

Path of the White Swans in the Sky

An account of a Sri Lankan Hermitage & its Head Nun



By Bhikkhuni Dr.W. Suvimalee



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*“The Path of the White Swans
Glittering in the distant sky
Leaves no trace for the eye
Enthralled by earthly bonds”*

- anonymous

“They for whom there is no accumulation who reflect well over their food,
who have Deliverance, which is Void and Signless, as their object – their
course like that of birds in the air cannot be traced.”

- The Dhammapada, Arahant Vagga, stanza 92
Translation by Narada Thera

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Acknowledgements

The present account is a modest offering to the Venerable Badalgama Dhammanandani, Head Bhikkhuni of Visakharamaya, a temple situated in the remote village of Galgamuwa about seven kilometers into the hinterland of Veyangoda. It is my token offering to her for inspiring me on the path with her example of assiduous practice; a practice that speaks of incredible sustained effort, dignity and humility. This book is also timely, I think, for those of the general Buddhist public even in Sri Lanka who do not seem to know of what stuff the newly “resurrected” *bhikkhunis* are made.

This short account has taken the form of an impressionist mosaic as the Venerable Bhikkhuni is very unassuming and reserved when it comes to talking about herself, therefore of necessity, I have had to depend on my own observation of her character, molded in the strict tradition of the Pali Theravada canon, not only in spirit but in letter as well. A few individuals like her older sister, T.A. Podimenike, a learned, retired government school teacher, has given me a vivid account of their childhood environment. Also a very senior *bhikkhuni* in the *bhikkhuni* community of Naugala, Kegalle, Ven. Ranwala Upacala, has also given me glimpses of the young girl of nineteen who was brought by her mother to the headquarters of the Dasa Silmata Sangamaya (Ten Precept Mothers' Society) at Naugala, Kegalle in 1972. Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari, the Head Nun of the *arama*

in Naugala at the time (who later became a *bhikkhuni* and a *theri*) decided to take the young girl to the newly established Visakharamaya at Galgamuwa, Veyangoda and give her in charge of the head nun there, Rev. Dedigama Sakula, Dasa Silmata, to be ordained. It was Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari who had got the tiny *arama* established on a piece of land donated to the Head Monk of the Yogashrama at Naugala by an *upasika* named Ranmenike Edirisinghe of Galgamuwa. The present account traces that young girl's steps as she matures into one of the most loved and respected *bhikkhuni* teachers of the community of *bhikkhunis* of Naugala, today. My informants have been elders in the village of Galgamuwa also, who have been devotees of Visakharamaya since its inception in 1965.

I am most indebted to Professor K.M.de Silva for having perused the initial manuscript and given me a grant towards preliminary expenses before its publication, in memory of his dear wife, Chandra. It was most kind and generous of him.

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The maps used in the account were given to me by Ms. Rasika Ramanayake, also of the same department. Both the above mentioned officers are from the village of Galgamuwa and were able to authenticate the information given.

My thanks are also due to Mr. K. A. Ariyaratne for having taken me round the village in his three wheeler taxi to interview the elders of the village or their progeny, who have had a long connection with Visakharamaya.

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I wish also to mention Ven. Bhikkhuni Morahela Damitananda who accompanied me round the village of Galgamuwa and took photographs of the elders and their houses. Some of the other photographs in the account were taken by Ven. Dhamma Gavesi of Myanmar and photographs of the new *avasa* were taken by Kethmi Imasha Gunasekera and how can I ever forget Pushpakanthi Gamage for her self-denying help at all times!

I am also grateful to Ven. Bhikkhuni Nuwara Eliye Mettika for typing some of the chapters initially. Last but not least much merit to my cousin, Gitanjali Dilrukshi Gunatileke who corrected typographical errors and flaws through innumerable drafts untiringly on the laptop soft copy to get the manuscript ready for the publishers. I am beholden to all of them for, if not for them, this account would not have seen the light of day and I do think the character of Ven. Bhikkhuni Badalagama Dhammanandani merits presenting to the public at large.

Bhikkhuni Suvimalee
Visakharamaya, Galgamuwa, Veyangoda.
March 2020



01

Introduction

01

In this short account what I have tried to bring out is the inner motivation and spiritual struggle of a strong character despite her seemingly ethereal delicateness. Her humility, dignity, and her single minded path is surely that of the white swans seen streaking across the sky. I have observed that Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani, Head Bhikkhuni of Visakharamaya, Galgamuwa, Veyangoda, solves problems that emerge in daily life in an extremely pragmatic and sometimes innovative manner without departing from the principles of the Teaching. She solves weighty matters of conflicts among nuns in the same way by standing firmly on the premise that she is untouched by personal likes and dislikes that might prejudice her clear judgement. Most importantly she is concerned with the overarching objective of maintaining the longevity of the *Sasana* – the Teaching and its institutions such as the Vinaya and its executive arm in the *aramayas*.

During the struggle in her younger days to gain a secondary and tertiary education, which she had missed out on, she was certainly hampered by the physical hardship of travel and religious duties she had to perform towards the *aramaya*, personal services for her teacher as well as towards the wider community of newly established *aramayas*. The struggle of putting her private need aside to make good the deficiency in her education, both secondary and tertiary, and giving foremost place to her religious life must have been a grim sacrifice that

cut deep into her. I believe she triumphed in her struggle by the purity of her actions, by equating self-abnegation with self-realization. Embracing the religious life till it impregnates every pore of one's being is the real role of a nun. She has been saved from bigotry and a 'holier than thou attitude' by a wisdom that is known only to the compassionate.

In this short account on Buddhist religiosity I have decided not to use diacritical marks for *Pali* words. Instead I have placed all words foreign to the English language in italics. The narrative took shape with the general public in mind though I hope it will interest academics of Religion as well.

As the Head Bhikkhuni of the oldest branch *aramaya* of the Naugala 'Chapter', she has the responsibility with nuns, some much senior to her, to carry out Vinaya acts, Disciplinary measures, correctly. When engaged in making such judgements, she seemed to gain much reinforcement , in spiritual terms, by re-visiting her earlier experience of self –abnegation to a higher order to which she surrendered when a young practising *dasa silmata*. Such a self-denial seems to give her the necessary correct direction.

It is with such a spirit of self-abnegation that she left the new 'State of the Arts' nunnery to take up occupation in the humble *gilan kuti*, giving up her room to any visitor who may need accommodation in the new *avasa*.

A black and white photograph showing a long, straight path lined with tall, thin trees or poles. The perspective leads the eye towards a person walking away from the viewer at the end of the path. The scene is slightly blurred.

02

A Brief Journey into the Past

Visakharamaya in 2007

I arrived at Visakharamaya to be trained for the higher ordination in the year 2007. There were twelve candidates for the in-house training programme of 4 -5 months. I was thrilled to live in the environment of a traditional rural hermitage.

I was given accommodation in the “*gilan kuti*” (sick room) which was roomier than the cells in the *avasa* (residence). I had to share the room with two other candidates. I wondered where the other candidates would be accommodated and later saw the small space – a back verandah – the half wall of which had been fitted with iron grills, up to the roof, to make an enclosure for beds which were placed cheek by jowl. Everyone was in a happy, elevated mood as we knew contentment with few wants were key words in the monastic training.

The devotees seemed to have risen to the occasion to supply village curries and rice in abundance for the fifteen or so residents for the morning as well as the forenoon alms food.

There was a *upasika*, Chandra, studying the *Dhamma* under guidance of the Head Bhikkhuni. The *upasika* dressed in white, was an eager student and industrious worker, making tasty snacks for the mid-morning tea breaks and medicinal beverages or tea for the afternoon.

Most of us bathed at the well surrounded by a high wall and a thicket. There was a tiny *viharage* surmounted by an ornamental stupa by the thicket on one side. The Buddha image in the *viharage* had the most beautiful compassionate expression I have ever seen on any modern Buddha image. The image maker is now no more, I was told. Apparently he came from a long line of traditional image makers.

In the *avasa* I saw in 2007, there was an alms hall with two long trestle tables and two long benches to sit on. The kitchen adjoining it was a traditional open hearth “smoke” kitchen and whenever curries were made in earthenware ‘chatty’ pots over the wood fire hearth, the curries were very tasty.

Originally the *avasa* had a thatched roof of dried coconut palms, I was told. It must have represented the type of *avasa* that existed in rural settings in the past. The tiny cells, four in number, were each no bigger than 7'x 7', just enough for a small bed and a cupboard. There were no other items of furniture. The nuns would have studied or meditated on mats. The Head Bhikkhuni told me that in one cell there had been a narrow cement slab about



one foot in height and about 6 feet in length and about 2 ½ feet wide on which the Head Nun, Rev. Dedigama Sakula, used to sleep. The other junior nuns used to sleep on the floor on mats. At about that time there were also two modest *kutis* behind the *bo* tree. Very often, although alms food is brought by devotees, morning and forenoon, one curry was made in the *aramaya* by a long standing *upasika* who had recently become a *samaneri*, Ven. Pilimatalawe Dhammadorika, who had been residing at Visakharamaya for more than twenty years at the time.

In 2007 there was no Dhamma School building. The children used to sit under the clove or mango tree or in front near the main gate, under the guava tree or behind the *bo* tree under the *na* (iron wood) tree. It was under the *na* tree also that we, the candidates for the higher ordination sat on benches facing the Head Bhikkhuni who would read *suttas* (discourses) from the texts and explain, or read from the *Vinaya Pitaka* and explain the rules of monastic discipline to us.

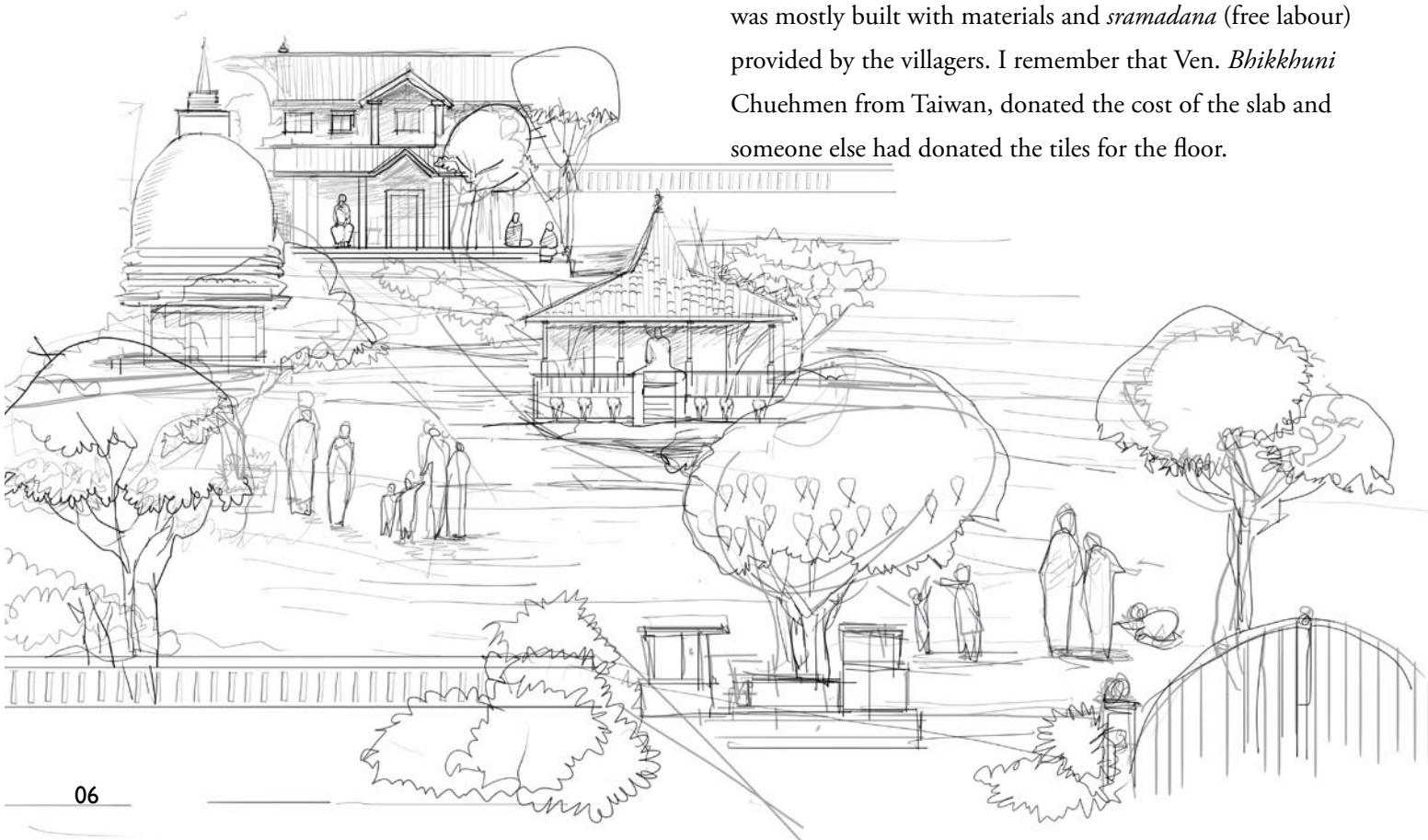


Visakharamaya in 2019

The thicket I saw in 2007 is now no more (probably a vestige of what was there originally) and the tiny *viharage* surmounted by the ornamental *stupa* is also no more. However the image remains in a new *ceitya* that has been built. There is now also next to it facing the front gate quite an impressive, large *viharage*.

The tiny *avasa* with four cells is also now no more. I was sad that the old *avasa* had to be demolished. The space has been taken by a two storey *avasa* which has on the ground floor, three airy rooms, a *danasala* (alms hall), a modern pantry and immediately outside an open hearth “smoke” kitchen. Upstairs there are three rooms for nuns and two dormitories to accommodate ten higher ordination candidates.

There is now behind the ‘*bo maluwa*’ (bo tree precincts) a two storey Dhamma School for children of the village. It was mostly built with materials and *sramadana* (free labour) provided by the villagers. I remember that Ven. Bhikkhuni Chuehmen from Taiwan, donated the cost of the slab and someone else had donated the tiles for the floor.

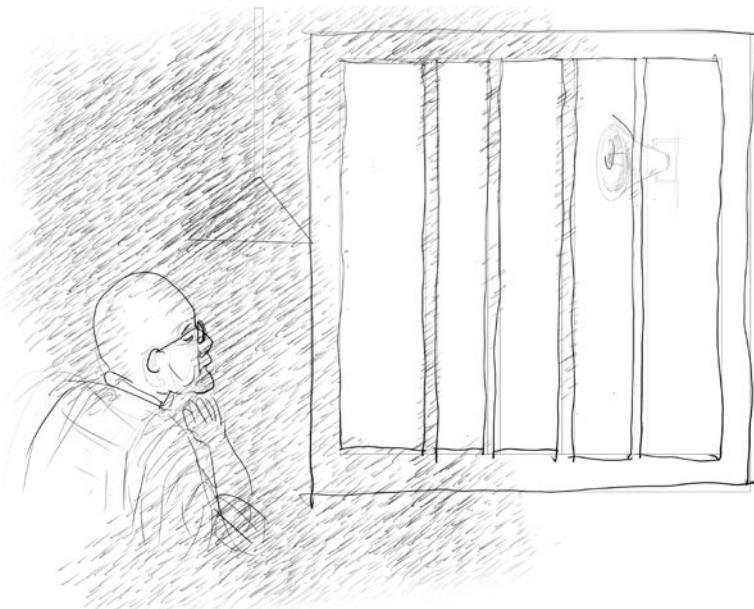


A Mystic State Evoked by a Voice

Late one evening I was seated in the *gilan kuti*, reading a Buddhist text, when I heard through the open door a voice chanting the *Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta*¹

I could not recognize the voice as that of anyone of the nuns in the *aramaya*. I surmised it must be a guest nun who had been invited to chant *Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta* that evening and that *pirit* (protection discourses) chanting for the evening *Pooja* had got under way. The voice coming over the loudspeaker caught my attention, especially when it intoned the elevating refrain² but it kept breaking up from time to time due to a defect in the loudspeaker or its connection. One moment it seemed to come from far away and the next moment swelling into proportions larger than life itself. What struck me about the voice was its low pitched mellifluous intonation and clear pronunciation of *pali* words and its measured authoritative firmness. It expressed faith based on conviction in the Buddha's enlightenment. The voice seemed to come from a far distance in time and space, from a source twenty six centuries past. Then it struck me suddenly with the stabilization of the loudspeaker connection that the voice belonged to none other than the Head Bhikkhuni. I was grateful for the initial defect in the sound system for it supplied for a momentary point

in time a mystic quality to the voice broadcast. I have ever since regarded the Head Bhikkhuni from that perspective of an authentic *bhikkhuni* stepping out of the canon, as it were, playing her role with much grace and ease in our present modern age. It amazes me how she is able to bridge the gap of centuries, scaling over them as lightly as picking her way over a small pebble strewn stream in the countryside.



1.“Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth”, *Samyutta Nikaya*, *LVI, ii.*

2. “*Pubbeananussutesudhammesu, cakkhumudapadi, nananudapadi, pannaudapadi, vijjaudapadi, alokoudapadi.*”

“Such was the vision, the knowledge, the wisdom, the science, the light that arose in me concerning things not heard before.”



03

Metta and Karuna

Names that Echo from a Colonial Past

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani was born on 10th January 1953 in a village called Petigoda in the vicinity of Badalgama township in the District of Gampaha. Her father's name was Tammita Aracchi Nikulas (Nicholas) Appuhamy and the mother's name was Danansuriya Mudiyanselage Martina.

I must mention here that names like 'Nikulas' and 'Martina' are foreign names loaned to the Sinhala language and Sri Lankan life. It is part of the colonial experience. 'Nikulas' is of Portuguese Catholic origin and in this particular case, the bearer was of the Catholic religion. Such foreign name sometimes indicate that the bearer has a connection to a foreign religion but for the most part a foreign name has no such significance. They are just names. Such names were popular during colonial times. It was only a few years before and after independence in 1948 that a huge wave of patriotism swept over the country and parents started giving their children Sinhalese names or even Indian names.

Sri Lanka was known during the British Raj as Ceylon. It had been until independence in 1948 under the successive rule of the Portuguese, Dutch and last of all the British, a foreign rule collectively and continuously totaling nearly four hundred and fifty years since 1505. Despite foreign domination, its

Buddhist cultural heritage appears to have been jealously guarded, founded on the bed - rock of the Buddhist faith. There could be superficial changes made with regard to dress and names but its core has remained, to a great extent, inviolate. This meant that both geographically and metaphorically, the periphery could take in and absorb foreign influences but as these influences proceed to the core they meet with a stone wall of resistance. It is an involuntary resistance to invasion. Villagers are exceedingly conscious of their national identity. The island has been at the centre of trade routes from East, West and the North, sometimes becoming submerged temporarily by ocean traffic and contending powers as in the past. Considering this, it is to be wondered at how the island people have held fast to the notion of a national identity.

The fair complexioned baby girl born to Nikulas Appuhamy and Danansuriya Mudiyanselage Martina in 1953 was given the name of Ranmenike (golden gem). She was the 5th of 7 siblings, last two being younger brothers and two older brothers and two older sisters occupying upper rungs of the sibling hierarchy.

The Father

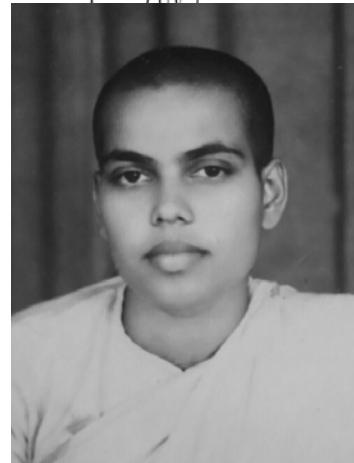
Their father was a physician of indigenous medicine. He was skilled in the treatment of sick animals also. The Venerable *bhikkhuni* told me that her father once cured the injury on the leg of an elephant by keeping the animal in their garden and tending and caring for it; bathing it, bringing fodder from the surrounding forest for it and applying the necessary medicinal leaves and roots found and selected by him. Podimenike said the leaves and roots would have been pounded and ground into a paste either by her or perhaps one of the older siblings. Apparently, the father was skilled in curing snake bites as well. Some of these qualities of compassion and caring would have undoubtedly rubbed off on other members of the family.



Head Nun's father who was a physician of indigenous medicine and a farmer



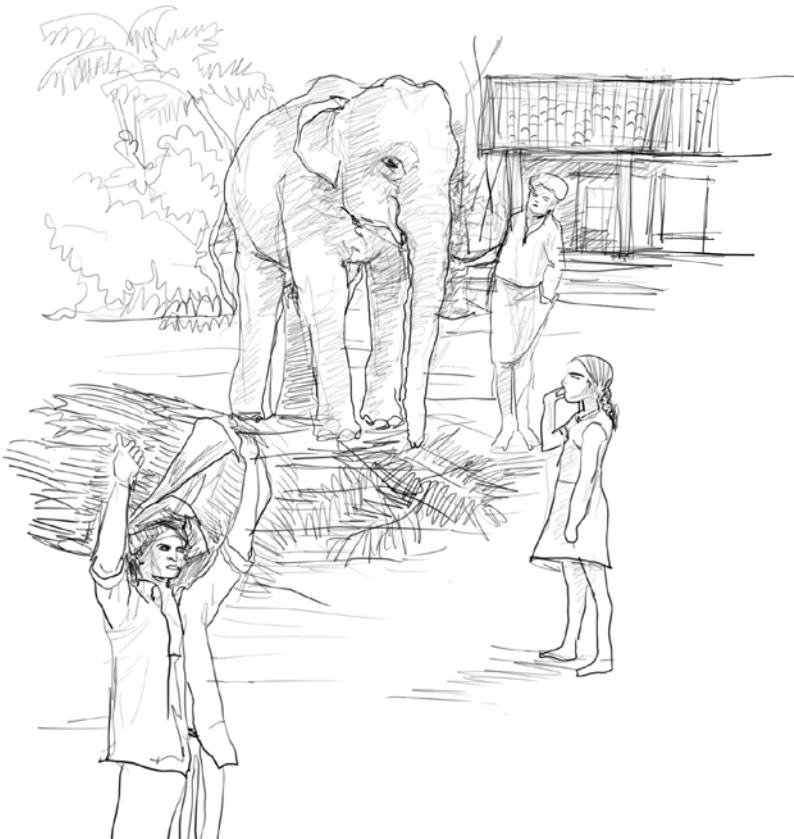
The present head nun's mother when she was quite young



The present head bhikkhuni after her first ordination as a Dasa Silmatha at the age of 19



Head Nun's older sister who was a government school teacher, taken fairly recently.



Bringing up a Baby Squirrel

On numerous occasions I have seen baby squirrels fallen from their nests that are hidden in the roof of the *Viharage*, being retrieved by the Head Bhikkhuni. She would quickly swathe it in several folds of a small sponge cloth and feed it milk with a wick for clay oil lamps. Then the bundle of the wee baby squirrel wrapped in the small sponge cloth is kept on the branch of a tree if the mother is calling out for it continuously in agitated tones. Sometimes when the Head Bhikkhuni calls to the mother, “**Your baby is on the branch of this tree here. Come and fetch it**”, the mother does come bounding from branch to branch. Otherwise, the baby squirrel is kept in a cupboard safe from wily predators stalking the premises like the cat, the rat-snake or *Kalavedda/Uguduwa*(civet cat) which latter are nocturnal visitors. I have observed that the young nuns too are very adept at tending fallen, forlorn baby squirrels. The wee things would graduate from milk to punctured grapes, the juice of which they would busily lick and later eat the pulp. The next graduation after a couple of weeks would be to a slice of ripe mango or papaw or even tiny spoons-full of yoghurt.

