

Life and Work of
Sujib Punyanubhab (1917-2000):
The Father of Modern Buddhist University in Thailand¹

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kāyavāṃmānasam karma
sarvaṃ samyakparīkṣya yaḥ/
parātmahitam ājñāya
sadā kuryāt sa paṇḍitaḥ//

§ 1. Introduction

When you first arrived in Thailand from abroad to attend this fourth World Buddhist Summit, many of you may have had lots of questions in mind such as: Why and how was Mahamakut or King Mongkut Buddhist University (henceforth MBU) which hosts the conference established? And by whom? How has the university contributed to strengthen Buddhism in Thailand since the second world war onwards? All the historical background of the university is connected with the name of but one man. He is ‘Sujib Punyanubhab’. This name commands great respect and admiration from a large number of people in Thailand and, in particular, all the people working at Mahamakut Buddhist University ever since the inception of the institution.

Asked whether they know Sujib Punyanubhab, general leading Thai intellectuals may answer ‘yes’. They know him because he was a noted and learned Buddhist scholar. Some may remember him as a famous, prolific writer of Buddhist novels while he was still a monk. He used to be well-known nationwide under the pen name Sujivo Bhikkhu, whose persuasive writing style is excellent. Some may quote their favourite Buddhist scholarly books written by him, mostly under the name ‘Sujib Punyanubhab’. Some may say they used to attend his lectures on Buddhism, at various times, here and there.

Still, I am sure that few people, even Thais, know him well. This is partly because Sujib himself never provided a detailed account of his own life in any books or articles whatsoever. If they think of Sujib as merely a scholar who spent most of his entire time in

¹ This article was mostly written in 2000 while I was reading for a DPhil degree at the Oriental Institute of Oxford University in the UK, soon after I had learned of Sujib’s passing away. Although I wrote this article primarily out of my memory, I thank the Mahamakuta Rajavidyalaya Foundation’s (henceforth MRF) academic staff: Assoc. Prof. Suchao Ploychum and Mr Suchin Thongyuak, for sending relevant information on Sujib’s work unknown to me at Oxford. My thanks are also due to two former Presidents of the Pāli Text Society: Prof. Richard Gombrich, my teacher at Oxford, and Mr Lance Cousins for their valuable suggestions in writing this article. However, if there are any shortcomings or inaccuracies, I must bear responsibility for them alone.

solitude producing such works to make himself famous, they are mistaken. Sujib always had a propensity to cast bread upon the waters. I have never claimed to know him well, or better than others, even though I myself was one of his closest students and, at times, his colleague. However, as if Sujib were one of my favourite actors whom I regularly saw on stage, I shall describe just a few of his characteristics, as an appreciative viewer.

Anyone who knew Sujib would not hesitate to name him as one of the Thai scholars who worked hard, for the service of Buddhism in the 20th century. Again, of all the current Thai Buddhist scholars who delved deep into Pāli Canonical texts and put the upāsaka dharmas into practice, it is not an exaggeration to say that he was the leading one. Yet, he avoided giving interviews to any media, whether magazine or radio (including BBC) or newspaper or television which could make himself more popular. His close pupils and colleagues know very well that he was indifferent to fame and material gain, despite the fact that his works were highly praiseworthy. Though his contribution to Buddhism is great, not only locally but also globally, throughout his life he wished to remain incognito and lived a simple Buddhist life, out of the limelight. His name is, therefore, rarely mentioned in any long comprehensive articles or oft-quoted historical monographs on Buddhism in modern Thailand.

Sujib Punyanubhab, better known as Sujīvo Bhikkhu in the past, was actually behind many Buddhist movements which laboured to strengthen Thai Buddhism in the last sixty years or so. In fact, some movements should have been recorded as 'his'. To use a popular term, he was one of the leading social reformers. Like them all, I suppose, he was an orator who made keen, sharp and persuasive remarks when giving talks. Unlike others, however, he was so gentle a man that he hardly criticised anybody, either in speech or in writing. He delved deep into the Pāli Canon with several admirable publications now in circulation, many of which are pioneering works of their kind. These scholarly works are profoundly expressive of Buddhist values, targeting modern Thais who tend to neglect Buddhism in favour of materialism. His style of writing is accurate, clear-cut and, more importantly, avoids in every way possible putting his 'self' into it. It is so objective, or at least noted as such, that when he had a book on comparative religion published, a Muslim scholar wrote a letter in admiration of his objective views.

Psychologically, he was a very gentle, kind, modest and amiable man. He observed the eight precepts (uposathasīla) as a true Buddhist does throughout his life. One thing that we realised when talking with him is that he understood Theravada Buddhism thoroughly, as something which people could learn endlessly from.

He was a text-based scholar and all his explanations were always verified by Canonical texts. People such as the late Prime Minister Prof. Sanya Dharmasakti always called him the 'Mobile Buddhist Canon' or 'Living Tipiṭaka'. He was neither appointed 'Professor', despite his writings surpassing that level, nor was he willing to take that

title. Yet, people around him, Thais as well as foreigners, always called him thus, when mentioning him in English. He worked for the Royal Institute of Thailand for several years, chairing several committees responsible for producing Buddhist books on its behalf, yet he never expressed his willingness to be appointed to its fellowship, unlike others. To him, how to live counted more than social positions and this is obviously conveyed by his example.

§ 2. His Early life and Education

Born into a family which owned a small grocery store in Nakhornpathom province on April 13, 1917, Sujib obtained primary education at a local school. He came to Bangkok and became interested in Pāli while still young and later was ordained as a novice. While staying at Wat Kanmatuyaram, he was fortunate enough to attend a Pāli class for beginners taught by Somdet Phra Phutthakhosacharn (Charön Nāṇavaro), one of the most brilliant pupils of Somdet Phra Mahā Samana Chao Krom Phrayā Vajirañāṇavarorasa (henceforth Prince Monk Vajirañāṇavarorasa) at Wat Thepsirintharawat and showed his willingness to learn Pāli. Sujib took a keen interest in Pāli and began to study it under the guidance of this great Pāli scholar monk.

As generally known, Pāli is a dead language and a daunting subject. The bridge between basic knowledge and mastery as taught in the Thai monastic curriculum is hard to cross; many discouraged monks give up efforts in the course of study. Like many novices in small monasteries, Sujib took Pāli under several teachers. Though dwelling at Wat Kanmatuyaram, a small monastery which depends for its Pāli studies on Wat Thepsirin, he went to consult other learned monks at other monasteries, including Wat Bovornivesviharn, on a regular basis.

