

BUDDHISM IN COLONIAL MYANMAR (1886-1947)

SUMMARY of THESIS

Submitted to
Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University
(A Central University)
Lucknow



For the Award of Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
In
HISTORY

Submitted By:
Osadha Theri
Enrollment No. 531/17

Under the supervision of
Prof. S. Victor Babu
Head

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
SCHOOL FOR AMBEDKAR STUDIES
BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY
(A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)
VIDYA VIHAR, RAEBARELI ROAD, LUCKNOW-226 025 (U.P.), INDIA

2022

SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

BUDDHISM IN COLONIAL MYANMAR (1886-1947)

Buddhism is one of the world's religions that had been accepted in the world today. Founded by Gotama Buddha over 2600 years ago, Buddhism spread out of India after the 3rd century B.C with the help of Emperor Asoka soon after the 3rd Buddhist Council and Ven.Sona and Uttara led the mission to Thaton (then known as Suvannabhumi) in lower Myanmar (then known as Burma) and introduced Buddhism to the people so Buddhism has been flourishing in Myanmar since the time of Emperor Asoka.

Myanmar (then known as Burma) has a long history of Buddhism as one of the greatest religions in the world. Myanmar which is situated in South East Asia region has been known to the world as the Golden Land due to its religious monuments especially Pagodas gilded with gold plates. There is no village in Myanmar that does not have a monastery or a pagoda. Myanmar has been exercising Buddhism since the life time of the Gotama Buddha as recorded in the scripture.

From the time of the arrival of Buddhism till the end of Konbaung dynasty in 1885 the people of Myanmar has been exercising Buddhist way of life but the entire people and their religious belief have been lost under British Colonial period (1886-1947). There is a Pali sentence '*Raja padhanamsasanam*' which means Sasana, the teachings of the Buddha, relies on the kings. It directly points out that only if the kings, the rulers or the governments believe in Buddhism, they surely provide and support Buddhism and the nation but if the rulers were not Buddhists they surely will not favor to the belief of the people in that country for Buddhism has nothing to do with them and they will do only the welfare of themselves.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF STUDY

The study is primarily based on archival sources. At one level, it reviews why the British expansionists want to occupy other sovereignty as their land and on other level study is British men's attitude on Myanmar people and Buddhism, coinciding with scholars' books and point of view on that historical events. In short, the study is basically a critical historiographical document on the British' reign, which is not consider or account for public of mother's country.

The study is not a narrative of history of Theravada Buddhism rather attempt has been made to explore how socio-economic and cultural process of Myanmar intertwined with Buddhism. In other words, this study is an ethico-religious-historical study of religion in Myanmar. By using the similar framework, the study attempts to document the evolution of Theravada Buddhism and its impact upon the Myanmar civilization in the past and present.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objects of the study are:

1. To shed light on the policy and the strategy carried out by the British invaders to Myanmar for making Theravada Buddhism as official religion in the country.
2. To emphasize the role of the spiritual leaders in the history of Myanmar.
3. To point out how the people paid their respect and supported to their religion and the Sangha.
4. To analyses social context in which Theravada Buddhism begin popular and influenced.
5. To explain the development of institutional form of Buddhism by focusing on monastic order and education.
6. To highlight how Theravada Buddhism influenced the life of Burmese people in their daily life.

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study starts with some assumptions. I had searched and made a reach about it. This study explores extensively on the historical books recorded and preserved in archive which is in Myanmar and England as much as I could reach. I had proved applicable books in this modern era Buddhism in Colonial Myanmar (1886-1947) contributed for unification of the people of Myanmar and its religion, Buddhism.

This study proposes that the united Samgha and the people significantly facilitated by Buddhism cemented the relationship between the Samgha and the people at one level. Buddhism in Colonial Myanmar attempted to create Myanmar society based upon the strict principles of Theravada Buddhism. This study also proposes that Buddhism had to encounter the difficulties among the British rulers and their policies formulated to the monastic system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on historical method. Descriptive and interpretative methods were also applied. In addition, historical narration and critical evaluation are being used. The original sources written mainly in Burmese language as well as English are applied and historical data have been gleaned as possible to reach our knowledge. Apart from the original source's other methods such as comparative, historical, textual and scientific have been utilized for the present work and rational thinking has been applied to clarify the facts. All the collected data have been justified.

ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK

CHAPTER- I THE HISTORY OF BUDDHISM UPTO BRITISH COLONIZATION

In Chapter one, as an introduction, we traced the brief historical background of Burma from its inception up to the present day. Burma had been ruled several kings and several dynasties throughout the history but the British annexed the country and Burma lost her independence in 1885 after the Third Anglo-Burmese War.

In the pre-colonial period, education and religion were inextricably linked as the Theravada Buddhist monastic order and the Sangha served as the main educational institution for the natives. The emphasis of monastic education was placed largely on learning and reciting religious Pali scriptures that would help the boys develop skills required to eventually monks. Though the education was of a religious nature, the monastic schools ensured that Burma had a high literacy rate of about 60% as the majority of Burmese men were at least able to read and write their basic letters.

