



Access Online



Article DOI:

10.5281/zenodo.23015718

¹ Research Scholar,
Department of
Buddhist Studies,
University of Delhi

² Professor,
Department of
Buddhist Studies,
University of Delhi

How to Cite:

Morm Savonn & Prof.
Indra Narian Singh
(2026), A Study on
Monastic Practices
and Rituals and
Dhamma to Social
Order, International
Educational Applied
Scientific & Research
Journal (IEASRJ),
Vol: 11, Issue: 9,
59-63

A STUDY ON MONASTIC PRACTICES AND RITUALS AND DHAMMA TO SOCIAL ORDER

Morm Savonn¹, Prof. Indra Narian Singh²

ABSTRACT

Most Cambodians or Khmers identify themselves as Theravada Buddhists. It is not uncommon to hear Khmer people suggest that being Khmer means being Buddhist. The ideas and practices of Buddhism are fundamental to the definition of Khmer culture. Buddhist ideas underlie history, art, literature, education, shared moral values, and ritual practices. The exercise of political power, too, remains at least symbolically linked to Buddhism. Buddhism is described as a system of thought, a way of understanding life, an analysis of mental processes, and a series of well-constructed arguments that point towards the adoption of certain attitudes, values, and practices that may create the conditions for a new vision of human life and purpose. In Buddhist societies, culture, values, and customs are deeply rooted in Buddhism.

Although there are normative and substantive socializing agents, the monks and monasteries are another important socializing institution. They have served as ethical and moral socializing agents. They persuade the people to follow social rules and regulations and to lead their lives according to the Buddhist way of life. Such virtues as loving and kindness (Mettā-Karuṇā), kind-heartedness, being helpful to each other, courtesy, and social relationships between persons of different status constitute this way of life.

KEYWORDS: Monastic, Practices, Rituals, Dhamma, Social, Order

INTRODUCTION

Monastic Practices and Rituals

A. Buddhism and Khmer Beliefs

Most Cambodians or Khmers identify themselves as Theravada Buddhists. It is not uncommon to hear Khmer people suggest that being Khmer means being Buddhist. The ideas and practices of Buddhism are fundamental to the definition of Khmer culture. Buddhist ideas underlie history, art, literature, education, shared moral values, and ritual practices. The exercise of political power, too, remains at least symbolically linked to Buddhism (Cavendish, 2008). Buddhism is described as a system of thought, a way of understanding life, an analysis of mental processes, and a series of well-constructed arguments that point

towards the adoption of certain attitudes, values, and practices that may create the conditions for a new vision of human life and purpose.

The Khmer people believe in Kamma, the idea that human action has consequences. The law of Kamma, a basic Buddhist doctrine, states that everyone has free will and can act in a virtuous or an evil way; in addition, the universe operates according to a law by which virtue is rewarded, and evil is punished, whether in this, previous, or subsequent life. Acts committed in previous lives affect one's situation in this life, and acts committed in this life will affect one's situation in a future life. (Ebihara M. M., 1994). Therefore, past actions (good and bad) determine the

current life circumstances (kamma), and proper behavior, humble attitude, and merit-making can improve one's path in this life and subsequent rebirths. Human life is explained as essentially social, connected through these interlocking and reciprocal relationships.

A. The Buddhist Temple and Khmer People

Traditional Cambodian culture is centered on the daily activities of the wat, the Khmer word for Buddhist temple. The Wat was not only the religious center, but also the social and educational center of village life. The Buddhist monks served laypeople in many ways, including providing psychological support and relief. The establishment of Wats was critical for the emotional and mental health of all Cambodians, (Needam, 2008).

The temple serves obviously as a moral-religious focal point, integrating the villagers within its congregation into a religious community through the shared norms and common participation in rituals. The temple also reinforces or creates bonds between individuals while performing other functions for the Khmer people. For example, while attendance at Buddhist festivals is a way to earn merit, these events and the temple are also the primary centers for social gatherings and entertainment in the countryside. The major annual ceremonies are eagerly anticipated months in advance as they punctuate the drab cycle of rice cultivation, and they bring together people from many different villages; they bring together people from near and far. For many, these festivals are one of the few reasons for travel to other regions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study on monastic practices and rituals
2. To study on the dhamma to social order

