

Online learning of Buddhism during / post-COVID in the Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract

Outbreak of COVID-19 is an international human crisis. The damage to health, wealth and well-being has already been huge. The rapid spread of the coronavirus pandemic started from China and throughout Asia, Europe, and the United states. Nepal is not spared.

This paper attempts to look at how Buddhist philosophy is helping the online participants to cope with stress due to coronavirus pandemic and their experiences in participating in online programs run by various *Theravada Viharas* (monasteries).

The COVID -19 is a blessing in disguise for the Buddhist community in the Kathmandu valley followed by lockdowns – long, short and partial. Since last year these lockdowns have confined people to their houses but it provides a wonderful opportunity for learning the teachings of Buddhism through online lectures, discourses and webinars including the *Vipassana* meditation organized by learned *Bhikkhus* (monks) of *Theravada Viharas* (monasteries).

This paper is entirely based on empirical studies. Therefore, a primary survey among the online participants have been conducted through a questionnaire. Mobile phones, landline and emails are employed to collect information. *Theravada Viharas* (monasteries) that are running the online programs are briefly described, and profiles of learned *Bhikkhus* (monks) are also given including their feedbacks.

The study deals entirely with *Theravada* Buddhist tradition in Nepal and does not address other Buddhist traditions such as *Vajrayana* and *Mahayana*.

Keywords- *Theravada* Buddhism, COVID-19, online learning

1. Introduction

Outbreak of COVID-19 is an international human crisis. The damage to health, wealth and well-being has already been huge. Starting from Wuhan, China in late December of 2019, in four

months it spread in many countries, and World Health Organization (WHO) declared it as a pandemic on 11th March 2020 (Zhu and et al. 2020, 727). Globally, till 12th September 2021, confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached up to 225,460,162 including 4,643,866 deaths (Worldometer,2021). Nepal is not spared, the first symptom of coronavirus was seen in a student returning from Wuhan China on 13th January 2021. The confirmed cases till 12th September 2021 were 777163 with 10949 deaths according to Ministry of Health and Population, Nepal.(MOHP)

Arslan and Yildirim (2021) stated people are experiencing various stresses related to COVID-19 (2). It has created insecurities and worries to the people due to deaths of loved ones, fear of falling ill and dying, losing livelihood, and isolation during quarantine, financial crisis and many more. Bernardo and et al. (2020) predicted that the mental health impact from COVID-19 will increase and persist even after the pandemic passes. Poudel and Subedi (2020) illustrated situations in developing countries including Nepal are worse where people are not receiving enough supports as health safety-nets and various relief funds. Lockdowns for encouraging social distancing have affected the overall physical, mental and social health of the people (748).

World's scientists and global health professionals are doing their best to develop new norms and standards to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic and help care for those affected (WHOc). However, medical science and technology are not in the situation to address mental health issues as negative feelings (e.g. anxiety and fear) and irrational ideas caused by this crisis. From time immemorial all the religions and spirituality are solacing humankind in times of crisis and illness. Fardin (2020) argues spirituality can be one of the proper methods to create mental relaxation and easing stress in the crisis of COVID-19. Unfortunately, these issues are neglected in this crisis as most of the professionals are keen on only preventing further spread of this dreadful disease. In addition, the spirituality can provide moral support for frontline workers as healthcare professionals with risky jobs and solace for patients and families (1-4).

Wallace and Hodel (2008) had differentiated science and spirituality reasonably. According to them science explores the material nature of phenomena in deep. However, it could not study non-material phenomena as mind-consciousness, emotions, thoughts etc. In contrast the role of the religions are to study mind that observes phenomenon and that does the investigating. They concluded science and spirituality work together in complementary manner (xviii). Hence,

medical science and religion/ spirituality should go hand in hand for the solutions of unpredictable difficulties caused by pandemic.

During this critical situation of pandemic, when the world is pursuing for spirituality, the COVID -19 is a blessing in disguise for the Buddhist community in the Kathmandu valley followed by lockdowns – long, short and partial. Since the days when lockdown was commenced in Nepal, it confined people to their houses but provided a wonderful opportunity to Buddhist community for learning the teachings of Buddhism through online lectures, discourses and webinars including the *Vipassana* meditation organized by learned Monks and Nuns of Theravada *Viharas* (Monasteries).

