



THE MAXIMS OF THE SANGHARĀJA
OF THE THAI SANGHA
AND
THE GOVERNMENT OF THE THAI SANGHA

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Mahā Makuta Rājavidyālaya

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by Phra Sāsana Sophana

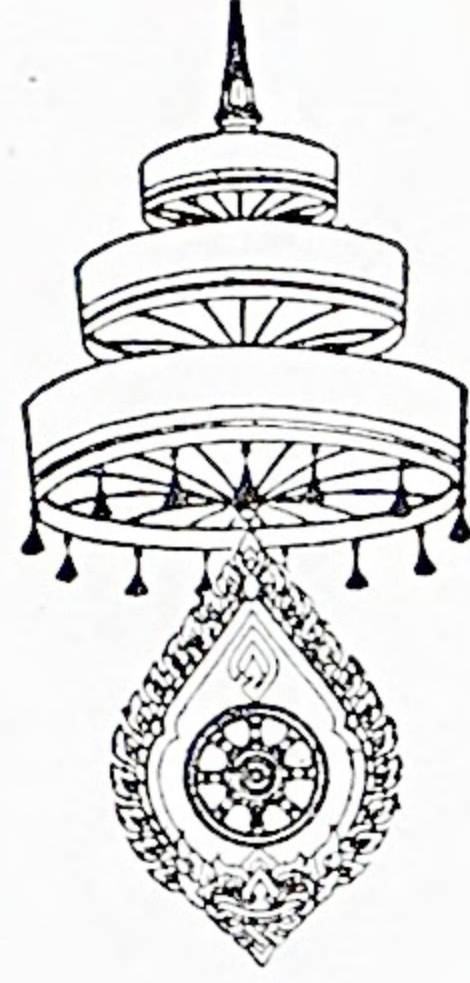
OFFERED BY MAHĀ MAKUTA RĀJAVIDDHYĀLAYA FOUNDATION

TO COMMEMORATE THE VISIT TO CEYLON
OF
SOMDEJ PHRA ARIYAVANṢĀGATAÑĀNA
SANGHARĀJA OF THE THAI SANGHA

February 2510 (Thai Buddhist Era)



The Siamese, Cambodian and Laotian Buddhist Era seems to be one year later than that of Burma, Ceylon and India. In fact this is not so. The difference is that while the latter regards the year of the Maha Parinibbana as B.E. I, the former takes it to be the first anniversary after the Master's Passing Away. For example this year is B.E. 2509 according to the Siamese, Cambodian and Laotian Calendar, but it is B.E. 2510 according to the Burmese, Ceylonese and Indian Calendar.



*Maxims of Somdej Phra Ariyavaṅṣāgatañāna
Phra Sangharāja of The Thai Sangha.*

1. Before a man can control others to good purpose he must first learn to control himself.
2. Before a man can create prosperity in another, he must have created prosperity in himself.
3. Before a man can be an effective teacher of others he must be able to effectively teach himself.
4. A good teacher is a man of exemplary conduct.
5. The friend most loved is he who is dependable and not deceitful.
6. The person most worthy of respect is he who can sacrifice personal happiness for the happiness of others.
7. The most sublime freedom results from the conquest of one's defilements.

The Government of the Thai Sangha

The Sangha — meaning the body of monks (including Samaneras) in the Buddhist Religion — is expected to obey three things: the Vinaya, the law of the land and tradition. The Vinaya means the rules laid down by Lord Buddha; by the law of the land we mean the Ecclesiastical Act, and by custom we mean the customary patterns of behaviour. These three may be regarded as the three laws of the Sangha, and the government of the Sangha has for a long time been based upon them.

