

# **Theri Sanghamitta And The Bodhi-tree**



**Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta Theri & Bodhi-tree**

**Compiled for the Serene Joys and Emotion of the Pious  
A Gift of Dhamma**

## Preface

The Buddha — the "Awakened One" — called the religion he founded *Dhamma-vinaya* — "the doctrine and discipline". To provide a social structure supportive of the practice of Dhamma-vinaya (or Dhamma for short [Sanskrit: *Dharma*]), and to preserve these teachings for posterity, the Buddha established the order of *bhikkhus* (monks) and *bhikkhunis* (nuns)— **the Sangha** — which continues to this day to pass his teachings on to subsequent generations of laypeople and monastic, alike. Even today, after a long 1,000 years of lapse in Bhikkhuni sasana, lay people are totally confused to understand that the *care taker of the Buddha sasana includes both Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni – as a united Sangha order.*

However, in Theravada sect. the Bhikkhuni Sangha had been defunct for over 1,000 years and many in this generation do not know that our Lord Buddha had left his Dhamma-vinaya heritage to his worthy heir – **Sangha**, meaning both Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni. Quite a few learned Monks in Myanmar did agitated to revive Bhikkhuni Sasana to fulfill the Buddha's proclamation and tradition that the term **Sangha** truly meant – Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni and that it does not meant Bhikkhu alone.

The Bhikkhuni sasana was well established in the second century BC, when king Dhammasoka sent emissary led by **Sona** and **Uttara Thera's** landed in **Suvannabhumi** to establish the Bhikkhuni Sasana. Due to Brahmin influence in this region (Thailand, Cambodia and Mon State of Myanmar) the Bhikkhuni sasana quickly came to an end in Myanmar. There was at one time the Mon king who worships **Hindu Gods** had launched an attack on Buddhism by destroying Buddha images and thrown them into ditches. The legend has it that a lady savaged the images from the ditch cleaned and worships the images. The king in his anger ordered her to death, if she could not show miracle to multiply one image to eight images and fly away towards the heaven. The king was finally converted and took the lady as his chief Queen. Such was the fate of Buddhism in the Mon state. To no one surprise, the Bhikkhuni sasana was quickly came to an end and was defunct for a long, long time (over 1,000 years)

In recent time, there were several attempts made to revive the Bhikkhuni sasana in Myanmar by few learned famous Sayadaws:

- *There was one attempt in the 1930s, by a very learned monk named **Shin Adicca**. The learned Bhikkhu U Adicca agitated for nun's ordination as early as the 1930s*
- *Then in 1950, **Mahasi Sayadaw's** teachers, the **Jetavana Sayadaw**, made another attempt for Bhikkhuni revival.*

The main argument, however to this day, seems to be that only *unbroken ordination through the Theravadin lineage will do.*

Through the miracle of the divine power overseeing the Buddha sasana (**Sakka** and **Avalokitesvara** or **Lokanattha**) in **429 AD**, Theravada Bhikkhuni from Sri Lanka went to China and had established the Bhikkhuni sasana in China led by **Bhikkhuni Devasara** and her ten fully ordained Bhikkhuni's from Sri Lanka. This unbroken Bhikkhuni lineage had been preserved to this day in Mahayana sect in China, Taiwan and Korea.

In the past few decades, the Sri Lanka Thera's had studied the Chinese Bhikkhuni lineage and had traced back to the Sri Lanka Bhikkhuni lineage that was originally established by Theravada tradition of Sri Lanka Bhikkhuni's lineage. Thus, whoever was ordained today in Sri Lanka are recognized and accepted as Bhikkhuni ordination in Theravada tradition.

The facts of History will be on the side of all Bhikkhuni's who had already been fully ordained in Sri Lanka and those who will later be ordained in Sri Lanka should be accepted as ordained in Theravada tradition. Those who did very little research outside its own country will never know that the Theravada Bhikkhuni lineage exists in the world, miraculously in China (in Mahayana sect) y some divine power, as is always the case in Buddhism miracles do happen...

Let history be the judge to those who opposed the revival and those proponents for the revival of Bhikkhuni sasana for their concern of the sasana to endure as long as the natural life span as predicted by Buddha...

