



BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN THE NORTH-EAST THEN AND NOW

Rev. Kyawsu Mog, (Ven.Nyanissara Bhikkhu)

(Lecturer)

Department of Buddhist Studies

Arunachal University of Studies,

Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh, PIN-792103

With the growing interest in the teachings of the Buddha worldwide in recent years there is an increasing need for a sound Buddhist education system to impart knowledge of Buddhism to the upcoming generation at least those who profess Buddhism as their faith. The name of this faith is known as Buddhism but most scholars prefer to call it as 'the teachings of the Buddha'. Hence the followers of this faith are known as 'students', because, if the faith is known as the teaching of the Buddha, then there must be students to learn it. Even if we call this faith as Buddhism the word has derived from the Pāli or Sanskrit root '*budh*' to know and from '*budh*' the word '*Buddha*' has come and, from the word Buddha scholars have coined the word as Buddhism. And Buddhism has two divisions known as Theravada and Mahāyāna which modern scholars have named them as Southern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism. Yet Buddhism is not a religion, so to say, because Buddhist philosophy goes at par with the modern science especially with quantum physics and modern psychology. In this way Buddhism has become a subject for studies and many leading universities of the world have already begun to teach Buddhism as a research subject. Also these universities have produced a good number of Buddhist scholars, professors and writers around the globe.

Whether Theravada or Mahayana the whole Buddha Vacana or the teachings of the Buddha can be summed up into Trisiksha or the Threefold Teachings such as *Sīla*, (Morality) *Samādhi* (Concentration) and *Prajna* (Wisdom).

Now, when we look back at the system of Buddhist education in the North-east India particularly among those who profess the Theravada form of Buddhism, we have lots of things to be discussed. In the olden days when the secular educational institutions were quite rare Buddhist monasteries were used as education hubs. The Singpho, Khampti and the Tangsas call

a Buddhist Temple as 'Kyong' or 'Chyong'. The true meaning of Kyong or Chyong is a school or a seat of learning. In each and every Singpho and Khampti village there is a Buddhist monastery which is used not only for religious performances but for learning too. All the village children used to attend the classes, mostly in the evening after finishing their household activities. They carried in their hands candles flowers and joss-sticks to offer to the Buddha while they were learning the prayer stanzas. The stanzas were mostly in Pāli language known as *gāthā*. Students did not need to write them down because the *gāthās* or some lengthy chanting had to be memorized from mouth to mouth orally. The chief monk or a novice is appointed as the guide; therefore we did not need to have a particular teacher as instructor and no modes of payment were made to the instructor. Since written materials were not available the students had to by-heart the *gāthās* and some important Sutras. Books were anyhow available but written in Myanmar script. Therefore, those students who permanently stayed in the monasteries had to learn Myanmar language to understand the Pāli words. Apart from religious education arithmetic was also taught and the traditional folk tales and Jātaka tales were related to the students in order to bring them down from generation to generation. These tales were played as drama in the occasion of Buddhist ceremony and festivals. Some of our elders still have a little knowledge of Pāli language and recitation of prayer and they are able to recite those prayer *gāthās* with their meanings, but in comparison to these elders the present generation knows nothing and because of this very reason they are reluctant to go the monasteries even on the Buddhist holy days.

Character building and mannerism were the most important parts of monastic education that were imparted to the students basing on the principles of PañcaSīla, the five precepts.

1. To abstain from killing.
2. To abstain from stealing.
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. To abstain from telling lies, and
5. To abstain from intoxication.

To honor to those who are worthy to honor, to respect the elders, to respect one's own parents, to do their services in due times, and to support the aged and disabled were basic teachings for character building. Now a days, the situation is quite changed and the scholastic atmosphere of the monasteries is slowly fading away. There is no time for the children to attend to the monastic trainings. Modern and secular form of education system has introduced job oriented short period courses which attracts the mind of both children and the parents whereas skill development programs are nil. Therefore, even after passing out from the schools or colleges most of these students simply remain as job seeking candidates because of lack of pragmatic knowledge.

Apart from the character building the basic philosophy of Buddhist Thought was also taught basing on the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutra. Particularly the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path and also the three signs *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* also known as the Central Philosophy of Buddhism. Most of the followers of the Theravada form of Buddhism know the

Four Noble Truths (a) that there is suffering, (b) that there is the cause or reason for suffering, (c) that there is the cessation of suffering and (d) that there is the path for the cessation of suffering, and the Noble Eightfold Path, (a) right view or right understanding, (b) right speech, (c) right thought, (d) right effort, (e) right action, (f) right livelihood, (g) right mindfulness and (h) right concentration. And the three signs or the Central Philosophy of Buddhism *anicca*, (Impermanent), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anatta* (soullessness). Besides the basic philosophical teachings of the Buddha they had to memorize the middle-length Sutras such as “*Mangala*” Sutra, “*Karaniya*” Sutra, “*Ratana*” Sutra which are used to chant by monks as protective and blessing *mantras*.

In this direction the Arunachal University of Studies, Namsai, for the first time in the North-east has taken a further step to open the Department of Pāli & Buddhist Studies from the year 2017 and there are almost 15 students had enrolled and completed their Certificate Course in Pāli Language and basic Buddhist Philosophy and Five more students are pursuing their Master Degree in Buddhist Studies. Some more students have expressed their desire to continue their studies in this University therefore; the University has an idea to begin a Diploma Course for Pāli Language and Buddhist Studies. In the year 2018 five students have enrolled for the Pāli Certificate Course and Seven students for the Pāli Diploma Course, Fifteen Students for the B.A. (honours) in Buddhist Studies.

