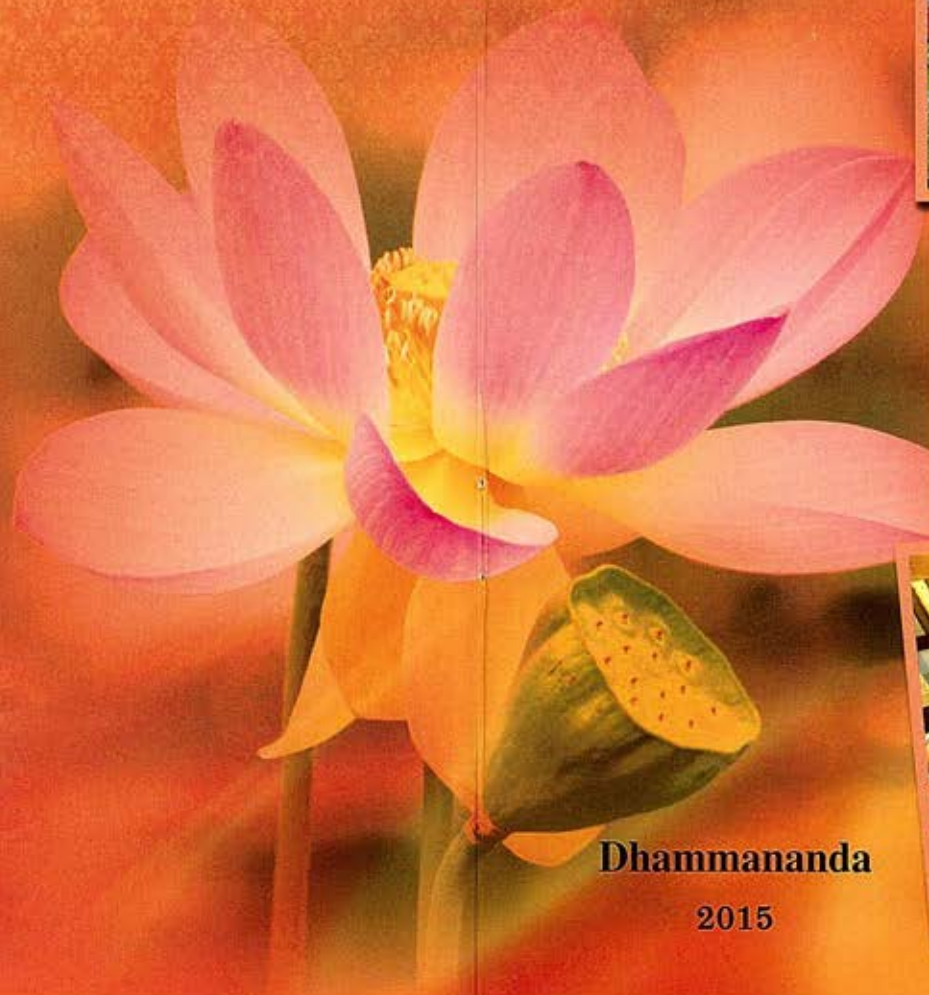


Theravada Bhikkhuni Lineage



Dhammananda

2015

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From the Author

With permission from the bhikkhu sangha I have been giving samaneri ordination (bappajja) twice a year since 2009.

The first one was on April 6, 2009. At that time there were 36 candidates, hence this group is known as the three dozens. A publisher came to visit during the ordination time and was kind enough to bring out a book reporting on the feedback of all the samaneris. It was a request from this group that we should consider giving temporary ordination regularly. Even though the ordination may only last 9 days, at least these women will be exposed to the proper teaching of the Buddha.

Towards the end of the year, H.M. the King was not well and he was hospitalized. We thought that the best women can do for him is to receive (temporary) ordination to offer merit to him. Thus, we came together to have another ordination on Dec.5, 2009.

Since then, it has become a tradition to offer the 9-day samaneri ordination twice a year, one in summer and one in winter (our winter means a milder weather).

I am happy to limit the number of registration at around 30 as this allows me to get to know my students better. One time we accepted 50 candidates and learned from that experience that it did not work out so well. So each time we try to limit the candidates to around 30.

bhikkhunis in performing proper sanghakamma, in receiving the Kathina robe at the end of the vassa, etc. During the 2015 vassa, Songdhammakalyani Monastery offered to give monastic training to Indian and Vietnamese bhikkhunis. The existence of the Theravada bhikkhunis is still fragile and they have to lend a helping hand to help each other at this transition period. Vice versa, the Thai bhikkhunis also receive assistance from their sisters in other countries.

Songdhammakalyani Bhikkhuni Arama has completed constructing a Vihara for bhikkhunis. this will not be only for Thai bhikkhunis but also accessible to all Theravada bhikkhunis in the region. In 2013, they successfully hosted trainings for international bhikkhunis to be trained as kam-mavacacarinis, preparing the most senior bhikkhunis in Asia to give full ordination in the future.

Being the most senior in Thailand I take the responsibility to give lower ordination in Payao (in the North) and Songkhla (in the South). I have, so far, given ordination to over 500 women. Also, some of them return to be re-ordained again and again as time allows. One woman came for temporary ordination 6 times, each time, she is more strengthened in her understanding of dhamma and the practice of vinaya.

During the 9 days, I focused on giving lecture 4 hours a day to make sure that once returned to lay life, they can answer questions properly, particularly on the ordination lineage. Yet, many of them called back to say that they could not remember the information exactly. Hence I brought out this booklet to help them understand their own ordination lineage.

Nov.29, 2014 I was appointed as *pavattini*, to teach and train candidates to be fully ordained, by the most Venerable Maha Nayaka Mahindavamsa of Dipaduttamaramaya in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

I trust this booklet will provide you with a proper understanding of the issue.

Eventually, I hope, you will understand the importance to support women to find their place in Buddhism.

