vanaratana Mahāthera as their preceptor. In fact, the royal title, *vanarat*, for the head of this new fraternity at Ayutthaya was taken from that of their preceptor in Ceylon, Vanaratana. From that time Ayutthaya had three *nikāyas*, “fraternities”: *gāṃavāsī sai*, “the village-dwellers of the left”, *gāṃavāsī khwa*, “the village-dwellers of the right” and *araññavāsī*, “forest-dwellers”.<sup>11</sup> We do not know why the “village-dwellers” were known as of the right and of the left. Perhaps the monasteries of the new fraternity were situated south of the city, and those of the older *gāṃavāsīn* in the north. “The right” usually means the south and “the left” the north. To the west of the city, however, lived the “forest-dwellers” (*araññavāsī*).

At Ayutthaya, however, all the three positions, *phutthkhosāchan*, *phutthāchan* and *vanarat* (Vanaratana) came to be recognized as *sangharājas* indicating the increased influence of the heads of the fraternities. As a result, the post of *sangharāja* that had existed during the Sukhothai period came to be known as *somdech (phra) sangharāja*, *somdech* being the Khmer word for royal. Also, it may be around this time, probably the first part of the fifteenth century, that the *somdech (phra) sangharāja* also was given a

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<sup>10</sup> Ploichum, *Khana song raman nai prathet Thai*, (The Mon Sangha in Thailand), p.119.

<sup>11</sup> Udomsri, cit., pp.69-70.

royal title, *ariyawongsāthipati* [Ariyavaṃsādhīpati].<sup>12</sup> Here it may be noted that the existence at Ayutthaya of more than one *sangharāja* (three *sangharājas* and the *somdech phra sangharāja*) was the reason why La Loubère mentioned in *The Kingdom of Siam* as “*sancrats (sangharājas)*”, and not *sancrat (sangharāja)*, when he recorded the ecclesiastical authorities who had the authority to conduct ordination.<sup>13</sup> The position of the *somdech (phra) sangharāja* was usually occupied by one of the *gāṃavāsī sai*, “the village-dwellers of the left”, the older group of the “village-dwellers”.

The office of the *somdech (phra) sangharāja* was Wat Mahathat. The heads of the three *nikāyas* assisted the *somdech (phra) sangharāja* in the ecclesiastical administration at the central level. But in the provinces ecclesiastical supervision was equally divided among these four most senior monks. The *somdech sangharāja*, apart from being the head of all fraternities, had authority over ecclesiastical affairs also in the north, northeast and some part of central Ayutthaya. The head of the “village-dwellers of the right” was in charge of the south and some parts of central Ayutthaya, while the head of the “forest-dwellers” took charge of all belonging to his fraternity in all parts of Ayutthaya<sup>14</sup> and in fact, according to Ploichum, also of the *Sangha* of Mon and Laotian descent.<sup>15</sup> (In this context, we are not certain if the structure of the *Sangha* administration was directly related to the secular model of the administrative system at Ayutthaya at the time, as would be the case from 1902 when King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) brought in the first ever *Sangha* act to constitute a *Sangha* hierarchy.)

<sup>12</sup> In the late Ayutthaya period the title *Ariyawongsāthipati* (*Ariyavaṃsādhīpati*) was changed to *Ariyavaṃsañāpa*. That was again modified by King Mongkut, Rāma IV of the Ratanakosin dynasty as *Ariyavāmsagatañāpa*. All the past *somdech sangharājas* held this title. The present *somdech Sangharāja*, however, holds a special title called *Yanasangwon* (*Ñāpasamvara*).

<sup>13</sup> La Loubère, cit., p.114. See also pp.168-169.

<sup>14</sup> Udomsri, pp.69-70.

<sup>15</sup> Ploichum, cit., p.119.

In the Kingdom of Lanna, at present the northern part of Thailand, on the other hand, the *Sangha* was administered independently of Ayutthaya without much interference from the monarch. This reflected the fact that for centuries Lanna, with its capital at Chiang Mai, was an independent state. In spite of that, the *Sangha* there always had a close connection with their brethren in Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, *Rāmaññadesa*, Ava and even Sri Lanka. These connections help explain the history of the *Sangha* in Lanna. A strong link between the *Sangha* of different regions was provided by a lineage system: a pupil established a tradition he inherited from his teacher in his home region. For example, in the mid-fourteenth century, a Sukhothai monk, Sumana Thera was trained in Martaban, *Rāmaññadesa* under Udumbara Mahāsāmi, a teacher of Sinhalese lineage<sup>16</sup>, and then went to Lanna with ten Mon monks to spread the word of the Buddha. Sumana Thera thus provided a link between the *sanghas* of different regions i.e., *Rāmaññadesa*, Sukhothai and Lanna. The Sinhalese tradition brought by Sumana Thera was the fraternity of the “forest-dwellers”. In the early fifteenth century, a group of twenty-five Lanna monks, who studied and were ordained in Sri Lanka, returned to Chiang Mai to found another Sinhalese fraternity. Accompanying them to Lanna were eight monks from Lopburi, which was then a part of the Ayutthaya Kingdom, and one Mon monk; all of them were also trained and ordained in Sri Lanka. This group of monks came to be known in Lanna as the new Sinhalese tradition (*Lankawong sai mai*); and one of the famous monasteries in Chiang Mai, Wat Padaeng (Red Forest Monastery), was built for them by the king. The other Sinhalese tradition, established by Sumana Thera, was now called the old Sinhalese fraternity (*Lankawong sai kao*); their main monastery was Wat Suan Dok (Flower Garden Monastery). It was these lineages that became “the leading intellectual and cultural force in the kingdom for the next two or three centuries”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp.75-76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.76.

There was also, according to Ploichum<sup>18</sup>, a Mon fraternity. It may have been established by some of the Mon monks who accompanied Sumana Thera or the group of Lanna monks who established the new Sinhalese fraternity. In addition to these three fraternities, the Mon and the two Sinhalese traditions, there came a fourth fraternity from Ava, as Burma was then known. Phra Sujāta of Wat Sri Boondaw was particularly known in this Burmese tradition. So, from the time the Burmese conquered Chiang Mai for the first time in 1558, there were in Lanna four main lineages or fraternities: the Mon, the two Sinhalese and the Ava.

However, the influence of the Mon and the Burmese traditions seems to have been limited in most parts of Lanna; those fraternities probably existed only in the cities. And the two Sinhalese traditions appeared to have become divided into the fraternity of the “village-dwellers” and of the “forest-dwellers”. Despite Sumana Thera’s connection to the “forest-dwellers” community, his successive pupils at *Wat Suan Dok* became known as “village-dweller” monks. This was the reason why, in the time of Queen Mae Ku (1551-1578), in most parts of Lanna, as Ploichum writes, the three fraternities of the *Sangha* were: “village-dwellers” (*huan wieng*), “forest-dwellers” (*huan pa*) and the Sri Lankan *Nikāya* or *Lankawong* (*Lanka vaṃsa*). Each of these three communities was ruled by a governing body of its own consisting of two levels: *sangharāja* and *bu khru*.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4.1.2 An Educational Institution

As already discussed in Chapter Two, in addition to being the spiritual focus of the society, the monastery was also an educational institution. Indeed, as in Burma, providing education for the people was the major means of recruitment into the Order.

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<sup>18</sup> Ploichum, cit., p.114

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

This was because ordination was a pre-requisite for higher study. During the time of the Buddha ordination was motivated by a desire for salvation; but centuries later, when Buddhism was established outside India, study became the primary motivation. This was true in the Siamese kingdom from the time of the arrival of Buddhism at Sukhothai right up to the 1930s, when secular primary education, which had been introduced about half a century earlier, was made compulsory throughout the country. Indeed, monasteries were the only places to which ordinary people could send their children for education, as the royal school, *samnak ratchpandit*, situated in the palace, was reserved for children of royal descent.<sup>20</sup>

As in Burma, parents sent their sons to a monastery to receive education<sup>21</sup>; these boys were known as *dek wat*, “temple-boy”, receiving instruction in reading and writing in Siamese, and serving their master. Many boys spent a few years in the Order studying, and then left. This temporary ordination became a part of Thai Buddhist culture and was one that often caused “needless readjustment within the community” as the monastery had to devote human and material resources to training them.<sup>22</sup> Ordination “was considered as part of a man’s education”.<sup>23</sup> It was felt in those days in Siam that the objective of ordination was to study, *bot-rian*, “to ordain and study”.<sup>24</sup> As with all other Theravada countries, a boy was normally initiated as a novice, *sāmaṇera*, if he received ordination before he was twenty. A young man of twenty and above would be given a full or higher ordination, *upasampadā*. Study after ordination, on the other hand, was focussed on raising the monk’s knowledge of Buddhism. Learning the Pali scriptures, the

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<sup>20</sup> Prawat krasong suksathikarn (History of Ministry of Education), pp.1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Young, *Village Life in Modern Thailand*, p.118.

<sup>22</sup> Bunnag, *Buddhist Monk and Buddhist Layman*, p.41; Zack, *Buddhist Education Under Prince Wachirayanwarorot*, pp.45-46.

<sup>23</sup> Ishii, *Sangha, State and Society*, p.26.

<sup>24</sup> Payutto, *Prawat karn suksa khana song khong thai* (The History of the Education of the Thai Sangha), p.16; Thewethi (Payutto), *Phra phutthasasana gap karnsuksa nai adid* (Buddhism and Education in the Past), p.117.

*Tipiṭaka*, preserved in Siam only in Khmer script until the mid-nineteenth century, was one of the most important factors in monastic life. One studied for one's own practice. This was to enable one to live by the discipline, *vinaya*, and to practise meditation. In addition, secular arts and sciences were occasionally integrated into the monastic curriculum to fulfil the needs of the wider society.<sup>25</sup> In the twentieth century, this gave rise to debate on the nature of the curriculum in monastic education, for the secular subjects not directly related to the Buddhist teachings were considered inappropriate by some conservative educationists in the Order.

#### 4.1.3 Royal Patronage

As a spiritual and educational institution, the Order attracted royal support. In Siam, as in other Theravada states, kings viewed it as their duty to support the Order to earn merit for themselves and to perpetuate the religion. On this tradition Gombrich remarks: "History has shown the importance for the Order of the favour of kings and governments".<sup>26</sup> The monarchs were interested in two aspects of the Order: maintenance of discipline and study of the scriptures.

As far as discipline is concerned, royal attention was given to maintaining the unity of the *Sangha* and strict observation of the *Pātimokkha* rules by individuals. Many rulers forced monks to leave the Order from time to time on the grounds of poor discipline. To maintain the unity of the Order and strict adherence to the *Vinaya*, a system of ecclesiastical hierarchy, with a *saṅgharāja* at the top, was instituted by the kings in the early days of the Siamese kingdom.<sup>27</sup> According to European visitors to 17<sup>th</sup> century Ayutthaya, such as the Dutchman van Vliet and the French Catholic missionary de

<sup>25</sup> Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform*, p.4. See also Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, p.161.

<sup>26</sup> Gombrich, "Introduction: The Buddhist Way", p.9.

<sup>27</sup> na Nagara & Griswold cit., pp.274, 277.

Bourges, by the late Ayutthaya period there were at least four “highest regents”, i.e. *saṅgharājas*, at any one time; all *saṅgharājas* were appointed by the king; and one of them was made “supreme dignitary” of the whole *Sangha* in Siam.<sup>28</sup> Here three of the four “highest regents” were clearly the deputy-*saṅgharājas*, one each from the “village-dwellers of the south”, the “forest-dwellers” and the Mon *Sangha*.

Over the centuries, the kings took measures to promote monastic education. The monk appointed to the post of *saṅgharāja* would usually be the most learned (and senior), often described as one who knew “all the three *piṭakas* in their entirety”.<sup>29</sup> Here the question may be raised whether every past *saṅgharāja* actually knew all the scriptures very well. Peter Skilling, for example, argues that the term *tipiṭakadhara*, “one who knows all the three-baskets”, did in fact become a title or rank, and thus should be regarded as a metaphor.<sup>30</sup> The tradition of appointing a learned and senior monk to this highest ecclesiastical post began during the Sukhothai period. King Ramkhamheng (1279-1298) appointed a learned “forest-dweller” from Nakhon Sri Thammarat as *saṅgharāja*, for he “has studied scriptures from beginning to end and is wiser than any other monk in the kingdom”.<sup>31</sup> That enthusiasm on the part of the monarch in promoting monastic education meant that sometime kings themselves took up the task of teaching the *Tipiṭaka* to members of the Order. At Sukhothai, King Lithai (1346-1368), the author of the famous work on Buddhist cosmology, *Traiphum Phra Ruang* or *Tribhūmikathā*, taught monks. At Ayutthaya, King Song Tham (1611-1628), who was a very senior monk with the title Phimontham (*Vimaladhamma*), before leaving the Order to ascend the throne, taught monks and novices the *Tipiṭaka* “in the three pavilions (*chom thong*,

<sup>28</sup> na Pombejra, *A Political History of Siam Under the Prasathong Dynasty*, p.91. See also p.164.

<sup>29</sup> na Nagara & Griswold cit., p.492. Swaeng Udomsri, *Karn Bokkhrong Khanasong Thai*, p.66.

<sup>30</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, pp.261-262, 274, 298.



golden spires) in the palace”.<sup>32</sup> As a part of their support for monastic education, the kings throughout the centuries also provided learned monks with requisites and built them monasteries. These monasteries have come to be known as *wat laung*, “royal monastery”.

#### 4.2 Monastic Education in Early Ayutthaya

However, despite such strong royal patronage, abbots, as in early Ava, were in total control of the administration and also of the education in their monasteries: they selected their own candidates for ordination and designed their own syllabuses.<sup>33</sup> With regard to administration, no permission was required to admit a new member into their monasteries. La Loubère reported that even “*Sanrats* have not any jurisdiction nor any authority, ..... over the *Talapoints*, which are not of their convents”.<sup>34</sup>

In education, consequently, there were no centrally designed syllabuses for all monasteries to follow.<sup>35</sup> “The nature of traditional education” provided in the monastery “was clearly determined by perceived traditional needs”. The subjects were not necessarily religious alone, but reflected “instead whatever academic abilities the teacher had such as mathematics or poetry, for example”.<sup>36</sup> Having taught reading and writing in Siamese to new students, various teachers must have adopted different texts or parts of them of their own selection to plan a curriculum. But we do not know what texts were actually used to teach monks and novices in monasteries.

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<sup>32</sup> Besides these pavilions, there was a chapter house in the palace compound, called *Wat Sri Sanphen*.

<sup>33</sup> Bodhiprasiddhinanda, “*Kansuksa khongsong nai adid*, (The Sangha’s Education in the Past)” *Roi pi mahamakut withayalai (The Centenary of the Mahamakut Royal University)* p.418.

<sup>34</sup> La Loubère, p.114.

<sup>35</sup> Keyes, *Thailand*, 184.

<sup>36</sup> Zack, p.44.

However, from the fact that some texts were more popular and widely used than others we may possibly deduce that in ancient Siam there was some standardization of the curriculum, or, in the words of Justin McDaniel, a researcher on the *nissaya* literature in northern Thailand (and Laos), even a “curricular canon” or “practical canon”.<sup>37</sup> Charles Keyes, in his work *Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State*, lists three “key” texts which he considers to define basic parameters of Buddhist education in Siam because they were “in almost every monastic library”.<sup>38</sup> These texts are the *Traiphum Phra Ruang* (*Tribhūmikathā*), the *Phra Malai* and the *Vessandon* [*Vessantara-jātaka*].

The *Traiphum Phra Ruang*, written in 1345 AD by Phya Lithai, at that time the heir apparent of Sukhothai and later its paramount ruler, is an “expression of the orthodox Theravada tradition, and a sermon that seeks to make the *Dhamma* more accessible to the laity”.<sup>39</sup> Working “closely with the leading Theravada monks of his day”, Phaya Lithai drew the materials from “the scriptures, commentaries, and treatises that had been transmitted and endorsed by the Theravada elders”.<sup>40</sup> It is a sermon, as Phya Lithai endeavoured to put the message of those scriptures “in a new and more accessible form” because he feared, as George Coedès puts it, that the Three Baskets, the Buddhist canonical scriptures, would disappear.<sup>41</sup> The *Traiphum Phra Ruang* deals with the way to enlightenment, mainly but not exclusively in a cosmological form. As Frank and Mani Reynolds have observed, the cosmological vision is also seen by Phaya Lithai as

<sup>37</sup> McDaniel, “The Curricular Canon in Northern Thailand and Laos” *Manussaya: Journal of Humanities*, 4:2002, pp.20-59.

<sup>38</sup> Keyes, p.179.

<sup>39</sup> Reynolds & Reynolds, *Three Worlds According to King Ruang*, p.5. For more information see na Nagara & Griswold, *Epigraphic and Historical Studies*, pp.424-425; Lausoonthorn, *Study of Sources of Triphum Praruang*, p.11.

<sup>40</sup> Lausoonthorn lists 28 texts as identified sources of the *Traiphum Phra Ruang*. They are *Jināṅkārā*, *Pāḷeyya* (*Māḷeyya*), *Jātaka*, *Cariyāpiṭaka*, *Buddhavaṃsa*, *Dhammapada*, *Papañcasūdanī*, *Madhuratthavilāsinī*, *Manorathapūraṇī*, *Mahākāḷapa*, *Mahānidāna*, *Mahāvagga*, *Linatthapakāsinī*, *Milindapañhā*, *Lokuppatti*, *Lokapaññatti*, *Visuddhimagga*, *Sāratthasangaha*, *Samantapāsādikā*, *Sāratthadīpanī*, *Sāratthapakāsinī*, *Sumangalavilāsinī*, *Anāgatavaṃsa*, *Abhidhammatthasangaha*, *Caturāgamaṭṭhakathā*, *Abhidhammāvatāra-ṭīkā*, *Vinayaṭṭhakathā-ṭīkā* [*Kaṅkhāvitaraṇī*, *Pālimuttakaṭṭhakathā*, *Vajīra-*, *Vimati-*, *Kaṅkhā-* and *Vinayamañcūsā-ṭīkā*] and *Aruṇavatī-sutta*.

<sup>41</sup> Coedès, *Recueil des Inscriptions du Siam*, Part I, pp.77-90 cited by Reynolds, p.6.

complementary with the psychologically orientated analysis of consciousness and material matters (*nāma-rūpa*). The *Traiphum Phra Ruang* explains the differences in the universe as conditioned by the inhabitants' own *karma*, the law of intention-based action. This work "has exerted a powerful influence on the religious consciousness of the Thai" and is described by the Reynolds as "the most important and fascinating text that has been composed in the Thai language".<sup>42</sup>

The *Phra Malai* is the collective name of texts that tell the legend of an *arahat* Māleyya (Mālayya), believed to have lived in Aruradhapura, Sri Lanka, during the reign of the legendary Sinhalese King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi (101-77 BC). The majority of the texts were composed in Thai dialects such as Lanna, Laotian and central Thai.<sup>43</sup> All the texts were based on the Pali version of the *Phra Malai* called *Māleyyadevatthera-vatthu*. The exact details of this work remain unknown despite several attempts by different scholars.<sup>44</sup> However, despite the uncertainty surrounding its origin, the various versions of *Phra Malai* in Thai dialects have dominated the Thai monastic syllabuses throughout the centuries.

The *Phra Malai*, in summary, portrays the good life in heavens and the suffering in hells which the monk, Phra Malai, visited "repeatedly" using "his supernatural power and

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<sup>42</sup> Reynolds & Reynolds, p.7.

<sup>43</sup> Brereton, *Thai Tellings of Phra Malai*, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> Denis in his thesis at Sorbonne in 1963, for example, thinks that the work was not known in Sri Lanka and was probably written in a Southeast Asian country, though he did not mention which country. Denis, "L'Origine cingalaise du P'rah Malay" *Felicitations Volume of Southeast Asian Studies Presented to H.H. Prince Dhaninivat*, pp.329-38., cited by Brereton, *Thai Tellings of Phra Malai*, p.38. Supaporn Machang, however, in her doctoral work on the origin of *Phra Malai*, writes that the Pali version of *Phra Malai* was composed in Burma by a Burmese monk sometime between the tenth and the twelfth century, based on a Sinhalese work *Cullagalla*, which itself is a part of another work *Madhurasavāhinī*. Supaporn Makchang, "Khwan pen ma khong malai sut (The Origin of the Maleyya Sutta)" *Wattanatham: somphot krung rattanakosin 200 pi* (Culture: The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ratanakosin Dynasty), p.1-14. But Bangchang suggests that the work was written by a Thai monk in the late fifteenth or late sixteenth century. Supaphan na Banchang, *Wiwithanakan gnankhian thi pen phasa bali nai prathet thai* (Research on Work Written in the Pali Language in Thailand), p.320.

knowledge”.<sup>45</sup> The *Phra Malai*, “one of the most pervasive themes in Thai Buddhism”,<sup>46</sup> helps simplify the intention-based Buddhist moral teaching of cause and effect, *kamma*, for ordinary folk. It was through heavenly rewards and hellish tortures that the majority of the Buddhists were taught about the importance of moral action and its consequences. The monk Malai, through his conversation with Sakka, “the king of gods”, and with the future Buddha, Metteyya, was able to give hope of enlightenment, the final goal, to the laity, who usually thought that liberation was impossible for them. Moreover, the *Phra Malai* leaves a powerful impression on listeners that the actual verification of *kamma* and its effect is beyond the capacity of ordinary people. In a comparison of the *Traiphum Phra Ruang* and the *Phra Malai*, we find that the former attempts in some way to justify the differences between social classes in the human world but the latter focuses on the impact of present action on future existence. The monk Phra Malai brought back to the human world a message from the future Buddha, Metteyya, that in order to meet and listen to him (Metteyya), and attain enlightenment, people should “listen to a complete recitation in one day of the Great *Vessantara* Birth-Story”,<sup>47</sup> which is known in Thai as the *maha chat* (great life). The *Phra Malai* in northern and eastern Thailand (and Laos) has therefore been used as a preface to the preaching of the *Vessantara-jātaka*.<sup>48</sup>

The *Vessantara-jātaka*, the last of the three important texts that Keyes mentions, is, according to Cone and Gombrich, “the most famous story in the Buddhist world”<sup>49</sup>. As is well known to most, Prince Vessantara “gave away everything, even his children and his wife” and this story “has formed the theme of countless sermons, dramas, dances, and

<sup>45</sup> Collins, trans. “The Story of The Elder Maleyyadeva” *The Journal of the PTS*, XVIII (1993), p.65.

<sup>46</sup> Brereton, p.1.

<sup>47</sup> *Mahāvessantarajātakaṃ ekadivase yeva pariniṭṭhitam suṇantu.. “Brah Māleyyadevattheravattḥuṇi”* (ed. Denis) *The Journal of the PTS*, XVIII (1993), pp.44-45. See also Collins’ translation on p.85.

<sup>48</sup> Brereton, p.61.

<sup>49</sup> Cone and Gombrich, *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara*, p.xv.

ceremonies”.<sup>50</sup> It was from this popular *Jātaka* that many Buddhist values, for instance, generosity, which is foremost among them, but also others, e.g. loyalty to one’s family, determination, and Buddhahood as the highest possible goal in life were conveyed.

The *Vessantara-jātaka* attracted the interest of two Siamese monastic commentators: the first, whose name is unknown, wrote a commentary on it in the vernacular language at the request of King Boromatrailokanat (1448-1488) of Ayutthaya, and this work is believed to be the one known today as *mahā chat kham laung*, “the Royal Version of the Great Life” and forms the heart of every *thed mahā chat* (chanting of the Great Life) ceremony;<sup>51</sup> the second author, a monk by the name of Siri Sumaṅgala, composed in 1517 a commentary in Pali, which he named *Vessantaradīpanī*.

Apart from these three “key texts”, there may have been some other texts that served both as popular literature, at least among the erudite scholars, and as part of a monastic curriculum. Such texts were those that prompted the writing of numerous *nissayas* and other forms of commentary on them. Justin McDaniel lists some of the most popular *nissayas*. They include the *Dhammapada*, the *Paritta* (*Sutmon*) (which are discourses selected for chanting), the *Paṇṇāsa-jātaka* (a post-canonical work composed in Lanna), the *Mātikā* (the contents of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*), the *Aṭṭhasālinī* (commentary to the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*), the *Aṭṭhasālinī-ṽojanā* (commentary on the *Aṭṭhasālinī*), the *Saccasaṅkhepa* and the *vācā* (texts for ordination and other ecclesiastical rituals).<sup>52</sup>

Besides these *nissayas*, at its higher level the Siamese monastic education system emphasised the study of a certain tradition of Pali grammar, perhaps *Kaccāyana*’s; we

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Wyatt “The Buddhist Monkhood as an Avenue of Social Mobility” *Studies in Thai History*, p.208; *Thailand*, pp.73-75; Wood, *A History of Siam*, pp.84-85; *A history of Wat Rachathiwat* (Samorai), also mentions these facts. See *Prawat Wat Rachathiwat* (History of Wat Rachathiwat), p.31.

<sup>52</sup> McDaniel, “The Curricular Canon in Northern Thailand and Laos”, pp.28-30.

assume that bi-lingual versions of *Kaccāyana*'s grammar or sections of them were used. One of those bi-lingual versions of the *Kaccāyana*'s grammar extant today is a work called *Mūlakaccāyana-atthayojanā* written by Ñānakitti Thera in the late fifteenth century. The influence of *Kaccāyana*'s grammar is evident in the way commented words (*saṃvaṇṇetabba-pada*) are explained, for example, in the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*.

The *Abhidhamma*, some of the *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathās* and the *Visuddhimagga* were also studied, at least in some of the bigger monasteries. Ñānakitti Thera's works are a good indication of this fact. His various works on the seven texts of Theravada *Abhidhamma* and on the *Vinaya* were all called *atthayojanā*, indicating that they were composed to aid students. Ñānakitti Thera wrote commentaries on the *Bhikkhu-pātimokkha*, the *Sammohavinodanī*, and also a work on *sīmā*, "chapter hall". Another monk, by the name of Uttarārāma, wrote a commentary on the *Visuddhimagga*, and named it *Visuddhimaggadīpanī*.<sup>53</sup>

We do not know which *suttas* were selected for syllabuses. But we know that the famous *Maṅgala-sutta* of the *Sutta-nipāta* was one of them. Siri Sumaṅgala, the author of the *Vessantaradīpanī*, already mentioned earlier, composed a Pali commentary on the *Maṅgala-sutta* in 1524 at Chiang Mai. It is clear from this famous work that the author was well versed in the Pali canonical and commentarial texts, which he cited often as his authorities. The *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* is about ten times longer than Ācariya Buddhaghosa's commentary, written a thousand years earlier. The *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* was the only Pali commentarial work which is still a part of the monastic curriculum today and is the few

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<sup>53</sup> Khruathai (ed.) "Bod nam (Introduction)" *Wannanukam phutthasasana nai Lanna (Buddhist Literature in Lanna)*, pp.14-15.

works from Siam to be known to monastic scholars in Burma<sup>54</sup>, Cambodia<sup>55</sup> and Sri Lanka.

The history of the *Sāsana* may have also been part of the monastic curriculum at Ayutthaya. Well-known among the chronicle works composed in Siam are *Jinakālamālī* (1516), written by Ratanapaññā Thera; *Mūlasāsana* by Buddhakāma (year unknown); and *Cāmadevīvaṃsa* (1407-1457) and *Sihiṅganidāna* (1411-1457), both by Bodhiraṃsī Thera (1460-1530). Ratanapaññā Thera and Bodhiraṃsī Thera (1460-1530) were Siri Maṅgala's contemporaries. Although most of these works were written in Lanna, the northern part of present Thailand, they undoubtedly reflected the nature of monastic education in Ayutthaya as well. This was because the Sinhalese fraternity, *Lanka wong*, to which these authors in Lanna belonged, was first established at Ayutthaya before expanding into Lanna. The Sinhalese connection explains the high standard of Pali knowledge in Ayutthaya and Lanna, which in turn helped develop Thai literature.

It may be noted here that nearly all the Pali and bi-lingual works, twenty-eight out of thirty-one,<sup>56</sup> composed during the early history of Siam were produced between 1407 and 1530 before Chiang Mai and Ayutthaya were conquered by the Burmese, when the people and the monastic Order enjoyed peace and stability.

In the Siamese monastic education system before the late seventeenth century, there were no formal examinations, and in their absence a student's qualifications were judged in several ways, for instance as a teacher or a preacher. With respect to the reputation of a monk as a learned teacher, one such instance is recorded in the inscriptions and in the

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<sup>54</sup> *Sāsanavaṃsa*, p.51. Bode, p.47.

<sup>55</sup> Dutt, *Buddhism in East Asia*, p.100.

<sup>56</sup> Khruathai, *Wannakam putthasasana nai Lanna* (Buddhist Literature in Lanna), pp.14-15.

*Jinakālamālī*.<sup>57</sup> Mahāsāmi Sangharājā, whom we have mentioned earlier, attracted to “Maung Bann” (Martaban) the future leaders of the two Sukhothai fraternities, forest-dwellers and village-dwellers, Sumana and Anumati.<sup>58</sup> They decided to go to study with Mahāsāmi Sangharāja when they heard of his reputation in learning and observing monastic rules, and submitted themselves to the *Sangharāja*’s rules and course of training. As to preaching, La Loubère observed of Ayutthaya: “When they (the *Talapoints*) preach, they read the *Balie* [Pali] text of their Books, and they translate and expound it plainly in Siamese, without Action, like our Professors, and not our Preachers.”<sup>59</sup>

### 4.3 Changes in Ecclesiastical Administration and Education in the Seventeenth Century

However, there were developments at Ayutthaya in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century such that the abbots lost absolute control over administration and education. In administration, the abbots were not permitted to conduct ordinations. They were to be conducted only by one of the four senior monks in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, namely *sangharājas*, who were all appointed by the king. La Loubère thus reported: “None but the *Sanocrats* [*sangharāja*] can make *Talapoints*, as none but Bishops can make priests”.<sup>60</sup>

In education too, an equally far-reaching transformation had taken place: the introduction of formal examinations. Towards the end of his reign, King Narai (1656-1688) is believed to have introduced formal examinations for the monks. Consequently, the abbots, who had until then enjoyed total freedom in devising syllabuses for their students,

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<sup>57</sup> *Jinakālamālī* p.6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, pp.82-85.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p.61.

<sup>60</sup> La Loubère, p.114.



had to take into consideration the syllabus of the royal pundits, that is to say the texts on which they occasionally tested the knowledge of monks.

King Narai, wrote La Loubère, who was the first to record formal examinations in Siam, “causes them [the monks] to be from time to time examined as to their Knowledge, which respects the *Balie* Language and its Books”.<sup>61</sup> *Oc Louang Souracac*,<sup>62</sup> a twenty-eight year old and the son of a commander in charge of elephants, was charged with the task of examining the monks and novices. The “forest-dwellers”, *araññavāsins*, resisted being examined by a layperson and demanded that they be examined only by their own superior. It was unlikely that the demand was granted. At the end of those exercises “several thousand” monks and novices were forced to return to “the secular condition” for “not being learned enough”.<sup>63</sup> In the next section, we shall examine the circumstances in which these developments took place. But before that, we shall discuss the current official position as to why King Narai found it necessary to introduce formal examinations.

#### 4.4 Why Formal Examinations were Introduced

According to the currently accepted interpretation, King Narai instituted formal examinations for the *Sangha* to prevent the standard of monastic study from further decline.<sup>64</sup> The deterioration, the official version claims, was due to two factors: first, the early Ayutthayan kings, unlike their predecessors at Sukhothai, neglected their duty to provide royal patronage. As a result, the *gāmaavāsins*, the “village-dwellers”, who were once influential over the monarchy and the people, lost their prominence, and neglected

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, p.115.

<sup>62</sup> He became King Sūa (Tiger King) (1703-1709).

<sup>63</sup> La Loubère, p.114.

<sup>64</sup> *Prawat karn suksa khong song*, pp.14-16.

their main profession, teaching. Second, the “*āraṇyik*” [*āraṇṇakavasins*], “the forest-dwellers”, on the other hand, exploiting this royal negligence, began to study astrology, magic and mantra (*saiyasart wetha katha*), which were “the animal sciences” that the Buddha forbade monks to study.<sup>65</sup>

We consider this interpretation to represent the official voice because the book, *Prawat karn suksa khong song*, (The History of Education of the Sangha) (1983), containing the above arguments was published by the Department of Religious Affairs (*krom karn sasana*), (the Religious Studies Section) with an introduction by the Director of the Department. It bears no authorship, the mark of an official paper in Thailand, and carries several announcements by the *somdech Sangharāja*, Minister for Education, and Director of Religious Affairs.

#### 4.5 Official Interpretation Unsatisfactory

However, this official interpretation of the causes for the decline is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Firstly, the early Ayutthayan kings, particularly those before King Narai, were themselves strong supporters of the Order. King Boromatrailokanat, for example, who ruled at Ayutthaya and Phitsanulok between 1448 and 1488, was an ardent supporter of the *Sangha*. According to the “Law of the Military and Provincial Hierarchy” (1454 AD) “the educated monks and novices received higher *sakdi na* grades [by which they were given land indicating their social status] than those who were not educated”.<sup>66</sup> He also vacated the throne temporarily to become a monk; and, as noted earlier, he caused the Siamese version of the *Vessantara-jātaka* (*mahā chat*) to be written.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* This opinion is also held by other Thai writers, for instance Bodhiprasiddhinanda. See “*Karn suksa khong song nai adid* (The Sangha’s Education in the Past)” *Roi pi mahamakut withayalai* (The Centenary of the Mahamakut Royal University), p.418.

<sup>66</sup> Wyatt, “The Buddhist Monkhood as an Avenue of Social Mobility”, p.208; *Thailand*, pp.73-75; Wood, *A History of Siam*, pp.84-85;

King Song Tham (1610-28), another predecessor of King Narai, was very religious, and as already discussed, taught the *Tipiṭaka* to monks. While we have no evidence to assess the impact of his scholarship on the learning of the *Sangha*, it is possible to discern his keen support for monastic education. This fact has been cited by Bhikkhu Prayut Payutto.<sup>67</sup> But, although this historical fact was quoted also in *Prawat karn suksa khong song*, “The History of the Education of the *Sangha*”, it had no impact on the way the official interpretation was reached. Furthermore, up to 1634, about two decades before King Narai came to power, there were no signs that the *Sangha* was neglected by the king and the people. Van Vliet, who was in charge of the Dutch East India Company at Ayutthaya between 1629 and 1634, estimated that there were “about 20, 000 ecclesiastics” and wrote that “they live partly on what the king and the mandarins bestow on them.... But most they receive from the common people, who furnish them with food and other necessities.”<sup>68</sup> While the number of the members of the *Sangha*, if true, might be unusually high for the population of Ayutthaya at that time, there was no evidence that the *Sangha* and their “beautifully gilded and painted” monasteries were uncared for in any way.

