

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE *PARIYATTI* COURSES IN MANDALAY AND PAKOKKU

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Myanmar is supposed to be a *Theravâda* Buddhist country and it has a long tradition in the study and practice of Buddhism. To made that possible both monks and men including kings and governments take their equal share in:

1. Teaching the *Pitaka* comprising *Suttanta*, *Vinaya* and *Abhidhammâ*.
2. Learning the *Pitaka*.
3. Discussing the theory and practice of the teachings of the Buddha (know as *Sâsanâ*).
4. Propagating the *Sâsanâ*.

In the aspect of teaching, the most important thing is to have competent teachers. In the aspect of learning, I find that the medium of teaching is also an important thing to consider. For promotion and propagation of *Sâsanâ*, the members of *Sanghâ* have to do the two duties viz. *Ganthadhûra* - the duty to learn and teach the *Pitaka*, and *Vipassanâdhûra* - the duty to meditate. (*Buddhist Term*, 2000,62) In order to carry out these duties of the member of the *Sanghâ* establish monasteries or *Câsantuik*, where Buddhist Scriptures are taught especially to young monks. They are also expected to perform other responsibilities of *Pariyatti*. There are three kinds of *Sanghâ* engaged in the *Ganthadhûra* viz. *Câkhya*, *Câluik* and *Câchui*. Students who attend the lectures are called *Câluik*. One of them selected to read the text is *Câchui* and the lecturer is *Câkhya*. The teachers or *Câkhya Charâtoau* (*Ganthavâcaka*) use various methods to make the lessons easy for the students. The two widely used methods in Myanmar are Mandalay Method and Pakokku Method.

Mandalay lies on the east bank of the Ayeyarwady river, about 382 miles (614.638 km) on the north of Yangon. King Mindon, who founded it in 1859, built eighteen great monasteries in the eastern part of Mandalay with the noble aim of promoting the *Sâsanâ*. The king further promoted the *Sâsanâ* by holding the religious examinations every year in the month of Nayone (June-July). The examination results are issued in order of merit and the best candidate would be rewarded richly. As the result, in all four quarters of Mandalay, the number of *Câkhya Charâtoau* as well as *Câsan* increased proportionately. As teacher, monks taught the Three *Pitakas* in day and night courses by turns, the *Pariyattisâsanâ* in Mandalay reached its summit in those days. Since then, Mandalay became an important centre of learning Buddhism. *Câkhya Charâtoau* had their own method of teaching and this

method was handed down in all *Cāsantuik* (monasteries teaching Buddhist Scriptures) since the time of King Mindon. It had been the same in all *Cāsantuik* of Mandalay in pre-war days and therefore their way of teaching the *Pitaka* came to be known as “Mandalay Method”. (Khin Thein, 1972, 254)

Pakokku, an isolated town on the west bank of the Ayeyarwady about 300 miles (482.7 km) on the north of Yangon and the gateway to the Yaw and Chin land to the west, has long been famous a centre of quite an independent monastic learning in Myanmar. The elder monks there said that they have their own regulation book to receive new members in their monasteries. They said in pride that “You are illiterate until you have learn in Pakkoku”. That attracts a lot of young monks to seek a chance to learn in Pakokku and eventually Pakokku became an important centre of Buddhism.

Obviously the Mandalay Method of *Ganthadūra* is quite old and reputable. It emphasized on a full examination of the *Pitaka* and necessarily it contains a lengthy discussion taking much time. It is widely known as Mandalay Method and it has its roots in earlier days when the capitals were at Awa and Amarapūra. There was a well-known saying:

*“Ñgakhum Sayadaw can teach well the whole Tipitaka,
Makyañ: to Sayadaw can complete the Tipitaka in a short
period and Sai-an: Sayadaw can explain well the whole
Tipitaka”.* (Mānita, 30 March 2001)

In spite of this, there is a popular assumption that the Mandalay Method was introduced by *Sai-an: Sayadawgyi U Sūriyabhivamsa* (13 August 1763-19 November 1839). (Sirisobhana, 1955, 291-294)