In fact, Wat Thepsirin, so named after Mongkut's Queen Rampha Boromphimon (Somdet Phra Thepsirintharaboromrajinee) who mothered King Chulalongkorn, and Wat Bovornivesviharn have been closely linked as the first abbot of the former arrived from the latter; and both wats belong to the Dhammayuttika Order. Since Mongkut, then a monk, had been Abbot of Wat Bovornivesviharn and was succeeded by Prince Vajirañāṇavarorasa, this wat had become the strongest seat of Pāli learning. It is recorded that several disciples of Mongkut could converse well in Pāli and were sent to Sri Lanka for missionary purposes based on that. Sujib's preceptor himself was directly trained by the Prince Monk.

As he told me, Sujib often went to Wat Bovornivesviharn, to seek conversation with learned monks and to consult his contemporary friends. Apart from learning under his regular teachers, he made every effort to study the Pāli Canon on his own while still a novice. As shown in his writings and talks, he owed a great debt to Mongkut and the Prince Monk, whose writings inspired him to learn and compose in Pāli and made fast

progress in the study of Buddhist texts. He was a brilliant student with a highly developed mental ability, and completed all nine grades of the Thai traditional Pāli studies aged 23, in 1939, just one year after being ordained as a monk. Had he not decided to be ordained as a monk early, he would have been the first novice in the kingdom to be sponsored by the King for higher ordination at the Emerald Buddha Temple, within the compound of the Grand Palace following the tradition handed down from ancient times.

After completing Pāli classes, he spent more time learning English, Sanskrit, Brahmanism-Hinduism, other world religions, the Pāli Canon together with its commentaries, astrology, mathematics and even Chinese, basically by himself. He also learnt Buddhist scripts such as Sinhalese, Burmese and Cambodian (Tham), making him able to compare Pāli texts in various recensions. Due to his deep and wide knowledge of Buddhism, lay people began to pay regular visits to him while he was still a young monk, mostly to consult him and listen to his dharma discussions. Monks and novices from different monasteries also found him a great source to learn from and came to visit him often. He began to become more popular, on the one hand because he possessed a deep knowledge of Buddhism and on the other, because what he taught and the sermons he delivered were all put in a way that met the demands of modern people whose inclination tended to be rational and egalitarian. Buddhadasa bhikkhu of Jaiya once wrote in his autobiography entitled *Lao Wai Mua Wai Sonthayā* (Telling My Own Story When Advanced In Years) thus:

‘It was Sujib or Sujivo Bhikkhu who was the most outstanding star during that time. He is younger than me, but produced scholarly works while he was still young. Then, he was the leader of Buddhist youths who materialised various significant Buddhist activities. He initiated the founding of the Buddhist University at Wat Bovornives. He was also the first monk in Thailand who delivered sermons in English. The lectures were organised especially for him. Many foreigners came to listen to them. Later, I also attended his lectures. I was taken there by Phrayā Ladphalithamprakhan. Mr Chamnan also used to take me to visit him at his kuṭi (residence).’

§ 3. The Sangha’s Condition after the Renaissance Period

For convenience, I shall divide the reformation of Buddhism in Thailand into three periods: early, renaissance, and modern, based on the classification divided by leading reformist educators and public figures.

The early period lasted from ancient times to the reign of King Taksin (1768-1782), during which time Pāli classes were offered in accordance with the old tradition and, because of frequent wars, did not change significantly in their format. The renaissance

period began in 1782 when King Rama I (1782-1809) tried to stabilise the internal political order whilst initiating the project of compiling the Pāli Canonical texts from other countries such as Sri Lanka, which culminated in writing them down in a Khom (Tham) script. The King also purified the sangha community by taking legal actions against monks who had been demoralised and decimated since the fall of Ayutthaya to Burmese troops. The modern period began with several movements.

The earliest movement began when King Mongkut (1851-1868) (Bhikkhu Buddhavajirañāṇa or Vajirañāṇa) and his royal son, Prince Vajirañāṇavarorasa, played the dominant role in rehabilitating religious studies in the Kingdom. I label the period which started in 1851 onwards as 'modern' as it saw a tremendous change in the sangha's educational structure, leading to the establishment of the first Buddhist university in Thailand, modelled on modern state-run universities.

It is important to note that prior to 1945, the sangha had no high level, well-organised institutions at all. Education for young boys was normally provided by monasteries with monks as spiritual teachers, parallel to the tuition provided by personal tutors to children in the royal households. Subjects taught were Thai (Siamese) language and literature, Pāli, Sanskrit, history, Buddhism etc. Females were basically trained to be housewives and therefore attended courses on housework or womanly matters such as needlework, cookery, flower arrangement, social etiquette etc. The monasteries mainly bore the responsibility for higher education.

In 1889, King Rama V or King Chulalongkorn (1868-1910) founded Mahādhātuvidyālaya at Wat Mahathat, Bangkok, in an attempt to make it a strong place for advanced Pāli classes. This was certainly the first time the word vidyālaya, normally translated as 'college', was officially used. However, in essence, the institution was merely a place of Pāli schooling for monks following the traditional curriculum, transferred from the Grand Palace. A step forward to a tremendous change in sangha education was taken by Prince Vajirañāṇavarorasa who followed the footsteps of his royal father, Mongkut. The latter opened the country to Western influence and encouraged his royal children to learn modern subjects to catch up with the West, especially with the aim of freeing Thailand from being colonised.

Like other princes encouraged to learn Western languages, Prince Maṇṣyanāga or Vajirañāṇavarorasa took English and Pāli even before he was ordained as a monk. He was so brilliant a man that he profoundly mastered Pāli and its commentaries as well as Sanskrit and later was invited to be an honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain. As far as his publications and intellectual ability were concerned, he undoubtedly was the preeminent Pāli scholar of his day. He not only composed and edited a large number of Pāli texts which have been published by MRF until now, but also moved the sangha education forward by institutionalising Pāli schooling after Buddhism had been deteriorating due to wars.

I have called the period during which Mongkut and Prince Vajirañāṇavarorasa played the dominant roles ‘modern’ as they took a seminal step towards putting the country’s national and sangha education on a firm footing, so that Pāli and Buddhist studies began to bloom again. Judged from administration and curriculum records, the first ever established college proper was founded at Wat Bovornivesviharn in 1893 by the Prince Monk who named it Mahāmakūṭarājavidyālaya, better known among western scholars as King Mongkut Royal Academy or King Mongkut Buddhist College, in honour of his royal father. It was obvious that Mongkut’s wish to push Thailand to catch up with the West was the mainspring of his inspiration. Since national education then centred around monasteries, the prince thought of using the vast area of Banglamphu district which surrounded the monastery to be, as he put it, sākālavidyālaya (University).² He intended it to be the strong seat of learning for Buddhist studies at university level.

