The present study seeks to learn the nature of attitude of the monks and nuns as well as the laypersons towards regeneration and conservation of plants, trees and forest and their role in it in a particular area of Thailand. It wants to examine two situations: First the one in which the attitude and role of the monks are primarily focused upon; second, the situation where the attitude and role of the laypersons are emphasized primarily. In order to meet the first purpose, the researcher focused on a monastery, viz., Watpa Satuek Monastery, that is located in Nikhom sub-district of Satuek district of Buriram province.

Lahokkrasang Forest Community in Khuokok sub-district, Prachonchai district in the same province of Buriram is chosen for studying the attitude and role of the laypersons in particular. Both the locales are part of Buriram province. Buriram province belongs to Isan or Northeastern part of Thailand. Isan was earlier known for its very dense forest but stood at a later point of time nearly denuded of its once existing thick green cover. Attempts at afforestation of the area as well as
conservation of forest are being made in recent times. Both the monk order and the laypeople, it is claimed in different quarters, participate in these attempts. The study has made a humble effort to examine the nature and consequence of this participation.

To take up the first thing first, why the study concentrates on Watpa Satuek Monastery has been explained below in a greater detail. Before presenting the data obtained from an observation of what is going on in the monastery in relation to regeneration and protection of forest, one may consider in brief outline the socio-economic conditions of Nikhom sub-district of Buriram province, where Watpa Satuek Monastery is located. But, in order to better appreciate the conditions obtaining in Nikhom sub-district, one may like to examine the larger context of Buriram province which contains the district of Satuek, of which Nikhom is a sub-district. One may examine some of the relevant data in the records furnished by the National Statistical Office of Thailand to the situation prevailing in Buriram. One may take up for consideration the data presented in Table 10.

According to Table 10 which presents statistics of land or different types of (according to the modes of their use) in Buriram province, the measure of total land in Buriram has remained from 2002 to 2011 constant, i.e., 6,451,178 rai. But, one comes to notice fluctuations in the size of forest land through the years. Thus, in 2002 and 2003, forest land stood at 563,750 rai. It increased to 594,875 rai in 2004. But there had been a sharp decline in the relevant figure in 2005. The figure declined further in 2006. There was no farther decline in the figure in 2007. But, a sharp rise in the figure is noticed in 2008. That is, the figure relating to
forest land rose from 50,688 rai in 2007 to 602,088 rai in 2008. The figure remained constant through 2010 and 2011. Maybe, it is an indicator of the success of the people of Buriram in regenerating and protecting forest in recent times. Though, one should admit that in an area which was earlier covered extremely with dense forest, the forest land today is only 9.33 percent of the total available land.

A farther perusal of data in Table 10 shows that the largest portion, i.e. 72.5%, of land in Buriram is claimed by farmland. Only 18% of total land in Buriram is non-agricultural land. 78.63% of total farm land is under paddy cultivation; the rest of farm land falls under culture of orchards, waste land, etc.

From this one may infer that the expansion of agriculture might have been an important factor causing depletion of once-existing dense forest in Buriram. Till today agriculture is the mainstay of the residents of Buriram. The small quantity (i.e., only 18% of total land) of non-agricultural land is a pointer to the fact that Buriram probably offers very little opportunities to the people of Buriram for earning their livelihood from non-agricultural occupations. The economic condition of the people is not, therefore, good. What is true of Buriram seems to be true of Nikhom sub-district as well.

Table 11 provides information regarding rice cultivation in Buriram province. Analysis of the data presented in Table 11 buttresses the fact of predominance of rice cultivation in Buriram. Nikhom sub-district also shows the predominance of agriculture, more specially, rice-cultivation, in the pattern of economic activities of Nikhom sub-district.
An idea of the nature and size of the population in Buriram may be formed from a perusal of the data provided in Table 12. Data in Table 12 shows the data sub-district regarding the size and nature of population in Buriram has been increasing, though the rate of increase is not rapid. They also show that the male-female ratio is not adverse for the females though the number of females is slightly higher than that of males. The picture of sex-ratio is more or less the same in Nikhom sub-district, though the number of males is slightly larger than that of females in Nikhom.

As to the economic condition of the people of Buriram, it is poorer in comparison with what is known about Thailand as a whole. Table 13 provides the necessary data.
Table 10

Statistics of land, Buriram province: 2002-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tape of Land</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest land</td>
<td>563,750</td>
<td>563,750</td>
<td>594,875</td>
<td>526,863</td>
<td>506,881</td>
<td>506,881</td>
<td>602,088</td>
<td>602,088</td>
<td>602,088</td>
<td>602,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm holding land</td>
<td>4,655,712</td>
<td>4,640,973</td>
<td>4,645,208</td>
<td>4,647,750</td>
<td>4,649,435</td>
<td>4,659,164</td>
<td>4,669,357</td>
<td>4,661,438</td>
<td>4,682,457</td>
<td>4,680,759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under field crop</td>
<td>574,640</td>
<td>560,490</td>
<td>558,284</td>
<td>556,684</td>
<td>559,476</td>
<td>561,223</td>
<td>560,254</td>
<td>559,178</td>
<td>562,975</td>
<td>562,693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under field crop</td>
<td>168,287</td>
<td>165,943</td>
<td>166,574</td>
<td>170,050</td>
<td>172,709</td>
<td>174,950</td>
<td>184,414</td>
<td>186,659</td>
<td>187,739</td>
<td>187,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under vegetables and ornamental</td>
<td>26,344</td>
<td>26,311</td>
<td>26,301</td>
<td>26,311</td>
<td>26,255</td>
<td>26,366</td>
<td>26,616</td>
<td>26,397</td>
<td>26,573</td>
<td>26,308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasture land</td>
<td>13,760</td>
<td>13,743</td>
<td>13,733</td>
<td>13,743</td>
<td>13,714</td>
<td>13,771</td>
<td>13,902</td>
<td>13,787</td>
<td>13,880</td>
<td>13,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous land</td>
<td>60,307</td>
<td>60,231</td>
<td>60,208</td>
<td>60,231</td>
<td>60,104</td>
<td>60,357</td>
<td>60,929</td>
<td>60,428</td>
<td>60,598</td>
<td>60,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non agricultural area</td>
<td>1,231,716</td>
<td>1,246,455</td>
<td>1,211,095</td>
<td>1,276,565</td>
<td>1,294,862</td>
<td>1,285,133</td>
<td>1,179,733</td>
<td>1,187,652</td>
<td>1,166,633</td>
<td>1,168,331</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of Agricultural Economics, Ministry of Agriculture and cooperatives
Complied by: Statistical forecasting Bureau, National Statistical Office
### Table 11

Statistic of rice cultivation, Buriram province: 2001-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planted area (Rai)</td>
<td>2,715,917</td>
<td>2,666,300</td>
<td>2,651,826</td>
<td>2,756,845</td>
<td>2,753,342</td>
<td>2,757,691</td>
<td>2,761,773</td>
<td>2,782,553</td>
<td>2,809,475</td>
<td>3,223,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvested area (Rai)</td>
<td>2,603,364</td>
<td>2,501,603</td>
<td>2,492,900</td>
<td>2,514,027</td>
<td>2,586,679</td>
<td>2,595,874</td>
<td>2,606,557</td>
<td>2,608,480</td>
<td>2,699,775</td>
<td>2,837,719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production (Tons)</td>
<td>807,534</td>
<td>829,632</td>
<td>836,495</td>
<td>834,866</td>
<td>903,404</td>
<td>893,599</td>
<td>884,282</td>
<td>890,456</td>
<td>909,202</td>
<td>1,185,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average yield per rai (kg.)</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Office of Agricultural Economics, Ministry of Agriculture and cooperatives

**Complied by:** Statistical forecasting Bureau, National Statistical Office
Table 12
Population from registration record by sex and area, Buriram province: 2002-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex and area</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,545,779</td>
<td>1,554,009</td>
<td>1,524,261</td>
<td>1,531,430</td>
<td>1,536,722</td>
<td>1,536,070</td>
<td>1,541,650</td>
<td>1,546,784</td>
<td>1,553,765</td>
<td>1,559,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>772,168</td>
<td>776,038</td>
<td>760,794</td>
<td>764,457</td>
<td>767,131</td>
<td>766,889</td>
<td>769,670</td>
<td>772,377</td>
<td>775,766</td>
<td>778,0599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>773,611</td>
<td>777,971</td>
<td>763,467</td>
<td>766,973</td>
<td>769,591</td>
<td>769,181</td>
<td>771,980</td>
<td>774,407</td>
<td>777,999</td>
<td>781,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal area</td>
<td>195,387</td>
<td>195,016</td>
<td>197,323</td>
<td>197,525</td>
<td>213,684</td>
<td>213,352</td>
<td>213,701</td>
<td>33,798</td>
<td>335,385</td>
<td>336,0047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>95,882</td>
<td>95,611</td>
<td>96,787</td>
<td>96,923</td>
<td>105,001</td>
<td>104,727</td>
<td>104,828</td>
<td>164,864</td>
<td>165,499</td>
<td>165,778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>99,505</td>
<td>99,405</td>
<td>100,536</td>
<td>100,602</td>
<td>108,683</td>
<td>108,625</td>
<td>108,873</td>
<td>168,934</td>
<td>169,886</td>
<td>170,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-municipal area</td>
<td>1,350,392</td>
<td>1,358,993</td>
<td>1,326,938</td>
<td>1,333,905</td>
<td>1,323,038</td>
<td>1,322,718</td>
<td>1,327,949</td>
<td>1,212,986</td>
<td>1,218,380</td>
<td>1,223,038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>676,286</td>
<td>676,427</td>
<td>664,007</td>
<td>667,534</td>
<td>662,130</td>
<td>662,162</td>
<td>664,842</td>
<td>607,513</td>
<td>610,267</td>
<td>612,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>674,106</td>
<td>678,106</td>
<td>662,931</td>
<td>666,371</td>
<td>660,908</td>
<td>660,556</td>
<td>663,107</td>
<td>605,473</td>
<td>608,113</td>
<td>610,757</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior
Complied by: Statistical forecasting Bureau, National Statistical Office
Table 13

Average monthly income per household: 1994-2011 in terms of Baht

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole Kingdom</td>
<td>8,262</td>
<td>10,799</td>
<td>12,492</td>
<td>12,150</td>
<td>13,736</td>
<td>14,963</td>
<td>17,787</td>
<td>18,660</td>
<td>20,904</td>
<td>23,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern Region</td>
<td>5,599</td>
<td>7,388</td>
<td>8,546</td>
<td>7,765</td>
<td>9,279</td>
<td>10,139</td>
<td>11,815</td>
<td>12,995</td>
<td>15,358</td>
<td>18,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buriram</td>
<td>4,392</td>
<td>6,446</td>
<td>8,365</td>
<td>8,137</td>
<td>7,861</td>
<td>8,632</td>
<td>9,698</td>
<td>10,263</td>
<td>13,734</td>
<td>17,316</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Household Socio-Economic Survey, National Statistic Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology
Complied by: Statistical forecasting Bureau, National Statistical Office

It is clearly revealed that income earned by the residents of Buriram computed in terms of the earnings of a household per month is poorer not only than base on an average what is estimated to be the national average to be but the average (of earning of households) that holds good of Northeastern region or Isan of Thailand. The figure related to Isan is poorer than the figure related to Thailand as a whole. The figure related to Buriram is lower than even the figure which is related to Northeastern region as a whole. Thus, the economic condition of the people of Buriram is poor indeed. Since Nikhom is a part of Buriram and does not have a noteworthy record of industrial production, what is true of Buriram holds generally true of Nikhom.

Nikhom sub-district is comprised of 15 villages. The population of the sub-district is, according to census records available in 2010, 9470. Of
them 4797 persons were males, and 4673 persons were females. The number of women in the sub-district is less by 124 than that of men.

The number of households was 2,237. Thus, the size of households was, on an average, not large.

Table 14 may give some idea of the limited varieties of occupations pursued by the residents of Nikhom sub-district.

Table 14

Occupations of the residents of Nikhom sub-district (2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle farming and poultry keeping</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job in shop and small factories</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service holder</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report of Nikhom- sub district Administration Office

80% of the population in Nikhom sub-district are found to be engaged in agriculture and allied occupations. 5% of the population earn their livelihood from raising and rearing of cattle and poultry-keeping. Both of the groups which are engaged in cattle farming and poultry keeping practice their trade with an eye on the market. 10% of the population are employees in local shops and in shops and small factories in the nearby township of Satuek district. Only a microscopic minority, i.e., 5% of the population of Nikhom sub-district is found to be service-holders on a regular basis.
The very high incidence of people engaged in agriculture may be considered a probable factor explaining the fact of depletion of once-existing forests. Expansion of agricultural land might have told upon the health of the forest. The absence of opportunities for alternative employment has made people extremely dependent on activities related to farming. And, increasing pressure on land might be considered, as the researcher gathered from a number of respondents, a factor for relative neglect of the forests and their gradual decay. Heavy dependence of the people of Nikhom sub-district on agriculture may be due to the absence of supply of finance for developing any sort of non-agricultural enterprise. Though a bank is there in Satuek township which is 3 kms away from Nikhom sub-district, it would not advance loan to any villager without collateral. But, the common people living in the sub-district lack collateral.

One may turn attention to Watpa Satuek Monastery. Watpa Satuek Monastery has a very large area which provides the space for the huts for the monks, the nuns, and the lay people—male or female, who may visit the monastery from time to time as well as for the structures of various service centres. Since it is a wat (monastery) — pa (forest), Watpa Satuek Monastery has a large forest to protect and manage. The forest provides the space required for meditation (cf. Appendix 6).

Watpa Satuek Monastery has got two portions: one portion is meant for the monks and male lay visitors and the other portion is earmarked for the nuns and female lay persons. The first portion may be described as monks’ domain. If anybody enters the monastery through its main entrance, he would find that to his left lies the site for the huts for
the abbot and other monks, the big chanting hall, the hall used for performing the rites related to the deceased—monks/nuns as well as laypeople from the vicinity—before the cremation of their bodies, the tea/coffee centre, the structure of the centre where herbal treatment is offered to the patients. It is separated by a metalled road from the portion of the monastery, which lies to the right of the visitor (who faces the main entrance of the monastery). The latter portion is comprised of two segments—one at the front portion of the monastery, which may be called the older segment for the females, and the other at the end or back portion of it which may be described as the new segment for the females. Earlier, i.e., before 2003, both the nuns of the monastery and the female lay visitors to it stayed in the old segment, i.e., the segment in the front portion of the monastery which was then the only segment for females in the monastery and was known as the (only) nuns’ side. The entire monastery was then (i.e., before 1998) encircled by a wall of concrete to prevent the intrusion by outsiders into the forest of the monastery.

In 1998, farther land (of about 4 acres) was collected from the people in the vicinity and the area of green cover of the monastery was farther expanded. Since then this extended portion has been utilized for growing trees and plants and constructing the huts and a (smaller) chanting hall for the nuns. The nuns of the monastery have come to reside in this spatial segment for their living and meditation. The huts which were constructed for them in the older segment in the front portion of the nuns’ side have been utilized for providing temporary accommodation to the female lay visitors.
The newer segment at the back portion of the monastery lies outside the wall of concrete of the monastery. It is marked off from the walled and older portion of the monastery by a narrow lane of asphalt running through the series of dense trees. This newer segment has a wall of concrete in its front side. This wall provides the gate for entrance into it. And, this segment with its huts for the nuns and female visitors and the newly created forest is surrounded by barbed wires supported by pillars of concrete on all the sides except the front side. Anybody who wants to come to the 'newer' segment for the females—nuns and female persons—will have to secure the permission of the abbot and enter through the main entrance of the monastery, come out of it through the gate for exit lying at the back portion of the wall, cross the narrow road dividing the older part from the newer part, and then enter into the newer segment of the nuns' area through the gate in front portion of it.

One has to come out of the nuns’ portion through the same gate. No person, monk or layman or laywoman, can go and talk to the nuns without the prior permission from the abbot and save in presence of a third person.

The larger part of the forest of the monastery falls within the area of the monks. The nuns have to look after a much smaller part of the forest of the monastery. There is a kind of segregation of the inmates of the monastery on the basis of gender. It imposes restriction on the conduct of both the monks and the nuns. But, this discipline may appear to some as an indicator of asymmetry in power between the two genders, males enjoying relatively more power than the females. Though, the nuns and female lay persons visiting the monastery did not complain of it.
At the main entrance of the monastery, rather 5 meters away from the main entrance on its right side from the viewers’ point), there stand three huge figures of elephants. They are made of brick and mortar of sand and cement. They are painted in appropriate colours. As if, the elephants are the gatekeepers and guards of the forest of the monastery. The story of an apparently incredible event is associated with the figures of the elephants. It is depicted in course of presentation below of the report of the case study of the abbot of Watpa Satuek Monastery, viz., Luangpoh Somporn.

The monastery has got one kitchen near the dining hall (i.e., the hall where meal is taken—in case of the monastery. Meal is taken once a day and in daytime only) on the monks’ side. It is managed mainly by the nuns. The monks and the nuns take food separately. While the monks and other males (laypersons) take food in the dining hall, the nuns and other females will take food in the extended portion of the kitchen. The nuns will prepare the food for all. Whatever is collected by the monks is given to the nuns who then prepare the food out of it. The nuns oftentimes add more of vegetables and other edible items to what is given by the monks in order to give the monks and all others an adequate feed.

The chanting hall is multipurpose. A chanting hall is used not only for regular chanting of prayers but also for, on special occasions, holding seminars and workshops as well as providing shelter for night to the visitors in case the number of visitors becomes large. The chanting hall on the nuns’ side caters to the needs of the females only. The dining hall is used only for the purpose of serving and taking the meal served during daytime only, once a day. There is, of course, one small hall where
afternoon- or evening- tea or- coffee is served, if it is needed. The hall is furnished with the arrangement for boiling water and for storage of soft drinks. Monks are found working here and only monks or other males (visitors, etc) take tea or other kinds of drink here. In case the females need tea or coffee or any kind of soft drink from here, the monks will serve them the required staff in the hut meant for visitors. The nuns have a separate arrangement for tea/coffee in their own segment.

There is a hall on the monks’ side of the monastery to perform rituals for a deceased person, monk or nun before his/her cremation. The crematorium of the monastery is open not only for the cremation of the monks and nuns but also for the cremation of the dead bodies of the lay persons, male or female.