Secondly, the attribution of astrology and magical practices to the “forest-dwellers” alone was hardly reasonable. The “village-dwellers” were equally sympathetic to the needs of lay society, and thus would have been persuaded by lay people to give astrological advice. In fact, Gervaise, a missionary who travelled widely throughout Siam, reported that “they [both village-dwellers and forest-dwellers] were asked regularly to calculate auspicious times and dates, to tell fortunes and to find hidden objects... They also gave charms to sick people, travellers, and young children to ward

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<sup>67</sup> Payutto, *Karn suksa khong song thai*, p.6. *Prawat karn suksa khong song*, p.15.

<sup>68</sup> Cited by Tambiah, pp.179-180.

off evil. A Buddhist monk could thus be teacher, preacher, astrologer, and magician to a community.”<sup>69</sup>

#### 4.6 A New Interpretation

Having shown the inadequacy in the current official position, we shall now argue that the introduction of formal examinations was due to a combination of internal and external political circumstances.

Internal political problems at Ayutthaya were already evident by the beginning of the seventeenth century. The waning days of the famous Thammaracha dynasty (1569-1629), that included the reign of Naresuan, the great warrior king, were characterised by succession problems that would persist until the end of Ayutthaya. The following dynasty, that of Prasat Thong (1629-1688), therefore saw a systematic undermining of the political power of princes by the reigning monarchs, lest they challenge the throne. The kings were also concerned about the threats posed by powerful nobles, who controlled both manpower and government departments. To reduce the influence of the nobles, the responsibilities for controlling manpower were divided between *Kalahom*, the Defence Department, and *Mahathai*, the Interior: the former took charge of the southern provinces and the latter the northern. There was also another department (*krom tha*) to maintain “centralised registers of all freemen [*phrai laung*] liable for labour service”.<sup>70</sup> These internal politics at the capital, Ayutthaya, affected the king’s ability to control manpower from the provinces. Wyatt therefore argues: “Kings seem to have had

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<sup>69</sup> Gervaise, *The Natural and Political History of the Kingdom of Siam*, p.83. Also cited by na Pombejra, pp.95-96.

<sup>70</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp.75-76.

continuing difficulties in controlling the provinces and manpower and in maintaining a ready military force”.<sup>71</sup>

Other domestic problems resulted from wars. Due to the campaigns in the early years of Narai's reign (1656-1688), when people had no time to plant their crops, there had been a severe shortage of rice; as a result, rice export was banned, except by the Dutch, who had by that time successfully negotiated economic concessions from the Siamese. The wars also damaged the economy of the provinces, such as deer-hunting in Phitsanulok; deer-meat too was exported by the Dutch. The crumbling economy in the provinces threatened the power of the *khunnang*, the governors of those provinces.

Developments at Ayutthaya from the 17<sup>th</sup> century on, or even earlier, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, were related to geopolitics at the time: Southeast Asian states were at war with one another, building and consolidating their empires. Ayutthaya was overrun for the first time by the Burmese in 1569. The invaders “thoroughly looted the city and led thousands of prisoners, both commoners and nobles, away to captivity in Burma” and installed Maha Thammaracha (1569-90) on the throne.<sup>72</sup> A son of Maha Thammaracha, Prince Naresuan, was taken as a captive to Pegu as a surety for his father's good behaviour until his sister was presented to Bayinnaung, alias Bureinnaung, the Burmese king (1551-1581) at Hamsavati, the then capital of Burma. In 1593, a year after escaping from Burma and soon after succeeding his father, Naresuan (1590-1605) defeated the invading Burmese troops under Nandabayin (1581-1599), the son and successor of Bayinnaung, in what has become famous as the battle of *Nong Sarai*. Naresuan's brother and successor, Ekathosarot (1605-1611) subsequently continued to repel Burmese attacks and to rebuild Ayutthaya.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p.108.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p.100.

When Narai came to the throne in 1656, the kingdom of Ayutthaya had been at war with her neighbours, especially with Burma, for most of the past century. Although Ava, as Burma was then known, under Pintale (1648-1661) and Pyi (Pyei) Min (1661-1672) was no longer its former self, and could hardly pose a threat to Ayutthaya due to the incursions from China and Manipur<sup>73</sup>, her earlier aggression meant Ayutthaya had to be on guard at all time. Apart from Ava, Ayutthaya had other wars to fight. Another neighbour, Cambodia, attacked Ayutthaya no fewer than six times, according to Wyatt, in the two decades after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1569. On the other hand, Ayutthaya also expanded its power whenever given the opportunity. “The Lao country”, (i.e. the present northern part of Thailand), Cambodia and remote parts of Burma were the usual targets. In 1660, just four years after coming to power, King Narai marched thousands of troops to conquer “the Lao country” i.e. Chiang Mai. In December 1668 Narai blockaded Cambodia with several vessels. But from now onwards the king would choose to stay behind and ask *Phrakhleng*, a minister, to lead his troops into battle. This was because of the increasingly dangerous political situations at home: a conspiracy involving his half-brothers and some *khunnang*, “nobles”. As a result, some provinces over which Ayutthaya often fought with Burma (Tavoy, Mergui and Tenasserim) were at times administered by foreigners, who were employed at the Siamese court by the Ayutthayan king. The picture we get here of Ayutthaya, described by Tambiah as being a “galactic polity”, is a state constantly at war, having to marshal all its human and natural resources. Tambiah, in fact, comments on the “galactic polity” as being “no effective cybernetic system” for it “lacked... mechanisms that produced homeostasis and balance.”<sup>74</sup>

Whenever the Ayutthaya kingdom was under attack or the king wished to occupy another country, for example, Cambodia or “the Lao country”, all able-bodied men in the

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<sup>73</sup> Phayre, pp.136-148.

<sup>74</sup> Tambiah, p.123.

capital and other provinces were conscripted. This was because there was no standing army before Rāma V (1868-1910).<sup>75</sup> Narai conscripted thousands of men in his various war expeditions. The Dutch recorded that he levied sixty thousand men in 1658 and 1659. When he actually marched, not to Ava, but to “the Lao country”, i.e. Chiangmai, in December 1660 the number swelled to two hundred and seventy thousand men, and that army was joined by another two hundred thousand men from Phitsanulok province.<sup>76</sup> Even foreign communities at Ayutthaya had to contribute manpower to such expeditions.<sup>77</sup> Na Pombejra observes: “The years 1659-1665 thus saw Siam’s manpower resources being constantly drained.”<sup>78</sup>

As mentioned earlier, there was a plot by some senior princes and nobles against the king, preventing him from personally leading troops to war. In those circumstances, it was understandable that the king would look to outsiders for help. Foreigners to whom the king turned were from among those settled at Ayutthaya as well as merchants, missionaries and diplomats. They were appointed in many capacities, from that of bodyguard to adviser and even minister and prime minister.

The king recruited Japanese, Chams and Malays, all settled at Ayutthaya, as royal bodyguards, although such recruitment was not always in the best interest of the kingdom: the risks were evident during the power struggles, for example in 1611 and 1629, between King Suthat (Si Saowaphak) (1610-1611) and Song Tham (1611-1628), and between King Athittayawong (Aug - Sept 1629) and Prasat Thong (1629-1656), in which the Japanese in the royal bodyguard supported the opposition, Song Tham and Prasat Thong respectively. Sometimes members of the foreign communities at Ayutthaya

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<sup>75</sup> For more information see Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp.100-09.

<sup>76</sup> A letter from Van Rijck, representative of the Dutch company V.O.C at Ayutthaya written to Governor-General Maetsujcker cited by Na Pombejra, pp.286-287.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p.288.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p.307.

were conscripted for war expeditions: there were one hundred and fifty Portuguese men conscripted in the war against “the Lao country” in 1660. Some of the men were “stationed at strategic points above Ayutthaya to stop deserters fleeing downriver”.<sup>79</sup>

Some foreign merchants and even adventurers were also employed by the king. A few Englishmen, for instance Richard Burnaby and Thomas Ivatt, from the East India Company, and a former English army captain, Williams, were hired by the Crown. Williams trained the king’s bodyguards while the others were employed at the royal court.

French and Portuguese Catholic priests, who had already established themselves in Siam as early as 1662, were not directly employed by the king, but he and also the Ayutthayan people appreciated their learning and involvement in education.<sup>80</sup> Jesuit priests, most of whom were mathematicians, advised King Narai when he built another palace at *Luvo*, now Lopburi. To strengthen their presence at Ayutthaya, two French Catholic bishops<sup>81</sup> came to Ayutthaya with a letter from Pope Clement IX and King Louis XIV in 1673.<sup>82</sup>

Foreigners who by far exceeded all expectations and became extremely powerful ministers were some Persians, for instance Sheikh Ahmed, his younger brother, Muhammad Said, and their descendants. In 1630 during the reign of Prasat Thong, the predecessor of Narai, Sheikh Ahmed was made the minister responsible for trade, *phrakhleng*, and then for home affairs, *mahatthai*, and eventually prime minister, *samuhanaiyok*. He was succeeded by his son, Chaophraya Aphiracha (Chun), and his (Sheikh Ahmed’s) grandson, Chaophraya Chamnanphakdi (Sombun), at the *mahatthai*

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p.288.

<sup>80</sup> Tachard, *Voyage to Siam*, pp.195-196, 202-204.

<sup>81</sup> Vicar-apostolic Pallu, Bishop of Helipolis, and Lambert de la Motte, Bishop of Beritus.

<sup>82</sup> na Pombejra, p.321; Wyatt, *Thailand*, p.113.



office, which was controlled by the family for more than half a century. Muhammad Said's son, Aga Muhammad Astarabadi (Okphra Sinaworarat), also became prime minister under Narai.<sup>83</sup> The dominance of this Muslim Persian family was only interrupted by the appointment of another foreigner, Constance Phaulkon (1647-1688). This Greek adventurer was first employed as a court official, and finally became prime minister in the later years of Narai's rule in 1685.

In the meantime, foreigners trading with Ayutthaya, such as the Dutch, French, English, Chinese and Japanese competed with one another for privileges. The commercial concessions, such as exclusive rights to export and deer-hunting, enjoyed by the Dutch, were biased against other foreign nationals, some of whom, notably the Portuguese, the French and the English, already had a strong presence in South and Southeast Asia. Now King Narai had to turn his attention to balancing his relationships with these foreign powers. However, he did not always succeed. For example, the Dutch blockaded the ships of China and Japan in 1663, which resulted in the 1664 Siamese-Dutch Treaty: the treaty prohibited Narai from using Chinese and Japanese crews on his ships, and from punishing Dutch citizens breaking Ayutthayan laws. The Dutch, whose first ships had arrived at Ayutthaya more than half a century earlier, also seized some possessions of the prime minister, Aga Muhammed (Okphra Sinaworarat), saying that he owed them 2,700 guilders.<sup>84</sup> In future the Dutch were to conduct commerce in Siam wherever they chose.

The French were determined, however, not to be bound by any such agreement between the Dutch and the Siamese. The Siamese were equally keen on good relationships with France in order to balance the influence of the English in India and the Dutch in Java. France, in order to obtain political and commercial privileges for herself, used her

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<sup>83</sup> na Pombejra, p.301 & Wyatt, *cit.*, pp.108-109.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.301.

missionaries at Ayutthaya, who had been in the kingdom more than a decade. By 1680 their efforts “over the preceding 15 years” resulted in the exchange of diplomatic missions between the two countries. King Narai sent a diplomatic mission to France in that year. The mission was accompanied by Jesuits, who acted as translators. By now Phaulkon, a Greek Orthodox Christian, had converted to Catholicism, and the increased influence of the French at the court of Ayutthaya owed much to his involvement. Even before he was appointed prime minister in 1685, he began to oversee an improved relationship between Siam and France.

Over the course of time, the French missionaries were able to convince their king, Louis XIV, that the aims of his mission to Ayutthaya should include securing not only commercial privileges but also the conversion of King Narai to Catholicism.<sup>85</sup> The leader of the first French diplomatic mission to Siam in 1685, Chevalier de Chaumont, was specifically despatched to achieve this divine assignment,<sup>86</sup> and the second mission, led by Simon La Loubère in 1687, was also partially tasked with this undertaking.<sup>87</sup> With the second mission came six hundred French troops. They requested King Narai to permit them to set up garrisons at Ayutthaya and Bangkok, the two strategic points, perhaps to pressure Ayutthaya into offering better commercial deals. The demands by the French to set up garrisons ultimately culminated in the Great Revolution of 1688, in which the French had to leave Ayutthaya, King Narai was dethroned and Phaulkon was executed.<sup>88</sup>

In their religious mission, too, the French seem to have been equally frustrated with the outcome. When King Narai had still not been converted even after the two diplomatic

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<sup>85</sup> Smithies (ed.) in his “Introduction” to the Chevalier de Chaumont and the Abbé de Choisy, *Aspects of the Embassy to Siam in 1685*, p.4. See also Wyatt, *Thailand*, p.113.

<sup>86</sup> Kuloy, in his “Introduction” to Tachard’s *Voyage to Siam*, p.4.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, pp.420-421.

<sup>88</sup> See also footnote no. 3 of this chapter.

despatches from France, a senior Jesuit, Father Guy Tachard, is reported to have told the French envoy: “that in the future Narai ought to be instructed by a Jesuit who was proficient in Siamese.”<sup>89</sup> For Bishop Metellaopolis, despite being in Siam for almost twenty-five years, had not been able to convert King Narai to Christianity. On realising this lack of progress, Phaulkon had earlier told the missions that “Christianity hath made no greater progress in Siam after so many years of endeavours....” and counselled them that “there must be another House of Jesuits, where they should as much as lay in their power lead the austere and retired life of the *Talapoints*, that have so great credit with the people”.<sup>90</sup> For this, Lord Constance, as Phaulkon was then known to the French, promised the French missionaries that “he would protect and favour [them] in all things that lay in his power”.<sup>91</sup>

It is interesting to note here that it was Phaulkon, known officially to the then Siamese as Phaya Wichaiyen, was the prime minister who ordered the monks to leave the monastic Order and put them in the royal service. *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya* records: “Many were the monks and novices whom he unfrocked and brought to perform royal services”.<sup>92</sup> Phaulkon’s instruction to defrock the monks and novices brought him into a “conflict” with Oc Louang Soracac (also Sorasak), the royal pundit who had earlier examined the monks and novices under Narai’s order. Realising that King Narai would not stop Phaulkon, Oc Louang Soracac is said to have physically “struck” and “knocked down” Phaulkon.<sup>93</sup>

These internal and external political developments worried the Siamese, particularly the most privileged groups: the princes, the nobles and the monastic Order; and we have

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<sup>89</sup> na Pombejra citing C  b  ret’s journal. *Ibid*, p.421. See also Tachard, *Voyage to Siam*, pp.204-205.

<sup>90</sup> Tachard, pp.203-204.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, p.203.

<sup>92</sup> *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, pp.303-304. See also *Prawat karn suksa khong song*, p.15.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p.304.

already pointed out how the senior princes and the nobles, having witnessed how their powers were being undermined, conspired to depose King Narai.

The *Sangha*, too, had seen their relationship with King Narai deteriorate over the years. The most controversial area was, as at Ava under Thalun, conscription. Even the official version of why the formal examinations were introduced recognised that a large number of men took refuge in the Order as ordained persons. The reason for this was officially considered to be the generosity of the king himself towards the *Sangha*, which attracted many into the Order: many became monks for a comfortable life.<sup>94</sup> The *Sangha* was accorded a few privileges: no corvée obligation; no taxes, and in many cases offenders were not punishable by the law of the land while in the yellow robe. These privileges had been afforded to members of the *Sangha* from the early days of the Order. This was evident in the conversation between the Buddha and King Ajātasattu, in which the King said to the Buddha that he would not force anyone, a former servant, a farmer or a householder, who had joined the *Sangha* to leave their religious life but would pay them homage and material support.<sup>95</sup>

It is indeed possible as indicated in the official interpretation of the event during King Narai's time that some joined the Order for an easy life, some for a short cut to wealth and fame. The privileged position of the Order was always open to abuse, as indeed suggested in King Narai's claim and other royal edicts. Yet we cannot rule out other reasons, such as continuous conscription. If conscription was the main reason for the deterioration in relations between the monarch and the *Sangha*, this raises a question: is it right for the Order to admit those fleeing conscription as its members? On this, we

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<sup>94</sup> *Prawat karn suksa khong song*, p.15.

<sup>95</sup> For more, see the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta*, D i 60-62.

have already explained in Chapter Two that the Buddha forbids the Order from ordaining anyone who is *already* “in the king’s service” (*abhiññātam rājabhaṭam*), military or civil.

But what if someone is not on the official reserve list, and there is no conscription law or any other law specifically barring people of a certain age from ordination? Whilst, as we have explained, there was continuous conscription under King Narai and there is evidence that there was a drastic increase in the number of monks and novices at Ayutthaya, we do not know if the Order during the reign of King Narai admitted men who were already on active or reserve service. Nor do we have any evidence to suggest that King Narai himself passed a law prohibiting men of a certain age from receiving ordination, as indeed was the case under King Mongkut alias Rāma IV about two hundred years later. There are different reports on whether a man needed permission from the authorities before becoming a monk: La Loubère, who was in Siam after formal examinations were introduced, said that every citizen was free to become a monk. However, Nicolas Gervaise, a missionary who had visited various provinces of Siam before the introduction of examinations, reported that all candidates for ordination needed permission from an official of the crown.<sup>96</sup>

Yet the fact that some form of formal examination had to be introduced suggests that there were no effective measures to stop men from entering the Order. The absence of such a law may have led to confusion and then tension between the King and the Order on the question of conscription. Because, on the part of the Order, turning away fleeing men who came as candidates for ordination was not an option, even on the grounds of their avoiding potential conscription. In other words, whilst the spirit of early Buddhism emphasises the importance of the right motive for entering the Order, the *Vinaya*,

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<sup>96</sup> Gervaise, cit., p.83.

particularly the rules dealing with ordination procedures, on the other hand, stress the absence of wrong motive. Here the wrong motive, fear of conscription, was extremely difficult to prove. In such a situation, the Order might have to accept anyone who had met the normal requirements for ordination even though it was evident that the candidates were likely runaways from enlistment in the army. This may have created a situation in which many able-bodied men joined the Order, and members of the Order were reluctant to leave their robes, apparently for fear of conscription.

This state of confusion and tension was brought to an end only two centuries later by King Chulalongkorn, Rāma V. He promulgated a law, the military act, in 1905, requiring men of a certain age to serve in the armed forces. But if someone had already been in the Order before that age, and if he was judged to be a *phu ru tham*, “one who knew the Buddha’s teaching”, he would not be required to leave the Order, but would be exempt from military service. (At present, men in the armed forces or government service may be ordained with the permission of their superior. And most of the cadet-trainees at the Royal Military Academy become a monk for one month during their course as a part of their training.)

If men were ordained with a worldly motive such as fleeing conscription, the case we have mentioned under King Narai, this would be a burden on the abbot, for it was more difficult to administer or teach a larger group of men with motives other than faithfully following the path to salvation. The increase in number (*vepullamahattam*), the Buddha himself was reported to have said, was one of the four main reasons why the Order was becoming corrupt. The other reasons are when the Order has attained “long standing” (*rattaññumahattam*), “greatness of (material) gains” (*lābhamahattam*) and “great

learning” (*bāhusaccamahattaṃ*). These conditions had necessitated the prescription of monastic rules and regulations, *sikkhāpadāni*.<sup>97</sup>

With those who had fled conscription, the number of monks and novices at Ayutthaya swelled to “thousands”, as noted by Gervaise at Ayutthaya, causing shortages of manpower. The king was therefore prompted to keep a separate register of all the monks “in the state’s population polls”. This was to retain the control of manpower on which his authority depended.

The king’s difficult relationship with the nobles, as explained earlier, was most likely further to complicate the relation between the crown and the Order, already strained over the question of fleeing conscripts.<sup>98</sup> The dissatisfaction felt by the nobles towards the king was likely to have spread among some important members of the Order, because “the kings and *chaos*, [nobles,] had their favourite monks”.<sup>99</sup> The “forest-dwellers”, for example, used to have great respect from Narai’s father, King Prasat Thong. He built for the “forest-dwellers” a monastery, Wat Chai Watthanaram, considered to be “the grandest building project of his reign”, and appointed its chief a *sangharāja*.<sup>100</sup> The Order itself, on the other hand, was not totally outside politics. Succession problems often dragged influential members of the *Sangha* into political affairs. Support from the *Sangha* or a section of it would go a long way in any power struggle. As Father Claude de Bèze said, King “Narai won the throne with the support of certain *talapoints*”.<sup>101</sup> His successor, Petracha, also received, in his attempts to gain the throne, the blessing of the

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<sup>97</sup> *Yato kho Sāriputta saṃgho vepullamahattaṃ patto hoti, atha idh’ekacce āsavaṭṭhāniyā dhammā saṃghe pātubhavanti, atha satthā sāvakānaṃ sikkhāpadaṃ paññapeti uddisati pātimokkhaṃ tesaṃ ñeva āsavaṭṭhāniyānaṃ dhammānaṃ paṭighātāya.* Vin iii 10; ...*theranavamajjhimaṇaṃ vascena vepullamahattaṃ patto...* *Samantapāsādikā* i 194.

<sup>98</sup> na Pombejra, p.325.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p.93.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*; *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, pp.215-216.

<sup>101</sup> Hutchinson, *1688 Revolution in Siam*, p.54; also cited by na Pombejra, p.94.

*Sangharāja* of Lopburi. The *Sangharāja* was rewarded for his part when King Petracha donated the palace in Lopburi (built by Narai) to the *Sangha* of Lopburi. Narai, however, may have lost the favour of the Order soon after coming to the throne as a result of the power struggles between the king and the higher-ranking princes or the nobles early in his reign. Indeed, in 1676 the Dutch had already reported that king Narai had “lost much of his credit” in the eyes of the Buddhist clergy. Interestingly, that was when the French missionaries increased their profile with the arrival at Ayutthaya of two Bishops to head the mission.

For their part, the *Sangha* may have been concerned about the influence over the Crown of the Europeans, particularly the French. It must have been known to some of the nobles, and therefore also to the *Sangha*, that first the French missionaries and then the envoy, Chaumont, had tried to convert the king to Catholicism. It is said that a few months after the departure of Chaumont in 1686, there was a petition “attached to a tree in front of the palace” in Lopburi, which warned of “the dangers that threatened the Buddhist faith, and invited all men to open their eyes to a matter which concerned the public weal.”<sup>102</sup>

It was in these circumstances, in which the king, as na Pombejra notes<sup>103</sup>, needed manpower, that King Narai ordered the monks to be examined, between 1684 and 1686, on their knowledge of the scriptures. Consequently, as already mentioned, “several thousand” monks and novices with insufficient knowledge of the scriptures were required to disrobe.

However, these uncompromising actions by King Narai did not seem to have affected, in the long run, the traditional custom of temporary ordination among the Siamese during

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, pp.409-410.

<sup>103</sup> na Pombejra, p.94.



which boys received the best education the monastery could offer. In fact, the harsh measures were confined only to the last four years of King Narai's thirty-two-year reign. And, as far as education was concerned, even during those decisive years, the abbots by and large retained their freedom in designing syllabuses for their monasteries because the examination syllabuses were not standardised for the next one and half a centuries; nor were there enough candidates to hold state examinations regularly, even once in every three years, for another two centuries or so.

Over the following centuries, in contrast to King Narai's rigid approach, the kings adopted a more diplomatic tactic: through their generous support for the successful candidates, the kings made efforts to popularise formal examinations within the *Sangha*. Though never compulsory after the time of King Narai, as indicated earlier, examinations were used, whenever possible, as an instrument to strengthen the ecclesiastical hierarchy: administrative posts within the *Sangha* came increasingly to be filled by candidates successful in the examinations. As a result, in the subsequent reigns the influence of these examinations was to become increasingly perceptible.

#### **4.7 The *Parian***

Despite the evidence showing that King Narai introduced formal examinations, the early development of formal examinations in Siam remains sketchy. Nothing about *Parian* or any other form of formal examination is mentioned in *The Royal Chronicle of Ayutthaya* or any other documents related to the period. The first evidence of the existence of the *Parian* is found only in one royal order, *phonsawadan*, issued by Rāma I (1782-1809), just after he came to the throne. Part of that order reads: "Appoint Mahā Mee, *Parian Ek*, of Wat Blied as *vinayarakkhita* ("the guardian of ecclesiastical disciplines") replacing

Phra Upāli.....Appoint Mahā Thongdi, *Parian Ek*, of Wat Hong (haṃsa) as the abbot of Wat Nag (Nāga)”.<sup>104</sup> In this order, the king mentioned of Mahā Mee and Mahā Thongdi as *Parian* monks with a *Parian ek* degree, confirming that the *Parian* had existed before he came to the throne. And, based on this evidence that Phya Damrong concluded that the *Parian* examinations had begun sometime during the Ayutthaya period, for there is no record of King Taksin of Thonburi (1767-1782) sponsoring any *Parian* examinations.<sup>105</sup>

Here it is presumed that Narai introduced only some form of formal examinations, for the sole reason, as argued earlier, of purging the Order; but these examinations in the form that had been introduced may not have continued under Narai, and it was for sometime before the formal examinations, which we now know as *Parian*, developed at Ayutthaya. This was because Narai introduced formal examinations, as described earlier in detail, for the wrong reason, and at the wrong time. The examination was introduced just four years before he died. During that time the political situation in the kingdom was, as we have seen, fragile and dangerous, and the *Sangha* was no longer in good terms with the king. It would not have been possible even to devise a systematic syllabus for the *Parian* in those circumstance, let alone to complete it. As we shall see later, it took at least two years to study Pali grammar at that time, and many more years for a candidate to be able to enter the *Parian* examination with a syllabus based on the centuries-old classification of the *Tipiṭaka*: the *Vinaya*, the *Sutta* and the *Abhidhamma*.

<sup>104</sup> *Phra phongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin Ratchkarn thi nung*, (Chronicle of the First Reign of the Ratanakosin), p.13. (Mahā Mee became *Sangharāja* during the reign of Rama II).

<sup>105</sup> Rachanubhab, “*Athipai reung karn sop phra pariyatti tham*” (Account of the Pariyatti Examinations) *Tamnan tharng phra phutthasasana* (Chronicle of Buddhism), p.341.

However, regardless of when they became fully developed, the *Parian* examinations were the only formal examinations in Siam from late Ayutthaya to early Bangkok.<sup>106</sup> They were also informally known as *blae Balie* [the Thai pronounce Pali as *Balie*], “translating Pali”, because candidates studied and translated the *Pali nikāyas* at the examinations. Among students, the examinations were identified as *Parian Balie* or P.B for short, because the emphasis was on learning Pali and translating passages from Pali texts. Hereafter we shall use the word *Parian* to refer to these examinations.

The origin of the word *Parian* is not clear. It could be the Thai pronunciation of *pariyatti*, meaning learning.<sup>107</sup> We assume that it may have been derived from Pali *Pariññā*, “knowledge”. Peter Skilling and Praport Assavavirulhakarn<sup>108</sup> think that this is more probable.<sup>109</sup> It may have been first used by the Khmer to mean one who had full knowledge of the *dhamma* and then adopted by the Siamese at Ayutthaya. According to the *Pariññā-sutta* and the *Pariññeya-sutta* of the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, *pariññā* is equal to the extinction of greed, hatred and delusion (*rāgakkhaya, dosakkhaya, mohakkhaya*).<sup>110</sup> If this was the case, we could see that the principal object of examinations in monastic education was supposed to be to liberate students from defilements. Incidentally, *pariññā* is now the Thai word for “knowledge at university level”, and the term *pariññā-batr* is used for an academic degree.<sup>111</sup> The term *Parian*, apart from the examinations, was also applied, according to the Royal Thai-Thai Dictionary (1986), to mean “students of Buddhist scriptures”.<sup>112</sup> But, as far as written history is concerned, at least by the end of the Ayutthaya period, the term *Parian* may have come to apply specifically to being a graduate. The word was added to the names of monks who had passed the examinations.

<sup>106</sup> *The Life of Prince-Patriarch Vajirañāṇa*, p.60.

<sup>107</sup> I owe this point to my supervisor, Gombrich.

<sup>108</sup> Professor of Sanskrit, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

<sup>109</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>110</sup> S iii 26, iv 32-33, v 29, 159, 182, 191 & 236.

<sup>111</sup> *Thai-Thai Dictionary*, p.126.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, pp.126, 144.

Once all the three levels were completed, a monk was called *mahā parian*, or *mahā* in short, which was added in front of the names of successful candidates.

There were three levels in the *Parian* examinations, following the division of the Pali Buddhist scriptures into *Vinaya*-, *Sutta*- and *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*. At the highest level, i.e. *Parian ek*, all the canonical texts from the three *Piṭakas* were prescribed. At the intermediate level, i.e. *Parian tho*, the *Sutta*- and *Vinaya-piṭaka* were examined and at the preliminary level, i.e. *Parian tri*, the whole *Sutta-piṭaka* was the syllabus. Theoretically, the examiners could examine candidates on any passage from the Canon. However, we have no evidence in our hands to suggest that the Canonical texts were so thoroughly examined.

A candidate took about three years to prepare for each grade. So to complete all levels took nine years or more on average. Students preparing for the *Parian* examinations first studied *Kaccāyana*'s Pali grammar, which, the Prince-Patriarch and Prince Damrong said, took about two years.<sup>113</sup> That was before students were introduced to canonical texts. As a result, *Kaccāyana*'s Pali grammar was known at the time as *mūlakaccāyana*, “basic *Kaccāyana*'s grammar” or simply as *mūlapakarāṇa*, “the foundation text”.<sup>114</sup>

The main task of the candidates in the examinations was to translate at sight, orally, selected passages from the texts. It was held that understanding the teachings of the Buddha depended on one's ability to read the original Pali texts, and the best way to ensure this was to examine the translation skills of students. Until the reign of Rāma II, the translation was from Pali to Thai; hence, the informal but popular term *blae balie*, “translating the Pali canonical texts” for the *Parian* examinations. As in Sri Lanka and

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<sup>113</sup> Rachanubhab, “*Athipai reung karn sop phra pariyatti tham*” p.340.

<sup>114</sup> *Prawat Mahamakut Ratchwithayalai*, p.3.

Burma, the *Tipiṭaka* was preserved in Pali in Thailand. Following the centuries old Theravāda tradition that emphasises preserving the teachings in the original, people were not keen on translating the *Tipiṭaka* into the local tongue for fear it would alter the words or meaning of the teachings.<sup>115</sup>

The *Parian* examinations were held only when there were candidates. During the Ayutthayan and early Ratanakosin era, once a student felt confident enough to be examined on his knowledge of the texts, he informed the abbot, who applied on his behalf to the king. We have found no record of the number of candidates during the Ayutthaya period. Over the following century, we may assume that the *Parian* examinations did take place when there were candidates and the kingdom was stable enough. However, during the period of great instability leading up to the destruction of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767, it was unlikely that *Parian* examinations were held.

#### **4.8 The Thonburi Period, 1767-1782**

During the Thonburi period, 1767- 1782, as a direct result of the destruction of the “old capital” or *krung kao*, King Taksin failed to revive the Order and its education. Although no records survive concerning the *Parian* examinations, we know that King Taksin, who liberated both Ayutthaya and Lanna from the Burmese yoke, restored some political order and supported learned monks.

Initially, the king’s efforts to restore order in the kingdom were successful: the chaotic situations were brought under control. The royal chronicle of Thonburi reports King Taksin quelled a revolt in Swangapuri that was led by dissident monks under the

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<sup>115</sup> Rachanubhab, cit., p.341.

leadership of Phra Fang, who seized political control. These monks, who claimed supernatural powers and invincibility, also took control of another neighbouring principality, Phitsanulok, in 1770. And almost a decade later, the King suppressed another monk in the “old capital”, Ayutthaya, who had declared that he had supernormal powers and rebelled.<sup>116</sup>

However, King Taksin’s work to revive the monastic Order was, in the long run, unsuccessful. At first, the king showed much enthusiasm for restoring the ecclesiastical hierarchy and promoting monastic learning: he commissioned the *Traiphum Phra Ruang* to be copied with illustrations. (One of the copies was taken to Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it is presently kept in the Museum of Indian Arts in Berlin.<sup>117</sup>) The king also wrote a version of Phra Malai, which was several times longer than the original one. Then the King assigned a noble to find out monks knowledgeable in the holy scriptures. The monks were then offered new robes and other requisites as a mark of honour for their learning. He also asked them to come and reside in the capital. But the king soon caused uneasiness among the *Sangha*.

Whilst his commanders were sent to restore law and order in remote areas, and to regain parts of territories lost during the destruction of Ayutthaya, the king devoted most of his time to study of scriptures and meditation. Shortly thereafter he started behaving strangely, asking learned monks to check signs on his body to see if they matched those of a great man, *mahāpurisa*, described in the Pali canon as belonging to either a Buddha or a universal monarch. He even declared himself to have reached the stage of a stream-winner, *sotāpanna*, and demanded that members of the ordained community prostrate themselves in front of him to acknowledge his superiority in spiritual achievement.

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<sup>116</sup> *Phraratphongsawadan krung thonburi* (Royal Chronicle of Thonburi), p.190.

<sup>117</sup> Reynolds & Reynolds, p.244.

Monks who refused to follow his order were either forced to disrobe or demoted. This deterioration of the relationship between the monarch and the Order started to create tension in society and put the newly re-established Siamese kingdom at risk once again from external threat. King Taksin was, therefore, dethroned by one of his generals, Chakri, in 1782, and subsequently put to death.

#### **4.9 The Early Ratanakosin Period, 1782-1809**

By contrast, General Chakri, or Rāma I, who founded a new dynasty, Ratanakosin, in 1782, brought not only prosperity to the people by restoring political order but also normalcy to the *Sangha* through his promulgation of ten laws. Mostly issued in the first two years of his reign, the edicts in their main contents dealt with specific disciplinary matters that arose at that time, recording the offenders and other details exactly. Some of the laws pointed out to lay people how their attitude and actions affected the purity of the monastic Order, and exhorted them to respect the “world of the monastery with its special code”.<sup>118</sup> The king, who moved the capital to Bangkok, sought to strengthen not only the observation of the *Vinaya*, “the monastic rules”, by the monks but also the practice of Buddhist moral conduct by his officials. Indeed, the laws “were addressed to both monks and lay officials, such as provincial governors, to obtain their co-operation in implementing them”.<sup>119</sup>

Laws number Two, Three and Four were, respectively, to deter monks from engaging in vocations “contrary to the *Dhamma*” such as astrology and medicine; to prevent the Order from being used as a base to rise against the state; and to prohibit monks or ex-monks from claiming supernatural power. Law number Seven was enacted to re-

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<sup>118</sup> Reynolds, pp.36, 40.

<sup>119</sup> Tambiah, p.182.

establish in the administration of the Order the supremacy of *sangharāja* and *rājagaṇa*, “royal appointed ecclesiastical authority”, the positions which were created by the state in the times of Sukhothai. The need to ensure the power of the *sangharāja* indicated how the monastic establishment in the capital and its surroundings had been severely disrupted, noticeably from 1754, when Alaungpaya of Burma (1752-60) began his campaign to subjugate Ayutthaya, until the founding of Bangkok in 1782. In such circumstances of chaos and disorder, preceptors (*upajjhāya*) were no longer able to “retain control of their disciples”, so that Rāma I had to order relatives of the monks and officials to report misbehaviour of monks to the authorities concerned.

