

# WOMEN IN BUDDHIST NUNNERY IN POST-COLONIAL MYANMAR (1948- 2017)

## SUMMARY of THESIS

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## SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

### WOMEN IN BUDDHIST NUNNERY IN POST-COLONIAL MYANMAR (1948-2017)

Myanmar community is bond to each other with Buddhist spirit for it is a strong Theravada Buddhist country in the world. Buddhist spirit is nothing but the four sublime states: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. From its inception, the country was led by spiritual leaders, the monks joining hand together with the kings throughout the history. Buddhist community is divided into three categories: Samgha, nuns and lay people. The first two are spiritual ones and the last one is secular. Due to secular-spiritual relationship, Myanmar community is significant its relation. Any organizations have been trying to promote the welfare of ones and others in society and the founders have to encounter many difficulties to survive. Some organizations in religious sectors have been disappeared due to several reasons and some tried to come to live as a new organization. They are living as new one but not the same standard as the previous society.

From the time of the arrival of Buddhism until the present day the people of Myanmar had been exercising fully Buddhist way of life. The present proposed work entitled **Women in Buddhist Nunnery in Post-Colonial Myanmar (1948-2017)** will focus on Buddhist nuns and their activities by tracing the historical background of the birth and development and it will be emphasized after independence in Myanmar and the nun organization is one of the religious institutions in Myanmar back in the Bagan dynasty.

The history of Buddhist nuns then known as *bhikkhuni* in *Pali* means female monks, the Order of female monk community (bhikkhuni Sangha). It can be traced from the

time of the Buddha permitted by the Buddha himself. There were four group followers or disciples (*cattaro parisa*) of the Buddha, namely: (1) *bhikkhu* (male monks), (2) *bhikkhuni* (female monks) (3) *upasaka* (male lay persons) and (4) *upasika* (female lay persons).

Among the four kinds of disciples, we wanted to emphasize that the women in our work can be considered as a lineage of the second category. These four categories are still existing in Myanmar, the strong Theravada Buddhist country but the existing nun community is not the same level, *bhikkhuni*, as the time of the Buddha because the Order of *Bhikkhuni* has been ceased since five hundred years after the passing away of the Buddha. The present nuns in Myanmar can be said that they are the part of the lineage of the ancient *bhikkhuni*.

The longest and civilized institution is the Order of Buddhist organization. It has been over 2600 years ago and still has been formed as a strong one in the Buddhist world. When a number of young men left their families to join into the Buddhist monastic order, the followers of the Brahmans blamed the Buddha by saying, “This *Samana Gotama* is on the path that deprives us of children; this *Samana Gotama* is on the path that destroys families”. So, we can consider that in the beginning, the Buddha and his male disciples encountered difficulties due to the traditional beliefs of a society dominated by Brāhmans in those days.

When we trace the birth of *Bhikkhuni* community, we have to see that the woman who led the Sakyan princess was none other than *Pajapati Gotami*, the foster mother of *Siddhatha Gotama*. It was she who appealed the Buddha to give her permission to go forth into the homeless life. This incident took place when the Buddha went to the Sakya country to reconcile the two groups; the Sakyans and Koliyans who were

quarrelling over the use of the water of the river *Rohini*. The Buddha refused, saying, “No, *Gotami*, do not wish for women to enter homeless life in this Doctrine and Discipline that has been taught by the *Tathgata*”. She was disappointed when she was refused but she made the same request on two other occasions, but the Buddha gave a negative answer each time.

On a later occasion, when the Buddha was residing in *Vesali*, *Maha-Pajapati Gotami* and a large group of sakyani ladies cut their hair, dressed themselves in ascetic clothes, and went to *Vesali*, travelling the long distance for more than three hundred kilometers on foot to show their profound determination. At the end of their journey, they gathered together weeping outside the gate of the place where the Buddha was residing. Seeing *Maha-Pajapati Gotami* and her group, Ven. *Ananda* made a new request on their behalf. This time, the Buddha gave permission to *Maha-Pajapati Gotami* to enter the homeless life on condition that she would accept the Eight Great Conditions called *atthagarudhamma*. When she heard these conditions, *Maha-Pajapati Gotami* was very happy and said that she would accept them with great joy, just as a young man or young woman would accept a bouquet of lotus or jasmine flowers on his or her head. The Buddha specified that the purpose of the Eight Great Conditions was to protect the community of Nuns and he had imposed them just as a man who was building a dyke would not want the water in the reservoir to overflow.

