

# A Study of Proper Saṅgha Dāna in Theravada Buddhism: A Study Based on Thai Buddhist Monks

Phra Rurngvit Ukkhadhammo Phetkrai

International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC)

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand.

rurngvitukkhadhammo@ibsc.mcu.ac.th

Received February 8, 2021; Revised February 24, 2021; Accepted May 23, 2021

## ABSTRACT

This research article wrote with 3 objectives in mind, namely 1) To examine the problems and impacts of Saṅgha Dāna in Thailand, 2) To examine the concept of Saṅgha Dāna in Theravada scriptures, 3) To present the proper Saṅgha Dāna for Buddhist Monks in Thailand. The finding shows various problems and impacts that aren't so difficult or complicated to solved if Thai Buddhists society pay attention and willing to co-operate. The original teaching on Saṅgha Dāna practice in the Tipitaka is found to be the offering given to group of the Ariya monks (the 4 pairs of individuals, the Stream Enterer for instance) of at least 4 members. However, with the right intention and appointing, it is merely the Dāna offering for the sake of Saṅgha even though the offeror only give to a single monk or appointed individual. The results founded have been used to present the ideal

proper Saṅgha Dāna for the contemporary Thai Buddhist society in the following categories. Proper materials for Saṅgha Dāna must be consumable and good quality. Proper monks must be ariya (noble) monks of at least 4 members, otherwise the monks should at least complete with vijjā carana sampanno (endowed with perfect clear vision and exemplary good conduct). Proper offeror should have a good virtue and characteristics. The proper occasion to offer Saṅgha Dāna is the monks are visiting, leaving, ill, goods are hard to get and still fresh and new. Proper understanding is when realized that most of the modern days Saṅgha Dāna practices are not what originally taught by the Buddha.

Keywords: Saṅgha Dāna, Theravada Buddhism, Thai Buddhist Monks.

---



## Introduction

Looking deeply into the most popular Thai Buddhists' merit making traditions, Saṅgha Dāna is known to be among one of the most participated of them all. Those Buddhists living their life in Thailand are all well familiar with such tradition, and willing to join this particular practice with their heart set sky-high in the confidence of the field of merit that they venerated. To a Thai Buddhist, the images of those surrounding them offering Saṅgha Dāna to the monks are inscribed in the memory just like another normal practices, whether they are the families, neighbors, or friends, most of those have ever joined this merit making traditional practice of Buddhism. The collaboration, and elaboration among Thai Buddhist community in Saṅgha Dāna practice make it invulnerable, surviving, and evolving through time from the early Thai Buddhism era until present. This is of course alongside with the other practices such as keeping precepts (sīla) and meditation practice (bhāvanā), which known among the Buddhist to be the practice of virtue and good conduct.<sup>1</sup>

Saṅgha Dāna is the offering dedicated to Buddhist monks (deep sense of this term refers to Ariya Saṅgha, or enlightened monks),<sup>2</sup> widely popular among the Thai Buddhists. This kind of offering is preferably given on the important occasion of Buddhism, such as Visākha-pūjā, Mākhapūjā and Āsāraha-pūjā.<sup>3</sup> It is so popular until it becomes part of Thai culture and traditional events. However, most of the Thai Buddhists don't have the knowledge and right understanding on the historical background surrounded Saṅgha Dāna. This is because they are only carrying on doing so from generation to next generation. With most of Thai Buddhists are merely following the traditional offering of their grandparents and ancestors, without ever study the profound history of Saṅgha Dāna. This sort of traditional event without the background knowledge leads to the incorrect Buddhism belief within the Thai society. Of which, doesn't lead to any disasters or wrong doing just yet but lead to the wrong understanding of the teaching of the Buddha, within the belief of Theravada Buddhism, and

---

<sup>1</sup> See A IV 241, Puññakiriyavatthu Sutta [Action] - E. M. Hare (tr.), *Anguttara-Nikāya* [The Book of the Gradual Sayings], vol 4, (London Henley and Boston: PTS, 1978), pp. 164-166.

<sup>2</sup> Ariya Saṅgha or the group of noble monks refers to the four pairs of enlightened beings of Buddhism. These are the pair of Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmin, Anāgāmin, and Arahant.

<sup>3</sup> Phrakrū Kanrayānasitthivat, *In-Depth Important Days of Buddhism*, (Bangkok: MCU Press, 2014/2557 B.E.), pp. 15, 85, 117.

eventually cause the mismatch understanding within Thai Buddhist society. This is why the researcher had done the research, collected the info of the general problems found on Saṅgha Dāna throughout Thai Buddhist society, then attempted to present the reader with ideal proper Saṅgha Dāna.