Watpa Satuek Monastery has got two big tanks and three tanks of a smaller size from which water is provided to the plants and young trees in the monastery area. Electrically operated pumps of very large size are used for the purpose and pipe lines have been laid for distribution of water to the plants and trees in the monastery forest.

There is a small unit in the monastery for purification of water and for bottling it for sale in the market. The bottler is a small group of villagers who hail from the surrounding villages. The group is supported by the monastery so that it becomes financially self-reliant. The bottler supplies, however, purified water to the monastery free of cost. The unit is situated in the part of the monastery, which falls on the monks’ side. The bottler also has built a structure of concrete with a tinshed for the monastery wherein herbal treatment is offered to the patients who come mainly from the villages around the monastery. It provides steam bath
(with the help of water boiled with herbal medicine) to the persons who come to the monastery for treatment of ailment or diseases. The furnace where the fire is made for boiling water to produce steam is housed in a structure adjacent to the room where the patients take steam-bath. The fuel for the furnace comes from the wood collected from the monastery forest. The herbal centre has endeared the monastery to the lay people and, it is claimed, also plays an important role in arousing consciousness of the people of the need for protection of herbs and plants and trees.

The monastery has 22 huts for the monks living in the monastery. Some of them remained vacant at the time of the interview of the monks by the researcher. 12 huts were earmarked for the nuns and lay women and these were in a part of the monastery which was separated by a small lane from the area of the monks.

Before proceeding to present the findings of case studies, the researcher should give some more information about the background of these studies, in addition to what has been mentioned earlier, i.e., in Chapter One.

Of the two sites where the fieldwork for the present study was carried out, Satuek is to be noted for the location of Watpa Satuek Monastery or Watpa Satuek Pattana Monastery within its ambit. In this monastery a group of the monks have been working for protection and regeneration of trees and plants. 15 monks out of 17 monks who are inmates of the monastery have been interviewed. Each of the monks was interviewed over a long duration. Sometimes a monk was interviewed for two or three hours at a stretch and in some cases a monk was interviewed for a second time. The nature of the interview was more of an informal
nature so that the interviewee should feel free to narrate his/her experiences and ideas and views in clear and full detail with a degree of spontaneity. Repeat interview of a respondent was made in order to resolve the contradiction, if any, that might be discerned in the statement made by him/her during the first interview. Long interviews of the monks were, as it has been repeatedly pointed out, accompanied by observation of the daily round of activities of the monks. This observation gave rise to several questions in the mind of the observer. Repeat interviews helped the task of finding answers to these queries as well.

The daily routine of monastic life is as follows:

03.00 am: Waking up
03.30 am: Chanting
04.00 am: Listening to Dhamma and Meditation
05.00 am: Cleaning of the Hall and cleaning the area within the boundary of the monastery
05.30 am: Taking the arm bowl (for the purpose of begging food)
07.30 am: Offering blessing to lay people and taking food
08.30 am: Practice of meditation
11.30 am: Relaxing
14.30 pm: Drinking water, juice, coffee, etc.
15.00 pm: Cleaning of the monastery area
16.00 pm: Taking bath
17.00 pm: Chanting and meditation
19.00 pm: Practice of Meditation

21.00 pm: Taking rest at the end of a day.

The researcher observed that the monks of the monastery scrupulously followed the routine, and he himself followed the routine during his stay in the monastery.

Interview of each respondent along with observation of their daily activities within the monastery and the researcher's interaction with them during his stay in the monastery provided good stuff for case study of the respondents from the category of monks. One gets in this way a relatively complete and detailed picture of the activities and ideas of the monks of the monastery.

The researcher interviewed also lay persons who were relatively closely associated with the activities of the monastery. He followed in their case the same techniques as were applied to the case of monks.

4.1 The Position of Nuns in the Monastery as Reflected in the Layout of Monastery and Its Rules

The researcher applied the same techniques to the case of nuns and female lay persons. There was only one difference. In case of interviewing the nuns or other female within the monastery, he had (a) to prior suck permission for the same from the abbot of the monastery, (b) approach the nuns to the accompaniment of at least another monks and (c) in presence of a third person other than the researcher and the nun.

Like many other Buddhist monasteries in Thailand, Watpa Satuek Monastery also provides shelter to nuns (in Thai = Mae Chi) along with
the monks. Though, a certain kind of discipline is maintained in regulating the conduct of and relation between the monks and the nuns. The monks and the nuns live in separated and quite distinct parts of the monastery. The monks take care of the huts in which they live and their surroundings and the nuns take care of the huts in which they live and also the surrounding area.

A sort of hierarchy of the monks and the nuns in terms of prestige and power becomes visible to the eyes of anybody who may visit the monastery. The office and the big chanting hall belong to monks' side of the monastery. The main entrance is situated on the monks' side. Lay people who may come to the monastery for the purpose of learning Dhamma and related matters or subjects will enter into the monastery through this entrance. Nobody, a monk or a lay person, male or female, can go and talk straight to a nun. They must get the permission from the abbot of the monastery for that. Further, if any male person, a monk or a lay man, wants to have any talk with a nun, he cannot do so without the presence of another monk or nun or a female assistant to a nun. The presence of a third person is here compulsory. Similarly, if a nun or lay female wants to talk to a monk, they will do it in presence of a third person. This sort of gender segregation is resorted to so that nothing untoward happens.

Further, no female can become an abbot of a monastery. What is to be noted here is that the abbot of a Buddhist monastery, as it is in the case of Watpa Satuek Monastery, must be a male.

Gender segregation reflects asymmetry in power when one considers that the front side of the monastery, which houses the abbot and
the monks, is fortified with a well-constructed wall but the back side, where the nuns live, is not. Indeed, the chanting hall, the huts of the abbot and the monks, and a large portion of the forest of the monastery is guarded by high and thick walls. But, the monks’ area is separated from the nuns’ arena by a narrow road. The nun’s area has got a wall of brick and cement in front of it but there is no wall on the other three sides. Obviously the question arises, “Does it not make the forest lying in the area of nuns vulnerable to the mischief-doers?” Both the monks and the nuns informed the researcher that the area of the nuns’ side of the monastery extends over four acres only. The size of the forest there is not large and the nuns living in the monastery and their female assistants who live on that side can keep vigil on what is happening in that forest. There is a wall of brick and mortar on the front side of the nuns’ area. The forest is bounded on other the three sides by barbed wires supported by pillars of concrete. There are seven huts in the nuns’ area. Four nuns live in four huts and two other huts give shelter to two assistants of the nuns. The assistants may on occasions go back to their houses in the villages. Then their huts may remain vacant and may be used by a female who may visit the monastery during their absence. One hut is always available for the female visitors. If more than one female come to the monastery at a time, temporary tents may be erected for their use. They may spend their night also in the chanting hall situated in the area of the nuns. It may be repeated here that foregoing description relates to the newer segment of the nuns’ area. The older segment of the nuns’ area lies within the older structure (existing before 1998 also) and the huts constructed therein for the nuns have been enlarged to provide accommodation to the female laypersons.
The forest on this side, i.e., the nun’s side or, more accurately in the newer segment on the nuns’ side is full of *Yang na* trees. It is regularly taken care of by the nuns and their female assistants. Sometimes, monks may with the permission from the abbot go to that forest on the nuns’ side for helping the process of regeneration and protection of plants and trees there. No monk, however, can visit the nuns’ portion of the monastery singly. The number of monks visiting the nun’s area, no matter what the purpose may be, must be at least two at any point of time.

4.2 Reason behind the Researcher’s Selection of Watpa Satuek Monastery

Before proceeding to present and analyze the material gathered through case studies of the monks, one may find it helpful to know the story behind the selection of the Watpa Satuek monastery. The researcher heard that the Research and Development Institute of Rajpat Buriram University was in a way connected with some kind of research regarding the measures of forest protection in Buriram. Some of the teachers there were directly involved with NGOs which were engaged in the task of protection and regeneration of forest. Indeed, as the researcher went to the Institute, he found that Mr. Chaowalit, Mr. Niran and Mrs. Kanokkun, who were teachers in the Buriram Rajphat University, were directly connected with two NGOs devoted to the task of forest protection in Buriram.

When approached, all of them welcomed the researcher’s idea of fieldwork among the monks as well as the lay people to ascertain their
views on the problems and prospects of forest protection in Buriram. Mr. Chaowalit appeared to be most enthusiastic. It was mainly he who suggested the idea that the researcher should consider the prospect of studying the activities of the monks in Watpa Satuek monastery because the monastery had to its credit a good record of activities in promoting forest protection with their own initiative and with the help of lay people, i.e., villagers residing around the area of the monastery. The monks of the monastery had been trying to arouse the awareness of the laity of the need for planting new trees and plants and protecting the existing ones. By the by, he mentioned the name of a lady who was doing, according to him, a wonderful job in protecting forest in Prakhonchai, about 115 kilometers away from Satuek. Satuek is about 40 kms away from Buriram city where the Rajpat Buriram University is situated.

Mr. Chaowalit observed that a change occurred in recent times in the attitudes of the Buddhist monks in Buriram, rather, in Thailand as whole, regarding the role of monks in forest protection. Just four decades ago the monks looked upon the forest mainly as a place for meditation and for securing peace and calm of mind to get enlightenment and wisdom. This situation prevailed at that time in and around Buriram, more particularly in Satuek. The monks did not then appear to be sensitive enough to the problem of destruction of trees and plants, which resulted from the activities of timber merchants and several other interested parties. They did not seem to be conscious that they too might have an important role in preventing the destruction of plants and trees and in the regeneration of forests. Now a change is evident in the attitude and activities of the monks in the area. And, this change, Mr. Chaowalit claimed, would be clearly discernible in the attitude and activities of the
monks of the Satuek monastery in the field of forest protection. Mr. Chaowalit’s observation seemed to be buttressed by Mr. Udom Srisunan, the Head of the Branch office of the National Buddhist office at Buriram. He confirmed that there had been a change in recent times in the Buddhist monks in the field of protection of forests. On request, he gave the researcher a list of names of Buddhist monasteries situated in Buriram and also a list of name of monks who were doing their work in these monasteries. On farther inquiry by the researcher, he told him the names of, in particular, those monks who were doing good work for protection of forest in Buriram. He specifically mentioned the name of the abbot of Watpa Satuek monastery of Buriram.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Srisunan mentioned incidentally, the name of one lady in Prakhonchhai, 75 kms away from Buriram city, who did remarkable work in forest protection. It may be noted that Mr. Chaowalit of the Buriram Rajaphat University too named the lady as a person with a noteworthy record of work for protection of forest in Buriram.

The name of the lady was mentioned to the researcher also by Mr. Suphob Theakchoho, an officer in Buriram branch of the Royal Forest Department. Mr. Suphob Theakchoho is an expert in the art and science of afforestation and forest protection in general. Naturally, he is expected to have at his fingertips details of the activities carried out in forest protection as well of the persons who are engaged in it. Lahok Krasang Forest Community in Prakhonchhai district did, according to him, some remarkable work in forest protection and one particular lady of the community earned wide recognition for her contribution to the forest
community. He advised the researcher to contact the lady and also other members of the Lahokkrasang forest community. Mr. Suphob Theakcholo informed the researcher of the activities done by the monks and monasteries as well in the field of forest protection. And, he mentioned in course of his discussion the creditable performance of Satuek Pattana Monastery, particularly its abbot, in preventing the destruction of forest and in regenerating forest.

4.3 Case Study of Phrakhru Opasthammayan, the Abbot of Watpa Satuek Monastery

Phrakhru Opasthamayan, the Abbot of Watpa Satuek Monastery is known also as Luangpoh Somporn Kuntawanno. He was born in Nikhom village in Nikhom, a sub-district of Buriram. He was born on 1 April 1946. That is to say, in 2007 when he was interviewed, he was 62 years old (The researcher carried out his interview in Watpa Satuek Monastery for about four month spanning parts of the years, 2007 and 2008). He maintained good health though he wore a pair of spectacles. He had a very fair complexion. His facial expression bore the unmistakable sign of firmness of resolve and simultaneously compassion and kindness. He was soft spoken but unwavering and clear in his assertion and statement. He appeared to have a deep and clear understanding of the principle or Dhamma. The above statements are not to be treated as impressionistic. Because, the abbot commanded veneration from everybody who came contact with him. He seemed to be very agile and active. The researcher found him untiringly working for the improvement of the conditions of the monastery and also for the welfare of the lay people.
Luangpoh Somporn had his ordination into the Buddhist Order in 1984. Prior to that point of time, he was an ordinary farmer working on the farmland of the family he belonged to. Before his ordination into the Buddhist order, Phrakhru Opasthamayan was known as Somporn. Somporn read up to class XII in the formal system of schooling. But, he could not proceed farther in the formal system of education. He started learning “Dhamma” side by side with his work in the farm land. There are three levels of Dhamma teaching. Somporn completed his learning at all the three levels. But, all he learnt was learnt by him through his mother tongue, i.e., Thai. He did not have, he regretted, good knowledge of Pali, though he had to chant sacred syllables or words of Dhamma in Pali. He did not possess good knowledge of English either.

Somporn was initiated or ordained into the Buddhist order by his Master, Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro. Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro was a famous monk who belongs to the line of forest monks (Thammayut sect) in Isan. Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro actively helped the forest protection campaign while he was there in Phanumyoi monastery in Roi Et province, which is not very far from the province of Buriram. Phanumyoi Monastery has 123 branches spread over Isan. Watpa Satuek monastery in Satuek district of Buriram is one of these branches. Master Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro sent Luangpoh Somporn to Satuek Monastery in 1993 to develop it in a proper manner and also to take care of the depleting green cover in Satuek.

The Satuek monastery was then not in a good shape. It started in 1988 only. Its abbot was an aged person and was not keeping good health. Luangpoh Somporn became the second abbot of the monastery. The first abbot grew infirm because of his advanced age and Luangpoh
took over the charge of the monastery from the first and ailing monk. On assuming the charge of the monastery, he devoted himself to the development of the monastery and the surrounding area. The total area of the monastery is 144 rai or 58 acres. Luangpoh must take care of the growth and preservation of trees and plants in the large space of the monastery. He should take care also of 8 other monasteries belonging to the network of Phanumyoi monastery of the Great Master of Meditation, Luandpoo Sri Mahaviro. Luangpoh observed that before his entry into Watpa Satuek monastery, the area in its vicinity was turned into pasture land and part of it was used as crematorium ground. Though, he as a person residing in a village which was not far from the monastery area, knew that the area around the monastery was forty or even thirty years back covered with trees and plants of a great variety. In fact, it was a forest area. Any aged person, the Abbot claimed, would testify to the fact. But, a combination of factors like construction of the highway in the recent past in the adjoining area and many link roads connected with it and piercing the heart of the forests that existed earlier, grant of concessions from the government to the villagers residing in the forest area to graze their cattle on it or to collect wood from the forest, was responsible for the steady decline in the green cover in the area.

Earlier, thirty or forty years back, the population of the area was small. The villagers living in or at the outskirts of the forest led their life with whatever little they could gather from the forest. No large scale damage was then made to the forests in the area. But, because of the government project for construction of roads in or near the area, trees were felled, as if, wantonly. The capitalist enterprises engaged in construction of highways or link roads were granted concession by the
government to clear the area from wood and jungles for construction of roads. The timber merchants too made good use of the situation. Sawmills sprang up. And, they were joined by the common people. They too cut down the trees for making their houses. They even used the timber collected from the forest area for its sale in the market or made charcoal out of the wood thus collected for sale in the market. This was a way for them for making easy and quick money. The villagers were granted, informally, the concession to graze their cattle on the land which had earlier been covered with trees, plants and grasses.

When Luangpho Somporn took over the charge of the monastery one of the chief problems faced by him in protecting the trees and plants in the area of the monastery came from the needy and greedy villagers. The location of the monastery made the trees and plants in its area vulnerable to the activities the lay people in felling or cutting down the trees and plants. The area is surrounded by public land (open land under the control of the government) on one side, by the school building of an institute of technology on another side, and by the villages of Nongbuochaopa, Nahuochang, Nikhom and Rong Riey on the other sides. The residents of these villages often intruded upon the forest area lying under the management of the monastery.

The story of denudation of the area surrounding the monastery continued for several decades. The process brought about a significant change in the way of life of the common people. Earlier it was one of contentment with whatever little was available from nature which seemed to provide the villagers with resources to satisfy their needs but did not yield what was required to satisfy their increasing greed.
The task of the Abbot and other monks of the monastery was to regenerate the plants and trees in the area under the monastery as well as through generation of awareness of the people of the need for growing more and more plants and trees, in the surrounding area. Their second but no less important task was that of protecting the trees and plants of the monastery area against the predatory activities of outsiders.

Hence, Luangpoh Somporn and the other monks in the monastery had, first, to take the step for protecting the plants and trees of the forest falling within its ambit. They first built a wall of bricks around the forest of the monastery to prevent the outsiders from encroaching on the area of the forest under the control of the monastery. It was a huge and difficult task, no doubt. But, it had to be done because of several factors that proved to be inimical to the forest of the monastery. The trees and plants of the forest of the monastery had to be distinguished from those of the adjoining plots of land. Secondly, there were villagers who were interested in growing eucalyptus in the available land and did not hesitate to encroach upon the land of the monastery for the purpose. Thirdly, there were quite a few villagers who were interested in gathering or thieving wood from the ‘monastery-forest’ for turning it into charcoal that would immediately sell in the market.

Once the wall was constructed, the Abbot and his companions cleared the area of Pek grass (Arundinaria pusilla) which was injurious to other plants and trees. Then, new plants and trees were planted in the land of the monastery. Side by side, the ground was cleared of those old trees which lost vitality or which came under the attack of white ants. Watering of the young plants was done regularly. The researcher found the Abbot
watering the plants and young trees at least for one time on every second day of the week. This practice was scrupulously followed by other monks as well in the monastery.

While care was taken of regeneration and preservation of the plants and trees and steps were taken to ensure the growth of herbal plants (the abbot had a good knowledge of the herbs and their use for treatment of ailments and diseases), measures also for protecting, the herbs, plants and trees from their theft by the outsiders were ensured through the construction of the surrounding wall. The arrangement was sought to be fortified through 24 hour long vigilance. This vigilance over the herbs, plants, and trees within the monastery area created a certain kind of stir in the minds of people in the locality around the monastery. In this connection, a story that appeared incredible was told by the Abbot.

