

# **Ecclesiastic Titles (*Samanasatti*): Advantages and Problems\***

*Watchara Ngamchitharoen\*\**

## **Background and significance**

*Samanasatti* are ecclesiastic titles or ranks conferred by the monarch or the government on members of the *Saṅgha* in recognition of their religious activities. The titles are often associated with administrative positions in the administration of the *Saṅgha* community; in this respect, they are similar to the honors and titles bestowed upon public servants and nobility in the affairs of the state. The *Samanasatti* system of the *Saṅgha* order has long been in existence in every country whose national or predominant religion is Buddhism.

H.R.H. Prince Somdet Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanubhab (2000, 33-34) offers an explanation of the origin and the benefits of the system. The monarch and the state became involved in the *Saṅgha* administration in order to protect and support the *Saṅgha* order. For instance, King Ashoka the Great helped solve the schism in the *Saṅgha* administration. As a result, the *Saṅgha* order came to be modeled on the state administration ranging from planning the administrative structure to establishing titles for its leaders such as *Saṅghanāyaka*. The system is designed to facilitate

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\*\* Professor, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University

the co-management of Buddhist and state affairs, thereby strengthening the foundation of Buddhism in the country.

The state's involvement in the *Saṅgha* affairs was considered beneficial to both the *Saṅgha* and itself. Somboon Suksamran explains that the state's support for the *Saṅgha* affairs enables it to control other affairs at the same time. Its political power over the religious order is derived from the role it or its leader plays as the defender of religion and the *Saṅgha*. This role helps maintain the social order. If it is not well-executed, Thai people may lose their faith in the *Saṅgha* and Buddhism as well as in other moral compasses (Somboon Suksamran, 1977, 29). The security of both the *Saṅgha* order and Buddhism based on such support in turn benefits the state, contributing to the maintenance of law and order in society and enabling the government to perform its tasks on a more secure basis.

Regarding the origin and legitimacy of *Samaṇasatti* within the *Dhamma-Vinaya* framework, although during the Buddha's time the system did not exist in the same form as today, there is evidence that the Buddha conferred the title of *Etadagga* on *Arahanta* with special abilities or skills such as intellectual excellence or the ability to perform supernormal acts. He praised Ven. Sāriputta for his profound wisdom and Ven. Moggalāna for his supernormal powers. It is noteworthy that the title of *Etadagga* had something to do with administrative duties as well. Ven. Sāriputta was the chief disciple on the Buddha's right, while Ven. Moggalāna was the chief disciple on his left. As chief disciples, they significantly helped the Buddha in the administrative, governing, and propagation works. The Buddha used to compare himself to *Dhammaraja* and Ven. Sāriputta to his Prime Minister (Department of Religious Affairs, 1982, 165-166).

After the Buddha's death, Buddhism became the main religion in a number of countries. The monarchs of those countries themselves became its principal patron, promoting and supporting Buddhism in various ways in accordance with their customs and practices. They have also recognized members of the *Saṅgha* as religious heirs, providing them with all the basic necessities as well as conferring titles or ranks on them for their achievements (Department of Religious Affairs, 1982, 165-170).

With regard to the royal practice of conferment of religious titles, Prince Damrong (2000, 39-40) views that “every country with Buddhism as its main religion has this tradition. I understand that (Sri) Lanka was the first to start the tradition. *Samaṇasatti* in Siam only started in the latter period of Sukhothai when the Lankan *Saṅgha* model was popular. It is likely that the practice of *Samaṇasatti* was borrowed from Lanka as well.”

Therefore, the *Samaṇasatti* system and *Cittavījanī* (ceremonial fans) of the Thai *Saṅgha* was most likely borrowed from Sri Lanka. The *Samaṇasatti* system first appeared during the reign of King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai who conferred religious titles on distinguished monks for their performances of religious affairs. The system underwent a series of changes during the Ayutthaya, Thonburi and early Rattanakosin periods. It was finally crystallized during King Rama VI’s reign. The current system has greatly helped support the administration of the *Saṅgha* order (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, abstract).

In light of this development, *Samaṇasatti* is something that the monarch conferred on monks known for their virtues and special abilities to encourage them and other monks to perform religious duties for the sake of strengthening and propagating Buddhism. *Samaṇasatti* is also an element of the *Saṅgha* administration. The titles and ranks render their holders more respectable in their performance of administrative duties to the monks as a whole, contributing to greater efficacy.

Despite its useful and important function in the *Saṅgha* administration and structure, and despite the support of the state in the supervision of the *Saṅgha*, *Samaṇasatti* is beset with a host of problems, including criticisms against the administrative duties that come with the titles.

The *Samaṇasatti* system is regarded as the state’s tool in its attempt to control and exploit the religious order for its own good rather than for the good of the religion (Phra Phaisan Wisalo in Phithaya Wongkun, 2002, 57). In addition, it is often seen as a replica of the entitlement system in the lay world that has given rise to greed and unscrupulous practice in the form of lobbying, financial payment, and vying for positions. For example, Thammaraksa thinks that “*Samaṇasatti* is a matter concerning *Kilesa* and

*Tanhā*. It is created to show off one's *Pāramī* in a wrong manner and leads to danger for those who are deluded. Buddhists should join hands to stop the practice so that our religion will be cleared of these blemishes (Prasop Thammaraksa and Khamhuto, 1975, 20).

Besides, the *Samanasatti* system is sometimes seen as conflicting with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. For example, it spells out the class system marked by inequality and the lack of freedom. This does not fit well with the *Saṅgha* community which the Buddha established with the concept of freedom and equality in mind under *Dhamma-Vinaya*.

In short, Thailand and other neighboring Buddhist countries have a system of *Samanasatti* in place, and mention is made in the Tipitaka about the conferment of the titles of Chief Disciples or *Etadaggain* various fields. These must have been advantageous and beneficial to the religion to a certain extent. The practice has, as a result, continued. In Thailand, the system has been adopted since the Sukhothai period. Nevertheless, *Samanasatti* today has become problematic with regard to its conferment, the activities leading to it, the conducts relating to it, as well as the social criticisms directed at it. If they are allowed to continue in this manner, adverse effects may increase, and they may become counterproductive. It is therefore important to carefully investigate the system's advantages and disadvantages so that the public may be informed. It is equally essential to analyze the problems related to it and propose meaningful solutions.

### **Meaning and background of *Samanasatti***

The word “*Samanasatti*” as currently used means ecclesiastical honorific ranks or titles conferred by the monarch. The titles come with *Cittavījanī* or “Phat Yot” in Thai (meaning ceremonial fans indicative of the ecclesiastical ranks/titles). They can be compared to the titles and ranks given to the nobility and civil servants in the lay counterpart or in the state system. Some evidence shows that in the past *Samanasatti* used to be called “*Bandasak Phra*” (titles for monks) which later fell out of use, because of their similarity to the titles used by the nobility (Chumnong Thongprasert, interview). In any case, they are associated with the administrative positions

in the *Saṅgha* administrative structure. Phra Methithammaphon (Prayoon Dhammacitto), currently Phra Brahmapundit, rector of Mahachulalongkorn-rajavidyalaya University, explains the meaning of *Samaṇasatti* as follows:

*Samaṇasatti* are titles conferred by the monarch to monks, comparable to such titles in the lay world as Khun, Luang, Phra, and Phraya at the time of absolute monarchy. While the latter have already been abolished, the *Saṅgha* titles in use since the Sukhothai period continue to exist. (Phra Methithammaphon [Prayoon Dhammacitto], 1990, 34)

*Samaṇasatti* or titles for Buddhist monks are associated with the *Saṅgha* administration and administrative positions. It is no accident that monks with high *Samaṇasatti* tend to hold positions in the the *Saṅgha* administration. For instance, in the Ayutthaya period, Phra Buddhācāraya was Ecclesiastical Chief Officer of *Araññavāsī* (Forest Monks), and Phra Wannarat of Wat Pa Kaew was Ecclesiastical Chief Officer of the Right *Gāmavāsī* (Town Monks). Both Buddhācāraya and Phra Wannarat are *Samaṇasatti* or ecclesiastical titles (Phra Methithammaphon [Prayoon Dhammacitto], 1990, 33-34). In present-day Thailand, monks with high *Samaṇasatti* also hold high administrative positions. For example, in the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council Rule No. 24 (1998) on the Appointment and Removal of Ecclesiastical Administrative Officers, monks who are Ecclesiastical Governor-General (*Mahāsaṅghamandalapāmokkha*) must hold at least a position of Somdet Phra Ratchakhana, although in practice they tend to hold a position of Somdet Phra Rachakhana, Suphannabat level – the level second only to the Supreme Patriarch. On the other hand, monks in high administrative positions tend to be promoted to higher *Samaṇasatti* ranks. For example, a monk who is appointed Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor but who holds a position of Phra Maha Pariññu or Phra Khru Saññāpaṭṭa will soon quickly be promoted to Phra Rachakhana Ordinary Level. *Samaṇasatti* and administrative titles/positions are therefore closely related and support each other.