Dhammananda bhikkhuni
July 11, 2015

The fourfold Buddhists

Soon after the enlightenment of the Buddha, the Mara came to invite the Buddha to pass away. The Buddha refused saying that he will not consider passing away as long as his Fourfold Buddhists are not well established yet.

The Fourfold Buddhists are bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, upasakas (laymen) and upasikas (laywomen). To establish further means that they have studied his teaching, that they have put his teaching into practice and last but not least, that they are able to defend the teaching, should there be any outsider who might attack it.

We will recall that at that time there were no bhikkhunis yet, meaning: this incident implies that the Buddha was already aware that his teaching will be transmitted into the future with the help of these fourfold Buddhists. It is not true to insist that the Buddha never had the intention to give ordination to women.

Also in the *Pancakanipata*, when the Ven. Kimpila asked about the possible decline of Buddhism in the future, the Buddha predicted that it may happen if the fourfold Buddhists do not respect the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, the Sikkha (study) and if they do not respect each other.

Ven. Dhammananda completed 12 vassas in 2014. On Nov.29, 2014, Ven. Maha Nayaka Mahindavamsa (Abbot of Dipaduttamarama in Colombo) appointed her as the first pavattini in Thailand in front of 20 monks and 12 bhikkhunis at Thipayasathandhamma Bhikkhuni Arma, Koh Yoh, Sonkhla, Thailand. She also formed the Network of Thai Bhikkhuni Sanghas on July 9, 2013. The purpose of the network is purely to assist the Thai bhikkhunis to follow dhamma and vinaya properly. Also, she continues with important work to provide training for international bhikkhunis.

In the whole country, there are now over 100 bhikkhunis spreading in 20 provinces. The more established centers apart from Songdhammakalyani monastery in Nakhonpathom (Central Thailand), are Nirodharama in Chiangmai (Northern Thailand) and Dipayasathandhamma bhikkhuni Arama in Songkhla (Southern Thailand).

Thai bhikkhunis still do not have an official status, even though they are protected by the Constitution. Some leading senators being aware of the problem are taking an interest in bringing about the change to accommodate bhikkhunis in the present legal structure.

Thai bhikkhunis are not concerned only about their own well-being but they extend their hands also to help bhikkhunis in other countries. In Nov.2013, they went to give training for Indian bhikkhunis in Nagpur. For the last 3 years, they have been travelling to Vietnam to assist the Vietnamese

knowledge to prepare herself well, notably on transparency of the ordination lineage and proper training with the clear intention to start the bhikkhuni sangha

She knew that the Mahayana lineage would have more difficulty to survive due to lack of proper training. Her mother could not train and therefore could not start a sangha in Thailand.

Also, Thailand, being a Theravada country, would have more difficulty to accept Mahayana bhikkhunis.

By then, Sri Lanka had introduced bhikkhuni ordination, so she chose to be ordained in Theravada tradition, trained from Sri Lanka which is very close to Theravada as practiced in Thailand. She followed the vinaya requirement closely. After her full ordination, she was supposed to take nissaya (stay with) under her pavattini, but her mother was 93 years old, so she could not stay abroad. To take care of her mother, and also to respect vinaya, she, instead invited her pavattini, Ven. Saddha Sumana to come and spend the vassa with her in Thailand.

During the vassa she was trained along with 5 other newly ordained bhikkhunis from Indonesia, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. That was how they had monastic training together to recite the Patimokkha, to receive the kathina (robe offering ceremony) robe at the end of the vassa, to attend pavarana in both sanghas, etc.

Status of Indian women before Buddhism

In order for us to fully understand and appreciate the status of women under Buddhism, one needs to understand the social context in India prior to the emergence of Buddhism. During the Vedic period, it is true that there were some women who were outstanding in their spiritual knowledge, but such cases were very rare. In general, the common status of women as prescribed in the **Manudharmasastra** provides a more appropriate view of women. Women were under the care and protection of their parents when young, under the care of their husbands when they were married, and lastly under the care of their sons when old.

Families with daughters had to take responsibility to marry the daughters, as society looked down upon unmarried women. Thus, if women remained unmarried, they became a direct burden to their families and were seen negatively. Lives of women then, depended on this important transference of responsibility (or marry-in) to other families.

Married women might perform the offering to the gods as the other half of their husbands, but they could not do it on their own, they needed to have the husbands leading the offering. Then, married women were expected to produce sons. This was tied to the Hindu belief that the sons will perform the last rite to send the souls of their parents to heaven. A couple

without sons will end up in hell called "Putta". This religious belief became popular social practice, effectively limiting women to household chores. Spiritual freedom came through one and only means: *Bhakti* (devotion) to their husbands. The husband is called *Sami*, implying ownership over the women.

The *Caturasrama* prescribes 4 different stages of life:

Brahmacaraya is the first stage of life when a person is a student seeking knowledge. Boys are sent to be trained under *Rsi*, the sages of old. Only after having completed the knowledge of the Vedas, the boys return to household life.

The second stage is called *Grhastha*, meaning house holder. This is the time when a person is engaging in business, getting married, raising the family.

The third stage is called *Vanaprastha*, this happens when a person is said to notice the first gray hair. Then he considers leaving his worldly life and now going to live his life in the forest. *Vana* means forest. For this stage, a man may also take his wife along.

The last stage is *Sanyasi*. Even the wife is now sent back to stay at home with her son. The man proceeds on to search for the absolute truth or freedom which is called *Moksa*.

Briefly we can see that within this setting, women's ordination was not part of the culture of Indian society. With this social framework, we can understand where the Buddha was coming from when he refused women to join the Order in the beginning.

Thailand became a constitutional democracy in 1932. Logically it would follow that any order prior to that has to follow the spirit of this constitution. However, as late as 2006, after my ordination, the Council of Elders still quoted this royal order for not recognizing bhikkhunis in Thailand.

In Thailand in the 1960s, there were some 200 Chinese bhikkhunis but they concentrated only in the Chinese shrines and Mahayana Chinese temples. Because they wore grey and black, spoke Chinese, and did not perform monastic rituals outside of this community, they were not felt by the larger Thai society.

