

The Preservation of Vipassanā in Burma: The Role of Lineage Masters in Modern Theravāda Transmission

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Abstract- Vipassanā, or insight meditation, is one of the principal methods taught by the Buddha in the 5th–4th century BCE for realizing impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and not-self (*anattā*). This paper traces vipassanā's historical spread, decline, and preservation, focusing on its transmission to Burma (modern Myanmar) from Emperor Ashoka's 3rd-century BCE missions. The mission to Suvāṇṇabhūmi (The Golden Land)—identified in Burmese tradition with Lower Burma—is argued to have established conditions for an enduring lineage. Vipassanā declined elsewhere under pressures of scholasticism, ritual integration, political instability, and doctrinal shifts; Burma uniquely preserved it in a complete, pure form, maintained from the time of the Buddha. Factors include the alliance between Burmese royalty and the Saṅgha, rigorous vinaya observance, unbroken teacher–student transmission, integration of study and practice, and the opening of training to laypeople from the 19th century by Most Venerable Ledi Sayādaw. The Burmese example offers a rare case study of how a living contemplative technology can endure over millennia and eventually come to be a global revival. Preserving vipassanā is a spiritual conservation and the safeguarding of an ancient method aimed at the cessation of suffering. The Masters from the Golden Land have exerted great effort in the continuation of vipassanā in India and worldwide; with this, they have promoted the positive transformation of global society.

Keywords: Buddhist history, vipassanā, meditation, preservation and spread, Burma, global vipassanā movement.

I. VIPASSANĀ: A LIVING PRACTICE

Even in the earliest centuries, the Buddha recognized that without continuous training and personal

guidance, the Dhamma as a living capacity to transform could decline. In the *Anāgatabhaya Sutta* (AN 5.79, A iii 105), the Buddha forewarned that when the teachers and leaders of the Saṅgha are not well practiced, their weakness will be passed down the generations. The true Dhamma would survive only so long as the Saṅgha continued to train according to the path. Vipassanā, as a set of specific techniques requiring precise instruction, was especially vulnerable to degradation if its chain of transmission were broken.

Within the foundational texts and commentaries of early Buddhism, vipassanā—which literally means 'clear seeing' or 'insight'—occupies a position of central importance. Vipassanā is direct observation of bodily and mental processes—a practical discipline, inseparable from the training of the Noble Eightfold Path. This systematic training is aimed at direct experiential knowledge of reality's three universal characteristics: impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*) (Analayo, 2013). Vipassanā is built on contemplation of the four foundations of mindfulness, described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10, i 55) and its expanded version, the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22, ii 290). The Buddha describes the practice of Satipaṭṭhāna, which will lead to vipassanā, as the *ekāyano maggo*—the 'one-way path' to the purification of beings, the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, the cessation of pain and grief, and the realization of Nibbāna. The core aim of vipassanā—liberation from suffering—remains as relevant today as it was in the Buddha's time. Cultivating continuous mindfulness of body, feelings, mind, and mental objects, practitioners come to see the conditioned, transient, unsatisfactory,

and non-self-nature of all experiences. This insight undermines the tendency to cling, weakening the roots of craving, aversion, and delusion. In the Buddhist view, the training is a path to not merely temporary relief or psychological well-being, but to the complete cessation of unsatisfactoriness, culminating in the realization of Nibbāna.

In the early discourses, vipassanā is often paired with *samatha* (calm or tranquillity) meditation, the cultivation of mental stability through focused attention. While samatha meditation steadies and unifies the mind, vipassanā investigates the true nature of phenomena as they arise and pass away. The Buddha taught that these two modes of practice are complementary, and when developed together, they lead to the destruction of the mental defilements (*kilesa*) and to liberation. This integration was preserved in the earliest training regimens, ensuring that insight practice was grounded in the mental clarity and composure fostered by concentration.

