

# BUDDHIST EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: CRISIS AND REMEDIES

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## ABSTRACT

*In this twenty-first century when humankind is craving for peace and sublime happiness, proper and caring education is the only succor. Buddhism being the greatest interest drawer for people's daily religious behavior, its educational elements are therefore sought for enormously. It is also true that the learning/knowledge related terms (jnāna, śikṣha for example) which are found in abundance in an Asian Buddhist vocabulary, cannot be understood properly by mere one word, 'education'. The subtlety of the Buddhist education is resultantly very important.. The ethics and morality which adorn a beautiful human life are embedded in the tenets of Buddhist education which draw people towards it. However, it has been found in recent decades that the modern meaning of education is quite different and market oriented which was never a characteristics of pure education. The Buddhist education system is no exception and has been badly affected by such forces. The present paper looks at the crisis pervading within Buddhist education in general and its status in Southeast Asia. The remedial issues are also explored and discussed in this paper.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of education in human growth is universally acknowledged. Since early times of mankind, the tools of education have been not only essential part of expressing ideas, knowledge and wisdom but for dissemination of learning and thus nurturing future generation. The evolution of writing, the concept of teacher, and that of writer/composer in every civilization has subsequently led to the mental development, innovation and invention, and healthier mutual socio-culture behavior. While the word ‘education’ according to Cambridge dictionary, is “the process of teaching or learning in a school, or the knowledge that you get from this”, and also , “the study of methods and theories of teaching”, we have to remember that the very word is not the total reflection or essence of the enforced synonyms of terms such ‘*vidyā*’, and ‘*śikṣā*’ frequently used in Hindu and Buddhist ‘education’. Hence, while taking the word ‘education’ in our English conversation and writing, we must realize its limitation and inability to express all what the related Indic terms stand for.

Today’s world in the name of ‘development’, ‘progress’ and ‘advancement’ has put the system of education in big trouble. The cut-throat ‘competition’ among students, scoring grades and marks becoming the main aim of the education Teachers are also themselves in a soup, as they are required all the time to ‘produce’ results. In the name of education the students are required to undergo standardized instruction intended to make them efficient servants of a demeaning social system. While such education may be necessary to guarantee societal stability, it does little to fulfil the higher end of learning, the illumination of the mind with the light of truth and goodness. A major cause of our educational problems lies in the “commercialization” of education.

The same is the case in the societies of South and Southeast Asia, where the Buddhism oriented agrarian based population is has been made tool of economic spin. Before Vietnam War, Southeast Asian life was dotted by traditional ways of life. While buffalo culture was replaced by mechanized agriculture, the evenings at Buddhist Wat featuring discourse on Vessantara Jataka and inspiring socio-religious *Lakon* (Plays) were replaced by soap opera on television,

the education also became prey to the economics. The concept that an education system is to prepare students to turn into productive citizens governed by the drive to maximize profits created an unnerving situation. Such aim of education was quite inconsistent with Buddhist principles and practices. The Buddhist education too therefore was in peril in these wet cultures of Southeast Asia where the rural life and agriculture covered almost 80 percent of the region. Therefore, the Buddhist monasteries which were the main source of shaping the young minds by providing primary education, began a new journey. True, practical efficiency certainly has its place in Buddhist education propounding a middle path. But for Buddhism the practical side of education must be integrated in the educational policy guided by Buddhist principles. The present paper discusses the status of Buddhist education in Southeast Asia both at the monastic level as well as at the level of the laity.

Going back to the antiquity, the origin of Buddhism itself lies in 'knowing differently', 'exquisitely' and 'impressively'. Naturally enough, the first elements of Buddhist education were the continuation of the exploration of new ways and methods of learning and imparting knowledge. As expressed by Buddha himself, the purpose of learning and education which culminated in sending the exponents of Bhikṣu sikṣaka (preachers) to the people was loaded with the intention for a large scale benefit of human beings, creating better persons in the society, making both people and deva happier, and establishing an ideal example of 'anusaraṇa' (loosely translated to 'follow'):

*"Caratha Bhikkhave Cārikam bahujana hitāya bahujana sukhāya, lokānukampāya althāya hitāya sukhāya, devamanussānam, mā ekena dve agamittha desetha bhikkhave dhammam ādikalyānam, majjha kalyānam pariyo- sanakalyānam, sattham, sabyañ-janam..."*

(Vinaya-Mahavagga, 1.8.32)

