



## CONTEMPORARY MONASTIC LIFE OF MONKS AND NUNS IN VIETNAM

**Nguyen Thi Suong**

*Research Scholar M.PHIL+PH.D (Integrated), Samrat Ashok Subharti School Of Buddhist Studies, Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Subhartipuram, NH-58, Delhi Haridwar Meerut Bypass Road, Meerut-250005, India.*

**Paper Received On:** 25 SEPT 2021

**Peer Reviewed On:** 30 SEPT 2021

**Published On:** 1 OCT 2021



*Scholarly Research Journal's* is licensed Based on a work at [www.srjis.com](http://www.srjis.com)

**Introduction:** Buddhism is one outstanding religion by peaceful, harmonious, and pure features in the world. Buddhism has inspired humankind, even scientists. That is a source of exceptional cultural achievements with over five million followers follow the Dhamma in three main traditions: Theravāda in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, Dharmaguptaka in East Asia, and Mulasarvastivada for Tibet and the Himalayan region are going on around the world at present.

Around the sixth century B.C, the Buddha found Buddhism at Deer Park, Isipatana, Sarnath near Benares city, northeastern India. He was Prince Siddhattha Gotama, the son of King Suddhodana and Queen Mahāmāyā in Kapilavatthu. Buddhism includes: (1) The Buddha, (2) the first Saṅgha was five bhikkhus (Koṇḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji), and (3) the first Dhamma was the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.

**The monastic life of Buddhism:** The monastic life is a way of moral lifestyle, Holy lifestyle of Buddhism. It is as the heart of Buddhism. With the tradition of renunciation and being single, the monastic life is simple with only a few possessions and without people close relatives. However, they live together in the Saṅgha, in which everyone supports and helps each other to gain the Holy life, Arahant, or Bodhisattva, and Buddhahood. It is one of the most primary institutions and the earliest surviving form of organized monasticism of Buddhism. It manages all the activities of monks and nuns, that is, Pātimokkha and the codes of Vinaya Piṭaka. This lifestyle was not completely reclusive and isolated from society. Because between the Saṅgha and lay Buddhists, there is a mutual relationship of material and spiritual interaction.

According to the Sutta Piṭaka and Vinaya Piṭaka, his disciples initially consisted only of men, after that, the Buddha recognized women as disciples- first, bhikkhūnī was his stepmother, Mahāpajāpati.

And then, after the Buddha entered into Nibbāna approximately one hundred years ago, Buddhism was divided into two schools by members from the Second Buddhist Council, Copyright © 2021, Scholarly Research Journal for Humanity Science & English Language

and through many divisions, these three schools finally became known as Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayana schools of today.

Bhikkhus (Bhikshu, Sa) or bhikkhuṇīs (Bhikshuni, Sa) who renounce worldly life, ordain the Pātimokkha, live by the alms bowl. Bhikkhus and bhikkhuṇī have a firm belief in the Triple Gem (Ratana). They understand the law of impermanent (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-ego (anatta). They accept a self-disciplined life, voluntarily going on the path to Arahant, Bodhisattva, Buddhahood, and helping others as well. They know how to appreciate the morality of life and are not people who failed before entering the Saṅgha.

Since the Saṅgha has sixty-one Arahants, the Buddha taught them to go anywhere to propagate the Dhamma. The Buddha and his disciples walked for alms, without a particular residence, with no material possessions other than the yellow robe covering the body and a bowl to beg for food. When the monks increased by approximately one thousand bhikkhus, King Bimbisāra offered the Veluvana (Rajāgaha) garden, the first Buddhist monastery of Saṅgha, to settle for the rainy season. From that event, other kings, the upāsakas, and upāsikās, built many monasteries in the forms as āvāsa and ārāma. Settlement life also gradually took shape.

