



**Burmese Buddhist Nuns In The Theravada Tradition
And Their Attitudes Towards Social Work**

Ms. Me Me Khine

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
Master of Arts
in
Religious Studies**

**Graduate School of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Assumption University of Thailand
December, 1999**

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The Graduate School of Philosophy and Religions, Assumption University,
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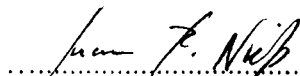
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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, women in religious service have faced oppression, degradation and exploitation. In Burma, particularly, the foundation of civil society - the religious sector - downplays and undermines the status and efforts of Buddhist nuns. The nuns have undergone significant historical persecution in both the religious and social spheres. While many Burmese Buddhist nuns dedicate their lives to overcoming that oppression, the contemporary situation impedes their progress because it is grounded in the historical situation. To ameliorate the status quo, an analysis of the historical context has been carried out with a corresponding evaluation of the current situation. Nuns practising in the central Burma were surveyed to ascertain their expectations, their educational backgrounds and the role and status they enjoy in society. Three case studies of nunneries have been selected as archetypes of the present conditions. The problems they face are outlined in addition to the benefits they provide. Possible solutions to their problems are suggested. These solutions employ social work as a kind of active *mettā* to bring about the necessary changes in the religious sector and society at large.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Significance of the Study

The idea for this thesis stems from the reading of papers presented at the Fourth International Conference on Buddhist Women held in Ladakh, India, 1995. In her paper Ven. Amchi Jamyang Palmo¹ investigates, analyzes and proposes solutions to the problems of the Ladakhi nuns. She makes the following observations about the pathetic conditions of the Ladakhi nuns.

- they are no better than household maid servants
- they have little religious knowledge and practice
- they are religiously bound to live a celibate life and have no family to look after
- they are fully exploited by their parents, villagers and kin.
- not much opportunity is given them to attend to their studies and practices.
- they perform almost the same menial tasks a village woman.

The reasons for such conditions are

- the lack of proper monasteries for the nuns with adequate training and study facilities.
- society in general is not aware of the plight and the needs of the nuns and of those young women who aspire to lead a religious life.

This paper has inspired the researcher to look at the conditions of Burmese nuns and ways to improve their condition, after being struck by the difficult conditions of nuns in different parts of the world, their plight and dedication.

¹ This speech was delivered by Ven. Amchi Jamyang Palmo on the occasion of the 4th International Meditation Centre, Dewachan, Leh-Ladakh from 1 to 7 August 1995.

In Burmese society, women have been considered human beings dangerous to the monkhood. This belief has been taken to the extremes in contemporary Buddhist practice: men are allowed to wear the robes as long as they can, thus the wife and children gain merit, reducing their life cycles. Women are virtually denied access to education since their place in society is only to help men. With no education, even the basics, reading and writing were denied in the olden days. Modern society has changed this concept to a certain extent, but still women feel that they are inferior to men.

H. H. Dalai Lama in his opening speech at the same conference outlined guidelines for how Buddhists can contribute to human society: He said that the Buddha gave us an example of contentment and tolerance through serving others unselfishly.

Moved by a spontaneous concern to help others... it is the inherent nature of human beings to yearn for freedom, equality and dignity. If we accept that ... peaceful living is about trusting those on whom we depend and caring for those who depend on us... women have an equal responsibility to do this.

If women had had equal opportunity and had been given responsibility to care for others, the nuns could have done better for the society. However, because of the historical barriers mentioned above, Buddhist nuns are seldom given a chance to perform their tasks. On the other hand, when the Buddhist nuns perform their religious as well as lay duties, their accomplishments are rarely recognized.

Scholars who are well-versed in the Buddhist scriptures and the historical background of Buddhism have said that women are not inferior to men in any way. The goal of life for a Buddhist is to attain *nibbāna*, the cessation of the wheel of birth,

the end of life cycle. There is no gender classification - once we leave this world. It is the soul that enters into the life cycle, striving for that goal.

According to Kawanami², the religious position of *thilashin* in Burma is often treated as 'ambiguous'. But in her point of view the contemporary position of the Burmese Buddhist nuns is 'transitional'. She explores the direction in which changes may take place. The rising standards of Buddhist education, success in Buddhist examinations, the general recognition of their academic achievements seem to have contributed to a renewed awareness and confidence for the Burmese Buddhist nuns.³

During her stay in Thailand, the researcher has encountered and befriended some nuns of other faiths who are very active in social work, running orphanages, schools and hospitals. These friends inspire the researcher to look back at her sisterhood in Burma, namely the Buddhist nuns, to see whether they are involved in social work as the nuns of other religions and to understand and analyze their attitude towards such social commitment.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratic leader of Burma and the Nobel Peace prize laureate, in her book The Voice of Hope, explains that

Engaged Buddhism is active compassion or active *mettā*. It is not just sitting there passively saying, 'I feel sorry for them'. It means doing something about the situation by bringing whatever relief you can to those who need it the most, by caring for them, by doing what you can to help others. Of course, 'the sending of loving-kindness' is very much a part of our Burmese Buddhist training. But in addition to that we have got to do more to express our *mettā*

² A Japanese Anthropologist doing research on *thilashin*

³ A paper presented at Sakyadhida International Conference, Ladakh, August, 1995.

and to show our compassion. And there are so many ways of doing it (1997, p. 17).

The researcher is greatly overwhelmed by this remark and believes that doing social work is a kind of active *mettā*. This leads the researcher to investigate the possibilities of spreading active compassion by the religious communities in non-violent ways.

Many more questions should be answered concerning the attitudes of nuns towards social work. Should women be allowed to study the Buddhist scriptures other than by rote? Learning the scriptures by rote has been the norm in Burma. Those who could recite the *tri-piṭakas* were considered the most learned, and revered, and hence earned the highest approval. There are two important issues that women must be aware of:

1. Women must realize that they are also human beings who are not in any way inferior to men and should be judged on the basis of physical strength alone.
2. Active-*mettā* to lessen suffering – hence the Buddhist outlook that one's suffering is due to one's past *kamma* – should be seriously studied and discussed.

The Buddha returned to society to share his knowledge. He did not live a secluded life, away from mankind. This concept has not been given sufficient emphasis. Hence, the Buddhist world believes in isolation. In today's society active *mettā* is needed in all spheres. Especially in Burma, they need good teachers, doctors, engineers, nurses, businessmen, etc. Has it depleted the country's economy for nuns to be shut up in nunneries and to be dependent on the labour of others for one's survival? Can the nuns have more of a commitment towards the society?

For the researcher, such women studies as Thai Women in Buddhism by Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh and Women Under the Bo Tree by Tessa Bartholomeusz have been a great inspiration. Although there are limitations, the research represents a serious attempt to analyze the Burmese Buddhist nuns within a larger societal framework, since they constitute the largest population of women in robes in *Theravāda* Buddhism.⁴

1.2. Purposes

This research aims to show the situation confronting Buddhist nuns of the *Theravāda* Tradition in Burma and the conditions under which they have to pursue their vocation. The research will also examine the historical background, the role and status of nuns in the past compared with the present, the nuns' role in social work and the factors both for and against such commitment. In doing so, the researcher would like to highlight the dedication of nuns in the propagation and teaching of Buddhism, as well as their commitment and contribution towards the community and society in which they work. It is hoped that this study will help the general public to recognize the women's role and their religious rights.

⁴ In Thailand, the total number of *Mae jis* is 14,691 in 1997(given by Department of Religious Affairs). However, the Aae jis who registered with Thai Nuns' Society is only 4,521 (given by TNS). In Sri Lanka, there were approximately 5,000 *Dasa sil mata*, female renunciants, in 1989. This figure was given by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress (Bartholomeusz, 1994, p. 204). In Cambodia, there were some 4,000 *Don chees* in 1995 (Seed of Peace, Vol. II. No.3, p. 34).

1.3 Objectives

This research aims to meet the following objectives:

1. To give the historical background of Burmese Buddhist nuns in the *Theravāda* tradition and to indicate how that background poses a barrier to the well-being of the nuns in today's society.
2. To examine the role and status of Burmese Buddhist nuns today and compare this with their role and status in the past.
3. To describe the situation facing three nunneries in contemporary Burma, and to compare them as regards the problems they encounter, the social functions they perform, the benefits they produce and to posit solutions to the problems.

1.4. The Status of the Research Question

There is a considerably significant number (approximately 23,000)⁵ of Buddhist nuns of the *Theravāda* Tradition in Burma. However, most of the research done on Buddhism in Burma has not been able to incorporate the role of women in religion.

Hiroko Kawanami, a Japanese scholar on the topic of Burmese nuns, has pointed out that education has the greatest potential benefit for Burmese nuns in strengthening their religious position. One of the topics under investigation in this study is whether Burmese nuns really want to be engaged in social work considering

⁵ Country paper: Myanmar (presented at the same conference) by Carudassini. Also in a nuns' conference in Cambodia from May 1st to 4th, 1995, the Burmese nun, Daw Ah Barthi mentioned that there are 22,986 nuns, 162,098 monks and 234,594 novices in Burma at that time.

that social work is a possible solution for uplifting the social status of the nuns and improving their conditions.

From the interviews conducted with the abbesses, it seems that tradition plays a very significant role in the nuns' attitudes towards social work. There are many justifications for a social work solution in Buddhist texts, but since traditionally the religious perspective has been separated from the research perspective, this thesis aims to provide a more comprehensive picture to contemporary problems and solutions.

1.5. Selected Review of Literature

Although there are some classic works of literature on Burmese Buddhism in general, there is little literature on Burmese Buddhist nuns. There are some studies on Buddhist women in other countries with a *Theravāda* tradition such as Thailand and Sri Lanka, but few studies on the topic of Buddhist nuns in Burma has been published. Among the available works of literature the most appropriate one for this study is that of Hiroko Kawanami.

Hiroko Kawanami, in her paper "Buddhist Nuns in Transition: the case of Burmese *Thīla-shin*" (presented at Sakyadhida International Conference, Ladakh, August, 1995), remarks that most of the Burmese nuns whom she has interviewed are not willing to challenge the socio-religious conventions. She claims that education is of the most beneficial ways for Burmese nuns to strengthen their religious position.⁶

In Women under the Bo tree, Tessa Bartholomeusz examines the tradition of female world-renunciation in Buddhist Sri Lanka through a textual, historical, and

⁶ A paper presented at Sakyadhida International Conference, Ladakh, August, 1995.

anthropological research. Among the numerous interesting discoveries, The one most worth-noting is the linkage of the fortunes of Buddhist female renouncers to that of Buddhism in Sri Lanka as the caretaker of Buddhism. Bartholomeusz made attempts to link ancient tradition with contemporary practice, and relied heavily on data collected on her field experiences in many contemporary cloisters. She deals with the history of the re-emergence of Buddhist female renouncers in the late 19th century after a hiatus of several hundred years, the reasons why women renounce, the variety of expressions of female world-renunciation; and the attitudes about women and monasticism that have either prohibited women from renouncing or have encouraged them to do so.

In Thai Women in Buddhism Dr. Chatsumarn Kabisingsh makes a thorough study of the historical role of female in Thai society by following the patterns of discrimination in Thai society and the exclusion in its religious tradition and an analysis of the portrayal of women in Buddhist texts. A more significant part of this research is Dr. Kabilsingh's presentation of the situation of contemporary Thai women. Essays of high interest are on the attractive spiritual communities Thai women have formed, efforts to reestablish the *Bhikkhunī Saṅghā*, and the role it may play in lessening the plight of Thai prostitutes.

Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha (edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo) contains essays presented at the International Conference on Buddhist Nuns, held in worldwide Bodhgaya, India, February 11 to 17, 1987. Men and women, religious and laymen all over the world representing both branches of Buddhism gathered to discuss the issues of religious women in their own contexts. Topics ranged from reasons for ordination to the way to abide by the laws of monastic codes in the present day and in

the West. One benefit gained among several others, is the new understanding and the appreciation for the existence of the two traditions - *Mahāyāna* and *Theravāda*.

In Sangha and State in Burma an extensive research was carried out by E. Michael Mendelson who defines Burmese Buddhism as a sophisticated creation influenced by *Theravāda* Buddhism proper, a complex of belief and ritual, and the spirit-cult world. It is claimed that although they are unlikely to attain them, the Burmese Buddhists constantly strive to achieve the highest ideals of *Theravāda*.

In Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese vicissitudes Melford E. Spiro makes an attempt to understand Buddhism in Burma as one historical variant of the human attempt to find meaning and hope in a sacred order. With a clear focus on Buddhism as a ritual system, Buddhism as a monastic system, and Buddhism and the world, the researcher carries out his field research in a not very remote village community. His findings show how much the existing practice is deviates from the normative doctrines of *Theravāda* Buddhism. While the canonical literature teaches its followers to strive for *Nibbāna*, existing practice has a trend toward *Kammatic* Buddhism. Despite being the classic model, this cynical picture of Burmese Buddhism does not have a positive impact on the Burmese Buddhists.

Edited by Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B.King, Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia is a compilation of papers chronicling the impact of Asian Buddhism on social and political activism. The liberation movements inspired and directed by charismatic individuals is presented in 3 stages: (a) biographical, dealing with the life and career of the leaders; (b) ideological, dealing with the ways in which traditional Buddhist teaching have been reinterpreted to address the contemporary social realities; and (c) institutional dealing with the shape

and constituency of the movement. This edition offers opportunities to assess the ideals of personal transformation, spiritual/social visions, and community formation that make these movements authentically Buddhist against the backdrop of the three refuges of Buddhist practice- the Buddha (exemplar), the *Dhamma* (teaching), and the *San̄ghā* (Buddhist community).

1.6. Definitions of the Terms Used

1.6.1. *Thīlashin*

According to Friedgard Lottermoser⁷, the present nuns of Burma are not regarded as equivalent to the monks. They are not *bhikkhunīs*. The Burmese Buddhist nuns are called *thīlashin*. The most commonly accepted way of spelling in English is *śīlashin* or *thīlashin*. *Śīla* (in Pāli) or *Thīla* (in Burmese) means good moral conduct. *Shin* in Burmese means possessor or male novice. So the Burmese term *thīlashin* literally means possessor of good moral conduct.

In the basic rules for the organization of *Theravāda* Buddhist *Thīlashin*, a *thīlashin* is defined as a *Theravāda* Buddhist nun who has a shaven head, wearing earthen-red or tree-bark dyed robes which are different from the colour of saffron robes of monks, who has preserved the moral conducts.

Lay nuns first appeared in Sri Lanka in the 19th century in their attempt to restore and to reinvigorate Buddhism. They shaved their heads, put on saffron and white robes and kept ten precepts. They made a new generation of a female monastic order standing between the ordinary layperson and a fully ordained *bhikkhunī*. Burmese *thīlashins* are also termed lay nuns because of their position in the monastic

⁷ *Buddhist Nuns in Burma* <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~tsoma/NewsLetters/2-2.htm#Burma>

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order. The benefit of being a lay nun is that because they have taken a vow to keep the precepts they are always conscious of their moral conducts. In this sense they are more religious. Moreover, because they have already renounced the world they have 24 hours a day to devote to religious functions without any responsibilities of the mundane world.

1.6.2. Nunnery

Mi Mi Khaing, in her book The World of Burmese Women, explains that the word 'nunnery' is merely a convenient English equivalent which refers to the residence of *thilashins*. The Burmese word is *gyaung*. It is a word that is used to mean a quiet nook, especially a secluded hollow or cave surrounded by woodland. Such a site is chosen for meditation. The word 'monastery' in Burmese is synonymous with school. It is *kyaung*, and so to call the residence of the *thilashins* a *kyaung* would not be wrong, though 'monastery' may be equally unacceptable. Some Burmese translate *gyaung* as vale, with poetic connotations of a remote retreat in mind. Cloister is perhaps more generally applicable, to urban as well as woodland centres (1984, p. 80). For convenience, in this study 'nunnery' will be used to refer to the residential area of the nuns.

1.6.3. *Mettā*

The meaning of *mettā* was well defined by the famous World Buddhist Missionary Venerable Sayadaw U Thittila as:

Mettā is much deeper than goodwill. Some people interpret the meaning of *mettā* as generous-mindedness and sending out thoughts of love to others. But, in the worlds of Buddha, *mettā* has a far wider significance and a more extensive application. It means a great deal more than loving-kindness,

harmlessness, and sympathy. It is not a mere feeling but a principle; not merely radiating benevolent thoughts but doing charitable actions, not a dream of rapture for the fancy to indulge in but essential work for the hand to execute.⁸

How this kind of metta can be practised is shown by the late Venerable Mohnyin Sayadaw as follows:

Mettā can be practised in deed, word, and thought. (1) By deed: - promote another's happiness by giving personal assistance and by relieving distress and miseries or giving alms, etc. (2) By word: - speak gently and sweetly. Your words should be for the good and well-being of all creatures. By your words, try to relieve distress and misery of all creatures. (3) By thought: - focus your thoughts on the individuals or groups of persons or on all those living in hamlets or parishes or small countries or big nations; focus your thoughts on any one to whom you wish to extend your love and kindness, visualize them and then transmit kind thought-waves to them.⁹

1.6.4. Merit (*Puñña*) and Meritorious Deed

It is important to have a clear understanding of merit and meritorious deed.

According to the Dictionary of Buddhist Terms,

Merit (*Puñña*) is that which upgrades one's status or that which leads one to a higher existence or that which purifies the mind of the person who performs

⁸ Venerable Sayadaw U Thittila Aggamahapandita, in his discourse on "The Main Causes of War and Their Remedy thorough Buddhism" (cited in Aung Than Tun, The Light of the Dhamma, Vol. VII, No.1, 1986, p.9.

⁹ The late Venerable Sayadaw, Aggamahapandita, in his discourse on "Love and Peace to the World" (cited in Aung Than Tun, The Light of the Dhamma, Vol. VII, No.1, 1986 pp. 8 - 9

merit. A person who has done a great deal of meritorious deeds previously is called a person who has amassed great merit.

Meritorious action is a blameless wholesome action producing beneficial results. Charity, moral conduct and meditation are meritorious actions. Meritorious deeds bring all kinds of happiness and prosperity. The following actions are recommended as meritorious deeds: generosity, morality, meditation, paying due respect to those who are worthy of it, helping others perform good deeds, sharing of merit after doing some good deed, rejoicing at others merit-making, listening well to the Doctrine, teaching the Doctrine, and straightening one's views (pp. 149 - 151).

1.6.5. Social work

According to the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences: social work is defined as:

The objectives of social work are to help individuals, families, communities, and groups of persons who are socially disadvantaged and to contribute to the creation of conditions that will enhance social functioning and prevent breakdown. These objectives commit the social work profession both to helping persons adapt socially in keeping with their capacities and the norms and values of the society, and to modifying or reforming features of the social system. The professional social worker is expected, because of this specialized training and experience, to bring a high degree of skill to the process of helping, and modifying the social conditions of, individuals, groups of persons, and communities. The special competence of the professional social worker is exercised in such tasks as providing material assistance for the

needy and dependent; assisting those of whatever means who have difficulties in adjusting to their economic and social environment because of poverty, illness, deprivation, conflict, or personal, family, or social disorganization; and participating in the formulation of social welfare policies and preventive programs. (Vol. 13 & 14, 1972, p. 495)

This is the western idea of social work. After the Second World War, performing social work was regarded as a profession and special training courses are now given to equip social workers with the necessary skills.

For Buddhists to perform social work, active compassion or active *mettā* plays a vital role. *Theravādin* Buddhists will show their active *mettā* by practising the Buddha's teaching and following the Buddha's way. Most of the social work performed by the religious persons is done out of compassion and there is seldom professional or specialist knowledge in the field.

According to the Encyclopedia of Religion, Buddhism specifically teaches us that:

The response to suffering humanity should be active compassion, and the direct result of this has been the formation of social service ministries (i.e., hospitals, schools, orphanages, and other benevolent institutions). Compassion also dictates such individual virtues as generosity, morality, patience, vigor, concentration in meditation, and wisdom. But these virtues belong to a fundamental emphasis upon the primacy of individual consciousness; this is understood in stricter *Theravāda* Buddhism as communion with the Buddha and in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism as the vow of the human spirit to become a Buddha (Vol. 13, 1987, p. 377).

In Buddhist scriptures, the term *Parahita*, in general sense, means “working for the benefit, well-being, and improvement of others” and in Buddhist perspective, “fulfilling conviction, morality, knowledge, charity, and wisdom”.¹⁰

1.6.6. Engaged Buddhism

The term “Engaged Buddhism” was coined by Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Master. The idea of Engaged Buddhism was born during the time when traditional societies were confronted by the demands of modernity. Its meaning is defined as:

“Engaged Buddhism” refers to the kind of active involvement by Buddhists in society and its problems. Participants in this nascent movement seek to actualize Buddhism’s traditional ideals of wisdom and compassion in today’s world. Engaged Buddhists refuse to turn away from suffering or sadness. They believe that no one is really able to avoid feeling pain for what is happening in the world today, try as one might to keep such feelings from coming to consciousness. For centuries Buddhism has focused on suffering as the starting-point of the religious life. Buddhism has always emphasized that the spiritual path is a way that is “walked not talked” (Kraft, 1988, pp. xii – xv).

1.7. Limitation of the Research

This study focuses on the Burmese nuns and their attitudes towards social work. Within a number of constraints, the research tries to provide as wide a scope as

¹⁰ Conviction = *saddha*, morality = *sila*, knowledge = *suta*, charity = *caga* and wisdom = *panna* from Interview to Ven. Bhaddanta Sumangalankara, *Tipitakadhara Aggamahapandita*, July, 1999.

possible for an overall picture of the Buddhist nuns in Burma. The research is intended to show the development of modern conditions in the nunneries, status of these conditions as seen by the nuns themselves and proposed solutions through social work.

It is very difficult to conduct a field study on Burma, be it concerned with religious, economic or political affairs. People are reluctant to answer the questionnaires or allow anyone to conduct an interview with them. To collect 200 valid responses to the questionnaires, the researcher had to approach the subjects in several ways. At one time she went to Shwe Dagon pagoda, the most sacred place of worship in Burma, on a Sabbath day, and begged the *thilashins* to answer the questionnaires. They moved away from her for fear it might be a kind of investigation, cross examination or attempt to gain a confession.

In Burma, the information is strictly controlled. People from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Propagation of *Sāsana* are reluctant to give the necessary information, even exact details about the number of nunneries in the whole country, the population of *thilashin* in each state and division.

1.8. Methodology

This study adopts an eclectic approach making use of descriptive, documentary and empirical research. For most of the information on the historical background, the researcher heavily relies on such primary-like sources as *Tipitaka*. The research will analyze the social aspects in Buddha's teachings. For the history of

Burmese nuns, History of Nuns¹¹ by Yaway Tun, a Burmese monk author, is mainly relied upon.

Regarding the prevailing conditions of contemporary nuns, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 200 nuns. Except for one who came from Kachin state in the Northern part of Burma, the rest of the respondents for the semi-structured questionnaire were nuns mainly from central Burma. Central Burma was selected because Buddhism has thrived well in central Burma since the time of its arrival. Moreover, most of the nunneries are situated around central Burma.

This survey was carried out during April 1997. The researcher studied the rules and regulations of the nunneries, and observed the functions undertaken at the nunneries. In one way, this research may be considered an outsider's perspective. However, the researcher attempted to be part of the real life by staying in the nunneries as much as possible.

Although the nunneries where the survey was conducted were selected based on such practicalities as easy accessibility; their willingness to cooperate amongst others, the actual sampling of the nuns was done at random. Ten percent of the population in a nunnery were surveyed and an attempt was made to include different age groups. The responses to the questionnaire will serve as the primary source of information regarding contemporary nuns.

Moreover, the researcher has conducted about 20 interviews with the abbesses of well-known nunneries as well as those from the less known ones whom she met at the hospital for the *Saṅghā* (known as *Saṅghā Say-yon* in Burmese). These nuns include both patients and their attendants. In her attempt to get a more complete

¹¹ Yaway Tun, Bhikkhunī Sāsana Hnit Thilashin Thamaing (Bhikkhunī Sāsana and History of Nuns), 1991, Veda Sapa, Yangoon

picture of the nuns, the researcher visited nunneries in several towns. She also visited nunneries with orphanages. Based on the results of the interviews and the literature review, the researcher classified the nunneries into three sub-categories: nunneries which perform social work, nunneries which serve as learning centre and nunneries as part of a meditation centre. These are then analyzed from a comparative perspective.

1.9. Expectations

Traditionally it is believed that only the orphans, widows, poor girls and failures in life become nuns. The researcher believed that the questionnaire would show whether this traditionally accepted perception is true or not. It was also hoped that the responses of the interviews would shed some light on the existing status of the nuns in Burma. This will lead to a better understanding of the nuns by the Burmese people and the international Buddhist communities.

As we are approaching the new era of global progress, the researcher hopes that social commitment as a form of active *mettā* will create more room for the Buddhist nuns in the *Theravāda* tradition.

CHAPTER II

NUNS IN BURMESE HISTORY

Theravāda Buddhism¹ has flourished in Burma since the days of the first Burmese Kingdom, Pagan. A form of religious life for Burmese women has existed throughout Burmese history though little is mentioned about them in most of the scholastic literature, which was mainly done by non-Burmese researchers. In this paper an attempt is made to trace the conditions of the nuns from the time *Theravāda* Buddhism first took root in Burma. This is done in two ways. In the first section the researcher relies heavily on the un-translated work of the Burmese author, Yaway Tun's History of Burmese Nuns² to trace the history of Burmese religious women. Information set out in the profiles of present day nuns and nunneries was obtained from the survey referred to in Chapter I.

2.1. Communities of Nuns in Burma: *Thīlashins*

The contemporary female religious order, known today as *thilashin*³ has been well established and prominent throughout the entire history of Burma. We can read the written accounts from Burmese history referring to the apparent features and

¹ *Theravāda* is the branch of Buddhism now preserved in Sri Lanka and parts of continental southeast Asia. The term means 'Doctrine of the Elders'; the elders in question are the senior monks, who preserve tradition. *Theravāda* reached Ceylon from India in or very near 250 BCE. For more than a thousand years thereafter it existed mainly in Ceylon and southeast India. In the eleventh century it went from Ceylon to Burma; over the next two centuries it diffused into the areas which are now Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. *Theravāda* has been the religion of the majority of the community (Sinhalese, Burmese, Thai, etc.) and generally enjoyed state patronage and official status. In Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand *Theravāda* Buddhism is today in some sense the established religion and enjoys widespread support and patronage. (Gombrich, 1988, p. 3)

² Bhikkhuni Sāsana and Thīlashin Thamaing

³ Pali: *Silāvati*

achievement of this female order in Burmese living society. As far as the research could substantiate, the emergence of *thīlashin* or *silāvatī* could be considered to have been established since the beginning of the Konbaung (Shwebo) Dynasty. However, this organization of women might have existed long before the Ava and Pagan periods under a different name.

2.2. Burmese Nuns in Early Burmese Chronicles

The name *silāvatī* in Pali, or *thīlashin* in Burmese, came into existence very late. It is still unknown how and when this conventional name had emerged during the period of the Pyu⁴, Srikhattara⁵ and Hanlin⁶ periods, and the Pagan era. However, the coexistence of such nuns and female ascetics in the monastic order of monks was oftentimes mentioned in annals, records and stone inscriptions.

The history of Burma was systematically recorded only after 1000 AD, the golden days of King Anawratha (also known as King Aniruddha). The historical accounts of old Pagan emerged simultaneously with the prosperity of Buddhism.

According to written history, *Theravāda* Buddhism came to Burma only during the days of King Anawratha. During the prosperity of the Pyu Kingdom and prior to its deterioration, it was hearsay that, Pagan had practised only the *Mahāyāna* tradition or the *Ariya* Buddhist religion, and that *Theravāda* Buddhism was totally absent there until the introduction of it by Reverend Shin Araham⁷ from Thaton.

⁴ 494BC Maha Thambawa arrived near Prome from Tagaung, and became King of the Pyus.

⁵ 443BC Dwuttabaung, son of Maha Thambawa, ascended, and founded Tharekhattara.

⁶ Founded near Shwebo and fell in the early 9th century.

⁷ A Mon monk who had fled from Thaton to Pagan, because of the growing encroachments of Hinduism (and *Mahāyāna*?) on Thaton Pali Canon Buddhism.

Although the Burmese records had not explicitly mentioned Pyu inhabitants in Burmese Empire, the Chinese accounts had recorded about the Pyu people more elaborately. The Chinese accounts of Pyu period had mentioned that *Theravāda* Buddhism in Pyu period was shining glamorously. In the *Tang Dynasty Annals*⁸, the prosperity and the glory of the Pyu kingdom and the emperors were elaborately mentioned.

There were more than 100 monasteries in Pyu's region. In these monasteries there are halls painted crimson red with vermilion, and embellished with gold and silver. The floors are also red and covered with embroidered carpets. The roofs are decorated with porcelain and glazed ceramics like in the royal palaces.

Each Pyu boy and girl were initiated into the monastic order with shaven heads at the age of seven. At the age of twenty, if the initiated ones did not wish anymore to follow the rules and regulations of the Buddhist monastic order they could leave the religious life having disrobed and could allow their hair to grow long (Yaway Tun, 1991, pp. 99 –100).

Thus, it could be concluded that during the period of the Pyu dynasty (from the 3rd century to the 9th century AD) monks and nuns might have led a very blissful and dignified religious way of life in society.

⁸ the ancient Chinese historical accounts were inscribed in about 800 AD

2.3. Buddhist Nuns in the Pagan Period (1044 AD to 1298 AD)⁹

Historical accounts show that when the Pyu Empire was weakening in 900 AD, the developing Pagan area was dominated by *Ariya* school of *Mahāyāna* tradition, as the state religion.

