

# **A Re-Seeding for India**

## **A Reflection on the Need of Education and Dissemination**

**Ven. Dr. Punnobhasa**  
**Dean of the Faculty of General Buddhist Studies**  
**Sitagu International Buddhist Academy**  
**Sagaing, Myanmar**

India is familiar to me since I went there to pursue my higher education. I owe India twice. What I owe her was big ones. The first one was because those who brought the teaching to my country were Indian monks. Thankfully, generations of our teachers and their teachers preserved the teaching well. I was born to a Buddhist family where the seed of knowledge on Buddhism for me was sowed and because of that I was given since an early age a map to *nibbana*, the goal of a Buddhist. There is nothing greater than this gratitude. I owe India not as myself but as a Buddhist. It may not be wrong if I say that you, my dear Dhamma friends, also owed India a lot too.

The second one I owe India was when I went to India and studied philosophy. My teachers were Indians; my friends were Indians, and many other things that I am still grateful to were Indians. That, you may call personal. Yet, there are many students from Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and other countries who went to India and are still there for their study. Their study somehow has benefited other Buddhists around the world. Thus, directly or indirectly we all Buddhists owe India enormously.

Now, let us think about the situation of Buddhism in India. Buddhism was lost in its origin due to many reasons. If you don't want to call it "lost" it certainly is extremely weak. Thanks to the very inspiring efforts of some great personalities to re-introduce Buddhism to India, many people in India are following the Dhamma again. However, among those people in India there are some dangerous misunderstandings about the Dhamma. That is due to lack of competent Dhamma teachers there. Some people follow the Dhamma blindly. They embrace Buddhism for their worldly needs. Forgive me if I call it political Buddhism. I am sure you all know the situation.

Once, I was invited to a Buddhist family and they offered lunch. After the Dhamma talk, the lady of the household told me that she respected her Buddhist leader than the Buddha for it was her leader, not the Buddha, who took them out of the downtrodden life. I was shocked to hear that. Indeed I have come across such attitude more than once. One day, I was at the station waiting for a local train. A drunkard man tried to disturb me. I tried to remain calm. But the man spit on my feet. I did not know why. Then, all of a sudden, some men rushed to us and hit the drunkard shouting "Don't abuse our leader, Baba Sai Ambedkar." I had to stop them.

Here, in my experience many uneducated people in India think that if you are a Buddhist you belong to out-caste. It was a sad thing. They did not know there is no caste system in Buddhism. Everybody should be equally respected in the Dhamma.

Some new Buddhists in India have not learnt to respect Buddhist monks because in India there are only a few Buddhist monks who can lead the people. In fact, there were

not enough educated Buddhist monks there. Even if they are educated they are educated in non-Buddhist universities; not in the monasteries or Buddhist universities. They might hold B.A., M.A., Ph.D., yet the study of Buddhist literature is lacking. I mean they do not have proper Buddhist education in India. People may not respect if a monk just knows what they also know. How can a monk be their teacher if he does not have anything to teach them? I must say that I admire Tibetan universities and Nalanda University in India. But even they can only do so much.

While Vipassana meditation centers also serve practical aspect of the Dhamma, yet they have not paid sufficient attention to theoretical aspect and cultural aspect. In a meditation center I met with a monk and I was happy to see him since I had not seen a senior monk for quite a long time. As soon as I saw him I bowed to him. The manager of the center came to me and complained me about my bowing. He said nobody should bow to anybody in their center. I asked why. He said it was their Guruji's order. I can understand that Guruji was wise in instructing his pupils like that, because otherwise people would worship him. He knows that his followers think of him so highly that later it might create another sect in Buddhism. He does not want that. But the manager just follows the instruction strictly and stops practicing a beautiful Buddhist tradition of paying respect. I believe it is due to the lack of knowledge in Buddhist cultural tradition.

Restoration of Buddhism is as much important as promotion of it. While we are trying to promote Buddhism in new places, we should also try our best to restore the teaching where it was lost. I would like to humbly request to the most venerable monks and Buddhist leaders to consider the restoration of Buddhism in the land of origin and to find out the way to do so.

I would like to make another request to those monks who go to India for their study that they should maintain the identity of being Buddhist monks. A Buddhist monk should follow the *vinaya* rules since the *vinaya* gives the identity to a Buddhist monk. Identity brings dignity. We should retain our dignity among those who are willing to learn the teaching from us. People are ready to respect those who are respectful, and they will respect when they know Buddhist monks and teachers are respectable. Without respect to a teacher the Dhamma cannot be taught properly and effectively.

Please be suggested that we should establish a center of United Buddhist Nations as soon as possible and train, for example, young Buddhist monks who would like to go to India to restore the Dhamma there. We should support them to be able to work for that purpose. We should run monasteries in India so that it can serve religious needs of the local people and teach them the Dhamma. Only then the future Buddhist generations of India will have proper knowledge of the Dhamma.

A Buddhist monk who goes to India for restoration of the Dhamma should learn the local language so that he could reach to more people, both educated and uneducated. We should follow the example of the Buddha who used Pali, the local language of that time, as the media of teaching and learning. If we could train a few local youths when they become teachers there would be more people, and then more and more people who can be benefited from the teaching.