However, in some cases “*Samaṇasatti*” could include both the status or rank and the administrative position, as they are closely related. Prince

Damrong explains in Thamniap Samanasak (*Samānasatti* Directory) that in King Rama VI's reign, Somdet Krom Phraya Vajirananavarorosa, the Supreme Patriarch, was given a royal permission to regulate the *Samānasatti* order in 1912 by separating ranks (status) from positions. The status consists of 21 levels starting from Phra Phithitham to Supreme Patriarch. The position classification, on the other hand, includes 11 levels, with levels 11 to 4 divided further into Administration and Scripture Divisions, starting from deputy abbot and deputy *Ācariya* to *Sakalasaṅghapariṇayaka*. The reason for the separation was that in former times, *Saṅgha* ranks and positions were combined as one. Monks with certain ranks were supposed to assume certain duties. For instance, monks with Somdet Phra Rachakhana titles would also act as Ecclesiastical Governor-General. However, by the time they could be promoted to Somdet Phra Rachakhana, most were quite aged and could no longer work actively. There are also other reasons for separating ranks and positions. Ranks are more appropriate to senior monks, while positions are more becoming to those with abilities. This separation may facilitate the *Saṅgha* administration more considerably (Somdet Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanubhab (2000, 97-102).

This paper will use “*Samānasatti*” in a popular sense, i.e. to refer to the status or rank of a monk. It does not include any administrative position. What follows is a brief description of the evolution of *Samānasatti* from the Buddha's time to the present day.

It is believed that during the Buddha's time, the *Saṅgha* administration was already in place without *Samānasatti* which came into being later. There were only incidents in which the Buddha called his disciples – Bhikkhu, Bhikkhuni, *Upāsaka*, and *Upāsikā* – who excelled in various fields *Etadagga*, e.g. in wisdom and lodging preparations (*Senāsana*). Some people maintain that *Etadagga*, especially with regard to the *Saṅgha* was the basis of the *Samānasatti* system (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 26). Besides the honors received, these *Etadagga* monks were seen to have engaged with the *Saṅgha* administration. For example, Ven. *Sāriputta* was appointed the Chief Disciple on the Buddha's right hand and *Dhamma* Prime Minister responsible for looking after the *Saṅgha* in the south, while Ven. *Moggalāna* was made Chief Disciple on his left hand to supervise the

*Saṅgha* in the north (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 19). In other words, the *Samaṇasatti* system was modeled on the Chief Disciple and *Etadagga* concepts in the Buddha's time, for their jobs are the same although they are called differently (Phra Thammakittiwong [Thongdi Suratecho], 1993, 4).

Prince Damrong described the origin and development of the *Saṅgha* administration and *Samaṇasatti* in Thailand. The *Saṅgha* administration is believed to have been established in the Buddha's time. With more people being ordained, it was necessary to set up some kind of administration, or at least put into effect rules governing the relationship between teachers and students in the schools. The *Ariya-Sāvaka* monks who had other student monks under their charge conducted themselves as if in the *Saṅgha* organization. After the Buddha's death, Ven. Mahā Kassapa presided over the Rehearsal (*Saṅgīti*); this was equivalent to his being the head of the *Saṅgha* administration. After his death, there were other Elders who subsequently headed the *Saṅgha* community. Later, Buddhism was divided into various sects. The Third Rehearsal took place in the reign of King Ashoka the Great who adopted Buddhism, acting as its patron and for the first time declaring it the country's main religion. The king requested Ven. Moggallīputtatissa-Thera to preside over the rehearsal which was organized in order to eliminate heretics from his kingdom. Apparently, it was not possible to keep them out of the religion altogether. A number of false monks remained. As a result, it was necessary to rely on the king's power to keep the religion untarnished. The *Saṅgha* administration in a country with Buddhism as its principal religion needed the state's support.

In the same way, when Buddhism spread to other countries, its stability depended on the support of the monarchs who acted as its patron. The *Saṅgha* administration in each country, therefore, varies according to its cultural and national context, as supposedly in the case of Siam, Cambodia, Burma, Mon, and the Singhalese region. It is often modeled on each country's national administration, ranging from structural planning to the appointment of the *Saṅgha* chief. In this way, the religious and state administrations could go hand in hand, making it possible for Buddhism to establish a secure footing in the countries concerned.

In Prince Damrong's view, the oldest evidence of *Samanasatti* in Siam was found in King Ramkhamhaeng's stone inscription of 1782 which states that in the city of Sukhothai there was a patriarch, Pu Khru, Mahā Thera and Thera. It appeared that the patriarch was the highest position, while the Pu Khru was possibly equivalent to Phra Khru today – a position second to the patriarch. Mahā Thera and Thera in all likelihood were senior and elderly monks of good standing who are well-versed in *Dhamma*; their positions were in accordance with the *Vinaya* practice rather than appointed by the monarch.

The fact that *Samanasatti* exists in every country that has Buddhism as its principal religion may have derived from the practice initiated by Lanka. In Siam, *Samanasatti* took shape in the latter Sukothai period which saw the widespread popularity of Lankan Buddhism. It may be inferred that *Samanasatti* was most likely adopted from Lanka as well (Somdet Krom Phraya Damrong Rajanubhab, 2000, 30-40).

So, according to Prince Damrong, *Samanasatti* in Thailand began in the Sukhothai period, during King Ramkhamhaeng's reign. During the reign of King Mahathammaracha Lithai, Siamese scholars were sent to Lanka to request Phra Mahā Sāmi (called "Swāmi" in some cases – Researcher), a patriarch, to come to Sukhothai to propagate Lankavamsa Buddhism. Patriarch Phra Mahā Sāmi was a Lankan who lived in the town of Phan (possibly Mottama today). The patriarch must have advised the Sukhothai king to establish *Samanasatti* to monks following the Lankan tradition. In the Sukhothai period *Samanasatti* was uncomplicated, as there were only two levels: the patriarch and Pu Khru or Phra Khru (Phra Methithammaphon [Prayoon Dhammacitto], 1990, 36).

Nevertheless, *Samanasatti* and titles must have existed in some form before the Sukhothai period. Stone Inscription No. 18, in octagonal shape, found in San Sung in the province of Lop Buri, included the word "Saṅghapāthākam," while Stone Inscription No. 121 at Hin Khon in the district of Pakthongchai, Nakhon Ratchasima province included the words "Kammaratañāñ Srirajabhidhikshu and Upādhayāya Srirajabhidhikshu." The former stone inscription was carved in 674, the latter in 700. The words

thus inscribed in all likelihood indicate a combination of *Samaṇasatti* and titles (Phra Mahā Nirutta Thitasamvāro, 2009, 2). Also, the stone inscription at Wat Kamphaeng-ngam, Sukhothai province, of 1350 uses a number of words to call the *Saṅgha*, which could be some form of *Samaṇasatti* used in the Thai kingdom before the introduction of Lankavamsa Theravada Buddhism. For instance, Chao Thera could be both *Samaṇasatti* and a title, as in Chao Thera Satthathamthararattanachan (Natthaphat Chanthawit, 1986, 10-13, referenced in Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 52).

Besides, there is evidence of the appointment of *Samaṇasatti* and titles together with their paraphernalia from the Lankan model found in the Kalayānī Inscription discovered at Songkhayongdistrict outside the city of Hanthawaddy (Bago/Pegu) in eastern Burma. Ten inscriptions were altogether discovered. Two were written in Magadhi (Pali), and eight in the Mon language. They were inscribed in 1476 during the reign of King Dhammacetī of Pegu (1460-1491). The gist of the inscriptions is that the king of Pegu wanted to revive Buddhism in Mon and therefore sent 22 Mon monks to Lanka to study Buddhism and be re-ordained in the Lankan tradition. Having permitted the ordination, Lankan King Bhuvanekabahu granted various titles to the Mon monks and presented them with a number of gifts and articles including robes, curtains, canopies, rugs, fans with ivory handles, and betel boxes. The practice of granting titles and articles is likely to have become a model for the Thai *Samaṇasatti* and paraphernalia later on (Phra Mahā Nirutta Thitasamvāro, 2009, 4).

### **Types and levels of *Samaṇasatti***

Apart from being divided into statuses and positions in King Rama VI's reign, *Samaṇasatti* can be divided into other categories. The rationale for *Samaṇasatti* allows us to categorize it into two types:

1) On the basis of knowledge: the monarch grants *Samaṇasatti* to monks and novices who have passed the Pali Scholar Examinations from Level 3 to 9, with each level being accompanied by different ceremonial fans (Phat Yot).