CHAPTER-II BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND BUDDHISM

In chapter two, we discussed the situation of Buddhism under British authority who did not believe Buddhism and what had happened during their annexation. The emotional feeling of annexation by the British made the people suffer as they lost everything even though they lived in their home. The well-known spiritual leader called Seebanni Sayadawa poem based on national spirit that echoed even today. What he said we lost our kings, our palace and sovereignty. In this age of nothing, it is better for us to die. The entire Burmese people believe that we are the Master as well as the Buddhists not the slave but now our bad luck came upon us. The Burmese kings were ardent patrons

of Buddhism and they were also great patrons of learning and culture since the kings and the subjects were embracing Buddhism because Buddhism is the heart of the people in social, politic, education, culture, literature and administration.

Soon after the country lost her independence, the role of the monks faded away little by little during colonial period. British colonial rule made for a new kind of society and a new kind of knowledge to go with it. Secular in character and oriented towards a career in colonial administration was provided by Christian mission schools. While the aim of the monastic education was to “teach the boys how to live but not merely how to make a living”, the modern schooling system based on western ideologies taught students skills that had market value. The British Government attempted the introduction of literary and scientific education. It intended to give students knowledge of various modern subjects.

The policy of religious neutrality adopted by British government made less the power and authority of Thathanapaing so Sir Charles Bernard invited Thathana-paing to come to Rangoon to grant his authority to the entire nation. When the Thathanapaing passed away, as adopted policy, the British government ignored to appoint new Thathanapaing. Within nine years after the passing away of Thathana-paing Taung Taw Sayadaw, many self-selected Thathanapaing happened among the community. Religion depended on the kings and that unity and harmony functions were totally ceased so we found that the British government ignored due to their policy.

CHAPTER-III THE SITUATION OF THE SANGHA IN COLONIAL PERIOD

The *Samgha* organization was headed by Thathanapaing (*Samgharaja*) whose power was supreme in affairs of religion in the time of the kings. The Thudhamma Council, the leaders of the Sangha, met under the chairmanship of the Thathanapaing every full moon day at the Thudhamma Hall to decide all cases and disputes pertaining to the affairs of the *Samgha* in the kingdom. The administration and control of the Samgha in the kingdom, the Thathanapaing in turn appointed a hierarchy of provincial and district heads called gainggyoke (local leader monks), gaingoke (deputy leader monks) and gainghtauk (assistant leader monks).

The Samgha has been preserved the scriptures since the Buddha passed away as the guide to the Eightfold Path leading to emancipation. The profession of maintaining the

Doctrine has given the Order an unparalleled position in the history of the Buddhist world.

Under the colonial rule, it was the *Sangha* and the Buddhist community leaders who promoted formal examinations but when the Pathamapyan was revived in 1895 it was only the state and the Sangha working together because the community leaders chose to confine themselves to the nongovernmental boards of examinations. After the independence, however, the three main players were involved together in promoting formal examinations as the way to revive and advance the *Buddhasasana*. A good example was the creation of a new board of examinations called the *Tipitakadhara* Selection Examinations.

CHAPTER-IV LIFE AND WORKS OF SOME BUDDHIST LEADERS

The spiritual leaders are none other than Buddhist monks who led the country in secular and spiritual sectors. Leaving all including their families, Buddhist monks renounced the world by following the foot step of their Master, the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha called *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* are termed *Pitaka* or Pali Texts or Pali Canons., The teachings kept handily in such separate baskets are then handed on from generation to generation till the present time. As mentioned earlier, the Pali canon has three *Pitaka: Sutta, Vinaya, and Abhidhammapitaka*. In the Theravada tradition the order of *Tipitaka* is given as *Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma*. It talks about various renowned Buddhist scholars and their contribution.

CHAPTER-V BUDDHIST MONKS AND LAY DEVOTEES AND MUTUAL OBLIGATIONS

Myanmar community was led by Spiritual Leaders for long history of Myanmar and the Spiritual Leaders were provided with the four requisites by Lay Devotees. The Spiritual Leaders and Lay Devotees have been performing reciprocal duties for the nation. By following the guidance of the Buddha stated in Sigalovada Sutta, we took our reciprocal duties and responsibilities and by establishing social and religious organizations, the monks and the people could endure the difficulties that they encountered.

CONCLUSION

The last chapter concludes the thesis in the way of findings. We found that Buddhist monasteries in Burma were the centers for education and administration of the entire people before British Colony. Buddhist monks taught every subject for the nation and students either boys or girls from all walks of life including the kings and hierarchy came to the monastery to study in the time of its emperors.

Buddhism under British Colony continued to impact on religion, socio-political spheres. Buddhism had been extremely changed within sixty-one years moving to downstream due to change of the rulers and the policy adopted by the British government. Losing the Kings who actively carried out the propagating of Buddhism created the changes among the Buddhism and the people in Burma.

We found that the British Government did not trust the Sangha and Thathanapaing although they appointed Taung Khwin Sayadaw as Thathanapaing, which was the supreme council of the Sangha. Thus, Buddhist monks and lay devotees tried to promote and propagate *ganthadhura*, learning and teaching the scripture and organized religious examinations as the kings performed for religion. The Sangha had to encounter many hardships and changed due to the lack of the kings who promoted and propagated Buddhism. The senior Venerable monks kept on performing their main duties at their respective monasteries even though they lost their kings to protect and propagate Buddhism in the country.