### **The Problem and Impact of Saṅgha Dāna in Thailand**

In the present, Thailand has so much misunderstanding on how to create merit with Saṅgha Dāna, but hardly able to give detail statistically.<sup>4</sup> For example, many Thai Buddhists believe that in order to offer Saṅgha Dāna they have to buy the yellow Saṅgha Dāna bucket from Saṅgha store to make this offering or some believe that they have to put all the offerings goods inside a yellow bucket to make the offering called “Saṅgha Dāna”. These are all the misunderstanding that should be comprehended otherwise might lead to the deformation of Theravada Buddhism. In this research article, we will take a look at these problems along with the concept and what the Buddhist monks in Thailand really want of Saṅgha Dāna according to the proper context of Buddhist scripture “Tipitaka” and the context of modern Thai Buddhist society. These problems include many aspect and dimensions but mainly the research will be emphasizing the perspective of the general Thai Theravada Buddhists all over Thailand. What are the common problems of Saṅgha Dāna that can be seen all over the country? What are the general concepts of Saṅgha Dāna Thai people have? What is the proper Saṅgha Dāna for Buddhist Monks in Thailand according to Tipitaka and the context of modern world condition? These are the common questions that have been asked in Thailand but the questions were never actually given a clear answer, or some of the answers we get are somehow unsatisfied for some.

So, when Thai Buddhists are talking about Saṅgha Dāna, do they think about the origin and original concept? Or they simply think about following traditional activity that has been so common for many centuries until now. Many Thai Buddhists in general don't actually know about the original concept of Saṅgha Dāna, but instead have many different various

---

<sup>4</sup> Sanchai Phōmmalūesī, Saṅgha Dāna, (Bangkok: Dhamma Club, 1997/2540 B.E.), pp.

understandings on this and lead to many different practices.<sup>5</sup> This is one of the problems around this topic in Thailand. But the problems that present in Thailand don't just end there, there are also many problems surrounding Saṅgha Dāna. These problems include something like the quality of Saṅgha Dāna goods, commercial and business of Saṅgha Dāna, and the after effects toward the Kilesas of Buddhist monks.

### **Monks' Health Care Problems**

The problems and impacts that will be discussed in this research article starts with the Thai Buddhist monk's health care problems. It has been a concern by monks and monastery for years now that the foods and drinks that being offer as Saṅgha Dāna can be unhealthy. Although these foods are usually received in high amount and variety, but most are just not very healthy to eat - these can be too oily, too salty, high calories and sometimes doesn't have a right nutrient proportion. Some of these can also be contaminated, this can be either from the Saṅgha Dāna packages, or contaminated right from the market or the crop fields.

### **Saṅgha Dāna goods Problems**

The next issue that will be discussed here is the Saṅgha Dāna goods problem which in Thailand have been around for so long now ever since these goods are available to sell. The Saṅgha Dāna shops are mostly concern about their own benefit without thinking about the quality of the goods provided for the customers. The customers that buy these goods are also not concerning too much about the quality of the goods that they buy for the monks. This is because of the reason mentioned before most people simply follow their parents and ancestors on this tradition. Therefore, they tend to think about what can be done conveniently, and go ahead buying anything that is provided by the shop. All these lead to so many useless and inconsumable goods given to the monks, and these goods eventually piles up as trash inside the temple's storage room. Until there is a phrase that commonly say among some of the Buddhists that beware of this situation, that is "pseudo Saṅgha Dāna"<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Nāvāeak Thongyoy Sangsinchai, Right way to offer Saṅgha Dāna, (Bangkok: Dhuangkaew Press, 1999 /2542 B.E.), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Kanyārat Reunjai, CPB investigation of "Pseudo Saṅgha Dāna" found unqualified and useless goods, Innnews, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3l7DERh38Q#action=share> (accessed January 8, 2021).

which refer to the fake Saṅgha Dāna's goods that don't live up to the standard expected. The people that buy the goods don't get to use, and the people that get to use don't get to buy.

Other Saṅgha Dāna good's problem is that some temple actually sells all these goods themselves to make some money, this is Rotated Saṅgha Dāna (Sanghathānwien) which cause controversy among Thai Buddhist and lead to decline in faith. Many Thai Buddhist don't want the monks to sell those goods back to the shop and make money for themselves, which is clearly against the Vinaya that forbid the monks from receiving and using money.<sup>7</sup>

### **Misleading Concept of Saṅgha Dāna Problems**

The major problem that will be discussed in this research is the misleading concept of Saṅgha Dāna. In the present Thai Buddhists don't actually get to study much of the Tipitaka. There are many reasons for this, but mostly it is because the Tipitaka itself isn't all that interesting enough especially toward those that simply follow the tradition of the previous generation. The Thai Buddhist society does not understand well the origin of Saṅgha Dāna; thus, the Thai Buddhists are pretty much following it blindly. So, it is now up to the monks and minority of the lay Buddhists to study and pass on their knowledge. This can be done by the study of the concept of Saṅgha Dāna in Theravada Buddhist scriptures, Tipitaka and its related commentary. Furthermore, the concept of Saṅgha Dāna in the Tipitaka is very old: almost 2,600 years old. The concept of such practice is probably be best to study and try to modify sensibly so that it can be apply to the modern way of monastic life of Thai Buddhist monks

---

<sup>7</sup> Vin III 237, I. B. Horner (tr.), Vinaya Pitaka [The Book of Discipline], Vol 2, (London: PTS, 1969), pp. 99-105.

The concept of Saṅgha Dāna in the Tipitaka also appear all over the Tipitaka, but it is only in the Dakkhināvibhanga Sutta (The Exposition of Offerings)<sup>8</sup> that can be said to be the origin of this practice. This means this research article have to emphasize on this particular sutta for the central part of the study, but since this practice also appear in so many suttas, they also need to pay attention to as well, especially on Velāma Sutta (Velāma)<sup>9</sup> where the results of merit of Saṅgha Dāna are shown. However, because the related teaching on this topic is so vast, it cannot possibly be covered all in detail.