The Vinaya

Theravāda Buddhist monks follow the original Vinaya as laid down by the Lord Buddha in accordance with the resolution of the First Council under the leadership of Ven. Mahā Kasapa Thera. Ācāriyavāda Buddhist monks, on the other hand, follow a gradually revised version of the Vinaya. The argument of the Theravāda Buddhists against the revision of the Vinaya is that while it was true that towards the end of his life the Buddha did give permission to his disciples to suspend the minor rules, the First Council of monks was not able to reach an agreement as to what 'minor rules' signified. Seeing that even great monks on the First Council who were themselves enlightened and well versed in the Tipitaka could not agree on the point, Ven. Mahā Kasapa Thera proposed that no rules be suspended, and his proposal was unanimously adopted. Buddhists who adhere to the resolution as proposed by Ven. Maha Kasapa Thera and adopted by the First Council are known as 'Theravāda Buddhists' and they include the Sanghas of Siam, Burma, Talaing and Ceylon. In their contention that it was right to revise the Vinaya the Āchāriyavāda Buddhists argued that the Buddha had given his permission, and the purpose of the revision was to keep in harmony with the changing time. Venerable Bhikkhus other than the five hundred who sat on the First Council did not all concur with the resolutions of the Council. The question whether to revise the Vinaya was one on which their opinions were divided. There were signs then that Buddhist monks were going to divide themselves into two schools and this they eventually did.

The difference between the two schools would not have become so great if the Āchāriyavāda Buddhist had adhered to the version of the Vinaya revised by the original Mahā Theras of this school. But as it happened, as time went on, with Buddhism spreading further beyond India, the Vinaya came to be revised again and again many times over, thus rendering the differences from the original Vinaya greater and greater, as we see when we compare Theravāda Sanghas with the Sanghas of Tibet, China and Vietnam. The Theravāda school has spread mostly southwards, hence its name: 'Daksina Nikāya' (the Southern School), while the Āchāriyavādins had moved North and become known as Utra Nikāya (the Northern School). The Northern School has also named itself 'Mahā Yāna (the Big Vehicle) and the Southern School 'Hīna Yāna' (the Small Vehicle).

Every monk must do his duties according to the Vinaya. Venerable Mahā Theras who are spiritual preceptors or teachers have the duty of governing their pupils. However, in *Sangha Kamma* (i.e. acts performed by a chapter of Buddhist monks assembled in solemn conclave) all Bhikkhus have the same status, whether teachers or pupils. When a business of the Sangha arises, a council of monks must be held and a resolution can only be carried by a unanimous vote. It can be said, then, that with regard to the Vinaya, the government of the Sangha takes two forms: government on the teacher-pupil level within each individual institution, similar to the principle of government within a family; and government by a body of monks in *Sangha Kamma*, meaning matters that affect the whole group. The latter is said to approach democracy, but it is not quite the same as a democratic form of government. In a democratic form of government the parliament has only legislative power, and no administrative power, but the Sangha cannot lay down any more Vinaya rules because the Buddha has laid down all that is necessary, as confirmed in the following passage from the Aparihāniyadhamma: 'Do not enforce any rules other than those laid down by the Buddha; do not cancel any of his commandments. Follow the regulations laid down by him.' Matters to be decided by resolutions of monks assembled in solemn conclave (*Sangha Kamma*) are specified in the Vinaya. For a major business, such as the admission of a young man into monkhood, a motion must first be made, and then an approval of the chapter of monks must be obtained three times. The process is called a resolution by '*Natti Catuttha-kamma*', meaning 'a resolution by a four-fold verbal act', and it has been adopted by parliament for the process of passing a bill. In *Sangha Kamma* all resolutions must be unanimous. If there is only one voice opposing, the motion cannot be carried. If all monks remain silent, it is taken as a sign of a unanimous assent. For a lesser matter only one

approval or only a motion is necessary. For matters concerning the whole community which are not specified in the Vinaya as matters to be put before a council of monks, often the same procedure as described above is used for the sake of administrative order. This adoption of the process of carrying out *Sangha Kamma* for other matters may be said to be by customary practice.