At this stage it would have been taken out from its “nest” in the cupboard and placed inside a wire cage. The cage has been a refuge for many a refugee over the years, birds as well as squirrels. While being fed, I have noticed that the tiny creature is exposed to a great deal of “baby talk” which I think is an essential ingredient in its diet. There is a discourse in the Buddhist texts regarding four kinds of *ahara* (food) that serve as nutriments for human beings³. The four kinds of nutriments are *kabalinkarahara* (physical food), *phassa* (sensory contact), *manosancetana* (mental volition) and *viññana* (consciousness). I understand that all four are equally important for the development of the total being, *nama-roopa* (mentality-physicality). Bhikku Bodhi’s note, 120, in his translation of the Majjhima Nikaya explains: “Nutriment (*ahara*) is to be understood here in a broad sense as a prominent condition for the individual’s life – continuity. Physical food ‘*kabalinkarahara*’ is an important condition for the physical body, contact for feeling, mental volition for consciousness and consciousness for mentality-materiality, the psycho-physical organism in its totality”.

3. *Sammadhitthi Sutta*, Majjhima Nikaya: The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, p. 133-134. Translation by Bhikkhu Nyanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi; Wisdom Publications, Sommerville, Mass., 1995

The *Sammuditthi Sutta* states clearly that physical food as well as sensory contact (which we know carries messages to the brain through the nervous system) are equally important for growth of the total being. Thus as in the case of a human infant exposed to ‘baby talk’ the baby squirrel exposed to the nuns’ baby talk as well as physical contact with them must act as stimuli for its brain.

A stick had been placed horizontally inside the cage about six inches above the base, the two ends of the stick extending a little outside the cage. I had seen parrots and parakeets, former refugees, walking sideways along the stick on earlier occasions and hanging from it, head downwards, with their claws curled around it. I observed the squirrel also running to and fro along the stick and performing all kinds of acrobatics, hanging from it with its tail twirled round the stick. These activities must prepare the muscles of the squirrel when it is finally released from the cage and it runs about among trees and branches. In the absence of its *pubbacariya* (natural mother/first teacher) it is at Visakharamaya having many foster mothers and soon nature itself will assert its role of being the principal teacher for it. Thus, it is not a wonder that ‘nature’ is referred to as ‘mother’ nature, though I have observed among birds that parenting is done by both parents.

On one perfectly beautiful morning, the cage was taken out and hung from a branch of an *anoda* fruit tree, the branches of which reached up and brushed against the balcony of the new *avasa*. At first, the squirrel seemed dumb-founded by the brilliant sunshine and green vegetation all around it and the incessant chatter of birds and squirrels. But before long, the machiavellian intentions of the cat became apparent and the cage was taken down hastily and brought inside the nuns’ residence again.

One of the most difficult things to know is when to let out a half grown squirrel from its captivity inside a cage. Soon after its last outing it was let loose on a trial run, watched on anxiously by the nuns. As it ran about joyously, exuberantly with its new found freedom, nearly somersaulting as it ran willy-nilly, it nearly ran straight in to the jaws of the waiting cat if not for the timely intervention of the nuns. They chased the cat away and having picked up the frightened, trembling creature, put it back in the cage. The whole drama took place under the keen observation of a very vocal choir, chief of which were hysterical babblers, grackle and chattering squirrels. That night, returning from a neighbouring house to



which the Head Bhikkhuni had been invited to deliver a *bana desana* (discourse) she took the squirrel out of the cage to feed it some milk. Throughout the feeding operation it had given her a non-stop account of the day's near disaster in the form of a bitter complaint. This is what she related in Sinhala:

"mama oota kiri povanakota oo mata kiyanawa, kiyanawa, kiyavanawa, iverayak ne." (When I was feeding it milk it went on complaining and complaining and complaining without an end) to which the Head Bhikkhuni had responded with sympathetic noises all the while such as "You poor motherless, fatherless creature!"

Why these muttering , grumbling accusations to her and her only? Perhaps it had developed a special rapport with her. I remembered that, at first, when it was a wee creature it would take food only from her slender delicate fingers...

I must say that the Head Bhikkhuni treats all sick nuns with this same quality of TLC.

The Rat-snake Episode

On another occasion, a rat snake was discerned slithering away, stealthily up the exterior of the '*gilan kuti*' wall. It gave the impression that it was on a secret nefarious mission to the ceiling under the roof where many a nocturnal creature visited (or made its abode). Anyone occupying the '*gilan kuti*' could hear clumsy, lumbering noises along the ceiling. They were mostly *Kalaveddas* and I suspect iguana and mongoose also made visitations to the rats nesting place. It had become a feasting ground for them, no doubt. I have seen flashes of them through the open doorway moving quickly across the premises at dusk.

The rat-snake's nefarious mission to the ceiling was being watched by the usual orchestra of babblers, grackle and squirrel sounding their choral warnings sometimes rising to a crescendo. Hearing the incessant noise, the young nuns came rushing out with the Head Bhikkhuni who on seeing the rat-snake took immediate charge of the situation. She took an ekel broom in her right hand and asked one of the young nuns to bring a bucket quickly and when it was brought she held the bucket with her left hand and with a swift motion of the



right hand swept the rat-snake with the ekel broom into the bucket. Then the Head Bhikkhuni hurried along with the bucket to the back wall and threw it over to the adjoining thicket, like throwing the baby with the bath water, bath tub *et al.*

Quite unabashed by its undignified exit, the rat-snake was seen at irregular intervals slinking along the plants by the boundary wall and if it was chided it would slither along as fast as it could on its belly, as docile as a domesticated pet dog. The Head Bhikkhuni's deputy, Ven. Kuruvita Khema Kantini has become quite an expert at chasing away such unwanted visitors on the premises by chanting the *Khandha Paritta*⁴ in a rather stern tone.

*"May I have metta towards the footless
and towards bi-peds, too, metta may I have;
may I have mettā towards quadrupeds
and towards the many-footed, metta may I have.
All creatures, all beings, all having life,
may good fortune attend them all.
May not the least harm on them befall⁵.*

4. i. CullaVagga ii. ,
ii. *Abi (metta)sutta*, Anguttara Nikaya, ii, 72

5. *"Apadakehi me mettam*
Mettam dipadakehi me
catuppadehi me mettam
mettam bahuppadehi me

Sabbe satta, sabbe pana,
Sabbe bhuta ca kevala
Sabbe bhadrani passantu
makinī ci papa ma gama

Invasion of the *Bo Maluva* by *Kuros*

Metta (loving kindness) *Karuna* (compassion) based on non-violence, of course, are principal tenets of Buddhist philosophy. Sometimes, one wonders how such principles could be practised in this day and age, e.g., in the case of household pests. Screen doors and screen windows are the answer to flies and mosquitoes and mosquito nets become essential at night. Keeping one's dwelling hygienically clean with the minimum of poisonous substances is another method.

The Buddha has given advice to monastics and the laity regarding the subject of non-violence towards every type of life. In the Book of Discipline he tells monks not to throw the remains of their alms bowls into flowing streams lest the oily spicy food might affect harmfully fish in the streams. The remains must not be thrown on grass or plants either but thrown on bare patches of earth⁶.

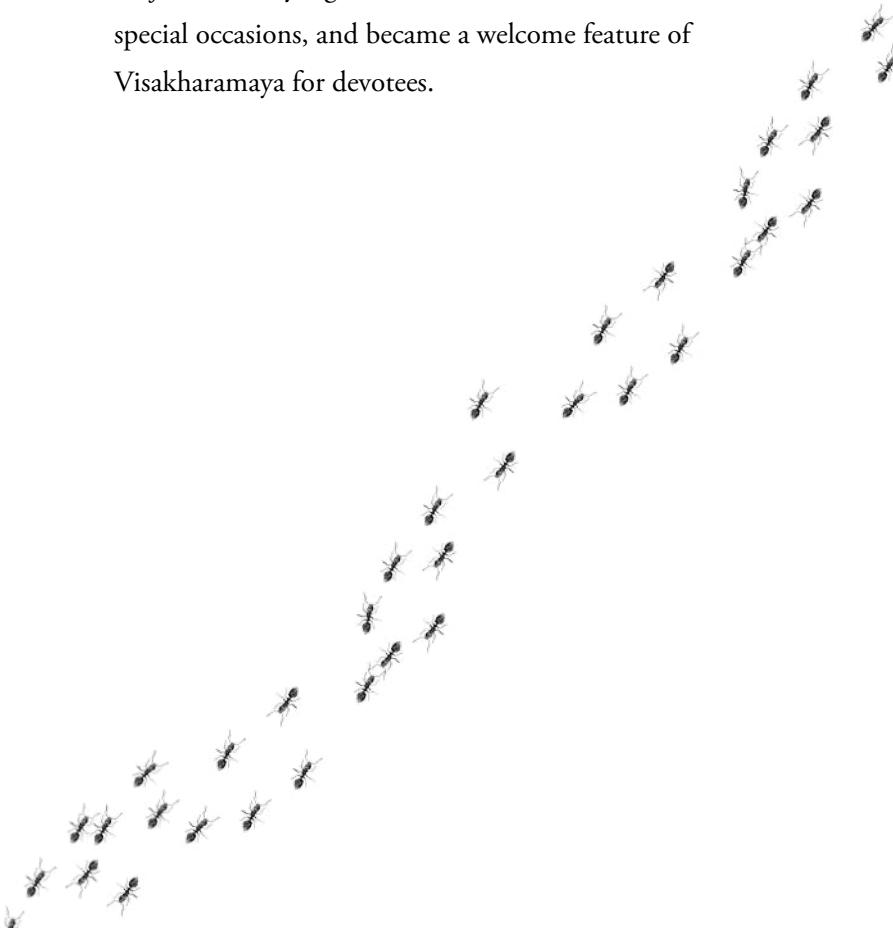
A few years ago, the *bo maluwa*(precincts) on the premises of Visakharamaya was invaded by armies upon armies of ants called *kuro*. They were tunneling the base of the *Bodhi Prakaraya* (wall with shrines) in search of a safe dwelling place. Since their presence and activities would affect adversely the foundation and roots of the *Bo tree (ficus religiosa)* the Head

6. Mahavagga, Vinaya IV; A. IV VIII

Bhikkhuni was very worried. Consulting pest control authorities and companies in Colombo was suggested but she was averse to exterminating even pests. She consulted the elders in the village but none could advise her on ancient nonviolent methods of pest-control. The wisdom of simple ancient methods has been forgotten and most people resort to the easiest way out. Consequently the Head Bhikkhuni thought of a plan which she put into action without delay.

Along the track the “*kuro*” were taking from outside into the premises in a bee line towards the *Bo* tree behind the barricade of its *prakaraya*, she laid a track of sweetmeat morsels made out of palm tree treacle and rice flour and when the “*kuro*” massed themselves in patches to eat the morsels, the large patches of ants were collected onto dry leaves fallen from teak trees and jak trees and dropped into buckets and taken to the nearby wilderness from where they had come. This was done tirelessly and hundreds and thousands of “*kuro*” were translocated in this painstaking time consuming manner to their former forested surroundings. Then, *Pirit* chanting at the *Bo* tree every evening was resorted to: *devas*, divine beings, in the bhuddhist pantheon of demi-gods protecting the *aramaya* were offered merit and requested to safeguard the *Bo* tree. The single minded stream of “*kuro*” certainly diminished by

that concerted effort. Finally, the Head Bhikkhuni decided to purchase 28 sedentary Buddha statues of about 14 inches in height and install them in shrines round a new and bigger *Bodhighara*. The building of the new wall of shrines was put in hand, the old *prakaraya* was demolished and earth excavated for a much bigger foundation for the new one. Village devotees were invited to purchase the twenty eight Buddha statues which they did with great enthusiasm and devotion and hence forth the *Atavisi Pooja* for twenty eight Buddhas was conducted on special occasions, and became a welcome feature of Visakharamaya for devotees.



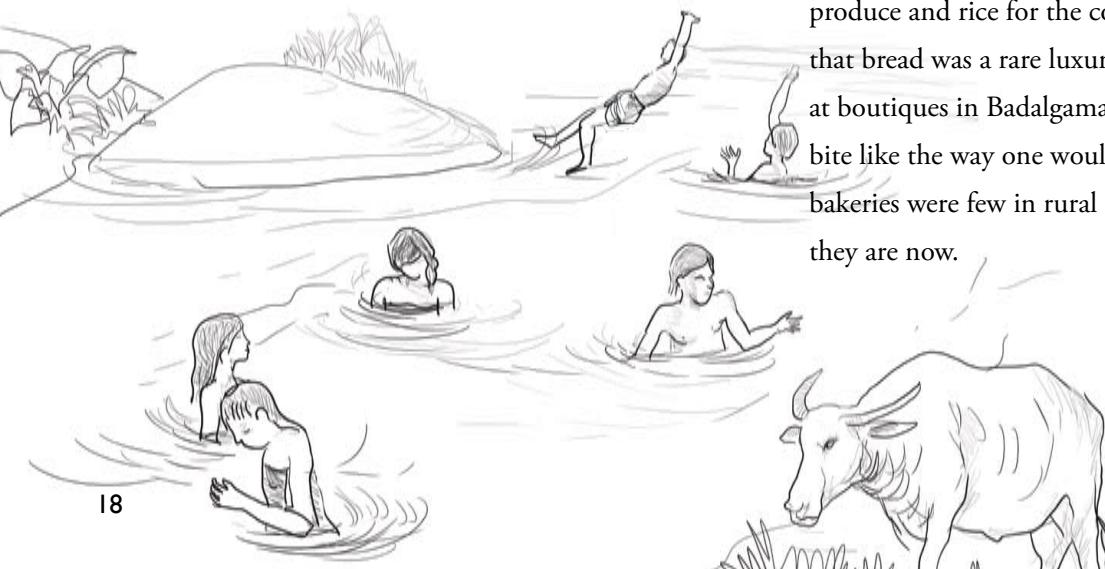
04

Facing the Vicissitudes of Life

Home in the Countryside

The rural environment experienced by Teacher Podimenike and her younger sister, Ranmenike, and other members of the family must have been scenic and serene with the river Ma Oya flowing through paddy fields on either side. The children were accustomed to bathe in the river, the girls wrapping their bathing cloths around their bodies up to their armpits and the boys girding up their sarongs *dhoti* fashion, no doubt. The landscape would consist of paddy fields stretching far and wide. On slightly higher ground there would be island oases where one could see homesteads partly hidden by the thick foliage of coconut palm trees and fruit trees. Beyond in the horizon would be seen thick forests. Also seen in the foreground were extensive estates of coconut owned by rich land lords.

The father supplemented their family income by cultivating rice in fields he irrigated by cutting and directing channels from the river to his fields. Teacher Podi Menike said he grew other grain crops as well, like *Kurakkan* (millet) *tala* (sesamum) and vegetables such as potato, sweet potato and *mannokka* (cassava) and many varieties of other vegetables like '*thibbotu*' (a species of brinjal the size of a coffee berry or jam fruit) and numerous kinds of herbs could be found everywhere. There were fruit trees in their garden like papaw, banana, guava, mango, *anoda*, *jambu* (roseapple), durian, *delun* (pomegranate), etc., and the almost perennial jackfruit that hangs from the trunks of doughty trees, (some growing to monstrous proportions yielding a variety of preparations for the family meals), *rambutans*, *mangosteens* and, no doubt, *kaju* (cashew) trees. Teacher Podimenike said they needed to buy only salt and dhal from the kiosks at Badalgama for they had enough garden produce and rice for the cooking pot. She also told me that bread was a rare luxury those days which they bought at boutiques in Badalgama. Each of them would enjoy a bite like the way one would enjoy a piece of cake. Perhaps bakeries were few in rural areas and not as ubiquitous as they are now.



Wheat Flour or Rice Flour?

Many people bemoan the fact that bread has taken the place of rice or rice flour based foods in the mornings. School authorities have tried to break this trend by giving a list of nutritious lentils, grains, gram or yams that could be boiled quickly by mothers to send with their children to school. I have noticed that at Dhamma School conducted on Sundays at “Visakharamaya” generous devotees provide children a mid-morning meal of boiled gram wrapped in a lotus leaf with chili and onion paste (*lunumiris*) or rice flour string hoppers which latter is a great favourite. Generally, bread is widely favoured in the country as it is ready to eat requiring only one curry accompaniment.

Tragedy struck the contented, happy self-sufficient Badalgama family when the father suddenly fell ill with a stroke and 3 months later passed away. Then they came upon lean times, indeed. Teacher, Podimenike was sixteen at the time and Ranmenike twelve.

The Children’s Schooling

Their schooling had been originally in the temple school. It was a humble village school. The packed earth floor of the ‘*maduwa*’ (classroom) was given a coating of cow dung mixed with water which the children themselves spread around with an ekel broom. This is

not the usual method of application, I was told, but one cannot expect much more from mere children. When the floor was perfectly dry, a few days later, reed mats would have been unrolled over the floor and the children would sit on the reed mats and do their lessons. Their writing materials consisting of a slate and slate pencil were brought to school in reed woven sling bags. Podimenike was promoted to Grade 7 at a government school when she passed that particular scholarship examination. Thereafter, she seemed to have sailed through her school career with great ease. Then as the years went by, having passed the university entrance examination she entered the University of Sri Lanka, Colombo.

Ranmenike had a very different career as she had missed out on schooling from the 2nd grade because there had been no one to accompany her to school when she was promoted to 3rd grade. Also it was not considered imperative for a female child at that time in rural society to have an education beyond the 2nd grade, mostly if they lacked a chaperone. Podimenike had left those early years behind her and was carving out her own individual academic career.

Free Education Policy

I must add here that free education (introduced to all government schools by the far sighted Minister of Education, C.W.W. Kanangara in the years even before independence was gained in 1948) had percolated into the rural sector even at the tertiary level and bright children benefitted by it and forged ahead.

Free Education policy as an universal human right was proposed in Ceylon's State Council in 1943 under the Donoughmore Constitution and implemented in 1945. This would have been in the interim period between Home Rule and full independence which came in 1948.

In actual fact, free education had been available to people in the island both for the Buddhist clergy as well as laity for more than a thousand years through *Pirivenas* (monastic colleges) after Arahant Mahinda brought Buddhism to the island in the 3rd century B.C.E. *Pirivena* education would have been interrupted from time to time, no doubt, during foreign invasions and successive foreign rule. It was nearly extinguished by Christian missionary influenced policies of the British colonial government. The counter move to the establishment of Christian Missionary schools in the late 19th century was the establishment of private Buddhist schools under the aegis of the Buddhist Theosophical Society of Ceylon

with the assistance of Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, an American lawyer (among his other eminent qualifications) and the establishment of Sunday Dhamma Schools in temples. All this activity came about under the leadership of Buddhist monks who had begun the Buddhist Revival about a century before the late 19th century. Anagarika Dharmapala along with monks such as Ven. Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala, Ven. Waskaduwe Sri Subhuti, *et al.* took it still further forward into the 20th century. The momentum still goes on in the 21st century.

Female Literacy

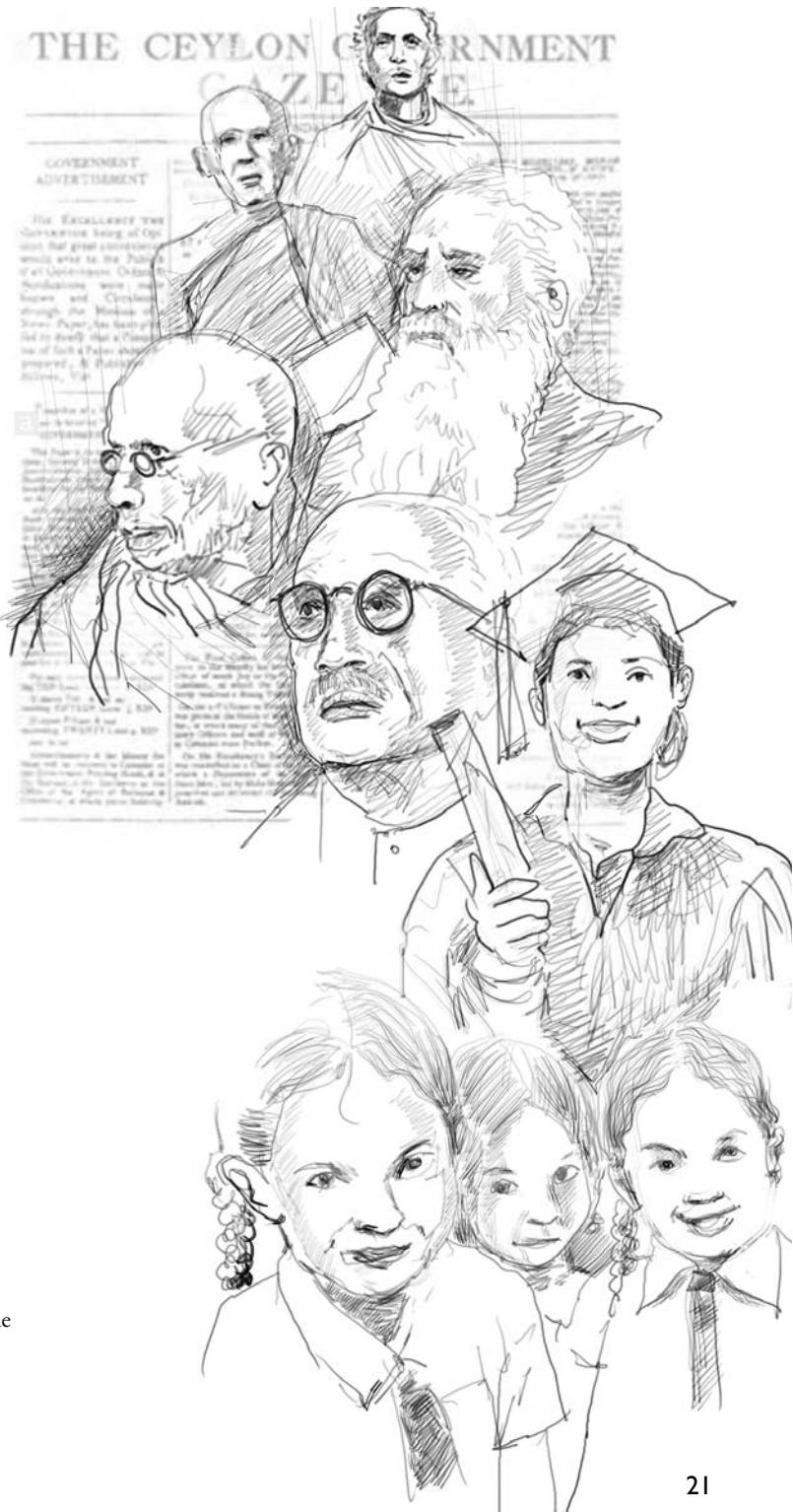
Female literacy reached a high level, something like 90% before the North-South war disrupted school education in war torn areas⁷, so says Swarna Jayaweera in the CENWOR (Centre for Women's Work) Report under the title "Facets of Change" covering the decade 1985-1995.