### **Kilesas And Perception of the Monks Problems**

Another major problems and impact Saṅgha Dāna has on Thai Buddhist society is how it is affecting Kilesas and perception of the monks. Many monks tend to get more and more greedy when they rely on Saṅgha Dāna for their requisite need. No matter how much they receive, it is never quite enough. Sometimes, when they have to share Saṅgha Dāna they even get into conflict over the better goods and start fighting each other.

### **Questions and Objectives of the Research**

When all of these problems and impacts have been examined together with the study of the true concept of Saṅgha Dāna from the Tipitaka, it is then that the proper Saṅgha Dāna for Thai Buddhist monks can be analysed and represent. This has to be considered in the context of the problems and impacts on modern day life and the original Vinaya, then suggest the best solution that possibly solve the issues. This means the proper Saṅgha Dāna may not has to be match the original teaching, but integrate well into the modern way of life of the Thai Buddhist monks. The problem that may happen after this is the disagreement that is norm among the wise.

All these problems are considered to be the important issues to be addressed. This is because Saṅgha Dāna is among the most common way for Thai Buddhists to make merit, but somehow, don't seem to comprehended the proper way to do this. These problems needed to be pointed out, so that everyone can be more aware and help each other looking

---

<sup>8</sup> M III 253, Dakkhināvibhanga Sutta [The Exposition of Offerings] - Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trs.), Majjhima Nikāya [The middle length Discourse of the Buddha], (Oxford: PTS, 1995), p. 1102.

<sup>9</sup> A IV 392, Velāma Sutta [Velāma] - E. M. Hare (tr.), Anguttara Nikāya [The Book of the Gradual Sayings], vol 4, (London Henley and Boston: PTS, 1978), p. 262.

after and pass on the true concept and principle of this Saṅgha Dāna tradition to the next generation. This would yield a great benefit of preserving and purifying Buddhist traditional and practice for years to come.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the problems and impacts of Saṅgha Dāna in Thailand?
2. What is the concept of Saṅgha Dāna in Theravada Buddhist scriptures?
3. What is the proper Saṅgha Dāna for Buddhist Monks in Thailand?

### **Objectives of the Research**

1. To examine the problems and impacts of Saṅgha Dāna in Thailand.
2. To examine the concept of Saṅgha Dāna in Theravada scriptures.
3. To present the proper Saṅgha Dāna for Buddhist Monks in Thailand.

### **Research Methodology**

This research article is based on the thesis of the same title, “A Study of Proper Saṅgha Dāna in Theravada Buddhism: A Study Based on Thai Buddhist Monks”. It is a Critical Study Research which emphasized on the Document Research. The research made the investigation on various documents, and had also examines other papers as see needed while writing. This is to make sure the data collected through the examination are as reliable as possible. But if the objective involves the investigation of the Buddha teaching (Dhamma), the Theravada Buddhist literature such as Tipitaka and its commentaries would be used. However, since the researcher of this research has a very low Pali language skill, the English translation of the Tipitaka will be used, instead of the Pali-Roman version. The translated Tipitaka and its commentaries used here will mainly be “The Pali Text Society (PTS)” version, but the researcher will also use it together with the comparison with other translated version to gain a better understanding.

It has the sequence of steps as the following:

1. Collect the data from the primary and secondary resources, these include the Tipitaka, related book and articles. Do some research for the specific detail and information about Saṅgha Dāna in Thai Theravada Buddhism from all the resources available within the boundary of the Research needed for this Thesis.
2. Represent the research in the form of Analytical Description together with giving the opinions and perspective of the researcher.
3. Make the conclusion and suggestion on the proper Saṅgha Dāna for Buddhist monks in Thailand.

### **Findings**

The proper Saṅgha Dāna about to be presented in this of the part of the article is basing on the finding of the first 2 objectives of the research. This suggested by considering the problems and the cause from the first objective as the starting point. Without a doubt the proper Saṅgha Dāna that is going to be introduced here will not be acknowledge by all Buddhists, but hopefully, it will be an appropriate solution and presentation according to the teaching in the Tipitaka and contemporary way of life in the modern Thai Buddhist society. To do this, all the problems and causes of the problems studied from the 1<sup>st</sup> objective (to examine the problems and impacts of Saṅgha Dāna in Thailand) is used as the pillar of the presentation, and the original teaching studied from the 2<sup>nd</sup> objective (to examine the concept of Saṅgha Dāna in Theravada scriptures) is used as the pillar of the solution. But since the way of life in early Buddhism era have changed according to anicca (impermanence)<sup>10</sup>, the modern concept of Saṅgha Dāna in the present era will also need to take into the account of the solution.

#### **Proper Objects or Materials of Saṅgha Dāna**

One of the very first thing the Saṅgha Dāna offerors have to do is to decide on what they are going to give as the Dāna to the Buddhist monks. There are many things they can give but to do it properly they must think about a few factors. These factors must be correct according to the Buddhist teaching and capable of being a solution to the particular problems found according to the research.

#### **Proper Saṅgha Dāna for A Good Health of Thai Monks.**

---

<sup>10</sup> One of the Tilakkhaṇa, anicca, dukkha and anatta.