The Law of the Land

As we have seen, as far as the Vinaya is concerned, the government of the Sangha is divided into two departments: teacher-pupil government, and government by the assembly of monks. By the 'assembly of monks' we do not mean all monks from that country or that region, but monks from within that particular boundary marks (*Sīma*). Each monastery (*wat*) is bounded by one 'sīma', and thus a chapter of monks in one wat is capable of carrying out a *Sangha Kamma*. However, since according to the Vinaya, a quorum of monks for the purpose of performing a *Sangha Kamma* need not include all the monks in the wat, this still leaves us with no instrument of government which holds together all Bhikkhus. In the day of Lord Buddha, he himself acted as the gathering centre for all Buddhist monks. It was a custom for Bhikkhus from all regions to gather together where he was once or twice a year. Any senior monks who were unable to attend would send their pupils in deputy. Such a procedure was necessary for a number of reasons. It enabled his disciples to learn of any additions or amendments of the Vinaya which Lord Buddha might have decreed. It gave them opportunities of hearing his latest teaching and of learning techniques of meditation. Any enlightenment attained had to be reported to Lord Buddha at one of these meetings and after being certified by him it would become generally recognised. We hear today of people attaining enlightenment. Such reports are subjected to the arbitration of loud rumours or soft whispers, while in Lord Buddha's days only he himself could ascertain the degrees of enlightenment of his disciples. After his passing away there was no one to replace him, since he appointed no one but left the Teaching behind to take his place as the Supreme Teacher. To Ven. Ananda, his disciple, he said, 'Ananda, the Dhamma I have expounded and the Vinaya I have issued shall be your Teacher after I have gone. So after his Parinibbāna there was no gathering centre for all Buddhist monks scattered in self-governed institutions. Furthermore, within an institution monks lacked authority to deal with certain matters. For example, in an event of a monk guilty of misconduct being ordered by his preceptor and tutor to leave the monk-hood, if he chose to disobey and stay on in the same wat or move to another institution, there was nothing the preceptor could do. In the Buddha's own days there were also some cases (of violation of the Vinaya) which were protracted for a long time, such as Devadatta's case which finally ended with Devadatta's

defeating his own end, (but not after causing a great deal of commotion in the Sangha Circle). In consideration of this problem the governments of Buddhist states usually enact secular laws to help ecclesiastical government. Such measures help to ensure civil peace and order, because if there is trouble in the community of monks who command the respect of the people, the trouble is liable to effect the people as well.

In Siam the state government began to participate in the government of the Sangha a long time ago. Even in the past it was the King who appointed Bhikkhus to ecclesiastical positions of all levels. In the old days there appeared to be two order of monks: the Gāmasi (House Order) and the Araññavāsi (Forest Order), each with a head monk appointed by the King. Later on the Sangha was reorganised into four *Ganas*: the Northern Gana, the Southern Gana, the Middle Gana and the Dhammayuttika Gana. Prior to the reorganisation of the provinces of Siam into Circles which took place in the Reign of King Chulalongkorn, the Northern Gana included the provinces under the Ministry of the Interior, situated mostly in the North of Siam; the Southern Gana covered the province under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence and Foreign Affairs situated mostly in the South; the Middle Gana included wats in Bangkok and Nakorn Kuen Kan which did not belong to the Northern or the Southern Ganas; and the Dhammayuttika Gana included all Dhammayut wats in Bangkok and the provinces. Chief Superintendents of all the four Ganas and their supporting officials were appointed by the King.

At the time of the reorganisation of the provinces into Circles, in an effort to establish popular education King Chulalongkorn appointed Somdej Phra Mahā Samana Chao Krommaphyā Vajirañāna Varorasa, one of his brothers, Director of Ecclesiastical Education, with His Royal Highness Prince Damrong, another brother, acting as his lay counterpart. This royal move was prompted by an awareness that in the establishment of school system for the people the country needed the cooperation and support of abbots.