The Buddha knew that there would be other difficulties for women in a monastic institution especially their security. Even after the Community of Nuns was established, the security of its members was always a serious problem, especially in regions where there were few Buddhists. On several occasions, young nuns on their own were raped in deserted by ways, in forests, and even on boats. That is why, even later, after their community was well established, the nuns were restricted to living

only in areas where Buddhism was well established. It is therefore only to be expected that the Buddha would wait until there were a number of such safe areas before founding the Community of Nuns. The Buddha's initial refusal had not been based on considerations of the spiritual or intellectual capabilities of women but had rather been for other reasons, such as institutional problems: administration, security, etc.

Most of the women who came from the Sakyan country were from aristocratic families. Some of their servants, however, also became nuns. *Vaddesi*, for example, who had been *Maha-Pajapati Gotami's* servant, entered the religious life with her mistress and later became a well-known nun, Nuns like *Jenta Theri*, *Sumedha Theri*, and *Sela Theri* came from royal families. The nun Khema was the former wife of King *Bimbisara* of the Magadhans, the nun *Siha* was the niece of a *Vajjin* military leader, *Siha Senapati*.

The regulations were useful for the proper functioning of the Community, and for the welfare of each member of that community. Through its rules, the *Vinaya* indicates not only the duties but also the rights of the members of this monastic organization. Each nun had to be courteous, co-operative, and sensitive to the well-being of the other members. Thus, the rules were enacted according to the timeliness, necessity, comfort and welfare of the nuns. At the beginning of each rule of the code of discipline, the *Vinaya* indicates ten reasons why the disciplinary rules were laid down for instance, to protect the community, to comfort the community and so on.

Most of these ten reasons deal with social relationship among the nuns inside the Community. Only the fifth and sixth reasons are related progress. It is obvious that the main objective of the *Vinaya* rules was not the mental development of the nuns but their external behavior. Religious training for a nun, however, did not have as its

principal goal the observation of monastic rules or taking care of the monasteries; the nun's goal was to discipline the mind in order to attain the highest liberation. The things to be abstained from that are given in the Vinaya are only one aspect of monastic life and are given because abstaining from them is helpful in pursuing in the path of inner progress.

The Community of Nuns continued to prosper for many centuries. However, like the Community of Monks and other Buddhist institutions, the Community of Nuns eventually disappeared from the soil where it had originated as a result of various factors. As for the nuns of the Theravada school, their most important center was in Sri Lanka. According to Pali chronicles, *Sanghamitta* was a daughter of the Emperor Asoka (268-233 BC), and she came to Sri Lanka as part of a Buddhist mission organized by her father. She was also the younger sister of *Maha-Mahinda Thera*, who established Buddhism in this country in 247 B.C. They are both held in great veneration, even today. The first Ceylonese women to be attracted to join the nuns' community were members of the royal household. *Anula-Devi*, the king's wife, was ordained under *Sanghamitta Theri*. The Community of Nuns was weakened because of dissension among the monks. This dissension led to the monks' being divided into different schools from the first century onwards. Each of these schools had its own Community of Monks and its Community of Nuns. When a school lost its influence or disappeared, the nuns of that school disappeared too.

Today, some schools of Buddhism in several countries still have a Community of Nuns. For example, in Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, the monastic tradition for women has been passed down from generation to generation. Theravada Community of Nuns had disappeared.

As to the Theravada nuns, this succession was broken forever at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century. Actually, in Theravada countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Sri Lanka, there are a certain number of women who wear pink, white or ochre-colored clothes and observe the ten precepts. They are the part of the lineage of *Bhikkhuni* Order but not the fully ones so in this work we are going to discuss the role of Buddhist nuns in Myanmar and the mission they are doing for religion as well as the nation.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

The women in Buddhist Nunneries have been an integral part of Myanmar culture and civilization and they also shoulder the duties as the monks perform to protect and propagate Buddhism. The present project is an attempt to explore the history of the nuns with particular reference to the post-colonial period from 1948 to 2017. Some of the important objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the female religious organization known as ‘Thilashin’ in the country.
2. To trace the role of the nuns in preserving, promoting and propagation of Theravada Buddhism.
3. To analyse why and how the Buddhists paid their respect and supported to their mission.
4. To emphasize the role of Buddhist nuns in the history of Myanmar and their contribution to education and moral values of society.
5. To analyse social context in which the nuns carry out and influenced.
6. To narrate development of institutional form of Buddhist nuns by focusing on nunnery order and education.