The most common Saṅgha Dāna that has potential of harming the monks is food, and it usually offered to the monks on the regular basis almost every time Saṅgha Dāna is made. But often, it isn't so healthy due to the lack of care. Ingredients that used to cook food should avoid those that lead to illness. There are plenty of guideline and research they can rely on. For example, "Encyclopedia of Foods. A Guide to Healthy Nutrition" have suggested that you "try to be sure that your meals and snacks are rich in plant foods (fruits, vegetables, and grains), because, ounce for ounce, plant-based meals are almost always lower in fat and calories than meat-based meals. Although meat and dairy foods contain many nutrients, they also can be very high in unwanted saturated fat. The key is to avoid high-fat types of meats"<sup>11</sup> This means that the offerors should make an effort to choose the lower-fat meats, and focus on low fat products to use as the ingredient of foods to be offered to the monks. This way the monks are less likely to be fat from celebrating the faith of the offerors, and avoid the disease such as obesity.

What more, the offerors should avoid sweet and salty food. The overly sweet foods are usually high in sugar and over consumption can lead to diabetes which is a well-known illness. The guideline on diabetes management stated that the advice given is focused specifically on carbohydrate intake and sugar restriction.<sup>12</sup> This is one of the confirmatives that sweet ingredient such as sugar should be used with great care in cooking Saṅgha Dāna food. Too much can lead to, or worsen diabetes. As for salty food, too much salt can be a risk of high blood pressure condition, and may lead to heart and kidney disease, it is also known to

---

<sup>11</sup> Medical and Nutrition Experts from Mayo Clinic, Encyclopedia of Foods. A Guide to Healthy Nutrition, (California: Academic Press, 2002), p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Frost, Anne Dornhorst and Robert Moses (ed.), Nutritional Management of Diabetes Mellitus, (London: Wiley, 2003), p. 1.

be a cause of paralysis.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, when preparing Saṅgha Dāna food the offerors should lighten on salt, sauce, fish sauce, black soy sauce, soy bean pastes and so on.

The offerors should also beware of contaminated food. There are times that Saṅgha Dāna offering come with contaminated food or drinks, either already cooked and not yet cooked. This can be the cause of food poisoning of both instantly and in the long run. If the monks get ill instantly it is usually due to germs and the diseases because the kitchen is dirty and become home to rat and cockroach, but these usually not so serious. More serious matter is the foods that contaminated with insecticide and pesticides<sup>14</sup> such as fruits and vegetable brought from the market, and those contaminated with preservative chemicals such as package of meat, seafood, canned food like pickle bean and vegetable and so on. Other than that, is when the foods offer together with chemical that is used for washing and cleaning. This kind of food contamination happens when putting all the Saṅgha Dāna goods together in the same container for sell, when unsold for a long time the foods will be contaminated.

#### **The Proper Saṅgha Dāna Goods to Be Offer.**

The goods offering to the monks these days are varied vastly ranging from foods and drinks, tooth brush, tooth paste, shampoo, soap, washing powder, cleaner to light torch, cloths and slipper. There is a rule that business operators who bring products that may react with each other to cause color, odor or change in taste which is dangerous for monks or consumers, the warning must be indicated on the label in order to quickly separate the products from each other.<sup>15</sup> There are many shops that sell very low quality Saṅgha Dāna goods to their customers to make more money. The “Office of The Consumer Protection

---

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of public health, Good health start at... reduced sweetie, oily, salty food, and filled with fruits and vegetable, (Bangkok: Nutrition Promotion Group, 2017/2560 B.E.), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Public Health, how to buy and wash fruits and vegetables so they are safe and clean, (Bangkok: Agricultural Cooperative Community, 2014/2554 B.E.), p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Religious Affairs Ministry of Culture, Happy merit creating need to pay attention to Saṅgha Dāna’s label, (Bangkok: Dhamma in Trend, 2015/2558 B.E.), p. 8.

Board”<sup>16</sup> have been trying to solve this problem for several years but until today the low quality Saṅgha Dāna still can be seen selling in the Saṅgha store. Since this is the case, the offerors need to boycott these products by not buying them and don’t recommend anyone buying them. Instead, they need to choose the offering goods themselves to make sure the goods are actually consumable.

In choosing Saṅgha Dāna products, it is a common knowledge for the wise offerors to ask themselves the 5 questions.<sup>17</sup> 1) Is it appropriate or not? 2) Is it ok with the monk’s disciplines or not? 3) Do monks need this? 4) Is it in good quality? 5) Does it help with the propagation? Then, the offerors should avoid buying expired food and medicine. These sorts of things can be dangerous for the monks so the offerors should always check the label to make sure these are still suitable to consume.

#### **The Proper Concept of Saṅgha Dāna Materials Base on the Tipitaka.**

Within Thailand where its Buddhist society is Theravadin. The Thai Buddhists use Tipitaka as the primary source of the Buddha original teaching. This is the significant of the study of the Tipitaka. This is to help with the presentation of proper Saṅgha Dāna according to Theravada Buddhism for Thai monks. The proper concept that is about to present here is based on the suttas.