This paper attempts to look at how Buddhist philosophy is helping the online participants to cope with stress due to coronavirus pandemic and their experiences in participating in online programs run by various Theravada *Viharas* (Monasteries) in Kathmandu Valley. The study deals entirely with Theravada Buddhist tradition in Nepal and does not address other Buddhist traditions such as *Vajrayana* and *Mahayana*.

Theravada Buddhism in Nepal

Majority of population in Nepal follows Hinduism (81.3%) followed by Buddhism (9.0 %) according to the 2011 Census of Nepal. The *Newars*, the indigenous ethnic group of Kathmandu Valley, follow both Hinduism and Buddhism. The indigenous *Newar* Buddhists have been following three form of Buddhism prevalent in the country -*Vajrayana*, *Mahayana* and *Theravada* for centuries. *Theravada* is only one of the early Buddhism. Since the 1930s they have followed enthusiastically *Theravada* that is gaining more popularity among the Newar Buddhists. On top of *Vipassana* meditation is introduced in Kathmandu in 1981 separately by *Mahashi Saydaw* (1904 – 1982) and *Satya Narayan Goenka* (1924 – 2013). This event has made *Theravada* popular among non-*Newars* as well.

Online learning

Online learning or distance learning is the education that takes place over the Internet. With the increasing use of technology in education, it has become a common teaching method. Eventually COVID-19 has challenged the education system across the world with no option but to shift entirely to online teaching–learning methods. Worldwide, most popular Apps in practice in

education systems are Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft team. The education system of Nepal is following the same.

2. Methodology

This paper is entirely based on empirical studies. Therefore, a primary survey among the online participants have been conducted through questionnaires. Mobile phones, landline and emails are employed to collect information. Theravada *Viharas* (Buddhist monasteries) that are running the online programs are briefly described, and profiles of learned *Bhikkhus* (Buddhist monks) are also given including their feedbacks. Among the numerous online learning sessions in progress by various monasteries in Kathmandu, this paper has selected participants from Champavati Smriti Meditation Group as a target group with the sample size of 30 participants considering efficacy and limitation of time. The organizers and teachers of various online sessions are also distributed with questionnaires for information from their side.

3. Lockdowns and launching of online classes by Theravada Monasteries and Institutes

Nepal has experienced full lockdown twice since 24th March 2020 for three months and again on 19th April 2021. It is natural for people to respond with fears, worries, stresses etc. and spiritual care can be one of the vital component during this uncertain situation. Since, Nepal being a religious country, people's belief in their faith is strong. However, lockdowns has forced authorities to close the temples and monasteries. This circumstance has motivated Monks and Nuns of *Theravada* Buddhists Monasteries and Institutes to build online communities to carry on their monastic duties. Lists of prominent Monks/Nuns with their respective monasteries involved in online learning since first lockdown are given below-

- i. Bhikkhu Bodhijnana is chief abbot of Viswa Shanti *Vihara*, one of the prominent *Theravada* Monasteries in Kathmandu. He is the pioneer in starting online services through Facebook Live in Kathmandu. Since 2010 he has been experimenting with recording *Pali*

(an ancient language of the Buddha's era) recitation of various sections of *Tipitaka*¹. In early 2018 he used Facebook Live for reading *Pali* books. This experience has eased him to manage online services for traditional ritual prayers for deceased families as lockdown commenced. Later he added guided meditation and the concept of distance meditation was originated.

- ii. Bhikkhu Vimalo, educated in Myanmar, started virtual classes from the earliest lockdown. His vibrant sermons of two to three hours on Facebook Live is a soothing relief to approximately 1000 listeners. His ongoing sermons on Facebook Live has completed 534 episodes till September 8, 2021.
- iii. Nepal *Vippassana* Centre (Dhamma Shringa) has been guiding *Vippasana* meditation through Zoom as taught by S.N. Goenka since the announcement of lockdown.
- iv. International Buddhist Meditation Center is in continuation of Saturday Meditation program through Facebook Live coordinated by Agganyani *Guruma* and Vimalanyani *Guruma*.
- v. YMBA is also arranging various Buddhist scholars for Saturday sessions through Zoom.
- vi. Dhammakirti *Vihara* has been successfully contributing in propagating *Theravada* Buddhism for more than 50 years under the leadership of Chief Abbess Dhammawati *Guruma*. It has also chosen online services for carrying on its diverse activities through Facebook Live and Zoom including regular prayers and sermons.
- vii. Shreedip Silakar – A teenage boy has been reciting *Pali Tripitaka* since the first lockdown continuously to date on Facebook Live. His fluency in reciting *Pali* has charmed everyone.

