

**Ven. Bhikkhu Sanghasena:** *Planting seeds of hope in the desert land of Ladakh*

**Venerable Bhikkhu Sanghasena**, is a renowned religious leader of the Theravada Buddhist tradition and an esteemed member of *Religions for Peace*, India. He has been working relentlessly in the Himalayan mountainous region of Ladakh for the moral and spiritual development of the people residing in that area.



In 1986, Ven. Bhikkhu Sanghasena founded the **Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre (MIMC)** which is 12 km from Leh city, nestled at an altitude of 3,500 meters (11,482.94 foot) above the sea level, deep within the mighty Himalayan Mountains in Ladakh. This region is a cold desert and this arid terrain experiences drastic weather changes. The temperatures

are so extreme that in winters, it drops below -30 degree Celsius, and in summers, it rises near 30 degrees Celsius.

Since the establishment of MIMC, **Ven.**

**Sanghsena** has worked tirelessly to put the Buddha's teachings on loving kindness and compassion into action through multifarious charitable humanitarian services which are being carried out in the 250

acres of the moon-like desert that forms the impressive backdrop to the Devachan Campus at Choglamsar, Ladakh and has transformed this desert area into an oasis.

For the past several years, he has made determined efforts to provide high quality education and safe shelter for underprivileged children and compassionate healthcare for the sick and the needy. He has started empowerment and literacy programmes for women folk and other socially disadvantaged groups.



*Aerial View of Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre (MIMC)*



## Projects for Children:

**Ven. Bhikku Sanghasena's** contribution towards the education and all-round development of children living in the remote rural areas of Ladakh is indeed commendable. The lives of the



inhabitants of the isolated villages in the vast desert land of Ladakh is full of hardships and struggle. Most of these villages lack basic amenities like electricity, roads, modern education and medical care.

**Ven. Sanghasena** realized that when people are given proper holistic

education, the cycle of poverty and social evils could be broken. In the Ladakhi society girls are given lesser opportunity for education and other privileges as compared to boys.

Considering this fact, he opened a girls' school in the beginning.

In order to make education accessible for the rural children, **Ven. Sanghasena** has established

separate hostels for both boys and girls who come from around 75 villages situated in far flung areas. Children staying in these hostels not only get free boarding and lodging, medical care and quality education but also a comfortable life that is essential for their overall



development. The

hostel wardens and staff take good care of these hostels. At present there are 124 boys and 178 girls residing in these hostels.

**The Mahabodhi Residential School** established by Ven. Sanghasena in Leh is a natural and tranquil institution situated at a distance from the hustle and bustle of the city. This institution fosters an ideal educational environment for both students and teachers. Set amidst the



beautiful snow-capped mountains, the school nurtures students coming together from the backward hamlets scattered across Ladakh. The foundation of the school was laid in the year 1991 with its first batch of 25 girls students lodged in a single multipurpose room with just three teachers-cum-support staff. Over the years, the school has

grown in size and infrastructure and now caters to the educational needs of around 1125 students where equal importance is given to moral, social and spiritual knowledge. The students also have an opportunity to participate in various sports and traditional cultural activities like music and dance.



Educational activities are not confined to the campus of Mahabodhi alone. Ven. Sanghasena has also opened schools in some remote villages as well with hostel facilities to ensure education to the poor rural children.

**Ven. Sanghasena** has a passion to provide quality education to children in need.

*“Nothing else gives me more happiness than to see the deprived children fully blossoming into the light of education and meditation” ~ Ven. Bhikku Sanghasena*

The Mahabodhi also works in Nunneries where nuns and monks are given basic monastic spiritual training along with modern secular education.

*“It give me lots of joy to imagine that I have the opportunity to spend the rest of my life as a nun and serve the Mahabodhi organisation in my own capacity. I am grateful to my respected Guru, supporters, my teacher, parents and all the Dhamma friends for helping and guiding me to live my life as a nun. I am very happy and feel myself fortunate to be here”. ~ Supadma (Mahabodhi Nunnery)*

The nuns, monks and children receive high quality education up to class 10. After this the children have to go outside Ladakh to pursue higher studies. Many students drop out of studies as this proves to be too costly for most of them. Keeping this in mind, **Ven. Sanghasena** has opened a girl's hostel in Chandigarh, Punjab. Presently there are 35 girls residing in this hostel and pursuing higher studies.