1) The honesty of the Saṅgha Dāna goods base on Dakkhināvibhanga Sutta.<sup>18</sup> The offerors should think about how are they going to obtain the goods, and how righteous of the good. The proper way the goods should be obtained is from honest earning, or right livelihood

---

<sup>16</sup> “Office of The Consumer Protection Board” (CPB) is the official authorities in Thailand that deals with the standard and fairness of trading in Thailand. Thai people called this organization “Sor-Kor-Bor” which is the capital letter name of the official name.

<sup>17</sup> Pimtent99, “What is the meaning and origin of Saṅgha Dāna?”, Online Article, <https://www.shopat24.com/blog/trending/what-is-the-meaning-of-sangkhathan/> (accessed January 12, 2021).

<sup>18</sup> M III 257, Dakkhināvibhanga Sutta [The Exposition of Offerings] - Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trs.), Majjhima Nikāya [The middle length Discourse of the Buddha], (Oxford: PTS, 1995), p. 1106.

(*samma ājiva*).<sup>19</sup> Meaning the offerors must not be stealing it from somewhere or cheat someone for the *Saṅgha Dāna* materials. What more? Is that the good must be righteous in term of morals and ethics of the society. Therefore, the offerors should not offer pornography, addictive drugs, weapons and so on, as the objects or material of *Saṅgha Dāna*.

2) The condition of the goods base on *Velāma Sutta*.<sup>20</sup> The Buddha taught in this sutta that the *Dāna* given should not be something left over or already been used (he mentioned “Give but orts” and “Give other than orts”, it is one of the four *Dāna* offering conditions in *Velāma Sutta*, otherwise the result of such *Dāna* won’t turn out well. This means it is better to give the food that hasn’t been eaten but freshly cooked, and it is better to give the tools that haven’t been used but still brand new. This way, it shows the great intention of the offerors and proved that the *Dāna* offered is truly with great faith for the sake of *Saṅgha*.

3) Faith and intention are the key. In the *Tipitaka* commentary (*Atthakathā*) there are some example of the offerors that give *Dāna* with leftover food and used cloth, but because of the great faith and intention the offerors have, the *Dāna* bear great fruit. The example of someone offered the leftover food can be seen from the commentary of *Dhammapada*, *Pañcabhikkhuvatthu*<sup>21</sup> (The brahman who gave the gifts of first-fruits). And the example of someone that offered the used cloth is also in the commentary of *Dhammapada* of different volume, *Cūlekasāṭakavatthu*<sup>22</sup> (The Brahman with a single robe). Therefore, the intention and faith are the key toward great merit.

---

<sup>19</sup> S V 8, *Vibhaṅga Sutta* [Analysis] - Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), *Samyutta Nikāya* [The Connected Discourses of the Buddha], vol 2, (Oxford: PTS, 2000), pp. 1528-1530.

<sup>20</sup> A IV 392, *Velāma Sutta* [*Velāma*] - E. M. Hare (tr.), *Anguttara Nikāya* [The Book of the Gradual Sayings], vol 4, (London Henley and Boston: PTS, 1978), p. 262.

<sup>21</sup> Dhp-a 8, *Pañcabhikkhuvatthu* [XXV.6. The brahman who gave the gifts of first-fruits], Book XXV The monk Bhikkhu Vagga - Eugene Watson Burlingame (tr.), *Dhammapada Commentary* [Buddhist legends], Translation of Book 13-26, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1921), pp. 252-253.

<sup>22</sup> Dhp-a 5, *Cūlekasāṭakavatthu* [IX.1. The Brahman with a single robe], Book IX *Evil Pāpa Vagga* - Eugene Watson Burlingame (tr.), *Dhammapada Commentary* [Buddhist legends], Translate from the original Pāli text, Translation of Book 3-12, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1921), pp. 263-264.

### Proper Monks for Receiving Saṅgha Dāna

According to the Vinaya Pitaka, “Saṅgha” means a sufficient number of monks to represent the Order of monks (Saṅgha) for various ecclesiastical purposes. The Vinaya states that there are 5 kinds of Order of monks (Saṅgha), these have the members of 4, 5, 10, 20 and more than 20 monks.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, proper Saṅgha, must have at least 4 monks in the assembly. And according to Yajamāna Sutta (Bestow alms)<sup>24</sup> in the Saṃyutta Nikaya, what the Buddha really meant by the Saṅgha here is the four pairs of enlightened being.

However, the key element of offering Saṅgha Dāna is to offer with the right intention for the sake of Saṅgha. This had been stated by the Buddha as he said to his attendance, Ananda:

“In future times, Ananda, there will be members of the clan who are “yellow necks”, immoral, of evil character. People will give gifts to those immoral persons for the sake of the Saṅgha. Even then, I say, an offering made to the Saṅgha is incalculable, immeasurable. And I say that in no way is a gift to a person individually ever more fruitful than an offering made to the Saṅgha”<sup>25</sup>

In this modern day, ariya monks are well known to be extremely rare. The chance for the offerors to encounter one is very little, needless to say about more of those. Moreover, the characteristics of the ariya monks can be impersonated, makes it difficult to distinguish between the fake ariya monk and the authentic one. The ariya monks in these present days are very unlikely to appeared, if there are some, they are probably living their life away from this disordered Thai society. The offerors should be aware of this situation and happy with what they can find. As the Buddha has said, even if the people give dāna to the immoral

---

<sup>23</sup> Vin I 319, [Five (kinds of) Orders] - I. B. Horner, M.A. (tr.), Vinaya-Pitaka [The Book of Discipline, Vol 4, (London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1971), p. 457.