In Emperor Asoka period, He sent missionaries to other countries in Asia such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, etc. Hence monastic life continued to be an essential part of Buddhism that governs monks and nuns all over the world, including Vietnamese Buddhism on Theravāda tradition to this day; under the dynasty of King Kanishka (2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D), Mahāyāna tradition has developed along with its monastic life. However, monastic discipline and regulations have been changed by environmental, geographical, and cultural conditions.

**Buddhism in Vietnam:** Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE by the Indian subcontinent or China in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. Buddhism has been localized with Vietnam folk religion and was greatly influenced by Chinese Buddhism with Mahāyāna tradition. Vietnamese Buddhism always accompanies the nation and has been passed down throughout more than 2,000 years of Vietnamese Buddhist history.

Buddhism is one of the great religions and has a significant influence in Vietnam. Both Theravāda tradition and Mahāyāna tradition exist in Vietnam until today. Besides Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, Buddhism in Vietnam has some branches of Mahāyāna as Pure Land, Zen, Truc Lam Yen Tu Zen, Buddhist Mendicancy (Dao Phat Khat Si Vietnam) from Mahāyāna and Theravāda, and so on. Therefore, the monastic life of Buddhism in Vietnam has many differences.

Vietnam has been dominated by some of the other countries such as Chinese around one thousand years, French colonial around one hundred years, American imperial near thirty years also. Therefore, accompanying the pain of the nation, Vietnamese Buddhism also faced many difficulties. Sometimes they have to hide and stop working, but they still guiding people to live in the spirit of Buddhism.

The most famous Vietnamese Zen in the West is Thich Nhat Hanh, who has written a dozen books and founded the Dhammacentre Plum Village in France. It is different from any

traditional Vietnamese Buddhist Zen practices and is also another monastic life of Vietnamese Buddhism.

Until today, the monastery has always been the center to learn, practice, ordain, and maintain all the teachings of the Buddha. In Vietnam, the Sangha is a simile a vast home of the Great Brahmavihāra, which means Mettā (Loving-kindness), Karuṇā (Compassion), Muditā (Sympathy in other welfare), and Upekkhā (Equanimity).

**The contemporary monastic life of Vietnamese Buddhism** consists of four aspects:

*The religious life of monks and nuns:* The monastic life of Buddhism often has rules, rituals, and regulations for monks and nuns to follow, such as chanting, meditation, assigned duties, cooking, breakfast, have lunch, receiving guests, studying at monasteries or Buddhist school, resting, recite Pātimokkha (Uposatha), three months Rainy Retreat (Vassa), festivals (Vesak), and so on for daily, monthly, and yearly. Note that each school has different rules, rituals, and regulations, but the basic is still on either Theravāda Vinaya or Mahāyāna Vinaya. The whole activities of monks and nuns have to follow several rules their ordained, practice, and maintain their mindfulness.

*The academic life of monks and nuns:* The Buddhist education system starts at the temple, where we ask to renounce. Only Master, who accepts disciples, is responsible for transmitting the five basic precepts of Buddhism and Vinaya Essentials for Daily Life to them. And then, they can learn some things from senior monks or nuns. After ordaining, they will attend Buddhist schools.

The study of monks and nuns in Vietnam Buddhism today is mainly in Buddhist schools. This place primarily teaches Tipiṭaka, including Nikāya, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma Suttas. Moreover, Buddhist University also teaches subjects about the History of Buddhism in the world, Buddhist Philosophy, etc. Furthermore, they can learn the Dhamma from some means as an online or periodic course of their sects.

*The social life of monks and nuns:* Buddhism community is also a form of society. But this is a society of nobility, of those who share the same goal of achieving Holy life, free from suffering. Buddhism in Vietnam comprises Bhikkhus Saṅgha and Bhikkhunīs Saṅgha that they live together in harmony and purity like water mixed with milk. Looking back on the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, there has never been any internal debate or division in the Sangha. They always lived in the six dhammas harmony on bodily acts, verbal acts, mental acts, whatever righteous gains, virtues (sīla), and knowledge.