Even in the Ratanakosin era, the incidence of monks or ex-monks claiming mystical power to attract a following in their attempts to revolt against the state was far from over: just a month before Rāma I promulgated this Law number Three, some ex-monks in Nakhonnayok were reported to have induced “each other to scheme and deceive, extolling supernatural power to take the throne”.<sup>120</sup> To prevent such incidents, Law number Three therefore required a monk to carry an identification paper bearing his name, monastery, seniority, the name of his preceptor and the seal of the *sangha* officials in the region; and abbots were asked to forward a register of monks in their monasteries to the department of religious affairs, thus tightening the state’s control over the *Sangha*.

Tambiah commented that these registers, which paralleled the civil registers, were not only to control manpower mobilization but also to discourage monks from wandering.<sup>121</sup> However, the obvious intention of the registrars was to assist, if not force, the preceptors to take responsibility for their pupils rather than to discourage the monks from wandering. As indicated earlier, there was a declining relationship between preceptors and pupils

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<sup>120</sup> “*Kot Phrasong 3 (Sangha Law No. 3)*” *Kotmai tra sam duang (Laws of the Three Seals)* II, pp.177-78. See also Reynolds, pp.42-43.

<sup>121</sup> Tambiah, p.185.



following the Burmese invasion. When this happened, it is apparent that the first of the two layers - and evidently the more fundamental one - of the ecclesiastical administration, i.e. supervision within the monastery, had broken down. This necessitated the strengthening of the other layer, which was a hierarchical one involving groups of monasteries and the secular authority.

Some of the Laws were designed to rebuild the unity of the *Sangha*, which had faltered since it was divided into two camps by the claim to supernatural power and sainthood by King Taksin. When the king of Thonburi demanded that monks bow down to him, the *Sangharāja* and two other top-ranking monks had refused to do so and were consequently demoted; but they were reinstated by Rāma I.

The last law was similar in its contents to Law number Two, which concerned the observation of the *Pātimokkha*. While the former law stressed to monks, officials and lay Buddhists in general the importance of the practice of *Vinaya*, for it was synonymous with the vitality of the *Sāsana*, the last ecclesiastical law was to reinforce the *Vinaya* in a certain context. Law number Ten caused more than a hundred monks to be expelled from the Order for their alleged decadent behaviour. It is interesting to note here that, like his contemporary in Burma, Bodawpaya,<sup>122</sup> Rāma I decreed that the unfrocked monks “shall have their arms tattooed as royal commoners and shall serve the government at heavy labour”.<sup>123</sup> These ten ecclesiastical laws were so far unique to Rāma I because they, observes Wyatt, “represent the king’s assumption of religious authority”.<sup>124</sup> From the extant records, only two decrees had been promulgated prior to the First Reign. One was by King Borommakot (1733-1758) of Ayutthaya who reminded that the monks should

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<sup>122</sup> See p.95.

<sup>123</sup> “*Kot Phrasong 10 (Sangha Law No. 10)*” *Kotmai tra sam duang*, IV, p.226. See also Ishii’s *Sangha, State and Society*, p.65.

<sup>124</sup> Wyatt, “The Subtle Revolution of King Rama I of Siam” *Studies in Thai History*, p.148.

mind their own business and not interfere in secular affairs. The other by King Taksin of Thonburi was a restatement of the *Pātimokkha* rules.<sup>125</sup>

The monastic administration at the beginning of the Bangkok era continued to be headed by the *Sangharāja*, whose position was for life, save in exceptional circumstances. The power of the *Sangharāja* was dependent on his relationship with the reigning monarch. The office of *Sangharāja* is further discussed in the next section. The *Sangharāja* was assisted by a few dozen *rājagaṇa* ranking monks, all of whom were also appointed by the king. Among them, several were responsible for specific tasks. The *vinayarakkhita*, “the guardian of the *Vinaya*”, for instance, was the ecclesiastical judge who had responsibility for judicial matters. This shows that the king had not only created a hierarchy in the *Sangha*, but also was in total control of every official, for he was appointed, and could be removed, by the king. To co-ordinate between the king and the *Sangha*, there were two departments: *Sanghakari* and *Krom Thammakarn* were responsible for ecclesiastical affairs, with the second one also in charge of education.

With the discipline and administration of the Order strengthened, ecclesiastical education became the focus of Rāma I. He is said to have gathered all the senior monks and put to them certain questions on traditional Buddhist cosmological knowledge, based on the *Traiphumkathā* (Three Worlds), composed by King Lithai (1247-1274) of Ayutthaya. Having found that most of the monks were not familiar enough with the contents of the *Traiphumkathā*, he caused it to be copied so that the monks could study it. Some say that the version of the *Traiphumkathā* produced at the request of Rāma I was not the same as the one composed by Phaya Lithai. This was because the king and his pundits could not obtain a copy of the *Traiphumkathā* at that time. So the royal pundits decided to write a

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<sup>125</sup> *Kotmai tra sam duang*, Vol. 4, pp.306-311; *Buddhajayamongkhon 8 phraratchkamnot phrachao krung Thonburi was duei sin sikkha* (The Eight Blessings of Buddhism, and Royal Decrees of the King of Thonburi Concerning the Precepts of the Monastic Life), (dated 13 February 1774) pp.28-59.

new version, taking them nearly two decades to complete, and which was, despite all those efforts, not satisfactory to the King, who then ordered them to write another edition.<sup>126</sup> This edition is what is now known as the *Traiphum Vinicchayakathā*.<sup>127</sup> However, as we now know not all copies of the *Traiphumkathā* by Phya Lithai were lost in the kingdom, and soon this famous work continued to dominate Siamese Buddhist education. To revive Buddhism, Rāma I also built monasteries, appointed learned monks to the abbotship and supported the teaching of the *Tipiṭaka* in monasteries by sending royal pundits to help teach the monks there and by promoting the most learned of the monks with *Parian* degrees up the ladder of the hierarchical order, as can be seen in some of his edicts.<sup>128</sup> These *Parian* monks were those who had obtained their degrees during the waning years of Ayutthaya for we have no record of successful *Parian* candidates during the Thonburi period and the First Reign of the Ratanakosin periods. In fact, only after two decades of sustained efforts in reviving the Buddhist Order and its education, Rāma I was able to preside over, as had been the tradition since King Narai of Ayutthaya, the conduct of the *Parian* examinations. The examinations were held from December 1803 to January 1804. A part of the royal efforts to revive the Buddhist teaching was the revision of the *Tipiṭaka*. That was more than ten years before the first ever *Parian* examinations of the new dynasty could be conducted. In 1788 a council of more than two hundred monks and lay scholars was convened at Wat Mahathat, the seat of the *Sangharāja* in Bangkok, a task never undertaken in Siam since King Tilokarat of Lanna in the fifteenth century, and produced a new edition, now known as the Golden Edition.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Thipkhakorawong, *Phraratchphonsawadan krung Ratanakosin ratchkarn thi nueng* (The Royal Chronicle of the First Reign of the Ratanakosin Era), p.304.

<sup>127</sup> *Traiphum lok winitchai, camlong cak chabap luang* (Exegesis of the Three Worlds Copied from the Royal Edition), p.3. I am thankful to Peter Skilling for reminding me of this important point.

<sup>128</sup> See *Phra phongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin Ratchkarn thi nung*, p.13. See also pp.194-195 of this chapter; Reynolds, pp.56-57; Van Rawanswaay, "Translation of Jeremias Van Vliet's Description of the Kingdom of Siam" in JSS, VII, p.77; Wyatt, *Thailand*, p.88.

<sup>129</sup> The king collected the Ayutthayan laws, revised them, and codified them. Ancient texts were also collected and copied. (He himself wrote a Thai version of the *Rāmāyana*, known as *Ramakien*.)

Siamese literary activities were revived, with classical works from other Asian languages being translated into vernacular Thai. Works in Chinese, Persian and Mon were translated into Thai. The first translation of the *Mahāvamsa*, the great chronicle of Sri Lanka, was also made during this period.

#### 4.10 Conclusion

We have thus shown how the internal instability and changes in geopolitical circumstances during the seventeenth century at Ayutthaya up to the early nineteenth century in Bangkok, have led to changes in the relationship between the monarchy and the monastic Order. Those changes which took place under King Narai and subsequently under King Taksin of Thonburi and Rāma I of Bangkok have increased the influence of the monarchy over the monastic Order. This trend culminated in 1902 in the creation or rather formalisation of “a tradition of ecclesiastical hierarchy” in Siam. Such a hierarchy, as Mendelson and Tambiah have observed, has “materialised under powerful kings”.<sup>130</sup> The ecclesiastical hierarchy is sustained and strengthened through the monarch’s exertion of greater control over ecclesiastical education, more specifically formal examinations, a process that was clearly witnessed in Siam under another powerful king, Chulalongkorn (1868-1910). This subject we will explore in the next chapter.

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<sup>130</sup> Mendelson, pp.66-67; Tambiah, p.179.

## Chapter Five

### **The Standardisation of Monastic Education and the National Integration Process: Ecclesiastical Education under King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910)**

In the previous chapter we showed how the instability from the mid seventeenth century at Ayutthaya to the late eighteenth century at Bangkok affected the *Sangha* and its education system. These circumstances led strong monarchs such as King Narai and Rāma I to exert a greater control over the *Sangha*. Particularly, we discussed how the instrument of formal examination was employed to put monastic scholarship firmly under royal supervision. However, in the century or so following King Narai, the formal examinations were not effective, because the *Sangha* remained passive towards the system of formal examinations and did not actively promote them as a means of raising the standard of monastic scholarship so that there were very few candidates.

From the early nineteenth century, however, in the “new Siam”, which had become “a stable and enduring empire at least in the minds of those who lived within its compass”<sup>1</sup>, successive monarchs sought to encourage the *Sangha* through various measures to accept the formal examinations as a means of promoting the study of the words of the Buddha. In this chapter we shall examine how, from the reign of Rāma II (1809-1824), the formal examinations were promoted, culminating in the standardisation of monastic education under Rāma V, also known as King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), who united the whole of Siam with his modernisation and national integration programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp.145-160.

In the discussion in this chapter we shall try to provide the geopolitical background to the development of monastic education and, wherever deemed necessary, ecclesiastical administration under the three monarchs, Rāma II (1809-1824), III (1824-1851) and IV (1851-1868). Particular attention will be given to: the first change to the *Parian* examination curriculum under Rāma II; the birth of the *Dhammayuttika* reform Order under Rāma III; and, ironically, the lack of change in monastic education under Rāma IV, also known as King Mongkut, the founder of the *Dhammayuttika*.

Next, we shall proceed to our main discussion, the standardisation of monastic education under Rāma V. To this end, following the chronological order of events, the various modernisation programmes introduced by Rāma V will first be sketched in. Then we will begin a more comprehensive assessment of reforms on the religious front. Here special attention will be given to the periods 1892-1910 under Rāma V and 1910-1921 under Rāma VI. During the periods mentioned, the following subjects will be discussed in order: the founding of two monastic colleges in 1893; the dynamic innovations at the Mahamakut Royal College in the form of Mahamakut *Parian* led by Prince Wachiarayan; Mon and European influence on the *Dhammayuttika* thinking on education; the subsequent dominant role of the Mahamakut of the *Dhammayuttika* in the development of the Mahachulalongkorn Royal College for the majority of the *Sangha*, the *Mahānikāya*; the crucial role of the *Sangha* and their leader, Prince Wachirayan, in the introduction of primary education in the provinces between 1898 and 1902; the *Sangha* act of 1902; and finally the relationship between the 1905 Royal Edict on Conscription and the standardisation of monastic education through the creation of a new curriculum, the *Nak Tham*.

### 5.1 The Expansion and Change of Focus of the *Parian* under Rāma II (1809-1824)

The reign of Rāma II (1809-1824) is seen by historians such as Wyatt as “quiet” and an “interlude between the First and Third Reigns because there was no major crisis or warfare”. Although his peaceful succession to his father is considered a watershed and a sign of stability, Rāma II himself has, nevertheless, been described as a “hesitant and uncertain” ruler because under his rule there were no radical changes in the civil and political administration.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, as far as monastic education was concerned this reign was one of the more dynamic periods; and the king took measures to popularise the *Parian*, formal examinations. Those measures included a programme to translate the *Tipiṭaka* into Thai, which went on well into the next reign. Another immediate and direct measure towards popularising the *Parian* was to make its curriculum more straightforward. This change was introduced towards the end of his reign when a *Parian*monk, Maha Mee, was appointed *sangharāja* in 1816. Here, before we discuss the measures undertaken by Rāma II and the *Sangharāja* concerning religious scholarship, it would be appropriate to appraise the *Sangha* administration during the time of Rāma II, also known as the Second Reign.

The administration of the *Sangha* under Rāma II, also known as Phuttha Lert Larn, remained much the same as in the previous reign. That is, an ecclesiastical hierarchy headed by the *sangharāja* continued to govern the *Sangha*, and the *Sangha* continued to receive royal patronage. However, in this reign the *Sangha* administration did undergo some minor developments. These changes occurred mainly on geographical grounds. For administrative purposes, the *Sangha*, in particular the village-dwellers or *gāmavasins*,

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.154.

throughout the country was divided into three geographical regions: Bangkok; northern and north-eastern; and southern. Bangkok, the capital, now became a separate administrative region,<sup>3</sup> indicating its increasing prosperity, with the capacity to accommodate a larger population, monks and lay alike. Each of the three regions had an ecclesiastical governor called *chao-gaṇa*, whose formal title was *somdet-chaogaṇa*. In contrast, the forest-dwellers, or *ārañṇavāsins*, in the whole kingdom were administered by their own chief, as had been the case since the Ayutthaya period. Under the governors of the three regions and of the forest-dwellers there were abbots, of whom those in charge of the royal monasteries, usually with the rank of *phra rājagaṇa*, wielded more power than other abbots.

In 1816 the *rājagaṇa* who had been promoted to the position of head of the ecclesiastical judiciary, *vinayarakhit*, under Rāma I, Mahā Mee, became *sangharāja*. *Sangharāja* Mee himself was a *Parian-ek* degree holder (i.e. comparable to a doctorate). His appointment by the king to the most senior position in the *Sangha* thus signalled Rāma II's intention to promote the *Parian*. It was during the tenure of Mahā Mee as *Sangharāja* between 1816 and 1819 that the *Parian* underwent some crucial modifications. One of those changes was that the three levels of the *Parian* examination were now expanded into nine levels. But the fundamental change was the decision of *Sangharāja* Mee to replace the canonical scriptures with non-canonical ones and to specify a text or part of it as a prescribed text for each level.

These changes were the first modifications since the *Parian* had been introduced in the seventeenth century. The changes marked a major shift in the direction of Pali study in Siam. As Ishii points out, the Pali canonical texts were no longer part of the core

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<sup>3</sup> Udomsri, *Karn bokkhrong khanasong thai*, p.73; Tambiah, p.231, citing Bishop Pallegoix's *Description du Royaume Thai ou Siam*, II, pp.27-28.



curriculum.<sup>4</sup> While we have no means of guessing how much emphasis was given to studying the Pali canonical scriptures in Siam before or since the seventeenth century, the non-canonical Pali commentarial works by Buddhaghosa were always popular among traditional scholars. This is evident in the works the Siamese Pali scholars produced, in which Buddhaghosa's commentarial works were cited as authorities.

Here the replacement of canonical texts with commentarial works was aimed mainly at encouraging more students to go in for the *Parian* examinations because commentarial literature were considered easier than canonical. Before this change was made, the students previously had to study a number of different canonical texts before they decided to sit for the *Parian*, because no one particular text was specified. As described in the previous chapter, the whole *Tipiṭaka* was divided into three “baskets”, and one had to complete at least one of them to sit for each of the three *Parians*.<sup>5</sup>

Now the students and their tutors knew exactly which text they had to study for the examinations. From now on, no doubt, the student-monks who were fortunate enough to study at royal monasteries in the capital would be persuaded more than ever of the merit of the *Parian*. And, indeed, this is evident from the increase in the number of *Parian* entries in the following reigns.<sup>6</sup> We shall discuss these increases in the number of candidates in the relevant sections of this chapter when we consider monastic scholarship in each reign.

Now in the second decade of the nineteenth century that the *Sangharāja* himself was leading the promotion of the formal examinations and that measures had been taken to attract more candidates, the once passive *Sangha*, or at least some sections of it, had

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<sup>4</sup> Ishii, “Ecclesiastical Examination in Thailand” *Visakha Puja*, 2515/1972, p.53.

<sup>5</sup> See pp.196-197.

<sup>6</sup> See also p.225.

begun to warm to the idea that formal examination was a useful instrument in preserving *phra phutthasāsanā*, (*buddha sāsana*) “the Buddha’s dispensation”. In fact, as would become evident in successive reigns, the *Parian* came to be considered as vital not only in safeguarding the *phutthasāsanā* but also in creating some social mobility: the *Parian* degrees enabled intelligent people who were “not men of good family” subsequently to climb up the social ladder. The chance to enter government service was thus a huge incentive to the *Parian* degree holders, the majority of whom were “sons of farmers” from the provinces.<sup>7</sup>

However, despite the fact that the candidates for the *Parian* came from simple backgrounds in the provinces and that the formal examinations, *Parian*, had become more popular than ever before, instruction for the examinations remained confined to the élite circle in the monastic education system in the capital. This was to go on for some time, well into the next century.

As far as the new syllabuses for the *Parian* were concerned, they became more organised; they were narrowed down to a few texts; and they were, as already explained, all commentarial literature. From now on, understanding the teachings of the Buddha would be achieved in the context of the established Pali commentarial traditions. Buddhaghosa’s work would dominate the way the doctrines were interpreted, while the works of Sāriputta and Sumaṅgalasāmi, of the Polonnaruwa period, Sri Lanka, and of Srīmaṅgala, a local Pali scholar, would also enter the syllabuses.

In this new curriculum, each *Parian* level was divided into *prayogs*, and thus three *Parians* became nine *prayogs*. The word *prayog* originally meant ‘passage’ because in

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<sup>7</sup> Wyatt, “The Buddhist Monkhood as an Avenue of Social Mobility in Traditional Thai Society” pp.207-218.

the examinations candidates had to draw, through a lottery system (*salak*), ‘a passage’ or ‘passages’ that had been selected by either the *Saṅgharāja* or one of the senior monks with *rājagaṇa* rank. But *prayog* soon came to mean ‘level’. Although the word was equally applicable to the procedure during the Ayutthaya period, it seems that the term *prayog* was used only from Mahā Mee’s time. The first three *prayogs* were recognised as *Parian sāman*, “ordinary *Parian*”, while the fourth *prayog* marked the completion of *Parian tri*, the lowest of the three levels of *Parian*. In other words, to attain *Parian tri*, one had to pass the first four *prayogs*. The fifth and sixth *prayogs* constituted *Parian tho*. The last three *prayogs*, seventh, eighth and ninth, were called *Parian ek*, “first class *Parian*”, with the seventh officially termed *Parian ek sāman*, (“ordinary *Parian ek*”), the eighth *Parian ek majjhima* (intermediate *Parian ek*) and the ninth *Parian ek udom* (highest *Parian ek*).<sup>8</sup>

As will be seen shortly in the syllabuses, the new system focused on texts that would be useful for monks in preaching moral values to the laity, such as commentaries on the *Maṅgala-sutta* and the *Dhammapada*. The new formula also emphasised the Theravada *Vinaya* tradition by prescribing not only the commentaries but also the sub-commentaries on the *Vinayapiṭaka*. This emphasis perhaps reflected the expertise of the *Saṅgharāja* Mee. On meditation and monastic training as a whole, a complete guide was found in the *Visuddhimagga-aṭṭhakatha* and it was therefore made a part of the curriculum. No texts from the Pali *Nikāyas* appeared in the curriculum. This may be because, as we have seen, the Ayutthayan curriculum, which had all the Pali *Nikāyas* as its prescribed texts, seemed too difficult for the candidate and attracted few students to the examinations. Nor was any text on the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* prescribed. This must be the reason why the

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<sup>8</sup> Rachanubhab, “*Athipai rueng karn sop phra pariyattitham*”, p.343.

*Sāratthadīpanī* had to give way to the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī* by Sri *Sumaṅgala* (12<sup>th</sup> AD) later, probably after *Saṅgharāja* Mee had passed away.

The syllabuses of the nine *prayogs* will be given here with some related information. It is important to see what the texts in the syllabuses are in order to determine the nature of the training the candidates received. From the outset, the training afforded by the *Parian* system was directed more to book learning and not to the regular training that monks and novices had received at the feet of their teachers in monasteries around the country for centuries. The prescribed texts for the *Parian* have not so far received much attention from scholars, and among those who have studied them, some, for example, Ishii, are not sufficiently familiar with the texts. Ishii incorrectly calls both the *Sāratthadīpanī*, a Pali sub-commentary on the *Vinaya*, and the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-ṭīkā*, a commentary on the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, sub-commentaries on the *Visuddhimagga*.<sup>9</sup>

The nine *prayogs* and their syllabuses are as follows. **Prayogs One - Three:** *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*.<sup>10</sup> This commentary on the stanzas of the *Dhammapada* has traditionally been ascribed to Ācariya Buddhaghosa, the great Pali commentator, though doubts have been raised whether he really was the author of this work.<sup>11</sup> This commentary has been particularly popular as a textbook. This may be because the work commented on i.e., the *Dhammapada*, is itself one of the most famous books in the Pali Canon, containing most important doctrines in 423 precise verses, more than half of which are also found in other texts. The language of the commentary was easily

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp.84, 96; Ishii, “Ecclesiastical Examinations”, pp.53-54.

<sup>10</sup> Rachanubhab does not say specifically *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā*, but only calls this *Dhammapada*. But the account of Prince-Patriarch Vajirayan mentions it in his biography as *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* and his account is more reliable as he had to sit the *Parian* examinations in this system himself. See Rachanunbhab, “*Athipai rueng karn sop phra pariyattitham*”, p.243; The Life of Prince-Patriarch Vajirañāṇa, pp.56, 59.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the debate over the authorship of the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* see Norman, *History of Indian Literature*, VII, pp.58-60. See also Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, Part I, p.26; Law, *A History of Pali Literature*, II, pp.450-451; Malalasekera, *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*, pp.95-98; Hazra, *Pali Language and Literature*, II, pp.582-590.

intelligible to students, providing them with a good foundation for pursuing “the great commentaries”, such as the *Samantapāsādikā*. The *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* also contains stories and tales that are interesting to read: names and personalities in the *Nikāyas* are also introduced at various points in these stories. In short, the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* was considered to provide not only the necessary grounding in the commentarial Pali language but also for moral teaching, with illustrations for monks to use in preaching. Janakābhivamsa calls this commentary the *aṭṭhakathā ache byu*, “introductory commentary”; and he has compiled a guide to the Pali commentaries in which he explains all the Pali commentarial methods, using the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* as illustration.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Prayog Four:** Maṅgalatthadīpanī, Volume one.

The Maṅgalatthadīpanī was written at Chiang Mai in 1524 by a Lanna Thai monk of the Sinhalese fraternity, Sri Sumaṅgala, during the reign of King Muang Kaeo (1495-1526), a grandson of the great King Tilokarāja (1442-87).<sup>13</sup> The work comments on the famous *Maṅgala-sutta* of the *Suttanipāta*, which teaches thirty-eight kinds of blessings in daily life. About a thousand years earlier, Buddhaghosa had written a commentary on the *Maṅgala-sutta*. In the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*, which was ten times longer than Buddhaghosa’s commentary, each of the 38 *maṅgala*, “blessings”, was explained at length. The *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* was the only Pali commentarial work produced in Thailand to have found its way into the monastic curriculum in the entire history of the ecclesiastical examinations. Also known to monastic scholars in Burma<sup>14</sup>, Cambodia<sup>15</sup> and Sri Lanka even before the availability of printing press in the mid nineteenth century,

<sup>12</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Aṭṭhakatha akhye byu*, (Introductory Commentary), pp.i-vi.

<sup>13</sup> Siri Sumaṅgala also wrote three other Pali works: *Vessantaradīpanī* (1517), *Cakkavāladīpanī* (1520) and *Sanikhyāpakāsaka-ṭīkā* (1524). Siri Maṅgala’s two contemporary Lanna Pali scholars were Ratanapañṇā Thera, the author of the Pali chronicle work *Jinakālamālī* (1516), and Bodhiramsī Thera (1460-1530), who wrote *Camadevīvaṃsa* and *Sihiṅganidāna*.

<sup>14</sup> *Sāsanavaṃsa*, p.51. Bode, p.47.

<sup>15</sup> Dutt, *Buddhism in East Asia*, p.100.

the *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* was reprinted in Thailand ten times between 1910 and 1962.<sup>16</sup> It was also translated into Thai in 1938 by a group of monks from the Mahāmakūṭa-rājavidyālaya.<sup>17</sup> The first volume, running to about 175 pages, consists of the explanation of the first four stanzas i.e. the explanation of the blessing factors from *asevanā ca* to *anākulā ca kammantā*.

**Prayog Five:** *Pālimuttakavinayavinicchaya*. This was also known as *Vinayasangaha* by Sangharājā Sāriputta of Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka. Commenting on the *Vinayapiṭaka*, it gave concise explanations of *Vinaya* rules. Later it was replaced by the *Sāratthasaṅgaha* but we do not know when and why. From the reign of Rāma III to that of Rāma V, however, we do know from the Prince-Patriarch that *Sāratthasaṅgaha* was prescribed.<sup>18</sup> Like the *Pālimuttakavinicchaya*, this work commented on the *Vinayapiṭaka*, and was written in Sri Lanka during the reign of Bhuvaneka-Bāhu by Siddhattha Thera, a member of the *Vanavāsī* fraternity and a pupil of Buddhapiya Thera, the author of the grammar *Padarūpasiddhi*.<sup>19</sup>

**Prayog Six:** *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*, Volume two. This is the commentary on the last six stanzas of the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the explanation of the blessing factors from *dānañ ca* (giving) to *khemam* (security).

**Prayog Seven:** *Samantapāsādikā*. Commentary on the *Vinaya* Pali by Buddhaghosa. Highly respected for its explanation and interpretation throughout the ecclesiastical judicial courts in Theravada countries, this commentary has also been a part of the

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<sup>16</sup> Yamnadda, *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*, p. ix.

<sup>17</sup> *Maṅgalatthadīpanī*, Thai Translation, Mahāmakūṭarājavidyālaya, p.iii.

<sup>18</sup> *The Life of Prince-Patriarch Vajirañña*, p.59.

<sup>19</sup> See also Malalasekera, *The Pali Literature of Ceylon*, pp.228-229.

Burmese curriculum since 1894, when the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* Examinations were started in Rangoon.

**Prayog Eight:** *Visuddhimagga*. This is the most famous work of Buddhaghosa and regarded as a compendium of the *Tipiṭaka*.

**Prayog Nine:** *Sāratthadīpanī-ṭīkā*. Written by Sangharājā Sāriputta in Sri Lanka during the reign of Parakkama-Bāhu (1153-1186), it was a sub-commentary on the *Samantapāsādikā* of Buddhaghosa. The work was divided into two parts, *cūla* and *mahā*, and both were prescribed for this level.<sup>20</sup>

Later the *Sāratthadīpanī-ṭīkā* was replaced with the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-ṭīkā* written by Sumaṅgalasāmi. As mentioned earlier, this was probably to widen the curriculum to cover some materials on the *Abhidhamma*.

## 5.2 Promotion and Challenges of the *Parian* during the reign of Rāma III (1824-1851)

At his death, Rāma II was succeeded in 1824 by his son, Prince Chetsadabodin, later known as Rāma III. During this reign, on the political front the kingdom was internally stable. The king, observes Wyatt, “kept on nearly all his father’s ministers”<sup>21</sup>, then a sign of continuity and orderliness. However, “the most urgent business of the early years of the Third Reign was concerned with foreign and military affairs”.<sup>22</sup> Britain had just annexed the coastal regions of Burma in the First Anglo-Burmese war, 1824-1826. This meant that Siam had to deal with the British as her neighbour. Moreover, conflict in the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p.192.

<sup>21</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand*, p.168.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

Malay Peninsula, where the Siamese traditionally claimed suzerainty, began to involve the British. The urgency of the need for amicable relations with the British was highlighted by the mission of Captain Henry Burnley in 1825 that resulted in the agreement of a commercial treaty signed a year later. In the meantime, Siam also continued to engage in military conflicts with her neighbours, namely Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.<sup>23</sup>

As far as monastic education is concerned, the *Parian* continued to receive the keen attention of the king. Soon after he came to the throne, in 1826, the king complained of the *rājagaṇas*' inactivity in preparing their pupils for the *Parian*. The complaint was made when Rāma III personally observed the conduct of the *Parian* examinations and found out that not a single monk had passed even the first level, except Prince Mongkut, who achieved the *Prayog* Five level.<sup>24</sup> The senior monks promised the king that they would produce more *Parian* monks to succeed them. In fact, the monks even went as far as to imply in their reply to the king that the knowledge of the *Tipiṭaka* was synonymous with a *Parian* degree and that the Pali degree was vital to preserve the *sāsana*.<sup>25</sup> The king asked the Sangharāja, Prince Paramanuchit, and other *rājagaṇas*, namely Phra Phutthakhosachan [Buddhaghosācāriya], Phra Phrommuni [Brahmamuni] and Phra Yanwiriya [Ñāṇaviriya], to produce at least five or six monks of "the highest qualifications" every year.

The *Parian* examination system itself continued without change under the reign of Rāma III, except that he made it a point to hold the examinations regularly once every three years, a sign of stability missing since the destruction of Ayutthaya in 1767. Rama III

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp.166-174.

<sup>24</sup> *Prachum phraratchputcha phak* 4 (Collected Royal Questions, Part 4), pp.75-87. See also Reynolds, *The Buddhist Monkhood*, pp.158-159.

<sup>25</sup> *Prachum phraratchputcha phak* 4 (Collected Royal Questions, Part 4), pp.85-86.



systematised the promotions of the *Parian* monks by rewarding them not only with *rājagaṇa* ranks but also by freeing their parents from slavery, if they were slaves. In addition, the relatives of the *Parian* monks were recognised as *yom song*, “the (*Parian*) *Saṅgha*’s devotees” if they had been in the royal army, thus exempting them from further military service.<sup>26</sup> To the king the *Parian* examinations were an important means by which he could supervise Buddhist learning. He therefore urged the senior monks in the capital “to persevere in their study of Dhamma” because “if Buddhism flourishes with monks and novices knowing the *Tipiṭaka* at various levels in this way, the Dhamma rises like a fragrance and is diffused back and forth by the wind, enrapturing all men and deities”.<sup>27</sup>

Although used to promote standards in monastic scholarship, the *Parian* examination system did not go unchallenged. In fact, the challenge was directed against not only the new *Parian* but also the whole tradition of monastic learning that had existed so far largely outside the *Parian* system, despite sustained royal efforts to promote the latter. This challenge came neither from the “forest-dwellers” who had defied King Narai, nor from the “village-dwellers”, who until the early part of the Ratanakosin period had also been passive towards the royal-controlled *Parian* examinations, but from Prince Mongkut, a half-brother of Rāma III himself, who had been ordained just days before Rāma III came to the throne.

It was said that the ordination of Prince Mongkut, now Bhikkhu Wachirayan [Vajirañāṇa], was hurriedly arranged by his dying father, Rāma II, and the prince felt obliged to continue in the monkhood to avoid a succession problem after his father died.

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<sup>26</sup> Phra Thamthajmuni and Colleagues, *Phutthasāsana prawat samai ratanakosin ratchwong roi pi* (Buddhism in One Hundred Years of the Ratanakosin Dynasty), p.126.

<sup>27</sup> Reynolds, p.62; *Prachum phraratchputcha phak thi 4 phraratchputcha nai ratchakan thi 3* (Collected Royal Questions, Part 4, The Royal Questions of the Third Reign), pp.75-76.

Despite being the eldest son of the chief queen, to whom the throne would normally be expected to pass, Prince Mongkut was not selected by the council of princes, ministers, nobles and *Sangha* responsible for selecting a successor to the throne in the Ratanakosin dynasty. Selection took place only after the death of the king, who as the reigning monarch thus had no direct influence on the selection process. In fact, the council chose Prince Mongkut's half-brother Prince Chetsadabodin (Rāma III), who was his senior in years and was also at the time more experienced in state affairs. Prince Mongkut himself wrote some years later that his ordination was the result of "a careful estimation of the power realities he faced".<sup>28</sup> Whatever the reason for Prince Mongkut's 27 years stay in the Order, his initiatives in education and the training of the *Sangha* within his authority as an abbot of a royal monastery were to be far-reaching. His life and reign have been so well documented that we see no need to repeat them here.<sup>29</sup> However, we shall concern ourselves with his reform movement in the *Sangha* and his initiatives in monastic education, which began, as already pointed out, in the reign of Rama III.

The monastic life of Bhikkhu Wachirayan, except for the circumstances surrounding his dying father, began as that of any other prince before him. Following the centuries-old custom, he was ordained at 20. After his ordination, he was sent to Wat Samorai (now *Wat Rachathiwat*), a forest-dwellers' monastery in the outskirts of Bangkok for training in meditation. The newly ordained prince monk was interested not only in the regime of religious austerities such as the meditation in which he was instructed there, but also "wanted to know the reasons behind such practices".<sup>30</sup> Through his inquiring approach,

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<sup>28</sup> Reynolds, p.74. See also Mongkut, *Phraratchniphon phasa bali nai phrabatsomdet phra chomkao chaoyuhua wa duai phraratchphongsawadan krng Ratanakosin* (Essay by King Chomkao on the Royal Chronicles of the Bangkok Period), p.14.

<sup>29</sup> For more information on his life as an able monarch see, Prince Chula Chakrabongse, *Lords of Life: A History of the kings of Thailand*; Griswold, *King Mongkut of Siam*; Wyatt, *Thailand*, Chap. Seven, pp.181-191; Tambiah, *World Conqueror* pp.204-224. For a brief but comprehensive account of Mongkut's reforms, see Vella, *Siam Under Rama III*, Chap. IV, pp.38-42.

<sup>30</sup> Vella, *Siam Under Rāma III*, p.39.

he soon discovered that the meditating monks had deviated from the actual aim of the practice. Some of them appeared to meditate so that they may achieve supernatural powers, which had been discouraged by the Buddha. Many followed meditation instruction without understanding it or at least without being able to explain their practices to this royal monk. Obviously, he also found the knowledge of the Pali canonical scriptures among the senior monks unsatisfactory. This was, to Bhikkhu Wachirayan, the failing of the new *Parian* system, which prescribed only non-canonical texts, as much as of the Siamese monastic scholarship as a whole, which had not emphasised a rational approach.