II. FROM THE BUDDHA TO EMPEROR ASOKA TO BURMA

Following the Buddha's passing (*parinibbāna*), the Saṅgha found itself without its spiritual leader and faced the pressing task of preserving both the teachings and the discipline he had established. In the centuries immediately after his death, communal recitations and councils were convened to standardize the Dhamma and Vinaya, ensuring that the teachings—both doctrinal and procedural—remained consistent across regions. Yet as the Buddha himself had forewarned in the *Anāgatabhaya Sutta* (AN 5.79), the survival of the Dhamma in its 'true form' (*saddhamma*) depended on continuous training and fidelity to the path as practiced by the elders (*thera*). By the 3rd century BCE, the Mauryan Empire under Emperor Asoka (268–232 BCE) had unified much of the Indian subcontinent. King Asoka's personal encounter with the Dhamma, as related in both the *Asokavadana* (Strong, 1983) and the *Mahāvamsa* (Geiger, 1912), came in the aftermath of the Kalinga War—a conflict whose immense human toll catalysed his moral transformation. After seeing the devastation and the ruthless deaths that he had caused, he vowed never to go into war ever again and rejected any further military conquest. King Asoka adopted the principles of *Dhamma-vijaya* (conquest by righteousness) and

became the most prominent royal patron in Buddhist history. He shifted his empire from military expansion to promoting and protecting the three Jewels, the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha.

Perhaps the most consequential outcome of the Third Buddhist Council patronaged by King Asoka was the dispatch of nine missionary delegations to different regions, each led by senior Arahants. These missions carried doctrinal texts and the living methods of practice, including vipassanā. Among these missions, the journey of Venerable Sona Thera and Uttara Thera to *Suvaṇṇabhūmi*—the Golden Land—is of particular relevance. The *Mahāvamsa* describes Suvaṇṇabhūmi as a land across the sea from India, inhabited by people ready to receive the Dhamma. Burmese historical tradition, supported by the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (Tin & Luce, 1923), identifies this region with Lower Burma (modern Myanmar).

While Buddhism spread extensively beyond its Indian birthplace—taking root in Sri Lanka, mainland Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and later China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet—the procedural transmission of vipassanā as a living, methodical training system gradually weakened in most regions. This decline occurred over centuries and was the result of a complex interplay of doctrinal, institutional, cultural, and political factors. In Sri Lanka and certain Indian monastic centres, the later classical and medieval periods saw a flourishing of Abhidhamma analysis, commentarial literature, and doctrinal debate (Braun, 2014; Crosby, 2020). While these developments enriched intellectual understanding, they also shifted the emphasis from direct meditative cultivation to textual mastery as the primary measure of a monk's accomplishment. Without regular intensive retreat training, insight meditation became a subject of study rather than a systematic practice, often reduced to conceptual contemplation without the full supportive structure of continuous mindfulness and concentration.

As Buddhism entered new cultural environments, it often absorbed and blended with pre-existing religious systems, particularly in Southeast Asia and Central Asia. This syncretism enriched the ritual life of Buddhist communities. However, it often redirected resources and institutional energy toward devotional and ceremonial activities—festivals, merit-making rites, protective chanting—at the expense of demanding meditative regimens (Harvey, 2013, p.

312). Over time, the ideal of the forest monk devoted to intensive meditative practice became less central to mainstream religious life in these regions. By the late medieval period, the term vipassanā survived in the textual heritage of many Buddhist cultures but largely as a doctrinal category or a brief meditative exercise appended to other practices. The intricate, staged process that once formed the heart of the training—requiring years of uninterrupted practice under a qualified teacher—was, in most regions, no longer a living training. This pattern of weakening of the practice highlights the rarity and significance of Burma’s preservation, where the method’s technical precision and teachers’ lineage remained intact into the modern era.

Burma’s preservation of vipassanā stands out as a singular achievement in Buddhist history. While other Theravāda regions experienced periods of decline or partial loss of the practice, Burmese Buddhism maintained the technique’s procedural integrity over centuries (Braun, 2014). This resilience resulted from the convergence of multiple institutional, cultural, and pedagogical factors that reinforced one another to create a durable environment for transmission. From the Pagan dynasty in the 11th century through the Konbaung dynasty in the 19th century, Burmese monarchs consistently acted as patrons of the Saṅgha. Chronicles such as the *Glass Palace Chronicle (Hmannan Yazawin)* record repeated royal interventions to ‘purify’ the Saṅgha, often by convening councils to expel corrupt monks, commission new scriptural recensions, and ensure doctrinal orthodoxy (Tin & Luce, 1923). These acts of state support provided the monastic community with the resources and legitimacy necessary to sustain long-term training environments. In effect, the monarchy and the Saṅgha formed a mutually reinforcing relationship: kings gained moral authority through their role as defenders of the Dhamma, while the Saṅgha benefited from political protection and material patronage.

