

GREAT HERO

~ Mahaweera ~



Bhante and Mdm Chew Quee Neo, the benefactress of Mangala Vihara.



*The Shrine Hall before the arrival of
the marble Buddha Image in March, 1962.*

*Madam Chew Quee Neo in 1960 donated the piece of land
in Jalan Eunus on which Mangala Vihara stands today.*

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Foreword

Ven. M.M. Mahaweera Maha Nayaka Thera has rendered immeasurable services to the cause of Buddhism in Singapore during his lifetime and his influence will continue as long as members and devotees in Mangala Vihara remain faithful to his ideals. His driving force in propagating the Buddha-dhamma was Buddhist education – through the vehicle of the Sunday Dhamma Classes, supplemented by the murals in the Shrine Hall where the Life of Buddha and His deeds come alive visually, chanting classes with explanations of the suttas, sermons and the Buddhist and Pali College. He opened the eyes of many to the true teaching of the Buddha.

Bhante was a hard taskmaster, both on himself and others and a stickler to details and punctuality. I have benefited a lot from him. He even carried on with the lessons although I was the only student in front of him. I have repaid my good fortune (*mangala*) of having associated with a wise man (*panditanam sevana*) by being the Hon. Secretary of the Management Committee during the 1980's while he built the extension building and the chairman helping him to build the Shrine Hall and setting up the Buddhist and Pali College.

When he set up the College with the help of Ven. Dr. P. Gnanarama, he encouraged the students of the Diploma of Buddhism to just carry on, and it led to B.A., then M.A. and PhD. To him who never had the luxury of post-primary schooling, education is the most important thing one should not miss in life. So, out of compassion he would encourage people to learn and study for knowledge especially the Dhamma.

In his capacity as a monk, he did his best to provide free Dhamma education. He made sure that, in the case of the Buddhist and Pali College, everything is provided free (lectures, a congenial environment, fees and textbooks or reading materials). You have only to put in your share – effort – to benefit yourself. It is now left to the later generations to keep up his legacy.

This biography of Bhante is to commemorate his first death anniversary.

May Bhante attain his aspirations of Nibbana.

I would like to Thank Mr Lloyd Chua and Mr Shang Ang for an excellent lay-out and printing of the book and Ms Phylia Poh for designing the cover.

Lim Ah Swan

Chairman, Management Committee

June 2003.



First Management Committee of Mangala Vihara

Gratitude to Bhante

Venerable Maliduwa Mahanama Mahaweera Nayaka Thera was the most admirable person in my life. I have arrived in Singapore in 1962, the third year of my higher ordination. It was the first time that I stepped out of my native land, Sri Lanka. Although it was only for a few months, my association with Bhante resulted in many changes in my life. Perhaps, it was due to his kindness and compassionate attention towards me; moreover it was only in Singapore that we realised that my father's family and his father's family were related. Surprisingly, both of us came from the Akurassa area in southern Sri Lanka.

We have developed a father and son relationship that although I was to be sent to Kuala Lumpur, Ven. Dhammananda kindly allowed me to stay on in Mangala Vihara for a few more months. In his free time, Bhante told me how he came to Malaya and Singapore and his experiences here. In 1963, I had to go to the Brickfields Temple in Kuala Lumpur for my first assignment. Bhante called often to encourage me to study hard and to inform him if I needed any assistance. In those early days, he used to go to various places in Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Taiping, Kedah and Penang.

In 1970, Bhante asked me to accompany him on his world tour that lasted almost eight months to see for himself how bhikkhus in other countries are propagating Buddhism. It was during the tour that I realised what a simple and humble way of life he led. He was a strict vegetarian and I have since been influenced by him. Bhante and I have a common trait, our lives are constantly interrupted by others and he suffered greatly because of his tolerant and sympathetic nature.

Among the monks ordained together with him at Paragoda Vihara – Ven. Dhammadassi, Ven. Dhammavasa and Ven. Walpola Rahula – he has outlived all of them and had achieved much during his lifetime. He started the vihara at Outram Road, then the Sri Lankaramaya, and finally the Mangala Vihara. In every place, he had trained the lay people to be independent to carry on the religious activities, giving the monks more time to do the necessary services. In the earlier years, Bhante used to invite monks from Singapore and Malaysia to conduct the whole-night chanting especially for the anniversary of the temple. He realised the difficulties the monks faced and therefore he trained the members and to this day, they are able to conduct the whole-night chanting after the initial ceremony by the monks. He used to stay up the whole night and check on the chanting by the lay people, such was the intensity of his effort to educate the members in the study of Buddhism!

Bhante had done much for the propagation of the Buddha-dhamma in Singapore and therefore we should all try to remember and emulate his efforts and endeavour to maintain the Mangala Vihara for the next generations.

May he attain to his aspiration of Nibbana!

Ven. K. Sri Pemaloka

*Resident Monk,
Mangala Vihara.*



1961 – Students, teachers & helpers (SDC): Fong Peck Yew, Siri Lim, Bhante, Wee Tin Guan, Mdm Chew Quee Neo

Tribute by the Chief High Monk of Malaysia and Singapore

I was greatly saddened by the passing of the late Venerable Mahaweera Nayaka Thera on 12th June 2002. For a year has since passed and I have not been able to reconcile to the loss of such a great man, selfless and energetic, devoting his entire life to the cause of Buddhism.

Arriving to this region nearly seventy years ago, the late Venerable has been actively engaging to promote Buddhism in Singapore. The epitome of his effort is the founding and construction of the Mangala Vihara and there, the venerable remained the abbot until his passing. The vihara under his passionate zeal has seen developments in leaps and bounds. In the ensuing years and by no means a small feat of imagination, the venerable started the Sunday School to teach the Dhamma to his followers and it has since blossomed into the first Buddhist college of this region with accreditation to the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka.

The vigor of the venerable can only be matched by his heart. For the late venerable has been ceaselessly and tirelessly introducing the Buddha-Dhamma in Singapore by teaching the lay followers to lead a Buddhist way of life. To date, his efforts can be attested by the strong following of devout followers.

The Late Venerable Mahaweera and I have more than fifty years of association in Buddhist Activities. There will be no doubt he will be highly missed by both the members of the Maha Sangha and the Buddhist community alike, but in him, the fire and zeal for the Dhamma will never be forgotten. For in him, is a model of excellence in the field of Dhammaduta and is an example for all.

As representing the Buddhist community here in Malaysia, we would like to offer our heartfelt sympathy to the Management and devotees of Mangala Vihara for their loss and to transfer our merits to our highly esteemed venerable.



Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda



Miniature Shrine in Mangala Vihara through the years

Tribute from the Principal, Buddhist & Pali College, Singapore

It gives me great satisfaction to pay my tribute together with the staff and the students of Buddhist and Pali College to the late Ven. Mahaweera Mahanayaka Mahathera on his first death anniversary. All, who associate Mangala Vihara, know that the Buddhist and Pali College, which provides free education in Buddhist Studies up to post-graduate degrees of M. A. and Ph. D., is the brain child of the Ven. Mahaweera.

The venerable Mahaweera's devotion to popularize Buddhist education in Singapore reminds me what the Buddha said in Kevaddha Sutta of the Digha Nikaya. Kevaddha, a Buddhist devotee in Nalanda wanted the Buddha to advise a disciple to perform a psychic miracle to win more devotees in Nalanda to Buddhist faith. The Buddha refusing his request told him that he believed only in the miracle of education and described the Buddhist method of education culminating in the realization of Truth. The Ven. Mahaweera dedicated his resources and labour to propagate Dhamma and exemplified what the Buddha has said with deeds.

Being a man of vision and strict discipline, our venerable did not employ undue means to win devotees. He did not go after people, but those who recognized his good qualities and the integrity of the character followed him faithfully. As the Buddha said in the Udanapali, he did not commercialize Dhamma taking it to a commodity (*Dhamme na vanijjam care*). He walked in the footsteps of the great Mahatheras and became the foremost Dhammaduta monk in Singapore. Among his numerous Dhammaduta activities, the inauguration of the Buddhist and Pali College, affiliated to the Buddhist and Pali University is to be remembered with gratitude. From 1994 up to now the college has produced quite a good

number of Diploma holders, Graduates and Post-Graduates in Buddhist Studies. Some of them now serve the college as lecturers. He will be ever remembered by the Singaporean Buddhists for the service he had rendered to propagate and popularize Buddhist education in Singapore.

May he attain the Supreme Bliss Nibbana!

Ven. Dr. P. Gnanarama Thera

Principal

Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore

Singapore



Bhante addressing the first batch of "Diploma in Buddhism" students to carry on studying.

In Praise of Bhante by Editor, Echo of Dhamma

When there were 60 arahants in the world, excluding the All Compassionate One, the Buddha exhorted his disciples “to go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, out of compassion of the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of gods and men” M.V. 1, VIII – 11.2

The late Ven. M. M. Mahaweera Maha Nayaka Thera had heeded the call and successfully fulfilled his duty during his lifetime. He planted the seed of Theravada Buddhism in Singapore since 1930s when it was unknown to many Singaporeans. He built Buddhist temples and then established Dhamma classes. He was one of the pioneers who made Buddhism the religion of the educated in Singapore. In the early 20th century, Buddhism was thought to be full of superstitions, meant for the illiterate women only. Today, many intellectuals in Singapore proudly proclaim themselves as knowledgeable and practising Buddhists after having known the Dhamma.

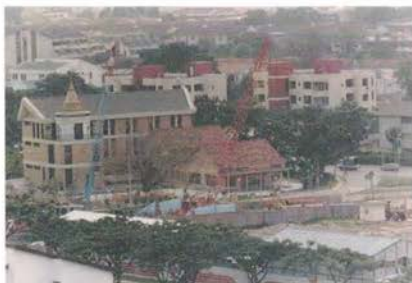
At Mangala Vihara, the spirit of Bhante Mahaweera still lives on. Members and devotees of Mangala Vihara are continuing with their Dhamma activities as vigorously as before during Bhante's lifetime.

Bhante's motive in spreading the Dhamma is not focused to Singapore only but also to many countries throughout the world. After his world tour in 1970, he started to send the temple's quarterly magazine, the Echo of Dhamma, to many countries. Later, there were cases of letters from the West requesting for Dhamma books from him.

Let us out of gratitude, carry on Bhante's missionary work, each according to his own capabilities.

Tan Geok Koon

Editor, Echo of Dhamma.



Original building and building extension



Three-Storey Shrine Hall

Tribute from Dhamma Supervisor, Sunday Dhamma Class

I am greatly honoured to express my tribute on behalf of the Sunday Dhamma Class teachers and students in honour of Ven. M. M. Mahaweera Mahanayaka Mahathera, on his first death anniversary.

Our late Bhante was indeed a great teacher, educator and mentor to all the Sunday school teachers and children. As an educator, he placed great emphasis on Buddhist education; he realized the importance of having a Buddhist education into the making of a more tolerant, beautiful and wholesome individual.

Countless children have the good karma to benefit from him a wholesome Buddhist education since 1960 when the temple has its humble beginning.

As I reflected on the Buddhist education, my sisters and brothers received at the temple from a very tender young age, I wondered what would we have become without Bhante's strong, firm guiding hands and his kind and compassionate nature. My success in life is due to the strong faith, strict Buddhist upbringing reinforced by my close association with Bhante.

Our Bhante started the Sunday school from a very humble beginning, way back in the early 1960, taking in students from the neighbouring squatters of the kampong. The children looked forward to coming to the temple where he always had time for them. He was energetic and faithful in expounding the Dhamma and he enjoyed doing it. Throughout the years with our Bhante's energy and foresight, the propagation of the Buddhist education continue to progress, with more and more students wanting to learn more about Buddhism. It's most heartening to see a greater

increase in adults coming forward to attend the School Dhamma Class. The Sunday school has now scaled to a greater height.

The Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore, a brain child of Bhante, cater to many people from all walks of life. Many have graduated from this college.

