

Nissarana Yatra, life of Ven. Nanasiha Thera of Siri Vajirarama

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This autobiography, entitled *Nissarana Yatra*, covers the life of Ven. Nanasiha Thera of Siri Vajirarama.

The autobiography covers his lay life, the exemplary environment in which he grew up, his schooling and higher education, his duties in the Administrative Service of Sri Lanka as a member of the Ceylon Civil Service, his contribution to make creative changes in the administrative structure, the national, religious and societal mission he performed during and after his official tenure, and exploring the background in which he thought towards and made the decision of becoming a monk at the age of 80.

The close association with the Most Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Thera seems to have invoked even more energy to nurture the character of the author of the *Nissarana Yatra* with virtue. He has been an active contributor to all Sasana and social service related activities of the Maharagama Siri Vajirana Dhamayatanaya. It may have further brightened his virtues.

He also had a very close Kalyanamitta association with Ven. Ampitiye Sri Rahula Maha Thera and Ven. Piyadassi Maha Thera.

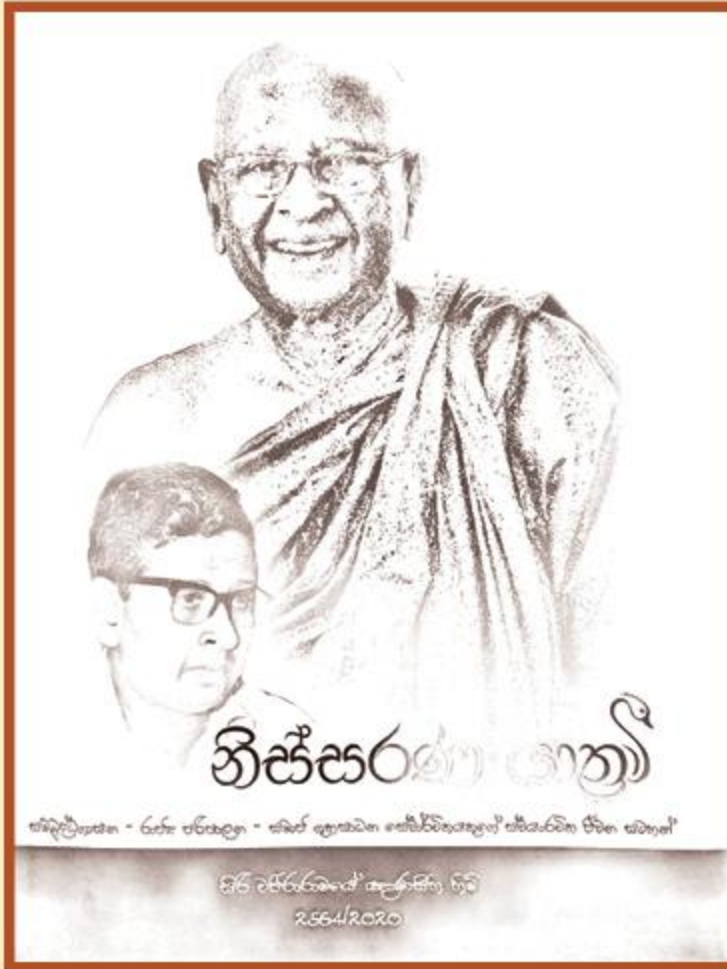
He has travelled extensively around the world, the most memorable being that with the Most Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Thera. In 1964, he spent 139 days on a world tour with the Most Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Thera. He says that the time spent with the Mahanayaka Thera was never boring.

He chose the Vajiraramaya in Bambalapitiya to be ordained as a monk and finally Olcott Gunasekera joined the Vajiraramaya Bhikkhu family under the name of 'Nanasiha' by adding 'Nana' a section of the name of the Most Venerable Siri Vajirana Mahanayaka Thera and 'Siha' a section of the Most Venerable Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Thera.

His knowledge and immense contribution in alcohol and tobacco control is incomparable with any other person in Sri Lanka. Noble deeds done in silence should be most esteemed.

Various activities, which were initiated under the Maddihe Pannaseeha Mahanayaka Thera's patronage, culminated in Nanasiha Thera becoming a tireless international and national tobacco and alcohol control activist.

Over the years, Ven. Nanasiha Thera has worked tirelessly with world leaders in the battle against



tobacco, and to eradicate the tobacco epidemic from the world. The first step ended with the approval by the member states of the WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control after nearly three years of negotiation. That historic event took place on February 28, 2003. Venerable Thera (then Olcott Gunasekera), was involved in making his contribution in formulating the FCTC through the Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) of which he was once the Vice-Chairman of its Governing Board. He was awarded the Orchid Award by the FCA at the 2014 Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) meeting held in Moscow in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the cause of tobacco control over the past 15 years in formulating the international legal framework for tobacco control (FCTC).

Sri Lanka became the first Asian and the fourth in the world to have ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, WHO's FCTC, in 2003.



After the adoption of the international law (FCTC), on the invitation of the South East Asia Regional Office, he prepared and submitted a report in 2005 on the changes necessary for promulgating a FCTC Compliant Legislation for Tobacco Control in Sri Lanka. The study highlighted the existing laws for tobacco control at that time and the rules and regulations needed to comply with the provisions of the FCTC.

He also mentions Professor Diyanath Samarasinghe's exceptional contribution towards alcohol and tobacco control in the country.

The most formidable and biggest challenge with alcohol and tobacco control was the enactment of the relevant legislation, formally called the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol Act, in Parliament. The Sri Lanka Temperance Association made a significant contribution in this regard. The then Member of Parliament Ven. Omalpe Sobhita Thera introduced it as a Private Member's Bill first and was taken over by the Government and represented. There were two determinations by the Supreme Court on both these bills. Finally in July 2006, the National Tobacco and Alcohol Act was passed.

It is sad to read the brief note of this most knowledgeable person who did his utmost service to save people from these evil vices. "The reward I received from the government was that the Ministry of Health sidelined me in implementing the Bill on Tobacco and Alcohol. Venerable Harispattuwe Ariyavansalankara Thera, the then Chairman of Sri Lanka Amadyapa Samithi Sammenalaya sent a letter requesting that I be appointed to the Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol which was the unanimous decision of Sri Lanka Temperance Association, but the Ministry of Health did not have the courtesy of even acknowledging the letter". Disregarding a globally acclaimed veteran is an injustice not only for the people, but for the right to good health of the people.

He has also played a significant role in prevention of alcohol use. He was the Chairman of Alcohol and Drug Information Centre from 1998 to 2015 and was a Board Member (Global Alcohol Policy) of IOGT International from 1998 to 2006 and (Rehabilitation Core Group) from 2006-2014.

He was awarded the prestigious Ruben Wagnsson medal by IOGT International for his contribution in framing global alcohol policy.