2) On the basis of performance: appointments for *Samaṇasatti* are made in light of performances in various fields, including public

work and education. Such *Samaññasatti* includes Phra Khru Prathuan Venerable Teacher, Phra Thanankrom (*Thānānukkamā*), Phra Khru Sanyabat Venerable Teacher, and Phra Rachakhana.

However, *Samaññasatti* can also be divided according to levels and types into 5 groups:

**1. Phra Racha Khana** represents high levels of *Samaññasatti*. Monks with this title are called the Right Venerable or “Chao Khun.” There are 7 levels of subdivisions:

1) Somdet Phra Ariyawongsakhatayan, His Holiness Supreme Patriarch – for a royal family member, the title is His Holiness Royal Supreme Patriarch

2) Somdet Phra Rachakhana, Suphannabat level, second to the Supreme Patriarch

3) Phra Rachakhana Chao Khana Rong, Hiranyabat level, third to the Supreme Patriarch (Deputy Somdet Phra Rachakhana)

4) Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level – divided further into three types:

(1) Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(2) Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level, with a specific title and accompanying ceremonial fan

(3) Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level

5) Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level – divided further into two types:

(1) Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(2) Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level

6) Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level – divided further into two types:

(1) Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

(2) Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level

7) Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Level – divided further into four types:

(1) Phra Rachakhana, Pariññū Ordinary Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

- (2) Phra Rachakhana, Pariññū Ordinary Level
- (3) Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Upgraded Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
- (4) Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Upgraded Level

**2. Phra Khru Sanyabat (Venerable Teacher)** is a *Samañasatti* with the title “Phra Khru” conferred by the monarch, with a royal letter of appointment and ceremonial fan. There are many groups and levels as follows:

- 1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Governor at Provincial level:
  - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor
  - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Deputy Provincial Governor
- 2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor:
  - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
  - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level
  - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
  - (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level
  - (5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, Second Grade Level
- 3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Ecclesiastical District Governor:
  - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
  - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level
  - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
  - (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level

- (5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Second Grade Level
- (6) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level
- (7) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Ecclesiastical District Governor, Second Grade Level
- 4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor:
  - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
  - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Special Grade Level
  - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
  - (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level
  - (5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Ecclesiastical District Governor, Second Grade Level
  - (6) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
  - (7) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, First Grade Level
  - (8) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, Second Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
  - (9) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, Second Grade Level
  - (10) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, Third Grade Level
- 5) Phra Khru Sanyabat for Royal Monastery:
  - a) Abbot of Royal Monastery
  - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level
  - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Royal Monastery, Second Grade Level
  - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Royal Monastery, Third Grade Level

- b) Deputy Abbot of Royal Monastery
  - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level
  - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Abbot of Royal Monastery, Second Grade Level
  - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Abbot of Royal Monastery, Third Grade Level
  - c) Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery
    - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
    - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Special Grade Level
    - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
    - (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level
    - (5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Second Grade Level
  - 6) Phra Khru Sanyabat of Private Monastery:
    - a) Abbot of Private Monastery
      - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Special Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
      - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, Special Grade Level
      - (3) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
      - (4) Phra Khru Sanyabat, equivalent to Assistant Abbot of Royal Monastery, First Grade Level
      - (5) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, First Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)
      - (6) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, First Grade Level
      - (7) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, Second Grade Level, for meditation affairs (*Vipassanādhura*)

- (8) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, Second Grade Level
- (9) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Private Monastery, Third Grade Level
  - b) Deputy and Assistant Abbots of Private Monastery
  - (1) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Deputy Abbot of Private Monastery
  - (2) Phra Khru Sanyabat, Assistant Abbot of Private Monastery

**3. *Thānānukkamā*** is the *Samaṇasatti* order outside the directory by which the monarch permits Phra Rachakhana to appoint fellow monks in the ecclesiastical entourage in their honor as appropriate, e.g.:

- 1) Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Level, as right-hand and left-hand Palat, assistants to His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch
- 2) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Somdet Phra Rachakhana
- 3) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana Chao Khana Rong, Hiranyabat level
- 4) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana Chao Khana Rong, Suphannabat level
- 5) Phra Khru *Thānānukkamā*, First Class Level, as assistant to His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch
- 6) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana, Dhamma Level
- 7) Phra Khru *Thānānukkamā*, Second Class Level, as assistant to His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch (Phra Khru Paritta)
- 8) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level
- 9) Phra Khru Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level
- 10) Phra Khru *Vinayadhara*
- 11) Phra Khru *Dhammadhara*
- 12) Phra Khru *Upasampatācariya*
- 13) Phra Palat as assistant to Phra Rachakhana, Ordinary Level
- 14) Phra Khru *Saṅgharakṣa*
- 15) Phra Khru *Samuha*
- 16) Phra Khru *Tīkā*
- 17) Phra *Samuha*
- 18) Phra *Tīkā*

**4. Phra Pariññā** is *Samāṇasatti* for a monk who has passed the Pali examination from Levels 3 to 9. At each level there is a ceremonial fan according to each *Samāṇasatti*. This is a matter of education or *Ganthadhura* and has nothing to do with administration. In the former time it was not regarded as part of the *Samāṇasatti* until Somdet Krom Phraya Vajirananavavorosa the Supreme Patriarch re-regulated the system (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 76).

**5. Phra Khru Prathuan** is a title appointed by the Supreme Patriarch for a monk who is a member of the committee overseeing education and administration of Buddhist studies schools and state schools. “Phra Khru” at this level is not a formal title, but merely a prefix to the monk’s name. For instance, when Monk Buntham is appointed Phra Khru Prathuan, he will be called Phra KhruBuntham.

The above classification and order of *Samāṇasatti* does not encompass all possible positions. It does not include, for example, Phra Phithitham responsible for ceremonial arrangements. Besides, the order of ceremonial fans can be very complex, especially at the levels below Phra Rachakhana. For example, the positions of monks with Pali qualifications Level 9 are lower than those of Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor at Special Grade Level, and Phra Khru Palat assistant to Phra Rachakhana but higher than those of Phra Khru Sanyabat, Abbot of Royal Monastery, Second Grade Level and Phra Khru Sanyabat, Ecclesiastical District Governor, First Grade Level.

#### **Criteria and procedures in the appointment and promotion of *Samāṇasatti***

In the old days it was the monarch himself who decided on the appointment and promotion of *Samāṇasatti*. It was a personal decision based on the performance or qualifications of individual monks. There was no formal criterion or regulation. It was the royal prerogative to confer *Samāṇasatti* on a monk as the monarch saw fit. During the reigns of King Rama V and King Rama VI, when Somdet Krom Phraya Vajirananavavorosa was the Supreme Patriarch, the monarchs would consult the Supreme Patriarch before conferring a title on a monk. Since then, it has become a

practice in which the *Saṅgha* plays an advisory role as to whom to appoint and promote. Today, the appointment and promotion are governed by a set of rules and regulations by which the *Saṅgha* participate in the procedure starting with the abbot, Ecclesiastical Sub-District Governor, Ecclesiastical District Governor, Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor, and Ecclesiastical Regional Governor to Ecclesiastical Governor-General. The names then are submitted to the *Saṅgha* Supreme Council for approval. Then it is the duty of the National Buddhism Office to submit the list to His Majesty the King for proper conferment of *Samaṇasatti* in accordance with the official regulation.

Monks who are to be appointed or promoted must meet the required criteria. For example, a monk to be appointed as an ecclesiastical administrative officer must have extensive public service experience.

### **Purpose of *Samaṇasatti***

The above description shows that *Samaṇasatti* is designed to honor and encourage monks to conduct themselves and do good work in a manner beneficial to the religion and the nation as a whole. For example, in the appointment of Phra Rachakhana at a higher level, since the time of absolute monarchy to the democratization in 1932 to the present day, in particular during King Rama IV's reign, there is a detailed description of the work and achievements of the monk concerned and how they have benefited the country and the religion.

### **Legitimacy of *Samaṇasatti* and the administration of the *Saṅgha* and the State**

*Samaṇasatti* as conferred by the monarch and the state and as part of the *Saṅgha* administration is under the state's supervision. Therefore, it is seen as a legitimate institution, or at least one that is not in serious conflict with the *Dhamma-Vinaya* and in accordance with the Buddha's permission (the Tipitaka, Volume 4, No. 186, p. 295). It is not in serious conflict with the principles governing seniority by years spent in monkhood, ability based on knowledge and performance, *Saṅgha* administration and relationships

based on the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. Monks bestowed with *Samaṇasatti* titles still observe the seniority principle except in some extraordinary cases such as royal and state functions in honor of the monarch (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). They earn their honors on the basis of their knowledge, competence, and achievement, comparable to the ways in which the titles of *Etadagga* and such administrative positions as the preceptor (*Upajjhāya*) are given. This is in line with the *Sangha* administrative principles. The Buddha permitted competent monks to act as preceptors charged with administrative duties as well as imparting knowledge and training to their disciples (the *Tipitaka*, Volume 4, Nos. 66-67, pp. 82-92).