If, during day time, the villagers seeking opportunities for sneaking into the forest of the monastery for wood or other jungle products faced resistance from the monks who were inmates of the monastery, they would attempt at thieving wood at night. There too they encountered strict vigilance by the inmates of the monastery. The monks took every care of the young plants growing in the area lying under the control of the monastery. For the villagers the young trees were attractive because charcoal could easily be made out of the branches and logs of the young trees. The villagers, however, faced severe obstruction to their plans and programmes for plundering the young trees and making charcoal out of them. They lost patience with the monks, Exasperated with the strict vigil by the monks over the forest, trees and plants within the monastery area, the villagers came on a rainy day about eleven years ago [i.e.,
around 1996] to teach the monks a lesson by destroying their huts and the young plants and trees. They came riding on three elephants for the purpose. Had the plan succeeded, it would have resulted into a real massacre of the human life and trees and plants in the monastery area.

What happened in reality was, however, a miracle. The elephants did not obey the men who rode on their back. They did not move an inch from the gateway of the monastery to destroy the plants and trees and disturb the human lives within the monastery. Sometimes truth proves to be stranger than fiction and the stubborn refusal of the elephants to cross the gateway and intrude the area covered with trees and plants within the monastery, though incredible, did happen in reality. The villagers got alarmed and returned to the areas they came from. Within a few months from the occurrence of this incident the three elephants died. The local people believe that the elephants sacrificed themselves for the cause of protection of trees and plants within the monastery. They, as if, sacrificed themselves so that the villagers could not use them again for the destructive purpose of injuring the forest within the area of the monastery or the monks. It is difficult to test the validity of the assumption or of the explanation. However, the villagers got frightened. They took the help of the monks in the task of burying the carcasses or bodies of the three elephants. One meets a statue of three elephants together in front of the gate of the monastery. The statue preserves the memory of the dead elephants. The elephants in the statue symbolize, as if, the guards of the forest within the monastery.

However, attempts at thieving wood or forest product from the forest within the monastery, observed Luangpoh Sonporn, continue
through present times. While poverty or poor income of the villagers compels many of them to destroy the trees, it can hardly be denied that quite a few of the villagers are interested in making some extra income by selling a quantity of wood or charcoal in the market. To get these villagers sensitized to the problem of destruction of forest and to the need for protection of trees and plants proves to be a serious challenge today. A continuous campaign for protection of forests is badly needed. But, to carry the task out requires, according to the abbot, very huge sum. The monastery does not enjoy any financial grant or aid from any quarters, government or private, to help such campaign or programme for regeneration of forest and prevention of destruction of plants and trees.

In response to the question, 'How and wherefrom did you get the idea of urgency of forest protection? Luangpoh Somporn observed that he got it from his master Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro in Phanumyoi monastery. Earlier he had not been adequately aware of the danger created through destruction of plants and trees. As a farmer he welcomed the idea of enlargement of the agricultural land in his native village, even at the cost of the plants and trees of the forest. Though, as a farmer, he felt concerned with the steady decrease in rainfall in the area. But he was not aware of the association between destruction of trees and decrease in rainfall. It was his master who helped him appreciate the nature of this association. But what was more important was that Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro was an ardent lover of nature, of plants and trees. Working for regeneration and preservation of the green cover of the earth had a spiritual message for him and he sought to convey this message to all.
Luangpoh Sompora realized the meaning of the message of the master as he gained greater maturity. Luangpoh Sompora observed that his master, Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro, highlighted, in course of his teaching Dhamma, the prime importance of nature, of the trees, in the different stages of life and spiritual journey of Gautama Buddha. The Buddha spent part of his life in the forest, was born under a tree, experienced enlightenment under a tree, taught the principles of Dhamma under a certain tree or trees, and ultimately realized mahaparinirvana under a tree. Thus, Buddhism is Nature and Dhamma is Nature. If people take care of nature, of trees and plants, of forests, they would come to learn Dhamma and work for preserving Buddhism. “I learnt these lessons from my master gradually as I assisted him in his work for planting seedlings, plants and trees and preserving them during my stay with him in Phanumyoi monastery”, observed Luangpoh Somporn. “My master’s dedication and devotion to the task of regeneration and preservation of trees and plants was”, continued Luangpoh Somporn, “evident from his tireless efforts towards the end. Master Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro’s practice was an eloquent expression of his message which helped the spiritual realization of the monks and the lay people who came to him and which had a bearing on our existence in this world.” He took keen interest in regeneration of trees and plants in the area within and around the monastery. And, all of his disciples were imbued with his noble and valuable idea as well as his enthusiasm to realize the idea. The master was never content with what he did for improvement of the natural surrounding at the Phanumyoi monastery only. He sought to extend the ambit of his work for protection of forest. He had a genuine concern over the loss of green cover in Isan and other parts of Thailand. “It was he who
sent me to Satuek' with the task of improving the condition of the plants, trees and forests there”.

The master was interested in forest protection in the areas which were covered by 123 branches of Phanumyoi. “He believed and made us believe that the every act of involvement in forest protection would be in tune with Dhamma.”

“It is from my master, Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro”, observed Luangpoh Somporn “that I learnt the idea and notion of Pratityasamutpāda (Sanskrit) or Paticcasamuppāda (Pali) of Buddhist metaphysics to explain the interdependence of Dhamma, monks and the forest. It suggests that phenomena arise together in a mutually interdependent web of cause and effect. Monks’ attainment of enlightenment through Dhamma practice requires a congenial milieu which is provided by the forest. “It is the principle of Dhamma which teaches us how to know our ‘self’ and the surrounding like the forest with its trees, plants and creatures. Everything is separate and impermanent but as we live our life we must appreciate how everything is dependent on every other thing and forest sensitizes us to this principle of interdependence of all things and beings and reminds us of our duty to care of all around us.” It is interesting to note a kind of similarity in this understanding of the relationship of man and nature and that of Beck who observes, in one context, “Being an individual does not exclude caring about others... A new ethics will establish a sense of ‘we’ that is like a cooperative or altruistic individualism. Thinking of oneself and living for others at the same time, once considered a contradiction in terms, is
revealed as an internal, substantive connection” (cited in Bhadra 2007: 168; emphasis added by Bhadra).

Luangpoh Somporn further observed, “The master had faith in the efficacy of persuasion in making people accept the fact of urgency of protection of plants and trees. Through his Dhamma teaching he sought to impress upon the people the idea of the value of trees and plants in human life. He did not hesitate to secure help from any quarters for the accomplishment of the task of protection of trees and plants or, one may say, the green cover of the earth. Thus, when he was challenged by the mafia in the rank of the timber merchants or of those who helped them, he approached the local office of the Royal Forest Department for help in meeting the challenge. The Department was persuaded by the master so that it should extend the help. The master observed that patience and persuasion were the key features of the method of any true Buddhist. Through our close and long association with the master, we, his disciples, too come to appreciate the value of the method suggested by and followed.”

Luangpoh Somporn submitted that he too always took to the method of gradually making people aware of the need for protection of plants and trees within the watpa Satuek monastery. “I try to highlight the importance of growing plants and trees and preserving them in my discourses on Dhamma with the fellow monks as well as with the lay people as I meet them every morning and, particularly, in my meetings with them on punnima (full moon) days.”

The abbot informed the researcher that he took special care in growing seedlings from seeds of different plants and trees, particularly of
Yang na (*Dipterocarpus alatus*) trees. (See Plants) The soil of Satuek is sandy which does not favour the growth of all types of trees. Yang na (*Dipterocarpus alatus*) trees are suited for this land. The seedlings and young plants of Yang na (*Dipterocarpus alatus*) do not take much time for their growth in this land. Though, the Yang na trees do not suck as much water from the earth as the Eucalyptus trees do. Eucalyptus grows faster than Yang na. But, Eucalyptus trees draw a huge amount water from the soil and leave it dry. As a result other trees cannot grow well in that soil. Of course, the abbot said, he and his fellow monks in the monastery would try to grow and or collect the seedlings or plants of other varieties as well such as Makha mong (*Afzelia xylocarpa*), Pradu (*Pterocapus macrocarpus*), Rang (*Shorea siamensis*), Teng (*Shorea obtuse*), Makha tae (*Sindora siamensis*), Dang (*Xyilia xylocarpa*) though their first preference was for Yang na. The abbot and his fellow monks tried to grow and nurture these seedlings and plants from the beginning of a new year. They plant these seedlings or young plants in the forest of the monastery and also in the surrounding areas. In the latter case the abbot and his fellow monks would take the help of the villagers. Indeed, they distribute hundreds of these plants free of cost among the villagers to plant and nurture them in their own gardens or fields and sides of village lanes during the rainy season. According to the statement made by the abbot, the monastery grows nearly 30,000 plants every year for their distribution among the villagers. It has earlier been said that the researcher noticed the great amount of time spent and care taken by the abbot in growing and nurturing the seedlings by watering them every day without failure. Also, he found an equal measure of interest among the fellow-monks in Watpa Satuek Monastery in this kind of work. The abbot
reported that a large plot of land within the area of the monastery remains earmarked for growing herbs or herbal plants of different varieties. Those herbal plants which have proved efficacy in curing the ailments of the Thai people, particularly people of the locality, are grown in this plot of land.

Much time and effort and care have to be taken for their nurture and growth and many of them do not grow abundantly or without proper nurturing. Hence, these plants are not as freely distributed among the villagers as is done in case of Yang na (*Dipterocarpus alatus*) and like plants. Though, the villagers benefit from them in the form of herbal medicine which is given free of cost to them by the monastery. One fact should again be noted here. In this whole endeavour by the abbot and his fellow monks for developing and growing the seedlings, they would take the help of the lay people of the surrounding villages. The Theravada Buddhists, the order which the abbot belonged to, refrain from digging the earth lest this digging of the earth may kill worms and insects lying hidden in the soil. The monks adhere to this principle of non-injury even to the smallest insect and, therefore, avoid digging of the soil. They, therefore, must take the help of the villagers who are Buddhists but remain outside the monastic order, in preparing the seedbed and the nursery and in planting plants or trees in the forest within the monastery area or outside it. Similarly, the monks themselves will not cut down the trees even when it is necessary to do that for maintaining the health of the forest. It is the villagers who will do this work. The villagers in lieu of their work get the herbs or herbal medicine or twigs and branches of trees and other forest product free of cost. Indeed, the villagers consider the work to be a kind of service to the monastery.
The abbot reported that because of the keen interest of the villagers in the activities of the monastery in growing and nurturing of plants and trees and in the practice of Dhamma, the monastery has developed into a well-known centre for both forest protection and practice of Dhamma. Many villagers from the neighboring districts also visit the monastery and discuss with the abbot and other monks in the monastery the dos and don’ts of forest protection and also the principles of Dhamma. The monastery is run with the resources flowing from voluntary donation by the lay people and believers. It is a pointer to the popularity of monastery and its activities. The monastery does not get any financial assistance from the Royal Forest Department of Thailand or the National Buddhist Office or organization either for forest protection or for teaching of Dhamma.

“The schools in Satuek”, observed the abbot, “occasionally approach me for discourses on Dhamma and also on the importance of a protection of plants and trees. And, I readily accept such invitations. I find many of the boys and girls showing interest in protection of plants and trees in their respective neighbourhoods.”

The abbot pointed out that many of the students come to the monastery to have a direct experience of the practice of Dhamma and also the ways of how to grow, nurture and protect the plants and trees. Not only that but schools from across other districts (which were not visited by him) sent their students to the monastery for the purpose. Of course, visits to the monastery by the students of schools of the district of Satuek were more frequent then the visits by the students of schools of other districts. Generally the duration of the visit was 10 to 12 hours in a day.
"But, in some cases, the high schools send their student for a three-day-long (from Friday to Sunday) visit to the monastery. The avid interest displayed by the young and tender minds in the practice of Dhamma and growth and preservation of plant life attracts the attention of everybody. To discuss with them the rudiments of Dhamma or the principles of nurturing plants is a matter of pure delight." The monastery and the concerned school jointly work for the board of the school boys and school girls though the lodging for them is provided by the monastery in the big chanting hall of the monastery.

Many school children come to the monastery on special days like Maga puja day (March), Visakha day (May), Asarha puja day (July) when the lay people from different parts of the district or across the district also come to visit the monastery to observe the practice of Dhamma and join such practices. These are special occasions also for understanding and practicing the art of growing and nurturing plants and trees and discussing its importance. For example, *Wan khao Barnsa* or beginning of the rainy season in the month of July every year, or the

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1 The Rainy Season Retreat of three months, or Buddhist Lent, and the ceremonies connected therewith, have an important place in the religious life of the people and of the Bhikkhus whom they support. This period is sometimes referred to as "Buddhist Lent." The Thai use two terms for it, either *Vassa*, or *Barnsa* (Pansa), both meaning "rain, season of rain, "or "year." The custom of spending the rainy season in a temple or fixed abode was practiced by monks and wandering ascetics in India long before the time of Buddha. "Shall the ascetics who belong to the Tiitthiya schools, whose doctrine is ill-preached, retire during the rainy season...and yet the Sakyaputtiya Samanas go on their travels alike during winter, summer and the rainy season, crushing the green herbs, hurting vegetable life and destroying the life of many small thing?"...These bhikkus told this thing to the Blessed One. The Blessed One...addressed the bhikkus, "I prescribe, O bhikkus, that you enter upon Vassa." Cited from Max Mueller, *Sacred Books of the East*, Mahavagga III. 1, 1, Vol.13, p. 29B.) From considerations of health and comfort there is much to recommend this custom. Both India and Thailand are subject to monsoon winds bearing torrential rains which make travel difficult in regions where there are swamps and swollen streams and no adequate roads. During the rains the monks take up residence in a specific monastery and use period for study and for teaching those who have chosen to enter the priesthood for *Vassa. *Wan khao Barnsa* or the beginning of Buddhist Lent of Rainy Season Retreat is a
king’s birthday or the Queen’s birthday provides the special occasions when the idea as well as the art of protection of plants and trees, forest, is reiterated with due solemnity and resolve. A huge number of seedlings and plants are distributed among the people who visit the monastery. The abbot made a special mention of the fact that every year on these days, particularly on the day of Wan Khao Barnsa, the monastery takes an elaborate programme to celebrate the occasion. On the day of Khao Barnsa the monks and the villagers join together to celebrate the occasion of planting the seedlings or young plants in the ground of the monastery and also in the ground of the surrounding villagers. Also, the monks from all the other seven branches of the chain of monasteries, with which the abbot and Watpa Satuek Monastery are connected, gather in Watpa Satuek Monastery on this day to celebrate the occasion of planting the trees with appropriate devotion and dignity. After the celebration of the occasion when seedlings and plants are planted in the ground or the monastery and numerous plants are distributed among the villagers around the Watpa Satuek Monastery, the abbot himself goes to a few other monasteries belonging to the chain encompassing his monastery to ceremonially plant the seedlings or young plants in the ground of those monasteries. He goes to those places by car. In some cases, the monks from other monasteries carry along with them the plants from Watpa Satuek Monastery for planting them in the ground of their respective monasteries. The entire event takes, the abbot pointed out, the form the character of an annual and important ritual. It helps the spread of the message of the need for regeneration of trees and forest. Because of its national holyday. In 1959 this came on July 21; in 1960 it came on July 9, being the day after full moon of eighth month, July. (Kenneth E. Wells. 1975. *Thai Buddhism: Rites and Activities*, pp. 99-100).
assuming the character of a religious ritual, this annual event, makes people specially conscious of the need for reproduction and protection of plants and trees. The message of a kind of connection between Buddhist ritual and plant protection is conveyed thereby.

Sometimes, the monastery gives, as the abbot mentions, to the people ‘black soil’ for its application to the soil where the seedlings or young plants or trees are to be planted and grown. This black soil is given to the monastery by a nearby firm that generates electricity. The firm burns eucalyptus and other kinds of trees for the energy required for operating the machines which generate electricity. The black soil referred to above is the remains of the fuel burnt for producing the energy for operating the machines. The remains of the burnt out fuel are given by the authorities to the monastery for its use in growing the plants and trees. It is given free of cost. The monastery distributes a large part of it among the villagers for using the same for growing the plants and trees. The researcher himself went to the said factory where electricity is produced and which has a huge reserve of “black-soil” that becomes available from the burning of eucalyptus and other kinds of trees. The authorities whom the researcher met expressed a genuine sense of admiration for the abbot and the monks of Watpa Satuek Monastery and the work they did for protection of plants and trees.

The abbot belonged to the Thammayut sect. As to the question, whether the abbot finds any difference between the monks of the Thammayut and Mahanikaya sects in their attitudes towards forest protection, the abbot observed that he was not aware of any such difference in practice. Monks of both the sects in Thailand today take
interest in forest protection. It is true that most of the Thammayut monasteries are situated in forests or are surrounded by thick circles of trees. It is also true that it was the Thammayut sect which embraced the forest monks in its fold. The forest monks had been living and working in Isan before the spread of Theravada Buddhism in the region. These are the factors why people consider Thammayut monks to be monks of wat (monastery) pa (forest) or forest monastery. Since most of the Mahanikaya monasteries are situated in localities inhabited by people and situated outside the forests, they are called monks of wat (monastery) ban (village) category. But, at the present moment the fact of threat to forest is pronounced in the minds of the people in general and monks of all the sects of Buddhism in Thailand. So the monks of the both Mahanikaya and Thammayut sects take keen interest in forest protection.

If in present times the people were sensitized to the need for protection, as the Abbot felt, was there any need for the walls around the forest of the monastery? What necessity was there for keeping the vigilance at night against the trespassers or thieves? In response to the questions above, the abbot replied that the hearts of all men and women do not change overnight. People of different categories and classes do not have the same intensity of feeling towards the protection of plants and trees. Certain sections of the population are still very poor. They are hard pressed by their financial distress. To solve the problem they take to thieving of wood from the forest. They do not hesitate in cutting down the trees. Charcoal is made out of the timber thus collected and it is sold in the market at an attractive price. Also, there are villagers who may not be poor but find an easy way of making money out of selling the wood and charcoal in the market of the nearby town. If they do not have the
pressing financial need, they are greedy. They themselves or the men and women hired by them do not hesitate to destroy the plants and trees. It is important to take steps for preventing such people from indulging in any injury to the plants, trees and forests.