Consequently, the disappointed Bhikkhu Wachirayan thought of leaving the monkhood. But he then came across a Mon monk, Buddhavamso, who provided him with all the answers he had sought. This very important meeting between Bhikkhu Wachirayan and the most senior Mon Mahāthera has been described by many as one that took place by chance or even by the power of a vow that the prince had made. Bhikkhu Wachirayan's vow was “.. [i]f the lineage of ordination which comes down from the times of the Sugata [Buddha]... still remains in any land... may I see or hear the news regarding it within three or seven days. If my vow does not succeed.... I shall understand that the lineage of the *Buddhasāsana* has disappeared already. I shall disrobe and become a layman and keep the Five Precepts according to the strength of my faith.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite the attribution of a miracle to the meeting between the Mon monk and Bhikkhu Wachirayan, their meeting was not entirely unpredictable. Buddhavamso Mahāthera was at the time the head of the Mon *Sangha* (*khana rāman*), with the royal title Phra Sumed, and resided at a royal monastery, Wat Bovonmongkhon, just across the river from Wat

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<sup>31</sup> Pavaresvariyaalongkorn, “A Brief Account of King Mongkut (Rama IV): from the time of his ordination as a bhikkhu until his passing-away” *Visakhapuja*, 2513 (1970), pp.20-21. See also Ploichum, *Khana song raman*, pp.152-154.

Mahathat, in Bangkok. It is likely that he was well known in the royal circle. Bhikkhu Wachirayan himself was not ignorant of the Mon population in the kingdom. In his early teens, he had gone to a border province on behalf of his father, Rāma II, to receive some Mon refugees fleeing from persecution in Burma.<sup>32</sup> For his role in helping Bhikkhu Wachirayan, this Mon Mahāthera, was later criticised continually by a senior prince, Rakronnaret, informally known as Mom Kraison. Prince Rakronnaret, the head of Kromsanghakari department, in charge of supervising lay support for the *Sangha*, also demonstrated his resentment at Bhikkhu Wachirayan's academic achievements and increasing popularity.

Inspired by the Mon tradition, Bhikkhu Wachirayan studied Pali at Wat Mahathat. However, he did not study the scriptures under the Mon monk, Phra Sumed, but under Phra Wichianpricha (Phu), who was a lay teacher and the head of the Royal Pundits he followed instead the traditional *Parian* syllabuses by studying Pali and some prescribed texts. Intelligent and naturally rational, Bhikkhu Wachirayan worked hard in his Pali study, enough for him to pass the highest Pali examinations within three years in 1826. Now a Pali degree holder, he was entrusted by the king with responsibility for the *Parian* examinations, then the only form of examination in the country.

The high profile prince-monk continued to reside at Wat Mahathat, the residence of the *Sangharāja*. There he began to attract some monks with his own critical interpretation of the *Tipiṭaka*. But he soon discovered that Wat Mahathat was the heart of the tradition that he sought to reform and was hardly a place for him to start his criticism of the tradition, for he would risk invoking opposition at the highest level before he could persuade others of the merit of his reforms. So in 1829 he moved back to Wat Samorai, where he

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<sup>32</sup> Ploichum, pp.144-46.

would “no longer be constrained by the watchful eyes of the elders” at Wat Mahathat.<sup>33</sup> By that time he had been five years in the *Sangha* and according to the *Vinaya* could live apart from his preceptor.

Within three years of his return at Wat Samorai, Bhikkhu Wachirayan received a new ordination on a raft moored to the river bank nearby. This re-ordination ceremony, later known as *dalhīkamma*, was performed by Mon monks, all of whom had been ordained in the *Kalyāṇī-sīmā* in Pegu.<sup>34</sup> This was to set himself apart from the majority of the *Sangha*, from whom he had received his first ordination. It was also a way of settling his own doubt about the validity of the existing ordination halls (*sīmā*), for Bhikkhu Wachirayan discovered that the sanctuary boundary stones were of incorrect sizes; and this discovery threw into question the validity not only of the ordination halls but also of the ordination ceremonies performed in them. This re-ordination of Bhikkhu Wachirayan set an example for all the members of the *Dhammayuttika-nikāya*, requiring them also to go through a second ordination.

Here in Bhikkhu Wachirayan’s drive for reform the influence of what Lingat describes as “the tradition of the Burmese Mon *Sangha*” was evident.<sup>35</sup> In the *Dhammayuttika*’s formative years Mongkut sought legitimacy from the Mon tradition, which itself had been purified by Dhammaceti, a Mon king, in Pegu in 1476.<sup>36</sup> Bhikkhu Wachirayan asked the Mon monks to assist him in important ecclesiastical rituals because the prince-monk considered the Mon ordination to be valid and more pure. It may be said, though, that as the reform advanced, the changes taking place were also influenced by western rationality and the Sinhalese tradition, which we shall shortly discuss in further detail.

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<sup>33</sup> Reynolds, p.81.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.82.

<sup>35</sup> Lingat, “La vie religieuse du roi Mongkut,” *Journal of the Siam Society*, p.129.

<sup>36</sup> For more information see *The Kalyani Inscriptions*.

Nevertheless, the Mon influence, such as their Pali pronunciation, which was considered to be closer to the Sinhalese pronunciation of Pali, was to persist for a long time to come.

A few years after Bhikkhu Wachirayan had started his reform at Wat Samorai, he was appointed in 1837 by the king as the abbot of Wat Bovonives, a royal monastery in Bangkok. This could be considered as recognition by the king of the ecclesiastical reforms carried out by Bhikkhu Wachirayan. Now, with royal backing and a learned prince-monk, Bhikkhu Wachirayan, as its head, Wat Bovonives was to become a leading centre for Buddhist studies in Siam. The monastery housed a printing press set up by Wachirayan to promote the study of the Pali canonical texts. Wachirayan himself studied Latin and English and some western sciences from French and British missionaries to whom he offered facilities in his monastery so that they could preach Christianity. It was believed that his encounter with these missionaries helped develop his rational approach even further, which he put to use in the development of his reform group, *Dhammayuttika*, “adherers to the Dhamma”.<sup>37</sup> Reynolds, however, is of the opinion that “Mongkut’s *Sangha* reforms owed less to the missionaries’ proselytizing than to the cultural fields they opened to him”.<sup>38</sup>

With the help of the king, Bhikkhu Wachirayan organised three expeditions to Sri Lanka, then Ceylon, to borrow copies of the *Tipiṭaka*, the first in 1840, nearly a century after Siam had given some of those texts to Ceylon. The first mission brought back forty volumes of the *Tipiṭaka* to be compared with those in Siam. Many Sri Lankan *bhikkhus*, *sāmaṇeras* and laymen also came to Siam with the party. The second party was despatched in 1841 and returned with thirty more volumes of the *Tipiṭaka* with some Sinhalese *bhikkhus* now settled at Wat Bovonives to help with the task of editing. The

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<sup>37</sup> For more information see Reynolds, pp.84; Bradley, “Prince Mongkut and Caswell” *Journal of the Siam Society*, LIV, 1 (Jan, 1966), p.34.

<sup>38</sup> Reynolds, p.84.

formal revision of the Siamese *Tipiṭaka* started in 1842 and was completed ten years later.<sup>39</sup> In addition, it is possible that as a result of contact with Sri Lanka, Wachirayan abandoned some of the Mon practices.

During his tenure as the abbot of Wat Bovonives, Bhikkhu Wachirayan emphasised knowledge of the Pali language and study of canonical texts as opposed to the *Parian* curriculum and non-canonical literature. For example, instead of the usual topics such as the commentary on the Vessantara-jātaka or the Phra Malai, the *Anguttara-nikāya*, one of the collections from the Pali canon, was chosen as the material for regular sermons at Wat Bovonives. The stress on canonical study reflected Bhikkhu Wachirayan's determination to search for a pure and rational message in the Buddha's teaching, for he saw the Buddhism followed at that time in Siam as superstitious, irrational and deviating from the original teaching of the Master. In addition to their strict interpretation of the Pali canon and dedication to the *vinaya* practice, Bhikkhu Wachirayan and his followers at Wat Bovonives were also distinguished from the majority of the Siamese *Sangha* by a new way of chanting Pali, which Bhikkhu Wachirayan himself introduced, and a Mon style of robe wearing.<sup>40</sup>

"The aim of the reform movement in essence, was to expunge from Siamese Buddhism all that was not in accordance with the *Hīnayāna* canon."<sup>41</sup> However, in reality, Mongkut changed, as we shall see, "the spirit of the Siamese religion" by reforming monastic discipline, changing details in ritual, and defining and purifying the canon.<sup>42</sup> These were drastic changes, the more remarkable since they were introduced by such a

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<sup>39</sup> See also Lingat, p.84.

<sup>40</sup> See Reynolds, pp.82-90. For more information on the development of chanting, first introduced by Bhikkhu Wachirayan and then expanded by his successors, in the Dhammayuttika see Ploiphum, *Tham niam haeng khana thammayuttika-nikai* (The Practice of the Dhammayuttika-nikāya).

<sup>41</sup> Vella, *Siam Under Rāma III*, p.39

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

relatively junior *bhikkhu* as Wachirayan. But, his learning, charisma and “high birth in the royal family” may have “insured him support that may have been denied a more humbly born reformer”.<sup>43</sup>

Despite his emphasis on the study of canonical literature and its rational interpretation at Wat Bovonives and its branches, however, as chairman of the *Parian* examination board, Bhikkhu Wachirayan was unable to effect any significant change in the *Parian* system in line with his other reforms. Instead, he appears to have played the role of chairman of the *Parian* mainly to preserve the status quo. This may suggest that he had taken the position as chairman only to please the king who had appointed him, whereas his heart was focused on reforming the state of Siamese Buddhism as a whole. Or it may have been that he was not able to overcome the opposition of the traditionalists. So for the time being the return to a puritanical approach to study and practice was confined only to the few who belonged to the *Dhammayuttika*. In fact, the restriction of the reforms to these few namely, those at Wat Bovonives and one or two other monasteries, would continue when he became the king known as Rāma IV.

Although therefore the *Parian* system does not seem to have been modified significantly during Bhikkhu Wachirayan’s term of office as its chairman, the success rate in the *Parian* examinations, on the other hand, increased dramatically. There were sixty-six successful candidates in 1841.<sup>44</sup> These increases took place as a result of the measures taken by Rāma III in 1826 when he, as mentioned earlier, made a complaint to the senior monks for not being active in producing *Parian* monks.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p.38; Reynolds, p.66.

<sup>44</sup> *Prachum phraratchputcha phak thi si*, pp.87-89.

<sup>45</sup> See p.210.



The royal pundits, and also a few other lay teachers, who had been ordered by the king to produce more *Parian* monks, were employed by the crown to give instruction to the *Parian* candidates on Pali and the texts prescribed in the *Parian* curriculum. The classes were conducted in special halls in the palace. In fact, the lay teachers were hired not only by the crown but also by the nobles, who began to dominate the court of Siam until Rāma V reversed the situation in the 1880s, to give religious instruction to the novices and monks in their mansions or at the monasteries they sponsored. The role of the royal pundits and the lay-teachers consequently became very important in preparing candidates for the examinations. The royal pundits could, therefore, be considered the driving force behind the king's promotion of formal examinations. And unlike the abbots, who had responsibility for both monastic training and academic guidance for their pupils, these royal pundits and lay teachers had responsibility for guiding novices and monks only in their academic study.

### 5.3 A Quiet Period under Rāma IV (1851-1868)

On the death of Rāma III in 1851, the council of nobles, ministers and *Sangha* requested Bhikkhu Wachirayan to leave his 27-year long ascetic life and assume the throne. He became known as King Mongkut, or Rāma IV, and he laid the foundation for his son and successor, King Chulalongkorn, to modernise the kingdom in “an extraordinarily dangerous time”. King Mongkut was different from his predecessors in that he had the opportunity to “study and read widely” both Buddhist and western literature.<sup>46</sup> He was the only ruler to hold a *Parian* degree and was, as has been discussed, a proved reformer of the Theravada *Sangha* in his country. Therefore, if anything, his monastic experience may have prepared him better for the throne. During his monkhood he did also “travel

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<sup>46</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand*, p.181.

throughout the country and meet with people with whom princes only rarely came into contact”.<sup>47</sup> His study of western languages and sciences while a monk also meant that he was the first monarch to speak English and hire European teachers for his children. His ability to communicate in English enabled him to present his case better to the European monarchs.

As to his reform group, the *Dhammayuttika-nikāya*, a large number of monks had already been trained by him, at Wat Bovonives and a few other monasteries, by the time he left the Order. During this reign, the *Dhammayuttika* reform movement continued under the leadership of his immediate disciples, some of whom, such as Prince-Patriarch Pavares, would play a prominent role up to the next reign. Some new monasteries were founded for the *Dhammayuttika* order by the king during his 17 year rule and all the abbots of these monasteries were chosen from the best educated at Wat Bovonives.<sup>48</sup> The monastery continued to be preferred by royalty, and indeed also nobles, whether they ordained on a short or a long term basis. All future kings were to be ordained there. It was therefore natural that there was a good relationship between the *Dhammayuttika* fraternity and the powerful nobility, which in turn guaranteed not only the continuity of the reform order but also “compensated for its numerical minority”,<sup>49</sup> despite the king’s neutrality towards both orders. In the meantime, the reforms that Mongkut had begun as a monk, including an emphasis on canonical texts, was continued at Wat Bovonives by his senior pupils. As we have seen, these reforms were not to spread far and wide, but were confined to the reform group. It remained so for a while even after he died.

As a monarch, Rāma IV displayed both rationality and neutrality in his approach towards different groups within the monastic Order. He showed balance in his patronage of both

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, p.182.

<sup>48</sup> Wat Somanassavihar (1853), Wat Pathumvan (1857), Wat Rachapradith (1864) and Wat Makutkasat.

<sup>49</sup> Reynolds, p.65.

orders, *Dhammayuttika* and *Mahānikāya*. He demonstrated no prejudice in making appointments in the *Sangha* hierarchy and in invitations to chant at royal ceremonies. Prince Damrong said that King Mongkut refused to rule in favour of the *Dhammayuttika* in a petition regarding the manner of wearing robes. Despite a request from a senior prince, Somdet Chaophrya Prayurawong, for royal permission to wear the robe in the *Dhammayuttika* style, the king issued a decree permitting monks to wear the robe the way they wished. It was argued by the king that the robe style was a matter for the *Sangha* to decide, not the state.<sup>50</sup>

There were no changes in the *Parian* examinations under his reign. In fact, King Mongkut effected the reforms in the *Sangha* only as a *bhikkhu* with “the privileged status” that came with his “high birth”, but without the backing of the state: it was only towards the end of the Third Reign that the reforms introduced by him actually “gained the king’s (Rāma III’s) hesitant support”.<sup>51</sup>

## **5.4 The National Integration process and Monastic Education under Rāma V (1868-1910)**

### **5.4.1 The Young King, His Reforms and Reform-minded Brothers**

King Mongkut died in 1868 and was succeeded by his son Prince Chulalongkorn, then aged fifteen. During his reign Siam faced new political realities, with “the threat of imperialism” from European colonial powers.<sup>52</sup> “Siam was awkwardly placed between Britain with her Malayan protectorates [and Burma] to the west and France with her

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<sup>50</sup> Rachanubhab, *Khwamsongcham* (Memoirs), pp.86-87.

<sup>51</sup> Reynolds, p.65.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, pp.21-23, 27, 61-62 & Wyatt, *Thailand*, pp.187-208.

colony to the east.”<sup>53</sup> London and Paris “could [also] clash in Siam” for their shared “interest in China and India”.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the interest in Siam that was shown by these colonial powers was equally a great threat to Siam’s sovereignty. For example, Wyatt observes that as “British teak-exploitation activities in lower Burma moved into north Siam in Mongkut’s reign, British interests and involvement in that area began to worry the Siamese”.<sup>55</sup> To safeguard its independence, not only did King Chulalongkorn have to unite his kingdom through national integration programmes but he also had to modernise it.<sup>56</sup>

Although generally the reign of Rāma V has been considered the threshold of the modern era in Siam, there were, however, no rigorous programmes for modernisation in the early years of his reign. The reason for this was partly his youth, for he ascended the throne at the age of fifteen, and partly the resistance of the nobles. When he ascended the throne, King Chulalongkorn had not even finished his education, and the administration of the kingdom was in the hands of the regent. The nobles, who had become increasingly powerful since the beginning of the Ratanakosin dynasty in 1782, stood to lose from the king’s reforms.<sup>57</sup> In fact, not only the nobles but also the heir apparent resisted the reforms. The heir, known by his title as the Second King (*wang na*), was an older prince and was appointed to his position on the death of King Mongkut by the Regent (Chaophraya Sisuriyawong), “because they shared an aversion to reforms which were perceived to be a threat to their interests”.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Nish, “The Policies of the European Powers in Southeast Asia, 1893-1910” *King Chulalongkorn’s Visit to Europe: Reflections on Significance and Impact*, p.14.

<sup>54</sup> Jacquemyns “European Perception of King Chulalongkorn’s Visit to Europe” *King Chulalongkorn’s Visit to Europe: Reflections on Significance and Impact*, p.5.

<sup>55</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand*, p.194.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.208-212.

<sup>57</sup> Charit Tingsabadh, *King Chulalongkorn’s Visit to Europe*, p.23.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

But after the king had his second coronation, when he reached the age of 20 in 1873, he began to introduce many changes, both political and religious. On the political side, the king introduced measures to consolidate power in central Siam, with its capital in Bangkok. In 1874 the king created the Council of State, or cabinet, consisting of twelve members who were mostly his half-brothers such as Prince Devawongse and Prince Damrong, “in order to effect reforms through legislation”.<sup>59</sup> The “progressive institutional innovations” initiated by King Chulalongkorn, including those on finance, education, defence, infrastructure, health and the civil service, brought disadvantage to the Second King and the nobles. As expected, they came into conflict with the king and his cabinet. The clash between the king and his heir apparent resulted in what is now known as “the *wang na* crisis” in 1875. The Second King fled to the British Consul in Bangkok and finally lost the sympathy of both the Siamese elite and the foreign powers. Some of the other nobles were exposed for their abuse of power while some of them were too elderly to continue to oppose the young king.

On the religious front, it was his half-brother Prince-monk Wachirayan[warorot] (1860-1921) who was the main architect of the changes. The *Sangha* underwent administrative and educational reorganization. But before we discuss these transformations, let us first briefly recount the life of Prince Wachirayan, which has been well studied by Reynolds (1972). Prince Wachirayan was one of the sons of King Mongkut and half-brothers of King Chulalongkorn. He received the best education his country could offer at the time, studying Thai with his aunt, Princess Worasetsuda; Pali from the royal pundits; and English, mathematics, geography, history and poetry from Francis George Patterson, an Englishman hired by King Chulalongkorn to educate his half-brothers. In brief, he was in the same royal school as his half-brothers such as Prince Damrong and Prince

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Devawongse, who would one day become Rāma V's indispensable lieutenants in his reform drive. Prince Wachirayan also received the best Buddhist education in the *Dhammayuttika* under the senior disciples of his father, King Mongkut, the founder of the reform Order.

After a period in government service, Prince Wachirayan decided to lead the life of a monk. His ordination took place at Wat Bovonives but he continued his Pali studies under some royal pundits at Wat Makutkasat, another important monastery of the *Dhammayuttika*. Three years after his ordination, he was encouraged by the king and his teachers to enter the *Parian* examinations in 1882. He passed up to *Prayog* Five at the first attempt and as a result was given a royal rank, *Krommamun*, and made the deputy head of the *Dhammayuttika-nikāya* by the king. The head of the *Dhammayuttika* at the time was a senior prince-monk, *Kromphrya* Pavares[variyaalongkorn], who finally became the *Sangharāja* (supreme patriarch) of the Siamese *Sangha*. He was the preceptor of Prince Wachirayan, and has therefore been known as “Prince-Preceptor”.

For the next decade, Prince Wachirayan spent his time teaching Pali and writing textbooks for his students at Wat Makutkasat, the monastery built by his father, King Mongkut. Two of the books he compiled there, *Navakovāda*, an instruction for the newly ordained, and a Pali grammar which ran to four volumes, would come to dominate the curriculum of the Siamese *Sangha* after this reign. Generally, at Wat Makutkasat he experimented with some new ideas about textbooks and teaching methods which we shall shortly discuss. In his experimentations, which were limited to a handful of *Dhammayuttika* monasteries, Prince Wachirayan faced some frustration in implementing his reform ideas thanks to resistance from some senior monks. It should be noted that the reforms that King Chulalongkorn initiated also progressed only slowly between 1888 and

1892 when the transfer of power had not been completed. During that time the king arranged to transfer the responsibilities for reform from the old ministers to his half-brothers, who were now the best educated people in Siam and highly motivated reformers.<sup>60</sup>

#### 5.4.2 The Founding of the Buddhist Monastic Colleges

Towards the end of 1892, the new minister in charge of education, formally called Public Instruction, Phraya Phatsakorawong (Phon Bunnag), proposed to the king and thereafter to the cabinet to set up a new higher and modern college at the *Dhammayuttika* monastery, Wat Makutkasat, obviously because Prince Wachirayan had established a reputation for excellent learning there. This proposal would not only give the *Dhammayuttika*, the minority in the Siamese Order, leverage with the majority fraternity, the *Mahānikāya*, but also help the *Dhammayuttika* achieve institutional acceptability. This acceptability would therefore be attained not mainly because of the increase in the number of monks in the reform Order but also because of its more rigorous academic and monastic training. In fact, from now on we shall see how the expansion of the *Dhammayuttika* academic plan would dominate the history of monastic education in Siam and culminate in its standardisation a few decades later.

However, the establishment of a college for the *Dhammayuttika* was a sensitive decision for the king. He did not want to be seen, on the one hand, to favour one or the other fraternity and, on the other, he was also a pragmatic ruler who wanted to give responsibility to the ablest. Wat Mahathat, the seat of the *sangharāja* since the early days of the Bangkok era and now the centre of the *Mahānikāya*, had long been considered a

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<sup>60</sup> Wyatt, *Politics of Reform*, pp.91-93.

place of higher study in Pali and Buddhist scriptures. To deprive Wat Mahathat of its central position in Siamese monastic education would be an extremely risky decision for the king, for he would alienate the majority of the *Sangha* from his reforms. However, the king knew himself that the *Dhammayuttika* Order had overtaken Wat Mahathat in the field of education and had therefore more potential to help him realise his reforms in general, and in education in particular. The king, while a young prince, was ordained a novice at Wat Mahathat, but then moved to Wat Bovonives, where he was taught the Dhamma.<sup>61</sup> The two monasteries belonged to two different *nikāyas*, the first being the *Mahānikāya* and the other the *Dhammayuttika*. His move to Wat Bovonives suggested that the monarchy considered at the time that a better Buddhist education was available there. Indeed, Wat Bovonives had become an excellent institution for the study of Pali and Buddhism when his father, King Mongkut, then a *bhikkhu*, had been the abbot. So, the king would have to make a careful decision so as not to upset the *Mahanikāya*, on the one hand, and on the other, to make use of what the reform Order, the *Dhammayuttika*, could offer.

In the end, the cabinet decided in 1892 to found two academies. One of the two colleges was to be based at Wat Mahathat and the other at Wat Bovonives. Wat Makutkasat, which had featured in the proposal of the Minister of Public Instruction, had to give way to Wat Bovonives, for the king thought the latter was already the centre of the *Dhammayuttika* Order and was also centrally located in the capital.<sup>62</sup> The objectives in establishing these monastic colleges, according to Prince Damrong and Prince Wachirayan were: to promote the study of Buddhist scriptures, which had been crucial for the future of Buddhism, *phutthasāsanā*, so as to produce able Buddhist monks who could explain the *Dhamma* well to the Buddhist population “like the Christian

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<sup>61</sup> Rachanubhab, *Phrarachphongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin Ratchkarn thi ha*, p.51.

<sup>62</sup> Reynolds, p.175.



missionaries did”; and to standardize the way novices and monks were taught.<sup>63</sup> Here the two princes can be seen as being clearly influenced by western civilisation.

The decision to set up two separate monastic colleges came amid fear among some of the cabinet members that having two different institutions could further divide the *Dhammayuttika* and the *Mahanikāya*; they suggested that the two Orders should therefore share a single academic institution in the interest of the unity of the *Sangha*, which was vital for the future of the kingdom. The king himself was aware of this delicate issue and had therefore taken the measure of reassuring the *Mahanikāya* by transforming Wat Mahathat into a modern college at the same time. In promoting the traditional learning centre at Wat Mahathat of the Mahanikāya, the king renamed Wat Mahathat after himself as Mahachulalongkorn Royal College. It was generously endowed by the king, and was given special attention because it coincided with the cremation of his son, the crown prince, Vajiranuhid. In fact, a new building at the Mahachulalongkorn College was constructed in the memory of the late crown prince.

On the academic side, however, the Mahachulalongkorn Royal College was encouraged by the ministry of Public Instruction to adopt the Mahamakut curriculum, which we shall shortly discuss.<sup>64</sup> This intervention was not without risk, given the tension that had existed between the two Orders since the founding of the *Dhammayuttika*.

Meanwhile, there had been an important development at Wat Bovonives. In October 1892 the Prince-Preceptor passed away, and was succeeded by Prince Wachirayan, who now became the abbot of Wat Bovonives and the head of the *Dhammayuttika*; but not

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<sup>63</sup> Rachanubhab & Prince Wachirayan, “*Karn tang Mahamakut withayalai* (The Establishment of the Mahamakut Royal College)” *Parian ratchkarn thi 5* (The Parian Examinations During the Reign of Rama V), pp.2-3.

<sup>64</sup> Reynolds, pp.181-185.

*sangharāja*, because the king decided to leave the top post in the Siamese *Sangha* vacant for the rest of his reign. Prince Wachirayan also became the head of the Mahamakut Royal College (*Rajāvidyālaya*), which was opened in October 1893.<sup>65</sup>

At Mahamakut Royal College Prince Wachirayan introduced a new Pali curriculum. For the first time there were to be written examinations in place of the traditional oral ones. The new curriculum had six levels. The first three levels were called *nak rian* (student) levels and the rest *Parian*. The highest *nak rian* level was made equal to *prayog* III of the old *Parian*. The Mahamakut curriculum came to be known as *Parian mai*, “new *Parian*”, in contrast to the old *Parian* that had been held at the palace (*sanam laung*). The introduction of the Mahamakut curriculum was the first change in monastic learning to take place under Rāma V. The students at the Mahamakut could choose to enter both or either of “the old *Parian*”, which still maintained oral examinations, and the “Mahamakut *Parian*” examinations. This choice was also given to students at Wat Mahathat and other monasteries. This arrangement was made possible because after 1894 the Mahamakut took over responsibility for the administration of both its own *Parian* and the old *Parian*.

The Mahamakut curriculum does not seem, at first glance, to be very different from the curriculum of the old *Parian*. However, a close examination of the curriculum of the *Dhammayuttika* reveals a very significant change that in some way linked the “deteriorating” state of Siamese Buddhism to the nature of the curriculum of the old *Parian*. We noted earlier that King Mongkut, soon after his ordination in 1824, found the knowledge of Pali canonical literature and the practice of the *Vinaya* among the Siamese monks to be distressingly unsatisfactory. The texts chosen in the Mahamakut curriculum

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<sup>65</sup> “Preface” *Prawat Mahakamut Ratchvithayalai nai boromarachupatham* (History of Mahamakut Royal University) (p.i), mentions that it was founded in October 1892.

were intended to address these two problems. Therefore the Mahamakut curriculum itself would represent a very important change in monastic education in Siam. Let us now briefly examine the Mahamakut curriculum.

#### 5.4.3 The Mahamakut Curriculum<sup>66</sup>

Levels	Syllabus
<b><i>Nak Rian Tri</i></b> (Preliminary Dhamma Student)	Pali grammar
<b><i>Nak Rian Tho</i></b> (Intermediate Dhamma Student)	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i> , Part I; <i>nidāna</i> to be memorised.
<b><i>Nak Rian Ek</i></b> (Advance Dhamma Student)	<i>Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā</i> , Part II; Explanation of verses.
<b><i>Parian Tri</i></b> (Preliminary <i>Parian</i> )	<i>Mangalatthadīpanī</i> , Part I.
<b><i>Parian Tho</i></b> (Intermediate <i>Parian</i> )	<i>Ubhatovibhanga</i> of the <i>Vinayapiṭaka</i>
<b><i>Parian Ek</i></b> (Advance <i>Parian</i> )	<i>Cūḷavagga</i> and <i>Mahāvagga</i> of the <i>Vinayapiṭaka</i>

The study of Pali grammar had been essential for all *Parian* students since the Ayutthaya period. However, Pali grammar had never been a part of the curriculum. This had led to an unsatisfactory situation in the teaching of Pali grammar: it took longer than it should

<sup>66</sup> Prawat Mahamakut ratchvithayalai, p.30.

to acquire basic knowledge of Pali grammar sufficient for the student to read and translate the *Tipiṭaka* by himself. And by the time many students had grasped Pali grammar, many of them had decided to return to lay life, exhausting their enthusiasm for further study before they had even begun reading the important texts of the *Tipiṭaka*. This trend was responsible for the situation in which the Order was left without “higher *Parian*” monks to teach and run the *Sangha*’s affairs. When there were not enough “higher *Parian*” monks to teach, there would not be enough *Parian* monks produced. Moreover, some *Parian* monks were given a *rājagaṇa* rank even before they attained higher *Parian*. Their *rājagaṇa* position brought with it administrative responsibility and kept them away from further study. So in the eyes of the promoters of the *Parian* examinations, namely Prince Damrong and Prince Wachirayan, the neglect of the study of Pali grammar had resulted in this vicious circle.<sup>67</sup> To solve this problem, Prince Wachirayan radically transformed the method of studying Pali grammar: instead of studying Pali grammar in the Pali language as had been the case before, the student would now learn Pali grammar in Thai. For that, Prince Wachirayan compiled a comprehensive guidebook to Pali grammar. With this book, a student would be able to acquire sufficient knowledge of Pali grammar within one year, and his grammatical knowledge would be formally tested according to this new curriculum.

Reading of Pali texts began at the intermediate level. In fact, the student, *nak rian*, not only had to read the introduction (*nidāna*) to the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakatha*, but also had to memorise it. Though memorisation had been an important part of monastic scholastic activities in Siam for a long time, this was the first time learning by heart was formally required of a student. At the Advanced Student level, the student was required to explain stanzas from the *Dhammapada*, and its commentary was prescribed as reading material.

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<sup>67</sup> Rachanubhab & Prince Wachirayan, *Karn tang Mahamakut withayalai*, pp.2-8.

This was more than an exercise of translation skills in the old *Parian* system; and in fact the student had to write essays (*krathu*) on these Pali stanzas. This essay writing was unique to the new *Parian* system and it must have been one of the many influences on Prince Wachirayan from his European teachers.

The six levels of the Mahamakut *Parian* were recognised as equivalent to the nine *prayogs* of the old *Parian*. However, since the number of the levels in the new and old *Parian* differed, the comparison, especially between the higher levels, was far from simple. While the first four levels of the Mahamakut *Parian* were equivalent to the first four *prayogs*, the fifth level of the Mahamakut *Parian*(called *Parian tho*) was recognised as equivalent to the *prayog* level five of the old *Parian*; but if the student added one text from the *Sutta-piṭaka* into the syllabus of this level, then the fifth level in the Mahamakut *Parian* system would be equivalent of the *prayog* level six, and would be called *Parian tho phiset*, “special *Parian tho*”. Similarly, where the sixth level of the Mahamakut *Parian* was recognised as equivalent to *prayog* level seven of the old system, if the student added one extra text from the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka*, then the sixth level of the Mahamakut level would be recognised as equivalent to *prayog* level eight of the old *Parian* and would be called *Parian ek phiset*, “special *Parian ek*”. To achieve the same level as the highest level, *prayog* nine, of the old system, however, the student would have to submit a thesis on the *Dhamma*.

It is clear that the Mahamakut *Parian* was very different from the old *Parian* in its format, especially at the higher level. The *Parian tho*, the fourth level in the Mahamakut system, was considered to be good enough for an average student. We have mentioned that this level was equivalent to *prayog* five of the old *Parian*. The highest level of the Mon *Parian*, which we shall briefly look at later, was also equivalent only to *prayog*

five. The fact that Prince Wachirayan himself and his father, King Mongkut, both attained only *prayog* five, but had been competent enough to carry out great reforms in education and monastic discipline, meant that *prayog* five of the old *Parian*, or its equivalent, was considered the standard required of the many candidates in Siam. The aim of the Mahamakut *Parian* was, therefore, to produce as many successful candidates for *prayog* five, or its equivalent, as possible. And that would have met the three objectives of the founding of the two Buddhist colleges.

For those who were academically more able, however, the Mahamakut system opened the way to achieve their potential. We may notice that the added texts that a student had to work on for the levels higher than the *Parian tho* of the Mahamakut *Parian* were not commonly taught at the time in Siam. Moreover, no text, but only the *piṭaka*, was specified, leaving most of the decision to the student. The most significant feature of the Mahamakut *Parian*, however, was the requirement of the submission of a thesis for the highest level, the formal title of which has not survived. And other aspects of this requirement, for example the number of words, the time limit and supervision, were not defined. But it was specifically stated that the thesis would be examined by both internal and external examiners. Despite the lack of these details, there remains the fact that the Mahamakut *Parian* represented a radical reform in the Siamese monastic education system.

In the Mahamakut curriculum, particularly the three highest levels, the influence of the Mon *Parian* syllabuses was evident. The Mon *Parian* had the whole *Vinaya-piṭaka* as its syllabus. While the *Dhammapada-aṭṭhakatha* was retained, possibly to keep a link with the old system and therefore encourage students already familiar with the old system to

accept the new one, all the texts from the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, except the *Parivāra*, became compulsory in this curriculum.

#### 5.4.4 The *Mon Parian* and its Syllabus

Let us now briefly analyse the *Mon Parian* examinations. The *Mon Parian* probably attracted the attention of people from outside the Mon community in Siam when Prince Mongkut was able to clear his doubt about the scriptures and practice with the help of the head of the *Mon Sangha*, Phra Sumed, in 1824.<sup>68</sup> We do not know when the *Mon Parian* began. No record of Ayutthaya or early Ratanakosin mentions it. However, we can say that the *Mon Parian* was not introduced earlier than the reign of Rāma II, during which the three-level *Parian* was expanded to nine *prayogs*. This was because it was officially made known that the third level of the *Mon Parian* was equivalent to *prayog* four of the old Thai *Parian*; and the *Mon Parian* four was considered equivalent to *prayog* five of the Thai. In the examinations, the candidate of the *Mon Parian* had first to give his answer in his mother tongue, the Mon language, and then had to provide the syntax in Pali to the Thai examiners, who did not understand Mon.<sup>69</sup> This procedure for the Mon candidate took longer than for his Thai counterpart and he was judged by both Thai and Mon members of the *Parian* examinations committee. The *Mon Parian* examinations were abolished in 1892 under Rāma V when written examinations were introduced to the new Thai *Parian* at the Mahamakut. The *Mon Parian* syllabus is given below.

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<sup>68</sup> See pp.220-221.

<sup>69</sup> *Prawat karn suksa*, p.36.