"The latter has the highest literacy rate in South Asia, over 82%, but this rate represents a drop from 90% on account of the on-going North-South war..."

She further states in this report that "the female child has more disadvantages on account of her sexuality, which necessitates her protection. Her non-participation even at the primary educational level has as its cause her difficulty in getting herself to school in remote areas although there is a sufficient number of schools in the island to serve the public within a two mile radius."

She further states that there are other pressures on the female child (than her sexuality which necessitates her protection):

"Usually her assistance is required by the mother who is hard put to it to cope with too large a family of children and this interferes with the female child's education. However, in urban areas, it is the reverse. Economic factors operate more on the male child who is seen to drop out of school in search of employment much sooner than the female child. It is seen, therefore, that it is not only social factors such as conventional gender roles that stand in the way of a female child's education in Sri Lanka. This is borne out by the fact that in the congested urban areas where public transport is freely available and cheap, and schools are within easy reach, the female child does not suffer a disadvantage in getting herself to school"⁸.



7. Dr. Swarna Jayaweera. *Facets of change : Education in Sri Lanka* in CENWOR (Centre for Women's Research) Report of the decade 1985-1995, Colombo: CENWOR, 1995.

8. ibid.

Household Chores

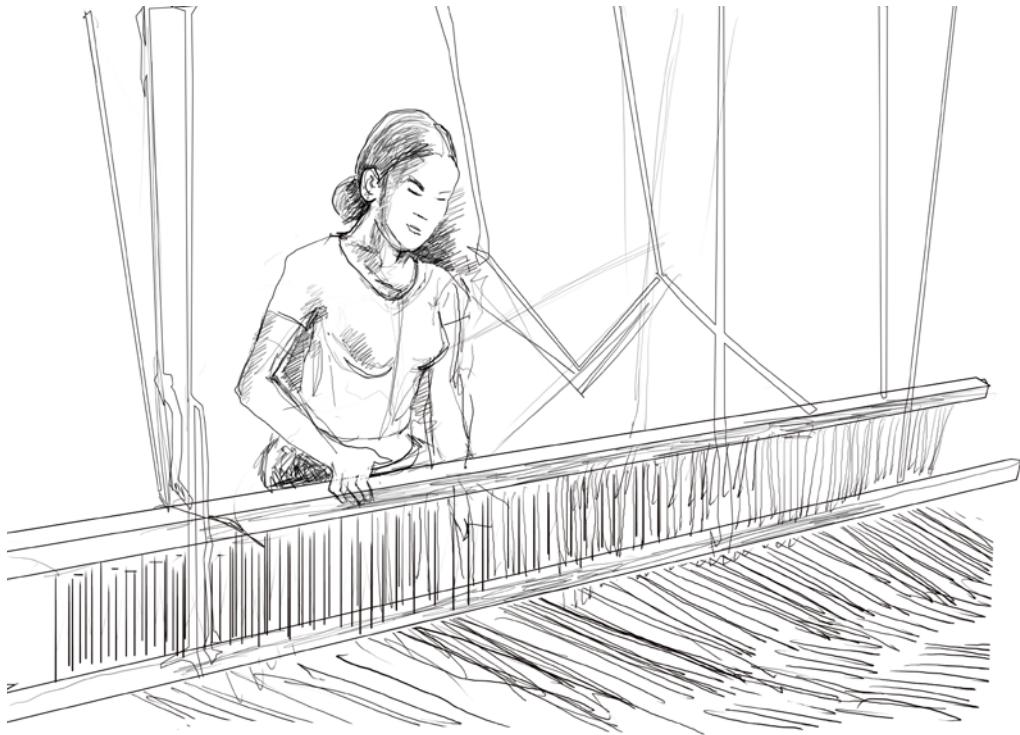
The disaster that struck the family with the father's death would have certainly impacted on Ranmenike's education. She would have had to stay at home and help her mother with household chores, no doubt, like grating coconuts, grinding condiments or dry chilies on a grinding stone, pounding rice in a stone mortar with a heavy, long palmyrah wood pestle (that would spring up on its own volition, as it were, and bounce back into place); sifting the flour, roasting it slightly for string hoppers and using freshly pounded rice flour for making hoppers, cutting up a big Jak fruit with a *manna* (hatchet) to make *kirikos* a popular white creamy curry that resembles pasta in white sauce, but very much more nutritious than the latter, or boiling it and thereafter tempering it with chili and spices and serving it dry with a separate gravy accompaniment called *goda hoddha*. Rural folk know well to prepare such dishes in smoke kitchens or open hearth traditional kitchens. These are not out-of-the-ordinary activities in rural households. Fetching firewood from surrounding forests, chopping firewood with a type of hatchet called *porava*(axe) and husking coconuts on a pointed iron stake would have been done by older brothers perhaps and even plucking of coconuts by climbing the tall coconut trees or by using a *pol kekka*, a long heavy pole with a hook attached to it.

Weaving Handloom Material

Sometime later, Ranmenike, barely fourteen years old, courageously joined a hand-loom weaving centre. Very quickly she learnt to weave lengths of white handloom material and lengths of coloured checked material. Soon we find her bringing a hand loom weaving machine to their home and beginning to ply her own cottage industry in order to contribute towards household expenses to help her mother make ends meet. The home industry she was engaged in reminds me of the lay *upasika*, Visakha, who was the Buddha's foremost lay female benefactress and the advice the Buddha gave her. He advised her how she should apply herself to home industries with an eye to avoiding wastage and always with an eye focused on profitability and good economic management of resources. He was talking to the richest woman of her time; no matter, she must avoid wastage and be skilled in whatever she does:

"And how, Visakha, is a woman capable at her work? Whatever her (husband's) home industries, whether in wool or cotton, therein she is deft and nimble, gifted with an inquiring turn of mind into all such undertakings, she is able to arrange and carry them out. In this way a woman is capable at her work"⁹.

9. Anguttara Nikaya translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Book of the Eights p.1183-1184



Economic Management of Resources

Economic management of *aramaya* affairs had to be given much thought and much praised if managed well. As a matter of fact, economic management of resources has been stressed by the Buddha on many an occasion. The example of the fig tree for instance¹⁰. A man is advised not to waste his wealth like shaking a fig tree to get one fruit, thereby causing all the fruits on the tree, ripe and unripe, to fall on the ground and go waste. Nor is one advised to hoard wealth without enjoying it and die of starvation. King Udena once asked Ven. Ananda what they would do

with old robes when his queen Samavathi with her retinue of 500 women offered an enormous amount of robe material for the temple. He replied that old robes could be cut up and sewn for use as bed sheets. “When they get old what would you do?” Ven. Ananda replied that they could be cut up again for use as floor rugs and later cut up for use as dusters. Then King Udena asked further what they would do

10. Anguttara Nikaya translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Book of the Eights p.1195. See Bhikkhu Bodhi's note p.1751.

when the dusters were not usable and Ven. Ananada replied that finally they would be torn up and mixed with clay to fill up spaces in the wall to restore the wall¹¹.

The Head Nun is also very keen that no wastage occurs at Visakharamaya. Water is not allowed to go waste. Taps are closed well when not being used. During times of drought when the well is showing a low water level, waste water used during cooking preparations are saved in a large vessel and sprinkled on plants and shrubs to ‘slake their thirst’, as it were. Usable toilets on the premises are never demolished even though old. “They have been built with the hard earned money and labour of faithful devotees. They are perfectly usable. No need to demolish them just because they are old” she says, “Fix new doors and give the toilets a fresh coat of white paint”.

These qualities of good management I have observed in the Head Bhikkhuni. I suppose such qualities have developed not only when engaged in her cottage industry at home but also *aramaya* training under the guidance of Rev. Dedigama Sakula.

The Woodshed

Good management is what makes the Head Bhikkhuni keep a watchful eye on the woodshed where good timber as well as firewood are stacked. The Head Bhikkhuni gives the woodshed a thorough overhauling from time to time for the sake of keeping it neat and tidy and to maintain the good timber. She very generously makes the good timber available to other *aramayas* when requests are made for building purposes.

Store Room Provisions

Accumulations of dry food stuffs are arranged very neatly on shelves in the store room. These, such as tea, sugar, milk powder, rice and other grain, pulses, green gram, gram, soap, toothpaste, etc., are sorted out equally and put into 8-10 *poshanamallas* (sacks of nutritional food stuffs) and distributed every last Saturday of the month to pregnant young women of the village.

11. Eugene Watson Burlingame, Buddhist Legends, Book 2, Story 1, p.287. Translation from the Dharmapada Commentary, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1999.

Flood Relief

Excess dry food stuffs are also distributed to refugees when there is a national disaster like a flood in a certain area or landslide or some other calamity. I have noticed that the Head Bhikkhuni always rises to such occasions. She orders a van for transporting provisions but does not inform the devotees in case they will be inconvenienced. However, the information trickles out and a few devotees collect at the *aramaya* to accompany her. Once I remember thirty packets of home cooked rice and curry, steaming hot, arrived at the *aramaya* to be distributed at such refugee centres for the night meal.

The Head Bhikkhuni also acts with great decorum on such occasions by co-ordinating with neighbouring temples so that the *aramaya* does not appear to take the lead in such matters but allows the temple monks to take the lead. This kind of diplomacy comes naturally to her because of her respect for the Bhikkhu Sangha and from her humility and delicacy of feeling. This kind of deference comes not from a subordination on the basis of sexual difference as some may think but out of the unique Sri Lankan historical perspective – that it was the Bhikkhu Sangha that preserved the Dhamma throughout the centuries in the past during wars, during destruction of temples under foreign rule and through famines¹².



12. i Mahavamsa.

ii Ananda Guruge "Fountains of Buddhism".

A Momentous Event

About the time young Ranmenike was plying her home industry of weaving, an important event took place in her life which would alter her course in the future. A friend requested her to accompany her to a funeral house in Badalgama. That friend knew a member of the bereaved family who had been her classmate in school. Ranmenike agreed and went with her friend to the funeral house. It was there that she saw for the first time the Head Nun of the *aramaya* of *dasa silmata* at Naugala, Kegalle. The

sight of the Head Nun moved her deeply and a yearning in her began to grow for the life of renunciation. She expressed this feeling to her mother but met with firm resistance. However, later, seeing that her daughter was bent in that direction, she relented and finally gave her permission to 'go forth' from home to homelessness. She accompanied her to Naugala to obtain permission from the Head Nun, Rev. Galigamuwe Khemacari. On receiving her assent, the mother gave over her daughter in charge of the Head Nun. That was in 1972, when the daughter was nineteen.

A decade before, in 1961 a piece of land in Galgamuwa village had been donated by Ranmenike Edirisinghe of Galgamuwa to Ven. Batagama Medhananda, Chief Monk of the Yogashrama at Naugala. She was a pupil of Rev. Galigamuwe Khemacari, and the head monk had made a request from that *upasika* to find a donor for the purpose of gifting a piece of land on which to build an *aramaya* for one of the *dasa silmatas* to settle down in Galgamuwa to lead the life of a renunciant. It was on that piece of land that the present Viskaramaya was built. Visakharamaya was built in 1965 but the deed of gift was written in 1961. In order to describe the history of Visakharamaya I must go back a little in history to 1958 when the society of *dasa silmatas* was started at Naugala by Ven. Batagama Medhananda. This is the event to which I am turning now.



05

The Chief Monk of Naugala Hill



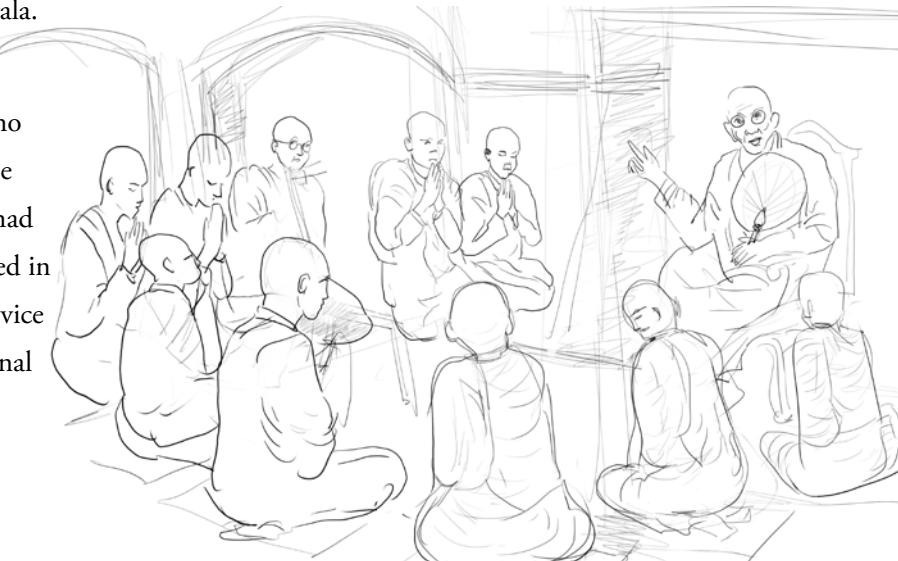
Apay Loku Hamuduruwo



Most Venerable Batagama Medhanandabhidana Thero, Chief Monk of the Yogashrama at Naugala, Kegalle, founded in 1958 the International Dasa Silmata Society at Naugala. He was the *Anushasaka Upadhyaya* monk of those nuns. The society later evolved into the International Sasanaloka Bhikkhuni Society of Naugala.

He was known to all his pupil nuns as "*Apay Loku Hamuduruwo*" and was a classic patriarchal figure who resided in the cave on top of Naugala hill. He was the epitome of Theravada orthodoxy, the core of which had a truly Buddhist liberal humanism. This was ingrained in him and expressed in his actions of humanitarian service to society. But what he presented mostly to the external world was a stern tall, lean, ascetic figure. He rather matched the rugged rock strewn hill of Naugala.

Something I noted during the last twelve years as a member of the higher ordained nuns' association, of the newly re-named "Bhikkhuni Society of Naugala" was the form of address *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo* used on his *bhikkhuni* daughters. He addressed them as "you" in the plural, i.e. '*umbala*' commonly used in Sinhala rural parlance. The word would be a downright derogatory term of address if used in the urban middle class milieu but it is not so in the culture of the village. It had a nuance of inclusiveness in a family which a father or mother or elder relative would use on their youngsters. The same kind of affectionate tone resonates from the word "*apay*" which means 'our'. But '*apay*' in this context does not mean 'our' only but is reserved for those in a special category of affectionate regard. These are the nuances that are almost untranslatable, which makes the texture of the village colloquial language rich with its unique tonal nuances that reflect its culture.



Apay Loku Hamuduruwo's Early Education and Career

Apay Loku Hamuduruwo, the lion of Naugala Hill, was born in a traditional Buddhist family that represented the backbone of rural society. His father was Charles Appuhamy and his mother's name was Gammedha Aracchilage Jane Nona. Their only son Jayakodi Aracchilage Pedrik came into this world on April 5, 1928. He completed his primary education at a village school, Jinaraja Maha Vidyalaya, Nivandagama, and after that he entered Royal College, Colombo, at the secondary level. Having completed his secondary education, he joined government service but before long, his mother's untimely death caused in him a profound effect, making him realize the futility of human life and mortality. He then turned his mind completely to the path of renunciation from lay life.

On May 28, 1953 he was ordained by Ven. Asmadale Ratnapala Nayake Thero of the Divela Mellagala Yogashramaya. Having studied under the Thero's guidance, he then continued his monastic education from the famous scholar and saintly personality, the most Ven. Balangoda Metteyya Thero and later received higher ordination on June 12, 1954 under the direction of Ven. Alubomulle Ariyawansa as his *Upadhyaya Bhikkhu*.

Apay Loku Hamuduruwo comes to Naugala

After some time had elapsed he chose the Yogashrama at Naugala at which to reside and meditate and to teach meditation and give instructions. Many young monks came to him for guidance in meditation and to obtain instructions. He started a *pirivena* school there also. In the years to come many of his pupils became head monks of various branch temples.

At about the same time *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo* started a programme of Dhamma teaching and meditation for women in memory of his mother. For this purpose he invited Rev. Mawicari of Burma who was the Abbess of Lady Blake's *aramaya* in Katukelle, Kandy and asked Rev. Morontuduwe Seelawathi to conduct the meditation sessions. He himself remained as the *Upadhyaya* Chief Monk of the *yogins* (white clad meditators who have taken extra precepts like eight or ten precepts in addition to the usual five that Buddhist lay people take) . On September 14, 1958 he founded the Samastha Lanka Sasanaloka Dasa Silmata Sangamaya (Society of Dasa Silmatas). Among the first to be ordained by him were Hakinne Yasawathi of Nelundeniya, now a *bhikkhuni*; Galigamuwe Dayawathi (the late Ven. *Bhikkhuni* Galigamuwe Khemacari, the Head Bhikkhuni of the *Bhikkhuni aramaya* of Naugala) and Ridithotuve Abhinanda, now Ven. *Bhikkhuni* Abhinanda Head Bhikkhuni of Sri Sunanda *Bhikkhuni* Aramaya, Alpitiya, Galapitamada. Thus the present Bhikkhuni Society of Naugala evolved from the *Dasa Silmata* Society which was begun at Naugala. That was the small creek of its origin, now becoming a large flowing river.

Bhikkhuni Higher Ordination for Apay Loku Hamuduruwo's Pupil Nuns

In the latter half of 1990's *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo* inquired from the members of the *Dasa Silmata* society at Naugala which he had founded whether they would like to be higher ordained. This was when the movement for resurrecting the *Bhikkhuni* order had made its presence felt in Sri Lanka. He had made a careful study of the texts and was in a position to decide for himself whether a revival of the *Bhikkhuni* Order was possible or not. When he asked his pupil nuns whether they would like to be higher ordained and become *bhikkhunis* they had all replied in the affirmative. On that basis he had remained committed and steadfast, unshaken like an *Indakila* (a firm post or pillar) on his hill stronghold of Naugala.

I would like to comment here that the right intellectual climate for the revival of the *Bhikkhuni* Order in Sri Lanka had been created by the opinion of several well informed persons, rather like the coming together of certain auspicious planets! each contributing to the final result.

In Sri Lanka it should be remembered that Dr. Hema Goonatilake, the well known scholar of Buddhist history brought to light in her researches the fact that the Sri Lankan *bhikkhuni* Devasara of the 5th century A.C.E. had been invited to give

higher ordination to the Chinese nuns at Kunmin Temple, Nanjin, Yunan province in China. That higher ordination given by *Bhikkhuni* Devasara and her entourage of *bhikkhunis* became the link between Mahapajapati Gotami's higher ordination and the revived higher ordination re-introduced to Sri Lanka in the 20th century A.C.E. through Korean and Taiwanese *bhikkhunis*. There were also other researches done by scholars such as Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, namely, The *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha of the Six Schools*, Bangkok, 1991, which made clear that the Dharmagupta Vinaya followed by the nuns of Nanjin and Theravada Vinaya followed by the Sri Lankan *Bhikkhunis* were and are the same to all intents and purposes. It should be noted that all these schools originated directly from the Sthaviravada sect, not the Mahasanghika sect which later developed into the Mahayana sect. All these researches made a stir in Buddhist academic circles and at an international conference in Bangkok, a Sri Lankan lay woman, Ranjani De Silva took up the torch to "empower" the *Dasa Silmatas* of Sri Lanka. She organized a Sakyadhita conference for women in Colombo in 1993 which focused on the *Dasa Silmata*. The latter filled half the auditorium at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall. Thus the intellectual activity also introduced practical programmes that brought into being the revival of the *Bhikkhuni* Order

in Sri Lanka. It must be mentioned that Kusuma Devendra (*Bhikkhuni* Dr. Kolonnawe Kusuma) another scholar of Buddhism took a prominent part at the BMICH conference.

The revival of *Bhikkhuni* higher ordination was given vigour and immediacy by Ven. Mapalagama Vipulasara, Head Bhikkhu of the Parama Dhamma Cetiya Pirivena, Ratmalana who worked unceasingly towards the final result. He was joined by other notable *bhikkhus* like Ven. Tallale Dhammaloka, Head

Bhikkhu of Tapodhanaramya, Mt. Lavinia, Ven. Inamaluwe Sumangala, Chief Monk of the Dambulla temple and of course *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo*, Ven. Batagama Medhananda of Naugala. The *Bhikkhuni* Revival was a joint Western Buddhist and Asian Buddhist endeavour. If not for the support and co-operation of Sri Lankan senior *bhikkhus* (other than the disapproving Mahanayaka hierarchy) the revival could not have taken root.



In the year 2000 a select group of ten-precept nuns who had been ordained again as *samaneris* in 1998 at Naugala including Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani were sent to Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Taiwan to receive higher ordination. It was an *Ubbato Sangha* ordination with ten Chinese nuns from Taiwan and ten Chinese nuns from mainland China with ten Taiwanese *bhikkhus* participating in the ceremony.

Immediately after the ceremony a contingent of twelve higher ordained very senior Sri Lankan and other Theravada *bhikkhus* held an additional higher ordination ceremony at a different venue in Taiwan to give the earlier conducted ceremony a Theravada legitimacy.

The Sri Lankan and other Theravada *bhikkhus* who officiated at the ceremony were,

1. Most Ven. Attudawe Rahula Maha Thero,
Mahanayaka of Rohana Sect, Sri Lanka.
2. Most Ven. Henepola Gunaratana Maha Thero,
Chief Sangha Nayaka of America of the Malwatte Sect.
3. Most Ven. Batagama Medhananda Maha Thero,
Deputy Mahanayaka of Udarata Amarapura Sect of Sri Lanka.
4. Most Ven. Porowagama Somalankara Maha Thero,
Sangha Nayaka of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka.
5. Most Ven. Bodagama Chandima Maha Thero,
Chief Sangha Nayaka of Taiwan, R.O.C.

6. Most Ven. Kumbukwewe Pannakitti Maha Thero.
7. Most Ven. Ambampola Seelaratana Maha Thero.
8. Most Ven. Ratwita Wimalajoti Maha Thero.
9. Most Ven. Walpola Piyananda Maha Thero,
Chirf Sangha Nayaka of Kotte Sect, USA.
10. Most Ven. Hinbunne Kondanna Maha Thero.
11. Most Ven. Nyaneida Maha Thero (Myanmar).
12. Most Ven. Sundarananda Maha Thero
(Bangladesh).

All these senior *bhikkhus* no doubt, recognized the role passed down to them by the Buddha with the explicit injunction given by the Buddha himself to *bhikkhus* to help *bhikkhunis* “to raise themselves up” for the purpose of gaining liberation from samsara, not at the speed of a flapping low flying peacock but at the speed of a swan flying swiftly to its goal in the far distant sky!