In marked contrast to previous monastic Pāli schools, the new college provided students with a strong foundation in Pāli and its literature with new methods of assessment of students’ ability, i.e. through written instead of oral examination. More importantly, attempts were made to interpret Buddhism to meet the need of modern people on a wider scale, far beyond the confines of personal interest as before. It was well organised, ahead of its time and recognised as the highest educational institution of the country. Formal classes replaced the old system in which monks served as personal tutors of individuals. Graduates from this institution were successful in subsequent careers: if they remained in the monkhood, they would be promoted to higher ranks, bearing such responsibilities as the governors of ecclesiastical provinces. Had they disobeyed, education obtained from the college qualified them for high and prestigious positions in the royal service. As every road in the ancient Roman empire led to Rome, monks and novices began to centre around Wat Bovornivesviharn. Several had left the old, traditional education system so that the number of students who sat the traditional Pāli studies exams conducted by the Central Samgha Supreme Council decreased.

Since the college was within the compound of Wat Bovornivesviharn, the stronghold of the Dhammayuttikanikāya, Chulalongkorn encouraged the Prince Monk to found a sister college for monks of the Mahānikāya Order. It was only then that Mahādhātuvidyālaya was renamed Mahāchulālongkornrājavidyālaya, initially modelling its course and organisation on that of its sister college. As their names denote, King Mongkut Royal Academy was in honour of the royal father (King Mongkut or King Rama IV) while the other place was named in honour of King Mongkut’s Royal Son, Chulalongkorn. Like Oxford and Cambridge long ago, the two colleges stood side by side as the foremost colleges in Siam when no other institutions for higher education were in existence. Prince Monk Vajirañāṇavarorasa is deservedly counted as the Father of the Thai sangha’s modern education.

² ‘University’ is normally translated as mahāvīdyālaya (Great College) but sākālavidyālaya seems a bit closer in its strict sense of the term.

Approximately eight years after their inception, both colleges came to a standstill, in about 1901. King Mongkut Royal Academy closed down first. The reasons behind its closing are arguably many. One of the strongest reasons, however, was that the Prince Monk was shouldering heavy burdens each day in his capacity as the Supreme Patriarch. He was obliged *ex officio* to apply himself to administrative work, and did not have much time to supervise the development of the college. More importantly, impetus for reform of the national education system was brought into focus by King Chulalongkorn himself. The latter upon returning from Europe on a study tour made it the highest priority to establish a well-organised secular university which met international standards. He asked the Prince Monk to work with Prince Damrong to set up the national educational scheme which resulted in the foundation of Thailand's first secular university, Chulalongkorn, in 1917. He then devoted much of his time to this project. Since its inception, Chulalongkorn University was highly geared towards preparing graduates for government service, in keeping with the rapid changes in society. When contacts with Europe were well on their way, it became fashionable amongst the Establishment to send children abroad, either to the USA or the United Kingdom.

Just after World War II,³ Thailand enjoyed rapid development matching that of Western countries. More and more people were sent overseas in response to the continuous influx of high science and technology which, together with the democratic system of government, began to be topics of vast discussion amongst the intelligentsia. Soon when modern intellectuals were on the increase, the call for political reformation from absolute monarchy to democracy was loud and gained wide support. On June 24, 1932, a group identifying themselves as the Khana Rāt (The People's Association) which was composed of both civilians and the military and had Luang Pradith Manutham (Dr Preedee Phanomyong) as leader, mounted a coup and was successful in establishing the constitutional monarchy which placed Thailand on a footing similar to other democratic countries. This coup d'état put an end to the absolute monarchy of the reign of King Prajāthipok or King Rama VII (1925-1935). It is reliably recorded, however, that the king, encouraged by the foreign policy of Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, had prepared a constitution and was in the process of handing over power to his people himself, even before the coup d'état was staged.

To pave the way for the modern political system, just seventeen years after Chulalongkorn University was founded, Thammasat University was established at the time of the political crisis in the 1930s (in 1934) when ideal politicians were much required to strengthen the new form of government. From the same government policy of modernising the country by educating Thais nation-wide, other state universities evolved: Kasetsart,

³ For most of the information on the upgrading of Buddhist colleges into universities, the writer owes much gratitude to Lieutenant-Colonel Thong Chaiyasarn who was contemporary with Sujivo Bhikkhu and His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand. I interviewed him personally at MRF in January, 1997.

mainly for agricultural research, and Mahidol, basically for modern medicine (both founded in 1943), Sri Nakharinwirot for teacher training (founded in 1954) and Chiang Mai for the preservation of Lanna local culture (founded in 1961).

Modelling themselves on Western universities, all these universities had a broad curriculum and offered both graduate and professional degrees; all were fully secularised in administration, well-organised and fully state-financed, with increasing numbers of students each year. Still, the annual competition to enter universities was severe while the places on offer were limited. To meet the demands of students who failed the entrance examinations, other state and private colleges or universities throughout the kingdom, including those of Protestant and Catholic Churches, were soon established, being fully recognised as colleges or universities. Most grew up during either the middle or second half of the twentieth century.

Like a huge tidal wave, Western civilisation began flooding into Thailand. New science and technology came in waves and the Thai classics: Buddhism, Sanskrit and Pāli, though taught at some universities such as Chulalongkorn, quickly sank beneath them. They became merely foundation courses, with interest shown only by a few students who took them in earnest for their future careers. The sangha lost its role as the leading intellectuals of society, and they were resorted to only for performing Buddhist rituals. Its education was totally ignored by the state. Stigmatised as 'old-fashioned' in the eyes of modern people, it had never been in the national education scheme of any government whatsoever. In a way, it was not only static but also totally resigned to its fate. On the one hand, Pāli schooling was basically limited to monasteries; monks had been left behind in modern times and, even worse, were seen as contributing little to the country's development. The Marxist motto 'religion is an opiate' was occasionally echoed.

Moreover, those who received traditional training under monastic guidance were not held in high regard and many could not even find proper jobs in the government sector as certificates of Buddhist studies issued by monasteries were no longer valid. On the other hand, state universities became overly devoted to modernising the country and lacked concern for intrinsic values. One can say that from World War II onwards, the government turned a blind eye and deaf ear to the sangha; its critics at times even said words to the effect that the purpose of ordination was spiritual development, which had nothing to do with modern subjects; any attempts to give modern education to monks would only encourage them to disrobe.

Of those who played a part in teaching Sanskrit and Pāli after the War and before the establishment of the first Buddhist University, King Mongkut (Mahamakut) University in 1945, mention should be made of Phra Sāraprasert⁴ (Tree Nākhapratheep) who taught Pāli part-time at Chulalongkorn University. Tree was a gifted pupil of Prince

Monk Vajirañāṇavarorasa. In fact, it was he who significantly broadened Sujib's views. He then was a renowned Sanskritist of the day and was his tough teacher of Sanskrit too.

