

Mindfulness Training at Retreat: A Qualitative Study by Practising *Vipassanā* at Retreat

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Abstract

This study examines the significance of *vipassanā* meditation training at S.N. Goenka's retreats, focusing on its relevance for non-monastic participants. It explores the structured schedule, curriculum, and environment of the retreat, emphasizing its effectiveness and widespread appeal through the lens of a participatory observer. A key focus is on the practice of the *dasa pāramī* (ten perfections) and their impact on contemporary wellness among attendees.

The paper highlights the role of motivation in participant outcomes, revealing that spiritual aspirations significantly enhance engagement and performance, whereas outcomes differ for those motivated by other reasons. Psychological health assessments integrated into the retreat process further contribute to enriching participants' experiences, fostering both subjective and spiritual well-being. The research underscores the transformative potential of mindfulness practices, such as mindful eating, which realign participants' internal rhythms, promoting holistic health.

This work provides a nuanced perspective on the retreat's relevance, significance, and acceptance among participants, offering insights into its role in advancing psychological and spiritual health. It argues that *vipassanā* meditation effectively addresses contemporary wellness needs while resonating deeply with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Keywords: *Vipassanā* retreat, Mindfulness Meditation, *Dasa Pāramī*, Unconscious ego, *Mettā Bhāvnā*.

Introduction

Mindfulness meditation has become a subject of increasing interest and demand in contemporary society. Its origins can be traced back to Buddhist literature, where the Pāli term *sati*—translated as “mindfulness”—is a foundational element of meditative practice. Historically, mindfulness was cultivated primarily within monastic communities, from the time of the Buddha until the 18th century. In the 19th century, monastic teachers in Myanmar began extending these practices to lay communities as a means of spiritual development. The

global spread of mindfulness accelerated in the late 20th century when Jon Kabat-Zinn adapted it into secular therapeutic interventions through programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), framing mindfulness as a practical tool for health and well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Schlieter, 2017).

Within India, S. N. Goenka played a pivotal role in introducing retreat-based *vipassanā* meditation courses, which have since attracted participants worldwide. In contemporary times, the *Vipassanā* retreat can offer mindfulness practice through formal and informal contexts. The formal is structured meditation through samatha and vipassanā training and practice. Mindfulness is practiced informally through everyday activities like mindful walking, eating, and chores. The COVID-19 pandemic further heightened interest in mindfulness as individuals sought practices to support resilience, emotional balance, and overall wellness (Sinha et al., 2020).

As a student of Pāli literature, the author seeks to examine the contemporary relevance and impact of mindfulness training, particularly through Goenka's *vipassanā* meditation retreats. This study is guided by three primary research questions:

1. To what extent does *vipassanā* meditation uproot latent egoic tendencies (*anusaya/āśava*), and does this contribute to the development of humility as one advance along the path of the ten *pāramī*?
2. Does participation in a *vipassanā* meditation retreat recalibrate circadian rhythms, supporting a more regulated daily routine and enhanced psychological and physical well-being?
3. Would a pre-retreat psychological screening or self-reflection tool support first-time participants in understanding their current mental state and clarifying their motivations for attending? To what extent can mindfulness retreats offer meaningful benefits to a diverse range of individuals, and are there circumstances in which such retreats may be unsuitable? Is the environment and curriculum of mindfulness retreats accessible and inclusive for participants from varied socio-cultural, cognitive, or physical backgrounds?

This research, therefore, investigates *vipassanā* meditation as a practice that fosters personal growth, examines the need for psychological preparedness and support, and reflects on the accessibility of retreats. The paper is organized into the following sections: a conceptual overview of mindfulness meditation, a brief introduction to the *dasa pāramī*, participatory observations—including the researcher's lived experience of Day 0 at the retreat—and finally, a discussion and conclusion.

Methodology

This study examines mindfulness training at retreats, focusing on its significance for non-monastic individuals. It explores the acceptance of the curriculum and the environmental effects on participants who complete the course. As a researcher, it is important to recognize the resonance and effectiveness of the *vipassanā* process. However, to maintain objectivity, the researcher must remain detached from the process and observe it without bias. To ensure impartiality, the researcher has shaped the methodology based on practical experience.

The researcher explored the objectives of participating in *vipassanā* courses at Goenka's meditation centres. These centres offer two roles: *dhmma sādḥaka* (meditator) and *dhmma sevaka* (volunteer). Both roles aim to cultivate the four sublime states (*mettā, karuṇā, muditā, upekkhā*). *Dhmma sevaka* assist meditators by ensuring they wake up early, serve meals, provide care during practice, and help during emergencies. Both roles support the development of these sublime states.

From 2022 to 2024, the researcher participated in four 10-day *Vipassanā* courses. As a practitioner, the researcher experienced the roles of *dhmma sādḥaka* and *dhmma sevaka* during the course. The first retreat experience took place at Dhamma Giri (Maharashtra) as *dhmma sādḥakas*¹, similarly at Dhamma Koṇḍānā (Telengana) and Dhamma Kuṭi (Chattisgarh), served as *dhmma sevaka* at Dhamma Gaṅgā (West Bengal).

Concept of Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness is regarded as a safeguard for the mind, preventing it from reacting with desire or aversion. It fosters the development of insight into whether mental states are wholesome or unwholesome. When combined with clear comprehension, mindfulness lays the foundation for the growth of wisdom, which is essential for achieving spiritual liberation (Ditrich, 2016). Buddhism aims for transcendence, attained through the Eightfold Path, which integrates both practical and ethical elements. The purpose of meditation, including mindfulness, is to achieve liberation from suffering—referred to in Pāli as *bodhi*. While often translated as “enlightenment,” a more accurate term is “awakening”—awakening from the delusions, cravings, and aversions that cause suffering. Mindfulness is a key element in the broader soteriological framework of early Buddhism, which emerged within the religious discourses of ancient India and is inherently connected to them (Ditrich, 2016).

The mindfulness practice is popularly known as insight meditation in English and *samatha-vipassanā bhābanā* in Pāli literature. In the Pāli literature, the *samatha-vipassanā bhābanā* is explained in one word as *ekāyano magga*. The main objectives of this technique are to be free from worldly suffering and stop the cycle of life and death (MN.10., DN.30.). The *dhmma*

does not impose anything or stop any one to practice it on the basis of religious or demographic diversity. *Vipassanā* helps to balance the inclination of individuals towards materialistic possessions (Singhal and Sriram 2023). Mindfulness is a spiritual practice for becoming self-aware. In a world where the body is admirable for beauty and strength, mindfulness teaches spiritual seekers to accept their physical imperfections and use them as tools for spiritual growth (Lazaridou, Pentaris, 2016).

