

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOUR PĀRĀJIKĀ IN THE THERAVĀDA TRADITION OF MYANMAR****Venerable Parama<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar (Ph.D.) Swami Vivekanand Subharti University Meerut, U.P., India.  
Ashinparama1500@gmail.com**ABSTRACT:**

The Four Pārājika rules in the Theravāda tradition of Myanmar are fundamental to monastic discipline and represent the utmost ethical standards for bhikkhus (monks). The Sangha (monastic society) relies on these offences to preserve its purity and integrity. These laws include the prohibition of sexual misconduct (Abrahmacariya), theft (Adinnādāna), killing a human being (Manussaviggaha), and making false claims about spiritual attainments (Uttarimanussadhamma). Every rule pertains to essential components of ethical behaviour, guaranteeing that monks strictly follow the Dhamma (the Buddha's teachings) and Vinaya (monastic code of conduct).

The Pārājika offence has been crucial in upholding the monastic Order's sacredness since the Buddha's era. From a cultural standpoint, they substantially impact the connection between the Sangha (Buddhist monastic community) and the lay people in Myanmar, promoting mutual respect and trust. From a spiritual perspective, these regulations facilitate the monks' journey towards Nibbāna (enlightenment), fostering a life devoid of impurities and distractions.

Any breach of the Pārājika rules leads to swift removal from the Sangha, indicating the seriousness of these transgressions. The strict implementation of regulations highlights the significance of ethical behaviour in the Theravāda tradition, guaranteeing that the Sangha continues to symbolize moral and spiritual direction. Comprehending the Four Pārājika rules is crucial for recognizing their significant influence on the Theravāda monastic tradition in Myanmar, emphasising their function in maintaining the ethical and spiritual foundation of the community.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Theravadas Buddhist tradition is central to Myanmar's cultural and spiritual life, profoundly influencing its people's values, ethics, and daily practices. As one of the oldest and most conservative forms of Buddhism, Theravadas, meaning "Teaching of the Elders," strongly emphasizes the monastic life and the rigorous discipline required to attain enlightenment. In Myanmar, the monastic community, or *Sangha*, is held in high esteem, and monks play a crucial role not only as spiritual guides but also as preservers of Buddhist teachings and cultural values. The Sangha forms a bridge between the monastic ideals and the lay community, with monks seen as role models who embody the ethical and moral principles of Buddhism, which in turn serves as a guiding force in society. Ethics and discipline form the backbone of this tradition, emphasizing moral conduct, meditation, and wisdom as pathways to personal and communal harmony.

Central to the discipline of monastic life in Theravāda Buddhism is the Vinaya, a code of conduct that governs the actions and behaviour of monks and nuns. The Pārājika, or "defeats," represent this code's most severe ethical transgressions. The term "Pārājika" is derived from the Sanskrit and Pali roots, meaning "defeat" or "defeated." In this context, a "defeat" refers to a grave violation those results in immediate and permanent expulsion from the monastic community. Unlike lesser offences, which may be forgiven after confession and repentance, a Pārājika offence marks the point of no return for a monk within the Sangha. This uncompromising approach underscores the importance of maintaining an unblemished ethical foundation within the monastic community, ensuring that monks who represent the Buddha's teachings do so with integrity and purity.

There are four Pārājika offences in the Theravāda tradition, each addressing an aspect of ethical conduct fundamental to the monastic path. The first is engaging in sexual intercourse, which breaches the vow of celibacy and undermines the monk's focus on spiritual development. The second is stealing, an act that violates the principle of renunciation and the monk's reliance on the generosity of the lay community. The third is intentionally taking a human life, contradicting the core Buddhist principle of compassion and non-violence. Lastly, falsely claiming supernatural powers misleads followers and damages the reputation and credibility of

the monastic community. These four rules are the foundation of monastic ethics in Theravada Buddhism, reinforcing the commitment to a life of renunciation, discipline, and spiritual integrity.

In Myanmar, the Four Pārājika are highly regarded, shaping both monastic life and societal expectations. They set a high standard for ethical conduct, reflecting the deep-seated respect for moral discipline within Myanmar's Theravāda tradition. Through these stringent rules, the Sangha not only upholds its own spiritual and ethical purity but also serves as a model of moral excellence for the broader society, influencing the Burmese people's collective values and spiritual aspirations.