Of course, there should be continuous campaign for making people from all classes and categories aware of the need for forest protection. And, the monks are doing the needful for it. It is not true that the monks have no effect on the minds of the people. There is now a more heightened consciousness than before of the threat to the forest and the need for forest protection in the minds of students of schools and colleges and other varieties of the lay people. The monastery takes the opportunity for making people interested in protection of plants and forests and in regenerating the plants and trees. Through the performance of different rituals which are accompanied by ceremonies and celebrations, the Watpa Satuek Monastery and the monks accomplish the task of creating a milieu for protection and regeneration of forest in Satuek.

The abbot of the Watpa Satuek Monastery seems to be pragmatic and realistic enough when he points out the limitation of the monks and the monastery in the face of onslaught on forest by the so-called ‘development initiatives’ by the government and the vested interests influencing the government machinery. But, the monks can do their bit by arousing the consciousness of the people of the need for forest protection and making humble efforts towards protection and regeneration of forests. The Buddhist values help the process. But, their spread requires
appropriate logistics for which adequate financial resources are not available.

4.4 Case Study of Luangpoh Sudev Sujinno

Luanpoh Sudev Sujinno, monk in Watpa Satuek Monastery, was 68 years old on 27 November 2007, i.e., the day when he was interviewed by the researcher. He claimed to be one of the persons who had worked hard for the beginning and farther development of Watpa Satuek Monastery. He was ordained into the Buddhist order only 2 years earlier, i.e. in 2005. But, as a lay person of Satuek he had been familiar with erstwhile thick and deep green cover of Satuek and its gradual disappearance because of the working of various factors. He had all through nurtured a deep faith in the Buddhist order and in the importance of monasteries in the life of the people, though he did not become a ‘novice’ in his early youth.

Mr. Sudev was born and brought up in Satuek. His father was a shopkeeper in Satuek Township. He sold food articles mainly. He had formal education up to the high school (i.e. class 10) level. Mr. Sudev passed the School Leaving Examination. But, he did not like to study farther. He joined his father in his work in the restaurant run by him. In course of time, his father because of his old age wanted to get relieved of the responsibility for running the restaurant and Sudev took the charge of it. Mr. Sudev got married with a girl who was 13 years younger than he. The couple had three children the youngest of whom was a daughter. The daughter was 26 years old in 2007. The researcher met her and her mother when they came to Watpa Satuek Monastery to offer food and other gifts to the monks and nuns in the monastery in November 2007. By
that time the daughter became a graduate. By Thai standard, she seemed to be rather late in completing under undergraduate studies. When Mr. Sudev was asked about the reason of the delay in his daughter’s passing B.A. Examination, Mr. Sudev told that his daughter was engaged in some gainful work and pursued her study in Bachelor’s Degree in the college along with the performance of her job in the work place. Both the mother and girl appeared to be devoted to Lord Buddha and respectful of the monks and nuns in the monastery.

Since Mr. Sudev embraced the life of a monk, his wife (in his life as a lay person) looked after the restaurant. Her youngest daughter assisted her in running the shop though she did not give up the service she had been engaged in. The other two children of Mr. Sudev found a sort of satisfactory job in Bangkok. Mr. Sudev’s financial condition before his entry into the monastic order was not bad. His wife and the youngest daughter too did not face any financial hardship. Indeed, Mr. Sudev’s restaurant did brisk business in the area. The restaurant had an arrangement for serving food in the restaurant. Also, it had a arrangement for ‘take home’ delivery. Mr. Sudev and his wife were fortunate enough to get the service of a cook who excelled in the culinary art. While the ‘boys’ in the restaurant remained busy in serving food and selling the “take away” packets of food to the Mr. Sudev and his wife (now his wife and his daughter) engaged in collecting money at the cash counter. Of course, they took every responsibility for running the restaurant to the satisfaction of the customers. Sometimes, Mr. Sudev did other kinds of work, e.g., driving cars or light vehicles and earned money therefrom. Indeed, when Luangpoh Somporn, the current abbot of Watpa Satuek Monastery, came to the monastery, many a time Mr. Sudev was called in
by the monastery which was not far away from his restaurant, to drive the car of Luangpoh Somporn. After embracing the monastic order, Mr. Sudev ceased to do the work of driving. He abandoned also the charge of running the restaurant which he had owned.

Mr. Sudev had acquaintance with Luangpoh Somporn when the latter was living in Phanumyoi Monastery. Mr. Sudev visited the monastery form time to time along with some other villagers for meditation over there. So when the question as to who should be invited as the new monk of Watpa Satuek Monastery, he had no hesitation in indicating his choice for a monk from Wat Phanumyoi. He witnessed the intensive care taken of the plants and trees there by Master Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro and his devoted assistant Luangpoh Somporn. Mr. Sudev and his companies invited Master Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro to take charge of Watpa Satuek Monastery. But, Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro himself could not come. When he proposed Luangpoh Somporn as the new abbot of the Watpa Satuek, Mr. Sudev and his companions welcome the idea with great fervour. As a person having faith in Buddhism, Mr. Sudev went in for meditation to Wat Phanumyoi and he appreciated the importance of solitude, the calm and quiet, of the forest and the environment created and fostered by plants and trees. Though, Mr. Sudev did not undergo the ritual of becoming a monk temporarily before his marriage. Generally, the Thai young men having faith in Buddhism embrace the life of a monk for a brief period before their marriage. Much later in his life, it was at the instance of Luangpoh Somporn, that Mr. Sudev was ordained into the monastic order. It may be noted here that traditionally a male Thai whose
parents are Buddhists ought, if possible, on reaching a full twenty years of age, to become a monk for a while.

Luangpoh Sudev claimed himself to be one of those persons because of whose initiative Watpa Satuek Monastery was started. He had been a resident of Satuek since his birth. He claimed, therefore, a degree of authenticity for his statement. According to him, the area where at present Satuek township developed was in his childhood and teenage covered with dense forest. At that time the agricultural land available at

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2 It is a popular belief that by becoming either a novice or a monk one gains great merit and so also the person or persons who sponsor the undertaking.

A son who becomes a novice or a monk is, in popular belief, a mysterious agent for helping save his parents from hell when they die. A novice will be able to help his mother from such an unhappy state in the next life, and a monk will do so for his father. Thus parents are desirous of having at least one of their sons become a novice, or better still a monk. If possible, the son—candidate ought to be unmarried man; if he has been married, all the merit thus gained will go to the wife instead of to the parents, and moreover his thoughts are likely to be more on his young wife than on religion. With rare exceptions, the Order of the Church will not allow a married candidate to be ordained without the implicit consent of the wife. If it is desired to gain religious merit for a person when he dies, his son or, if he was childless, anyone else, may on the day of the cremation become a novice if he is a boy, or a monk, if he is a man. By so doing he expresses his gratitude to the deceased, and shows that he holds his ceremony sacred. Such an act is deemed highly meritorious to the deceased person, even if it is done only for one day.

A man who has not passed through the monkhood is regarded as a “raw” or immature man. The people will have an unfavorable opinion of him as an uneducated and imperfect man who is not “a son of Tathagata,” that is to say, a monk. It will be difficult for him to find a wife, for decent folk will look at him askance wondering whether he is a proper and suitable man to be a husband or a son-in-law. [One speaks here] of the good old days but the custom lingers to the present time, especially among the country folk.

All that is mentioned here pertains to time in premodern day, when the culture-pattern of the people, especially in central Siam, was more or less identical. It is still the culture-pattern of the personality of the Thai, despite the fact that there are some radical changes in behavior and thinking among present-day people, mostly in modern towns or cities through contact with modern civilization. In the old days when schooling was practically limited to the wat, it was no wonder that the people were desirous of having their male relatives become at least temporary novices or monks. When a man becomes old he sometimes as a devotional act becomes a monk for life, or if for various reasons he is not able to do so, he will frequently on Buddhist holy days repair to the wat and observe certain religious precepts and hear sermons. Many retired officials in Bangkok still observe such a practice. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon. 1986. *Popular Buddhism in Siam and Other Essays on Thai Studies*, pp. 30-32)
the outskirts of forest was limited but provided the required food for the population living in the villages near the forest. Also, the villagers gathered fruits, roots, tubers and mushroom from the forest to supplement or replenish their food. But, the villagers did not have at that time facilities for communication. No roadways were there. Also, no hospital or medical clinics were available in the vicinity. For treatment of the sick or ailing patients villagers had to move far. But, because of absence of vehicles and roadways, they had to negotiate great distance by carts drawn by bullocks. During the rainy season, the village roads got muddy and the situation turned out to be extremely miserable. So when the government took steps for construction of roadways, the villagers felt relieved. Construction of roadways meant destruction of the forest. Countless trees, young and old, ordinary or valuable, were cut down. The timber merchants used the opportunity for making profit. The contractors engaged for construction of roads and the timber merchants came from outside and they brought a large number of people along with them. Forest was cleared for their settlement. Expansion of agricultural land also told upon the condition of the forest. Grants or Concessions for clearing jungles for collecting timber or for starting new settlements or for expansion of the agricultural land were available from the government. The trees were felled indiscriminately to support the government projects, and to provide the material for the owners of saw mills and timber merchants. The forest disappeared gradually. The local people did not have anything to do in reversing the process. Nor did they want to do anything for the purpose.

They received the benefit of roadways for negotiating great distance, could avail themselves of the facilities for medical treatment in
hospitals situated at a distance from the villages in Satuek, and enjoyed the opportunities for earning from the development of markets and township in the area or nearby area. But, scores of them did not notice the fact that the area which was once covered by thick forest became almost denuded of any green cover. True, the national highway was only 230 meters away from the villages in these days but the entire area became devoid of big and tall trees. Only small trees and grass subsisted. But, the existing trees also seemed vulnerable to the acts of theft or illegal felling (since the government declared felling of trees without prior permission from the authorities as illegal). Whatever amount of twigs, branches or logs of trees might be gathered (through illegal means) was either directly sold in the market or turned into charcoal for its sale in the market.

Large plots of land cleared of trees here and there became the target of squatters or settlers from outside the area. The large plot on/in which today Watpa Satuek Monastery stood was one such chunk of land. Though part of the land served the purpose of a cremation ground, it did not deter the parties who were interested in grabbing the land for self-interest. Luangpoh Sudev and some of his friends and associates, all of whom were the original inhabitants of the area around today’s Satuek township, resolved to help the foundation of a Thammayut monastery on that land. Since people did not have any Thammayut monastery with a forest in the area, people had to go to Mahanikaya monasteries which were situated in other districts or provinces. A few monks volunteered for starting the monastery in Satuek. An old monk took up the responsibility of the abbot. But, he was not keeping good health and the monastery did not take a good shape.
Luangpoh Sudev recalled the good work done by the Master Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro in the area of forest protection in Phanumyoi Monastery in Roi Et province and approached him for his taking the responsibility for organizing the monastery. Master Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro in his youth visited the forest at Satuek. The old villagers remember even today his lack of fear and his great courage to meditate in the thick of the forest. The forest was then infested with many wild animals and people believed that it was the abode of ghosts. But, the master remained unperturbed. He practiced meditation for days together in the forest. He did not visit Satuek in recent times since it became bereft of forests. But, his love of trees and plant and care for their nurture and preservation became well-known. If he assumed the responsibility for developing the monastery, it would for sure develop in the right direction and turn into a centre ensuring regeneration and protection of forest. But, the Master declined the offer and sent, instead, his devoted follower, Luangpoh Somporn. And, Luangpoh Somporn was warmly accepted by Luangpoh Sudev and other people interested in the development of Watpa Satuek Monastery.

In reply to the question, how did you get the idea of forest protection? Luangpoh Sudev frankly admitted that he became conscious of the need for protection of trees and plants when he visited the Wat Phanumyoi for meditation for a short time. He then came to appreciate the need for the calm and peaceful atmosphere provided by forest. The gradual disappearance of plants and trees and forest from Satuek, he confessed, went largely unnoticed by him. But, the decreasing rainfall and increasing temperature in the climate of Satuek made him and his associate concerned with how to meet the problem. It was Luangpoo Sri
Mahaviro in Wat Phanumyoi who explained to them the close connection between the existence of trees, plants and forests in an area on the one hand and the nature of climate there on the other. And it was Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro who demonstrated how the Buddhist monks and monastery could play a vital role in prevention of injury to plants and trees and in regenerating forest.

Luangpoh Sudev went exuberant on the work of Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro and his associates in the Wat Phanumyoi for protecting and regenerating forest there.

He and his association firmly hoped that Watpa Satuek Monastery also would do good work in forest protection as it would world under the stewardship of a monks sent by Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro. Luangpoh Sudev mentined with modesty that it was he who first suggested to the present monk of Wat pa Satuek Monastery that the monastery should take initiative in cultivating and nurturing herbs in the area under the monastery. The abbot had the knowledge of the efficicy of herbal medicine and knew the art of preparing medicine out of medicinal plants and herbs. But, herbs required by him were not found in Satuek which went denuded of plants and herbs in the area of the monastery was readily accepted by him. And, the abbot who was knowledgeable enough about how to grow these plants and herbs succeeded, along with the other monks of the monastery, in his attempt. The herbs and plants and medicine made out of them are given free of cost to the people. This creates a favourable attitude in the minds of the villagers towards the monastery, the monks and their activities for the growth of plants and herbs and trees.
Luangpoh Sudev farther pointed out that he suggested to the abbot of the Watpa Satuek Monastery the idea of collection of black soil from the firm producing electricity and its distribution among the villagers for facilitating the growth of plants and trees through its application. It would strengthen the bond of collaboration between the monastery and the people living in its vicinity.

Regarding the query about the nature of the role of Buddhist monastery and its monks in protection and regeneration forest, Luangpoh Sudev observed that Vinaya (monastic order) regulates the conduct of the monks and prevents them from doing any injury nature to water, to plants and trees, to the forest and to the animals living in the forest. If the monks follow the order, it would automatically lead to protection of plants and trees. Of course, the lay people, though they are Buddhists, may indulge in felling trees or destroying plants and grass for meeting the needs of their mundane existence particularly when they are poor. It is, of course, true that it is not only the poor but the well of and even the rich also engage in destruction of trees and forests out of greed (not need) and for making huge profits in the short run. If is very difficult for the monks and monasteries to restrain the individuals to the last mentioned categories. But, the Buddhist monks and their monastery can spread the message of the need for forest protection. They can through their message as well as practical activities for protection of forests help the people in realizing the fact of close connection between forest protection and their existence in the world. Luangpoh Sudev observed that protection of plants, trees and forest is a task not only for the monks but for the people of all the categories of society. True, the monks’ activities in forest protection may have a ‘demonstration effect’ over the ideas and conduct of the lay
people. Also, the monks should try to help them appreciate the vital importance of plants, trees and forest for their life and existence. The efforts by the monks in this arena do have some positive effects. The creation of awareness of the need for regeneration and protection of trees and forest in the minds of people through the efforts of the monks and monasteries would have to be buttressed by the larger socio-political order.

As to the nature of difficulties faced by the monks and Watpa Satukek Monastery, Luangpoh Sudev admitted that the problem of the threats to the trees and forest from the acts of theft and felling of trees by the common men did exist and persist. But, according to his estimation, these acts had become less recurrent with the passage of time. Also, the growth of trees in the forest of the monastery and in its vicinity for the past two decades was remarkable and could catch the notice of one and all. The strategy of involving the local people in forest protection activities and in distributing among them the twigs and branches and small logs of trees which were occasionally felled for maintaining the health of the forest of the monastery forged a link of mutual appreciation and trust between the monks and the villagers or lay people. The number of acts of theft went down in recent years.

About the relationship of the monastery and monks, the villagers and the local administration, Luangpoh Sudev mentioned that all of them did not work in tandem for, regeneration and regeneration and protection of the plants, trees and forest in Satuek. That the villagers still indulge in acts of theft of twigs and branches of trees and forest of the monastery area had already been pointed out. The high wall around the monastery
area could not be effective in the face of the skill of the thieving villagers in scaling the wall and intruding into the forest area and in throwing across the wall the fruits of their plunder, which were immediately caught and taken away by their accomplices standing on the other side of the wall.

Recently, a certain mechanism was devised in order to tackle such cases as mentioned above, with cooperation of the villagers. The (managing) committee of the monastery and the head(s) of the village(s) wherefrom the thief (thieves) came would jointly decide the fate of the persons caught red-handed for thieving of wood or other substance from the monastery forest or felling of trees of the monastery forest. According to the experience gathered so far, the head of the village and the committee of the monastery would jointly examine the matter and try to ascertain the facts and would, if the charge of theft was established, fine the accused person with a sum ranging between 500 and 1,000 Baht. The body would issue the warning to the erring individuals that they would be sent to the police if they were found to be committing the same offence again. But, it hardly proved to be a deterrent for the persons intent on thieving wood from the forest of the monastery. The monks lacked in the power to apply any effective sanction against the trespassers.

As to the lack of coordination between the monastery, the people and the administration of the relevant Tambon or Sub-district, Sudev reported the occurrence of an unhappy incident. The monks of the monastery and a number of villagers from the vicinity organized a campaign for regenerating the green cover in areas surrounding Watpa Satuek Monastery. Planting of trees in pasture land and ‘public land’
(under the control of Satuek Administration) was an important part of the campaign. But, the Tambon or sub-district Administration (under the jurisdiction of which Watpa Satuek Monastery fell) did not take it kindly. They charged the monks and the villagers with the intention of illegally usurping pasture land and 'Public land'. Indeed in one case as many as 13 monks engaged in the campaign for green cover were arrested by the police. Thanks to the efforts of the committee of the monastery and good offices of certain influential persons among the laity, the monks were not sent behind the bars. But, they had to pay ‘fine’.

Luangpoh Sudev surmised that the fear of loss of importance in the eyes of the higher administration might be responsible for the Tambon administration’s aversion and opposition to the campaign for green cover launched by the monks and the villagers. If the area became green because of the success of the joint campaign by the monks and the villagers the credit for making the area green would go to the monks and the villagers. But, Tambon Administration was granted particular projects for the purpose. Naturally, the Tambon Administration would not be in a position to claim straightaway success for the project(s) for the successful launching and completion of which the Tambon Administration was directly responsible. The source of the money and materials for their ‘projects’ might get dried up. Thus, a sort of vested interests of the Tambon Administration developed which did not favorably look upon the activities of the monks and the villagers in regeneration of the green cover. The lack of understanding by the local level administration of the purpose and spirit of the efforts of the monks, monastery and villagers for regenerating plant, trees and forests in Satuek become evident also in the case of its opposition to running a radio station by the monastery in
coveying the message of Dhamma to the lay people and conducting the campaign for regenerating the green cover of the land in Satuek. The radio-started by the monks of the Watpa Satuek Monastery was launched in the ‘public land’ adjacent to but outside the nuns’ area of the monastery. It worked satisfactorily for six months only. But, the Tambon Administration became highly dissatisfied with it. A notice to the committee of the monastery came from the police for immediate cessation of broadcasting from the radio-station. On enquiry by the monastery as to the reasons behind it, the committee of the monastery come to learn that the radio station must be closed down, for preservation of the spread of any farther misinformation by those who manned it. The radio-station was not only spreading wrong information but also creating lack of trust in the minds of the people regarding the intention and activities of Tambon Administration in the field of forest protection. The reason advanced by the administration for closing down the radio-station was, according to Luangpoh Sudev, far from the case.

