

Bhikkhu Bodhipala's message on Karmayogi Kripasaran Mahasthvir 155th Birth Anniversary vision



Bhikkhu Bodhipala

Celebrating the 155 Birth Anniversary of this great Savant whose dedication towards Buddhism and it's revival and regeneration was his only motto and determination.

Ven'ble Karmayogi Kripasaran Mahasthvir

22 June 1865 - 30 April 1926

Born on 22nd June 1865 to Ananda Mohan Barua his Father and Aradhana Barua his Mother in the village of Unainepura, district of Chittagong in the then undivided India which today is in Bangladesh. On 15th April 1881 on the occasion of the Bengali New Year which was a momentous occasion he was given pabbajja (novitiate ordination) by Ven'ble Sudhan Chandra Mahasthvir and received his upasampada (higher ordination) in 1885 under the preceptorship of Ven'ble Acharya Punnachar Chandramohan Mahasthvir and was given the name Chandrajyoti Bhikkhu but he was more famously known

as Kripasaran, the given name by his family. He was the sixth child of his parents. Although he received no elementary education or schooling and as such he was committed to learning the Pali suttas and practice of the vinaya as is to be followed by a Buddhist monk. He then accompanied his Guruji on a pilgrimage to the holy places connected with the Buddha and saw for himself the condition prevailing then and pledged to himself to work for the regeneration of Buddhism and Buddhist culture in the land of its birth which was already in a steady decline and also to unite the Barua Buddhist community which lay scattered and fragmented in different parts of India.

On his return to Chittagong he spent his first Vassa (rain retreat or lent) in the village of Bakkhali Vihara in Patiya. His inner voice beckoned him for a tryst with history and thereafter he decided to come to Kolkata in 1886 in the prime of his youth and established the Nabin Vihara in 72/73 Malanga Lane in a rented house where he stayed for three years alongwith Ven'ble Mahavir Mahasthavir from whom he learnt Buddhist Philosophy and Vinaya and thereafter shifted to the Mahanagar Vihara in the year 1889 in 21/26 Bow Street constructed on a plot of land donated by Smt. Rani Swarnamayee where he stayed for 13 years. In 1886 he went on a visit with Ven'ble Mahavir to Allahabad, Lucknow and Kusinagar. He did not venture to start his work in the many pilgrimage spots that would eventually find many benefactors but he wanted to work amongst his own kinsmen and thus made Calcutta -- the metropolis his home and it was here that he established the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha (Bengal Buddhist Association) on 5th October 1892. He purchased 5 kathas of land in the year 1900 at Rs. 4500/- in Lalit Mohan Das Lane that was renamed as the Buddhist Temple Street. The adjacent Park of the Dharmankur Vihara was renamed as the Nalanda Park by the Calcutta Improvement Trust under the Chairmanship of Mr. T. Emerson in response to an appeal made by Ven'ble Kripasaran. The Dharmankur Vihara was inaugurated in the year 1903 and

threw open the doors for the masses. From here he travelled to different parts of the country and established branches of the Sabha in places like Simla in 1906, Lucknow in 1907 (on a plot of land donated by the Government of the United Provinces), Shillong (the land of which was given by the Government of Assam) and Dibrugarh in 1908, Ranchi in 1915, Darjeeling in 1919 (the land of which was donated by Bijoy Chand Mahatab, the Maharaja of Burdwan on the occasion of the 54th birthday of Kripasaran), Jamshedpur in 1922 (land donated by the Tatas).

Even in Chittagong (Bangladesh) he was instrumental in establishing the Shaktipura Bauddha Balak Samiti (1908) and the Satbaria Mahila Sammelani (1917). He also undertook the reconstruction and restoration of various viharas like the Viharas of Noapara in 1913, Unainepura Lankaram and in Rangamati in 1921. He also donated many Buddha statues in different Buddha Viharas in Chittagong like the Silak Dharmananda Vihara, Chatar Pitua Silkamal Daroga Vihara, Panchariya Vihara, Comilla Buddha Vihara, Damdama Gurudas Mahasthavir Vihara, Laksam Aliswar Vihara etc. These were places far away and the amount of time spent and travel hardships endured, can be well imagined to be believed and yet he with his indefatigable energy carried on with one-minded devotion, which is necessary to give creation to his dreams and aspirations that the future generations would savour. It was this devotion and concern for his community that started the ball rolling for the revival of Buddhist culture and along with it started the work to organize and uniting the people of the Barua community who were living lives scattered, individualized and marginalized in a land of their dreams and aspirations, a land of hopes which was a metropolis and the then capital city of India. Struggling to come to terms with a life of urban hurry and economic hardship, they worked hard and for long hours and many of them became famous as the Barua cooks working with the Maharajas in the Rajbaris, with the English Sahibs in the Raj Bhavans (Governor's House) up to

