

## **THE AMARAPURA NIKAYA (SECT) OF CEYLON**

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As a result of the vandalistic actions against Buddhism of King Rajasinghe I who reigned in Ceylon in the 16th century no trace was left at all even of one monk who had received the Higher Ordination. The religion had reached its lowest depths, and was almost disappearing when during the reigns of King Vimaladharmasuriya I and King Vimaladharmasuriya II, monks who had received the Higher Ordination were brought to Ceylon from the Rakkangha district in Burma. Although by this act both the Higher Ordination and the Sasana were restored, on both occasions signs of progress were not evident and the Sasana began to decline.

During the 18th century King Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe sent a mission to Siam. Having got down a retinue of monks including Upali Thera, he re-established the Higher Ordination and the Sasana both. The Siamese Sect (Nikaya) came to be known by this name because of the fact that the Higher Ordination had been brought from Siam. This Sect is the premier sect of the several sects in Ceylon.

The second sect that came into existence in Ceylon was the Amarapura Sect. In referring to this sect as the second sect, it must be emphasised that the term second denotes only a point of time and does not imply any inferiority in ecclesiastical dignity. The question may be raised as to the necessity of establishing a second sect in Ceylon at a time when the Siamese Sect was fast spreading its influence over the length and breadth of Ceylon, with the zealous and enthusiastic support of a Buddhist king.

The answer to the above question lies in the fact that the granting of the Higher Ordination was denied to some communities and was the privilege of only the members of that community which brought the Higher Ordination from Siam. This discrimination however did not exist at the very early stages when this sect came into being in Ceylon. This was a period when some of the leading monks with the consent and support of the King contrived to implement with almost legal fervour this discriminatory selection for High Ordination. Thus the privilege of entering the Order and receiving Higher Ordination was denied to people of other communities. The inducement therefore to go abroad and receive Higher Ordination was not at all strange. They too needed the solace of Buddhism. They were left with one of two alternatives; either they had to discard Buddhism and embrace some other faith or they had to go abroad and enter the Order if they were to remain Buddhists. They chose the second alternative. This therefore is the principal cause of the birth of another Nikaya

in Ceylon other than the Siam Nikaya. But for this second sect Ceylon would be having even today only the Siamese Sect.

### **The Beginning of the Amarapura Sect:**

Rev. Ambagahapitiye Gnanawimala Tissa who resided at Ambarukkarama in the village of Welitara had entered the Order according to the early traditions of the Siamese Sect. This Venerable Thera, disgusted with this discriminatory principle of the Siamese Sect decided to seek the Higher Ordination in a foreign clime. His inquiries brought Burma to his view and to that country he decided to go.

There lived at 'Sahabandu Walauwa' (mansion) in Welitara at this time, a Mudliyar (chieftain) by the name of Haljothi Dines de Souza Wijayatilleka Siriwardena. With the generous munificence of this Mudliyar Rev. Gnanawimala Tissa in the company of five monks and three ministering dayakas left Ceylon in 1799 bound for the district of Amarapura in Burma. They received a warm welcome at the hands of King Maha Dhamma Rajadhi Raja; Rev. Gnanabhiwansa, Chief Sangha-raja and other leading elders in Burma. It was on this occasion in 1801 that on the orders of the King, the Ecclesiastical Council presided over by the Chief Sangha-raja bestowed the Higher Ordination upon Rev. Gnanawimala Tissa and the other monks who accompanied him.

This company of monks from Ceylon continued to live in Burma for two years enjoying the bountiful hospitality of the King. In the year 1803 they returned to Ceylon fully satisfied with the achievement of their aims and the fulfilment of their hopes. They were accompanied by a party of Burmese monks led by Aggasara Thera.

Rev. Gnanawimala Tissa and the other monks of his party who were received with tremendous exaltation and honour by the dayakas (helpers) were taken back in procession to Ambarukkarmaya, Welitara. In the course of time they decided to hold a ceremony for the purpose of bestowing the Higher Ordination brought from the district of Amarapura on the monks of Lanka. Accordingly there was constructed a 'Seeme-Mandiraya' (pavilion) on the Madu river in Balapitiya. At this spot a large number of monks received their Higher Ordination for the first time in 1805 at the hands of the Very Rev. Aggasara and the other monks who accompanied him from Amarapura.