In 1971 Mrs. Voramai Kabilsingh went to receive full ordination in Taiwan, she became the first Thai bhikkhuni in Mahayana tradition as it was the only tradition that offered bhikkhuni ordination at that time. However, she could not start a sangha because of the Chinese language and lack of training in Mahayana tradition. Still, she prepared the ground for the future bhikkhuni sangha by purchasing the land and built the uposatha Hall to start a temple.

The more longlasting attempt came when Associate Professor Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, her daughter, joined monastic life. She went to receive her lower ordination in 2001 from Sri Lanka and returned again to receive full ordination in 2003, thus becoming the first Theravada bhikkhuni in Thailand. As an academic, she was fully aware of the shortcomings of the previous attempts of bhikkhuni ordination. She used that

The bhikkhuni sangha in Thailand

Bhikkhunis never arrived in Thailand in ancient times. The earliest reference to bhikkhunis came only in 1928, when the two sisters Sara and Chongdi followed their father's instruction, went ahead and received ordination. Narin Bhasit, the father, was an outstanding social and political critique and he was supportive to fulfill the Buddha's establishment of the fourfold Buddhists, i.e. bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, laymen and laywomen.

However, the details bhikkhuni ordination were not disclosed, this was purely to protect the monk who gave them ordination. So we do not know whether it was done correctly, and whether the ordination was given by the bhikkhu sangha. The latter is highly unlikely.

Narin himself lashed a strong criticism against the Thai bhikkhus and particularly of the Sangharaja (supreme Patriarch). As a result, bhikkhuni Sara was imprisoned for a few days, and when she was set free, she was not allowed to wear the saffron robe. The attempt to establish the bhikkhuni sangha came to an abrupt end when Sara was kidnapped on her morning alms round. On June 18, 1928 the Sangharaja sent out an order forbidding Thai monks from giving ordination to women at all levels (bhikkhuni, sikkhamana, samaneri).

The First Bhikkhuni

When King Suddhodana, the Buddha's father, became very ill, it was Queen Maha Pajapati who took care of him. The Buddha returned to Kapilvastu to take care of his ailing father, he gave dhamma as the best medicine, and the King was enlightened. The Queen also entered *Sotapanna*, the first stage of the Ariya path.

After the King had passed away, the Buddha supervised the funeral befitting his royal status. After this, the Queen approached him to join his Order and to be ordained. However, the Buddha refused 3 times without giving any explanation, or at least it was not recorded. (**Gotami Vatthu, Vinaya pitaka**). This led to many interpretations: Some would say that the Buddha never wanted women to join the Order. However, as seen previously with the Fourfold Buddhists this view contradicts the intention of the Buddha as expressed immediately after his enlightenment.

We can understand from the historical context that in India, society was not familiar with an ordained lifestyle for women.

Also we should not forget that the Queen had achieved *Sotapanna*. Her idea to be ordained was clearly not because of her grief of having just lost her husband or because of her now clinging to her son, the Buddha. Instead, she expressed

her commitment by shaving her head, and along with a large retinue of women from the royal palace took to this homeless life. They followed him by foot from Kapilvastu to Vaihali.

At that time, the Buddha was staying at Kutagara in the Mahavana forest. Having arrived at the place, his mother and her followers waited at the outer gate. Having taken a long journey by foot for many days, they were in a sorrowful state, with torn robes and bleeding feet. Some of them were weeping in despair. It was Ananda who came out to meet them. After having learnt of their plight, he went to the Buddha, asking the Buddha again on the behalf of the women to reconsider his stance.

Again, the Buddha refused. So Ananda went around and posed the question differently by asking for the reason behind the refusal: whether it was because women cannot be enlightened.

The answer from the Buddha was a positive one: he confirmed that women can indeed be enlightened in all spiritual stages, and that they can see with their own eyes. After having declared this, he then gave the 8 important rules (Garudhammas) for Ananda to remember.

Then, Ananda, having remembered the 8 Garudhammas, went out to ask whether the Queen Maha Pajapati could

Theravada bhikkhunis in Indonesia

Indonesia has a large population of 300 millions, but out of this number only one per cent are Buddhists, with most of them following Mahayana. There are only 50 Theravada bhikkhus, mostly ordained from Thailand.

The first batch of Indonesian bhikkhunis consisted of 4 nuns to be ordained in Taiwan in A.D.2000, through a chapter of Theravada bhikkhus to establish them in Theravada. However, after returning to Indonesia they faced much criticism. Two of them returned to lay life. So in the whole country, there were only 2 Theravada bhikkhunis, Ven. Santini and Ven. Silavati. However, Venerable Santini has been receiving full support from her lay community. She conducts regular monthly meditation courses, and also gives temporary samaneri ordination to university students as a way to enlarge the Buddhist circle. Ven. Santini works closely with her monastic sisters both from Vietnam and Thailand. In June 2015, for the first time, an upasampada was organized and 9 candidates became fully ordained as bhikkhunis. Ven. Santini could now form her sangha with 5 bhikkhuni members.

In Sangha Agung Indonesia, there are also 2 young bhikkhunis ordained in Theravada Buddhism from Sri Lanka. They are now studying towards their Ph.D.'s. The future of Theravada bhikkhunis is quite promising in Indonesia in spite of the fact that it is a Muslim country.

The bhikkhuni sangha in Vietnam

Vietnam is a country that can boast of the highest bhikkhuni population in the world: There are over 22,000 bhikkhunis and 12,000 bhikkhus. But they are Mahayana.

In Theravada, the bhikkhuni sangha in Vietnam only started in 2002, when Ven. Lieu Phap and three other nuns received full ordination to become bhikkhunis at Topodanramaya, Mt. Lavinia, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Out of this number, only Ven. Lieu Phap and Ven. Susanta stayed in Vietnam. Ven. Lieu Phap continued her study in India and got a Ph.D. in Pali from Delhi University in 2012.