All these would not have been possible without our late Bhante's aspiration and selfless devotion for he worked tirelessly for the last 42 years towards the propagation of the Buddhist education in Mangala Vihara.

Bhante has left a legacy of Buddhist knowledge for us to carry on his fine tradition of excellence for the benefit of mankind.

As a Dhamma Supervisor it's my utmost task to see to the smooth running of the Sunday Dhamma Class, though he is not physically around us we will not fail him.

May Bhante attain the Supreme Bliss of Nibbana!

Sister Lian Chin Chye

Dhamma Supervisor 2003/2004

Sunday Dhamma Class



Sunday Dhamma School - Teachers' Day 1999

Chapter 1

Introduction

Mahaweera ~ Great Hero

Ven. Maliduwa Mahanama Mahaweera was born on 16th January 1913 in Maliduwa village in Matara district and was given the name of Upasena de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana. After finishing his primary school education at age 12, he was ordained a samanera under the Venerable Paragoda Sumanasara, and was given his ordination name Maliduwa Mahanama Mahaweera, which in Pali mean Great Name, Great Hero.

He did his religious studies under his preceptor until the latter left the Order in 1926. In 1929, Ven. Mahaweera set sail for the Federation of Malaya. With Brickfields Temple as his base, he set about propagating the teachings of the Buddha among the layfolk in Malaya and Singapore. He had plans to go to Thailand for his meditation training. But it was not to be as the demand for his religious services kept growing in Singapore. He only managed to squeeze in his higher ordination (*upasampada*) in Thailand at the age of 21.

Ven. Mahaweera, in 1934, set up his first vihara at Spottiswoode Park Road and later moving to a larger one at Outram Road. With the expanding Sri Lankan expatriates' population in Singapore, Ven. Mahaweera was instrumental in securing the land at St. Michael's Road to build the Sri Lankaramaya Temple.

Bhante built Mangala Vihara on a piece of land in Jalan Eunus donated by Madam Chew Quee Neo to the Sangha in 1960. With his foresight on the benefit of education, he set up the Sunday Dhamma School, with

syllabuses from YMBA, Colombo, and himself as the first Dhamma teacher. In 1982, a three-storey annex was added to cater for the expanding Sunday Dhamma School.

After finishing re-building the Main Shrine Hall, Ven. Mahaweera in 1993 was able to realise his dhammaduta dream with the setting up of the Buddhist and Pali College, with Ven. Dr. P Gnanarama as the principal.

In the last few years of his life, Ven. Mahaweera, with his health failing, had to get an assistant monk to help him with the religious services. He was bed-ridden after a fall on 18th February 2001 and he passed away on 12th June, 2002.



The original building of Mangala Vihara

Chapter 2

Gunawardhana Family

Bhante came from a large family of nine children – seven sons and two daughters. Born on 16th January, 1913, in the village Kindaliya, Katanvila in Maliduwa Matara district, Sri Lanka, he was named Upasena de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana, sixth in the family of Don Diyes de Silva Gunawardhana and Dona Francina Seneviratna. The brood :



Mr. Don Diyes de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana
Bhante's Father



Madam Dona Francina Seneviratna
Bhante's Mother

- 1st, Don Dias de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana,
- 2nd, Samuel de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana,
- 3rd, Carolis de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana,
- 4th, Hendry de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana,
- 5th, Ariyadasa de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana,
- 6th, Upasena de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana
(*Bhante*),
- 7th, Sugatadasa de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana,
Seelawathie de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana
(*daughter*),
Somawathie de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana
(*daughter*).

At that time, an appointment such as “gammuladani” was only bestowed upon selected person from well-known and respected families considered by the public as sincere and honest. That Bhante’s father was appointed a “gammuladani” spoke volume of his public standing within the community as this appointment carried with it certain powers.

A “gammuladani” is the sole arbiter in minor judicial matters in his village, according to the existing laws of the country. Given the powers vested in the village headman, he can settle any dispute as his verdict is final so no further proceedings are allowed. His approval or recommendation is also needed when petitions are to be sent to the Government. Hence, the importance of having a person of virtues holding such an appointment, otherwise he could be adversely influenced or bribed to return biased judgement. For his father to hold office for such a long period, he must have been a fair and impartial gammuladani.



Most of Bhante's brothers worked as superintendents of tea plantations in the Maliduwa district situated in Hinidum Pattu, in the province of Matara, a fertile tea-growing region in the low country of southern Sri Lanka.



After conferment of Upaddhyaya, Bhante with Ven. Paññasiri on his right, and Ven Molligoda Maha Nayaka Thera, Ven Paññasara (Principal of Vidyalankara Pirivena), and Ven. Paññaloka and Bhante's two brothers (front row)

Chapter 3

Historical influence of Buddhism

Since the introduction of Buddhism into Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE by the Arahant Mahinda, the Buddha-Dhamma has played an important part in the lives of the people of the country. Ancient texts record that when king Devanampiyatissa asked the Thera whether Buddhism was now established in the Island, the latter replied, “O great king, the Sasana is established, but its roots are not yet gone deep”. “When will the roots go deep?” Mahinda’s answer is most remarkable, “When a son born in Sri Lanka of Lankan parents, becomes a monk in Sri Lanka, studies the Vinaya in Sri Lanka and recites it in Sri Lanka, then the roots of the Sasana are deep set”.

The king’s nephew, Maha Arittha, a minister with fifty-five others joined the Order of the Sangha, and together with Ven. Mahinda and other Theras spent the first *vassa* in the Missaka-pabbata. At the end of the rain retreat (*vassa*), Ven. Maha Arittha recited the Patimokkha to celebrate Pavarana, thus fulfilling Ven. Mahinda’s injunction for a true son of the soil reciting the Vinaya for the Sasana to take deep roots in the Island.

The ladies of the court, led by the sub-queen Anula, also expressed a desire to join the Order as nuns and, on Mahinda’s suggestion, Devanampiyatissa despatched an embassy to the court of Emperor Asoka to bring the Theri Sanghamitta along with the southern branch of the Bodhi-tree. The Emperor not only acceded to the request, but also presented the right collarbone, and a large quantity of other bone relics together with the almsbowl of the Buddha. The planting of the Bodhi-tree was symbolic of the establishment of Buddhism and Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka. The relics of the Buddha were regarded as representing the Buddha himself and their enshrinement was as good as Buddha’s residence in the Island.

It is also recorded in the Pali tradition that on Ven. Moggaliputta Tissa Thera's instructions, Emperor Asoka made his son Mahinda and his daughter Sanghamitta enter the Order of the Sangha so that the emperor might become a Sasanadayaka, an inheritor or a kinsman of the Buddha-sasana, for so far he was, only a paccayadayaka, a giver of wealth or requisites, by which means alone he had no right to claim relationship with the Buddha-sasana.

These incidents, perhaps, inspired the nation to offer its children to be ordained in the Buddha-sasana. It has become a tradition since, for every Buddhist family to offer a son, if possible to be ordained as a bhikkhu for the propagation of the Buddha-dhamma. There is also a strong belief among the Buddhists in Sri Lanka that if someone were to offer one of his children to the Buddhist religion (Sasana), the merits accrued could help four generations of that family to get out of this Samsaric world that we are trapped in. Hence, the majority of Sinhalese family of the Buddhist faith make sure that at least someone related to them is ordained into the Sangha.

In those days, the Buddhist temple was the focal point and a gathering place for various activities in the village. On religious festivals and poya days, the monk administers the precepts and preach sermons " pointing the way to heaven" to the layfolk, while they in turn look after the mundane requirements of the monk. Prior to the actual days, there were plenty of activities preparing for the actual day, like cleaning and decorating the temple's compound and food for the congregation and the members of the sangha. The monks, because of their education, are the teachers and advisers of the community. The monk was the most trusted teacher, guide and friend of the people. In all matters, great or small, people went to him for advice, guidance and consolation with the greatest truthfulness. He may even be called upon at all critical moments in a devotee's life or to help settle domestic disputes. Temples supplement the schools by providing early education to the children of the village, especially the younger ones with their vernaculars as well as their religious education.

Chapter 4

Developments in the 19th century in Sri Lanka

When Sri Lanka was colonised by the foreign powers, first by the Portuguese in 1515 ACE, then the Dutch from 1658 and finally the British in 1796 until she gained independence in 1948, the Buddhist faith suffered great setbacks. Hitherto, education of the layman and the monk was the responsibility of the *pirivena*, which was presided over by a monk and assisted by several other village monks. The Buddhist monk had a prominent place in every village, where life revolved around activities connected with the temple or *aramas* that together with the *cetiyas* and Bodhi-tree are objects of worship. He was consulted for all-important undertakings, even called upon to settle minor disputes, and his decision was regarded as authoritative.

With the arrival in Sri Lanka of European powers, the status of the monk declined. Missionary schools established by the European undertook the task of education, with the result the *pirivenas* began to assume inferior status. Because of outright discrimination in government employment favouring those educated in missionary schools or those who have adopted the Christian faith, some weak Sinhalese families opted for earthly gains and conversion into Christianity became very common. Until the close of the 19th century, these circumstances prevailed and it was indeed not a beneficial period for persons professing the Buddhist faith.

In the 18th century, the state of Buddhism had sunk to such low ebb that not a single monk who knew the Dhamma could be found in the cities. It was Ven. Weliwita Pindapatika Asaranasarana Saranamkara, a very learned monk, having mastered both the Pali language and the Dhamma, taught other pupils and became the first to be initiated into the higher ordination

(upasampada), by bringing in ordained monks from Siam to revive the upasampada. He was later appointed Sangharaja, the highest office conferred on a monk. Many Buddhist monuments and monasteries that had fallen into decay were restored and many educational institutions were established.

It was around 1860 that a young Buddhist monk, Mohottiwatte Gunananda, went from village to village making public speeches defending Buddhism and challenging the Christian missionaries in open debates. There were altogether three such public controversies, in 1866, 1867 and 1873. The last at Panadura was a great victory to the Buddhists, so the young monk's efforts were not in vain and he paved the way for a re-awakening of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

Having read the publications of those controversies in America, Colonel Henry Steele Olcott arrived in Sri Lanka in 1880, studied Buddhism and was convinced by the teachings of the Buddha. He began to work for the upliftment of the Buddhists in Sri Lanka. Later, Madame Blavatsky joined him and they founded the Buddhist Theosophical Society in 17 June 1880. The aim was to set up Buddhist schools so as to coordinate the Buddhist workers without distinction of caste or position for the advancement of the Buddhist cause. During that period there were only three Buddhist schools while the Christian missionaries controlled others. By 1903 the society was managing 174 schools and the number of Buddhist schools rose to 429 five years later.

Col. Olcott and his supporters like C.W. Leadbeater, Bowles Daly, F.L. Woodward, A.E. Bultjens, Mrs. M.M. Higgins established the leading Buddhist schools like the Ananda and Nalanda Colleges (Colombo), Dharmaraja (Kandy), Mahinda (Galle), Dharmasoka (Ambalangoda), Visaka (Bambalapitiya), Museus (Colombo) and Rahula (Mattara). They have travelled widely across the island appealing for donations for the maintenance of the schools, undertook publications to bring more awareness and impact on the general public.

As a result of the tremendous effort put in by Col. Olcott and his group, the Buddhists in Sri Lanka regained their lost rights such as the freedom to conduct Buddhist activities and holding processions for Buddhist festivals. Most importantly, it was the declaration of Vesak as a public holiday. The Buddhist flag was also a creation of Col. Olcott and he had appealed to the Buddhists to hoist it on all public occasions. With the appointment of the Buddhist Registrars of Marriages (again the work of Col. Olcott), marriages were no longer to be solemnised only by the Christian missionaries.