On the occasion of a higher ordination ceremony I came to hear what a senior *Upaddhyaya Bhikkhu* had communicated to another that they wait for the end of the ceremony when the newly higher ordained *bhikkhunis* exchange *anumodana* (like greetings) and ask pardon for transgressions. Indeed, it is a moment of great purity, a meritorious moment radiating *kusal* thoughts. When they kneel and pay their respects to the senior *Upaddhyaya*

Bhikkhus they repeat a stereo type stanza which in my opinion is not a subordination to the male wing of the *Sangha* but a mutually respectful exchange of verbal interaction. The *bhikkhunis* are naturally grateful to the senior male wing of the *Sangha* for having given them higher ordination, a requirement laid down by the Buddha. This is in addition to their having received higher ordination from the senior female wing of the *Sangha*. A closer look at the verbal interaction shows that it is really meant for establishing harmony between the two wings of the Sangha. What is asked is, “Ven. Sirs, please take joy in our good deeds” The reply is “Good. We do take joy in them.” Next, “Ven., Sir, please make known to us your good deeds so we can also take joy in them” “Do take joy in them”. It may seem that asking for forgiveness shows that the *bhikkhunis* are inferior to *bhikkhus*, which may hurt the sensitivities of feminists. But that need not be the case. When *bhikkhunis* confess transgressions among themselves, they may do so to equals.

The text repeated is as follows:

The newly higher ordained *Bhikkhuni* says

Okasa Vandami Bhante, Maya katam punnam samina anumoditabbam

(English Translation) Permit me, Ven. Sir, to pay my respects to you. May you take joy in my good deeds.”

The *Upaddhyaya* Monk replies: “***Sadhu.Sadhu. Anumodami***”

Good Good. I take joy in them.

The newly higher ordained *Bhikkhuni* then says:

“Samina katam punnam maibam databbam”

May the Master (make known to me) his good deeds (so I may take joy in them)

The *Upaddhyaya Bhikkhu* replies:

“Anumodahi” You may take joy in them

Next, the newly higher ordained *Bhikkhuni* says :

“Sadbu,Sadbu. Anumodami. Okasa dvarattena katam sabbam accayam kamatha me Bhante.”

Good, Good. I take joy in them. May the transgressions committed by me at the door of the senses be pardoned.

The *Upaddhyaya Bhikkhu* replies ***“Kamami. Kamitabbam.”***

“I do pardon; (The transgression) ought be pardoned.”

The newly higher ordained *Bhikkhuni* repeats request for obtaining pardon a second and a third time.

From a Theravada point of view, this is not a subordination of *bhikkhunis* to *bhikkhus* but respectful behavior to the senior wing of the *Sangha*.

The *Bhikkhuni* Legacy

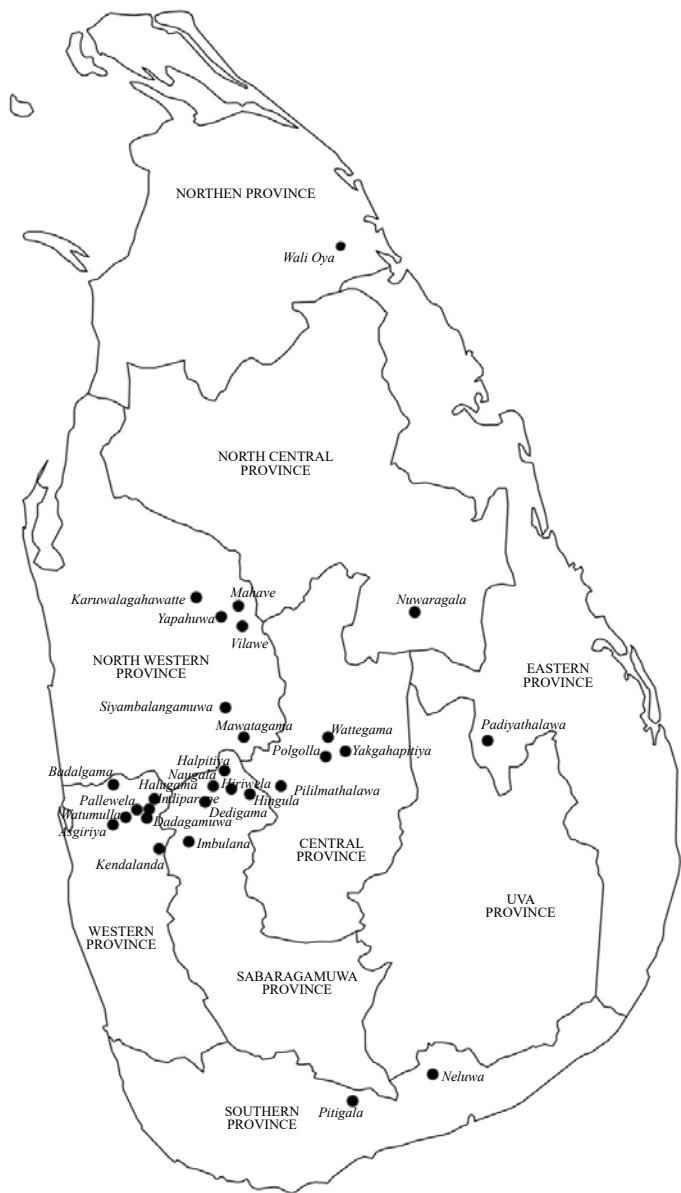
Not very long ago, *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo* had answered queries put to him regarding the legitimacy of the Bhikkhuni Order at a sitting of an official court of law. This was regarding the matter of issuing the *bhikkhunis* National Identity Cards (NICs) which amounts to recognising them as citizens of the country, Sri Lanka.

He had answered by quoting the scriptures. And, what a legacy he has left behind for his *bhikkhuni* daughters! not only highly trained disciplined *bhikkhunis* in the *Bhikkhuni* Society of Naugala but also in the 60 odd branches and affiliated *aramas* scattered throughout the length and breadth of the island. They stretch from Weli Oya north of Anuradhapura and Nuwaragala in Polonnaruwa to Pitigala in the foothills of the southern mountain range in the hinterland of Galle and from Kurunegala in the north western province to Amparai in the south eastern region. The map shows the provinces where the Naugala branch *aramas* have been set up. Some of these *aramas* are mere hermitages surrounded by forests where elephants and wild animals roam and visit them periodically. These *arama bhikkhunis* are very precious to the villagers, especially the womenfolk who guard and help to maintain them with devotion.

In the years to come, many a time during *vassa*, the rain retreat and also on full moon days, the *bhikkhuni* members of the society that came into being sprung from the original *Dasa Silmata* community, would gather together in the hall a few steps below *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo*'s cave to receive *ovada* (religious instruction and advice). Later the *bhikkhunis* would assemble in the *sima malaka* (hall) in the *arama* of the nuns at the foot of Naugala hill, to listen to the recitation of the *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha* in the original *Pali* by a *bhikkhuni* invited to do so by the community of *bhikkhunis*.

Apay Loku Hamuduruwo treated all his *bhikkhuni* daughters equally without any favouritism, though understandably, he was closest to his senior- most *bhikkhuni* daughters who had been ordained by him much earlier as ten-precept nuns way back in 1958 at Naugala. That was the year he established the society of *Dasa Silmatas* at Naugala which later evolved into the International Sasanaloka Bhikkhuni Society of Naugala.

A few months before *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo* passed away on February 2nd, 2016, he had been warded at the Kegalle Hospital due to a chest infection and after a few days had returned to his cave *kuti* at Naugala. After the lapse of a few days he was taken to a *bhikkhu gilan centre* a (*bhikkhu* convalescing centre) in Horana managed by one of his *bhikkhu* pupils. Later, he was shifted to the hospital at Horana when his condition became serious. It was there that he passed away, very peacefully after a light breakfast which he had taken after several days.



Affiliated branch *aramas* are not shown on the map. They comprise another thirty or more.

The Funeral

It is no wonder that *bhikkhunis* came in droves from all over the island, even from remote out back villages for *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo*'s funeral. They came with their *dayaka-dayika* devotees during the last five days before the cremation took place to pay their last respects to the ascetic *bhikkhu* of Naugala hill. The villagers brought with them from their fields, sacks of rice and other grain, corn, yams and melons to feed the hundreds streaming in. *Bhikkhunis* living in those much hardship encountered areas say that life is a desperate struggle for the poor farmers but their generosity is unstinting. The *bhikkhunis* who have gone to reside in those regions in Weli Oya, Nuwaragala, Amparai and in distant remote parts of Kurunegala and Bandarawela are the new heroines of modern times.

They are doing a tremendous religious service for those people living in those arid areas. They are the true followers of Maha Pajapati Gotami, Sanghamitta Theri and those whose names read like a long roll call of the lineage recorded in the 4th century chronicle, Dipavamsa.

Apay Loku Hamuduruwo's colleagues from all three *nikayas* (chapters) came to pay their last respects to him whether agreeing or not with the Bhikkhuni Revival. It was a fitting tribute to his exemplary character, the work he had set himself to do, silently and with dignity. His work transcended divisive politics. May such Sangha leaders arise in the future too, in order to protect the Dhamma and support the fledgling *Bhikkhuni* Order to attain to its full growth.

I had heard now and again, snatches of conversations referring to *Apay Loku Hamuduruwo*'s social service activities in setting up elders' homes – the Medhananda Elders' Home at Ambanpitiya and another elders' home at Yakkala and such like projects, but it was during the funeral orations that my full attention was caught and focused on the volume of social service projects he had initiated and in which he was wholly involved and, what is more, lubricating annually without a break.

Apay Loku Hamuduruwo had received many titles and ranks from the Maha Sangha but though he discharged his numerous Sangha duties conscientiously, he never gave up his ascetic cave *ashram* at the summit of Naugala hill and that is how he is remembered with much affection and reverence by all his *bhikkhuni* pupils at the foot of the hill and all over the country¹³.

After the demise of the most Ven. Batagama Medhananda Thero, the new *Upajjhaya Bhikkhu* of the Naugala nuns is the most Ven. Karagoda Vyangoda Maitri Murti Maha Nayaka Thero of the Rassagala Parshavaya of the Amarapura Nikaya.

The *Achariya Bhikkhu* is Ven. Mapalagamuve Pannananda Thero.

13. Bhikkhuni Suvimalee. *Apay Loku Hamuduwo* in the Sunday Island, January 29, 2017.

Facts for the article were taken from a pamphlet in Sinhala edited by Ven Mapalegamuve Pannananda and pupils on the occasion of the funeral of the late Most Ven. Medhanandabhidana Thero.



06
The Creek that Became a River

The Founding of the Dasa Silmata Society of Naugala and its Spread

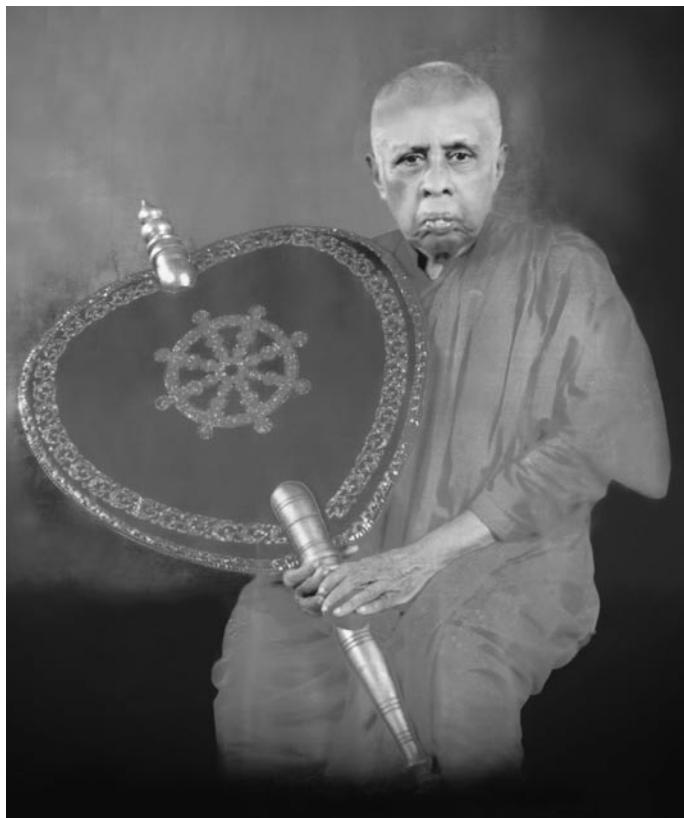
It was seen that *Visakharamaya* had its origin in the Dasa Silmata Society of Naugala, Kegalle, established in 1958. The Society came into being when 3 pupils of Most Ven. *Bhikkhu* Batagama Medhananda became ordained as Dasa Silmatas. They were Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari, Rev. Hakinne Yasawathi and Rev. Ridithotuve Abhinanda. They were ordained under the direction of Rev. Mawicari of Burma and Rev. Morontuduwe Seelawathi. Thus these three nuns became the founder members of the Dasa Silmata Society of Naugala. A short time later, Rev. Kehelpannala Subhadra joined the Society. These four *Dasa Silmatas*, living a life of great hardship, ordained a number of young women during a period of forty odd years.

At the Sixty First Anniversary Celebrations of the Naugala Society on the 14th of September 2019, the above facts came to light in a talk concerning the early history and spread of the Naugala Society of Dasa Silmatas. It is fortunate that these facts were included in the talk as it is within the living memory of senior members, perhaps in the absence of written records.

The most Venerable Batagama Medhananda Thero, the Upadhyaya monk of the nuns of Naugala, had started to teach meditation to a number of pupil monks. He also began meditation classes for his Dasa Silmata pupils in memory of his mother. A systematic programme for the Dasa Silmatas was begun for which purpose Rev. Mawicari of Burma, the Abbess of Lady Blake's Nunnery at Katukele, Kandy, was invited to give instructions on a regular basis. The running of the programme was given in charge of Rev. Morontuduwe Seelawathi. Later, Rev. Waragala Aramaye Sirinanda continued the programme until it was handed over to Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari who was the President of the Dasa Silmata Society of Naugala and the Head Nun of its *aramaya* that came up there.

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani has told me about the tireless work the late Ven. Batagama Medhananda, Head Monk of the Yogashrama at Naugala, had done to set up the Bhikkhuni Sangha. Also, she has told me what dedicated service the late Ven. Galigamuwe Khemachari has contributed towards establishing the Bhikkhuni Sangha of Naugala which has been, to a great extent, not recognized. The map of Sri Lanka on page 35 will show the districts in the island where Bhikkhuni *aramas* have been established by the Naugala Society. These *aramas* are on lands donated to the Head monk of Naugala.

The setting up of the early *aramas* were chiefly due to the efforts of Ven. Khemachari. As for *aramas* that had been already set up of which the Head Nun of those *aramayas* had opted to take higher ordination at Naugala and become a *bhikkhuni*, they automatically became *Bhikkhuni Aramas* under the aegis of the Naugala Bhikkhuni Society. As for *Visakharamaya*, it was the first branch *arama* of the headquarters at Naugala and its establishment was personally supervised by Ven. Galigamuwe Khemachari. However, there happened to be encroachments on some



Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari.

of the lands gifted to the society at Naugala and litigation ensued, as in the case of Wathumulla Bhikkhuni Arama at Gampaha and Halugama Bhikkhuni Arama at Mirigama. Bhikkhuni Khemachari attended to the hearing of these cases in courts, not to speak on behalf of the *bhikkhuni* ownership of the said land but to represent it. The speaking was left to lawyers. Besides, all the writing work that had to be done in connection with the work of the headquarters concerning bhikkhuni *aramas* or higher ordination, etc., all that was done by Ven. Galigamuwe Khemachari as she did not have a personal assistant.

In 2015, Ven. Galigamuwe Khemachari with three other senior *bhikkhunis* were conferred the title of '*Therini*.' By the Chief Monk of Naugala, at an Investiture Ceremony held in *Visakharamaya*. The three other *bhikkhunis* who were promoted to this rank were Ven. Ridithotuve Abhinanda, Head Bhikkhuni of Sunandaramaya, Galapitamada, Alpitiya; Ven. Kehelpannala Subhadra, Head Bhikkhuni of Uppalavannaramaya, Ruwanwella, Imbulana and Ven. Mattemagoda Dhammadchari, Head Bhikkhuni of Khemaramaya, Indiparape, Mirigama. They belonged to the senior generation of *bhikkhuni* pupils of the Chief Monk of Naugala, Ven. Batagama Medhananda.

Ven. Khemachari is said to have taught several nuns who were ordained at Naugala the three R's as they had missed out on a school education. The Buddha never emphasized on a formal education as a qualification for entry into the Sangha but what he did emphasize was that they should have a clear understanding of his philosophy and take upon themselves the practice. During the time of the Buddha, females had no opportunity to access an education but the *Theri Gatha* bear out the fact that women could become renowned spiritual teachers and attain great spiritual heights. The Buddha showed deep concern for the religious education of the *bhikkhunis* and appointed exhorter monks with special qualifications to exhort *bhikkhunis*. He also appointed senior qualified monks to give discourses to the *bhikkhunis* on a full moon day and made it a rule that they must do so.

Early History of Visakharamaya

In 1961 a piece of land in Galgamuwa, Veyangoda, was donated to the Chief Monk of Naugala for the purpose of establishing an *arama* for nuns. The signature of Galigamuve Khemachari Silmata and Yasawathi Silmata are on the deed of gift representing the President and Secretary respectively of the recipient, the Society of Dasa Silmatas at Naugala. The deed had been signed on the 20th of November, 1961.

The donors who had put their signatures to the deed of gift were the 6 children of Migohami, daughter of Liyana Aracchi of Galgamuwa, the original owner from whom the land had passed down to her children. They had wished to gift the land to the head monk of Naugala for the use of nuns at Naugala in order that their mother may receive merit.

The six children's names are:

1. Edirisinghe Aracchige Jagonis Appuhamy.
2. E.A. Menchi Nona.
3. E.A. Peter Appuhamy
4. Ranmenike Edirisinghe Hamine
5. E.A. Podi Appuhamy
6. Dingiri Menike Edirisinghe



The fourth child, Ranmenike Edirisinghe, who was unmarried, was a pupil of Rev. Galigamuve Khemachari in the meditation class being run by her at Naugala. It was Ranmenike Edirisinghe to whom Ven. Medhananda had made a request to try and find a donor who would like to gift a piece of land in Galgamuwa for the use of the Dasa Silmatas at Naugala to set up a small *arama*. Ranmenike Edirisinghe had acted quickly on the request and had invited her teacher, Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari Silmata to come and reside in her house till she found a donor. Rev. Khemachari did so and the present *Visakharamaya* stands on the piece of property that had been gifted. The donors who Ranmenike Edirisinghe found were her own siblings and herself.

Apparently at that time in 1961, there were only 4 or 5 houses near that piece of land which was under forest cover. Except for those houses, all was a pathless wilderness. It was built on in 1965, though gifted in 1961. Putting up the modest *avasa* did not take up much time. Villagers helped with *sramadana* (free voluntary labour), and so did the nuns. When it was built Rev. Khemachari went into residence in it with a few other nuns such as Rev. Galigamuwe Uttara, Rev. Dedigama Sakula and Rev. Ranwela Upacala. The former two are no more now. The latter is presently the Head *Bhikkhuni* of Seelawathi *arama*, Siyambalangamuwa, Kurunegala.



Originally, the *avasa* roof had been thatched with dry coconut palm leaves and the walls of the small building were made of wall rocks sealed together with clay. Those who worked on the building, including Galigamuwe Uttara and other nuns had learnt the technology, no doubt, from the *baas* (overseer) supervising building work, Wijedasa Baas *Unnehe*. A deep pit had been dug and the clay soil was thrown up on to the ground in a heap near the pit, then trampled thoroughly several times over to make it malleable and left exposed overnight. The following day the clay soil had to be kneaded to make it more workable. Then, having made the clay into soft lumps it had to be applied into the gaps in between the wall rocks to seal them together firmly. Apparently, this was the *avasa* I saw in 2007. To a great extent, perhaps with some minor changes, it was what had been built in 1965. Ven Badalgama Dhammanandani told me that one *kuti* (cell) in the *avasa* had a *pila* (raised narrow cement slab) about one foot in height on which the Head Nun, Rev. Dedigama Sakula, slept. The other junior nuns slept on the floor on mats. Perhaps the cement '*pila*' was a feature in forest *aranyas* (hermitages) in the past.

In 1965, a piece of land adjoining *Visakharamaya* premises, on which stood an old bo tree was gifted to the Dasa Silmata Society of Naugala. It was gifted by E.A. Somatilleke's '*loku Amma*', (mother's elder sister) who was unmarried. Mr. Somatilleke and wife are very well known to the Head Bhikkhuni and other nuns at Visakharamaya. They are long standing devotees known as '*kade maama*' and '*kade nenda*' (kiosk uncle and kiosk auntie for the younger ones and kiosk younger brother and kiosk younger sister for the older ones.) to the young nuns and '*kade malli*' and '*kade nangi*' to the older nuns. The latter teaches at the Dhamma School every Sunday.

After residing at the newly established *arama* for about two or three months, Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari returned to Naugala, leaving behind Rev. Dedigama Sakula in charge of others, namely, Rev. Galigamuwe Uttara and Rev. Ranwela Upacala. Later, a few other nuns also came to reside there like Rev. Ridithotuve Abhinanda and Rev. Mattemagoda Dhammachari. They also received gifts of land through the Head Monk of Naugala, mostly in the Kegalle, Kurunegala and Mirigama districts. When they received their pieces of land they left their temporary shelter of Visakharamaya to establish their own respective *aramas*.

Thus were born the first children of the parent body at Naugala. These first generation nuns brought up under the strict discipline of the Chief Monk, were very active, courageous pioneers. They were one of a kind, like Rev. Ridithotuve Abhinanda and her group of nuns who lived

in a cave in the forested piece of land gifted to them in Alpitiya for several years until a proper *avasa* was built for them with the help of the villagers in the area. Now the cave has been enlarged and incorporated into the new *avasa* as a whitewashed alms hall leading into the rest of the *avasa* at different split levels. The Alpitiye Head Nun is now Ven. bhikkhuni Ridithotuve Abhinanda and a *Therini* (a senior *bhikkhuni*). She is at present the President of the Bhikkhuni Society of Naugala and the Head Bhikkhuni of the *arama* at Naugala as well. The first generation *bhikkhunis* have certainly been the salt of the earth and I can vouch for the fact that some (if not all) of the present generation *bhikkhunis* show the same courage and energy of the earlier pioneers and sterling *seela* qualities (genuine virtues).

Ordination of Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani

In March 1972, the nineteen year old *upasika* from Badalgama who was brought by Rev. Galigamuve Khemachari, to be ordained by Rev. Dedigama Sakula as her pupil nun, was ordained in 1974. The name given her was Rev. Badalgama Dhammanandani.

I was told that at the time of her ordination in 1974, there were far more houses near Visakharamaya than the original 4 or 5. Indeed, about one hundred houses had come up according to the statistics given by the Divisional Secretariat, Mirigama.



Religious Practices of the Nuns

Vandana, Vat Pilivet, Pooja, Anumodana and Chanting of Pirit

Religious Practice is a large subject area. Suffice it to say here that one cannot really draw a line arbitrarily between external religious practices, rites and rituals and the development of inner religious life. For the clearer understanding of non Buddhist readers, I would like to say that genuine religious practice is engendered through Dhamma and Vinaya. The rules of behavior are set down in the Vinaya texts but what is aimed at is not paying mere lip service to rules. Adherence to rules must arise from an inner religiosity resulting from a true understanding of the Doctrine. The Dhamma contained in the Sutta Pitaka in *suttas* (Discourses of the Buddha, Chief Disciples and some senior monks) and the Vinaya texts guide religious development. External practices, at best, are expressions of that inner religiosity not religiosity itself, *per se*. They may certainly speak of genuine *saddha* (confidence in the Buddha and his Teachings) and a clear understanding of the philosophy, or they may not reflect such noble qualities, as the case may be. One who is a genuine practitioner will bring to bear on the rites, rituals and other religious practices a concentrated mind (an outcome of meditation) that is purified, to a great extent of defilements.