7. To high light how the nuns influenced the life of some Myanmar people in their daily life in social, education, administration, economic, culture, architecture, literature.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The present work is an attempt to document the history of Buddhist nuns and the services they are performing. History is a study of the past events concerned in the development of a particular place. Every nation has its historical background so Myanmar, one of the countries in the world had been standing with their kings in their past for centuries and their supports to Buddhism. The original sources written mainly in Burmese language as well as English are applied and historical data have been gleaned as possible as reach to our knowledge. Apart from the original sources other methods such as comparative, historical, textual, inscriptions, reports and scientific will be utilized for the present work and rational thinking has been applied to clarify the facts. Keeping this limitation into consideration, the proposed study attempts to use available sources and its impact upon the cultural and civilizational process of Myanmar. For so doing depends upon both primary and secondary sources. So far as primary sources are concern, attempt has been made to collect wide range of primary consist of the following:

## **HYPOTHESIS OF STUDY**

This study proposes that the women who devoted their lives to do their missions for the welfare of other people are significantly facilitated by Buddhism which cemented the relationship between the people and their community. They attempted to create rights and opportunities based upon the strict principles of Theravada Buddhism. This

study also proposes that nuns acquired high popularity among the people who actively support them to monastic system.

Materialism alone cannot give happiness and peace which we all desire. It is not materialistic ideology but the Buddhist way of life that has acquired prominence in Myanmar. The factor that made Buddhism as influential force is that the practice of the noble principles of Buddhism which teaches the upholding of the laws of morality, fair dealing, honor, trust, right and refinement. Neglect of religious principle is one of the fundamental causes of war. One of the most important ethical teachings of the Buddha is 'non-killing' or 'non-violence' *ahimsa* in Pali. Man has to choose between cruelty and sympathy, which cannot be both exercised at the same time with regard to the same object. Myanmar Buddhists believed that they were born to serve as the welfare of others so they followed the Buddhist ways of life to build the secure of the country through Buddhist principles. This study will explore the ideological foundations of Theravada Buddhism and their interaction with everyday life of Buddhist nuns.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Life is precious for every sentient being human beings as well as animals in the world. All sentient beings have to struggle to survive for their lives whatever conditions they have to encounter. Everyone both disabled persons and normal ones have to meet up and down in life because life is challenge so what one has to do is nothing but face it with one's courage and ability to survive one's life. The day when one loses one's hope, it is one's failure to survive in life.

From Buddhist point of view, being born as a human being is very rare chance in life comparing any other creatures in this human realm. There are four types of

individuals (*puggala*) in human world mentioned in psycho-ethical philosophy called *Abhidhamma*, one of the Baskets of the *Tipitaka* taught by the *Gotama Buddha*.

Those four individuals are as follow:

- (1) Some individuals were born in woeful states which means beings born in woeful abodes without the roots '*ahetuka*' in *Pali* term. Those beings are known as *duggatiahetuka* individual in *Pali*. A root '*hetu*' in *Pali* term means causes as moral condition of good and bad deeds which have six in numbers: three for evil deeds and three for good deeds; namely- greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) for evil actions and non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*) and non-delusion (*amoha*) for good actions.
- (2) Some individuals were born in good planes without the roots, non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion and they did very weak wholesome actions in the past as a result they were born in blind, dumb, deaf or idiotic and those being are called '*sugatiahetuka*' individuals.
- (3) Some individuals were born as human beings and gods for their good deeds but since they had done their meritorious deeds without the accomplishment of knowledge (*amoha*) they are endowed with only two roots, non-greed and non-hatred so they are called '*dvihetuka*' individuals.
- (4) Some individuals were born as human beings and gods for their good actions endowed with the three roots and they are called '*tihetuka*' individuals.