The probable reason behind the step taken by the Tambon administration might be that the programme broadcast by the radio-station of the monastery failed to give sole credit for protection of forest in the vicinity of Watpa Satuek Monastery to the Tambon Administration.

“How could the radio- station started and operated the monastery”, asked Luongpoh Sudev, “do anything that would disturb in any way any programme by any quarters for regeneration and conservation of forest?”

The monks engaged with the all sincerity in the activities for promoting regeneration the protection of plants, trees and forest even at the risk of facing the criticism (or even the actual problem) that they did not, as a
result, find adequate time for the practice of Dhamma and meditation in order to attain liberation from kilesha and enlightenment. For, Luangpoh Sudev and his fellow monks appreciated the importance of the tranquility provided by the forest for the practice of Dhamma. Luangpoh Sudev observed, “We can’t find and practice Dhamma save and except in the forest. The forest in the base of Dhamma, rather, Dhamma is Thamachat (forest)”. He regretted the unkind attitude of the administration to the programme of the monastery for securing the goal of regeneration and conservation of plants, trees and forest. But, he was hopeful that the monks would ultimately realize their mission. Their modest success so far in generating awareness among the people around the monastery of the need for planting trees and protecting them seemed to sustain this hope.

4.5 Case Study of Luangta Noi Paphakaro

The case of Lungta Noi is interesting because of a certain kind of difference between it and those of Luangpoh Somporn and Luangpoh Sudev. In the latter cases both the monks looked forward to Phanumyoi monastery for their experience and inspiration in spiritual life and the task of forest protection. A certain degree of superiority was, it seemed, accorded by them to Phanumyoi monastery in comparison with Watpa Satuek Monastery. But, Luangta Noi gave more importance to Watpa Satuek Monastery than to Phanumyoi Monastery, though he too had his first experience with the activities of Buddhist monks and monastery in Phanumyoi and admiration for it.

The researcher met Luangta Noi quite often during his stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery. He was one of the most aged monks of the
monastery. He was 69 years old at the time of his meeting with the researcher. But, he seemed to be ever active.

Luangta Noi was born in Bangkok. And, he was familiar with the tinsel world of film industry. He was a film director. He was a producer too and had his unit situated in Bangkok. Unfortunately, the building housing his office and studio along with so many costly equipment was consumed by fire which broke out of a short circuit in the supply line of electricity. Luangta Noi was ruined. It was a terrible shock for him and he did not even dream of such a calamity. He almost lost the balance of his mind. He sought recovery from the terrible mental shock. And, in search of equipoise of mind he came to Phanumyoi Monastery for practicing meditation there. As he observed the practice of Dhamma there and participated in it, he got the much sought after peace of mind. And, he decided not to return to the life in the lousiness of the business world. He got back a portion of the money he lost through the incident of breaking out of fire in his business unit from the Insurance Company. He could have started anew his business in the film world. His wife and grown-up daughter, indeed, insisted upon his doing it. But, his mind was changed because of his experience gained in Phanumyoi Monastery. He declined to return to the life of hectic business. His wife and his daughter opened a large outlet in a posh area in Bangkok for the sale of fashionable cloth, clothing and dress material and dresses. But, Luangta Noi did not feel like joining them. He continued to stay in Phanumyoi Monastery and practice Dhamma there. He noticed how sincerely the agedly abbot and other monks of Phanumyoi Monastery worked for the growth of plants and trees and for their protection. He gradually came to realize the close link between the protection of plants and trees and the Buddhist principles of
non-violence, compassion for all forms of life and nature. He too started participating in the activities of forest protection as he continued to practice Dhamma in Phanumyoi Monastery.

He continued to stay in Phanumyoi monastery for two years. And, then he sought ordination as a monk in the Buddhist Order. But, this ordination took place not in Phanumyoi Monastery but in Watpa Satuek Monastery. ‘Why?’ the researcher inquired.

“I found the atmosphere in Watpa Satuek Monastery more congenial to what I sought for than the atmosphere prevailing in Phanumyoi Monastery”, replied Luangta Noi. “Phanumyoi Monastery is,” he continued, “a great monastery. The great abbot and other monks are most devotedly working for the practice of Dhamma and accomplishment of allied objectives such as regeneration and protection of forests. But, the very grand scale of activities of the monastery, the very large area of its forest which stretches over an area of 8,000 acres seemed to me imposing. So many visitors everyday frequented the monastery, so many people were working on the land of the monastery for generation and protection of plants and trees that it seemed to disturb the calm and quiet much longed for by a person like me who was wearied of the din and bustle of life of the mundane world. Once I got an opportunity to come to Watpa Satuek monastery and I came to develop a liking for it. It is much smaller in size than Phanumyoi Monastery and I found its beauty in the smallness of its size in terms of the number novices and monks and nuns in the monastery, the number of lay persons visiting the monastery, the size of the area of the forest looked after by the monastery. The ambit of its activities was smaller in comparison with
the huge scale of activities of Phanumyoi Monastery. I decided to leave Phanumyoi Monastery after my stay there for two years. I came down to Watpa Satuek Monastery and I got myself ordained as a monk into the Buddhist Order. It was not that I was afraid of the huge volume of work which I would have to do if I stayed in Phanumyoi Monastery. I love and like to do work. But, the problem was that I was growing in age and my old age did not permit me to take the huge load of work that I would have to perform there in case I stayed there. What was more important for me was the relative calm and quiet prevailing in Watpa Satuek. Indeed, I can engage in meditation here with near perfect mental equipoise”.

Luangta Noi informed the researcher in 2008 that he was ordained as a monk in 2005. Since then he had been continuing to stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery. Of course, he made short trips to Phanumyoi monastery on special occasions when he was invited by the Monastery. “I go to Bangkok periodically for medical check up. I should mention that it is a great advantage for me to stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery from the perspective of medical treatment. Since Bangkok provides ample scope for good medical treatment and is not far from the Watpa Satuek Monastery, my stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery proves convenient for me from the point of view of maintenance of my health”.

Though consideration prevailing in a person’s mundane life such as maintenance of health through dependable medical treatment seemed to follow Luangta Noi even in his life as a monk, his eagerness for acquiring merit through the practice of Dhamma was touching. “I enjoyed huge wealth and the comforts and luxuries accompanying it. But when I found all my belongings turned into ashes overnight, along with dejection a
sense of impermanence of worldly materials dawned in me. I came to the Phanumyoi Monastery and felt that the practice of Dhamma would provide me a way out of the morass of the desires for seemingly valuable but ultimately impermanent goods. Also, I had the feeling that ‘I entered into the life of a monk at a late age. I should practice Dhamma as intensively as possible till I breathe my last,’ ” observed Luangta Noi. “And”, Luangta Noi continued, “the calm atmosphere prevailing in the forest of Watpa Satuek Monastery, rather, in the monastery as whole, helps me a great deal practice meditation and pursue Dhamma. Care taken in nurture of plants and trees is a part of Dhamma practice. I too try to do my bit for planting the tender plant and very young trees and nurturing them”.

Luangta Noi observed that he had lived a hectic life before he came in contact with Phanumyoi Monastery. He then did not have any clear idea of the tenets of the Buddhism and the intimate link between the Buddhist way of life and reverence for nature and love for all forms of life. But, he perceived and realized it only when he came to stay in Phanumyoi. The abbot Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro and other monks explained lucidly the nature of this connection. He was surprised to see the continuous to see the effort of the abbot and other monks of Phanumyoi Monastery in the field of regeneration and protection of plants, trees and forest. The spirit, he come to notice, pervaded also many other monasteries which were linked with Phanumyoi Monastery, e.g., Watpa Satuek monastery. This realization grew stronger during his stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery.
Luangta Noi suggested that the message of the need for the initiative for planting new trees and plants and trees and for protecting them as an allied part of Dhamma practice should be highlighted and spread more and more among the people by the monks. For he himself remained almost totally ignorant of what was being done by the monks for protection of nature and environment. He became aware of it only when he came in touch with Phanumyoi Monastery and particularly after his contact with and later involvement in the activities related to forest protection. If there and in Watpa Satuek Monastery vast number of common people were made adequately conscious of the need for planting and nurturing trees and the activities of the monks in both planting and nurturing the plants and trees and protecting them, their initiative and involvement in regeneration and protection of the green cover of earth would have been more spontaneous.

"One may learn", observed Luangta Noi, "certain basic tenets of Dhamma from one’s close association with and observation of the plants and trees. A tree hardly lives for itself. It lives for others. It gives food to animals, shadow to pedestrians and travelers, nests to birds, flowers and fragrance to human beings, medicine to the sick and ailing. So also a human being who practices Dhamma should be oblivious of his self interests and try to do whatever good he can do to others. The life-cycle of a tree seems to resemble the life-cycle of human beings — to be born [in case of trees in the form of sprouting of seeds], to grow and to wither way and to take birth again. But, throughout its existence, every tree remains a benefactor of other forms of life—worms and insects, birds and animals including human beings. A tree seems unperturbed when it has to shed the old leaves, every year with the change in the cycle of seasons. A
human being also should try to cultivate indifference to countless experiences causing him suffering (as well as happiness). He can then attain peace of mind. A man should, like a tree, go on serving others and try to acquire merit or Punya thereby”. At the end of life of a tree, its branches and trunk and roots become objects of service to human beings. Similarly, remarked Luangpoh Noi, men and women of one generation should carry on activities that benefit others including those of the coming or succeeding generation. The logic of forest protection lies here.

Luangpoh Noi repeatedly told the researcher that as a lay person he did not have the realization mentioned above. He came to attain this realization only gradually as he himself engaged in meditation in the forest and in the task of regeneration and protection of herbs, plants and trees with encouragement from the monks. There is, according to Luangpoh Noi, an intimate link between Buddhism and activities of Buddhist monasteries and monks and reverence for nature, for plants, trees and forests. It is quite natural that the monks take special care not only for protecting trees but also for making the others, the lay people, convinced of the urgency of activities for protecting herbs, plants, trees and forests. In reply to the query regarding his own role in forest protection, Luangta Noi remarked that he assisted to the best of his ability the Abbot and other monks of the Watpa Satuek Monastery in their activities relating to the planting of trees and nurturing and participated in the campaign for regeneration and protection of plants and trees every year. In his daily life in the monastery, he regularly walked around in the forest of the monastery everyday after having food in the morning and after meditation at night. And, then he performed practically the role of a security man. He would keep a vigil on whether anybody from outside
entered into the forest and whether anybody was engaged in any activity amounting to injury to the plants and trees there. Once he caught hold of a trespasser who was trying to cut down a tree and brought him to the notice of the abbot and other monks who took action against him. The news got wide circulation. And, after that the knowledge of his having regular rounds in the forest everyday prevented many outsiders from engaging in acts of theft and felling of trees in the forest of the monastery.

Luangta Noi sometimes came to notice particular places in the forest area which lay without any kind of vegetation or plants or trees standing on it. He informed the abbot of it. The abbot took initiative in planting seedlings and plants there.

The acts of intrusion into the forest and felling of trees continued notwithstanding the watch kept by him and other monks on the forest. Some villagers could not afford the cost of fuel needed for their hearths. They took to illegitimate felling of trees whenever they got the opportunity for it. In certain cases, they would make charcoal out of the branches or of trees for its sale in the market. Luangta Noi mentioned also the problem arising from the fact that the abbot and other monks of Watpa Satuek Monastery allow, during the rainy season every year, the villagers or outsiders to pick edible mushrooms that grew in abundance in the ground of the forest of the monastery. As such this grant of permission to the outsiders to gather mushroom was not problematical. The problem lay in the careless behavior of some villagers which might harm the new and young plants. And, a few of them might even try to fell the trees of the forest. Luangta Noi himself regularly kept watch on the
outsiders and thus sought to prevent the felling of trees in the forest and thieving of wood.

The monks of the monastery prepared a roster which ensured the participation by every monk in the task of the keeping watch on what was happening in the forest. It decreased the incidence of injuries to forest plants and trees but could not solve the problem altogether. The researcher himself participated, during the period of his stay in the monastery (in the month of May in 2008), in the act of keeping vigil on the people who entered into the forest of the monastery. "It would require," observed Luangta Noi, "concerted effort of all, the monks and the lay people alike, for ensuring the prevention of destruction of the green cover of earth and regeneration and protection of plants, trees and forests. The monks would be guided by Vinaya and try to ensure preservation of plant life and forest. Their counseling through preaching of Dhamma would gradually convince the people of the importance of plants, trees and forests in human life and make them take active steps for ensuring it. But, for doing these, the monks and monasteries require financial and other kinds of resources. Support from the mass media may not ensure supply of funds for carrying on the campaign by the monks for regeneration of forests but may spread their message among a much larger audience. "For example, I as a layman was", pointed out of Luangta Noi, "not aware of the efforts of Buddhist monks towards regeneration and protection of plants, trees and forests in different parts of Thailand. I never came across any programme telecast by the media, which highlighted the role of monks. I came to learn of the activities of Buddhist monks in the field only when I came in contact with Phanumyoi Monastery". The media including the television channels highlight the
government projects for protection of forests, e.g., they publish the news or broadcast or telecast the activities of the project taken in the name of the King and Queen or Royal Thai Government for ensuring the planting of saplings or young plants and protecting them. "But, the monks through their practice and preaching of Dhamma are making an important contribution to regeneration and protection of the green cover in Thailand. That news must be given adequate importance and publicity which may bring forth more spontaneous and active participation by the lay people of Thailand in the important task of regeneration and protection of herbs, plants, trees and forests in Thailand", remarked Luangta Noi. He concluded with the following observation: "I like to stay in the forest of this manner do I get an opportunity for meditation and for purification of mind before my departure from the world".

4.6 Case Study of Phra Boonmee Athipunyo

During his stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery the researcher found Phra Boonmee taking his seat next to that of the abbot of the monastery in the sessions of prayer or discussion. He was 48 years old and had a well-built physique and somewhat dark complexion. He was calm and quiet. Indeed, he was remarkably cool in his talks and dealings with others. The researcher accompanied him when the monks went out in the morning with their arm-bowls to collect food from the residents of the villages in the vicinity of the monastery. Before starting the walk, Phra Boonmee would discuss with the researcher this or that point of the Dhamma. He had always been very kind to the researcher and taught him the principles of Dhamma and the art of meditation with great care and practice. He seemed to the researcher a teacher in the truest sense of the term. The
researcher therefore called him Phra Ajan Boonmee (‘Ajan’ means teacher).

Phra Ajan Boonmee had been ordained into the order of monks fifteen years before the researcher met him. He completed lessons up to Dhamma Class 3 (Nak Thum Ek). Prior to his embracing the life of a monk, he was a farmer and worked on the family farm. However, to replenish the income of the family he took a job in a factory in Bangkok. He was a bachelor but had to look after his parents and take care of his two minor brothers as well. After staying in Bangkok for a few years, he came back home in Satuek district to see his parents. He decided to become a monk temporarily as it is considered desirable by the traditional people of Thailand. When the period of monkhood would be over, he had the plan, he would go back to Bangkok to resume his job there. Phra Ajan Boonmee went to Phranumyo Monastery to lead the life of a monk for a short while. But, the experience he gathered there changed his mind and outlook regarding life and the world. He decided not to disrobe and go back to the life of a layman. He preferred the life of a monk and the practice of meditation along the line suggested by the great abbot of the monastery, Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro, and by Luangpoh Somporn who revered Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro.

During his stay in the monastery he came to appreciate the intimate bond between the principles of Buddhism and the care and preservation of plants, trees and forests. Gradually, he earned the trust of the other monks, particularly, of those who had the primary responsibility for the maintenance of the monastery and continuance of the flow of its activities. They gave him the responsibility for the improvement of
conditions in certain monasteries which were linked with, rather regarded as branches of, the Phanumyoi monastery. Improvement of the situation relating to trees, plants and forests was a part of his task. And, he most willingly took up the responsibility. He came to Watpa Satuek Monastery to assist Luangpoh Somporn to develop it in a proper manner and, of course, to improve the condition of plants, trees and forest there.

The researcher asked him, “What made you decide in favour of continuance of life as a monk?” Phra Ajan Boonmee replied, “Look, I could think of going back to the life of lay people on termination of my temporary monkhood. And, in my old age I could again enter into the life of a monk. But, my brief experience with the course of activities of monastery made me realize the importance of putting an end to my Kilesa (desire). Kilesa was the root cause of all kinds of suffering in life. Anybody seeking peace of mind must put an end to kilesa. But, it would not be attained by me if I should go back to the life of a layman pursuing mundane interests of varied nature; kilesa would become more and more intense and would be channelized along ever new courses. The ultimate cause of putting an end to kilesa and thus getting liberated from kilesa would never be realized. When I sought the permission of my parents for my continuance in the life of a monk for the rest of my life, they agreed to my proposal. I have continued to live my life as a monk since then. Of course, I visit my parents from time to time but I go to them to discuss with them the principles of Dhamma and the art of meditation for attaining a life that is free of kilesa or desire.”

Phra Ajan Boonmee informed the researcher that both Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro and Luangpoh Somporn stressed the need for regeneration
and protection of plants, trees and forests as a part of the practice of Dhamma. Regeneration and protection of trees in the space of a monastery and in the space around it constituted, according to Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro and Luangpoh Somporn, a sure step for the development of a Buddhist monastery. He, therefore, sincerely engaged in regeneration and protection of plants and trees of Watpa Satuek Monastery under the stewardship of Luangpoh Somporn. In addition to that, he sought to convince the monks of any monastery, which he was asked to visit, that regeneration and protection of plants, trees, and wherever possible, a forest constituted a vital part of the developmental activity of a monastery.