In the Buddha's scheme of religious development the internalized path of *Vimutti* (liberation) is a constant elimination of defilements through *Visuddhi* (purification) till the pinnacle of *visuddhi* is reached and *vimutti* is realized¹⁴.

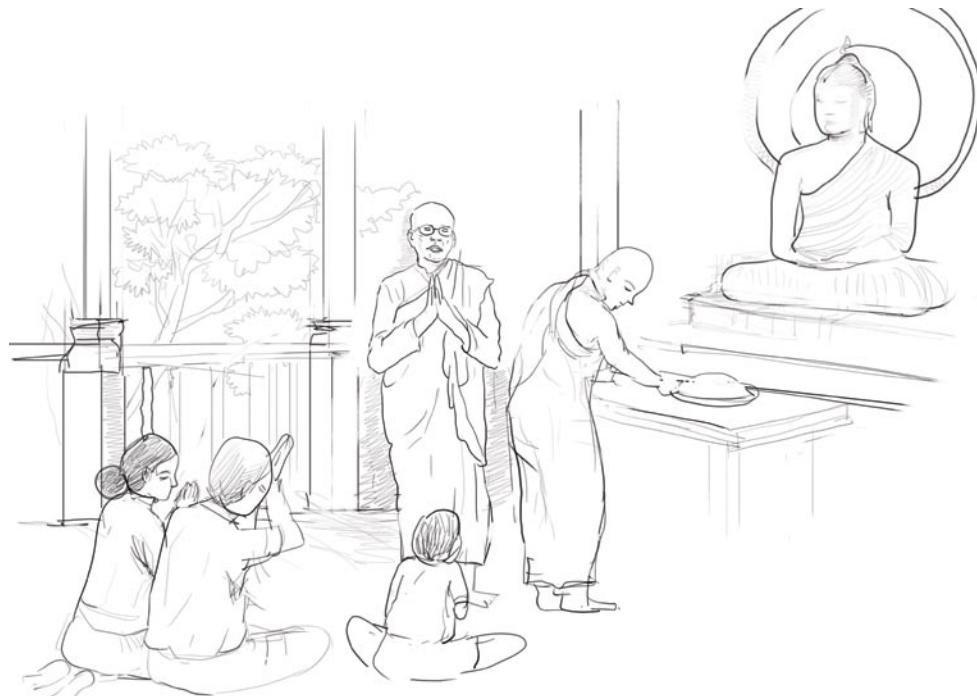
Arama life can be quite rigorous in the sense that there is a tight schedule that nuns have to follow. Nuns wake up and start on their ablutions usually around 4.00 a.m. Then comes the lighting of the hearth in the open hearth "smoke kitchen" to boil water and make rice gruel. With regard to the early morning *pooja*, what is offered to the Buddha first is warm water in a bowl, symbolic of the hot water got ready for early morning ablutions for the teacher. At 5 a.m. the rice gruel is offered in a cup along with a glass of water on a tray covered with a lace covering for the Buddha image in the *Cetiya* and the *Viharage*. The same offerings are made to the two chief disciples, Arahant Sariputta and Arahant Moggallana whose relics also have been placed in a reliquary inside the *stupa*.

At 6 a.m. the *gantara*, big bell fixed in a tall bell tower is rung and nuns begin their *Vat Pilivet* or services for the *arama* which comprise *amadinava* (sweeping) and cleaning the premises. Services are performed for the *gurudeva* (teacher) also, hot water for *penpahasuveema* (bathing,) *gilanpasa* (tea or medicinal beverages) washing of robes, sweeping and cleaning her room, looking after her when she is ill. The teacher has to reciprocate with same when the pupil is ill.

14. *Samannaphala Sutta*, D.1. 2

At 6.30 a.m., usually, the *dayikas* bring the morning *dana* (alms) according to a monthly roster. A nun serves out this food into several small bowls placed on a tray – rice in a larger bowl and curries, accompaniments, fruits and sweetmeats in small bowls and the whole tray is covered by a lace covering. Three such trays are arranged, one for the Buddha in the *Cetiya*, a second one containing the *poojas* for the Buddha's two chief disciples, Arahant Sariputta and Arahant Moggallana, and a third tray for the Buddha image in the *Viharage*. The images are of course symbols of the Teacher to whom Buddhists pay homage with great veneration and gratitude for having shown the path to liberation from *samsara*.

The *pooja* ceremony is done in the presence of the devotees who have brought the alms food to the *arama* so that they may receive blessings through the merit gained from their generous act. First, the devotees pay salutations of homage to the Buddha and then they go for refuge to the triple gem, the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha, and take upon themselves the five precepts which are given them by the nun who is performing the service. More stanzas are chanted in homage to the triple gem and the Buddha is symbolically invited most respectfully to partake of the food with stereotype appropriate stanzas. Then a short discourse is delivered to the devotees by the nun on the merit acquired by the offering of alms food and how that merit is acquired.



Next, departed relatives are given ‘*anumodana*’ (their minds made happy) by the offering of alms food and *devas* are also invited to partake of the merit offered which will make them happy. At the end of the ceremony benedictory stanzas are recited wishing all beings well with the following concluding stanza:

**“Devo vassatu kalena
Sassa sampatti hotu ca
Pitho bhavatu loko ca
Rajah bhavatu dhammiko”**

“May the rains come in due season
May harvests be plentiful
May the world prosper
And the ruler be righteous”

It is a solemn and beautiful ceremony expressing deep religious faith. There is a belief in Buddhism that good governance at the level of a country’s foremost leadership results in prosperity for the whole country. That relevance is inbuilt in the stanza.

The morning *dana* is partaken of at around 7.15 a.m. The *vat pilivet* services that commenced earlier at 6 a.m. continue after the morning *dana*. The receptacles used for the *pooja* ceremony are washed in a special basin kept for that purpose and wiped and placed on a special rack. The alms hall is swept and cleaned before and after meals.

Vat Pilivet is considered very important. It appears to be the physical and mental support given to one’s observance of all the *Vinaya* rules – the practice. One performs the services due with mindfulness and full of religious devotion. It is a kind of *sramadana*, a voluntary giving of services with one’s physical and mental energy. It goes hand in hand with one’s *dana* and *seela*, the practice, that leads gradually into meditation.

The same procedure that was followed for the morning almsfood offering is repeated for the forenoon *dana*. Devotees bring the *daval dana* at 10.30 a.m. The *gantara* bell is rung at 11 a.m. to announce that the *pooja* is taking place. At 11.30a.m. a tiny bell is rung summoning all the nuns for the forenoon *dana*.

Sometimes, in an emergency, food is also cooked in the *arama* by *bhikkhunis*. This is not encouraged because they are prohibited from cutting certain types of vegetables like yams or bulbous plants like onions and garlic or vegetables that have seeds that can be grown. Since these vegetables are considered to have the life principle in them it is a transgression against the rule of ‘*beejagama*’ to cut and cook them. A *bhikkhuni* follows 304 *sikkha* (rules) of training and ‘*beejagama*’ falls into the category of minor transgressions. A *samaneri* (novice nun) follows only 10 precepts and a *upasaka* or *upasika* (layman or laywoman) observes only 5 precepts and ‘*beejagama*’ is not one of the precepts of abstinence for

them. Such minor transgressions entail confession to another nun. These confessions are in a stereotype format which is committed to memory and recited to each other while squatting on the floor in the ‘*ukkutika*’ posture with folded palms. Usually, an *upasikava* or a *samaneri* does the cooking in an *arama* as *beejagama* transgressions do not apply to them.

One can take a rest after the forenoon *dana* but *vat pilivet* starts again at 4 p.m. Some nuns do the sweeping of the premises while others arrange trays of flowers for offering the Buddha at the evening *pooja*. Beverages of fruit juice or medicinal decoctions are prepared for the evening *pooja*. The ritual called *vandana* lasts about half an hour depending on how many stanzas are agreed upon for the chanting. It is followed by the chanting of *pirit* which lasts for about an hour and a half, depending again how much of the protective discourses one wishes to chant. When the evening *pooja* starts at 6 p.m. it usually ends at about 8 p.m.

Vat pilivet and the rituals take up many hours of the day. Especially if one nun has to do all this work by herself. I think Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani was faced with a situation such as this of having to do *vat pilivet* herself as most of the time after 1974 since she was ordained, there were only two in the *arama*, the Head Nun and herself.

Sammadam

In the early days, nuns had to go on *sammadam* i.e. going from house to house in the village or even outside the village, collecting dry rations and oil. They brought to the *arama* whatever little they received from humble homes in sacks which they balanced on their heads. Only *Dasa Silmatas* and *upasikavas* used to go on *sammadam* as *bhikkhunis* could go on *pindapata* if they did not receive alms food regularly. There were no facilities like electricity in those days. They lit coconut oil lamps or kerosene lamps at night. There were no roads in the village, perhaps footpaths but mostly people used the railway track for convenience sake which was dangerous.

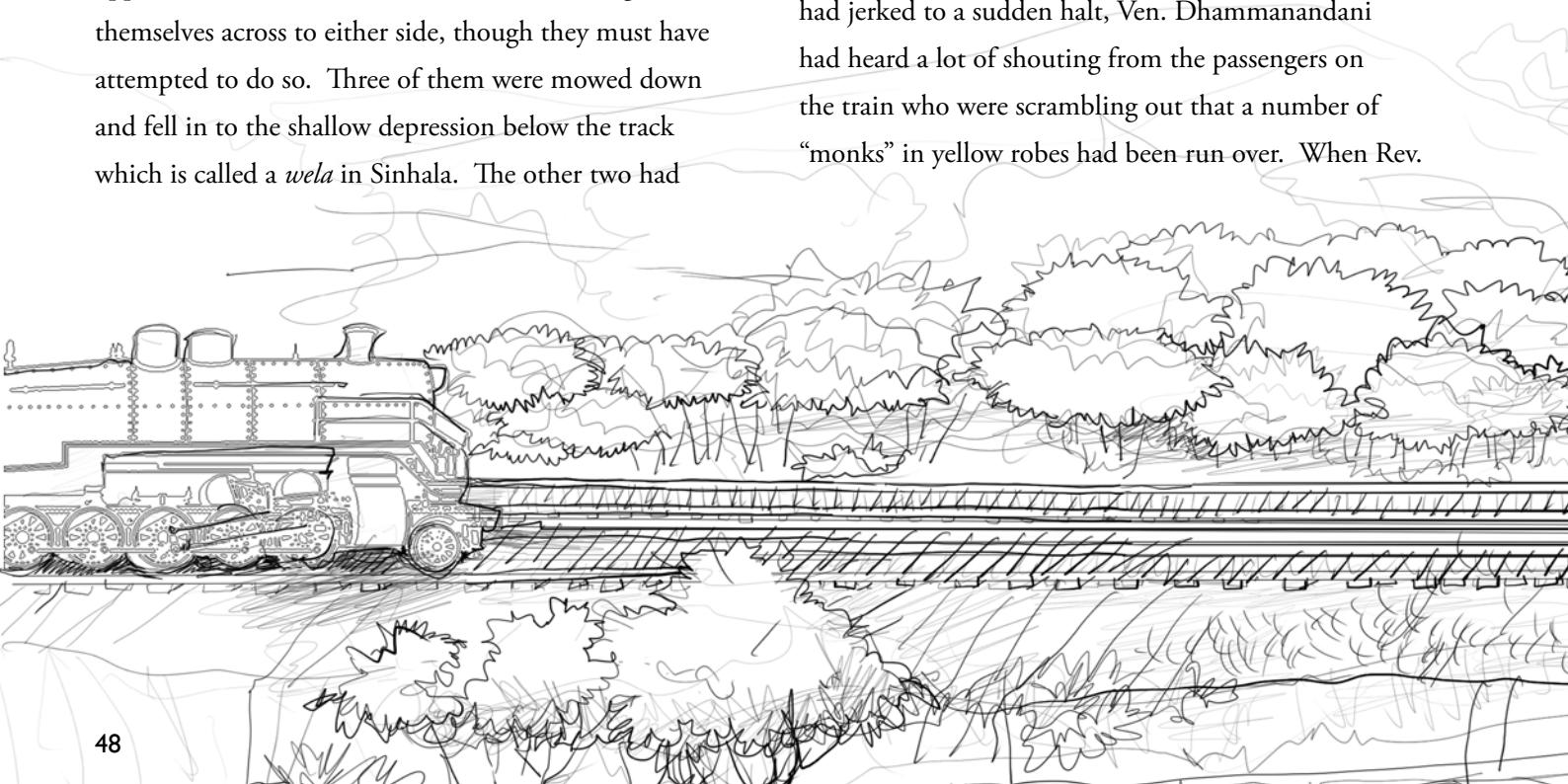


A Train Accident

In 1982, a tragic train accident took place a few yards from Visakharamaya. Four Dasa Silmata and one *upasika*, all residents in an *aramaya* in Rajawatte, Maligatenne, close to Keenawela had been invited to a *dana* at Visakharamaya. After *dana*, about half past one, all five had wended their way through the thorny undergrowth and bushes on to the railway line and were walking along towards Keenawela station when they became aware that a train was speeding down upon them from behind. At the same time another train had come charging down the track from the opposite direction. There had been no time to get themselves across to either side, though they must have attempted to do so. Three of them were mowed down and fell in to the shallow depression below the track which is called a *wela* in Sinhala. The other two had

fallen back on to the thicket they had crossed. One Dasa Silmata, the Head Nun of the Sudharmaramaya had fallen on her back and her head had hit a small sharp rock which had wedged itself into the back of her head. The other Dasa Silmata, Rev. Sudhammika sustained only superficial injuries from her fall.

The train that had come full speed along the track from the direction of Mirigama was a train from Anuradhapura. It was carrying, among other passengers, Rev. Badalgama Dhammanandani and her sister, teacher, Podimenike and her family who had gone to listen to a pirit chanting ceremony at Mihintale. When the accident occurred and the train had jerked to a sudden halt, Ven. Dhammanandani had heard a lot of shouting from the passengers on the train who were scrambling out that a number of "monks" in yellow robes had been run over. When Rev.

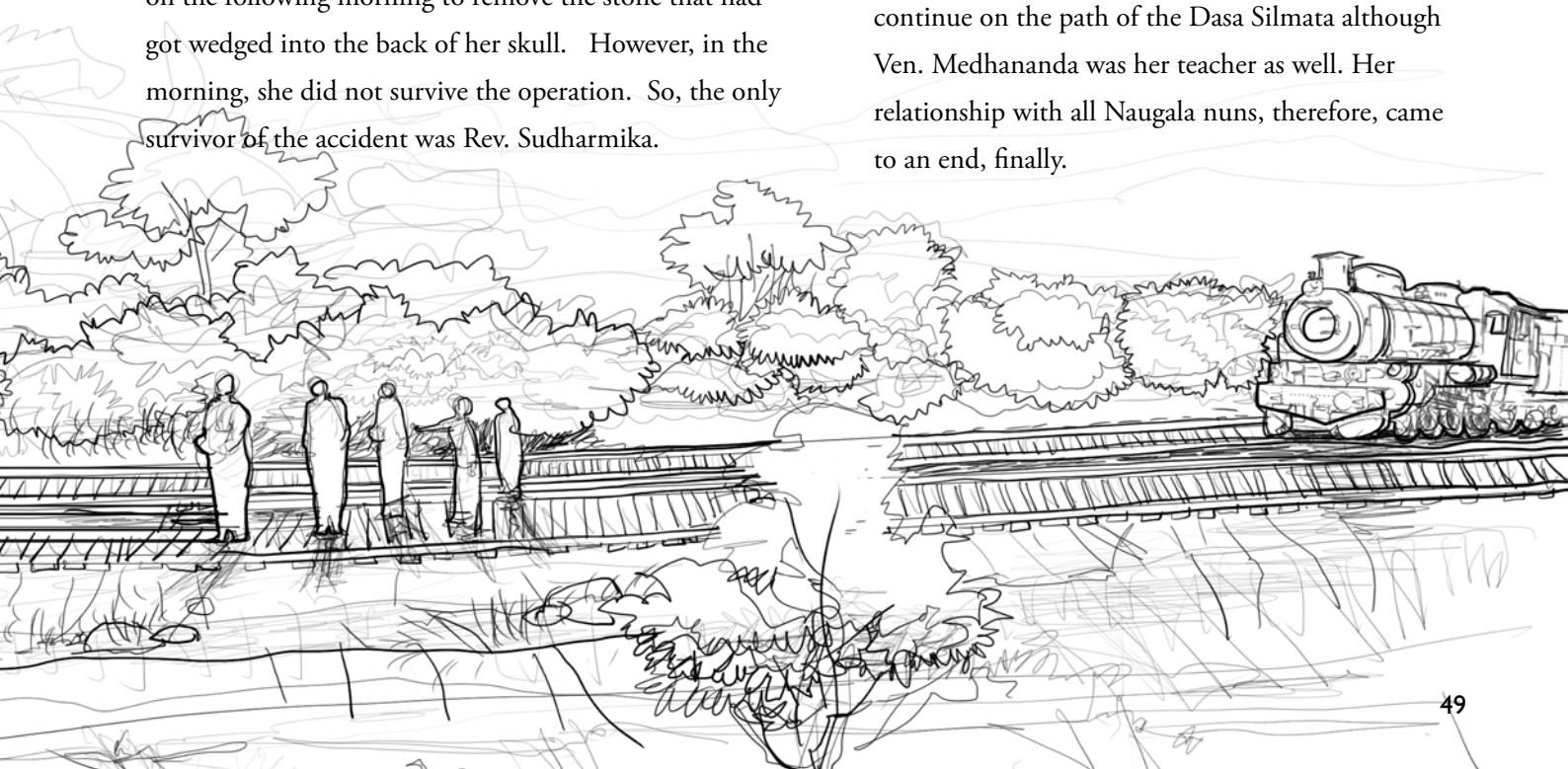


Dhammanandani heard their shouts she realized what had happened. She jumped down from the train and saw the two Dasa Silmata fallen in the thicket getting up with difficulty in a state of shock. Rev. Sudharma was still alive but in great pain and Rev. Sudharmika was in better condition. The other three, of course were dead in the *wela*.

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani when relating the story to me said she had helped Rev. Sudharma into the Guard's carriage and taken her, along with Rev. Sudharmika to the hospital in Gampaha. On admission to hospital, the doctors had examined Rev. Sudharma and said that she would have to undergo an operation on the following morning to remove the stone that had got wedged into the back of her skull. However, in the morning, she did not survive the operation. So, the only survivor of the accident was Rev. Sudharmika.

Meeting the Only Survivor of the Accident

When I heard the story, I went to Rajawatte, Maligatenne, in a three wheeler taxi, passing the Keenawela station to meet Rev. Sudharmika. I was fortunate to meet her. She corroborated the story recounted to me and confirmed that Ven Badalgama Dhammanandani had been most helpful to them that fateful day and even afterwards. However, some years later, their relationship had become strained after she heard that Ven. Batagama Medhananda had taken the decision to guide his pupil nuns towards higher ordination. Rev. Sudharmika had opted to continue on the path of the Dasa Silmata although Ven. Medhananda was her teacher as well. Her relationship with all Naugala nuns, therefore, came to an end, finally.





07

The Nuns of Visakharamaya

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani's Academic Studies

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani started her monastic education at *pirivenas* (monastic colleges) from 1987. She had occupied herself with self-study in between '*vat pilivet*' duties and interludes at other *aramas* such as those at Pamunuwa, Badalgama and even Naugala, sometimes for as long as one year. These spells at other *aramas* were necessitated when Ven. Khemachari observed that those *aramas* were without suitable Head Nuns or assistants. When going to overlook such *aramas* she would take Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani with her and if and when the situation warranted it she would leave Ven. Dhammanandani as a support to that *arama*. She would have to carry out *vat pilivet* duties or to attend to *poojas* or help teach in the Dhamma School classes or to fill up whatever deficiencies there were.

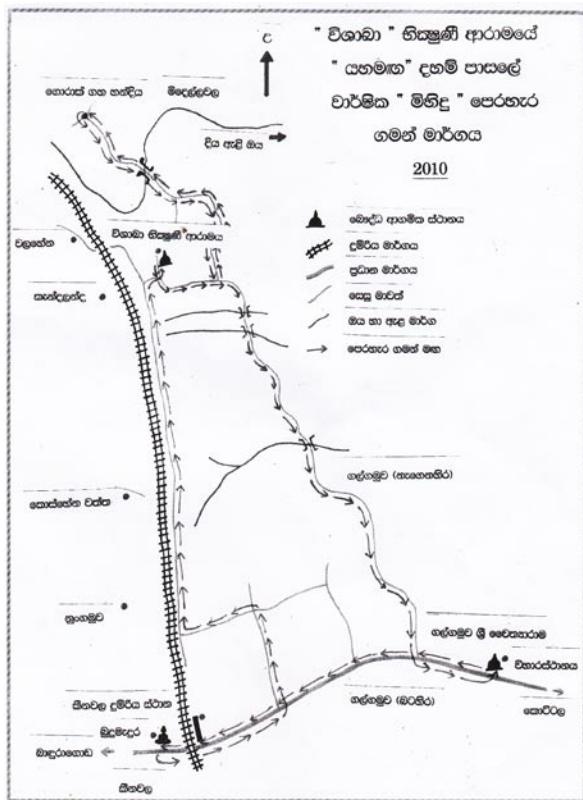
By this time, Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani had through self-study gone over very carefully, from cover to cover, the books on Dhamma left by Ven. Khemachari in a cupboard at Visakharamaya. Also, Teacher Podimenike had also given her some books on the Dhamma and notes she had taken down in her student days which also Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani had gone over thoroughly. Armed with these studies, she had faced courageously the Dhamma School examinations which she had passed and later, the Dhamma School *avasana* (final) and still later, the Dhammadchariya (Dhamma School Teacher's examination), both of which she completed successfully. She now set her heart on the diploma course at a *Pirivena* which

would qualify her to enter an university B.A. Degree programme. Her choice was Vidyaravinda *Pirivena* at Gampaha, but there was still no proper road to the Keenawela station. There was only the railway track, a most hazardous track for people to walk along, as the recent fatal accident in 1982 had shown.

The absence of roads in Galgamuwa village made itself felt very strongly on two brothers, Mr. S.A. Leelasena and Mr. S.A. Gunasena. The latter told me that they took the initiative to build a road from near Keenawela station into the interior of Galgamuwa, through the forested countryside to the settlement of houses. But first they had to motivate the administration authorities to give them authority to do so which they finally did. The two brothers worked tirelessly with other village volunteers which reminded me of Magha Manavaka of the Jataka tales who busied himself in doing social service work for the community by building roads, planting shade trees, building bridges, ponds, groves, parks and digging wells. He was rewarded for his tireless efforts by being born in his next birth as the god Sakka in a heavenly abode.

A.P. Ratnawathi Nonamahathmiya had been bringing *dana* regularly to Visakharamaya from its inception from sixty odd years ago. She told me that she remembers having to go over an *edanda* (makeshift bridge) of coconut tree logs over the *oya* (stream) to bring the alms food with an attendant. This *edanda* has been replaced by a proper modern bridge now.