#### AIM OF THE ARTICLE

The aim of the article *The Importance of the Four Pārājika in the Theravāda Tradition of Myanmar* is to examine the foundational disciplinary rules within the Theravāda Buddhist monastic code, focusing on their role in maintaining monastic integrity and societal harmony. The article explores the origins, interpretation, and application of the four Pārājika rules prohibitions against sexual misconduct, theft, murder, and false claims of spiritual attainment—within the Myanmar context. By analyzing historical, cultural, and textual perspectives, the study highlights how these rules ensure the purity of the Sangha, foster public trust in monastic institutions, and reinforce ethical conduct in a predominantly Buddhist society. It aims to provide insights into their enduring significance in modern Myanmar.

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for the article *The Importance of the Four Pārājika in the Theravāda Tradition of Myanmar* adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on textual analysis, interviews, and ethnographic observations to explore the significance and application of the Four Pārājika rules within Myanmar's Theravāda Buddhist tradition. **Textual Analysis:** The study examines primary Buddhist texts, including the *Vinaya Pitaka* and relevant commentaries, to understand the doctrinal foundation of the Pārājika rules. Secondary sources such as scholarly articles, historical records, and cultural studies are analyzed to provide context and interpret their application in Myanmar.

#### The Four Pārājika Rules Explained

##### 1. Sexual Misconduct (Abrahmacariya)

*“Yo pana bhikkhu bhikkhūnam sikkhāsajivasamā panno sikkham appaccakkhaya' dubbalyam anāvikatvamethunam dhammam patisevैया antamaso tiracchānagatāya pi, parajiko hoti asamvāso.”*

Definition and Implications: Sexual misbehaviour, also known as brahmacharya, refers to any involvement in sexual acts by a monk. Engaging in this action is seen as a grave violation of the monastic canon and results in immediate dismissal from the Sangha. The repercussions are significant, leading to the forfeiture of monastic status and damaging the individual's spiritual progression.

The significance of celibacy in Theravāda Buddhism: Celibacy, also known as brahmachariya, represents the deliberate abandonment of earthly indulgences and cravings, essential for advancing one's spiritual journey in Theravāda Buddhism. The concept symbolizes the dedication to a lifestyle characterized by purity and self-control, which is crucial for achieving elevated levels of meditation and enlightenment.

##### 2. Theft (Adinnādāna)

*“Yo pana bhikkhu gama vā araṇṇa vā adinnam theyyasankhatam adiyeyya yatharupe adinnadane rajano coram gahetva haneyyūm va bandheyūm va pabbajeyyūm vā coro'si balo'si mulho'si, theno'si ti, tatharūpam bhikkhu adinnam adiyamāno, ayam pi parajiko hoti asamvaso.”*

Stealing, or adinnādāna, refers to appropriating something that does not belong to oneself. Monks who commit this transgression are promptly expelled, highlighting the seriousness of upholding moral purity. The consequences encompass the disturbance of trust and unity within the Sangha and the broader community. The Significance of Integrity and Trust within the Sangha: Integrity and trust are essential for the proper operation of the Sangha. Stealing weakens these principles by undermining the respect and confidence that the laity and other monks have in the monastic community.

##### 3. Taking the life of a human being (Manussaviggaha)

*“Yo pana bhikkhu saācicca manussaviggaham jivitā voropeyya satthahāarakam vāssa pariyeseyya maranavannam va samvanneyya maranaya va samadapeyya ambho purisa kim*

*tuyh'iminā papakena dujjivitena? Matam te jivitā seyyo ti, iti cittamano cittasankappo anekapariyayena marana vāsam vā samvanneyya maranāya va samadapeyya, ayam pi pārājiko hoti asamvāso.*"

Manussaviggaha refers to the deliberate act of taking someone's life, which directly contradicts the principle of ahimsa, or non-violence. Engaging in this action results in swift dismissal from the monastic Order and carries significant karmic repercussions.

The principle of Ahimsa, or non-violence, is a fundamental tenet of Buddhism. Ahimsa, a basic Buddhist tenet, highlights the significance of life's sacredness and compassion. Maintaining non-violence is essential for monks since it is in accordance with the path of moral behaviour and spiritual growth.