That His Holiness Prince Vajirañāna realised that the government of the Sangha had to be systematised simultaneously with the establishment of popular education is evident from a statement made by him before the passing of the B.E. 2445 Ecclesiastical Act. The following is an extract from that statement: *'What we did then was to bring all schools operating under 'tutoring' monks under the jurisdiction of the wat and the supervision of the abbot. If any wat wished to establish a formal school, it could do so, and the school would then be entitled to a subsidy from the Royal Treasury. Wat schools were listed under groups, districts, provinces and Circles. That was all that could be done at the time, and so, after I had completed this reorganisation His Majesty was graciously pleased to discharge*

Prince Damrong and myself from our duties. It is, however, my opinion that education in the wat is difficult to deal with in isolation. It must be planned as part of the system of ecclesiastical government and must also be coordinated with the policy of the Department of Education' As a result of all this the Ecclesiastical Act was promulgated in B.E. 2445 (1902).

The Ecclesiastical Act of B.E. 2445 was the first attempt to systematise the government of the Sangha, basing it on the system of civil government. This meant that the Sangha was organised in Circles, provinces, districts, groups, and wats. There was also the Mahā Thera Council consisting of the four Somdej Phra Rāja Ganas (Chief Superintendents of the four Ganas) and their four deputies. These high dignitaries acted as counsellors to the King on religious matters and on ecclesiastical government in general. Religious matters concerning the administration of the Sangha were, by royal decree, decided at the meeting of the Mahā Thera Council so long as there were at least five members present. Decisions of the Mahā Thera Council were regarded as final and incontestable. Such was the system as far as the metropolis was concerned. In the provinces the hierarchy of Ecclesiastical officials consisted of the Chief monks of Circles, provinces, districts and groups, and the abbots, in that order. Prior to the promulgation of this Act, the Sangha was organised in four Ganas, as was mentioned above, and in addition to these each province formed its own gana, with a gana chief. In the event of controversy, a royal decree had to be obtained. Such cases have been collected and published under the title of *the Government of the Sangha in Successive Reign*. At this point the reader may wonder why there has been no mention of the Sangharāja (Supreme Patriarch) and why it was specified that 'the Mahā Thera acted as counsellors to the King...'

In B.E. 2445, at the time of the promulgation of the Ecclesiastical Act, the position of the Sangarāja was vacant. There has been a continuous succession of Supreme Patriarchs from earlier reigns until the reign of King Mongkut who appointed Somdej Phra Mahā Samana Chao Krommaphra Paramānujita Jinorasa of Wat Bodhi to that post. After the death of this Prince Patriarch the post was left vacant until King Chulalongkorn created Somdej Phra Mahā Samana Chao Krommaphya Pavaresvariyaṅkārana of Wat Pavaranivesa Vihara, his own spiritual preceptor, the next Supreme Patriarch. He was succeeded by the Venerable Pussadeve Sā of Wat Rājapratisth after whose death the post was left vacant once more.

As regards the mentioning of Mahā Theras as the King's counsellors, it should be clearly understood that even before the promulgation of the Ecclesiastical Act, the Supreme Patriarch and the Chief Superintendents of ganas did not directly rule over the Sangha. It was the task of the lay Minister

of Public Instruction to oversee the religious affairs. In other words, it was the King himself who closely supervised the affairs of the Sangha. He regarded it as one of his main duties to maintain Buddhism. The reason behind this may be traced back to the time of the fall of Ayuthia, when religious affairs of the country became chaotic and in his effort to rebuild the nation the King at that time felt it incumbent upon him to rehabilitate the religion also, and it was found that the Sangha could not be left to administrate its own affairs without help from State. Consequently the King took part in the government of the Sangha from that time until B.E. 2445, and his participation did by no means end with the promulgation of the Ecclesiastical Act. As it was provided by that Act, the Mahā Theras acted as His Majesty's 'counsellors' and it was by royal decree that their decision were to be regarded final. Commenting on article 4 of this Act, Prince Vajirañana wrote, 'In the absences of a Supreme Patriarch or a Prince Patriarch since the four Ganas were equal in status, the Minister of Public Instruction who conveyed the Royal Edicts to the meeting of the Mahā Thera Council would choose the most senior monk and present the edicts to him. At that time I was the most senior member.'