In addition to composing books on Sanskrit literature and teaching Pāli at Chulalongkorn University, Tree accepted young monk-pupils and offered Sanskrit classes at Wat Thepsirin. It was quite fortunate that all his pupils had an excellent background in Pāli which contributed much to making fast progress in Sanskrit. Later, almost all of them such as Nirantaro Bhikkhu (former abbot of Wat Thepsirin), Sujīvo Bhikkhu and Santānkuro Bhikkhu (currently Somdet Phra Nāṇavarotama, Vice President of King Mongkut Buddhist University), came to be highly spoken of as Sanskrit authorities. At almost the same time as Tree's opening of Sanskrit classes, Suvaddhano Bhikkhu (currently the Supreme Patriarch) also learnt Indian philosophy and English under a learned Indian Brahmin who settled down permanently in Thailand, Svami Satyānandapuri. With him studied some of his contemporaries such as Candapajjoto Bhikkhu (the late Somdet Phra Mahā Muniwongse, Abbot of Wat Noranath, Bangkok) and Uḍāḍhimo Bhikkhu (the late Somdet Phra Vanarat, Abbot of Wat Rajabopith, Bangkok).

All of these young yet far-sighted and active monks, in fact, were close friends and at times gathered together at Wat Bovornivesviharn. Almost all of them are now high ranking monks of the Thammayut Order. Sujib told me that at times he consulted Suvaddhano Bhikkhu, and they tutored each other. However, Suvaddhano Bhikkhu later confined himself to Pāli and meditation and had good contact with forest monks in those days while Sujīvo stood foremost in making his voice heard for the development of sangha education whenever he was invited to give lectures and met people.

It is interesting to note that during this time few monks in the Kingdom learnt English properly and fewer could speak English fluently enough to be able to explain aspects of Buddhism at length in English, let alone give a lecture. Sujīvo, perhaps resembling Ven. Guṇānanda of the second half of the 19th century in Sri Lanka,⁵ was the first Thai monk who gave a Buddhist lecture in English standing, against the normal way which is lucidly described by Richard Gombrich: 'Traditionally, monks preached seated, and often holding a fan in front of their faces, in order to render the sermon as impersonal as possible'.⁶ Sujīvo was invited to give his English début at Chulalongkorn University auditorium as he had hitherto been seen as possessing an exceptional command of English, a qualification which was extremely rare among monks. Apart from modern languages, other activities carried on by those young but brilliant monks also attracted fellow monks on a wide scale, especially an oratory art. Both Buddhādāsa and Paññānanda Bhikkhus are said to have come to Wat Bovornivesviharn sometimes to

⁴ I mention him here because Sujib always told me that he owed a large debt of gratitude to this scholar.

⁵ Richard F. Gombrich, (1988). *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., p.182.

join some of these activities.

As said earlier, the primary objective of the state's modern education was to modernize the country with little significance given to the spiritual dimension. Buddhist culture by degrees tended to become softer as a long-term consequence. Undeniably, the weaker it got, the more powerless it would become. The gap between the sangha and the people widened. While Western-educated Thais spoke Thai mixed with English words, monks always gave sermons in Thai mixed with Pāli and Sanskrit jargon, hardly comprehensible to them. Many people tended to think that Buddhism and modern sciences were ultimately irreconcilable.

Obviously, the sangha had been left so far behind that people of the new generation held the sangha and its members in contempt, saying they were dinosaurs of the country and lacked proper contact with the outside world. Even worse, many monasteries prohibited monks from learning modern subjects including English, criticising that they were 'low (lit. "beastly") subjects' (tiracchānavijjā) which contributed less to spiritual development. Monks who were interested in English in monasteries sometimes hid themselves when trying to learn them, either with personal tutors or by themselves. Of all the monks who disrobed to seek further education outside, Thong Chaiyasarn, believed to be the first monk to publish a persuasive article in a Thai daily newspaper calling on modern education for monks, kindly told me that monks sometimes even hid English notebooks in their alm-bowls when going out to see personal tutors.

In the circumstances, the sangha education during Sujīvo's time had already reached an impasse. The sangha was no longer relevant, as it was out of touch with modern needs. Though the country had developed a great deal and survived colonialism, it had paid a high price; Buddhism which instilled the Thais' habits of hospitality, friendliness, compassion, calmness, non-violence and righteousness had almost been discarded; almost everywhere was permeated by modern trends and materialistically inclined. It is always, until now, claimed that modern life is based on science and technology ; the more life is based on science, the more one is rational.

However, the truth speaks for itself: superstitious beliefs have prevailed almost everywhere side by side with material development. Like in other major cities, true Buddhism in Bangkok has hardly survived and maintained its real core. It has, in my personal opinion, evolved to be merely a form of Buddhism which responds mainly to capitalism or modern consumerism under which few people believe in such principles as the law of karma, life after death and so on seriously. Indeed, the state's modernisation has been highly successful and has exceeded all expectations. It went so far as to neglect the enlightened mind of Mongkut. Had he still been alive, he would have never

⁶ Ibid.

consented to the government policy of modernisation to the neglect of the national religion, though it was he who initiated the opening of the country.

§ 4. The Wat Bovornivesviharn Movement

Since 1937, Sujīvo Bhikkhu had personally offered classes on Buddhism, English and Pāli at his monastery, Wat Kanmatuyaram, to a group of monk students who gathered around him. It was fortunate that, upon learning that he had opened classes for monks, Phra Phrommuni (Phin Suvaco), then Director of MRF and deputy abbot of Wat Bovornivesviharn, gave him full support and encouraged him to formally institutionalise his classes so far as to offer a place at Wat Bovornivesviharn and monetary support from MRF to run them.

Strongly backed by the deputy abbot and inspired by the remarkable growth of modern secular universities and the government's lack of concern for spiritual development, Sujīvo began to move, as advised, to set up a higher institution for training monks in the hope that they could speak the same language as westernised people. He also had strong backing from his close friends, especially from Phra Mahā Charōn Suvaddhano, Phra Mahā Nirand Nirantaro, Phra Mahā Prayoon Santaṅkuro, all of whom had finished Pāli Grade 9, the highest Pāli class available in the Thai traditional Pāli studies. The project to re-enliven King Mongkut Royal Academy which had stopped dead for almost 44 years, soon came to the minds of these Dhammayut progressive monks. The daunting task, however, was to convince the majority of the other high ranking monks in charge of the sangha education scheme and, in this, Sujīvo Bhikkhu was more active than most.

The project, in fact, had been controversial from the start. Many monks tended to be extremely conservative. Despite creating a storm of controversy and being subject to pressure by dissenters, Sujīvo with the backing of Phra Phrommuni had a firm seriousness of purpose and took pains to continue to campaign for the establishment of a well-organised Buddhist university, as a means of preparing Buddhist missionaries in modern times. Sujīvo himself argued against those dissenters many times. In effect, he explained that the project supplied the most basic educational needs of monks in keeping with modern trends. To him, Buddhism could be practically applied to such modern subjects as economics, politics, law, social sciences etc. to form what is called 'Buddhist ways of life' for Thai Buddhists in conformity with the new rapidly changing society. He always likened modern subjects to rails which were sine qua non for modern monks to learn so that the Buddhism-train could meaningfully and smoothly run on them, in every aspect of modern life.

