



The Sanghamitta Day

KKS PERERA

U nduvap, the last Full moon for the year, in the month where Jesus Christ was born, is obviously the time to reflect upon giving up hatred speech and destructive judgment on other faiths that are contrary to Buddhist, Christian and other teachings. Proper practice of religious principles would definitely help in commencing the diluting of the differences between our approach and those of others; while compassion being cultivated for every living being.

The daughter of Emperor Dharmasoka, Sangamitta theri, bringing with her a sapling of Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi, arrived in the island accompanied by arahat Bhikkhunis, King Dharmasoka's ministers, Brahmins, and Kshatriya family members. The contingent landed in Dambakolapatuna in Jaffna on an Unduvap fullmoon day during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa.

The sixteen year-old charming Princess Sanghamitta, married Prince Aggribrahama. They were blessed with a son named Sumana. Emperor Asoka's brother Prince Tissa became a monk and entered the Buddhist order, followed by Aggribrahama and his seven year-old son Sumana. Her brother, uncle, husband and son entering the order left Sanghamitta with no options but enter bhikkhuni order under two elderly nuns, namely Ayupali and Dhammapali and attain arantship following the footsteps her brother Mahinda thera. Theri Sanghamitta, was partly responsible in making this

island the "Dhammaddveepa" along with her brother Mahinda thera. She passed away at the age of 61, during the rule of King Uttiya. A proud civilization changed the society— Buddhist culture, literature, arts, economy, and crafts developed on Buddhist thoughts.

King Devanampiyaissa was considerate of the necessity to establish the Order of Nuns [Mehenisasna –] in his kingdom. Princess Anula, the wife of king's viceroy who had already attained Sowan , the first stage or path to Nirvana together with many others were anxious to enter the Order of Nuns. Hence Mahinda Maha Thera requested his father, the emperor Dharmasoka to send Arahant Sanghamitta with a sapling of Sri Maha Bodhi in Budthagaya. the fact that Sangamitta Theri's, samanera son was already in Sri Lanka with uncle Mahinda thero, prompted Sangamitta to demand her father, King Asoka: she said *"Father, the order of my brother is important and the ladies who are to be ordained in Lankadveepa are many, it is absolutely essential that I visit them"*.

The Bo sapling which was in a golden casket was planted with a magnificent ceremony in the Maha Megha Garden where it lasts for over 23 centuries [perhaps the oldest known tree in the world] receiving the adoration of millions of devotees. Arahant Sangamitta theri passed away at the age of 79, while residing in Anuradhapura. Her last rites were performed in close proximity to Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi by King Utthiya. These great occurrences, exchange

of contributions of dhamma were possible as a result of Consensual governing structures, healthy foreign relations that existed during monastic rule in the earliest times in the sub-continent.

Discrimination of Women

The Buddha always treated women with kindness and civility and made no distinction on gender in all matters. Women from all walks of life received the blessings in joining the order. Sangamitta theri worked with untiring devotion and fearlessly for the rational, moral, and pious upliftment of the womenfolk. Bhikkhuni order that was established by Sangamitta lasted for over a 10 centuries before it was destroyed during Chola invasion. It was revived on December 8th 1996 at the Mulagandhakuti premises, in Uttar Pradesh, India where seven Dasa Sil Mathas from Sri Lanka were ordained as bhikkunis. In ancient India, like in many parts of the world, women were treated as being inferior to men; they were measured on the same level as the so-called lowest of the four castes. Their liberty in male dominated societies was extremely restricted under the view that they had to be under the guard of their husbands. The main role of women was considered to be that of housewives, attending to house chores, looking after the children as per the wishes of their husbands.

Buddhism totally disagrees that women as being inferior to men: it consider men

and women to be equally useful to the society. The Buddha in many instances have emphasised the productive role the women can occupy and should play. Buddhism persuades both husbands and wives to share equal liability and discharge their obligations with equal commitment. The wife is a companion, a friend, and equal in partnership— wife was expected to acquaint herself with the assets owned by the family, so that she could administer such affairs in husband's absence. In a Buddhist culture the wife occupied an equal place with the husband.

The liberal approach towards women that exists and has sustained from the distant past in Sri Lanka is due to Buddhist authority. The place of women in many Theravada countries like Myanmar and Thailand has been as favourable as here in Sri Lanka. In ancient India, a widow was not allowed to remarry, but had to commit suicide [sathi puja] by leaping into dead husband's funeral pyre. In some primitive African territories, India, and in America wives were treated as the private property of their husbands. Religious freedom was restricted , and they did not have educational choices. So much so the birth of a female baby was considered a bad luck, it happened that when King Pasenadi of Kosala who being informed that his queen had given birth to a daughter, the king came to the Buddha and lamented. The Buddha had to pacify him saying, 'A female child, O Lord of men,

may prove even a better offspring than a male. ' –Samyutta Nikaya

Buddha encouraged women to demonstrate themselves and to confirm that they too had the ability like men to attain the highest position in the spiritual way of life by attaining Arahant hood.

Many religious institutions today claim that they give equal rights to women, though, it seems that they are discriminated in various fields, they have no property rights and usually undergo violence in many subtle forms. Even in the so-called advanced societies in the western world, women seeking the right to vote through organized protest had to struggle very hard for their rights. Buddha recognised their capabilities and capacities, and gave them responsible places in the Bhikkhuni Sangha. The Buddhist literature are full of eminent Bhikkhunis, who had been scholarly, like in Khema, Dhammadinna and Uppalavanna to mention a few who excelled in sermonising the Dhamma. Theri-gatha contains so many stanzas that undoubtedly articulate the feelings of happiness experienced by pious bhikkhunis at their skill to realize the Truth. The Buddha himself was born as a woman on many of his previous births in Samsara and even as a woman he developed the noble character and insights in his path gaining enlightenment. Buddhism fashioned a 'conflict' against Brahmin doctrine rejecting discrimination in any form. Gender difference has no place in Dhamma, which emphasizes the spiritual equality both male and women.