### **Advantages and problems of *Samaṇasatti***

*Samaṇasatti* is a stratagem by which the monarchy and the state honor and promote monks who have performed good deeds. It has other important administrative purposes which have been viewed in various lights, both negative and positive. In sum, there are four different views on the matter:

1. *Samaṇasatti* has both advantages and disadvantages, just like any other phenomenon, as viewed by Professor Chamnong Thongprasert (specially appointed), Member of the Royal Institute.
2. *Samaṇasatti* is in itself well-founded. It is a method used to honor and encourage monks who perform good deeds. The problems surrounding it arises through human interference, as viewed by Phra Suthithammanuwat (Thiap Siriñāṇo), Dean, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalai University.
3. *Samaṇasatti* is neutral – neither good nor bad. It is created by humans, but made advantageous or disadvantageous by the people involved, as viewed by Professor Sathianphong Wannapok (specially appointed), Member of the Royal Institute. He remarks that “*Samaṇasatti* in itself is neither good nor bad. However, in a time when some people are dishonest or consumed by greed, it can become a tool for financial gains” (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999, 234). This view is similar to that of some Buddhist scholars who gave an interview for an M.A. thesis on “Buddhism and *Samaṇasatti*: Case Study on the Views of Buddhist Academics and Student Monks in Universities” by Phra Maha

Wichian Saisi. To them, *Samaṇasatti* itself is neutral; whether it turns out to be positive or negative depends on the people involved (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 203).

4. *Samaṇasatti* is harmful. It has no advantage whatsoever because it has nothing to do with Buddhism. It blocks the way to *Nibbāna*, and leads monks to delusion. People who maintain this view include Prasok Thammaraksa and Khamhuno (1975, 11).

### **1. Advantages of *Samaṇasatti***

Despite divergent views on this issue, it seems that *Samaṇasatti* does have certain benefits, as will be discussed in what follows:

**1. *Samaṇasatti* is used to honor and encourage monks who perform good deeds.** *Samaṇasatti* is a way to pay respect to or acknowledge the good deeds of virtuous monks and their contributions to the religion, people, and the nation. *Samaṇasatti* is, therefore, a way to inform the general public about their good work, thus encouraging the monks to continue their endeavor.

According to the research by Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, most student monks who constitute the sample population believe that *Samaṇasatti* is beneficial. The view is shared by a number of academics that *Samaṇasatti* is a necessary tool to boost the morale of monks dedicated to the cause of Buddhism, even though it may not be necessary for the monastic who seeks deliverance from suffering or *Nibbāna* (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 201).

**2. *Samaṇasatti* is a tool to promote Buddhism.** It is designed to honor and encourage monks who perform good deeds for Buddhism and the nation. It motivates the monk to work harder in their pursuit of *Dhamma* for the public good, leading to greater faith and appreciation among the public, thus contributing to the prosperity of Buddhism.

**3. *Samaṇasatti* is a part of the monarch's charitable works.** It has been practiced in the course of national history. Today it is a part of the royal charitable works to commemorate important occasions such as the birthday anniversary celebrations of Their Majesties the King and Queen.

Phra Thep Wisutthikawi (Kasem Saññato) believes this is an advantageous aspect of *Samaṇasatti*. He states: “the person who confers [*Samaṇasatti*] is the monarch who wishes to do something good for Buddhism as a religious person. Although the monarch has no political power now, his faith in Buddhism remains a personal act. (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview)

**4. *Samaṇasatti* is part of an ancient cultural and traditional identity of Thailand.** From what has been described above, the tradition and system of *Samanasatti* conferment is an important cultural and traditional royal practice of Thailand that has passed on from generation to generation over time. It is generally considered important to preserve this tradition.

**5. *Samaṇasatti* is an important component of the *Saṅgha* administration.** In the Thai *Saṅgha* administrative system and structure, *Samaṇasatti* is an enabling factor that enhances the efficiency of the administrative machinery and justifies the promotion of individual monks to the administrative positions. According to Phra Maha Wichian Saisid's research, most Buddhist academics see *Samaṇasatti* as a necessary tool that helps support the *Saṅgha* administration. It encourages the appointed monks to conduct themselves in a becoming manner and other monks to perform their duties more diligently. In addition, it helps strengthen the public faith in the religion, especially as exemplified by the appointed monks (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 182). The *Samaṇasatti* system, therefore, puts the *Saṅgha* administration in good stead in relation to the general public and state agencies.

Phra Suthithammanuwat (Thiap Siriñāṇo) comments that *Samaṇasatti* facilitates *Saṅgha* work because the monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles are well-respected, thus promoting greater work efficiency and compliance (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

**6. *Samaṇasatti* promotes better working relationships with the state.** As the *Samanasatti* system and the *Saṅgha* administration are created by the state to facilitate better supervision and control of *Saṅgha* work and to promote peace in the order and the country, it contributes to greater support and care from the state. Through the *Samaṇasatti*

ceremony, the relationship between the *Saṅgha* and the monarchy or the state is strengthened.

**7. The *Samaṇasatti* system enables the *Saṅgha* to give counsel to the monarch or the national administration.** The strengthened relationship with the monarch and the state by way of the *Samaṇasatti* system provides the *Saṅgha* with an opportunity to offer advice to the monarch or government. For example, Somdet Phra Wannarat advised King Naresuan to pardon soldiers who were found deficient in the military duties during the Elephant Battle (Songkhram Yutthahatthi) with Minchit Sra of Burma.

**8. *Samaṇasatti* contributes to greater efficiency in the dissemination of Buddhism.** The system commands great respect from the public who believes that monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles are able and knowledgeable. These monks are often invited to give sermons or advice, thus providing more opportunities for the dissemination of Buddhist teachings, thereby winning greater acceptance. Such an advantage is confirmed in the research work which indicates that to most academics, if the monks conduct themselves appropriately in light of their *Samaṇasatti*, they will instill greater faith in the public (Phra Maha Wichian Saisi, 2000, 182). This will be beneficial to the *Saṅgha* administration as well as to the dissemination and maintenance of Buddhism in many ways.

**9. *Samaṇasatti* encourages the disciples or supporters of the monks who are given *Samaṇasatti* titles to serve the cause of Buddhism even further.** In addition to increasing morale to individual monks, the *Samaṇasatti* system encourages their disciples, especially laypersons, to support their work and other religious activities. Phra Suthithammanuwat (Thiap Siriñāṇo) comments this advantage of *Samaṇasatti* is external in that those associated with the monks who are conferred *Samaṇasatti* titles feel that their *Ācariya* are honored. The disciples are thereby motivated to further the Buddhist cause (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

In support of this statement, Dr. Amnaj Buasiri adds that *Samaṇasatti* makes the monks' followers very proud and willing to promote, develop and maintain Buddhism even further (Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

## 2. Problems of *Samaṇasatti*

It seems natural that everything has its pros and cons. Professor Chamnong Thongprasert (specially appointed) states that “In fact, everything has its advantages and disadvantages, depending on how you view it (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview). *Samaṇasatti* is no exception. It has its benefits and problems. The disadvantages, however, are mainly caused by people who are involved in the machinery of *Samaṇasatti*. Admittedly, *Samaṇasatti* is beneficial in light of the initial intentions in conferring such titles. There is nothing harmful or unwholesome about it. It is designed to honor virtuous and competent monks, as seen in the proclamation of *Samaṇasatti* described in the Section on *Samaṇasatti* above. Phra Suthithammanuwat shares this view, saying “*Samaṇasatti* in itself poses no problem. The problem lies with those who use it and those who consider it. The problem is with the system. I personally do not think it an undesirable thing.” (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview). According to the research by Phra Maha Wichian Saisi (2000, 182, 203), most academics consider *Samaṇasatti* as neutral. The desirable and undesirable effects come with people who are involved. If the system is improved, the *Samaṇasatti* system will be further strengthened. The findings show that the *Samaṇasatti* problem is not unsolvable. Here are some views on the problems or disadvantages of the system:

**1. *Samaṇasatti* creates greed and delusion with regard to titles and gifts.** *Samaṇasatti* uplifts the position of the monk who is granted the title, leading to greater recognition and honor, together with all the accompanying privileges and gifts. Some monks are carried away by all the attention and material goods and are clung to them. This is against the purpose of monkhood and training as described in the *Sikkhāttaya*, which is designed to curb desires.