Prior to the Ecclesiastical Act of B.E. 2445, before the Mahā Thera Council came into the existence, the government of the Sangha was in the hands of the Ministry of Public Instruction whose duty it was to appoint various Gana chiefs and preceptors (*upajjhāya*) as well as to decide all disputes and disciplinary cases. Consequently, this Ministry was regarded with much awe and deference. That power was transferred to the Mahā Thera Council and for this credit must be given to Prince Patriarch Vajirañana who, guided by the wisdom of King Chulalongkorn, was most successful in his effort to reorganise the administration of the Sangha and the establishment of education in the provinces.

This Prince Patriarch was one of King Chulalongkorn's brothers. Son of King Mongkut, he became a Samañera in his boyhood. Upon reaching the ordination age he became a Bhikkhu and spent the rest of his life in monkhood. He was a great scholar and contributed a very great deal to the development of the Buddhist religion in Siam. As a pioneer in education, he introduced formal modern education in wat schools. For a long time in this country wats served as schools, but the education offered there was not systematic. Education then was an affair of the wats or 'tutoring' monks and not a responsibility of the state.

In addition to reorganising the administration of the Sangha, the Prince Patriarch contributed a great deal to the development of an educational system for monks and novices. He wrote and edited Pali texts for all grades, developed a Dhamma curriculum for the Third, Second and First Classes (the First was completed after his death), as well as selected text books for these courses. Together with King Chulalongkorn he made plans for the establish-

ment of Mahāmakut Rājavidhyālaya, intending it to be an institute which gave both academic and Buddhist education up to the university level (Later it became registered as a foundation with an aim to promote Buddhist education and propagate Buddhism). Then, after the establishment of King Mahāmakut Buddhist Academy, His Holiness went on to establish schools teaching Pali and Siamese in a number of wats in Bangkok, including Wat Pavaranivesa, and some in the provinces. For one session Mahāmakut Rājavidhyālaya served as the centre for Pali examinations, but afterwards it was decided to send candidates to take examinations organised by the Sangha. Many schools established at this time later became government secondary schools. The present Wat Pavaranivesa Secondary Schools, for example, was formerly Mahāmakut School founded about the same time as the King Mahāmakut Buddhist Academy.

At about the same time as the founding of Mahāmakut Rājavidhyālaya, King Chulalongkorn established Mahāchulālakāra Rājavidhyālaya at Wat Mahādhatu. (These two institutes are now our two Buddhist Universities).

After the death of King Chulalongkorn, King Vajiravudh who succeeded him created Prince Vajirañāna who was his preceptor and spiritual teacher, Somdej Phra Maha Samana Chao Krommaphyā Vajirañāna Varorasa, that is to say, he was created Supreme Patriarch. (In the whole history, there have been only three Princes Patriarch with the special title of 'Somdej Phra Mahā Samana Chao', namely Their Holinesses Prince Paramanujit Jinorasa of Wat Bodhi, in King Mongkut's time; Prince Pavaresavariyālakāra of Wat Pavaranivesa Vihara, in King Chulalongkorn's time; and our Prince Vajirañāna Varorasa, created in King Vajiravudh's time.)

King Vajiravudh handed over all power in the government of the Sangha to the Prince Patriarch. This meant that the Mahā Thera Council ceased to function as an advisory body to the King; and Prince Vajirañāna came to have absolute authority in the administration of the Sangha. His Holiness, however, wished the Mahā Thera Council to continue in existence, and so he called meetings and had members discuss administrative matters and disciplinary cases. Later on, since the Chief Superintendents of Ganas were mostly very old and their Deputies were usually posted in the provinces, the Prince Patriarch decided to include monks of lower ranks (Phra Rāja Gana of the 'Dhamma' Rank) in these meetings of the Mahā Thera Council. The idea behind this was to train younger Bhikkhus. In his time the Prince Patriarch undertook many tours of the provinces to observe Sangha activities and to make acquaintance with provincial chiefs of Gana and abbots. He visited a number of wats and occasionally summoned chiefs of provincial Gana to consultations. As a result of all this the administration of the Sangha improved a great deal both in the metropolis and in the provinces.