Thus the passage of years showed an increase in the number of those who entered the Order and received the Higher Ordination until there came into being in Ceylon a new sect of Buddhist monks. This new sect was named the

Amarapura Sect because the Higher Ordination had been brought from the kingdom of Amarapura in Burma.

Not long after the establishment of this sect, several other groups of monks went across independently to Burma and brought the gift of Higher Ordination. Owing to these missions the Amarapura Sect had several branches and began to extend its size. Although at the beginning the term Amarapura Sect was used in reference to the Sect set up by Rev. Ambagahapitiye Gnanawimala Tissa as an individual, this same sect later came to be known popularly as the Amarapura Mulawansika Sect because of the subsequent growth of its branches started by other monks.

### **The Second Stage:**

Rev. Kapugama Dhammakandha, Chief Incumbent of the Dadalle Walukaramaya in the Galle district was one who had received his Higher Ordination from the Siamese Sect. He, however, received his Higher Ordination for a second time having gone to the district of Amarapura in Burma. This reverend monk created a subsection out of the existing Amarapura Sect.

This Rev. monk too had followed the footsteps of Reverend Ambagahapitiya Gnanawimala Tissa. In the case of Rev. Kapugama Dhammakkhanda, his benefactor was Dadella Adrien de Abrew Wijesundera Wickramaratna Rajapaksa Maha Mudaliyar. Rev. Dhammakkhanda set out on his journey in 1808, accompanied by four theas, two novices and three dayakas.

Rev. Kapugama Dhammakkhanda too had received the same hospitality and affectionate treatment at the hands of the King of Burma. In the end he returned to Ceylon after the Ecclesiastical Council had bestowed on him and the two novices the gift of Higher Ordination. This therefore is the second branch section of the Amarapura Sect and is popularly referred to as the Sri Sad Dhammawanaika of the Amarapura Sect.

### **The Third Stage:**

Rev. Kathaluwe Gunaratana Tissa who was aware of the fact that two monks who had received the Higher Ordination from the Siamese Sect had received Higher Ordination again in Burma, had a strange desire to go to Burma. Accordingly, in the company of some laymen and monks, in the year 1809, he left for Burma from the Dodanduwa harbour to obtain Higher Ordination for the second time. He was received by a vassal of the King of Lower Burma and conducted to the city of Hansawathie in the district of Ramanna. The Ceylonese

monks made known to the King the purpose of their visit and implored him to help them in obtaining the Higher Ordination at Amarapura.

At this time there was an epidemic raging in Amarapura and these monks were warned not to come to Amarapura. Under these circumstances the King of Amarapura issued the Imperial Order to the King of the province of Ramanna to the effect that the monks from Ceylon should be given their Higher Ordination in Hansawathie itself.

To expedite matters a Minister by the name of U. Me Ung was also sent. Thus the Ecclesiastical Council of Lower Burma presided over by Rev. Rajaguru Medhanada Dhaja, Chief High Priest, conferred Higher Ordination on the monk of Ceylon in the pavilion known as the 'Kallyani Seema' of Hansawathie.

Rev. Kathaluwe Gunaratana Tissa after a short stay in Burma returned to Ceylon in 1810. He performed great and distinguished service by bestowing the Higher Ordination on a very large number of monks and passed away in 1832 at the Pulinatalaramaya in Kalutara.

The Sect begun by this celebrated monk is today divided into two. One section calls itself Amarapura. The other calls itself as Kalyaniwansa sect. It is my personal opinion that it is helpful and appropriate to give the name Amarapura Kalyaniwansa sect to that sect coming down from its author, the Rev. Kathaluwe Gunaratana purely for the convenience of distinguishing it from the other.