BUDDHISM TO SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

1 The Dhamma to Social Life

Buddhism has been an integral part of the life of Buddhists, for it is the root of the culture and way of life of the people. To appreciate the importance, role, and influence of Buddhism on the way of life of the Buddhist populace, it is necessary to understand other structures or fabrics that are integral parts of Buddhism. Important components are the Buddha (Nyanasamvara, 2000), the Dhamma, the

Saṅgha, the Wat (monastery), and lay disciples. The Dhamma, or the teachings of the Buddha, has been the most influential on the way of life of Buddhists. The teachings are found not only in the Pāli Canon and Suttapiṭaka but also in such religious literatures as the Jātaka, Buddhist chronicles, and myths. The Dhamma component is an abstract aspect and serves as the heart of Buddhism. The Saṅgha, or the community of monks, and the Wat are in close relation and proximity with the laymen and interact with society in its daily life.

The close association and continuous relationship between Buddhism and society is based on the concept that a society is a conglomeration of tangible compositions and such abstract elements as virtue, value, goodness, morality, and ethics. There are continuous interactions between the tangible and intangible components. To maintain the society functionally and structurally, there must be an interdependent and supportive relationship among different components of Buddhism. Lacking any of them would cause an imbalance in society. In a village community, for example, not having a monastery and monks to edify and guide the people would result in low morality and spirit of the inhabitants. Similarly, if the monks in the community do not strictly adhere to the Dhamma and keep to their duties according to the code of discipline (Vinaya), the people's morality and spirit would become lax, the community's social relationships would also be weakened, unstable, and not at peace. Social relationships are not always in harmony. Conflicts may arise from time to time. Resolution to such conflicts may be achieved by utilizing adjustment and adaptation of the existing social structure and function to maintain society. Alternatively, the existing societal structure and functions might be replaced by a new and improved framework.

2 The Dhamma to Society

The teachings of the Buddha are voluminous and classified. Each group serves a specific purpose. It explains an existing phenomenon, its cause of arising, and the effects thereof. There are also prescriptions to overcome individual problems. The level of depth and sophistication of the teachings is also purposely prescribed to suit individual needs. Due to the differences in context and level of sophistication of the

teachings, there arise differences in the interpretation of the teachings. This concerns one's perception and experiences, occupation, and education. Some political scientists may understand the Buddhist concept of Santosa (satisfaction with whatever is one's own) as not conducive to development. In contrast, conversationalists and environmentalists would see the meaning of Santosa as contentment with the maintenance of the existing status and conditions, which is supportive of environmental conservation. Students of Buddhist Studies would view such interpretations as not comprehensive. This signifies different levels of understanding of the teachings of the Buddha by the Buddhists. According to Robert Redfield's concept of 'Great and Little Tradition', people's appreciation of Buddhism can be divided into two broad categories. (Redfield, 1965), doctrinal and popular Buddhism.

Firstly, doctrinal Buddhism refers to the teachings of the Buddha and practices contained in the Canon Sutta and related literature. Doctrinal Buddhism is thus believed to be original. Its followers will refuse principles, teachings, and practices that are not contained in the Canon and Suttapiṭaka. They view belief in spirits, deities, and other forms of Animism, including beliefs and practices adopted from other faiths, as heresy. The followers of doctrinal Buddhism are few but are well educated.

3 The Dhamma to Socio-political Changes

The principle of ever-changing nature or the impermanent condition of society is a very important consideration when one studies the relationship between Buddhism and society. It is argued that at the time when Gotama was seeking enlightenment, there had been rapid sociopolitical changes in the homeland of Buddhism, i.e., the present Northern India. The Buddha considered that the ever-changing or impermanent conditions were causes of suffering and societal problems. He therefore devoted himself to the search for truth to remedy human suffering. The suffering and problems, which the Buddha perceived, were: (1) natural changes in human beings and (2) changes caused by man.

Firstly, natural changes in human beings, these causes of suffering inherent in human beings are, for example, birth, sickness, death, happiness, suffering,

satisfaction, disappointment, etc. Though they are natural phenomena, they can cause suffering to people. The Buddha believed that there must be a remedy to end or at least to minimize those causes of suffering. Thus, he set out in search of the truth. Secondly, changes caused by man are included: (1) political changes and (2) socio-economic changes.