Hence, the widespread practice of meditation among both monks and laypeople developed in Burma in the early twentieth century, reaching a scale previously unknown in Buddhist history. This large-scale revival of meditation practice can be traced to the influence of a single prominent figure: the Burmese monk, the Most Venerable Ledi Sayādaw (Braun, 2013, p. 3).

The Modern Revival: The Lineage of Modern Vipassanā Masters (1846 – 2013)

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Burma faced a third phase of social and political challenges (Houtman, 1990, pp. 29-30; U Chit Tin, 1999, p. 7). British colonial rule had disrupted traditional patterns of monastic life, eroded royal patronage, and introduced Western educational systems that competed with monastic learning. Against this backdrop, a remarkable renewal of vipassanā emerged, spearheaded by a succession of Burmese masters who drew on the preserved monastic lineages while adapting their teaching methods for contemporary audiences.

Since the time of the Buddha to the present day, vipassanā has been handed down by this unbroken chain of teachers. The lineage extends through generations of teachers, and is transmitted in its pristine form to Ledi Sayādaw, Saya Thetgyī, Sayāgyī U Ba Khin, and Mr. S.N. Goenka. Mahāsi Sayādaw was another Burmese scholar monk who influenced the modern transmission of vipassanā greatly. Mahāsi was a direct student of, and therefore belonged to, the lineage of Most Ven. Mingun Sayādaw, a respected contemporary of Ven. Ledi Sayādaw.

In the past, vipassanā meditation was largely regarded as a solitary practice primarily reserved for monastics. In modern times, however, meditation centres have been established globally to teach and support the practice among large groups of monks, nuns, and lay practitioners from diverse backgrounds. This development has come to be known as the ‘Modern Vipassanā (Insight) Movement.’ The Modern Vipassanā Movement—initiated by Ven. Ledi Sayādaw and later popularized by teachers such as Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw, Sayāgyī U Ba Khin, and Acharya S. N. Goenka emphasize the practice of Satipaṭṭhāna, understood as the cultivation of right mindfulness, as the primary entry point to meditation. In this approach, practitioners develop only a basic level of concentration before proceeding directly to insight practice, often described as “dry insight” or ‘bare insight’ (*sukkha-vipassanā*). In other words, the practitioner moves from the Four Foundations of Mindfulness toward insight without first attaining deep states of meditative absorption (*jhāna*) (Buswell Jr. & Lopez Jr., 2014, p. 889). Because this method does not require mastery of the jhānas, it can be more easily standardized in short training courses and has

therefore become more accessible to large numbers of practitioners.

Most Venerable Ledi Sayādaw (1846–1923)

Most Venerable Ledi Sayādaw's profound achievement, which has been passed down over generations, was laying the foundation for widespread meditation. He has proven to be one of the earliest and most influential monks to teach vipassanā meditation (Houtman, 1990, pp. 22 & 28). In the lineage of the renowned Acharya S.N. Goenka of modern times, he is acclaimed as the root teacher of the global vipassanā organisation (VRI, July 1994). Ledi Sayādaw was one of the most influential Buddhist scholar-monks of his era, renowned for his mastery of the Abhidhamma and his ability to present meditation in a clear, systematic format (Braun, 2013, p. 28). He was perhaps the most outstanding bhikkhu of his age; he was excellent in his skill of combining rigorous scholarship with a deep commitment to meditative practice. His concise, comprehensible, and extensive writings clarified the experiential dimension of the Dhamma, which made him able to bridge the gap between doctrinal study and practical application.

Ledi Sayādaw recognized that British colonial rule threatened the continuity of intensive practice. He therefore initiated a bold reform of Burmese Buddhist tradition: he was the first monastic who began teaching vipassanā to laypeople on a wide scale—something that had been rare and controversial in earlier periods (Braun, 2013, p. 137). His works, often written in Burmese rather than Pāli, distilled complex doctrinal concepts into accessible manuals, enabling householders to engage in practice without abandoning their livelihoods.