From the 9th to the 11th century, *Theravāda* Buddhism had moved around from Pyu to Mon and to Pagan. Thus *Theravāda* Buddhism might not have had a chance to prosper as much as in Pyu kingdom during those three centuries, but it developed consistently after its arrival in Pagan. Accordingly, like the lotus flower in the pond, the condition of female religiosa who had inherited from the Pyu era undoubtedly progressed during the Pagan golden era.

Quite a number of names and epithets of Buddhist monks are found in many inscriptions of Pagan era. The epithets are all in Pali like that of present day monks; and to indicate the monkhood, adjectival titles are usually prefixed to the original names.¹⁰ But a woman commoner was called with *Ein*, *Oh*, or *Io*. If an inscribed name appeared with a monk and woman prefix, it is the name of a woman religiosa. Some of the names of women in the inscriptions we come across are

The Graceful *Oh Hsee Tao*:

Venerable Master *Io Kran Pingsan*

Sankadhi Oh A Kran Sang

The Graceful *Ih Tee Sang* etc:

The Graceful *Oh Hsee Tao* may be interpreted in the modern colloquium as the Great Master (Female Master) *Daw Hsee Taw*. The Venerable Master *Io Kran*

⁹ See Appendix I, Picture 1

¹⁰ According to the status of the monastic order, 'the Noble' (*Myat Swa Taw*), 'the Reverend' (*Myat Gyi*), the Venerable' (*Myat Gyi Swa*). 'the Graceful' (*Phone Myat Swa*), etc: and sometimes 'the Master' (*Tha Khin*), 'the Teacher' (*Saya*), are prefixed to the names.

Pingsan may be interpreted in the modern tongue as the Junior Master (Female master) *Ma Kran Pingsan*. *Sanbadhi* may mean the highest patriarch. The time of these inscriptions was 11th century AD. These may be epithet and names of women religiosa or the wandering women ascetics similar to *silāvati* of present day.

Pe Maung Tin, in his paper Women in the Inscriptions of Pagan¹¹, had assumed by reading such names that woman members of the religious order *bhikkhunī* existed in Pagan period. In his paper, he mentions:

In L303 *Sakkaraj* 623¹² we read about the dedication of a cave: “The 8 *skhins* (lords) who recited *paritta* on the occasion are: *Skhin Vinan Thuir*, *Skhin Sarapuiy*, *Skhin Thamonka*, *Skhin Upata*, *Surabhirac’s* teacher, *Panranmi’s* teacher, *Ui’ Chi Taw*, the Princess’s teacher” You will notice that *Ui’ Chi Taw* is a woman’s name. And it is curious that she should be one of the 8 lords who recite the *paritta* prayer. We may dismiss the idea that judging by her name she is a lay woman. A lay woman would not be one of the 8 lords who recite the *paritta* prayer. A lay woman would not be one of the 8 lords performing a *paritta* ceremony. It would be less unnatural to regard her, in spite of her lay name, as an ordained nun. ... She would thus be the head of a nunnery to which she has given her name. Then in L153 we meet her twice as “the Venerable *Uiw Chi Taw*.” Since this inscription is dated *Sakkaraj* 560, she must have acquired this title soon after her ordination on the completion of her 20th birthday. She would thus be about 83 years of age when she took part in the *paritta* ceremony 63 years later in *Sakkaraj* 623 as stated in L303. It is thus

¹¹ This paper is read to the University College Historical Association on 14th December 1934 and appeared in *Journal of the Burma Research Society* Vol. XXV. Part I, 1935, pp. 149 -159

¹² L refers to the List of Inscriptions found in Burma issued by the Archaeological Department 1921. *Sakkaraj* refers to Burmese Calendar year.

worthy of note that a nun was accorded the same honour as monks on the occasion of such an important religious function as the *paritta*, on the dedication of a cave. If this interpretation of the passage is correct, then we have a rare instance of an alms ordained woman (*bhikkhunī*) in Pagan (JBRS, Vol. XXV, Part I, 1935, p.151).

Than Tun, in his Essays on the History And Buddhism of Burma, in agreement to Pe Maung Tin's view, mentioned that " Buddhism during the period under survey (Religion in Burma 1000 –1300) was not different from the Buddhism of the present day Burma. It was, however, much more tolerant as it allowed the presence of *bhikkhunī* female ascetics, in the Order." (1988, p. 23)

There was some controversial view on the existence of *bhikkhuni* Order in Pagan however. Yaway Tun citing the accounts of Chinese pilgrim, Fa Hein¹³, argued that there could not have existed a *bhikkhunī* Order in Pagan period (1991, p. 106-108). Yaway Tun said that in 399 AD, Fa Hein visited the central part of India called Majjhamadesa and in Sihladipa (Srilanka) with an aim of copying the canonical scriptures. Fa Hein had written his travelogue in detail. In it, he recorded that quite a number of monks (*bhikkhus*) were found. However, nothing was mentioned about ordained nuns (*bhikkhunī*). He carefully noted the places where he met ten thousand monks, or five thousand monks, etc. But nothing is mentioned about the ordained nuns.

The last place where the *bhikkhunī* order existed was Sihala (Lanka dipa). This was explained elaborately in Fa Hien's records about Abhaya-giri monastery

¹³ See The Travels of Fa-Hein: A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms (James Legge, 1993, Eastern Book House, India). It is an account by the Chinese monk Fa-Heien of his travels in India and Ceylon (AD 399-414) in search of the Buddhist books of Discipline.

where more than five thousand monks are residing. The records about Maha Vihara monastery where three thousand monks were residing. The records are all discriminatingly recorded detailed with the exact number of population. But nothing is mentioned about the *bhikkhuni* there. This may confirm that there was no more *Bhikkhuni* existing after 900 years of Buddha's Religion.

Yaway Tun continues to argue that in the well-known sub-commentary on *Vinaya* rules¹⁴, the measurement of the underwear girdle robe is one and half cubit in breadth according to the saying of ancient exegesis. This may mean that even in the days of sub-commentarians, even the requisites of *bhikkhuni* were unknown and the gap has lapsed so much since, no one knows with any measure of certainty (ibid, p. 108).

Yaway Tun thus concludes that if the lineage of the *bhikkhuni* religion had lapsed, the revival could not be realized. So, the woman religiosa in Pagan period were simply *paribbajakas* or woman ascetics. We do not know what these women were called at that time, but they are sure to have been the ancestors of present day (*silāvatīs* or *thīlashin*) nuns (ibid, p. 110).

On the view of the existence of *bhikkhuni* in Pagan period, the researcher would like to conclude that as Professor Pe Maung Tin and Professor Dr. Than Tun were prominent and internationally accepted experts in Burmese history, their assumption is highly respected. On the other hand, Fa Hein records are also universally accepted historical accounts and the researcher feels that Yaway Tun's counter argument also carries weight. In general, it can be concluded that in Pagan period, in relation to *bhikkhu saṅghā*, eminent woman religiosa existed. We do not

¹⁴ *Vajira Buddhita* in the exegesis chapter of *Bhikkhuni Vibhanga*, concerning the subject of the under-wearing (bodice-vest), girdle robe.

know what these women were called at that time; but they are sure to be the ancestors of present day *thilashin*.

2.4. Buddhist Nuns in the Ava Period (1364 AD to 1752 AD)¹⁵

For many years the empire of Pagan dynasty succeeded in annexing the territory to the eastern world of Indo China Peninsula including Thailand, Cambodia, Lao, Vietnam and Malay, and brought it under its rule. After having exhausted its might, the empire collapsed into a petty kingdom. Thereafter, minor royalties of Pinya and Sagaing succeeded the power however disturbed by insurgents, riots, bandits and unloyal tyrants. The country suffered a reckless dark age at the hands of cruel warrior chiefs. Thus the most powerful and majestic mighty kingdom was shackled and smashed into pieces and witnessed by very unstable and precarious countryfolk.

In 1364 AD, King Thatoe Minphyah exterminated the rulers of Sagaing and Pinya; and firmly established a new Ava kingdom at the sanctified junction of two rivers: the Irrawaddy and the Myitnge.

During the days of King Thatoe Minphyah the country became well established without agitation and riots, though not perfectly tranquil condition; however, the successive rulers could manage to calm down and promote the kingdom gradually. Thus during the days of King Minkyi Swa Sawke¹⁶ after the founder, the kingdom became remarkably blissful and tranquil.

During the Ava dynasty, the kingdom became prosperous with developments in religion, education, and social affairs. However, during the reign of King Min

¹⁵ This period was overlapped with the Toungoo Period (1486 –1752). Ava was the capital of Upper Burma whereas Toungoo was the capital of Lower Burma. Also see Appendix 1, Picture 2

¹⁶ The third ruler of Ava (1368 – 1401AD)

Khaung¹⁷, the Mon Burmese-war (from 1383 to 1424 AD) broke out and lasted for 40 long years. As the Mon and the Burmese were *Theravāda* Buddhists, in spite of being at war with each other, neither side made any attempts to undermine Buddhism. Although they were engaged in fighting in the battlefields, religion, literature and fine arts continued to progress.

The following extract enlightens the status of religious woman prevailing during the Ava period.

In 1401 AD, Rājādhirāj¹⁸ (Mon King) accompanied with three thousand boats, canoes, yachts and equipped with six hundred thousand soldiers, accompanied with four army officers marched upstream from Pegu up to Yay wun.

Simultaneously King Min Khaung of Ava, consulted with ministers, officials, and monks, how to plan a bilateral dialogue or use force to make Rajadhiraj to retreat. All of the audience kept silent. Thereupon 31-year-old Sakyo Thumyat, the abbot of Pinya monastery, exclaimed that he was able to discuss through dialogue even all kings in Jambūdīpa¹⁹ to go back home peacefully and not to speak of Rājādhirāj alone. At this King Min Khaung was very much pleased and delighted supplicating the Elder Monk to be frank to the best of his ability.

Reverend Sakyo Thumyat made full arrangements and marched out in the golden palanquin fully harnessed with elephant-trappings five-cubit-high non-

¹⁷ Son of Minkya wasawke (1401 – 1422AD)

¹⁸ Son of Binnya U, (1385 to 1423AD) Mon rulers of Hanthawaddy (Pegu)

¹⁹ Refers to India where the Buddha got enlightenment.

tusker jumbo. In the front, led three hundred neophytes clad in white robes, and at the rear three hundred aged men handling royal gifts followed.²⁰

In the first paragraph, it mentions the arrangement for peace-making dialogue and plan by eloquent Reverend Sakyo Thumyat to avoid the battle with Rajadhiraj.

In the second paragraph, it mentions the procedure of the peace-making march of Reverend Sakyo Thumyat. The non tusker-jumbo was purposefully selected to display a peaceful envoy. Moreover, three hundred nuns or religious women were selected to indicate that these harmless peaceful women were the symbol of tranquility. In such meaningful demonstration of peaceful dialogue, the celebration was done so cleverly and effectively by the ability of Reverend Sakyo Thumyat together with the loving kindness of Rajadhiraj that the matter was settled smoothly and peacefully. Then Rajadhiraj retreated back to Pegu. In this account, we witnessed woman religious being utilized in a peace-making delegation.

2.4.1. *Theetinthone* and *Thilashin* (The Woman-Neophytes and Buddhist Nuns)

Theetin means precepts or *Sabbath*: and *thone* means to observe or to practise. So *theetin thone* can mean both male and female observers of precepts.

However, according to the Royal Mirror Story²¹, *theetinthone* means only the female observer. The story is as follows.

In the past, Rajakarunna was the ruler of Mangalanagara country. He enjoyed

²⁰ (Glass Palace Chronicle Vol. 1, pp. 446 - 448).

²¹ Royal Mirror Story (Ratana Kyaymon) written by Shwetaung Thihatu written during days of King Alaungpaya (1752 – 1760 AD)

his royalty with the queen Pañcālamanda and they were blessed with a daughter by the name of princess Suvannarāj. When she attained her puberty, because of her beauty and her five perfect virtues she was placed among five hundred retinues in three mansions; and she was famous throughout the entire Jambudipa land.

Then Prince Avajjāñña, the son of king Dasadhammaraj the ruler of Indapathana country and Khemasanti queen, followed by five hundred attendants went to Mangalanagara and stopped at the garden created by Māgharī *thetinthone*. Being the son of the king, he recited daily and punctually *Cūla Sattaru gāthā* and *Bharipappataya gāthā*.²²

When Maghari over-heard the recitation she asked him to teach her those incantations. When the Prince asked why the nun wanted to learn it, the nun replied that she had been teaching princess Suvannarāj, daily in the seven storied mansions and that she wanted to teach the Princess that particular incantation. So the Prince replied that it would be better and easier to teach the Princess himself than through the nun. At this, she explained that the king had protected the princess by setting up abundant guards in order to avoid all contact with the opposite sex. No man was allowed to enter the mansion even to teach. “If it were so, who would teach the princess whilst the nun was studying the treatise with the prince? If the student princess wanted to learn, let the attendant maidens come to study” was the answer. Accordingly the princess, who was eager to learn the lessons, asked the Malladiya *thīlashin* to study the treatise (Ratana Kyaymon, p. 60).

²² These are treatises of *Veda*

In the above quoted passages, we can see the terms *māgharī theetinthone* and *thīlashin* nun. So *theetinthone* must be a woman and must be the same as *thīlashin* nun of the present era.

In Burmese literature, the term *thīlashin* was primarily used, since the earliest usage in Royal Mirror Story. So it could be concluded that the term *thīlashin* has been popularly used since the beginning of Konbaung dynasty during the days of King Alaungpaya.

It is also to be noted that these *theetinthone* or *thīlashin* had to teach the royal maidens and damsels in the palace. Moreover, *theetinthones* were asked for help in relation to the religious affairs of the queens and they helped the queens in such affairs. The following story shows the important role of the nun in history.

During the days of King Ava Minkhaung, in Pagan, Tetthaythumyat²³ appealed to the king for the weavers' tax. The king replied that he must discuss the issue with the queen. At this Tetthaythumyat said sarcastically, "Does the queen own your Majesty the King?" When queen Bomei heard this she replied "only because he is a monk, if otherwise he must be executed."

From Ava if one started at the time of cock's crow, he would arrive at Pagan in the evening. The queen used to visit the Shwezeekhone Pagoda often by she-elephant. When the royal couple visited the next time, Tetthaythumyat came and said to the queen, "If you would execute me, do it now". At this the king and queen were puzzled and were uneasy that their private talk was known to Tetthaythumyat already. So, they sent a *theetinthone* to investigate who reported this private affair. It was found that the city guardian spirit (Tepathin

²³ The reverend monk.

Nat) had informed the reverend monk, Tetthaythumyat (Royal Glass Palace Chronicle, 1992, Vol. 2, p. 1).

It was during the days of King Min Khaung when Sakyothumyat was sent together with 300 *theetinthones* to Rajadhira. And it was during the days of this King Min Khaung when a *theetinthone* was sent to investigate Tetthaythumyat.

So during the reign of King Min Khaung, the nuns or neophytes were given the status of nobility in Ava city. These must have been a great community to be able to send three hundred nuns once. These nuns could even render services when the king and queen supplicated them for religious affairs. All these facts enlighten the important position and status of nobility of these *theetinthone* and *thilashin* nuns.

2.4.2. The White Clothe and the dyed Clothe

The problem of white clothe and dyed clothe was raised in the book Treatise of Questions and Answers.²⁴ The questions were asked by King BodawPhaya and answered by the Supreme Patriarch Maung Htaung Sayadaw.

The question raised by the Interior Minister of King Bodawpaya was about “The sister and kinswomen of Taung-lay-lone Sayadaw who were all *theetinthones* wearing crimson red dyed clothes. Other nuns generally wear white clothes. The problem is whether they should wear dyed or white clothes in accordance with the Texts, Commentaries and other literature.” The answer given was as follows:

There are two types of wearing, one in white and the other in red colour dyed clothes of the *theetinthones*. As for the red colour dyed with barks of tree, in previous 92 Kalpas, at the time of the Enlightenment of Lord Phussa, three brothers

²⁴ Ah May Daw Phay Kijyan cited in (Yaway Tun, 1991, pp. 126-128)

who would become Uravela Kassapa, Gaya Kassapa and Nadi Kassapa in this aeon, were clad in the dyed clothes. And they observed the ten precepts for three whole months in the temple of Lord Buddha. This is mentioned in the Dhammapada Atthakathā, palm leaf manuscript in (ga) folio of ten lines. So to wear dyed clothes is quite appropriate for them. As for the white colour clothe, mention has been made in Sāratthasaṅgaha, eight line palm leaf manuscripts in (Khe) folio that wearing of white clothes had been practised since the days of Lord Kassapa Buddha. So it is also appropriate for them to wear in white (Yaway Tun, 1991, pp.127 - 128).

This problem of white clothes and dyed clothes had reached the King, and the prelate Sayadaw himself had to decide the case. Since this issue spread out broadly that we can well imagine the monastic women were clad in white clothes at that time and that wearing of dyed clothes was not yet practised popularly in the *theetinhone* community. Then again in the Konbaung period, although *thīlashin* was the popularly known term, the term *theetinhone* was still in use and had not yet disappeared. Even three reigns afterwards, at the time of King Mindon, *thīlashins* were said to be clad in white still, according to the scriptures.

During the reign of King Mindon, the most eminent Bammaw Sayadaw was residing at Sagaing Hills. Bammaw Sayadaw was contemporary with the famous *silāvati* (*thīlashin*) Saya Kin and both were rival poets, and satiric and critical scholars. At one time Bammaw Sayadaw toured from his usual residence glen to Wah-chet village and on his route he saw a *thīlashin* (nun) staying at a rest house. So being a very learned and happy poet, Sayadaw composed a critical verse of merriment.

No wit and no skill,
 To greet the white hen on the rest house is my will;
 She is dainty and her form is delicate,
 Clad in her clothes of white jute.
 In her nunnery under the hill to meditate.

This brief verse of the personal sight of Bammaw Sayadaw displays the shape and form of *thilashin* of that time. “White hen” displays the white form of the nun and even more, ‘clad in her white clothes of jute’ explains the colour of the dress of the nun. So this short verse helps to confirm that the colour of the nun’s dress is white.

Moreover, this very poet Bammaw Sayadaw visited the friendly Htut Khaung Sayadaw and made a joke by composing a short ‘quadred-foot verse’.

With rosary beads, retreated Htutkhaung U Shwe Soe
 Retired in this glen with pretty nuns form material aggregates;
 Shin Htut creates a form;
 The white pure *Thila* is satisfactorily torn.

The layname of Htutkhaung Sayadaw is U Shwe Soe, which is composed in the verse. By the material support of Queen Me Nu of King Bagyidaw, he was ordained as a *bhikkhu*. After eight years of ordination the monk renounce the city life and retreated near Seekhon Pagoda at the Min Wun hill. He then moved up to the Min Wun hill range and dwelt near Ratana Htut Khaung Pagoda. So eventually he was known as Htutkhaung Sayadaw (cited in Yaway Tun, 1991, p. 129).

During the days of King Mindon, the elder was conferred with Royal Titles, but he bitterly refused to accept the glorification and titles. He said “Such

honorification with office seal is futile while I am living; and even when I expire I shall be embarrassed if it were placed by the side of my funeral pillow.”

At the old age, Sayadaw dwelt at the Dhammika Glen for religious retreat attended by many nuns (*thilashin*) who prepared delicious foods for the venerable one. Daw Uttara was one of several nuns then.

So Bammaw Sayadaw composed a short verse to depict a satiric scene. But the poet explains the meaning of the world in the verse that ‘pretty *thila*’ ‘White pure *thila*’ only indicate the morality and virtue of the Reverend Elder. Here in this verse the term, ‘white’ is used also to mention the colour of the nun and her dress.

Nuns were clad in white dress not only during the days of King Mindon, but also in the days of his son, King Theebaw. This is evident in the ‘Sweet songs’ composed by U Kyaw Hla²⁵. In a song about the neophyte U Thudaw, the poet wrote: “With a carrier jug, from the city of Thonse, having collected rice alms very often like *thilashin* the white ones. Premeditating on the rest house, to rob the white clothe. Please do not allure like a nun of the same age. Oh Neophyte my fellow...”

In this Sweet song, ‘*thilashin* the white ones’ and ‘to rob the white clothe’ are used to indicate the sign of nuns.

In connection with this statement the speech of the chief nun of Thit Seint Gyaung²⁶ on Sagaing hill range is quite authentic to refer. According to her,

This Thit Seint Nun had dressed herself about forty years ago when she was young, with dyed underwear, waist dress and upper garment; but with pure

²⁵ A famous composer of new songs ‘*Than Cho*’ who lived at the time of King Mindon.

²⁶ One of the oldest nunneries in Sagaing hill.

white bodice and robe. At that time the nuns had to approach to pay respect to the Mahārgandhārāma Sayadaw²⁷ (1895 – 1919AD) who was then dwelling at Sagaing hill. Sayagyi Daw Wunna was there at Thit Seint Glen then. When the nuns paid respect and salute the Mahārandhārāma Sayadaw, the Reverend looked at the white dress of the nuns and admonished to wear only dyed clothes in the same colour as the upper garment because the white shirt and bodice were white similar to those of laywomen. Thenceforth the white coloured dress of nuns disappeared (cited in Yaway Tun, 1991, pp.132 –133)

Quoting this speech it is to be noted that the disappearance of pure white dress of nuns has been only forty years ago.

2.4.3. Dying the robes

In previous time nuns dyed their waistcloth and upper garment with brown earth from Pakhan²⁸ region. Without any mixture of other chemicals the brown earth from Pakhan alone was used in suitable quantity to get an appropriate religious colour. But later on when the imported chemical dyes came to Rangoon, the red earth powder was used popularly as dye.

They mix the red earth with the yellow earth and use as dye. The waistcloth is dyed with this blended coloured earth to get strong heavy colour. They dye the bodice and long garment lightly in soft shade. But the shoulder shawl is dyed in natural coconut shell colour and they use that coloured cotton piece.

²⁷ The first Venerable Sayadaw of the famous monastery of Amarapura.

²⁸ A region in the Central Burma.

Thus in this Ava period, the development of Burmese Buddhist nuns is witnessed. Thilashin started to get their present name, form and robes. They also enjoyed higher respect from loyalty and compassionate care from prominent monks.

2.5. Buddhist Nuns in the Konbaung Period (1752 AD to 1885 AD)²⁹

The present nuns in Burma had a great period of revival and prosperity during the *sāsana* reforms sponsored by King Mindon (1853 –78) who built the royal city of Mandalay and held the Fifth Buddhist Council there in 1871 to carry out the revision of the holy scriptures. We can witness the influence of the *thilashin* in the reign of King Mindon, the second last great king of Burma. The most prominent nuns at that time were Saya Kin and May Nat Pe, two orphans of war from Manipur³⁰ (now India) who reached Burma in early childhood and were adopted by a royal minister.

While Prince Mindon and his brother Kanoung were hiding out due to royal unrest, they met and often listened to the preaching of two famous *thilashins* Saya Kin and Saya Mai Nat Pay. When he became king in 1853 and the capital of Mandalay was completed in 1859, King Mindon invited both nuns to come and teach his consorts religion and manners. Mai Nat Pay was the daughter of a master mason who was taken as prisoners of war from Manipur. As she decided she could not change her abrupt and rough way of speech to suit a court, she decided to stay back in the forest, at Mingun Gulay Gyoung where she eventually built a pagoda which is named after her to this day.

Saya Kin, whose brother was also a learned monk known as Shankalay Kyung

²⁹ See Appendix 1, Picture 3

³⁰ It is the land of Kathe, a Shan tribe, and it fell under the hand of Burmese King Bayinnaung. The region fought back to gain independence. There were successive battles and in 1820AD it was captured again by King Bagyidaw.

Sayadaw, agreed to come to the capital on three conditions, which she thought necessary to ensure her freedom from the chains of court life. She would sleep in no tiered roof residence, she would receive no titles or medals, and no alms money was to be given as per her instructions. She herself chose various places to stay in and people must come where she was to hear her. She preferred to stay under the trees of Sagaing across the river, east of the Shwegyin monastery or near Mandalay Hill in the capital. Most of the time, she dwelled in a nunnery built 500 fathoms to the north of the palace in the royal city. The court and other women came to her for instruction to read the scriptures and to write, for Pali grammar and Buddhist philosophy. Children were brought along for disciplining. Court and commoners became *thīlashins*. King Mindon was most appreciative and, as a mark of veneration for Saya Kin, he let his younger daughters to become temporary *thīlsahins* under her tutelage.

As years passed, Saya Kin raised pupil *thīlashins* to take over the court instruction in her place, and finally returned across the river to the Sagaing hills and woods, where her ties with the bodily life became very light. She would sit to meditate at 8 p.m. and would not rise until the pre-dawn alms food was brought to her. Passing the young *thīlashins* still asleep then, she would say in her soft voice as they remembered throughout their lives “Oh, the young girls are sleeping. Get up girls, get up”. Ethics, calmness and wisdom were the qualities people saw in her. In 1878 while practising *Vipassanā* meditation she passed away. King Mindon, when he heard the news, was greatly affected and he had her ashes enshrined in a tomb so that he could pay his respect to her (Yaway Tun, 1991, pp.137-160; Saw Mon Nyin, 1976, pp. 308-309; Mi Mi Khaing, 1984, pp. 79 – 80).

Thus, it could be concluded that during the Konbaung period, the nuns were honoured and respected even by the king and courtiers. The nuns played the role of royal teachers and enjoyed the high status in social and religious circles.

2.6. Buddhist Nuns in the British Colonial Days (1885 AD to 1948 AD)

After the third Anglo-Burmese war, Burma came under the rule of the British. British rule (1885 –1948) was a misfortune for Buddhism in Burma. It ended state support for Buddhist institutions. However, there were movements of revival of Buddhism and Burmese independence movements which were closely linked. Although there were many prominent monks taking part in the nationalist movements, little was mentioned about the nuns in Burmese historical accounts of colonial days. This may be because the nuns shun themselves away from the struggles for independence. Perhaps they were occupied with religious functions only. There were still some well-known nuns during the colonial period and information about them was found in the writings of foreigners as well as by the local writers.

The condition of Buddhist nuns in colonial days can be traced back in the writings of foreigners. W. Osborn Allen³¹, a Christian minister who toured India, Ceylon and Burma during 1882 and 1883, wrote in an account of his journey to Burma as:

...The great pagoda at Rangoon is called the Shwedagon. Up and down the steps pass throngs of men, women, children, monks with their shaven heads and yellow robes, and sometimes a nun shaven but dressed in white, looking old and ugly... (cited in Tessa, 1989, p. 28).

³¹ W. Osborn Allen wrote A Person's Holiday: Being an Account of a Tour in India, Burma and Ceylon in the Winter of 1882 -83 (Tenby, England: F.B. Mason, 1885)

It could be said that Allen was aware that a tradition of female renunciation existed in Burma and it was important enough to include in his description of religious life in Rangoon.

As with Allen, whose impressions of the Buddhist lay nuns of Burma were a central feature of his writings, Dharmapala³² was aware of the contribution of the lay nun to other Buddhist cultures. Writing in 1891 for an English weekly journal published by the Buddhist Theosophical Society in Colombo, Dharmapala offered his impressions concerning education and female monasticism in Burma:

Education is an important factor among them. Every boy and girl is made to learn, - the former in a *pansala* (temple school), the latter in a Buddhist Convent - the home of the *dasa sil upasikas* (devout laywomen who keep the ten precepts, i.e. lay nuns). They are taught to read and write on a purely Buddhistic basis. Jatakas, Pali sutras and the like are given to be read; and the child not only learns its language but learns its religion, too (cited in Tessa, 1989, p. 46).

Dharmapala related other impressions of Buddhist lay nuns in Burma, including specific details of their daily life, as well as their appearance:

The *upasikas* who observe the *dasa sīla* (the ten precepts) are greatly respected by the laymen for their purity of life and knowledge of the *dharma*. It is an edifying spectacle to behold in the pavements and courtyards of the temple these revered women, with their pure white robes and shaven heads, slowly walking up and down, rosary in hand, and their thoughts concentrated on some

³² Anagarika Dharmapala a Buddhist theosophist a symbol of religious and national pride of Ceylon. He was formerly Don David Hewavitarane, helped to redefine the role of the layperson in Buddhist Sri Lanka. He was born in 1846 and died in 1933. Just before his death, he became a Buddhist monk.

subject. Some of these *upasikas* are quite young, but as a rule they enter the order when they are over 40...(cited in *ibid*, p. 46).

His discussion of lay nuns in Burma suggests that he valued the contribution that women were able to make to Buddhism; he hoped that the women of Ceylon would be able to make a similar contribution.

Writing in Burma in 1910, nearly ten years after his initial visit there, Dharmapala again displayed an interest in Burmese lay nuns:

At Mandalay... in the evening went to see the nun who talks in Pali. She is about 54 years old. Her husband had built a Kyoung pagoda and at his death she became a nun. She was also teacher to the Queen of Burma ... According to Dharmapala, "seeing the Burmese nuns and their self sacrificing lives, Miss Shearer ³³expressed her desire to join their ranks, and with the consent of her friends, she took up the *upasika* life. That is, the life of a lay nun and the name *Padmavati* and lived in a cottage at the Upyatawya Kyoung, Boundry Road, Rangoon, studying the *Abhidhamma* in Pali and learning the Burmese Language" (cited in *ibid*, pp. 80 –81).

Ceylon Buddhists, such as Dharmapala, often invoked the Burmese lay nun's example. Moreover, Burmese lay nuns were commonly seen in Ceylon at that time; their example doubtless influenced the changing role of Buddhist women in the island. This was also the case in the early 1900s, when a Sinhala woman named Catherine de Alwis³⁴ journeyed to Burma to become a lay nun. Her spiritual successors maintain

³³ Catherine Shearer (a disciple of Dharmapala), whose clerical name was Sister Padmavati, was an American nurse who travelled to Sri Lanka in 1899 to assist the Countess with the lay nunnery work.