Vietnamese Monks and nuns are prominent on the Bodhisattva path, so the Buddhist conception of society is no limit to all beings living (Mettāsutta). Therefore, Buddhism is like a loving house for everyone, the source of lay Buddhist morality in Vietnam.

*The cultural life of monks and nuns:* One of the outstanding features of Vietnamese Buddhism is harmony. That is harmony with the traditional beliefs of the Vietnamese people, harmony between the Buddhist sects, the harmony with Taoism and Confucianism to create spiritual members of Three Religions (Tam Giao). Buddhism in Vietnam is one of the significant cultural features of the Vietnamese nation. For example, North Vietnam has three times honorably held International Vesak to commemorate the Birth, Enlightenment day, and

the day of Nibbāna of the Buddha, welcoming thousands of foreign Buddhist delegates to attend.

Another feature of Vietnam Buddhism is mainly combined between Pure Land school, Zen school, Mantra, and Vietnamese folk religion also. The major cultural events of Vietnam and Vietnamese Buddhism are Ullambana Festival or Sangha Day, or Ghost Festival, and the Pavāraṇā ceremony. It was the day when the Sangha had completed their Rainy Retreat (vassa), a unique cultural feature of Buddhism and the Vietnamese people.

The Contemporary Monastic Life of Monks and Nuns in Vietnam with the objectives-

1. To study the Religious life of Monks and Nuns in Vietnam
2. To study the Academic life of Monks and Nuns in Vietnam
3. To study the Social life of Monks and Nuns in Vietnam
4. To study the Cultural life of Monks and Nuns in Vietnam

The significant difference between monastic life in the Buddha's era and contemporary Vietnam there is the Buddha's era has only one monastic life (Theravāda). In contrast, Vietnamese Buddhism has two monastic life now (Mahayana and Theravada). Therefore, the results of studying and practicing the Dhamma vary significantly because the mainly Vietnamese monks and nuns are following in Mahayana on the Bodhisattva Path rather than only the Nibbana (Arahant) like the Buddha's era.

It is a blessing that in this world, we still have a way to enter the Triple Gem, a place to perfect ourselves, where there is no suffering, sin, a place where holiness goodness is respected and preserved from being obscured by matter and evil. Triple Gem is the house of Compassion, wisdom, peace, and liberation. First, who one join the Sangha with the first apprentice form, after the specified time, if approved by the Saṅgha, this person will be ordained as sāmanera or sāmanerī. Today, there are many temples in Vietnam, and people can choose whichever school suits them and select an abbot they respect and trust.

## Reference

- Vinaya Pitaka, I. B. Honer: The Book of the Discipline, six vols. London: Pāli Text Society, 1938-1966.*
- Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (Mahāyana) or Caturvagikavinaya (Vinaya in Four Parts) of Mahāyāna, vol.22, No.1428.*
- DighaNikaya, Ed by Maurice Walshe, Wisdom Publication Boston, 1987, 1995, Tr. Maurice Walshe.*
- MajjhimaNikaya I, Ed by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Buddhist Publication Society Kandy, Sri Lanka, Tr. by Bhikkhu Nanamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995.*
- SamyuttaNikaya, The Book of the Kindred Sayings. Part V (Mahavagga). Tr. by Mrs. Rhys Davids, M.A. Published PTS, London, 1980.*
- AnguttaraNikāya: 6Vols, Ed. R. Morris, E. Hardy, and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, Tr. by E. M. Hare, The Book of The Gradual Sayings, London: P. T. S., 1994.*
- P.V Bapat, 2500 Years of Buddhism. New Delhi: Publication Division, 2012*
- Nguyen Tai Thu (2008, History of Buddhism in Vietnam, Cultural heritage and contemporary change: South East Asia, CRVP, ISBN 1565180984. Internet.*
- Hirakawa Akira, A History of Indian Buddhism, 2007, Ed and translated by Paul Groner. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990.*