However, it was not until His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch Vajiraṇavamsa (M.R.Chün Navawongse), then Lord Abbot of Wat Bovornivesviharn, was convinced that the project became a reality. Sujīvo again insisted to him personally that modern

subjects would be arranged for monks, only as they climbed the ladder to a successful future missionary career and, though these modern subjects would be on offer, Buddhism would still remain the core requirement in curricula. The period during 1939 onwards was a transitional time of mixed culture between East and West. As Charles Darwin spoke of 'the survival of the fittest', those who remained too 'Siamese', i.e. ignored change and stayed idle would find it hard to survive during the influx of high science and technology and soon naturally die off. It is noteworthy that the country also changed its name from 'Siam' into 'Thailand' in 1941 during the Phiboon regime.

Knowing that the time to change had come, His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch not only agreed to the project to re-enliven the King Mongkut Royal Academy into a university, but also gave it adequate protection. When the Supreme Patriarch himself and Phra Prommuni came forward as the strongest patrons of the new University, the project received increasing support from other monks and scholars congregating around them. When the movement was seen as Wat Bovornivesviharn's, it then found a very warm reception amongst wider Buddhists and the gossip from conservative dissenters who kept close watch on Sujīvo's movements for fear that the modern education system would lead the sangha astray, soon slackened and eventually vanished.

Under the monetary support of MRF, the newly-revived King Mongkut (Mahamakut) Buddhist University (KMBU or MBU) came into existence. It was officially opened in 1945, offering a B.A. in Religious Studies. Its classes started in 1946 with the then Supreme Patriarch as President of the University Council, Phra Phrommuni as Rector and Sujīvo himself serving as its Secretary-General. With the successful establishment of this university, a move by progressive monks of the Mahānikāya Order was also well on its way. In 1947, they were successful in founding King Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University.

It is important to note that even though the University was declared open, the government did not give full financial support as they considered it illegal. They provided only a small amount of money for administrative work per year. The annual budget given by the government actually equaled the amount of money spent for one day by other secular universities. Students were not required to pay tuition fees either. Not only was more money desperately needed to fund improvements to MBU's academic infrastructure such as better teaching facilities, recruiting some of the finest minds of the country to be permanent and special lecturers etc., but the university also tried to prepare bursaries to those students most in need. The financial support from MRF could help alleviate this financial pressure somewhat, but obviously was not sufficient to maintain and enhance its national roles against the aggressive materialistic trends which were witnessed across the country.

Since the purpose of reviving the old college to be a university had been mainly to

produce reliable and capable monks to lead the laity, the coursework required for the B.A. degree was more than double that of secular universities. Though more than one hundred students enrolled for the entrance examination, only a few passed and fewer still were successful enough to complete the demanding course. It appeared that when there was a conferring ceremony later, less than twenty competent monks received a B.A. degree.

As earlier mentioned, while Sujīvo struggled to revive the old college, he was not isolated. His friends took a close interest and lent a hand in every way possible to strengthen the new Buddhist University, either as lecturers or administrators. Sanskrit grammar and literature were also introduced as major subjects side by side with Pāli. The noted P.S.Sāstrī, an Indian Sanskritist of the time who stayed permanently in Thailand, was invited to teach Sanskrit. Of the few but talented students of Nagapratheep, Phra Mahā Prayoon composed a series of books of Sanskrit Grammar, an admirable and pioneering work of its kind, in four volumes and this has been used as a handbook for students of Sanskrit at the University even today.

Sujīvo, on the other hand, was foremost in translating Pāli suttas and composing books on comparative religion such as History of Religions, Comparative Religion, World Religions. Most were bestsellers for several decades and remain so on account of their being pioneering works which noted scholars of the subject never fail to refer to as references. In fact, it was he who introduced the study of comparative religion, which was initiated for the first time at Oxford University by Prof. Frederick Maximilian Müller,⁷ at the newly established university before the subject spread to other universities such as Thammasat, Chulalongkorn, Kasetsart, Chiangmai. His reputation stood high nationwide in this respect and therefore he was invited to teach it at many other secular universities. On these grounds, he was deservedly called the Father of Comparative Religion in Thailand even though no chair in this subject was created for him in his honour by universities where he taught.

The new University, therefore, was run by a group of highly qualified monks, most of whom had a good knowledge of modern subjects relevant to Buddhism such as Sanskrit, English and Thai together with its literature. No doubt, its establishment marked the flowering of the Thai sangha education revival and this group of monks was the true successor of the modern period pioneered by Prince Vajirañāṇavararasa. Sujib told me⁸ that the foundation of this Buddhist University evolved from the supposition that it would be an ideal place where monks of both Dhammayuttika and Mahānikāya could develop together their capacity for the progress and prosperity of Buddhism without the discrimination of Orders, following the noble path previously taken by the Prince Monk

⁷ See, for example, N.J. Girardot, Max Müller's Sacred Book and the Nineteenth-Century Production of the Comparative Science of Religions, History of Religions, 2002 : 213-250.

⁸ Personal communication.

when he declared King Mongkut Royal Academy open in 1893.

Since the Buddhist University was newly established and people of modern times still regarded sangha education as very backward, Sujīvo proposed to invite leading scholars of the day in various subjects to be special lecturers at the University with high payment per hour, even doubling the rate a part-time competent professor would usually obtain in state-run secular universities. The first year monk students at the University were therefore fortunate enough to be trained under highly qualified guides of the country, many of whom were well educated abroad. Phra Mahā Saeng Ghosadhammo, currently Prof. Emeritus Saeng Chandngarm, from the first Small But Beautiful group of students, was competent enough to be the first student monk in the kingdom who could deliver sermons in English. He did so first at the University's auditorium, then opposite Wat Bovornivesviharn, to an audience mainly from the Asia Foundation which later sponsored him to do an M.A. degree in English literature at Michigan University in the States.

§ 5. His Literary Work

In spite of overwhelming burdens, Sujīvo never stopped writing. It is interesting to note that even though he deals with profound teaching of religions, his writing style, though authoritative, is soundly commonsensical, preferring the most common and familiar idioms to the far-fetched jargon often seen in philosophical essays. His messages are therefore direct, simple, lucid and impressively accessible to the general public.

One day, while having lunch together in Banglamphu, Bangkok, I asked him how to write a book. He said: 'First, define the problem or title; second, collect all the relevant evidence as much as you can, and third, lay it out and try to let 'facts' reveal themselves rather than introduce your 'self' to meddle with them. Just keep in mind at all times that we are trying to spread the Buddha's own words, not our own ideas.'