³⁴ Like many Christian Ceylonese children of her period, de Alwis received an English style education upbringing. While she was grieving over her father's death, she met a Buddhist who counseled and consoled her, and eventually converted her to Buddhism.

that she was inspired to renounce normal life having met some Burmese lay nuns at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy...(cited in *ibid*, p. 92).

The status of the nuns during the colonial period can also be studied from the lives of some prominent nuns of that time. The following nuns are the leading nuns of those days and they were so prominent that they left a legacy and influence to the next generations of religious women.

2.6.1. Daw Dhammacārī (1821 - 1971)

Daw Dhammacārī had a yearning to be free from the cycle of birth and death. She determined that one day she would become a *thīlashin*, devoted to this path. When she was 16, she asked permission to do this but her parents refused her brother emphatically saying he did not wish to be called 'the brother of *thīlashin*'. Nevertheless, she went with some friends to a Mingun cloister where after a year of observing and performing religious duties, she became a *thīlashin*. She studied Sanskrit in Mandalay, and while there, met a monk who, it is said, for love of her, left the monastery and became a layman, though still devout. But Daw Dhammacārī took no notice and went ahead with her *thīlashin's* life.

She later went to Sri Lanka with monks who took a golden cube to hold the Sacred Tooth there. Sri Lanka had no *thīlashins* but she was able to spend two years there studying Singhalese. When she returned, she became a teacher of monks as well as *thīlashins* who wished to learn the scriptures in that language. She wrote a book on the commentary of faithful followers called Thissawadi Tikā and her sermons were famous. It is said that if a person had not heard what Daw Dhammacārī preach, then he was still far from attaining *nibbāna*. She was often referred to as the beloved

adopted mother of Sasana by the Tipitaka master Sayadaw U vicittasara Bhivamsa and paid due respect. She died in 1971 and was buried at Mingun (Saw Monyin, 1999, pp. 310 - 312).

2.6.2. Daw Mālārī (1880 – 1979)

Born to village parents in Khattiya in Nyaungdon Township, Daw Malari attended a village school together with her sister. At 17, swept by the desire to devote her life to study of the scriptures, she went to Sayadaw U Ponnya of Theamein Tawya Monastery, received the ten precepts and became a *thīlashin*.

She now began a long period of study. She learned Pali-based religious writing from the presiding monk. She then spent 6 years studying under her cousin, the renowned *dhamma* lecturer U Zanita³⁵, then with other teachers at Rangoon and Pyapon for two years at each place. During this time she was also under the tutelage of Tayanka Sayagyi³⁶, who had won the title of the greatest learned monk³⁷ three times. Next she spent four years in the cloister of Thayaing Village in Shwebo district up in the north. Then she meditated at Sagaing Guni for another two years, at the same time learning the higher level of commentaries.

In 1931, at the age of 46 she finally built a cloister the Thameikdawdaya Gyaung on the Sagaing Hills. There, she began the teaching, which continues until today. She started with seven *thīlashins*, and today there are over 100. In 1945, she began holding examinations in grammar, vocabulary, poetry and philosophy. About forty candidates passed the examination in a year. They were rewarded according to

³⁵ He was also known as sein-za-ni in Burmese.

³⁶ The master who was partitioned by mattresses from the female pupils.

³⁷ This title is known as Rajaguru Agga Mahāpandita in Burmese.

their grades. Meanwhile she continued her search for self-improvement: seven years meditation training with another period with Sayadaw U Kawthala. She went wherever there was someone to instruct her further. In 1970, at the age of 90 she handed over her administrative control of the Cloister to her niece Daw Haymari and two others.

At 95, still in good health, Daw Mālārī was still reading books on *Vipassanā* by the Mahasi and Mogok Sayadaws. She was the only woman member in the examinations on Buddhist Literature, and her clear memory often reminded fifty-year old pupils of things they had forgotten (ibid, 1999, pp. 316 - 318).

Daw Mālārī shows the hardship and suffering the nuns had faced to pursue learning at the beginning of the century. She sets an example for the younger generation nuns how one can strive for education, self-improvement and spread of the religion.

2.6.3. Daw Kumārī (1872 – 1954)

Daw Kumārī was the founder of Aye Myo Gyaung, a famous nunnery on Sagaing Hill. She established the nunnery with the guidance of the first Mahargyanyoung Sayadaw in 1908. She wrote the rules to be abided by for the nuns, Thīlashin Upaday Kyintkun (the regulations for nuns), with the help of above mentioned venerable monk. This Treatise was used as a reference when Daw Pannayasari wrote recitations of Khema Rama.³⁸ These books serve as sources of reference for the Religious Affairs Department of Burma when it wrote the rules and regulations for the nuns.

³⁸ known as Khema Rama Wutt Yutsin in Burmese

She also wrote a treatise on *Vipassanā* meditation at the request of her disciples. Her book, a treaty for the path to *nibbāna*³⁹, has become a religious best seller running into several editions. (Thiri, Dhamma Yokeson, No. 9, 1994, pp.120-126)

Daw Kumārī proves that nuns are also capable of fostering intellectual well-being of religious communities. Her books are still widely read and used.

2.6.4. Daw Ṇaṇa Cariṇi (1899 – 1976)

Daw Ṇaṇa Cariṇi was the daughter of a rich landowning family. Her father was a headman, which during Burmese monarchic times, was a hereditary officer, recognized by royal appointment and honoured with special symbols of office such as a red umbrella, guards, a more elaborately roofed house. Daw Ṇaṇa Cariṇi was the eleventh child of such a headman in charge of a circle of villages in Myanaung area. Her brothers, given a modern university education, were already filling official posts in the British administration. When she was the age of 16, she asked her parents' permission to become a *thīlashin*. Three times she was refused by her parents crying and saying that a youngest daughter should look after her parents when they get old. She replied that she would benefit them more by being a *thīlashin* but they would not listen to it. So she enlisted the help of a maid in fleeing the house.

So Mai Ṇaṇa Cariṇi got what she had longed for which was to be immersed in religious books. She went through study and training. She chose the place where a Sayadaw, whose teaching attracted her, taught. When she took the Pathamabyan examinations she won first prize in the senior level.

³⁹ Nibbāna Pawasathanikyan

In 1930, at the age of 31, she returned to her native Myanaung to find a new cloister. In 1947, she started yet another one in Rangoon in the famous Myanaung Gyaung. There she started with 60 *thilashins* whom she had trained. Recruits came from all over Lower Burma, from Twante, Maubin and Pegu, and she became known as 'Teacher of 500 *thilashins* and more.' It is at her nunnery that girls from other countries have come to study Buddhism and young girls spend vacations in learning Buddhist duties as young *thilashins*. She was very strict with her rules of writing and diction. She was also a tireless questioner and many monks avoided her lest she ask questions to which they could not answer spontaneously.

Her nunnery, Ñyana Sāri Learning Centre⁴⁰, is a world-famous centre. Nuns from other countries who wish to study Buddhist scriptures or the life of the nuns are usually sent there to study. It is also regarded as one of the best nunneries in producing the most learned nuns and has a high degree of student success on the Buddhist examinations (Saw Monyin, 1999, pp.319 – 323; Kabilsingh, 1991, p.88).

2.6.5. Daw Oo Zun or Daw Sumālā (1868 – 1944)

Daw Oo Zun was the only child of silk trader U Ei and his wife Daw Myin. When her parents successivley passed away in her young age, she had to manage the family business. At the age of 30, while visiting Rangoon on a pilgrimage, she happened to be at the home for the aged run by the Catholic nuns. She found that aged Burmese were looked after well. However, finding the aged had to recite the Christian prayers instead of reciting Buddhist scriptures and keeping *sabbath*, she was

⁴⁰ Also called Myan Aung Kyaung Taik or Ñyana Sāri Kyaung Taik

deeply saddened. The idea of running a home for the aged Buddhists prompted her to look for ways of doing so.

One year after her return to Mandalay, she discussed this idea with the Sayadaw of Ariyamaggin Gyaung in the Mingun area. She was given a place near the world famous Mingun bell and Mingun Pagoda. She built three small buildings for meditation and started to accept the elderly people. After two years, there were already about 20 members. She received medical supplies from the Tiger Balm Company.

She set up a committee for a Buddhist home for the aged at her house in Mandalay when she received many letters from around the country. The home was up-graded with electricity and water supply and transportation across the river was arranged free of charge. After 8 years of establishment, new buildings were constructed and people from such towns as Thaton, Paungde, Hninsigon in Rangoon and Pakhukku asked her to establish homes for the aged in their towns. So, new homes for the aged were founded near the Myathabeik foothill in Thaton in 1927, at Paungde in 1928, Hninsigon in Rangoon in 1933 and in 1937 at Pakhukku.

When she was 60 years old, Daw Oo Zun received the ordination and became a *thilashin*. She took the title of Daw Sumālā and stayed in the home for the aged in Paungde. She passed away in 1944 at Mingun Home for the Aged (ibid, pp.313 – 315). The Homes for the Aged set up by Daw Oo Zun are still functioning well under the guidance of the Social Welfare Department. The costs are largely covered by donation from the public.

Daw Oo Zun was the pioneer nun who proved that nuns are capable of doing social work. Her commitment was so great that she was recognized as the martyr nun.

2.6.6. Daw Dhammawadi (born in 1927)

Daw Dhammawadi is the most prominent Nepalese nun who tried her best to revive *theravāda* Buddhism in Nepal. She risked her life in pursuit of Buddhist learning at a very young age. When she was only fourteen, Dhammawati travelled to Burma in search of a *dhamma* education, as it was not available in Nepal. Because of her young age, her parents refused to give her permission to go, so she ran away from home. She walked to Burma and she was arrested for entering the country illegally. Finally she was able to get a passport and to study as planned.

Daw Dhammawadi spent fourteen years studying *dhamma*, specializing in the *Abhidhamma*. Returning to Nepal in 1955, she was determined to work for the propagation of *dhamma* and for the advancement of women. By 1966, she had succeeded in establishing a nunnery called Dharmakirti Vihar, in Kathmandu, where there are now fourteen nuns studying and practicing. In addition to study and practice, the nuns at Dharmakirti Vihar also engage in teaching and various other *dhamma* activities. The vihar is supported by lay people, and every *uposatha* day, about nine hundred lay disciples, mostly women attend the Buddha *puja* or offering ceremony (Kabbilsingh, 1991, pp. 91-92).

Daw Dhammawadi was known as Thami Chit (Beloved Daughter) in Burma for her endeavour. She has established a close tie between Nepal and Burma to spread *Theravāda* Buddhism. There are several Nepalese nuns studying Buddhist scriptures in Burma. In return some prominent monks are establishing monasteries in Nepal and conducting *vippasānā* meditation courses.

2.7. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has traced the historical development of Burmese Buddhist nuns. The position of the nuns is discussed throughout Burmese history from the time *Theravāda* Buddhism arrived in Burma to contemporary times. The status of the nuns in Pagan seemed to be so high that most of the scholars accepted that *Bhikkhunī* order existed in Pagan period. In the Ava period, the nuns functioned as symbol of peace who had a role in preventing war. In the early 19th century during the reign of King Mindon, two famous *thīlashins* were invited to the court to teach religion and manners to royal members. And thus earned the respect of King Mindon who in gratitude honoured the nuns at court. During the colonial period, a profile has been given of several nuns who were struggling for innovative ideas like writing religious books, establishing nunneries and engaging in social work. Although nuns did not take a very prominent role in the society as compared to monks, they had their place as scholars, educators and peacemakers. They were respected, although not very influential.



CHAPTER III

NUNS IN CONTEMPORARY BURMA

The survey data used to analyze the condition of the nuns in contemporary Burma has been gathered through questionnaires with a sample of 200 nuns. The questions asked to the nuns relating to their backgrounds, their attitudes and their patterns of life. The questions were partially controlled in the sense that a set of reasons for becoming a nun was given and the nuns were asked to choose according to their priority. They were asked to number the choices 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc, in order of importance to them.¹ To give the nuns some freedom, an open question was given at the end of each section. They could mention any other reasons for becoming a nun that were not included in the above lists. An interpretation of the data was made on the basis of frequency for each particular reason. The total number of times a choice was made was calculated and a percentage worked out.

As part of an eclectic approach to a fuller understanding of Burmese nuns in *Theravāda* Tradition, the researcher sent out a set of questionnaires to 200 nuns. These nuns are mostly from three large cities, namely Rangoon, the capital; Mandalay, the last Royal capital; and Monywa, the researcher's hometown. The researcher attempted to make the sampling random. However, due to a number of constraints, a completely random sample was impossible. Ten percent of the nun population in each nunnery was surveyed and an attempt was made to get different age groups. It was found that 42% of the respondent nuns are from Monywa, which has about 700 nuns in 29 nunneries. The reason is that when some responses were found invalid, the researcher had to contact some other nuns to answer the

¹ See Appendices 3 and 4

questionnaire. However, it should be kept in the mind that Monywa is a very pious town. It is the home town of also a prominent venerable monk Ledi Sayadaw.² Other places include Sagaing Mingun, Shwebo, Shwedaung, which are situated in the Central Burma where most of the nuns concentrate, and Moulmein in Mon State, Monyin in Kachin State and Nyaungdone in Irrawaddy Division. The researcher believes that this sampling may dispatch a general profile of *Theravadin* Buddhist nuns in Burma.

3.1. General Profile of the Burmese Buddhist Nuns

In order to draw the personal background of the nuns, 16 questions³ were asked concerning background information including age, ordination age, and duration of nunhood, personal data, family background, educational background and present education. The answers from these questions will establish a profile of the nuns in contemporary Burma.

3.1.1. Personal Data

Among the respondents 37% were students, 22% farmers, 5.5% shopkeepers, 3.3% teachers and 19% had no job before they became nuns. The remaining came

2 Ledi Sayadaw, the learned master of Leditawya Monastery, north of Monywa town, who is less well known by his personal name of Bhikkhu Nyana. Born in 1846, he died in 1923 at the age of 77, and his career was of a pattern followed by other less well-known Burmese monks. At the age of 20 he was ordained a *bhikkhu* and soon gained a reputation for his outstanding ability as a student in Pali and in Buddhist literature. He published his first Pali work, the Manual of Perfections (*Paramin dipani*), at the age of 35. In the course of his lifetime he wrote seventy-six Buddhist manuals, commentaries and essays altogether, some in Pali and some in Burmese. He was well known as a teacher of *Abhidhamma* and the founder of meditation centres for lay Buddhist devotees. The quality of his scholarship was recognized by the University of Rangoon's conferring on him the degree of Doctor of Literature (*honoris causa*). He is best remembered in Burma for his emphasis upon the practice of meditation, and the exercises of insight which are necessary as a preliminary to meditation. His life and work provide a good illustration of the way in which Burmese Buddhist monks have combined serious scholarship in Buddhist philosophy with personal practice of Buddhist meditation (Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy, 1997, p. 405).

³ See Appendices 3 and 4.

from all walks of life including lawyers, doctors, assistant engineers, university students, clerks, housekeepers, shopkeepers, tailors, weavers, and those selling cakes, firewood and running bookshops. It cannot be said that the jobless population is low, but on the other hand, it is promising to see many students as well as professional women join the nunhood. This data will counter the general assumption that nuns are former spinsters, widows or social rejects who have become nuns for lack of other means of economic support.⁴ Nuns with higher intellect and education whose reasons for renunciation are positive ones are a source of great potential for the future order of nuns.

3.1.2. Family Background

The majority of the nuns came from peasant families as there were 55.5% of nuns whose parents are farmers. The second largest is that of shopkeepers 12% and traders 12%. About 11% of the nuns' parents had already passed away and 3% of the nuns' parents are jobless. The family background was largely divergent as the nuns came from weavers, goldsmiths, tea-shop runners, contractors, military men, carpenters, construction workers, directors, sale agents, practitioners of indigenous medicine and pensioners. Why do the daughters of peasants constitute the largest nun population? The answer can be for two reasons. It can be because peasants are economically the poorest people in the country and becoming a nun is a way of vertical social mobility in society. On the other hand, it can be because peasants are the most religious among lay people and thus happy to allow their descendents to enter the religious orders.

A generalization could be drawn that most of the nuns came from relatively large families as they have several siblings in their families. To illustrate this

⁴ See Spiro, 1982, p. 290

numerically - 25% of the nuns have 4 siblings, 20% have 5, 16% have 6, 11.5% have 7, 5.5% have 8 and 3.5% have 9. This data shows that generally, most of the nuns came from a big family. This can be shown in the table as:

No. of siblings	Percent
4	25%
5	20%
6	16%
7	11.5%
8	5.5%
9	3.3%

It is a fact that having relatives in the monastic order can affect the decision of the girls or women to become nuns since 75% of the nuns have their relatives in the monastic order. To be more specific, 8% have their parents are in the monastic order, 5% have participating grandparents, 49% have an uncle or aunt, 31.5% have brother or sister, 2% have niece or nephew and 1.5% have grandchildren. Nuns who have relatives in the monastic order can be shown as:

Parent	7.7%
Grandparents	3.5%
Uncle / aunt	32%
Brother / sister	22.5%
Cousin	5.5%
Niece / nephew	1.5%
Grandchildren	1%

It can be also generalized that the younger generation is more affected by their relatives than the older generation. It is also clear that uncle / aunt and brother / sister influence is the strongest. The acquaintance with life style of nun or monk encourages them to become nuns. It seems to indicate that there should be some needs for personal connection or contact.

Getting support is important for the nuns for their survival. This support usually came from their family. Sixty-four percent of the nuns have family members as their supporters. Only 36% say they have no supporters. It is a general practice that during the harvest time, the nuns usually take two weeks' leave to go back to their home village. They usually gather rice, peas and beans from parents, relatives and friends. This is for them to survive for the whole year.

3.1.3. Present age, Ordination age and Length of Nunhood

To start the general profile of the nuns, the present age of the nuns will be discussed first. Among the 200 respondent nuns, the youngest one is 12 whereas the oldest is 90. The nuns younger than 20 years of age constitute 11.5% of the population. The average age of these nuns is 39 years. The largest age group is that of 30 to 39 which comprises 25% of the population. In fact, the age groups between 20 to 29, 30 to 39, 40 to 49 almost equally constitute the sample population having respective figures of 20.5%, 25% and 19.5%. As most of the nuns are younger in age, it may be safe to assume that they take on an active part in all kind of tasks whether it be meditation, learning or doing social work.

The ordination age of nunhood begins with 4-year-old⁵ as the youngest and 66 year-old as the oldest. The average age at ordination is 18. The majority of the nuns get their ordination between the age of 10 to 19, which constitute 58.5% of the population. Those younger than 10 years of age make up 14%. This may be due to the fact that most nunneries accept single, unmarried women or young girls who are required to become a religious. It is found that after the age of thirty, Burmese women are reluctant to become nuns as the total of nuns above thirty and above amounts to only 10%. By that age, most of the Burmese have already settled down as the mean age of singles at marriage is 24.5 years. So it is better that one enters nunhood before puberty, otherwise there is less chance of renunciation as there are so many responsibilities of an adult, wife and mother once a woman get married.

For the length of nunhood, most of the respondents have been in the nunhood one to five years at 21%; 6 to 10 years is 11.5%; and 11 to 15 year length constitute 10%. The greater length is spread almost equally: 16 to 20 years makes up 9.5%; 21 to 25 years is 8.5%; 26 to 30 years is 6.5%. The average length of nunhood is 21.5 years.

Most of the nuns responded that they had already decided to become a nun permanently. This group constitutes 96% of the nun population. When they were asked how much time they took to make the decision of becoming nuns 20% said their decision was spontaneous, 12% took a few days, 24% took less than 6 months, 2.2% took 6 months to a year and 2.1% took more than one year. So it is obvious that most did not take much time to make a decision to become nuns. However, it cannot be taken as an

⁵ The youngest age for *samanera* is 7.

easy decision because after ordination, almost all *thilashin* (96%) decided to be permanent nuns.

In Burmese society, it is difficult for monks as well as nuns to return to lay life. First, there is a social sanction imposed on them as parents, relatives and devotees would like to see them in what they accepted a more peaceful life. Parents may object at the beginning, if their daughters' wish to lead a religious life, but once they have given the consent, they want it to be a life long commitment. The parents want to take pride in being the parents of venerable monks or nuns instead of ex-monk or ex-nun. There is also a worry for their children that they will not able to adjust themselves in society and earn their own livelihood.

Secondly, there is rejection from the community. The public do not want to see their monks come back to lay life as they feel they have lost their role model or their spiritual teacher. This rejection is stronger when the monk or the nun is more respectable or learned. Moreover, they fear the donation they made through these monks for merit earning might be annihilated.

Thirdly, the ex-monks or ex-nuns are usually regarded as awkward people as they find it hard to become adjusted back in society. While leading a religious life, the monks are usually given the role of leader and are highly respected. Even though the nuns do not earn as much respect as the monks do they are still paid respect. So these people are used to a commanding role. But they usually forget that they have lost their leading role in society. There is usually a clash when the people do not want to accept their command in public affairs.

As for asking the consent of the parents, 78.5% had approval from their parents whereas 16% were not given consent, and the rest of the respondents refused to answer this question.

3.1.4. Educational Background : Education Before Becoming a Nun

The educational background of the nuns will be discussed in two parts:

1. the kind of education they have before they become nuns and
2. the monastic education they are pursuing in their nunhood.

Among the 200 respondents 7.5% had a monastic education before joining the nunhood, that is they studied in monasteries or nunneries. Forty-eight percent had only primary education, 17.5% studied in middle school, 7% in high school. Two and a half percent had a university education and 6.5% were university graduates. Only one out of 200 respondents was illiterate. Those who have education of high school and above may be considered as having intellectual potential.

3.1.5. Education Pursued as a Nun

Officially there are five levels of monastic education ⁶for the nuns in Burma at present. The very basic level is called *muladan*, which is equal to primary education that is from grade one to four. At this level, the novice or nuns study *Vinaya* code and a secular primary education. The study is done individually at ward / village-tract monasteries or nunneries. The next three levels are *pattamanye*, *pathamalatt* and *pathamagyi* which may be said to be at the level of lower middle school, upper middle school, and high school levels respectively. The highest level of monastic education that can be pursued by the nuns is *dhammācariya*⁷, literally meaning teacher of *dhamma* which is recognized as equal to the Bachelor's degree. These studies are done at *pariyatti* centre which are run autonomously, but follow the same syllabi set by the central

⁶ See Appendix 8

⁷ Doctrinal instructor: (1) Teacher or instructor who teaches *dhamma* scriptures, Pali Texts, commentaries sub-commentaries, etc, (2) A *dhammācariya* is one who has passed the *dhammācariya* examinations qualifying him for such instructorship.

examination board. If the nuns would like to continue their studies they can do so individually and take examinations held by other non-government organizations. Most of the monasteries and nunneries are termed learning centres or Pali Universities.

Among the 200 respondent nuns in this survey, 13% have finished the Elementary (*muladan*) examinations, 9% High School (*pahtamagyidan*), 11% Higher Middle School (*pahtamalatt*), 14.5% Lower Middle School (*pathmange*), 39% Bachelor Degree (*dammacariya*). One percent or 2 nuns have passed *nikaya* examination which is equivalent to *Tripitika*. Twelve percent of the respondent nuns have stopped pursuing a monastic education. There are a few successful candidates at each level. Why are the nuns striving to pass such difficult examinations? Does it strongly support Kawanami's claim that education is the most potential asset for Burmese nuns to strengthen their religious position?

In pursuing Buddhist education, the nuns should be aware of the three kinds of learning in Buddhist scriptures:

- 1) Snake charmer's way of learning, that is, learning that resembles catching a snake unskillfully.
- 2) Studying the scriptures so as to find ways to escape from *samsāra* and
- 3) learning like a custodian of property, that is, studying of the Buddhist scriptures in order to preserve them.

Some people learn to conqueror others, to boast, to have glory. They learn the Buddhist scriptures on the basis of greed and anger. When catching a snake, if one is not skillful he will be either killed or in danger. So also, while learning the Buddha's teaching, if one learns because of anger and greed, he will be led to nowhere but hell. Some people learn Buddhist scriptures to practise and fulfill *sīla*, *samādhi* and *pañña*.

Such kind of learning will help a person achieve what he is striving for. *Arahans* (enlightened monks) have already fulfilled the tasks of a monk. Actually they do not need to teach or learn Buddhist scriptures. However, to safeguard the *dhamma*, these *arahans* learn and spread Buddha's teaching. Their learning serves as a saving bank. Learning Buddhist scriptures should be done this way. When one is young, he might start with the first kind of learning. Afterwards, when he realizes the essence of Buddha's teaching, he changes to the second and ends with the third form of learning.

As religious persons, nuns should not be content with learning theory (*Pariyatti*) only. They should continue practising. It is said that there were five factors that caused the waning and disappearance of *Bhikkhunī sāsanā*.⁸

1. Little encouragement from the monks.
2. Less encouragement from the laity.
3. The rigidity of the *Bhikkhunī Patimokkha* (Rules for nuns).
4. Repeated encounter with bad times.
5. Flourishing of rival women ascetics.

Nuns should learn lessons from history and take the necessary actions to safeguard their existence at the present time. This can be done by

- 1) listening to the Buddha's teaching
- 2) studying the Buddhist scriptures
- 3) memorizing the Buddha's doctrines by heart
- 4) understanding the teaching and
- 5) practice according to the teaching.

⁸ Ye Way Tun: "Disappearance of *Bhikkhunī Sāsana*" in *Dhamma Bvuhā*, No.5, Vol. 9, 1970, p.31.

Thus, nuns should not be content with learning only. To fulfill the aim of eliminating suffering, nuns must practise (*paṭipat*). Only when *pariyatti* and *patipatti* flourish, Buddha *sāsanā* will last long. *Pativeda sāsanā*, a full realization of the Buddha's doctrines, should be the aim of the nuns.⁹

3.2. Ordination

Theoretically, there are three categories of Buddhist nuns:

1. Female novice (*sāmaṇerī*),
2. Probationer (*sikkhamāna*), and
3. Fully ordained nun (*bhikkhunī*).

Murcott, in her analysis of the Psalms of the Sisters¹⁰, says that she discovered ancient Buddhism to be a system of faith that contains at least two elements:

- i. an affirmation that women can understand and attain the highest religious truth,
- ii. institutional structures that provide women equal opportunity.

The contemporary nuns and their institutions have lost the status enjoyed by the *Bhikkhunis* in the Buddha's time through the history.

According to Tsomo (1988, p. 53), of the estimated sixty thousand Buddhist nuns in the world today, approximately fifteen thousand are *bhikkhunīs*, five thousand are novices and the remaining are women living as nuns without having received any one of these three ordinations. In *Theravāda* tradition it is believed that fully ordained nuns disappeared through the course of history. However, there are large numbers of women living as nuns in *Theravada* Buddhist countries who do not belong to any of the three groups. In Burma, the Buddhist nuns are known as *thīlashin*; in Thailand, they are called

⁹ Pathamakyaw U San Thin Hlaing, 1996, pp. 126 – 129.

¹⁰ The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therīgāthā, Murcott, 1991, p. vii.

Mae ji; in Cambodia they are known as *Don chee*; in Sri Lanka, they are *Dasa sil mata*. In Nepal, they are *Anajarika*.

3.2.1. Description of the Ordination Procedure in Burmese Context

There is no such full procedure of ordination for *bhikkhunī* in Burma. This is because the Burmese believe that the *bhikkhunī* order has already disappeared. The ceremony for a woman to enter the nunhood is normally known as *Thilashin Wutt Pwe*, literally meaning a ceremony for “the donning of a nun’s robe”. This ceremony is normally held in the nunneries separately or sometimes it is associated with the initiation ceremony of novices or ordination ceremony of the monks. One the researcher witnessed was a mixture of the three ceremonies sponsored by a government factory and the other one was a single ordination ceremony of the nuns.

If a Burmese lay woman wants to enter nunhood, she has to undergo several trial procedures first. The procedure may vary from one nunnery to the other, but the general pre-requisites prescribed by the State Saṅghā Mahānāyaka Committee is

1. for a laywoman to be ordained as a temporary nun, she needs to keep 8 precepts for one week before the ordination,
2. for a laywoman to be ordained as a permanent nun, she needs to keep 8 precepts for one month at least before the ordination,
3. she must learn the renunciant’s precepts and request in Pāli.

When a laywoman has obtained the requisites and agreement from the abbess of a nunnery and a preceptor or advisor-nun who will serve as a mentor, she is ready for ordination.

It has been reported that the ordination ceremony is becoming more elaborate, and that the number of parents who send their daughters to nunnery schools during holidays

for short periods (seven days or a month) is increasing. However, in many nunneries the ceremony involves only shaving one's head and changing into conventual robes. In fact, there seems to be no real rules for ordination. In some cases, many monks (up to ten) may be invited, yet in other cases there may be only one monk present. The candidate recites the precepts and is initiated by the monk. It has been pointed out that although the ordinary ceremony has little religious significance, the women become real nuns in the course of everyday discipline and study (Chatsumarn, 1991, pp. 89- 90).

However, the abbess of a famous nunnery said that the significance of *Thilashin Wut Pwe* lies in the chanting of 32 parts of impermanent bodies.¹¹ In the time of Lord Buddha, some people could attain sainthood, at the end this recitation. So the nuns-to-be must pay attention to the chanting while their head is being shaven. This chanting also aims to cause them to view their own body with detachment.

3.2.2. Reasons for Ordination

Generally speaking, there are two main categories of reasons for ordination: conviction (*Saddhā*) and fear (*Bhaya*).