By quoting the above four individuals what I would like to say here is that our good and evil actions determine our life and destiny not only to differ being born but also in

physical appearance and mental capacity. We have to inherit the good and bad actions that we had done and being born.

Those who sacrificed their lives for the welfare of others are the noblest one among the four and they are termed as '*tihetuka*' individuals. Buddhist monks and nuns should be considered as '*tihetuka*' the noble ones for they give up their welfare by devoting their lives for the welfare of their fellow devotees. No one knows exactly what types of persons we are either *dvihetuka* or *tihetuka* individuals but we can imagine the attitude and the work of the persons whether he or she is selfish one or selfless one and we can judge the physical and verbal actions they act.

Dealing with 'Buddhist Nuns' by Mohan Wijayaratna, the author discussed about female religious organizations that Buddhist nuns were not the only female ascetic group at the time and there were other groups of renouncers belonging to different religious traditions.<sup>1</sup> The Buddha was one of the rare religious leaders to steer homeless life away from the maze of austere practices. Two months after attainment of omniscient knowledge, the Buddha taught his first teaching to the five ascetics and then established the Community of monks (*bhikkhu*). Monastic life for Buddhist renouncers was more a communal affair than an individualistic one. Later, community of female monks (*bhikkhuni*) also was permitted requested by Pajapati Gotami, the foster mother of the Buddha. The first members of their community were Sakyan ladies.

The author traced the historical background, the attitude of those Sakyans ladies who joined into the order and their spiritual attainments. Not only the princess but also courtesans and lower castes joined into the nuns' community. There were some ladies

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<sup>1</sup> . Mohan Wijayaratna: Buddhist Nuns,2, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy,1996.

who entered the religious life as Buddhist nuns due to painful experiences in lay life and that led them to search for spiritual comfort. For instance, Patacara born into a rich family in Savatthi fell in love with a servant of her parent's household and fled with him to live in far away and when she came back to her parents she learned the entire family have been killed by the storm and she went crazy and began to wander around the streets without clothes. She knew nothing where she was going and arrived somewhere the Buddha delivered the discourses and the Buddha's words comforted her and completely cured her mental suffering and she joined into the order of nuns.

In civilized society, between family members, there would be no question of unsuitable relationship. The code of discipline allows some personal ties between the monks and the nuns on condition that they are relatives. The Vinaya rules define relatives as those who are related both on the father's and on the mother's side. The text says that during the time of the Buddha, several members of the same family were among the community of monks and nuns. In the nun's community, there were several mothers whose sons were monks, for instance, Kumarakassapa and his mother, the monk Rahula and his mother, and all brothers and sisters of Ven. Sariputta became monks and nuns.

As the evidences found in the Therigatha Pali texts, the nuns (bhikkunis) had recorded their lives as the noble persons they did. They proclaimed themselves who they are and what they are. There was no difference between the monks and the nuns in obtaining the spiritual progress and both were trying to attain the same summum bonum Nibbana. Even though the Buddha passed away, the community of Nuns continued to prosper for many centuries like the monks but it disappeared from its soil and spread in Ceylon until 10<sup>th</sup> century A.C on that land. Finally, the order of nuns disappeared in the history of Theravada tradition from that time onwards.

In his book, 'Bhikkhuni Sasana and History of Thilashin' by Raway Tun, the author discussed the inception of the order of nun community led by Maha Pajapati Gotami, the leader of feminists. He traced the Pali text and related the entire story dealing with the appeal made by Pajapati and finally the Buddha permitted by granting her the eight great conditions. Then, in the time of Emperor Asoka, after the Third Great Council in 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C, the order of bhikkhunis spread in Ceylon led by Sanghamitta, the daughter of Emperor Asoka. Sanghamitta and other nine bhikkhuns ordained Anula, the queen of Devanampiyatissa, king of Ceylon.

He commented the possibility of the disappearance of bhikkhuni due to the two reasons: one is the famine that broke out in the time of Brahmanatissa in the years of 450 Buddhist Era. The bhikkhuni order might exist when the Fourth Great Council was held after the famine but after 500 years of Buddhist Era, it totally disappeared. Another reason was that in Milindapannha, the Pali text composed by Ven.Nagasena written about 500 years of Buddhist Era did not mention any clue about bhikkhun order so by looking at the two reasons he said that it is sure no more bhikkhuni order in Theravada Buddhist history.