I am not surprised that in any work he writes on aspects of Buddhism, he gives an exhaustive survey with the intention of spreading the Buddha's own words as the guiding passion of his writing career. To my personal impression, however, it seems that though his style is accessible to a wide audience, his target was in many cases mainly egalitarian modern people. He explained to me several times⁹ that while it is true that the Buddhist Noble Eightfold Path essentially demands adherers to renounce the world to fulfil its supreme goal, Buddhist ethical principles have hierarchical steps, pragmatic and suitable, for different levels of laypeople, and should be interpreted to meet the demands of the surrounding social conditions in which Buddhism grows and develops. Buddhism in many of his books is, therefore, presented in virtue of its timeless and

⁹ Personal communication.

rational principles which can cope well with modern society.

An authority of Buddhist canonical texts himself who learnt a great deal from the Pāli Canon as a first hand source, he pioneered to make its deep and extensive essence in Pāli, previously limited to a handful of learned monks and scholars, easily accessible and comprehensible to the general public in Thai. This resulted in his famous magnum opus, Phra Traipidok Chabab Samrap Prachāchon (The Pāli Canon for the General Public), the first complete publication of its kind in Thai. Published by MRF no less than 20 times, the book summarises all Buddha's important teachings from all 45 volumes of the Pāli Canon in Thai script, covering a wide range of knowledge of Buddhism. Even at first glance, academics never fail to feel amazed at the comprehensive information relating to the editing and printing of the Pāli Canon in Thailand in its introduction, based on little known sources.

One may be doubtful as to how he got all this information as it is rarely fully mentioned in even well-researched Buddhist historical monographs in circulation. To use his own words, they were 'accidentally obtained'. As he told me: one day, while strolling on a small road at Trok Khao San at Banglamphu where he stayed soon after he disrobed, he chanced to enter a small shop which sold secondhand books. There, he found a small book, somewhat rotten and nearly thrown away, which contained the official announcements relating to editing and printing Canonical texts in Thailand.

Highly noted as an excellent and admirable summary of Buddhist cores is, among other things, Prominent Characteristics of Buddhism, a collection of his papers prepared to give lectures to students of the Economics Faculty at Thammasat University. With this, he is highly successful in an attempt to show Buddhist viewpoints towards such modern subjects as economics, politics, science, democracy, social science, psychology and so on. Since its circulation, the book has been a bestseller and an inspiring source on which several scholarly works were based.

Pot Canānukrom Sab Phra Puttha Sādsanā (Dictionary of Buddhist Terms) was also a pioneering work of its kind. It was the first attempt to produce a Thai-English and English-Thai Dictionary dealing with Buddhist technicalities. Interestingly enough, for any topic on Buddhism on which he begins to write, he scrutinizes Pāli original sources carefully on the basis of a thorough philological examination of the context in which they appear. The work, in fact, was a long-term project since the collection of words from both Canonical and non-canonical sources into a dictionary was a demanding and challenging task. As he told me, the dictionary of Buddhist words in his mind might cover almost all important Pāli terms enough to be used as a handbook for reading general Buddhist publications in English and Thai. As he was exposed to Western scholarship produced in the 19th and 20th centuries, it came to his notice that some Western scholars such as R.C.Childers who preceded him, translated many Pāli words inaccurately

into English and those mistranslations are found in several learned books.

Let me take an example.¹⁰ The word *saṃkhāra* which forms part of the Five Aggregates (*khandha*), has been translated differently by a number of scholars before him. The Pāli Text Society's Dictionary renders it '(mental) coefficients', Buddhadatta's Concise Pāli-English Dictionary puts it 'mental coefficients', Childers's Pāli-English Dictionary translates it as 'mental property', Nārada's Dictionary uses 'volitional activities'. In his dictionary, Sujīvo renders it as 'volition', but in the context of *sabbe saṃkhārā aniccā* 'All *saṃkhāras* are impermanent' and so on, he translates it as 'compounded things', 'component things' or 'conditioned things'. Unfortunately however, when Phra Phrommunī to whom he felt extremely grateful for his extensive assistance passed away, and he was asked to prepare a work at hand to publish in commemoration of the monk's crematory ceremony, he decided to publish this incomplete work. He told me that the published dictionary was a quarter of what was really collected.

Besides this, he also took a lead in introducing Buddhism into the modern literary world by brilliantly showing a remarkable gift for composing such well-known didactic novels as *Nanthapajābodee* (Nanda and His Wife), *Lum Nam Nammathā* (In the Valley of the *Nammadā* River), *Tai Rom Kāsāwapath* (Under the Shade of the Saffron Robe).¹¹ Of the most famous publications of this kind, mention should be made of *Āthit Khün Thang Thid Tawantok* (The Sun Is Rising in the West), a well known novel illustrating the popularity of Buddhism, which has been seen by Western scholars as the biggest religious trend in the West after he had noticed the steady waves of renowned Western scholars or leading Buddhists such as E. Burnouf, T. W. Rhys Davids, Hermann Oldenberg, Christmas Humphreys, Miss I. B. Horner who took a keen interest in introducing Buddhism to the Western socio-cultural milieu from the early 19th century onwards. In a tone which is kept up throughout the story, the book arouses Thais to return to Buddhism-based Thai culture and customs, rather than to move fast along the highway towards material development whilst discarding Buddhism, blindly following the capitalist societies in Europe and America. As he tries to point out, the sublime teaching of the Buddha was being highly admired, seriously practiced and devotedly disseminated even by leading Western thinkers.

One of the most popular, inspiring didactic Buddhist novels to enjoy great success is undoubtedly *Kong Thap Tham* (The Dharma's Army) which focuses on the

¹⁰ Sujib Punyanubhab, *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms*, 8th Impression. Bangkok: MRF, 1998, § 4 (introduction).

¹¹ I was told that when Dharmacakṣu was delayed in publishing these novels, many readers even went to the printing house at MRF, opposite Wat Bovornivesviharn, just to ask if they could read the manuscripts being printed.

missionary life of Ven.Sariputta, a chief disciple of the Lord Buddha. His life in this novel is depicted as the general (senāpati) who, upon receiving commands from Buddha the Universal King, led the dharma-army to persuade the whole world to fight against mental defilements. All the soldiers were arhants, sent forth by the Buddha in different directions, for the benefit, advantage and happiness of the many. Their goal was noble: it was to convince intelligible people to taste freedom from bondage (vimuttirasa). No one, I suppose, would fail to feel the aura of strength of the dharma army in this simple yet forceful, persuasive and utterly charming style of writing.

Other well known novels which are also passionate expressions of Buddhist philosophy include Chōng Phā Himaphān (In the Valley of Himavant), Lee La Jeewit (Aspects of Life Uncovered), Phiman Ung Hath (Dream Castle). The last one, written many years ago, has never been published so far. He told the editorial staff of the Dharmacakṣu, the first Buddhist magazine in Thailand (first issued by MRF in 1896), just before I left for Oxford in 1997, that the manuscript was lost; he was looking for it and he wished to get it published in the magazine soon.