Leading a nun's life because of conviction has a positive aspect whereas renunciation that stems from fear bears a negative aspect. A lay woman may choose to become a nun because of conviction, because of fear or because of both. The negative aspect can turn into a positive but the reverse hardly ever takes place. According to Ayya Khema, as a laywoman, one can meditate, live according to the precepts, and practise generosity. One

¹¹ This recitation is known as *Thonesenhit Kawtthatha*. "There is no I or you, no male or female at hair, soft hair on human body, nail, tooth, skin, flesh, nerve, bone, marrow, heart, liver, pancreas, lung, stomach, intestine, faeces, excrement, brain, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, fear, sebaceous, spit, mucus, liquid, urine [from *Thilashin Khint wut* (Rules for Nuns) 1994, pp. 4 – 5].

can certainly do many things, but one's daily life is beset with so many other duties and responsibilities that often, practice becomes very difficult. It is when one comes to see clearly that there is no other path toward the elimination of suffering *dukkha* forever, then comes the moment when ordination seems to be the only possible step (1989, p. 66).

A laywoman can become a nun because of conviction or *saddhā*. Conviction based on knowledge is of paramount importance. *Saddhā* denotes abiding conviction in the Three Gems, and the belief that beings are heirs to their own volitional actions, both in this existence and in the hereafter. A clear and incisive way of perception is the chief attribute of what is meant by the word 'Conviction'. Four kinds of conviction are differentiated:

- (1) firm conviction arisen in a Buddha-to-be from the time of aspiring to become a Buddha,
- (2) firm conviction of the *ariyas*,
- (3) unshakable conviction in the Three Gems, and
- (4) clearness of conviction in the Three Gems (A Dictionary of Buddhist

Terms, 1996, pp. 44 - 45

A laywoman can become a nun because of one, some or all of the conventions mentioned above. When she becomes a nun, she has to devote all her time to her convictions on Buddha, *dhamma* and *saṅghā*. And because a nun is aware of herself being a nun and observing precepts, she has better chances to practice the Buddha's teaching.

Fear and peril or *bhaya* is often the cause of ordination for a nun. As a lay woman, she might face the ups and downs of life and she can no longer endure its hardships. Then taking refuge at the foot of the Buddha is the only outlet for her to escape. Then this laywoman will become a nun. The famous Burmese saying, "death of son or spouse,

loss in business, indebtedness, unfulfilment, all lead a woman to become a nun”, relate to the negative reasons for becoming a nun. How much this statement is true will be explored in the following section.

What are your reasons for ordination?

The following reasons are regarded as positive reasons as they dispatch conviction.

Positive reasons = conviction	1st choice	Total
Because of predisposition or past <i>kamma</i>	29.40%	39.70%
Encouragement by parents	10.80%	21.60%
As meritorious deed	15.50%	57.20%
For a better life in the after life	1.00%	24.70%
As a meaningful life	1.00%	17.20%
To escape form <i>samsāra</i>	7.30%	56.80%
For closure of the path to hell	7.80%	49.50%
To attain enlightenment	18.20%	47.50%
To propagate the teaching in the country	3.10%	33.00%
To work as missionary overseas	1.00%	9.90%
To lead a religious life	1.00%	2.10%
It is a chosen life preferable to others	1.60%	12.50%

What are your expectations as a nun?

	1st choice	Total
To pursue higher education	19.40%	24.50%
To study the teachings of the Buddha	38.30%	73.60%
To enjoy meditation	18.70%	72.50%
To become meditation master	0.50%	8.50%
To become abbess	2.00%	14.60%
To become teacher of <i>dhamma</i>	3.00%	36.50%
To become <i>dhamma</i> propagator	9.30%	63.90%
To fulfil the assignment of a Buddhist	0.50%	19.60%

In Buddhist countries, where ordination is viewed as extremely meritorious, it is said that predisposition arising from positive actions created in past lives play an important part in a person’s decision to become a nun or a monk. In these Buddhist

countries, it is generally believed that without having created certain “roots of merit” in the past, one would never get any opportunity to live the ordained life. It is pointed out that propensities such as a fondness for nuns, monks, and monasteries in small children, for example, are evidence of familiarity with monastic life in the past lives. Such predisposition may be one factor in a person’s decision to seek ordination (Tsomo, 1989, p. 58). This statement is confirmed by the response to the questionnaire conducted with 200 Buddhist Burmese nuns during the researcher’s field study. Approximately 29.4% of the respondents choose predisposition as first choice for the reason for ordination as a nun. Altogether 39.7% agree that becoming a nun is due to the root of merit from their past life, i.e., because of predisposition.

Encouragement by parents is another important factor for becoming a nun. 10.8% of the 200 nuns say that it is their parents’ encouragement as the primary reason to become a nun and 21.6% agree to this as one of their reasons for ordination. This factor may be influenced by the family background of the subjects as 75% have relatives (parents, uncle or aunt) in monastic life and 83% say they are given consent to renounce the world from their parents.

The decision by a number of Buddhists to lead a “home-less” life is primarily motivated by a sincere wish to practice the Buddhist teaching full-time. It seems that, these people want to practise meditation in particular. Of the respondents 18.7% choose the joy for meditation as their first reason and altogether 72.5% agree to this statement. Why is meditation so important for the nuns?

Ordination is symbolic of renunciation in which one renounces the endless process of repeated births and deaths known as cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*). Since unwholesome actions are the causes of rebirth, ordination is one way to prevent one from engaging in unwholesome deeds and thus releases one from the process of rebirths. To escape from

saṃsāra is chosen as the first choice for renunciation by 7.3% of the 200 nuns and 56.8% accept it as one of their reasons. This group will not be interested in social work as they are more inclined to be escapist.

Escape from *saṃsāra* is closely connected with the closure of the path to hell. For a Buddhist, although reaching *nibbana* is important, it is more important not to fall into hell, since this would deprive them of the chance to hear the *dhamma* or practise *dhanna* or *sīla*. The respondents seem to have this in mind because 49.5% of them give the desire to close the path to hell as a reason for ordination.

Theravāda Buddhists traditionally accept that an ordained life has a better asset towards gaining enlightenment. This seems to be reflected in the responses to the question of reasons for ordination. More than seventeen percent of the respondents choose nunhood as a meaningful life, 2.1% say they become nuns to lead a religious life and 12.5% say that nunhood is a chosen life preferable to others and 19.6% choose nunhood to fulfill the assignment of a Buddhist. For these nuns, entering nunhood means the first steps in following in the Buddha's footsteps.

In the *Theravāda* tradition, practising the Buddha's teaching consists of two things – the study of the holy scriptures (*pariyatti*) and the revelation of the road to salvation (*patipatti*). So, study and meditation should be balanced. Regarding learning, 24.5% say they choose to become nuns to pursue higher education and 73.6% to study the teachings of the Buddha. This is almost balanced by the response of 72.5% who say they became nuns to enjoy meditation.

Moreover, by practising meditation, the nuns aim to reach enlightenment. 18% of the respondents say their primary reason for renunciation to attain enlightenment and 47.5% agree to this as one of the reasons.

By studying Buddhist scriptures, some nuns proclaim that they will work for the propagation of the *sāsanā*. 33% of the respondents have as their objective to propagate the teaching in the country whereas 10% expect further to work as missionary overseas. As the responses to their expectation as nuns 8.5% say they intend to become meditation masters, 14.6% to become abbess of their own nunneries, 36.5% to become teachers of *dhamma* and 63.9% to become *dhamma* propagator. The fact that there is such a high percentage of nuns whose expectation to study the teaching of the Buddha (73.6%) and to become *dhamma* propagator (63.9%) is very encouraging for the Buddhist religion. These nuns or women in general stand a good chance of becoming *dhamma* propagators.

Majorities of the nuns believe that their entering of the nunhood itself is spreading *sasana*. They do not have any ambitious intention of converting people into Buddhism. Today, there are several Burmese *Theravāda* Buddhist monks going abroad and spreading meditation techniques and preaching and the government encourages it. However, it is unheard of that *thīlashin* should go abroad for teaching or for learning. It seems to be the reason why there is only 10% advocating being a missionary abroad. On the other hand, the nuns want to emphasize the fact that it is more important to make ordinary Buddhists become real devotees. This idea is reflected in the response that 33% choose to propagate the teaching within the country. The words of a chief nun from a famous learning centre also confirm the point. She said she had no intention of spreading Buddha *Sāsanā* abroad. She quoted the words of Mahāgandharama Sayadaw, a very famous abbot of a monastery in Amarapura, that even within the country we need to do a lot to make people realize the essence of the Buddha's teaching.¹³

¹³ An interview with Daw Aye Thu Wadi, the abbess of Aye Thu Wadi Learning Centre, Monywa, April, 1997.

What are the influential factors behind the nuns' decision to lead an ordained life?

The foremost reasons for becoming a nun, according to this survey, are to study the Buddhist scriptures [(first choice 38.3%) (total 73.6%)] and to enjoy meditation (18.7 ; 72.5). It shows a combination of serious scholarship in Buddhist philosophy with personal practice of Buddhist meditation is the ideal life for a Buddhist religious. However, which level of achievement, the nuns reach for such an ideal life is in question. This will be examined in the section dealing with the role and status of the nuns.

The second most important reason to become a nun is to attain enlightenment (18.2; 47.5) and as meritorious deed (15.5; 57.2) respectively. The other important reasons are to escape from *samsāra* (7.3; 56.8) and closure of the path to hell (7.8; 49.5). Why do many Burmese nuns want to attain enlightenment? Why do they choose *escape from samsāra* as an important reason for renunciation? What do they mean by meritorious deed when they choose entering nunhood as a meritorious deed?

Why do Burmese want to escape from *samsāra*? How do Burmese understand the ways to escape from *samsāra*? The continuous arising of mind and matter, of aggregates is *samsāra*. *Theravādin* Buddhists believe that human beings are made up of the 5 aggregates, namely: bodily processes, perceptions, feelings, dispositions and states of consciousness. They see themselves as composite beings, which are the result of different aggregates being put together. They also see themselves as impermanent entities. Meditating on themselves as a body made up of aggregates helps them to overcome the sense that they have egos. Buddhist teaching makes people use their minds to realize a philosophical truth, and to get people to understand the analysis through the cultivation of the contemplative method (Companion Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy, 1993, p. 310). For the majority of Burmese Buddhists, then, the only way to escape

from *samsāra* is through meditation. It is the main reason why the nuns list practising meditation as their main reason for ordination.

Meritorious deeds include generosity or charity, morality or good moral conduct, paying due respect to those who are worthy of it, helping others perform good deeds, sharing of merit after doing some good deed, rejoicing at others merit-making, listening well to the Doctrine, teaching the Doctrine, and straightening one's views. (A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms, 1996, pp.151 - 152). It is doubtful that the Burmese way of understanding generosity or charity is in a narrower sense of giving *dana* especially to the monks. Burmese in general believe that it is only by making offerings to a pious monk, that merit is acquired. Thus the duty of a religious person is to save oneself and a layman's duty is to provide him with the physical requirements. Accordingly, social service, community welfare, economic justice or public relations will be foreign to these religious communities and their involvement in such things will not be encouraged by the laity. This fact seems to be the most serious misconception of meritorious deed and is a hindrance to the social engagement of religious communities.

What are your reasons for Renunciation?

Negative reasons = fear or *Bhaya*

	1st choice	Total
Failure in school	1.00%	1.50%
Failure in family life	1.00%	1.50%
Avoidance of marriage	20.50%	22.00%
Death of spouse	0.00%	0.50%
Failure in business or at work	0.00%	0.50%
Failure in life	0.00%	1.50%
Disappointed with people or life	15.50%	21.00%
Cutting themselves off from all social contacts and / world or outside	3.00%	9.00%
Poverty or economic difficulties	0.00%	1.00%
Sickness	0.50%	1.00%
Old age	0.00%	0.50%

Other factors for ordination may stem from fear or danger and may be more mundane and bears negative aspects. Illness, poverty, old age, death of a loved one, disappointment with love or life or people, failure in school, family or professional life, avoidance of marriage, having no supporters and similar frustrations may also play a role in one's decision. However, the data from survey study shows that poverty, sickness or old age are not the major reasons for renunciation. Only 1% of the respondents say poverty is the reason for ordination.

In some countries, frankly speaking, ordination is seen as an above-average job opportunity. Some people feel that ordination is essentially escapism, a cowardly retreat from everyday realities. They view renunciation as seeking an easy way out of the world's problems – a basically self-centred solution.

It is interesting to note that most of the respondents did not select negative reasons for ordination. This may imply that they do not want to confess the reality or that they are just being too polite to indicate the negative reasons. Women in general would like to keep their secret to themselves. Because *thilashin* are the keepers of at least 8 precepts which include refraining from lying, it is clear that they will not tell lies. However, they have the right to refuse to answer the questions they do not want to answer. Moreover, Burmese people by nature are also very reluctant to say no or give their negative response. They just keep quiet when they do not like the idea. This may be the fact that, out of 200 nuns, only 99 responded to this question. On the other hand, the nuns' life is quite simple and they do not have any burden of life and so they do not have a negative attitude to entering nunhood. Some nuns wrote in the remark that the above mentioned reasons have nothing to do with them.

However, if the responses are taken at their face value then this holds some very positive religious implications. Only 1% say it is because of poverty, 1.5% say it is because of illness, 0.5% say it is because of old age, another 0.5% failure at work, 1.5% failure in life, another 1.5% failure in family life and .5% death of spouse. However, a large percentage, 22%, agrees that avoidance of marriage is their reason for ordination and 21% confess that they are disappointed with people or with life.

Why does avoidance of marriage get the highest choice for the negative reason for ordination? In Burmese society, choice of marriage is comparatively free. Very few girls are forced to marry. Remaining single is acceptable in the society and even appreciated or respected. If there is no social disapproval about staying single, then why does avoidance of marriage concern the nuns most? One possible reason is that the family tie or the responsibility of a mother towards her children is the most difficult tie to cut off for women. Then marriage seems to be the obstacle towards the escape from *samsāra*. A

more cynical outlook on marriage is that it is seen as sending one into *samsara*. Moreover, being separated from loved ones and having put up with hated ones are counted as the causes of suffering. In addition, menstruation, pregnancy and giving birth are extra burden to women according to Buddhist teaching.¹⁴ Then, chastity will help women to remove these extra sufferings with the exception of menstruation. This seems to show the escapist tendency of nuns. Some nuns even mentioned that their reason for ordained life is to become a male in the afterlife.

There are 21% of nuns who confess that they are disappointed with lay-life. When the nuns confess that they are disappointed with people or with life they are leading more towards an isolationist tendency. Some of these nuns even said that life is tedious and they are fed up with it. This group completely drops out from society and social success. For them, social work will be too much of a burden to perform.

Nine percent of the respondents agree that ordination is cutting themselves off from all human contacts and /or outside world. It will be difficult to convince these nuns of the benefit of participating in social welfare activities since they want to coop themselves up in their own confinement.

Other reasons stemming from negative aspects also include not wanting a woman's life, cutting off ties, wasting life on mundane work, escape from a life of working for a living, being afraid of demerit earned by spraying insecticide, being disgusted with the human world and being afraid of death. It can be concluded that Burmese women think themselves inferior to the men and thus have no pride in being a woman. The majority of the population of nuns come from peasant families, and such reason as being afraid of demerit earned by using insecticide clearly shows that the

¹⁴ This makes most of *Theravada* Buddhist women think they are inferior to men.

Burmese are very conscious of misdeeds, especially killing. Even killing insects is regarded as a great sin.

3.3. The Roles and Status of *Thīlashins* in Burmese Buddhist Society

The role and status of the nuns will be investigated in the literature of experts on Buddhism in Burma first. Spiro said that the tiny population of Buddhist nuns have neither religious nor social position in Burmese society. With a few exceptions, their social origins are humble and their educational attainments meager. Typically, they are former spinsters, widows or social rejects who have become nuns for lack of other means of economic support. Typically, they receive no religious training nor do they serve any religious or social function. Observing the same five or eight precepts observed by Buddhist laymen, nuns do not live according to a rule (Spiro, 1982, p. 290).

Spiro even cited the comment of Crawford,¹⁵ that Burmese nuns are as relevant today as they were when he met them over a century ago. "The profession of a nun is not much respected by the people, and in general may be looked upon as little better than a more reputable mode of begging. A *p'hun-ghi*, or priest, never begs; he only expects charity. The nuns, on the contrary, go about begging from house to house, and are to be seen in the public markets openly asking for alms (Crawford, cited in Spiro, 1982, p. 290)."

Spiro, continued to comment that "Bigandet¹⁶ attributes the high status of women in Burma and other Buddhist countries to Buddhism. He asked rhetorically who could think of looking upon the woman as a somewhat inferior being, when we set her ranking, according to her degree of spiritual attainments, among the perfect and foremost followers

¹⁵ Crawford, J. 1834, Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Court of Ava in the Year 1827, 2 vols. London. Henry Colburn.

¹⁶ Bigandet, Paul Ambrose, 1912, The Life or Legend of Gaudama, the Buddha of the Burmese, 2 vols. London Trubner.

of Buddha?" However, Spiro argued that it is true that women enjoy a high status in Burma- although it must be remarked that it is high in fact rather than in principle. "Males are much nobler than females," the Burmese say; so much so that "a male dog is nobler than a female human." It would be difficult to attribute the genuinely high status of Burmese women to Buddhism, since there have been other Buddhist societies where the status of women was low (Bigandet, 1912, Vol.2, p.33, cited in Spiro, 1982, p. 432).

Mi Mi Khaing gives a clear description of the functions of Burmese nuns:

Meticulous care given to the compounds is the foremost activity of the nuns... Cooking is an important part of many *thilashin's* mornings. They cook not only for altar offerings and their own food, but also for monks in the nearby monastery. Preparing and offering food for monks is a meritorious act.... After the normal duties such as care of altars, buildings and kitchens, the remaining time is spent in studies, prayer and meditation (1984, p. 84)

Chatsumarn painted the life of a Burmese nun as "an early education in studying the teaching of the Buddha. As they grow older, the *stlashins* practice meditation and other devotional practices. They do not become involved in political activities or discussion. Their religious life is one of recitation, *dhamma* talks, and studies. The *stlashin* of Burma nurture a tranquil life apart from worldly life" (1991, p. 91).

Kawanami (1995, p.10), mentioned that one of the ways that *thilashin* make themselves useful is through handling of money. As the *Vinaya* prohibits the monks from handling money or fire, the nuns make themselves almost indispensable to the monks in these areas. These functions give Buddhist nuns a certain amount of influence as they often come to be in charge of the kitchen and the monastery finances. It is common for them to welcome lay visitors, look after young novices, organize ceremonies and in many cases, take an active part in running the monasteries.

The majority of the *thilashin* are more than keen to offer help and serve the monks in their Buddhist belief that they are accumulating spiritual merit. Such activities involve various kinds of menial work and domestic chores, such as cooking, cleaning and attending the *Saṅghā*. Buddhist nuns play the symbolic role of being daughters to the Buddha, and symbolic mothers to the monks.

The roles played by the Burmese nuns and which Kawanami termed as useful are ritual specialist, educator and propagator of Buddhism. As ritual specialist, the nuns officiate religious ceremonies. They have the detailed knowledge of every ceremonial procedure so that they complement the monks in Buddhist ceremonies. They occupy the front line of the pious and lead the whole congregation. They facilitate and make sure that the ceremony is complete without inconvenience. In this way they get social approval for granting more religious authority. However, because of handling of money for errands, although it gives them a certain amount of influence in charge of the kitchen and the monastery finances, they do not have much power in the religious domain.

Kawanami even made a remark that it is an irony that Buddhist nuns who have left their families and renounced the traditional roles of mother and wife, should lapse into a similar domestic situation and even find it their *raison d'être* to serve yet another set of dependants, the monks. As for religious roles and functions of *thilashin*, Kawanami's finding is that they act as important ritual specialists, educators and propagators of Buddhism (1995, p.11).

The role of nuns as educator is confined mostly to teaching the nuns in the nunnery as the nun's preaching in public is rare. The nuns may preach informally in private settings, inside the nunneries or in lay-devotees' houses. The reason cannot be because the nuns do not have ability, as the nuns form an enthusiastic audience at the monks' sermons, some are well-versed, knowledgeable and well-qualified. It is due to

the tradition that it is the role of monks to preach. A nun must be modest and shy, preaching in public seems to be a bold action. So the nuns are not willing to risk their prudent and clean religious image and challenge the socio-religious convention lest they should undergo unpleasant experience in public which they anticipate might happen if they ventured to preach and lose the support of their donors. This, in turn, lowers the status of the nuns in taking the role of propagators of Buddhism.

The observation made by the researcher on the nuns' roles and status in the Burmese Buddhist society will be discussed in three main categories: according to doctrine in a broader context, in their own institution, and in the community in which they participate.

According to Buddhist doctrine, women are as equal as men in their ability to attain enlightenment. However, there are evidences of discrimination against women in Buddhism and these evidences can be traced back to the teaching of Lord Buddha.

If we study *Tipitika*, first of all, we will see that the Lord Buddha himself denied the ordination of nuns several times. It was because of Ananda's argument that if women can attain enlightenment, they should not be refused to the order, Buddha accepted Pajapati Gotami, Buddha's stepmother, into the nun order. Even though Gotami was accepted into the order, she still had to practise the Eight Important *dhamma* which seemingly is very humiliating to womenfolk: "a nun, even ordained for 100 years has to greet and pay respect to a monk who is ordained even in that day." Ananda, whose commitment was persuading the Lord Buddha to accept the nuns' order, had to take the blame for the decay of *Saddhamma*. It was believed that the core doctrine of Buddhism which was supposed to last 1000 years was now reduced to 500 years on account of the inclusion of nuns' order and confessed this in the First Council at Rajagaha.

In *Vinaya Tipitaka*, under the *Patimokkha* section (the Sangha Monastic Codes of Conduct), we can see there are 227 rules for monks to follow whereas there are 311 rules for nuns. This means that nuns are given stricter rules and more rigid disciplines than monks. For example, for monks only sexual intercourse is regarded as *parajika* (defeat) whereas for nuns taking pleasure out of a mere physical contact with a male is already *parajika*. The same discrimination can be seen in *patidesaniya*, in which 4 rules for monks are for different misconduct where the same sin (begging for medicinal support while ill) is put under 8 rules for nuns.

Buddha himself pointed out the social inferiority of women in *Anguttaranikaya* as having four kinds of defilement; anger, jealousy, stinginess and stupidity all make women the inferior half of the species. He also mentioned the natural, biological formation of women, which are regarded as additional suffering to men such as pregnancy, giving birth, etc. This sort of defilement influences the chances of women being born in hell.

Most Buddhists believe that women have no access to attain Buddhahood. All the former Buddhas and all the would-be Buddhas are male. Only the sons have a chance to inherit Buddha's *sāsana*. Parents are happy when they have a son believing that they can help flourish the Buddha's *sāsana* through ordination.

Although there is discrimination and anti-feminism in Buddhism, the role of a woman can in no way be compared to that of a male dog. His statement that "in Burma males are much nobler than females so much so that a male dog is nobler than a female human" is an unscholarly exaggeration, the basis for which is difficult to find. Buddha pointed out women's power beauty, wealth, relatives, son and morality and this enables women to be an important figure in the family. And also Buddha never denied that women should persevere for the attainment of the enlightenment. Women can hear,

understand and practise Buddha's teaching so that they can reach *nibbāna* even in this life or become better beings in the after life.

In nunneries at present, the nuns are administrators, managers, educators and learners in their learning centres. The abbess is the chief administrator in her own compound, getting help from *taike-oak* (warden) and *taike-kyat* (hall tutor) being the managers, and runs the nunnery both for its welfare and survival, disciplining and health care. The abbess is the role model who sets examples to other nuns in deeds and in words. A nunnery becomes famous mainly because of the charisma of the abbess. Most of the nuns in a learning centre are both educators and learners at the same time. While they are pursuing higher level Buddhist scriptures, they have to teach those who are lower level learners.

As in a community, nunneries nowadays become centres which cater for certain religious as well as social ceremonies such as *shinpyu* (initiation) ceremony, meritorious deeds for the deceased kin, birthday parties and even wedding receptions. However, in some nunneries wedding receptions are not encouraged to be held for fear that the younger nuns would have an interest in them. On the day of such ceremonies, the nuns become the cook, the waitress and the caretaker. Some monks want to criticize this kind of service. In fact, such a service renders the nuns thank from the community and in turn earns donations and concerns in the long run. Moreover, a nun renowned for her learning or kindness becomes a role model for the womenfolk around the nunnery afar.

Burmese Buddhist nuns enjoy a diverse range of status in the society. On the one hand, they are the most revered women in society. But, on the other hand, they are the most looked down upon females in the community. In a conference of State Saṅghā Mahā Nayaka, State/Division Saṅgha Nayaka and State / Division *Theravāda thīlashin*

Executive Members (held on 1st February 1998), a question was raised how to set disciplines for the nuns who beg near bus stops, railway stations, jetties, in the markets, on buses, trains and ferry boats, etc. The answer given was that prohibition of such an act was already mentioned in the regulations for *thīlashin*. However, this group of nuns do who beg not disappear completely and they create a negative attitude towards religious, Buddhist lay people and Buddha *sāsanā* in general. Among these begging nuns some are from nunneries, but most of them are homeless, having no teacher, who take the life of a nun to make a living by begging. To stop such a shameful act, the authority concerned should put a stop to this shameful act. Although it is difficult to get donations, nuns should be allowed to go on the alms only on pre-Sabbath day and those who are younger than 7 years of age should not be allowed to go for the alms round. Thus, one must agree to the remark made by Kawanami that the position of Burmese Buddhist nuns is ambiguous.

3.4. Expectations of the Nuns

It is interesting to learn the expectations of the nuns. However, it is difficult to investigate such an abstract idea. The following findings are based on the questionnaire administered to the 200 nuns. Their responses are taken as serious and realistic as the nuns are the observers of at least 8 precepts. It is taken for granted that the nuns tell the truth. To know the expectations of the nuns the question is set out as “**What are your expectations as a nun?**” The nuns are allowed to choose more than one answer and asked to mention their preferred choice in numerical order. The responses in detail are as follow:

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5 th choice
to learn higher education(secular)	19.4	2	1	1	1
to study the teaching of the Buddha	38.3	32.1	2.1	1	0
to enjoy meditation	18.7	26.4	22.8	1.6	3.1
to become a meditation master	0.5	0	3	4.5	0.5
to become an abbess	2	2	2.5	6.5	1.5
to become teacher of <i>dhamma</i>	3	10	8.1	11.2	4.1
to be <i>dhamma</i> propagator	9.3	8.2	20.6	13.4	12.4
to fulfill assignment of a Buddhist	0.5	3.6	4.6	4.6	6.2

An extra column is given to mention other expectations not mentioned in the questionnaire. The expectations given by some nuns are to escape from *saṃsāra*, to keep the precepts, to cook for the monks who propagate *sāsanā*, to fulfil *parami*¹⁷, to be able to teach Buddhist scriptures, to work for the spread of *sāsanā*, to pass the prescribed Buddhist examinations, to spread *sāsanā*, to do merit, to attain *nibbāna*, to spread *Theravāda* Buddhism in the motherland of Nepal¹⁸, and to attain the real blessing.

The fact that *to learn secular higher education* gets a considerable percentage as first choice means there are some young girls who would like to study but have no chances to do so as laypersons. There are a few nunneries that run monastic education with the encouragement of the government. These schools offer primary education together with some Buddhist learning. The girls from poor families intend to study at such nunneries and consequently become nuns.

The highest expectation of the nuns lies in studying Buddhist scriptures. Thirty – eight point three percent of the nuns say that their highest expectations as a nun is to study

¹⁷ *Parami* (Perfection; sufficiency of accumulated virtue). It is sequence of practice of the Virtuous; sequence of practice of the Buddha-to-be's, *Bodhisatta*. The *Bodhisattas* aspiring to attain Buddhahood have to fulfil ten perfections. The ten *Paramis* are: - perfection in giving, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, resolution in loving-kindness and equanimity.

¹⁸ There are some Nepalese nuns studying in Burma and some respondents are among them.

the teaching of the Buddha. This clearly shows that education is highly focussed. The priorities of the nuns seem to be like this: first to study Buddhist scriptures; second, to practice meditation; third, to be *dhamma* propagators; fourth, to become teachers of *dhamma*; fifth, to become abbesses. These data show that the nuns do not have great expectation on themselves. Only one out of 200 says that she expects to attain *nibbāna*. The nuns seem to be more down-to-earth, realizing that *nibbāna* is too far to attain in this very life. In their reasons for ordination, the very reason to attain *nibbāna* gets a second highest choice but in their expectation it is not. Does it mean that although Burmese nuns understand that *nibbāna* should be their final aim, they are not striking for that aim in this very life? They seem to realize that there is a long way to go to reach *nibbāna*. Can this aspect lead a nun to work for others at the same time working for herself?

3.5. Society's Expectation of Nuns

In Burma, the society tends to accept the nuns only in supportive and subservient position. This was clearly seen on one occasion the researcher herself encountered. At the Mingun Tipitaka University, founded by the first *Tipitaka* master (Tipitakadhara) U Vicittasara Bhivamsa, the nuns serve the teacher as well as learner monks with breakfast and lunch. This has to be done in turns on a weekly basis from each group of nunneries in the Mingun area. In addition, whenever there is a special function or ceremony, the nuns in that area is asked to cater for it. However, these nuns are not allowed to study at that university where they are serving as caretakers. When the question was raised of when these nuns will be allowed to study at this centre, the top administrative monk cannot give the answer. The late *Tipitaka* master U Vicitta commemorated his foster mother who was a nun, Daw Dhammacari, in a stone inscription at her tomb, but the discrimination against the nuns exist still at that very place.

At a funeral, both the monks and nuns are invited to perform funeral rites. The nuns usually have to recite *paritta*, protective verses and usher the corpse to the burial ground. They usually have to walk along with the relatives whereas the monks are sent by cars. However, for the donation offered for the funeral rite, the nuns usually get as little as from 1/10 to 1/4 of those given to the monks.