This criticism is valid in that most monks are human. Dr. Amnaj Buasiri thinks that *Samaṇasatti* encourages greater desires in monks who are not well trained (Dr. Amnaj Buasiri, interview), but it does not mean that it is true for every monk or that monks with such greed or desires are all bad. Admittedly, there are monks affected by greed or delusion with *Samaṇasatti*, but the number is small. We may understand the situation better

if we compare it to that which a layperson might face. For example, there are people who are promoted to a higher rank or position and are carried away by it. They are what we call in Thai “Kingka Dai Thong” [literally meaning “a chameleon that acquires gold” or a person who likes to show off] or “Khangkhok Khuen Wo” (literally meaning “a toad on the palanquin” or a person who forgets his roots], i.e. those suffering from “self-delusion”, who are conceited and arrogant. Again, there are very few people like this, so the problem may not be altogether unsolvable. Phra Thep Wisutthikawi comments as follows:

“I think that this happens in every society. The monks’ society is no exception, but how bad is the situation? We should look at it really objectively, but not indifferently, objectively in a sense that we consider both pros and cons. In every society today, there are good and bad people, whether they are civil servants, military officials, police, teachers or monks. However, it is my belief that malicious or conceited people are few in number... In a period where there are many such people, the society is in decline. It is the same with monks. If it appears that there are many problematic monks, there will be a decline in faith. People will criticize that even monks have greed and are infatuated with ranks and titles. In fact, the Buddha taught that one who acquires a rank should not be infatuated with it. It does not mean that one should reject ranks. Ranks should continue, and one should acquire them, but one should not get infatuated with them. The problem is that a person can get carried away with them, but it is not yet that severe. It is a common thing. It just happens that today the media exerts a strong influence... Sometimes, monks are not in the wrong at all... Sometimes, we do not know what yardstick to use... Perhaps a certain monk is influential, or maybe the media is influential and turns to official laws to decide the issue; so, it has become a legal issue. Nobody can draft laws that say specifically that the issue must be such and such; if one wants to do so, one will have to come up with so many laws to cover everything (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

**2. *Samaṇasatti* causes monks to vie with one another or lobby for titles, giving rise to jealousy and conflict just like in a lay society, leading to confusion and injustice among the *Saṅgha*. Honors and gifts**

that come with *Samaṇasatti* can prompt monksto want to acquire it just for the sake of it, while those with a certain title want to get promoted to a higher level for greater honor and gifts. However, there is a limited number of positions or titles available each year; so, there is a fierce competition among monks, causing jealousy and conflicts among monks who are eligible for *Samaṇasatti*, especiallythose from the same monastery or province. The problem that follows is unseemliness and injusticein approving the list of *Samaṇasatti* as a result of lobbying. Some monks who should be given the honors are bypassed.

In Phra Thep Wisutthikawi's view, despite all the lobbying there are very few monks who resort to the practice (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Dr. Amnaj Buasiri believes that vying for *Samaṇasatti* titles exists but only to a limited degree (Dr. Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

### **3. *Samaṇasatti* causes monks to take delight in extravagance.**

When *Samaṇasatti* titles are conferred, there is a celebration and merit making ceremony. Functions are organized, and much money is spent. There are critics who say that *Samaṇasatti* causes monks to indulge in the extravagance of the celebration and other related events.

However, lavishing celebration and merit making may be due to the financial status of the monks concerned. Some, for instance, reside in monasteries with a lot of income or are financially supported by wealthy followers. The latter may want to celebrate the occasion, falsely believing that the bigger the party they organize, the more merit they will obtain. In their opinions, a higher *Samaṇasatti* title should be marked by a greater financial offer. In such cases no bad intention or self-seeking scheme is involved. Phra Thep Wisutthikawi maintains a similar view that it is possible that some titled monks may enjoy extravagance, but it is not always the case. There seems to be a practice that lavishes monks who are conferred a higher honor with a lot of money. The monks, in turn, squander the money on extravagant events consideredfitting to their new status or rank (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

Phra Suthithammanuwat holds a similar view. Organizing an event to celebrate the conferment of *Samaṇasatti* is a social value which is sometimes accompanied by a donation of money according to the monk's

status. It is done not out of a desire to please those in high positions, but rather out of a desire to make merits. He adds further that there are not many monks who organize such celebratory events. Monks in Bangkok do not like to see them organized. In some cases, it is their followers who undertake the organizing. Some monks donate the money received to other charitable causes. For instance, Phra Thammakhnaphon (Phaibun Dataxuñño), former Ecclesiastical Provincial Governor of Kanchanaburi, celebrated his *Dhamma Samanásatti* conferment and donated the money to school constructions. Some of his followers wanted to offer him a car, but the monk asked that the money be donated to the school construction project instead (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

**4. *Samanásatti* distracts monks from the study and practice of *Dhamma-Vinaya*.** Critics believe that when monks take delight in and become infatuated with *Samanásatti*, they tend to spend more time finding ways and means to obtain *Samanásatti* titles at the expense of their study and practice of *Dhamma-Vinaya*. This allegation is far from the truth. It is difficult for monks to turn away from *Dhamma-Vinaya* study and practice for the sake of *Samanásatti*, as such study and practice are the direct reasons why *Samanásatti* is conferred in the first place; they are part of the conditions leading a monk to be considered for *Samanásatti*. The inattention to *Dhamma-Vinaya* study and practice may be caused by a number of factors. Some monks may not be interested in such study and practice because of their lack of faith or because of their laziness. It is not necessarily due to *Samanásatti*.

Phra Suthithammanuwat admits that there is some truth in the above criticism but it is not necessarily an important factor. Monks with no *Samanásatti* can be uninterested in such study and practice (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview). Dr. Amnaj Buasiri holds a similar view that only in some cases is *Samanásatti* the cause of a lack of interest in the study and practice of *Dhamma* among monks (Dr. Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

**5. Like traditional ranks and titles that have been abolished, *Samanásatti* should also be discontinued.** Ranks and titles that were created at the time of absolute monarchy have all been abolished,

because they tended to cause social class division and inequality. Similarly, *Samaṇasatti* is a legacy of absolute monarchy and it should be abolished as well. Such a comment is not well substantiated. It is an oversimplification coupled with extreme attitudes. It is not true that ranks and titles are always the cause of discrimination or exploitation. Classification, whether in terms of titled status or other administrative posts, can lead to class distinction as well. In addition, *Samaṇasatti* resembles rather the modern rank system than the former system of noble titles. Indeed, the former system has not completely disappeared; rather, it is replaced by something more modern.

Assistant Professor Dr. Channarong Bunnun who is in favor of the abolition of the *Samaṇasatti* system does not agree with the above reason, arguing that *Samaṇasatti* and the lay system of ranks and titles are not related. To argue that they are, therefore, is not reasonable (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

**6. *Samaṇasatti* makes monks subservient to or become an instrument of the state.** The *Samaṇasatti* system was created by the state for political and administrative purposes and as a consequence was regarded as subservient to it like other civil services that function like a state apparatus.

Such view is only partially true in the case of self-seeking monks who act like state servants. In general, however, monks that agree to receive *Samaṇasatti* titles and allowances do not have that in mind. They agree to receive the honors that are created by the State for political and administrative purposes, and their acceptance is not against the rules of the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. On the contrary, *Samaṇasatti* is beneficial to Buddhism, and it is essential that society functions under the same administrative order. It is rather unfair to treat the acceptance of *Samaṇasatti* as an act of subservience to the state, as the majority of monks are not of that mind. The case of Phra Thep Moli (Sircando) who had his title removed could be evidence that monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles do not follow the state's order unquestioningly. In this case Phra Thep Moli expressed his opinion frankly while other monks kept their silence (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

Besides, such a comment overlooks the fact that as part of the state's administration and under its governance, the *Saṅgha* must comply with the request or order made by the state authorities no matter whether the monks have any *Samanasatti* titles or not. It seems that the criticism raised here is too severe to be true, as it overlooks the fact that in any period or under any government rule, religion serves as part of the state's apparatus and is invariably involved in politics somehow. Professor Preecha Changkhwanyuen points out that religion or the *Saṅgha* clearly became a political tool after the 1932 Coup when change was in the air. For instance, when Thai people were under the influence of democratic fervor, they tried to turn the *Saṅgha* or *der* into a democratic organization and introduced the idea that Buddhism must be democratic. When politicians ran for an election, they used the monastery as their platform and monks as election canvassers. The professor concludes that "at no place and no time do religion and politics not intermingle" (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999, 286-287).