In 2012, she successfully organized an international ordination for bhikkhunis in Vaishali, where 6 more Vietnamese nuns became bhikkhunis. There are now at least 3 bhikkhuni Aramas in Vietnam.

Vietnamese bhikkhunis work hand in hand with both bhikkhunis in Indonesia and Thailand.

They have also formed a network of Asian Theravada bhikkhunis where they can lend support to each other.

accept them. Maha Pajapati accepted the 8 Garudhammas wholeheartedly, just as a young woman coming out of a bath would graciously accept fresh flowers to decorate her hair.

And this became her ordination.

She was the first bhikkhuni, and the only bhikkhuni who received ordination through accepting the 8 Garudhammas. The royal women, her followers, received ordination from the bhikkhu sangha.

Understanding the 8 Garudhammas

The 8 Garudhammas are a set of rules to be respected by bhikkhunis. Often they are seen or translated as heavy rules, but when we look closely, they are meant for the bhikkhunis to respect them. At least 4 of them occur again in the patimokkha with minor transgressions, so they should not be translated as heavy or important (please see Ven. Analayo's paper on "Legality of the ordination of bhikkhuni" in which he describes each rule clearly).

The 8 Garudhammas are as follows:

1. A bhikkhuni even with 100 years standing must pay respect to a monk ordained on just that day.
2. A bhikkhuni should not pass the vassa in an arama (residence) without bhikkhus.
3. Every half month, bhikkhunis must ask for an uposatha day, and receive ovada (instructions) from a senior and learned bhikkhu.
4. After the vassa, bhikkhunis must pavarana (invite) both sanghas to question her about any doubtful action.
5. Having transgressed serious apatti (transgression), she must keep manatta for half a month.
6. If a sikkhamana (advanced female novice) has successfully kept the 6 anudhammas for 2 years, her pavattini (senior bhikkuni teacher) must arrange for her upasampada (full ordination).

After having returned to Sri Lanka, two of the 20 newly ordained bhikkhunis, were appointed as pavattini by the bhikkhu sangha: Ven. Bhikkhuni Saddha Sumana and Ven. Sumitra. The lineage which has continued to Thailand mostly has these two bhikkhunis as their pavattinis.

In Sri Lanka, there are now not less than 800 bhikkhunis, they are well supported by their Maha Nayaka preceptor. The two pavattinis often travel to Thailand to give ordination. Even though they are not recognized by the Government, they perform *sanghakamma* according to dhamma vinaya. They can also officially use their titles as "bhikkhuni" in their travelling documents.

Apart from Dambulla, there are also other places where the senior Sri Lankan monks arrange for full ordination.

After this ordination, however, the senior Sri Lankan bhikkhus realized the difficulty that the newly ordained bhikkhunis will face when they get back to Sri Lanka. That is the vinaya concern on being *nanasamvasa* (of mixed ordination) because the Theravada still think that the Chinese belong to Mahayana which is different from Theravada. The Chinese bhikkhunis follow Dharmagupta vinaya and observe 348 precepts, whereas the Theravada bhikkhunis follow Theravada vinaya and observe 311 precepts.

The Maha Nayakas and Maha Theras convened and agreed to give the newly ordained bhikkhunis yet another ordination. This happened in Sarnath, where 10 Maha Theras who were purely Theravada gave the upasampada ordination to this first batch of 20 Sri Lankan bhikkhunis. This is allowed by the Buddha according to the Vinaya (in **Cullavagga, Vinaya Pitaka**): "I allow bhikkhus to give ordination to bhikkhunis."

Thus, this ordination is taken as establishment of the Theravada bhikkhuni lineage in the present time (Please read also Ven. Analayo's article on this ordination).

In Sri Lanka, the very first place to offer upasampada to bhikkhunis on a yearly basis is at Dambulla, by Maha Nayaka Sri Sumangalo of Syamvamsa.

7. A bhikkhuni must not scold a bhikkhu.
8. From today on, a bhikkhuni will not instruct a bhikkhu, but a bhikkhu can instruct a bhikkhuni.

After having received the 8 Garudhammas, Ananda went to report to the Buddha. In this context, apparently the Buddha said the following in five short paragraphs:

1. Having accepted the women to the Order, the Sasana (Buddhism) which would have lasted 1,000 years, will be lessened to 500 years.
2. Comparing to a household with too many women, the robbers could easily break in.
3. Just like a wheat field infested by worms, the product will be less.
4. Just like a sugar cane field infested by insects causing a certain disease in sugar cane, it will not last.
5. Wrapping up all the four paragraphs mentioned above, the Buddha compared himself to a man knowing that there will be a flood, thus building a dam to prevent it. The said dam to prevent the flood is the 8 Garudhammas set for the bhikkhunis to take for life.

Often we hear the objection to ordination of women that women will cause the downfall of Buddhism. This is clearly reading out of context without considering the last paragraph, where the Buddha set up prevention ahead of time.

Also, now it is B.E.2558, a clear proof that such a statement is not true.

Again, it was never mentioned anywhere in the entirety of the texts that women would cause the downfall of Buddhism. In fact, in the history of India and Sri Lanka, both sanghas, bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, came to an end otherwise: in the case of India, with the invasion of the Turk Muslims in the 12th C.A.D., and in the case of Sri Lanka, with the invasion of the South Indian Jola king in 1017 AD. .

In this section we have seen 2 kinds of ordination:

1. The ordination of the queen Maha Pajapati took place through accepting the 8 Garudhammas.
2. The ordination of the Sakiyanis, her followers, through the bhikkhu sangha. Buddha's permission of ordaining bhikkhunis through the bhikkhu sangha was never lifted, implying that it can still be used.

The discussion about supporting women to be ordained as bhikkhunis had been in the air for 2-3 decades in Sri Lanka. In 1988 there were 5 Sri Lankan dasasilmatas who travelled to Los Angeles to receive bhikkhuni ordination, but they did not and could not continue as bhikkhunis. The reason why they continued as dasasilmatas was the lack of social structure to support them, the lack of proper bhikkhuni training, the geographical distance between them and the language barrier as all the texts were in English.