### The Mon Parian Syllabus<sup>70</sup>

Levels	Syllabus
<i>Parian One</i>	<i>Parājika-aniyata Pāli or Pācittiya Pāli of the Vinayapiṭaka.</i>
<i>Parian Two</i>	<i>Mahāvagga or Cūlavagga, Vinayapiṭaka.</i>
<i>Parian Three</i>	<i>Pālimuttakavinayavinicchaya.</i>
<i>Parian Four</i>	<i>Samantapāsādikā.</i>

The first two levels of the Mon *Parians* prescribed canonical texts from the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, while the latter two had a sub-commentary and a commentary prescribed respectively. This syllabus reflected the emphasis on the *Vinaya* by the Mon monks. At *Parian* level one, the student studied the *vibhaṅga* of the *Vinaya-piṭaka* and at *Parian* level two, the *khandhaka*. A Mon monk would only be given a *rājagaṇa* rank if he had attained the highest level, *Parian* four. The Mon *Parian* examinations are no longer held at present and we do not know when they were held for the last time. So far we only have records of the Mon *Parian* between 1893 and 1900. During these years, there were only fifteen candidates achieving second and third levels (equivalent to third and fourth of the Thai *Parian* respectively), and none attained the highest level.<sup>71</sup>

#### 5.4.5 The Introduction of Primary Education in the Provinces

In the meantime one of the central plans of King Chulalongkorn for the modernisation of Siam, the introduction of primary education, seems to have been in difficulty. This education programme was conceived in 1875 but began to be implemented only in 1888 when Prince Damrong became the Minister for “Public Instruction” [i.e. Education]. However, when Prince Damrong was promoted in 1892 to the Interior Ministry to lead

<sup>70</sup> Prawat Mahamakut ratchwithayalai, p.27; Prawat karn suksa, p.49.

<sup>71</sup> Chao Phraya Thammathikoranathipadi, *Parian ratchkarn thi* 5.



the introduction of the civil service to the provinces, “a more pressing national requirement”, the primary education programme seems to have stalled.<sup>72</sup> But even before that the success of the introduction of primary education was limited to Bangkok alone. And Prince Damrong’s successor at the Ministry of Public Instruction, Phraya Phatsakorawong, did not sustain that progress.

Consequently, in 1898 the king decided to bypass his own minister and give the responsibility to Prince Wachirayan, who had established himself as an educationist for the last sixteen years and was now the head of an inspiring Buddhist college.<sup>73</sup> Prince Wachirayan was to introduce primary education to the provinces. This was a very important task, for through this project he would lay the foundations for further educational and administrative changes in the *Sangha*, which, as we shall see later, were central to the national integration process.

For many reasons Prince Wachirayan was in a better position than the Minister of Public Instruction to carry out the task of introducing primary education to the provinces. He had attended, as mentioned earlier, the first English School founded in the palace by his father, King Mongkut, and had also gained a Pali degree.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, by virtue of being the head of the reform Order, the *Dhammayuttika*, and of the Mahamakut Royal College, he was certain to gain the trust of the people on educational matters. He also had at his disposal some *Parian* monks and other academic staff at the Mahamakut Royal College to help him communicate with the monasteries in the provinces, where traditional learning had existed for centuries. Above all, Prince Wachirayan himself was a reformer, who understood the need for the kingdom to modernise in order to preserve her

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<sup>72</sup> Wyatt, *Politics of Reform*, p.144.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, pp.216-217.

<sup>74</sup> See pp.230-232.

independence. (In fact, Prince Wachirayan appointed monks who held Pali degrees to implement the education programme in the provinces.<sup>75</sup>)

Moreover, King Chulalongkorn might have foreseen that the provincial education programme could be introduced by the *Sangha* more safely than by the Ministry of Public Instruction because of political sensibilities in the provinces. The traditional rulers in the provinces, particularly in the north, south and east, would resist any effort to bring them under the control of Bangkok. To solve this problem, the education-director monks from Bangkok would directly approach the provincial *Sangha*, which was influential over the population in the provinces, rather than the ruling families. But the traditionalist monks in the provinces could still oppose the type of curriculum already introduced in Bangkok on the grounds that it emphasised “modern secular subjects”. Although the provincial monasteries never opposed secular subjects, these subjects have never formed the core of the curriculum. But the main objections of the traditionalist monks in the provinces would have been the dominant role of lay teachers that the teaching of modern secular subjects would bring and the use of the central Thai alphabet in place of the alphabets unique to each dialect in their areas.

To overcome these hindrances, Prince Wachirayan in his persuasion of the monks said that the *Sangha* should “not let people think that the *Sangha* is under the control of the Ecclesiastical Department” of the Ministry of Public Instruction.<sup>76</sup> The education-director monks should distribute the *Dhamma* books written by Prince Wachirayan in the central Thai language (*Thai klang*) to the provincial monks and those monks would see no reason to object to a *dhamma* book. In addition, a book for learning central Thai, called the *Rapid Reader*, would be given to those provincial monks only as something to

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<sup>75</sup> For more information on these monks see Wyatt, *Politics of Reform*, pp.237-255; *Prawat Mahamakut ratchwithayalai*, pp.102-136.

<sup>76</sup> Wyatt, cit., pp.237-238.

be read at leisure and not as a textbook. It would be up to the provincial monks whether or not to make use of it. The textbooks on actual modern secular subjects would follow only after some time, partly to give time for the education-director monks to prepare the ground and partly because the textbooks had still to be composed. Although some textbooks had already been composed a few years earlier, new textbooks had to be written because of the situation in the provinces, where there were not enough lay teachers to teach the modern secular subjects. (The standard of education in the provinces was apparently lower than in Bangkok.)

Due to the provincial sensibilities, observes Wyatt, the king himself did not mention *secular subjects* in his decree on provincial education. Instead, he only said that he would “extend his patronage to all monks” and “provide them with government textbooks on moral and other useful subjects”. This would be interpreted by the provincial monks as the king’s desire to promote many of their monasteries to the status of royal monastery, *wat laung*, and that would be appreciated.<sup>77</sup> The king then officially gave Prince Wachirayan the authority to organise the “religion and education of the Buddhist population” and made the Mahamakut Royal College the headquarters of national education in Siam.<sup>78</sup> It was here at the Mahamakut, where there also existed a Thai school and a teachers’ training school, that some provincial monks would soon come to train as teachers and go back to their home towns to raise educational standards. Apart from executing the plans and supervising the director-monks, Prince Wachirayan also had to compile textbooks, mostly with the use of reference books the Thai ambassador in London had acquired for the purpose.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p.236.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p.237.

The primary schools were to continue to have their premises in the monasteries, the traditional seats of learning for centuries. Monks were to be recruited as teachers. In fact, many of them already were. Textbooks were distributed free and the first step was only to persuade the provincial monks to accept the idea of a unified education under Prince Wachirayan; the next step would be to focus on the curriculum. These steps were in line with what Prince Wachirayan and also Prince Damrong thought, that “in the initial stages quantity was more important than quality and starting more important than waiting indeterminately”.<sup>79</sup>

In 1902, after three years, Prince Wachirayan had successfully “completed” the introduction of the primary education system “as a part of the general integration of the provinces into the life of the Thai nation”.<sup>80</sup> There were only 177 schools at the beginning, but that number increased to 790 in 1898 and jumped to 6183 in 1899/1900 and 12062 in 1900/1901. The “popular demand and support for provincial education” was so solid, especially at the lower social levels, that it “was left to develop of its own accord without either compulsion or inducement from the government”.<sup>81</sup>

This success, however, came at a price. During the three years or so when Prince Wachirayan and his staff at the Mahamakut were absorbed in the provincial education project, the development of the Mahamakut as an institution for higher education had been neglected. As a result, after the examinations in 1900, the Mahamakut stopped its own *Parian* programme and instead decided to enter its students for the old *Parian* examinations. The decision was not taken lightly and the Mahamakut informed the king of their decision. The king in his letter to Minister of Public Instruction said that the decision to stop the Mahamakut *Parian* was a “setback” and that the Mahamakut

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p.254.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p.246.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p.253.

teaching method was “very good”. However, the king had one criticism to make of the new *Parian*: “though very good, the Mahamakut *Parian* was very different from the old *Parian*, and whenever a new programme is introduced, it should be made compatible with the old system; the result was all that was important and the [compatibility] would be very desirable”.<sup>82</sup> From this comment it can be seen that the king for his part wished to maintain impartiality between the two Orders, the *Mahānikāya* and the *Dhammayuttika*, and was extremely cautious not to upset the balance of power in favour of one or the other.

As a result of the education director-monks going to the provinces, the *Sangha* in Bangkok exercised more and more control over the provincial *Sangha* through education. Also, given the speed of the modernisation programmes of the country through centralisation, it was inevitable that the *Sangha* in various parts of the country would also be brought under central control. It was only a matter of time before a law was brought in to give legal status to what had already been launched and achieved in connection with national education. The directors of education sent to the provinces had organised some form of ecclesiastical hierarchies, filled vacant positions themselves in certain instances and strengthened monastic discipline. Reynolds notices that the directors focused their attention on “the celebration of Buddhist rites, (and) matters which pertained more directly to the integrity of the *Sangha*, and which varied from province to province”.<sup>83</sup> The director-monks themselves saw that it was essential to have a sound hierarchical organisation if the national education initiatives were to progress. They suggested in 1899 a structure of the *Sangha* that would make ecclesiastical and civil jurisdiction coincide geographically. That involved the creating of hierarchies at *tambon* (commune), sub-district, district and province level, like those at *monthon* (group

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<sup>82</sup> *Prawat Mahamakut ratchwithayalai*, pp.138-139.

<sup>83</sup> Reynolds, p.235.

of provinces) level that had been there since the early Ratanakosin period.<sup>84</sup> Their suggestion would become the blueprint of the first ever *Sangha* Act in Siam, which we discuss next.

#### 5.4.6 The 1902 Sangha Act

Strengthened by the suggestion of the director-monks, Rāma V, who had embarked upon a grand scale of integration, passed the *Sangha* Act in 1902, the first of its kind in Siam to cover the whole country. This ecclesiastical act would, as we shall see, bring the *Sangha* from all parts of the kingdom under a single hierarchy, called the Council of Elders (*Mahāthera samakhom*), which would hold all the executive, legislative and judicial power for the *Sangha*. The act would also reaffirm the traditional patronage of the monarch over the Order, who would have a final say over the appointment of monks to all higher ecclesiastical ranks.

The reason behind the introduction of the 1902 *Sangha* Act has been a subject of interest for many scholars. Ishii, for instance, argues that “the law was prompted by the secular aim of spreading education”.<sup>85</sup> Bhikkhu Payutto, better known in Thailand today as Chao Khun Dhammapitaka, on the other hand, seems to judge that the need for a body such as the Council of Elders merited the passing of this law. The Council of Elders created by the 1902 Act, was “to act as advisor to the king in all affairs concerning the religion and the administration and the support of the *Sangha*”, an explanation also officially given by King Chulalongkorn in the text of the law itself.<sup>86</sup> Bhikkhu Payutto does not comment on other aspects of the *Sangha* act. However, he does point out that royal patronage of

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<sup>84</sup> Report of Phra Methathammarot, director for Nakhon Swan Province, in 1899, cited by Wyatt, *The Politics of Reform*, p.247.

<sup>85</sup> Ishii, *Sangha, State and Society*, p.68.

<sup>86</sup> Rajavaramuni, *Thai Buddhism in the Buddhist World*, p.22.

the Order had already existed before, thus implying that the uniqueness of the 1902 act lays in the creation of the Council of Elders. Phra Sasana Sobhana (1967), presently the *Sangharāja Somdet Nāṇasangvon*, writes in the same spirit when he states that the Council of Elders were “the king’s counsellors”. But he cautions the reader to look at the matter in its historical context, lest it be misunderstood that the 1902 act brought the *Sangha* under the control of the secular authority. Even before the promulgation of the act, he continues, “the *Sangharāja* and the *rajāgaṇas* did not directly rule over the *Sangha*”. It was the Minister of Public Instruction, a lay person, who oversaw religious affairs. In other words, the affairs of the *Sangha* were “closely supervised” by the king himself.<sup>87</sup>

A more general view on the promulgation of the 1902 act is given by Reynolds (1972), who maintains that the reason was to formalise “the administration of the monkhood into law”<sup>88</sup>. The principles in the law, though in existence in a fragmented state for some time, needed to be made uniform, especially in the provinces that the monk-directors found to be varied. Tambiah (1976) agrees with Reynolds when he says the 1902 act was for the “formalisation and legitimation of development in ecclesiastical organization precipitated by the *Sangha*’s involvement with the historic experiment of spreading primary education in Thailand”.<sup>89</sup> The act, indeed, gave centuries-old practices, such as the king’s authority in appointing the *sangharāja* and abbots of royal monasteries, a statutory status for the first time in history, though it had been in force during the Sukhothai period, and was continued at Ayutthaya, Thonburi and in the early Ratanakosin period. In its concept, the 1902 *Sangha* act, therefore, was nothing new, despite the sweeping impact that would follow. The 1902 act also expanded the hierarchical structure to include every village and monastery in the kingdom. Moreover,

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<sup>87</sup> Sobhana, “The Government of the Thai Sangha”, pp.11-12.

<sup>88</sup> Reynolds, p.236.

<sup>89</sup> Tambiah, p.233.

the decree also brought the *Sangha*, already united doctrinally at a *national* level yet culturally diverse in local traditions, into a programme of national integration, steered by Bangkok. The *Sangha* hierarchy created by this act “directly parallels the provincial administrative hierarchy” designed and implemented earlier through the programmes of centralisation of the civil service by Prince Damrong and of the state primary education system by Prince Wachirayan.<sup>90</sup> (It may be recalled here that that secular counterpart of the national hierarchy with the king as its head, was effected a decade earlier, with various provinces grouped into *monthons*.)

We agree with Reynolds and Tambiah that the 1902 *Sangha* act was a matter of formalising a long tradition of royal patronage. However, it should be added here that the 1902 act, when compared with the developments in Burma and Sri Lanka, directly produced two outcomes: firstly, the act, particularly the formation of the Council of Elders, provided a practical framework for a smooth co-existence and co-operation between the two *Sangha nikāyas*, the *Mahānikāya* and the *Dhammayuttika*. The Council of Elders was a unique administrative structure in the history of the Theravada *Sangha* in the world because it brought all *nikāyas* together in the highest decision-making body. This was very important for the unity of the *sangha* in every country. As far as Burma is concerned, it had no such body until 1980, when the state *Sangha Mahānāyaka* committee was created to represent the interests of all the *nikāyas*. Before that, because of the absence of such an all-embracing executive body, no major policies on education could ever be agreed among the different *nikāyas*. In Burma, the failure on the part of the *Sangha* to agree on a set of education reforms proposed by the 1935 *Pathamapyan* Commission and the 1965 Hmawbi Conference was evidence of difficulties that arose due to the absence of a unified body in the *Sangha* hierarchy. As for Sri Lanka, it has

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<sup>90</sup> Keyes, *Thailand*, p.140.



never had such body in which all the *nikāyas* come together. As a result, important acts such as a *Sanghavinicchaya*, an ecclesiastical judicial act that would govern the *Sangha* of all *nikāyas* under the same rule, could not be passed, and consequently discipline could not be enforced.

Secondly, the act made sure that the minority *nikāya* was not put at a disadvantage by its relatively small numbers. In Burma and Sri Lanka, by contrast, the small *nikāyas* were and still are disadvantaged. In Sri Lanka the majority Siam-*Nikāya* has had far more power and prestige than the two smaller *nikāyas*, Amarapura and Rāmañña. In Burma, seats in the highest *Sangha Mahānāyaka* Committee, equivalent to the Council of Elders, were located by the percentage each *nikāya* represented in the population of the *Sangha* nationally. As a result, 87% of the seats went to the *Sudhamma*, the biggest *nikāya*, while the four smallest *nikāyas* had no representation in the committee. Moreover, the two most powerful positions, chairman and secretary-general, were always occupied by the *Sudhamma*. In fact, in Siam the 1902 *Sangha* Act even favoured the minority *nikāya*, the *Dhammayuttika*.<sup>91</sup> This was because the act was silent about the role and appointment of the *sangharāja*, leaving it open for the king to manipulate. With good royal connections, it was the *Dhammayuttika* which benefited from the conspicuously unspecified role of the *Sangharāja* in the act. This was evident in the unusually high number of members of the *Dhammayuttika* appointed to the post of *sangharāja*.

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<sup>91</sup> The *Dhammayuttika-nikāya* is considered by its members to have been established in 1829, when *Bhikkhu* Wachirayan (King Mongkut) moved back to Wat Samorai. Some though take the year 1833, as the founding date of the *nikāya* when he and other *Ramañña* monks consecrated a *sīmā*. It is clear that the *nikāya* was well established before 1902 for two reasons: the establishment of the Mahamakut Buddhist College (now University) in 1894 for the *Dhammayuttika* by King Chulalongkorn, and the appointment of Prince Bhikkhu Wachirayan as deputy commissioner of the *Dhammayuttika* prior to that. Despite this, there is a popular belief that the *Dhammayuttika* came into being only with the enactment of the 1902 *Sangha* Act. This is historically incorrect. For more detail, see, *Pravat Mahamakut Ratch Vidyalai nai phra boromrachupatham*, pp.1-4; *Ñāṇasamvara, Buddhasāsanavamsa*, pp.3-28.

However, the 1902 *Sangha* Act was subject to some changes by the revolutionary government which introduced a constitutional monarchy in 1932. In 1941, the government attempted to decentralise and democratise the ecclesiastical organisation by modifying the Council of Elders into three separate bodies: the executive body called the ecclesiastical cabinet (*khan song montri*); the ecclesiastical assembly (*sanghasabhā*); and the ecclesiastical court (*khana winai thorn*). The executive body was divided into four: administration; education; propagation of the *Dhamma*; and public work. Owing to these changes, the Council of Elders ceased to exist. With more members – up to 45 in all – in the executive, legislative and judicial council, reflecting the population of each *nikāya*, it was the minority *nikāya*, the *Dhammayuttika*, that was at this time at a disadvantage. But the 1941 version was replaced in 1963 with the earlier version, i.e. the 1902 version, by Prime Minister Sarit. And, it is the 1963 version *Sangha* act, which is now in force.

We should now briefly describe the structure of the *Sangha* hierarchy created by the 1902 act. (Note that apart from the changes described above, the administrative structure of the *Sangha* in all the three versions, 1902, 1941 and 1963, has been the same.) The ecclesiastical hierarchy had at its summit the *sangharāja*, who, if he so wished, wielded a considerable amount of power. He was appointed by the king. His term was usually for life. With twenty other senior monks with the ranks of *somdet* and *rong-somdet* (assistant *somdet*), also appointed by the king, the *sangharāja* formed the *Mahāthera Samakhom* (*mahāthera samāgama*), “The Council of Elders”, the highest authority responsible for all executive, legislative and judicial matters. The *Mahāthera Samakhom* thus now controlled all *Sangha* affairs including curriculum, ritual practices and the establishment of new monasteries.

According to the *Sangha* Act, each province was to be ruled by a *Sangha* provincial governor. Immediately above them were eighteen regional governors (*chao gaṇa phak*), each overseeing a few provinces. Five other senior monks were appointed as *chao gaṇa monthons*: four of them from the *Mahānikāya*, which administered the seventeen regions among themselves. However, a *Dhammayuttika* member of the same rank had authority over all *Dhammayuttika* regional governors throughout the country. Lower down the ladder in the hierarchy were the head of a district (*amphoe*), a village (*tambon*) and a monastery (*wat*), in that order. The head of a *wat* (abbot) had direct responsibility for all resident monks in his monastery.

The *Sangha* Act also required all *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras* to carry an identity card. In Thailand all adults carried identity cards, but the much larger one for *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras* was actually a book recording all important personal information since entry into the Order, bearing the signatures of all abbots and the district *Sangha* governor under whose jurisdiction one happened to reside.

Notwithstanding the bureaucratisation of the *Sangha* administration, the abbot remained the most powerful authority, as before. He was responsible for the education of monks and lay people in his care. He had to notify the authorities about the monks and lay people in his care. But, his authority as to admission and termination of residency in his monastery was unchallenged. Moreover, the *Sangha* Act gave all abbots the backing of the ecclesiastical and secular authority in the area. If the abbot disagreed with him, a resident monk could hardly get any official work done. Today in Thailand, for instance, to apply for a passport a *bhikkhu* needs to collect a string of signatures, starting with his own abbot. If the signature of his abbot is not on the application, no higher *Sangha*

authority will pay attention to it. Without the approval of the *Mahāthera samakhom*, he cannot expect the government agency to issue a passport.

On the issue of temple property, the *Sangha* Act stated that a temple was theoretically the property of the whole *sāsana*, though no monastery/temple needed to share its wealth with others. This rule made it clear that the abbot was thus only the guardian of the donations and property, including compounds and estates dedicated to his monastery. He had to keep an account of all the property. He had no power to appoint a successor to look after the property nor could he establish a lineage by ordaining someone, as in Sri Lanka. Nor had he power to appoint any one he deemed fit, as in Burma. In short, he was not the owner but the guardian.

The act, in addition, defined the power of the Council of Elders. The decision of the Council “under His Majesty’s grace” was final. The king retained direct appointment of abbots in Bangkok, and in the provinces it was the task of the regional governor to call a meeting of the monks of the monastery and devotees to select an abbot. If the selection by the monks of the monastery and its devotees was disputed, the governor himself appointed the abbot. The act also classified three types of monastery: royal, common, and ecclesiastical abode, the last of which was yet to get monastery status. The act even required that permission be sought for building a new monastery, and also for developing a newly repaired monastery or for developing an ecclesiastical abode into a monastery.

The implementation of this historic *Sangha* act, however, was delayed to give time to people to prepare for it. It was early in the next reign between 1915 and 1918 that the act was implemented, and during that time the Prince-Patriarch made at least eight inspection tours in the provinces. The tours altogether took almost three hundred days

and the Prince-Patriarch took the opportunity to meet government officials and the *Sangha* hierarchy everywhere he went. These tours were to implement the *Sangha* act as well as to introduce the newly created curriculum, which would embrace the whole of Siamese monastic scholarship for many generations to come.

There was some resistance in the provinces to the centralisation brought about by the 1902 *Sangha* Act. This was because the Act gave the *Sangha* in Bangkok and their patron, the king, all the power to make final decisions. In addition, it was also because the centralisation, as Donald K. Swearer<sup>92</sup> and S. J. Tambiah<sup>93</sup> observe, “erecting a national *Sangha* organisation” controlled from Bangkok meant “the elimination of regional variants”. Kamala Tiyanich has taken the subject further by focussing her research, *Forest Recollections*, on some of the best known twentieth-century local Buddhist practices outside Bangkok.

#### **5.4.7 A New Curriculum (*Nak Tham*) and the Standardisation of Monastic Education**

A few years after the *Sangha* act had been passed, monastic education was forced to reflect the changing political conditions once more. For the first time a standing army was established in Siam in 1905 with the Royal Edict on Military Conscription, enacted by King Chulalongkorn just five years before he died. This law, which required all able-bodied men to serve in the army for two years, exempted all *bhikkhus* from the draft, but among *sāmaṇeras*, “novices”, excused only those who were considered to be *phu ru tham*, “ones who know the *Dhamma*”. The edict, however, did not specify what qualified one as *phu ru tham*. In 1911 King Rāma VI (1910-1925) therefore asked Prince

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<sup>92</sup> Swearer, “Centre and Periphery: Buddhism and Politics in Modern Thailand” *Buddhism and Politics in twentieth-century Asia*, pp.203-205.

<sup>93</sup> Tambiah, pp.245-246.

Wachirayan, whom he had promoted to *kromphraya* rank and the position of *Sangharāja* with the title “the Prince-Patriarch (*somdet mahā samaṇa chao*)”, and the *Mahāthera Samakhom* to determine that qualification. As a result, a new set of examinations was eventually introduced. This new set of examinations, *Nak Tham*, would radically change the way the Siamese *Sangha* was educated. The effect, which would be felt throughout the country within ten years of its introduction, meant that national integration was further strengthened through standardisation of monastic education.

The request by the king to the *Mahāthera Samakhom* to define the qualifications of those novices to be exempt from conscription was the first time that Siam made a coordinated effort to settle once and for all the problem that had often brought the secular ruler and the *Sangha* into conflict. We have already discussed in the previous chapter how the problem of conscription brought King Narai and the Order into conflict. But this time Rāma V, unlike King Narai in the late seventeenth century, was very fortunate in the sense that there was now a very important link between the *Sangha* and the monarchy in the person of the Prince-Patriarch, whom Reynolds describes as “the representative” of the royal family in the *Sangha*.<sup>94</sup>

The Prince-Patriarch, in his communication with the *Sangha* from the whole kingdom, set out to quell any potential resistance within the *Sangha*. He justified, from canonical scripture, that “monks should comply with the government, and not disobey”, quoting an incident during the Buddha’s time when the monks were told by the Buddha that they should follow the king [*Bimbisāra*]’s request.<sup>95</sup> (The request of the king was that the monks observe a three months retreat in his kingdom. But since it was during the summer, the monks refused. On hearing of it, the Buddha said that monks should follow

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<sup>94</sup> Reynolds, pp.67-68.

<sup>95</sup> Wachirayanwarorot, *Thalaengkarn khana song* (Bulletin of the Sangha), pp.122-123.

the king's request.<sup>96</sup>) This appeal to the *Sangha* was unlikely to meet real resistance because at that time the country had just gone through the period when there was “the threat of European colonialism”. Indeed, those threats helped foster nationalism under Rāma VI.

In the same year, 1911, the Council of Elders, led by Prince-Patriarch Wachirayan, created a new curriculum to define the qualification of *phu ru tham*. This creation of a new curriculum resulted from the Prince-Patriarch's conclusion that the *Parian* curriculum was “restricted” to students fortunate enough to study at royal monasteries in the capital Bangkok; it had “not spread to the provinces”.<sup>97</sup> As all the prescribed texts in the *Parian* examinations were in Pali, which required some time to master, monks and novices who did not stay long enough to gain sufficient knowledge of Pali could not enter for the *Parian* examinations. This also meant that they had no chance of reading the words of the Buddha, for they were mostly available until then only in Pali.

In fact, in the provinces the monks and novices “have only not studied in this [translating based education] method [required in the old *Parian* examinations], but not in other ways either”.<sup>98</sup> It was found that even the *bhikkhus* who had been ordained for several years did not have sufficient knowledge of the *dhamma* and *vinaya* because they had no access to the *Tipiṭaka* in the Thai language. Therefore, to test the knowledge of *phu ru tham* in practical terms there should be a new curriculum and it should be in the vernacular language. But even in its early stages of conception, the curriculum soon proved to outgrow its original objective of providing a measure for exemption from conscription, and in fact came to be envisioned as a course that could improve the

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<sup>96</sup> *anujānāmi bhikkhave rājānaṃ anuvattitum.*

<sup>97</sup> Wachirayanwarorot, *Thalaengkarn khana song*, I, 1913, p.132.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

religious education of the majority of the *Sangha*.<sup>99</sup> This will be evident when we examine the various stages in which changes to the curriculum occurred. Below is the curriculum of the *Nak Tham*, “the course for *dhamma* student” as it was created in 1913.

#### 5.4.8 The Curriculum of the Two-level *Nak Tham*

Level	Ordinary	Special
Prayog One	<i>Dhammavibhāga</i> <sup>100</sup>	+ <i>Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā</i> , translation exercise
	Essay writing	
Prayog Two	Life of the Buddha	+ Pali grammar and the study of Pali syntax
	Essay writing	

As can be seen in the above table, this course initially had two levels: *prayog* one and two; and each *prayog* was further divided into two: ordinary and special. At the ordinary levels no knowledge of Pali was required. However, the same course would be elevated to special grade when a paper on Pali translation or Pali grammar and the study of Pali syntax were added. The candidates from Bangkok had to go for the special course from the beginning but those in the provinces were allowed to sit for the ordinary *prayogs*. However, once a provincial examination centre had held the *Nak Tham* for three years, all the candidates there had to start with the special courses, meaning that they had to study the *Dhamma* in both the vernacular language and Pali.

A pass in the ordinary *prayog* level one was sufficient for a *sāmaṇera* in the provinces to be exempt from conscription, while his counterpart in Bangkok needed a special course at the same level. However, to receive a certificate of the *Nak Tham* examinations, the

<sup>99</sup> *Prawt karn suksa*, pp.51, 56.

<sup>100</sup> See pp.259-260.



student had to also pass another paper, *Vinayapaññatti*, a work by the Prince-Patriarch that explains the *Pātimokkha* rules. But only *bhikkhu* students were eligible to sit this paper. Therefore, the *sāmaṇeras* who had completed both levels had to wait until they had received *upasampadā*, “higher ordination”, before they were allowed to sit the *Vinayapaññatti*.<sup>101</sup> This certificate of *Nak Tham* was called *Parian tham prayog* two and was equivalent to *prayog* three of the old *Parian*.

It is worthy of notice that three terms, *Parian*, *tham* and *prayog* were used together here. The *Parian* also the formal examination in monastic education, had by this time come to be so highly regarded among Siamese monastic scholars so that any new qualification had to adopt the name *Parian* as part of its title. We have seen earlier that both the Mon and the Mahamakut curricula also used the term *Parian*. Another term, *tham* (*dhamma*), was frequently used by the *Dhammayuttika*, the reform Order, to differentiate their puritanical identity from the traditionalists. The word *prayog* had been a part of the *Parian* system, and thus carried authority in the history of Siamese monastic scholarship. The use of these terms indicates the Prince-Patriarch’s skilful approach in his persuasion of the majority of the *Sangha* to follow the changes he introduced.

#### 5.4.9 The Three-level *Nak Tham*

Substantial changes were made to the *Nak Tham* even during its formative years. In 1915, two years after the *Nak Tham* had been introduced, the students in Bangkok came to be required to pass both levels, *prayog* one and two, in the same examinations. The candidates in the provinces would be required to do the same in three years. This requirement effectively combined *prayog* one and two into *Nak Tham tri* (third level *Nak*

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<sup>101</sup> Prawatk karn suksa, pp.58-59.

*Tham*), the lowest grade in the *Nak Tham* examination system as we have it now. In 1918 *Nak Tham tho* (second level *Nak Tham*) was introduced and the special *Nak Tham* levels requiring the candidates to have some Pali knowledge were abandoned; for those desiring to attain that, the old *Parian* would remain there. In the meantime the Prince-Patriarch continued to write textbooks, which we shall discuss below, for the *Nak Tham* curriculum until he died in 1921. The highest level, *Nak Tham ek* (first level *Nak Tham*), was introduced only after the death of the Prince-Patriarch.

All the textbooks initially prescribed in the *Nak Tham* were written by the Prince-Patriarch. But some of them were not organically intended for the *Nak Tham* and had been compiled long before the *Nak Tham* curriculum was conceived in 1911 to explain the problems in the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. These books included the famous *Navakovāda* (*Nawakowart*), *Buddhasāsanasubhāsita* (*putthasāsanasuphasit*), and Pali grammar; these were all written at Wat Makukasat during the ten years 1882-1892, before the Prince-Patriarch had assumed any important educational and administrative role in the kingdom, and indeed in the *Dhammayuttika*. Although the books were composed to help the initial training of his students at Wat Makutkasat, there is no doubt that the author had the general problem of ecclesiastical education in Siam in mind. Collected from various Pali canonical sources, the books were written in the vernacular language and contained the Prince-Patriarch's commentary. Before they were adopted as textbooks of the *Nak Tham* in the 1910s, these textbooks were used as part of the Mahamakut curriculum.

The *Navakovāda*, "instruction for the newly ordained", was initially divided into three parts: *Vinayapaññatti*, *Dhammavibhāga* and *Gihipaṭṭipatti*. The *Vinayapaññatti* was an outline of the Pātimokkha. Some of the Pātimokkha rules were abbreviated but others

were expanded to make each one “simple and self-explanatory”.<sup>102</sup> The *Dhammavibhāga*, “Classification of the Dhamma” was a collection of edifying sayings of the Buddha arranged numerically as in the *Anguttara-nikāya*. The *Gīhipaṭipatti*, “Layman’s Practice”, contains likewise sayings of the Buddha for householders arranged numerically. Clearly the first part was to provide guidance to someone newly ordained on monastic training; the second to give basic knowledge of the Dhamma; and the third to prepare them to become good Buddhist citizens, should they return to lay life. The strength of the *Navakovāda* was, remarks Zack, “its commitment to the use of the vernacular language,” with its sources drawn from Pali works “from all levels of the traditional curriculum for *Parian* plus other equally respected scriptures”, providing “a firm foundation in the religious principles accessible to the newcomer”.<sup>103</sup>

The *Buddhasāsanasubhāsita*, “Buddhist proverbs”, was compiled at the request of Rāma V in 1904 in celebration of the Prince-Patriarch’s elevation from *Krommamum* to *kromlaung* rank. Initially containing 249 aphorisms, the expanded and final version of this work had 919 proverbs, gathered from the Pali canon. It was arranged in an alphabetical order: *aṭṭhaka-vagga*, *appamāda-vagga* etc.

The work on Pali grammar by the Prince-Patriarch was in response to the deficiency he found in the study of Pali by the traditional method. Traditionally, *Kaccāyana*’s Pali grammar and *nāmapadamāla* were taught with the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* as an exercise to gain translation skills. The Prince-Patriarch saw this method as slow and ineffective.<sup>104</sup> Now his work, conveniently called *waiyakorn* (grammar), was written in the Thai vernacular and arranged into topic headings covering in stages elision, nouns, prefixes, suffixes, verbs etc. It would allow the student to gain a rapid but thorough

<sup>102</sup> Wachirayanwarorot, “Introduction” *Navakovāda*, p.xiv.

<sup>103</sup> Zack, p.194.

<sup>104</sup> *The Life of Prince-Patriarch Vajirañña*, p.31.

knowledge of the linguistic background of the subject. In contrast to the spoon-feeding technique of the old method, this new work urged the instructor to guide the student so that he learned how to think for himself. And instead of reciting, as in the old method, the student should be asked to translate Pali sentences according to the grammatical principles he had learnt before the teacher analysed them and corrected him. The *Life of the Buddha (phutthapawat)* was written in a way that avoided the “accounts of miracles [that] may have been accumulated gradually from various sources, the chief one being perhaps the imagination of poets, who preferred to relate the story in similes and exaggerated form for the sake of the beauty of language”.<sup>105</sup>

Besides those composed prior to the conception of the *Nak Tham* curriculum, there were also some textbooks specifically written for the *Nak Tham* curriculum. These included works intended to widen the knowledge of the student on the *Vinaya*, the lives of the immediate disciples of the Buddha, meditation and Abhidhamma. The *Vinayamukha*, providing the training rules outside the *Pātimokkha*, was mainly drawn from the *khandhaka* of the *Vinaya-piṭaka* and its commentary. The work on the *Lives of the Disciples (anuputthapawat)*, never properly collected before, emphasised for each their last life during which they met the Buddha, differentiating it from the legendary accounts of the previous lives.