#### **The Fourth Stage: The Amarapura Sect of the Hill Country:**

The founder of the above Sect was the Rev. Bogahapitiye Dhammajothi. He had got the Higher Ordination at Amarapura in Burma at the hands of the Ecclesiastical Council presided over by the Rev. Sangharaja Gnanabhiwansa Dhamma Senapathi. Rev. Dhammajothi, after a period of five years in Burma returned to Ceylon in 1811 and performed great religious service to the people, especially to the people in Kandy and to those Buddhists of Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces. Many were the ramifications of this sect in later years.

#### **The Fifth Stage: Amarapura Sri Dhammarakshitawansa Nikaya**

The founder of this sect was the Rev. Aththudawe Dhammarakshita. This illustrious monk too encouraged and induced by the founders of the earlier sects, journeyed to Burma accompanied by a party of others and obtained the Higher Ordination at the hands of the Ecclesiastical Council presided over by

the Rev. Gnanabhiwansa Dhammasenapathi Sangharaja. He too returned to Ceylon in 1813 and bestowed on his pupils the gift of the Higher Ordination and thereby performed commendable service towards the development of the Sasana. This Sect is called the Amarapura Sri Dhammarakshita Sect.

### **Amarapura Chulaganti Nikaya:**

This sect unlike the earlier ones was not started by a monk who had gone to Burma for his Higher Ordination. It is a branch of the Amarapura Mulawansika Sect of which mention was made at the beginning of this article. The author and founder of this Sect was Rev. Welitara Gnanatilaka. This Ven. monk for some reason or other broke off from his own sect in 1886 and created a new one by the name of Chulaganti.

### **Amarapura Sri Sadhammayuttika Sect**

The above sect too, was not one begun by a monk who had been to Burma and had received his Higher Ordination there. It is a branch that had severed its connections with the Amarapura Kalyanawana Sect founded by the Rev. Kataluwe Gunaratana Tissa Thera. The Rev. Matara Dhamma was its founder. He performed his religious activities independent of the sect founded by the Rev. Kathaluwe Gunaratana Tissa owing to differences of opinion. Further ramifications of this branch again arose. Among these sub-branches are:

(a) Ariyawansa Saddhamma Yuttika Sect.

(b) Sri Kalyanawansa Sadhamma Yuttikka Sect.

and

(c) a few others.

### **Amarapura Vajirawansa Sect:**

This again was not unlike some of the earlier ones, a sect established by monks who had been to Burma in quest of Higher Ordination. It was the creation of a party of monks of Saddhamma Yuttika Sect headed by the Maha Theras of Vajirarama who came to Ceylon from Burma. The Gangaramaya Temple in Peliyagoda was its first home.

### **The Amarapura Swegin Sect:**

This Sect too was not founded by a person who had gone to Burma to receive the Higher Ordination there, but by one Rev. Arangala Siridhamma who

returned to Ceylon after a long sojourn in Burma acquiring consummate knowledge and penetrating understanding of the Abhidhamma.

Among its illustrious forbears were the Rev. U. Cakkinda and U. Vinayalankara, while the Maha Vissuddharamaya (temple) at Dematagoda in Colombo and the Makutaramaya (temple) became its most important centres. There are in Ceylon only a very few small number of temples of this Sect which follow in the footsteps of Burmese customs and religious practices with almost meticulous devotion.

Thus it will be seen clearly that at the beginning there were five principal Sects which had gone to Burma and had come back after receiving the gift of the Higher Ordination and further that there were three secessions from them subsequently. They say that the position as it is today records the existence of eighteen secessions of the Amarapura Sect.

As the origin of all these sects, whatever the causes may have been, goes back to Burma, we may reasonably refer to all of them generally as the Burmese Sect.

It would be an interesting study to probe into the causes that have been responsible for the growth and spread of the various Schisms and secessions among the monks of the original Burmese Sect.

Today one is in a position to list seven principal causes, to wit:

1. Caste distinctions
2. Tribal distinctions
3. Territorial distinctions
4. Different opinions, views and interpretations of the Vinaya rules
5. Personal ambition for factional leadership
6. The urge to keep away from those that are disagreeable to oneself.
7. The tendency and desire to form a separate Sect if and when one's ambition for office or leadership is thwarted.