

The Restoration of the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* in the Theravāda tradition¹

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1. The historical development of the performance of the higher ordination for nuns

The foundation of a nuns' community (*bhikkhunīsaṅgha*) by the Buddha took place only after the community of monks had been established, and only on the instigation of Ananda. The first type of an ordination of nuns according to tradition was the acceptance of Mahāpajāpatī Gautamī and 500 Sakya women into the order by their acknowledging eight grave rules (*garudhammas*). The historicity of this type of ordination is debated.² The first regular form of a nun's ordination as handed down in the Buddhist law code, the Vinaya-piṭaka, shows that initially nuns were ordained by monks. The next step in the development consisted in the monks' transference of the task of ordaining nuns to the nuns. This occurred because the candidates for ordination needed to be physically examined and to respond to intimate questions prior to ordination to ensure there was no hindrance to their receiving ordination. The final form of a nun's ordination described in the Vinaya-piṭaka indicates that a nun was first ordained within a nuns' community and then a second time by monks within a monks' community.³ Thus two separate legal committees performed separate legal procedures. Each of these legal procedures had to be in accordance with the legal rules and each of the communities (*saṅgha*) had to mutually accept the legal procedure of the other. The possibility of faults originating with respect to nuns' ordinations, therefore, was higher than in the case of monks' ordinations, where only one legal procedure takes place within the monks' community.

2. Ordination of nuns and the Buddhist Hīnayāna schools

After the establishment of the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha*, the Buddhist community of early Buddhism (*srāvakayāna* or *hīnayāna*) for various reasons, doctrinal as well as legal, split into various schools over the course of time. Among the eighteen traditional Hīnayāna schools at least nine had their own Vinaya and therewith their own legal tradition. The Vinayas of the different schools are very similar to each other, which indicates that they all had one common kernel. However, their differing in many details shows that they were redactionally still open when the schools developed.⁴

How many of the schools with their own legal tradition also had a living nuns' ordination lineage remains unknown. The fact that a school hands down the Vinaya code for nuns does not necessarily imply that a conforming *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* existed as well.⁵

Up to the present day only three schools with a legal tradition survived: the Dharmaguptaka in China, Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, etc., the Mūlasarvāstivādin in Tibet, Mongolia, etc., and the

¹ This is an unpublished English version of a lecture given in Hamburg, in November 2005, in the frame of the "Weiterbildendes Studium der Universität Hamburg." I thank Ven. Thubten Chodron for improving my English and her comments.

² Ute Hüsken, *Die Vorschriften für die buddhistische Nonnengemeinde im Vinaya-piṭaka der Theravādin*, Berlin 1997 (Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie, 11), p. 346ff., especially p. 360.

³ Ute Hüsken, *Die Vorschriften*, pp. 409-423.

⁴ Petra Kieffer-Pülz, "Die buddhistische Gemeinde," *Der Buddhismus I. Der indische Buddhismus und seine Verzweigungen* (Religionen der Menschheit), Stuttgart 2000, p. 288f.

⁵ The Tibetan canon, for instance, hands down law texts for nuns which belong to the tradition of the Mūlasarvāstivādin, though it is supposed that no living tradition of nuns ever came to Tibet.

Theravādin in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, etc. Only within the school of the Dharmaguptaka did an ordination lineage of nuns survive.

In that context it is important to stress the fact that the so-called Hīnayāna schools with their legal traditions remained intact in most countries even after the development of Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna Buddhism. The idea that the schools of Hīnayāna Buddhism did not play any role in countries where Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna had a firm stronghold, is wrong, perhaps with the exception of Japan. In fact the importance of the Vinaya schools of Hīnayāna never decreased since Mahāyāna and Tantrayāna did not produce new Vinaya codes which replaced the old ones, but only added supplementary procedures connected with the Bodhisattva vows. The ordination and all legal procedures of the fully ordained Buddhists had to be performed according to the Vinaya of those Hīnayāna schools, independent of their doctrinal position, be it Mahāyāna or Tantrayāna.⁶

A living nuns' tradition was documented in India, Central Asia (East Turkestan, sixth to tenth centuries), China, Nepal (fifth to eleventh centuries), and Sri Lanka. We do not know for certain whether there ever existed a *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* in Burma.⁷ Preserved inscriptions are not yet sufficiently evaluated. It is also not guaranteed that a nuns' tradition ever reached Tibet, Thailand, or Cambodia.⁸

The nuns' tradition in India died out with the Muslim invasion of India and the related extinction of Buddhism. But we cannot exclude the possibility that the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* was extinguished even earlier. The last inscriptional evidence dates from the seventh or eighth centuries AD. In China, Korea, etc., the Dharmaguptaka tradition survived up to the present. In Sri Lanka the monks' ordination and the nuns' ordination lineage died out during the political upheavals that followed the Coḷa invasion of the eleventh century AD. Not enough monks or nuns (that means less than five) remained to perform the ordination ceremony. The reigning king, Vijayabāhu I (1055-1110), was the first who purified the Buddhasāsana by reintroducing a new ordination lineage for monks from another Buddhist Theravāda country, Burma. But nothing is said that at this occasion also an ordination lineage for nuns was introduced. Whether there was no interest in nuns' ordination in Sri Lanka or whether Burma never or no longer had a living nuns' tradition is unknown.