THE DHAMMA TO SOCIAL ORDER

In the context of socio-political changes, Buddhism has played a very important role in regulating and organizing society for the survival and continuity of society. These functions can be summarized as follows:

1. Socialization function. In Buddhist societies, culture, values, and customs are deeply rooted in Buddhism. Although there are normative and substantive socializing agents, the monks and monasteries are another important socializing institution. They have served as ethical and moral socializing agents. They persuade the people to follow social rules and regulations and to lead their lives according to the Buddhist way of life. Such virtues as loving and kindness (Mettā-Karuṇā), kind-heartedness, being helpful to each other, courtesy, and social relationships between persons of different status constitute this way of life.
2. Social control function. Social control is indispensable for human society. To keep society in order and its members behaving correctly, to maintain peace and order, there must be laws and regulations governing society. It is necessary to have an authoritative body, i.e., a government, to enact and enforce such secular laws and regulations. In addition, there are also traditions and customary laws that enhance the social control of any society.
3. However, those secular social control mechanisms are aimed at regulating men's activities and overt behavior. They will be effective only when men feel morally obligated to follow the laws and regulations. Religion can play a very important role in instilling in people a sense of morality and edifying them. The monks and monasteries are essential religious socializing agents that train Buddhists to be good citizens. Buddhist principles, which function as a social control mechanism, are, for example, the Five Precepts, Brahmavihāra (sublime states of mind), Saṅgahavathu (virtues making for group integration and leadership and principle of

services), Nāthakaraṇadhamma (virtues which make for protection), Sārāṇīyadhamma (virtues for fraternal living), Adhipateyya (dominant influence, supremacy), Diṭṭhadhammikaṭṭha (sources of happiness in the present life), etc. People who are trained, edified, and keep to the teachings of the Buddha will have shared norms and follow a common way of life. Such a society will face minimal conflicts; people will live together with reason, and social problems will be minimized.

The Buddhist Concept of Political Authority

In the past, the claim that Buddhism was the source of political ideology of the state and the authority of the ruler was undisputed by the subjects. At present, those who believe in the separation of religion and state have contradicted such a claim. They think that Buddhism seems obsolete in dealing with complicated social problems. It is irrelevant to the progress of modern technology. Its principles and nature are remote and incomparable with political, social, and economic activities. They conclude that Buddhism is incapable of influencing the social, economic, and political life of the present society.

On the other hand, some scholars strongly believe in the latent influence of Buddhism on the political arena. They hold that the political potential of Buddhism can be mobilized to meet the demands of society in various capacities, regardless of time and place. This is because the interaction between the religious domain and the political realm is a continuous and natural phenomenon. Political power transfers from the religious realm to the political domain coincide with social changes. They postulate that religion does not lose its influence totally but still maintains a latent power in different forms.

It is argued that so long as the existence and continuity of society need moral and ethical support, religion will play an important role and can exert its influence on the political body of society. It must be understood that moral authority and ethics are deeply based on religion. Religion, therefore, supports the existence of society, fosters growth and prosperity, and maintains balance within society. It also provides the ruler with political legitimacy. We shall now consider Buddhist concepts of social evolution, which lead to the development of social and political organization.

In Buddhist scriptures, political authority is viewed as being established because of the imperfection of man and the need for social order. This belief is best understood if one examines the creation of myths. In the beginning, the world evolved as part of the universe (SiddhiButra-Indra, 1979). From fire came solids, liquids, and gases, which became the earth, the moon, and the sun, the planetary system, and stellar constellations. Plant and animal life evolved, and, over time, became increasingly differentiated. Eventually, human beings became differentiated from other animals and began to feed on rice after they evolved. They then became stronger, and differences in physical type and sex appeared. At this stage, fragrant and cleaned grain rice in unlimited supply was naturally available in open spaces and became communal property. Every human being enjoyed as much of it as his body required. Some males and females became interested in sexual intercourse; they developed in themselves passion and lust, which were considered immoral. These immoral people were expelled from the existing settlements; they lived in separate huts to conceal their immorality, and yet, were still allowed to have a share in the communal property. Then, there appeared greedy people who collected and hoarded rice. As passion, lust, immorality, and greed increased, rice ceased to grow spontaneously, and its quality degenerated. Men then divided rice fields among themselves as private property and created boundaries. Property disputes arose; men proceeded to steal others' plots; and censure, lying, and punishment became known.

As men became increasingly immoral and greedy for private possessions, conflict, violence, and disorder grew. This led men to gather to discuss how their lives should be regulated to ensure decent survival. They then agreed that they needed a 'certain being', who should give order to society, who should censure that which should be censured, and who should banish those who deserve to be banished. They also agreed to select the most handsome, best favored, most attractive, and most capable from among them; and they invited him to be their ruler and to regulate society. In return, the ruler was given a share of the rice produced by the people.