the Rashtrapati Bhavan (President's House) and in the various Embassies and the Consulates to the big hotels in town. The Baruas have come a long way since then. The community has grown and prospered. Although the Barua cooks had access to the powers that be but it could not be put to use for their own personal gains whereas the other communities prospered and this was due to their rustic simplicity and lack of practical knowledge. Though this community did not progress in leaps and bounds but develop they surely did in slow strides.

During his lifetime he realized the importance of a literary journal through which he not only could spread his message across but would also be a testimony of his trials and tribulations through which he was going through and so started the journal Jagajjyoti in the year 1908 under the editorship of the poet-scholar Ven'ble Kavidhvaja Gunalankar Mahasthavir (1874–1924) and Ven'ble Samana Punnananda Sami (1878–1928). Ven. Gunalankar of Silak, Rangunia arrived here in Kolkata in the year 1903 and joined the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha to work with the Karmayogi. Ven. Kripasaran ordained Ven. Samana Punnananda (Purnachandra Barua) of Chatarpitua, Patiya in 1903 when he too arrived from Chittagong and thereafter he was sent to Sri Lanka for further studies in Pali. Ven. Punnananda went on to become a Lecturer in the Deptt. of Pali in the University of Calcutta in 1912. The Jagajjyoti has been continuously published with a few breaks in between and yet it continues to be published till this day with regularity. It has received wide acclaim from readers and scholars for its rich literary content. His idea to use the name Jagajjyoti which means the Light of the World was to give a message to Sir Edwin Arnold (1832-1904) who wrote about the Buddha as the Light of Asia in his epic poem (1879) and Jesus as the Light of the World (1891). The first issue of the Jagajjyoti carried a poem titled Udbodhan where it was written:

“I have come to your doors,
My name is Jagajjyoti
To show the Light to the people
Enveloped under the darkness of ignorance”.

Ven. Kripasaran also started the Gunalankar Library in the year 1909. This shows Ven. Kripasaran and Ven. Gunalankar shared a great relationship based on mutual trust and respect for each other. He established a school (Kripasaran Free Institution) for the children in the year 1912 where children from all communities could join alongwith a night school for the unlettered and the working class.

Kripasaran alongwith Anagarika Dharmapala @ Don David Hewavitarne -- founder of the Maha Bodhi Society of India worked in close co-operation for the spread of Buddhism so much so that at one point of time when the Maha Bodhi Society of India decided to shift its headquarters from Buddhagaya to Calcutta, they organised many a functions both religious and social in the premises of the Dharmankur Sabha. In one such meeting Prof. Suniti Chatterjee, a noted linguist also attended where he writes in one of his writings that he was overwhelmed hearing the Anagarika speak so fluently and his Pali chanting was so soothing and enchanting which took him back to his childhood memories. Kripasaran was invited by the Anagarika to visit Ceylon in 1911 where he was given a rousing reception wherever he went like Anuradhapura, Kandy, Mihintale, Kalyani Chaitya, and Ceylon and the Anagarika also visited Chittagong in 1915 where he was warmly received and given a grand felicitation at Unainepura, Satbaria and Silak. Thus was the trust and bonhomie both shared in each other's company. It is another matter that this relation was not continued by the successors of both the organisations till relations were again restored in the twenty first century. We

hope this relation grows into a strong bond to work for the betterment of Buddhism in India.