With the assistance of the laymen, the vibrant air of re-awakening also spurred many learned monks to establish Buddhist centres of learning like the Vidyodaya Pirivena in 1874, the Vidyalankara Pirivena in 1875. These two famous institutions attracted many scholars from abroad to receive instructions in Buddhist studies. David Hewavitarana (later better known as Anagarika Dharmapala) joined the Buddhist revival movement and was a great public speaker. In his speeches, he strongly opposed the habit of imitating the foreigners in religion, names and customs. The gradual result was a cultural revival where many young men joined him to guide the people in the progress of the Buddhist activities. Anagarika Dharmapala, ordained as a Buddhist monk, continued his activities in India.

Anagarika Dharmapala inspired many of the Buddhist leaders of the 20th century and they came to work for the upliftment of Buddhism and the struggle for independence from foreign rule. The highlights of the campaign were numerous open debates and tours around the country to explain to the people about the bad consequences of colonial rule, and encouraged the people not to be afraid of the missionaries and not to give any support to the missionary activities. There arose a great deal of literary works being produced, canonical and commentarial works were edited and published by both laymen and monks. An intensive restoration programme took place whereby many ancient Buddhist shrines and sacred sites were restored and re-constructed, e.g. Anuradhapura, the sacred city was also restored. It was under these tumultuous but a turnaround time in the fortune of Buddhism that our Bhante was born in 1913.

Chapter 5.

Ordination at Paragoda Vihara

Following the traditional belief of Sinhala Buddhists, Don Diyes de Silva Liyana Gunawardhana and his wife offered one of their sons to the Buddha Sâsana. The fortunate one was Upasena who was 12 years old then, having finished his primary education at the Maliduwa (Kanista) Junior School.

The ordination was held at the Paragoda Vihara, which is an old temple in the district of Matara. It is now included in the list of old temples of Sri Lanka. Situated in a beautiful locality, prominently visible on the side of the Galle/Akurassa main road, the temple sits in between the



Paragoda Vihara - Dec. 1999

road and a padi field. Towards the hill facing the main road is an ancient Bodhi Tree, main shrine, pagoda (cetiya) and other objects of veneration for the public. On the other side of the road are the quarters for the monks. In this way, devotees had complete freedom to do their religious activities any time of the day without disturbing the monks.

Young Upasena was brought to the temple early at 8 years old, in 1921, while still undergoing his regular studies as a student at the Maliduwa Junior School. This basic training for monastic life was a necessary prerequisite for anyone intending to be ordained as a novice (samanera). Such early training make it possible to gauge the suitability of a recruit for monastic life while giving the candidates a perspective into a life to come.

Upasena was a simple person, with an aptitude for solitude. He was an eager and fast learner of the Dhamma, and his devotion to the Sâsana indicated to his preceptor (uppajjhâya Ven. Sumanasara or Satyanatha Weerasinghe – his lay name) that he was suitably qualified for ordination. In the meantime preparations were made for his ordination ceremony after he had finished his Junior School education at 12 years of age.



Bhante's Preceptor
Van. Paragoda Sumanasara



Young Bhante
(Upasena de Silva Liyana Guunawardhana)

The ordination ceremony was organised on a grand scale in the village especially so given that Upasena's father was the village headman. It was held at the Paragoda Purana Vihara, Kananke, Imaduwa. The preceptor was a well-known exponent of the Dhamma among the Sinhala community, in the region of Paragoda, Walpola and Maliduwa in Akurassa electorate, often called Pandita Hamuduruwo.

Originally, the ceremony was meant for a couple of boys but the interest generated and the enthusiasm for monastic life against a background of national campaign for revival of Buddhism eventually resulted in a mass ordination. Several boys were ordained on the same day as Upasena and one of them was the internationally renown and learned Ven. Prof. Dr. Walpola Sri Rahula.

This mass ordination, organised by Ven. Sumanasara was intended to counter the bogus teachings spread by foreigners who dressed themselves in Buddhist monks' robes but their practices and behaviour were contrary to the Vinaya rules.

Certain Christian groups dressed their conspirators like Buddhist monks, wearing dark coloured garments, similar to those of the forest tradition but tried to confuse the general public through their habits like taking of meals at odd hours, and their demeanours. They pretended to be "*tapas*" (ascetics) or "*dhutangas*" (forest monks) following some forms of austere practices. Upon investigation, some curious Buddhists discovered they were trained in a church in the Balangoda region. They were trained to distort and discredit the Buddhist teaching among the general public. When the truth was revealed, they disappeared. Their idea was to discourage the people from supporting the Buddhist clergy.

Ven. Sumanasara had the idea to start a movement to revive Buddhism in his region by training novice monks to preach and reach out to the people directly. Though born as Buddhists, the people were happy natured but complacent except for a few far-sighted individuals. They were easily taken in by the trickery of the Christian missionaries and their supporters.

Some mistakes were made in this ordination in that the organisers did not follow the generally accepted rules in selecting candidates for ordination as many did not undergo the pre-monastic training before their ordination (*samanera pabbajja*). After a short period as a samanera, some realised their unsuitability for a life as a monk and they left the Order and returned home. Unfortunately, some of the village elders were skeptical of the movement started by Ven. Sumanasara, equating it with the bogus monks scandal initiated by certain Christian groups as Ven. Sumanasara himself was not a high-ordained monk, i.e. did not undergo the upasampada ceremony qualifying one to train novices. Amidst this confusion, the rank of the original group of novices shrunk.

Meanwhile the more disciplined ones like Bhante, Walpola Rahula, Maliduwa Dhammadassi and Paraduwa Dhammavasa, having been inspired by the life of the Buddha and the Dhamma, were determined to carry on with their monastic training for dhammaduta work. They were given proper training and guidance in the Vinaya rules but they imposed higher discipline upon themselves, such as going barefoot on alms-round (*pindapata*), using coconut shells instead of ready made bowls for their alms collection. And using only easily available requisites for their daily needs and sleeping on hard surface instead of mattresses. Their sincerity, determination to serve the community and strict adherence to the Vinaya discipline inspired their country folk, who in turn provided for their daily needs as having a fixed rotation (*salaka dana*) of offering of cooked food, for breakfast and noon meals as well as medicinal drinks (*gilana paccaya*) in the evenings.

They were taught and trained to give sermons and perform daily religious activities. Being a quick learner, Bhante committed to memory the Pali language and the Suttas taught just like the olden days of the Buddha. They practised a rigorous mode of life in the forest tradition (*arañña*), with daily religious devotion and studies at the Paragoda Vihara, below the hills. The *arañña* tradition became popular in the 6th century ACE onwards after some natural calamities hit the country but this tradition was no stranger to the country because after the introduction of Buddhism in the 3rd century BCE, the Mahavihara followed two traditions: *araññavasi* (forest dwellers) and *gamavasi* (city dwellers) as early as the 2nd century BCE.

Events on the national stage were getting more exciting. Nationalistic leaders like Sir Don B. Jayatilake, and religious leaders like Anagarika Dharmapala, Ven. Battaramulla Sri Subhuti and their foreign sympathisers and converts like Col. Olcott were going around the country preaching and explaining the Buddha-dhamma to awaken the people to the value of their religion and to rid these simple-minded folks of their fears of foreign missionaries by taking dummies of such person and beating them in public. Foreign academicians like Prof. Rhys Davids were busy translating the

Buddha's teachings into the English language showing to the world the peace loving message of the Buddha compared to the violence prone and trickery of the Christian religion. Thanks to the various kinds of national campaigns, many Sri Lankans realised their folly in changing their religions for personal gains and reverted back to Buddhism. With their realisation of the evil ways of the foreigners, they fully supported the cause of those pioneer campaigners and were no longer hesitant in offering their children to the Sāsana for ordination.

Keeping the Buddha's injunction to the first group of dhammaduta, when he despatched them for dhammaduta carika (missionary mission) in mind:

*“Caratha bhikkhave cārikam
bahujana hitāya,
bahujana sukhāya, lokanu kampāya,
attāya, hitāya
sukhaya sadeva manussānam ”*

**“ O bhikkhus, go forth,
for the benefit of the many,
happiness of the many and welfare of many,
of gods and men ”.**

Bhante and his fellow novices – Rahula, Dhammadassi and Dhammavasa – continued with their religious duties while continuing with their religious education. Whenever needed, they provide the necessary assistance to the people of Paragoda Vihara without hesitation. Their preceptor, Ven. Sumanasara, disrobed in 1926 on account of his old age and failing health after many years living the rigorous mode of life in the forest, and returned to lay life as Satyanatha Weerasinghe. He lived in seclusion in solitude in Yakkalamulla, close to Walawa and visited the resident monks of Paragoda Vihara whenever he could. People continued to respect him and even built a memorial for him at the temple.

Without an instructor, the samaneras stopped going to the adjacent hill to practise *dhutanga*. But they continued to provide the necessary help and assistance whenever called upon whether it was a sermon, dana, house blessing or funeral service to the people of the region. Ven. Rahula, in the meantime, departed to the foremost centre for Buddhist studies, the Vidyalandara Pirivena or the Ecclesiastical Institution for monks' training in Paliyagoda, Kelaniya.

Bhante realised that it was not possible to continue without the assistance of a proper guide or teacher and he then contemplated going to Thailand to undergo some further training. He was able to contact some of his relatives living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. His former preceptor Satyanatha Weerasinghe also known as Pandita Mahattaya assisted him. Evidently, they were both related and so was Mr. G.K. Sediris Appuhamy of Kuala Lumpur.



*With the Supreme Patriarch Siam
Maha Nikaya (Sri Lanka)*



With some pioneers of Mangala Vihara

Chapter 6

Journey to Federation of Malaya



*Mr. G.K.Sediris Appuhamy
visited Bhante*

In 1929 Bhante's relative, Mr. G. K. Sediris Appuhamy, formally invited him to Malaya. Mr. Appuhamy was an expert in dressmaking and later he became the personal dressmaker to the late Malaysian Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman. Bhante accepted the invitation and accompanied by his brother monk, Ven. Dhammadassi, they went to Malaya. At that time he was 17 years old when he reached the shore of Penang then under British colonial power. Ven. Dhammadassi was also related to Mr. Appuhamy.

Later they were accompanied to Kuala Lumpur and at that time, the Buddhist Temple at Brickfields, in Kuala Lumpur were functioning without any resident monk. Besides the main temple at Temple Road (Jalan Berhala) there was another smaller temple in Sentul Pasar in the vicinity of Ipoh Road which was under the trusteeship of the Buddhist Temple, then the main Sri Lankan Buddhist temple. The group arranged for the two monks to stay at both temples, Bhante at Brickfields and Ven. Dhammadassi at Sentul to carry out the dhammaduta activities.

Up till then they have not yet reached maturity for higher ordination (upasampada). Coming from Sri Lanka they were not familiar with the traditions and ways of the people of Malaya. But Bhante did not have any difficulty in continuing the Buddhist activities as his relatives and other pioneers were providing him with all the necessary assistance and

encouragement to carry on his work. He was mainly engaged in teaching Buddhism and the Sinhalese language and to attend to the religious needs of the community. The presence, loving care and support from the Sinhalese community helped to lighten his burden.

I have very high regard particularly for Mr. G. K. Seditis Appuhamy and his family who assisted the samaneras when they first came to Kuala Lumpur otherwise the history of Malaya Buddhism could have taken a different turn. His sojourn in Kuala Lumpur enabled him to practise his skill as a dhammaduta bhikkhu; his early training in Sri Lanka helped him to win the hearts and minds of the Sinhalese community. At that time many Sinhalese were employed in the various British companies and the colonial government offices. Their sincerity, honesty and hardworking nature made them quite popular in the state of Singapore and Malaya. In fact most of the stationmasters, post office workers and even the head of government printing department were Sinhalese.

Bhante and Ven. Dhammadassi carried out their duties well in both temples. They organised Buddhist and Sinhalese classes, celebrated Vesak annually on a grand scale. They were happy with their work. The government had granted to the Brickfields Temple more than 10 acres of land in Brickfields starting from the Main Brickfields Road to Temple Road. However some members of the community found the land too large to manage and the government later divided the surplus land between the Hindu and Christian communities. The Buddhist Temple in Brickfields is managed by the oldest registered Buddhist society (The Sāsana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society) in the Federation of Malaya. The main shrine was built in 1894 during the time of Governor Spooner.