The work on meditation, the Essentials of *Samatha (hua chai samatha kammathan)* and *Vipassanā (wipassana kammathan)*, was partially written prior to the introduction of the *Nak Tham* curriculum and partially after it. The *Samatha* part extensively dealt with the practice of the thirteen *dhutangas* and how to overcome the five hindrances of mind (*nīvaraṇa*), but the Prince-Patriarch dealt with *vipassanā* meditation very briefly in this

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<sup>105</sup> Wachirayanwarorot, *The Life of the Buddha*, p.14.

textbook. Although himself a scholar and administrator, the Prince-Patriarch said that meditation practice was important to the understanding of Buddhist texts.<sup>106</sup> The work on the *Abhidhamma* was called *Dhammavicāraṇa* (*thammawicharn*), “Investigation of the *Dhamma*”, and it reaffirmed the traditional understanding of the *Abhidhamma* as ultimate *dhamma*, non-conventional and higher teaching (*paramattha-dhamma*). Unique to the *Nak Tham* curriculum was a work called *Maṅgalavisesagāthā*, the record of King Chulalongkorn’s meritorious deeds and achievements. Although this kind of royal praise was not new in Siam, this work would help present the king to the provincial *Sangha* as an ideal Buddhist king who preserved the *sāsana* and protected the people. Below is a table showing how these texts were prescribed in the three-level *Nak Tham* curriculum.

#### 5.4.10 The Three-level *Nak Tham* Curriculum

Level	Curriculum
<b><i>Nak Tham Tri</i></b> (Third/ Preliminary Level)	<i>Vinayapaññatti</i>
	<i>Dhammavibhāga</i> I
	<i>Gīhipaṭipatti</i>
	<i>Vinayamukha</i> I
	<i>Buddhasāsanasubhāsita</i> I
	The Life of the Buddha
<b><i>Nak Tham Tho</i></b> (Second / Intermediate level)	<i>Dhammavibhāga</i> II
	<i>Vinayamukha</i> II
	<i>Saṅgītigāthā</i>
	<i>Buddhasāsanasubhāsita</i> II

<sup>106</sup> Wachirayanwarorot, “*Hua chai samatha kammathan* (The Essentials of Samattha Meditation)” *Tham khadi* (Themes of the Dhamma), p.179.

	The Lives of the Disciples
<p><b><i>Nak Tham Ek</i></b> (First/ Advanced Level)</p>	<i>Dhammavicāraṇa</i>
	<i>Vinayamukha</i> III
	<i>Samatha Vipassanā Kammathan</i>
	<i>Vinayamukha</i> III
	<i>Buddhasāsanasubhāsita</i> III
	<i>Maṅgalavisesagāthā</i>

The *Nak Tham* curriculum as a whole, therefore, reflected the intellectual authority of the *Dhammayuttika* reforms: these texts provide information directly from the *Sutta*- and *Vinaya-piṭaka* before students came to study commentaries. The *Nak Tham* were supposed to train students to become rational, for one of the papers encouraged students to express themselves freely (*krathu tham*) as they would preach to people. The emphasis on canonical materials was in marked contrast to the existing *Parian* tradition, which taught students the commentarial literature before introducing them to the *suttas*.

## 5.5 Conclusion

We have shown that throughout his involvement with the introduction of the *Nak Tham* curriculum the Prince-Patriarch emphasised two points: the standardisation of Siamese monastic education and the integration of the provincial *Sangha*. These two objectives were educational and political respectively; they were entwined with one another. His concerns were reflected in the way the provincial *Nak Tham* examination centres were treated with favour in the first three years, for fear that they would not be able to catch up with the progress already made in Bangkok. This special treatment was in contrast with

the *Parian* system, both the old and the Mahamakut, that had shown no concern for the *Sangha* in the provinces, with its lower standard of education. Moreover, even in Bangkok the Mahamakut *Parian* system was inclined to become more and more confined to the *Dhammayuttika* as the *Mahānikāya* monks either did not have the facilities to study the Mahamakut *Parian* or chose to preserve the old *Parian*. The *Nak Tham* curriculum, however, was created to go beyond sectarian and geographical limits, although the *Dhammayuttika* monks were dominant in both the drafting and the implementing stages. It should be noticed that the Mahamakut *Parian*, on the one hand, was introduced in 1892 when the full-fledged integration programmes of King Chulalongkorn were just about to begin and at the height of the threat of colonial powers. The *Nak Tham* curriculum, on the other hand, which was conceived under King Chulalongkorn, was introduced under his son and successor King Vajiravudh (Rāma VI) after national integration had been achieved.

## Chapter Six

### **Idealism and Pragmatism Dilemmas in the Current Monastic Education Systems of Burma and Thailand**

In the previous five chapters we discussed how, since the seventeenth century, the monastic education system in Burma and Thailand has changed as a result of geopolitical influences: ecclesiastical education was brought under the control of the monarch. And formal examinations, as a mechanism to control ordination and education in the monasteries, were introduced and then used to standardise monastic education.

In this chapter we shall argue that, given the magnitude of the changes, social, political or otherwise, which have taken place in Burma and Thailand since the seventeenth century, particularly from the mid-nineteenth century, it was inevitable that the *Sangha*'s education would be also affected. We shall then also discuss the development of monastic education in the latter half of the twentieth century. In doing so, we will examine two important issues: the lack of agreement between reformers and conservatives within the *Sangha* as to the aim of modern monastic education; and the impact of western secular education upon the debate between them. Finally, we shall summarise our observations with an analysis of actual questions and answers from the examination boards of the *Sangha* in Burma and Thailand. In this chapter we hope to point out that *Sangha*'s lack of proactive vision on education has been one of the main reasons contributing to the ineffective state of current monastic education in both countries.



## 6.1 Inevitable Changes

There are two main reasons why it would have been impossible for the *Sangha* to remain untouched by the changes taking place in both countries. First, as already noted in chapters Two and Four, there was a close connection between the monarchy and the *Sangha* from the time Buddhism was introduced to Burma and Thailand. The *Sangha* benefited from the king not only through material support for the upkeep of monasteries, particularly teaching monasteries<sup>1</sup>, but also through protection “not necessarily from external encroachment,” as Prince Dhaninivat remarks, “but from the monks’ own failings”<sup>2</sup>. The present Sangharāja of Thailand writes that the *Sangha* not only has “no instrument of government which holds together all *bhikkhus*” but also “lack[s] authority to deal with certain matters”, for example, a pupil disobeying his preceptor and refusing “to leave the monkhood”.<sup>3</sup> The monarch, on the other hand, saw the *Sangha* as the main source of moral legitimation for his political authority and made efforts to maintain close ties with influential members of the Order. As a result of this close relationship, it was unlikely that the Order could remain untouched by the changes affecting the monarch.

Secondly, the *Sangha* was at the heart of society, not least because of its role as the provider of education to the wider society. But the society needed to modernise itself and thus its educational needs changed from time to time. This need for society to have a more sophisticated education was urgent in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Burmese and Siamese kingdoms wished to acquire more sophisticated “weaponry, steamships, telegraphs, hospitals, smoke-billowing mills”<sup>4</sup> and administrative machinery. As a result, in Burma and Siam, society as a whole began to

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<sup>1</sup> *Phongsawadan phak thi* 51 (Chronicle, Part 51), pp.18-34.

<sup>2</sup> Dhaninivat, “Monarchical Protection of the Buddhist Church in Siam” *Visakhapuja*, 2508 (1965), p.6.

<sup>3</sup> Sobhana “The Government of the Thai Sangha” *Visakhapuja*, 2510 (1967), p.9.

<sup>4</sup> Thant Myint-U, p.113.

require a more sophisticated general education, and that was not available in the monasteries.

Therefore the king had to find alternatives to provide a better general education, that is, to send students abroad to where they could obtain such education, and to set up schools independent of monasteries. In Burma, in 1859, King Mindon (1853-1878) sent the first state scholars to St. Cyr and the École Polytechnique in France. More students, some as young as fifteen, were sent to Calcutta, India and Europe, mainly France and England. Between 1859 and 1870, Mindon sent a total of at least seventy students abroad for western secular education. He also encouraged the Christian missionaries to set up schools where western secular subjects would be taught. The first schools for laity not run by the *Sangha* were set up by Dr. John Marks, a British missionary, and Bishop Bigandet, a French Catholic missionary, in Mandalay.<sup>5</sup> The king provided these missionaries with lands and financial assistance to build churches and schools<sup>6</sup> where his sons, including Prince Thibaw, were educated.

In Siam, King Chulalongkorn sent students first to the famous Raffle's School in Singapore, a British colony, and then to Europe, mainly Germany and England. One of his sons, Prince Vajiravud, received his general education in England and later graduated from Christ Church, Oxford. In fact, secular schools offering western secular subjects had been first set up in the palace in the previous reign by King Mongkut (1851-1868). Mongkut was well versed in both traditional Buddhist learning and western sciences, which he had studied with American and French missionaries during his monkhood at Wat Bovonives. This secular school was expanded by Mongkut's successor, King

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<sup>5</sup> Daw Tin Sein, "The Role of the Christian Missions in the Relationship between Burma and the West-17-19<sup>th</sup> AD" *Studies of Burmese History*, p.441.

<sup>6</sup> Shwe Gaing Tha, *The Centenary of Mandalay*, p.216.

Chulalongkorn, in the 1890s when he introduced, as mentioned in the previous chapter, a secular primary education system to the whole kingdom.

In fact, the monasteries had not only lacked a general system of education similar to western secular education, but also were reluctant to embrace one when it was offered to them, as would happen in the next few decades. In Lower Burma from 1866 and in Upper Burma from 1896, the colonial authorities made attempts to offer support to modernise the curriculum in the existing monastery schools.<sup>7</sup> In 1894, the chief commissioner wrote in his report: “Where *kyaungs* (monastic schools) exist, which are supported by the people, and in which the instruction is efficient, it is not desirable to encourage the opening of lay schools. The efforts of the department should be devoted to improving the indigenous institutions of the district<sup>8</sup>”. However, the monasteries were, as Mathews notes, unprepared “to come to grips with ideological and intellectual issues associated with modernisation and foreign cultural presence”.<sup>9</sup> The monasteries resisted introducing additional subjects, even ones such as English and arithmetic.<sup>10</sup> So the attempts by the British rulers to modernise 20,000 monastery schools failed.<sup>11</sup>

In Siam, too, there was similar resistance to the introduction of western secular subjects. We have discussed how King Chulalongkorn (Rāma V) treated the introduction of primary education extremely carefully because most schools were situated in monasteries and the monks could object to the teaching of what they considered to be secular subjects.<sup>12</sup> Even some of the most progressive monasteries were not always ready to embrace western secular education. For instance, Rāma V attempted to make Wat

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Religion and Politics*, p.58.

<sup>8</sup> Report on Public Instruction in Burma, 1893-94, pp.9-10, cited by Smith, p.60.

<sup>9</sup> Mathews, “Buddhism and the Nation in Myanmar” *Buddhism and Politics*, p.29.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, p.60.

<sup>11</sup> *Report on the National Education in Buddhist Monasteries Inquiry Committee, 1948* cited by Mandelson, p.259.

<sup>12</sup> See, pp.243-244.

Bovonives the centre of “relevant education in an age of progressive education”<sup>13</sup> not only “for the whole kingdom of Siam” but also “for other countries”.<sup>14</sup> The king’s vision of “progressive education” was planned and implemented by his brother Prince-Patriarch Vajirayan, who combined the study of Buddhism and the secular subjects newly introduced from the west. We have already mentioned that Vajirayan was educated in the palace secular school and later also at Wat Makutkasat, where he studied for a Pali degree. However, although under Prince-Patriarch Vajirayan Wat Bovonives became a teachers’ training college for some time, it did not become the desired centre of learning that promoted secular knowledge guided by Buddhist philosophy for the masses. Prince-Patriarch Vajirayan was the only monk there who had sufficient secular knowledge of his time and understood the needs of the kingdom. The others at Wat Bovonives and its branch monasteries were initially even reluctant to support the modernization of the Pali curriculum introduced by the Prince-Patriarch, let alone the introduction of secular subjects. Therefore Vajirayan’s initiatives, such as the teachers’ training school and the Thai school at Wat Bovonives, soon came to an end.<sup>15</sup>

Here, there was also a radical change for the monasteries in what were considered to be secular subjects. Secular education was earlier taken by the monks to mean sciences, which were not directly relevant or even considered by some to be inimical to achieving enlightenment. These subjects ranged from astrology, medicine, healing and carpentry, the skill of the blacksmith and goldsmith, and martial arts. However, by the second half of the nineteenth century (after the lower part of Burma had been annexed into British India), secular education in Burma and Siam came to mean the type of education which would secure those who had studied a job, a position in society, and in general the type

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<sup>13</sup> *Prawat mahamakut ratchwithayalai nai phra bromratchupatham*, p.73.

<sup>14</sup> *Prawat karn suksa khong song*, p.103.

<sup>15</sup> *Prawat Krasuang suksathikarn*, pp.217, 335; *Prawat mahamakut ratchwithayalai nai phra bromratchu-patham*, p.157.

of education to make one a good bureaucrat. In brief, people wanted a secular education system like that of the West.

It was therefore only a matter of time before the educational role of the *Sangha* would be taken over by the state. The introduction of formal examinations in the seventeenth century was but the start of a long process, which would culminate in the *Sangha* relinquishing its role as the provider of education to the wider society.

## **6.2 The *Sangha* Left in Control**

Although initiatives to introduce formal examinations for the *Sangha* mostly came from the rulers of the land, once established the formal examination boards were, even so, kept under the control of the *Sangha*. The authority to set the curriculum, hold the examinations and to evaluate the performance of students and teachers was in the hands of leading abbots and monastic scholars, who were on the boards of various examinations. Even today, the curricula for the monks are taught only in the monasteries by monks. Usually two to three monks, selected from those actively involved in teaching, are assigned the task of setting questions for one paper. With their questions these monks also provide answers to the board of examinations. In Burma, the identity of those who set the questions always remains secret; the answers they provide for their questions are also known only to those marking the answer scripts and are not made public. However, in Thailand, the examination board publishes the names of those who set questions as well as the answers to their own questions as part of their report, which is available to the public.

The marking takes place a month or so after the examinations have been taken. The markers, numbering a couple of hundred each year, get together in the headquarters of the examination board to evaluate the answers. In Burma, Kabha-aye, the venue of the Sixth Buddhist Council in 1954-1956, was the headquarters until 1998, when the military government decentralised the *Pathamapyan* examinations. Since then, the marking has taken place at the monastery of the head of the *Sangha* in every district where the examinations are held. In Thailand, the *Nak Tham* and the *Parian* examinations remain centralised, and therefore the marking is carried out in the monastery of the abbot who holds the chairmanship (*mea kong sanam laung*) of the examinations board. In recent years it has been at Wat Samphraya in Bangkok.

### **6.3 Failure to Improve**

Despite the fact that the control of formal examinations, and thus the monastic education system as a whole, has been in their hands, these members of the *Sangha* responsible for it have failed to improve the curriculum and the teaching method. The curricula in both countries have been inflexible, with no options for students to choose from. In Burma, the prescribed texts in the *Pathamapyan* examinations have remained more or less the same at least since the time of Bodawpaya (1782-1819). The change under Mindon, as we have discovered in Chapter Three, mainly affected only the format. These curricula were specialised ones and consisted only of religious texts. In Thailand, the first *Parian* curriculum introduced under King Narai of Ayutthaya in the late seventeenth century was in use for almost 150 years without change. The modified and expanded *Parian* curriculum that came into existence in the 1820s under Rāma II (1809-1824) received a review only seven decades later under Rāma V. As to the matter of general education, there was never a proper curriculum at all in the monasteries.

As far as the teaching methods in monastic education in Burma and Siam are concerned, the main objective has been to transmit information from teacher to pupil, and thus the mnemonic tradition has formed a very important part of the Buddhist monastic learning process, reflecting its roots in Indian religious traditions. The mnemonic tradition, as Dreyfus points out through his training in the Tibetan monastic education system, is not necessarily flawed in itself. In fact, memorisation helps make “apparent” “deeper meaning” of a text and combines “scattered bits and pieces of information” “to provide actual knowledge”.<sup>16</sup> Graham also comments: “memorisation is a particularly intimate appropriation of a text, and the capacity to quote or recite a text from memory is a spiritual source that is tapped automatically in an act of reflection, worship, prayer or moral deliberations.”<sup>17</sup> But, as Dreyfus explains, memorisation “is only a preparation for the central part of the scholastic education, the interpretation of the great texts.”<sup>18</sup>

In fact, the Buddha also said that a good learning process consists of five components: book study (*pariyatti*), preaching or teaching (*paññatti*), applying logic (*vittakka*), memorisation or chanting (*sajjhāya*) and practice (*dhammavīhārī*).<sup>19</sup> At Ava, Burma, Shin Mahārāṭṭhasāra, a great poet-monk, elaborated these five components into eight. His eight-point educational philosophy is best known in its abbreviated Pali form as *su-ci-pu-bhā-vi-si-li-dhā*. According to Mahārāṭṭhasāra, a student should use listening (*suṇeyya*), thinking (*cinteyya*), questioning (*puccheyya*), preaching or speaking (*bhāseyya*), analysing (*vicāreyya*), practice (*sikkheyya*), writing (*likheyya*) and memorising (*dhāreyya*).<sup>20</sup> It is clear that memorisation did not come first, but last.

<sup>16</sup> Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping*, p.92.

<sup>17</sup> Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, p.160.

<sup>18</sup> Dreyfus, p.98.

<sup>19</sup> A, iii, pp.86-89.

<sup>20</sup> *Naing gnan daw thangha mahanayaka aphwe pariyatti simankain*, pp.33-35.

However, there is no evidence that either the Buddha's favoured way of learning or Shin Mahāraṭṭhasāra's educational philosophy has become common practice. In fact, there were very few attempts to balance a memorisation-based teaching method with an analytical one. This led people from outside the Buddhist monastic tradition to make the criticism that Buddhist monastic learning did not "esteem the faculties of reasoning and discoursing"<sup>21</sup> but "emphasises only memory"<sup>22</sup>. In fact, in recent years the same concerns about this short-coming have been expressed in Burma by the leading abbots themselves. One of them, Janakābhivaṃsa argues that times have changed and that the ancient learning methods are not relevant to the present time.<sup>23</sup> The State *Saṅgha Mahānāyaka* Education Committee, the highest monastic education authority in Burma, too, acknowledged in 1980 that "at present only listening to the teacher and memorising what he has said are emphasised and that other factors should be encouraged, to develop analytical skills".<sup>24</sup>

In Thailand, Payutto, in his lecture on "the Direction of the Sangha's Education" at the Mahachulalongkorn *Sangha* University in 1988, conceded that the centuries-old *Parian* system, which is regarded as more advanced than the vernacular system of the *Nak Tham* examinations, focuses on only one aspect: "the ability to translate Pali passages in the examination". "Although the prescribed texts are about the *dhmma* and *vinaya*, no attention is paid to the contents" and therefore, the "teaching technique" is "narrow in focus".<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Sangermano, *The Burmese Empire*, p.181.

<sup>22</sup> Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*, 1982, p.361.

<sup>23</sup> Janakābhivaṃsa, *Tatbhava thanthaya*, p.234. For the attitude of Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa on this question, see also, Janakābhivaṃsa, *Bhathathwe*, p.76.

<sup>24</sup> The *Pathamapyan* Examinations Syllabuses and Rules and Regulations for Questions, p.4.

<sup>25</sup> Thepwethi, *Thit thang karn suksa*, p.29.



Since their inception, the formal examinations have not encouraged essay writing, in which a student may think independently and express his opinion freely. Before the 1890s there was no use of writing in the monastic examinations in either country; all the questions and answers were given orally. Even after written examinations were introduced, the main practice remained mnemonic.

Here we shall demonstrate briefly how dominant the mnemonic tradition now is, dealing first with the tradition in Burma. The following are short notes taken from popular guidebooks for students.<sup>26</sup> They represent standardised answers in almost all examinations. The first four are lessons on Chapter Five, *Vīthimutta*, of the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-ṭikā*, and part of the *pathamalat* (intermediate level) in the *Pathamapyān* examinations. This guidebook has been written by Issariyābhivaṃsa, a leading lecturer at the *Gyakhat Waing* teaching monastery, Pegu, where there are more than one thousand residential students. Although the lessons are arranged in a question and answer style, they are the usual notes given in the class. The four notes appear in order.

**Q:** Explain the meaning of the following passage: *bhavantara paṭisandhānavasena uppajjamānam’eva paṭiṭṭhāti bhavantare*.

**A:** *paṭisandhi citta* connects a previous life with the next one. A new life takes place as soon as the connecting takes place. It is not that [something] transmigrates from the present life to the future life.

**Q:** “Once [a person is] dead, [his] soul travels [to the next life]”. Is this belief correct? Explain.

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<sup>26</sup> Issariyābhivaṃsa, *Tikāyāw aung pan* (Questions and Answers on the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-ṭikā*), pp.126-127.

A: This belief is not correct. When a *paṭisandhi citta* takes place in a new life, nothing from the previous life travels to the new life. However, without the causes, namely *avijjā*, *taṇhā* and *saṅkhāra*, which happened in the previous life, a new life does not happen. It is similar to an echo, a flame or the impression of a seal.

Q: “Living beings exist because God created them”. Is this belief correct?

A: This belief is not correct. With reference to [the Pali passage] *avijjānusaya parikkhittena taṇhānusayamūlakena saṅkhārena janīyamānaṃ – pe – patiṭṭhāti bhavantare*, living beings exist because of *kusala-* and *akusala-kamma*, which are rooted in *taṇhānusaya* and strengthened by *avijjānusaya*.

Q: Give the meaning of *paṭisandhi*, *bhavanga* and *cuti*.

A: *Paṭisandhi* is so called because it connects the previous life with the next one. *Bhavanga* is so called because it is the cause of life, keeping it going on so that it does not stop. *Cuti* is the end of a present life.

The following are notes usually given in classes for the *Nak Tham* students in Thailand.<sup>27</sup>

Q: *Saṅkhāra* is *anatta* [meaning] without any authority to command [condition] it; it happens through cause and effect. Then, for *nibbāna*, which is also *anatta*, how do you explain it?

A: *Nibbāna* being *anatta* means that it is void of being, person, owner, or authority of any kind. It is not subject to cause and effect, as in the *saṅkhāra*. This is because *nibbāna* is the *asankhata dhamma*, the *dhamma* which is not conditioned.

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<sup>27</sup> Nāṇagambhīra, *Prachum nanapanha thammawicharn chan ek* (A collection of Questions and Answers for *Dhammavicāraṇa, Nak Tham Ek*), pp.68-69.

**Q:** There is a description of the Buddha's *nibbāna* as *pajjotass'eva nibbānam vimokkho cetaso āhu*, meaning there has been liberation of the mind, similar to the blowing-off of fire. Does this mean the Buddha still exists? Explain.

**A:** It means that the Buddha still exists. [Even] when we cannot normally see fire, it still exists as an element [*dhātu*]. This element is manifested in flames when other conditions arise. When those conditions end, the flames also cease. However, they continue as a fire element.

**Q:** Explain the two important categories of *nibbāna* according to the *Somdet Phra Mahāsamaṇa chao*'s analysis.<sup>28</sup>

**A:** When the defilement is eradicated, but there is still a *carimakāya*, that is the attainment of arahantship [here and now], it is called *saupādisesa nibbāna dhātu*. When the *carimakāya* ceases, it is *anupādisesa nibbāna dhātu*. This is how it has been explained by *Somdet Phra Mahāsamaṇa chao*.

**Q:** Why is *nibbāna* not included in [the passage] *sabbe sankhārā aniccā, sabbe sankhārā dukkhā* but in *sabbe dhammā anattā*?

**A:** Because *nibbāna* exists all the time and is also the highest happiness, so it is not included in the first two. However, *nibbāna* is *anatta*, with no self, and is one type of the *asankhata dhamma*. Therefore it is included in the last one.

The Pali words used in the questions and answers are here left untranslated, to demonstrate how it is actually taught and explained. It can be seen how complex ideas are explained, leaving the main Pali terms untranslated, and therefore unlikely to be

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<sup>28</sup> Here *Somdet Phra Mahasamaṇa chao* is Prince-Patriarch Vajirayan, the author of most of the *Nak Tham* textbooks.

understood clearly by students. No concept is introduced. From these answers, it is clear that the system enforces standardised answers.

#### **6.4 Inherent Nature of the Tradition**

The reasons for the lack of improvement in both the curriculum and study methods were the inherent nature of the *Sangha's* hierarchal tradition and the lack of consensus in defining the aim of monastic education in relation to the society from which the Order recruits its members.

According to the hierarchical ancient ecclesiastical tradition in both countries, the abbot of a monastery had an unparalleled authority, resulting from his twin roles as a teacher and an administrator. He taught students in his monastery, who also came under his jurisdiction. He was the only one in his monastery with the authority to admit candidates for ordination and also to expel them, either from his monastery or from the Order when they broke major rules. In brief, the abbot looked after the students with regard to their education, moral and spiritual training, and welfare and well-being. This position made him the most important person in the educational development of his students, who had in equal measure both fear of and respect for him. Students never questioned his authority; instead they felt a sense of gratitude throughout their lives even if they had left the Order.

So students did not learn how to question their teacher: they learnt what he taught them. To give some examples from Burma, one of the few reformer-monks in Burma, Janakābhivamsa, had to get an instruction from his teacher, Ñāṇābhivamsa, also known as Mayung Mya Sayadaw, as to what lessons he should follow even when he was no

longer under his teaching and was now a student at the famous Mahāvisutārāma, Pakhokku.<sup>29</sup> Not until he was appointed a lecturer there himself was he permitted to exercise his own judgement on this matter. This kind of practice was seen as an obedient gesture on the part of the student, and on the part of the teacher, it was considered important to pay minute attention to the needs of his student. This meant that as a student Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa never learnt to question his teacher, inside or outside the classroom.

This unquestioning obedience was not confined to the early twentieth century, when Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa was a student. In fact in my days as a student, including those at the Sasana Mandaing Pali University at Pegu, between 1980 and 1986, I rarely seldom came across a student asking the teacher a question. However, one day in a classroom at the Sasana Mandaing, a student with an inquiring mind, by the name of Shin Suriya, whom we have met in Chapter Two, put a question in the class to the teacher, U Dhammānanda, if the understanding that a *paṇḍaka*, “hermaphrodite”, had both sexes, i.e. a female sexual organ and a male one, was really correct. The teacher shouted at him, and asked him to leave if he could not accept that interpretation. Discouraged and embarrassed, Sūriya had to keep quiet and, like all other students, never asked a question again.

When, in the early twentieth century, the unparalleled authority of the abbot was transferred, first in Burma and then in Thailand, to a newly established ecclesiastical hierarchy, the decision of the body was not to be questioned. This highest body, initially called the *Pathamapyan* committee and then the *Sangha Mahānayaka* in Burma and the *Mahathera Samakhon* in Thailand, controlled both administrative and educational

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<sup>29</sup> Janakābhivaṃsa, *Tatbhava thanthaya*, p.154.

matters. Members of this highest body themselves also hardly questioned the curriculum they had inherited. The *Nak Tham* examinations in Thailand, for instance, have changed little in their curriculum, textbooks or study method since they were introduced by Prince-Patriarch Vajirayan in the 1910s and 1920s.

This history of the *Sangha*'s education has shown that it took an interested government and an individual reform-minded monk or monks to make a significant change. Rarely has the *Sangha* as an institution taken initiatives seriously to review or reform its education system. This was because the *Sangha* has been inherently unquestioning and its way of learning has been routinised. In other words, when it comes to the education system the *Sangha* as an establishment has shown no proactive vision.

### **6.5 Lack of Consensus between Idealists and Pragmatists on the Objectives of Monastic Education**

As to the lack of consensus among monastic scholars on the definition of education, the argument centred on idealism versus pragmatism. The ideal life of a *bhikkhu* was to study and practise the *dhamma* and *vinaya*, “teaching and discipline”, aimed only at liberating himself from suffering. Part of this ideal was for a *bhikkhu*, when he could, to impart his knowledge of the *dhamma* and *vinaya* to newcomers into the Order to ensure the continuation of the *sāsana*. However, on a practical level, the life of a *bhikkhu* was interwoven with those around him. Those who joined the Order may not all have had liberation from suffering as their immediate aspiration. If the number of such worldly aspiring *bhikkhus* increases, it could cause an institutional problem which reflects the reality of the society in which the ideal *bhikkhu* lives. For this vital argument we shall again here summarise the history of the development of monastic education.

It has long been recognised that membership of the Buddhist Order required one to be literate. Literacy and literature were among the visible signs of the monastic Order. However, this expertise in study soon attracted those in society who wished simply to be educated, not necessarily for the sake of any spiritual attainment. In this context, we have discussed how the monastery was an education centre and was at “the hub of the village” and so the entrance into the Order of those seeking education forced monasteries to include in their curriculum subjects which were not directly related to attaining *nibbāna*. As we shall see, these subjects were to be called secular subjects, (*lawki phinnya* in Burmese; *wicha thang lok* in Thai). The point here is that the *Sangha* had had to redefine their curriculum. The aim was now not only to educate those who wished to free themselves from suffering but also those who had a worldly motive.

The Order managed those demands well by producing a curriculum that took account of the needs of both the Order and society. This curriculum essentially included lessons or texts on basic moral and monastic training as well as on vocational subjects known at the time. This type of curriculum was designed and modified by individual abbots to suit the needs of their students, and never adopted nationally, despite similarities in curriculum between monasteries. There was another type of curriculum for those who stayed in the monastery longer, mostly as ordained monks. This second category of curriculum, such as the *Pathamapyan* in Burma and the *Parian* in Siam, focused entirely on the *dhamma* and *vinaya*, and it was presumed that those who studied this curriculum were committed to serious spiritual practice and would one day become leading members of the Order themselves. Earlier, we described this curriculum as a specialised one.

But then there came the time, in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the government decided to take over responsibility for providing education for its own

citizens. Among different education programmes initiated, the most significant in relation to monastic education was the introduction of primary education, brought in by the British colonial government in Burma and by King Chulalongkorn in Siam.

This development, at least in theory, relieved the *Sangha* of the need to provide education for the society at large, but it could now return to the ideal learning, the education in *dhamma* and *vinaya*. The aim was to help fulfil the spiritual aspirations of individual *bhikkhus* and to produce “the heirs to take care of the future of the *sāsana*”. The only thing the *Sangha* needed to do was extend the conduct of the examinations on this purely religious curriculum outside the capital. This was because until the early 1930s they had been held only in the capital. In Burma, the *Pathamapyan* were held alternately in Mandalay and Rangoon, the old and modern capital respectively. In Siam (Thailand), the *Parian* examinations were not even extended to Ayutthaya, the old capital, where the *Parian* had first come into existence. In fact, the introduction of the *Nak Tham* examinations in the 1920s, as we discovered in Chapter Five, was partly aimed at expanding the use of a certain monastic curriculum at the national level. In the next couple of decades, all these examinations would be held also in the provinces, mainly in the bigger towns and cities. This expansion on the part of the *Sangha* went hand in hand with government school programmes, which by now had also begun to provide secondary education for the population at large.

However, in both countries the government education programmes still failed to offer equal opportunity in education to the people, particularly those in rural areas, where the majority lived. For them, education within their reach existed only in their village monasteries. So the people continued to send their children, mostly boys, to the monastery for education. The monasteries in rural areas had not changed even several



decades after the state had taken over responsibility for education. The majority of them had never ever taught the curriculum for monastic examinations now widely held in the cities. Nor had they yet abandoned their own combined religious-secular curriculum. But, as before, their curriculum was too basic, independent and disorganised to be accepted by the ecclesiastical education authorities.

Consequently, people from rural areas sent their children to monasteries in towns if they could afford to do so. The children were accepted on condition that they were ordained in the monastery. Those who were bright enough were subsequently sent by their abbot to a teaching monastery in a bigger town, or even to the capital. But, as many found their way to the capital in search of better education,<sup>30</sup> the monasteries in the capital could no longer accommodate every student that came. These famous teaching monasteries therefore had to introduce very strict rules for admission.

At the same time the government, recognising its inability to extend universal education to all, asked the monasteries to adopt a secular curriculum and accept some non-residential students in their monasteries to help those who would otherwise be denied the opportunity of education. This was why, as mentioned earlier, the British colonial officials attempted to persuade the monasteries in Burma to include secular subjects. Even after the rejection by the monasteries, as already explained, the colonial rulers continued with their attempts at persuasion. In 1939, the *Pathamapyan* Review Committee appointed by the governor, consisting of the influential Pakokku *Sayadaws* and the deputy head of the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, the Abhayārama *Sayadaw* of Mandalay,

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<sup>30</sup> For detail on this point in Thailand, see Palanee Thitiwatana, *Kankhlu'anthi khong song* (The Mobility within the Sangha). In this MA dissertation at Chulalongkorn University, the author traced the origin of 2,015 student-monks at the Mahachulalongkorn University, Bangkok between 1963 and 1972 and found nearly all the students were from a rural background. Tambiah also mentions that 85.37 % of 35,550,105 total population of Thailand in 1970 live in rural areas and that the north-eastern region where the availability of secular education is behind the other regions is “the powerhouse of the country’s *sangha*”. Tambiah, *World Conqueror*, pp.270-273.

suggested that novices should be taught arithmetic before they studied the *Tipiṭaka*.<sup>31</sup> This suggestion was supposed to set a precedent for certain further secular subjects in the near future. Many prominent *sayadaws* were in favour of the proposal. Unfortunately, when World War II intervened, the whole process had to be abandoned.

Soon after independence in 1948, Prime Minister U Nu gave some grants to monasteries to encourage them to open primary schools, which came to be known as *ba. ka* in brief or monastery schools. U Nu intended to open up to five thousand of such school.<sup>32</sup> Some of those monasteries that did open primary schools were later upgraded to secondary level. These schools accepted both boys and girls. Almost all the teachers were monks. Even some teaching monasteries in big cities, especially those in deprived parts of town, were requested to open primary schools. The teaching monastery where I was educated and taught, the Sasana Mandaing Pali University, in Pegu, was one such monastery. Only fifty miles from Rangoon, the capital, Pegu had been a city with good education since the time of the British. However, as the city expanded, with many poor people coming in seeking employment, the government could not provide education for all. Therefore monasteries in the outer parts of the town, such as the Sasana Mandaing, were asked to provide education for the people in the vicinity. However, the success was very minimal.

However, the military government that toppled U Nu in March 1962 suspended this programme about two years after they came to power. Although no official reasons were given, it was at the time believed that General Ne Win, the coup leader, wanted to get rid of as many of his predecessor's programmes as possible. Critics pointed out that Ne Win also abolished, almost at the same time, the Pali University system and the Sasana University, both of which were the brainchildren of U Nu. But the current military

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<sup>31</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Tatbavha thanthaya*, p.377.

<sup>32</sup> *Phongyi kyaung pyinnya thinkyaryay mawgun*, pp.28-29.

government, which came to power in a bloody coup in 1988, has overturned Ne Win's ruling and asked the *Sangha* to open monastery schools for lay students. So far, only a handful of individual monasteries, not the *Sangha* as an institution, has responded to the request. Phaungdaw-Oo monastery high school in Mandalay is one of a few such monasteries.