Ven. Kripasaran in his life met a number of persons who shaped many a thing in this country but prime amongst them was his relationship with Sir Asutosh Mookerjee who being the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, Kripasaran was able to convince him for the need to establish Pali studies in the University, schools and colleges. This relationship with Sir Asutosh helped him immensely in getting affiliations for many schools in Chittagong with the University of Calcutta like the Mahamuni Anglo-Pali Institution (1903), Silak Dowling Primary School (1910), Kartala-Belkhaine Middle English School, Noapara English High School, Andharmanik High School, Naikhine Purnachar Pali School, Dhamakhali High School, Pancharia Middle English School, Satbaria Girl's School and Library, Unainepura Primary School, Rangunia English High School, M. A. Rahat Ali High School, Patiya, Shakpura English School, Rangamati School and Library. At Kripasaran's insistence higher studies in Pali was established in the University of Calcutta by Sir Asutosh Mookerjee who also made recommendations to the Government of India to sanction scholarships for higher studies in the University of London. Sir Hercourt Butler, the then Education Secretary who also personally knew Ven'ble Kripasaran accepted the proposal and Benimadhab Barua (1888-1948) who hailed from Pahartali, Raozan in Chittagong was selected from amongst the three candidates selected by Kripasaran to go to London in 1914 to study and research in Pali. Subsequently Dr. Benimadhab Barua became the first Asian recipient of a D. Litt. Degree from the University of London in 1917 and after his return he was appointed as a Lecturer in the University of Calcutta. In 1912 Kripasaran was instrumental in setting up the Buddhist Students Hostel recognized by the University of Calcutta and was situated in 46/7 Harrison Road. Thereafter the hostel was shifted to 39/1 College Street in the year 1917 and at present

is situated in 4 Bowbazar Orphanage Lane, Kolkata 700012 and bears the name Buddhist Students Hall (PG) since 1939.

Kripasaran's zeal and enthusiasm to work for the propagation of Buddhism brought him closer to many of the personalities of those days like Sir Asutosh Mookerjee famously known as the Tiger of Bengal, served as the Justice of the Calcutta High Court and Vice Chancellor of the University of Calcutta, Bijoy Chand Mahatab, the Maharaja of Burdwan, Abdus Sobhahan Chowdhury, the Nawab of Bogra, Pratap Chandra Ghosh and his son Bhupendrasri Ghosh, Narendranath Sen, Editor, Indian Mirror, Manindra Chandra Nandi, Maharaja of Qasim Bazar, Satishchandra Vidyabhusan, Justice Saradacharan Mitra, Hirendranath Dutta, Charuchandra Basu, Bepinbehari Sanyal, Harinath De. He was able to take so many responsibilities as he had some able disciples like Ven. Kalikumar Bhikkhu (Kali Kumar Das) who was instrumental in establishing the Bodhisattva Vihara in Lucknow, Ven. Ananda Sami Bhikkhu helped him in the construction of the Gandhamadan Vihara in Darjeeling, Indologist Dr. Benimadhab Barua, Surendralal Mutsuddi, Kailashchandra Chowdhury, Golapsingh Chowdhury, Maung Khezari and apart from the many others mentioned previously.

Kripasaran did not stop with this success only rather moved forward with a renewed zeal and vigour. In 1910 he organised a Convention of Young Men's Buddhist Association. On 12th March 1912 he organized a meeting with the students from the Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist communities for their welfare, education and character building. For encouraging students to study Pali he instituted two prizes gold and silver. In 1918 he organised a Buddhist Women's Conference under the Presidentship of Ms. A. L. Janau, Principal of the Bethune College, which gives us a glimpse of his progressive thinking towards women and their rights. In 1924 he also convened a World Buddhist Conference in Calcutta in which he tried to bring about unity amongst both the groups where a schism of

sorts had been prevailing in the Sangha which although could not succeed due to his untimely death (30th April 1926) but it is a sad tragedy of the Sangha that no one after him tried to do this work of removing the rift and creating the unity of the Sangha. It can also be noted that during this conference a Bhikkhu Sima (consecrated area) was established in the Dharmankur Vihara on 8th December 1924 and it was here that Kripasaran had given upasampada or higher ordination to his disciple Dharmadarshi Samanera {Mahathera} (1904 – 1973) of Shakpura who later went on to become the 23rd Sanghanayaka of Bangladesh Bouddha Bhikkhu Mahasabha. Later on his disciple Ven. Dr. S. Dharmapal Mahathera (Pingala) went on to become the 27th Sanghanayaka of the same Mahasabha. At present Ven. Suddhananda Mahathera is the 28th Sanghanayaka. The Sangharaja of the other faction - Bangladesh Sangharaja Bhikkhu Mahasabha is Ven. Dr. Dharmasen Mahasthavir, grandson of Kripasaran. Thereafter, it was only after this Conference that international Buddhist conventions, conferences and seminars are being held of the Buddhist community. In between he also convened conferences and conventions to foster friendship, understanding and unity amongst the different communities. In 1896 Kripasaran visited Rangamati to take part in the coronation ceremony of the Chakma King Bhuvan Mohan Roy. In 1902 when he was just 37 he was conferred with the title of Mahathera by none other than his Guru, Ven. Acharya Punnachar in the presence of a large gathering of his devotees in the Sakyamuni Vihara of the Chakma Kingdom in Rangamati. In 1905 he gave a reception to the Tashi Lama of Tibet when he came to Kolkata. In the same year Ven'ble Kripasaran as President alongwith Ven'ble Gunalankar Mahathera, Vice-President of the Association was invited by the Government of Bengal to attend the royal reception to the Prince of Wales and offer their benediction. He also gave a rousing welcome to the 13th Dalai Lama of Tibet in the year 1910 when he came here as a guest of the Government of India. Ven. Kripasaran visited Delhi in 1911 to