It is evident that, in reforming the administration of the Sangha, Prince Vajirañāna not only put the system of ecclesiastical government in order, ensuring co-ordination among officials of all ranks, but also established Dhamma education in every wat, in town and provinces alike. With a good system of government and better education facilities, the religious affairs gradually improved. The Prince Patriarch made a point of personally overseeing the administration of Gana chiefs of all levels. He read and gave detailed comment on all reports submitted by Chiefs of Circle Gana, and undertook many inspection tours of provincial wats. After accomplishing a great deal of work, beneficial to both the country and the Sangha, the Prince Patriarch died in B.E. 2464 (1921).

The Ecclesiastical Act of B.E. 2445 was superceded by the Ecclesiastical Act of 2484 (1941). The new Act was moulded on the civil system under the constitution. That is to say, there was an Ecclesiastical Assembly (the *Sangha Sabha*) which was a legislative body, an Ecclesiastical Council in charge of administration, and a judiciary called *Gana Vinayadhara*. The Supreme Patriarch was recognised as the Head of the Sangha in the same way as the King was head of State in a system of constitutional monarchy. In the provinces the Gana Chiefs were retained but were given the new titles of Ecclesiastical Superintendents of Regions, Provinces, Amphur, Tambol respectively, in addition to abbots of wats.

Members of the Ecclesiastical Assembly had to be Phra Rāja Gana of the rank of 'Dhamma' or above, or Phra Ganācārāya first class or Bhikkhus with a doctor degree in Pali Studies. The number of members was limited to 45. The administration was organised into four functional departments: Administration, Education, Propagation and Religious Properties.

In B.E. 2505 (1962) the 2484 Act was replaced by a new Act. Under the new Act, the Mahā Thera Council was revived. Under the provisions of the new Act the Mahā Thera Council is empowered to issue any regulations for the Sangha as long as they do not conflict with the civil law or the Vinaya. The Supreme Patriarch is the chairman of the Mahā Thera Council, and all the Somdej Phra Rāja Gana are members of the Council ex officio. In addition, the Supreme Patriarch appoints at least four and no more than eight members chosen from among the Phra Rāja Gana. Through the Mahā Thera Council which combines legislative, administrative and judicial power, the Supreme Patriarch governs the Sangha. As far as the provinces are concerned, authority is distributed through the Ecclesiastical Superintendents of Regions, Provinces, Amphur and Tambol respectively, and lastly through the abbots of wats.

For the purposes of Ecclesiastical administration the kingdom is divided into 18 regions as follows:—

- REGION 1, CONSISTING OF 5 PROVINCES : Bangkok, Dhonburi, Nondhaburi, Pthumdhani and Smutprakarn.
- REGION 2, CONSISTING OF 3 PROVINCES : Ayuthia, Angtong and Saraburi.
- REGION 3, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Lopburi, Singhaburi, Jayanad and Uthaidhani.
- REGION 4, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Nakornsawan, Kampaengpetch, Pichit and Petchboon.
- REGION 5, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Pissulok, Sukhothai, Tak and Uttradit.
- REGION 6, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Lampang, Chiengrai, Prae and Nan.
- REGION 7, CONSISTING OF 3 PROVINCES : Chiengmai, Lampoon and Maehongsorn.
- REGION 8, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Udorn, Nongkai, Luey and Skolnakorn.
- REGION 9, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Khonkaen, Mahasarakam, Kalasin and Roy-ed.
- REGION 10, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Ubol, Srisakes, Surin and Nakornpanom.
- REGION 11, CONSISTING OF 3 PROVINCES : Nakornrajsima, Jayapoom and Burirum.
- REGION 12, CONSISTING OF 3 PROVINCES : Prajeenburi, Nakornnayok and Cha Choeng Sao.
- REGION 13, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Cholburi, Rayong, Chandaburi and Trad.
- REGION 14, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Nakornpathom, Supanburi, Kanchanaburi and Smutsakorn.
- REGION 15, CONSISTING OF 4 PROVINCES : Rajburi, Petchburi, Smutsongkram and Prachuabkirikhun.
- REGION 16, CONSISTING OF 3 PROVINCES : Nakornsridhammaraj, Surasdhani and Chumporn.
- REGION 17, CONSISTING OF 5 PROVINCES : Phuket, Trung, Pung-gna, Krabee and Ranong.
- REGION 18, CONSISTING OF 6 PROVINCES : Songkla, Pataloong, Stoon, Pattani, Yala and Naradhivas.