In Thailand, in 1940, the government created special schools (*rong rien wisaman*) to educate monks in secular subjects.<sup>33</sup> There were in addition to the existing traditional monastic courses, *Parian* and *Nak Tham*. The aim was to provide education for the monks that was "relevant to the modern age". The ecclesiastical cabinet, created by the government through the amended *Sangha* Act of 1940, was the official organ through which these schools were set up. The introduction of special schools was popular with young monks. However, when the 1940 *Sangha* Act was replaced in 1961 and, therefore, the *Sangha* cabinet no longer existed, the *Mahathera Samakhom* moved to abolish those special schools for monks.<sup>34</sup>

However, some young monks and novices took their own initiative by attending classes at evening schools run by the Department of Adult Education. They studied a secular curriculum in the same classes as lay students, including girls. The number of these monks is not known because the Department of Religious Affairs did not participate in that programme, and at the Department of Adult Education they were simply registered as students, not monks. The decision of the young monks to find every possible way to educate themselves shocked the senior monks, starting with the Council of Elders. Furthermore, for the monks who had taken a vow of celibacy to study in the same

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<sup>33</sup> *Prawat karn suksa*, p.142

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p.143.

classroom as “villagers (*chao barn*)”, including girls, was considered socially unacceptable.

As a result, in May 7, 1963, the chairman of the *Parian* Examinations Board, Somdet Buddhaghosacārya (Pheun Cutindharo), set up a committee to reform the curriculum to accord with the vision of the state. The reform resulted in 1967 in a new form of curriculum that combined secular subjects with those existing subjects in the traditional monastic curriculum. The system started functioning in 1970 and has since become popular at the expense of the traditional *Parian Tham* and *Nak Tham* examinations. Secular subjects are emphasised because the government is concerned that when monks leave the order, which many do in Thailand, they will not be equipped with “necessary knowledge to become valuable human resources to lay society”.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the aim of the study was no longer to understand the words of the Buddha and to end suffering alone, but to help develop the nation and society.

However, in Thailand, despite the introduction of some form of general education at the primary and secondary levels at the government’s encouragement, the conservative members of the *Sangha* continued to resist the change and thus prompted a debate with those who wished to modernise monastic curricula.

This resistance arose partly because the combined religious-secular curriculum now demanded was more complicated and largely unprecedented in the history of monastic education. The education programmes of the government had raised not only the standard of general education but also public expectation as to what a curriculum should consist of. This was totally different from the kind of general education the monasteries

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p.142.

had provided up to a century or so earlier. After all, the primary education being thrust upon the *Sangha* at this time was based on the model of western education, in which the *Sangha* had no expertise.

The main reason for resistance offered by the conservative members of the *Sangha* was, however, that the study of the secular subjects which the governments wished to prescribe for monastery schools was not appropriate for monks, and could even be considered as “animal science”, *tiracchānavijjā/kathā*. The rejection by the leading monks of those secular subjects, particularly English and mathematics, appears to have been made on a doctrinal basis; in reality, however, only subjects designed to torture people are called “animal science”, regardless of the language in which they are taught.<sup>36</sup> It is doubtful if the debate over “animal science” was ever conducted in the light of the canonical scriptures. The main objection seems to have been the study of the English language,<sup>37</sup> although arithmetic has always been mentioned together with it in the debate. Before the British colonisation of the whole of Burma in 1885, a debate of such a kind on the study of languages, European or Indian, had been unknown in either country.

In Burma, it could be argued that the *Sangha*’s designation of some subjects, particularly English and mathematics, as “animal science” stemmed from the British presence in Burma. We have discussed in Chapter Two how the *Sangha* became nationalist in the periods leading up to the British occupation. The Burmese monastic Order saw the native kings as the protectors of the faith and the British as the destroyers.<sup>38</sup> As occupiers, the

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<sup>36</sup> For more on “animal science” see D i. 9; Vin i. 73;

<sup>37</sup> Sīlānanda, *Biography of Sayadaw Ashin Thitthila*, p.51. Janakabhivamsa, *Pātimok bhāṭhāṭṭikā*, p.439.

<sup>38</sup> The destruction, soon after the occupation of Mandalay, of the royal monastery Atumashi Kyaung-taw where the British army was stationed was often cited an obvious example. Lord Dufferin, the British governor of India in his meeting with the *sayadaws* in Mandalay in 1886 denied that the British had the intention to destroy the *Sāsana* as was rumoured among the people. The denial was among the six points he made during the meeting designed to reassure the Order. Shwe Gaing Tha, *The Centenary of Mandalay*, pp.279-80.

British adopted a policy of so-called neutrality towards religion,<sup>39</sup> refusing at the outset the traditional protection afforded by a Buddhist ruler,<sup>40</sup> and ended all support for the Order. (They had done the same in Ceylon.<sup>41</sup>) Under the British, the judicial power of the *thathanabaing* was taken away.<sup>42</sup> This was, indeed, a fundamental change for the Order, and came as a blow to its influence over society, especially in education. The lack of material and moral support from the state caused the monastic educational institutions to decline, and Mandalay saw a considerable number of teacher-monks leaving the capital for other places within a few years of its fall.<sup>43</sup>

On the issue of designating arithmetic as animal science, Janakābhivamsa reasoned that one could not study Saṅkhyāvāra, the “chapter on numbers” in the *Paṭṭhāna*, without some mathematical skill; the *Vuttodaya*, a part of the *pathamagyi* syllabus, also requires a good knowledge of arithmetic in the last chapter; the ancient *vinayadhara sayadaws*, “the experts on the *Vinaya*” themselves, he pointed out, taught arithmetic.<sup>44</sup> However, none of the *sayadaws*, at that time suggested the incorporation of English in the *pathamapyan* syllabuses; and, this was understandable, given the strong sentiment of nationalism among the people and the *Sangha* in opposition to the British at that time.

In Thailand, although never colonised by any European power, there was the same debate on this issue. We do not know how it all began; but we learn that two of the most important figures in the history of Thai *Sangha* education in the early twentieth century, Somdej Khemacari of Wat Mahadhatu (*Mahā-nikāya*) and Somdej Nyanavaro of Wat Thep (*Dhammayuttika-nikāya*), did not allow their students to study English on the

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Religion and Politics*, pp.38-9,45.

<sup>40</sup> Bischoff, *Buddhism in Myanmar*, p.58.

<sup>41</sup> Malalgoda, “Buddhism in Post-Independence Sri Lanka” *Religion in South Asia*, pp.183-4.

<sup>42</sup> Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia*, p.623.

<sup>43</sup> Sāsanābhivamsa, *The Centenary of the Pariyatti Sāsanahita Association of Mandalay*, p.14.

<sup>44</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Pātimok bhāṭhāṭikā*, p.439; *Anāgat thāthanayay*, p.371; *Bhāṭhāṭhwe*, pp.82-8.

grounds that it was “animal science”; ironically, both were pupils of the English speaking Prince-Patriarch Vajirayan.<sup>45</sup>

When the British left Burma in January, 1948, the anti-British (English) feeling that had clouded the debate started to subside. As it also became clear that there was no doctrinal conflict in studying English and mathematics, the conservatives then gave a different reason. This was that after they had studied English and mathematics, educated young monks changed their minds and left the monkhood, which therefore brought a great loss to the *sāsana*. This reasoning caused tremendous anxiety among lay supporters, who feared that young monks were now likely to be attracted by the good prospects for employment in the lay life.<sup>46</sup> In the early 1930s, Ashin Thittila (Seṭṭhila), the translator of the Book of Analysis (*Dhammasaṅgaṇī*)<sup>47</sup>, was asked by his benefactor in Mandalay never to come to his house for alms again because he had heard that Ashin Thittila was studying English. For a monk to study English was seen as corrupt and having an ignoble aim. This perception was directed even to a dedicated monk, like Ashin Thittila, with two degrees, the *pathamakyaw*<sup>48</sup> and the *Sakyasīha dhammācariya*, and already a lecturer at the famous *Phayagyi* teaching monastery at that time.

But there were also some leading *sayadaws* who tried to put the issue in perspective to allay the fears of the *Sangha* and the people. One such *sayadaw* was Janakābhivaṃsa. Due to the lack of written records by others on the debate, we shall be referring to much of his work here. In one of his famous works aimed at educating lay people, *Bhathatwe*, “The Essence of the Religion”, Janakābhivaṃsa blamed “the lack of a good foundation in monastic discipline”, not the study of English, as a factor contributing to the

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<sup>45</sup> Sivarak, *Sarm Somdejs* (Three Somdets), p.3.

<sup>46</sup> Janakābhivaṃsa, *Bhāthā-thwe*, pp.139-40; *Tatbhava thanthaya*, p.256.

<sup>47</sup> Published by the Pali Text Society in 1969 and reprinted in 1988.

<sup>48</sup> *Pathamakyaw* was considered a degree at that time because the government board of examination for the *Dammācariya* had not been set up.

abandonment of the monkhood: if a monk had been well trained in the *Vinaya* and lived under his teacher, he would not leave the monkhood. He argued that the first six generations of leading *Sayadaws* from the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, including its founder Jāgara and his successor, Visuddhayon *Sayadaw*, had studied English; many of them were also well versed in Sanskrit and Hindi, and with the help gained from it, they had written books on Pali grammar useful to understanding the *Tipiṭaka*.<sup>49</sup> If these secular subjects were not taught, people would not bring their children to the monasteries any more but take them to the Christian convents where they could study these subjects. If those educated at convent schools became leaders of the country, they would have little contact with or respect for the *Sangha*.<sup>50</sup> He held responsible “for a drop in the number of students in monastery schools the attitude of some *sayas* (*sayadaws*) that arithmetic and English are not appropriate (for a monk) to learn”.<sup>51</sup> He said that “arts and science subjects that are not prohibited by the *Vinaya* should be taught (to lay people) by monks free of charge. So the monks should make efforts (to study) so that they could teach.”<sup>52</sup>

In Thailand some forty years later a similar argument was made by one of the leading scholar-monks in the twentieth century, Prayud Payutto. In his lecture at the Mahachulalongkorn *Sangha* University in 1984, he said that the *Sangha* had a responsibility towards individual students and the state. Individual students wished to be educated and had turned to the Order for help. The quest for good education through the Order by certain sections of society was a good opportunity for the Order to instil Buddhist values in those students and to propagate the *dhamma*. The *Sangha* also had a responsibility to assist the state in producing good citizens, because the *Sangha* as an institution could not exist by itself without the support of the state. Eminent educationists

<sup>49</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Bhāthā-thwe*, pp.85-8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, pp.123, 137-8.

<sup>51</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Pātimok bhāthāṭikā*, p.439.

<sup>52</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Yok pum shin kyint woot*, p.195.



such as Vajirayan, Payutto and Janakabhivamsa all believed that the *Sangha*'s education should be for the *sāsana*, society and state.

Against the point that educated monks left the Order once they had received a good secular education, Phra Payutto argues that taking away an opportunity for monks to study secular subjects was not a guarantee of their not leaving the Order. On the contrary, among the educated monks who had left the Order, the overwhelming majority were trained in a purely religious curriculum and had no knowledge of secular subjects. That could be disadvantageous to a monk who left the Order highly educated in religious scriptures and yet totally ignorant of any secular subject. He would be lost, unable to integrate into the secular life. This would degrade monastic education, and thus the Order, in the eyes of society.

However, there was no way that the Order could prevent its members from leaving if individual members chose to do so. The *Sangha* is an organisation of volunteers, which upholds the freedom of individuals to join or to leave. Instead of wasting effort in trying to prevent the unpreventable, the Order, Payutto says, should concentrate on ways to provide education that would benefit both those who decided to stay in the Order and those who wished to leave. If the Order could help move its former members up the social ladder, not only would that help individual members, it would also bring esteem to monastic education from those who were in contact with those individuals. Not only would these individuals become better citizens, but the Order could also count on them to spread through the society in which they lived the knowledge of the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* they had acquired as a monk.

## 6.6 A Mission or a Pretext?

Meanwhile the debate to win the hearts and minds of the people was also going on. The modernizers sought to address the lay devotees in order to allay their concerns that if they studied secular subjects more monks might be tempted to leave the Order. Providing monks with both secular and religious knowledge, the reform-minded monks claimed, was essential for the promotion of Buddhism in the modern age, especially in the western world. The reformers in Burma found a sympathetic audience in the government and educated Buddhist people, who considered the notion of sending Buddhist missionaries abroad, particularly to western nations who had once ruled the whole world, as a matter of national pride. In Burma, the result was the setting up of a *Sangha* university, officially called the World Buddhist University at the Kabha-Aye, Rangoon, where the Sixth Buddhist Council was held between 1954 and 1956. Indeed, the founding of the university was one of the many objectives of that Council.

Mendelson, who visited the new *Sangha* university to hear formal speeches, “was struck by the emphasis upon missionary efforts in the English-speaking world”.<sup>53</sup> “The burden of virtually all the speeches was the need for learning English as a universal language and as the key to understanding the people missionaries would work among”.<sup>54</sup> Even Janakābhivamsa in his argument for setting up two modern universities for the *Sangha*, one in Mandalay and the other in Rangoon, saw their main purpose as producing missionary monks.<sup>55</sup> Any purpose other than producing missionaries would not have won from the outset the support of the people, or even the modernisers, such as Janakābhivamsa.

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<sup>53</sup> Mendelson, p.304.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Janakābhivamsa, *Anagat thathana yay*, pp.373-374.

The founding of the university was not in the end successful, not necessarily because Ne Win was determined to abolish it but rather because the *Sangha* was not ready for education that combined both western and Burmese traditions. There were only eleven students from Burma, and the *Sangha* was not able to participate in building up this new University or in running the administrative and academic business. However, the university was able to inspire some of its students to seek further education, to redress the shortcomings of their own monastic education system. But only one batch of students graduated from this university before it was closed by Ne Win.

In Thailand, the *Sangha* universities, Mahachulalongkorn and Mahamakut, also initially focussed only on producing missionary monks rather than enhancing academic disciplines for their own sake. This was essential to win over the hearts and minds of the prospective benefactors and ultimately the powerful conservative members of the Council of Elders. We explained in Chapter Five that these two universities were founded under King Chulalongkorn. But they continued for half a century as no more than big teaching monasteries with the traditional curriculum of the *Parian*. In 1947, however, they decided to modernise their curriculum in line with those of western universities. This meant that not only the format but also the subjects were to be adapted to the practice in the state universities.

However, this move to bring in secular subjects and new administrative machinery, unlike in Burma, had no backing from the government or from the highest ecclesiastical administrative body, the Council of Elders. It was rather the two biggest monasteries, Wat Mahathat and Wat Bovonives, with a traditionally close relationship with the monarchy, that took the initiative to modernise. Ironically, the abbots of the two monasteries were also members of the Council of Elders.

These two monastic universities have produced many graduates over the years without the recognition of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities. When the now most famous alumnus, Payutto, graduated in 1956, his degree was recognised neither by any of the state universities nor by the Council of Elders. Only in 1969 did the Council of Elders recognise the two universities. But the government, for its part, took no measure to support this ecclesiastical decision. So in 1973 the Council of Elders passed a motion saying that if the government were to recognise the two *Sangha* universities, that would indeed be an appropriate action. However, it was not until more than a decade later, in 1984, that the government officially recognised the two universities; and, according to this 1984 Education Act, the government recognised only the First Degrees and not the two universities as institutions. Here we can see that the government itself sent out contradictory messages. Although it wanted the *Sangha* to help shoulder the responsibility of educating the underprivileged, it failed to give adequate support to the members of the *Sangha* willing to do so.<sup>56</sup>

In Thailand, Payutto has summarised this problem facing the education of the *Sangha*. He said that if the government and the leaders of the *Sangha* failed to give appropriate support, the *Sangha* would not be able to lead the people in instilling Buddhist values into the nation. He cited examples of how the *Sangha* could not teach Buddhism and Pali at state universities because their qualifications were not recognised and argued that the higher institutions of the *Sangha* themselves faced many obstacles in producing qualified teachers. He pointed out how universities in non-Buddhist countries have produced competent Buddhist scholars and how Buddhist countries themselves could not do the same. This comparison came after Payutto visited in the late 1970s some top American

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<sup>56</sup> Thepwethi, *Thit thang karn suksa*, pp.16-17, 21-24.

universities, such as Harvard and Princeton University, where there has been a long tradition of Buddhist studies.<sup>57</sup>

In Burma, where the debate between monastic scholars on the definition of education was quiet for almost two decades, there was a sudden movement in 1980 towards providing the *Sangha* with secular education with an “up-to-date method of study”. There were two political reasons for this move. First, General Ne Win, who had been in power since 1962, retired from the post of president, although he retained the post of chairman in the only party, the Burma Programme Socialist Party (BPSP). This meant he would no longer run the country on a day-to-day basis. Another reason was the government’s drive to win over the *Sangha* to support the controversial “purification programme”, *thathana thant shinn yay*, launched in December 1979.

Seizing the moment, Ashin Vicittasārābhivaṃsa, the first monk to have been successful in the *Tipiṭakadhara* examinations,<sup>58</sup> who had worked closely with former Prime Minister U Nu, took the initiative to set up *Sangha* universities. The government represented his effort as part of their “purification programmes”. But the government did not directly finance the project, but left that burden to the voluntary donations of the followers of Ashin Vicittasārābhivamsa. The two universities, one in Rangoon and the other in Mandalay, focused on the same theme: to send missionary monks abroad. The courses would be available in five major languages of the world: English, French, German, Japanese and Chinese. In reality, however, there has been only one medium available, Burmese; and elementary English is taught for the first few years only three hours per week by a visiting lecturer from the Institute of Technology.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p.23.

<sup>58</sup> See pp.155-156.

The setting up of the universities was very popular with the public, not only because it recaptured the spirit of the newly liberated Burma i.e. to send Buddhist missionaries to the English speaking world, but because of the calibre of the leading monk, Vicittasārābhivamsa, who had come first in all the then newly introduced examinations boards such as the *Sakyasīha* and the *Tipiṭakadhara*. Since then, two more *Sangha* universities have been established, one by one of the graduates from the now defunct World Buddhist University, Ñāṇissara. He led the foundation of a *Sangha* university at Sagaing in Upper Burma. For this project, he receives solid moral support from the leading *sayadaws* of the *Shwegyin-nikāya*, to which he belongs, and generous financial support from wealthy donors, who are attracted to his status as the best preacher in the country. Ñāṇissara continues to build on the earlier appeal of producing missionaries to go abroad. The name selected for this new *Sangha* university, Sitagū International Buddhist Academy, reflects the view of the lay benefactors and the conservative members of the *Sangha* as to why a *bhikkhu* may legitimately learn English and other secular subjects. Sitagū is also named after some major social welfare projects Ñāṇissara has led over the years, for instance, a water scheme for all monasteries and nunneries in Sagaing; an eye hospital, the best in the country, for the *Sangha* and the people; and a rice project for the monks and nuns of Mandalay, Sagaing and Mingun Hills.

The other *Sangha* university was founded by the present military government with the aim of sending Theravada missionaries abroad. The name of this latter university, Theravada International Missionary University, shows why the government thinks that the monks should study English. Indeed, the very reason the military set up this Buddhist University in December 1999 was, according to them, because the existing *Sangha* universities lacked the capacity to teach in the English medium and it was the noble intention of the government to address that shortcoming. It may surprise many scholars

inside and outside the country to learn that General Khin Nyunt, the chief of the Military Intelligence Service and the newly appointed Prime Minister, is the chairman of the Academic Committee at this University. Although the current military government claims to have made this university a modern higher institution of study for the *Sangha* university with the medium of instruction in English, there has been a shortage of English speaking academic staff. This is not surprising, given the fact that the teacher-monks have received their principal training in the *Pathamapyan* and *Dhammācariya* systems, which provide no teaching of English or any other European or Asian languages.

## Concluding Reflections

We have now given a brief but general picture of monastic education since the seventeenth century in Burma and Thailand. We have attempted to demonstrate two factors influencing the current state of monastic education in Burma and Thailand. First, some of the existing aspects in monastic education, such as the formal examinations and the standardisation of monastic education systems and their promotions, are the product of historical developments. As discussed in four chapters, Two, Three, Four and Five, these developments cover roughly three hundred years, from the seventeenth to nineteenth century.

The kings, namely Thalun (1629-1648) and Bodawpaya (1782-1819) at Ava and King Narai (1656-1688) at Ayutthaya, introduced and imposed a method of assessment on the monasteries. Despite the royal claims that the measures were taken solely as a response to the decline in learning and discipline in the Order, this thesis has argued that there was a more complex issue involved. The king's military ambition, his consequent need to conscript as many able-bodied men as possible and, in some cases, also the perceived or otherwise threat from the monks in succession problems led to the need for the king to control the *Sangha* for his own political aims. The formal examinations were indeed introduced to serve those ends. When assessing the monks and the novices, the kings followed in the design of syllabuses the monastic ideal, that is to test the monks and novices exclusively on the *dhamma* and *vinaya*, although no record is left as to the exact texts on which the tests were carried out. This exclusive focus on the *dhamma* and *vinaya* was in contrast with the educational practice current in the monasteries at the time. The monasteries had two different types of syllabuses, focussing in the early years



on the *dhamma* and *vinaya* as well as secular subjects to serve the aims of both the Order and that of lay society.

The *Sangha*, for its part, resisted the introduction and use of formal examinations as a means to test the knowledge of the monks and novices, a fact that has never been highlighted before in either native chronicles or modern academic works. But this resistance disintegrated as early as during the reign of Rāma III (1824-1851) in Thailand, or rather Siam, and that of Mindon (1853-1878) in Burma. The leading monks now came to regard the formal examinations, the Parian in Thailand, and the *Pathamapyan* in Burma, as a means to preserve the *Buddha-sāsana*. The interest of the *Sangha* in formal examinations intensified in Siam under King Chulalongkorn when the national integration programmes were carried out and in Burma in the early decades of British rule when the *Sangha* increasingly perceived an alien rule as threatening to the Buddhist religion and the Burmese identity.

The second factor which has contributed to the unsatisfactory state of present monastic education is the *Sangha's* failure to manage its own education. As we have discussed in Chapter Six, there has never been a systematic attempt on the part of the *Sangha* as a whole to develop a strategy to maintain its freedom and to adapt to the changing world. Although there have been individual educationist-monks over the years in both countries, the *Sangha* as an institution lacks a proactive vision in education management. While leading individual members of the Order continue to debate on whether to follow monastic idealism or pragmatism in designing the syllabuses, the motives of students entering the existing various examinations, which are based exclusively on monastic idealist, have ironically become secularised.

Today, as the two prominent educationist monks, Janakābhivaṃsa of Burma and Payutto of Thailand, have found, the present state of the *Sangha's* education is far from being satisfactory.<sup>1</sup> Regarding this current state of monastic education in the two countries, we would like to undertake some remarks. Some of these remarks are concerned with the curriculum, while others deal with culture and attitude.

By and large the curricula in both Burma and Thailand are based on textual study. One of the problems common to both countries regarding textual study in recent years has been a lack of clarity in language teaching. Study of the languages of the primary sources, namely Pali, Burmese and Thai, has not been carried out in the context of reading the contents of the text, but rather a pure exercise in itself. In Burma, the study of Pali has not received adequate attention in recent years.<sup>2</sup> The curriculum of the *Pathamapyyan* has one paper of translation from Pali to Burmese and vice versa. A certain text, for instance, the *Jātaka*, is prescribed. However, no practice in Pali composition is required of the students by the curriculum. This is because earlier it was a tradition for most of the monasteries to teach Pali composition to their students. At present, however, the monasteries have to struggle to complete the curriculum and teach little outside it. Even if Pali composition is required, as Myint Swe, a lecturer in Sanskrit at Mandalay University, pointed out, this requirement itself would indicate that even at the *pathamagyi* (the Advanced Level) students still had to practise Pali composition, which they should have mastered at the *pathamange* level. U Myint Swe also criticised the teachers who teach a student basic *Abhidhamma* by using the Pali version of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* before the student has studied Pali sufficiently. Yet this is how

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<sup>1</sup> Janakābhivaṃsa, “*Nan net khin ovada mya*”, pp.23-24; Naing gnan daw thangka mahanayaka aphwe pariyatti simankain, p.6; Thepwethi, *Thit thang karn suksa*, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Naing gnan daw thangka mahanayaka aphwe pariyatti simankein, p.6.

most of the teaching is done, because the monasteries are under a lot of pressure to complete the curriculum.<sup>3</sup>

The curricula in none of the monastic examination boards in Burma offer any subject of general knowledge. As pointed out, this is an on-going debate on the stigma of studying what were once considered to be secular subjects. But not studying the so-called secular subjects has done more harm than good to the monks. For instance, monks who have studied a curriculum offering general knowledge before being ordained are more capable of explaining the *dhamma* to the people, particularly the younger generation and educated people. Three monks from Burma can be taken as examples here. They are U Jotika, also known as Maha Myaing Sayadaw; U Uttama, better known by his pen-name as U San Lwin; and Ashin Sandādhika or Shwe Parami Sayadaw. These three monks are now not only some of the best known preachers but also the only ones who can convince the people of the *dhamma* through their writing.

Jotika, now 59, came from a liberal Muslim family. He went to a convent school and became an engineer. After converting to Buddhism, he became a *bhikkhu*, studying Pali and the Pali Nikāya under a prominent teacher, U Silānandābhivaṃsa, in Mandalay. His meditation training was under the late Taung Pulu Sayadaw, a friend of another reputed meditation teacher, Mahasi Sayadaw. Uttama, who died last year at 70, coincidentally also came from a liberal Muslim family and went to a Catholic school, before becoming a lecturer in philosophy at Rangoon University. He became known for his work on comparative religions under the title *One Who Has Come to take the Three Refuges*, (*Yatana thone pa ko koe kwe la thu ta yauk I akyauk*). Such a work could not be produced by a scholar monk who has gone through only the normal training offered by

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<sup>3</sup> Myint Swe, *Pali pyatthana* (The Problem of Pali Study), pp.23-31.

the many examination boards. The Bible, the Koran, the Bhagavadgītā and the Upanishads are considered unsuitable subjects for monks to read, and we have never seen them in our library. However, these two monks, Jotika and Uttama, had the opportunity to study those religious texts, as well as subjects they were interested in, namely philosophy and psychology, before they were ordained.

Sandādhika, still only 36, has not studied these non-Buddhist religious texts like the above two, but studied normal subjects such as mathematics, English, history, science and Burmese at government schools until he was 18. He came first in the whole country at Burma's Advanced Level examinations in 1986. Instead of proceeding to medical school, he decided to become a monk and studied the curriculum of the *Pathamapyyan* and *Dhammācariya* examinations at the Mahagandhayon Monastery, Amarapura. With only one *Dhammācariya* degree, which is not much compared with most of his contemporaries, he has become one of the most popular writers on Buddhism in Burma today. He is able to understand people's daily problems and speaks to them directly. The most striking feature of the writing of these three monks is that their approach is, unlike those who have not studied any "secular subjects", not exclusively textual.

In Thailand, as it is now, the curriculum of the *Parian* and that of the *Nak Tham* do not complement each other well. It seems students are made to regard the study of contents as less important than Pali as a language or than textual study, if the *Parian* can actually be so described. We have seen in Chapter Five that the *Nak Tham* textbooks, arranged in questions and answers, are based on content, even though the students are not encouraged to explore. The students have to pass the *Nak Tham* first in order to enter for the *Parian* (now called *Parian Tham*), thus making the *Nak Tham* the foundation course. However, at the *Parian* levels one has to concentrate only on the linguistic aspect of the

prescribed texts, not the content. The teachers have focussed in their teaching on the narrow scope defined by the examination papers, and not what is needed to be a competent student in the *dhamma* and *vinaya*. Many of the topics in the *Nak Tham* curriculum are derived from the Pali *nikāyas*, and the student will benefit more if he has some knowledge of Pali and therefore has access to the original *suttas* in Pali.

The problem then would be that at a young age, which most of the *Nak Tham* students are, it may not be interesting for them to study a dead language such as Pali, let alone to master it. This is the very reason why the vernacular *Nak Tham* was introduced in the first place. However, times have changed. Unlike in the 1910s, when the *Nak Tham* were created, now a complete Thai translation of the *Tipiṭaka* also exists and could be made available to the *Nak Tham* students.

Another shortcoming of the curricula is that they prescribe too many texts. This is true also of the curricula from major examination boards in Burma such as the *Pathamapyan*, the *Dhammācariya*, the *Sakyaśīha*, the *Cetiyangana* and the *Tipiṭakadhara*; and in Thailand the *Nak Tham*, the *Sai Saman Suksa* and the *Sangha* university syllabuses. It is not possible for average students to complete the syllabus within a nine-month academic year. Whereas there is enormous pressure on the teachers to complete the syllabus. Earlier it was possible to complete them because before studying examination syllabuses the students spent two to three years learning foundation texts. In Burma, for example, the future Mahasi Sayadaw learnt Pali grammar and all relevant texts, including some important commentaries and sub-commentaries, in his village monastery, Seik khun, Shwebo, sitting at the feet of his teacher, the abbot, until he was 19. When he entered the examinations in his early twenties he had no problem in completing the syllabuses. In Thailand, Prince Vajirayan had studied Pali grammar and some important texts before he

read the *Parian* syllabuses. At present, however, as students spend less and less time learning important texts before they start examination syllabuses, the actual study of the syllabus itself becomes less and less effective.

In the case of the *Nak Tham* syllabus in Thailand, the students study only for three to six months. Thus it is not possible for the teacher to go through the syllabus thoroughly. In the end, in both Burma and Thailand, the teachers resort to examination question papers from the previous years as a guide on what to teach and what to leave out. In Thailand, the *Sai Saman Suksa* syllabuses are the best example to demonstrate that students are required to study too many texts and subjects within a year. This reflects the high expectations the state and society have of the student. He is expected to be a good Pali scholar, a *dhamma* teacher, a good monk with thorough knowledge of the *vinaya*, an expert in rituals, a good administrator, a peacemaker, a missionary monk, an artist and a health worker with all necessary general knowledge of science, geography, English, mathematics and archaeology. (See Appendix C for the curriculum.) A system that reflects only unrealistic expectations and not the interest of the students in the end produces only disenchanted students. The whole *Sai Saman Suksa* syllabus shows how the reformers have adopted a quick-fix solution to the lack of secular knowledge among the *Sangha*. All the subjects are compulsory. The *Sai Saman Suksa* system, as it stands today, neither helps the student achieve the aim of an ideal *bhikkhu* for the future of the *sāsana* nor produces a knowledgeable person competent in both secular subjects and the Buddhist teaching as expected by pragmatists. However, were these subjects to be divided into compulsory and optional to reduce the burden for both the teacher and student, not only would that help reduce the burden on teacher and students but it would also give them more time to study each subject in greater depth than they can at the moment.

There is also no independent committee or similar instrument to set a general standard and maintain it, despite the existence of many examination boards and committees to draw up curricula. In both countries, the main tasks for the ecclesiastical education authorities have been to produce question papers and mark the answer scripts each year. Even if someone complains of a decline in the standard of monastic education, there is no channel through which such a complaint can be pursued and problems investigated. Therefore in the history of monastic education discussed in this study, we have not heard of a proper review of the curriculum.

Another problem common to the two countries is the lack of reference works available in the student's mother tongue. The materials widely available can be categorised into three: texts in Pali; guidebooks arranged in the popular format of questions and short answers closely following the past question papers; and paraphrase translations such as *nissaya* in Burmese and *blae yok sap* in Thai. Works to explain the content of the texts are very rare. For instance, there is no single work for the student in his mother tongue dealing with essential topics of Buddhist teachings such as *kamma*, the four noble truths, dependent origination, the noble eightfold path or meditation. More worrying is that were such works available, the students themselves might well not use them because they are not required by the examinations. There is no work which critically studies the prescribed texts, either.

This point brings us to another: the absence of a good library in nearly all traditional teaching monasteries. Not that the monastery cannot afford a decent library: even some of the monasteries with millions of *Kyats* (Burmese currency) or *Bahts* (Thai currency) do not have a good library. *Gya khat waing* in Pegu, Burma, Wat Pak Nam, Wat Saket in Bangkok, Thailand, for example, are wealthy monasteries; but the culture of keeping

books for research at any level simply does not exist. Even in one of the most famous teaching monasteries, Wat Bovonives, the library has no good collection.

In Burma, most of the monastery libraries keep only the *Tipiṭaka* and some *nissaya* literature currently in use. Old *nissaya* literature no longer in use for examinations will be discarded. No proper library administration is known among the *Sangha*. In the whole of the Sasana Mandaing Pali University in Pegu, where I studied and taught for five years, there are only four cupboards for the *Tipiṭaka* and some *nissaya* literature. There were not enough copies of them for all students. In fact, all students had to acquire their own, including *nissaya* and other reference books. Those who could not afford them had to depend on the lecture in which the teacher gave the necessary information. This is a common feature of nearly all the teaching monasteries in Burma. Simply, there is no reading culture among the students. The emphasis is not on reading about something, but rather on knowing something of a particular text prescribed in the examinations.

Since there is an insistence on the part of the authorities that students follow standardised answers in the textbooks, students are neither trained nor given an opportunity to comment and question. Students are not given the responsibility to try and understand the text themselves or come up with their own answers. In fact, students will get a pass only if they are able to provide standardised answers. The examiners expect the standard answers as in the following. The questions are for the primary level in Burma.<sup>4</sup> The subject is the *Vinaya* and it was held by the Mandalay branch of the *Pathamapyan* examinations Board in 2000.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This level has been abolished by the present government in 2002 after twenty years of trial.

<sup>5</sup> Tilokābhivamsa, *Pathamapyan sarmeibwe akhyay pyu mulatan poksar aphyayson*, 2000 (Answers to the Questions at the Primary Level of the Pathamapyan Examinations, 2000), pp17-18.



## Questions

1. Provide the *nissaya* translation of the Pali passage related to punishment and condemnation in this life of a thief-*yahan* [*bhikkhu*].
2. Reproduce the Pali passage which is the admonition by good *yahans* to a disobedient *yahan*.
3. State the bad result of the *sampajāna-musāvāda dukkaṭa āpatti* (transgression of knowingly saying a falsehood) and the good result of redressing it. And what is a *kuladūsaka*?
4. List the practices to be followed by *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras* on alms-round in a village or town. Give also the number of rules (*sikkhāpada*) which are related to eating.
5. Determine the offence of the following *bhikkhus* and *sāmaṇeras*.
  - a. A *sāmaṇera* who says that *dhamma* practice does not help to end the circle of suffering.
  - b. A *sāmaṇera* who says that there is no rebirth but death is the end of life.
  - c. A *sāmaṇera* who preaches to someone who is using an umbrella. [*my translation*]

## Answers

1. *Rājāno coraṃ gahetvā haneyyūṃ vā pabbājeyyūṃ vā coro'ti bālo'ti mūlho'ti theno'tīti.*
2. *Māyasmā attānaṃ avacanīyaṃ akāsi. vacanīyaṃ ev'āyasmā attānaṃ karotu. āyasmā pi bhikkhu vadatu sahadhammena. bhikkhu pi āyasmantaṃ vadanti sahadhammena. evaṃ saṃvaddhā hi tassa bhagavato parisā yadidaṃ aññamaññavacanena aññamaññavuṭṭhāpanenā'ti.*

3. The bad result of transgression: danger to the achievement of *jhāna*, *magga* and *phala*. Good result of redressing: helpful to the attainment of *jhāna*, *magga* and *phala*. *Kuladūsaka* is the destruction of genuine faith of the devotees by a bhikkhu who tries to win their favour by giving them flowers etc.
4. *Piṇḍacārika-vagga*. The number of rules related to eating is thirty.
5.
  - a. *Lingānāsana*.
  - b. *Lingānāsana*
  - c. *Daṇḍakamma*. [my translation]

The following are some of the questions and answers of the *Nak Tham tri* level for the Academic Year 2545 (2002) in Thailand.<sup>6</sup> The subject is the *Dhammavibhāga* and *Ghiṇṇapatti*.