The researcher asked Ajan Boonmee, “Is your involvement in regeneration and protection of plants, trees and forests the result of the teaching of Luangpoo Sri Mahaviro and Luangpoh Somporn only?” In reply, Ajan Boonmme stated, “Though to a very large extent they were the source of my knowledge and inspiration, I came to develop an increasing interest in forest protection as I myself engaged in the task of growing and nurturing plants in Phanumyoi Monastery. I sought to generate this interest in the minds of the monks of a few other monasteries which I am asked to look after. Growth of plants and trees and ultimately of a forest results into the creation of an atmosphere that is calm and quiet and is most congenial for meditation. Hence every Buddhist monk or layman should take care for the growth and sustenance of plants and trees and ultimately of forests”.

“A sense of genuine love for nature, for plants and trees has dawned in me”, observed Phra Ajan Boonmee. He continued, “The nature
of association between Buddhism and the care that is taken of plants and trees is evident. Perusal of the biographies of Gautama Buddha and other great monks of Buddhism clearly suggests that they utilized the solitude of the space in the midst of forest for practicing meditation and for gaining the knowledge of Dhamma. But, now-a-days depletion of forest has rendered the availability of a quiet place for meditation extremely difficult. Hence everybody should wholeheartedly try for regeneration and protection of plants and trees. In Watpa Satuek Monastery I try to do that to the best of my ability. In the two other monasteries which I have been asked to take care of I do what I do in Satuek. I try to convince the monks there of the need for putting in efforts for regeneration and nurture of plants, trees and forest. In Satuek I try to assist the abbot not only to take care of the forest in the monastery but also to convey the message of the need for protection of plant life to the villagers around the monastery. We try hard to ensure spontaneous and active participation by the villagers in activities for ensuring the growth of plants and trees in their villages. The monks of other monasteries that are connected with us are persuaded to do the same”.

Buddhism is, according to Phra Ajan Boonmee, a Dhamma of compassion and love for nature and all forms of life. Protection of plants and trees and forests is a form of articulation of that love. Forest Protection and practice of Dhamma are thus closely interlinked.

In reply to the question whether cutting of any tree is totally prohibited in Buddhist tenets, Phra Ajan Boonmee informed that cutting of dried up or dead trees is not forbidden. It may, rather, be considered necessary on such occasions when very old or dried out or dead trees
prove to be a hindrance to the growth and survival of other plants or trees. “If dry log is not removed from the forest, it will cause injury to other plant and trees. Space for planting new trees will be wanting. Sometimes, old trees turn out to be the abodes of white ants. They should be removed forthwith. Logs of dry or dead trees may be used in this monastery as fuel for such purposes as making of herbal medicine or running the unit of the monastery for offering herbal treatment through steam or vapour to the patients. In Watpa Satuek Monastery we have such a herbal treatment unit and we use pieces of log as fuel for boiling the huge amount of water mixed with herbs, which is needed for operating such a unit”.

The researcher found Phra Ajan Boonmee engaged in the laborious task of cutting the dried up logs of trees into pieces, of course, with the help of other persons most of whom were villagers of the surrounding villages. He did not seem to have any inhibition against it since the logs come from dried up or dead trees. Sometimes, 4 or 5 years old trees were cut down in case worms and insects ate into the vital of these trees. Great care was taken at the time of removing or cutting down trees. Indiscriminate felling of trees was scrupulously avoided so that cutting down of trees should not harm in any way the plant life in the forest of the monastery. Nurture of plant life in the monastery was a major concern of Phra Boonmee as well as of other monks of Watpa Satuek Monastery. According to him, the importance of forest in the life of Buddhist monks can hardly be overemphasized. Forest itself is a great teacher. Phra Boonmee has told the researcher that forest has many a hidden meaning of the various elements of Dhamma, or of life lived in accordance with Dhamma. “Many things of our mundane life on this earth to which we are attached appear to be insignificant in the forest which teaches us, the
monks, that the monks need not carry (material) things with them since everything is transient and will fall one day. It teaches us how to delete *kilesa* or desire for worldly things. Further, it teaches us that the shadow of the tree is enjoyed by others as well as by us. A tree is like a friend whom we have no reason to hurt. To injure a tree is like hurting a friend. Such a meritorious inner attitude toward nature will prevent us from destructive behavior, on the one hand, and will encourage helpful actions, on the other.” “Moreover”, Phra Ajan Boonmee continued, “the law of nature or *Kottamachat* (Thai word) suggests that humans and all other sentient beings are bound together in a universal process of birth, old age, suffering and death. Consciousness of this principle and of the common enemy, the king of death (*Maccuraja*) or Mara, yields the sense that we need to weigh carefully the consequences of our action so that we do not willingly increase the suffering of sentient and non-sentient beings and our use of plants and animals should not be careless and irrational”.

### 4.7 Case Study of Phra Arkhom Chathasupo

A noteworthy feature of Phra Arkhom’s life in Watpa Satuek monastery is that he himself volunteered for making broomsticks for cleaning the space within the monastery including that of the monastery forest. He would most diligently and carefully and skillfully make the broomsticks with the fallen leaves of trees of the monastery. He would tie the leaves with the stick firmly so that those who would use the broomsticks should not find any difficulty in sweeping the ground and the leaves and garbage from the surface of the area of the monastery and also the forest. The broomsticks were very strong. Phra Arkhom told the
researcher that he never considered the work of making of broomsticks
difficult or an act of compulsion. He liked the task because it would help
maintain cleanliness in the monastery and clear the jungle of the huge
amount of leaves and small twigs fallen from the trees and of undesirable
materials such as the mounds of white ants from the forest of the
monastery. The monks of the monastery liked the strong sturdy
broomsticks made by Phra Arkhom. A more interesting fact was that
several other monks in Watpa Satuek Monastery volunteered for helping
Phra Arkhom in his self-chosen task of broomstick-making. Phra Arkhom
seemed to be very particular regarding the cleanliness in the monastery
and the forest of the monastery. There is, according to Phra Arkhom, a
connection between cleanliness and Buddhism and protection of forests.
There should be some arrangement for regular observation of the
condition of the forest. If the forest ground were full of undesirable forms
of plants, creepers or trees and mole-hills or mounds of white ants, it
would be rendered unfit for the growth of desirable plants and trees.

Phra Arkhom told the researcher that he belonged to a farmer
family. After he had finished his study at high school, he left the rural
residence and went to Bangkok to find a job there. He got it and paid an
annual visit to Satuek every year to spend some time with the other
members of their family such as the parents and siblings. He did not till
then embrace even temporarily the life of a monk. But, his parents desired
that he should embrace the way of life of the monks for a brief while. In
deerence to the desire, he got himself ordained as a monk in the Buddhist
order 9 years ago, i.e., in 1999. His master was Luangpoh Somponr who
ordained him into the life of a monk in Watpa Satuek Monastery.
Originally, he had the plan of leading the life of a monk only for a month.
But, after his ordination into the order of monk life, his experience of monk life was so happy and fulfilling as he gave up the idea of returning to the life of a lay person. Phra Arkom started learning the principles of Dhamma at Watpa Satuek Monastery. He completed the course up to Dhamma class 3. Phra Arkhom continued to learn and practice Dhamma with the guidance of Luangpoh Somporn. The practice of Dhamma in Watpa Satuek Monastery did include taking care of regeneration and protection of herbs, plants, trees, and forest.

Phra Arkhom came to appreciate a special kind of relationship between the ‘clean’ and the ‘green’. And, he could convey his understanding to the others as well. This became evident from the fact that several other monks were impressed by his devotion to the work of the keeping the monastery and monastery forest clean and green and his self-chosen task of making broomsticks for the purpose. The researcher too came to appreciate the relation between the task of maintenance of the cleanliness in the surrounding of an area and that of care and protection of the green plants and trees in that area. He also learnt from Phra Arkhom how to make strong and useful broomsticks so that he could make such broomsticks for their use in his own monastery in the suburbs of Bangkok.

Phra Arkhom was found to religiously perform the task of cleaning leaves and twigs of trees that were strewn over the roads and roadsides in the monastery area. He used to enter into the forest area and clear the ground of leaves and twigs and branches. And, he was not alone. Some other monks also joined him in doing the task. They spent two hours
everyday on this work. The researcher too joined the team during his stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery.

During his field work in Watpa Satuek Monastery the researcher himself too came to realize the meaning of the observation by Phra Arkhom, “I feel fresh in mind and spirit when I discover myself in a clean and green atmosphere. I breathe pure and natural air when I stand or sit under a tree. When I can do something for the regeneration and particularly, preservation of plants and trees, I feel a sense of accomplishment. My insistence on maintenance of cleanliness is a step towards my practice of Dhamma which suggests an intimate connection between Buddhism and reverence for and love of nature”.

Phra Arkhom expressed his sense of gratitude to his master Luangpoh Somporn for gaining the insight into the nature of the relationship of the practice of Dhamma in Buddhism and the care taken of nature—the plants, trees and forest. His occasional visits to and stay in Phanumyoi Monastery, informed Phra Arkhom, buttressed this understanding and appreciation of the great value of keeping the nature clean and green. “Forests give us the space, the quiet and calm place for our meditation. We should try to help the growth and preservation of a much larger number of plants and trees and take every step towards maintaining our surrounding clean and green. We can then realize the spirit of Dhamma”, observed Phra Arkhom.

There is a bond of cooperation between Watpa Satuek Monastery and the monastery at Phanumyoi Monastery and its different branches. That way, Watpa Satuek Monastery may be considered a branch of Phanumyoi Monastery. The monks in these monasteries may be called
upon to extend their hands of cooperation for the performance of job in Phanumyoi monastery and in any other monastery related to it. Similarly, Phanumyoi Monastery will send its monks to any monastery connected with it in case a need for that arises. Phra Arkhom observed that he always admired how the monks of Watpa Satuek monastery and those of Phanumyoi Monastery and the other monasteries connected with it shared the value of care and protection of nature as part of the practice of Dhamma. And, he felt a sense of gratification that the need for clearing the surrounding of the monastery and monastery forest of undesirable elements was getting increasingly appreciated by the monks in other places. What was required, in addition, was the spread of this understanding among the common people.

"Everybody should", remarked Phra Arkhom, "understand the importance of greening, greenery and cleanliness in a life that is tune with Dhamma. The series of plants and trees in a watpa is really helpful for getting relief from the sense of suffering that plagues one’s mind and the attainment of mind for purification of mind in mind and its purity constitute an effective step towards the attainment of wisdom (Panña). These are the goals of life of a devout Buddhist, of a monk in particular". It is quite natural that a monk should take every care regenerating and conserving plants and trees. "But, don’t you think that monk may have to engage in many activities of the mundane world to ensure regeneration and conservation of plants and trees and this engagement may tell upon his pursuit of the ultimate goal? asked the researcher. Phra Arkhom admitted, "I and quite a few of the other monks in Watpa Satuek Monastery had in fact faced this dilemma: the imperative of regeneration and protection of the forest in the watpa and its surrounding area and the
time and energy by the task, on the one hand, and engagement in discourses on Dhamma and meditation in solitude in the forest, on the other. I, however, sought to overcome the dilemma by accepting the tasks related to the growth and conservation of forests as an inseparable part of the practice of Dhamma since it is the forest that provides the most congenial atmosphere for meditation”. Phra Arkhom reiterated that in order to secure the goal of the regenerating and conserving the green cover of earth not only the monks but also the lay people in general should make a consistent and continuous effort towards the maintenance of cleanliness and greenness of the surroundings of human habitats and also of the sacred places such as monasteries. Phra Arkhom felt that he and the other monks of Watpa Satuek Monastery put in their modest effort for generating awareness of the need for creation and conservation of plants, trees and forest in the minds of the people.

4.8 Case Study of Mae Chi Sununtha Pongprayung

The researcher met three nuns, viz., Mae Chi Sununtha, Mae Chi Sudjai, Mae Chi Chanphen, and two lay women, viz., Mrs. Kulab and Mrs Arthai, who are assistants to the nuns, during his stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery. The huts of the nuns were situated in the back side of the monastery. The researcher accompanied by Luangpoh Sudev, visited the nuns’ area for interviewing the nuns. Luangpoh Sudev called the nuns to come to talk with the researcher sitting under the Yang na grove.

Mae Chi Sununtha is the oldest nun, rather the oldest inmate, of the Watpa Satuek Monastery. She was 93 when the researcher met her in Watpa Satuek Monastery, i.e. in 2008. The researcher was accompanied
by Luangpoh Sudev at the time of his interviews of the nuns. It created a difficulty. If the nuns had any grievance against the abbot or any other monks of the monastery, or arrangement in the monastery as a whole, they would not express it in presence of an important monk of the monastery. And, the researcher could in no way learn of such grievances, if there were any, since he could not alone talk to them. He must be talking to them in presence of a monk of the monastery.

When Luangpoh Sudev introduced the researcher to the nuns, they were a bit surprised with the information that the researcher completed higher education up to M.A. level in the formal system of education. They admired the achievement of the researcher. They appreciated his research - endeavour, particularly the subject matter of his research, viz., relation between Buddhism and protection of plants, trees and forests. Mae Chi Sununtha and the other three nuns expressed their happiness with the researcher’s choice of the topic.

Even at a ripe old age Mae Chi Sununtha was found to engage in the task of regular observation and supervision of the work related to protection of plants and trees. Mae Chi Sununtha informed that she was born in a district of Roi Et Province. She was initiated into the order of nuns when she was 41. She did not say anything about her life before she embraced the life of a nun. Her initiation into the way of life of a Buddhist nun commenced in Phanumyoi Monastery. She had been practicing Dhamma since then. And, she came to cherish her way of life as a nun. She became free of the cares and anxieties of mundane life through meditation in the monastery. The trees and forest of the monastery had an important role in her practice of meditation. The
relative isolation in the monastery and calm and quiet amidst the trees greatly helped her practice Dhamma. Thus plants and trees became an inseparable part of her life.

Mae Chi Sununtha visited several other monasteries also in the Isan. She remembered that fifty years back the area of Isan was covered with dense forest. It was then not at all difficult to find trees and forests that helped meditation. But, she and scores of others—monks, nuns and lay people—remained almost helpless witness to the gradual depletion of forest in the Isan.

Mae Chi Sununtha came to Watpa Satuek Monastery from Phanunyoi Monastery in 1998 to help Luandpoh Somporn in his work of regeneration and protection of forest in Watpa Satuek Monastery. She came to know luangpoh Somporn in Phanunyoi Monastery where she came to admire his devotion to protection of forest as a part of practice of Dhamma. When she came to Watpa Satuek Monastery, the area of the monastery was not so densely covered with herbs, plants and trees as it appears today. The area was covered with Pek grass. Pek grass grows and spreads quickly. It does not allow other plants and trees to grow. It turns the soil dry. Luangpoh Somporn put in great effort to first clear the area of the monastery of Pek grass. The other monks as well the villagers of nearby villages assisted him in performing the task. Two other nuns accompanied Mae Chi Sununtha in her journey from Phanunyoi Monastery to Watpa Satuek Monastery. One of them still continued to stay in Watpa Satuek Monastery, the other had since left. These three nuns also joined the venture.
Mae Chi Sununtha, as the oldest nun, virtually looked after the other nuns and their female assistants as well as the female visitors to the monastery. Of course, the overall charge of the monastery remained with the abbot. Mae Chi Sununtha and other nuns and female assistants of the monastery felt happy to get the opportunity for preparing food and offering it to the monks in the Eating hall, situated near the Big Chanting Hall. After the monks collected food articles from the villagers in their arm-bowls, they would put them together and the nuns would prepare food out of the stuff thus gathered together. Then they would put the cooked food in the arm-bowls of the monks. The monks would have their food from their respective arm-bowls. What would remain after meeting the needs of the monks would be taken by the nuns, their female assistants, and also by the lay people who might happen to visit the monastery. Arm-bowls were used by the monks only; the nuns or lay persons were denied the use of arm-bowls. Both the monks and nuns would take food after chanting. The monks and the nuns would engage in work after having food. Mae Chi Sununtha and other nuns would like the monks take food only for once a day. The lay persons who might come to the monastery for Dhamma practice would follow the same rule.

Though old in age, Mae Chi Sununtha would never sit idle. She would look after the cleanliness in the monastery. She would go to the forest almost everyday to clear the forest ground of Pek grass or any undesirable plants. She and the other nuns would root out thick layers of Pek grass or harmful plants, which they might find, to facilitate the growth of desirable plants and trees. She and her companions took delight in plucking mushrooms from the forest and use them in preparing food for the monks and others.
"How did you come to develop the idea regarding the value of forest protections," asked the researcher. In reply said Mae Chi Sununtha, "They say that I am a calm and quiet person. Indeed, I've always liked calm and quiet places, even when I did not become a nun. Forests are an abode of calm and quiet atmosphere. Buddhism emphasizes meditation as a step to attain a state of peace and quietness of mind. A forest, away from the din and bustle of mundane life, helps one a great deal for practicing meditation and attaining peace of mind. I, one may say, intuited this close relationship of forest and the practice of Dhamma in Buddhism. The lessons received by me from monks such as Luangphob Sompon buttressed by intuitive understanding. I always felt alarmed and pained whenever trees were cut down or forests were "cleared". But, so many factors that lay beyond the control of humble souls like myself worked in the past for the destruction of trees and forests. The people as a whole became looser thereby. So, whenever, I found an opportunity for doing whatever I could do in my modest way for regeneration and protection of plants and trees, I utilized it with alacrity".

While the other respondents mentioned above highlighted the fact of donation of plants by the monastery to the villagers for encouragement to the efforts towards forest protection, Mae Chi Sununtha drew the attention of the researcher to another aspect of the process of forest protection by the monastery and monks and the lay people. She observed that in earlier and even at present times she purchased plants of trees from the market and donated them to the monastery. It was considered by her an act resulting into accumulation of merit or Puñya. She mentioned that she donated a great number plants of Pradoo trees to Watpa Satuek Monastery. The adult or grown up Pradoo
Mae Chi Sununtha pointed out that the campaign for *Thot Phapa Tonmai* encouraged people of the villages around Watpa Satuek Monastery to donate trees to the monastery. Thot Pha Pa Tonmai proved to be a ritual regularly observed by the lay people and encouraged by Watpa Satuek Monastery. The ritual took place every years in the rainy season. This was the ritual when the lay people of the villages around the Watpa Satuek Monastery or those who came to visit the monastery well as the monks and nuns presented herbs, plants and young trees to the monastery. By making this gift of trees to the monastery, they sought to earn merit or *Puñya*. Some of these plants or trees presented by the devotees were relatively costly. Watpa Satuek Monastery’s stock of plants got enriched thereby. The monastery would take every care in planting and nurturing these plants and trees. Since it had become an annual ritual, every year the monastery was assured of the supply of a quantity of plants and trees. This fact helped the replenishment of the forest of the monastery. When the quantity of such plants and trees would be very large, Watpa Satuek Monastery would distribute the surpluses quantity of trees to other monasteries. Thus, this ritual helped regeneration of forest not only in Watpa Satuek Monastery but in several other monasteries which were related to it in terms of the chain of monasteries linked with Phanumyoi Monastery. The ritual of Thot Pha Pa Tonmai, as mentioned by Mae Chi Sununtha, seems to be connected with the ritual or Thot Pha Pa as described by Phya Anuman Rajadhon in his
book *Popular Buddhism in Siam* (1986)\(^3\). However, Mae Chi Sununtha’s description seems to point out the latent function performed by the ritual (Thot Pha Pa Tonmai) for regeneration and protection of forest (and it is not highlighted by Rajadhon).