At Vidyaarvinda Pirivena she attended the *Prarambha* (Primary) course and passed the examination. However, she could not follow the *Madhyama* (middle level) course continuously due to the heavy *vat pilivet* schedule in the *arama* and other duties. Instead, she followed from time to time an Abhidharma course conducted by the well-known Mr. Kodikara Arachchi at various venues in such places as Veyangoda, Kirindiwella and Badalgama because of her keen interest in the subject. She excelled in these studies and at the *Madhyama* level examination at Vidyoda Pirivena, she received the rare distinction of the “*Abhidharma Visaradha*”



certificate but, unfortunately, she could not complete the *Madhyama* level examination or the *Avasana* level courses there.

That being the case, later, she enrolled herself in a course conducted by Ven. Galatura Pannananda Thero, *Viharadhipati* (Chief Monk) of the Gotami Vihara at Nelundeniya. She followed this course and prepared herself for the diploma examination set by the Buddhist and Pali University, Homagama. When she passed the diploma she was eligible to follow the B.A. Degree course conducted at the Vidyodya Pirivena from 1996-1999. Having got through the B.A. Examination, she followed the M.A. course at the Post Graduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies of the University of Kelaniya and passed the examination.

Nuns could not sit the examinations set by the Buddhist and *Pali* University at Homagama as an internal student as it is a University for Bhikkhus only. However, nuns could sit the examinations set by the university as an external student.

Ven. Dhammanandani never forgot or neglected her religious practice. By “religious practice” I do not mean only the rites and rituals connected with the offering of ‘poojas’ but following strictly the ten precepts that a *Dasa Silmata* takes upon herself to follow doing the *vat pilivet* duties towards the *arama* and her teacher which she performed not chafing at interruptions to *Pirivena* studies. apparently she didnot give in to feelings of frustration but paid obedience to a higher calling of disciplining the self , the *sikkha* (training) so essential for a monastic. That she embraced whole heartedly.



Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari
after higher ordination.



Rev. Dedi gama Sakula teacher of
Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani



Ven Badalgama Dhammanandani
after higher ordination.



Ven. Kuruvita Khema Kantini and the
Head Nun



The entrance to Visakharamaya



The old *prakaraya* (Wall round the Bodhi Tree with shrines for Buddha images), Bo Tree and Dhamma school building put up mostly by the villagers



The old *avasa*



The new *avasa*

What I see in this is an exceedingly high motivation to “...live the fully-perfected holy life perfected and polished like a conch-shell”¹⁵. This involves *Nekkhamma*, the giving up of the ‘self’ notion.

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani has shown us that it is possible for a genuine conscientious monastic to follow all the precepts and rules in the Vinaya Pitaka relating to *Bhikkhunis* not only in spirit but to the letter while living in the context of the wider Sri Lankan Buddhist society. She though living in an *arama* scenario and not a forest *aranya*, has the psychological non-attachment of a forest dwelling monastic. At any given moment she can pick herself up and move on to another abode like a bird with the burden only of its wings.

In 1996, Rev. Dedigama Sakula had been taken ill which disease was diagnosed as leukemia. Although treated at

the base hospital at Gampaha she succumbed to the illness and passed away the following year. And so, Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani, who had looked after her teacher with great devotion since 1972, became the Head Nun of Visakharamaya.

On September 14, 1998, Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani took the bold step of being ordained as a *samaneri* along with some of her colleagues among the *Dasa Silmata* community at Naugala. They were ordained as *samaneris* under the patronage of Ven. Talalle Dhammadhala Thero, Ven. Batagama Medhananda and Ven. Porogama Somalankara thero. At that time there were seventy five nuns in the society. In the year 2000, she received, with nine other *samaneris*, higher ordination at Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Taiwan.

At this juncture I cannot help but mention that eighty four nuns have been given a 4-5 months' training for the higher ordination by Ven. Talawathugoda Dhammadheepani and Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani at Visakharamaya, since 2007. It is not a wonder that these two competent *bhikkhunis* have been appointed repeatedly from 2007 to function as *Karmacariyas* at all the higher ordination ceremonies conducted at Naugala, Kegalle.

I like to mention here a rather unusual happening that may interest readers. Not so long ago there was a prolonged dry season with no sign of rain at all.

15. Maurice Walshe, The Long Discourses of the Buddha. A Translation of the Dhiga Nikaya, D I. 63; *Samannaphala Sutta*, p.99 Wisdom Publishers, Sommerville, Massachusetts, 1995.



Rev. Talawathugoda Dhammadheepani

Wells in the village were drying up and so was ours. We did not know what to do. Finally the Head Nun decided to call off that year's scheduled in-house training programme for the higher ordination candidates and accordingly informed the executive committee of the Society at Naugala but they insisted that the programme must go on. They said it was not possible to cancel it after so many had sent in their applications which had been accepted . Ven. Dhammanandani had replied that without water for the *arama* residents themselves how could they cope with ten or twelve more nuns? But the Committee took a very intransigent stand and said the programme could not be cancelled.

When the other nuns at Visakharamaya heard about this decision they were quite perturbed. Some waited silently but one articulated her criticism of the Head Nun saying she should have been strong in her refusal. But I knew it was not like our Head Nun to disobey senior nuns. We all waited to see what the outcome would be. Then, when the candidates were to arrive on the appointed day, quite suddenly, on the day before, it started to rain cats and dogs. It was not just a gentle shower of blessings but a mighty down pour. All the wells in the village began to fill up and so did our's. Had the 'rain gods' heeded our Head Nun's prayers, I wondered. But she never prays to gods. She only transfers merit to them!

She certainly would have borne a great deal of strain when running this programme regularly though she did so with a wholesome state of mind, full of joy for the sake of the good service performed for the *Sasana*.

I have observed that Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani maintains an exceptional bond of harmony and goodwill with all the village supporters residing in Galgamuwa, Veyangoda. The harmony and close contact she has established over the years, a period of forty seven years, is commendable. I suppose it has much to do with her discipline and kind disposition. She also keeps a wary eye on the future succession to the management of the *arama*. This is all important to her as there must be continuity to the established *arama* and much of that would depend on the ability of the Head Bhikkhuni to forge that continuity and guide it.



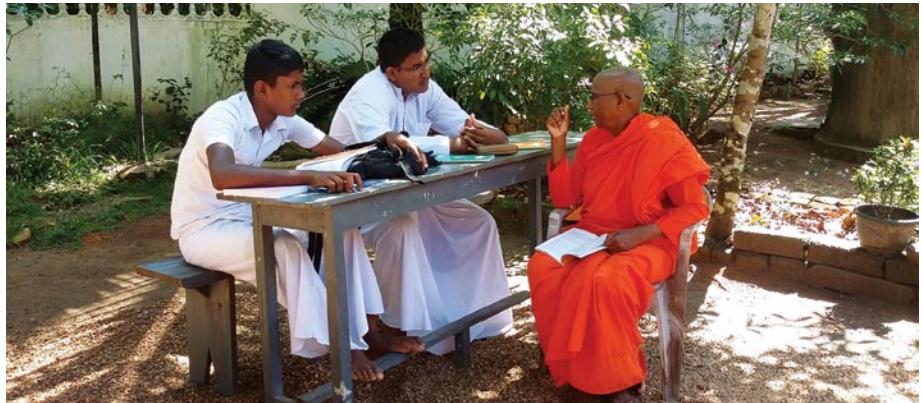
Ven. Bhikkhuni Kuruvita Khema Kantini

It is a quirk of *karma*, no doubt, that Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani's one and only pupil, the only one who has come up to standard in her eyes, whom she has groomed as her deputy, came to Visakharamaya quite late. It was in 2009 that Ven. Kuruvita Khema Kantini came to Visakharamaya to study the texts under the guidance of the teacher and be trained by her. The pupil received higher ordination in 2011. Today, she is equipped with the higher ordination training as well as a B.A. Degree. She is on a strong religious foundation to further her studies. She is also the Principal of a *Pirivena* for *bhikkhunis* and *samaneris* conducted at an *arama* close by in Ganegoda.

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani has waited long for a suitable nun to come and share the burden of running Visakharamaya. Ven. Kuruvita does not need to be told what to do. She looks into all the nooks and crannies of the *arama* and keeps the whole place spick and span under her vigilant eye and with her own physical energy. I see in her the same kind of conscientious acceptance of *vat pilivet* as a religious practice. She is the first to come out of the *avasa* and start sweeping the premises at the appointed times i.e. 6.00 a.m. and at 4.00 p.m. She gets up early and fills

the boiler with water, switches it on and lights the hearth to make the rice gruel. If Ven. Dhammadajotika or Ven. Morahela Dhamitananda have not woken up yet, she does not wait for them to start the early morning *pooja*. She attends to all the internal management of the *arama* with a kind of obsessive, compulsion which no one else can match. The Head Bhikkhuni's unobtrusive guidance is always behind her. Likewise the work of the Dhamma School goes on smoothly under her firm control with the unseen hand of the teacher guiding her. She is a live wire when there is a special event or ceremony like the *Katine* ceremony or a *Kiriahara pooja* or *Suvisi pooja* or a Dhamma School event all of which demonstrate her organizational ability put into operation in an optimum manner to carry out the Head Bhikkhuni's instructions.

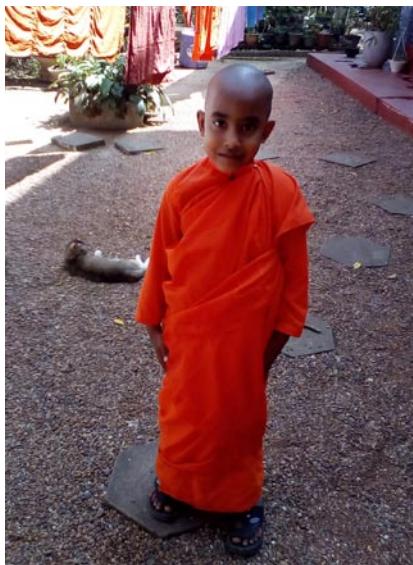
It is the Head Nun's deputy who runs the *arama* and keeps all the buildings in the premises and the premises itself clean and tidy. The garden with its flowers also are all according to her plan and under her care. In other words, she is the CEO of the *arama*. But, of course, when the Head Nun takes certain decisions, they are never contested. Generally, she allows her deputy free rein to organize and manage the space allocated to her.



Ven. Bhikkuni Kamburugamuwe Saddhasumana teaching at Dhamma School



Ven. Pilimatalawe Dhammadhotika



7 years old Samaneri Serankada Sudhammadeepa,
new comer to Visakharama



Venerables Pilimatalawe Dhammadhotika , Kuruwita Kema Kantini
and Kotadeniyawe Pasadika restoring old arms bowls

Ven. Pilimatalawe Dhammadajotika

In 1986 or so there was an addition to Visakharamaya. She was an *upasika*, now a *samaneri*, Ven. Pilimatalawa Dhammadajotika. She does not do much physical work at present as she is somewhat frail and elderly. However, she is useful in a number of ways like when serving out alms-food into bowls for the morning *pooja* and forenoon *pooja*. She also helps in offering the early morning bowl of hot water and the rice gruel for the Buddha and the two arahant chief disciples. I have observed that these duties were shared with Ven. Bhikkhuni Morahela Dhamitananda who is no longer here now. She is a fairly senior *bhikkhuni*. The rice gruel is cooked invariably by Ven. Bhikkhuni Kuruvita Khema Kantini. After the early morning *pooja* which is offered at 5 a.m., Ven. Dhammadajotika cleans and washes the receptacles, and puts them away on the special rack after wiping them. She also sweeps and cleans the alms hall before and after the nuns have partaken of their *dana*. Sometimes I see her sweeping and mopping the external skirting round the alms hall. She sometimes cleans the *viharage* also and regularly prepares the *gilanpasa* beverages for the evening *vandana* and arranges several trays of flowers for offering at the altars of the *ceitya*, *viharage* and *Bo* Tree. In these activities she was sometimes joined by Ven. Morahela Dhamitananda and very often the Head Nun.

Multi coloured flowers are brought every evening by devotees, especially by "Baby Amma" from the village whether from gardens or growing wild in groves and glades. White jasmine, white *araliya*, yellow and orange carnations, yellow *alamandas*, navy blue, mauve, baby blue and vibrant magenta flowers. There are also tiny buds like match sticks of different hues which are decoratively arranged around the trays. The *gantara* bell is rung at 6 p.m. and the *vandana* begins with lighting of coconut oil lamps, joss sticks, flowers and the trays of multi coloured beverages of fruit juice: orange, mango, pomegranate or papaw and of course, cool water. It is a simple but beautiful ceremony to pay homage to the Buddha.

Ven. Dhammadajotika serves refreshments to workmen who come now and again to attend on various repairs to the *arama*. She also makes and offers refreshments to visitors who come from other *aramas* and elsewhere. In this duty, if there are many visitors, she is always helped by young nuns. Greatly relished is an occasional curry made by her with vegetables and raw ingredients offered by lay devotees.

Occasionally, Ven. Dhammadajotika has to officiate at the morning or forenoon *pooja* herself, when other nuns have gone somewhere far away for the day. She very readily rises to the occasion to fulfill the *arama* obligation to its devotees.

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani (continued)

Badalgama Dhammanandani can now sit back and relax a little and do some meditation as she has a deputy who has the competence to run the *arama* according to her wishes. But a Head Nun who has been at Visakharamaya for forty seven years and in whom the villagers have so much confidence, respect and affection can never really relax. One who resides in this *arama* knows well how demands are constantly made on the Head Nun's time and energy, especially with regard to the *dayaka-dayika* matters. There is not a single day she can call her time her own without having to visit a funeral house or visit a sick person to whose side she is summoned to chant *pirit*, or to conduct a *Bodhi Pooja* or to attend an almsgiving all, of which she undertakes gladly, blithely, as part and parcel of her religious life. Then of course there are the invitations to attend ceremonies from the wider community of *bhikkhunis* belonging to Naugala that she must heed. Never does the Head Nun shirk her duties or show the slightest reluctance to perform them. This is all the more remarkable as she is subjected to an advanced arthritic condition. At one moment it is a crisis in another *arama* that beckons her. The next moment she must go more than a hundred miles away to attend the funeral of a

mother or father of a nun belonging to the Naugala community or of a temple prelate she knows well. Being the spiritual head of even a small remote *arama* in Sri Lanka entails many obligations based on the universal humanitarian principle of compassion. She is a senior nun in the executive committee of the Bhikkhuni Society of Naugala. It is timely that at last a responsible deputy who can share her duties is now on the scene.

Visakharamaya, like many other bhikkhuni *arama*, has developed very fast during the last fifteen years or so. In 2007, I remember it had a very tiny *viharage* surmounted by a miniature ornamental *ceitya*, a *Bo* Tree, with a modest *prakaraya* and a small *dana sala* besides the very small *avasa*. It had the atmosphere of a rustic, sylvan *ashram* that had the power to transport one to the distant past as described in legends and myths in Indian and Sinhala religious literature.

What is significant about the development of Visakharamaya is that it has taken place with the close co-operation and participation of the villagers. The service rendered by the *arama* for the villagers and *vice versa* amount to a two way process. During the last forty seven years, the Head Bhikkhuni has built up a bond that is unique. The present new buildings could not have come up without the labour

and materials freely given by village devotees though some donations may have come from outside and even from abroad.

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani had a short respite, a perfect rest of nearly three months in Australia in 2018. She was invited by her elder sister, Teacher Podimenike, to spend a short vacation in Perth with her younger daughter and family. Ven Badalgama Bhikkhuni accepted the invitation and went with Teacher Podimenike and her elder daughter, an engineer, retired early in life. Since we had the latter's email address we were able to exchange news and keep ourselves informed of the Head Bhikkhuni's health. She would have been very happy there as her sister, nieces and grand-niece knew from their long association with her what her monastic life style was like. They had made every arrangement they could, so she can lead her religious life undisturbed. However, there were certain religious practices she could not adhere to which are necessary for a *bhikkhuni* to follow. They pertain to rules such as residing always within a community of *bhikkhunis* or at least in the company of one. If a *bhikkhuni* does not adhere to this rule it amounts to a Sanghadisesa transgression. So Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammanandani had made a determination on her return to Sri Lanka to make amends for the transgression which meant that she would have to undergo *manatte* (paying respect or honour to a rule of

the Vinaya Discipline) up to two weeks in seclusion in an *arama* after submitting herself to a vinaya act in the presence of senior *bhikkhunis*. She spent the stipulated period of seclusion at the Alpitiya *arama* where the Head Bhikkhuni is Ven. Ridithotuve Abhinanda Therini who is also the President of the Naugala society of *bhikkhunis*. It was quite an eye opener for all when Bhikkhuni Badalgama Dhammanandani took this step. First, to realize that one has transgressed an important rule which entails manatte is self-knowledge. Only someone who possesses great humility and someone who practices the Discipline very meticulously would take this course of action. This is so because, for instance, one has to demote oneself in the hierarchy of *bhikkhunis* to the level of the most junior *samaneri* when undergoing manatte. If one of the junior nuns tries to pay respect to the nun who is undergoing *manatte* the latter must reject the obeisance. If she meets a visitor outside her *kuti* she must inform that visitor that she is undergoing *manatte*.

The action of Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammanandani showed to all in the community of Naugala *bhikkhunis* that she follows the rules of the *Vinaya* with so much mindfulness that her nun's life nearly matches what the texts describe as living "...the fully perfected holy life purified and polished like a conch-shell" which I mentioned earlier.

The kind of discourse that Venerable Dhammanandani delivers to devotees when they give alms at the *arama*

or in their homes have a distinctive quality. They are deceptively simple but in actual fact the essence of the discourse, its all-important wisdom is forcefully brought out and made to go straight to the heart. Whenever we present ourselves at the home of a devotee for a special almsgiving, I wait to hear the Head Nun's discourse at the end of the *dana* because she has a way of revealing the inner kernel of the teaching, its humanity. Based on one or two episodes in the Sutta Pitaka, her discourses explore the most humble day to day lives of ordinary people, even royalty and bonds them to us. As an example, I must mention the discourse she gave at a funeral house of a neighbor during the performance of last rites. The father of the household had died one month before and now the mother. Ven. Dhammanandani mentioned something which other speakers had not mentioned earlier. She said that more than the father (who had been a merry, happy go lucky person, and very likeable) it was the mother who had brought up the five children undergoing great hardship "**and what good human beings they are!**" she declared emphatically. What she laid emphasis on was the crux of the matter. What could be more important, indeed? Whatever the mother earned by dint of hard work was earned in a righteous way. She also engaged in numerous merit making acts according to her means, never stinting on what she could afford to give. She lived the exemplary life of a mother till she broke down in health and could no longer work. Then in order to bolster

the courage of the children present who were emotional, Ven. Dhammanandani related the a story in the Dhammapada Commentary¹⁵ about General Bandhula of King Pasenadi Kosala's army who had been killed in the battle field with all his thirty two sons. The slain General's widow, Bandhula Mallika, received the letter giving the news when she was in the midst of serving food to monks at an almsgiving she had arranged. She had remained unshaken and tucking the letter at her waist, she continued serving the food when somewhere in the interior a vessel containing alms food was heard falling to the floor and breaking into pieces. The monks thought she would get flustered, but how could she be disturbed by such a triviality when she had just heard news that shattered her whole world. Thus, Ven. Bhikkhuni Dhammanandani showed the five children how they should behave in a restrained manner when faced with such life events. Life is invariably made up of *dukkha* which is inevitable.

There are many among Ven. Bhikkhuni Dhammanandani's pupils who appreciate her excellence as a teacher. The following is what Ven. Kuruvita Khema Kantini, her pupil and *protege* says of her Teacher:

"Teacher *Therini* wishing the Buddha *Sasana* to flourish in the future, is ever ready to help pupil nuns from the

15. Dhammapada Commentary – Dhp A.1. 228f; 349f. J iv. 144f

very depth of her heart to develop their talents and skills. She, facing squarely the 8 worldly conditions, *Attha loka Dhamma*¹⁶ with equanimity, shows by example how she leads her renunciant life. Always scrupulously obedient, to the Discipline of the *Vinaya* rules and giving religious advice (to all her pupils) to follow only the path shown by the Buddha, she points out that one should train the mind to be prepared to renounce everything at any given moment.

Having associated with Teacher *Therini* during the short period of about twelve years, there is no doubt that my life will testify to the fact that it is her guidance that helps my life of renunciation to meet and victoriously triumph over challenges in the future.”

There are many others among Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammanandani's pupils who admire her as a *teacher par excellance*. Here, I like to include what a devoted higher ordination pupil of her's has said. The pupil is Ven. Bhikkhuni Kotadeniyawe Pasadika, Head Bhikkhuni of Amadora Bhikkhuni *Arama*, Kotadeniyawa. She says of her teacher, Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani that it is not possible for her to describe her excellent qualities as a teacher in a few words but will quote instead an *arahant* who describes who an excellent teacher is, and that would suffice to convey what she would like to say of Ven.

Bhikkhuni Badalgama Dhammanandani.

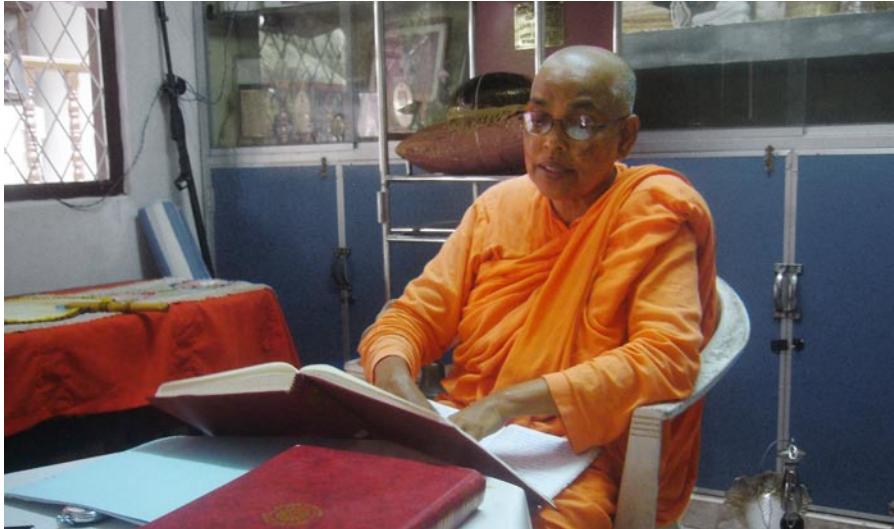
She says that in the Buddhist text, *Milinda Panha* (Milinda's Questions), King Milinda asks Arahant Nagasena how many qualities a bhikkhu must possess to realize nibbana and Arahant Nagasena replies:

“A monkey when seeking a suitable abode, looks for a place where large trees grow, where there is solitude, sheltered by a network of branches, an almost awesome place which is well protected.

“Likewise, Great King, a bhikkhu who fulfills his training in the *pilivet* (practice) should seek a teacher who is a *kalyana mitta* (genuine friend) ashamed to do anything wrong, who is well disciplined, virtuous, who has the qualities of genuine friendship, highly learned, bearer of the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*, who is pleasant, worthy of respect, speaker of noble words, who bears up rough speech, who gives advice, who shows what is good and what is evil, who makes one undertake wholesome actions, who exhorts and fills one with enthusiasm to follow the Dhamma path who makes one happy minded; such a teacher should he seek as his *kalyana mitta*.”