take part in the special coronation ceremony of Prince of Wales invited by the Govt. of India to shower his blessings. In 1912 Kripasaran alongwith Anagarika Dharmapala visited Lucknow and Delhi where he met Sir Hercourt Butler, Member of the Governor General's Council in charge of the Education Department and Sir Carlyle, the Revenue Secretary. Kripasaran also undertook his first visit to Yangon, Burma in 1908 where he was overwhelmed seeing the devotion of the people towards the Dhamma and their enthusiasm to see a monk come to visit them from the land of the Buddha. Thereafter he made several visits to Akyab to collect donations. In 1920 Kripasaran organized a reception in honour of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee where he was given the title of Sambuddhagama Chakravarthi.

When we reflect on his life and works we find Kripasaran as a karmayogi, a visionary with an unfathomable zeal and enthusiasm, dogged tenacity and unwavering perseverance who having no basic education and no knowledge of language yet he was able to carry forward his thoughts and principles for which he was dedicated and determined. We find in him the fearlessness with which he was able to move forward and get his work done no matter how mighty their personalities were. We find in him the uncanny knack with which he could befriend people and get his views sent across.

His disciples and devotees led by Maharaj Mahajan decided to erect his life size statue that was made by an Italian sculpture in white marble stone and installed in the forecourt of the Dharmankur Vihara on 31st October 1915 during his lifetime. In the installation ceremony the President of the meeting was Sir Asutosh Mookerjee and the Chief Guest was Anagarika Dharmapala. The Guests of Honour were Sri Satish Chandra Vidyabhusan and Sri Jatindranath Choudhury. Speakers showered praise and recollected his contributions to society – its culture and heritage and Dhamma for which they were all grateful. Sir Asutosh in his speech mentioned, “What I have learnt from the books on Buddhism – the rules and conduct of

Buddhism are very high, very noble and very generous.....the attitude of the people is rather different in this day of reawakening. If textbooks be written for the students in the light of Buddhist idealism, it would do good. Everybody should accept Buddhist idealism. Buddhism is a generous religion. It is good if everybody obeys the rules and conduct of Buddhism.... That I have rendered my help in spreading the Buddhist literature – in the very root of it stands Kripasaran Mahathera’s intimacy with me. It is due to his association alone I was attracted to Buddhism and Buddhist Literature”.

The marble plaque installed during the unveiling of the statue sums up the dedication of his admirers:

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa

Mahasthavir Kripasaran

Erected by his disciples, friends and admirers

In token of gratitude, love and veneration and in humble appreciation of his services to the cause of Buddhism.

His life is dedicated to the realization of the message of his master. He is the maker of modern Buddhist, Bengal, whose advancement as a community, is due entirely to his bold initiative and indefatigable energy. The Dharmankur Vihar and Sabha with its branches, the ‘Jagajjyoti’, Kripasaran Free Institution and the Gunalankar Library will ever be regarded as his best memorials, of simple childlike and saintly personality, of large heart and high-souled enthusiasm, a worker who knows no defeat and is ever in harness. Kripasaran is the servant beloved of the Lord Buddha, his chosen instrument for doing his work.