The most successful ordination which was also accepted by academics happened in 1998. For this 1998 ordination, the senior Sri Lankan bhikkhus were involved from the beginning. They sent out application forms to all the nuns on the island, and made a serious screening. The selected 20 candidates from Sri Lanka all had long years standing, with good Dhamma knowledge.

At that historical ordination, some 147 women received full ordination as bhikkhunis. But in this book, tracing the Theravada bhikkhuni lineage from India through Sri Lanka to Thailand, I will choose to mention only the Sri Lankan lineage from which the lineage continues to Thailand and other Asian Countries.

Fo Guang Shan, the host, had both bhikkhunis and bhikkhus present at the ordination. This is to answer to the need of having both sanghas involved.

In 1017 A.D. Sri Lanka was attacked by a Jola king from South India, after which Sri Lanka was under Hindu rule for 50 years. It was during this time that both the bhikkhus and bhikkhunis disappeared from the island. As the invasion in Sri Lanka happened at the same time as the invasion of the Turk Muslims in India, the sanghas in both countries were uprooted, hence explained the disappearance of the sanghas and Buddhism.

After 50 years of Hindu rule, eventually a Buddhist king returned. On the whole island there was no bhikkhu left. It was not until 1753 A.D. that the ordination lineage from Thailand arrived in Sri Lanka and successfully took root. This new lineage is called *Syamvamsa* as it came from Syam (Thailand). The majority of bhikkhus in Sri Lanka belong to this sect. But in Thailand, there was no bhikkhuni. Hence Sri Lanka could not revive the bhikkhuni sangha from the Thai lineage.

The Revival of the bhikkhuni Sangha in contemporary Sri Lanka.

In modern times, the first attempt to revive the ordination of women in Sri Lanka happened in 1905 when Ms. Catherine de Alwis, a daughter of a Sri Lankan Christian missionary, went to Burma and returned as *dasasilmata* (a nun with 10 precepts). It was the first time that Sri Lanka witnessed women wearing yellow garment (not yet *civara*). She was supported by Lady Blake, the wife of the English Governor in charge of Sri Lanka at that time. Before the introduction of bhikkhunis, there were around 2,500 *dasasilmatas* in the whole island.

Sikkhamana: A necessary step before becoming a bhikkhuni

You are all familiar with the samaneri, a novice who wears the robe and takes ten precepts. A sikkhamana is also a samaneri, but we call her intensive samaneri. She is certain that she is on the path to become a bhikkhuni in the next two years. She has to make a formal request in front of the bhikkhuni sangha (minimum 5 bhikkhunis), and the act must be done within the *sima* boundary. The Pavattini must also inform the bhikkhu sangha of the joining of the new member.

A sikkhamana will observe the 6 *anudhammas* without break for the next 2 years. *Anudhammas* are the first six rules in the set of ten precepts that is normally observed by the samaneri.

A sikkhamana sits after the bhikkhunis and before the samaneris.

Having completed the two years, her pavattini will have to arrange for her *upasampada* (full ordination).

When the author went to pay respect to the acting Sangharaja in Thailand in 2014, he reminded her that a bhikkhuni must come from sikkhamana, and that a sikkhamana must observe the 6 anudhammas properly. The author affirmed that in her temple, the members are aware and have met these requirements.

In a context where a samaneri lives alone, it will be more difficult when she becomes bhikkhuni, as there are sanghakamma that need a community of bhikkhunis. Forming a bhikkhuni sangha in a new country, one should plan to have a group of women going forth together. Once ordained, they can depend on each other to observe vinaya properly.

The bhikkhuni sangha in Sri Lanka

As mentioned earlier, the Sri Lankan bhikkhuni sangha received their lineage from India as early as 3rd C.B.C., having Ven. Princess Sanghamitta as their pavattini (bhikkhuni teacher).

Ven. Princess worked side by side with her royal brother, Ven. Prince Mahinda to establish Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Both of them did not return to India until the end of their lives. Ven. Mahinda passed away when he was 80, Ven. Sanghamitta passed away the following year, also aged 80.

Interestingly it was Ven. Fa Hien, the Chinese pilgrim who came and saw the prosperity of both sanghas in Sri Lanka, he helped to revive the Chinese lineage based on this prosperity. When the Chinese women were looking for full ordination, he suggested to them that they could take the lineage from Sri Lanka. This was arranged and in 433 A.D., the Chinese invited Ven. Bhikkhuni Devasara and a group of bhikkhunis from Sri Lanka to travel to China and give ordination to Chinese women. The ordination was given to 300 bhikkhunis at the Southern Forest monastery in Nanking. It is this Chinese lineage that has remained intact up to present day.

The bhikkhuni sangha in Sri Lanka prospered for more than a thousand years. Ordination was popular among Princesses and also ladies of the court, daughters of ministers, etc.

However, the mission of Ven. Sanghamitta to give full ordination to Sri Lankan women is stated clearly in both chronicals. It is therefore very illogical to assume that since she would have come with a group of laypeople and not bhikkhunis.

Thai bhikkhus generally take for granted that the bhikkhuni lineage died out in 3rd C.B.C. In fact it is quite the contrary, in the 3rd C.B.C. bhikkhuni sangha started to spread to another country.

The ordination of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis prospered side by side in Sri Lanka. They came to an end with an attack from a Hindu Jola king coming from southern part of India.

The bhikkhu sangha was revived from Thailand before the collapse of Ayudhya, the capital of Thailand (1767 A.D.), and is called *Syamvamsa* which remains the strongest sangha until now. But Thailand did not have a bhikkhuni sangha, thus, the Sri Lankan could revive only the bhikkhu sangha from Thailand.

The recent revival in Sri Lanka came in 1998, and it has become the motherland for the growth of the bhikkhuni sangha to continue not only in Sri Lanka, but to spread to U.S.A., Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, etc.