<sup>24</sup> S I 233, Yajamāna Sutta [Bestow alms] - Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), Saṃyutta Nikāya [The Connected Discourses of the Buddha], vol 1, (Oxford: PTS, 2000), pp. 332-333.

<sup>25</sup> M III 255, Dakkhināvibhanga Sutta [The Exposition of Offerings] - Bhikkhu Nāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trs.), Majjhima Nikāya [The middle length Discourse of the Buddha], (Oxford: PTS, 1995), p. 1105.

people for the sake of the Saṅgha, the result of such kamma is incalculable, immeasurable.<sup>26</sup> The researcher would highly suggest that if the offerors can find the monks with good Dhamma knowledge, and appeared to behave themselves appropriately, the offerors should be content with the chance to offer Saṅgha Dāna to such monks. They are known to be at least complete with *vijjā* carana sampanno (endowed with perfect clear vision and exemplary good conduct).

Therefore, it is very important to note the key success, that with the right intention in mind, offering Saṅgha Dāna to even one of the appointed monks for the sake of the entire Saṅgha, without specify any particular monk. The offeror would gain the result of Saṅgha Dāna.

#### **Proper Saṅgha Dāna Offeror or Giver**

The proper offerors' characteristics based on the Sutta are:

1) Has a good virtue. According to 4 kinds of purification of offering in Dakkhināvibhaga Sutta,<sup>27</sup> the proper offeror to offer the Dāna should have the good virtue which is the primary key factor in making merit because it is this way that leads to the trusting heart in Dāna, leads to righteous of Dāna materials, lead to great faith in the fruit of Dāna. Ultimately, leads to the proper purification of any kind of Dāna.

2) Humble and respect. According to the conditions of dāna offering in Velāma Sutta",<sup>28</sup> this is the first condition of good Dāna practice. He said that one should "Give considerately, after taking thought", meaning that the offeror should give Dāna wisely with humble and respect together with other condition to get the best out of their Dāna.

3) Have faith in the law of Kamma. According to both of the suttas mentioned, Dakkhināvibhaga Sutta and Velāma Sutta. Faith in kamma and its fruit in Dāna offering have been mentioned by the Buddha himself. This indicated how important it is for the offeror to have faith in the law of kamma, which is the basic level of sammā ditthi (right view) and the 1<sup>st</sup> path of the noble eightfold path.

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp. 1105-1106.

<sup>28</sup> A IV 392, Velāma Sutta [Velāma] - E. M. Hare (tr.), Anguttara Nikāya [The Book of the Gradual Sayings], vol 4, (London Henley and Boston: PTS, 1978), pp. 262-263.

4) Has a proper mind before, during and after offering. According to *Chalaṅgadāna Sutta*,<sup>29</sup> a proper Dāna offeror is one who his heart (mind) is glad before offering, satisfied during offering and uplifted after offering. This is what it means by the proper mind of the offeror. The offeror must maintain the moral mind (kusala citta) all the way through the 3 stages of the process of giving Dāna “before, during and after” giving. It is this way that the offerors can know for themselves in the present moment that the Dāna offered generated a great deal of merit. They can feel it through the happiness within their heart that the merit has been created, just like the Buddha said in the *Metta Sutta* (Amity)<sup>30</sup> that “the deed of merit is the name of happiness”.

#### **Proper Occasion or Time to Offer Saṅgha Dāna**

Based on “The timely gift (Kāladāna Sutta)”<sup>31</sup>, and the contemporary circumstance, this research article would suggest the proper times of Saṅgha Dāna offering as following:

1) The monks are visiting. In Thailand the monks don’t usually visit the laypeople home unless get invited. It is just a part of Thai culture that the monks and laypeople living separately and don’t interact much. When it is time for the monks to come to visit, it is a great opportunity for the householder to make a proper Saṅgha Dāna. This is also correct according to the sutta (the PTS translator uses the term “the new-comer”). This is why it is very popular among the Thai Buddhist society to invite monks to visit their home to offers foods, drinks and other requisite goods in the name of Saṅgha Dāna practice.

2) The monks are leaving. When the monks are going somewhere or maybe just going back to the monastery after the invitation. It is also a great opportunity for the laypeople to offer Saṅgha Dāna. The PTS translation of this is “one going away”. Thai people usually offer Saṅgha Dāna to the monks before they leaving the invitation so it is fair to say Thai Buddhist know this proper time well

---

<sup>29</sup> A III 336, *Chalaṅgadāna Sutta* [Alms] - E. M. Hare (tr.), *Anguttara Nikāya* [The Book of the Gradual Sayings], vol 3, (London and Boston: PTS, 1973), pp. 236-237.

<sup>30</sup> A IV 88, *Metta Sutta* [Amity] - E. M. Hare (tr.), *Anguttara Nikāya* [The Book of the Gradual Sayings], vol 4, (London Henley and Boston: PTS, 1978), p. 54.

<sup>31</sup> A III 41, *Kāladāna Sutta* [The timely gift] - E. M. Hare (tr.), *Anguttara Nikāya* [The Book of the Gradual Sayings], vol 3, (London and Boston: PTS, 1973), p. 33.