There are five Area Superintendents:—

1. The Superintendent of the Central Area—supervising the administration of Regions 1, 2, 3, 13, 14, and 15.
2. The Superintendent of the Northern Area—supervising the administration of Regions 4, 5, 6, and 7.
3. The Superintendent of the Eastern Area—supervising the administration of Regions 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12.

4. The Superintendent of the Southern Area – supervising the administration of Regions 16, 17, and 18.
5. The Superintendent of the Dhammayuttika Nikaya – supervising the administration of the Dhammayut monks of all Regions.

Every region, province, amphur and tambol has its own chief monk and in each wat there is an administrative position of the abbot. There is, therefore, an unbroken line of authority from abbots of wats up to the Mahā Thera Council headed by the Sangharāja, or from the Supreme Patriarch down to abbots.

According to the 2506 (1963) Annual Report of the Department of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, there were 23,322 wats in Siam and the total number of monks and novices was 238,570. This figure included monks who took the vows only for the Vassā Period of three months, and these constituted quite a large number. It also included many others who would remain in the monkhood for a few years. On the whole the number of monks who intend to spend the rest of their lives in the monkhood is not very large.

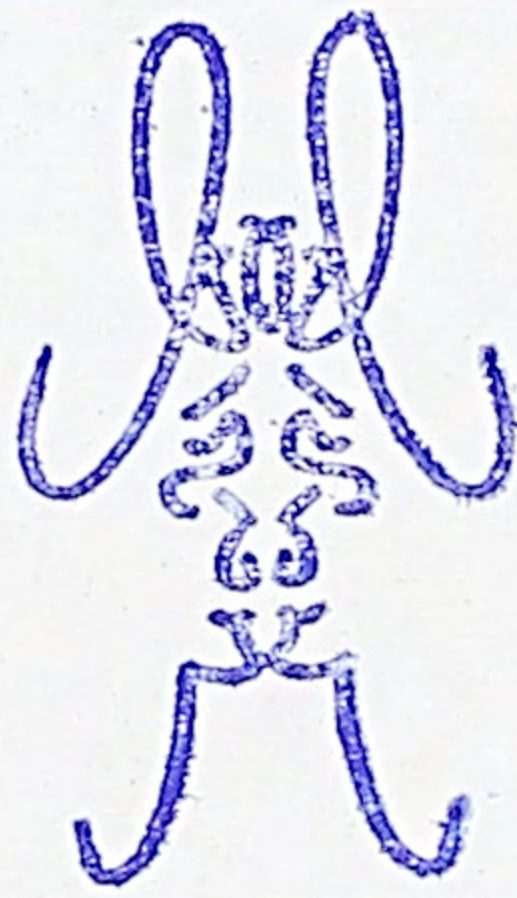
Customs

In addition to the Vinaya and the law of the land, Bhikkhus have to comply with certain established customs related to the Vinaya – such as the manner of robing, the method of chanting, the manner of receiving gifts etc. These customs may vary from group to group, but they are regarded as being equally correct.

The three bases of the government of the Sangha which we have described briefly must be well coordinated in order for the affairs of the Sangha to run smoothly. If they conflict, trouble will result, as we have experienced. The Vinaya is regarded as the main basis of the Sangha government. The customs, both long established and newly introduced, though they may vary from one group to another, must all be based on and in concurrence with the Vinaya. With regard to the State law, it must of necessity be in harmony with the Vinaya and the customs in order for the Sangha to maintain peace and to achieve progress. Often we hear people who do not understand the Ecclesiastical set up suggest that monks should do this and that. If they study the matter carefully they will realise that there are many details to be taken into consideration, and many rules to be compiled with.

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