Furthermore, using monks as a state apparatus may be justified if it is done for social good and not against the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. Providing assistance to the people and the state is something that the Buddha permitted, as seen in his statement "Bhikkhu, I permit you to go along with the king" (The *Tipitaka*, Volume 4, Item 186, p. 295), when he permitted the delay of the *Vassūpanāyikādivasa* as requested by King Bimbisāra.

In other words, the legitimacy and moral justification of the state's use of the *Saṅgha* or religion as its administrative tool depends on its intent. Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto) – former Phra Dhammapiṭaka – contends that the efforts of the ruling party to make the people easier to govern and the government to function more efficiently for the sake of public good are correct and legitimate. However, if the governing is designed only for the good of the governing party and their self-directed ends, such act is problematic and illegitimate. Likewise, if good governance which utilizes Buddhism is aimed at public good, it is legitimate; if designed for self-interest, it is illegitimate. So there is a difference between being a tool for selfish ends and a tool for public good. Phra Brahmagunabhorn says that "to serve for administrative purposes is not necessarily a bad thing or an act with evil intent" (Phra Dhammapiṭaka [P.A. Payutto], 1996, 23-25).

**7. The present *Samaṇasatti* system is degrading to the *Saṅgha* order and destroys the Thai traditional value because today monks request the titles on their own behalf whereas in the past they are conferred on monks by authorities.** In the old days conferment of titles was the monarch's decision, while today the interested and eligible monks need to submit their requests for *Samaṇasatti* for themselves. Some view that this is a degrading act that destroys the traditional value and that it is not becoming for the monks who are supposed to leave ambition and desire for material gains behind.

Phra Thep Wisutthikawi thinks that it is not fitting for monks to ask for *Samaṇasatti* titles for themselves. However, culture has changed as a result of foreign influence, not because of *Samaṇasatti* it self. It is rather the system has made it so (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). In his view, submitting a request for *Samaṇasatti* may not be the most proper thing to do, but this is not due to the nature of *Samaṇasatti*, but because of the changing culture or system.

Phra Suthithammanuwat provides another interesting viewpoint that today the large number of monks makes it impossible for each and every monk to be duly considered for a title. So, it is necessary for the monks concerned to submit their work for the consideration of *Samaṇasatti*. We may regard such act as “presenting” or “informing” others of one’s work so that they may appreciate it, just like the act of *Pattānumodanā* (rejoicing for merits done by others). We happen to use the word “request,” thus making it problematic (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

**8. *Samaṇasatti* is not in line with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, because the titles conferred by the monarch are different from the titles of *Etadagga* appointed by the Buddha.** Since *Samaṇasatti* did not exist in the Buddha’s time and since it is the monarch, not the Buddha, who appoints the monks, it has been criticized for not being in line with *Dhamma-Vinaya*.

However, the objective or the essence of *Samaṇasatti* is similar to that of the *Etadagga*. They are not in conflict with each other. Many academics view that *Samaṇasatti* is similar to the title of *Etadagga* or even originates from it. For instance, Professor Sathianphong Wannapok

(specially appointed), Member of the Royal Institute, makes the following comment:

“I think that *Samaṇasatti* that came in to being in subsequent times was not a new creation. It had its origin from the Buddha’s time, then to Lanka, and to Thailand. Much has been developed in Thai society... *Samaṇasatti* later on was modeled on the worldly structure: division into classes, as in the case of honorific titles, from Somdet Chaophraya, Chaophraya, Khunphra, Khunluang, and Khun. If we compare them to the religious titles, we can see they are the same: Somdet Phra Rachakhana is equivalent to Somdet Chaophraya, Deputy Somdet to Chaophraya, Phra Rachakhana, Thep Level, to Khunphra, Phra Rachakhana, Raj Level, to Khunluang, and Ordinary Level, to Khun” (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Center, 1999, 233-234).

These views indicate that *Samaṇasatti* has developed along the model of *Etadagga* and undergone changes into classes and divisions parallel to the system of honorific titles royally conferred on distinguished individuals. In this regard, *Samaṇasatti* should not be seen as going against the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, as it has developed from or is modeled on the title of *Etadagga*.

In addition, it is legitimate and not contrary to the *Vinaya* for the *Saṅgha* to accept its administrative structure as well as *Samaṇasatti* titles created by the state in light of the principle of “compliance with the king” when the Buddha permitted the monks to delay the *Vassūpanāyikādivasa* as requested by King Bimbisāra, although it was not in line with his original instruction. This shows that it is quite in order to comply with the authorities in minor matters that do not cause significant repercussions. The essence of the *Samaṇasatti* system and the *Saṅgha* administrative structure created by the state is not too different from the issue of delayed *Vassūpanāyikādivasa*; it may not completely be in accordance with the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, but it does not bring about serious adverse effects. Dr. Amnaj Buasisi concurs, stating that “the *Dhamma-Vinaya* does not lay down any specific rule in this matter it does mention “*Rājānam Anuvattitum*” – comply with the wish of the monarch. So, one can interpret the matter as not being against the *Vinaya*” (Dr. Amnaj Buasisi, Interview).

**9. *Samaṇasatti* goes against the *Dhamma-Vinaya* in several aspects, e.g. against the principles of no class division, respect for seniority, and non-involvement in the affairs of laypeople.** This is based on the notion that *Samaṇasatti* was not established by the Buddha, unlike the issue of *Etadagga*, and is considered as not being in line with the *Dhamma-Vinaya* in many ways. For instance, the practice of *Samaṇasatti* has led to class distinction, abandonment of traditional respect for seniority based on years of ordination, and greater tendency to become involved in lay affairs.

Such criticism, again, is partially correct as discussed earlier. However, there is some error of judgment here, especially with regard to the issue of class distinction and disregard for seniority. The practice of *Samaṇasatti* has resulted in the administrative hierarchy just like *Etadagga*—both are based on competence rather than seniority. The difference lies in the fact that *Samaṇasatti* appointments are made by the state. Like the principle of *Etadagga*, it does not replace or entirely do away with the observation of seniority. Monks under the *Samaṇasatti* system continue to observe seniority. For example, when carrying out ecclesiastical affairs, monks with a shorter monastic life must honor their senior and call them “*Bhante*,” while the latter calls the former “*Āvuso*,” in accordance with the seniority principle. Monks with a longer monastic life are not required to prostrate before those with higher *Samaṇasatti* who have a shorter monastic life. On the contrary, it is the latter that will pay proper respect to the former first. A monk with *Samaṇasatti* shall always pay respect to his preceptor or teacher with lower or no *Samaṇasatti* title. In this connection, Phra Thep Wisutthikawi and Professor Chamnong Thongprassert give a similar point of view that respect for seniority is still observed, except for the seating arrangements in the royal and state ceremonies, which is done, according to Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, in honor of the monarch (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

Besides the title of *Etadagga*, there are other positions in the *Saṅgha* order that are appointed based on level of competence. For example, apart from having at least a ten-year monastic life, a preceptor monk must be competent to carry out his *Upajjhāya* duties. The Buddha decreed that “O, Monks, monks who are foolish and incompetent shall not carry out the ordination duties. Any monk that does so will be considered as

having committed an ecclesiastical offence. O, Monks, I permit a competent monk with ten or more years of monastic life to do ordination duties" (the *Tipitaka*, Volume 4, No. 76, p. 105). In all likelihood, these positions are not appointed on the basis of seniority alone, as the preceptor will have to preside over the ordination ceremony and supervise monks with less than five years of monastic life.

Thus, *Samaṇasatti* does not create class distinction or disregard seniority. It is similar to the idea of *Etadagga* that ranks some monks higher than others, but it does not cancel out the seniority principle entirely. *Samaṇasatti* is different from class or caste in that the former has a certain mobility, i.e. possibility for change, while the class or caste in India remains immobile (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Class distinction as a result of *Samaṇasatti*, if it ever occurs, is a matter of individual monks who are infatuated with the titles and divide people into classes. In other words, to be put in a high position is a matter of merit and competence, but some people may take it too seriously (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). *Samaṇasatti* has no such design. The system may be devised by the state, but to consider it as a hierarchy of classes is surely not what the Buddha intended to see. Neither did he with the title of *Etadagga*. It may be acceptable to follow the state for the good of the *Saṅgha* order and Buddhism, but it needs to be kept in mind that *Samaṇasatti* is not an indication of class distinction as it may be for the laypeople.