During the second lockdown i.e. from 19th April 2021 Dhammakaya Foundation from Thailand provided two Zoom links to the young Monks and Nuns. They shared the link to carry on various programs from their respective Monasteries. To make the sessions more attractive prominent, learned monks and nuns are invited for discourse and guided meditation. The following are Buddhist Monasteries and institutes sharing common Zoom Apps are –

¹ Tipitaka is a Buddhist scriptures in which deliveries by Buddha in his lifetime are accumulated. It is a Pali word literally meaning 'ti' - three and 'pitaka' – baskets. Hence, the three baskets of knowledge are –

- a. Vinaya Pitaka-the rules of discipline for monks and nuns
- b. Sutta Pitaka- the collections of discourses, stories and verses delivered by the Buddha and his disciples.
- c. Abhidhamma Pitaka- the philosophical and analytical summation of the teachings

- viii. Shakya Singh *Vihara*, Lalitpur - Headed by Bhikkhu Chandragupta, Dharani *Guruma*, Bhikkhu Sumangalo,
- ix. Dharmaasthali International Meditation Center, Kathmandu: Headed by Anupama *Guruma*.
- x. Dharma Pasa Pucha, Kathmandu : Headed by Bhikkhu Sumangalo,
- xi. Shakyamuni Kirti *Vihara*, Kathmandu: Headed by Punyawati *Guruma* and Prassanawati *Guruma*
- xii. Vijayaram *Vihara*, Banepa : Headed by Bhikkhu Piyaratan

Champavati Smriti Meditation Group contributed Zoom App link to:

- xiii. Shree Sumangal *Vihara* ,Lalitpur: Headed by Bhikkhu Pannasara ,Bhikkhu Pannaratan, Bhikkhu Khema.

Other well-known Monasteries delivering sermons through Facebook Lives or Zoom since April 19th 2021 are:-

- xiv. Buddha *Vihara*, Kathmandu: Headed by Bhikkhu Kondanya
- xv. Boudha Jana *Vihara* , Kathmandu: Headed by Bhikkhu Dharmagupta
- xvi. Ganamaha *Vihara* Kathmandu , Headed by Bhikkhu Sovit
- xvii. Tri-Ratna *Vihara* ,Dharan: Headed by Bhikkhu Ananda and Abhasawati *Guruma*
- xviii. Gautami *Vihara* ,Lumbini : Headed by Khameshi *Guruma*
- xix. Punya Udaya *Vihara*, Lalitpur : Headed by Sarawati *Guruma*

3.1. Champavati Smriti Meditation Group

This group is a product of lockdown and originated from family members related to their late grandmother, Champavati Bania, who was the devout follower of *Theravada* Buddhism and the major supporter of Dharmakirti *Vihara* headed by Dhammawati. This group is named after her in fond memory as she inspired her granddaughters and grandsons to *Theravada* Buddhism. As the lockdown has paralyzed everyone with worldwide crisis this program is a boon in relieving fear and worries. Later it became a regular program on Zoom in the evening for approximately two hours.

The schedules include *Pali* recitation, meditation, sharing knowledge from learned participants in Buddha's teachings. Since the pandemic has given spare time the members are able to give full attention to the program in learning Buddha's Teaching and *Vipassana* Meditation. The program is running continuously up to September 12th 2021 with 533 sessions. In order to make the program more effective and interesting the prominent learned Theravada monks and laypersons are invited for in-depth learning of *Pali Tipitaka*. The lists of monks and laypersons are as follows:

- i. Bhikkhu Pannasara, *Tripitaka Vishasrada* from Sri Lanka, is the only Nepalese Bhikkhu to have this title. Expertise in *Abhidhamma* (philosophical discourse of *Tipitaka*), he gives discourses on *Abhidhamma* that deals with understanding reality of life.
- ii. Bhikkhu Rahul –Chief Abbot of Dhyankuti *Vihara*, Banepa.
- iii. Associate Professor, Mr. Madan Ratna Manandhar, a famous Buddhist scholar, instructs *Pali* language.
- iv. Dr. Keshari Laxmi Manandhar, a senior instructor of Vipassana Meditation Centre, Dharmashringha. She has been guiding Vipassana meditation in the tradition of S.N.Goenka to the group.
- v. Associate Professor, Dr. Tri Ratna Manandhar, also a well-known Buddhist scholars gives discourse on Applied Buddhism.