After four years of dhammaduta activities in Malaya and Singapore, at the age of 21, in 1934, Bhante and his brother monk Ven. Dhammadassi went for higher ordination as arranged by Mr. G.K.Seditis Appuhamy and the Chief Abbot of Wat Chetavan, Petaling Jaya Thai Buddhist Temple, and the Ven. Prakru Palad Vieng. The venue chosen was the famous Wat Bhupala in the Patalung Province in South Thailand under the Maha

Upajjhaya Chaokun Phra Municara Soborn. A large congregation of monks and devotees participated in this meritorious event.



*Higher Ordination at the Wat Bhupala in the Patalung Province in South Thailand,
under the Maha Upajjhaya Chaokun Phra Municara Soborn*



After higher ordination, Bhante and Ven Dhammadassi with Mr. G.K.Sediris Appuhamy

Without a Buddhist monk stationed in Singapore, Bhante had to make frequent trips here from Kuala Lumpur to attend to various religious festivals and special requests. Eventually after his higher ordination in 1934, he decided to move permanently to Singapore. Nevertheless, his sojourn in Kuala Lumpur had a great impact on the Buddhist community there, particularly the Sinhalese.

Chapter 7

Singapore

Bhante spent three quarters of his life in Singapore, after arriving in Singapore in 1934 at the age of 21 until he passed away at the age of 89 on 12th June 2002. He was in Brickfields Temple, Kuala Lumpur for five years, having left Sri Lanka at 16 years of age. Hence the most interesting part of his life was spent in Singapore where he was able to put all his energy, effort and capabilities into propagation of the Dhamma. As a Bhikkhu, he has no other distraction except to study and put into practice his knowledge of the Dhamma, and to guide or point the “way to heaven” to others. That was his only expectation in life – to be of service to the Buddhist community with the Vinaya as his guide.

Bhante was no stranger to Singapore when he arrived in 1934, unlike the first time he stepped ashore in Penang in 1929. In between the periods, he had been making frequent trips to Singapore from KL to administer religious services to the growing Sinhalese community here.

It all began in the late 1920s when large numbers of Sri Lankan workers were brought to Singapore by the colonial government to fill the vacancies in various government departments as well as army regiments in Colombo Camp. Besides looking after their basic needs in housing, food and medical, the authorities also made allowance for their spiritual requirements. They wanted a permanent resident monk to help the Sinhalese in their daily cultural and religious activities. That was why Bhante in the early 1930s had to make frequent trips to Singapore from KL.

By the time Bhante had uprooted himself and make Singapore his new base, they have prepared for him a temporary residence at Wilkie Road,

near the Railway Station for easy access to KL. But this place was too small and could only accommodate a small number of devotees at any one time. Therefore, on religious or holy days, many could not participate in the puja services in the small shrine room.

The following year, a more suitable place at No. 5 Spottiswoode Park Road was found for him, not far from the Singapore General Hospital. Family members of K. R. Williams remembered well that their mother prepared the first dana for Bhante when he moved to the new place. In the area around SGH, there were many Sinhalese families and Bhante had no problem in respects of etiquette towards monks. Within a short time, Bhante became very popular not only among the Sinhalese community but also among Buddhists from China, India, Burma, Thailand and Indonesia.

Singapore Buddhist Temple was the name of his temple. Besides the regular religious service, he started a Sakya Muni School, offering classes in Sinhalese and English for young students. Although not a public holiday, Vesak Day was celebrated, as well as other important Buddhist events like vassana and Kathina.



His dignified manner, strict commitment to the Vinaya rules, vegetarianism together with his whole hearted dedication to his religious mission inspired confidence in his devotees. His patience and willingness to go the extra mile in providing religious services endeared him to his devotees. They began to appreciate the special requirements and needs of a Theravada monk.

It was here at Spottiswoode Park that he put his organizational skills to use. With the support of his devotees, he set up the Singapore Buddhist Association to help organize the religious activities for all and the Singapore Sinhala Benevolent Association for the benefits of the Sinhalese speakers. His command of spoken English improved tremendously with the help of the children and the Sinhalese families. Quite a number of Peranakan Chinese had joined by then, the most prominent was the late Mr. Wee Tin Guan.



Singapore Sinhala Benevolent Association

According to Bhante, when he first arrived in Singapore, the local community was not aware of Theravada or Mahayana Buddhism. Although there was a large Chinese Buddhist community here, they were totally ignorant of what constitute Buddhist beliefs and practices. They were performing various rites and rituals, which they thought were Buddhist practices. So when they joined and participated in the religious services conducted by Bhante, they were pleasantly surprised by the simple mode of the services especially the meaning behind the Buddha puja services. Those who understood the true teachings of the Buddha discarded their previous practices and prevailed on Bhante for more. In 1938, Bhante published the Path of Emancipation (then called Vandana Gatha) for the benefits of those keen on learning Pali recitation.

As the congregation kept on expanding, the devotees established a fund to acquire a bigger and permanent place for Bhante to carry out his daily religious services. By 1939, with enough money, they bought the land at No. 96 Outram Road (on the other side of SGH) when it was put up for sale.

Together with the management committee, Bhante obtained the approval for the building plans and invited a senior government officer to lay the foundation stone. Within a year, the new temple became the focus of his activities until he shifted the Sinhalese Buddhist Temple to Sri Lankaramaya at St. Michael's Road in 1950. More joined the temple's activities and Bhante started his first Sunday Dhamma School at 96 Outram Road (later re-numbered 263 Outram Road).



Laying the foundation stone



Outram Road Vihara: Under construction



Outram Road Vihara: Nearing construction



The Completed Outram Road Vihara



No. 96 Outram Road, The Singapore Buddhist Association then the only Buddhist Sunday School in Singapore

The Independence movement in India had an impact on Bhante. Nationalist leaders, like Mahatma Gandhi, were employing the Buddhist teaching of ahimsa (non-violence) to fight against colonial imperialism. An extension of ahimsa, civil disobedience, was employed as a resistant campaign in the fight for national independence. Pandit Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, the late Prime Minister of India spent several years in prison fighting for independence. Later as Prime Minister, he wrote that in moments of despair in the prison, his mental recollections of the statue of Buddha and His message brought back his sanity and confidence. He was “convinced that the world cannot find a new path for itself by war and violence, but by following the Buddha then it will be good for all of us”. This statement by the leader of Indian independence and the nationalist campaign greatly influenced Bhante. When Bhante visited India with a group of Singaporeans, he made a point to visit Sri Nehru.



India: Group photo with the PM Nehru



Bhante in India

Due to the increasing and conflicting demand on his time and services in the late 1930s, Bhante set up a few associations to streamline the activities in the temple. He made them responsible for the planning and carrying out of their activities, while coordinating and cooperating with the others, with him undertaking the religious services. The Singapore Sinhala Buddhist Association was for the Sinhalese community, the Singapore Buddhist Pali Association for the study of Theravada Buddhism – the



Singapore Buddhist Association at No. 263 Outram Road

Sunday Dhamma classes for the dissemination of the Buddha-dhamma and Pali chanting classes in the evenings. Special activities like the observing of Eight Precepts on Full Moon/New Moon days by lay people were also organized. Bhante has already started giving sermons in English to the congregation on poya days. Later he added the National Sinhala Youth Committee to organize outside activities such as charitable works.

Being the only Theravada Buddhist temple in Singapore, the temple attracted more attention and interest when students of the Sunday Dhamma School went on stage at the Victoria Memorial Hall to recite "Jayamangala Gatha" during Vesak Day in the 1940's.



Jayamangala Gatha Group

The vihara generated a greater sense of belonging to the devotees with families congregating on Sundays there, having their children attending dhamma classes, adults helping out in cooking, maintenance, decorating, whatever or join in the puja services and meditation classes at the

appropriate times. Other days of the week, it was also a hive of activities – Pali chanting lessons, meditation, and ladies-only classes. As the community expanded, Bhante had to perform more blessing services that covered all events in life – blessing on birthdays, house blessing, wedding blessing, hospital visits and especially the funeral services.

Buddhist events like Vesak, Vassana and Kathina, were celebrated annually. Many Buddhist personalities, like Prof. Malalasekera visited Bhante at Outram Road vihara.



Prof. Malalasekera visiting Outram Vihara.



Bhante with Prof. Malalasekera

Bhante initiated inter-religious exchanges, which he carried on into the early days of Mangala Vihara. After Vesak, accompanied by many members, Bhante would visit numerous religious, cultural centers and charitable institutions, orphanages, old folk homes, hospitals and other settlements in Singapore and Malaya.



Sinhalese devotees for Vesak Celebration



Vesak 1946: Singapore Buddhist Temple



Vesak Celebrations in 1940s



Funeral service is part and parcel of a monk's life. Here Bhante was instrumental in changing the mindset of the early Chinese Buddhists, in doing away with the burning of joss papers and offerings of food to the deceased at the graveyards. Bhante had then compiled a book, the recital of Maranasati verses from various suttas, for the understanding of members as well as to provide solace for the bereaved. Indeed, that was a significant contribution by our Bhante and it is a great honour to say that various Buddhist temples in Singapore have followed the practice of chanting Maranasati verses!



World War II Memorial Service



*Bhante and Ven. Wandiya with
Pali section's members*

When the Japanese occupied Singapore during the Second World War in the early 1940's, many Sri Lankan have already left Singapore. Bhante stayed on to administer religious services to those left behind with a Burmese monk, Ven. U. Wandiya to help him. Many activities were scaled down or cancelled due to the disruptions caused by the war. Services were quite often interrupted but Bhante and Ven. Wandiya were left alone to carry out their work.

With the return of the British colonial government after the end of the war, the Sri Lankan population in Singapore also increased. Buddhist activities at the vihara returned to its pre-war days. However, the returning and newly arrived folks from Sri Lanka soon made the vihara look inadequate. Bhante then requested for a piece of land from the government to build a larger vihara to meet the needs of his expanding congregation.

He did not have much difficulty in this department. As a leader of the Theravada Buddhist community, he had regular contact with many influential people whom he met in the course of his activities. A large piece of land at No. 30 St. Michael's Road was granted to the Sri Lankan community by the government. Sri Lankaramaya is currently situated here.

Many rounds of fund-raising were carried out by the management committee of the vihara. The Hon. D.S. Senanayake, (the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka) and his delegation paid a visit to the vihara in April 1946, together with two saplings of the Maha Bodhi Tree at Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka. Bhante planted them in two boxes, displaying them at the vihara. Later, he transplanted one at Sri Lankaramaya and the other at Mangala Vihara. The Hon. Senanayake, later, took part in the groundbreaking ceremony at Sri Lankaramaya.



Saplings of Bodhi-



Hon. Mr D.S.Senanayake at The Singapore Buddhist Temple on 16 Apr. 1946



Hon. Senanayake, after ground-breaking ceremony, at Sri Lankaramaya

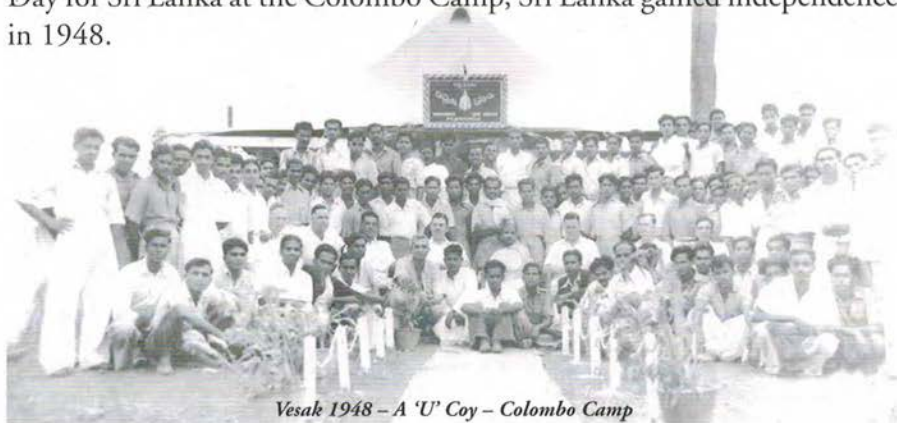


*Sapling of Bodhi-tree transplanted
to Lankaramaya*



*Hon. SWRD Bandaranaike &
Mrs Bandaranaike at Outram Vihara*

Members of the public contributed generously. Fund raising even extended into the army camps, with Bhante celebrating Vesak and Independence Day for Sri Lanka at the Colombo Camp, Sri Lanka gained independence in 1948.