Like other pieces of his works, this new style of writing also attracted readers on a wide scale, creating a great wave of interest among people. It also aroused his pupils to follow in his footsteps. They, too, have had tremendous success in their writing careers. Foremost among them are prolific writers on Buddhist philosophy, Prof. Emeritus Saeng who currently serves as a specialist in Buddhist Philosophy at King Mongkut (Mahamakut) Buddhist University, Lanna Campus, Chiangmai and Vasin Indasara, former Head of the Department of Buddhist Studies, King Mongkut Buddhist University, Wat Bovornivesviharn Campus. Some of their writing are occasionally dramatised and appear on television.

In addition to Pāli, Sujib's mastery of Sanskrit gave him a deep and wide understanding of Indian literature, philosophy and religious traditions. Very often, he consulted Sanskrit, Pāli and Prākṛit dictionaries when in doubt and made clear a historical development of words when he philologically explained them. It was also at the King Mongkut Buddhist University that Mahāyāna Buddhism, ignored by the Thai sangha in its traditional Pāli Studies course, found its place and significantly was taught side by side with Theravāda Buddhism for the first time. This was, again, his attempt to make his students fully realise the existence of another school of Buddhism, historically and doctrinally. Translations of Buddhist Sanskrit texts were also initiated and undertaken by him. As far as I know, at least two Mahāyāna texts were translated by him from the original Sanskrit and are now in circulation. They are the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sūtra and the Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra the latter being published first in 1951 by the University.

The project to translate these texts, however, almost came to a standstill due to his

overwork. It was not until he delegated the task to other reliable lecturers, either his friends or pupils, that he gave up this project. Among his famous pupils or colleagues who are well versed in Mahāyāna Buddhism, mention should be made of Sathien Bodhinanda, his young Sino-Thai brilliant pupil. Since Sathien, himself a specialist in Chinese, was encouraged to teach Mahāyāna Buddhism at the University, Mahāyāna texts have been gradually translated, basically from the original Chinese sources and been published. Works authored by Sathien are many. Those include Mahāyāna Philosophy, A Collection of Mahāyāna Sūtras, Laṃkāvatāra Sūtra, Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra, Eastern Thinkers, History of Buddhism, Many Questions Answered, to mention but a few. Most have been published by the University.

Since the successful move to revive King Mongkut Royal Academy into a university under the name 'Mahamakut Buddhist University', modern subjects such as psychology, politics, sociology, economics, law, etc. have been taught in the hope that students could understand the current trend of the social-cultural milieu in which they live and wisely interpret and disseminate Buddhism in a way relevant to the needs of modern people. Philosophy was also taught at tertiary level here for the first time under Sujīvo Bhikkhu's guidance. As specialists in the subject of the times, Western-educated lecturers Samak Burawat (1916-1975) who was educated at London University and former Prime Minister M.R. Kūkrit Pramroj who read philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) at Queen's College, Oxford, both having won nationwide reputations for their profound knowledge of philosophy, were invited to give a series of lectures on the subject. While the former taught in Thai, the latter did in English.

Encouraged by Sujīvo to prepare papers for monk students for each lesson, Samak felt it his duty to compile philosophical books, all of which were first published, mainly by the University. Since philosophy was taught here for the first time in the kingdom and Samak was among the few authorities on it who could produce such philosophical works, he soon became increasingly popular. His books have commanded great admiration from students of philosophy both inside and outside Buddhist Universities until today. Inspired by the University, Departments of Philosophy were introduced at other secular universities, first at Thammasat in 1963, to be followed by others such as Chulalongkorn, Kasetsat, Chiang Mai, Khonkaen, where Buddhist Studies are strongly taught nowadays. Since then, books or research works on the state of philosophy have been uninterruptedly released by various universities and publishing houses.

Sujīvo also introduced Buddhist classes to lay people. Inspired by vigorous attempts made by Colonel Henry Steele Olcott and other Buddhist groups who launched a campaign to revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka during the colonial period, and were successful in the establishment of Buddhist Sunday schools for young children, a school with similar aims was also initiated by him. The class was first opened unofficially to a group of interested laypeople who gathered around him at the ground floor of his residence at

his monastery, even before the University was officially declared open. When the University came into existence, the classes moved from Wat Kanmatuyaram to Wat Bovornivesviharn, with a more structured system.

Without any certificates issued to students when first introduced into the University, the primary objective of the Buddhist Sunday school was mainly to educate modern city young children and other interested people who lacked adequate knowledge of Buddhism or Buddhism-based Thai culture and customs, complementary to normal schooling run by the government. The classes normally provided practicable and practical courses of Buddhist teachings, always taught by student monks and lecturers of the University who were trained in the subject and put in a way easily understandable to students of varying ages. It was much later that a more formal class with certificates of attendance or passing exams was officially introduced.

At its earlier stage, the University was neither financed properly nor was it recognised as a University by the government, though there had been a continuous campaign launched by students, administrators and lecturers of both King Mongkut and King Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist Universities. Any time the proposal was submitted, it would be turned down or aroused resistance amongst government officers. The University had been 'illegitimate' and its certificate had been invalid for 39 years before the government yielded to enact a law to recognise its degrees in 1984 due to heavy and consistent appeals.

§ 6. His Social Work

Sujib began his teaching career while still a novice as he was to deliver a regular sermon to Buddhist devotees at his monastery and had continued to teach since then. For more than sixty years, he was invited to teach Buddhism, comparative religion, Buddhist philosophy and world religions at many universities, namely, King Mongkut, Chulalongkorn, Thammasat, Mahidol, Ramkhamhaeng, to mention but a few. He was invited to give lectures on Buddhism and joint panel discussion in many places on a regular basis. He did these jobs tirelessly, out of his own aspiration to serve Buddhism. Apart from this, he played a significant role at many leading Buddhist organisations. These include the World Fellowship of Buddhists, the Buddhist Association of Thailand, the Buddhist Youth Association of Thailand and so on, for many years and been seriously involved in their activities, especially during their seminal stages.

As for the Young Buddhist Association of Thailand (YBAT), again, it was he who was behind its initiation. The idea came when Sathien, then aged between 17-18, whose popularity was increasing mainly due to his admirable comprehensive articles published in the *Dharmacakṣu* which showed his profound knowledge of Buddhism, was invited to give a lecture at the King Mongkut Buddhist University auditorium, then opposite Wat Bovornivesviharn, to an audience of interested lay Buddhists. Under Sujīvo's guidance,

Sathien prepared himself very well for the given topic and could speak more articulately than any listeners seeing a first-time guest speaker, in school shorts, could expect. Later, some of them (perhaps including Sujīvo Bhikkhu himself) encouraged Sathien to become the head of Buddhist youths who became seriously interested in Buddhism to organise activities for encouraging others of the same age to learn and practise Buddhism. YBAT, therefore, emerged with the backing of Sujīvo, thereafter coming regularly to give lectures in its earlier stages. The name of the association, however, was obtained from Phra Phrommunī (Phin).