The history of Buddhist education begins with the history of the Buddhist Sangha as the latter was the most natural tool for imparting education, first among the Sangha communities, then Upasaka-Upasika to be followed by the provision of offering education to the masses. The history of the Buddhist system of education is practically that of the Buddhist order or Sangha

Buddhist education and learning centered round monasteries. The Buddhist world did not offer any educational opportunities apart from or independently of its monasteries. All education, religious as well as secular, was in the hands of the monks. They hold the monopoly of imparting education and of the leisure to impart it. They were the only custodians and bearers of the Buddhist culture. With the beginning as resorts during the rainy season, the Buddhist monasteries at the next stage turned into great centers of learning. The account of such a transition from residences to seats of learning is a remarkable one in the history of Buddhism in India. Undoubtedly, such a process of transformation was rather slow, but it was steady. The growth of Viharas as educational institutions may also be noticed in the following passage from the Manorathapurani, the commentary of the Anguttara Nikaya “Even if there be a hundred or a thousand bhikkhus practising Vipassana (meditation), there will be no realization of the Noble Path if there is not learning”.<sup>(1)</sup> Therefore, the *Sasana* is stabilized when learning endures. The value of learning and proper imparting of education was thus greatly felt. Monasteries used to be the main seats of doctrinally focused education in the Buddhist traditions outside India as well. It is seen even now in major Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia where the Buddhist Monastic complexes offer education in villages and towns.

Learning occupies an important place in the overall doctrinal structure of Buddhism. Canonical textual learning (Pali: *pariyatti*) is understood to be a necessary condition for the maintenance of *sasana* (the Buddhist creed). In the tradition of Indian Buddhism after the reign of Emperor Asoka (r.ca. 269–232 b.c.e.), the monastic complexes, or *viharas*, were the recognized seats of learning. Learning in post-Asokan Buddhism was not necessarily limited to the study of canonical literature.

The Pali expression *grantha-dura* (the vocation of book), which was used in that era, also included the study of grammar, history, logic, and medicine. As an famous Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited a number of Indian *viharas* in the late seventh century, Yijing

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1. Araddha Vipaakanam bhikkhunam satapi sahassepi sagivijjamine ‘myattiya asati ariyamaggepavedhna hoti.

(635 - 713), could testify, the learning was deemed important as a means of refuting the arguments of the “heretics” (non-Buddhists) and disseminating the Buddhist doctrine among the better educated classes of society.

The method of education in early Buddhism differed with that of then prevalent system in some respects. In Vedic times, we find the Āśrama of Rsi-Guru mostly known as it used to be a particular student specific. Krisna going to Sandipani Āśrama, and Rama-Laksmāna being in the Āśrama of Valmiki are very celebrated case. Though, it does not mean that there were no other students in these Āśramas; still Buddhist monasteries or Vihāra were not known due to its famed pupil(s). They were centres of learning and teaching was imparted to a large number of students. Both religions and secular subjects were taught to the younger as well as the senior monks therein. The learned Bhikṣu-s carried on all the educational activities inside the monastic complex. In fact, they were really the only custodians and torch-bearers of Buddhist learning and culture. Other than the Buddhist monasteries, there was practically no full-fledged educational institution where education was regularly provided. This system of education and learning was monitored and managed by Buddhist Sangha. This process of rendering education was so well designed by Buddha himself and he made provision of a multi-tiered system. He introduced two kinds of instructors known as Acāriya and Upajjhāya. The Acāriya had one intelligent person attached to him who was called Antevāsika. For the Upajjhāya too, a post of Saddhivihārika was provisioned. The Vinaya texts provide us with minutest details about them. The impressive growth of Buddhist education system culminated to the establishment of great Mahavihāra at Nālanda, Vikramsila, Odantpuri and Valabhi as Buddhist Centre of Learning. Literally, the Buddhist education system lasted for almost 1,800 years from its humble beginning as a Sangha with 61 members during Buddha’s time when 54 persons led by Yasa, the Setthi of Varanasi joined it along with Buddha and his five disciples (55+1+5) before it collapsed due to the ransacking of academic institutions like Nālandā, and the Islamic catastrophe which destroyed the religion-culture fabric of the nation.