Dealing with the link with Myanmar history, he discussed that the Myanmar word "Thilashin" nowadays applied to the body of women associates of the Buddhist lineage in the history of the Myanmar peoples. Literary references to such an institution of Buddhist nuns abound throughout the ages but the particular term for nuns. "Thilashin" itself seems to have come into existence only during the earlier part of the Konbaung period (1752-1885 A.D), while nuns were known by other names during earlier times such as in the Bagan and Innwa periods. Since the modern Buddhist nun (Thilashin) belongs to the lineage of pabbajja recluses, it must follow that the morality prescribed for the nuns be in line with morality pertaining to

pabbajja recluses. It should be remembered that Buddhist morality can be broadly differentiated as morality for lay persons (*gahattha sila*) and morality for those who have renounced the mundane society (*pabbajjita sila*) that is for the category comprising monks, novices, rishi hermits, other recluses and nuns. That is why Buddhist nuns, whose lineage is related to the *paribbajika* recluses, should observe the ten precepts daily. The author keeps on discuss the lineage of Thilashin from the Phy period up to the modern time and the derivative of the terms how they come into use was discussed in length.

The order of Buddhist nuns called Thilashin community reached its acme in the reign of King Mindon, patron of the Fifth Synod during the Konbaung period. The nuns Mae Kin and Mae Nat Pe were amongst the van in this phenomenon and were respectfully worshipped by the queens and other ladies of the court. Princes Mindon and Kanaung went around the environs where they came upon Saya Kinn and Saya Mae Nat Pey who were at that time sojourning in a dell near the pond of the Red Lotuses (*Kyanigan*). They were much impressed by the demeanor of the meditating nuns and then and there they made up their minds that they would request them to honor them with a visit to the palace when kingship had been achieved.

The author traced the place where Mae Kin studied Buddhist literature that It is not known in which year she donned the robes of a nun but since it is said that it occurred after reaching Innwa so that it could only be conjectured that she became a nun while quite young. The name of her first mentor nun is also not known but that she taught her classical Pali grammar and explanatory works concerning commentaries on the Tipitaka. She is known to have progressed to have learnt the Atthasalini and Sammohavinodani commentaries under the tutelage of an ex-monk. She then took up abode in a monastery in the Sagaing hills, a favorite haunt of recluses and that the

venerable Htutkhaung Sayadaw was another mentor just as he was to other nuns too. There is, however, no mention that she was tutored by her elder brother, the Shangalay Kyun Sayadaw, although he was famous for his scholarship. It might be that the Shangalay Sayadaw was averse to teaching women.

Meanwhile Saya Mae Kin was spending her days around Sagaing. The Guta-lone Gyaung (the Solitary Grotto Retreat) in Sagaing was where she had sojourned. However, she was wont to leave the relative comfort of the nunnery to repair to the austere surroundings of the hills where she could meditate in complete isolation. It is said that her pupils had to follow her to the nooks and crannies where she sat in meditation to continue their lessons.

Saya Kinn had, however, a natural bent for teaching while Saya Nat Pey was more engrossed in the practice of meditation and assumed her teaching duties as just one of her obligations she had to perform as a nun. The latter had a retiring personality she was by nature taciturn and often dispensed with niceties when speaking so that she tended to avoid personal contact as much as possible. At times Saya Mae Nat Pey used to pay Saya Mae Kin a visit to spend days together in meditation. They complemented each other and it seems that the former being more experienced in this practice could lead the other, who was more inclined towards teaching the scriptures, in the practical aspects of this discipline.

King Mindon invited Saya Kin who was then staying in Sagaing and Saya Mae Nat Pey who was then at Mingun to reside in the royal city to tutor the queens and princesses on religious matters. However she finally came after the king insisted for the third time that she should come and stay for the benefit of the queens and ladies of the court, that they might be imbued with religious teachings which would enrich their

lives. She was occupied with the task of educating the queens and the ladies of the palace in Buddhist literature, lecturing on the doctrines or teaching them insight meditation practices. In this way she gained the love and respect of the queens, princesses and ladies of the court.