As stated in *Mahaparinibbana sutta*, Buddha said this: "I have left my Dhamma Vinaya to the worthy heirs; to my Sangha – *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhuni* – as caretaker of my sasana and that it should endure the remainder of the Sasana until the end of my dispensation in 5,000 BE.

## CONTENTS

1.1. The first Miracle .....	4
1.2. The Second Miracle .....	5
1.3. The Third Miracle .....	5
1.4. The fourth Miracle – the lineage .....	5
1.5. We owed much to Sanghamitta .....	6
1.6. The story of Sanghamitta Theri .....	6
Bibliography.....	8

# The Theri Arahant Sanghamitta and The Bodhi Tree



Sanghamitta with Bodhi Sapling  
Arrived in Sri Lanka

## The Miracle of Buddha Sasana

(Sathhadevamanussanam)

*He is the teacher of Gods and Humankind*

"iti pi so bhagava araham sammasambuddho  
vijjacharana sampanno sugato lokavidu anuttaro  
purisa dhamma sarati satta deva manussanam  
buddho bhagava ti".

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa

After over two hundred years of the birth of Buddhism, Buddhism was at its peak during the time of King Dhammasoka in India. The King Dhammasoka understood the essence of Buddhism, and offered great support to the cause of Buddhism by erecting rock- edicts in all parts of his territory enjoining upon the subjects to follow the Doctrine in their daily lives. With his royal patronage Buddhism flourished, and the Sasana gradually grew in importance and numbers. Tempted by worldly gain, many undesirables of alien sects joined the Order and polluted the Sasana by their corrupt lives and heretical views which they taught. Good monks could not live together with these sham monks and there was trouble.

### 1.1. The first Miracle

The King consulted the *Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa* to protect the Sasana. The King tested the monks and disrobed the



undesirables to purify the Sasana. The Third Buddhist Council was then held by 1000 Arahants, with the Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa as the presiding Thera. Seeing the imminent dominance of Brahmanism religion dominating India in some future time, Moggaliputta sent emissaries of arahats to nine regions outside of India to spread the Buddhism. The most successful emissary was the delegations led by *Mahinda Thera* who first established the Bhikkhu Sangha in Sri Lanka; and followed by the her sister *Sanghamitta Theri* who then established the Bhikkhuni sasana in Sri Lanka. For over 1,000 years (242 BC to 1050 AD), Buddhism flourished in Sri Lanka with both Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Sangha working in harmony for the Buddha sasana in Sri Lanka. Up till 1050 AD, Bhikkhuni Sasana flourished world wide with Sri Lanka as the center of Buddhism, after Buddhism left India, its birth place.

## 1.2. The Second Miracle

In 429 AD, the visionary Bhikkhuni *Devasara*, seeing the future of Bhikkhuni was in imminent danger of war and famine and of being vanished from Sri Lanka, sent emissaries to China led by *Devasara* to establish the Bhikkhuni Sasana in China. The original Theravada Bhikkhuni lineage was planted in China since 429 AD to grow in unbroken lineage to this day as Mahayana Bhikkhuni Sasana.

## 1.3. The Third Miracle

To this day, many in Theravada have known Theravada Sangha as consisting of Bhikkhu alone; not knowing that our Lord Buddha had left his heritage to his trusted Sangha – the worthy heir of his dhamma – Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni. It was a sad thing to see many younger generations still thought that Bhikkhuni Sangha was defunct and should not be revived again. Mahaparinnibana discourse had defined the Buddha heir to consists of both Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni and without Bhikkhuni Sasana in active participation to carry the responsibility of spreading the Sasana to the posterity; it will be very hard for Theravada to endure the remainder of Buddha sasana for another 2,400 years. For that reason, Sri Lanka has now revived the Bhikkhuni sasana some two decades ago, using the unbroken Theravada Bhikkhuni lineage preserved in China.

It was a miracle that Mahayana had preserved the Theravada Bhikkhuni lineage to this day so that Theravada could revive their Bhikkhuni sasana, which they all along thought was defunct and extinct in the world. This was another act of miracle in the chronicle of Buddha sasana. The miracles said above must attribute to three persons, *Moggaliputta Tissa Thera, Mahinda Thera, Sanghamitta Theri* and *Bhikkhuni Devasara* of Sri Lanka and the divine helps working behind the scene.