\(^3^\)“Thot pha pa’ literally means the laying down of forest cloth. In actual practice a piece of cloth is placed on branch of a tree in the wildness for any passing monk to take and utilize as a robe........

During the Buddha’s time a monk had to be satisfied with a robe made from discarded clothing from the living or in some cases belonging to a corpse which he may happen to find. A person wishing to present any wandering monk with a robe could do so by hanging a cloth or clothing somewhere in an uninhabited place for the monk to take as his own. This is the original meaning of ‘Thot pha pa’.

In actual practice those who wish to perform a ‘thot pha pa’ hang a robe or a piece of cloth somewhere in an out-of-the-way place. In addition other articles are provided for the monk. Usually a small earthen jar is filled with articles, including of course a robe or a piece of cloth. In the middle of jar a miniature tree or an actual branch of a tree is fastened into position. On the many branches are hung numerous small articles, chief among them being a towel folded into the form of a gibbon. This doll is hung on a certain branch of the tree, obviously to give the effect of being a tree in a forest. The whole can be conveniently transported to any place. This jar of things is carried into a *wat*. A monk will come up and touch the robe or cloth with his right hand silently saying words in Pali which may be translated thus: ‘This cloth is owned by nobody. It is a rag from a dust heap. It ought to belong to me’. He then takes it along with the other things........

The ‘Thot pha pa’ which usually takes place during the *Kathin* season may be performed at any other season or time.......The people take advantage of the rainy season to have a picnic excursion along the rivers and canals, and carry on with their merit making at the same time; hence ‘Thot kathin’ is usually performed during this season.

The ‘Thot pha pa’ maybe one man’s show or it may be organized by a group or party. Sometimes there are competitions to see who can provide the ‘pha pa’ with the most costly or gay decorations. There is also music and processions. People of small means may combine their resources by subscribing to their own ‘Thot pha pa’. On the eve of the appointed day there may be a celebration of the ‘Pha pa’ with plays and other entertainments. Some ‘pha pa’ in the past were on a grand scale. The people are willing to go to great pains and expense as they consider it all a matter of merit making. Undoubtedly it is the instinctive desire in man to express himself of his own person”. (Phya Anuman Rajadhon.1986.*Popular Buddhism in Siam and Other Essays on Thai Studies.*,pp81-83; emphases added).

As the last sentence in the above citation suggests, Phya Anuman Rajadhon also mentions a latent function of the ritual, viz., assertion of his/it identity by an individual or a group through the colourful celebration of the ritual, though its manifest function may be described as facilitation of merit making. Though, Phya Anuman Rajadhon does not focus on the association between the ritual and the phenomenon and fact of forest regeneration and forest protection.
The latent function of the ritual lay, if one peruses the account of it by Mae Chi Sununtha in facilitating the work of regeneration and protection of plants and trees by the monasteries. And, the people also came to be involved in a certain way in the programmes of regeneration and protection of trees and forest. As to the problems faced by the monks and nuns of the Watpa Satuek Monastery in the course of activities related to forest protection, Mae Chi Sununtha pointed out, like the monks, the difficulty created by the villagers who engaged in the thieving of wood from the monastery of the forest for turning it into charcoal mainly for the purpose of selling it to the market of Satuek township. The people became accustomed to the fact and process of felling of trees which had continued through decades. They had not been conscious of the peril of denudation of earth of its green cover. In the Isan, efforts toward enlargement of agricultural land claimed countless plants and trees. The so-called developmental activities of the government, and the conduct of the bureaucrats, other government employees, the contractors and timber mafia had a prominent role in the destruction of forest. Now, constant campaign for protection of plants, trees and forests launched by the government, NGOs, and the monk and monasteries made people, to a certain extent, conscious of the need for protection of plants and trees. No longer were the people encouraged in their attempts at clearing jungles and creating thereby new cultivable land. People started taking interest in planting and protecting plants and trees and generating forest in most of the cases where it was possible. Though still a small segment of the lay people continued to indulge in activities that proved injurious to forest, their number and size would, Mae Chi Sununtha hoped, decrease gradually. And, Buddhism, its emphasis on the need for maintaining
forest which would provide the calm and quiet of the abode of trees would progressively strengthen the favorable attitude of the people towards the protection of plants and trees.

4.9 Case Study of Mae Chi Sudjai Chaisuwan

At the time of interview by the researcher in 2008, Mae Chi Sudjai, another nun of Watpa Satuek Monastery, told that she was 51 years old. She was a close associate Mae Chi Sununtha. And, she came to Watpa Satuek Monastery because of her admiration for Mae Chi Sununtha and because Mae Chi Sununtha had been working in Watpa Satuek Monastery.

Mae Chi Sudjai was born in Amnatcharoan province. Before her embracing the life of a nun, Mae Chi Sudjai had been working as a government officer. 7 years before, i.e., in 2001 she decided to enter into the Buddhist order and practice Dhamma intensely. She was ordained as a nun in a monastery in her native village of Amnatcharoan province. She had a chance to visit a number of monasteries and to practice Dhamma in those places. Thus 4 years ago she was there in Phanumyoi Monastery. She chanced to meet Mae Chi Sununtha there. And, she was immediately impressed by the dignity and equipoise, the calm and composed bearing. She decided to accompany Mae Chi Sununtha come down to Watpa Satuek Monastery. Since 2004 she had been staying in the monastery. She found it gratifying that she could assist Mae Chi Sununtha in her work in service of the life in the monastery which included taking care of regeneration and protection of forests. From her interaction with Mae Chi Sununtha and also from the Dhamma teachings and activities of the abbot
she could gradually realize the intimate connection between protection of plants, trees and forest and the practice of Dhamma in Buddhism.

When requested by the researcher to further explain her ideas about the relationship of Buddhism and protection of forest, Mae Chi Sudjai confessed that she did not have any deep knowledge of Buddhism which might help her adequately explain the link between Buddhism and practice of Dhamma on the one hand and showing reverence for nature and taking steps for protection of plants and trees and forests on the other. But, one thing was clear to her as it was to everybody else. The practice of Dhamma in Buddhism was related to meditation and calm and quiet atmosphere helped meditation. Mountains and forests provided this kind of atmosphere. The trees in the forests would not speak or make a noise. The silence and peaceful atmosphere amidst the clusters of trees in a forest provide the most congenial atmosphere for practicing meditation which forms a part of the practice of Dhamma. Mae Chi Sudjai himself was keenly interested the peace of mind that might be obtained through meditation in a calm and quiet place and such a place was available in the forest. It was this need for peace of mind that prompted her to renounce her job in the government and embrace the life of a nun. For ensuring the appropriate space for gaining peace of mind people should try for protection of forests and regeneration of the same where they had been destroyed.

"The monks do a lot of work for protection of forest but what role do the nuns play in it? Is there any special reason why the nuns like you should take interest in it?" the researcher asked Mae Chi Sudjai. In answer to the questions, Mae Chi Sudjai replied that the nuns could do a
lot to supplement the work of the monks for protection of forests. The nuns would perform a very important task in regeneration and protection of forests in monasteries in particular. The nuns were especially interested in monastery forests "Why?" asked the researcher. Mae Chi Sudjai replied, "Look, the monks are males and in most of the societies the monks can move more freely and fearlessly than the nuns, who are females. The monks can travel distant areas in mountains and in dense forests. But, the females, the nuns, can hardly do it. For the females are more venerable to various kinds of hazards including those which they have to suffer because of their vulnerability as women. The monastery forests provide the females safety and security against such hazards. Hence, nuns like me are deeply interested in developing and protecting monastery forests like the forest maintained by Watpa Satuek Monastery".

Mae Chi Sudjai further informed, "I and Mae Chi Sununtha and two other nuns do whatever we can for the growth of plants and trees in the forest of the monastery particularly in that part of it which is contiguous to the nuns' side of the monastery. We avidly and actively join every year the campaigns of the abbot for the regeneration and protection of plants, trees and forests. We regularly keep a watch on the plants and trees in the monastery forest. I like Mae Chi Sununtha collect species of plants and trees from outside whenever it is possible for planting and nurturing them in the monastery forest. We collect these not only for the nuns' side of the monastery but also for the monks' side". Mae Chi Sudjai continued "The village women coming to the monastery seem to talk more freely to us, the nuns, than to the monks. We, the nuns, therefore, can enlist their cooperation for activities relating to the
Mae Chi Sudjai gave the additional information that the nuns along with the village women visited the monastery forest from time to time, particularly when the village women did not have much work to do at home and, therefore, come to the monastery to talk to the nuns. They would collect dried up logs and twigs and branches of trees. The village women would help the nuns in making charcoal out of it. While a part was given to the village women for their own use, a part of it was given to them for its sale in the Satuek township market. The money that the sale fetched would be spent for the maintenance of the huts and for the purchase of materials to be used by the monastery. "Of course, we do it," observed Mae Chi Sudjai, in the full knowledge of the abbot and with permission from him. It helps to make the forest ground clear of dried up logs and branches of trees and turn it fit for the growth of new plants and trees".

Mae Chi Sudjai concluded: "I am after peace and tranquility of mind. Indeed, that is the reason for getting myself ordained as a nun. This peace of mind is available in forest. While forests in general may be frequented by ill-meaning persons who may pose a threat to the nuns like me, a monastery forest is relatively secure. This is an important reason why the nuns take care to protect the monastery forest. Of course, the beneficial effect of plants and trees on human life of monks and nuns in particular (in terms of providing them a climate that is congenial to meditation) is always appreciated by those who have embraced the life of a monk or a nun, leaving behind the allurements of mundane life".
4.10 Case Study of Mae Chi Chanphen Malibat

Mae Chi Chanphen Malibat is the third nun now living and working for the practice of Dhamma in Watpa Satuek Monastery. At the time of her interview by the researcher, i.e., in 2008, she told that she was 50 years old. It means that she was born in 1958. She was ordained as a nun into the Buddhist Order when she was 45. She had been a housewife and living in a farmer family in Nikhom village which was near Satuek township and also Watpa Satuek Monastery.

Mae Chi Chanphen told the researcher that her elder daughter had been given in marriage to a young man of Nikhom village. She and her husband shared the same house where her parents, i.e., Mae Chi Chanphen and her husband, lived. Maechi Chanphen’s younger daughter studied in a college which was situated at a distance of forty kilometers from Nikhom village. She would visit her parental house at every weekend. Mae Chi Chanphen’s husband and both of her daughters took great care of Mae Chi Chanphen who suffered from several ailments. But, Mae Chi Chanphen felt embarrassed because everybody at home was kept anxious by her. Also she was tired of the repetition of the same course of activities and experience round the year. To put an end to the anxiety of her near ones for her health and to get over the problem of boredom Mae Chi Chanphen decided to embrace the life of a nun in nearby the Watpa Satuek Monastery.

“I chose Watpa Satuek Monastery because it was nearby my home in the village and I used to come here from time to time as a lay person and gathered good experience.”
Mae Chi Chanphen further observed, "Initially, I decided to embrace the life of a nun temporarily and after six months I would go back to the life of lay people. But, I find the activities in the monastery so gratifying that I do not feel like going back to the life of lay people. I like instead the way of life in the monastery. And, what is most interesting is that because of activities and regularity in the life of the monastery, my health has improved”.

When asked about the nature of activities done by her in the monastery, Mae Chi Chanphen mentioned that practice of meditation was one of her major activities in the monastery.

"I regularly engage in ‘walk meditation’ (Duen Chongkrom) under the trees. I like it more than anything else. Of course, I practice ‘sitting meditation’ (Nung Samāthi) also within the groves of the forest. Meditation gives me peace of mind. Indeed, it has improved my physical health as well”.

"Do you not do anything, then, for protection of the forest?" asked the researcher. Promptly came to the answer from Mae Chi Chanphen, "Oh, I do and love to do a lot of work for regeneration and protection of the forest. It is the trees and forest that give us the congenial climate for meditation. I and the two other nuns regularly take care of the plants and trees in the area of the monastery. Like the two other nuns, I too help the monks in their efforts towards the planting of herbs, trees and plants in the monastery of the forest and taking regular care of them”.

"What kind of idea do you have regarding the linkage between the practice of Dhamma and protection of trees and forests?" asked the
researcher. In reply Mae Chi Chanphen very frankly admitted that she did not have any clear idea of the connection between Dhamma and preservation of trees. She became conscious of the relationship of the two after her entry into the Watpa Satuek Monastery.

“Our abbot is a highly knowledgeable person. We have learnt the nature of the relation between forest protection and practice of Dhamma from him. I have been sensitized to the benefit of forest protection from the abbot’s Dhamma teaching. We try to help him in his campaigns for regeneration and protection of the forest. As I do the work, I feel refreshed and enlivened”.

The researcher asked Mae Chi Chanphen as to whether she had any experience of activities in the area of forest protection. She replied that she did not have any experience of that. She recalled that once, when she was living the village, the district Administration of Satuek announced the launching of a programme for planting young trees in their village and in other places. They requested the common people to actively participate in the programme. Protection of plants and trees was declared a vital part of the programme. But, Mae Chi Chanphen, like many other villagers, did not join the programme “Why”? enquired the researcher. “Because, the programme was conceived and sought to be executed in a bureaucratic fashion. There was no element in it which could ensure spontaneous involvement of the lay people in it. It was a programme funded by money allocated for it in the budget of the district administration which was in its turn connected with budget(s) of administration at higher levels. The problem with such programmes is that their performance was made closely linked with and contingent on the expenditure of money for
reaching the fixed target (in this case, of planting saplings and young tree of a certain number or quantity) within a stipulated period or point of time. Once, that tangent was reached, the administrative machinery did not show any further interest in it. Thus, once the trees were planted, the district administration hardly showed any interest in their nurture and protection. In such cases the entire effort proved to be abortive. There must be an awareness of appropriate values which would sustain people’s interest in the task of taking care of the saplings and plants and young trees that are planted in order to secure their nurture and growth”.

“Tenets of Buddhism spreading the message of love and compassion for nature —trees, plants, herbs, — if properly conveyed to the people, may ensure their voluntary participation in regeneration and protection of the trees,” continued Mae Chi Chanphen. According to her, “The abbot and other monks of Watpa Satuek Monastery try to explain the tenets of Buddhism showing its connection with reverence for nature and seek thereby to enlist the cooperation of the people in the creation and protection of plants and trees”. Mae Chi Chanphen and other nuns help the abbot and other monks in this task. Participation in forest protection gives her a measure of peace of mind which she did not experience earlier.

4.11 Case Study of Mr. Suthee Wongpok

Watpa Satuek Monastery has an arrangement for offering lodging to the visitors to the monastery. They can stay in the few huts reserved for the purpose. Male visitors get shelter in the males’ part and female visitors get lodging in the females’ part of the monastery. If the number
of visitors is large then they put up at the tents pitched in the monastery ground or in the chanting hall. There is another provision for lay persons. Those persons who remain connected with the monastery for a considerable length of time and help the monastery in performing its manifold activities are granted board and lodging by the monastery. A few cottages have been constructed for the purpose.

Mr. Suthee Wongpok was such a lay person. Mr. Suthee at the time of interview told the researcher that he was 85. But, he looked much younger than his age. He was agile enough in his movement.

Mr. Suthee was granted a hut for his lodging in the monastery. It was situated near the big chanting hall located in the monks' portion of the monastery. Mr. Suthee would go home at the weekend. On certain occasions, he stayed back in the monastery for two or three weeks at a stretch. He thus had regular connection with his family. Thus, he was not a monk, nor was he a novice. He remained a householder who came to the monastery for more intense practice of Dhamma than what was possible back home and stayed there for a much longer period than the occasional or regular visitors. It seemed that his tie with his family or household became increasingly feeble.

It seemed that Mr. Suthee was a pious man. He had great devotion to the life in the monastery. He had great reverence for the abbot and other monks. Like any other lay person he would sit on the ground in presence of the monks and would not take a seat on an equal pedestal with the monks even if he were requested to do that. The researcher, though a monk, was much junior to him by age. The researcher would call Suthee as Poh Suthee. The expression Poh is used as a prefix to the
name of a senior person is order to show the respect of a junior to a senior. Poh is an honorific term (Literally it means father or it means a father – like person) of address. But, when the interview took place Poh Suthee refused to share the same floor with the researcher, a monk, and took his seat on the ground. “A lay person,” he implored, “should sit below the level of monks”.

Poh Suthee had his home and family in Roungliey village which was situated at a distance of three kilometers from the monastery. Poh Suthee was the head of what may be termed a joint family. He had four children. All of them had grown up. Indeed, all of them were married. The only daughter was given in marriage to a youngman of the same village where Poh Suthee lived. The couple lived in a house which was near Poh Suthee’s house. The same held true of his elder son too. He too soon after his marriage settled in a new house which was very near his parental house. The younger sons, even after their marriage, continued to stay with their parental family. The original structure of the house was enlarged to accommodate the new entrants to the joint family. There was an intimate connection between Poh Suthee and his children and grand children.

Poh Suthee invited the abbot and three other monks of Watpa Satuek Monastery to regularly visit the village in which he lived and to collect food articles from the villagers in their arm-bowls. And, the monks complied with his request. The abbot and several other monks visited the village of residence of Poh Suthee. Thenceforth, at least three monks would everyday visit the village with their arm-bowls. They would walk down the distance from the monastery to the village in the
morning and a car of the monastery would bring them back to the monastery. The villagers thus got the opportunity to earn Punya (merit) by giving alms to the arm-bowls of the monks round the year. Needless to say, Pho Suthee thus endeared himself to the villagers.