3.6. The Problems of Nuns: The Acceptance of *Thīlashins*

The first Congregation of the *Saṅgha* of All Orders was convened in 1981 for purification, perpetuation and propagation of the religion. This first congregation had formed the State Central Working Committee and the State *Saṅghā Mahā Nayaka* Committee. The latter has prescribed rules for the organization of *thīlashins*. The objectives of the organization of *thīlashins* are as follows:

1. to practise the noble celibacy and lead her life with complete morality,
2. to reside in nunneries according to the disciplinary rules provided for nuns,
3. to promote the academic qualifications, and
4. to maintain the noble practice of the Insight Meditation and concentration.

Committees of *thīlashin* are to be established at divisional and township level. However, there is no State Central *thīlashin* Committee unless an emergency requiring discussion by such a body should arise.

The Congregation of the *Saṅghā* came to notice that *thīlashins* are not entitled to hold the National Registration Cards like laywomen. Therefore, the Working Committee of the *Saṅghā* adopted a record of identity cards for *thīlashins* which would include name, residence, birth place, the time and date of becoming a *thīlashin*; address, name of parents and so on. Arrangements have been made to issue official records by *Saṅghā Nayaka*

Committee of each township with the recommendation of the Sayadaw (abbot) of the monastery where the *thilashin* is residing, or by the Headmistress of the nunnery. The membership cards to be issued only to nuns attaining the age of twelve and above. The Abbot or the chief Nun must endorse the academic career in the records whenever the nun moves from one nunnery to another (The Light of the Dhamma: Vol. 1, No 2, pp. 44 - 45).

To recognize the outstanding job of the nuns there are some titles presented to the nuns by the government. These titles include the highest honour for learned monk, the second highest honour for learned monk, and the honour for learned monk. (Agga Mahā Ganthavacaka Pandita , Mahā Ganthavacaka Pandita, Cula Ganthavacaka Padita respectively). To be entitled the title of Agga Mahā Ganthavacaka Pandita, a nun must keep precepts, be at least 45 years of age, has at least 15 years of teaching experience. She must also be a graduate of *dhamāsariya* or learned nun and appointed as teachers of doctrine, not be opposed to the various *saṅghā* members and has 40 to 60 disciple nuns. The smaller titles reduced the number of students, teaching experience, and age, respectively. For the year 1999, three nuns, namely:

- 1.Daw Rupasingi, Sasanapala Nunnery, Sagaing Township, Sagaing Division
- 2.Daw Eindasingi, Aye-myo-gyaung Nunnery, Sagaing Township, Sagaing Division
- 3.Daw Khemari, Thameikdawdaya Thukhitayama Daw Nanacari Myanaung Kyaungtaik, Sangyoung Township, Yangon Division are entitled to the title of Agga Maha Ganthavacaka Pandita Title.

Three other nuns are given the title of Mahā Ganthavacaka Pandita and another three for Cula Ganthavacaka Pandita Title. In contrast, for these titles, 23 monks, 30 monks and 10 monks receive above-mentioned titles respectively in the same year. (The New Light of Myanmar, Monday, 4 January, 1999)

For the outstanding performance of propagating *sāsanā*, a nun is given the title of the highest honour for fame, the second highest honour for fame and the honour for fame (Agga Maha Thadamazawtika, Maha Thadamazawtika, or Cula Thadamazawtika respectively). To be able to entitle the title of Agga Mahā Thadamazawtika, a nun must have attended the training given by the Religious Affairs Department. She must not oppose any *Saṅghā* organizations. She must have performed propagation of Buddhism for at least 20 years. She must have organized at least 30 people for conversion to Buddhism or she must have been to the remote area for at least 20 years or she must have written and published at least 10 religious books.

Although there are titles relating to the honour of meditation master (Kammathanacariy), outstanding performance for teaching meditation, no nuns have received such a title so far in the history.

3.7. Discrimination against Nuns

There are some discrimination on the nuns in Burma. For example, nuns are not allowed to study at the two Buddhist universities, which offer Master Degree in Buddhist studies. The highest level a nun can reach is that of *Dhammācariya* which is equivalent to a bachelor degree. In the structure of the *Saṅghā* Organization also, the highest organization for the nuns is State / Divisional *Thīlashin* Committee. Even this committee is a temporary one, which can be called when necessary. Otherwise, the nuns have Township *Thīlashin* Committee as permanent organizations at the township level. Most of the nunneries are run automatically. Nuns are subjected to civil laws as well as regulations set up by the State *Saṅghā* Committee. Although each nunnery has their own rules and regulations, they are more or less the same. These regulations cover the aspects

of dress codes, daily routines, going for alms round and disciplinary actions so that the nuns will present a respectable image to the public.

3.8. Nunhood and Happiness

No one wants to lead an unhappy life. Most of the renunciants leave their household life in search of spiritual bliss. They might be in dilemma if they can't find happiness in celibacy. When nuns were asked about the contentment on their own life, the responses were given as follows:

Are you happy with your life as a nun?

	Very happy	To some extent	Not happy
Physically contented	45.4	31.1	23.5
Emotionally contented	51.7	28	20.3
Intellectually contented	58.5	40.7	0.8
Spiritually contented	68.3	31	0.7

Here, we can see that Burmese nuns are most contented at a spiritual level and least contented at a physical level. There can be several reasons behind this. One of the reasons is poverty. The country is poor, donations are rare, the nuns survive at the bare subsistence level. So, physically, the nuns have to bear hardship and scarcity and shortage of food supplies. However, because the nuns are determined to strike for salvation, they are happy with their lives. This idea is supported by the fact that very few nuns leave the nunhood once having decided to wear the robes forever and very high percentage of the nuns have already decided to become permanent nuns. Learning the Buddha's teaching may develop the nuns' intellectual faculties. Thus, they respond that they are intellectually contented second most. While the nuns are undergoing training by words and deeds, they are mentally cultured. They must be conscious of the fact that they are

religious people and thus must keep the precepts firmly. The high percentage of physical and emotional discontent (23.5% and 20.3%) compared to the low percentage of discontent for intellectual faculty and spirituality (0.8% and 0.7%) is very significant. It shows that the higher the percentage of spiritual contentment, the lower the percentage of physical discontent. It seems that when nuns are really enjoying the bliss of going forth, they can endure serious physical hardship. They attain equanimity of mind or *upekkha*.



CHAPTER IV

NUNS AND SOCIAL WORK

4.1. Social Work and Buddhist Nuns in Burma

In this chapter, an attempt is made to investigate the attitudes of the Burmese Buddhist nuns towards social work, their understanding of this commitment and their actual performance in social work. A comparison was undertaken among three institutions of nuns - an orphanage, a learning centre, and a meditation centre - with the purpose of highlight the actual context in which nunneries operate in Burma at present. It is expected that this will lead to a better understanding of a nun's life in Burma.

As *Therevāda* Buddhism places personal liberation first and foremost, there are only a very few examples of social service for the liberation of others in the history of Buddhism. However, Carudassini, a *Theravāda* Buddhist nun from Burma, at the Fourth Conference of Sakyadhita held in Ladakh, India, 1995, observed that

“Nuns also do the welfare of others. They teach the aspects of *dhamma* to the young children and ladies of all age, giving them self - assurance when necessary. With compassion they treat their devotees like their own relatives. Due to frankness and honesty, one feels very comfortable talking to them. There are nunneries which provide shelter, food, clothing and proper training to the orphans. Nuns try their best to educate and train them in discipline, handicrafts, dress-making, cookery and other areas to enable them become self-dependent. Nuns also provide facilities for the aged. Some nunneries take in old ladies with no one to care for them. Nuns make them feel that they are not unwanted and teach them to spend the last moment with *dhamma*”.

Some nunneries care for old people. Although the care of the aged is predominantly a family concern in Burma, there are some cases of poor or kinless elderly people. Daw Oo Zun who became a *thilashin* in middle life was considered a pioneer in such work. In many towns she founded homes for the poor and the old and her original Home for the Aged, founded in 1927 in Mingun, is still flourishing (Mi Mi Khaing 1984, p. 85).

Mendelson, in a chapter entitled "Missionary Monks and Social Service", said that:

In so far as the Buddhist monastery had always been a source of education and advice in the society, sporadic acts of social service no doubt have always characterized Buddhist organizations in traditional Burma. Though no statistics were found on the subject, a number of orphans and mistreated and abandoned children probably found their way, in the villages, into the care of the monks, there to be brought up and educated as likely as not, perhaps, to become monks in their turn. (in Saṅgha and State in Burma, 1975, p. 309)

This is the same with girl orphans. They ended up in nunneries which care for them. As yet there are not many nunneries in Burma that look after orphans.

At present, there are still a very few nunneries which run orphanages. The most well-known one is Aye Yeik Mon (Tranquil Heaven) which is situated in Mandalay. It has its branches in Taungoo, Chaung Oo, and Loikaw.¹

¹ See Appendix 2

4.2. A Nunnery which Performs Social Work:

Aye Yeik Mon (Tranquil Haven) Convent for the Welfare of Underprivileged Girls (Orphans)

4.2.1. General Description

Aye Yeik Mon (*Tranquil Haven*) is situated in the northwestern suburb of Mandalay, on 62 Street, East Palace Quarter. This convent was founded by Daw Khema Nandi and Daw Nanda Theri.² In 1956, two nuns established the first Buddhist convent for underprivileged orphan girls, the Zeyar Thiri welfare school and a convent for girls at Htee Ni Gone quarter in Taungoo. The second convent was set up in Mandalay in 1963 by Daw Khema Nandi and Daw Nanda Theri with the help of enthusiastic humanitarians.

In the beginning, there were only twenty five nuns and fifteen girls. A single nun took the responsibility of feeding a girl by going round and collecting alms from the public. Daw Nanda Theri herself headed the convent for three years, then handed it over to Daw Rupa Waddy (1966-1972), after things had settled down.

The basic policy of the convent is to help protect innocent young girls from being exploited and destroyed. Thus the rules for accepting girls are set up as:

1. First priority - Orphans (Fatherless and Motherless)
2. Second priority - Orphans (Motherless)
3. Third priority - Orphans (Fatherless)
4. Even if he/she has parents, if the child has come into straitened circumstances, due to some reason or other, he/she will be accepted after being scrutinized.

² See Appendix 5

Actually, according to the existing policy, only children between 6 years and 18 years old are accepted. However, depending on the true plight of a child, a child from 2 years and 6 months old will be accepted. At the time of this study, the youngest girl at the institute was only 2 years old, as her mother had passed away at childbirth.

The following is the structure of the staff and students at this convent as it existed in 1995. List of Staff of the Association (in 1995):

1. Nuns	20
2. Secretary	1
3. Joint-secretary	1
4. House in-charge	1
5. Students	207

List of Students

1. University Students	5
2. Tenth Standard Students	12
3. Ninth Standard Students	5
4. Eight Standard Students	10
5. Seventh Standard Students	12
6. Sixth Standard Students	40
7. Fifth Standard Students	36
8. Fourth Standard Students	22
9. Third Standard Students	16
10. Second Standard Students	15
11. First Standard Students	12
12. Kindergarten Students	8

13. Professional Training Students	2
14. Pre-Kindergarten Students	8
15. Disabled Students	4

Total	207
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Most of the children are from remote villages of Shan State. Most of them have lost both of their parents, others only one. These children have no one to look after them at their home village and they arrive at the orphanage through the headmen of the villages or through the abbot of the village monastery. Here at Aye Yeik Mon, they get a chance to study. They are allowed to study according to their intelligence level. They have to stay to at least 18 years of age. After that, they can leave the orphanage. If they still want to remain at the orphanage, they are welcome until they get married. The children are encouraged to study hard. Most of the funds for stationery, uniforms, slippers, are provided by donors. The children follow a simple daily routine.³ Compared to their previous background, it was observed that the children's conditions are much better.

³

5:30 a.m.	get up from bed.
5:30 to 6:30 a.m.	time to wash up and say prayer
7:00 a.m.	breakfast
7:30 to 9:00 a.m.	cleaning the compound
9:00 a.m.	school
1:00 p.m.	come back from school and have lunch
2:00 p.m.	back to school
4:00 p.m.	finish school
4:30 to 6:00 p.m.	exercise, bath, watering plants and cleaning the compound
6:00 p.m.	dinner
7:00 p.m.	assembly and say prayers
7:30 to 9:30 p.m.	study hours

4.2.2. Problems

Right from the very moment of founding the school (convent), the chief nuns had to struggle against heavy odds such as not having enough food, making do with poor living quarters. In addition, with an indomitable spirit, they had to stand up against the opinions of some people who did not understand and looked down upon them and their noble work. Establishing an orphanage for girls still requires a deal of courage and initiative to do even today in Burma. So back in the 1950s, the nuns faced great hardship and public scorn. However, they were brave enough to continue the orphanage. They undertook this formidable task thanks to their incomparable compassion for the welfare and future of unfortunate girls. They gladly welcomed all kinds of help (in any form of donation) from the public. They have never taken advantage of the plight of the girls in asking for aid except in the nunnery compound. Instead, the nuns have tried their utmost by themselves, relying solely on their own efforts, in maintaining the convent.

The convent was given aid by the government starting from 1968–1969 and in 1970 additional help in the form of rice was also proffered. In order to give relief to the nuns who had been shouldering heavy duties under not very enviable circumstances, Sayagyi (Senior nun) Daw Khema Nandi (*Ah May Ma*) came over from Taungoo to manage the affairs of the convent for more than twenty years.

Daw Khema Nandi is now over 80 years old and Daw Nanda Theri over 70. In their twilight years they are still striving with all their might for the orphan girls.

However, with the ever-increasing rising cost of living, it has become extremely difficult for the sisters to maintain the convent. For instance, in its thirty two years of its journey, when no donator turns up for the day, the girls have to make do with only boiled dry peas for breakfast and one bowl of vegetable soup for supper.

It was obvious that the orphanage in Mandalay has not developed very much even though it has been established for more than 30 years. The students exist on survival rations and the bare necessities of the children are met with the help of an association of merchants and individual donors. And, if we compare the donations made to the orphanage to that of monasteries, the monasteries are doing far better.

Once, after visiting an orphanage and seeing the poor condition of the children, the researcher complained to the abbesses of a learning centre that she felt sorry for it as she could not help much and the condition really needed to be improved. Hearing this, the abbess of the learning centre replied that in her nunnery there is no such poor condition. They have sufficient food and the nuns can study peacefully because they just look after those who have *sīla*. She implied that those orphans suffered because of their past *kamma* and the centre would gain nothing but suffering by attempting to help those with bad *kamma*.

Another problem is question of succession. The head nuns are now very old and weak. When asked who is going to continue with the administrative work, the abbess replied that she did not worry about it. When she passes away, the rest will carry on the task. She has neither prepared nor trained anyone to carry on the responsibility. In the researcher's opinion, a successor of the group should be earmarked and trained so that they can hand over the task smoothly. In Burma, it is a fact that the success of most of the organizations depends on the individual's charisma, be it a monastery or nunnery or even political organization. Accordingly, when that leader dies, that organization usually goes into decline due to loss of financial support, or it becomes a legendary figure.

4.2.3. Benefits

Before the establishment of the welfare schools for the girls there were orphanages run by Christian nuns. These children were mostly converted into Christianity. Now that there are orphanages led by Buddhist nuns, the children can follow their parent's religion without being forced to convert. Moreover, in the past, the monks looked after only the boys and let them stay in the monasteries as they thought it was not suitable to accept girls in the monastery. So usually the orphan girls ended up in relatives' houses doing household chores and were treated nothing better than maids. At this welfare school, the girls can at least pursue basic education and if they are good enough, they are encouraged to continue higher education. The destitute girls are saved from falling into flesh trade or being exploited.

The principal of the convent prefers that the money goes towards the girls getting a high educational standard rather than comfortable living conditions. Consequently, the prime objective of the convent is to give as much education as possible to its daughters. So far the convent has produced, (from 1963 to 1995), 10 graduates (degree holders) and 70 students have finished high school.

If the girls are not very intelligent, they are taught to be able to do some kind of livelihood such as sewing, weaving, making cakes etc. This is because if they have not learnt any kind of skill then when they leave the nunnery, then they might not be able to stand on their own and might be exploited by others. Most of the children aim to join the civil service, especially to become teachers so that they can give education back in their hometown in the remote areas. Some intend to become nuns when they are older as they see the peaceful life of their role model nuns.

Today, there are four branches of Aye Yeik Mon Convent for the girls in Taungoo, Mandalay, Loikaw and Chaung Oo.

4.2.4. Potential solution to the problems

What is the future of orphanages, especially those run by religious women? In the researcher's opinion, they will suffer more as the country is suffering economic hardship. As a Burmese saying goes, "Only when your stomach is full, your morality (*sīla*) is kept", it is top priority then to see the country rise out of its poverty.

Another problem stems from the Burmese understanding of *dana*. The belief that the *Saṅghā* are the most appropriate field of cultivating merits encourages lavish donation to the *Saṅghā*, especially the most revered ones. However, female renunciants are seldom recognized as members of the *Saṅghā*. The building and repair of pagodas, and religious ceremonies and festivals, are the second most preferred form of donation. Not much money is left for catering for the social needs of the community. So it is important to educate the monastic as well as the lay people to have a positive attitude and correct understanding towards social work. The concept of engaged Buddhism should be spread among people so that they can practice their *mettā* actively. In Burma there are several venerable monks who are believed to have gained enlightenment. These monks can lead the monastic as well as the lay community to participate in welfare activities. The best example is that of Thamanya Sayadaw. The Venerable Monk has established an all round centre on the hill called Thamanya. He first practiced meditation with a determined mind that he would not descend downhill until he gained enlightenment. After ten years of extensive meditation, Thamanya Sayadaw started doing community welfare. He not only built monastic buildings but also established a high school, a hospital and many bridges. He paved roads so that people could travel more conveniently. He is one of the most revered monks in Burma.

4.3. A Learning Centre: Myawaddy Learning Centre

4.3.1. General description

This nunnery is situated in the northern part of Mandalay. It is founded in 1979 by two nuns Daw Panna Waddy and Daw Yupa Theingi⁴. They were former students of Eastern Ledi learning Centre, Monywa. When they were going to finish their studies of *dhammāsariya* (teachers of *dhamma*)⁵, they got the idea of establishing a nunnery in Mandalay. Mandalay is the centre of Buddhism but there are very few nunneries there. So they started a nunnery with 17 nuns on a barren land given by a monk. This plot of land happened to be sacred ground which had been donated for religious purposes by the Burmese king Bodawphaya. But there was no monastery or nunnery on the land at that time.

Myawaddy is a learning centre. It is administered by two abbesses. There are more than 170 nuns in this nunnery in 1997. The lecturers who give the lower level courses are their own nuns. The nuns are learners as well as teachers; while studying higher level courses they have to teach the lower level student nuns. However, for the highest level of *dhammacāriya*, they have to go to other monasteries to follow lectures. This is because the nuns cannot teach the high level courses.

In the year 1997 the list of the student nuns at Myawaddy Learning Centre are as follows:

<i>Mulandan</i> (elementary level)	12
<i>Pathamange</i> (pre- intermediate level)	32
<i>Pathmalatt</i> (upper-intermediate level)	15
<i>Pathamagyi</i> (advanced level)	33

⁴ See Appendix 6

Dhammācariya (equivalent to Bachelor degree) 12

*Nikaya (Suttanta Piṭaka)*⁶ 30

There are four nuns who have passed the five *Nikayas* and one nun who has finished two sections of *Suttanta Piṭaka*.

The nuns at this nunnery share communal meals. It is known as “Ta-O-Sa” in Burmese, literally meaning “eating from the same pot”. This is a very good practice because all the nuns living in the same compound share the same food. So, there is the feeling of equality, kinship and comradeship, reminding one of the true sense of *sangha*. The daily routine at this learning centre is almost the same as other learning centres, whether it be monastery or nunnery.⁷

The course of studies begin with the *Abhidhamma*, then the *Vinaya*, and lastly the *Sutta Piṭaka*, or discourses. A student who has completed all her studies will know all the Pali texts including the commentaries. Everyday secular knowledge is not included in the curriculum. The lectures are prepared for the Government examination in Pali, and so all the students who have completed their courses would understand the scriptures.

⁵ *dhammācariya* (Pali) [*dhamma* = doctrine; *acariya* = teacher] highest level of Pali examinations and scholarship. Literally, one who observes righteousness. One who lectures on the *dhamma*.

⁶ The teachings of the Buddha which were divided into five collections called *Pancanikaya* by the *arahats* during the first Buddhist council. They are 1) Collection of long discourses, *Dighanikaya*; 2) Collection of medium-length discourses, *Majjhimanikaya*; 3) Collection of groups of connected discourses, *Samyuttanikaya*; 4) Collection of numerically graduated discourses, *Anguttaranikaya*; and 5) Collection of shorter, i.e., the remaining discourses, *Khuddakanikaya* (A dictionary of Buddhist Terms, 1996, p.36) Because nuns are not allowed to take Government *Tipiṭaka* examinations, they can sit for this *Nikaya* examination organized by various religious organizations if they want to further their studies beyond *dhammācariya* level.

⁷ At 4 a.m. the nuns must get up. They meet in assembly, take the refuges and precepts, light candle and place offerings before the Buddha statue. They then chant the *pritta* or sutras. The chanting takes about half an hour. After that they do meditation for about another half an hour. Breakfast is served at dawn at about 5 a.m.

The first lectures are delivered from 8 to 10 a.m. At 10 there is a break for taking bath. Lunch is served at 11 a.m. Nuns in a group of 5 take cooking chore in turn every week.

The lectures resume from 2 until 5 p.m. Then they have one hour break for the evening. At 6 p.m., the nuns gather at the altar to do collective worshipping. Before chanting begins a roll call is made

Sabbath days are days of rest. There are no lectures on Sabbath days. Twice a week, almost all the nuns in the nunnery go with trays on their heads to visit households in the city for alms. The nunnery has informed the respective living quarters in advance that on such and such a Sabbath day, the nuns will be coming round for alms. The nunnery has announced to the whole city on which Sabbath day they will be arriving at which households. Also, twice a year at harvest time, nuns from villages go back to their own villages to collect food and stores for the next six months.

4.3.2. Problems

Although this nunnery is the most advanced one in terms of facilities and living condition, there are still some drawbacks. The most serious drawback is that the nuns are incapable of teaching Buddhist scriptures at a higher level. As mentioned above the 23 nuns who are pursuing *dhammācariya* level have to go to another monastery to take classes. The abbesses have already finished *dhammācariya* level examination, so they should be able to teach *dhammācariya*. However, they are too much occupied with the administrative work. They do not have any treasurer or committee to help them run the nunnery so that they can concentrate on teaching. They are also constantly worried about financial survival.

The teaching learning situation is also not favourable. For example, the nuns have to sit on the floor and follow the lecture. They have to lean their body forward all the time to take notes. This is the traditional way of learning and many monasteries and nunneries alike have to follow this style. It seems quite all right in

to check the presence of the nuns. Worshipping and chanting finish at 8 p.m. Then is the time to study or for older nuns time to sleep. When examinations approach, some nuns study up to midnight.

the eyes of the devotees, for the nuns or monks to be very respectful and submissive to the teacher. However, it is physically very uncomfortable for them. On one occasion the researcher followed the lecturer together with the nuns for two hours and she found it extremely painful to support her body on her two elbows while following and taking notes from the lecture. Only when there is not enough room to sit on the floor for lectures, are the lectures conducted in the dining room where there are tables and chairs.

When venerable Thai monks who had visited Burma and studied the teaching-learning situations in Burmese monasteries were asked about this posture for learning; one said it was very traditional and the other said it was very primitive. The teaching is in a very passive way. The teacher gives word by word translation on the Pali terms, and translates the whole paragraph later. The teaching is also orientated to passing examination. Almost everything is learnt by heart. The nuns practice old examination questions later on their own. While being criticized about the rote-learning pattern in Burma, most of the Burmese monks argue that it is because of rote learning that the Buddhist scriptures are kept almost at their original stage in Burma.

4.3.3. Benefits

It was found that this nunnery enjoyed the best condition among the three nunneries that were observed. The nuns are constructing a large three-storey-building with a stupa resembling that of Buddha-Gaya on top of it. Most of the manual work such as carrying bricks, sand, cement is done by the nuns themselves. It is supposed to be the largest building built by the nuns themselves without the help of government.

This nunnery is also the most prominent one in the sense that it has the largest number of candidates (23 in 1998) for teachers of *dhamma* (*dhammāsayariya*)

examination which is equivalent to bachelor degree and the highest religious education level a nun can obtain at government sponsored examinations. There are not many nuns who can reach that level, much less accomplish it. Having learned nuns who are well educated, as Kawanami pointed out, is the most concrete way of boosting the status of nuns in Burma. And this is true with Myawaddy nuns. They are largely respected and admired for their education and donations come in from all corners. However, this status is hard-earned with patience for the difficulties and inconveniences of learning.

4.3.4. Potential Solution to the Problems

Why has this nunnery become prosperous within a relatively short period of time? Learning centres are the most accepted type of institution for nuns. Serving as schools for Buddhist literatures, the nunneries are supported by the communities. Even so, the nuns received the smallest donation. There are also very few nuns who can teach the higher level. For example, even at this Myawaddy centre which is supposed to be one of the most successful learning centres, the nuns who are studying at *dhammācariya* level must go to another monastery where the monks give lectures. Although the two chief abbesses have already finished *dhammācariya*, they cannot teach the nuns themselves. Because the nunnery owns a bus, it is much more convenient for the nuns to study at another monastery with its own transportation; otherwise, it would be difficult for them to pursue higher learning in Buddhist scriptures.

One beneficial aspect that was noted was that every nun in this learning centre has at least one individual supporter like that of the monks who have *Pazin dayaka* (the provider of four requisites). These individual supporters pay for expenses such as

books and personal affects. The two abbesses ask their lay supporters to adopt the nuns in this way. Such kind of support releases the nuns from the financial worries and thus they can concentrate more on learning. Other forms of support can be created through central funding organized by the headmen of the villages or wards in the city. In this way each nun will not have to endure the burden of a personal relationship with her particular donors.

It is better if the administrative tasks of the chief nuns are reduced to a minimum with the help of an administrative committee. The nuns should take some leadership training in order to be able to understand the situation they are in, to be able to think of improvement, to be able to think on their own.

It is felt that it is high time that the Burmese people, be they monastic or lay, learn how to work together as institution. However, it is not to blame the people, as they are never encouraged to form an institutional spirit. The charismatic leadership, whether it is religious or civil, should be channelled towards institution building. At the beginning we might have to start with charismatic leaders. But this leader must share his authority and charm with colleague who are capable and establish some kind of association. When the trust of the followers can be directed to the association, the group can function more successfully and can guarantee the survival of such institutions.

4.4. A Meditation Centre: Mahā Bodhi Vipassanā Meditation Centre

4.4.1. General description

Mahā Bodhi Vipassanā Meditation Centre (commonly known as Mahā Bodhi Meditation Centre) is situated in the southern part of Mandalay, on a 30-acre-wide piece of land, right in front of Mandalay University. It was established in 1950. A

group of *Yogi* (meditators), including Daw (Miss) Nyunt⁸, who was about 28 years old at that time, founded this centre. The chief teacher of meditation was a lay man, U Thein. At that time Daw Nyunt was his disciple. Daw Nyunt continued practising meditation even though she was not allowed to renounce the world at her young age.

In 1963 she became a nun by the title of Daw Cittaya. She stayed at the centre and looked after the chores while practising meditation. After three successors since U Thein's death, Daw Cittaya became the head teacher of meditation. There are not many nuns residing at this centre.

The centre runs seven-day *vipassana* meditation courses. The method practised at this centre is that of Ledi Sayadaw. The method is seeing *phyit -pyet* (becoming and ceasing).⁹ The first three days are for establishing concentration (*samadhi*) and the final four days are meant for practising insight meditation. Everyday one has to practise at least 13 hours but at present the length is reduced to 8 hours. The participant must practise at least until one of the 10 *jhanas* is reached. During the Burmese new year holidays, there are about 150 participants at the course whereas in normal time, only 10 to 15 members come to practise.¹⁰

Daw Cittaya is a very capable nun. She wears brown robes instead of pink ones as she takes the ten precepts and the life of a hermit. She never misses her daily chore

⁸ See Appendix 7.

⁹ (Come-go, in-out, creation-destruction) in physical and mental phenomena. It uses breathing method of keeping the mind on the tip of the nose, noticing the air as it comes in and goes out.

¹⁰ The timetable for a day is as follows:

4 a.m.	to	6 a.m.	Two hours' meditation
6 a.m.	to	7 a.m.	One hour for breakfast
7 a.m.	to	10 a.m.	Three hours' meditation
10 a.m.	to	11 a.m.	Lunch time
11 a.m.	to	12 noon	Bathing time
12 noon	to	5 p.m.	Five hours' meditation
5 p.m.	to	6 p.m.	Interview with the instructor
6 p.m.	to	7 p.m.	Leisure
7 p.m.	to	10 p.m.	Meditation
10 p.m.	to	4 a.m.	Sleeping time

of catering for the necessities of the meditators as well as attending to her resolution. She has established a replica of the Buddha-Gaya temple, which is 117 feet high and is very similar to the original one. At the time of the study, she was building a library to house the Buddhist Scriptures to commemorate her eightieth birthday in 1999. There are no other *thīlashin* at the centre. Two other yogis are dwelling at the centre at present.

This meditation centre once flourished well. In 1958, 59, and 60, an Australian barrister-at-law, Ms. Marie Beuzeville Byles came to this centre in her quest for inner peace. On her return, she wrote a book called Journey into Burmese Silence detailing her experiences of meditation methods at different centres and her preference for this particular centre.