Saya Kin's pupils carried on her good work at the palace up to the time of the British Annexation. Foremost among them was the nun Daw Vanna who was mentor to King Mindon's queen of the southern chamber and her daughter the princess of Monhnyin as mentioned earlier. She also took on the duty of educating other ladies of the court. The author have traced the history of nuns from its origins in the white-robed *Paribba-jika* order to that of the Bhikkhuni order of the ordained nuns during the lifetime of the Buddha, and the disruption of its lineage later to the developments in the female side of the religious order during the past periods in the history of the Myanmar Nation. I have also dealt with the terms used in their case through the times and in particular localities. Anyway, the mothers of the modern nuns in Myanmar were Saya Kin and Saya Mae Nat Pay.

The book of Samiddhodaya Sayagyi, the biography of Daw Malari' by Dr.Nandamalabhivamsa traced the life and work of Daw Malari, one of the senior disciples of Daw Dhamma who was the senior disciple of Mae Kin. Daw Dhamma founded learning nunnery called Guni Gyaung in Sagaing Hill the well-known learning nunnery which attracted to young nuns around the country. Daw Dhamma cherished Malari very much and had great hopes for her. She firmly believed in Malari's moral uprightness, civility and learning.

The author focused on the guardian venerable monks of Malari and she approached many respected Venerable Sayadaws while she was studying as well as doing her

mission. Some of her benefactors were the first Mahagandhayon Sayadaw who often exhorted her as follow, "You are quite young. The more teachers you have, the better. You must listen not only to what I say, but also to the exhortations of the Chanaye Sayadaw and the Masoyein Sayadaw." She was really fortunate noble person for following the guidance of her benefactors so she was successful whatever mission she performed.

By setting up the new nunnery called 'Samiddhodaya Gyaung' in Sagaing hill; she started her mission by teachings Buddhist literature her pupil nuns. She devoted her life for Buddha sasana and produced many learned and educated nuns across the country. Promotion of *Sasana* means learning and teaching of *Dhamma* Scriptures that one must learn systematically and then to teach the pupils to make them fully understand the Scriptures. Those who wish to promote *Pariyatta Sasana* must first of all approach and study under a good teacher. Those who do not study, recite nor try to be well versed in the *Dhamma* Scriptures cannot be a promoter of the *Sasana*. Instead they are the ones who make the *Sasana* disappear. All the Samiddhodaya teacher-nuns had high qualified who passed the government held *Dhammacariya* examination, having sound basic educational qualifications. The progress and prosperity of the Samiddhodaya Nunnery was due to the strict observance of the discipline and to the good administration of the presiding nuns. She had spent many years learning the *Pitaka* literature. She established the Samiddhodaya Forest Nunnery, teaching many to become learned nuns like herself. She exhorted the nuns to have good morality, and gave as much help as possible to the *Sasana*, whether a monk or nun.

The author pointed out that as one of the modern pioneers, Daw Malari had carried out the welfare of religious affairs as she was appointed. In 1895 the *Pathama-pyan*

Committee was formed. It was responsible for holding exams annually and consequently the government searched for ways to amend the Act and in 1937 it formed the *Pathama-pyan* Examination Enquiry Committee and Daw Malari became one of the committee members and she did her work by joining hands together with learned monks and lay devotees.

A lifespan of 95 years was not what everyone could hope for. Persons of advanced age are thought to be infirm. Though she was well advanced in years she was still vigorous, and she had not retired and she was still shouldering the tasks of *Pariyatti* and *Patipatti Sasana*. She did not let herself idle away her hours. She would call the young nuns to her to make them learn and recite their lessons.

She never wasted her time and read as much as she could, especially books written by the Venerables Mahasi and Mogok Sayadaws. She also would establish mindfulness of the *Dhamma*. She never whiled away a day. Instead she spent the time doing as many things as she could – beneficial to herself and the others – thus serving the *Sasana*. At her ninety-five years old, she was still as sharp and vigorous as ever, still carrying on with her many duties.