After many years of hard work, Sujīvo disrobed. When the news that he had disrobed became known nationwide, I was told by his contemporaries that many people were extremely astounded, shocked, or even cried. High ranking monks who had high hopes of him as a highly promising intellectual monk scholar who could reform the sangha contemplated aniccā (impermanence). The biggest selling newspaper of the day did not fail to put his story as the leading news item, including his photograph while he was preparing to disrobe and while the disrobing ceremony was due to begin.

Having disrobed, he rented a small house at Trok Khao San, Banglamphu, just five minutes walk from MRF and Wat Bovornivesviharn where most of his life had been devoted to the service of Buddhism before moving to Soi Chaiyapruk, Sukhumvit Road, then a paddyfield, where he lived with his family. Soon after disrobing, he was urged by Field Marshall Plaek Pibulsongkram, then Prime Minister, who highly admired him personally for being well-versed in Buddhism, to assume many high positions. The posts which Plaek at once offered Sujib included a 'high position' at the Royal Institute, Directorship-General of the Department of Religious Affairs attached to the Ministry of Education, or even a 'high position' at the newly-established Ministry of Culture. However, Sujib never expressed his willingness to assume any one of these high social status positions on offer.

He decided to work for the Ministry of Culture, starting with a low post. Since Plaek had laid down a policy to recruit capable civilians to serve the military in his government by which some such noted figures as Luang Wichitwāthakārn were promoted to assume the rank of Major General, he paved the way for Sujib, first promoting him Lieutenant Commander. Knowing Plaek's good intention however, Sujib did not report himself for the post. His name, therefore, was prefixed with only 'Acting Lieutenant Commander' and due to this, he was never promoted to higher positions until the Ministry was dissolved.

It was at the Ministry that he once was offered a short trip to New York, on a study tour as a Thai representative to cement good relationships with the US. One day, at midnight in New York, he quietly stepped out for a stroll on a road near his hotel and chanced to go into a bookshop, still open with a few customers. He saw a lot of newly-published books

on sociology. He bought a number of them. Upon returning to Bangkok, he composed a famous book on Thai culture, based on Buddhism titled *Watthanathamwitthayā* (Knowledge on Culture), first published by the Ministry of Culture in 1954, in which he pointed out what the indigenous Thai culture which is based on Buddhism is. His prime objective in producing this book, as the book itself states, is to remind Thai people to differentiate the Buddhism-based Thai culture from unwholesome habits such as smoking which are also included in what is called 'culture'.

It should not be forgotten that most books on Thai culture then were written by Sathiankoset. Unlike this great scholar who specialised in Thai folklore, Sujib brought to light Buddhism-based Thai culture with a definition of *Watthanatham* in the Buddhist context. As he has shown, the term in fact was used in a narrower sense than that of English culture as usually translated by modern Thai scholars. As he has implied, the word 'culture', is not equated with *Watthanatham* in Thai which is derived from Pāli *Vaḍḍhanadhamma* since 'civilised' here does not have any Buddhist sense and must be used with meticulous care. Its meaning in many learned articles is also dubious. While many tend to refer to the relative culture which changes according to time, Sujib points out that in a Buddhist sense it refers to 'the Dhamma or virtue which should be developed which makes one fully grown.' Here, he refers to the Buddhist way of life. Any culture which is improper (such as smoking) or immoral cannot be called *Vaḍḍhanadhamma* even though it may be counted as culture in English. When modern well-educated people say that culture means 'relative values' changeable and depending on environment and subject to be replaced by current materialist trends, Sujib argues that Buddhist culture should be solidly built and strengthened amidst the constraints of modern times, as Buddhist teaching itself is timeless.

It must be emphasised that all of his books, in Thai as well as English, are donated to philanthropic organisations like MRF, MBU, the World Fellowship of Buddhists and so on. At MRF, he donated all the money obtained from selling them for the welfare of KMU lecturers whilst funding some scholarships for young monks who pursue degrees in Buddhist Studies there.

§ 7. Conclusion

MBU came into existence because of Sujib. At this institution, he created a series of subject families across the university where students, lecturers and other academics who studied many aspects of Buddhism and other modern relevant subjects come together to talk across the range of their subject areas in attempts to adopt Buddhism to meet modern needs. It is nonetheless not a social institution where people simply come, get degrees and go away like all other secular universities in Thailand. It has a Buddhist heart. From the very beginning, it is the monument of a collective effort made by creative leading Buddhists who tried to place Buddhism on a firmer ground in response to the aggressive

challenge of capitalism or materialism of the day. It came into existence with the Buddhist spirit, and with one clear goal: spiritual and intellectual development of mankind. Currently, it has grown up, has been well known among international scholars and has somehow continued to renew itself. Yet the values which underpin it remain the same.

Sujib worked for MRF as the President of its Advisory Board on academic affairs where I was fortunate enough to serve as his colleague and secretary. He worked for the World Fellowship of Buddhists as Member of the Directing Committee for more than thirty years, whose responsibility was to plan for the promotion of Buddhism, locally and internationally. He worked at MBU as a lecturer in Buddhism and comparative religion to both undergraduates and postgraduates, and as a member of the University Council from its inception up until his death. As mentioned earlier, he also devoted his time to the Royal Institute of Thailand, chairing staff committees responsible for producing many books related to Buddhism and so on. Judged from all that he had done, we can certainly say that he was one of the Great Commander-in-Chiefs of the Dharma Army in the 20th century Thailand.

Despite the fact that he was a veteran worker for Buddhism of more than sixty years' standing, he never expressed any wishes, either verbally or literally, to assume any high social position. In fact, he never filled in any application forms for them. I once asked him personally why. In reply, he said to me seriously, in essence: 'In Buddhism, how to live counts more than what we possess---no matter whether they are money, position or assets. A man is truly valued on account of his verbal and bodily wholesome actions, not through his position.' Yet, he received Doctorate Degrees honoris causa from three universities in Thailand: Thammasat, Ramkhamhaeng and MBU. In 1998, he was selected by the government agency to be Khon Dee See Sangkhom (The Virtuous and Exemplary Man of Thai Society), in whose steps everyone should follow. This reward portrayed vividly what he had done, how he had behaved and how the Thai people always think of him.

I would consider this little article of mine successful if the late Prof. Sujib is at least remembered by his fellow Buddhists around the world as 'The Father of Modern Buddhist University in Thailand', without whose initiative the current Mahamakut Buddhist University, which hosts this Buddhist conference, could not have come into existence.

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