In Mandalay, a lecturer would explain the various shades of meaning in a word. It would be just *Samvannanā naya* (an explanation), *Ñyāsa naya* (an explanation in connection with other allied facts) or *Netti naya* (an inferred way) or *Patthana naya* (as it has been used in *Abhidhammā*). Explanation of a word in six ways is called *Samvannanā naya*. (Khin Thein, 1972, 253) The six ways of *Samvannanā naya* are:

1. *Sambandha* (connection of words)
2. *Pada* (classification of words)
3. *Padatta* (meaning of words)
4. *Padavigaha* (definition of words)
5. *Codanā* (question)
6. *Parihāra* (answer). (Uttarañana, 21 May 2001)

There are three types of *naya* that are *Samāsa*, *Taddhita* and *Kitaka* in the *Ñyāsa ganttha*.⁸ A lecturer made evident his resourcefulness in both *Saddā* (Grammar) and *Abhidhammā* by applying these ways. In accordance with his

ability, the lecture could get his lectures very learned and useful. It may take quite a long time to explain even a short sentence (e.g. *Namo tasa bhagavato arahato sammâsambhudhassa*) by using this method. Therefore, the Mandalay Method makes evident the lecturer's resourcefulness. One who has studied *Sutta Silakkhandha Atthakathâ*, *Parajikam Atthakathâ* and *Atthasalinî Atthakathâ* by this method would be well qualified to take the *Dhammâcariya* examination.

Another method of *Pariyatti* teaching, that is quite different from the traditional one, is used in Pakokku. The Pakokku Method, was introduced by Yezagyo Sayadawgyi *Baddanta Ganthasâra* (18 March 1833-4 October 1914). (Kelâsa, 1970, 198-218) In this new method, a lecturer tries to cover the whole course of teaching in the shortest possible time. The student has to learn all the *Pâli* texts first. Then he has to attend the lectures. This is known as "getting through the major texts" (Sergyi bauk). The Pakokku Method is in fact a copy of the method of *Mahâpaduma* and *Mahasâma* of *Úrilankâ*. (Kumâra, 1996,175)

The Mandalay Method emphasizes on full explanation of the text whereas the Pakokku Method emphasizes on understanding the text. It cannot be said however, that the Pakokku Method neglects grammar. It teaches the rudiments of the *Pâli* grammar and it proceeds to explain the text in the simple way. In this way the *Tipitaka* course is completed within seven years and *Nikâyas* in five years. By this method, a learner becomes a qualified teacher within three years if he has a good knowledge of grammar in *Abhidhammâ*, enough intelligence and strong determination.

It is obvious that the Pakokku Method does not abandon the traditional method but it tries to improve it by shortening the explanations. The improvement is made in two ways. First the students are given a basic course in *Pâli* grammar. Second, they are taught how to apply their knowledge of *Pâli* in understanding *Abhidhammâ*.

In teaching *Tipitaka* courses, it focuses on the ability to understand and translate the text of the *Pâli* cannon using all relevant *Atthakatha* and *Tika*. The following observation explains in short the Pakokku Method:

"*Pâli, Atthakathâ, Tikâmakyan, kyam: gankuikhya, wâkyaussum, nañ: cumyojanâ, kyam: lâkhaikap, dunnayatran:, khyapuikhran: hû, Pakhukkûcâkhyâ, nañ: naya. The Pakokku Method can be explained best that it uses all relevant Atthakathâ to give the meaning of each Pâli word and to use the Tika to understand the whole theme. In some way difficult passages are best explained by using the Yojanâ Method of discussion on interrelated themes.*" (Kelâsa, 1981, 299)

The Pakokku Method does not encourage examination system. In other words it is not a cramming for the examination. Generally, those who have learn the

Pitaka do not sit for the *Pathamapyan* examination.