3.1.2. Features of CSM group

Champavati Smriti Meditation Group is one of the online group operated by laypeople. The success of running for more than a year regularly is its specific activities described below:

- i. Sharing of knowledge between the participants through presentations. One of the notable event was *Sattipathaana Sutta* (technique of mindfulness) delivered by Associate Professor Meena Tuladhar.
- ii. To prevent the monotony of the session diverse types of programs were designed appropriate for youths, children, elders. The conveners, *Pali* recitation are assigned to the participants by turns.
- iii. Published a book *Dhammacharan* documenting the lessons of the teachers and presentations from the participants. This endeavor has encouraged the beginners in developing writing habit. Even the perspectives of youth on Buddhism were included.

- iv. Enthusiastic participants are learning *Pali*. The knowledge of *Pali* is essential to understand the core teachings of Buddha.
- v. Regular interactions and feedback from participants.
- vi. Youth and children are motivated in *Pali* recitation, meditation, assignments, presentations and interactions.
- vii. The program also includes essential information on the coronavirus pandemic and preventative measures.
- viii. Facility of recordings of sermons for the absentees.
- ix. The main attraction of the program is *Abhidhamma* taught by Bhikkhu Pannasara. It is uploaded on YouTube for the benefit of larger number beyond Champavati Smriti Meditation Group.
- x. Knowledge of *Abhidhamma* has helped participants to comprehend other discourses Of *Tipitaka* delivered by other monasteries through online.
- xi. Guided Meditation is the most impressive event. Even new participants developed the habit of mindfulness.

4. Success stories of online learnings of Buddhism

About twenty online services were in progress by *Theravada* Buddhist Monasteries running successfully since March 24 2020 till September 20th 2021. Some of them are still in progress. These sessions were a huge success in the Theravada communities. The activities widely appreciated are given below:

4.1. International popularity

- i. Bhikkhu Bodhijjan and Bhikkhu Vimalo were outstandingly popular not only in Buddhist community in Nepal but also residing in US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Denmark, Japan, Thailand etc. through Zoom and Facebook Live.
- ii. Recitation of *Pali* texts especially *Abhidhamma* by Bhikkhu Bodhijjan through Facebook Live and Zoom App has influenced Buddhist monks and nuns in Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, and Africa. All the *Theravada* texts are preserved in *Pali*, hence this ancient

language is popular among Buddhist societies worldwide. *Pali* recitation experts with correct pronunciation are admired.

- iii. Vimalanyani *Guruma* and Bhikkhu Bibekananda are guiding Vipassana to the participants in European countries for many years. Since lockdown they are doing it through Zoom app. Bhikkhu Bibekananda is a German monk residing in Panditaram Meditation Centre, Lumbini for about 20 years.

4.2. Nepal Buddhist *Pariyatti* Education (In *Pali- Pariyatti* means learn by heart)

In 1964 All Nepal Bhikkhu Association established a *Theravada* education system i.e. Nepal Buddhist *Pariyatti* Education as Buddhist Saturday School for students and adults. It has served as foundation in propagating Buddhism in the Nepalese society. Examination controller of Nepal Buddhist *Pariyatti* Education, Bhikkhu Bodhigyan is conducting virtual *Pariyatti* teacher's training program and classes for *Pariyatti* students replacing annual physical programs due to difficulties caused by coronavirus pandemic. Zoom has facilitated to invite experienced teachers as Bhikkhu Mangalo from Taiwan and Bhikkhu Sankinchha from Lumbini. Other respective Theravada Monasteries and Institutes are also conducting *Pariyatti* classes.