Brief Introduction to the *Dasa Pāramī*

The *pāramī* (perfections) constitute a vital framework within the Buddhist path, guiding practitioners toward enlightenment (*nibbāna*) and liberation from worldly suffering. According to Buddhist tradition, the attainment of *nibbāna* is possible when these perfections are cultivated to their highest maturity. While the concept of *pāramī* is not explicitly elaborated in the earliest canonical texts, it is systematically developed in later canonical and commentarial literature, particularly in connection with the *Bodhisatta* ideal.

Tradition holds that before attaining Buddhahood, Siddhartha Gautama perfected the *dasa pāramī* (ten perfections) over the course of countless lifetimes, spanning four incalculable aeons (*asaṅkhyeyya*) and a hundred thousand world cycles. This long process highlights the centrality of the *pāramī* for anyone aspiring to liberation: they are not merely moral virtues, but transformative qualities to be embodied and cultivated for the welfare of both oneself and others.

The eminent commentator Buddhaghosa, in his *Visuddhimagga*, underscores the profound consequences of practicing the *pāramī*. He explains that their development strengthens wholesome mental states, supports the arising of the ten powers (*dasa bala*), fourfold confidence (*catuvesārajjā*), six higher knowledges (*chaḷabhiññā*), and the eighteen unique qualities of Buddha (*aṭṭhārasa āveṇika dhammā*). Thus, the *pāramī* serve not only as a moral foundation but also as the very basis of Buddhahood itself.

Etymologically, the term *pāramī* (or *pāramitā* in Sanskrit) is often translated as “perfection” or “completeness” (Mahāthera, 2011). In *Theravāda* Buddhism, the *dasa pāramī* refer to ten noble qualities systematically cultivated by the *Bodhisatta*: *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (virtue), *nekkhamma* (renunciation), *paññā* (wisdom), *virīya* (energy), *khanti* (patience), *sacca* (truthfulness), *adhiṭṭhāna* (determination), *mettā* (loving-kindness), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). These are presented most prominently in the *Jātaka* literature, where the Bodhisatta’s past lives exemplify their gradual perfection.

Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005) notes that all the *pāramī* share a unifying principle: they are invariably rooted in compassion and guided by skilful means. Their characteristic is to benefit

others; their function is to provide unwavering support and assistance; their manifestation is the constant wish for the welfare of all beings; and their proximate cause is great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*). It is precisely the fusion of compassion and wisdom that transforms ordinary virtues into *pāramī*, making them the distinctive practices of the *Bodhisatta*. As Xien (2018) adds, the cultivation of these perfections purifies karma and enables an unobstructed progression along the path to ultimate liberation.

Dāna Parami

The first of the ten *pāramī* is *dāna*—the practice of giving or generosity. The treatises on the *pāramī* emphasize that a *Bodhisatta* is always ready to support and serve others, yet never seeks favours for himself. In a spirit of abundance, he gives freely, without distinction of caste, creed, or colour, and without expectation of personal gain. His giving is neither motivated by selfishness nor by possessiveness. In its essence, *dāna* is characterized by relinquishment. Its function is to weaken and dispel greed for possessions, while its manifestation lies in non-attachment and in the attainment of prosperity and a favourable rebirth. The immediate condition for giving is the availability of something that can be offered. The perfection of giving is thus rooted in the volition to surrender oneself and one's belongings, accompanied by compassion and skilful means (Bodhi, 2005). *Theravāda* sources further classify *dāna* into three types, according to the nature of what is given: the giving of material requisites (*āmisadāna*), directed towards those in need; the giving of fearlessness (*abhaya-dāna*), which involves offering protection and safety; and the giving of the *dhamma* (*dhammadāna*), considered the highest form of generosity, as it addresses the ultimate welfare of the recipient (Xien, 2018). In this way, the practice of *dāna* is not merely an act of offering, but one that responds to the needs of the recipients, fostering both compassion and wisdom in the giver.

Sīla Parami

The second of the *pāramī* is *sīla* (morality or moral conduct). For a *Bodhisatta* who has undertaken the life of a recluse, the practice of virtue is expressed through diligent observance of the disciplinary rules prescribed for renunciants. If, however, an individual leads the household life, his commitment to morality is upheld through adherence to the *pañca-sīla* (five Precepts). This entails abstaining from killing and harming living beings, refraining from stealing or taking what is not given, avoiding sexual misconduct, abstaining from false and harmful speech—including lying, harsh words, divisive speech, and frivolous talk—and refraining from intoxicants that cloud the mind and weaken mindfulness. In its broader sense, *sīla* is described as having the characteristic of composing and harmonizing one's actions (*sīlana*), coordinating behaviour (*samādhāna*), and establishing stability (*paṭiṭṭhāna*). Its

primary function is to dispel moral corruption and to ensure conduct that is blameless. The manifestation of virtue is moral purity, while its supportive conditions are moral shame (*hiri*) and moral dread (*ottappa*), which safeguard against unwholesome deeds. The perfection of virtue is expressed through wholesome conduct of body and speech, guided by compassion and skilful means. It entails refraining from unwholesome actions and nurturing the volition to undertake what is wholesome and beneficial (Bodhi, 2005). *Theravāda* texts explain moral discipline in four aspects: (1) restraint in accordance with the *pāṭimokkha* rules (*pāṭimokkhasaṃvara*); (2) restraint of the sense faculties (*indriyasamvara*), whereby one exercises mindfulness and self-control in relation to sensory experience; (3) purity of livelihood (*ājīvapārisuddhi*), ensuring that one's means of living are honest and ethically sound; and (4) proper reliance on the four requisites (*paccayasannissita*), using food, clothing, shelter, and medicine with wisdom and mindfulness (Xien, 2018). Thus, whether as a renunciate or a householder, the *Bodhisatta*'s practice of morality is not limited to abstention from wrongdoing, but represents a positive discipline that cultivates inner harmony, ethical responsibility, and compassion towards all beings. As such, *sīla* provides the firm foundation upon which higher mental cultivation and wisdom can be developed, ensuring that the path of the *Bodhisatta* is rooted in both integrity and compassion.