## 1.4. The fourth Miracle – the lineage

Buddha had predicted that when the sasana come close to 5,000 BE, the predicted five disappearances (see *Anagatavamsa Desana*) will come to pass. The Buddha relics (Dhatu – relics) from across the Universe will gather in one place at the **Bodhi Tree located in Anuradhapura to deliver the dhamma discourse to Devas and Brahmas** for them to pay their last homage to the Buddha relics forming the Buddha images through the supernatural power. This event will be celebrated for seven days and nights in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. The entire Universe will light up in brilliance while the Devatās are assembled for this convention. No human being will participate at this convention of Devatās. The convention would be led by the king of Devas, *Sakka* and his retinues of Devas including *Saputta* and *Bhallika*, and the retinue of Sakka from Tavatimsa heaven and *Brahmana lineage Devatās*. The end of the convention will mark the end of their final existence in the samsara – the round of rebirths has thus ended for the Devatās – so they will exclaim in joys as they enter Nibbana.

### 1.5. We owed much to Sanghamitta

When Sanghamitta was invited to visit Sri Lanka by the king of Sri Lanka to establish the Bhikkhuni sasana in Sri Lanka, she brought along with her the Bodhi Sapling, a branch of the original Bodhi tree grafted by the miracle power to be brought over to Sri Lanka for this event to come in the year near 5,000 BE. The dhatu relics will then be flown to the original Bodhi tree in Benares for final destruction to mark the end of Gotama sasana on earth.

### 1.6. The story of Sanghamitta Theri

The illustrious daughter of the Emperor Asoka (274-237B.C.) who ruled India arrived in Lanka on the Full Moon Day of Unduvap which falls in the month of December. This day commemorates two momentous events that gave tremendous impetus and stimulus to the spiritual awakening of the people of Lanka, namely:

***1. The arrival of the Theri Arahant Sanghamitta with a sapling of the Bodhi-Tree under whose benign shade the Buddha attained supreme Enlightenment.***

***2. The establishment of the Bhikkhuni Order in Lanka.***

In the 6th century B.C. in India women were considered inferior to men. They were highly dishonoured and disinherited in Brahmin dominated society. Their rights were banded and mouths were gagged. They were always kept confined to home. They had to work as slaves. According to the Brahamins' literature

“Women have no sacrifices of their own to perform nor religious rites of observances to follow. Obedience to the husband alone would exalt the woman in heaven”(Manu.v. 153).

But this type of hostile attitudes towards women both in religion and in society was criticised by the Buddha himself. The Buddha paved the way for them also to seek freedom from consciousness (cetovimutti) and freedom from wisdom (pannavimutti). It was for the first time in history, the Buddha established a Bhikkhuni Order with rules and freedom of thought for them to become full fledged Bhikkhunis in society. There were thousands of learned and well disciplined

Bhikkhunis during the time of the Buddha. Among them, *Pajapati Gotami, Khema, Uppalavanna, Patacara, Dhammadinna, Soma, and Nanda* could be mentioned a few. Even after the demise of the Buddha there were many other well versed Bhikkhunis. ***Sanghamitta was one such great Bhikkhuni who rendered an unparalleled service to the Buddha Sasana.*** She was the daughter of the Emperor Asoka who ruled India righteously in the 3rd century BC. Her mother was *Vidisa Devi*. Sanghamitta was born in 282 B.C. and at the age of 14 she was married to Agibrahma, the nephew of Asoka. She gave birth to a son named *Sumana* (who later was ordained and came to Lanka with Ven. Mahinda himself in the name of the novice Sumana). By 264 BC when she was at her young age of 18 years she took her ordination together with her brother Mahinda. Thereafter, she dedicated herself to the Dhamma and because of her strenuous efforts she became one of the Arahant Theris in the then society. After her attainment for Arahantship she mostly spent her time at Pataliputta (present Patna).

