

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

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The Siamese monks headed by Ven. Upali who came to Ceylon during the reign of Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe in the eighteenth century ordained the Ceylonese novices including the Ven. Velivita Saranankara and established this Nikaya. Hence this is called the Siyam Nikaya in Ceylon. We must not forget the fact that the Siamese monks were the descendants of those who received the Higher Ordination from the Ceylonese monks during the reign of Parakramabahu VI of Kotte.

It is well known that during the Kotte kingdom Buddhism flourished under the patronage of Sri Rahula, Vanaratana and Vidagama Theras but it deteriorated and disappeared under the pressure of the Portuguese and Rajasinghe I. The Buddhist monks who were driven out from Kotte and Sitawaka took refuge in Kandy. When Rajasinghe I invaded Kandy they found no refuge and consequently some of them disrobed themselves while others became semi-monks called Ganinnanses. When Wimaladharmasurya was crowned as the king of Kandy he left no stone unturned to bring a revival of Buddhism in the Kandyan kingdom. He brought the Upasampada monks from Arakan (upper Burma) and established the Upasampada. As it did not last long, Wimaladharmasurya II brought back the monks from the same country and established the Upasampada again. This time owing to the malpractices of the monks, the Upasampada established by him disappeared very soon. It has been said that the Sinhalese king who succeeded him made no attempt to revive the Upasampada.

## **Velivita Saranankara**

Velivita Saranankara who was mainly responsible for the establishment of the Siyam Nikaya in Ceylon was ordained by a Ganinnanse called Suriyagoda Rajasundara who was beheaded by Vira Parakarama Narendrasinghe, the king of Kandy and consequently Saranankara was driven out from his temple. Although he became a helpless person he did not give up his courage. It is said that he travelled from village to village and collected a large number of virtuous persons called Silvats. This group of virtuous ones was known as the Silvat Samagama of Velivita Saranankara. At this time, the descendants of the two fraternities, Gramavasa and Aranyavasa lived in the two centres Asgiriya and Poyamalu vihara in Kandy. They were corrupt and evil so that they were able to induce Vira Parakarama Narendrasinghe to banish Velivita Saranankara and his followers from Kandy.

In spite of all these troubles, Velivita Saranankara carried out his campaign quite efficiently so that he was able to win the king's favour. It is true that Vira Parakrama Narendrasinghe helped him in his religious and literary campaign. Although Saranankara made a number of requests to the king to bring the Upasampada monks either from Siam or Burma the latter turned a deaf ear. Vira Parakrama was succeeded by his Tamil cousin, Vijaya Rajasinghe who was a pupil of Velivita Saranankara. This king is said to have sent two delegations to Siam to bring back Upasampada but the delegates perished on the way except two or three persons including Vilbagedara Rala. In the meantime, Vijaya Rajasinghe died and his cousin succeeded him by the name of Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe. During his reign, Vilbagedara Rala returned from Siam and revealed what occurred to them.

### **The Third Delegation**

Velivita Saranankara was able to compel the new king to send the Third Delegation headed by Vilbagedara Rala to Siam for the same purpose. The Dutch government in Colombo supplied a ship called Vel Trek in which the delegation arrived in Siam. The Siamese king, Dharmika welcomed the Ceylonese delegation and gave the Upasampada monks including Ven. Upali and some Siamese novices. There were altogether eighteen Upasampada monks and seven novices who accompanied the elders to attend upon them. In addition, five Siamese ministers were sent with the delegation.

### **The Arrival of Siamese Monks**

At first, this mission had to travel on board the Dutch vessel "Seceli" but it was given up and the ship named "Oscarbel" was obtained from the Dutch government at Batavia. The ship arrived at Trincomalee with the mission. The Maha Adikaram of Ehelepola welcomed and brought them to Kandy. The Siamese monks were housed at Malwatta and their ministers in the rest house at Bogambara.

### **Upasampada Ceremony**

The Siamese monks are said to have ordained a Siamese novice at first in the hall of confession built at the Poya Malu Vihara for this purpose. Then the chief Ganinnase of Poya Malu Vihara was ordained. Next came the chief Ganinnase of Asgiriya Vihara. Velivita Saranankara was ordained as the third monk. The other monks of the two viharas and the members of the Silvat Samagama were ordained later. The Siamese monks established a number of simas or halls of confession throughout the Kandyan kingdom and conferred

first and higher ordinations to Ceylonese. As the Siamese monks established the Upasampada, the group of Ceylonese who received it has been known as the Siyam Nikaya in Ceylon.