Nekkhamma Pāramī

The third *pāramī* is *nekkhamma* (renunciation), which plays a vital role in supporting and perfecting the practice of morality. For *Bodhisatta*, the cultivation of renunciation involves both the voluntary relinquishment of worldly pleasures through adopting an ascetic way of life, as well as the temporary overcoming of the mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) that obstruct meditative absorption (*jhāna*). In essence, *nekkhamma* is characterized by the deliberate turning away from attachment to sensual pleasures and conditioned existence. Its function is to reveal their inherent unsatisfactoriness, while its manifestation is expressed through the act of withdrawal and detachment from them. What gives rise to this renunciation is a sense of spiritual urgency (*saṃvega*), the deep realization of the impermanence and futility of worldly attachments. The perfection of renunciation, therefore, lies in the volition of consciousness that willingly abandons sensual pleasures and clings to existence. This act of letting go is not rooted in aversion, but arises from wisdom, compassion, and skilful means, allowing the *Bodhisatta* to cultivate inner freedom and prepare the mind for higher meditative states. Renunciation, in this sense, is not merely a rejection of the world but a compassionate choice that frees the mind from bondage, creating the conditions for the deeper realization of truth (Bodhi, 2005; Xien, 2018).

Paññā Pāramī

The fourth of the *pāramī* is *paññā* (wisdom), which is central to the *Bodhisattva*'s path. *Paññā* signifies the capacity to see things as they truly are, rather than merely accepting their surface appearance. It is the deep understanding of the real nature of phenomena and the discernment of what is truly beneficial and what is harmful to oneself and others. For this reason, the *Bodhisattva* strives to cultivate wisdom from every possible circumstance and source, treating life itself as a field of learning. Wisdom is characterized by its penetrative quality, likened to the arrow of a skilled archer that strikes its target with precision. Its function is to illuminate reality, comparable to the way a lamp dispels darkness, and its manifestation is clarity, or non-confusion, much like a guide who leads the way through a dense forest. The supportive conditions for wisdom are concentration and the realization of the Four Noble Truths, which provide the foundation for insight. The perfection of wisdom lies in the comprehensive understanding of both the general and particular characteristics of *dharmā*—that is, the universal features of impermanence, suffering, and non-self, as well as the distinct qualities of individual phenomena. Importantly, this perfection is not a cold intellectual pursuit but is always accompanied by compassion and skilful means, ensuring that wisdom serves the welfare of all beings (Bodhi, 2005; Xien, 2018).

Vīriya Pāramī

The fifth of the *pāramī* is *vīriya* (energy or perseverance). For the *Bodhisattva*, *vīriya* represents the tireless exertion of body and mind for the welfare and happiness of others. It is not merely physical strength, but rather the strength of character and determination that sustains wholesome action. In this sense, energy is understood as the persistent effort to cultivate the good, abandon the unwholesome, and dedicate oneself wholeheartedly to the service of others, both in thought and in deed. The characteristic of *vīriya* is striving; its function is to strengthen and fortify the mind against obstacles. Its manifestation is seen in indefatigability—the refusal to be discouraged or defeated in the face of difficulty. The condition that gives rise to energy is often a sense of urgency (*saṃvega*), or the recognition of the fleeting nature of life, which inspires the *Bodhisattva* to act with vigour and determination. The perfection of energy is thus expressed through the unceasing application of bodily and mental effort for the benefit of others, guided always by compassion and skilful means (Bodhi, 2005; Xien, 2018). It is through such tireless perseverance that the *Bodhisattva* exemplifies courage, resilience, and unwavering commitment to the path, transforming energy into a force for liberation and the welfare of all beings.

Khanti Pāramī

The sixth of the *pāramī* is *khanti* (patience), which is regarded as the capacity to endure difficulties with composure and to meet the faults of others with forbearance. For the *Bodhisattva*, patience is not a passive submission but an active strength of character, cultivated to such an extent that even in the face of severe harm—such as the loss of his own limbs—he remains unshaken, free from anger, and grounded in compassion. Patience is characterized by acceptance; its function is to endure both favourable and unfavourable conditions without agitation. Its manifestation is tolerance and non-opposition, allowing the mind to remain balanced in the midst of hardship. The condition that supports patience is insight into the true nature of phenomena—the understanding that all experiences, whether pleasant or painful, are impermanent and devoid of self. The perfection of patience, therefore, is the conscious endurance of harm and adversity, whether caused by other beings or by natural conditions. This endurance is not marked by aversion or resentment but by equanimity, compassion, and skilful means. In this way, *khanti* becomes a transformative force, enabling the *Bodhisattva* to meet the world’s challenges without hostility, and to turn suffering into an opportunity for cultivating deeper wisdom and boundless compassion (Bodhi, 2005; Xien, 2018).

Sacca Pāramī

The seventh of the *pāramī* is *sacca* (truthfulness), which signifies unwavering honesty and fidelity to one’s word. For the *Bodhisattva*, truthfulness is not merely a matter of speech but a quality that permeates thought, word, and deed. It is said of him: “He acts as he speaks, and he speaks as he acts” (*yathāvādi tathākārī, yathākārī tathāvādi*), highlighting the perfect alignment between his inner integrity and outward conduct. Truthfulness is characterized by non-deceptiveness in speech. Its function is to confirm what accords with fact, and its manifestation is excellence and trustworthiness, qualities that inspire confidence in others. The condition that gives rise to truthfulness is honesty itself—the innate inclination to reject falsehood and remain faithful to reality. The perfection of truthfulness is realized through consistent non-deceptiveness in speech and action, which may be analysed in terms of abstinence from falsehood, the volition to uphold truth, and the cultivation of integrity in every aspect of life. Always guided by compassion and skilful means, the *Bodhisattva*’s commitment to truth does not serve personal advantage but the welfare of all beings (Bodhi, 2005; Xien, 2018). In this way, *sacca* emerges as one of the most salient characteristics of a *Bodhisattva*, ensuring that his words are reliable, his actions transparent, and his presence a source of moral strength for others.