### Questions

1.
  - a. What do people who make an unintentional mistake lack?
  - b. What do people who are known as *kataññu katavedī* practise?
2.
  - a. What are the Triple Gems?
  - b. What does the first gem mean? Explain.
3.
  - a. What are the three admonitions of the Buddha?
  - b. In what kind of *dhamma* should a man who desires development establish himself?
4.
  - a. What does a man attain who succeeds in his objective practise? And what are those practices?
  - b. What does *dukkha* mean? And, what is the cause of it?
5.
  - a. From which *dhamma* practice do “understanding, love and unity” arise?

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<sup>6</sup> *Reung sop tham khong sanam laung phneak tham* (The Royal Dhamma Examinations: Dhamma Section), 2545 (2002), pp.57-60.

- b. What are the *aparihāniya-dhamma*? How many of them are there? Explain one of them.
6.
  - a. What is the meaning of *mattaññutā* or being one who knows moderation in the *sappurisadhamma* or the characteristics of a good man?
  - b. What is the kind of speech referred to in the Right Speech of the Noble Eightfold Path?
7.
  - a. What is *nāthakaraṇa-dhamma*?
  - b. What does *kalyāṇamittatā* in the *nāthakaraṇa-dhamma* mean?
8.
  - a. Who are the four good friends?
  - b. Translate the following Pali terms into Thai:
    - b.1 *atithiphalī*
    - b.2 *pubbapetaphalī*

### Answers

1.
  - a. Because he has no *sati*, which is awareness before he undertakes an action, and *sampajāna*, which is awareness during the time he is carrying out his work.
  - b. *kataññū katavedī* is a person who returns gratitude.
2.
  - a. Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*.
  - b. Number One Gem is the Buddha. Buddha means the one who taught the people to practise wholesome deeds, speech and thought according to the *dhamma* and *vinaya*, called *Buddha-sāsana*.
3.
  - a.a Refrain from evil through body, speech and mind.
  - a.b Do good through body, speech and mind, and,
  - a.c Purify one's mind from defilement such as greed and anger.

- b. A man who desires development establish himself should establish himself in the following four *dhamma*:
- b.a Associate with a noble man.
  - b.b Listen to his advice with respect.
  - b.c Contemplate deeply through suitable means so as to appreciate what is good and bad, and
  - b.d Practise the good thing learnt from that contemplation.
4. a. Because he practises the four *iddhipādas*. They are: 1. *chanda*, a desire to succeed in his task; 2. *virīya*, endeavour to accomplish the task; 3. *citta*, determination; and, 4. *vīmaṃsā*, wisdom to accomplish the task.
- b. *Dukkha* is being physically and mentally uncomfortable. It is born of *taṇhā*, attachment.
5. a. *Sārāṇīyadhamma*.
- b. *Aparihāniya-dhamma* are the practices that prevent one from declining in life. They are: 1. meet regularly; 2. commence the meeting together, decide together and end the meeting together; 3. not to lay down what has not been laid down by the Buddha, not to abolish what has been laid down by him and to practise what has been laid down; 4. approach the senior *bhikkhus* in the *Sangha*, show respect and listen to them; 5. not to desire power; 6. be delighted to live in the forest; and 7. associate with moral and modest monks, invite those of them who have not come to the abode to come and help those who have come for their comfort.
6. a. *Mattaññutā* is about knowing moderation in search for food and in consuming it.
- b. Right speech means to refrain from telling a lie, slandering, harsh speech, and frivolous speech.

7.
  - a. *Nāthakaraṇa-dhamma* is the practice to depend on.
  - b. *Kalyāṇamittatā* means to have good friends and not bad ones.
8.
  - a.a. A friend 1. who is grateful; 2. who shares through thick and thin; 3. who wishes one's well-being; and, 4. who has genuine love.
  - b.a. The welcoming of a guest.
  - b.b. Doing meritorious deeds for the departed. (*My translation.*)

Now let us discuss some of the problems related to the attitudes of those involved directly or indirectly in monastic education. As in most aspects of life, monastic education is full of competition. That competition is manifested in the number of students and of successful candidates in the examinations. So many students are admitted by teaching monasteries that most of them are very crowded. This competition is too worldly, the result of competition to win wealthy supporters. As in both countries the government's financial support is minimal for students following religious curricula, most of the financial assistance comes in the form of donations from wealthy devotees, who select a worthy teaching monastery by its examination results, not unlike school league tables in England. Once the results are out, top teaching monasteries in Burma publish the names of successful candidates in their annual pamphlets. They include the total number of student-monks at each level.<sup>7</sup> The most important feature of such a pamphlet is the picture of those who have come first, second or third, if any, in the whole country. The detailed biography and a photo of such a successful candidate will not only convince prospective donors that the teaching monastery is one of the best but will also inspire other students to work harder.

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<sup>7</sup> See Varuṇālaṅkāra *Mahagandhayon taik gyi hnit khyaukse khayee waso thanga hnint pariyatti lok gnan hmattan* (Records of the monks during the Rains Retreats and their Studies for the 60 Year Journey of the Mahagandayon Monastery).

The two teaching monasteries in Burma with most students, the Mahagandhayong, Amarapura, founded by Ashin Janakābhivaṃsa and the New Masoeyeing (Asokārāma), founded by Ashin Sirindābhivaṃsa in Mandalay, share between them more than four thousand resident monks and novices. The huge number of students and therefore the high rate of success in the examinations have drawn many wealthy donors to these two monasteries. In the Mahagandhayon alone there are more than one hundred buildings, each one built by an individual donor, and the donors are from all over the country. The need to have more students is greater if in the same town the competing monasteries belong to different *nikāyas*.

But paradoxically, as a result of the increase in the number of students, proper attention cannot be given to individual students. The number of teachers, on the other hand, does not usually increase with that of students. The difficulty in increasing the number of teachers is in Burma primarily due to the custom that only a monk who has graduated from that monastery will be appointed a teacher. Rarely is a scholar who completes his study at one monastery appointed a teacher at a different one. This practice is intended to maintain the identity of not only the academic tradition but also the spiritual lineage in the monastery. But this practice is often dysfunctional in small teaching monasteries which cannot produce a sufficient number of teachers to meet any increase in students.

In Thailand, too, the competition to increase student numbers exists among teaching monasteries known as *samnak rian*. The abbots want to increase them because that will accelerate their promotion up the ladder of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The offer of a royal title (*patyot*) is the most visible sign of such a promotion. Besides, as in Burma, a high number of students attracts wealthy donors, who wish to support monastic education all over the country. In Thailand, unlike in Burma where government support

is minimal, in the monasteries where *Sai Saman Suksa* classes are conducted, every additional student also means that the monastery receives more funds from the government.

However, the increase in the number of students is not only due to the above reasons. In fact, the teachers themselves have come to have a different attitude towards this matter. In ancient days, the teachers were content with a small number of students, to whom they paid individual attention in both spiritual and academic training. At present, however, the teachers take pride in the huge number of students following their lectures, because the high number of students partly indicates popularity. In Burma, reputed teachers such as Ashin Odātasirībhivaṃsa of Mahāvisuddharāma Taik, Ashin Aggavaṃsa of Pauk Myaing Taik and U Obhāsa of Payagyi Taik, Mandalay, and Ashin Sirindābhivaṃsa of Mahavisuddharāma Taik, Rangoon, each have around two hundred students in their classes. They have to use a microphone. These teachers have no time to check the progress of their students.

Another problem of attitude concerns the fact that at the present in both Burma and Thailand there are too many examinations for students: they are over-examined. There is at least one examination every year and for every level. And a student is under pressure to enter examinations conducted by more than one examination board, for example, the *Pathamapyan* and the *Sakyasīha* in Burma, and the *Sai Saman Suksa* and the *Parian* in Thailand. The pressure of examinations means that the students tend to neglect what they consider to be unnecessary for the examinations. This problem is first and foremost the product of historical development. In Burma, for example, as we discussed in Chapter Three, the *Sakyasīha* examinations were created to replace the *Pathamapyan*, which were suspended by the British when they took over the whole of Burma in 1885. The

*Sakyasīha* examinations were, however, not designed to complement the *Pathamapyan*, nor later modified to do so when the *Pathamapyan* were resumed. Other government boards of examinations which came into existence after independence (1948), such as the *Tipiṭakadhara* examinations and the Nikāya examinations, were created to encourage monks to read all the *Tipiṭaka*. This was because students had not been sufficiently familiar with the *Tipiṭaka*, a problem created by the earlier examination boards such as the *Pathamapyan* and the *Sakyasīha*.

The real confusion over these separate examination boards began in the late 1950s, when the government started to promote monks who had passed most, if not all, of the examinations held by those examination boards. We pointed out in Chapter Three that these examinations have similar curricula.<sup>8</sup> One of the best known monks in the twentieth century Burma, Vicittasārābhivāmsa, is a good example. He was a good, learned and far-sighted monk, who was devoted to teaching and modernising the monastic education system. However, these qualities were not valued by the government. Rather, what was given prominence was the degrees awarded to him by those examination boards. So, the government, whenever given the opportunity, encouraged celebrations in every major town and city and those celebrations took place for over thirty years. The government wanted to be seen to be good Buddhists in the eyes of the people.

Over the years, with the dominance of the government in the media, the Buddhist people came to be persuaded of the need to pass as many examinations as possible. Their expectations in turn are passed on to the monks they support. In Burma, a student monk is generally looked after by one or two families and nowadays one only receives a higher

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<sup>8</sup> See pp.139-143.



ordination (*upasampadā*) when there is a family undertaking to guarantee his material needs while in the Order. The lay supporters are called *yahan daka* in Burmese. These patrons, persuaded by the government of the merit of passing many examinations, encourage the monks they support to get degrees from as many examination boards as possible. The front covers of the books published by so-called role-modelled monks in Burma will demonstrate the examination pressure in monastic education. Here their degrees are given in brackets. Below are some of the well known ones.

1. U Kovidābhivamsa, (*Sakyaśīha, Cetiyaṅgaṇa* and government *Dhammācariya*), *The Masoe Yeing<sup>9</sup> Answers on the Sīlakkhandha[vagga]*, Rangoon, Fourth Print, 1994.
2. Ashin Issariyābhivamsa, (*Sakyaśīha, Cetiyaṅgaṇa* and government *Dhammācariya*, Vinaya Pālipāragū, Piṭakattayapāragū), *Ṭikākyaw Vijayamālā: designed for the Pathama lat students*, Department of Religious Affairs, Rangoon, 2000.

The over-emphasis on passing examinations and acquiring certificates worries most of the abbots and teachers. Janakābhivamsa told his students during one of his regular morning “admonition sessions” (*nan net khin ovada*) that “[n]owadays monks and novices are benefiting little from spiritual growth [because] the entire monastic world goes only for formal examinations. They go for examinations not only at the beginning of their monastic study, but also from halfway until the end of it.”<sup>10</sup> Payutto of Thailand echoed this concern when he told his audience in one of his lectures that “people study for degrees and certificates, and not for knowledge or for practical development... the

<sup>9</sup> *Masoe Yeing* [Asokārāma] is the name of one of the most famous teaching monasteries in Mandalay.

<sup>10</sup> Janakābhivamsa, “*Nan net khin ovada mya*”, pp.23-24.

motivation has to be appropriate... for the *Sangha* it [motivation] should be about the *dhamma*...”<sup>11</sup>

Janakābhivamsa commented on the over-emphasis on examinations. He warned his students that “only if the aim of our education is spiritual growth and the development of knowledge will we be able to bring good to individual students, the nation and the religion. It is entirely improper for students and teachers just to focus on passing examinations, becoming famous and obtaining material gains. Take the utmost care to avoid such unworthy objectives.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dhammapiṭaka (Payutto), *Bot rian 25 pi khon thai rian ru rue yang* (The Lessons of 25 Years: Have the Thai People Learnt?), p.22.

<sup>12</sup> Janakābhivamsa, cit., p.24.

## Appendix A

### Syllabuses for Other Levels of the Pathamapyan During the Reign of Bodawpaya

Attention is drawn to similarities between the syllabuses of different levels. It has been a tradition in Burma that texts considered important are studied at all levels. At the higher levels, they are studied with their commentaries.

#### Intermediate Level for the Candidate for *Shin Laung*

1. Eight chapters of Grammar (i.e. the whole text of Kaccāyana's Pali grammar: its Pali and Burmese paraphrase and morphology.)
2. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (Compendium of Abhidhamma by Anuruddha): the first seven chapters in Pali, Burmese paraphrase and analysis of stanzas, the eighth chapter (*paccaya-pariccheda*) with comprehensive study of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*.
3. *Mātikā*
4. *Dhātukathā*: Pali and Burmese paraphrase
5. *Mūla Yamaka: Kusala-ṭīkā*

#### Higher Level for *Shin Laung*

1. Eight chapters of Grammar (i.e. the whole text of Kaccāyana's Pali grammar): its Pali, Burmese paraphrase, morphology and six types of *saṃvaṇṇanā*, "commentary" on the *paṇāma-gāthā* (preface).

2. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (Compendium of Abhidhamma by Anuruddha): nine chapters (i.e. whole text): explanation of all prose; *citta-vīthi*, “thought-process”; *marañāsannavīthi*, “thought-process-of-near-death”; characteristics of *cetasika* in detail; chapter on summary of function (*kiccasaṅgaha*); characteristics of matter in detail; *puggalabheda*; *bhūmicatukka* and *kammacatukka* in detail; explanation of both *Paccaya* and *Kammaṭṭhāna* Chapters.
3. *Mātikā*
4. *Dhātukathā*. Pali and Burmese paraphrase.
5. *Mūla*, *Khandha*, *Āyatana*, *Dhātu*, *Sacca* and *Sanikhāra Yamaka*: *Kusalatika* “triplet on wholesome phenomena”; Pali and Burmese paraphrase.

#### Primary Level for *Pazīn laung*

1. Eight chapters of Grammar (i.e. the whole text of Kaccāyana’s Pali grammar): its Pali and Burmese paraphrase, morphology and syntax (*sasat*) of *sutta* and *vutti*.
2. *Niddesa* (commentary on Kaccāyana’s grammar)
3. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: nine chapters (i.e. whole text): explanation of all prose; all *citta-vīthi*, “thought-process”; six *saṃvaṇṇanā* on the *paṇāmagāthā*, “stanzas on homage to the Triple Gems” at the beginning of the text; Grammatical connection exercise on prose; characteristics of *cetasika* in detail; chapter on summary of function (*kiccasaṅgaha*); characteristics of matter in detail; *puggalabheda*; *bhūmicatukka* and *kammacatukka* in detail. Six types of *saṃvaṇṇanā* on all stanzas in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*.
4. *Mātikā*
5. *Dhātukathā*

6. *Mūla Yamaka* (the first six triplets), *Khandha*, *Āyatana*, *Dhātu*, *Sacca*, *Saṅkhāra*, *Anusaya*, *Citta*, *Dhamma* and *Indriya Yamaka* (*kusalatika*, “triplet on wholesome phenomena”).
7. *Paṭṭhāna*: up to the end of *Kusalatika*.

### Intermediate Level for Candidate for *Pazin laung*

1. Eight chapters of Grammar (i.e. the whole text of Kaccāyana’s Pali grammar): its Pali, Burmese paraphrase, morphology and grammatical connection exercise of *sutta* and *vutti*.
2. *Niddesa* (commentary on *Kaccāyana*)
3. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: nine chapters (i.e. whole text): explanation of all prose; all *citta-vīthi*, “thought-process”; six types of *saṃvaṇṇanā* on the *paṇāmagāthā*, grammatical connection exercise on prose; characteristics of *cetasika* in detail; chapter on summary of function (*kiccasaṅgaha*); characteristics of matter in detail; *puggalabheda*; *bhūmicatukka* and *kammacatukka* in detail. Six *saṃvaṇṇanā* on all stanzas in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*.
4. *Mātikā*
5. *Dhātukathā*
6. *Mūla Yamaka* (the first six triplets), *Khandha*, *Āyatana*, *Dhātu*, *Sacca*, *Saṅkhāra*, *Anusaya*, *Citta*, *Dhamma* and *Indriya Yamaka*: *Kusalatika*.
7. *Paṭṭhāna*: up to the end of *Kusalatika*.
8. For *naywa* “Day Lessons”: little grammars such as *Kaccāyanasāra*, *Sambandhacintā*, six types of *saṃvaṇṇanā* on the first two stanzas of *Nyāsa*.

9. *Ṭīkā-kyaw (abhidhammatthavibhāvinī)*: up to the end of the comment on the stanza “*tattha vuttā*”: exercise on logical connections of sentences, grammatical connection exercise between words.
10. *Vuttodaya*
11. The first three chapters of *Subodhālaṅkāra*
12. The first chapter of *kalāpa* [better known as *kātantra*]: Sanskrit, Burmese paraphrase and etymology.

### Higher Level for Candidates for *Pazin laung*

1. Eight chapters of Grammar (i.e. the whole text of Kaccāyana’s Pali grammar): its Pali, Burmese paraphrase, etymology and syntax of *sutta* and *vutti*.
2. *Niddesa* (commentary on Kaccāyana); six types of *saṃvaṇṇanā* on all *suttas*.
3. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: nine chapters (i.e. whole text): explanation of all prose; all *citta-vīthi*, “thought-process”; six types of *saṃvaṇṇanā* on the *paṇāmagāthā*, grammatical connection exercise between words in prose; characteristics of *cetasika* in detail; chapter on summary of function (*kiccaṅgaha*); characteristics of matter in detail; *puggalabheda*; *bhūmicatukka* and *kammacatukka* in detail. Six *saṃvaṇṇanā* on all stanzas in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*.
4. *Mātikā*
5. *Dhātukathā*
6. *Mūla Yamaka* (the first six triplets), *Khandha*, *Āyatana*, *Dhātu*, *Sacca*, *Sanikhāra*, *Anusaya*, *Citta*, *Dhamma* and *Indriya Yamaka*: *Kusalatika* (“triplet on wholesome phenomena”).
7. *Paṭṭhāna*: all twenty-four conditions.

8. For *naywa* “*Day Lessons*”: little grammatical works such as *Kaccāyanasāra*, *Sambandhacintā*; *Saddatthabhedacintā*, six types of *saṃvaṇṇanā* on the first two *suttas* of *Nyāsa*.
9. *Ṭikā-kyaw* (*Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī*): six *saṃvaṇṇanā* on the comment on the *ahetuka citta*.
10. *Vuttodaya*
11. *Subodhālankāra*: All
12. The first chapter of *Kalāpa* (*sandhi*): Sanskrit, Burmese paraphrase and morphology; the first chapter of *Vitakka*: Sanskrit and Burmese paraphrase.

## Appendix B

### Syllabuses of the Sakyasīha Teachers' Qualification Examinations<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Special Students Grade

**Day One:** *Dvemātikā* (*bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī Pāṭimokkha*) (by heart), *Kaṅkhāvitaraṇī aṭṭhakathā*, its old and new sub-commentaries, *Khaṅkhāvitaraṇī-aṭṭhakathā*, its *yojanā*, its *mahāṭikā*, *Pāṭimokkha-padattha-anuvaṇṇanā* and other related commentaries.

**Day Two:** Great Grammar (Kaccāyana's), Analysis of Words, Analysis of Rules, Analysis of Grammar, Six Commentarial on Verses, Forty Methods and *Samvaṇṇanā* (by heart). *Nyāsa*, *Suttaniddesa*, *Rūpasiddhi*, *Rūpasiddhiṭikā*, *Kaccāyanavaṇṇanā*, *Saddanīti Suttamālā*, *Kaccāyana bhāsāṭikā*, *Rūpasiddhi bhāsāṭikā*, *Mogallāna* and other commentaries on *Rūpasiddhi*.

**Day Three:** *Saddhatthabhedacintā*, *Kaccāyanasāra*, *Vuttodaya* and *Abhidhānappadīpikā* (by heart); related *nissayas*, *Abhidhānappadīpikāṭikā*, *Bhedacintāṭikā*, *Bhedacintāmahāṭikā*, *Bhedacintādīpanī*, *Kaccāyanasāraṭikā* (both old and new), *Vuttodayagaṇḍī*, *Chappacayadīpanī* and *Vacanatthajotikāṭikā*.

**Day Four:** *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* (by heart); *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinīṭikā*, *Sanīkhepavaṇṇanāṭikā*, *Thingyogaṇḍī-Kraṇḍī*<sup>2</sup>, *Thingyo* Analysis<sup>3</sup> and other commentaries to the *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinīṭikā*.

<sup>1</sup> We shall give the syllabuses of the *Sakyasīha* where they are the same as the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa*, because although the *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* was first established, the government has shown that it placed the *Sakyasīha* in a higher regard when it openly announced that it was adopting the *Sakyasīha* as its model in formulating a *dhammācariya* syllabus. The *Pariyatti Sāsanaḥita Centenary*, Mandalay, pp.33-4.



**Day Five:** *Mātikā, Dhātukathā*, the first five chapters of *Yamaka* (by heart);  
*Mātikā Dhātukathā Gaṇḍi Kran, Mātikā Dhātukathā Ānugaṇḍi Kran,*  
*Yamaka Anugaṇḍi Kran* and related commentaries.

The minimum mark for simple pass is 50%.

## 2. Special Teachers Grade

**Day One:** *Pārājikakaṇḍa-aṭṭhakathā, Sāratthadīpanīṭikā, Vimativinodanīṭikā,*  
*Vajirabuddhiṭikā, Pārājikakaṇḍi, Pārājikakaṇḍayojanā, Nyāsa,*  
*Nettipakaraṇa* Analysis, *Samvaṇṇanā* and forty commentarial methods,  
Ten Metaphors (upacāra).

**Day Two:** *Sīlakkhandha[vagga]-aṭṭhakathā, Sīlakkhandha[vagga]ṭikā* (old and  
new), *Sīlakkhandhagaṇḍi, Vuttodaya, Subodhālaṅkāra* and  
*Samvaṇṇanā*.

**Day Three:** *Aṭṭhasālinī, Aṭṭhasālinīṭikā, Aṭṭhasālinīmadhuṭikā, Aṭṭhasālinīgaṇḍi,*  
*Aṭṭhasālinīyojanā, Yamaka* (the last five chapters), *Paṭṭhāna* Analysis.

The minimum mark for simple pass is 70%.

## Syllabuses of the Sakyasīha Sāmaṇera Examinations

The *Sakyasīha Sāmaṇera* Examinations are for *Sāmaṇeras* under the age of twenty only. Like the Special Grades for Students and Teachers, the *Sāmaṇeras* Examination have oral test before one is allowed to sit for the written examinations. The syllabuses are as follows:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A text in Burmese explaining the difficult points in the Abhidhammatthasangaha.

<sup>3</sup> A text in Burmese giving all the analysis of the details of consciousness (*citta*), mental factors (*cetasika*), their co-relationship, thought process (*vīthi*) and conditionality (*paṭṭhāna*).

<sup>4</sup> The Information for the *Pariyatti Sāsanaḥita (Sakyasīha) Examination*, p.4.

## 1. Grade One

1. *Vinaya Mahāvagga*
2. *Aṅuttaranikāya: Ekakanipāta* to *Tikanipāta* (I - III *nipāta*)
3. *Dhammapada Pāli* and *Aṭṭhakathā* from *Yamakavagga* to *Appamādavagga*.
4. Kaccāyana's grammar: four chapters i.e. *Sandhi*, *Nāma*, *Kāraka* and *Ākhyāta*.
5. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: the first three chapters i.e. *Citta*, *Cetasika* and *Pakiṇṇaka pariccheda*.

## 2. Grade Two

1. *Cūḷavagga* and *Parivāra*
2. *Aṅuttaranikāya: Ekakanipāta* to *Chakkanipāta*. (I – IV *nipāta*)
3. *Dhammapada Pāli* and *Aṭṭhakathā: Yamakavagga* to *Daṇḍavagga*.
4. Kaccāyana's grammar: the first six chapters i.e. *Sandhi*, *Nāma*, *Kāraka*, *Samāsa*, *Taddhita* and *Ākhyāta*.
5. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: the first five chapters i.e. *Citta*, *Cetasika*, *Pakiṇṇaka*, *Vīthi* and *Vīthimutta*.

## 3. Grade Three

1. *Pārājikā* and *Pācittiya Pāli*.
2. *Aṅuttaranikāya*: all.
3. *Dhammapada Pāli* and *aṭṭhakathā*: all.
4. Kaccāyana's grammar: all.
5. *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*: all.

Since its first examination in 1950, the Sāmaṇera Sakyasīha examinations have had 416 Sāmaṇeras graduating.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Pariyatti Sāsanaḥita Centenary*, p.219.

## Syllabuses of The Sakyasīha Five Nikāyas Examination

In order to encourage monks to study the whole five *nikāyas*, there is another examination by the *Sakyasīha* called *Nikāya* Examination.<sup>6</sup> There is no age limit in this examination. There is no written examination in this *Nikāya* Examination. The syllabuses are all the Theravada canonical texts recognised at the Chaṭṭhasangāyanā, which are here categorised into 32 groups. One may enter only for one group and has to finish all groups in one *nikāya* before moving to the next one. They 32 groups, which are given below according to the Burmese classification of the *Tipiṭaka*:

- (1) *Pārājika Pāli* (2) *Pācittiya Pāli* (3) *Mahavagga Pāli (Vinaya)* (4) *Cūlavagga Pāli* (5) *Parivāra Pāli* (6) *Silakkhandha[vagga] Pāli* (7) *Mahāvagga Pāli (Sutta-piṭaka)* (8) *Pāthikavagga Pāli* (9) *Mūlapaṇṇāsa Pāli* (10) *Majjhimaṇṇāsa Pāli* (11) *Uparipaṇṇāsa Pāli* (12) *Sagāthāvagga, Nidānavagga Saṃyutta Pāli* (13) *Khandhavagga, Saḷāyatanavagga Saṃyutta Pāli* (14) *Mahāvagga Saṃyutta* (15) The first four *nipātas* of the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* i.e. *Ekaka, Duka, Tika* and *Catukkanipāta Āṅguttara Pāli* (16) The fifth, sixth and seventh *nipātas* i.e. *Pañcaka, Chakka* and *Sattakanipāta Āṅguttara Pāli* (17) the eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh *nipāta* i.e. *Aṭṭhaka, Navaka, Dasaka* and *Ekādasakanipāta Āṅguttara Pāli* (18) *Khuddakapāṭha, Dhammapada, Udāna, Itivuttaka* and *Suttanipāta Pāli* (19) *Vimānavatthu, Petavatthu, Theragātha, Therīgathā Pāli* (20) *Apadāna Pāli* (first volume) (21) *Apadāna Pāli* (second volume), *Buddhavaṃsa* and *Cariyāpiṭaka Pāli* (22) *Jātaka Pāli* (first volume) (23) *Jātaka Pāli* (second volume) (24) *Mahāniddeśa Pāli* (25) *Cūḷaniddeśa Pāli* (26) *Paṭisambhidāmagga Pāli* (27) *Nettipakaraṇa* and *Peṭakopadesa Pāli* (28) *Milindapañhā Pāli* (29) *Dhammasaṅgaṇī Pāli* (30)

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<sup>6</sup> The Cetiyaṅgaṇa has almost the same syllabuses for the *nikāya* examinations, except that it divides the whole *Tripiṭaka* into 39 groups.

*Vibhanga Pāli* (31) *Dhātukathā Pāli* and *Puggalapaññatti Pāli* (32)  
*Kathāvatthu Pāli*.<sup>7</sup>

Following the early Buddhist tradition, the degrees are awarded as *Dīghabhāṇaka* for those who can recite by heart the whole *Dīgha-nikāya* and so on. The *Sakyasīha* has produced 143 *bhāṇakas* since its inception in 1970.

The *Cetiyaṅgaṇa* does not hold these special *Nikāya* examinations like the *Sakyasīha*, but holds different examination, whose syllabuses are the whole *Vinaya-piṭaka*, and it is called the *Vinaya* Examination.

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<sup>7</sup> Nos. 1 to 5 are the *Vinaya-piṭaka*; 6 to 8 are the *Dīgha-nikāya*; 9 to 11 are the *Majjhima-nikāya*; 12 to 14 are the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*; 15 to 17 are the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*; 18 to 28 are the *Khuddaka-nikāya*; and the last five belong to the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* as well as the *Khuddaka-nikāya*. Information for the three examinations of the *Pariyatti Sāsanaḥita* association, *Mandalay*, pp 5-7.

## Appendix C

The syllabuses of *Pariyatti Tham Sai Saman Suksa* are as follows.<sup>1</sup>

### Year One

#### a. Pali

- a.a Grammar
- a.b Basic translation of Pali language
- a.c Translation of the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (part four to be memorised.)

#### b. Secular Subjects

- b.a Mathematics
- b.b English
- b.c Geography
- b.d Science (all textbooks of primary year five of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai

#### c. General Knowledge

- c.a Basic monastic training

### Year Two

#### a. Pali

- a.a Grammar
- a.b Translation of the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (parts one to four)

#### b. Secular Subjects

- b.a Mathematics
- b.b English

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<sup>1</sup> *Prawat karn suksa khong song*, pp. 128-136.

- b.c Geography
- b.d Science (all textbooks of primary year six of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai

**c. General Knowledge**

- c.a Basic monastic training

**Year Three**

**a. Pali**

- a.a Grammar
- a.b Translation of the *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (parts five to eight)

**b. Secular Subjects**

- b.a Mathematics
- b.b English
- b.c Geography
- b.d Science (all textbooks of primary year seven of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai

**c. General Knowledge**

- c.a Basic monastic training

**Year Four**

**a. Pali**

- a.a Translation from Pali to Thai: *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* (part one)
- a.b Translation from Pali to Thai of a selected *sutta* connected to the *Maṅgala Sutta*
- a.c Translation from Thai to Pali: *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (part one)
- a.d Pali grammar

**b. Secular Subjects**

- b.a Mathematics
- b.b English
- b.c Geography
- b.d Science (all textbooks of secondary years one and two of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai

**c. General Knowledge**

- c.a How to write official monastic correspondence

**Year Five**

**a. Pali**

- a.a Translation from Pali to Thai: *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* (part two)
- a.b Translation from Pali to Thai of a selected *Sutta* connected to the *Maṅgala-sutta*
- a.c Translation from Thai to Pali: *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (parts two, three and four)
- a.d Advanced Pali grammar

**b. Secular Subjects**

- b.a Mathematics
- b.b English
- b.c Geography
- b.d Science (all textbooks of secondary year three of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai

**c. General Knowledge**

- c.a How to write official monastic correspondence

## Year Six

### a. Pali

- a.a Translation from Pali to Thai: *Samantapāsādikā* (part three, four and five)
- a.b Translation from Pali to Thai of a selected part of the *Vinayaṭṭhaka* connected to the *Samantapāsādikā* (part three, four and five)
- a.c Translation from Thai to Pali: *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* (parts five, six, seven and eight)
- a.d Advanced Pali grammar

### b. Secular Subjects

- b.a Mathematics
- b.b English
- b.c Geography
- b.d Science (all textbooks of secondary years four and five of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai

### c. General Knowledge

- c.a Propagation of the Dhamma.
- c.b Introduction to Art and Archaeology.

## Year Seven

### a. Pali

- a.a Translation from Pali to Thai: *Samantapāsādikā* (part two and three)
- a.b Translation from Thai to Pali: *Maṅgalatthadīpanī* (part one and two)
- a.c Versification
- a.d Advanced Pali grammar



**b. Secular Subjects**

- b.a Mathematics
- b.b English: Spoken and written
- b.c Geography and history: Thai and world geography and history.
- b.d Science (all textbooks of secondary years four and five of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai: literature and history

**c. General Knowledge**

- c.a Propagation of the Dhamma.
- c.b Introduction to Psychology
- c.c Introduction to Archaeology
- c.d Introduction to other religions
- c.e History of Buddhism

**Year Eight****a. Pali**

- a.a Translation from Pali to Thai: *Visuddhimagga* (parts one, two and three)
- a.b Translation from Thai to Pali: *Samantapāsādikā* (parts one and two)
- a.c Versification
- a.d Advanced Pali grammar

**b. Secular Subjects**

- b.a Mathematic
- b.b English: Spoken and written
- b.c Geography and history: Thai and world geography and history.

- b.d Science (all textbooks of secondary years four and five of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai: literature, history and composition.

**c. General Knowledge**

- c.a Propagation of the Dhamma.
- c.b Introduction to Psychology
- c.c Introduction to Archaeology
- c.d Introduction to other religions
- c.e History of Buddhism
- c.f Logic
- c.g The art of commentary

**Year Nine**

**a. Pali**

- a.a Translation from Pali to Thai: *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī*
- a.b Translation from Thai to Pali: *Visuddhimagga* (parts one, two and three)
- a.c Advanced Pali grammar

**b. Secular Subjects**

- b.a Mathematic
- b.b English: written, translation, literature.
- b.c Geography: North America and Europe. History: Rama I- IV.
- b.d Science (all textbooks of secondary years four and five of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai: etymology, syntax, literature, composition.

**c. General Knowledge**

- c.a Propagation of the Dhamma.
- c.b Introduction to Psychology
- c.c Introduction to Archaeology
- c.d Introduction to other religions
- c.e History of Buddhism
- c.f Meditation

## **Year Ten**

### **a. Pali**

- a.a Selected *sutta* or chapter from the three *piṭaka*. (prescribed)

### **b. Secular Subjects**

- b.a Mathematic
- b.b English: written, translation, history of literature, report writing.
- b.c Geography: the whole world. History: Rama V- to date.
- b.d Science (all textbooks of secondary years four and five of the secular schools.)
- b.e Thai: etymology, syntax, literature, composition.

### **c. General Knowledge**

- c.a Propagation of the *Dhamma*.
- c.b Introduction to Psychology
- c.c Introduction to other religions
- c.d Skilful means in peace building
- c.e Meditation
- c.f Propagation of the Dhamma in Thailand and abroad.

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*Dīgha-nikāya*

*Jinakālamālī*

*Majjhima-nikāya*

*Samyutta-nikāya*

*Sāsanavaṃsa*

*Sumaṅgalavilāsini*

*Vinaya-piṭaka*

## **In Thai**

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