### **The Sangharaja**

Saranankara Thera who thus fulfilled his ambition by receiving the Higher Ordination at the age of fifty five began to spend the rainy season in the Malwatta Vihara with the Siamese monks. Formerly, Malwatta belonged to the king but after the establishment of the Upasampada it was dedicated to the Sangha and known to be the Malwatta Vihara which has become the chief centre of the Siamese Sect today. As soon as Saranankara was ordained, King Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe conferred on him the post of Sangharaja by presenting him a fan, the emblem of this high post which had been vacant since the days of Vidagama Maitreya of Kotte. Along with this, he was given a royal mandate to rule over all the bhikkhus in the island. Subsequently, Kobbakaduve and Nivinne Theras were appointed as the Maha Nikayas of Poya Malu and Asgiri Vihara respectively. Soon after the construction of the Malwatta temple Poya Malu Vihara was undermined.

### **The Disunity of the Two Viharas**

This shows that Malwatta and Asgiriya are the two of the oldest viharas of the Siamese Sect, Asgiriya being the oldest one. It is supposed to be the centre of the Venavasins. This seems to be true when we consider its original place. The original place of the bhikkhus who came from Accaragiri at Dambadeniya, and settled down in Kandy was known as Asgiriya. Though Malwatta is regarded as a separate institution today it is a branch of the Asgiriya temple. The monks who vacated Asgiriya dwelt at the temple of Hantane. Some monks who were the descendants of them, lived later on at the Poya Malu temple built by King Vikramabahu of Kandy. It was after the time of the Sangharaja that Malwatta became a temple. Until that period it was regarded as a dwelling place for the foreign monks who visited the island from time to time.

Prior to ordination, the Ganinnanses of both Chapters lived in harmony, but with the ordination an unhealthy rivalry began. A mention was made earlier how the two Maha Nikayas were appointed for the two viharas. This is a fatal mistake committed by the king as the monks of the two viharas were at daggers drawn. The main cause of this was the tendency of the Malwatta to belittle Asgiriya. In retaliation the Asgiriya monks said that theirs was the original place and tried to glorify it. The Sangharaja collected the monks who were formed into two chapters, in Malwatta and they held rituals and ceremonials of monkhood jointly but this practice died out soon. The rivalry had actually

created great distress in the mind of Sangharaja. The Sangharaja had the power to amalgamate these two fraternities into one and keep it under the administration of one Maha Nayaka Thera. Had he done so, such a traditional dispute would not have arisen.

Although the Sangharaja made his best to revive Buddhism in this country, another difference emerged to the surface. That was the difference between the upcountry and low country. This originated in the greed for possession among the chief monks of Malwatta itself, regarding the incumbency of the places such as Sri Pada (Adam's Peak). Owing to this difference, the upcountry monks of the Malwatta Chapter treated their low country brethren rather contemptuously. This explains why those monks of Malwatta in the low country were compelled to form into a separate ecclesiastical organisation called Sri Kalyani Samagri Dhamma Maha Sangha Sabha. This is no doubt a branch of the Siamese Sect.

Owing to the pressure of the Hindu kings in Kandy and of the monks of high caste, the Upasampada was not conferred to the members of the other castes. Kirthi Sri Rajasinghe had a number of the Sangha assembled inclusive of the Sangharaja and ordered that no person outside the govigama caste was to be admitted to the order. We must not forget the fact that the Siamese monks conferred ordination upon a host of monks irrespective of their castes. It is said that Sitanamaluwe Thera, the right hand disciple of the Sangharaja was one such instance. Even the original incumbent of the Mulkirigala line was supposed to have received the higher ordination when caste was ignored. We can come to the conclusion that owing to the weakness of Sangharaja it became confined to one caste alone. As a result of this, the members of the other castes who were anxious to be ordained later on sent delegations to Burma. The monks who came from Burma conferred Upasampada on them and established the two Nikayas known as Amarapura and Ramanna.