4.3. Approaches of Young Monks and Nuns

Young monks and Nuns are trying their best with innovative approaches of Applied Buddhism in this pandemic situation suitable to contemporary society. They are helping people with stress management techniques caused by pandemic.

- i. International Buddhist Meditation Centre has introduced classes on 'Mental Health and *Sattipathan Sutta* (technique of mindfulness)' soon after imposition of first lockdown with almost 7000-8000 participants in Facebook Live.
- ii. Bhikkhu Piyadassi organized an international webinar on 'Buddhism and Mental Health Issues' on 14th April 2020 through a hired Zoom link.
- iii. A group of young Monks and Nuns organized workshops through Zoom on 'Mental Health awareness program during Pandemic' for *Pariyatti* students and their parents separately in early 2021. It was a huge success with more than 150 participants. The speakers were Bhikkhu Suvarna, Khema *guruma*, Ms. Renuka Manandhar and Mr. Sunil Lama. All of them hold degree in Psychology with Buddhist background.

5. Buddhism as a measure in managing pandemic stress

Buddhism when investigated in depth is not just a religion but combination of logical analysis as in philosophy and empirical investigation as in science (Wallace,2004, 27) . Cabezón, (2004) had reviewed works on several Buddhist Scholars advocating on similarity of Buddhism with Science. Among others, Anagarika Dhammapala, a Sri Lankan Buddhist leader can be taken as a pioneer in introducing this concept to the western world during the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. According to him, Buddhism reject the notion of creator. Its explanations are similar to science and denies miracles and faiths (46). Further Subhdra had added Buddhism examine inner world i.e. mind and body of self and science examines outer world (45). Buddha's Teachings are not simply orthodox belief but verified with personal experiences of mindfulness and meditation. These practices are the measures for reducing stress. Practically, all the content of *Tipitaka* are stress reliever from simple *Jataka* stories with moral ethics to higher doctrine as *Sattipatthan Sutta* (techniques of mindfulness), theory of Dependent Origination, Cause and Effect, Four Noble Truth, theory of Impermanency, *Abhidhamma* etc.

Almost all the participants agree with the fact that '*online learning of Buddhism has given them relief from mental stress caused by Covid-19*'. The aspects of Buddha's teaching that support in stress management from the perspectives of teachers and understanding of participants are as followings:

- i. Concentrating to recitation to Triple Gem (in *Pali- Triratna Wandana*)², protective rites (in *Pali-Parittran*)³ and listening to sermons prevent mind to distract from unnecessary thoughts. These activities lessens fear and worries due to stressful news in media.
- ii. Practicing five precepts (in *Pali -Panchasil*) of not killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, addiction to intoxicants makes one aware on not to get involved in wrong deeds. That way naturally they become free from stress.

². Triratna Wandana is taking refuge to Triple Gem i.e. Buddha, Dhamma (His Teaching), Sangha (Monastic order).

³ The most common *Pali Suttas* that are recited during *Parittran* are *Mangal Sutta*, *Bojjhanga sutta*, *Metta Sutta* and *Ratan Sutta*. All of them has deep meaning with their practical application. *Mangal sutta* is about moral duties for prosperity in life. *Bojjhanga Sutta* is about understanding 'illness is part of our life'. *Metta sutta* deals with spreading love and compassion to all the sentient beings. Interestingly, *Ratan sutta* elaborates an incidence from Buddha's era explaining crisis in society due to pandemic. These discourses prove that Buddhism is not just an orthodox belief but a practical teaching.