4.4.2. Problems

Why has this meditation centre stopped flourishing? The main reason seems to be that women meditation teachers are not accepted in Burma. In Sri Lanka lay meditation teachers are predominantly nuns and this trend is occurring in Thailand (Bessey, in Sivaraksa, 1990, p. 322). In Burma, monasteries which run meditation centres are more successful. However, the meditation masters must be prominent monks of the country. Although Daw Cittaya herself is very capable, coming from a well-to-do family and greatly revered by her disciples; when it comes to choosing a meditation centre, most people opt for a meditation centre run by a famous monk. There is also no encouragement from the government for women meditation masters as there are no titles conferred to women even though such titles exist.

Meditation centres also try to cut themselves and their meditators off from the secular world even though they receive donations in kinds and deeds. *Theravāda*

Buddhism emphasizes individual salvation. Does this kind of teaching make Burmese selfish and self-centred? One prominent meditation master, a reverend monk, who was interviewed about his ideas on social service, regarded it as meddling in other people's business.¹¹ The monk used the analogy of saving. If a person does not have money in hand they cannot give it to others. So also, if the same person could not salvage themselves from *samsāra*, how could they help others? It was difficult to argue with the abbot as the custom does not allow this. However, it seems logical to follow Bodhisatta's ways. We practise meditation and at the same time try to help others as much as we can. On the other hand, the principle of "one thing at a time" is also acceptable. You cannot concentrate on both while you are trying to do two things at one time. So you have to practise for yourself before working for others.

4.4.3. Benefits

In Burma meditation centres serve the interest of the populace by giving them not only a place to do meditation but it also caters for their food and lodging during their stay as *yogi*. These centres run short meditation courses as five-day, seven-day courses, or medium-length courses like one-month courses or long courses like three-month courses. Some meditation centres give sanctuary to the elderly people who want to stay at the centre permanently. The meditators or *yogi* are treated as special religious people, like lay monks. Most of the centres charge the minimum amount to cover the expense. Some centres are free of charge. Only after the meditation course and the learners find the meditation course satisfying and beneficial, are they allowed to donate for the next comers. Some centres distribute saving boxes to the former

¹¹ Interview with the abbot of Golden Hill Sasana Yeiktha

meditators and collect them yearly. Moreover, there are many donors who give free lunch to the yogi at the meditation centres. So it is no wonder that meditation centres are the most popular places for people to go for spiritual as well as mental and physical well-being.

4.4.4. Potential solutions to the problems

Generally speaking, meditation centres have the least problems concerning their financial situation. Famous meditation centres have abundant food and donations coming from all corners. However, for a meditation centre administered by a nun, there is problem of preference. Although Ledi Sayadaw's method is a well accepted form of meditation, not many come to this centre due to the fact that it is a female renunciant who shows the way. This seems to be a very difficult situation to tackle. As long as male chauvinism exists, there is no way to solve this problem. At the time of the study, Daw Cittaya displayed her concern about choosing a suitable person to inherit the teaching. As there were three monks of Ledi monastery from Monywa who are learning the meditation techniques, she was relieved that at last she could return the technique back to the original possessor, namely Ledi monks.

It is a sad thing that there is no female meditator or nun to succeed Daw Cittaya. She might think that the nuns or the female yogi have not practised enough. She even tried to persuade the researcher to come and practise meditation before she passes away. This shows that she has not neglected her duty of finding a suitable successor, but that she had tried with all her means. The problem is that in Burma most people are not courageous enough to break with tradition. From the responses

on the expectation of the nuns, it is clear that the nuns are reluctant to become meditation masters.¹²

4.5. A Comparison of three nunneries

The similarities and differences among the three nunneries will be discussed in terms of financial support, functions and organizational structure.

Although financial support for all nunneries is insufficient, the learning centre is the most prosperous and the orphanage is the poorest. This is because the orphanage has children who have to depend solely on the nunnery and have no one to support them. There are only about 20 nuns there and the alms they collect is not enough to feed 200 children. The orphanage has tried several supporting programs such as bakery, tailoring, weaving, but they are not successful because of inefficiency and lack of continued support. For the learning centre the nuns can at least go for alms and support themselves. And they usually have relatives, parents or adopted supporters. Even though Mahā Bodhi Vipassanā Centre does not have abundant food, it is sufficient for the meditators. The reply to the question of whether there is sufficient food at the monasteries, is that if it is a meditation centre, food is abundant because there are many people who want to give donations on the meditators. If the monastery or nunnery is a learning centre, the chief administrator has to work hard to obtain sufficient food for its learners. Once an abbot of a famous monastery complained that if he runs a meditation centre, there would be abundant food, but now, because he runs a learning centre, his roasted beans are stolen and eaten by the novice learners. Contentment is the policy and practice of these nunneries and they seem to be quite used to it.

¹² See Chapter III, p. 68.

The above incidence is an instance of the ever-present debate between study and practice in the religious domain. The Burmese generally believe that the purpose of a monk's life is first, to gain enlightenment for himself; second, to study the Scriptures; and third, to pass on these attainments to others. For lay people to enter a monastic order and study Buddhist Scriptures is much more difficult than to take temporary refuge at a meditation centre. Practising meditation is much more tangible and practical. That is why lay meditation movement is gaining in momentum. Although studying the scriptures is accepted as preserving *sāsanā*, ordinary people think that it as a long-term business. Lay people who have been to meditation centres and enjoyed some peace and bliss of meditation are willing to make donation at these centres. So it is natural that meditation centres receive more donation than any other monastic institutions.

The greater differences lie in the functions of the nunneries as they are far apart in nature. Aye Yeik Mon caters for the welfare of the orphans, Mya Waddy focuses on the study of Buddhist scriptures and Mahā Bodhi teaches meditation techniques. Aye Yeik Mon is much like an orphanage and more lay people are seen in the compound. As the government is encouraging the revival of monastic schools, it has the potential of running a school of its own at least at the primary level. Some monasteries and nunneries already have primary level instruction in the compound. The abbesses of Mya Waddy learning centre, however, are reluctant to accept the idea of monastic school. They fear that by mixing with lay students, the nuns might get the idea of returning to lay life. They argue that opening of monastic schools should be done at those nunneries which have the smallest population of nuns. The Mahā Bodhi meditation centre, on the contrary, seems to have no concern with the mundane world. It welcomes those who want to gain release from the bondage of life and

encourages people to do so. For the ten days' meditation a fee is charged for food. Board and boarding is catered for during their stay. There are two kinds of meditators: permanent and temporary. Most of the buildings are built by individual donors, but they are under the supervision of a voluntary administration board.

The style of administration is relatively autonomous in all three centres; the chief nun usually makes the final decision. Respect for each member is based on a hierarchy in terms of length of nunhood, age, and learning. A sense of egalitarianism also flourished in all nunneries as they share food and work together and loving kindness and compassion are emphasized. Although Aye Yeik Mon has a committee to help run the orphanage, this is at the voluntary level. This is the same with the Mahā Bodhi Meditation Centre. Accordingly, these centres have not flourished into organized institutions. The future of the nunneries depends solely on the charisma of the abbesses.

4.6. A Defence of Proposed Solution

There have been instances of rejection of the renunciants' involvement in social work in Burmese history.

Mendelson pointed out that "... the principal aim of monks should be their own search for enlightenment. They should not be distracted from this by any worldly pursuits albeit of the most charitable kind. Thus the acts of social service are not traditionally performed as subject, but rather are the natural outcome of usually good and ethically minded Burman's living, with some freedom, among their respectful and grateful fellow-countrymen" (ibid, p. 309). According to him, "it was already apparent to him, before going to Burma, that the whole nature of Burmese society

might well be changed if Burmese changed their views about what actions constituted meritorious deed (ibid, p. 310)."

Mendelson quoted a letter to show the negative attitude towards social work as:

There was, of course, opposition to the melding of Buddhism and socialism particularly in terms of involving the monks in organized social service work. ...In a letter written to the BSC Light of the Dhamma, a monk argued that the *Saṅghā* has the highest possible task of teaching the preaching of the Buddha and of providing a cure for the world's ill. The task of the *Saṅghā* is not merely to offer a palliative in a world growing more and more degenerate, even if, as the leader contended, the *Saṅghā* itself is also degenerating in many quarters. He argued from the Digha Nikaya text that the word *Parahita* (the welfare of others) has nothing whatsoever to do with "social service" and suggested that, if monks wish to devote themselves to what is indeed a fine ideal for Buddhist laymen, they should leave the robe...(ibid, p. 310)

So we can conclude that there are monks who are not ready to accept social commitment as part of their duty.

4.6.1. Arguments Against the Nuns' Role in Social Work

Burmese people believe that the primary duty of a monk is to practice disciplines by which he can accelerate his attainment of salvation. Laymen need monks to be served by him. By offering *Dana*- food, robes, shelter, and so on to the monks, a layman acquires the merit necessary for his salvation. The primary function of the monks is to seek his own salvation. For it is only by making offerings to a pious monk, one whose life is devoted to soteriological action, that merit is acquired (Spiro, 1987, p. 285). This idea is encouraged from the scripture.

Let a man not neglect his own good for that of another.¹³ Let a man not neglect his own good for the good of another, however important. A man should learn what is good for himself and apply himself thereto with diligence.¹⁴

The Burmese see that the monk's duty is to save himself, and the layman's duty is to provide him with the physical requirements by which he can devote his energies to that end. If the monk is not expected to be primarily dedicated to the religious welfare of laymen, it is not surprising to learn that he is not expected to be concerned with their secular welfare. Buddhist monasticism is concerned with other worldly (*lokuttara*), not with the worldly (*lokiya*) goals. All those worldly concerns which at best have become associated with the clerical role, social service, community welfare, economic justice, public relations, and so on – are foreign to both the letter and the spirit of Buddhist monasticism (Spiro, 1987, p. 287).

The Burmese believe that assistance - physical or financial, or secular objects from lay persons - provides the donor with very little merit. There is lack of support for non-religious charities associated with social services and community development projects, but the traditional association with giving to the religious is undiminished. Burmese generosity was channeled almost exclusively toward religious ends. If a person has to choose between hospitals and monasteries, their savings will go to monasteries (Spiro, 1987, pp. 465 – 466). Teachings from *Tipiṭika* supports this idea as it is said:

¹³ This religious instruction was give by the Teacher while he was in residence at Jetavana with reference to Elder Attadatha. [158]

¹⁴ [This story is from By Righteousness Men Honor the Buddha, in Buddhist Legends, Translated from the original Pali text of the Dhammapada Commentary by Eugene Watson Burlingame, Part 2: translation of Books 3 to 12 , The Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1995. (First published 1921) p 366].

A man should first direct himself.¹⁵ “Monks, a man who admonishes others should first direct himself in the way he should go.” And when he had thus spoken, he pronounced the following Stanza,

A man should first direct himself in the way he should go.

Only then should he instruct others; a wise man will so do and grow weary.¹⁶

We cannot deny that *Theravāda* Buddhism encourages individualistic outlook on life and tend to be criticized as selfish. However, the teaching does not end here yet. This is the phase to strive for oneself.

According to Saw Monyin, *thīlashins* have influence on the womenfolk like the monks have on lay people. To be able to propagate without hurting their *sikkha* (training), *sāsanā*, *thīlashins* should have both secular and spiritual education. If they were competent in both fields, they could go further in propagating *sasana*. When they went far and wide to spread *sasana*, *thīlashins* should know first aid treatment and running private clinic. These challenging ideas are put forth by *thīlashins* in the nunnery of Boundary Aledawya. The World Buddhist University also helped to open a university for *thīlashins* and run *thīlashin* training courses. However, there are more people who are opposed to propagation of *sāsanā* by social services. After 1965, the idea of opening a university for Missionary *thīlashin* faded away. There was no evidence of educated *thīlashin* for missionary or to the hilly regions inside the country (1999, p. 310).

¹⁵ This religious instruction was given by the Teacher while he was in residence at Jetavana with reference to Upananda, the Sakyan prince. [139]

¹⁶ [the story of the greedy monk in Buddhist Legends, Translated from the original Pali text of the Dhammapada Commentary by Eugene Watson Burlingame, Part 2: translation of Books 3 to 12, The Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1995, (First published 1921) p. 352]

The findings of this research also agree with the point that Burmese nuns in *Theravāda* tradition are not yet ready to undertake social work. They seem to have a mixed feeling towards social commitments. As Kawanami terms, the contemporary position of Burmese Buddhist nun is 'transitional' in terms of educational achievements.

4.6.2. Arguments for the Nuns' Role in Social Work

Just as there have been a number of rationales that lend support for those in the religious order not to engage in social work some of the quotations that have cited above should indicate disengagement in social work is not the only argument. As the above quotes show, the sphere of activities that comprise "social work" has almost no limit. The extent and intensity of just how "engaged" Buddhism would need to be in every society is a decision that would have to be made by those members of the religious order of a particular society and the lay community of that society. As the earlier examples of nunneries have shown, the tradition and practice of "engaged" Buddhism is not entirely absent in Burma. Spiro, discussed the idea of social service by some monks in his book Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes as:

In a seminar held by the members of the Social Service *Sangha* Association (*Parahita Saṅghā*), their attitudes to social service are described as:

1. Working for and with orphans is not an expression of attachment, which they admitted is a serious obstacle to the attainment of *nibbāna* itself.
2. Those monks who criticize them are mistaken in saying that theirs is a worldly activity; it is otherworldly, because its object is *nibbāna*. By

working for the orphans, they obtain merit, and by this merit they can eventually attain *nibbāna*.

3. Contrary to what others say, working for others is the way to *nibbāna*. But obtaining *nibbāna* for oneself is not enough, one must also help others to attain this goal. In caring for those boys they also teach them about Buddhism, so that they too can achieve *nibbāna*.
4. Contrary to what others say, meditation is not the only way to *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* can only be achieved by abolishing the belief in a permanent self or ego. Meditation is one, but not the only way by which this end can be achieved. Social service can also lead to this end, for in serving others one reduces the concern for self.
5. By engaging in social service one emulates the Buddha who, having achieved detachment, nevertheless continued to work ceaselessly for all sentient beings (Spiro, 1982, p. 289).

The concept of social work is not foreign to the Buddha himself. The Buddha spent a long forty-five years of his life for the greatest service to the mankind to preach the *Saddharma* to all, from a king to a beggar. He inspired his disciples to move from place to place to demonstrate the way of the *dhamma* which was the source of "welfare and happiness". His command was "Go forth Ye *bhikkhus*, for the welfare of many. The Buddha's renunciation was not to escape from life and society, but it was for the enrichment of the both. The renounced Buddha involved himself for the welfare of society. After his enlightenment, he was fully involved with the welfare of mankind till the last breath of his life (Satchidananda Dhar, 1986, p. 110).

The Buddha's early sermon to his first batch of 60 monks to go for missionaries is thus given as follows:

Then the Lord addressed the monks, saying: "I, monks, am freed from all snares, both those of *devas* and those of men. And you,[20], monks, are freed from all snares, both those of *devas* and those of men. Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manyfolk out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of *devas* and men. Let not two (of you) go by one (way.) Monks, teach *dhamma* which is lovely at the beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely at the ending. Explain with the spirit and the letter the Brahma-faring completely fulfilled, wholly pure. There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who, not hearing *dhamma*, are decaying, (but) if they are learners of *dhamma*, they will grow. And, I, monks, will go along to Uruvela, to the Camp township, in order to teach *dhamma*.¹⁷

Acts of charity and service to others have a direct reward in the form of mental satisfactions of both the persons rendering service and being served. While helping the lay devotees in their spiritual progress or worldly benefits the monks think their acts as means of their own spiritual gain. Thus Buddhism has tied both the monastic order and the lay society to a common aim, realization of the merit of *dhamma* through service to each other. (ibid, p. 111) When we are talking about *service to others*, Lord Buddha himself set a very good example in an occasion, "Whoever, monks, would tend me, he should tend the sick."¹⁸

¹⁷ The story of the First Missionaries in the Book of the Discipline Vinaya-Pitaka, Volume IV (Mahavagga), translated by I. B. Horner, M.A. Associate of Newnham College, Cambridge, the Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1993, p. 28

¹⁸ The story of tend the sick: Now at that time a certain brother was suffering from dysentery; he lay fallen in his own excrements. Then the Lord, as he was touring the lodgings with the venerable Ananda as his attendant, approached that monk's dwelling-place. The Lord saw that a monk lying fallen in his own excrements; seeing him he approached that monk, and having approached that monk, and having approached he spoke thus to that monk:

"What is your disease, monk?"

The practice of loving kindness is the very essence of the Buddhist way of life. It is a positive quality of the mind which promotes an ethical attitude. The man who extends to his fellow beings the love and affection which a mother reserves for her only son and says with conviction and feeling, "May all beings be happy", finds no place in his mind for malice, jealousy, envy or pettiness. By the very practice of loving kindness, he becomes incapable of killing, stealing, lying, slandering or using harsh language. Not only does he avoid doing harm to others whether by deed, word or thought, but he also develops the tendency to engage himself in the task of relieving others of suffering and agony (ibid, p. 112). The importance of loving kindness is clearly shown in Buddha's own teaching of Boundless goodwill. It is said:

Even as a mother, as long as she doth live, watches over her child, her only child, - even so should one practise an all-embracing mind unto all beings.

"Lord, I have dysentery."

"But monk, have you anyone who tends you?"

"I have not, Lord," [301] he said.

"Why do not the monks tend you?"

"I, Lord, am of no use to the monks, therefore the monks do not tend me." // 1 //

Then the Lord addressed the venerable Ananda, saying: "Go, Ananda, bring water, we will bathe this monk."

"Very well, Lord," and the venerable Ananda, having answered the Lord in assent, when he had brought the water, the Lord sprinkled on the water, the venerable Ananda washed him over; the Lord took him by the head, the venerable Ananda by the feet, and having raised him up, they laid him down on a couch. // 2 //

Then the Lord, on that occasion, in that connection, having had the Order of monks convened, asked the monks:

"Is there, monks, in such and such a dwelling-place a monk who is ill? "

"There is, Lord."

"What, monks, is that monk's disease?"

"Lord, the venerable one has dysentery."

"But, monks, is there anyone who is tending that monk?"

"There is not, Lord."

"Why do not the monks tend him?"

"Lord, this monk is of no use to the monks, therefore the monks do not tend that monk."

"Monks, you have not a mother, you have not a father who might tend you. If you, monks, do not tend one another, then who is there who will tend you? Whoever, monks, would tend me, he should tend the sick. // 3 /

[The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Pitaka) Volume IV (Mahavagga), translated by I. B. Horner, M.A. Associate of Newnham College, Cambridge, The Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1993, pp. 431 – 432]

And let a man practise a boundless goodwill for all the world, above, below, across, in every way, goodwill unhampered, without ill-feeling or enmity.¹⁹

As for *regards for the others*, the Buddha once pronounced:

By constant use the idea of an 'I' attaches itself to foreign drops of seed and blood, although the thing exists not. Then why should I not conceive my fellow's body as my own self? That my body is foreign to me is too hard to see. I will think of myself as a sinner, of others as oceans of virtue; I will cease to live as self, and will take as my self my fellow-creatures. We love our hands and other limbs, as members of the body, they then why not love other living beings, as members of the universe? By constant use man comes to imagine that his body, which has no self-being, is a 'self'; why then should he not conceive his 'self' to lie in his fellows also? Thus in doing service to others pride, admiration, and desire of reward find no place, for thereby we satisfy the wants of our own self. Then, as thou wouldst guard thyself against suffering and sorrow, so exercise the spirit of helpfulness and tenderness towards the world...²⁰

The noble spirit of kindness and brotherly affection is the guiding principle in the programme of social service organized by the Buddhist *Sangha*. Since the time of their appearance, the Sangha themselves have formed a community where the welfare of all members is taken care of by their respective leaders as well as by its members. To a Buddhist, a social service programme is a process for his spiritual gain. For him, the work is worship, a *Sadhana*. The Buddhist ideal of social service, the '*dhamma*' of

¹⁹ Cited in Humphreys, Christmas (ed), 1979, p. 90, sources in Some sayings of the Buddha, Trans. F. L. Woodward. Oxford University Press, 1925, p.44 – 45, Metta-Sutta of Khuddaka-Patha and Sutta Nipata, v. 143.

the Buddha, was first accepted and applied in moulding of the moral character of the whole society by the great emperor Asoka. Asoka practiced the '*dhamma*' - the ideal of service towards men and animals - moral code promulgated by the Buddha. The *Saṅghā* and its monastic members were the source of inspiration for him. '*Dhamma*', when expressed through service and the social welfare activities, assures a permanent government and a peaceful order of the society (ibid, p. 113). Thus it is clear that through social services to the mankind, the ruler or government can lead to the stability and development of a nation.

Once the Buddha pointed out that which constitutes a profitable life. He said there are four types of people in the world and only those who are working for both him and for others can be regarded as leading a profitable life.

'Monks, these four persons are found existing in the world. What four?

He who is bent on his own profit, not another's; he who is bent on another's profit, not his own; he who is bent on the profit of both; he who is bent on the profit of neither.

... a certain person is bent on the restraint of lust in self, but does not incite another to the restraint of lust. He is bent on the restraint of hatred in self, but does not incite another to such restraint... on the restraint of delusion in self, but does not incite another to such restraint. Thus, monks, a person is bent on his own profit, not on another's.

²⁰ Cited in Humphreys, Christmas (ed), 1979, p. 137; sources in *The Path of Light*. Trans. From the *Bodhicharyavatara of Santi-Deva* by L. D. Barnett. John Murray. Wisdom of the East Series. 1909.

... a person bent on the profit both of self and another is a person both bent on the restraint of lust ... hatred ... delusion in self and incites another to such restraint.²¹

And how, monks, a certain person is quick to observe in teachings that are profitable, has naturally a good memory for teachings he has heard, examines the meaning of teachings he has heard, examine the meaning of teachings he has learned by heart, and by understanding both the meaning and the letter thereof, walks in accordance with *dhamma*.

And how, monks, a certain person is possessed of a charming voice... and he is one to teach... his fellows in the holy life.²²

‘and how, monks, is a person bent on his own profit, not another’s?’

herein a certain person, as regards himself, abstains form killing, but does not incite another to do so; abstains from stealing... wrong conduct in sense-desires... from lying... from liquor fermented and distilled, but does not incite another so to abstain.

Herein a certain person both himself abstains form killing and the rest and incites another to do so.²³

In an answer to the question “How does a person strive after his own welfare but not after that of others?”, the Buddha said:

²¹ vi. (96). Profit of self (a) in the Book of the Gradual Sayings (Anguttara-Nikaya) or More-Numbered Suttas Vol.II. (The Book of the Fours) translated F. L. Woodward, M.A. Published by the Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1995, p. 105]

²² vii (97). *Profit of self (b)*. in Vii(97) Profit of self (b), in *ibid.* , 1995, pp. 106 - 107.

²³ ix (99). *Precepts* in *ibid*, 1995, p 107.

Here a person attains to the moral life but does not encourage others to attain it, himself attains to [the practice of ecstatic] meditation but does not encourage others to attain it, himself attains to emancipation but does not encourage others to attain, himself attains to the perception of a consciousness of emancipation but does not encourage of a consciousness of emancipation but does not encourage others to attain that perception. Such a person is one who strives after his own welfare but not after that of others.

The Buddha did not stop his teaching here. He continued to answer the question of “How does a person strive after his own welfare as well as after that of others?” by saying that:

Here a person himself attains to the moral life and also encourages others to attain the moral life, himself attains to [the practice of ecstatic] meditation, and also encourages others to attain the same, himself attains to insight and also encourages others to attain insight, himself attains to emancipation and also encourages others to attain that state, himself attains to the perception of a consciousness of emancipation and also encourages others to attain that state, himself attains to the perception of a consciousness of emancipation and also encourages others to attain that perception. Such a person is one who strives after his own welfare as well as after that of others.²⁴

4.7. Advantages of the Engagement of Nuns in Social Work

From the above argument, it is clear that the concept of social work and welfare for others is mentioned and encouraged in the Buddha's teaching. The only thing is that over the course of time Buddhism has changed and some aspects are

²⁴ [Designation of Human Types (Puggalas-Pannatti) Translated into English for the first time by Bimala Charan Law, M.A., B.L., Pali Text Society, Oxford, 1992, pp. 74 – 75]

neglected while others are being emphasized. Rahula Walpola said that the common belief that to follow the Buddha's teaching one has to retire from life is a misconception. There are numerous references in Buddhist literature to men and women living ordinary, normal family lives who successfully practiced what the Buddha taught, and realized *nibbāna*.²⁵

Before turning to the arguments advocating nuns' involvement in social work, the attitudes of Burmese Buddhist nuns towards social work will be discussed. These findings are based on a survey conducted on the 200 nuns throughout Burma.

4.7.1. Attitudes of Burmese Buddhist Nuns Towards Social Work

It is difficult to uncover the attitudes of Burmese Buddhist nuns towards social work. However, the survey attempted to get an indepth answer to the question "As a nun, do you want to take part in social work?" in the questionnaire. If the response was "yes", they were asked to indicate the kind of work they wanted to take part in from the following list: to look after orphans, to teach children, to teach adults, to look after and cure the sick, to help needy people, to help the aged and others. They could choose more than one answer and state their preference.

If the response was negative, they were asked to choose from the following list of reasons for shunning social services: a nun has nothing to do with the outside world, a nun's responsibility is just to study the teachings of the Buddha, or just to do meditation or only to serve the monks or other reasons. They can express their preferences on the choices in numerical numbers.

²⁵ In The Social Teachings of the Buddha, in Eppsteiner, ed, 1985, p.103.

For the first main question of whether the nuns want to take part in social work 44% of the 200 respondents say “yes”. However, 56% of them say “no”. The responses made by the 200 nuns suggest those who hold that those in the Buddhist order should not become entangled with social affairs still outweigh those that consider a need for becoming involved. The researcher, however, would like to take the ratio of such a response as somewhat promising since nearly half of the nun respondents are willing to render social services.

For their preference of kinds of social work, the data are as follows:

	1st choice	2nd choice	3 rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
Look after orphans	11.9	1	1	1.5	0.5
Teach children	20.3	12	0.5	0	0
Teach adults	0	10.4	4.7	0	0.5
Look after and nurse the sick	1	0.5	2.6	1	1.5
Help needy people	5.2	4.1	7.8	4.7	1
Help the aged	1.6	3.1	3.6	5.7	2.6

Other kinds of activities that they would like to perform mentioned by the nuns are to teach young nuns, to teach Buddhist literature, to look after stray dogs, to raise the standard of living, learn or teach English and get donations.

From these data, it is obvious that what nuns prefer most is teaching as a form of social work, especially to young children. They also would like to take care of orphans. Helping the aged is the least preferred form of social service. What is the reason behind this attitude on the part of the nuns? According to Burmese culture, the elderly relatives or grandparents stay together with the family. They are seldom left at the homes for the aged. Old age is generally taken as the time to do meritorious deeds,

to seek *dhamma* or to do meditation. It is time for spiritual growth and thus to enjoy the fruit of life. Therefore, the problems of the aged seem less serious.

Very few nuns would like to look after and nurse the sick according to the study. This may be because the nuns think that they are not capable of tending the sick. Although there are a few hospitals solely for the monastic orders or a special ward for the monks at almost all township level hospitals, the staff, both doctors and nurses, are lay people. The researcher met two army nurses turned nuns at Rangoon Sangha hospital. They were voluntarily working as nurses there, but getting disheartened due to scarcity of food. They tried to run some nursing courses to train the nuns at Sagaing hill but turned out to be unsuccessful.

With regard to the children, teaching them or giving them education is the most appreciated job. However, although looking after orphans is recognized as meritorious deed, orphans are not giving priority as traditionally it is believed that one becomes an orphan because of one's bad past *kamma*. Consequently, the establishment of orphanages is not encouraged.

The reasons for **negative attitude** towards social work are given as follows:

	1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice	4th choice	5th choice
Nothing to do with outside world	11	4.5	1	0.5	0
To study the teaching of the Buddha	38.5	15	2	0	0
To meditate	13	30.5	10	0.5	0
Only to serve the monks	1	2.5	9	4	0

Other reasons for not wanting to do social work are given as: don't know there is a need to do social work, want to do propagation of *Sāsana*, want to do religious work, has no ability to do social work, to abide by the teaching of the Buddha, to

develop the nunnery, it is not the will of the Buddha, a nun's must do a nun's work, it will lessen the time to do religious work, afraid of demerits and want to do meditation.

The nuns who responded negatively towards social services say that studying Buddha's teaching and practising meditation are the most important tasks for them. They also seem to cut off themselves from the secular world. Does this mean that the nuns are selfish and self-centred? *Theravāda* Buddhism emphasizes individual salvation.

4.7.2. Advantages of Nuns' Involvement in Social Commitment

What are the advantages of nuns' involvement in social commitment? To answer this question, we must first understand the role and status of *thīlashin* in Burmese society. This is broadly discussed in Chapter III. In a nutshell, *thīlashin* in Burma are in a very good position to do social work. Their role is ambiguous, partly as lay person and partly religious. So they can function as lay people but at the same time earn more respect as they are more religious. So if they take the leadership role, they can be better accepted than ordinary women. Because of their present position in the religious community, they just need to keep the ten precepts. It is actually much more freer than the monks who have to keep 227 precepts. This will allow the nuns to function more actively in the society. From the study it is clear that Burmese nuns are not totally against social commitments. The percentage of nuns that vote for social work is even higher than had been expected. If they have good models to set examples and raise their morale, the nuns are more likely to get involved in the welfare work.

4.7.3. Models and Applications

In other *Theravāda* Buddhist countries we can witness the involvement of nuns in social commitments. In Thailand, members of the Institute of Thai *Mae Jis* engage in social work, such as establishing youth centres, providing teachers for Buddhist Sunday schools and kindergarten classes, offering day-care for preschool children, helping in the refugee camps on Thailand's eastern border, offering assistance to victims of natural disasters, and other activities (Chatsumarn, 1991, p. 55).