Ordination through both sanghas

In the beginning, the Bhikkhu sangha alone gave ordination to bhikkhunis without involvement of the bhikkhunis. This went on for some time until there was a case of a woman who felt too shy to declare her purity by answering the *Antarayikadhamma*. *Antarayikadhamma* means dangerous factors which will hinder the life of an ordained person. For monks there are 13, and for nuns there are 24. Some of them were very personal, particularly asking her for statements about her private parts, whether she has both marks (of the genders), whether she menstruates all the time, etc. This woman in question was too shy to answer such questions in front of all the bhikkhu sangha. The ordination procedure was interrupted and they could not proceed.

When the Buddha came to know of the problem, with his compassion and understanding he suggested that this part of asking *Antarayikadhamma* should be done by the bhikkhunis.

Hence the introduction of the bhikkhuni sangha into the ordination procedure.

In the vinaya, it is clearly stated that the female candidates should be purified by both sanghas, and the *upasampada* (full ordination) is done in the bhikkhu sangha.

This has been misunderstood and repeatedly led to insistence on dual ordination. In fact, ordination is a *sanghakamma* completed in the bhikkhu sangha. But a candidate should be purified in the bhikkhuni sangha first, then a representative of the bhikkhuni sangha can make this known to the bhikkhu sangha so that the bhikkhu sangha can proceed to give the candidate *upasampada*.

Those who have not read the text carefully, often mistakenly insist on dual ordination, meaning ordination in both sanghas which is not what the Vinaya prescribed. Ordination is a *sanghakamma* to be done only once. When ordination is given again, the second ordination would be considered invalid.

In the case of countries where the bhikkhuni sangha is inexistent but the candidate can clarify herself of *Antarayi-kadhamma* in front of the bhikkhu sangha, then she should be given *upasampada*.

This is a crucial point to be considered by Theravada bhikkhus who support the ordination of women in Buddhism.

Another important point to remember is that the ordination of bhikkhunis was established by the Buddha. To assist in the revival of something that the Buddha established is a sincere way of paying respect to him.

Spreading to Sri Lanka

After the Buddha's Great Passing Away, there was no reference to the bhikkhuni sangha at all. But in the 3rd C.B.C., when King Asoka the Great sent out 9 groups of Buddhist missionaries, one of them went down south to Sri Lanka. This particular route was led by Ven. Prince Mahinda, King Asoka's son.

Ven. Mahinda was very successful with his mission. Only in his second Dhamma talk, Princess Anula, King Tissa's sister-in-law became Sotapanna. She requested ordination.

Ven. Mahinda arranged for King Asoka, his royal father to send his daughter, Ven. Princess Sanghamitta, to come to Sri Lanka with her bhikkhuni chapter. Both **Mahavamsa** and **Dipavamsa**, the oldest Sri Lankan Chronicles, mention this important incident. **Dipavamsa**, the older Chronicle even mentions all the names of the 10 bhikkhunis joining Ven. Sanghamitta going to Sri Lanka to give higher ordination to Princess Anula and her female followers.

Very interestingly, in the handbook (of Nak Dhamma) for Thai bhikkhus this incident is brushed aside by saying that Ven. Sanghamitta came with a group of people. It states that as we are not sure whether they were bhikkhunis or not, we can thus say that the bhikkhuni sangha died out from this time.

them with their training. This became a reality, the senior bhikkhunis from Thailand and Vietnam, together with the Ven. Dr. Satyapala, the most senior Indian bhikkhu, assisted them in their one month monastic training. On Nov. 24, they also arranged for the first Indian bhikkhuni ordination. At this time, Ven. Suniti also received full ordination and became bhikkhuni. The ven Dhammananda from Thailand supported them by providing them with 10 civaras (robes).

The existence of the Indian bhikkhuni sangha can be compared to a young bud which needs careful and meticulous training. The international body of Asian Theravada bhikkhunis works hand in hand to make sure that they proceed well in Dhamma and Vinaya.

The connecting person for this Indian group in Nagpur is Ven. Suniti. A senior bhikkhuni who has great potential to be a leader for the local bhikkhuni sangha is Ven. bhikkhuni Rupananda. She was in the first batch of Indian bhikkhunis who received ordination in 1998, and also she was among the senior bhikkhunis to give ordination to Theravada bhikkhunis in Vaishali in 2012.

This group of Indian bhikkhunis needs support both in dhamma, vinaya and in kind.

Development of the bhikkhuni Sangha

The bhikkhuni sangha came into existence approximately 5 years after the establishment of the bhikkhu sangha. More and more women expressed their desire to lead a religious life. At that time, in Jainism which existed alongside Buddhism, we also find women leading a spiritual life. But apparently the bhikkhuni sangha which emerged within Buddhism was more established and organized.

Many women wanted to join the Order, as we see from the restriction in the Vinaya to control the number of bhikkhunis. A *pavattini* is to give ordination to one bhikkhuni every other year. This was due to lack of residence and also to lack of teachers to train them. Ordination without training is dangerous, hence the restriction in the early period.

The women who joined the Order were primarily from the *Kshatriya* caste, the same caste as the Buddha, but later women from all walks of life also joined the sangha. Among them, there were outstanding bhikkhunis as the Buddha himself praised 13 of them as *Etadagga* (foremost). Among these 13, two of them were queens (Queen Maha Pajapati, Queen Khema), two of them were princesses (Princess Yasodhara, daughter of King Suppabuddha of Devadaha, and Princess Rupananda, daughter of King Sudhodana of Kapilvastu).

There were also leading disciples just like Mogallana (performing miracles) and Sariputra (wisdom), there were the Theris Upalavanna and Khema. Interestingly, in the **Bud-dhavamsa** we see that each Buddha in the past (28 of them) had leading bhikkhu disciples as well as leading bhikkhuni disciples.

When somebody asked the Buddha whether there was any enlightened bhikkhuni, the Buddha replied, “not only one hundred, not two hundreds, not three hundreds, not four hundreds, not five hundreds, but more.” With this confirmation coming from the Buddha himself, Buddhist women should be sincere in their practice and follow the enlightened bhikkhunis of ancient times.