The work of Dr. Tin Shwe ‘Samiddhodaya Sukhitarāma Myanaung Kyaung Taik’ emphasized only the leading learning nunnery called Samiddhodaya Sukhitarāma Myanaung Nunnery located in Rangoon (now Yangon) and the center was established by Daw Nanacari, the senior disciple of Daw Malari. There were many challenges for a girl to become a nun and among those challenges; the family’s disapproval is the hardest one. Some girls left their homes when their family did not give them permission to become nuns. Daw Nanacari was also one of those girls who fight back to her family and finally she left her home secretly to become a nun. After studying

for four years under her teacher, she moved to Sagaing Hill for her further studies where well-known nuns gathered together in learning and practicing meditation. At that time, the good news of ‘Samiddhodaya nunnery Chaung spread far and wide so with the permission of her teacher she went to ‘Samiddhodaya Chaung’ in 1280 M.E. The head of that nunnery school was Daw *Malari* as well as the leader of nuns in Burma and Daw *Malari* was called as Grandmother in nun’s community, Myanmar.

After completing her studies, she had a thought to extend her mission for she noticed the works of Christian nuns and their success in the community so she admired their activities and she thought Burma, our mother land, is a land of Buddhists but Christian nuns came to do their mission from far away so why did they do their work largely in our land? The victory land is important to carry out the mission so Rangoon, the capital, is only the most suitable place for her work. Thus, she made up her mind to establish the learning center in the capital. Samiddhodaya Sukhitrama Myanaung Nunnery center was set up with the intention of producing new generation nuns. She was the reliable pupil of Daw *Malari*, the leader of the nuns in learning sector because she was awarded the certificate by the Governor of British. In 1937 (1299 M.E), the governor of Burma presented certificate of Good Service to Daw Nyanacari, the head of the nun Teacher, Myanaung for her excellent service in recognition of preparing nuns for the Pathamabyan examination.

Another work of Raway Tun called ‘Thamee Chit’ (Beloved Daughter) explored the biography of a brave Nepalese girl, Ganesha who left her country and traveled to Burma through Nepal and Indian border to become a Buddhist nun. She had to encountered many difficulties but never gave up her dream. When she had got the great chance to become a nun she tried her best to study Buddhist literature and sat for the religious examination. Finally, she went back her home by setting up a nunnery in

Katmandu, the Capital of Nepal by bringing up the new generation girls and women in Neapl.

Another work done by Hiroko Kawanami is 'Renunciation and Empowerment of Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar'. This work focuses on the nuns in Myanmar by tracing the historical and the empowerment of the nuns in social, education and spiritual progress. She traced the lineage of the present nuns as we mentioned and then emphasized the situation of Buddhist nuns in Myanmar. While staying at Daw Nanacari learning nunnery she commented that the center is one of the most prestigious and largest nunnery schools in Myanmar. She carried out her research work there.

Buddhist nuns perform essential roles in Buddhist rites, facilitating a smooth operation of the ritual procedure between officiating monks and the lay congregation. At many levels, Buddhist nuns interact with both the sangha and society. Although they have left their normative identity as lay women, their religious identity is still founded on a combination of traditional ideals of the feminine and other worldly values upheld in the monastic community.

Being a Buddhist nun, she has discarded everything symbolically associated with the notion of womanhood such as hair, beauty, female sexuality, pride, maternity and other implications of her female gender. Thus, the resultant bald head was much admired and a symbol of purity and control. By giving their time and service selflessly to whoever they come across and whenever the occasion arises, nuns perform a vital role in sustaining a relationship that bridges the monastic community and society.

Even though monasteries have traditionally held an important function in society as educational centers, the stand of nuns in society has limited within their environment and nunneries and nunnery schools owned by nuns. Every nunnery has a designated principal who takes on the role of school head. They are performing their learning and teaching routine in their nunneries with the support of their lay devotees and other donors. Thus, the role of the nuns stand below level to the monks and their works do not spread out as the monks do in religion and social affairs for the society.

### **BRIEF NOTE ON CHAPTERISATION**

The present work is divided into five chapters. The following section presents a brief description about the chapters of the proposed study.

#### **Chapter-I**

This chapter presents thematic and schematic introduction to the proposed study. This chapter deals with introduction of the topic, objectives, hypothesis, methodology, and context of study, review of literature and mention of sources and conceptual framework of the thesis. In shot this chapter proposes synoptic view of this study.