It is only when we see what the Buddha gave as qualifications necessary to be an exhorter of the nuns that we realize how close the above passage is to what

16. Attha Loka Dhamma relates to gain and loss, honour and dishonor, happiness and misery, praise and blame. Vis. XXII and A. VIII, 5



Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani taking a lesson



Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani introducing a guest Bhikku at a *bana deshana*

the Buddha himself has said on the subject. The Buddha emphasized on learning as well as spiritual attainments. The qualifications necessary to become an exhorter of the nuns have been laid down in the *Mahavagga* (of the *Vinaya Pitaka*). We see in these qualifications the perfect combination of learning which had become wisdom, with the amalgam of spiritual qualities. Such exhorters would have been true spiritual teachers *Kalyana mittas* (genuine friend who gives advice of an ethical nature), worthy of homage and respect.

The laying down of these qualities as qualifications to exhort *bhikkhunis*, show the Buddha's great concern for the education of the *bhikkhunis*.

“ I allow you monks, to agree upon a monk endowed with eight qualities as an ‘exhorter of nuns’: One who is virtuous, who lives restrained by the restraint of the *Patimokkha*, who is possessed of good behaviour and lawful resort, who sees danger in the slightest faults who undertaking, trains himself in the rules of training who has become very learned, who knows the learning by heart, who is a store of learning; those things which, lovely at the beginning, lovely at the middle, lovely at the ending, declare

with the spirit, with the letter, the Brahma-life completely fulfilled, wholly purified – such things come to be much learned by him, learnt by heart, repeated out loud, carefully pondered over, well penetrated by vision; the *Patimokkha* comes to be properly handed down to him in detail, well sanctioned, well regulated, well investigated rule by rule as to the linguistic form. He comes to be of charming speech, of charming delivery; as a rule he becomes dear to nuns, liked (by them), he becomes competent to exhort nuns, he does not come to be one who, on going forth for the sake of the lord, on being clad in yellow robes, has previously committed (some offence) against an important rule; he comes to be one of twenty years standing or of more than twenty years standing. Monks, I allow you to agree upon a monk endowed with these eight qualities as exhorter of nuns”.¹⁷

Laying down of these qualities like a charter given by the Buddha to the monks, couched in solemn, elevated language shows to what extent the Buddha thought it important to insist on these qualities for an exhorter of nuns. He laid a high premium on religious education in both the *Bhikkhu* and

17. Book of the Discipline, (*Vinaya Pitaka*), Vol ii, *Sutta Vibhanga*, translated by I.B. Horner, PTS, Bristol, 2012, p.265-266.



08

The Original Residents near Visakharamaya

Bhikkhuni Sangha. This charter could apply to nun teachers of higher ordination candidates too, for such good qualities of a teacher can be universalized.

The Good People of Galgamuwa

The present chapter is a brief account of the original residents whose houses were near the land gifted to Visakharamaya by Ranmenike Edirisinghe and her siblings. I place on record the original residents because they constitute the watershed, as it were, the beginning of the bond that was forged between Visakharamaya and the villagers of Galgamuwa. In this modest endeavour of mine, I was helped by Mr. K. A. Ariyaratne, who took me to meet several of the elders of the village of Galgamuwa, whose houses were in the vicinity when the land was gifted to Visakharamaya.

Liyana Arachchilage Migo Hamine was the original owner of that land that was gifted. She had six children. I give their names again:

1. Jagonis Appuhamy
2. E.A. Menci Nona
3. E.A. Peter Appuhamy
4. Ranmenike Edirisinghe
5. E.A. Podi Appuhamy
6. Dingiri Menike

Unfortunately, the house in which Ranmenike lived, has changed hands and is now in an abandoned condition.

Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari was invited to stay with her till she found a donor of a piece of land for the nuns' *aramaya*. I was shown the house and managed to get a photograph taken. It was she who was the prime mover of the gift of land by suggesting it to her siblings as she and her siblings owned the piece of land jointly. It was she, at the request of Ven. Batagama Medhananda who invited Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari to reside in her house till she found a donor of a piece of land to gift it to Naugala for the nuns.

Migo Hamine had an elder brother by the name of Banda Mahattaya. His son's name was Karunaratna and the latter had a son by the name of L.A. Kulatunga (Kule Malli). He lives in his parental house next door to Visakharamaya. He runs a busy catering service and also plies a taxi in between his main business activities.

Podi Appuhamy was Ranmenike's younger brother. He and his wife did not have any children. I was taken to the house in which Podi Appuhamy's wife's niece is living. It was her father's sister that Podi Appuhamy had married. The niece had an old diary belonging to Podi Appuhamy. Apparently he was a profuse writer, greatly influenced by the *dhamma*. He mentions in this diary the gift of a piece of land to Visakharamaya which originally belonged to his

mother. The niece had kept this diary carefully in a cupboard along with a photograph of a lady whom she thought may be Ranmenike Edirisinghe. I was struck by the dignity of the lady in the photograph. I borrowed it for the purpose of including it in this book and showed it to several elders in the village who confirmed that the photograph was, indeed, of Ranmenike Edirisinghe.

Mr. Wijeratne Bandara (Dambulle Mahattaya) is a physician of indigenous medicine. He specializes in curing snake and insect bites, though these may not exhaust the whole spectrum of ailments he treats. He is very well known in the locality and is held in great respect as a village elder by all and sundry.

We were taken to their house and I asked “Was your house existing when the *arama* land was gifted?” Dambulle Mahattaya smiled. “This is not my house. This belongs to her family” he indicated the *hamine*. “My house is in Dambulla because I come from Dambulla. This house is quite old, more than one hundred years old.” “It is about one hundred years old, not more” the *hamine* demurred. “Yes it was existing when the land there at the back was gifted for the nuns.”

I had heard that Dambulle Mahattaya came from an aristocratic lineage but the respect he is held in the village is not entirely due to his lineage. It is also due

to the fact that he is a skilled physician and that he has special healing powers and is an honourable elder of the village. I was told by several in the village that before he treats a snake bite victim, he performs a short religious rite by lighting incense and invoking the power of the Buddha’s virtues and seeking protection of *devas* for the wellbeing of the patient he is treating. It should be noted here that in many places in the Buddhist texts, including the Jataka Tales, the words used for respecting comprise a string of verbs such as “*sakkaroti, garukaroti, maneti, poojeti*”. These terms of respect are used not only for a leader of society but especially if he has the genuine qualities of a *spiritual teacher*, which assumes virtue to begin with.

He and his *hamine* have been stalwart supporters of Visakharamaya from its inception. Recently before the Head Nun went to Australia for three months in 2018, she had requested them to kindly keep an eye on the *arama* which they did conscientiously, coming from next door, even in the night, with Mr. K. A. Seneviratne (known to all as Sudu Maama or Sudu Malli).

Another of the old houses that existed in the 1960’s was **Algama Mahattaya**’s house. He is now no more neither is his house. However, his son,

K.A. Ariyaratne, is well known in the village and to the nuns of Visakharamaya. It was he who introduced me to the elders of the village.

Nanda Dissanayake Hamine is another old *dayika* of Visakharamaya from its early days. Her daughter, Sudu Hamine, follows in her mother's footsteps. She is always smiling and radiating happiness whenever she brings alms or drops in casually to see what she can do, always ready to help. She comes regularly in the evening during the *vassa*(rains retreat) season for the evening *pooja* or to listen to *pirit*. Her husband, Mr. Abeyratne owns a Hardware Store at the entrance to the village and is most helpful to the *arama*.

The Head Nun told me that she thinks it was Sudu Hamine's father's mother, who was keeping some of the Naugala nuns in her house till the *arama* came up. When I checked with Sudu Hamine she said that is correct. Her grandmother, Seensi Nona, lived in their old *Mahagedera* which is now no more. Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari and other nuns did reside there from time to time till the *arama* was built.

Mr. Rupasinghe's house was also one of the old houses, still existing from those early days. I heard that Mr. Rupasinghe's mother rendered yeoman's service to help our Head Nun when her teacher nun, Rev. Dedigma Sakula, was ill with leukemia in hospital.

Maggilin Akka and her mother Alice Nona were Upasikawas who were most helpful to the nuns of Visakharamaya in the early days. Alice Nona and another Upasikawa, Leelawathi Nona (Shanta Baas Unnähä's mother) used to come and spend the nights at the *arama* regularly in case the nuns would feel lonely and isolated because there weren't many houses close by like the way there are now.

Maggilin Akka had been most helpful to the nuns during times of drought when the well in the *arama* premises ran dry and many wells did too, in the vicinity. She used to fill up a barrel with water she brought from wells which had water. She would then tell the nuns to bring their pots and vessals and fill them up and take them away to the *arama*. She used to accompany the nuns to village homes where the wells had water. She would even help bathe the nuns by tirelessly drawing up buckets filled with water. Maggilin Akka is now paralysed after an illness but she is always in good spirits when we visit her. She recounts past events very accurately with dates and places remembered well.

Newton Malli is Maggilin Akka's younger brother. He was a small boy who can remember well when the Head Nun at Visakharamaya came there to be ordained. Newton Malli is very active when there is a *sramadana* at the *arama*. One day soon after the new



Ranmenike Edirisinghe Haminey



Mr. P. M. Perera



Alice Nona



Leelawathi Nona

avasa was built, Newton Malli dropped in casually. When he saw the interior of the new *avasa* with its tiled floors he was overcome with joy and gave vent to the emotion with an impromptu speech. He said he could remember the small simple *avasa* that existed before and how its roof leaked whenever there was a heavy shower of rain. He said our present Head Nun had to get up even in the middle of the night, run to the kitchen and bring pots and vessels and place them at various points where the rain water was pouring down from the roof. It was a regular occurrence, he said. Hearing all this a good *upasaka mahathaya* had come one day and having dug up the floor found that there was quite a lot of water collected under the floor that was stagnant. He had with others built a drain to direct the water out from under the floor. It is not surprising that the Head Nun developed arthritis fairly early in life, living working and studying in such damp conditions. Even now she is always busy and active despite her ill health. I suppose the roof was repaired by village supporters after the monsoon rains ceased.

These are the good people who have been the *dayaka-dayikas* from the inception of Visakharamaya as far as I was able to gather information. As for today's *dayaka-dayika*, it is quite impossible to mention them all by name. However, I cannot be without

mentioning the President of the *dayaka-dayika Sabha* Mr. Duminda Jayatilleke and Mr. Wimalaratna the Treasurer .

Of course **Dr. Lorance Piyasiri** who is a very busy doctor at Wathupitiwela Base Hospital but never too busy to help the nuns of Visakharamaya and so are his mother and wife.

Duminda Mahattaya has always been on hand whenever there has been an event of importance at Visakharamaya. He got the entire wiring done for the new *avasa* also, when it was being built and helps in numerous ways. His father was most helpful, apparently when Rev. Galigamuwe Khemachari was ill with pneumonia at the hospital in Gampaha.

Mr. and Mrs. T. A. Wimalaratna too, are always on hand when there is an important *pooja* ceremony or an important event or a *sramadana* in the premises. The *sramadana* work they have been doing with others is quite tremendous. All of their three daughters have been or are pupils of the Sunday Dhamma School. The eldest daughter teaches at the Dhamma School. The Head Nun has told me that Mr. Wimalaratna's mother used to come on every full moon day to take *sil*. So there is a connection of three generations here with the Wimalaratna family.

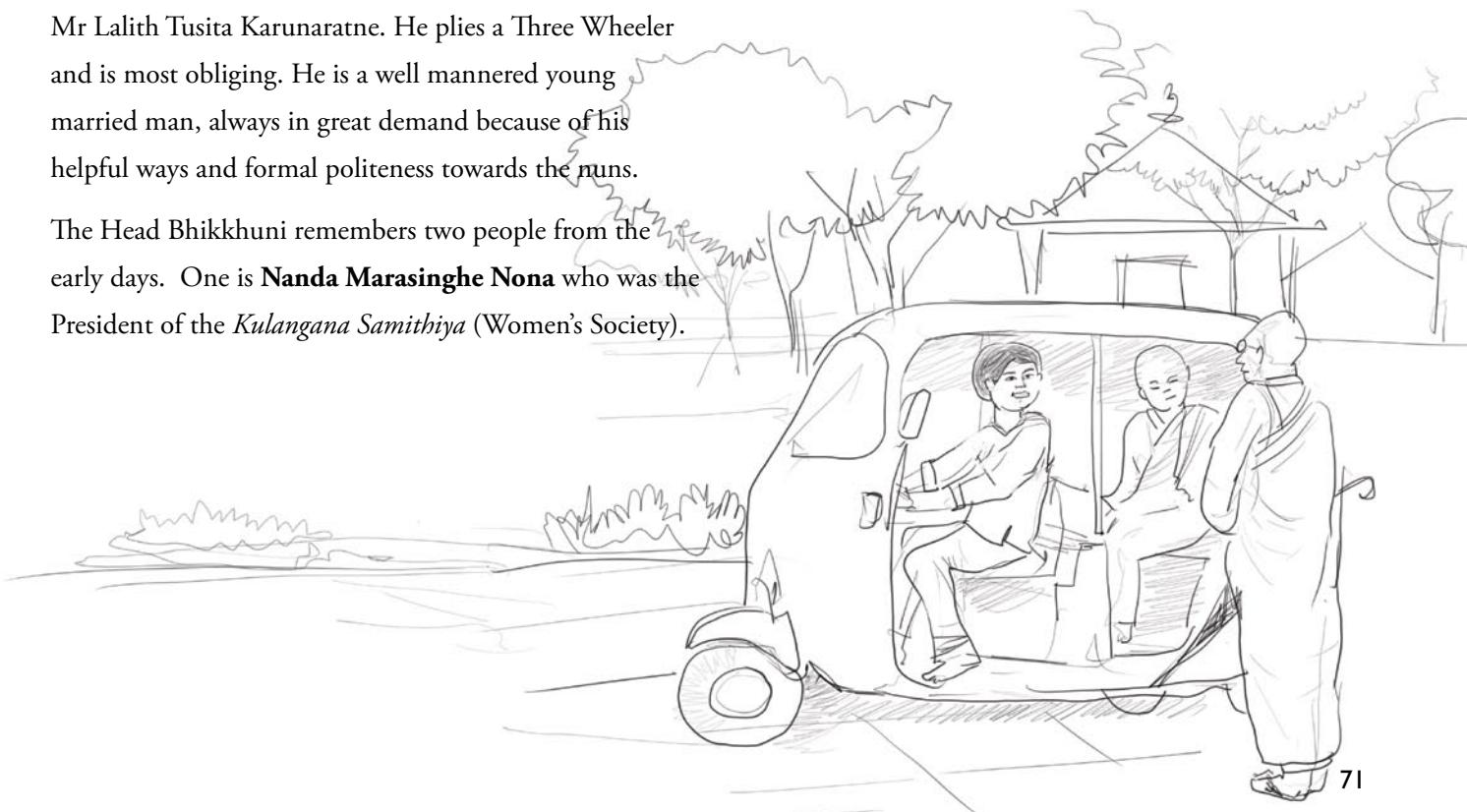
I have also seen that Lakmini Nanayakkara and her parents are always very helpful. Other regular visitors

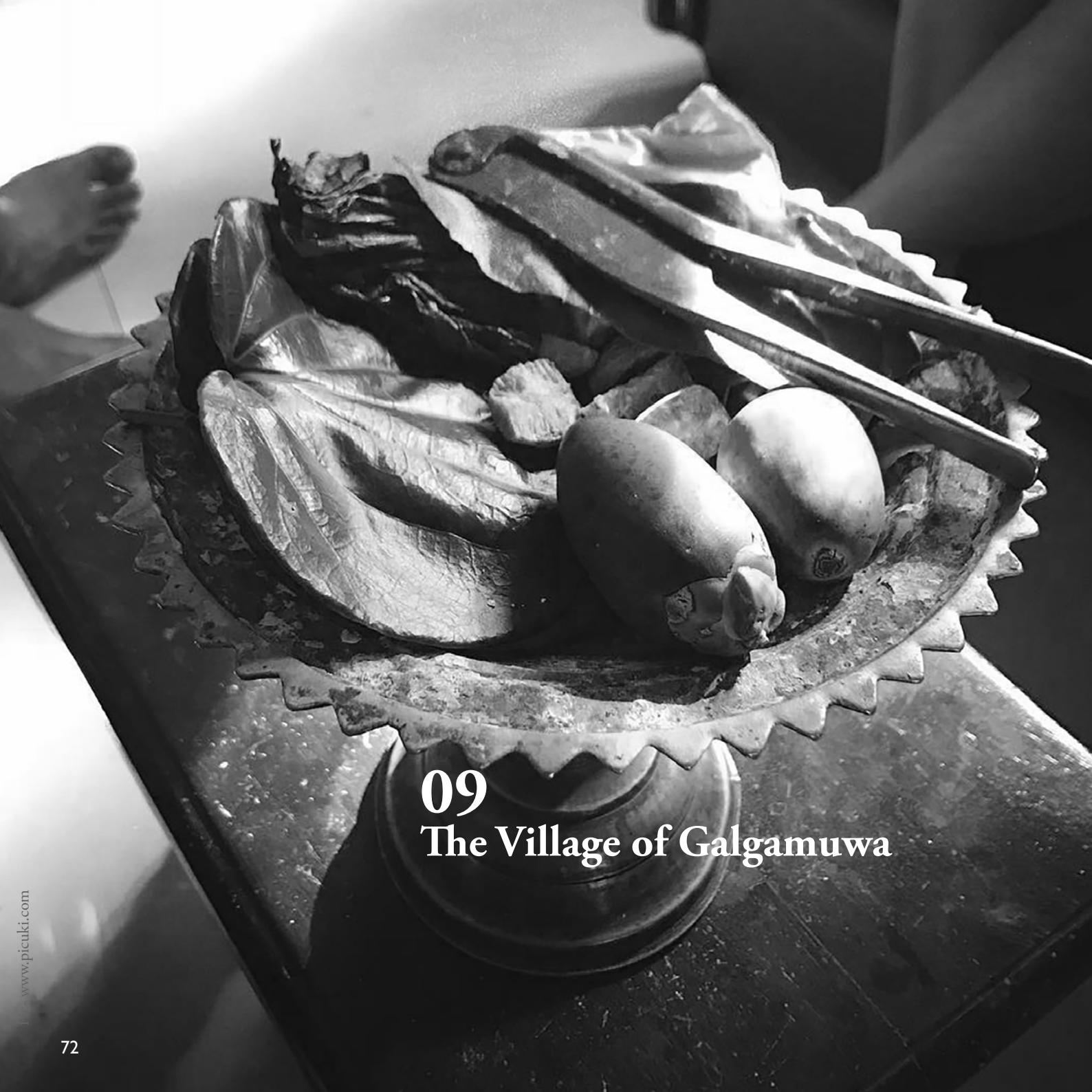
to the *arama* are **Udeshika's mother, Wimalawathi Nona and Udeshika's baby and also "Baby Amma" whose real name is Biso Menike.** She brings flowers for the evening *pooja* every day. The Head Nun told me that Udeshika's father, Lionel Mahattaya did the entire electrical wiring for the *arama* when it was first built in 1965. I also meet Sumana Dasanayaka (Sumana Nangi) in the *arama* frequently when she comes to do some work in connection with the Dhamma School, getting forms filled up and getting them across to the relevant monk in charge appointed by government authorities.

Another person who is very familiar to Visakharamaya is Mr Lalith Tusita Karunaratne. He plies a Three Wheeler and is most obliging. He is a well mannered young married man, always in great demand because of his helpful ways and formal politeness towards the nuns.

The Head Bhikkhuni remembers two people from the early days. One is **Nanda Marasinghe Nona** who was the President of the *Kulangana Samithiya* (Women's Society).

The other is **Mr. P. M. Perera Upasaka Mahattaya** who resided in Gampaha and used to visit Visakaharamaya very often, especially on a Full Moon *Poya* Day. She said that S. A. Haramanis *Upasaka mahattaya* used to talk at length on the *Dhamma* and sometimes ask questions from the nuns to see if they were following what he was saying. Both of them have done much for Visakharamaya according to the Head Bhikkhuni. Their deep faith in the *Dhamma* and their sincerity seems to have made an indelible impression on her. Their names are on a plaque in the *Centitya*.





09 The Village of Galgamuwa

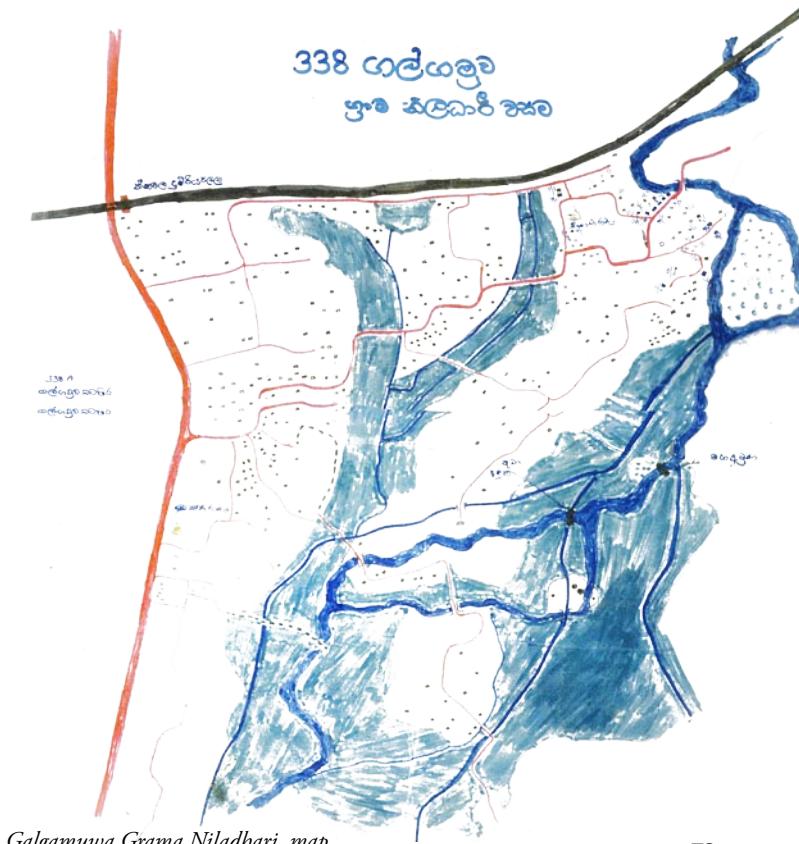
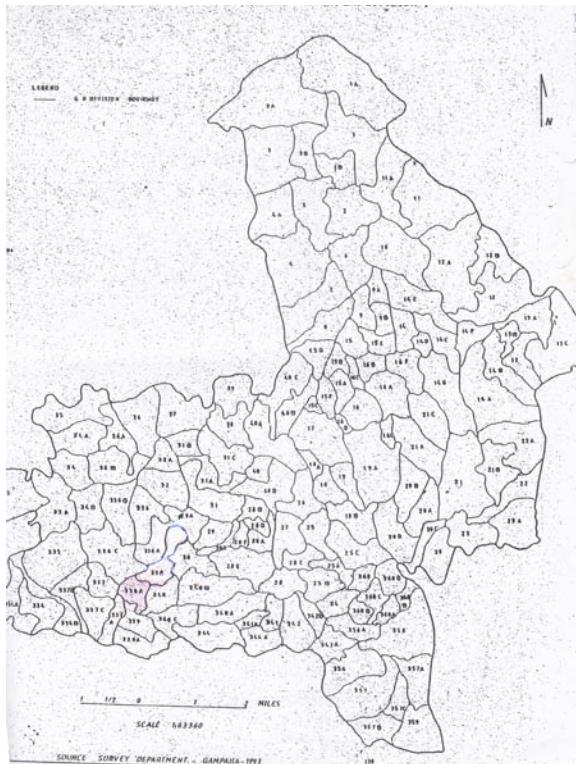
More about the Good People of Galgamuwa

The hermitage of Visakharamaya grew to maturity amidst a number of scattered cottages and modest homesteads in an un-urbanized countryside. The village of Galgamuwa is sixty six kilometers from the city of Colombo and 7 kilometers from Veyangoda, the nearest town.