In India, the bhikkhuni sangha prospered together with the bhikkhu sangha and also disappeared together through the invasion of the Turk Muslims, who uprooted Buddhism between C.11th-12th.A.D.

Recent emergence of the Theravada Bhikkhuni sangha in India

The Bhikkhuni sangha both in India and Sri Lanka came to an abrupt end at the same time in history. They were not in a position to lend a helping hand to each other. After 12th C.A.D., it was a dark age of Buddhism in India.

The bhikkhunis slowly emerged starting from the introduction of International ordination given by Fo Guang Shan in Bodh Gaya in 1998. There were 29 Indian women who received ordination at this time. They are considered the very first batch of Indian Bhikkhunis. All of them were from the new Buddhists converted to Buddhism since the 1950s under guidance of Dr. Ambedkar in Nagpur.

They are scattered in small aramas, 2-3 bhikkhunis in each. They speak Marathi, the local dialect, all of them could speak also Hindi, but none of them speak English.

During the International Sakyadhita conference in January 2012 in Vaisali, some of them came to attend the meeting and in their group, there was one samaneri, Ven. Suniti, a lawyer with post Graduate Diploma in International Human Rights was the leader. The group approached Ven. Dhammananda and the Theravada bhikkhunis present at the conference to help

The end of the bhikkhuni sangha in India

The bhikkhuni sangha prospered alongside the bhikkhu sangha. In 11th -12th C.A.D. they were wiped out by Turk Muslims invading India at that time. Buddhist monastics stood out clearly, with their shaved heads and clad in saffron robes. They were totally uprooted at this time.

The first Council

The **Mahaparinibbana** Sutta reported the last journey the Buddha took with Ven. Ananda from Vesali to Kushinagar. At that time the Buddha already made up his mind that he would pass away within 3 months. Ven. Ananda sometimes fell into the spell of sadness thinking of the approaching departure of the Buddha.

In one incident, when the Buddha was having an audience with a large group of monks coming to pay respect to him for the last time, the Buddha noticed that Ven. Ananda was missing, so he sent someone to look for Ven. Ananda. Talking to the monks in the audience, he praised Ananda in a moving expression. He said that for all the Buddha's attendants in the past (28 Buddhas), no one can exceed "My Ananda". Ven. Ananda knew exactly what to do, i.e. how to serve the Buddha, who should see the Buddha, etc.

This fact needs to be emphasized to have a better understanding of the incident to be mentioned later.

After the Great Passing Away, it was only natural that people who used to come to see the Buddha now started coming to see Ven. Ananda. For the last 25 years of the Buddha's life, Ven. Ananda had been serving the Buddha, and people always saw him attending to the Buddha.

After 3 months, Ven. Maha Kassapa called a meeting which later is known as the First Council where 500 Arahats came together. Ven. Ananda was enlightened just one night prior to the actual meeting, hence he joined in as one of the 500. In fact, it would be difficult to do without his presence for he was the only one who recorded all of the Buddha's teaching in the last 25 years before the Great Passing Away.

Ven. Maha Kassapa presided over the meeting on a mountain just outside Rajgirh. Ven. Upali was to recite the Vinaya as he was well versed in the Vinaya, praised by the Buddha. And it was only obvious that Ven. Ananda was to recite Dhamma, which was all the Dhamma that Ven. Ananda had heard and remembered directly from the Buddha.

An interesting incident happened before the actual recitation of Dhamma and Vinaya.

The sangha led by Ven. Maha Kassapa pointed out 5 mistakes (*dukkata*) that Ananda did, and the sangha thought that Ananda should confess.

Among the five, two of them concerned women. Here, we will look at these two mistakes that the sangha thought Ven. Ananda had to confess.

One was at the time of the Buddha's passing away: Ananda made a mistake by allowing women to pay respect to the body of the Buddha before the monks and some of the ladies' tears fell on the body of the Buddha.

evidence was found on the base of Buddha images, by identifying the bhikkhunis who made the images to offer to their bhikkhuni teachers. Also we find evidence of bhikkhunis mentioned on the base of Stupas. On the Sanci Stupa, which was built by the Queen Videhi to offer to Ven. Prince Mahinda, we also find traces of bhikkhunis living in that area.

We can come to a conclusion that ordination of women at that time was a state of honor and was a popular thing to do. Ven. Princess Sanghamitta, King Asoka's daughter was a great teacher who played a very important role of being the first *dhammaduta* to carry the ordination lineage from India and successfully established it in Sri Lanka as early as 3rd C.B.C.

From the record of Fa Hien, the Chinese pilgrim who travelled in India between A.D 399-414, he recorded that when he arrived in Savatthi, he found a vihara of Maha Pajapati Gotami but there were neither bhikkhus nor bhikkhunis living there.

In Sankasya (Sankissa) 45 miles north of Kanouj there were thousands of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis .

Later on the status of bhikkhunis might have declined, evidence was found mentioning their existence, but there were no honorary titles. There was only one place where the bhikkhunis were addressed as *bhadanti* (teacher) and *theris* (elders).

There were also mentions of senior bhikkhunis who had junior bhikkhunis as their disciples, i.e. Bhikkhunis Dhammadeva, Mula, Bodhi, Asalhamitta were disciples of bhikkhunis Mitsiri, Gada, and Padumanika (**Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy**, 1949-50, p.33). These names were inscribed on the right hand side in the Kanheri Cave.

The inscription in Amaravati (South India) mentioned the existence of bhikkhunis in not less than 8 places, also in the caves along Western India we find many places with mentions of bhikkhunis.

Areas where these inscriptions have been found spread far and wide even to the Western side of present India. This

Ananda clearly said he did not see that as a mistake for it was getting dark, and he allowed the women to pay respect first so that they could get home safely. Please be reminded that hardly 3 months before this incident, the Buddha had just praised Ananda for being the best of his attendants. He knew how to deal with people coming to see the Buddha, etc. Judging from the Buddha's viewpoint, one would say that Ven. Ananda did not do anything wrong considering the circumstances. However, as the sangha thought that he should confess, he made a confession.