#### **Chapter-II**

We focused on the social and religious history of women in Buddhism in this chapter. By looking at the position of women what we found is that women were considered as Sudra in Indian society due to caste system and they were deprived their freedom. It was the Buddha who destroyed the aged-old social structure by giving the equal opportunity in spiritual progress. The Buddha pointed out that human beings are the same in all respects but they differ only in their intellectual, karmic achievements and their professions. This stratification is based on ethical code of conduct. The

culmination of spiritual life is Nibbana. There is no difference such as caste, clan or sex. By tracing the texts, we will discuss it in great detail.

The historical background of the birth and development of women's monastic order will be traced in brief. It was Pajapati Gotami, the foster mother of the Buddha who asked the Buddha to give her permission to go forth into homeless life. An attempt has also been made to explore how religious world treats the concept of refuge as a means to handle the crisis of humanity and offer solace to the people who take refuge in spiritual world. The rise of the new community took place when Maha-Pajapati Gotami accepted the Eight Great Conditions and the Buddha specified that the purpose of the Eight Great Conditions was to protect the community of Nuns.

### **Chapter-III**

This chapter was discussed the role and status of women of Myanmar have been an integral part of the country. Compared to any other women in Southeast Asian regions, Myanmar women have equal rights and privileges to men. Thus acknowledgement of equal rights for women in Law was assured. Buddhism is the most dominant faith in the country. A great majority of the population profess it. Theravada Buddhism has permeated every aspect of Burmese culture. State and monastery worked hand in hand for the material and spiritual well-being of the society. Monastic education instructs ways of life based on morality to both youth and adult alike so most of the people always keep on the foundation of the precepts especially the five precepts. Myanmar women are free. They enjoy equal status with men. Myanmar women never seem to have any need for liberation movements throughout history. They never have known impediments like purdah or bound feet.

Their right to own property had never been challenged. In fact, they control the family finances.

#### **Chapter-IV**

In this chapter we discussed the historical background of Myanmar Buddhist Nuns when and how they came to exist in this land and carried out their missions among the people. The word "Thilashin" means the persons who observe the precepts and it applied to the body of women association with the Buddhist lineage. That is Buddhist nuns that have always been an honored institution throughout the history of the Myanmar people. We will trace the appearance of the nuns from the early Pyu period up to the present time and the lineage how they tried to stand on themselves without getting any privilege in the society. The pioneers of modern nuns were Mae Kin. She founded a nunnery called **Gutalon Gyaung** situated on the Sagaing Hill and Mae Nat Pe in the reign of King Mindon, the late Konbaung dynasty and due to their great efforts; the present nuns have got the lion share in their position.

#### **Chapter-V**

Chapter five has been discussed the activities of the nuns both in secular and spiritual works. Nuns, as members of Buddhist association, have to perform their vocational occupations and their occupations are nothing but preserving the teaching of the Buddha. All canonical subjects are taught to guide them to be clever, literate and behave well to their parents, senior citizen, the community and the focus of the monastic education is teaching and learning mainly Buddhist subjects. Sagaing Hill where the noble persons resided was the birth place of the modern nuns created by Mae Kin as its pioneer. Daw Malari, one of the most senior disciples of Mae Kin, set up a nunnery learning center called Thameidawdaya. The great effort of Malari

opened the new pages in the modern history of nuns' organization. Most of the present nunneries that are carrying out missionary works were rooted in Samiddhodaya Sagaing nunnery. Daw Nanacari, the senior disciple of Daw Malari followed the step of her Mistress and produced many modern nuns who are carrying out their social, education and spreading of Buddhism at home and abroad.

#### **CHAPTER -VI Conclusion**

The last chapter suggests conclusion and certain broad observations that the study attempted to reflect upon. Having narrated schematic and thematic aspects of the proposed study along with conceptual and practical approaches, there were 69334 nuns in Myanmar currently residing in 4807 nunneries around the country.

In social status, nuns in contemporary Myanmar are not regarded as complete female equivalents of the monks, although they renounce the worldly life. In civil status, both monks and nuns hold religious identity cards under the same title of member of the religious order. In alms-round and alms-food, monks go out for alms-round every early morning and receive cooked food but nuns go out for alms twice a week and receive raw rice and they need to cook by themselves. In ceremony invitation: monks are invited to preach at events: donation ceremonies for birthday and reception, novice ordinations, housewarming ceremonies and so on but nuns are normally invited for reciting at the funerals. Generally, devotees have more faith in monks than nuns.