

**ABHIDHAMMA & VIPASSANA PRACTICES AMONG
THERAVADA BUDDHISM FOLLOWERS OF
ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

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ABSTRACT :

This study explores the integration and practice of Abhidhamma and Vipassana within the Theravada Buddhist community in Arunachal Pradesh, a region in northeastern India. Abhidhamma, the analytical doctrine of the Buddha's teachings, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the nature of mind and matter, while Vipassana, a form of meditation aimed at insight and mindfulness, serves as a practical application of these teachings. Among the Theravada Buddhists of Arunachal Pradesh, these practices are not only central to spiritual development but also play a crucial role in cultural and communal life. Through field studies, interviews, and participatory observation, this research examines how the intricate doctrines of Abhidhamma are interpreted and taught, and how Vipassana meditation. There are a few different ways that Theravada Buddhists in Arunachal Pradesh practice Vipassana meditation. Some people study Abhidhamma texts on their own, while others participate in Abhidhamma classes or retreats. Some people also practice Abhidhamma meditation, which is a type of meditation that focuses on contemplating the concepts discussed in Abhidhamma texts. One of the main benefits of practising Abhidhamma is that it can help us to develop a deeper understanding of the Buddha's teachings. Abhidhamma can also help us to develop wisdom and compassion. This paper tries to highlight these practices in the region and how it developed in Arunachal Pradesh referring on both the primary and secondary sources.

Keywords : Abhidhamma, Theravada Buddhism, Arunachal Pradesh, Vipassana Meditation.

: INTRODUCTION :

Arunachal Pradesh, nestled in the North-Eastern corner of India, is a land of wonderful natural beauty and cultural diversity. Among its greensceneries and serene monasteries, one can find a vibrant community of Theravada Buddhist followers who have embraced the profound teachings of Abhidhamma as a pathway to spiritual growth and enlightenment. Abhidhamma often referred to as the “Higher Doctrine” or “Ultimate Truth,” is a complex and intricate system of philosophy and psychology that plays a pivotal role in the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

Within the Theravada tradition, the study and practice of Abhidhamma are considered indispensable for those seeking a deeper understanding of the Buddha’s teachings and a more profound insight into the nature of reality and the human mind. In Arunachal Pradesh, this ancient and scholarly discipline has not only endured but thrived, finding a dedicated and enthusiastic following among the local Theravada Buddhist community.

This exploration embarks on a journey into the heart of Abhidhamma studies and Vipassana Meditation practices among the Theravada Buddhist followers of Arunachal Pradesh. We will delve into the origins and significance of Abhidhamma Vipassana Meditation within the Theravada tradition, examine the specific practices and rituals embraced by the devotees of Arunachal, and gain insight into how these practices contribute to their spiritual lives, fostering a profound connection with the teachings of the Buddha. Through this exploration, we aim to shed light on the rich tapestry of Abhidhamma practices that have taken root in this remote and spiritually vibrant corner of India, and how they continue to shape the lives and aspirations of its devoted practitioners.

Significance of Study :

Arunachal Pradesh, known as the “Land of the Dawn-Lit Mountains,” is not only a region of incredible natural beauty but also home to a vibrant Theravada Buddhist community. Within this community, the study and practice of Abhidhamma and Vipassana Meditation hold a central place in the spiritual journey of its followers. Abhidhamma often referred to as the “Higher Doctrine” or “Ultimate Truth,” is a rigorous system of Buddhist philosophy and psychology, offering profound insights into the nature of reality and the human mind. This study aims to delve into the multifaceted aspects of Abhidhamma practices among the Theravada Buddhist followers of Arunachal Pradesh, shedding light on its origins, significance, and contemporary relevance.

Objectives :

1. To explore the specific Abhidhamma studies and Vipassana Meditation practices embraced by the local Buddhist followers.
2. To analyse the impact of Abhidhamma studies and Vipassana meditation practices on the spiritual and cultural life of the Theravada Buddhist community of Arunachal.
3. To provide insights into the challenges faced by the preservation and propagation of Abhidhamma studies and Vipassana Meditation in the modern context.

Methodology :

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. It includes in-depth interviews with Buddhist monks, scholars, and lay practitioners, as well as surveys administered to a representative sample of the Theravada Buddhist community of Arunachal. Additionally, ethnographic fieldwork will be conducted to observe Abhidhamma studies and Vipassana meditation practices in their cultural context.