Bessey, who conducted a survey on Thai *Mae Jis*, said that evidence of changing attitudes about the nuns may also be gained from a survey of nunneries. The most frequent response to why the women were ordained was to pursue the practice and study of the *dhamma*. Nuns now have access to education and training programs, and a few have gained the highest Pali qualifications... It is not doubted that nuns can perform an important function in society perhaps as a significant addition to the monks' development role... At meditation centre, meditation is stressed as being a central practice but it also accords with the common view that nuns and lay people are more suited to meditation than study due to the latter being more difficult for them. Attitudes as to whether greater emphasis should be given to study or meditation varies a great deal, even among educated people.²⁶

Burmese nuns can follow Thai models of the Institute of Thai Mae Ji. Although *thīlashins* have organizations at State level in time of needs and at township levels permanently, these organizations are mostly for administration purposes only. They have no concept of social welfare. Opening Sunday schools will be another option to familiarize younger generations with Buddhism and understand it better. At the same

²⁶ Bessey, in Sulak Sivaraksa, 1990, pp. 311 – 345.

time, there can be more social functions at nunneries and nuns are not just confined to their institution. They may have more concern for the community and realize the importance of coexistence between religious communities and lay communities. This may lead them to engage in social work.

In a country report on the Sri Lanka Attempt for *Bhikkhunī* Higher Ordination, Raja Dharmapala, the Secretary of the Dharmavedi Institute and co-founder of the Sri Lanka *Bhikkhunī* Development Organization, mentions that “there are many Buddhist nuns who are engaged in social services. These Buddhist nuns conduct pre-schools and Sunday Schools in their respective temple compounds and work in rural development societies. These Buddhist nuns, who are engaged in activities such as *dhamma* preaching, *pirith* chanting are given an opportunity to use the mass media like radio and television to deliver speeches”.²⁷ Most of the *dasa sil matavo* of Sri Lanka would prefer to remain as they are and prefer to live independent of control by the *bhikkhu saṅghā*. They consider themselves purer and appear ready to persevere as a new kind of women’s institution that is fulfilling.

Revitalizing the *bhikkhunī saṅghā* in Burma will help raise the status of *thīlashin*. Burmese nuns have seldom argued for the rights to become *bhikkhunī* nor have the monks shown their disapproval. The nuns submissively accept the fact that *bhikkhunī saṅghā* could not be established. As pointed out by Venerable Ayya Khema,²⁸ “the absence of the women’s *saṅghā* denies *Theravāda* women the opportunity to fully realize their religious aspirations, and could contribute much more to Sinhala society as *bhikkhunī* than they can in their present capacity.”²⁹ establishment of *bhikkhunī*

²⁷ In *Seeds of Peace*, Vol. 13, No. 3. pp. 9–10

²⁸ The German-born *dasa sil mata* who founded Parappaduwa Nuns’ Island in Sri Lanka,

²⁹ Nancy J. Barnes: “Buddhist Women and the Nun’s Order in Asia” in *Engaged Buddhism*, 1996, pp. 266.

saṅghā should be encouraged. On the other hand, if it is impossible, *thīlashin* can be happy as *dasa sil matavo*.

In Cambodia, where the main duties of the nuns are cooking for the monks, cleaning and decorating the pagodas and helping to care for the orphans, a German NGO, the Heinrich Boll Foundation (HBF), has recently launched a project which aimed at providing them with more opportunities to become involved in social work. HBF's representative in Cambodia, Dr. Heike Loschmann, says the project is aimed at boosting the nun's self-confidence, knowledge and skills. They will be encouraged to branch out into areas such as mental health counseling for women and children, and participation in AIDS prevention, nutrition, sanitation, education, contraception and family programs at the community level.

One important component of this project would be training nuns in the "Buddhist ways". According to Loschmann, "Our vision is that Buddhism could not only help the weak and poor to help themselves, but that it could also provide a basic value system of morals and ethics".

To this end, HBF recently organized a seminar in Phnom Penh on the role of Don Chees and lay women in the reconciliation of Cambodia. It was attended by nuns from all over the country and even attracted a contingent of foreign nuns. One of the attendees was Sokchom Charuwana, a French nun, who has returned to her homeland to work with the sisters.

Charuwana has established the Nun's Association for Cambodian Development in Battambang, and she is now seeking funds to build nunneries and centres in other provinces, where nuns could receive training in fields such as community health. She sees the organization's principle role as helping to ring the *dhamma* to poor women

and children. because, “As they learn *dhamma*, they also learn how to relieve their problems” (Seed of Peace Vol. 11, No3, p. 34).

This Cambodian model could be a very good example for the Burmese nuns. It shows many different areas where nuns can be useful. When the country is more open and NGOs are allowed to function, similar projects can be implemented in Burma. It is obvious that active *mettā* can be spread by deeds.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In Burma, the three important national institutions are the *Saṅghā*, the army (esp. the officer corps) and the civil service. Together they represent most of the cultural and national values of Burmese society. Their importance for nation building, modernization and economic development, either as leading and promoting or as obstacles and impediments cannot be exaggerated (Sprio, 1991, p. 364). Again, as some experts have pointed out, in Burma the only civil society existing is that of religious institutions, and it cannot be denied that the religious community plays a vital role in Burmese society. As nuns are regarded partly as lay people and partly as members of religious order their importance in the society should not be ignored. Moreover, in Burma, women constitute half of the entire country's population, nuns make up 17% of the religious population, and 89.4% of the country's 48 million people are Buddhist. So, it can be assumed that the success or failure of the nuns will partially represent the woman folk. Nunneries as civil institutions and nuns as individuals will guide Burmese women to their betterment.

In a society undergoing change, the secluded form of religious practice becomes somewhat questionable. Although nuns who have been and are involved in social work, they may have become involved without much thought. As a matter of fact, their actions have triggered some serious food for thought. They have also set in motion a new trend of practice for those in the religious order. Just how much nuns and nunneries can do for society, its economy and its education is evident by what has been found in the nunneries engaged in social work. If such kind of active involvement is barred, it is obvious that much benefit would be lost to society.

As Sramanerika Sangye Khandro in her article on Personal Development as a Nun, within the context of being a nun,

We have to live according to the *Vinaya* rules. We must find a balance between keeping our vows, being a good nun, being a pure nun, yet still being warm, friendly, and positive when dealing with other people. Sometimes this can be quite difficult. The idea of balance is very important in our development as people, as women, as nuns. Essentially we must create a balance between the different parts of our being – the intellectual, the emotional, and the intuitive. Some people become very intellectual, learn a lot, read many books, and take many teachings. They know a great deal about Buddhism and can talk about it at length, but they have not really integrated it into their hearts. They have not learned how to really live it. Other people may be out of balance the other way – by being very emotional. They may be very devoted to their teachers, emotions regarding these things, but they are lacking knowledge and wisdom. Sometimes they cannot even answer when someone asks them a simple *dhamma* question. So in our development as individuals we have to balance all these different parts of ourselves – our knowledge, our intellect, our feelings and our emotions.¹

If this is the case, can Burmese nuns balance themselves in their striving for learning, meditation, and social commitments?

In this study, the historical development of the nuns in Burma is examined. First, a study has been made of the development of nuns' communities through Burmese history. It seems that female religious orders in Burma are evolving very

¹ In Tsomo (ed.), 1988, pp. 71 – 72.

slowly. Buddhist nun order has existed before the time of the first Burmese Kingdom. In the Pyu kingdom (5th to 9th century AD), women shared the same privilege of entering a monastic life. Girls were sent to the monastery to learn until they reached the age of 20. Only then could they decide their dedication to continue monastic life or return to lay life. In the Pagan dynasty (11th to 13th century), religious women seemed to share almost the same status as monks. We witnessed in a stone inscription, a nun who recited paritta on the occasion of the dedication of a cave, together with 7 monks. It cannot be wrong to say that in the Pagan period women still enjoyed higher level of monastic life. In the Ava period (14th to 18th century), monastic women had their role in the country's peacemaking and palatial affairs. It is in this period that the nuns started to acquire the name they bear in the present time, *thilashin* and the colour of the robes. In the Konbaung Period (18th to 19th century), monastic women were highly respected by the royal families and two prominent nuns laid firm roots in the area near Mandalay, Sagaing and Mingun, the places where we can find largest population of nuns today. The nuns survived during the colonial period. Unlike the monks, the nuns were not involved in the fights for independence; instead they emphasized learning, their survival, and some tried initiatives in social work. It is this period that there was an encounter of local Buddhist communities with the foreign missionaries of other religions as well as Buddhist nuns from Sri Lanka. It seems that during this period the nuns started to gain pre-eminence with charismatic chief nuns, but at the same time started to lose their status in religious communities as a female order.

Historical obstacles that Burmese nuns have gone through still have their effects on the nuns of modern days. This can be witnessed in the actual conditions of the nuns at present. Buddhist nuns of contemporary Burma are still facing the

problems of recognition (although they are not working for it), insufficient support, lack of far-sightedness. They have to play an ambiguous role in the monastic order. And they are in an ambiguous position in society. They are not fully accepted by the monks as members of a religious order nor recognized by the laity as a monastic order. It is their tenacity for learning Buddhist scriptures and devotion for meditation that sustains the nuns to continue with their beliefs.

The background information collected from the questionnaire on the 200 respondent nuns' reveal the actual condition of the nuns in contemporary Burma. It paints a clear picture of the nuns; their family background, educational background, their reasons for ordination, their expectation as a nun and acceptance of them by the society. Through these pictures, the tasks nuns can accomplish and the tasks they would like to do are brought to light. The great roles the nuns can play and are playing in contemporary Burma guide us to an understanding of how the status of the nuns can be raised. It is understood that the nuns' hesitation to take the initiatives was culturally inherited and it has backfired by the actual impediments they face and the struggles they have to make. However, it was also discovered that the social commitment of the nuns is not a new idea, it was already embedded in our *thilashins* but still is not nurtured. It is the duty of all concerned to help grow the Buddha nature in our sisters.

Several nunneries in Burma have sought to change their historical position through various kinds of social work. There is a nunnery called Aye Yeik Mon or Tranquil Haven whose nuns are looking after the orphans and underprivileged girls. The nuns there are struggling hard to feed more than two hundred orphans and send them to school. Myawaddy Learning Centre is a nunnery which is serving as a learning centre of Buddhist scriptures for the nuns. There are 170 nuns who dedicate

themselves to studies of Buddha's teachings. We cannot help admire their collaborative effort, their endurance to the hardship. In Mahā Bodhi Vipassanā Meditation centre, although we cannot see many nuns, the chief nun's effort to maintain the meditation method practiced by their successive teachers is admirable.

A detailed study is made of the problems, benefits and potential solutions of these three nunneries. Although they are of very different nature and functions, there are common features shared by these nunneries. The prosperity of these nunneries solely depends on the charisma of the abbesses. All the nunneries are struggling for their own survival. The differences among the three nunneries are also highlighted. Because of the different objectives in their social commitment, the nature of the nunneries differ. It is believed that these analyses will help to find ways for the improvement of nunneries in particular and the status of nuns in general.

Buddhist values such as compassion, loving kindness and strong support for equality and freedom are not lacking in Burmese society. However, the dedication and commitment for community work are not much encouraged either. The teaching of individual salvation and fatalistic view of past *kamma* have hindered such humanitarian help. The reasons why we should advocate social work are traced from the Buddha's teaching to convince religious communities. However, we must be aware that we cannot force someone to do what we want them to do. We can just show them the way. It is hoped that different activities the nuns in other *Theravāda* traditions engaging in community welfare will set good models for Burmese nuns to follow.

The teachings of Lord Buddha provide a theoretical context for their focus on social work. Although some scholars deny the Buddha is a social reformer, there is a great wealth of literature on social engagement in the Scriptures. The term engaged

Buddhism was coined recently, yet Buddha himself and his disciples are engaged Buddhists who gave practical advice to villagers who were poor, illiterate, unclean, and unhealthy. The Buddha showed simple moral ideas conducive to the material well-being and happiness.

5.1. Recommendations

For solutions to the problems of Burmese nuns, this study advocates the institutionalization of nuns' communities. Any organization which is based on the charisma of its leader does not have a strong foundation and lasts only for a short life span. In Burma, many a monastery or nunnery spring up and then fade away once the abbot or abbess passes away. Most of the organizations in Burma, whether they are religious or civilian, are not encouraged to be established as institutions. So they do not understand the strength of group movement. This in turn hampers the egalitarian attitude of the society. Consequently, social welfare of the community tends to be neglected. Only when the religious organizations are strengthened as institutions, we can foresee flourishing nunneries and fully engaged nuns in social work.

In order for the nuns to survive with dignity, first of all they should be self-reliant. We witness the difficulties of nunneries and the struggles they are making. There should be some kind of income generating work. It does not mean that nuns should be doing some kind of business so that they get enough money to support themselves. However, they can do some self-sufficient projects like growing vegetables and flowers or sewing, weaving and bakery. The researcher has seen a *Mahayana* nunnery in northern Shan State which can support itself. It has vegetable patches, a middle school for children from the local area. These nuns meditate, teach

children and make vegetable pickles for their own consumption as well as for the market. This can be a good model for the *Theravāda* nuns to imitate.

The nuns should have a network for communication. There is the organization of nuns up to township level formed under the State *Saṅghā Nayaka* Council, actually it functions at a superficial level of getting administrative work done. The result is each nunnery has to run on its own. In one way, it seems to deliver more freedom for the nunneries, but in reality it leads to uncertainty and a heavier burden because they have to struggle for their own survival. As there is not such a network system, there is almost no communication in the nuns' society. There are no such publications as newsletters, periodicals, published about or by nuns although there are a few religious magazines for the general public. In Burma, a country where the media is strictly controlled by the government, we cannot expect such networking like internet communication. However, publication of some newsletters will carry information far and wide. Once the researcher wrote about the nunneries in Burma in the form of letters to her supervisor who is the editor of the Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities. Having read these letters, a group of Taiwanese nuns and monks came to visit the nunnery she mentioned. This kind of communication will bridge the female monastic communities, both local and international, to understand each other and respect their commitments.

In Burma, there is not much strong opposition to a nuns' community, although it is not much encouraged either. Surprisingly, the issue of the restoration of *Bhikkhunī Saṅghā* is not raised by the nuns themselves even though there are both sides of encouragement and rejections from the monks and lay people. It is said that there cannot be a *Bhikkhunī Saṅghā* in Asia unless women who want to lead a spiritual life have the means to do it: an education in the *dhamma*, economic support

and acceptance by monks, laity, and government. Ironically enough, it is the nuns who always support and look after the chores at monasteries. For example, at Mingun and Sagaing Hills the nuns offer rice and curry to the monks in their morning alms round. All the chores of the Mingun Tipitaka University are done by the nuns. If nuns are to get support, it should come from the monks first because they are like their immediate family or protective fathers to the nuns. Myawaddy Learning Centre flourishes partly because of the encouragement they get from the venerable monk Bodhi Thathoung Sayadaw.² The bus which ushers the nuns to the monasteries for studies is partially donated by this *sayadaw*. He got this bus from a Japanese donor and handed over to the Myawaddy nuns. This is an example of how monks can help nuns to be prosperous.

As a larger unit, Buddhist institutions and Buddhist society can help elevate the status of nuns. Capable nuns should be allowed to study at Buddhist universities. In the “Buddha-nature” theory, the Buddha points out that all human beings, both male and female, possess the same Buddha nature – the original nature of pureness, calmness, and brightness, the potential to attain enlightenment. There is also no historical evidence that female monastic order has caused any kind of regression or shame to Buddhism. In the historical development of *Thīlashin*, we have learned about the nuns who have written treaties on religious practice, who have initiated social work, and even who have defused the political tension of the country, and thus

2 The venerable monk of ‘A thousand Bo Tree Monastery’ which is situated near Monywa. He is very powerful and much respected around Monywa and Mandalay areas. His monastic compound has more than a thousand banyan trees. He is famous for his meditation for *samādhi* and famous as the monk who gets most donations and does most donations. He has built gigantic statues of Buddha which is supposed to be the largest recycling Buddha in Burma. He also has constructed a high school for the village, a hospital for monks. At present he is building a colossal statue of standing Buddha.

contributed to both the religion and the society. So, there is no reason to be anxious that women's ordination would cause decay to the religion. It is high time to change the negative attitudes toward female monastic orders.

As far as the Buddhist academe is concerned, they can educate the laity so that the latter will accept the nuns' communities willingly. Buddhist literature can be studied from different perspective and should highlight the achievement, the commitment and the significance of the nuns' religious orders. The Buddhist scriptures themselves being a great wealth of wisdom, in the life stories of Buddha, in the monastic rules, and in the philosophical doctrines, Buddha's sacrifices for mankind, his leadership ability, his compassion towards the weak are models for us to learn by imitation.

Further studies can also be done from the social dimension. Questions to be answered are: What are the societal hindrances to the nuns' involvement in social work? How much culture has influenced the society to have such a negative attitude to working for social welfare? Society is changing, the world is changing and the nuns' community cannot stand against the changing tendency. How should we change, to which direction we should move, what are the necessary preparations, how to implement the changes?

It is hoped that an order of educated women who would dedicate themselves to helping other women with their personal and family problems and to alleviating the social problems of poverty, illiteracy, and illness will emerge in the new millennium. On the other hand, if this kind of nun order cannot be materialized, the only hope we have for the establishment of civil society in Burma will trickle down the drain.

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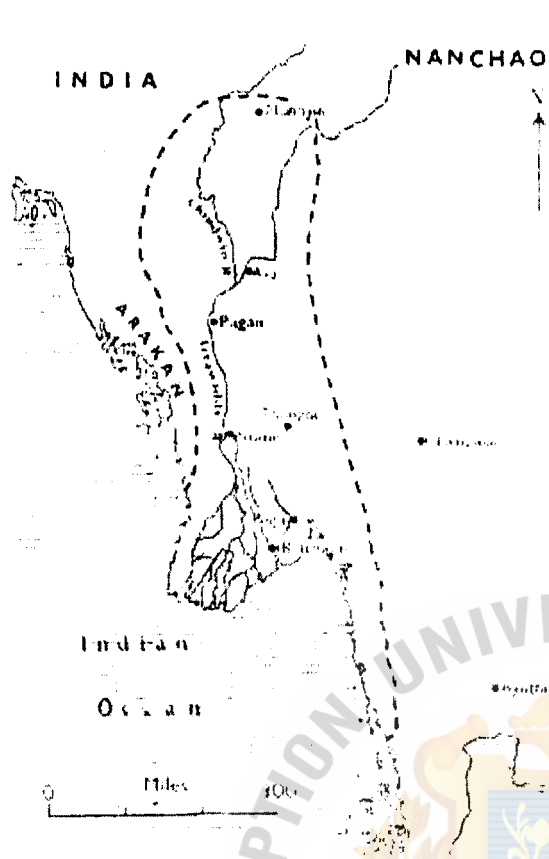
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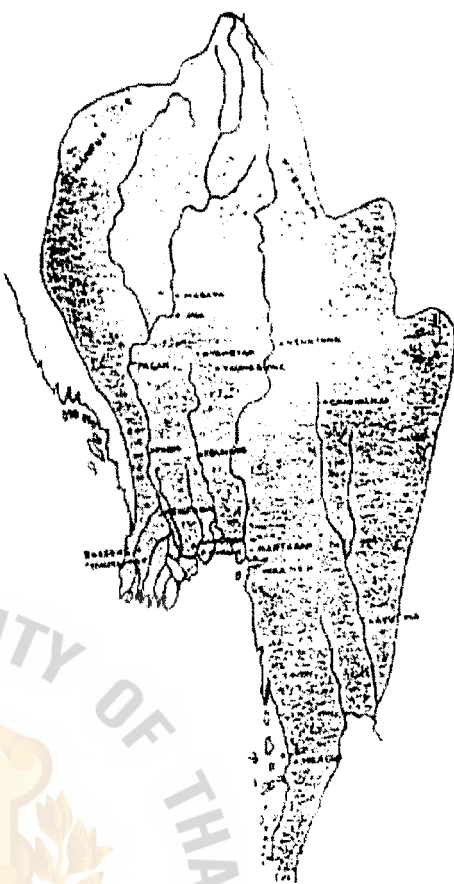
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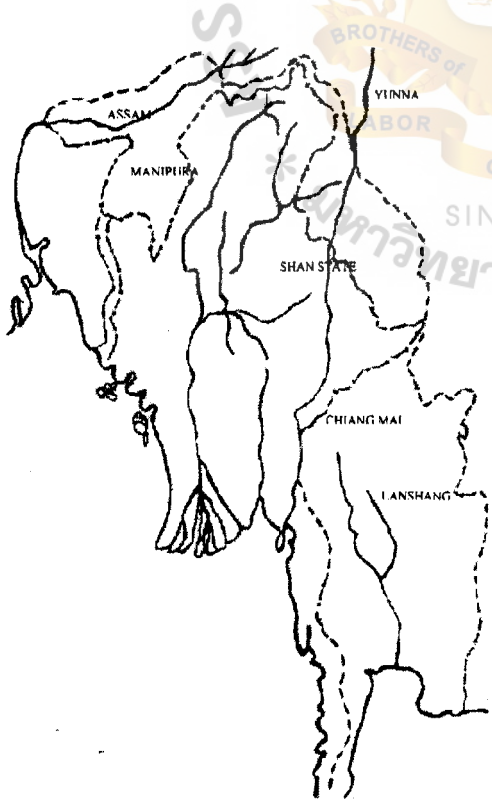




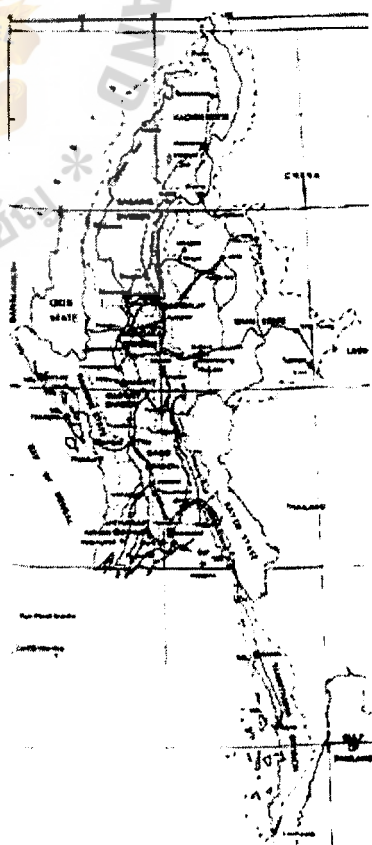
Picture (1). THE KINGDOM OF PAGAN
(AD 1044-1287)



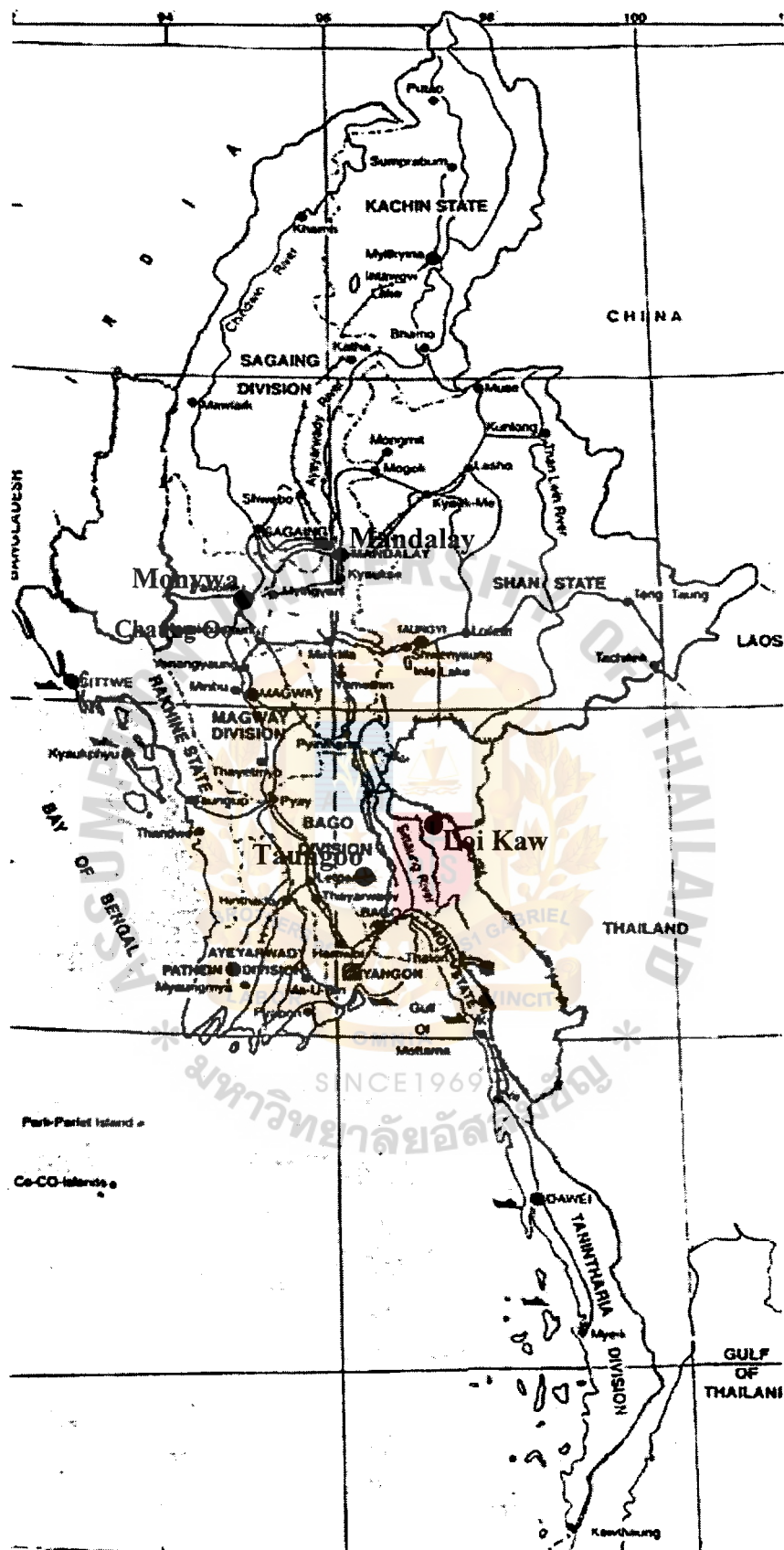
Picture (2). BURMA UNDER THE TOUNGOO DYNASTY (1531-1752)
also known as the Ava Period (1364 AD- 1752AD)



Picture (3). BURMA UNDER THE KOBANG DYNASTY
(1752 AD- 1885 AD)



Picture (4). CONTEMPORARY BURMA



**Locations of Aye Yeik Mon Convent for the girls.
"Taungoo, Mandalay, Loi Kaw, Chaung Oo"**

ဤမေးခွန်းများသည် သီလရှင်တို့၏ဘဝကို လေ့လာနိုင်ရန်အတွက်သာ ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ သို့ဖြစ်ပါ၍ အမည်ကို ဖော်ပြရန်မလိုပါ။ ကိုယ်ပိုင်ဆုံးဖြတ်ချက်နှင့် ဖြေဆိုရန် ဖြစ်ပါသည်။ မေးခွန်းအားလုံးကို ကြိုးစားဖြေဆိုရန် ပန်ကြားအပ်ပါသည်။ ကျေးဇူးအတူးတင်ရှိပါသည်။

၁။ နောက်မိသ မှီဝဲ:

က။ ယခုအသက်ဘယ်လောက် ရှိပါပြီလဲ။ ၃၅-၅၆

ခ။ မည်သည့်အသက်ရွယ်တွင် သီလရှင် ဖြစ်ခဲ့ပါသလဲ။ ၁၀-၂၆

ဂ။ ယခင်ကသီလရှင်ဝတ်ဖူးပါသလား။ ဘယ်နှစ်ကြိမ်ဝတ်ဖူးပါသလဲ။ တစ်ကြိမ်တည်းသာ ဝတ်ဖူးပါသည်။

ဃ။ ယခုအကြိမ်တွင် သီလရှင်အဖြစ်ဘယ်လောက်ကြာ ကြာ ပြီပြီလဲ။ ၂၅-၅၆

င။ သီလရှင်ဝတ်ရန် အချိန် ဘယ်လောက်ကြာကြာ စဉ်းစားခဲ့ရသလဲ။

စ။ သီလရှင် တသက်လုံးဝတ်ရန် ဆုံးဖြတ်ပြီးပါပြီလား။ မဆုံးဖြတ်ရသေးပါ။

ဆ။ မိဘများက သင့်အား သီလရှင်ဝတ်ခွင့်ပြုရန် အစကတည်းက သဘောတူပါသလား။ သဘောတူပါသည်။

ဇ။ သီလရှင်မဝတ်ခင်က ဘာအလုပ်လုပ်ကိုင်ပါသလဲ။

ဈ။ မိဘများ လက်ရှိဘာအလုပ်အကိုင်လုပ်ပါသလဲ။ စတုဂ္ဂါသုတ္တံ

ည။ သင့်တွင် ညီအစ်ကိုမောင်နှမဘယ်နှစ်ယောက်ရှိပါသလဲ။ ၃-ယောက်

ဋ။ မိသားစုနှင့်အမျိုးမျိုးများတွင် သာသနာ့ဝန်ထမ်း (ဘုန်းတော်ကြီး/ သီလရှင်) ရှိပါသလား။ ရှိလျှင်မည်သို့တော်စပ်သည်ကိုဖော်ပြပေးပါ။ ၁၀၀၀ မြောက် သီလရှင် သာသနာ့ကြီး