Adhiṭṭhāna Pāramī

The eighth of the *pāramī* is *adhiṭṭhāna* (determination), often translated as resolution, decision, or self-determination. Within the *Bodhisattva* path, *adhiṭṭhāna* is regarded as the firm foundation upon which all the other perfections rest. Without resolute determination, the *Bodhisattva* could not fulfil the other *pāramīs* or persevere in his tireless efforts for the welfare and happiness of all beings. Determination is the quality that enables the *Bodhisattva* to remain steadfast in his goal, regardless of the difficulties that may arise. Whether confronted with illness, grief, or disaster, he does not turn away from his chosen path. In essence, *adhiṭṭhāna* is characterized by the resolve to commit firmly to the requisites of enlightenment. Its function is to overcome the opposites of indecision and wavering; its manifestation is unshakable firmness in pursuing the task; and its supportive condition is the aspiration toward the requisites of awakening. The perfection of determination is the unwavering commitment to undertake and sustain activities for the good of others, a determination rooted not in self-interest but in compassion and skilful means. In this way, *adhiṭṭhāna* becomes more than willpower—it is the inner strength that aligns aspiration with action, ensuring that the *Bodhisattva* remains unyielding in his pursuit of awakening and the liberation of all beings (Bodhi, 2005; Xien, 2018).

Mettā Pāramī

The ninth of the *pāramī* is *mettā* (loving-kindness), the quality of boundless goodwill that underlies the *Bodhisattva*'s altruistic path. With unshakable *mettā*, the *Bodhisattva* is devoted to the welfare of all beings, without discrimination of caste, creed, colour, or gender. It is this selfless love that moves him to renounce his own immediate liberation in order to work tirelessly for the deliverance of others. Permeated by universal goodwill, he neither instils fear in others nor harbours fear himself, embodying harmony and trust wherever he goes. From the standpoint of the *Bodhisattva* ideal, *mettā* may be regarded as one of the deepest motives for undertaking the path of perfections. The *Ekarāja Jātaka* illustrates this spirit with the words: "No one can strike terror in me, nor am I afraid of anyone, for I am strengthened by the power of my loving-kindness, and I always take delight in the open forest." Here, loving-kindness is portrayed not as weakness, but as an inner strength that sustains courage, serenity, and joy. In doctrinal terms, *mettā* has the characteristic of promoting the welfare of beings; its function is both to provide for their well-being and to dispel resentment; its manifestation is gentle kindness, and its supporting condition is the perception of the lovable and positive qualities in others. The perfection of loving-kindness is the volition to work for the happiness and welfare of the world, always accompanied by compassion and skilful means. In essence, *mettā* is the active expression of benevolence, transforming the *Bodhisattva*'s inner goodwill into a universal embrace of all beings (Bodhi, 2005; Xien, 2018).

Upekkhā Pāramī

The tenth of the *pāramī* is *upekkhā* (equanimity), a virtue regarded as both the most challenging and the most essential to cultivate. The Pali term *upekkhā* is derived from *upa* (“justly, impartially, rightly”) and *ikkhati* (“to see, discern, or view”). Etymologically, it means “to see impartially” or “to discern rightly,” signifying a mode of perception free from attachment and aversion, favour and disfavour. Importantly, equanimity does not imply indifference or cold neutrality; rather, it denotes a balanced state of mind that remains steady in the face of life’s fluctuations. This perfection is especially difficult for lay practitioners, who live in the midst of an unbalanced world governed by ever-changing fortunes. Human life is inevitably marked by the “eight worldly conditions” (*lokadhamma*): praise and blame, fame and disrepute, gain and loss, pleasure and pain. In the face of such vicissitudes, the *Bodhisattva* stands unmoved, like a solid rock that remains steady against the shifting winds of fortune, exercising perfect equanimity grounded in wisdom and compassion. Doctrinally, equanimity is characterized by neutrality, its function is to view all experiences impartially, and its manifestation is the subsiding of attraction and repulsion. The reflection that all beings are heirs of their own *kamma* serves as its supportive condition. The perfection of equanimity, therefore, is the impartial attitude toward both agreeable and disagreeable beings and circumstances, a disposition that transcends bias and prejudice. Accompanied by compassion and skilful means, *upekkhā* ensures that the *Bodhisattva* acts neither out of attachment nor aversion, but with a mind imbued with balance, clarity, and unwavering dedication to the welfare of all beings (Bodhi, 2005; Xien, 2018).

According to the *dhamma* or *vipassanā* tradition of Sayagi U Ba Khin and his great disciples, SN Goenka School have given great importance to practicing *dasa Pāramī*, by attending the 10-day *vipassanā* course at retreat. The *pāramī* is good in human qualities, which helps to cross the ocean of misery and get enlightened to be free from worldly sufferings. This tradition helps attain *dasa pāramī* and encourages practitioners to reshape internally. They also endorse joining a course once a year. The environment in these centres helps to attain the *pāramī*.

Participatory Observation and Experience at the Retreat: From Day- 0 to Day-11

Noble Silence: From the very outset of the course, all participants are required to observe *Noble Silence*, which extends until the morning of the last day. This silence is not limited to refraining from speech but encompasses silence of body, speech, and mind. Participants are instructed to avoid all forms of communication with fellow meditators—whether through gestures, sign languages, written notes, or eye contact. Interaction is permitted only when strictly necessary, such as communicating with the teacher for guidance or approaching the management team regarding food, accommodation, or health-related matters. Even in such cases, participants are

advised to keep these exchanges minimal, fostering the sense that they are working in complete isolation. In line with this principle, participants are prohibited from engaging in any other activity that may lead to distraction, including gardening, picking flowers, or interacting with animals. Reading, writing, or recording is equally restricted, ensuring that the mind remains fully devoted to the practice.

Restrictions on Personal Belongings: Participants are not permitted to bring miscellaneous items such as snacks, notebooks, pens, or books. Any such items must be surrendered to the organizing committee. In cases of non-compliance, the committee reserves the right to inspect rooms, and disciplinary action may follow. The essentials, however, are always provided by the *dhamma sevikā*², who serve under the direction of the teacher.

Meals in the Dining Hall: The first meal experience on Day 0 left a lasting impression. Following the 5:00 a.m. bell, the author joined fellow meditators in the dining hall, where a modest portion of *poha* was served. Mistaking it for an evening snack, she ate sparingly, only to discover later from experienced participants that this was, in fact, the final meal of the day. Breakfast would not be served until 6:30 the following morning. Over the 10-day period, she learned that the schedule was fixed: two main meals (breakfast and lunch), with a light evening refreshment consisting of puffed rice, fruit, and tea or milk. After snacks on Day 0, the *dhamma sevikā* and office staff conducted the orientation, distributed identity cards, and assigned seat numbers.