The exception was that of Tāmraparṇi (modern Sri Lanka) and

Myanmar which could protect Buddhism and Monastic learning when Buddhist activities almost ceased to continue in India. And while India was experiencing a couple of *non-Buddhism* centuries (merely a bit more than one hundred years), the revival of Sangha was witnessed in Sukhothai in Thailand (middle 13<sup>th</sup> century) with the cooperation of Lanka, soon to be followed by the Buddhist traits from Myanmar.

However, the present scenario of Buddhist education is no more on the lines of the traditions as the Buddhist education for the beginners in primary stage (be it a Bhikṣu or a layperson) as it has to cope up with the modern education system. The attempt to match with it along with the ongoing process/pressure of modernizing Buddhism itself has thrown many challenges before us. With the demand of gender equality, human rights, and the social order and class gap to be bridged by the modern parameters, entire Asian Buddhism is in ‘repair’ mode! In between, the challenge of Christian proselytism is looming so large, the survival of Buddhism is at stake. The present research delineates the issues and problems in the Buddhist education primarily in relation with the Sangha community.

Buddhist education in Asia is an organic part of the project of Buddhist modernization pursued by a number of Buddhist reformers, often as a response to the challenges of imperialism, capitalism, and Christian proselytism. While in some cases (notably in colonial Burma) the resistance to colonialism could translate into the resistance of the monastery schools to the introduction of “modern” subjects, in most cases Buddhist educational systems attempted to reinvent themselves, using modern techniques of teaching and evaluation as well as modern institutional forms for example, that of a sectarian Buddhist university. Such a reinvention brought considerable successes in many places, notably Japan and South Korea, but modernization success is rife with inherent pitfalls. Once integrated into standardized modern educational marketplace, Buddhist educational institutions risk quickly losing their specifically religious character, with religion remaining as simply one compartmentalized and professionalized subject. In the countries where modernization has been state-driven (typically,



People's Republic of China), Buddhist educational modernization often implies close cooperation with and ultimately co-optation by the state institutions.

The fate of Buddhist education in modern times in the region of our study faces an uphill task. The development of modern Buddhist education coincided with the rise of Buddhist modernism, definable as a movement that aimed at adjusting Buddhism to the new circumstances dominated by nation-states and capitalist market economy. Modern Buddhist education was aimed at creating Buddhists who were competent enough to ensure the survival of Buddhism on the global religious market, in competition with formidable rivals (Christianity often being perceived as the main rival).

On the newly formed modern religious market, missionary Christianity was often perceived as a strong and threatening competitor, as it was commonly associated with the dominant (Western) culture of the capitalist world-system. Christian missionaries were seen as outrivaling Buddhists by offering their adepts, among other things, high-quality educational services, which combined religious learning as such with more general curricula emphasizing new, modern subjects. This sort of competition led a number of reformist Buddhists in a variety of Asian societies to critically reflect on their own educational tradition, which largely reserved the in-depth Buddhist training for the monastics and in most cases marginalized the non-doctrinal subjects. Consequently, in most Asian Buddhist traditions, religious modernization was equated with the development of modern Buddhist education—available for laypeople (including women) as well as monastics, and equipping Buddhists for functioning in the modern world.

In Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand or Burma; Buddhism was understood to belong to the core of the ethno-national identity. However, the modernization of Buddhist education was no simple issue there, and the resistance offered by more traditionalist elements inside the Sangha. The Sangha (both in Burma and Thailand) was confident enough of its central position in the society to participate in resisting colonizing powers. In Thailand, the Sangha Act of 1902 centralized the Sangha governance and also instituted a new, coordinated system of exams in Thai and Pali,

with uniform texts being used throughout the country.<sup>(2)</sup> In Burma, a province of British India in 1886, modern, secular education in vernacular and English complimented by the Christian missionary schools—and the Buddhist *kyaungs* (monastery schools) led a sort of separate, parallel existence.<sup>(3)</sup> The tension was so much built up that a compromise between the two divergent educational strategies was made wherein the Buddhist Anglo-vernacular schools were created (1890s). This marked the beginning of a ‘blend’ education system where governmental schools started to include some Buddhist instruction in their curricula, but as one, compartmentalized discipline of “religion” a far cry from the traditional Buddhist education. Nevertheless, Burmese education retained a dual nature, with monastery schools coexisting with the public ones.