From a historical perspective, this was a radical turning point. Vipassanā had previously been almost exclusively transmitted within the monastic context, safeguarded by strict vinaya discipline and reserved for those living a renunciate life. Ledi Sayādaw broke this tradition by making the practice widely available to non-monastics, thereby expanding the potential protective base of the method. He not only taught lay practitioners directly but also entrusted the responsibility of teaching to a lay disciple, Saya Thetgyi—the first householder authorized to teach vipassanā to other laypersons as well as to some monastics.

This deliberate democratization of access fundamentally altered the trajectory of vipassanā in Burma and, eventually, worldwide. Empowering householders to both learn and teach the technique, Ledi Sayādaw thus created a framework in which the practice could survive even if monastic institutions faced decline. The effects of this decision resonated far beyond Burma's borders, laying the groundwork for the later emergence of prominent lay teachers, the global spread of the method, and the establishment of a truly mass meditation movement.

Saya Thetgyi (1873–1945)

Saya Thetgyi was the devoted lay disciple of Ledi Sayādaw who played an essential role in the transmission of Vipassanā beyond the monastic order. He was the official second teacher in the lineage of Ledi Sayādaw. He is noteworthy as one of the earliest examples of a layman empowered by a highly respected, elite monk, Ven. Ledi Sayādaw, to teach vipassanā meditation (Houtman, 1990, p. 284). Ven. Ledi Sayādaw's public affirmation led to a lineage of lay teachers who succeeded Saya Thetgyi. It also aligns with Sayādaw's broader efforts to empower laypeople to take on new responsibilities in Buddhism. His life story illustrates both the depth of his personal practice and the transformative potential of lay-led teaching. Until a cholera epidemic struck his village, U Po Thet—later known as Saya Thetgyi—led a peaceful, contented life with his family (U Chit Tin, 1999, pp. 13-14). The epidemic claimed the lives of numerous friends and relatives, including his own son and daughter. Profoundly shaken by these losses, he left his home in search of a path that could address the root causes of human suffering.

During this quest, Saya Thetgyi encountered Ledi Sayādaw and chose to remain under his guidance, practicing vipassanā intensively for seven years (Ledi Paññāsīha, n.d, p. 117). Ledi Sayādaw, recognizing both his meditative attainment and his teaching potential, encouraged and authorized him to teach. Sayādaw even authorized him to teach monastics, something that was a radical change in the traditional roles of monastics and laypeople. Saya Thetgyi returned to his village and established a modest meditation centre, where he dedicated the remaining three decades of his life to meditative instruction.

His work was significant for several reasons. First, he embodied the possibility of attaining profound levels

of meditative insight while living as a layperson (U Chit Tin, 1999, pp. 16-17)—a powerful message in a context where deep practice was often associated exclusively with monastic life. Second, he opened access to systematic vipassanā training for people from diverse backgrounds, including farmers, merchants, and local officials, many of whom would otherwise never have received such training. Third, his decision to teach in rural areas extended the reach of vipassanā beyond urban monastic centres, broadening the practice's social base.

Over the course of thirty years, Saya Thetgyi instructed thousands of students, both lay and monastic. Among them was Sayāgyī U Ba Khin, who would become one of the most influential figures in the international spread of Vipassanā during the 20th century. In this way, Saya Thetgyi formed a vital link in the unbroken chain that connects the preserved Burmese tradition of Vipassanā to the modern global movement. His life stands as a testament to the adaptability and resilience of the practice when placed in dedicated lay hands.

Sayāgyī U Ba Khin (1899–1971)

Sayāgyī U Ba Khin was the third lineage teacher in the modern history of vipassanā, and one of the most respected lay teachers to emerge from Burma in the 20th century. He was born into humble circumstances, and he rose through merit and discipline to become a senior Burmese government official, serving as Accountant General of the newly independent Burma from 1947 (Houtman, 1990, pp. 203–5). For two decades, he managed multiple high-level government departments simultaneously, a career that sharpened the administrative precision later reflected in his teaching methods.