Vesak 1948 - A 'U' Coy - Colombo Camp



*5.6.1949: Heladiva 'A' Company
Buddhist Youth Association*



*Sri Lanka Independence Day Celebration
4.2.1949*

Bhante's model for Sri Lankaramaya was the layout of the vihara in his hometown, where the monks' quarters are separated from the Main Shrine Hall. At Sri Lankaramaya, the Bodhi tree sits in between the Main Shrine Hall and the monks' quarters with a Sima House on the side of the Bodhi Tree. He had reserved a large plot for the future construction of an institute for dhamma study.



Monks' quarters at Lankaramaya



Moving to Sri Lankaramaya

After completing the monks' quarters, he held a ceremony to transplant the Bodhi sapling to Sri Lankaramaya, and later the octagon Sima House. Finally, he took on the construction of the three-storey building to cater for all the religious and cultural activities of the devotees. It would consist of a large hall for general activities, teaching and preaching of the dhamma, dana ceremonies and cultural activities for both Sinhalese and Chinese. The upper floor was for the Shrine Hall, and a cetiya (pagoda) on the roof at one end.



Bodhi Tree Shrine at Lankaramaya



The building of Sri Lankaramaya

Bhante treated everyone equally, regardless of his or her nationalities, but he soon noticed several groups vying to monopolise the management of the temple, creating unpleasant incidents. He ignored them totally and continued with his usual activities.

In the course of my discussion with him I came to understand this great man's wisdom. His head was full of ideas, nothing personal but mainly concerning the establishment of Buddhism for the future. Bhante had so much faith (*saddha*) in the Buddha and His teachings. It was all because of that he had never wanted nor tried to study in universities or any training colleges. Whatever he had learnt from his preceptors he made full use of them. After he had left Maliduwa Kanista School he had never stepped into any institution of higher learning in Malaysia or Singapore. At that time he was armed with only that primary knowledge but he had more experience than academic knowledge. That experience is far greater than the knowledge gained from mere studies, proving the old saying, "experience is the best teacher". Although Bhante had read the teachings of the Buddha from the Suttās and being blessed with great powers of recall, he had sometimes regretted that he did not have the opportunity for higher education earlier in his life.

Therefore Bhante wanted to educate many in the teachings of the Buddha, he started the Sunday Dhamma School in the late 1930s. He believed that it is a great meritorious deed if it was possible to start a school to provide education to all. When the building was completed, Lankaramaya could be considered a full vihara with the three types of cetiyas. Once the

Buddha had spoken to His attendant, Ven. Ānanda of the possibility of three different types of Buddhist shrines or cetiyas: (1) those connected with the bodily remains of the Buddha (*saririka*), (2) those connected with objects used by the Buddha (*paribhogika*) and (3) those which portray or depict His likeness (*uddesika*). The three-storey building consisted of the shrine and cetiya (pagoda) and also the preaching Hall (dhammasala). He had built all the religious buildings essentially needed on one side of the road, and reserved space for the greatly needed educational institution – a school! That was why he did not make use of the other side of the land for any other purpose.



Meditation class in Lankaramaya



*Lunch served on Vesak in the new building
(Lankaramaya)*

Many prominent monks and guests began to visit Singapore and stayed at the Sri Lankaramaya. Among the many visiting monks were Ven. Madihe Pannasiha Nayaka Thera, Ven. Mirisse Gunasiri Thera, Ven. Kotahene Narada Thera, Ven. Kotahene Piyadassi Thera from Sri Lanka. Most of the distinguished visitors from Sri Lanka to Singapore gave priority to visit the vihara. The first Prime Minister Hon. D.S. Senanayake, Hon. Dudley Senanayake, Hon. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and Dr. G.P. Malalasekera,



*First PM of Sri Lanka, Hon. D.S.Senanayake
visited Sri Lankaramaya*

founder of World Fellowship of Buddhists were among the distinguished visitors from Sri Lanka.



Ven. Madihe Paññasiba Maha Nayaka Thera and Ven. Mirise Gunasiri Thera visited Bhante

In 1950, Bhante represented Singapore at the inaugural World Fellowship of Buddhists conference in Colombo and Kandy with Ven. Dhammadassi representing the Buddhist Vihara of Kuala Lumpur. He took the opportunity to visit his village which he had left 21 years ago. In 1966, when he attended the World Buddhist Sangha Council on Dhammaduta activities in Sri Lanka, he had informed his brothers and sisters of his intention to visit his village. They had prepared a grand welcoming ceremony for him by decorating the entrance to the village. He was accompanied by traditional drummers into the village.



1950. Inaugural meeting of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, Sacred Tooth Relic Temple, Kandy, Sri Lanka



Bhante and Ven. Dhammadassi in Sri Lanka



Bhante transferring merits to his late preceptor at latter's grave



Bhante visited his village in 1966



The entrance to his village was decorated to welcome Bhante



A group photograph at the Paragoda Vihara

Bhante also visited Burma (now Myanmar) with Ven. Mirisse Paññasiri Thera to attend the Chatta Sangayana, in 1952 and the Second Conference of World Fellowship of Buddhists.



Bhante with Ven. Mirisse Paññasiri in 1952



1952 Bhante attended the Second Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Rangoon, Burma

Naturally as the Association grew in size so did the number of disputes among the members. For the first time in his life Bhante was at a loss as to what to do, and how to carry on smoothly as planned so that all Buddhists in Singapore would enjoy equal benefits. Finally in 1959, unhappy over the bickering and power struggle, against what the Buddha had taught and contrary to what he had been practising and teaching the members, Bhante made the painful decision to leave Singapore and return to Sri Lanka.

Although he had wanted to leave quietly in the early 1959, he had to visit Mdm. Chew Quee Neo (daughter of late Mr. Chew Joo Chiat, a great philanthropist) who had been like a mother to him all those years. Having appreciated the situation, Mdm. Chew advised Bhante to return to the Sri Lankaramaya temple and to remain for three months. She told him that she had enough land to build a place for him.

Chapter 8

Mangala Vihara

When Madam Chew Quee Neo showed Bhante the piece of land in Jalan Eunus in early 1959, it was overgrown with lallang, like a secondary jungle with a few trees. It was located in a backwater of Singapore then, in a kampong with a few attap huts populated mainly by the Malays. There was a dirt track, large enough for a car to pass through, running through the area. Bhante accepted the generous donation of this piece of land by Madam Chew. Together with Mr. Fong Peck Yew, President of the Singapore Buddhist Pali Society, Bhante set about putting up a temple on the land, after receiving a cash donation from the family of Madam Chew, with the balance from donations of well wishers and savings from the Society. Members of the Society were associated with Bhante in Sri Lankaramaya in St. Michael's Road and they followed him to Mangala Vihara.



Mangala Vihara in the early days



Mangala Vihara in the 60s

The Venerable Pandit Pamaratana Maha Thera and Ven. Dhammananda Maha Thera of Malaya were invited by Madam Chew, under Bhante's instructions, for the ground-breaking ceremony held at the then No. 38 Jalan Eunus (later re-numbered No. 30 by the government). Mr. Fong

was a familiar sight walking around under an umbrella at the construction site over-seeing the work.

In March 1960 the Vihara, a two-storey bungalow building, was completed. The Shrine Hall occupied the front hall of the one-storey front block, with the second hall used for lecture-cum-library. A two-storey building was connected to the second hall, with two bedrooms on the upper floor. Bhante occupied one of the bedrooms. On the lower floor, there was a smaller hall with the kitchen on one side and two rooms on the other, occupied by the Hon. Treasurer and the Hon. Secretary.

The first thing Bhante did after the building was completed was to plant a sapling of the historical sacred Bodhi-tree in Anuradhapura, the ancient city of Sri Lanka, given to him by the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Hon. D.S. Senanayake when the latter visited Singapore in 1946. He had kept the sapling in a wooden box and re-planted it in Mangala Vihara in March 1960. Since then many Buddhists have come to venerate the Bodhi-tree and it has grown into a huge and healthy tree. Daily Bodhi puja has been carried out in the evening to this day, and we also have a special celebration, the Maha Bodhi Day, every full-moon day in December to commemorate the arrival of the Bodhi-tree with Theri Sanghamitta, daughter of Emperor Asoka, in Sri Lanka in 223 BCE.



Maha-Bodhi Celebration



*Bodhi sapling planted at
Mangala Vihara, 1960*

On 31st March 1960 Mangala Vihara was formally founded. The Maha Sangha invoked the blessings of the Triple Gem with a special whole-night pirit chanting. The establishment of Mangala Vihara was due mainly to the great and tireless effort of Bhante who wanted a proper



Monks, with Bhante, for whole-night chanting

place to propagate the Buddha-dhamma to one and all, without distinction. He wanted to be of service to humanity in keeping with the Buddha's injunction to the first sixty arahants to go forth for the weal, welfare, happiness and benefit of mankind.

The first celebration in the new Mangala Vihara's premises was on Vesak, 10th May 1960. Madam Chew performed the traditional "transferring of merits" service in fulfillment of her vow to build a temple should she survive the Japanese occupation of Singapore during the 2nd World War. The place was packed with happy devotees and the highlight of the evening was the first candlelight procession.



Madam Chew transferring of merits

The official opening ceremony of the temple took place on the first anniversary of the founding of Mangala Vihara, 31st March 1961. Ven. Prakasit Buddhasanna, Chief High Monk of the Thai Buddhist Temple, in Silat Road officiated at the ceremony, witnessed by several monks invited from other countries, including Ven. Pandit Pamaratana and Ven. K. Sri.

Dhammananda of Malaya. On this occasion, Madam Chew formally handed over the keys of Mangala Vihara to Ven. M.M. Mahaweera Maha Nayaka Thera in front of an assembly of monks and devotees, symbolising her good faith in donating the temple to the Sangha. A whole night chanting of parittas by the Maha Sangha was carried out. This tradition of a whole night chanting of parittas on the anniversary of the founding of Mangala Vihara has continued to this day. Instead of the monks, lay people participated throughout the night after the Maha Sangha had initiated the recitation. Bhante has trained the laity to chant the parittas.



Key hand-over ceremony



*Official Opening of Mangala Vihara by
Ven. Prakasit Buddhasanna, 1960*



Whole-night chanting at anniversary – Males



Whole-night chanting at anniversary – Females

Arrival of the Buddha Image

After the opening of Mangala Vihara, Bhante ordered a new Buddha image made of marble from Burma. In between the opening ceremony and the arrival of the Buddha image in March, 1962, Bhante and the Singapore Buddhist Pali Society were very busy working on a proper Constitution and Rules for the temple as well as getting the Sunday Dhamma Classes

off the ground. Bhante was the first Dhamma teacher teaching the first batch of 11 students.

The Buddha image finally arrived in March 1962, in time to be installed for the celebration of the second anniversary on 31st March 1962. The chief abbot of the Buddhist Vihara, Kuala Lumpur, Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Thera was invited to unveil the newly arrived Buddha image. This is the image in our present Shrine Hall. My first trip to Singapore was on November 23rd of that year.