In brief, the characteristics of the Mandalay Method are as follows:

- a. The *Kissi* grammar and other grammatical books that elaborate and explain, *Pāli* language, are taught well.
- b. *Abhidhammā* is also taught in detail.
- c. *Atthakathā* are used to explain the *Pāli* texts. (Khin Thein, 1972, 262)

The main characteristics of the Pakokku Method are as follows:

- a. *Pāli* grammar is taught only for a fundamental knowledge of the *Pāli* cannon.
- b. *Abhidhammā* is also taught to understand its rudiment.
- c. Most of the text of *Pāli* cannon is taught with the help of *Atthakathā* and *Tikā*.
- d. No attempt is made to give the explanation of a *Pāli* word.
- e. Students are supposed to work on their own if they want to know in detail.
- f. *Atthakathā* are used only superficially so that after about three years the student could make his own self-study.
- g. Evening lectures in three years called *Ñā-wā* on *Abhidhammā* are not compulsory. (Khin Thein, 1972, 265)

It can be obviously seen that the Mandalay Method takes emphasis on grammar and *Abhidhammā* whereas the Pakokku Method does not do so but focuses on completing the whole course in the shortest possible time. The Pakokku Method, however, does not pay much attention to the mastery of *Pāli* grammar. The students is expected to work by himself to have a full understanding of the *Pitaka*. In practice, most pupils felt that they have to combine the Mandalay Method with the Pakokku Method to have better results. Therefore if those who have learn grammar by the Mandalay Method continue to learn the whole course by the Pakokku Method, grammar and the text will be integrated and it will reinforce the learning and teaching of Buddhist Scriptures effectively.

Both the two methods are effective in their respective ways. So most of the students try to be acquainted with both methods. *Sayadaws* also encouraged them to try both methods until now. In the Mandalay Method, the teacher's mastery of the subject has to be supplemented by his extensive reading. In the Pakokku Method, the learner's ability is more important as they have to quote so many commentaries and sub-commentaries besides the text. It is difficult to become a good teacher in Mandalay whereas it is not easy to become a good student in Pakokku.

According to Dr Than Tun, a well-known scholar, the Mandalay Method is "I will teach you as much as I know" and the Pakokku Method is "I will teach you so that you can learn". (Than Tun, 15 March 2001) In the opinion of a learned monk, the teachings of the Buddha can be learn through the Mandalay Method and if a treatise is thoroughly learn, there shall be no difficulty to learn the others.

However, the Mandalay Method cannot teach a variety of treatise, i.e., the whole course of the *Tipitaka*. So the Pakokku Method does not follow it. (*Mānita*, 30 March 2001) Another learned monk points out that the Mandalay Method elaborates a little piece of the text in many ways, so it is hard to learn all. It is not good for examination purpose. The Pakokku Method helps the learner to study the entire course so that he knows the text well. (*Kumāra*, 29 March 2001)

The Mandalay Method emphasizes the techniques and grammar but the Pakokku Method focuses on the courses without much consideration on the techniques. For example, *Tikakyoau* has to be learn for seven years in Mandalay but it takes only one year in Pakokku. (*Uttara Nāna*, 9 April 2001) It helps the learner to understand the text more quickly. So most of the *Sayadaws* are in favour of the Pakokku Method. The students who have completed their learning in Mandalay usually try to spend at least a year in Pakokku. For example, *Ashin Janakābhivamsa* (27 February 1900-27 December 1977), one of the most well-known learned *Sayadaws* and who later became the Second Leader of *Shwegyin Nikāya*, want to Pakokku for learning the Buddhist Scriptures again after his studies in Mandalay. (*Janakābhivamsa*, 2000, 30)

In conclusion, the teachings of Lord Buddha are just like hidden treasures. The ways to discover those treasures depend on teaching methods. In the course of my studies, I interviewed so many learned *Sayadaws* of the Mandalay school and they maintain that their method is the best. On the other hand, prominent *Sayadaws* of the Pakokku school assure the fact that theirs is the best. In my opinion, both the two methods should be combined for better results and many scholar has done this way. Both methods, however, are becoming less in importance because of the examinations. Examination becomes more important to all the students. The monk must learn the teachings of the Buddha to know it and to practice it. If the monk is learning it for an examination, he would be an opportunist, seeking praise and reward. Even if a monk holds a teachership certificate, he would not be able to teach the wisdom to others because he do not know it properly himself. He just crams it for examination. So I suggest that examination system should be terminated, as it does not help much the Buddhistic studies.

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