Sayāgyī U Ba Khin began practicing vipassanā under the guidance of Saya Thetgyi in 1937, and by 1941, he had conducted his first course in the technique (International Meditation Center [IMC], n.d.; U Chit Tin, 1999, pp. 16–17). Sayāgyī was driven by a deep love for the Dhamma and a compassionate desire to share it with others. Hence, despite the demands of his professional life, he dedicated significant time and energy to the teaching of meditation.

In 1952, Sayāgyī U Ba Khin established the International Meditation Centre (IMC) in Rangoon (modern Yangon), where he taught the practice in intensive ten-day residential courses. He emphasized a

systematic, methodical approach to the Buddha's teaching—presented in a manner that was both faithful to the ancient tradition and accessible to the modern, scientific mind (Houtman, 1990, pp. 222–3; U Ba Khin & Goenka, 1999). He stressed the integration of meditation into daily life, showing that the cultivation of insight was compatible with, and could even enhance, professional and household responsibilities. Sayāgyī U Ba Khin was also one of the first Burmese teachers to welcome international students in the post-war period; in doing so, he planted the seeds of vipassanā beyond Asia. His vision, however, extended to the Land of the Buddha: he believed deeply that Myanmar owed a 'great debt of gratitude' to India—the birthplace of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. In his view, this debt could be repaid only by returning the technique of vipassanā to India in its 'pristine purity' (Vipassanā Research Institute, n.d.- b). By the mid-20th century, the practice had not only disappeared from India, but the very term vipassanā was virtually unknown there. U Ba Khin considered its restoration to India a vital step for the welfare of humanity, envisioning a renewed flourishing that would radiate outward to the entire world.

Through his teaching, he demonstrated that people of all backgrounds, cultures, and belief systems could successfully practice Vipassanā and integrate its principles into their everyday lives. In doing so, he provided a living example of how the Burmese-preserved method could speak to modern sensibilities while retaining its ancient integrity. Among his students was S. N. Goenka, who would go on to fulfil U Ba Khin's wish by reintroducing Vipassanā to India and spearheading its spread across the globe.

Acharya S. N. Goenka (1924–2013)

Acharya Satya Narayan Goenka was born into a Burmese Indian business family in 1924 (Global Vipassana Pagoda, n.d.). Mr. Goenka was one of Sayāgyī U Ba Khin's most prominent disciples and the central figure and last lineage teacher in the global spread of Vipassanā, which happened during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Mr. Goenka was initially a successful businessman. He sought meditation to relieve severe migraine headaches, which led him to U Ba Khin's International Meditation Centre in Rangoon.

His first meditation course proved to be a significant turning point in his life (Goenka, 1972, pp. 8-10). The

Jewel of the Dhamma (*Dhamma-Ratana*) proved to be of much more value to him than all the considerable material wealth he had accumulated in his career in business life. Through the practice, he realized the true meaning of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, as he gradually distanced from *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* (greed, hatred, and ignorance). His first meditation course proved to be a significant turning point in his life (Goenka, 1972, pp. 8-10). The Jewel of the Dhamma (*Dhamma-Ratana*) proved to be of much more value to him than all the considerable material wealth that he had accumulated in his business life. He realized the true meaning of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*, as he moved away from *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* (greed, hatred, and ignorance). The gradual purification by this technique continued, making the mind calm, clear, and steady. As mental confusion, tension, agitation, wavering, and doubt diminished, the mind's capacity for effective and balanced action increased significantly. This transformative experience convinced him that he had discovered the "royal road" to genuine peace and happiness—one that leads toward liberation from suffering. He later regarded this period as among the most illuminating stages of his life.

As a householder, Mr. Goenka continued to benefit from the Path, diligently practicing vipassanā and studying Dhamma, eventually discharging his business duties more successfully and efficiently. Withdrawn from business responsibilities, he devoted more and more time studying and practising with his teacher, immersing himself continuously in the Dhamma, the teaching of liberation, for fourteen years under the guidance of Sayāgyī. In 1969, Sayāgyī U Ba Khin formally appointed Mr. Goenka as the principal Vipassanā teacher. After fourteen years of dedicated training under his close guidance, Sayāgyī entrusted him with the important and dutiful mission of transmitting the technique beyond the borders of Burma (Hart, 1987, p. 1).