1962 Arrival of the Marble Buddha Image



Picture of Ven. Dhammananda unveiling the Buddha image

The great benefactress Madam Chew died on 11 December 1962, a paccayadayaka, after having initiated a revival in the history of Buddhism in Singapore. We continue to remember her for her generosity and wisdom in donating Mangala Vihara to the Maha Sangha every year with a memorial service. Bhante's own mother died earlier on 13 January 1961, a sâsanadayaka, and Bhante used to hold a memorial service on her death anniversary in Mangala Vihara in the sixties.

Sunday Dhamma School

Having had personal experience of purported Buddhists without any idea of the Buddha-dhamma in his earlier years in Malaya and Singapore, Bhante thought what better way to educate people in the Buddha-dhamma than

to teach the next generation the Buddha-dhamma. He set up the first Sunday Dhamma School in Outram Road in 1940.

Bhante lost no time in organising the Sunday Dhamma classes with only two qualified teachers in Mangala Vihara to assist him. There were five classes in June 1960 with about 70 students. Mr. Bennett Austin covered the Life of Buddha while Bhante taught Dhammapada to the first batch of Senior class, made up of 11 students: Siri Lim, Lee Wan Wan, Choo Chiau Beng, Lim Hock Hai, Victor Goh, Lee Kiong Loh, Lee Lak Neo, Lee Moi Lin, Catherine Cheong, Peter Lian and Jerry Wee. Mary Lian taught the Junior Class, while the preliminary and kindergarten made up the remainders. We are very appreciative that Mr. Siri Lim and Mr. Peter Lian are still actively teaching in the Sunday Dhamma Classes.



*May 1962 Our 1st Batch of
Sunday School Graduates*



Sunday School at Outram Road Vihara

In recognition of his long, dedicated and excellent service in the Buddha-dhamma, the Maha Sangha of Sri Lanka conferred the title of Dharmacarya on Siri Lim. The Chief Monk of the Palelai Buddhist Temple, Singapore, Ven. Phrakru Prakasa Dhammakun presented the certificate to him on Bhante's 68th birthday on

16 January 1981, in the presence of 23 monks from all over Singapore. Siri Lim is the first Dharmacarya from Mangala Vihara and he is indeed



Dharmacarya Siri Lim

worthy of the honour. In Mangala Vihara there are two other being honoured with the title of Dharmacarya, and they are Mr. Tan Geok Koon and Mr. Lim Ah Swan, also in recognition of their efforts in the propagation of the Buddha-dhamma.

At their first attempt in the YMBA examinations, Mangala Vihara Sunday Dhamma School in 1961 won the prestigious Sadhuwardhana Challenge Shield, an award presented to any dhamma school with the highest percentage of passes in the YMBA Examinations (English Medium) conducted worldwide. Since then, our Sunday Dhamma School had continuously been awarded the Shield and it now resides permanently in our temple – a symbol of Bhante's dedication to Buddhist education in Singapore.



Our Sunday Dhamma teachers with the Sadhuwardhana Challenge Shield in Sri Lanka (1981)

A news item in a publication, World Buddhism (Vol.XIII No. 9 April 1965) states:

“Singapore Buddhist School's success”

The unique distinction of winning a challenge shield for Buddhist studies for three years in succession has been achieved by the Sunday school of the Mangala Vihara in Singapore, at the yearly religious examinations conducted by the YMBA, Colombo.

The Sadhuwardhana Challenge Shield was won by this school in 1961, 1962, 1963 – three years in succession.

In early 1966 the YMBA, Colombo informed Bhante that they have officially declared and confirmed that our Sunday school is now the outright owner of the Sadhuwardhana Challenge Shield, having won it for four successive years from 1961.

Bhante subscribed to the adapt, “healthy body, healthy mind”. He had a resourceful person, John Khoo, a member of the Society to organise various sports and games for the students and helpers of the Sunday School such as table-tennis, badminton, sepak takraw, carrom, English chess, draught and netball. Badminton, sepak takraw and netball were played on the open ground next to the old shrine hall, but the ground is now unavailable due to the expansion of the Shrine Hall. Those activities used to last until evening on Sundays. The first excursion tour was organised in August 1967 with visits to the Straits Times Press Ltd., Prima Flour Mills Ltd., Port of Singapore Authority, Singapore Paper Products Ltd and Singapore Conference Hall for 47 teachers and students.



First Teachers's Day

Since the Sunday Dhamma School started, every year the School organised its prize giving day at the end of the year for participants of various sports and games. It was only in October 1977 that Teachers' Day was celebrated for students and others to show their appreciation to the teachers who have selflessly given their time and effort to impart their knowledge of the Buddha-dhamma to the students.

In January 1978 Abhidhamma classes began at the request of the YMBA. And it was the first time that Abhidhamma was taught to laymen in an organised way. Bhante rose to the challenge and took upon himself the teaching of Abhidhamma to teachers and students alike.

In 1980, the YMBA began offering a Diploma in Dhamma Examinations at the instigation of Bhante, for those with Higher School Certificate of YMBA. Again, Bhante confidently put the first batch of Diploma students through two years of the intricacy of the Pali Language and other papers, including Abhidhamma. Five students courageously stepped forward in June 1982 for the Diploma in Dhamma Examinations. And, as they say, the rest is history.



First batch of diploma students

Sima House

Until 1966 Mangala Vihara did not have a Sima or Chapter House which is an important place for Acts of Sangha, like conducting Uposatha and other matters related to discipline of monks. Bhante had to go elsewhere, like the Sima House at the Thai Buddhist Temple in Silat Road for the annual Kathina celebrations.

Six monks headed by Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Nayaka Thero, the Chief Monk of Malaysia, performed the consecration ceremony of the Sima. It coincided with the 6th anniversary of Mangala Vihara in 1966. The foundation stones of the Sima were laid round a small house behind the temple marking the exact site of the Sima. The solemn and impressive ceremony held for the first time was witnessed by a large gathering of members and devotees.

Mangala Vihara is now a full-fledged vihara, complete with a Sima, because the bhikkhus may not only use it as a meeting place, but also as a place

where ordinations of samaneras and upasampada (higher ordination) ceremonies can be held. In this Sima too the final act in respect of Kathina robes, ending the vassana season can take place.

The opening ceremony of the Sima House was held on the afternoon of Kathina day, 6 November 1966. The Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Nakaya Thero of Malaysia, following the raising of the Buddhist flag by Ven. Sarananda Maha Thero and speeches from the guests, performed it. Ven. Upananda Maha Thero unveiled the Buddha image presented by Mr. and Mrs. Fong Peck Yew & family and Ven. P. Pamaratana Maha Thero unveiled the Buddha's footprint brought from Thailand. The members of the Sangha held a meeting in the Sima House. A whole night chanting held in the Sima House was well attended. At the conclusion of the chanting the next morning, holy coloured thread and holy water were distributed.



*Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda Maha Nakaya Thero
opening the new Sima House*



*Ven. Sarananda Maha Thero
hoisting the Buddhist flag
near the Sima House*

In 1982 the relevant authorities approved our plans for a three-storey building extension. We had to demolish the Sima House to make way for the new building. On 15 May 1982 a special stone removing ceremony was held, led by Ven. Chaokhun Panna Dhamvides (Chief Monk of Wat Ananda Metyarama).



Stone-removing ceremony



Stone-laying ceremony

As the new extension building was near completion, Ven. Chaokhun Panna Dhamvides led a chapter of monks to re-consecrate the Sima on the top floor of the building on 23 September 1983. Many devotees were there to witness the ceremony. Ven. Chaokhun was back again on 22



New Buddha image

October 1983 with 28 monks to officiate and bless the installation of a new Buddha image in the Sima House. Although members and devotees were informed at short notice, many turned up for this important service.

Conferment of Upaddhayaya

The Supreme Council of Kotte Sri Kalyani Samagridharma Maha Sangha Sabha, the Highest Authority of the Buddhist Order in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, on 25 May 1966, conferred on Ven. M.M. Mahaweera Nayaka Thero, the Honorary title of “Upaddhyaya”



Conferment of Upaddhayaya

(Teacher and Preceptor). He is now known as Tripitakacarya Sri Saddharma Vagisvara Upaddhyaya M. M. Mahaweera Nayaka Thero. The Authority gave him the power to ordain samanera, conduct upasampada ceremony or other Acts of Sangha even in the event of having less than five bhikkhus to form a Maha Sangha.

Echo of Dhamma

Ven. Mahaweera was cosmopolitan in his outlook. At an early age he was not contented with just spreading Buddhism within the geographical sphere of influence constrained by his physical presence. Although many venerables and Buddhist personalities called on him when they were passing through Singapore, Bhante was also keen on keeping the outside world informed of the activities of Mangala Vihara.

The first quarterly Echo of Dhamma was published in the 1st quarter of 1965 and was billed as a quarterly organ of Mangala Vihara Sunday Dhamma School. The format emphasises articles on Buddhism from teachers and students of the school, with several sections reserved for the principal's report, Sports' section, major celebrations and events. It was originally edited by Mr. Tan Geok Koon, a Sunday school teacher and is still edited by him. In 1982, through the recommendations of Bhante, the Maha Sangha of Sri Lanka conferred on him the title of Dharmacarya in recognition of his long and dedicated service in furthering the cause of Buddha-dhamma.

The Echo of Dhamma is distributed worldwide after his world tour to organisations that reciprocate with their publications. In 1973, the Management Committee of Mangala Vihara took over the responsibility of publishing the quarterly from the Sunday Dhamma School.

Dhammaduta Activities

Bhante was a true dhammaduta adhering to the spirit of the Buddha's injunction to the first sixty arahants. He left his country of birth in his teens for foreign lands to propagate, study and practise the Buddha-dhamma among people whose languages he was unfamiliar with.

Not knowing one word of English or Malay Language (nor given formal English lesson), Bhante picked up the languages with the help of Sinhalese families and Peranakan devotees in the Buddhist community. He began explaining the intricate points of the Dhamma to the congregation in his

“broken” English and Peranakan Malay. He had built a strong foundation by not only knowing the original suttas but also reading widely the various commentaries in Sinhala. Indeed Bhante was self taught by his own great effort.

The Path of Emancipation was first published in 1938 by Bhante in Singapore (in romanised Pali) for a small group of Chinese who were keen in learning chanting in Pali. In 1948 he decided to publish the Path of Emancipation, with English translation, kindly assisted by Ven. Narada Thera and Ven. B. Kassapa of Sri Lanka, to meet the aspirations of the growing number of devotees.

Not only was he blessed with a curious and analytical mind, Bhante was also a keen learner with a strong desire to propagate Theravada Buddhism to the local community. On many occasions, he accompanied members and devotees to observe (even asked to participate in) the traditional rites and rituals and customs performed at various ceremonies. Buddhist monks are especially popular for wakes and funeral services for the deceased, but Bhante saw many activities not found in Buddha’s teaching. During the Cheng Beng season in the ‘60s, Bhante had gone with devotees to the cemeteries and saw the offerings and rituals at the graveyards. He was then determined to educate the public on the correct way to remember the deceased – the Buddhist concept of transferring merits to the departed. He selected appropriate suttas and compiled them into a Maranasati Book, which he used at services for the deceased. At wakes and funerals, death is an appropriate subject for a sermon on impermanence – *sabbe sankhara anicca*, unsatisfactoriness – *sabbe sankhara dukkha*, and soullessness – *sabbe dhamma anatta*. His Maranasati Book has since been adopted by most Buddhist temples in Singapore. In 1981 he streamlined the temple’s dhammaduta activities by having a Dhammaduta sub-committee to co-ordinate services to members/devotees such as recitals of Maranasati at wakes and funerals, visits to aged, bed-ridden and sick members at their homes or hospitals.

In his persistent way, Bhante managed to convince the members and devotees of the virtue of the Buddhist way and to this day, Cheng Beng is being celebrated the way he had taught. Another Chinese tradition, the 7th Moon Hungry Ghosts Festival, has been commemorated in the Buddhist way. Even the Chinese New Year's celebration took on a Buddhist tradition, with lesser offerings of meat and joss-papers. Instead Bhante encouraged devotees to come to temple (to observe Eight Precepts, if possible) and observe the day as a poya day.