The issue of *Samaṇasatti* being treated as a lay affair and being a barrier to *Nibbāna* has been touched upon earlier. Phra Thep Wisutthikawi makes an interesting observation that some ecclesiastical affairs are similar to those of laypeople. The case of a monk with a longer monastic life paying respect to another with a shorter monastic life but with a higher *Samaṇasatti* title is like that in which a father pays respect to his son with a higher title, this being based on competence (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

**10. *Samaṇasatti* goes against the Buddha's *Saṅgha* administration characterized by equality, fraternity and liberty.** The previously mentioned problems concerning *Samaṇasatti* gave rise to some aspects of Buddhist practice that seem to diverge from the original *Dhamma-Vinaya* practice. Consequently, *Samaṇasatti* is regarded as conflicting with the

Buddha's idea of *Saṅgha* administration characterized by equality, fraternity and liberty.

The criticism is partially valid. *Samaṇasatti* results in class distinction. There is a sense of inequality between monks with *Samaṇasatti* and those without such titles or with different ones. Such differentiation may not signify fraternity or the sense of familiarity among monks and may even become a barrier to the liberty of the *Saṅgha*, but it is too severe, as has already been discussed in the section dealing with class distinction. *Samaṇasatti* is to all intents and purposes patterned on the *Etadagga* model. In the *Saṅgha* order, this may lead to hierarchy that is not based on the seniority of ordination, but it does not cancel out the seniority principle.

Assistant Professor Dr. Channarong Bunnun thinks that this criticism has some validity. Even without the issue of *Samaṇasatti*, inequality exists because of the nature of the *Saṅgha* administration. Monks are not all equal. For instance, there is difference in terms of years spent in monastic life or student-teacher relationships. It is true that *Samaṇasatti* destroys a sense of fraternity if monks become infatuated with the titles they receive. As for liberty, the fact that it may be limited does not mean that it does not exist. (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

Phra Thep Wisutthikawi maintains that the issue of equality continues to fall within the *Vinaya* framework that focuses also on competence instead of treating all monks blindly equally. Fraternity should not be affected by the issue of *Samaṇasatti* (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Dr. Amnaj Buasiri is of a similar thought that monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles are still monks who have to carry out daily routine activities in the spirit of equality, fraternity and liberty, and also have to observe the seniority principle (Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

What one must be clear about is that the Buddha's *Saṅgha* administration was not democratic in the Western sense or in the sense discussed by Western philosophers. The *Saṅgha* administration is based principally on the *Dhamma-Vinaya* rather than on Western-styled equality. In the *Saṅgha* community, decisions are usually reached by consensus, as seen in such cases as ordination, *kathina* robe-making ceremony, and *Samanubhāsana* chanting related to misdemeanors of monks. The decisions are not reached by representatives in the same manner as members of the

Parliament. Monks' liberty is also limited by the *Vinaya* framework in which there are numerous prohibitions and restrictions. Liberty, ultimately a deliverance from all sufferings, is an ideal difficult to achieve, with or without the existence of *Samanasatti* and the *Saṅgha* administration. Even in the Buddha's time, there were many monks who joined the order without the aim of attaining *Nibbāna*. Take, for example, the Chabbaggaṇya monks: the Buddha said that "No animal desires to be liberated from the cycle of rebirth (*Vivattha*); they only desire the cycle of rebirth (*Vattha*)" (*Khuddakanikāya Atṭhakathā Dhammapada*, Part 5, p. 54). This can be interpreted that the Buddha acknowledged that most people desire the cycle of births and rebirths rather than the liberation from it, i.e. deliverance.

The issue of equality is just like that of classification on the principles of seniority, competence, and relationships, as has been discussed earlier. In other words, the *Saṅgha* under the Buddha's *Dhamma-Vinaya* are all equal in that they follow the same *Dhamma-Vinaya*, but also not equal with regard to certain issues. They are expected to show respect and obedience, as well as following orders, in proper order. For instance, the preceptor can give orders to his pupil and can punish him for any wrongdoing as long as it does not violate the *Dhamma-Vinaya*. All this is intended to ensure law and order in the *Saṅgha* community. Life in a large community is difficult and chaotic without rules and regulations and proper order. Like *Etadagga*, *Samanasatti* does not bring about inequality in the *Saṅgha* community to a damaging extent.

Fraternity may be affected by *Samanasatti*, but again not to a serious extent, as has been discussed earlier. Monks observe seniority and relationships. The majority of monks with *Samanasatti* are not so carried away with the title that they disregard friendships with other monks. Most relationships are maintained. There are only some monks who are so blinded by *Samanasatti* titles and material interests that they become inimical and hostile to other monks as in the aforementioned case of Somdet Phra Phutthachan (Ajarn Asapho).

In addition, the meaning of liberty itself is not without controversy. The monks' liberty is rather limited by the *Dhamma-Vinaya* with regard to what they can and cannot do in their daily life. They cannot always do

what they want. Their liberty is limited compared to ordinary people in democratic society. If the issue of liberty in question means that *Samaṇasatti* leads to greater administrative structure or control and to less liberty for monks to lead life as they see fit in the *Saṅgha* community, it is true to a certain extent, but it is not a serious problem. As a rule, monks have their liberty limited by the *Dhamma-Vinaya*, while the *Saṅgha* administration is carried out by those with administrative positions rather than those with *Samaṇasatti* titles. Monks with higher *Samaṇasatti* titles have neither power nor right to order those with lower *Samaṇasatti* titles who are not under their supervision. If the concern is with liberty or freedom from Kilesa and sufferings, this is a matter of *Dhamma* practice as discussed earlier. It is an individual concern and has little to do with *Samaṇasatti*.

**11. *Samaṇasatti* is an exploitative means for self-seeking persons.** *Samaṇasatti* may be desirable; monks who receive *Samaṇasatti* titles are honored and showered with gifts, interests, or attention. Some monks may seek them, thus allowing those involved in the *Samaṇasatti* activity to exploit the matter.

However, this is again not a serious issue. In general, the interests to be gained are not considerable. It is natural for those who seek something to repay others for their help, for example, to cover the expenses incurred and as a token of gratitude. If the amount is not considerable, it is not something to worry too much about.

So, even if it cannot be positively proven, it can be reasonably concluded that *Samaṇasatti* has more advantages than disadvantages; at least, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. *Samaṇasatti* may have some problems, but such problems are not intolerable. They can be corrected or redressed. It may be more beneficial for Buddhists to help improve the situation rather than to seek to destroy the system. *Samaṇasatti* still has its advantages and is still important to the existence of the *Saṅgha* and Buddhism.

## Suggestions for solutions and guidelines to problems concerning *Samaṇasatti*

### 1. Possible solutions

There are four suggested approaches: abolishing the system, improving it, inculcating proper values, and controlling and monitoring the conducts and works of monks with *Samaṇasatti* titles. Some approaches can be undertaken simultaneously, while others may be more difficult to implement. They are discussed in the following:

**1. Abolishing *Samaṇasatti*:** The proponents of this approach argue that there are more disadvantages to *Samaṇasatti* than advantages. It is best to abolish it. Some, however, disagree. For example, Phra Thep Wisutthikawi maintains that it does not really matter whether or not *Samaṇasatti* is abolished, as it is not the objective of ordination in the first place; however, it is more prudent to keep it, because it has more advantages (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Phra Suthithammanuwat shares the view that it is better to have *Samaṇasatti* than to have none at all. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages. If it is abolished, it will be replaced by another system not unlike it, because a system must be put in place to reward people with significant religious and social contributions. Monks are human and thus need to be motivated in some way to work hard. In this sense, *Samaṇasatti* will never totally disappear (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview). Besides, Professor Chamnong Thongprasert who once supported the abolition approach now maintains that the approach will be too extreme, for the system does not cause any significant damage. Monks like Luang Pho Buddhadasa, for example, do not attach themselves to *Samaṇasatti* (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview).

So, changing *Samaṇasatti* to a different system would amount to the same thing. *Samaṇasatti* would remain as an “improved” or “new” version of itself. According to the research by Phra Maha Wichian Saisi (2000, 190), a number of academics maintain that a system that could replace *Samaṇasatti* should be an ethical one modeled on the practice in the Buddha’s time. Appointments will be made on the basis of excellence through a committee. Such view may be tantamount to abolishing *Samaṇasatti*, but it also suggests that it be replaced by another “system”

whose essence is not far removed from the existing model. It is still designed to honor monks, although it may be called by a different name. The difference in the “improved” version may simply be its new name. This view is similar to that of Phra Thep Wisutthikawi who holds that the noble titles may have already been abolished, but in reality they still exist. A new form was introduced using ranks instead; the real change was only in its name. The name “*Samaṇasatti*,” on the other hand, remains unchanged (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). Similarly, Phra Suthithammanuwat comments that if *Samaṇasatti* is abolished, something with a different name will take its place. Positions and levels will still remain (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

**2. Improving the *Samaṇasatti* system:** This alternative may be more realistic and more likely to be implemented. Improvement will be made to minimize disadvantages or problems. Phra Phaisan Wisalo, a famous Buddhist scholar today, comments that if we cannot abolish *Samaṇasatti*, it is better to improve it.