ဌ။ သီလရှင်မဝတ်ခင်က သင်၏ပညာအရည်အချင်း ဘယ်လောက်ရှိပါသလဲ။ မူလတန်း

ဍ။ ယခုပညာအရည်အချင်းဘယ်လောက်ရှိပါသလဲ။ ၁၅၅၀ စတုရန်း

ဎ။ သင့်အား ထောက်ပံ့မည်သူ ရှိပါသလား။ ဤပါ သည်။

က။ လူနေအိမ် သို့မဟုတ် သီလရှင်ကျောင်းတွင် နေထိုင်ပါသလား။ သီလရှင် ကျောင်း တွင် နေပါသည်။

က။ သင်၏ ယခုလိပ်စာကို ဖော်ပြပေးပါ။

၂။ သီလရှင်ဝတ်ရခြင်းအကြောင်းရင်း

အဖြေတစ်ခုထက်ပို၍ ရွေးချယ်နိုင်ပါသည်။ ရွေးချယ်သော အဖြေများကို သင်၏ ဦးစားပေး အစီအစဉ် အရ
၁။ ၂။ ၃။ ၄။ ၅ အစရှိသဖြင့် အမှတ်စဉ်တပ်ပေးပါ။

က။ အထုံ (ရှေးဘဝရေစက်) ပါလာ၍

ခ။ မိဘများကအားပေး၍ ၁။

ဂ။ ကုသိုလ်ရရန်

ဃ။ နောင်ဘဝကောင်းစားရန် ၂။

င။ ယခုဘဝတွင် အဓိပ္ပါယ်ရှိရှိ နေထိုင်ရန်

စ။ အပယ်တံခါးပိတ်ရန် ၃။

ဆ။ သံသရာ မှ လွတ်မြောက်ရန်

ဇ။ နိဗ္ဗာန်ရောက်ရန်

ဈ။ ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာပြည်တွင်းတွင်ပြန်ပွားရန်

ည။ ပြည်ပသို့ဗုဒ္ဓသာသနာပြုသွားရန်

ဋ။ ဘာသာရေးဆောင်ရွက်သူတစ်ဦး၏ ဘဝကိုလျှောက်လှမ်းရန်

ဌ။ သီလရှင်ဘဝသည်အခြားဘဝများထက်ပိုကောင်းကြောင်း ရွေးချယ်ပြီး၍

ဍ။ အခြားအကြောင်းအရာများ (ပြည့်စုံစွာ ဖော်ပြပေးပါ)

၃။ လူဝတ်ကြောင့် စွန့်ခွာခြင်းအကြောင်းရင်း

အဖြေတစ်ခုထက်ပို၍ ရွေးချယ်နိုင်ပါသည်။ ရွေးချယ်သော အဖြေများကို သင်၏ ဦးစားပေး အစီအစဉ် အရ
၁။ ၂။ ၃။ ၄။ ၅ အစရှိသဖြင့် အမှတ်စဉ်တပ်ပေးပါ။

က။ ကျောင်းစာတွင်မဖြစ်ထွန်း၍

ခ။ မိသားစုဘဝအဆင်မပြေ၍

ဂ။ အိမ်ထောင်မပြုလို၍

ဃ။ လင်သားသေဆုံး၍

င။ သားသမီး(များ)ဆုံးပါး၍

စ။ လုပ်ငန်းခွင်တွင် (သို့မဟုတ်) စီးပွားရေးလုပ်ငန်းတွင် အဆင်မပြေ၍

ဆ။ ဘဝရည်မှန်းချက် မအောင်မြင်၍

ဇ။ လူကောင်လောက (သို့မဟုတ်) ဘဝကို စိတ်ကုန်၍

ဈ။ အပြစ်လောက(သို့မဟုတ်) လူအများနှင့် မဆက်ဆံလို၍

ည။ ဆင်းရဲ၍

ဋ။ ကျန်းမာရေးမကောင်း၍

ဌ။ အသက်ကြီးလာ၍

ဍ။ ကျောမောက်နောက်ခံမရှိ၍

က။ အခြားအကြောင်းအရာများ (ပြည့်စုံစွာ ဖော်ပြပေးပါ)

၄။ သီလရှင်တစ်ဦးအနေဖြင့် ဘဝမျှော်မှန်းချက်များ

အဖြေတစ်ခုထက်ပို၍ရွေးချယ်နိုင်ပါသည်။ ရွေးချယ်သော အဖြေများကို သင်၏ ဦးစားပေး အစီအစဉ်အရ

၁။ ၂။ ၃။ ၄။ ၅။ အစရှိသဖြင့် အမှတ်စဉ်တပ်ပေးပါ။

က။ အဆင့်မြင့် ပညာကို သင်ယူနိုင်ရန်

၁။ ခ။ ဗုဒ္ဓစာပေများကိုလေ့လာနိုင်ရန် (ပဋိပတ္တိသာသနာ)

၂။ ဂ။ တရားဘာဝနာပွားများရန် (ပဋိပတ္တိသာသနာ)

ဃ။ ကမ္မဋ္ဌာန်းနည်းပြဆရာဖြစ်လာရန်

င။ ကျောင်းတိုက်ပိုင်ဆရာကြီးဖြစ်လာရန်

စ။ ဓမ္မစရိယဖြစ်လာရန်

၃။ ဆ။ သာသနာပြုပုဂ္ဂိုလ်တစ်ဦးဖြစ်လာရန်

ဇ။ ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာဝင်တစ်ဦး၏ တာဝန်များကျေပွန်ရန်

ဈ။ အခြားအကြောင်းအရာများ (ပြည့်စုံစွာ ဖော်ပြပါ)

၅။ သီလရှင်တစ်ဦးအနေဖြင့် လူမှုရေးလုပ်ငန်းများကို ဆောင်ရွက်လိုပါသလား။

၅။ (၁) အကယ်၍ ဆောင်ရွက်လိုလျှင် မည်သည့်လုပ်ငန်းများကို လုပ်ဆောင်လိုပါသနည်း။ အဖြေတစ်ခုထက် ပို၍ ရွေးချယ်နိုင်ပါသည်။ ရွေးချယ်သော အဖြေများကို သင်၏ ဦးစားပေး အစီအစဉ်အရ ၁။ ၂။ ၃။ ၄။ ၅။ အစ ရှိသဖြင့် အမှတ်စဉ်တပ်ပေးပါ။

ဆောင်ရွက်ရန် မလိုပါ။

က။ မိဘမဲ့ကလေးများအား ပြုစုစောင့်ရှောက်ရန်

၁။ ခ။ ကလေးများအား စာပေသင်ကြားပေးရန်

ဂ။ လူကြီးများအား စာပေသင်ကြားပေးရန်

ဃ။ လူနာများအား ဆေးဝါးကုသပြုစုပေးရန်

င။ အကူအညီလိုသူများကို ကူညီရန်

စ။ အသက်ကြီးဘွားများကို ကူညီရန်

ည။ အခြားလုပ်ငန်းများ (ပြည့်စုံစွာ ဖော်ပြပေးပါ)

၅ (၂)။ အကယ်၍ သီလရှင်တစ်ဦးအနေဖြင့် လူမှုလုပ်ငန်းများကို မလုပ်ဆောင်လိုပါက

အဘယ်ကြောင့် မလုပ်လိုပါသနည်း။

အဖြေတစ်ခုထက်ပို၍ ရွေးချယ်နိုင်ပါသည်။ ရွေးချယ်သော အဖြေများကို သင်၏ ဦးစားပေး အစီအစဉ်အရ

၁။ ၂။ ၃။ ၄။ ၅။ အစရှိသဖြင့် အမှတ်စဉ်တပ်ပေးပါ။

က။ သီလရှင်သည် အပြင်လောကနှင့် ဆက်ဆံရန် မလိုပါ။

၁။ ခ။ သီလရှင်၏ အလုပ်သည် ဗုဒ္ဓစာပေများကို လေ့လာရန်သာ ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

၂။ ဂ။ သီလရှင်၏ အလုပ်သည် ဝိပဿနာတရားအား ထုတ်ရန်သာ ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

ဃ။ သီလရှင်သည် ဘုန်းတော်ကြီးများ၏ ဝေယျာဝစ္စ လုပ်ငန်းများကို ဆောင်ရွက်ပေးရန်သာ ဖြစ်ပါသည်။

င။ အခြားအကြောင်းအရာများ (ပြည့်စုံစွာ ဖော်ပြပေးပါ)

၆။ သီလရှင်၏ နေ့စဉ်လုပ်ငန်းများ

- က။ တစ်နေ့လျှင် ဘယ်နှစ်ကြိမ် ဘုရားဝတ်ပြုပါသနည်း။ ၃-ကြိမ်
- ခ။ တစ်နေ့လျှင် ဘယ်လောက်ကြာကြာ ဘုရားဝတ်တတ်ပါသနည်း။ ၁၀-မိနစ်ခန့်
- ဂ။ တစ်နေ့လျှင် ဘယ်လောက်ကြာကြာ စာပေလေ့လာပါသနည်း။ ၃-လက်မခန့်
- ဃ။ တစ်နေ့လျှင် ဘယ်လောက်ကြာကြာ တရားထိုင်ပါသနည်း။ ၁-နာရီခန့်
- င။ တစ်နေ့လျှင် ဘယ်လောက်ကြာကြာ ကျောင်းတိုက်တာဝန်များကို ဆောင်ရွက်ပါသနည်း။ ၁-နာရီခန့်
- စ။ တစ်နေ့လျှင် ကိုယ်ပိုင်အချိန် ဘယ်လောက်ကြာကြာ ရရှိပါသနည်း။ ၁-နာရီခန့်
- ဆ။ ဆန်ခဲ (အလှူခဲ) ထွက်ရလျှင် အချိန်ဘယ်လောက်ကြာကြာ ယူရပါသနည်း။ ၁-နာရီခန့်
- ဇ။ တစ်ပတ်လျှင် ဘယ်နှစ်ကြိမ် ဆန်ခဲထွက်ရပါသလဲ။ ၁-ပတ်ကြိမ်
- ဇူ။ တစ်ကြိမ် ဆန်ခဲ (အလှူခဲ) ထွက်လျှင် အလှူဘယ်လောက် လက်ခံရရှိပါသနည်း။ ၁-နာရီခန့်

ဆန်	အခြားပစ္စည်း	ငွေ

၇။ သီလရှင်အတွက် ဖျော်မွေ့ပါသလား။ အဖြေတစ်ခုကို အမှန်ခြစ် (✓) ပြပါ။

	အလွန် ဖျော်ပါသည်။	အသင့်အတင့် ဖျော်ပါသည်။	မဖျော်ပါ။
က။ ခန္ဓာကိုယ် ချပ်ပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ ဖျော်မွေ့ပါသည်။			
ခ။ စိတ်အာရုံခံစားမှုပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ ဖျော်မွေ့ပါသည်။			
ဂ။ ပညာဉာဏ်ပိုင်းဆိုင်ရာ ဖျော်မွေ့ပါသည်။			
ဃ။ လောကုတ္တရာ အာသာရေးဆိုင်ရာ ကျေနပ် ဖျော်မွေ့ပါသည်။			

QUESTIONNAIRE

These questions are merely to study the lives of nuns. So, you don't need to mention your name. Please answer with your own decision. Try to answer all the questions. Thank you very much.

1. Background information

- a. What is your present age?
- b. At what age did you become a nun?
- c. Have you been a nun before? If so, how many times?
- d. How long have you been a nun this time?
- e. How long did it take you to decide to become a nun?
- f. Have you decided to become a nun for good?
- g. Do your parents agree initially to let you become a nun?
- h. What is your profession before becoming a nun?
- i. What is your parents' occupation or business?
- j. How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- k. Do you have any Religious persons (monks or nuns) among your family members or relatives?
- l. What was your education before becoming a nun?
- m. What is your education now?
- n. Do you live in your own residence or stay in a nunnery or monastery?
- o. What is your present address?
- p. Do you have supporter?

2. What are your reasons for ordination?

You can choose more than one answer. Write No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. in order of importance according to your choice.

- a. predisposition or propensity (root of merit from the past)
- b. encouragement by parents
- c. as meritorious deed
- d. for a better life in the life-after
- e. for a more meaningful life in this present life
- f. closure of the path to hell
- g. escape from samsara
- h. attaining enlightenment or Nibbana
- i. propagation of Buddhism in the country
- j. as missionary of Buddhism overseas
- k. leading a religious life
- l. a chosen life preferable to others
- m. others (please specify)

3. What are your reasons for Renunciation?

You can choose more than one answer. Write No.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. in order of importance according to your choice.

- a. failure in school
- b. failure in family life
- c. avoidance of marriage
- d. death of spouse
- e. death of son(s) or daughter(s)
- f. failure in business or at work
- g. failure in life
- h. disappointment with people and/ or life
- i. cutting oneself off from all human contacts and / or outside world
- j. poverty or economic difficulties
- k. sickness
- l. old age
- m. no supporters
- n. others (please specify)

4. What are your expectations as a nun?

You can choose more than one answer. Write No. 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. in order of importance according to your choice.

- a. to prove higher education
- b. to study the teaching of the Buddha (patiyatt)
- c. to enjoy meditation (patipatt)
- d. to become meditation master
- e. to become abbers
- f. to become teacher of Dhamma
- g. to be Dhamma propagator
- h. to fulfil assignment of a Buddhist
- i. others (please specify)

5. As a nun, do you want to take part in social work?

5. (i) If yes, what kinds of social work would you like to perform?

You can choose more than one answer. Write No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. in order of importance according to your choice.

- a. to look after orphans
- b. to teach children
- c. to teach adults
- d. to look after and cure the sick
- e. to help needy people
- f. to help the aged

g. others (please specify)

5. (ii) **If no, why don't you want to do social work?**

You can choose more than one answer. Write No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. in order of importance according to your choice.

- a nun has nothing to do with the outside world
- a nun's business is just to study the teaching of the Buddha (patiyatt)
- a nun's business is just to do meditation (patipatt)
- a nun is only to serve the monks
- others (please specify)

6. **What is your daily routine?**

- How many times a day do you do chanting?
- How long do you spend a day for chanting?
- How long do you study a day?
- How long do you meditate a day?
- How long do you spend a day to attend to the chores of the nunnery or monastery?
- How long do you have for yourself a day?
- If you have to go for alms, how long does it take you?
- How many times a week do you have to go for alms?
- How much do you get at each alms round?

Rice	others	money

7. **Are you happy with your life as a nun?**

Please tick (✓) your choice.

- physically contented
- emotionally contented
- intellectually contented
- spiritually contented

Very happy	to some extent	not happy



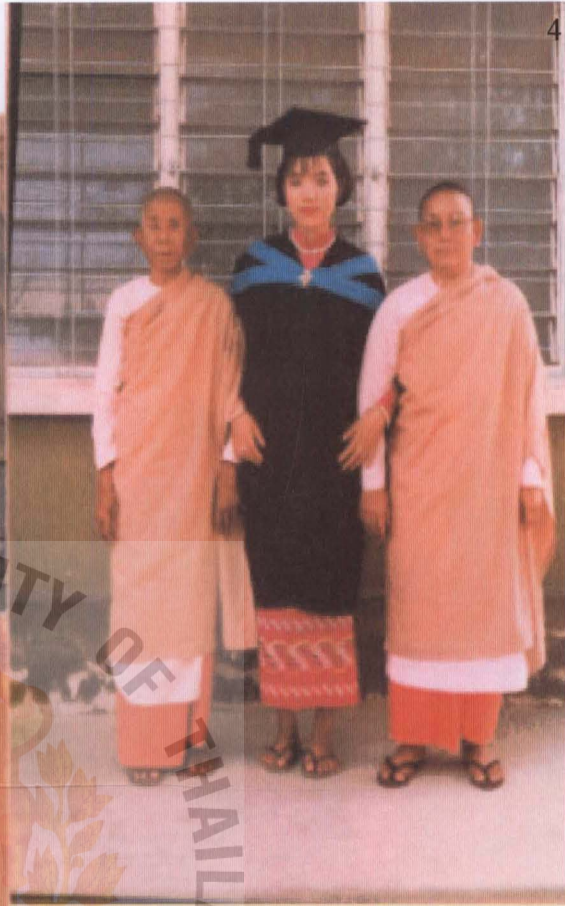
1



2



3



4

Aye Yeik Mon
(Convent for the Welfare of
Underprivileged Girls)

1. The Main Gate
2. Children ready to school
3. A Donation Ceremony
4. The Abbesses:

Left: Daw Khema Nandi
Middle: Ma Pele (a product of
the convent, graduated from
Mandalay University in 1995,
now a primary-school teacher)
Right: Daw Nanda Theri



1



4



2



3

- Myawaddy Learning Centre
1. Nuns in procession towards the earth-breaking ceremony
 2. The Construction site of a three-storey nunnery
 3. After the ordination ceremony
 4. The Abbesses:
Left: Daw Panna Waddy
Right: Daw Yupa Theingi



1



3



2

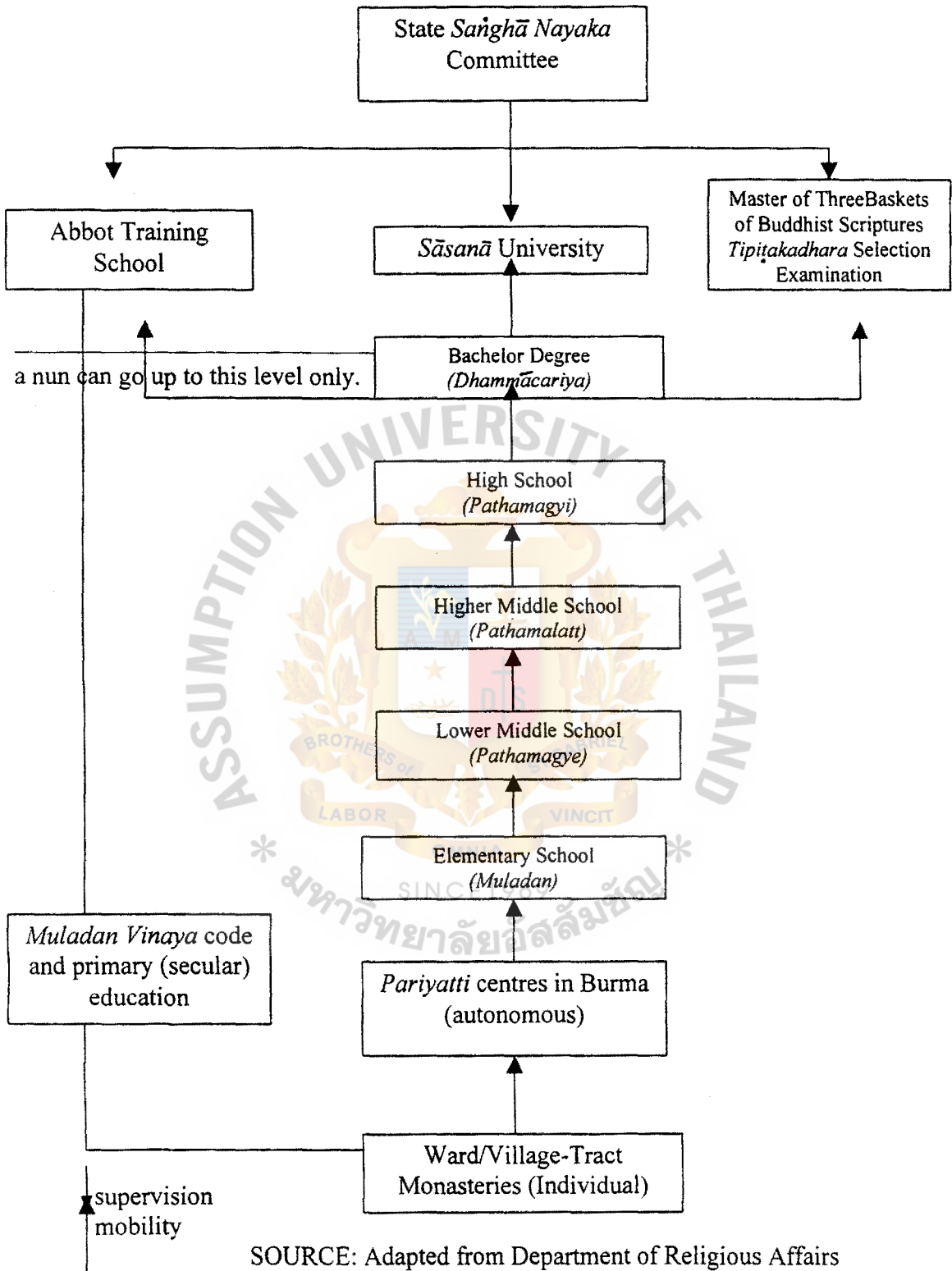


4

Maha Bodhi Vipassana Meditation Centre

1. The Front Gate
2. The Rear Gate
3. Maha Bodhi Pagoda (117 feet in height)
which is situated in the centre
4. Daw Cittaya, the head teacher

The Pariyatti Education plan *



SOURCE: Adapted from Department of Religious Affairs
Myanmar *Pariyatti Pyianyayei Simamkain* (1982, annex chart).

* adapted from Tin Maung Maung Than in Trevor Ling (ed.) *Buddhist Trends in Southeast Asia*, 1991, p36.



ပြည်ထောင်စု ဆိုရှယ်လစ်သမ္မတ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်

ဗဟိုဘဏ္ဍာ သိလရှင်များ၏

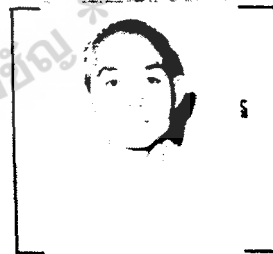
သာသနာ့နွယ်ငွေ မှတ်တမ်း

စာအုပ် အမှတ်စဉ်.....၀.၇.၆.၄.၄.....

အမှတ်စဉ် ၅/မရန(သိ)/ ၀၀၁၆၁

တိုက်တွန်းချက်

- ၁။ ဤမှတ်တမ်းကို အမြဲဆောင်ထား၍ စာရင်းအရ သက်ဆိုင်ရာက မေးမြန်းလာလျှင် ထုတ်ပြခြင်းဖြင့် သိလရှင်စစ်မှန်ကြောင်း ဂုဏ်ယူပါရန်။
- ၂။ မည်သည့်နေ့ရက်မဆို ဗုဒ္ဓပြတ်စွာ၏ အဆုံးအမကို ဦးထိပ် တင်၍ တွေ့မြင်သူများ၏ လေးစားမှုကို ခံယူကာ သာသနာ တော်၏ အသရေကို ဆောင်ပါရန်။
- ၃။ ပရိယတ်ပဋိပတ်ကို ကျင့်ကြံကြိုးကုတ် အားထုတ်ခြင်းအားဖြင့် သာသနာ့ကိစ္စများကိုသာ ဆောင်ရွက်ခြင်းအားဖြင့် သာသနာ တိုးတက်ရေးကို အားပေးပါရန်။



(အသက် ၁၂-နှစ်၊ ၁၂-နှစ်အထက်)

ဒေါ်ပညာဝင်း

ကိုဗိုလ်ချုပ်မှူး ဦးလှိုင်၏ လက်မှတ်

သီလရှင်

၁။ သို့ သီလရှင်

၂။ ယခုသီတင်းသုံးရာသီ ပြည်နယ်/တိုင်း
..... ဧရာဝတီ ဧရာဝတီ/

၃။ မွေးသက္ကရာဇ် ပြည်နယ်/တိုင်း
..... ဧရာဝတီ ဧရာဝတီ/

၄။ မွေးသက္ကရာဇ် လက်မှတ်/ရပ်ကွက်

၅။ မည်သည့်နိုင်ငံသား လက်မှတ်

၆။ အမျိုးသား/နိုင်ငံခြားသား မှတ်ပုံတင်နံပါတ် (ဒွိလျင်ပေါ်ပြန်)
.....

၇။ သီလရှင်ဖြစ်ရာသီ ပြည်နယ်/တိုင်း
..... ဧရာဝတီ ဧရာဝတီ/

၈။ သီလရှင်ဖြစ်ရာသီ သီလရှင်
..... သီလရှင် သီလရှင်

၉။ မူလ ဆရာတော် ပြည်နယ်/တိုင်း
..... သီလရှင် သီလရှင်

၁၀။ သီလရှင် သီလရှင်

၁၁။ အမျိုးသား/နိုင်ငံခြားသား သီလရှင်

၁၂။ မွေးသက္ကရာဇ် သီလရှင်

၁၃။ အမျိုးသား/နိုင်ငံခြားသား သီလရှင်

၁၄။ မှတ်ပုံတင် သီလရှင်

၁၅။ သီလရှင် သီလရှင်

၁၆။ သီလရှင် သီလရှင်

၁၇။ မှတ်ပုံတင် သီလရှင်

ဤ ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာ့အဖွဲ့မှ မှတ်တမ်းကို
ကိုင်ဆောင်သော သီလရှင်
သည် ဆရာတော်၏ ကျောင်း/သီလရှင်ဆရာကြီး၏ ကျောင်းတွင်
၁၃ လဆ ရက်နေ့မှ
စပြီး ပေးဆောင်လျက်ရှိ၍ အတက်ပါ ရေးသွင်းချက်များ မှန်ကန်
ကြောင်း ဆရာတော် ကိုယ်တိုင်/သီလရှင်ဆရာကြီး ကိုယ်တိုင်
လက်မှတ်ရေးထိုးလိုက်သည်။

လက်မှတ်
မူလ ကျောင်းထိုင်ဆရာတော်
(သို့မဟုတ်)
မူလ သီလရှင်ဆရာကြီး
ဧရာဝတီ/
ကျောင်း/တိုက်
ကျေးရွာ/ရပ်ကွက်
မြို့
ပြည်နယ်/တိုင်း
၆

မှန်ကန်ကြောင်းစစ်ဆေးပြီး

.....
ဥက္ကဋ္ဌ ဆရာတော် လက်မှတ်
မြို့နယ် သံဃာ့ဃာက ကရံ
မူရင်း
..... ပြည်နယ်/တိုင်း
.....
(ရက်စွဲ၊ လ၊ နံပါတ်-၁၁၁၁)
ပြည်နယ်/တိုင်း သာသနာ့ရေးမှူး/မြို့နယ်ဦးစီးမှူး
လွှတ်မှုကြီးကြပ်ရေးမှူး
မူရင်း
..... ပြည်နယ်/တိုင်း

ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏
သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်းနှင့် ပတ်သက်သော
စည်းကမ်းချက်များ

- ၁။ ဤဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်းကို သေချာစွာ သိမ်းဆည်းထားရန် လိုအပ်သည့်အပြင် ခရီးသွား လာသောအခါ ယူဆောင်၍ တာဝန်အရ သက်ဆိုင်သူများက သန့်ရှင်းလျှင် လျက်ပြ ချုပ်မည်။
- ၂။ ဤဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်းကို လွှဲပြောင်းခြင်း မပြုရပါ။
- ၃။ ဤဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်း ပျောက်ဆုံးလျှင် ဆော်လည်းကောင်း၊ မထင်မရှား ပြုစုလျှင် သော်လည်းကောင်း အသစ် လဲလှယ်ထုတ်ပေးရန် သက်ဆိုင်ရာ မြို့နယ် သံဃာ့ဃာနအဖွဲ့သို့ အကြောင်းကြားရမည်။
- ၄။ ဤဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာသီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်းပေါ်ရှိ အမှတ်အသားများကို ပြင်ဆင် ပြောင်းလဲ ရေးသားခြင်း မပြုရပါ။

- ၅။ သီလရှင်တပါးသည် ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင်မှတ်တမ်း တခုသာလျှင် ကိုင်ဆောင်ခွင့် ရှိပါသည်။
- ၆။ သီတင်းသုံးရာဌာန ပြောင်းရွှေ့ လိုလျှင် လိုအပ်ချက်များရေးသွင်း ခိုင်ရန် လက်မှတ်ချုပ်ချုပ်သူ ဆရာတော်၊ သို့မဟုတ် မူလ သီလရှင် ဆရာကြီးထံ လျှောက်ထား၍ ပုံစံတူင်ပါရှိသည့်အတိုင်း ပြည့်စုံစွာ ဆောင်ရွက်ရပါမည်။
- ၇။ အခြားနေရာသစ်သို့ ရောက်သောအခါ ဤ ဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင် များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်းပေါ်တွင် လိုအပ်သော မှတ် ချက်များ ရေးသွင်းနိုင်ရန် နေရာသစ်ရှိ အပ်ချုပ်သူ ဆရာတော်၊ သို့မဟုတ် သီလရှင် ဆရာကြီးထံ လျှောက်ထား၍ ပုံစံတူင်ပါရှိ သည့်အတိုင်း ပြည့်စုံစွာ ဆောင်ရွက်ရပါမည်။
- ၈။ ကိုင်ဆောင်သူ ကွယ်လွန်လျှင် ဤဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်းကို သက်ဆိုင်ရာ မြို့နယ်သံဃာ့ဃာန အဖွဲ့သို့ တာဝန်ရှိပုဂ္ဂိုလ်က ပြန်လည်အပ်နှံရပါမည်။
- ၉။ လဝက်လဲခဲ့သော် အမျိုးသား မှတ်တမ်းကမ်းတွင်း တုတ်ပေး ခိုင်ရန်အတွက် ဤဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်းကို လွှဲပြောင်းခြင်းမပြုရပါ။
- ၁၀။ ဤဗုဒ္ဓဘာသာ သီလရှင်များ၏ သာသနာနှယ်ဝင် မှတ်တမ်းသည် ခေတ္တခဏတစ်သော အချိန်အတွက် ရသလှ များနှင့် သက်ဆိုင်ခြင်း မရှိပါ။

Autobiography

Ms. Me Me Khine is a lecturer from Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Assumption University. She received her Bachelor degree in Arts majoring in English from the Institute of Education, Burma. She got a Diploma in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from the University of Sydney, Australia. She received the degree of Master of Philosophy specializing in English from University of Yangon, Burma, where she worked as a tutor (language instructor) in English Department. She joined Assumption University in 1993 and is currently teaching English to first year university students.