- iii. The basic teachings for beginners as stories on life of Buddha, *Jataka* tales are charming stories with morals.
- iv. Cause and effect (in *Pali-Kamma vipaka*) is a theory of Buddha that can be compared with Newton's Law that states, 'For every action there is equal and opposite reaction.' *Kamma* means action and *vipaka* means result. This theory emphasize on what 'we are today' is the consequences of our past deeds. If one prefers a better future he or she should avoid harming others by body, speech and mind. This concept assist in developing harmonious relationship with others.
- v. Buddha's teaching of impermanency helps to realize reality of life. The truth of impermanence (*in pali –Anicca*), states that everything in this life changes. For example buds change to flower and withers away. Baby becomes a boy, a man and at old age dies away. It is universal law. Attachment to appealing matters brings only sufferings as they are subjected to change and not permanent. So the law of impermanency states it is wise to accept the change. This concept bring strength to confront the undesirable losses.
- vi. Another important theory of Buddha is Four Noble Truth. It mentions four reality of life viz. suffering is truth, there is reason for suffering, suffering can be ceased, and there is path to the cessation of suffering i.e. Noble Eightfold path. Person practicing Noble Eightfold Path is developing pure mind free from greed, anger and ignorance.
- vii. *Abhidhamma*, the third basket of *Tipitka* is higher doctrine of Buddha. It is the analysis of every detail of 'Absolute truth'. In reality all that exists is only combination of mental state (*Nama*) and physical state (*Rupa*). In conventional way what we say man, animal, place or thing is just different types of mental and physical phenomena. As the law of impermanency these so called '*Nama*' and '*Rupa*' are changing. The knowledge of *Abhidhamma* helps to develop the right understanding of life. The participants of CSM group has reflected knowledge of *Abhidhamma* has helped them to cope with stress in many ways even in the time of death of a beloved family member.
- viii. Meditation- Meditation help in purification of mind by removing negative thoughts. The ultimate goal of Buddhist meditation is for realization of impermanent nature of life. The types of meditation guided through online learning sessions are '*Anapana*'- mindfulness in breathing, '*Vipassana*' - is to observe the body as they really are. *Sattipathanna*-being aware at every single moment. *Sattipatthana* or *Vipassana* is the foundation of gaining mental

health. Its techniques of observing 'one's own thoughts and emotions as they are, without judging or dwelling on them' is one of the best measures for relaxation and inner peace. 'Maitri Bhawan' is showing love and compassion for every sentient beings. All of them are ancient techniques of meditation as taught by Buddha.

6. Discussion

6.1. Opportunity in the midst of the lockdown

All the online sessions on operation are trying to teach important aspects of Buddha's Teaching which are difficult to acknowledge in the absence of well learnt instructors. The instructors (Monks, Nuns and sometimes laypeople) delivered the sermons as *Sattipatthan Sutta*, theory of Dependent Origination, Cause and Effect, *Milinda Panha*, Four Noble Truth, theory of Impermanency, *Abhidhamma* etc. These lengthy and high level doctrines require to be delivered for about one to two hours in day for a week or month or some almost for a year. In the past generations when the followers had more free time, the pioneer Monks and Nuns had instructed them thoroughly in *Viharas*. Contrastingly, the current busy lifestyle is not possible for such type of learnings. However, lockdowns has given opportunity for the contemporary Buddhists to learn these valuable and essential teachings. Moreover, provision of recording in Zoom and uploading in You Tubes and Facebook has facilitated for future preservation. It has benefitted both instructors and participants mutually in the following ways-

6.1.1 Online participants' experience

- i. Participants has reflected pandemic has taught life is uncertain and full of suffering. The overall Buddha's teaching has helped them in strengthening willpower and act calmly in adverse situations of life. Online learning has provided them with emotional support in the midst pandemic.
- ii. It is an opportunity for families in having quality time together. As the lockdown has confined all the family members in their houses, the young members became aware of the elders' participation in Zoom sessions, and subsequently they also showed interest in joining. On the other hand, the elders in the family became familiar with multiple uses of mobile and laptop with the help of their children for online activities.

- iii. According to tradition Monks and Nuns practice and learn Buddha's Teaching and deliver this valuable wisdom to the benefit of the laypeople. Since they do not have their own livelihood, in return laypeople provide them with basic needs. This mutual relationship had been in operation since Buddha's era. Some monasteries with large number of Monks and Nuns has to experience difficulties for their basic needs. Facility of online electronic payment is a relief for this condition and for the devotees who had habit of going to monasteries and offering alms to Monks and Nuns.
- iv. Devotees who had wish to visit monasteries for learning and meditations but could not due to busy schedules are benefitted most by these online sessions.
- v. Learning of *Pali* is an endeavor to preserve the ancient language laden with wisdom for future generation.
- vi. It has provided platform for in-depth learning of Buddha's Teaching during lockdown.
- vii. Practice of mindfulness meditation has helped in following preventive measures of COVID-19 as wearing mask, social distancing, and washing hands. Otherwise it was difficult to develop these habits.
- viii. Knowledge of Four Noble Truth and law of impermanence had strengthen to cope with uncertainties in life.
- ix. Even the COVID-19 patients in isolation and other chronic patients can listen the sessions which had helped them in gaining will-power to fight against diseases.