#### 4. Misrepresentations of Spiritual Achievements (Uttarimanussadhamma)

*"Yo pana bhikkhu anabhijanam uttarimanussa-dhammam attupanayikam alamariyañanadassanam samu dācareyya iti janami, iti passami ti, tato aparena samayena samanuggāhiyamāno' vā asamanuggāhiyamano? vā apanno visuddhapekkho evam vadeyya ajanamevam avuso avacam janāmi, apassam passami. tuccham musa vilapin ti. Aññatra adhimana, ayam pi pārājiko hoti asamvaso."*

Uttarimanussadhamma is fraudulently asserting one's possession of advanced spiritual achievements, such as jhāna or arahantship. Engaging in such deception results in swift expulsion, highlighting the gravity of upholding honesty in one's spiritual quest.

Effects on the credibility and trustworthiness among the Sangha and lay community: Engaging in deceitful assertions diminishes the reliability of the individual monk and erodes the confidence of both the Sangha and the lay society. Genuineness and truthfulness are crucial for the spiritual wholeness of the monastic Order and its function as a mentor for ordinary practitioners.

#### Practical Implications and Enforcement of the Four Pārājika in Myanmar

The Four Pārājika, or "defeats," has an essential and unique feature in the discernment of the Sangha (the monastic community) in the Theravada Buddhism, practiced in Myanmar. Such ethical violations, accepted as the normal and maximum by everyone, will not allow those incapable of self-discipline and self-purification to be ordained. In Myanmar, where the Sangha is revered, the Pārājika are essential for maintaining the loyalty, esteem and honour of the lay people who regard the monastic Order as the embodiment of the figure of the Buddha. This is the exact framework of the moral principles that allows not only the spirit of the Order to be preserved but also the monastic Order to be positioned as a moral authority to the remainder of the society in Myanmar.

Pārājika IV, III, II, and I set parameters, concepts and principles to protect Sangha's purity and elevate its moral standards. And there are such rules: no engaging in sexual intercourse, no stealing, no killing without reason, and no pretending to have supernatural capabilities. Monks observe these guidelines, enabling them to remain separate from the lay world. Monks maintain a very high level of control and awareness, which is essential for such individuals on the path to the spiritual hierarchy and the purpose of serving the community. Adhering to the criteria makes it possible for the monks and the nuns to be able to motivate and convince even the lay people that sila, a morally ethical conduct of a community, is put into reel practice within the Sangha, making it even stronger in the eyes of the lay devotees of the Dhamma. In contrast, should a monk break one of the Pārājika sexual acts, in this case, there is a reasonable explanation this act is viewed as controversial for the monk, so the former monk is cut out from the Sangha to protect the Order of monks.

Apart from eliciting a favourable and robust reciprocation that delights Pārājika disciples, Laction is also an exemplary person of ethical conduct for the unordained followers. The followers of Sangha exhibit these vices in overcoming the three deluding poisons that are obstacles to the development of a spiritual person. Suppose they are somewhat less strict concerning discipline. In that case, the lay disciples of Buddhism still cultivate the spirit of moral and spiritual discipline and the awareness of respect for the code of conduct of the Sangha. The laity is driven by the commitment of the monks to uphold such precepts in their own lives and to observe the Five Precepts against killing, stealing, adultery, false speech and intoxicants. In this way, the moral code of the Sangha positively influences Buddhist societies in Myanmar, where morals and the sanctity of life are held in high esteem.

However, some people go beyond the Buddhist rules set for them in observing the Pārājika life. They refer to the great people of Myanmaar nation, which pertains to the profound relationships, norms and ethics of the people devoted to the Theravāda teachings. This family, in particular, together with the other families in the

elementary training of monks, is said to adhere to the ethical principles in almost all parts of the society, including the family or family traditions found amongst the natives or villagers in Burma. For these Pratiharya outlines of ethics, which Myanmar's people revere so much, practicing Buddhism halfway through or completely ignoring the practices is seen as mischief against all Buddhist monks. To put it more simply, let us see how, as Pārājika is carried out with increased fervour, amongst those who profess the faith of Buddhism, we see a clean and devoid-of-violence path. Such a regard also extends to those laymen who, by making material donations to the Saṅgha, become subjects of the Monastic Circle that is so respectful of Buddhism and her people.