The ruler was called Mahāsammata, "the great elect" because he was chosen by the many; he was of high birth, 'Kshatriya', or the Lord of the Field, because he

protected the people's fields; and Rājā 'ruler' because he was righteous and guided by the Dhamma. Since then, the political ruler was generally embodied in a kingship.

In this manner, the Buddhist concept of political authority suggests that kingship was established because of the imperfections of man and the need for social order. Buddhist scripture, such as the Pali Canon and the Jātaka, emphasized the need for a king if order was to prevail. The relationship between the king and his subjects is described as one where he has reached his exalted position because he was a great merit-maker in his former life. Such accumulation of merit entitled him to the kingship, or else he could not have been born a king (S.N. Vol.I, 1993, p. 93). He governed the kingdom and reigned over the people and was endowed by them with authority to reprove, rebuke, punish, or destroy anyone who transgressed a royal command (M.Q. Vol.35, 1988). He was the receiver and enjoyer of taxes from the people (AN. Vol.III, 1993). He was their source of happiness and potential protector (Divids, 1993). He was the upholder of the Dhamma through which he watched over and protected his subjects (AN. Vol.I & Vol.III, 1993). The king was also endowed with five qualities: physical strength, material strength, the strength of an official, the strength of nobility, and the strength of wisdom (Cowell, 1978, p. 120).

CONCLUSION

The findings also highlight the significance of community outreach and activities that are altruistic in nature. The distribution of food, help to low-income homes, support for educational endeavors, community fundraising, assistance in the event of a natural catastrophe, and support for those who are vulnerable are all activities that monasteries take part in. Despite the fact that many of these activities are not formal and are dependent on contributions, they serve as a vital social support system at the local level. The fact that monasteries are community-based makes it possible for aid to be provided through pre-existing trust networks with the community. The fact that this is the case makes Buddhist organizations especially important in situations where official welfare programs might not reach every home in the same manner. It is also necessary to do research on the participation of women. Women have significant roles in Buddhist activities, such as lay supporters,

volunteers, donors, and participants. However, their contribution to the social development linked with monasteries has to be investigated in a more methodical manner. It is possible that future research may investigate the extent to which women are involved in decision-making, community programs, educational endeavors, and philanthropic activities. It is also important to conduct further research on the connection between Buddhism and mental health. While keeping obvious differences between religious assistance and professional healthcare, researchers might investigate the ways in which individuals' perceptions of their well-being are influenced by activities such as meditation, spiritual advice, and community engagement. The right ethical precautions should be utilized in these kinds of investigations, and trained medical experts should be included whenever it is essential. Another new field of research that is constantly developing is digital transformation. It is possible that future research may study the ways in which Cambodian monasteries make use of digital resources, online education, and social media in order to communicate with younger generations and maintain their Buddhist history. It is also possible for research to investigate the potential benefits and dangers related with religious communication conducted online.

REFERENCES

1. Prebish, C. (1999). *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America*.
2. Qizilbash, M. (1998). The concept of well-being. . *Economics & Philosophy*, 14, 51 - 73.
3. Rajavaramuni, P. (2007). *Vision of the Dhamma, A Collection of Buddhist Writing in English*. Bangkok: Wat Nyanavesakavan Press.
4. Rajavaramuni, P. (1982). *Buddhism and Thai Society*. Bangkok: Komol Kreamthong Foundation Press.
5. Ravasco, G. (2004). "Towards a Christian Pastoral Approach to Cambodian Culture",
6. *Master Degree of Theology in Missiology*. Africa:: Sa Theological Seminary Press.
7. Ray, N. (2000). *Cambodia*. Singapore: Graft Print Pte Ltd.
8. Redfield, R. (1965). *Peasant Society and Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
9. S.N. Vol.I. (1993). *Sanyutta-Nikāya*. In Vol.I (p. 93). Oxford: Pali Text Society.
10. Sarun, P. (2016). *The Role of Buddhism in Peace Building and the Development of the*
11. *Cambodia Society: A Case Study of the Contributions of Mahā Ghosānandā*. MCU Press. Ayutthaya, Thailand.
12. Sharan, M. K. (1974). *Studies in Sanskrit Inscriptions of Ancient Cambodia*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.
13. SiddhiButra-Indra. (1979). *The Social Philosophy of Buddhism*. Bangkok: Mahamakutarajavidyalaya Press .