In the meantime, her brother had introduced Buddhism to Lanka and established the Order. But still there were thousands of women who were willing to enter the Order. But as the Thera Mahinda was not in a position to ordain them as Bhikkhunis the king was instructed to send some one to India and bring his sister Theri Sanghamitta together with a sapling of the Bodhi-Tree. Therefore the Minister *Arittha* was sent to the Emperor Asoka by the then King of Lanka, *Devanampiyatissa* and requested the Emperor to send his daughter and the sapling of the Bodhi-Tree.

It was because of this invitation that the *Ven. Theri Arahant Sanghamitta* was sent to Lanka together with some other 11 nuns to establish the Bhikkhuni Order in Lanka so as to spread Buddhism in all over the country with the full participation and assistance of women. She was sent to Lanka by sea and landed at the ferry called *Jambukola* in the North. There the King received the sapling of the Bodhi-Tree with great respect and brought it to ***Anuradhapura*** in a procession with great honour, held some unprecedented ceremonies lasting for weeks. There after it was planted in ***Mahameuna Grove***.

According to the great Historian H. G. Wales this is the oldest historical tree in the world. “In Ceylon there grows to this day a tree, the oldest historical tree in the world, which we know certainly to have been planted as a cutting from the Bodhi-Tree in the year **245 B.C.** From that time to this it has been carefully tended and watered”.

By this time ***Queen Anula*** and 500 other women, shaven headed and clad in yellow, were eagerly looking to receive the *Pabbajja ordination*. This moment just after the introduction of Buddhism to Lanka is described by Prof. Bapat in his work “2500 years of Buddhism” as follows:

“The king and the people of Ceylon were deeply impressed by the new gospel and accepted Buddhism. Its progress was phenomenal. Hundreds of thousands of men and women embraced the new faith and thousands entered the Sangha and adopted the life of bhikkhu. Monasteries were erected on all sides and rich endowments were made for their upkeep. Queen Anula and a number of women also expressed their desire to receive the pabbajja ordination and enter the Sanghas. But as no monk was allowed to do this for them, emissaries were sent to Emperor Asoka to send some distinguished Nuns to help them (p.85).” ***It was under these circumstances that the Theri Arahant Sanghamitta after having well discerned the word of the Buddha established the Bhikkhuni Order in Lanka.*** Since then the Bhikkhuni Order has flourished in Lanka for more than thousand years. There were many well educated and creditable nuns with great composure in that lineage of the Bhikkhuni Sasana. At one time, in **429 A. D.** under the supervision of a renowned nun called ***Devasara***, a group of Nuns went to China and conferred Higher Ordination on Chinese Nuns.

But such a glorified and well connected Bhikkhuni Order came to be defunct by the year 1017 A. D. mainly because of chola invasion from South India. After the invasion, both Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis disappeared from Lanka. There were no at least five monks to perform a vinayakamma. It was under the able guidance of the Ven. Asarana Sarana Saranankara Maha Thera that the Higher Ordination was reintroduced from Siam (Thailand) and re-established the Order of Monks in Lanka (Malwatte Chapter) in 1753 A.D.

Now there are more than 200 Bhikkhunis in the country. We have to accept them as our own elderly mothers and sisters in robes. They have no way to turn to. They all are Buddhist and Sinhalese. Whatever the rules and regulations found in the code, at present, they are rendering a peerless service in society giving advice to the people and caring and sharing things with them. They are also, like monks striving to mould the future generation in the country. In short, they are now doing their service as full fledged Nuns. Therefore what we can do today is to help them in whatever the possible manner. On the contrary, their responsibility is also to be emphasised. They must be very well aware of the word of the Buddha (The Dhammavinaya). They have to lead their lives entirely abiding by the rules proclaimed by the Buddha. Mainly the *Astha Garu Dhamma* should be accepted as their basic principles. Thus respecting the monks and their own senior Nuns if they lead a life based on morality concentration and wisdom according to the teaching of the Buddha the Bhikkhuni Sasana of Sri Lanka will flourish again day by day and this same example also will be followed by the womankind in the whole world. I feel, on this very day of the Theri Sanghamitta's arrival and the establishment of the Bhikkhuni Order in Lanka, should be proclaimed as the International Women's Day.

*May Bhudha Sasana endure the entire life span  
May the posterity know that Sangha means – Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni  
May all beings be well happy and peaceful!*

*Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!*

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