Cheng Beng Celebration : 7-4-1991



8 Preceptors

In the early days, Vesak was not a public holiday. Bhante, together with other prominent Buddhist leaders were instrumental in getting the colonial authorities to declare Vesak a public holiday so that Buddhists can go to the temple and observe the thrice blessed day. Bhante used to encourage devotees to observe the Eight Precepts on Vesak.



Vesak celebration : 1949



Vesak celebration

Bhante started chanting practices early while he was in the Outram Road Vihara but it was in Mangala Vihara that he had the classes organised. Most importantly he taught selected suttas (only monks chanted the Atanatiya Sutta in the early days) in the Big Suttas Book (Catu Bhanāvāra

Pāli) in order for the laity to participate in the whole night chanting on the anniversary of the founding of Mangala Vihara. At that time, teaching such suttas was unheard of. Only monks could chant these suttas.



Chanting practice

In the mid '60s, Bhante, being confident of his spoken English, started giving lectures or talks on Buddhism to outside groups, for example, six lectures in the Cultural Centre, Canning Rise in May-June 1965, Singapore American School in October 1965, Singapore Lodge of the Theosophical Society in March 1966, lady members of the St. Georges' Ladies Guild of



World Buddhist Sangha Conference, 1966

RAF Changi in July 1966 followed by another to officers and airmen stationed at RAF Changi on 5 October 1966. In May 1966 Bhante journeyed to Sri Lanka to participate in the World Buddhist Sangha conference to discuss dhammaduta activities as a representative of Singapore.

He organised samanera ordination for Victor Goh (Ven. Vinita) in Brickfields Temple, Kuala Lumpur on 30 November 1969. Samanera ordinations for Lee Beow Lim (on 21 May 1972) and Raymond Lee (on 29 September 1984) were carried out in Mangala Vihara.



Ordination - Lee Beow Lim - 21 May 1972



Ordination - Raymond Lee - 29 Sept. 1984

No matter how tired Bhante could be or how old, he never excused himself once he had a task to perform! Even with one student in front of him for Sunday Dhamma Class, he carried on with the lessons. Up to the end of the '80s until the Tampoi leper settlement moved elsewhere, Bhante and a few members went to conduct services every second Sunday of the month after the Sunday School. We have seen Bhante dragging his tired body in his later years for Maranasati services. Bhante was a stickler to details, task and punctuality. He had a fixed timetable and like to organise events in the temple with detailed attention e.g. morning puja (dana) at 11 a.m. regardless of other interruptions.

To make the temple livelier, Bhante set up the Youth Sub-committee in early '80s to organise Tai Chi class, yoga, tae kwon do, cooking, computer, arts and crafts. They also organise visits to charitable institutions for our members and children to see for themselves the sufferings of disease, illness and old age. Bhante in the '60s used to visit charitable institutions with members to give donations on Vesak. Bhante initiated Pali chanting competition among Buddhist temples in the late '80s and now each temple takes turn to organise it. Meditation classes and retreats were organised, but only on an ad-hoc basis.



Tai Chi class



Yoga class



SILRA



Ren Ci Hospital

In 1995 Mr. Sim Poh Hock dedicated part of his late father's property in Pontian Kechil into a meditation centre, and Bhante made monthly visits with members to the centre. Mr. Sim sought Bhante's advice on the development of the centre, the installation of the Buddha image and the construction of a Sima House.

Bhante's greatest dhammaduta work is in the Sunday Dhamma School.



Meditation class



Meditation class



Pontian: Meditation centre

World Tour

In 1970 Bhante wanted to take a rest from all the activities of the temple, and at the same time, he wanted to see for himself how other Buddhist countries especially in the West conduct Buddhist activities. Then Bhante went to Kuala Lumpur and requested me to organise the tour and also to accompany him. In the period of a seven-month tour Bhante was able to visit most of the countries in Asia, including Japan and Philippines, the Mediterranean, Europe, Scandinavia, Russia, United States of America, Canada including the Pacific Islands and Hawaii. The intention was to attend the 10th World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference in Sri Lanka at the end of 1970. Unfortunately when we were in Moscow, the Sri Lankan Ambassador to Moscow informed us of the insurgence in Sri Lanka and that the conference was cancelled. Nevertheless we visited Sri Lanka for two weeks, and took up residence at the Vidyawardhana Pirivena, Dehiwala. I have managed to arrange for Bhante to meet various world leaders, religious leaders, and also founders of various international organisations



HK Buddhist Association welcome Bhante and Ven. Pemaloka



Japan – Kamakura



*Bhante with Sweden Ambassador
HE Rex Kolmeare*



Bhante at Dehiwala Temple



*Archbishop Okano of the Kodokyodan
Headquartore*



Al Afra University, Cairo



Egypt



London Vihara with Ven. Dr.H. Saddhatissa



*Paris, Sorborne University with
Prof. Walpola Rabula*



Chicago Buddhist Temple with Rev. Kubuse

during those seven months. Among them were H.S.H. Princess Poon Pismai Diskul, then President of World Fellowship of Buddhists and Iam Sankhavasi, Secretary General Sangharaja of Thailand, in Bangkok; Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, (a winner of World Peace Prize), founder of Risho Koseikai, Tokyo; Archbishop Okano, founder of Kodo-kyo Dan Buddhist Fellowship, Yokohama; Sunayo Miyabara, President WFB, Hawaii. We also met Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw and Vebu Sayadaw in Rangoon, Ven. Dr. Neluwe Jinaratana, Sangha Nayaka of India and Secretary General of the

Maha Bodhi Society in India and Ven. Dr. H. Saddhatissa, Sangha Nayaka Europe, President of the British Maha Bodhi Society in London Vihara. At the Vatican, we met Pope John Paul XII and in Paris Dr. Ananda Guruge, Head of UNESCO. We have also met with H.H. Dalai Lama at Dharmasala, India, Hambo Lama, Ulan Bator, in Mongolia, U Tanh, Secretary General of the UN in New York, Bishop Isuji, Head of the Buddhist Churches of USA and Bishop Newton Ishiwura in Canada.

In 1971, a Buddhist convention in Kuala Lumpur was organised by me and most of the Buddhist temples in the state of Selangor were represented. The Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda was on vacation in Sri Lanka during that period and it was an ideal opportunity to invite Bhante as one of the Guests of Honour. After the inaugural meeting at the Brickfields Buddhist Temple, Kuala Lumpur, the convention was held at the University of Malaya. One of the important outcomes was the inauguration and establishment of the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia and blood donation campaign.



Mangala Vihara – Welcome home from world tour, Bhante with Ven. Pemaloka and Ven. Dr Vajiranana (London)



Formation of Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia Bhante with Ven. Pemaloka, Tun Tan Siew Sin and Dr. Tan Eng Kong (Founding President)

Building Extension

By the late '60s Mangala Vihara has reclaimed the land and sheds, behind the Sima House, tenanted by squatters. Those sheds and Sima House were used as classrooms for the Sunday Dhamma School. Hence by the early '70s the need for additional space arose primarily due to the increased enrolment in our Sunday Dhamma School. Even on religious or festival days like Vesak and Kathina, the congregation spilled over into the second hall.

The Management Committee and Bhante had been working with the architects to add a three-storey building extension to the shrine building. But every time the authority rejected our plans citing “public interest”. Unfortunately, Mangala Vihara’s land lies adjacent to the planned route for the North East MRT line. Happily, one of our devotees managed to get the relevant authorities to approve our building plans in late 1981. I had introduced him to Bhante in the early ‘60s.

In the meantime, Mangala Vihara had to surrender a lot of land to the Government for road widening – the current Sims Avenue East. The Government also required our entrance to be shifted from Jalan Eunus to Sims Avenue East.

With the building plans approved, we held a religious stone removing ceremony for the Sima House on 15 May 1982 and demolished it the following month. On 15 August 1982 we held a religious ceremony to bless the commencement of construction and the building site. The first pile, driven by our immediate past Chairman, Mr. Fong Peck Yew, was witnessed by our MP for Kg. Kembangan, Tuan Haji Mansor Sukaimi, Buddhist monks, Sunday Dhamma teachers and students, members and devotees.



First pile for building Extension

Within a year, the new three-storey extension was up. Of course there were disruptions to classes and festivals. Classes were held in the shrine hall, under the Bodhi tree and makeshift sheds in the open field. We had to restrict our celebrations due to the construction. But all, happily, put up with the inconvenience.

A religious ceremony to re-consecrate the Sima House was held on 23 September 1983, followed by another ceremony on 22 October 1983 to install the new Buddha image in the Sima House. The next day was Kathina

and we held a bazaar to raise funds for the new building. Fund raisings were held during the prior several years but always among our members and devotees.

The official opening ceremony by the President of Singapore, Mr. Devan Nair, was held on 27 November 1983. It was a joyous occasion for all especially for our Bhante. He has now realised his dream of a bigger building for the propagation, study and practice of Buddhism through the Sunday Dhamma classes.

The completion of the building extension is a great testimony to Bhante's untiring effort to bring and make available the teachings of the Buddha to one and all. He offered the facilities – congenial environment, qualified teachers and free Buddhist textbooks – to all who would only put forth their effort. His compassion reminds one of the words of Brahma Sahampati to the Lord Buddha, immediately after His Enlightenment: *"There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who, not hearing the Dhamma, will fall away. There will be those who understand the Dhamma"*.

Another ten years elapsed before Bhante and the Management Committee could undertake a re-building programme on account of lack of fund. It was clear to all that the Shrine Hall was too small to accommodate the congregation on festival days. In the meantime, the Management Committee was appealing for and holding various fund raising exercises for the new Shrine Hall.



Old Shrine Hall : full house

Finally in early 1991, Bhante was informed by our architect of the approval of our plans to build a three-storey Shrine Hall linked to the extension building. A special religious ceremony was held in the evening of 30 June

1991 by the Maha Sangha to transfer the marble Buddha image and Reclining Buddha image to the Bodhi tree compound and Mangala Hall respectively.



Removal of the marble Buddha Image



Removal of the Reclining Buddha Image

A piling ceremony was subsequently held on the morning of 28 July 1991. As members of the Sangha chanted verses of blessings, our Vice-Chairman, Mr. Khan Kim Lock ceremoniously drove in the first pile. A large crowd witnessed the ceremony including our Guests of Honour, the MP for Cheng San, Mr. Heng Chiang Meng and the Sri Lanka High Commissioner, Mr. E. Jayasinghe and their wives. But work was delayed for almost a year because of a problem with the demolition certificate.



First pile for New Shrine Hall

All religious activities were held at the Mangala Hall where we had installed the Reclining Buddha image. Eventually piling started on 6 May 1992 and was completed three weeks later.

Halfway through the construction; with the main floor having been completed, we held a blessing ceremony on 30 May 1993 to transfer the marble Buddha image, temporarily stationed at the Bodhi Tree, to the pedestal made ready.

The new three-storey Shrine Hall was completed at the end of 1993. The 81st birthday of Bhante on 16 January 1994 was the first celebration held in the new Shrine Hall. As with the old Shrine Hall, Bhante commissioned the artist Jayasiri Semage, with some assistance from me, to paint Buddhist murals on the walls and ceiling. It took him and two assistants about a year to complete the job (on 6 August 1995).

In the meantime, Mr. Han Kyaik Juan and his family donated a marble Buddha image from Mynmar, in memory of his late father Mr. Han Min Fong, to Mangala Vihara. Bhante held a religious ceremony to install it at the Bodhi Tree on 7 August 1994.

The official opening ceremony for our new Shrine Hall was on 11 July 1999 by the former President of Singapore, Dr. Wee Kim Wee.