Thailand also ended up having a dual secular Westernized and monastic Buddhist education system: a way to circumvent the monastic resistance against the inclusion of “modern” subjects in the curriculum was to establish *rong rien wisaman*, or special schools, in some monasteries, to give the monks the needed general knowledge.<sup>(4)</sup>

These schools were abolished in little more than two decades; and only in 1970 was the monastic curriculum revised and supplemented with general subjects. While criticized as too Buddhist by the non-Buddhist minorities (Muslim Malays in the south of the country, etc.), the public school system was still clearly distinguishable from the old monastery education tradition. It appears that the exposure to English the language of colonizers and missionaries in the process of learning was still problematic for the Theravada monastic communities in Burma and Thailand.

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2. The uniformity of the new educational requirements was to contribute to the creation of a uniform ethno-cultural nationalism that was able to withstand the pressures of the age of high imperialism.

3. Monks were resistant even to the inclusion of modern arithmetic in the curriculum, not to mention English, despite pressure from the colonial government.

4. Dhammasami Khammai. 2007. “Idealism and Pragmatism: A Dilemma in the Current Education System of Burma and Thailand.” In *Buddhism, Power and Political Order*, edited by Ian Harris. London: Routledge.



## 2. BUDDHIST EDUCATION FOR THE WESTERN MARKET?

Following the lines of creating Buddhism for the Westerners (as witnessed in Korea and Japan in 1970 and 1980s). The renewed interest in Buddhism among North Americans and Western Europeans was majorly due to the Vietnam War which was the first war in a country where the cruelties upon a Buddhist population was thrust upon. Millions watched live through television such massive destruction of a Buddhist civilization. Buddhism, previously a rarefied pursuit of the elite, began to grow into a popular force among the young, college-educated. It has certain drawbacks too as the core of Buddhist education gets deviated when you look towards the efforts to make 'others' Buddhism-friendly. In this aspect, the creation of an English PhD program in Buddhist studies at Mahachulalongkorn University in Bangkok, one of Thailand's two public Buddhist universities, is a recent event without precedent in Thai Buddhist educational history: for the first time, a Buddhist university undertakes to train scholars who would treat Buddhism as an object for study aimed at both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist public, and without any obligation to concurrently subscribe to Buddhist devotion.

The idea of Buddhist education changed significantly in recent years compared to the heydays of Buddhist modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Then, the emphasis was squarely put on the simultaneous need for both preservation of the traditional, canonical text-based Buddhist learning and exposure to the modern curriculum subjects like English being needed to compete against Christian missionary activity and to bring Buddhism to the world beyond its traditional homeland.

Today, Buddhist textual learning in the language of tradition (Pali, Classical Chinese, etc.) is preserved inside the Buddhist universities in Theravada societies (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, etc.). In these societies, Theravada Buddhism provides the grounds on which modern national identity and nation-state legitimacy are built. Inasmuch as the maintenance of *Sasana* is understood as a primary national task, Buddhist education tends to preserve much more conservative character than, for example, in South Korea or Japan, where Buddhism does not play a decisive role in defining national identity and where Buddhist universities largely joined

the mainstream of the modern educational market. By contrast, in the case of Theravada societies, even a comparative approach toward Buddhism seems almost impossible inside a system of learning that is predicated on Buddhism's status as the core of ethno-national identity.

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 Mahāsilavamsa, a poet monk at Ava, recorded this tradition in his famous poem, *Shin Mahāsilavamsa Sounmasar* (The Admonition of Shin Mahāsilavamsa). 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, *sāmanera*, if he received ordination before he was twenty. A young man of twenty and above would be given a full or higher ordination, *upasampadā*.

The Buddhist education in Lao PDR has recently improved and developed both in quality and the quantity. It is assisted by the policy of the Buddhist Fellowship Organization of the Lao PDR, the Ministry of Education and Sports of Laos and the Lao government. In 2018, there are total 54 schools in Laos, dividing to 7 primary schools, 32 lower secondary schools, 12 Upper secondary schools, 2 Buddhist college and 1 school of Pali, there 9,122 students and 902 teachers. At present, most of the Buddhist education in Laos is studying two main subjects a. Buddhist studies and b. science & social sciences. Besides these, we are also teaching and studying how to practice Vipassana meditation for monks, novices and laypeople. In the future, we have the plan of the establishment of two new Buddhist college in Northern Laos (Luang Prabang) and in the middle part of Laos (Savannakhet), and try to improve and develop the Buddhist education to get along together with neighbouring countries in Asia. At the present, there are no women studying in the Buddhist schools in Laos, but women can become

Buddhist nuns staying and studying Buddhist in the monasteries, and lay women also can participate the Vipassana meditation retreats to studying Buddhist teachings and practice meditation. There is further need to empower Lao women by providing appropriate position and status in Lao Buddhist life.