3) The monks are ill. This is probably the most wanted time of Saṅgha Dāna for the monks. It is alright if the temples have the medicine store to use but if not, most of the monks in Thailand are poor and sometimes don't have money to pay for the medicine. If they are very strict, don't touch or keep any money they would need it even more. The offerors should look out for this opportunity to offer the medicine and health care to these ill monks if they can to make a great merit. In the sutta, PTS translator use the term "the sick".

4) The goods are hard to get. Or the goods are in high demand hence expensive. This is also the needy time for the monks. Everyone needs to live on the requisite goods including the monks. When the goods are hard to get, it makes the goods very valuable. It takes a great deal of generosity from the offeror to spare and share their hard earn goods. If the offeror can let go of their stinginess and offer goods as Saṅgha Dāna at this time, it will yield great fruit.

5) The goods are fresh and new. Or the top-quality goods. One of the best times to offer. The offeror should offer the best condition they can offer to the monks and when the goods are still new, foods are still fresh, they are definitely at their best condition. According to the sutta, it says "the first-fruits of field and orchard", this simile means the top-quality goods one may have. Therefore, the offeror should not wait long or hesitate to offer their goods to the monks, to get the best fruit of their own kamma.<sup>32</sup>

### **Proper Understanding Toward Saṅgha Dāna Practice**

There are a lot of misleading concept of Saṅgha Dāna in Thai Buddhist society, and this include the bad perception toward Saṅgha Dāna. This research article is going to go over a few points as following:

### **Proper Concept on the Saṅgha Dāna Ceremonies and Ritual**

Thai Buddhists almost always conduct ceremony on Saṅgha Dāna that tend to come with a set of specific ritual, such as lighting the candles and incenses, or organize ceremony<sup>33</sup> similar to those in Brahm-Hindu. Passed on for so many generations until it is now part of Thai Buddhist tradition. However, there is no such principle and practice on these rituals can be

---

<sup>32</sup> These 5 occasions listed is the adaptation of contemporary Saṅgha Dāna practice together with the Kāladāna sutta.

<sup>33</sup> Boonmee Tankaew, Tradition and ceremony of Buddhism, (Bangkok: Audience store, 2004/2547 B.E.), pp. 111-112.

found within the Tipitaka. Therefore, there is no such thing as the proper Saṅgha Dāna ceremony and ritual according to the Tipitaka. However, the ceremony and ritual are still needed as part of maintaining the religion. This is because it is one of the elements that make up a religion<sup>34</sup> and consider as one of the strategies needed for uniting its followers. The details of the common ritual use in the Saṅgha Dāna ceremony can be found in various books, such as “Tradition and ceremony of Buddhism” by Boonmee Tankaew, this article is not going to cover it any further here.

### Proper Attitude of Monks Toward Saṅgha Dāna

The impact of Saṅgha Dāna problems is also happening among the group of the monks themselves. The primary cause of this impact is their own kilesa, but there is also the secondary cause which involve Saṅgha Dāna offeror too. Here is what this article would like to suggest:

1) Money and Saṅgha Dāna. The monks receiving or keeping money is obviously against the Vinaya,<sup>35</sup> but due to the need of using money of the contemporary monks to cover the cost of various necessary things, this research cannot advice the laypeople to stop giving money to the monks or to the temple, unless there are someone there to provide for everything that are vital to their requisite need. However, wise offeror should choose to offer the money to the monks or the temple that are actually needing it, moderately, so they the monks would not over spend on the unnecessary things. What is more important is the monks themselves because this problem is originated from the monks kilesa, greed (lobha).

2) Conflict over Saṅgha Dāna goods. This problem is less likely to be seen because Thai offerors are usually generous enough to offer more than the monks need, but it can still happen. This is also due to the monks kilesa but this one has more to do with anger (dosa) than the other two (lobha and moha). The solution to this is simply doing the same as the

---

<sup>34</sup> Academic Division of Dhammadaya Open University, The Fundamental of Different Religions DF 404, (California: Dhammadaya Open University, 2007/2550 B.E.), p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Vin III 237, [Forfeiture (Nissaggiya) XVIII] - I. B. Horner, M.A. (tr.), Vinaya Pitaka [The Book of Discipline], Vol 2, (London: PTS, 1969), pp. 99-105.

problem with the money, but the problem can actually be prevented if the temple or the abbot can manage and share the result well and fair. If the conflict happened to the group of monks over Saṅgha Dāna however, the monks should consider disrobe.

3) Proper monk's perception on Saṅgha Dāna. Many monks in the present days look at Saṅgha Dāna as the opportunity to receive worship and fortune. These monks have been blind because kilesa cover up their mind, and unable to see the reality according to the truth that manifested by the Buddha. Their perception toward Saṅgha Dāna should be only to aid the need of creating the good kamma or merit of the offerors and nothing else. The monks should look at all the goods received as the danger that might harm their pure life and handle it with care. The sutta called "The fire (Aggikkhandhopama Sutta)" <sup>36</sup> tell the word of the Buddha himself to warn the monks not to enjoy pleasures, homage and Dāna of the laypeople. Otherwise, hell might be their destiny after death.