Course Commencement

Day-0-to-Day-11

The course formally commenced between 6:30 and 7:00 p.m. on Day 0, when the *Dhamma teachers*³ introduced themselves and played an audio recording of the inaugural discourse. In the recording, *Guruji*⁴ emphasized the importance of seeking permission to begin training, after which participants undertook the *tri ratna* (*buddha, dhamma, sangha*) chant and the *pañca sīla*⁵ vows. The structure and objectives of the course were outlined, beginning with ānāpāna meditation and extending to *vipassanā* practice, with three compulsory group sittings each day in the *dhamma* Hall. Attendance at evening discourses was mandatory, while personal practice could be undertaken in the meditation hall, individual cells, and residences. The significance of noble silence was highlighted once again, alongside the rationale for serving simple vegetarian meals, reinforcing mindful eating as part of the discipline. At the close of the session, participants were instructed to focus exclusively on ānāpāna meditation the following day.

Observations from the First and Fourth Retreats at Dhamma Kuṭi: During her first retreat,

the researcher was unfamiliar with the practice of noble silence until a senior student explained it on Day 0. From that moment until the morning of day 10, all forms of verbal and non-verbal communication were prohibited, including touching plants, animals, or even exchanging a smile. Any genuine requirement could only be conveyed through the *dhamma sevikā*, who would consult the *ācārya*. Breaches of this discipline were reported, and violators could be warned or reprimanded by the *dhamma ācārya*. The researcher experienced this during her first course at *Dhamma Giri*: on the evening of Day 9, she communicated non-verbally with a fellow participant who had inquired about the course. A *dhamma sevikā* noticed this exchange and reported it. The *ācārya* subsequently reminded and urged that noble silence must be followed, and to remain focused solely on breath and sensations.

By contrast, during her fourth retreat at *Dhamma Kuṭi* in October 2024, she observed a different approach. In some instances, breaches of noble silence were overlooked by the *dhamma sevikā*. On the evening of Day 10, however, one participant openly confessed to breaking the silence, prompting the *ācārya* to reiterate the value of the discipline to the entire group.

The feedback session on *mettā day* (Day 10) offered profound insights into participant motivations. Unlike her first course, this retreat gave participants the opportunity to share their reasons for joining. Her observation revealed a marked difference between male and female participants. Men primarily sought spiritual growth and were generally motivated by intrinsic factors. Women, however, often cited external or circumstantial reasons—health concerns, personal difficulties, or professional requirements. For example, women above 50 frequently joined to address physical ailments, while younger women (aged 24–28) hoped to enhance concentration. One participant, a 31-year-old pregnant doctor, attended at her parents' insistence due to marital issues, though she struggled throughout the retreat and often broke noble silence. Another, a 26-year-old woman, was obliged to participate because it was mandated in her professional training.

Interestingly, none of the male participants discontinued the course, while two women left between Days 1 and 3. Moreover, women were more prone to breaking noble silence, whereas men consistently adhered to the rules. From this, she inferred that those who joined the retreat out of intrinsic motivation were more committed to the discipline, while those who attended due to external pressures or obligations found it harder to maintain the rigorous practice.

Experiencing the Ten *Pāramī* Through Four *Vipassanā* Retreats

The author of the present study engaged in four intensive 10-day *vipassanā* courses, during which the cultivation of *dasa pāramī* (ten perfections) was not only doctrinally encountered

but also experientially embodied. Across these retreats, her understanding of renunciation, mindfulness, and self-discipline deepened significantly. The first retreat provided initial exposure to foundational *pāramī* such as *nekkhamma* (renunciation), *sīla* (ethical conduct), *dāna* (generosity), and *paññā* (wisdom). Yet, it was only through subsequent retreats that the fuller and more nuanced significance of all ten *pāramī* became clear.

Nekkhamma: Renunciation in Household Life

Nekkhamma, or renunciation, is traditionally associated with the monastic community, where monks and nuns renounce household life, possessions, and personal identity markers such as hair and robes in pursuit of spiritual liberation. In the context of lay practitioners, however, renunciation does not imply abandonment of family or worldly duties. Rather, it is an internal practice of detachment from craving and clinging while continuing to fulfil social and familial responsibilities.

The *vipassanā* retreat created conditions that temporarily mirrored a monastic lifestyle. The researcher observed that participants abstained from communication, consumed only simple vegetarian food provided by the centre, and relied on the generosity of donors. While householders were not required to shave their heads or take vows, the retreat's structured discipline cultivated humility and reduced the sense of ego. From this experience, the author concluded that renunciation is not defined by external abandonment of material possessions but by the relinquishing of ego-driven attachment and personal desire.

Sīla: Ethical Conduct in Daily Life

Ethical conduct (*sīla*) was woven throughout the retreat experience. Having previously been a non-vegetarian, the author was initially surprised by the provision of strictly vegetarian meals. This practice directly aligned with the first precept (*pāṇātipātā*), abstaining from the destruction of living beings, and encouraged conscious mindfulness of non-harming.

Further, participants were required to surrender valuables, including money, which reinforced the second precept (*adinnādānā*), cultivating detachment from materialism and the desire for ownership. Male and female participants were accommodated separately—even married couples—to reduce distractions and safeguard the sanctity of practice. Noble Silence (*ariyo tuṇhībhāvo*) was observed, ensuring abstention from false or frivolous speech (*musāvāda*). The researcher noted that the retreat environment was carefully structured to minimize external distractions, thus allowing participants to embody *sīla* as a lived discipline rather than merely an abstract principle.

Dāna: Generosity and Giving

The retreat provided a lived framework for practicing *dāna* (generosity) in three interrelated forms: *śrama dāna* (service through physical labour), *tapo dāna* (dedication of effort to meditation), and *artha dāna* (material giving). Participants engaged in voluntary chores, which enabled the cultivation of selfless service (*śrama dāna*). The sustained meditative practice itself was recognised as *tapo dāna*, a contribution of inner discipline and energy to the collective spiritual field. Finally, financial contributions were encouraged in the form of *artha dāna*, yet were entirely voluntary, underscoring that genuine generosity arises from sincerity rather than compulsion.