The village of Galgamuwa comes under the administrative range of the Divisional Secretariat, Mirigama, 308A Gramaniladari Unit. Their functions come under the authority of the relevant Ministry in the Central Government.

Galgamuwa has 70 acres of paddy land and 55 acres of cultivated land. It has a population of 984 consisting of 296 houses and 280 families comprised overwhelmingly of Sinhalese Buddhists.

The people of Galgmuwa are mostly government service personnel and other white collar workers. They commute to work in nearby towns or cities like Veyangoda, Nittambuwa, Gampaha or Colombo.



Becoming Commercial

There are not many industrial or commercial enterprises in the village. A hardware store is at the entrance to the village, and further down the circuitous partly tarred road is a motor vehicle repairing yard which restores old vehicles and transforms them into nearly new ones. There are also owners of rice milling machines and a machine turning out wall blocks of crushed metal, sand and cement. there is also a bread bakery. Ornamental plants and flowers are cultivated for commercial purposes in the village and recently aquarium has been started to breed ornamental fish, mostly for export.

Near the Keenawela railway station, about half a kilometer from Visakharamaya, there is seen a little more collective commercial activity in the presence of a tiny post office, a barber's salon, photographer's studio, a photocopying shop, a part-time doctor's clinic and a complementary laboratory facility. Adjoining are a few stores where freshly baked bread and groceries can be bought. By the gate of the railway station, a bevy of three-wheeler taxis awaits in readiness to pick up customers, but the drivers do not seem to be in a hurry for hires. They appear to be absorbed in reading newspapers or chatting to each other while chewing betel.

Animal Husbandry

An interesting fact I have noticed is that to the West of the *arama* our neighbor, Mr. Wimal Premasiri 'Wimal Malli' has two vocations, One is animal husbandry and the other is rice milling. He has a few cows and he has made a cow shed for them in his premises. His family consists of him, his wife and two children, a daughter and a son. The children are studying, one in the campus of an university and the other in a Technical Institute of Higher Education.

Wimal Malli and his wife have been exceedingly generous to the *arama*. He donated not one but two Jak trees from his garden for timber to be used for the new *avasa* roof. When a nun was ill, they supplied fresh milk for her for several months. When a temporary kitchen had to be put up when the kitchen in the old *avasa* was dismantled during building operations, Wimal Malli on request obligingly let the temporary kitchen behind the *dana sala*, extend into his land by about two yards. It was dismantled as soon as the new kitchen was built and the boundary between the *arama* and Wimal Malli's property reverted to the original. I was really amazed at his generosity and respect shown to the *arama* so that harmonious relations continued as in the past without disruption.

On one occasion, one of his cows gave birth to a male calf. The mother of the calf was pitch black but the calf was of a tan colour, like a faun, with a white half-moon on its forehead as if it were a batik printed design. All the nuns were

captivated by this timid creature guarded stoutly by its proud mother. One of the nuns wanted to send it to a coconut estate in Kurunegala where it could roam about freely in the open space and graze to its heart's content. The Head Nun fell in with her wishes and made the request to Wimal Malli offering him Rupees twenty thousand for the calf. Wimal Malli agreed and went through all the paper work required by the government to obtain a permit to transport the animal in a private van. The red tape involved for obtaining the permit at various government departments must have taken Wimal Malli about two full days off from his regular work but he did all this very obligingly. The fact of the matter is that male cattle are unwanted animals among milch cows. Today, oxen are not in demand for agricultural work as their former usefulness has been replaced by tractors for ploughing and threshing. They are not used for transport either, to pull heavy cart loads of firewood, brick or metal or whatever along roads from one point to another. The heavy work involved has been transferred to pick up vans or trucks.

One hardly sees a bull drawn cart on roads today. Even extensive dairy farms do not have more than one or two bulls.

So the young calf was taken away to an estate in Kurunegala by another obliging villager, Kapila Mahattaya, who had a van he used for transporting things. The Head Bhikkhuni visited the calf a few months later. It recognized her immediately, probably by the colour of her orange robe and came up to her to be petted and given some bananas. The nun who had expressed the wish to send it to Kurunegala kept a communication now and then with the manager of the estate to find out how the calf was doing and was informed that it was in good health. It was allowed to graze freely where ever it wanted to go and at night it would find its way to the watcher's cottage by the main gate and lie down in a corner of the sheltered verandah.



Becoming Machine Oriented

Wimal Malli's other vocation is working on a rice milling machine. He works over time on it sometimes late into the night to meet the heavy village demand. The two vocations seem symbolic of the gradual urbanization taking over the village, from an agricultural base to modern industrialization.

Wimal Malli is a very active agent of change working at his vocations in the transitional stage of the process. I have seen him often on the road, taking his cows to the fields lying below the road on either side during the day and bringing them back home before dusk. May he and his family prosper!

To the East of the *arama* is another business entrepreneur. His machine also works throughout the day. He manufactures building blocks of cement, sand and small rock stones like metal which are crushed and ground by a machine and transported to his premises via a Tipper to make uniform blocks for building purposes, especially walls.

The noise from these industrial machines from both sides of the *arama* is very representative of the change coming over the village from an agricultural base in the past to an industrial present. They are not harbingers of change but change itself.

Artisans

There are many skilled artisans in the village, carpenters, masons, bricklayers, plumbers, electricians, etc. They all commute to work in the nearby towns and cities and village residents have little opportunity to benefit from their skills.

Professions

A few of the professions, no doubt, like those of law, teaching in schools, nursing, practitioners of indigenous medicine and practitioners of western medicine are represented in the vicinity. Among them are doctors, mostly government doctors who run private clinics after returning from hospital work. They render a very useful personalized service to the appreciative community. A few members of the younger generation have made it to the managerial levels in banks and private firms in the mercantile sector in towns and cities like Veyangoda, Nittambuwa, Gampaha and Colombo. There is a lady surveyor in the vicinity and an Attorney-at- Law is also represented in the village.

A new arrival on the scene is the cultivation of ornamental plants and flowers. Mr. K.A. Ariyaratna's wife W.A. Yamuna Manel Wickramaarachchi is engaged in this business enterprise. Their eldest son K.A. Asita Madhushanka Ariyaratna is busy setting up a business in

rearing ornamental fish for export. The fish are in tanks which are really large sunken ponds in their garden. Their younger son K.A. Pubudu Shamal Ariyaratna drives a vehicle in the transport sector in a large company building of an express Highway. Another new arrival on the scene is computer technology, foreshadowing the invasion of more modernity into the life style of the newer generation. Some skilled computer and laptop engineers, operators and repairers are popping up among the youth as Information Technology takes off in the village. Young Dhanushka Buddhika Ranaweera is a computer technician working in Colombo . He is very useful to Visakharamaya. His younger brother Damith Sasanka Ranaweera has finished his training as an electrician and he too is seen actively performing small jobs at Visakharamaya.

Ven. Badalgama Dhammanandani came to Visakharamaya as a young *upasika* in 1972. At that time there was no electricity supplied to the village. The residents would have used kerosene or coconut oil lamps. Today electricity is supplied to all the houses in the village numbering 273, but water supply is a different matter. Each homestead has its own well. There are a total of 278 wells in the village today. The *arama* has an overhead tank which is filled with water daily from the well by means of an electric motor.

The still un-urbanized village of Galgamuwa is a maze of gravel pathways branching off from circuitous, partly tarred roads. These roads are connected to the main A1 Colombo-Kandy highway at several points such as Kalagedihena, Nittambuwa and Pasyala. The village comes under the administrative authority of the Provincial Council of Gampaha.

A slow urbanization process

Galgamuwa is a good example of the slow urbanization process taking place in many remote villages in Sri Lanka. At the grass root level one finds a store of folk lore and indigenous medicine culture among the villagers.

The belief in evil spirits, possession and exorcism embedded in the folk culture is not visible here though they maybe latent in the village subconscious as the belief in astrology is. The refining influence of the Buddhist doctrine flows out to the villagers from temples in the area and Visakharamaya. They receive a ready hearing among the villagers but among the younger generation these channels have to compete with the glitz of Bollywood and the local pop scene. There is hard bargaining to win their attention for they are well-nigh addicted to hand phones connected to Internet and the Face Book.



Wimal Malli with his rice milling machine



Wimal Malli's wife



Lalith Thusitha plies a taxi and does odd jobs for Visakharamaya



Chandana Malli who is in the transport trade



Wimal malli is involved in Animal husbandry



Ari malli's wife Yamuna Manel's business enterprise cultivating ornamental and flower plants



Wimal Malli's wife's sister who takes in sewing from the villagers



Asita Madhushanka who rears ornamental fish for export.



K.A. Ariyaratna (Ari Malli) and his wife Yamuna Manel Wickramaarachchi



Indunil Wickramasinghe and his wife, W. H.A. Lilani Chandrika



Magilin Akka



Mr. L A Rupasinghe



A P Ratnawathi
Nonamahathmiya



Nanda Dissanayake
Nonamahathmiya



Newtan Malli



Mr Somathilake and wife
(Kade malli and Kade nangi)



Dambulle Mahaththaya and hamine



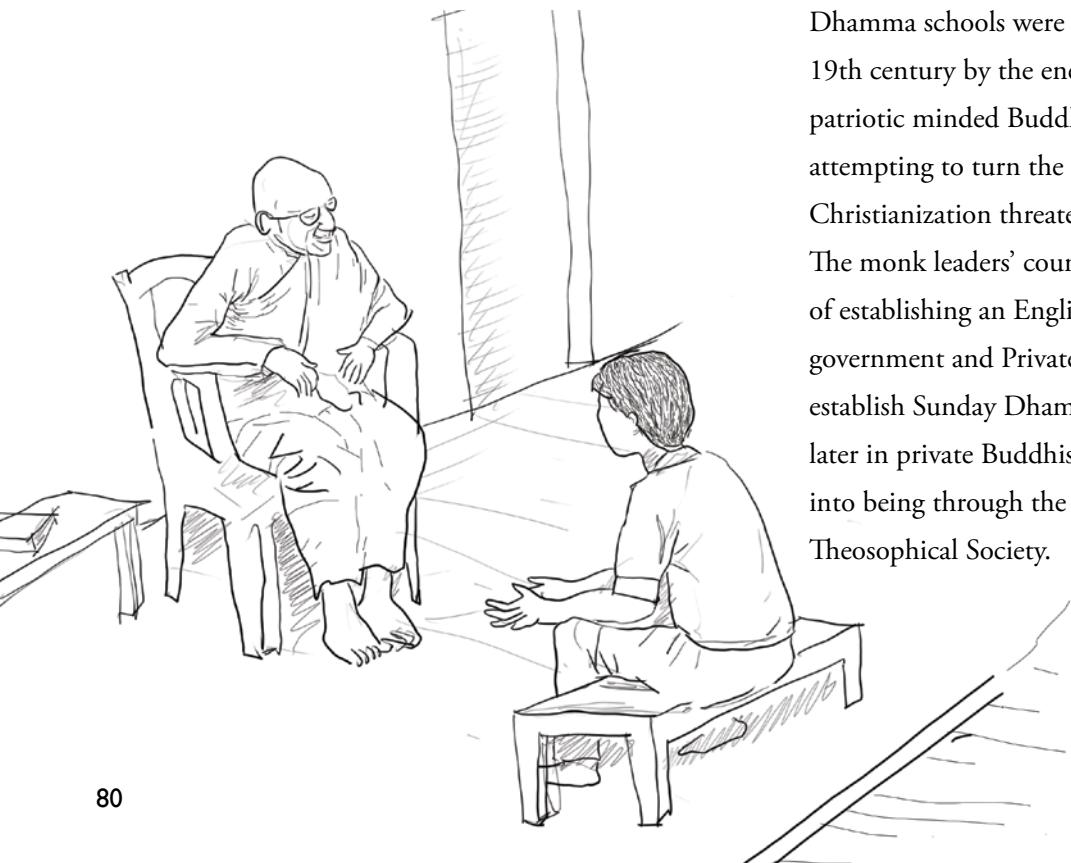
Mr K A Seneviratne and wife



P R L N Abayarathna and wife
Arunakanthi Disanayake

The change in the village on a large scale will come to a great extent from the way of life in the cities to which the younger generation is drawn more and more each day.

In this connection it is interesting to listen to a young rebel's voice; a voice that is rebelling against the wave of commercial materialism that is threatening to lash against the shore of the village and overwhelm it.



A Young Rebel of Materialism

Shannan Madhawa resides in the immediate proximity of Galgamuwa in Midellawela. He is a computer technician working for the government's Civil Defence Department at Moratuwa. Some interesting facts came out of a conversation I had with him in the verandah of the Visakharamaya early one evening. He is about thirty years old and looks like a typical product of the modern generation. He seems to be greatly influenced by the Dhamma School background he has imbibed during his school going years.

Dhamma schools were established in the early 19th century by the energy and determination of patriotic minded Buddhist monk leaders. They were attempting to turn the tide of colonial influence and Christianization threatening to take hold of the island. The monk leaders' counter move to the colonial policy of establishing an English school system through government and Private Christian schools was to establish Sunday Dhamma schools in temples and later in private Buddhist schools that were brought into being through the support of the Buddhist Theosophical Society.

Shannan Madhawa 's skill and expertise lies in the field of Information Technology. He works 5days a week and does his own private business during Saturdays and Sundays, which gives him very little time for relaxation. Being intelligent and having had the advantage of a Buddhist education background acquired through the Dhamma School, he sees that wealth earned at the speed modern living demands for survival is unsatisfactory. Economic wealth is absolutely essential, he says, for survival. He uses his mother's illness as an example, which necessitates certain facilities and medication that are quite expensive. But earning this kind of income to meet such contingencies requires that he joins the rat race of working seven days of the week, full time with his nose to the grinding stone as it were. He has no time for relaxation or recreation, leave alone reflection and contemplation. He derives deep satisfaction in coming to a place of Buddhist religious worship which offers him solitude, not a junction of clashing noise pollution. He says Visakharamaya still has that old world ambience of solitude that is so precious to him and he attributes his ballance in life to what he learnt of values and ethics during his student days in Dhamma School.

He is very much aware of the evil side of internet and Face Book that is corrupting the younger generation. Today what he sees is that ninety per cent of the

younger generation is addicted to the handphone connected to internet for the entertainment that it provides. The technological skill required to access this arena that titillates the senses is minimal. It is just an acquisition to open the door to that scenario that attracts the senses. One gets addicted to it just as one gets addicted to liquor, drugs or smoking. He thinks it is harmful to the individual's health and mental development. Such an addiction makes one lazy and indolent as one's brain stimulation comes entirely from what one's ears are plugged into - an internal world that is a product of external invasion. It is a harmful escape.

He wishes to engage himself in teaching IT but that demands a great deal of his time taken away from his present mode of earning a livelihood and would make severe inroads into it to the detriment of his vocation until he builds up the resources necessary for teaching. He fears the younger generation is becoming colonized by the plush world ushered in through advertisements. He sees danger in this kind of colonization which can lead to complete erosion of indigenous culture with the superimposition of a foreign culture in its place with implications of foreign imperialist domination.

As I type Shannan Madhawa's words into my laptop I hear the peaceful, calm voice of a monk, from an adjoining temple intoning sacred Buddhist stanzas

from some distance away over a loudspeaker. As I stop typing and listen to the voice it is immediately submerged by the brash raucous orchestration of pop music from electrical musical instruments coming over loud speakers from a house very close by. Along with it, as if bidden to come, came the noise of machines from both sides of the *aramaya*. I return to the laptop telling myself that Change (*anicca*) is indeed a characteristic of life.

Visakharamaya in Galgamuwa, like many other bhikkhuni *aramas*, has become modernized very fast during the last fifteen years or so. In 2007, I remember it had a very tiny *viharage* surmounted by a small ornamental *ceitya*, a *Bo* Tree with a modest *prakaraya*, a small *dana sala* and a very modest *avasa*. The vestiges of the wilderness that covered the premises were still visible surrounding the *aramaya*. Today, the *arama* has fully emerged out of the wilderness.

At present, the *arama* has quite a big *ceitya*, a large *viharage* and a large *Bodhigharaya* with altars for the twenty eight Buddha images encircling the *Bo* Tree.

What is interesting about this modernization process is that it has taken place with the close co-operation and participation of the villagers. The services rendered by the *arama* for the villagers and *vice versa* is a two way process. As I mentioned earlier the present new buildings could not have come up without the labour and materials freely given by devotees in the village, though some donations did come from outside and even from abroad. The new

avasa's modern State of the Arts building owes its plan to a professional architectural office in Colombo given free of charge. Buildings in themselves may not express the true value of the *arama*. The respect, the closeness of affectionate regard constitute the real capital and wealth of the *arama* and the Head Bhikkhuni is very right in valuing that.

The closeness between the devotees and the *arama* is reflected in a conversation I had with one of the devotees after the new *ceitya* was completed. "Now the *arama* is truly protected!" I exclaimed and the devotee, Sumana Nangi, said immediately "Not only the *arama*, *meheninvahamsa* (venerable), our whole village is now protected!" I was rather taken aback by this rejoinder. Then I realized what she meant. It reflected the oneness of the *arama* and the village, almost as if there were no boundaries between the *arama* and the village. If that is so, let that truth last long. *Sadhu! Sadhu! Idam ciram bhavatu!*



The second edition of Suvimalee Karunaratna's acclaimed protest novel "Lake Marsh" is being published at the behest of her well wishers. The first edition was published in 1993. Excerpts from it and from the collection of short stories "Bili Pooja" (1973) were included in Professor D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke's "Anthology of Sri Lankan Literature 1948-1998". Multiple anthologies of contemporary Asian, South Asian and Sri Lankan literature published in international literary journals have carried excerpts from her many novels and short stories. The BBC's World Service has broadcast several of her short stories. Her "Mandara Flower Salon and Other Stories" (2004), won the State Literary Award for the Best Collection of Short Stories in English and the novel "The Vine" (2001) also won the State Literary Award for the Best Novel in English. Her non-fiction work has included script writing and artistic direction of the SLBC's special radio broadcast on Anagarika Dharmapala received a special written commendation in 1990. So did the special feature programme on "The Taming of the Yellow River" and the special feature programme on the History of Radio Ceylon/SLBC to commemorate its fiftieth anniversary.

She holds two masters degrees from the Post Graduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies of the University of Kelaniya and a doctorate for her thesis on Buddhist philosophy from the University of Peradeniya. She was appointed by the Religious Affairs Ministry as a Special Collaborator on the staff of the Encyclopedia of Buddhism (2001–2004) and also researched and wrote articles for several fascicles of the Encyclopaedia. She served as a senior lecturer at the Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy in Kandy (2010-2014). Her academic papers on Buddhism have been presented at several international conferences. She received ordination as a samaneri (novice) nun in 2004 and higher ordination as a Theravada Buddhist nun in 2007 and is now known as the Ven. Bhikkhuni Dr W. Suvimalee. She currently resides at "Visakharamaya", Galgamuwa village, Veyangoda, in the rural outskirts of Colombo.

front side

back side

2"x7 1/2"



When Arahant Thero Mahinda preached in Sri Lanka, the first Sri Lankans to absorb the Dhamma and attain Sovan Magga Pala were Queen Anula, and a significant number of ladies accompanying her.

The Dipavamsa, a chronicle older than the Mahawamsa, was authored in Pali by a Bhikkhuni in the 1st - 2nd century AD. It includes a list of learned Bhikkunis who lived in Anuradhapura and Rohana focusing on their specialized subject and their lineage.



Galgamuwa Visakharamaya
Charitable Trust

Set up under the patronage of Ven. Bhikkhuni W. Suvimalee, its core objective is to facilitate the religious education of Bhikkunis, and raise awareness about the Bhikkhuni Sasana in Sri Lanka.

Contact - 0112678334, 0773879947
Whatsapp - 0773866683
Email-Visakharama.trust@gmail.com

“I read with interest the extremely well written account of the life of hermitage nuns of Sri Lanka, taking as a typical example the life in Visakharamaya, Galgamuwa, Veyangoda, Sri Lanka. Apart from a short biographical account of the Venerable Head Bhikkhuni of the monastery, Badalgama Dhammanandani, it gives a very impressive description of the process of transition of traditional Buddhist village life to modernized life of industrialization, retaining still some major elements of the Buddhist heritage. It also appeared to me to be a justification for the revival of the Bhikkhuni Sasana in Sri Lanka through direction of attention of the reader to the exemplary Buddhist way of life lived in the nunnery under the leadership of the Venerable Bhikkhuni Badalgama Dhammanandani. I found myself sufficiently educated regarding the recent revival of the Bhikkhuni Sasana in Sri Lanka, a measure taken by some Buddhists with serious commitment to the Dhamma, that I wholeheartedly approve of.”

*Professor P.D.Premasiri,
Professor Emeritus, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.*

“This is a poetic and exquisitely illustrated account of the life and practices of contemporary Buddhist nuns. Focusing on her teacher, Ven. Bhikkhuni Badalgama Dhammanandini, who was ordained under the auspices of the Naugala Bhikkhuni Society, and the establishment and growth of the Visakharamaya hermitage, Ven. Bhikkhuni Suvimalee’s narrative evokes the renunciant life of nuns, and describes how sil matas from Naugala who received the bhikkhuni upasampada developed a lineage of bhikkhunis under the tutelage of the late Ven. Batagama Medhananda Thero. This timely publication is essential reading for anyone wanting to learn about Buddhism and the lived life of Buddhist monastics from the perspective of a leading Sri Lankan bhikkhuni.”

*Professor Nirmala S. Salgado,
Professor of Religion and Religion Department Head, Augustana University,
Rock Island, Illinois, USA.
Author of Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of the
Female Renunciant.*

“The way Bhikkhuni Suvimalee has woven monks, dasasilmatas, bhikkhunis and the entire village around this one bhikkhuni, whose life resembles the venerable bhikkhunis of the Therigatha, is fascinating. The story also shows that a life of a Buddhist monastic leader, whether a monk or a nun, is inseparable from the life of his or her immediate surroundings characterized by mutual dependence, material needs on the part of the nun, in this story, and the need for inner guidance on the part of householder villagers. The chief bhikkhuni of this story reminds us of the ideal Buddhist monastic life of detachment, being in the village among the villagers but at the same time not being one among them, like a lotus born and grown in a muddy stretch of water but stays above unsullied by it!”

*Professor Asanga Tilakaratne,
Former Senior Professor, of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka,
Currently Visiting Professor, Nalanda University, Rajgir, Bihar, India.*

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