*Blessing ceremony : New Shrine Hall's
Buddha Image*



*First celebration in New Shrine :
81st Birthday of Bhante*



Painting Buddhist murals



*Installation of the Buddha Image at the
Bodhi Tree on 7 Aug. 1994*

Sanchi Gate

An entrance like that found in Sanchi, India would make a temple complete. Bhante requested me to get artisans from Sri Lanka to help with the engravings, depicting events connected with the life of Lord Buddha and other artworks. But Mangala Vihara was having difficulties getting approval to build a replica of the Sanchi Gate. Eventually it was approved on condition it was built behind the building line. H.E. Mr. Nirmal Wijayaratne, the Sri Lanka High Commissioner was the Guest of Honour at the opening ceremony of our Sanchi Gate on 16 January 1999.



Moon Stones and Guardstones

Another piece of architecture connected to a Theravada Buddhist temple is the moonstone found at the entrance of the shrines in the temples of Sri Lanka and India.

Mr. and Mrs. Lim Ah Swan & family, in fulfilling Bhante's wish, took that as their donation. They built a smaller moonstone at the entrance of the Bodhi Tree shrine, with the assistance of Mr. Tan Ee Tiong. Later Mr. Lim sought my help to get artisans from Sri Lanka to build an authentic moonstone and guardstones at the entrance to the main Shrine in accordance with Bhante's wish.



Moonstone : Opening Ceremony

in accordance with Bhante's wish.

Ven. Dr. K. Sri Dhammananda officially opened it on 6 June 2001. By that time our Bhante was confined to a wheelchair as he had suffered a fall on 18 February 2001 and had broken his hipbone.

Buddhist and Pali College, Singapore

By the mid '80s, there were quite a number of qualified Dhamma teachers having Higher certificate in Dhamma or Diploma in Dhamma from the YMBA, Colombo. Not satisfied with just a YMBA certificate for his disciples, Bhante began enquiring of the various tertiary institutions in Sri Lanka as to the availability of off-campus tertiary courses in the English Language.

It was only in early 1993 (while we were re-building our Shrine Hall) that several Buddhist temples and societies, including Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association and Sri Lankaramaya, approached Bhante with a proposal to start a Buddhist and Pali College in Mangala Vihara, offering tertiary courses from the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka.

Bhante was very happy because this was what he had been looking for. Immediately, he offered the facilities and books to the first batch of students of about forty who started the Diploma in Buddhism on 1st September 1993. The pro-tem Committee with Bhante as Director of the College appointed Ven. Dr. P. Gnanarama as the Principal of the College.



First batch of Diploma in Buddhism students

In the meantime, the Chairman of Mangala Vihara, Mr. Lim Ah Swan, applied to the Ministry of Education for a licence for the College. After several interviews, MOE in a letter dated 30 August 1994 exempted the College from the requirements of the Education Act, being a religious institution.

With the MOE letter, Bhante applied to the Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka for an affiliation status for the College (Bhante was so happy, he faxed me the MOE letter to my Dehiwala Temple). In the meantime the University sent Prof. N.A. Jayawickrama and an assistant registrar to invigilate the Diploma Examinations in August as well as check the College's eligibility for affiliation. In a certificate dated 30 September 1994, the University recognised the Buddhist and Pali College, Singapore as an affiliated College of the University.

The successful establishment of the Buddhist and Pali College completed the full circle for Bhante as an educator. With only formal primary education, he set out for foreign land not knowing one word of English, educated himself by sheer determination, gave talks in English on Buddhism to native speakers of the language, gave opportunities to the laity to chant auspicious suttas on appropriate occasions, train and nurture his young charges for YMBA's higher level and Diploma in Dhamma certificates and finally tertiary education with some pursuing their Ph.D. Bhante, sometimes, regretted not having the luxury of a tertiary education but that's our Great Hero – Mahaweera!



1st Diploma Class



1st BA Class

Chapter 9

Sabbe sankhārā aniccā

The Buddha has said that, all component things are impermanent (anicca) subject to suffering (dukkha) and everything is soulless (anatta). Age caught up with Bhante, though his spirit was strong, the physical body became weak. His health started to deteriorate somewhere in 1996 onwards. He felt the physical changes in himself and he knew that he needed someone to continue the activities of the temple in the same manner as he had done.

He recalled his companion, that is me, and tried to contact me in Sri Lanka. As promised, in early 1997 I returned to Singapore. Bhante had written a letter to Ven. Chaokhun and had me accompanied him to Wat Ananda. He introduced me to Ven. Chaokhun and handed that letter to him for safekeeping.

Slowly Bhante withdrew from his various activities and at the 1997 AGM he introduced me as his assistant to succeed his position and duties. Bhante even asked the Committee to approve the appointment and had it recorded in the minutes. He had informed the Committee that in future he would not be attending any more meetings and that I should take over his place. As Bhante advised, regular activities continued without any interruptions. Bhante later appointed me as a lecturer in the Buddhist and Pali College. On 18th February 2001 Bhante suffered a fall and broke his hipbone. After a long stay in the hospital he was no more mobile and had to be transported in a wheelchair. Before leaving the hospital, he summoned Mr. Richard Wee, the Chairman of the Management Committee and asked whether Mr. Wee had followed his instructions regarding the issue of the

assistant monk. The Chairman replied that everything was in order and that the Committee had the appointment recorded in the minutes, according to Bhante's instructions. It was after that confirmation that he returned to the temple.

That proved that although Bhante was physically weak, he was mentally alert and aware of everything that was happening in the temple. It also showed his deep concern for the welfare of the temple.



Bhante : in his last year

After the operation on his hipbone, his health went downhill and with the onset of a kidney failure, he needed to go for dialysis twice a week. It took a toll on his already failing body. His last days were spent in and out of hospitals. On the advice of the doctors, the Management Committee tried to give our beloved Bhante the best medical treatments.

Bhante managed to celebrate the last Vesak in Mangala Vihara, 2002 and finally passed away on 12 June 2002.

Members and devotees were devastated by the loss of their beloved Bhante. While coping with deep sorrow, the Management Committee managed to do their best in arranging the funeral ceremony befitting our great teacher. Many religious and lay people came to pay their last respects, coming from all over the world. His brother-monks paid their last respects to him on 16 June 2002 and conducted the elaborate casket to be cremated at the Phor Kark See Monastery.

Memorial services were held on the 7th day, 49th and 100th day of his passing away and Sanghika dana were offered. A cetiya, with a statue of our late Bhante, was constructed next to the Bodhi-tree. A religious ceremony was held on the 100th day of his passing away. By the merits accrued, May he attain to his aspiration – Nibbana!

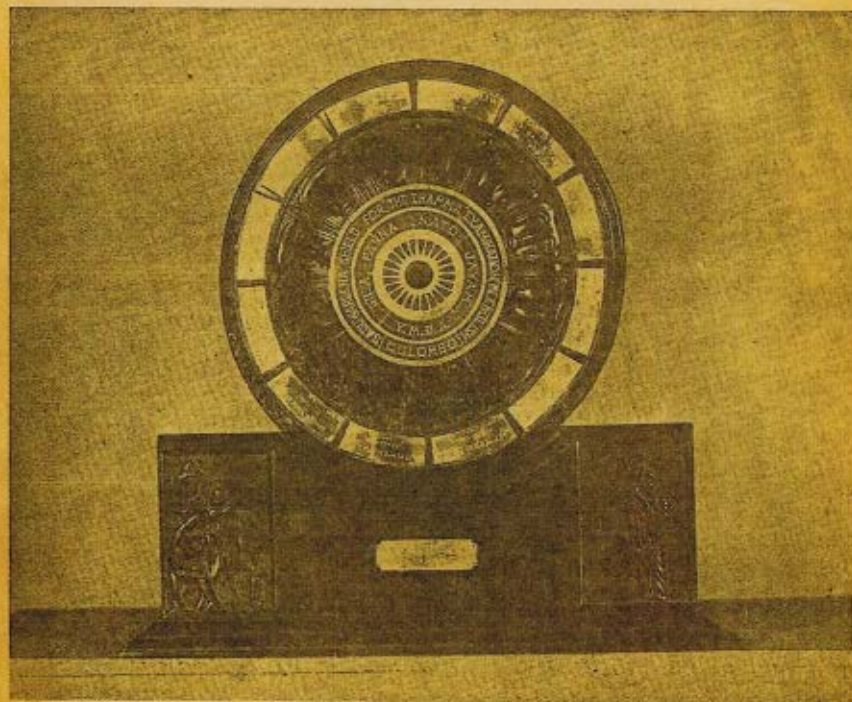
Since his passing away, everyone has wished for his welfare and final liberation of Nibbana.



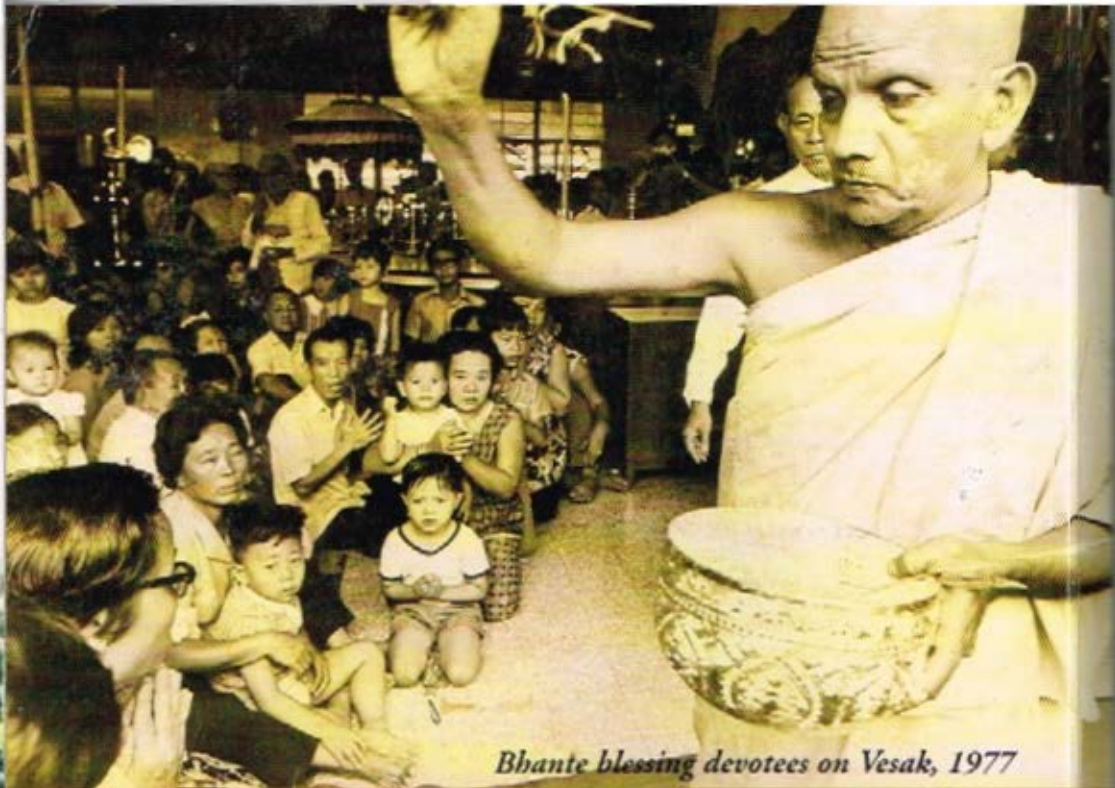
Brother-monks as pall-bearers: 16 June 2002

SADHUWARDHANA CHALLENGE SHIELD

Y. M. B. A. CEYLON.



The above Shield for the Dhamma Examination in English, conducted by the Young Mens' Buddhist Association, Colombo, Ceylon, has been awarded to the Mangala Vihara Sunday School, Singapore. The Sunday School won the Shield for six years 1961, to 1966, successfully.



Bhante blessing devotees on Vesak, 1977

This biography commemorates the first death anniversary of our beloved Bhante on 12th June, 2003.

*Lim Ah Swan,
Chairman,
Management Committee*

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