Through this holistic practice, the author recognised *dāna pāramī* not as an obligation but as a heartfelt expression of sincerity and interconnectedness that sustains both individual practice and the wider community.

Paññā: Wisdom Through Mindfulness

Wisdom (*paññā*) was cultivated through direct observation of bodily sensations, leading to insight into impermanence (*anicca*). The researcher realised that sensations—pleasant or painful—arise and pass away, and that clinging to them leads inevitably to suffering (*dukkha*). This embodied realisation extended to thoughts and emotions, deepening her understanding that all conditioned phenomena are transient.

The value of *upekkhā* (equanimity) was also internalised through observing the conduct of *sevaka* (volunteers), who maintained patience and compassion even when participants were inattentive or non-compliant. Greeting practitioners with folded hands (*namaskāra mudrā*), they modelled equanimity in action. This reinforced the author's understanding that wisdom is not merely cognitive but is enacted through calm, balanced responses in everyday interactions.

Khanti: Tolerance and Patience

The *pāramī* of tolerance (*khanti*) emerged vividly during the author's third retreat. Surrounded by participants struggling with illness, coughing, and sneezing during group sittings, the researcher initially felt irritation. By redirecting attention to her breath and extending *mettā* (loving-kindness), she gradually cultivated acceptance and compassion. This process highlighted that tolerance is less about enduring external disturbances and more about transforming inner reactivity into mindful patience.

Adhitthāna: Determination and Resolve

Determination (*adhitthāna*) was strengthened particularly in the third and fourth retreats. Initially, the author found it difficult to remain in a fixed meditation posture (*ekāsana*),

frequently shifting due to discomfort. Over time, however, she cultivated the resolve to remain still, even amidst significant bodily pain.

During her fourth retreat, prolonged sittings revealed the impermanent nature of painful sensations, reinforcing the principle of *anicca*. The embodied realisation that discomfort constantly arises and passes away fostered deeper concentration (*samādhi*) and aligned with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*'s emphasis on mindful observation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*) and sensations (*vedanānupassanā*). In this way, *adhiṭṭhāna* became not simply willpower but a disciplined resolve grounded in insight.

The Timetable Helps Reshape Lifestyle

In the Goenka retreat, the daily routine begins at 4:30 a.m. and concludes at 9:00 p.m., structured to foster discipline and continuity in practice. Three mandatory group sittings are held in the *dharmā* hall each day. From 4:30 to 6:30 a.m., participants practice either in the *dharmā* hall or the *sūnya gāra*⁶ (meditation room). Between 9:00 and 11:00 a.m., both new and experienced participants meditate, followed by a short class with the teacher. On the first day, new participants are permitted to practice ānāpāna in their quarters during this period.

From 1:00 to 2:30 p.m., participants continue their practice in their allotted cells or in the *dharmā* hall. Between 3:30 and 5:00 p.m., they may choose a location of their preference for meditation. The evening discourse by S. N. Goenka takes place from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., followed by a final group practice from 8:30 to 9:00 p.m., during which the schedule for the following day is announced.

The mandatory group sittings occur three times daily: morning (8:00–9:00 a.m.), afternoon (2:30–3:30 p.m.), and evening (6:00–7:00 p.m.). From the initial day (Day 0) until the first half of Day 4, participants practice only ānāpāna. From the second half of Day 4 until the first group sitting on Day 10, the practice shifts to *vipassanā*, guided by the recorded instructions of S. N. Goenka.

Non-Completion of the Course by Participants

During the author's observations at the retreat, it became evident that some participants discontinued the course, particularly between Day 0 and Day 4. This was noticeable through empty seats in both the *dharmā* hall and the dining hall. While volunteering during her second course, the author noted that three female participants, aged 21 to 26, left prematurely. Upon inquiry, it was revealed that they experienced heightened anxiety and were unable to manage their thoughts in the retreat's silent environment. One of them had been clinically diagnosed

with anxiety in 2020 and had been advised by her psychologist to engage in conversation whenever experiencing distress or negative thoughts—a practice that conflicted with the retreat’s discipline of noble silence. The other two participants, though undiagnosed, similarly found it difficult to adapt to the retreat atmosphere. In subsequent retreats, the author was not always able to ascertain the reasons for participants’ departures. However, during her first course, she personally witnessed a middle-aged woman faint during the discourse on the seventh day. That same evening, the author herself also experienced unease, marked by anxiety and hunger, which deepened her understanding of the physical and psychological challenges posed by the retreat environment. These observations underscore that the journey of meditation and mindfulness is not uniformly accessible. While the retreat offers profound opportunities for self-reflection and transformation, it may also surface unresolved emotions and fears that are difficult to confront. For this reason, the author emphasizes the importance of approaching such intensive practices with compassion, both towards oneself and towards fellow practitioners navigating similar challenges.

Discussion

This study begins with the key questions regarding the relevance of the 10-day *vipassanā* course for non-monastic people at the retreat. The first question is: To what extent does *vipassanā* meditation uproot latent egoic tendencies (*anusaya/āsava*), and does this contribute to the development of humility as one advances along the path of the ten *pāramī*?

The residential *vipassanā* training with philosophical environments which support dissolving the unconscious ego, with selflessness, also developed to stop reacting to the situation, simultaneously had the positive effect on self-concept in the youth (Emavardhana and Christopher, 1997). Mindfulness meditation does not aim to suppress or forget the ego, but rather to transform it. Through sustained and attentive observation of mental processes, the practitioner gradually dissolves the constructed or false ego. In this way, the ego becomes refined—not eradicated, but redirected—towards a deeper awareness of the impersonal nature of the mind. This transformation empowers what may be called the ‘enlightened ego,’ which is not driven by self-centeredness but aligned with the flow of present-moment experience (Epstein, 1988). Drawing from personal experience, the scholar notes that the retreat’s environment, curriculum, and discourses are instrumental in enabling participants to transcend the ego. By renouncing material attachments and living with only basic necessities—food, clothing, and shelter—participants cultivate humility and simplicity. The provision of adequate facilities and the practice of receiving food and bedding from others, as emphasised by S.N. Goenka, serve as subtle mechanisms for dissolving the false sense of self. Furthermore, the retreat’s ethos of *mettā* (universal love) ensures that socio-demographic status holds no relevance, as

all participants follow the same rules and share an equal living environment, reinforcing the process of ego reduction.