Arunachal Pradesh :

Arunachal Pradesh, the land of the rising sun, is a state in North-East India known for its stunning natural beauty, rich culture, and diverse people. Home to the easternmost point of India, Arunachal Pradesh shares borders with Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Assam.

The state is blessed with a wide variety of landscapes, ranging from the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas to the lush rainforests of the Brahmaputra Valley. Arunachal Pradesh is also home to a number of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, which are home to a variety of endangered and unique species of flora and fauna.

The people of Arunachal Pradesh are as diverse as its landscape. The state is home to over 26 different major tribes, each with its own unique language, culture, and traditions. The people of Arunachal Pradesh are known for their warm hospitality and their deep connection to nature.

Theravada Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh, India :

Theravada Buddhism is the oldest surviving branch of Buddhism, and it is the dominant form of Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh, a state in North-East India. Theravada Buddhism was introduced to Arunachal Pradesh in the 13th and 14th centuries by Burmese Buddhist missionaries. The majority of Theravada Buddhists in Arunachal Pradesh are from the Tai-Khampti, Singpho, and TikhakTangsa ethnic groups.

Theravada Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh is characterized by its emphasis on individual liberation through meditation and the study of the Pali Canon, the earliest Buddhist scriptures. Theravada Buddhists also believe in the importance of monastic life, and there are more than seventy Theravada Buddhist monasteries in Arunachal Pradesh.

One of the most important Theravada Buddhist festivals in Arunachal Pradesh is the Magha Puja festival, which is celebrated in February or March to commemorate the Buddha's first sermon. Other important Theravada Buddhist festivals in Arunachal Pradesh include Sankeng (New Year's Day), Visakha Puja (Buddha's birthday), and Kathina Civara Daan Utsav (the offering of new robes to monks).

Theravada Buddhism has played an important role in the cultural and social life of Arunachal Pradesh. Theravada Buddhist monasteries have been centres of learning and education for centuries. Theravada Buddhism has also had a significant impact on the art, architecture, and music of Arunachal Pradesh.

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Theravada Buddhists in Arunachal Pradesh follow the same basic practices as Theravada Buddhists all over the world. These practices include:

* **Meditation** : Meditation is the central practice of Theravada Buddhism. It is a way to train the mind to be more focused, aware, and compassionate.

* **Study of the Pali Canon** : The Pali Canon is the earliest collection of Buddhist scriptures. It contains the teachings of the Buddha and his disciples.

* **Monastic life** : Monastic life is an important part of Theravada Buddhism. Monks and nuns dedicate their lives to studying and practicing the Buddha's teachings.

* **Lay life** : Lay Theravada Buddhists follow the Five Precepts, which are ethical guidelines for living a good life. They also participate in Buddhist ceremonies and festivals.

Abhidhamma :

The Abhidhamma Pitaka is the third and final basket of the Pāli Canon, the Theravada Buddhist scriptures. It is a collection of texts that provide a systematic philosophical analysis of the Buddha's teachings.

The Abhidhamma Pitaka is divided into seven books, each of which focuses on a different aspect of the Buddha's teachings. The first book, the Dhammasangani, provides a list of all the ultimate realities (dhamma) that make up the universe. The second book, the Vibhanga, analyses these dhammas in more detail. The third book, the Dhatukatha, discusses the different categories of dhammas. The fourth book, the Puggalapannatti, examines the different types of individuals and their characteristics. The fifth book, the Kathavatthu, discusses various points of controversy in Buddhist doctrine. The sixth book, the Yamaka, presents a series of questions and answers on various topics related to the Dhamma. The seventh book, the Patthana, discusses the different types of causal relationships between dhammas.

The Abhidhamma Pitaka is a complex and challenging body of text, but it offers a profound understanding of the Buddha's teachings. It is a valuable resource for Buddhists who are interested in deepening their knowledge of the Dhamma and developing their practice of meditation.

A brief introduction to some of the key concepts in the Abhidhamma Pitaka :

The meaning of Abhidhamma :

The word Abhidhamma means the highest teaching of Buddha. It deals with four ultimate realities (Paramattha) which comprise Consciousness (Citta), Mental Concomitants (Cetasika), Matter (Rupa) and Extinction of Craving (Nibbâna).