### 3. BUDDHIST MONASTIC EDUCATION IN MYANMAR IN RECENT TIMES

Buddhist education system in Myanmar is an old educational system with a very long history dated back 11th century King Anawratha period. 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.

After the establishment of the Great Council of Sangha Mahanayaka of Myanmar in 1980, Buddhist monastic educational system in Myanmar went under the guidance of this Great Council, the Educational Working Committee reformed the old education system and laid down a new one with the aims and objectives to its Buddhist community - Bhikkhus and Nuns to meet the demand and to provide lay people with religious education. The examination method was rearranged with its syllabus and curriculums in both basic and high monastic educational institutions. The basic monastic educational schools are also established to provide the basic educational needs of the country especially for children from

needy families and orphans. In these schools, monks and nuns play a pivotal role to provide children with education. In conclusion, monastic education system in Myanmar is based on the traditional approach with some rearrangements and new creations to fulfil the needs of the Bhikkhus and nuns and of the country.

In Thailand, the base of Thai education itself has been this holistic approach based on the three Buddhist principles of learning: *sila sikkha* (moral conduct); *samadhi sikkha* (mind training); and *panna sikkha* (wisdom development). Because the majority of Thai people are Buddhists, such motive helps many dimensions of the life of a Thai at personal, family, school and communal levels. Therefore, 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.

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”, 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 Rama II (1809-1824), the formal examinations were promoted, culminating in the standardisation of monastic education under Rama V, also known as King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910), who united the whole of Siam with his modernisation and national integration programmes.

The problems in monastic education in both Thailand and Burma 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. When in 1837 Bhikkhu Wachirayan became Abbot of Wat Bovonives, a royal monastery in Bangkok, it saw the growth of Wat Bovonives as a Centre for Buddhist studies in Siam. While trying to learn Latin and English, he came in close contact with European missionaries (esp. British and French), and gave them facilities in his monastery so that they could preach Christianity. Strange enough, very rarely any scholar has talked about its side-effect. Instead, scholars like Reynolds opine that such encounter with these missionaries helped develop his rational approach. The advent of the sect *Dhammayuttika*, “adherers to the Dhamma” needs to be studied more before we talk about the reforms in Buddhist education in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Siam.<sup>(5)</sup> One positive outcome while Bhikkhu Wachirayan was learning Latin was that he sought assistance from the Mon monks of Burma to establish Pali as supreme lingua franca for Buddhist monastic education. No wonder, he emphasised knowledge of the Pali language and study of canonical texts over prevalent *Parian* curriculum and non-canonical literature. That was the reason, the Pali collection of *Anguttara-nikāya* was made to be the subject of the regular sermons at Wat Bovoranives in place of the *Vessantara-jātaka Atthakathā* or the *Phra Malai*.

In 1892, during the regency of 15 years old King Chulalongkorn, the two Colleges were established, one at Wat Mahathat and the other at Wat Bovonives. The objective in establishing these monastic colleges (which later on developed as the two Buddhist Universities) was to promote the study of Buddhist scriptures in Pali but written in Thai script. Training young Buddhist monks was foremost motive which would protect the *Dhamma* well to the Buddhist population “like the Christian missionaries.”<sup>(6)</sup>

#### 4. THAI BUDDHIST EDUCATION: ISSUES AND SOLUTION

The early twentieth century saw the increase of power of the Supreme Monks Council. This phenomenon was evident both in

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5. .Reynolds, pp.84; Bradley, “Prince Mongkut and Caswell” *Journal of the Siam Society*, LIV, 1 (Jan, 1966), p.34.

6. 6Rachanubhab, *Phrarachphongsawadan Krung Ratanakosin Ratchkarn thi ha*, p.51



Burma and then in Thailand. This newly established ecclesiastical hierarchy came along with the non-questionability of any decision of the Council. This *Sangha Mahānayaka* in Burma and the *Mahathera Samakhon* in Thailand, controlled both administrative and educational matters. Members of this highest body who are mostly 80 year old plus 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. Thus, Buddhist education and reforms became still. 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.