As both a researcher and participant, she observed that engaging with the 10 *pāramī* allowed individuals to become humbler and more compassionate. The renunciation of comfort and the embrace of simplicity diminished the desire for excess. Practices such as *khanti* (patience) and *mettā* (loving-kindness) further nurtured kindness and compassion toward others. In the *dharmā* hall, when co-participants coughed or sneezed, the researcher focused on her breath and sent them *mettā*. After completing the training, this learning helped her develop and maintain concentration even in undesirable circumstances. In daily life, if practitioners adopt a similar approach, accepting others' problems with tolerance and kindness can lead to positive outcomes.

The practice of *dāna* at the retreat is also diverse like; *śrama dāna*, *dhana dāna*, *tapo dāna*. Participants engage in labour, such as cleaning and other retreat-based chores which is known as *śrama dāna*, offering money (as per individual's accountability) which is called *dhana dāna*, and the *tapo dāna* by practicing *vipassanā* at the *dharmā* hall. This contributes to the well-functioning of the retreat and creates a sense of collective responsibilities of the *vipassanā* participants. It emphasizes that a healthy and hygienic environment, both in the home and in society, requires the contribution of individual labour. *Adhitthāna*, or determination, is another essential aspect of the retreat experience. By maintaining a stable posture during meditation, participants learn to control their minds, enhancing their concentration and wisdom. The ten-day course has mandatory group meditation thrice a day, morning (8 to 9 am), afternoon (2.30 to 3.30 pm) and evening (6 to 7pm). During this time participants should never miss the sessions and should not change their posture. The fourth day and the tenth day are called *vipassanā* days, during which the participants are not encouraged to change their posture, thus they can initially select a comfortable posture and hold that for the rest of the session. If participants have pain in their leg, they cannot change their posture. The personal experience of the researcher was that at that time she had various sensations in her legs, mostly she felt severe pain and restlessness in her body but with practice those sensations used to in her body and mind. Pain and restlessness helped her state of determination in her daily routine. It helps to complete any household chores or other work in one sitting. Concentration also developed by the practice. Determination develops the mental strength for completing any major or minor task. The participants cannot leave the session after beginning the *vipassanā* session.

Without determination, no one can reach their goals; whether spiritual or materialistic. By maintaining a stable posture during meditation, participants learn to control their minds, enhancing their concentration and wisdom.

Sīla is another key element of the retreat, benefiting not only the individual but also society. The precepts of refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and substance abuse help build an honest character. *Sacca* in particular, fosters understanding of the present moment and aids concentration. By focusing on the present, participants can cultivate wisdom, recognizing the impermanent nature of all things. Practicing non-reactivity helps develop equanimity, which in turn nurtures kindness and humility in an individual's character.

The second question posed is: Does the retreat reshape the human clock, promoting a healthier daily rhythm and overall well-being?

The structured retreat schedule plays a transformative role in reshaping participants' habits and lifestyles. In contemporary society, individuals often follow irregular routines—marked by late nights, insufficient rest, and unmindful eating. In contrast, the retreat fosters a disciplined rhythm of early rising and early sleeping, alongside mindful eating practices. The daily timetable, spanning from 4:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., demonstrates the significance of utilizing the full day in a balanced manner. This experience enables participants to accomplish tasks punctually, which in turn fosters a sense of satisfaction and psychological well-being.

From participatory observation, it was evident that certain retreat practices contribute significantly to the development of healthier habits. For instance, the observance of **Noble Silence**—extending for ten days—removes distractions by prohibiting verbal, non-verbal, and digital communication. The absence of mobile phones, social media, and casual interaction allows participants to disengage from unnecessary communication and overuse of technology. Many reported that this facilitated greater self-awareness, reduced compulsive behaviours, and encouraged mindful interpersonal engagement after the retreat.

Restrictions on personal belongings, such as books, notebooks, and snacks, further minimized external stimulation, ensuring that attention remained focused on practice. The dining hall routine reinforced this lifestyle shift. Participants adjusted to having two principal meals (breakfast and lunch) and a light evening refreshment. The initial challenge of adapting to this schedule gradually gave way to appreciation of its health benefits, including reduced indulgence, improved digestion, and a greater awareness of the body's needs.

The **daily timetable** also functioned as an effective framework for reshaping lifestyle. The combination of early waking, long hours of meditation, structured group sittings, and evening discourses by S. N. Goenka created a rhythm that balanced mental discipline with physical endurance. The transition from *ānāpāna* (awareness of breath) in the early days to *vipassanā* from Day 4 onwards deepened participants' engagement, reinforcing consistency of practice throughout the day.

Taken together, these practices not only regulate the biological clock but also cultivate mental clarity, discipline, and emotional balance. The structured rhythm of the retreat thus acts as a corrective to modern lifestyle imbalances, promoting both physical health and psychological well-being.

The third question asks: Would a pre-retreat psychological screening or self-reflection tool support first-time participants in understanding their current mental state and clarifying their motivations for attending? To what extent can mindfulness retreats offer meaningful benefits to a diverse range of individuals, and are there circumstances in which such retreats may be unsuitable? Is the environment and curriculum of mindfulness retreats accessible and inclusive for participants from varied socio-cultural, cognitive, or physical backgrounds?

Based on the researcher's dual experience as a *sādhaka* (meditator) and *sevaka* (volunteer), it became evident that adaptation to the retreat environment varied considerably. Several first-time participants, particularly women, either discontinued the course prematurely—most often between Day 0 and Day 4—or struggled to maintain the discipline of noble silence. For instance, during the researcher's second retreat, three female participants departed within the first four days due to heightened anxiety and difficulty adjusting to the silent, disciplined atmosphere. Similarly, in the fourth retreat, two female participants broke noble silence despite reminders of its importance. In contrast, male participants in the same courses tended to adhere to the rules more consistently and were more likely to complete the retreat.

Feedback sessions suggested that the motivation for attending played a decisive role in whether participants were able to persevere. Those seeking spiritual growth, such as deeper self-awareness or insight into the law of nature, demonstrated resilience and commitment. In contrast, individuals attending primarily for physical well-being or improved concentration often found the rigorous discipline difficult to sustain.