*"I pray for the long life of my Guru, Ven. Sanghasena so that he can continue his mission in providing holistic education for the needy children of Ladakh. It is from this school that life has been transformed for me. Not only my own life but many more lives have been transformed..." ~ Mrs Tsewang Dolma, Principal, Mahabodhi School*

*"I feel myself as an extraordinary child among my siblings as I received the opportunity to be a student and a humble disciple of my reverent teacher most venerable Sanghasena. I received love, care, a holistic education and respect for my individuality in this institution, I couldn't have expected more than this.*

*~Padma Sonam (Ex-student)*

Ven. Sanghasena also established **The Mahabodhi School and Hostel for the Visually-impaired Children** for the visually challenged children of the Himalayan region. In order to encourage socially inclusive education in the school, the visually impaired students go to the main school and enrol in a different class according to their abilities so as not to feel discriminated against from the rest of the students. This unique school is one of its kind in entire Ladakh area. By providing education at par with normal students, the visually challenged children gain confidence and are trained to stand on their own feet. So far, more than 15 visually children have benefited from this facility. Like other normal students, children who have passed out from this school are either pursuing higher studies or are at present employed in different sectors.



We just got a wonderful news that a boy from the visually Impaired hostel has just cracked Secondary School Certificate Exams. These students are grateful for the rare opportunity of receiving good education and a decent upbringing by this institution.

**Chunzin Angmo** a former MIMC Visually challenged student, finished her schooling from Chandigarh and is now a student of the University of Delhi. Sharing about her new life experience, she says,

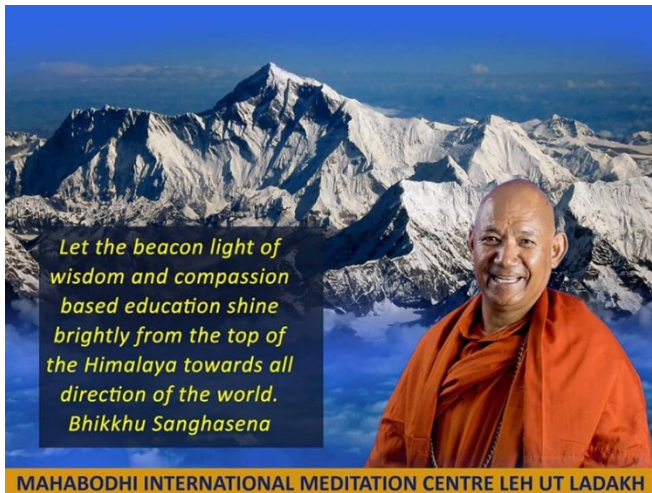
*“I lost every hope of life when I lost my eyesight at the age of 8. Luckily, I was brought to the Mahabodhi Centre where I met with my beloved Guruji who transformed my darkness with the light of education. Now I am pursuing my higher studies from University of Delhi. I also have learnt many new things for example sports and basic mountain course....”~ Chunzin Angmo*

### **Interfaith Programmes:**

Ven. Bhikkhu Sanghasena is not only passionate about spreading the message of Buddha alone. Rather, he is a thoroughly an interfaith person. He organizes interfaith programmes in Ladakh by inviting different religious leaders and international organizations working in the direction of peace, harmony and dialogue between religious groups for world Peace.



Since its inception, MIMC has been participating in and organizing major inter-religious programmes under the Interfaith and Harmony Programmes and dialogue through local, national and international inter-faith conferences and seminars in order to bring into awareness of inter-religious understanding and global harmony.



By providing a bright future to the impoverished rural children of Ladakh through his multi-pronged efforts, **Ven Sanghasena** is creating a new generation that is dedicated to meditation in action and compassion in action.

Religions for Peace, India hopes to collaborate with Ven. Sanghasena’s projects and to undertake more projects for the welfare and protection of children in difficult circumstances.

*By Deepali Bhanot, Chair, Women of Faith, RfP, India*