Citta (Consciousness) : The Pâli word 'Citta' means knowing an object. It means knowing visible object, knowing audible objects, knowing odorous objects, knowing tangible objects and knowing cognizable objects.

There are four classes of Consciousness namely :

- (I) Consciousness pertaining to the Sensuous-sphere (Kâmâvacaracitta).
- (II) Consciousness pertaining to the Form-sphere (Rûpâvacaracitta).
- (III) Consciousness pertaining to the Formless-sphere (Arûpâvacaracitta). And
- (IV) Supramundane Consciousness (Lokuttaracitta).

The consciousness is divided into 89 types in brief and 121 types in details.

1. Cetasika (Mental Factors): Cetasika is the phenomenon which is associated with the mind or Consciousness. They include the various mental states such as feelings, perception, Volition and the attention that accompany consciousness and shape one's mental life.

2. Rûpa (Material Phenomena): Rûpa refers to the ultimate truth of material phenomena There are twenty-eight kinds of matter, of those, four are essential elements (Earth, Water, Fire and Air) the sense of faculty and material objects known as Mahâbhûta-Rûpa and the rest are dependent elements known as UpâdaRûpa.

3. Nibbâna (Nirvana): Nibbâna is the ultimate truth that represents the state of liberation and the cessation of suffering. It is the goal of Buddhist practice and is beyond the conditioned and impermanent nature of others Paramattha dhammas.

4. Dhamma (phenomena): The Abhidhamma teaches that the universe is made up of a vast number of ultimate realities, or dhammas. Dhammas are impermanent, selfless, and subject to the law of cause and effect.

5. Kamma (karma): Kamma is the law of cause and effect. The actions that we perform, both physically and mentally, create karmic imprints that condition our future experiences.

6. Vipassana (insight meditation): Vipassana is the practice of observing dhammas as they arise and pass away. By developing insight into the nature of reality, we can overcome ignorance and achieve liberation from suffering.

The Abhidhamma Pitaka is a rich and complex body of knowledge that offers a profound understanding of the Buddha's teachings. It is a valuable resource for Buddhists who are interested in deepening their knowledge of the Dhamma and developing their practice of meditation.

Several important Vipassana Meditation Centre in Theravada Buddhist in Arunachal Pradesh :

1. Dhamma Aruna Vipassana Meditation Centre : Dhamma Aruna, the Sun arise of Dhamma, the meditation centre located in the Mudoi village of Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, India. It is a branch of the Dhamma Giri Vipassana Meditation Centre in Igatpuri, Maharashtra, and offers 10-day Vipassana meditation courses in accordance with the tradition taught by S.N. Goenka.

The centre is located in a rural area, surrounded by tea gardens and agricultural fields. The setting is rustic and simple, with a focus on nature and the practice of meditation. The centre can accommodate up to 28 students (14 males and 14 females). Some of the rooms on the female side have attached bathrooms, while the males are accommodated in a dormitory. The rooms are partially cement structured and partially thatched, made of local building materials.

The centre has a large Dhamma Hall, which can hold up to 200 students. This is where the meditation instructions are given and where the students meditate for the majority of the day. The centre also has a kitchen, dining hall, and other common areas. Dhamma Aruna is a beautiful and peaceful place to learn and practice Vipassana meditation. The centre is well-maintained and the staff is friendly and helpful.

2. International Bana Meditation Centre of Lala Pahar, Lathao, Arunachal Pradesh : The International Bana Meditation Centre of Lala Pahar, Lathao, Arunachal Pradesh, is a unique and special place. It is a centre for Vipassana meditation, one of India's most ancient meditation techniques. The centre is located atop a hill called Lal Pahad, which means "red hill" in the local language. The hill is surrounded by lush forests and provides an atmosphere of solitude ideal for meditation.

The centre is under development, but it is already a popular destination for meditators from all over the world. The main attraction of the centre is the 113-foot-tall statue of Buddha that is being constructed. The statue is expected to be the tallest of its kind in India when it is completed.

In addition to the statue, the centre also has a large meditation hall, dining hall, and other common areas. The centre can accommodate up to 200 meditators.

The Vipassana meditation courses offered at the centre are 10 days long. During the courses, students learn how to observe the physical sensations in the body and mind. This practice leads to a deeper understanding of oneself and the world around us.

The centre is open to meditators of all levels of experience. However, it is important to note that the Vipassana meditation courses are very demanding. Students must be willing to meditate for long periods of time and to observe the Five Precepts of non-killing, non-stealing, non-sexual activity, non-lying, and non-intoxicants.