That same year, Mr. Goenka returned to India, remaining unaware that he would fulfil his teacher's long-cherished wish to reintroduce vipassanā to its land of origin. In July 1969, he conducted his first course in India for his ailing mother, some relatives, and friends (Vipassanā Research Institute, n.d.- b). The results were immediate: participants, moved by the benefits they experienced, began organizing and supporting subsequent courses. The 'pure stream of

Dhamma,' as Mr. Goenka described it, began to flow again in India after centuries of absence.

Mr. Goenka's arrival in India came at a time when the country was still deeply divided by caste, religion, and social hierarchy. Yet, his courses quickly drew thousands from all strata of society, as well as students from abroad. He followed his teacher's approach, which was the technique's non-sectarian, experiential approach, allowing it to transcend cultural and religious barriers, and attracting a diverse and international following. Over time, Western students—including Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, Daniel Goleman, and Ram Dass—studied under Mr. Goenka and became prominent Western spiritual figures themselves. They contributed by their own efforts to the spread of Vipassanā in the United States and beyond.

For nearly 45 years, Mr. Goenka and his appointed assistant teachers led courses across Asia, Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Australia. He organised standardized ten-day residential course, conducted through recorded audio instructions and evening discourses, ensuring uniformity in method and message regardless of location. This system allowed the practice to scale globally without compromising its essential structure, making it one of the most far-reaching meditation programs in modern history.

By the time of his passing in 2013, the network of Goenka-led and affiliated centres had grown to nearly 400 worldwide, including both permanent facilities and temporary non-centres (Vipassanā Research Institute, n.d.- c). In these venues, participants receive training in the same method preserved in Burma for over two millennia—an unbroken transmission that Mr. Goenka helped carry back to India and then spread to the rest of the world. His work realized his teacher's vision and established vipassanā as a truly global practice, accessible to hundreds of thousands each year.

Most Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw (1904–1982)

Most Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw was another influential 'bare insight' (*sukkha-vipassanā*) master, who taught the vipassanā tradition in Lower Burma, as passed down by his teacher Most Ven. Mingun Sayādaw (Houtman, 1990, pp. 196-9). Most Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw was born as (U) Thwin in 1904 in the village of Seikkhun village in Upper Burma. In his life, he became one of the most influential monastic

meditation masters of the 20th century. Ordained as a novice monk at the age of twelve, he was given the Dhamma name Ashin Sobhana (Thawbana in Burmese) (Vipassanā in Europe, n.d.). He demonstrated early aptitude for both Pāli scholarship and meditative discipline. At a young age, during his novice period, prior to his full ordination, his teacher already considered him to be of exceptional intelligence. He was able to study and memorise complex works by heart within a short period, even mastering advanced works like commentaries that fully ordained monks often do not even attempt to study (Houtman, 1990, pp. 199–202). After completing his higher monastic education, he began intensive vipassanā practice under the guidance of the famous Most Venerable Mingun Jetavan Sayādaw, whose training shaped his understanding of the satipaṭṭhāna method (Vipassanā in Europe, n.d.).

Operating firmly within the monastic framework, Mahāsi Sayādaw developed and systematized a distinctive form of satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā now widely referred to as the ‘noting method.’ This technique emphasizes the mental labelling, or ‘noting,’ of bodily movements, sensations, feelings, and mental events as they arise in the present moment. The method’s simplicity belies its depth: by continuously noting phenomena, practitioners cultivate a high degree of moment-to-moment mindfulness, which leads to direct experiential insight into impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*).

In 1949, following the independence of Burma, Prime Minister U Nu invited Mahāsi Sayādaw to serve as the head teacher at a newly established meditation centre in Rangoon (modern Yangon), later known as the Mahāsi Sāsana Yeiktha. Under his leadership, the centre became one of the most active meditation training facilities in the country. By the 1970s, it was accommodating thousands of yogis annually, offering intensive retreats lasting from weeks to months, with a carefully structured schedule of sitting and walking meditation. The hallmark of the Mahāsi system was its strong emphasis on teacher feedback: daily interviews with instructors ensured that each practitioner’s progress through the stages of insight (*vipassanā-ñāna*) was closely monitored and guided.