6.1.2. Instructor's experience

Normally, Monks and Nun's has to spend majority of hours in a day on monastic duties as attending invitation for lunch offering, giving sermons to the laypeople, attending religious meetings and programs. These activities are hampering their time for self-study and meditation. Lockdown has given them opportunity for further study of *Pali* literature and mediation.

- i. As participants were eager to learn new aspects of *Tipitaka* reading habit of instructors is developed on preparation for online classes. These circumstances were very significant for the young Monks and Nuns.
- ii. The participants showing willingness to learn in depth are their encouragement for their better performances.
- iii. It is the platforms for young monks and nuns in practicing deliver of sermons.

- iv. They became habitual with virtual classes.

6.2 Significances and drawbacks of online learning

Significances

- i. Zoom Apps, You Tubes and Messenger Lives has become a medium in propagation of Buddhism. From a single sermon large mass of participants are benefited far and wide.
- ii. In normal days only middle aged or aged devotees visited Monasteries as others were busy with occupations or studies. The provision of online classes is advantageous in a way that a single sermon are listened by the whole family. Even the youngsters who previously ignored religious beliefs were influenced. They understood practical aspects of Buddhism. They became familiar that Buddha's Teaching is not just an orthodox but understood it as 'Art of living'.
- iii. More of the participant showed willingness to join for *Parriyatti* exam.
- iv. Online session are efficient and convenient as there is no wastage of time and travel expenses for both instructors and participants.
- v. It has healed participant's addiction in mobile games or Tiktok videos.

Drawbacks

- i. There is interruption in the sessions when Wi-Fi signal is not strong.
- ii. The Facebook Live do not has provision of direct interaction. Facility of Zoom App is expensive.
- iii. Aged participants cannot access the new technology independently.

The way forward

Almost all the participants are satisfied with this online learning of the Buddha's teachings. They want its continuity even after the coronavirus pandemic is over. However, the instructors have shown mixed reactions. Though virtual sessions has many beneficial aspects, when situations become normal they suggested physical presence is also essential for strengthening pure faith in Buddha and His Teaching.

7. Conclusion

Experts has stated spirituality can be one of the element in easing stress related problems provoked by COVID -19 but is receiving less attention. Medical science and religion/ spirituality should go hand in hand for the solutions of unpredictable difficulties caused by pandemic. In this scenario, contribution of *Theravada* Monasteries and Institutions in delivering online sermons to the distressed devotees in the Kathmandu Valley is appreciable.

Participants are benefitted by this endeavor tremendously. Professional and social life had always kept them in distant from learning valuable wisdom described in *Pali* literature. Lockdown has become a blessing for them to manage time to learn in- depth. Almost twenty online learning sessions operating in Kathmandu Valley are addressing various practical and interesting aspects of Buddha's Teaching. Most of these Teachings are difficult to acknowledge in the absence of well learnt instructors. Hence, the lockdowns due to pandemic has become an opportunity to dig out the gem of knowledge buried within *Tipitaka*. Buddha's Teachings are not simply orthodox belief but verified with personal experiences of mindfulness and meditation. It works as stress management tool. These online sessions has made participants aware of benefit of *Vipassana* meditation through virtual guidance. Its techniques of observing 'one's own thoughts and emotions as they are, without judging or dwelling on them' is one of the best measures for relaxation and inner peace.

Further, online learning has provided suitable opportunity in propagation of Buddha's teaching. The benefit of its practicality is not limited to small population of *Newar* Buddhist community in Kathmandu Valley but has expanded beyond the country.

This research has suggested tradition of learning and teaching process of *Pali Tipitaka* should be continued as it provide valuable knowledge applicable to various stages of life. In addition children and youth should also be encouraged for future preservation. This paper has focused on the relevancy of Buddha's teaching in stress management briefly. This approach should be elaborated in future studies. Stress management concepts of other sects of Buddhism as Mahayana and Vajrayana should also be studied.

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