The guidelines for improvement are several and will be discussed here.

**(a) Separate *Samaṇasatti* from *Saṅgha* administrative positions:**

The first suggestion made by Phra Phaisan Wisalo is to separate *Samaṇasatti* from *Saṅgha* administrative positions (Phitthaya Wongkun, 2002, 58).

The objective of the separation, in the view of Phra Phaisan Wisalo, is to reduce the role of the state and to have greater freedom in *Saṅgha* administration and governance. He maintains that the state today does not take as much interest in religion as it used to in former times. Its patronage is designed for its own good. It is not an individual who seeks to make merit or attain *Nibbāna*. The state is only an impersonal mechanical apparatus; consequently, when it comes to the supervision of the *Saṅgha* administration, it is unlikely to be for the good of religion (Phitthaya Wongkun, 2002, 57).

Nevertheless, the separation of *Samaṇasatti* from administrative positions is quite commendable but difficult to implement in its entirety. *Samaṇasatti* is an element of the *Saṅgha* administration whose structure is associated with administrative positions. The highest *Samaṇasatti*

title is the Supreme Patriarch with inherently administrative duties. It is, therefore, not possible to separate *Samaṇasatti* at this level from administrative positions. If separation is attempted, it will adversely affect the efficiency of administrative functions, because *Samaṇasatti* is a mechanism that facilitates the following of orders, thus contributing to efficient administrative work, as discussed earlier.

**(b) Incorporate *Samaṇasatti* into the *Saṅgha* administrative structure:** It has been suggested that *Samaṇasatti* titles be incorporated into administrative positions in the same way as the title of the Supreme Patriarch, which is both a *Samaṇasatti* title and as an administrative position. Assistant Professor Dr. Channarong Bunnun views that if one cannot abolish *Samaṇasatti*, one solution may be to turn *Samaṇasatti* titles into administrative ones (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

The advantage of this method is to reduce the number of positions that have given rise to delusion and attachment. However, a host of problems may ensue. For instance, when the number of positions is reduced, there may be greater desire and competition for the positions. Another problem is similar to that found in the separation proposal, i.e. a decline in the efficiency of the administrative machinery. In addition, monks who have no administrative positions contribute to the growth of the religion in other ways, such as dissemination, will not be recognized or rewarded.

**(c) Improve the procedure for the consideration of *Samaṇasatti*:** This proposal is significant and more likely to be implemented than the separation or incorporation approaches, for it does not affect the *Samaṇasatti* structure as a whole. In other words, it does not affect the *Samaṇasatti* system and does not have as many negative effects as the separation or incorporation approaches. Improving the procedure can be done in two ways:

The first is by changing the authorities who consider *Samaṇasatti*. Phra Phaisan Wisalo suggests that people in various sectors, including social organizations, participate in the consideration of *Samaṇasatti* in order to reduce the state's role and to prevent monks' monopoly of it (Phitthaya Wongkun, 2002, 58, 61).

Despite being a good method, Phra Phaisan's proposal may be problematic. Phra Thep Wisutthikawi makes an interesting observation that

to bring people from outside to consider *Samaṇasatti* titles for monks may be problematic, as it allows influential people to interfere with and exploit the situation, giving rise to favoritism and causing greater confusion than ever before. Monks may have self-interests, but the extent of their interests is still less than that of laypeople (Phra Thep Wisuthikawi, interview).

The second is by changing the criteria for the qualifications of monks entitled for *Samaṇasatti*. This can alleviate the problem associated with *Samaṇasatti* consideration and ensure a fairer and more comprehensive distribution to monks in various fields. The consideration should include seniority and qualification, thus minimizing competition and lobbying while boosting the morale of monks who dedicate themselves to religious and social works. The proposed criterion change is feasible if the authorities understand the reasons behind it and the likely benefits that may follow.

**3. Inculcating proper values:** One of the problems concerning *Samaṇasatti* is caused by inappropriate values. Too much importance is attached to honors or positions. Some monks entertain the view that *Samaṇasatti* elevates their status and brings fame and material benefits with it. This, surely, is not what the *Samaṇasatti* system is intended for. Training or education by various means to instill monks with proper values, ethical conducts, and knowledge will help reduce the extent of the problem. Dr. Amnaj Buasiri suggests that monks review their value to better appreciate the notion of “receiving the honors graciously conferred by the monarch with a clear proof of contributions and good work” (Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

**4. Controlling and monitoring the conducts and works of monks with *Samaṇasatti*.** As *Samaṇasatti* is created to honor and give morale to virtuous monks, as well as to promote greater religious and social contributions, efforts should be made to control and monitor the conducts and works of monks with *Samaṇasatti*. This will help ensure and justify the intent of the *Samaṇasatti* system. With strong and effective control and monitoring mechanisms in place, the *Samaṇasatti* problem will be minimized.

## 2. Suggested practice

In light of the situation of *Samaṇasatti* today, the following approaches are suggested for both monks and laypeople concerned with improving the system:

1) Monks who are conferred *Samaṇasatti* should take good care in conducting themselves respectfully and making further contributions accordingly (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

2) Monks who are conferred *Samaṇasatti* should take care that their *Samaṇasatti* titles not cause adverse effects (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview). In other words, monks with *Samaṇasatti* should be mindful not to be carried away by their titles, become attached to it, and seek inappropriate interests from it. Monks should not become attached to ranks and positions. Once they receive *Samaṇasatti*, they should not become attached to all the attention, honors and gifts that come with it (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview). They should not place too much importance on *Samaṇasatti* and should keep their Kilesa to the minimum (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

Phra Thammakittiwong (Thongdi Suratecho), Member of the Royal Institute, a well-known academic Thera of the Thai *Saṅgha*, provides an analogy with elephants that are given titles. Monks with *Samaṇasatti* should conduct themselves like titled elephants. The latter may receive much honor for their part in the battle, but they never show delight or pleasure in those titles or honors given by humans. They remain cool or indifferent. To be more exact, they steadfastly retain their elephant status and take no more pleasure in those honors than they do in bananas, sugar-canies, bamboo shoots, or grass – their staple food. Titles do not change what they are, i.e. elephants. Likewise, *Samaṇasatti* can not change monks to be something they are not (Phra Thammakittiwong [Thongdi Suratecho], 1993, 45).

3) Those lay or religious people who are/used to be disciples of monks granted with *Samaṇasatti* must make it their duty to ensure that their teachers do not get carried away or deluded by the titles and accompanying privileges (Phra Thep Wisutthikawi, interview).

4) Monks with *Samaṇasatti* who command respect from the public are in a position to make considerable social and religious contributions if they conduct themselves according to Buddhist teachings, blame people who deserve to be blamed, and commanding those who deserve commendation, and making proper use of the seven principles of Purisadhamma (Chamnong Thongprasert, interview).

5) Additional *Samaṇasatti* should be granted to monks in other fields. Although administrative and public works (construction of religious sites) are given much attention in the consideration of *Samaṇasatti*, they are not as outstanding as the social work that has been carried out by monks such as Phra Athonprachanat (Alongkot). Due consideration should also be given to monks dedicated to *Kammaṭṭhāna* meditation practice (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

6. Information should be disseminated to the general public and monks to promote knowledge and understanding about the objectives of *Samaṇasatti* and discourage inappropriate conducts in this matter (Amnaj Buasiri, interview).

7. Laypeople or the public may not know much about *Samaṇasatti* and may not have an issue with it. However, they should learn how not to encourage monks to strive for it (Channarong Bunnun, interview).

8. Monks and laypeople should view the *Samaṇasatti* issue with a wider perspective and avoid focusing only on the negative aspects of it. This will promote the use of *Samaṇasatti* in a positive manner, benefiting Buddhism and society as a whole, while minimizing adverse effects and problems (Phra Suthithammanuwat, interview).

## Conclusion

The above discussion deals with the advantages and disadvantages of *Samaṇasatti* and various comments/criticisms of the topic. It is difficult to come to any conclusive decision whether the advantages outweigh and disadvantages or vice versa. It is only fair to say that the advantages seem to be fewer, or at least no more than the disadvantages. Besides,

it is difficult to see how the problem should be completely solved by its abolition. Abolition is less likely to happen and has some major disadvantages. Perhaps, a more realistic approach is to improve the *Samanasatti* system by making it fairer and by promoting better understanding among the monks about the true objective of *Samanasatti* to ensure that they do not unduly get carried away by it.

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