31st October 1915 AD / 2459 BE

Celebrating his birth anniversary is an opportune moment for all of us to not only rededicate ourselves to walk his path and rejuvenate ourselves to regenerate the Buddhist Culture to its pristine heights that it once enjoyed but also at the same time

it is an opportunity for us to evaluate Kripasaran and his work which he did not only for his community but followed the Buddha's dictum of Bahujana Hitaya, Bahujana Sukhaya in letter and spirit. We do feel it a necessity as this period is of immense significance as he was the main responsible figure to bring together all the Buddhists living scattered in different parts of India who had migrated in different periods of time and settled wherever their work and livelihood took them. It is here that Ven. Kripasaran shines as a luminary inspiring a movement that switched on a light of renaissance of Buddhist thought and culture in the 20th century India. The Buddhists from all walks of life re-discovered their cultural and religious identity and affinity through the re-awakening movement. The community today is in need of an icon and Kripasaran is an ideal role model for us to follow whose life is an inspiration and example. Although he belonged to the Barua community but the sphere of his work knew no boundaries nor had any sectarian feelings. He was open to all, forever embracing and those who came in his touch got the feel of assurance and sustenance. Kripasaran brought about a social revolution and transformation in every sphere of our lives be it educational inspiration, social upliftment, economic stability or spiritual rejuvenation. Kripasaran and his work were not confined within Chittagong but his work and dream was for the entire Indian sub-continent. Dr. B. M. Barua had said that "Kripasaran is a Bodhisattva because he dedicated his life for the greater cause of the society" for which he dreamt, breathed and lived.

The work started by Kripasaran has been continuing for all these years but his dreams remain unfulfilled. We need to choose what we want whether we want to stay stagnated and cocooned or we want to walk shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the people of the Buddhist world. His multi-faceted thinking for the socio – religio development needs to be given a big thrust keeping in mind the modernization of each and every aspect of our life.

But then lots more need to be done if we want to give Kripasaran his due tribute for a man of his genre who without any elementary education and money landed in the metropolis from the hinterlands of Bengal, possessing a stony courage which led us to emancipation from bondage of penury -- both that of economic and illiteracy, thereby leading us to the vibrancy of the future, here then we stand at the crossroads of our existence today in the 21st century to choose a way for ourselves to move forward with élan. Karmayogi Kripasaran laid the foundations of the regeneration of Buddhist culture not only in Bengal but that for the whole of India working in close co-operation with the Anagarika Dharmapala of Sri Lanka. The result of this movement was the embracing of Buddhism by Babasaheb Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891 – 1956) alongwith lakhs and lakhs of Dalits in 1956 as a fertile field was laid prepared by them for this historic event.

It was again Kripasaran's close disciple in Lucknow Ven'ble Bodhananda Mahasthavir (1874-1952) @ Mukunda Prakash Lahiri who was ordained on 4th October 1914 in Kolkata to whom the great writer Mahapandita Rahula Sankrityanana (1893 – 1963) went in quest of Buddhist books and literature who in turn told him to read the Jagajjyoti published by Kripasaran from the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha. Thereafter he alongwith two others went to Sri Lanka to study Pali and Buddhist Studies in the Vidyodaya Pirivena. The other two were Ven'ble Jagadish Kashyap (1908 – 1976) who went on to establish the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara (1951) in Nalanda, Bihar, which today is a Deemed to be University (since 2006)and also had the entire Tipitaka to be translated into the Devanagari script and the other was Ven. Ananda Kaushalyayana (1925 – 1988) who settled down in Buddhabhoomi, Nagpur, Maharashtra and published books on Buddhism whereas Rahula Sankrityayana went to Tibet and brought back thousands of invaluable manuscripts to India and wrote books on various subjects. This was the fruit of the

seed of regeneration sown by these two stalwarts one from Sri Lanka and the other from India.

Ven. Kripasaran embraced death 30th April 1926 after a prolonged illness. His health had been deteriorating since the last few months and yet he did not deter to keep working. He went to Darjeeling to see the works and also collect funds for the construction of the Vihara in Calcutta and after his return he fell seriously ill and even after the persistent efforts of renowned physicians like Dr. Brown and Dr. S. C. Sengupta he breathed his last. His desire was to keep his body for a few days here and then to take it to his birth-place and consign it to flames besides the pyre of his Gurudeva.

It is to be noted with satisfaction that “during the 10th General Conference of the WFB (World Fellowship of Buddhists, Thailand) held in Colombo in the year 1972 a resolution was unanimously adopted that Anagarika Dharmapala of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, Ven. Kripasaran Mahasthavir of the Bengal Buddhist Association and Dr. Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar are the three pioneers of the Buddhist revival movement of India, due to their effort Buddhism and Buddhist culture is once again alive in the land of its birth” – WFB Review.

Bhikkhu Bodhipala