#### **Proper Understanding on Rotated Saṅgha Dāna**

One of the wrongly Saṅgha Dāna practice is the "rotated Saṅgha Dāna". This practice is fairly new and just appears in Thailand for a past 1-2 decade but it is unclear how long has it been around or where does it originated. This problem has the impact directly toward the faith and confidence laypeople have with the Saṅgha and the triple gems as a whole. The one should be responsible for this is the monks and the sellers that are involve and enjoy doing this for their own sake. Although the offeror would still be getting the merit and its fruit from this practice, it should not be encouraged or support by the wise Buddhists.

#### **Conclusion**

The problems and impacts of Saṅgha Dāna in Thailand are significant for the survival of the authentic practice and faith that the next Buddhist generations may have. These are starting from minor problem such as monk's health, to more serious problems, such as cheating of Saṅgha Dāna store in the Saṅgha Dāna's goods problem. More to this are problems with misleading concepts and principle problem which are very common nowadays. And finally, the negative impacts on Thai Buddhist society have been known as a new normal. Especially the impact on the perception and practice of Thai Buddhist monks that cause the decline in faith of laypeople as a whole picture. Through a Critical Study Research which

---

<sup>36</sup> A IV 128, Aggikkhandhopama Sutta [The fire] - E. M. Hare (tr.), Anguttara Nikāya [The Book of the Gradual Sayings], vol 4, (London Henley and Boston: PTS, 1978), pp. 84-90.

emphasized on the Document Research, a better understanding of the various problems and impacts of Saṅgha Dāna have been brought to light. The finding of this research has been used to present a proper Saṅgha Dāna which is appropriate for the contemporary context.

The proper Saṅgha Dāna objects such as foods and various Saṅgha Dāna goods is presented in a very simple way, but yet very logical. The offerors should be more aware of the monk's health care problems and offer only healthy foods, various food guideline can be used to provide a good idea of they should offer. When buying something to offer the monks, the offerors should avoid buying a yellow bucket that contain too many useless goods. But they should choose what to offer themselves to ensure the maximum consumable. At a time of offer Saṅgha Dāna they don't need to find the complete group of the noble (ariya) monks, but their intention must set to offer it for the sake of the entire Saṅgha. Other proper Saṅgha Dāna suggestion in this research article can also be studies by reading thorough it if the offerors need a further details.

## References

Academic Division of Dhammakaya Open University. *The Fundamental of Different Religions DF 404*. California: Dhammakaya Open University, 2007/2550 B.E.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (tr.). *Samyutta Nikāya [The Connected Discourses of the Buddha]*. vol 2. Oxford: PTS., 2000.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (tr.). *Samyutta Nikāya [The Connected Discourses of the Buddha]*. vol 1. Oxford: PTS., 2000.

Burlingame, Eugene Watson (tr.). *Dhammapada Commentary [Buddhist legends]*. Translate from the original Pāli text. Translation of Book 13-26. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1921.

Department of Religious Affairs Ministry of Culture. *Happy merit creating need to pay attention to Saṅgha Dāna’As label*. Bangkok: Dhamma in Trend, 2015.

Frost Gary; Dornhorst, Anne; and Moses, Robert (ed.). *Nutritional Management of Diabetes Mellitus*. London: Wiley, 2003.

Hare, E. M. (tr.). *Anguttara Nikāya [The Book of the Gradual Sayings]*. vol 3. London and Boston: PTS., 1973.

Hare, E. M. (tr.). *Anguttara Nikāya [The Book of the Gradual Sayings]*. vol 4. London Henley and Boston: PTS., 1978.

Horner, I. B. (tr.). *Vinaya Pitaka [The Book of Discipline]*. Vol 2. London: PTS., 1969.

Horner, I. B. (tr.). *Vinaya-Pitaka [The Book of Discipline]*. Vol 4. London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1971.

Kanrayānasitthivat, Phrakrū. *In-Depth Important Days of Buddhism*. Bangkok: MCU Press, 2014.

Kanyārat Reunjai, CPB investigation of “Pseudo Saṅgha Dāna” found unqualified and useless goods. Innnews, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3l7DERh38Q#action=share> (accessed January 8, 2021).

Medical and Nutrition Experts from Mayo Clinic. *Encyclopedia of Foods: A Guide to Healthy Nutrition*. California: Academic Press, 2002.

Ministry of Public Health. *Good health start at reduced sweetie, oily, salty food, and filled with fruits and vegetable*. Bangkok: Nutrition Promotion Group, 2017.

Ministry of Public Health. *How to buy and wash fruits and vegetables so they are safe and clean*. Bangkok: Agricultural Cooperative Community, 2014.

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu; Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trs.). *Majjhima Nikāya (The middle length discourses of the Buddha)*. Oxford: PTS., 1995.

Phōmmalūesī, Sanchai. *Saṅgha Dāna*. Bangkok: Dhamma Club, 1997.

Pimtent99. “What is the meaning and origin of Saṅgha Dāna?”, Online Article, <https://www.shopat24.com/blog/trending/what-is-the-meaning-of-sangkhathan/> (accessed January 12, 2021).

Sangsinchai, Thongyoy. *Right way to offer Saṅgha Dāna*. Bangkok: Dwuangkaew Press, 1999.

Tankaew, Boonmee. *Tradition and Ceremony of Buddhism*. Bangkok: Audience store, 2004.