Another mistake he was supposed to have made in the eyes of the sangha was his intervention to help women to receive ordination. This is the first evidence to show that not all the monks were happy with women joining the Order, but as long as the Buddha lived, none of them voiced their disagreement. But it came out at the First Council and the blame was directed towards Ven. Ananda. Ven. Ananda was very clear in his answer, he again said that he did not see that as a mistake as the lady who asked for ordination was none other than the Buddha's step-mother who breast-fed the baby prince Siddhartha herself. Again he made the confession because the sangha thought he should do so.

Ven. Ananda clearly showed a good spirit: it was at this time that the sangha was very fragile as the Buddha had just passed away. He did his best to maintain the unity of the sangha inspite of his own honour.

Interestingly, these were Vinaya questions but Ven. Upali, who was supposed to be a Vinaya expert, was not consulted and he did not seem to have any say in these arguments. Was it valid that Ven. Ananda should make confessions on these acts performed some 40 years ago?

From these inscriptions we can imply that the bhikkhunis were in a good position, they were always mentioned together with the bhikkhus. Princess Sanghamitta, the King's own daughter was also ordained, reflecting the high status of bhikkhunis at that time. The Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta, together with Ven. Mahinda, her royal brother, established Buddhism in Sri Lanka. We will discuss this later on.

Apart from Asokan inscriptions, we also have an inscription in Bodhgaya which mentions Kuranci bhikkhuni. She was a former consort of King Indramitra, she became an Arahat (**Gaya and Bodh Gaya** by B.M.Barua, II, p.67).

Another inscription from Sanci (**Outline of Early Buddhism** by Dr G.M. Shastri, p, 144) mentions Avisina bhikkhuni, who was honored as Sutatigini, a title signifying that she was a learned scholar in the Sutta.

In Kusana, there is also an inscription about Buddhimitra bhikkhuni, disciple of Bala bhikkhu, who was honored with a title of *Tripitakacarya*, one who was well versed in the Tripitaka.

In the Cunnar cave, we find an inscription mentioning a *bhikkhunupasaya* (residence of the bhikkhunis), belonging to Dhammuttriya and Sivapalitnika.

Traces of the bhikkhuni sangha in Indian History and Archaeology

In the Tripitaka, after the Great Passing Away of the Buddha there was no mention of the bhikkhunis except the arguments which came up at the First Council. But still we can find traces of them through archaeological study in India, proving their existence in many parts of India.

During King Asoka's period (who reigned from B.E.238), there are many stone inscriptions identifying the importance of the activities of the bhikkhunis in those places.

The stone inscription at Bhabara requests both bhikkhu and bhikkhuni sanghas to pay attention to dhamma and to meditate on those dhamma topics.

In Sanci, the King clearly asked both the bhikkhu and bhikkhuni sanghas to see to the development of Buddhism. Should there be any bhikkhu or bhikkhuni causing difficulty with the sangha, such a person should be expelled from the area.

In Sarnath, the stone inscription found the king addressing people of Patliputra, asking them to see to the unity of both the sanghas. This was recorded in the 20th year of his reign.

Venerable Ananda's important role in early Buddhism

The study of the emergence of the bhikkhuni sangha will not be complete without further mentioning Ven. Ananda. Before he was ordained, he was a Sakya prince, a cousin of Prince Siddhartha. He was among the very first batch of Sakya princes to be ordained.

Coming from the same family clan with the same Kshatriya caste, he was the right person to serve the Buddha. When the Buddha was 55, he expressed his desire to have a permanent attendant. Prior to that he had attendants on and off. Once, he even was left to carry his own bowl when the monk attendant decided to take a different route.

In the audience of monks, both Mogallana and Sariputra offered their service, but the Buddha declined. The reason that has been interpreted is that both of them were arahats - but I think with divine insight, the Buddha might have known that both of them would pass away before him, so the Buddha chose Ananda instead.

Ven. Ananda accepted if the Buddha would give him 8 boons (permissions). This is very interesting.

The first group consisted of 4 boons. If we look closely, we will understand that Ven. Ananda protected himself, knowing very well that in a position near the Buddha, the person would definitely gain personal benefit. Hence he requested the 4 boons to protect himself.

They were:

1. That the Buddha would not give him a high-quality robe,
2. that the Buddha would not share with him the good food he received from alms,
3. that the Buddha would not ask him to stay in the same residence,
4. that the Buddha would not take him (for meals) to an inviting household.

The second set of boons consisted of conditions to allow him to be an efficient attendant:

5. that the Buddha should go to the place where Ven. Ananda had accepted the invitation,
6. that the Buddha would allow the visit of people coming from far-away places,
7. that the Buddha would allow Ven. Ananda to clarify the points of doubt,
8. that if the Buddha should give Dhamma in other places, on his return, the Buddha would allow him to hear that Dhamma.

With these conditions, we can say that at least in the last 25 years that Ven. Ananda was attending to the Buddha, he had heard all the Dhamma, and because he had good memory, the Sutta section in the Tripitaka all came from Ven. Ananda.

Some people said that if we want to pay respect to the Dhamma, we should pay respect to Ven. Ananda. At the beginning of all the Suttas, it starts with “*Evamme suttam...*” which means “Thus I have heard”, “I” means Ven. Ananda.

Apart from the fact that he was responsible to request the Buddha successfully to give ordination to women, he also was a regular teacher to the bhikkhuni sangha together with Ven. Nanda (Queen MahaPajapati’s son), Ven. Anurudha (Maha Pajapati’s nephew), and Ven. Rahula (Maha Pajapati’s grandson).

The Mahayana tradition takes Ven. Maha Kassapa and Ven. Ananda as the chief disciples, as both of them succeeded the Buddha. Particularly Ven. Ananda has a special place in many Bhikkhuni temples in Mahayana Buddhism. Often they would honor him by having a separate Vihara for him.