Interestingly enough, the name of the village where Poh Suthee resided was Roungliey which is a Thai word for ‘sawmill’. Poh Suthee explained why his village was so called. The site on which the village was now located was the area where several sawmills were found to be operating. At the time of interview of Poh Suthee there were four sawmills still operating. Earlier the number was larger. In a sawmill wood is sawn up into planks, using a power-driven saw(s). It means that the input for the sawmills was collected from the forest in and around the area where the village came to originate. However, because of nationwide ban on logging of trees (1989) and because of the growing awareness of the people in the area of the adverse effects of disappearance of trees and forests, felling of trees slowed down. The number of sawmills also decreased. Input for the existing sawmills came from places outside the village. The area was located at the border between Cambodia and Thailand. Input for the sawmills started coming from Cambodia when the ban on logging came into force.

Village Roungliey originated at the margin of a once existing forest. The number of residents of the village (which did not then acquire a recognized identity or name) was quite small. But, it grew in size when the workers in saw mills brought their families from outside to reside there on a more or less permanent basis. It is interesting to note that these people who came to the area in connection with their job in the sawmills
which required logs of trees for their continuance. At a later point of time, mentioned Poh Suthee, these same people came to appreciate the problem of felling of trees in the area around their village and oppose the felling of trees. Obviously, the nationwide ban on logging and constant watch by the vigilant employees of Royal Forest Department had a role in it. But, Poh Suthee pointed out, the monastery and the monks too had a role in arousing the consciousness of the people of the need for regeneration and protection of trees and forests. The campaign for regeneration and protection of trees, distribution of saplings, plants and young trees, free of cost among the villagers had a positive impact on the villagers’ affirmative attitude towards protection and sustainable growth of the plants and trees.

Poh Suthee explained the impact in terms of his own personal experience. “I had worked for long thirty years in the sawmill in Roungliey village. I gained valuable experience in the work of shaping wood of different forms and sizes. Indeed, because of this experience I could offer my service as an efficient carpenter to the monastery. When I touch a log or a piece of wood I can tell the area or place wherefrom it came. But, because of my contact with the monks of the Watpa Satuek Monastery and their campaign for forest protection, I came to develop a favourable feeling towards the objects of nature- water, plants and trees”. This feeling had started working in Poh Suthee since the time he came in contact with Luangpoh Somporn, the abbot of the monastery, in 1994. Luangpoh Somprn’s persuasive way of conveying the message regarding the practice of Dhamma and activities for protecting forest had a salutary effect on him and many other villagers. “I left my job in the sawmill since
I felt bad about sawing the logs which I knew came from trees cut down for earning profit," remarked Poh Suthee.

"I must say", continued Poh Suthee "that by that time I could earn an amount of money which was necessary for putting our family in a more or solid financial position. True, the owners and the management of the sawmill where I worked insisted on my staying back and I knew that I could earn a larger sum by continuing in the job. But, I decided to leave the job and do whatever little I could do for regeneration of forest in Monastery and in our village".

"Why do you give the first priority to regeneration of forest in Watpa Satuek Monastery?" asked the researcher. "The reason is", replied Poh Suthee, "that the monks require dense forest for their meditation. If a monastery does not have a good number of trees in the area under it, i.e., if it does not have a good forest within and around it, the monks, particularly those monks who are regarded as Phra Patibat or monks who take meditation as praxis may feel compelled to leave such a monastery in search of a dense forest or some dense area in a forest for their meditation. The lay persons like us would then be deprived of the opportunity to listen to their teachings of Dhamma. From whom then would we learn the art and meaning of meditation? We shall then lose proper guides in our practice of Dhamma and meditation. A watpa should, therefore, be helped in every possible way in developing and

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4 The crystallization of particular monastic practices associated with forest dwelling—as a historical process, reinvigorated during the nineteenth century—has intensified the traditional division in the Greater Thai Sangha between the vocations (or "yokes", as Gombrich [1988] has it) of scriptural learning (pariyat: Pali: pariatti) and meditation as praxis (patibat; Pali: patipatti). (J.L. Taylor. 1993. Forest Monks and The Nation-state, pp 11; emphases added).
maintaining a good forest within its ambit. Everybody should help the process”.

The area where the monastery was founded was devoid of plants and trees. It lay like a pastureland and was covered with Pek grass and, therefore, even the cattle did not graze it. Many villagers had an eye on it. They were seeking opportunities for turning into it a land for cultivation. But, some of the villagers tried to resist the attempt by taking initiative in founding a watpa Satuek Monastery on the land and they succeeded.

Once the monastery was started, the question of regenerating forest on the pastureland -like area became most important. Efforts towards that came to be strengthened when Luangpoh Somporn took charge of the monastery. But, the task of clearing the soil of thick and stubborn Pek grasses was very arduous. “Villagers like me came to join the team of Luangpoh Somporn in weeding out of Pek grasses and making the ground fit for plantation of trees. The villagers contributed their physical labour for reaching the target. Not only that but the villagers themselves helped the monastery acquire plants and young trees for their plantation in the ground cleared of Pek grasses”.

“It should be acknowledged”, observed Poh Suthee, “that the monks and monastery distribute every year a large number of saplings free of cost among their villagers on certain important dates every year. This has undoubtedly increased the interest of lay persons like me in the planting and nurturing of trees in our villages and their vicinity. But, it may be modestly mentioned that the villagers too donate the stock of plants and young trees of the monastery through the celebration of
occasions such as ‘Thot Pha Pa Tonmai’ which take place also in the Watpa Satuek Monastery”.

“I have” continued Poh Suthee, “always found the work of regeneration of forest in Watpa Satuek Monastery highly gratifying. I have derived real pleasure in expending energy in plucking Pek grass and also in seeding plots of land for growing herbs”. Poh Suthee seemed to have knowledge of the names of herbs, plants and trees and the corresponding botanical terminology. He also claimed that he know the uses of many herbs or plants and trees. He would put in his labour of love for writing the names of herbs, plants and trees and their respective uses (or utilities) on pieces of tin and get them fixed close to the specific herbs, plants or trees. “If people know the names and uses or utilities of plants or trees”, said Poh Suthee, “They become interested in their planting and protection. I have, therefore, embarked on a programme of identifying all the plants, trees, and herbs in the monastery forest and also letting the people know these identities. The abbot of the monastery has readily accepted my proposal and encouraged me and a few other monks to do the task. Luangpoh Sudev himself has a thorough knowledge of the nature and utility of a large variety of herbs. He himself has taken interest in growing quite a few species of herbs in the forest of the monastery. And, he encourages the lay people to grow the herbs in the soil of their villages. And, for this he wants to be familiar with the names and nature and utilities of the herbs. Hence he too gives time in writing the names and qualities of herbs and plants on signs”. Poh Suthee found in the venture a strong desire of the abbot of the monastery and all the others connected with the task for making people conscious of the value of herbs, plants and trees not only for their physical health but also for their
spiritual benefit. Once the people became aware of the value of different herbs and twigs, plants or leaves and bark of trees, for their health and hygiene, they would hesitate to destroy them or to fell the trees. Dhamma teachings explaining the connection between the practice of Dhamma and reverence for nature would be reinforced through the demonstration of practical utilities of herbs and plants in people’s mundane life.

“Of course, Dhamma teachings highlight not only the practical utilities of plants and trees but the fact that the practice of panca sila includes refraining from killing creatures, which suggests the principle of non-injury to all forms of life and to nature. But, to make the people conscious of the practical values of specific of herbs or plants or trees is a

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5 Sulak says, “all Buddhists accept the five precepts (panca Sila) as their basic ethical guidelines. Using these as a handle, we know how to deal with many of the real issues of our day (Sulak, 1992 as cited by Henning, 2002/2006)

The concept of morality manifests itself in the five basic precepts underlying the rules for monastic life and for lay people’s conduct respectively: (1) not to kill any living being (often interpreted as “not to harm”); (2) not take what is not freely given by the owner (stealing); (3) not to indulge in sexual misconduct; (4) not to lie; and (5) not to consume intoxicant that lead to carelessness (Henning, 2002/2006).

In the first precept (i.e. refraining from killing), Sulak notes, ‘we promise not to destroy, cause to destroy, or sanction the destruction of any living being of any living being. Through accepting this precept, we recognize our relationship to all life and realize that harming any living creature harms oneself. The Buddha said, “Identifying ourselves with others, we can never slay or cause to slay”. (Sulak, Op.cit).

The first precept on refraining from killing and its meaning of non-violence (ahimsa) not only refers to directly taking the life of a living being through intentionally destroying its body. It also refers to indirect actions and non-actions. For example, the removal of natural habitat from wildlife and other living beings will destroy or harm these beings. The pollution of bodies of water will result in the dying or suffering of fish and other aquatic life, including other forms of land life which feed on water life. Also by not taking measures to prevent these indirect actions, one is involved with non-action when possibilities may exist to stop the killing of other living beings (Henning, 2002/2006).

“Buddha’s mindfulness about the environment created a variety of rules and precepts for the lives of forest monks, e.g., not to cut branches of trees, not to wear sandals made from palm leaves or young bamboo, not to toothwood of certain sizes, etc. He provided rules about how to urinate, how to use water, etc., which were remarkable in their environmental consciousness”. (Daniel H. Henning, 2006. A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology, pp. 37-38; emphases added).
step to grow in them an appreciation of the value of protection and preservation of nature. It is a step towards ensuring sustenance of forest not only for the present generation but also for the succeeding generations”.

Poh Suthee admitted that there were undoubtedly some greedy persons who did not value the preservation and protection of forest. But, he felt convinced that every pious Buddhist must realize its importance. “And, Watpa Satuek Monastery and its monks are sincerely trying to grow this realization in the minds of the people. The forest in the monastery and the abundance of trees in the villages around it is a pointer to this,” concluded Poh Suthee.

4.12 Case Study of Mrs. Ampha Chaitong

In course of his fieldwork in Watpa Satuek Monastery the researcher came to meet Mae Ampha, an eighty five years old lady, who was a lay person providing continuous service to the monastery. She was at that time living in a hut situated in the nuns’ side of the monastery.

The researcher had to secure permission from the abbot to have discussions with her. Poh Suthee accompanied the researcher to the nuns’ side. The nuns’ side was separated from the monks’ side by a narrow lane. The huts on nuns’ side were at a distance of 50 meters or so from those on the monks’ side. But, Poh Suthee told the researcher that it was after one year that he visited the nuns’ side.

When I met Mae Ampha, she was talking to a group of five lay women who, I was told, just arrived at the monastery. Mae Ampha was
discussing with them about the next days' programme. It was a full moon
day when the researcher first met Mae Ampha. Mae Ampha was not
initiated as a nun but she provided such a type of devoted service to the
monastery as everybody in the monastery acknowledged her contribution
to the wellbeing of the monastery. She lived in Nikhom village which
was near the monastery. She was a layperson who visited her home in the
village at the end of every week if the monastery did not have any special
religious ceremony to perform.

Mae Ampha on the day of interview was there in the monastery. She
received just before her interview five lay women who came to the
monastery to practice Dhamma, i.e., offer prayers and perform rituals on
the next day which was a full moon day. She was discussing with them
the matter which lay people were required to do at the time of performing
rituals and offer prayers on a full moon day. She was giving instructions
to the ladies regarding the change in their dress. They should wear white
dress and proceed to the chanting hall to get their identities registered
there. The women should follow the Sila of the chanting hall. The
women, it seemed, followed the guidance of Mae Ampha with reverence.

Mae Ampha was old in age but remarkably active in her daily life.
Everybody in the monastery was heard to mention her name with respect.
As the researcher met her, he could understand the reason behind it. Mae
Ampha had a bearing which naturally evoked a spirit of respect, rather
reverence, for her in the minds of others. The researcher too felt a sense
of reverence for her and almost spontaneously addressed her Mae Ampha
(Mae in Thai means Mother. It is used to address a mother-like figure or
an elderly woman who evokes respect or reverence in the hearts of men and women).

The hut used by Mae Ampha for the days of her stay in the monastery was situated, according to the norm of Watpa Satuek Monastery, on the nuns’ side of the monastery. It was at 4 p.m. on a day of January. The daylight was still there. The researcher found that the structure of the hut of Mae Ampha was made of concrete. The exterior of the hut was painted in cream colour. It was a very large structure. It had two floors. Each floor had a big hall, a toilet and a bathroom. About 25 persons could stay on one floor.

Mae Ampha had an amiable bearing and was soft-spoken. When she learnt the purpose of the researcher, she immediately agreed to respond to the queries by him. Not only that but she readily persuaded the five elderly women who came to meet her to have conversation with the researcher about the issue of protection of forest.

Mae Ampha told the researcher that she was not originally a Thai citizen. She came to Satuek district in Buriram province from Mahasarakham province to which her father migrated from Cambodia. But the family did not find enough opportunities for earning their livelihood and it migrated farther, around 1960, from Mahasarakham to Satuek district in Buriram province in search of land for living and cultivation. Mae Ampha was given in marriage to a well-off farmer in Satuek district. In course of time, she came to be the mother of six children. Two of them were daughters and four were sons. The girls were married to youngmen of Nikhom village, i.e., the same village in which Mae Ampha and her husband lived and amassed some property. The
husbands of both the daughters belonged to farmers’ families. All the four sons of Mae Ampha were engaged in farming. The land owned by Mae Ampha and her husband was equitably distributed among her children. Her sons lived on the earnings from cultivation of the land which they were given by their parents. A part of the landed property remained with Mae Ampha and her husband even after the distribution of a large portion of it among their children. A portion of what remained with her was sold out by Mae Ampha after the death of her husband. Mae Ampha lived in a separate household. She did not like to live in the household of any of her children. She liked independence and therefore avoided dependence on any offspring of hers.

“For how long have you been visiting the monastery? asked the researcher. Mae Ampha said in response, “I have been in touch with the monastery since its inception, i.e., since 1989. But, I became strongly interested in the activities of the monastery when Luangpoh Somporn joined the monastery and started his programme of afforestation of the area. As the forest grew in the monastery, it was turned into an abode of peace. I started visiting the monastery and forest regularly for peace of mind. I have given a major portion of my property to my children. They have their houses near to my house. They and their children often come to my house. Hence my house is often cluttered with them. With advancement in my age I find the noise created by them disturbing. I therefore spend some time in the monastery for its calm and quiet atmosphere. I regularly spend Wan Phra (3-4 days in Buddhist Calendar) period every month in the monastery”.
“Would you tell me how you came to appreciate the idea and programme of forest protection? asked the researcher. In reply Mae Ampha observed, “I came to be more seriously interested in the activities of the monastery when Laungpoh Somporn joined the monastery. He proved to be a very efficient abbot and an effective crusader for protection of forest. Truth to tell, our families—my family of orientation as well as my family of procreation—were after expansion of farmland. Therefore, we never appreciated the value and importance of protection of trees and plants and forest. But, Laungpoh Somporn made people realize the importance of regeneration and conservation of the green cover of the earth—i.e., of plants, trees and forests—for the sustenance of life and for the practice of Dhamma. Look, how green is the monastery and its surrounding! Laungpoh Somporn made all of us realize that the forest with its plants and trees and creepers and herbs provides calmness and peace, which is needed for meditation and practice of Dhamma. Many of us have voluntarily donated our time and energy to make Laungpoh Somporn’s programme of forest protection a success”.

The researcher enquired farther: “Would you specify a little more the nature of your participation in Laungpoh Somporn’s programme?” Mae Ampha replied, “We try to assist Laungpoh Somporn in planting saplings and trees inside and outside the monastery. I join the nuns and monks in their clearing the jungle and planting and nurturing saplings and young trees. I have persuaded my children and other kin to help, whenever they can, the monastery implement its programme for afforestation and forest protection. Also, they donate money to the abbot to meet part of the cost for implementation of the programme. Money is required to buy potable water, refreshments or food for the large number
of laypersons who came to participate in the activities of monastery for regeneration and protection of the forest. When my children or kin donate whatever sums they can, they do it willingly. It indicates probably that they have a measure of awareness of the need for creation and preservation of plants, trees and forest for protection of our environment and life. Also, they do it for earning merit or punya and in this way they indirectly practice Dhamma. Thus I and my kin help promote the programme of the abbot for regeneration and protection of forest in and around the Watpa Satuek Monastery”.

When Mae Ampha asked to kindly explain how her practice of Dhamma was related to participation in programmes for regeneration and conservation of plants, trees and forest, Mae Ampha remarked, “I am a layperson. I have not been ordained as a nun. I do not have, I must admit, any deep knowledge of Dhamma. I have learnt a little bit about Dhamma through my regular visits to the monastery. I am greatly indebted to the abbot of the monastery for whatever little knowledge of Dhamma I have got. As an ordinary Buddhist I know that the law of kamma (karma) governs us all. If I do a good deed, I shall earn merit or puñya. To help the monastery in its performance of various activities is considered by me and also by my children to be an act because of which merit or punya will accrue to us”.

“As lay farmers, I or my husband or any kin of mine did not”, continued Mae Ampha, “have any precise idea of the importance of plants, trees and forest in human life, in preservation of balance in ecology and environment, and in practice of Dhamma. It is from the people in the monastery, particularly from its abbot, that I and, through
me, my children came to realize it, though somewhat dimly. As for myself, I want peace of mind and tranquility. Though a considerable period in my life, I remained busy with mundane affairs such as earning of livelihood, acquisition of property, socialization of children, making arrangement for their proper placement in life and their marriage. The list of duties performed or to be performed by me for the members of our family and my kin seems to be a long one. I tried to perform my duties to the best of my ability. At the end of it all am I not entitled to relief from duties and to peace of mind which is necessary for practicing Dhamma?"

"My regular contact with the monastery", continued Mae Ampha, "made me reckon with the connection between the tranquility of trees and forest, on the one hand, and practice of Dhamma with peace in mind on the other. As I found the abbot and other monks of the Watpa Satuek Monastery most assiduously working for regeneration and protection forest in and around the monastery and as I listened to the discourses by the abbot, I came to develop a consciousness of the relation between the practice of dhamma and non-injury to nature and regeneration and preservation of plants, trees and forest. Like me there are many others among the lay people who view the participation in activities related and planting of trees and nurturing of them as a piece of good kamma which is in tune with the way of life prescribed by Buddhism. For gaining this sense of appreciation I am, personally, indebted to the abbot, the other monks, and the nuns of Watpa Satuek Monastery", concluded Mae Ampha.