Concerning Myanmar, the Four Pārājika has a breathtaking significance, as it is more than just additional monastic rules to be followed, being instead a proof of the love towards ethical practice and self-improvement typical of the Theravāda Buddhism. The Saṅgha's members' determination to abide by these precepts has also increased the perception of that particular fraternity as being guardians of the moral code and exemplars of compassion and righteousness to fellow humanity. While observing the Pārājika, the monks are not only forced to hold certain ethical principles but also contribute towards upholding the Burmese cultural – including religious – values so that Buddhism is revered in the community. In line with this, the Four Pārājika are still regarded as significant areas of ethics as they strengthen the people of Myanmar's relationship with their religion.

### **Historical and Cultural Importance in Myanmar**

The Pārājika regulations, considered the most stringent disciplinary measures in the Vinaya Piṭaka, were established during the time of the Buddha. The Buddha instituted these regulations to uphold the sanctity and coherence of the Saṅgha. A bhikkhu who violates any of the four Pārājika norms, which encompass prohibitions on sexual intercourse, theft, murder, and false claims of supernatural powers, is permanently exiled from the monastic community. These norms are essential for maintaining integrity and discipline inside the Saṅgha, guaranteeing that the monks strictly adhere to the utmost standards of behaviour.

The Saṅgha in Myanmar occupies a highly esteemed status, intricately connected to the cultural and spiritual fabric of the populace. Monks, also known as bhikkhus, serve as spiritual mentors and guardians of the Theravāda tradition. The Pārājika norms have a crucial impact on delineating the interaction between monks and laypeople. They contribute to upholding the trust and reverence that non-monastic individuals hold towards the monastic community. Adherence to these norms exemplifies moral excellence, strengthening the lay community's confidence in the Saṅgha. On the other hand, violating these norms can decrease respect and trust, emphasising the significance of ethical behaviour in promoting peaceful relationships between the Saṅgha and the lay community.

### **Importance of Spirituality in the Theravāda Tradition**

The Pārājika rules play a crucial role in the Theravāda tradition by ensuring the spiritual integrity of the Saṅgha. The rules, recorded in the Vinaya Piṭaka, aim to maintain the utmost level of ethical behaviour, guaranteeing that monks adhere to the noble road towards enlightenment. Bhikkhus maintain their spiritual integrity by rigidly observing the Pārājika norms, which forbid behaviours such as sexual intercourse, theft, murder, and making false claims of superhuman ability. These guidelines are a strong defence against large distractions and ethical violations, which can greatly hinder one's progress towards Nibbāna. To achieve enlightenment, it is crucial to refrain from committing such offences that can pollute the mind and impede spiritual progress.

The Pārājika rules are essential for upholding discipline and peace within the Saṅgha. By establishing explicit parameters for conduct, these regulations facilitate the establishment of an atmosphere characterized by reciprocal reverence and collective dedication to the principles of the Dhamma. The Saṅgha's communal existence is characterized by interdependence and collective engagement, wherein the activities of individual monks can significantly influence the entire community. Adherence to the Pārājika rules by bhikkhus cultivates trust and unity within the Saṅgha, creating an environment that supports spiritual development and community concord.

Likewise, these regulations guarantee that the Saṅgha maintains its esteemed and trustworthy status throughout the wider community. The lay community regards the Saṅgha as a source of direction and inspiration, and the ethical behaviour of the monks strengthens this connection. When monks adhere to the Pārājika rules, it not only enhances their personal practice but also maintains the integrity of the Saṅgha, ensuring that it continues to be a shining example of the Dhamma in the world. Therefore, the Pārājika rules are

essential for maintaining the monastic community's spiritual integrity and smooth operation in the Theravāda tradition.

### Immediate expulsion from the Sangha

When a monk breaks a Pārājika rule, they encounter *ānāpatti*, which is a state of irreversible violation. The process of expulsion, referred to as *nissaya*, entails formal procedures in which the offence is thoroughly examined. Upon verification, the monk is officially declared *pārājika*, so cutting his connections with the Sangha.

The consequences of expulsion are significant. The monk who has been expelled, now known as *āsamvāsaka*, forfeits his monastic identity, privileges, and community support. He has lost his status as a *bhikkhu* and is now excluded from engaging in monastic activities, such as the daily alms rounds (*piṇḍapāta*) and communal recitations (*pātimokkha*). This severance affects his spiritual progression, everyday subsistence, and social relationships.