When on May 7, 1963, the chairman of the *Parian* Examinations Board, Somdetch Buddhaghosacārya set up a committee to reform the curriculum, a new form of curriculum was introduced in 1967 which had the combination of traditional monastic curriculum and the secular subjects. Since its implementation in 1970, it has become popular at the expense of the traditional *Parian Tham* and *Nak Tham* examinations. The main purpose was to make the young monk understand the modern world and subjects as many of Thai Buddhist monks leave their monastic life to join the mainstream of society as layman.<sup>(7)</sup> The critics feel that the aim of the introduction of such mixed Buddhist education study was no longer to understand the words of the Buddha and to end suffering alone, but to help develop the nation and society.

Recently Thai Sangha has persuaded the Ministry of Education to mandate the teaching of Buddhism to all students from grade 1 to 12. Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University undertook the task of producing the formal curriculum on Buddhism for all schools. Local school districts, however, were left to formulate their own curriculum. It is also worthy to mention here that now the Ministry of Education approves the project of 'Schools in the Buddhist way' with the purpose to cultivate moral development

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7. Payutto, P. A *Prawat karn suksa khong khana song thai* (The History of the Thai Sangha's Education), Mahachulalongkorn University Press, Bangkok, 2532 (1988).....



together with physical, social and intellectual developments in a whole according to the teaching of threefold training vision: through training in morality, school students will be self-disciplined through the observance of the five precepts, through training in concentration, their mind will be calm and inculcated with compassion, friendliness, and love of peace and through training in wisdom, students will develop their understanding and intellect. Monasteries, villages and schools must collaborate in order to bring about integrity and sustainable development of children and society. Now, there are 12,000 'Schools in the Buddhist way' throughout the country. So it is urgent to train monks and lay teachers to be efficient Buddhist teachers for the growing number of such schools. Students in the School in Buddhist way must be trained both morally and academically. Their knowledge from both sides will guide them to live a good and moral life.

##### 5. HOW USEFUL ARE BUDDHIST SUNDAY SCHOOLS?

The Buddhist Sunday School originated in Sri Lanka in B.E.2429 (1886). At the school, monks, novices and some lay people teach various fields of Buddhist knowledge and languages. From B.E.2496-2500 (1953-1957), Phra Bimonladham, the abbot of Wat Mahadhat and the late Second President of the Council of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Bangkok, visited Sri Lanka and witnessed moral and cultural teaching in the Sunday School. He deeply appreciated the success of its work, having returned to Thailand, he decided to establish the first Buddhist Sunday School in Wat Mahadhat. It was said that in those days, Wat Mahadhat was a center of education and discussion about Dhamma. Even to this day, there is a Dhamma discourse on every Buddhist Holy Day and Sunday. While the parents listened to the Dhamma discourse, their children played around the hall, therefore, the concept of Buddhist Sunday School arose, so that the children can benefit from Buddhist teachings and get closer to Buddhism. The Buddhist Sunday School was established for the first time at Wat Mahadhat in B.E.2501 (1958) with the following objectives:

To make young people and children familiar with Buddhism.

To inculcate moral discipline and cultural appreciation in young people and children

To teach young people and children to lead their lives according to Buddhist principles.

To train young people and children to work for public welfare.

The Buddhist Sunday School are still going strong. Now, there are 1,340 branches of the Schools around the country and there are 228,159 students.<sup>(8)</sup>

## 6. THE BUDDHIST INSTITUTE SUNDAY SCHOLL IN MALAYSIA

The Buddhist Institute Sunday Dhamma School (BISDS) was first established as a Religious School in 1929 with an enrolment of 12 Sinhala children who studied the Sinhala language and chanting under the tutelage of Ven. M. Dhammadassi Thera, the incumbent bhikkhu of the Brickfields Buddhist Temple.

To complete the entire course, it takes 12 years. Teachers are monks, novices and some lay people. They teach the Buddhist doctrine, Buddha's history, English, French, Thai dancing, and Thai musical instrument and so on and work for the programmes on voluntary basis. Buddhist Sunday Schools are much appreciated by all Buddhists and considerably helps improve public morality.

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8. At the Buddhist Sunday School of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, class levels are arranged according to student's grades as follows:

- 1) ..... There are 4 elementary classes for primary school pupils of grades 1, 2, 3 and 4.
- 2) ..... There are 3 intermediate classes for secondary school pupils of grades 1, 2 and 3.
- 3) There are 3 advanced classes for high school students of grades 4, 5 and 6.
- 4) There are 2 final classes for the college students.

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