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3. Tengapani Meditation Centre: A Peaceful Haven for Meditation in Arunachal Pradesh:

The Tengapani Meditation Centre is a unique and special place. It is a Buddhist meditation centre located at Kongmukham, Golden Pagoda, Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh, India. The centre is situated in a serene and peaceful environment, surrounded by lush green forests and the mighty Brahmaputra River.

The Tengapani Meditation Centre was established in 2015 by the Buddhist public Leader Ex MLA of Chong Kham, Late.Chow Tewa Mein. The centre offers a variety of meditation courses, including Vipassana meditation by S.N. Goenka, Mahasi Sayadaw, &Ledi Sayadaw Vipassana traditions. The courses are open to meditators of all levels of experience, from beginners to advanced practitioners.

The Tengapani Meditation Centre is a non-profit organization and all courses are offered free of charge. However, students are encouraged to donate to the centre to help cover the costs of running the courses.

The centre has a large meditation hall, dining hall, and other common areas. The centre can accommodate up to 50 meditators. The rooms are basic but comfortable, and the food is simple and vegetarian.

The Tengapani Meditation Centre is a great place to learn about and practice meditation. The centre offers a variety of courses to suit the needs of different meditators. The setting is ideal for meditation, and the staff is friendly and helpful.

4. Dhamma Bhumi Buddhist Meditation Centre, Head Office of Arunachal Pradesh Bhikkhu Sangha-(APBS) : Dhamma Bhumi Buddhist Meditation Centre is a unique and special place. It is not only a Buddhist meditation centre located at Zero Point, Nanam-Salungtoo village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, India, but also the head office of the Arunachal Pradesh Bhikkhu Sangha. The centre is situated in a serene and peaceful environment, surrounded by lush green forests and the mighty Brahmaputra River.

Dhamma Bhumi Buddhist Meditation Centre was established in 2017 by the General Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh Bhikkhu Sangha APBS, Ven. Ratanadeepa Mahathera. The centre offers a variety of meditation courses, including Vipassana meditation by S.N. Goenka, Mahasi Sayadaw, &Ledi Sayadaw Vipassana traditions. The courses are open to meditators of all levels of experience, from beginners to advanced practitioners.

Despite of the above mentioned centres almost all the individual monasteries practice Abhidhamma Studies and Vipassana Meditation Practices in their respective areas with the limited facilities and infrastructures they have. During the rain retreat months (3 months) the practitioners of 8 precepts engages themselves in these practices also.

Findings and Discussion :

*** Historical Development of Abhidhamma Practices :**

Historically Abhidhamma Vipassana practices were not there in this part of the country. But in recent times it has gain attraction due its beneficiary characteristics. Some institutions are trying hard to

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spread the practices for better results, such as the Department of Pāli & Buddhist Studies, Arunachal University of Studies, Namsai which regularly holds meditation workshops in the institution for the youths.

*** Specific Abhidhamma Rituals and Practices :**

The Abhidhamma study & Meditation practices adopted here are influenced mostly by the Goenka Vipassana practices, hence specific practices to the place are not there. The practitioners are following the similar practices as the main land India.

*** Impact on Spiritual and Cultural Life :**

The Abhidhamma study & Vipassana meditation practices in the state have been dealing positively with the menace of drug addiction. Many youths who practiced Abhidhamma were able to come out of this deadly addiction, which a major positive impact of the practice in the state.

*** Challenges :**

The major challenges of Abhidhamma Study & Vipassana meditation practices in the state are-

- * Lack of regular and skilled trainers
- * Lack of adequate infrastructures for Vipassana practices
- * Lack of awareness among the local people about the practices and its benefits.
- * Lack of government's help for developing the facilities needed for the Vipassana practices in the state.

Conclusion :

In conclusion, this comprehensive study illuminates the profound significance of Abhidhamma studies and Vipassana Meditation practices among the Theravada Buddhist followers of Arunachal Pradesh. It provides valuable insights into the historical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of this ancient discipline within a contemporary context. By understanding the complex tapestry of Abhidhamma practices in Arunachal Pradesh, we gain a deeper appreciation for the enduring vitality of Theravada Buddhism in this region and its potential to continue guiding the spiritual journeys of its practitioners amidst the challenges of the modern world.

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