The consequences go beyond the individual. The monk's reputation, or "kitti," has been permanently damaged, negatively impacting his position, or "visuddhi," within both the monastic and lay communities. The absence of Kitti might result in the exclusion and withdrawal of support from lay followers (*upāsaka*), who often see monks as their spiritual mentors.

The wider ramifications for the Sangha are as noteworthy. Violating the Pārājika rules can undermine the moral basis of the community, leading to uncertainty and disappointment among lay supporters. The Sangha's function as a stronghold of ethical and spiritual direction is at risk, which could lead to a decrease in the lay population's faith (*saddhā*) and devotion.

Likewise, these occurrences emphasise the significance of rigorous compliance with Vinaya rules. The expulsion strongly warns the Sangha of the repercussions of ethical failures, emphasising the importance of being watchful and maintaining moral integrity.

Disregarding the Pārājika norms carries severe repercussions for the individual monk and the wider monastic community. This highlights the crucial significance of upholding the integrity and self-control that are necessary for the spiritual purpose and societal function of the Sangha.

### DISCUSSION

The *Four Pārājika* rules prohibitions against sexual misconduct, theft, murder, and false claims of spiritual attainment are central to the disciplinary framework of the Theravāda Buddhist monastic tradition. In the context of Myanmar, a nation deeply rooted in Theravāda Buddhism, these rules hold profound significance in shaping the ethical and spiritual fabric of monastic life.

The discussion begins with the historical and doctrinal underpinnings of the Pārājika rules, tracing their origins to the Vinaya Pitaka, the monastic code established by the Buddha. These rules are regarded as absolute; any violation results in permanent expulsion from the Sangha, emphasizing the importance of maintaining monastic integrity. The *Pārājika* not only serve as a guideline for personal conduct but also safeguard the reputation of the Sangha, ensuring its role as a moral exemplar in Myanmar's predominantly Buddhist society.

In Myanmar, the Pārājika are closely integrated into the daily lives of monks and the expectations of laypeople. Violations are perceived as detrimental to the Sangha's credibility and the spiritual well-being of the community. Case studies and historical instances illustrate how these rules have been upheld, sometimes amidst challenges posed by modernity and socio-political dynamics.

The article also discusses contemporary issues, such as globalization and cultural shifts that test the application of the Pārājika. However, their enduring importance lies in fostering ethical conduct, spiritual discipline, and societal trust, reinforcing their pivotal role in Myanmar's Theravāda tradition. This underscores their relevance as a cornerstone of monastic discipline and communal harmony.

### CONCLUSION

The Four Pārājika regulations are fundamental to the monastic discipline in the Theravāda tradition, playing a crucial role in maintaining the purity and integrity of the monastic community. The purpose of these regulations is to prevent activities that could cause irreversible harm to both the individual monk and the community. These regulations specifically forbid sexual misbehaviour, theft, intentional killing of a human being, and making false claims of spiritual achievements. The Pārājika rules offer a definitive moral framework for monks, ensuring that their manner of life aligns with the fundamental teachings of the Buddha. This fosters a sense of trust and respect among both laypeople and fellow monastics.



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Within the Theravāda monastic tradition of Myanmar, these regulations are of utmost importance in upholding the spiritual concentration and social unity essential for successful practice and instruction. The rigorous observance of the Pārājika rules safeguards against moral transgressions, guaranteeing that monks maintain their deservingness of the respect and assistance bestowed upon them by the lay community. The trust between the laypeople and the monastic community is essential, as the faith and generosity of the laypeople support the monastic community, resulting in a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship. Monks exhibit their dedication to the Dhamma by adhering to these regulations, strengthening the moral and spiritual principles central to Buddhist rituals.

Comprehending and abiding by the Pārājika norms entails more than simply following them; it involves a deep commitment to integrity, non-aggression, and relinquishment. These guidelines promote the development of a pristine state of mind among monks, devoid of impurities that obstruct spiritual advancement. To the general public and those who aspire to become practitioners, a more profound comprehension of these principles can foster increased reverence for the monastic way of life and a more committed adherence to the teachings of the Buddha.

Ultimately, the Four Pārājika rules are essential for maintaining the integrity of the Theravāda monastic tradition in Myanmar. They function as a guiding light for ethical behaviour, guaranteeing that the monastic community maintains an authentic representation of the Buddha's teachings. By embracing and comprehending these principles, individuals can cultivate a profound connection to the Dhamma and contribute to developing a harmonious and spiritually oriented community.

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