These observations underscore the potential value of psychological counselling or preliminary assessments, particularly for first-time participants. Individuals experiencing anxiety, depression, or other psychological vulnerabilities often found noble silence and the strict timetable overwhelming. As Emavardhana and Christopher (1997) note, participants without major psychological difficulties may more readily deconstruct the ego and embrace selflessness, whereas those with unresolved issues are more likely to struggle. Yet, retreat authorities currently do not conduct formal assessments, leaving some participants unprepared for the challenges of intensive meditation.

A comparative perspective further illustrates this point. Some contemporary retreat models, particularly in Western contexts, have begun integrating psychological screening

or preparatory sessions as part of the admission process. For instance, mindfulness-based programs such as MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) and MBCT (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy) often include initial interviews or questionnaires designed to assess participants' mental health status and clarify expectations (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Segal, Williams, and Teasdale, 2013). Similarly, certain Zen and Christian contemplative retreats request medical and psychological histories before admission, recognizing that silence and intensive meditation can surface unresolved trauma or emotional distress. Compared to these models, *vipassanā* retreats under the Goenka tradition generally adopt an open-access approach, requiring little more than a commitment to observe the ten-day discipline. This accessibility allows individuals from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to participate freely, without financial or institutional barriers. However, the absence of psychological assessment means that some participants may enter unprepared, leading to early discontinuation or distress.

The researcher therefore proposes that pre-retreat screening and orientation—including a brief psychological evaluation, motivational interview by assistant teachers, and an introduction to key aspects of the retreat such as simplified meals, restricted communication, and the daily timetable—could enhance readiness and reduce discontinuation. While *vipassanā* retreats offer profound opportunities for transformation, they may not be universally accessible. Their benefits appear most pronounced for individuals who join voluntarily, with mental stability, clarity of intention, and a genuine desire to engage with the realities of life and the universe. Ensuring psychological preparedness and clear motivation could make the retreat experience more inclusive, while safeguarding the integrity of the meditative environment.

Conclusion

Mindfulness meditation, as practiced in the ten-day *vipassanā* retreat⁷, provides a structured space in which participants gradually loosen attachment to the false ego, cultivating qualities of humility, self-acceptance, and compassion. While the retreat setting emphasizes equality—removing socio-demographic distinctions and minimizing personal entitlement through simple meals and shared living conditions—the deeper transformation arises from disciplined practice, including early rising, mindful eating, noble silence, and extended hours of meditation. These routines effectively realign the body clock, fostering healthier rhythms, mental clarity, and emotional stability, all of which stand in contrast to the irregular patterns of modern life.

At the same time, the study highlights that transformation through *vipassanā* is not universally accessible. The retreat environment is most effective for participants motivated by spiritual well-being and self-inquiry, whereas those seeking material or immediate benefits

often struggle with its rigor. Moreover, psychological stability and clarity of intention emerge as essential prerequisites for completing the course. Without such readiness, participants may discontinue early or fail to engage fully with the practice.

Based on the researcher's participatory observations, the integration of basic psychological assessments and motivational interviews prior to the retreat could greatly enhance participant preparedness and reduce disruptions. Such measures would not only safeguard the meditative environment but also promote inclusivity, ensuring that individuals are adequately supported to meet the demands of intensive practice.

Ultimately, the findings affirm that *vipassanā* retreats hold profound potential for personal transformation, but this potential is realized only when approached with sincerity, mental stability, and readiness for discipline. As mindfulness and meditation practices continue to expand globally, greater attention to participant preparation and support will be vital for sustaining both the integrity of the retreat model and the well-being of those who undertake it.

Future Application of this Work

This study's findings are applicable to the course organizers and retreat staff, especially in identifying participants' motivations for attending. If the *vipassanā* organization conducts psychological assessments to understand why participants join—whether willingly or due to external pressure—it could significantly benefit both participants and the organizing committee. This approach would ensure that participants are better prepared for the retreat experience, enhancing their ability to benefit from the program.

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Endnotes:

- ¹ In the *vipassanā* retreats, those who are attending courses for learning or practicing meditation, they are called *dharmā sādhanā*. The male practitioners are called *dharmā sādhanā* and the females are *dharmā sādhanikā*.

- ² In the *vipassanā* retreat those who are attending courses for volunteering. The male participants are addressed as *dhamma sevaka* and female participants are as *dhamma sevikā*.
- ³ In a *vipassanā* retreat, the supervision of the course is carried out by the assistant teacher and the teacher is called as *Dhamma Ācārya*, without whom the centre cannot conduct the program. Senior meditators may apply for the role of assistant teacher, and their selection is made by the teacher and the retreat authority. Experienced assistant teachers can, in turn, apply for the position of teacher. The post of the *Dhamma Ācārya* contribute as partial volunteers; by guiding meditators to the way to practise *samatha* and *vipassanā*, explaining the rules, and introducing the course curriculum from day 0 to 11. From Day 1 to Day 10, the teacher meets small groups of meditators after the afternoon session to inquire about their experiences of bodily sensations, followed by two to three minutes of guided practice. Additionally, between 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. (after lunch), the teacher holds one-on-one meetings with meditators, offering them an opportunity to discuss their sensations, thoughts, or any questions related to their meditation practice.
- ⁴ Followers of Goenka's retreat address him as Guruji. The instructions are provided by the Guruji's audio recordings, with the procedure of anapana and vipassana meditation, and more matters from zero to eleven days. Every evening, the discourse session happens with Guruji's audio-video
- ⁵ *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, b. Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, c. Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, d. Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami, e. Suramerayamajja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.*
- ⁶ According to the author's observation, the *sūnyagār* is a small meditation cell designed specifically for the practice of *vipassanā*. The room is modest in size, dimly lit with a low-watt bulb, and furnished with simple square cushions covered in blue cloth. It has a single door with minimal ventilation, creating a cool and quiet atmosphere conducive to deep concentration. These cells are generally attached to the pagoda structure and are made available to practitioners during the retreat—old students gain access from the first day, while new students are permitted to use them between the fifth and ninth days. Notably, older retreat centres often contain a larger number of *sūnyagār*, whereas newer centres may lack them. Wherever a pagoda has been constructed, however, *sūnyagār* are included as an integral feature.

⁷The researcher attended several *vipassanā* retreats across different locations in India in the role of a participatory observer. Observations were recorded through informal field notes and reflective journaling, with attention to participants' behavioural patterns, course structure, and interactions with teachers.

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