Mahāsi Sayādaw’s influence extended beyond Burma. He trained a large body of Burmese monastic and lay teachers who carried his method to Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other parts of Asia, as well as to Europe,

North America, and Australia (Houtman, 1990, pp. 216, 219). Many of these teachers established permanent meditation centres abroad, developing the noting method to become one of the most widely practiced forms of vipassanā in the modern world.

Mahāsi’s productive authorship also contributed to the method’s dissemination. His writings and transcribed talks—covering topics such as the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, stages of insight, and the practical challenges of meditation—were translated into multiple languages, making his teachings accessible to an international audience. The clarity, logical progression, and practical applicability of his system have led scholars and practitioners alike to regard it as one of the most effective vehicles for transmitting vipassanā in the 20th century.

By the time of his passing in 1982, Mahāsi Sayādaw had trained tens of thousands of practitioners, including prominent Western meditation teachers, and had established a global network of affiliated centres. His legacy endures as a model of how the Burmese-preserved vipassanā tradition can be rigorously upheld within the monastic framework while being successfully transmitted to diverse cultural contexts.

III. THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Nearly all lineages of practice that emerged from Burma can be traced back to their origins of either Most Ven. Mingun Sayādaw or Most Ven. Ledi Sayādaw. These two eminent masters therefore played a foundational role in the modern revival of insight meditation and in facilitating its subsequent global dissemination, including its transmission to Western countries (Braun, 2013, p. 162; Houtman, 1990, pp. 43-4). By the 20th century, this preservation of vipassanā bore global fruit. Ledi Sayādaw’s manuals systematized vipassanā for lay practitioners. Mahāsi Sayādaw’s noting method created large-scale meditation centres that trained both Burmese and international students. Saya Thetgyi marked an important shift in the transmission of vipassanā, paving the way for the emergence of lay teachers within the tradition. Sayāgyī U Ba Khin and his disciple S. N. Goenka developed standardized retreat formats, enabling faithful replication worldwide. Across these lineages, the core features remained: intensive retreat settings, methodical instructions, ethical grounding, and emphasis on direct experiential

insight through the method of bare insight. The combined work of these masters ensured that Burma's preserved method became a global phenomenon. They demonstrated that vipassanā could be taught in varied cultural contexts without diluting its procedural integrity. Whether through the lay-focused outreach of Ledi and Saya Thetgyi, Sayāgyī U Ba Khin and Mr. Goenka's standardized courses, or Mahāsi's teacher-led retreats, all adhered to the essential principles embedded in the preserved Burmese tradition: sustained mindfulness, direct observation of experience, and the ultimate aim of liberation from suffering.

IV. CONCLUSION

Vipassanā, the Buddha's direct path to insight and liberation, spread widely after his passing, notably through Emperor Asoka's missions. According to the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Glass Palace Chronicle*, the mission to Suvannabhūmi—often identified with Lower Burma—planted the seeds for a lineage that would remain unbroken for over two millennia. While the practice declined elsewhere under pressures of scholasticism, ritual integration, political instability, and doctrinal shifts, Burma uniquely safeguarded vipassanā as a living method. This was achieved through royal-monastic cooperation, strict adherence to the vinaya, unbroken teacher-student transmission, and later, lay accessibility.

By the modern era, Burmese masters such as Ledi Sayādaw, Mahāsi Sayādaw, Saya Thetgyi, Sayāgyī U Ba Khin, and Mr. S. N. Goenka were able to draw upon this intact heritage to create accessible yet uncompromised training systems. These models have since carried the practice across continents, maintaining the essential structure described in the early discourses.

Preserving Vipassanā is the safeguarding of a complete, functional method for ending suffering. It systematically reveals the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of all phenomena: One will come to the roots of human discontent and walk the way to true happiness and enlightenment.

In an age marked by mental restlessness and existential dissatisfaction, the value of vipassanā is amplified. Its preservation now extends beyond Burma's borders, calling for global responsibility to maintain its integrity and accessibility. To protect Vipassanā is to protect humanity's living access to freedom from

dukkha—a legacy of compassion from the past, and a gift of liberation for the future.

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