Since that time the method of reintroducing an ordination lineage from another country was applied again and again by all Theravāda countries. The present day schools of the *bhikkhusaṅgha* in Sri Lanka all date back to ordination lineages brought from Siam in the eighteenth and from Burma in the nineteenth centuries.⁹

Thus the nuns' ordination lineage in the Theravāda tradition was extinguished a long time ago. Whether there were attempts to revive the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* between the eleventh and the nineteenth centuries is unknown. But at the end of the nineteenth century there arose the movement of the nuns

⁶ Petra Kieffer-Pülz, "Die buddhistische Gemeinde", p. 289f.

⁷ According to Chinese sources girls and boys of the Pyu were educated in Buddhist monasteries and remained there till they left with the age of twenty, if they did not wish to receive higher ordination. Therefore it cannot be excluded that with the introduction of Buddhism from South India to Lower Burma in the time of Asoka a nuns' tradition had been established too. See Friedgard Lottermoser, "Buddhist Nuns in Burma," *Sakyadhīta Newsletter*, Summer 1991, vol. 2, no. 2 (*Buddhasāsana* Homepage, English Section), p. 3.

⁸ For the distribution of the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* in different countries, see Peter Skilling, "A Note on the History of the *Bhikkhunī-saṅgha* (II): The order of nuns after the Parinirvāṇa," *Pāli & Sanskrit Studies. Mahāmakut Centenary Commemorative Volume and Felicitation Volume presented to H.h. The Supreme Patriarch on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday*, ed. Pathompong Bodhiprasiddhinand, 2536 (1993), 208-251.

⁹ Heinz Bechert, "Sāsana-Reform im Theravāda-Buddhismus," *50 Jahre Buddhistisches Haus*, Berlin 1974 (2518), 19-34.

with ten vows (*dasa sil mātavā* or *sila mātavā*), a movement of women who dressed like nuns, but who lived according to only ten rules instead of the 311 rules for nuns who had received higher ordination.¹⁰ These *dasa sil matas* originally lived independently from each other. Some of them were supported by the Buddhist revival movement, for instance by Anagārika Dharmapāla. But since the 1980s the *dasa sil matas* have organised themselves more and have also received more support. In 1983 the *Department of Buddhist Affairs* started a program in order to enable the *dasa sil matas* to receive an education, which formerly was reserved for monks exclusively. Since 1995 fifteen monastic institutions began to run classes for *dasa sil matas*. Special identity cards were introduced for them, indicating that their status was accepted. The *dasa sil matas* of the different districts sent representants who formed a central committee and met monthly. There activities that concerned *dasa sil matas* nationwide were discussed and decided.¹¹

In Burma, Thailand, Cambodia there also exists a comparable status of women who left the householders life to practice Dharma. They are called *sila-rhan*, *may-sila* or *bhva-sila*,¹² and *maeji* in Thailand and Cambodia.

In addition to this movement, since the late twentieth century endeavours have been made to establish a nun's ordination in all Theravāda Buddhist countries. The international organisation *Sakyadhāra*, founded at the occasion of a conference in Bodh Gaya in 1987, as well as the *International Network of Engaged Buddhists*, has played an important role in this process.

Analogous to the reintroduction of the ordination lineages for monks from other Theravāda countries to Sri Lanka, there were plans to introduce the only living nuns' tradition, that of the Dharmaguptaka school in China, to Sri Lanka.

3. Legal criteria for higher ordination

In order to be able to perform a higher ordination (*upasampadā*) several legal criteria have to be fulfilled:

(1) It is necessary to have a group of monks or nuns, who are able to constitute an order (*saṅgha*) that is competent to perform legal acts. In border countries, to which nowadays nearly all Buddhist countries belong, such a *saṅgha* has to consist of at least five persons, the fifth being a law expert (*vinayadhāra*) The monk or nun who presides over the *saṅgha* at the same time is the instructor (*upajjhāya*) of the candidates for higher ordination. This instructor must have been ordained for at least ten years, the female instructor for twelve. None of the members may have committed any legal offence or if they committed minor offences they must have been purified.

(2) The person to be ordained also has to fulfill certain conditions: She has to have a minimum age: an unmarried woman must be at least twenty, a married woman at least twelve.¹³ She is not allowed to have any debts, has to have the permission of her parents or her husband, etc. After having received the ordination as a novice, she has to receive the probationary ordination and start a two year training period as a probationer (*sikkhamāna*). Having succeeded in those two years of education, she may receive higher ordination as a nun.

(3) The place or room where higher ordination is to be performed has to be defined by a Buddhist

¹⁰ Ute Hüsken, "'Gotamī, do not wish to go from Home to Homelessness!' Patterns of Objections to Female Asceticism in Theravāda Buddhism," *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Oliver Freiburger, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [in press].

¹¹ Hema Goonatillake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy: The Restoration of the *Bhikkhuni* Order in Sri Lanka," *Proceedings of the International Conference on Indian Religions (December 2003)*, ed. Madhu Kishvar, Ashi Nandi, Delhi 2004. [I only have a PC manuscript kindly sent to me by Dr. Paranavitana (Colombo)], pp. 2-3.

¹² Friedgard Lottermoser, "Buddhist Nuns in Burma," p. 2.

¹³ Petra Kieffer-Pülz, "Ehejahre oder Lebensjahre? Die Altersangabe für eine 'verheiratete' Frau (*gihigatā*) in den Rechtstexten der Theravādin," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 155, 1 (2005), pp. 199-238.

monastic boundary, the so-called *sīmā*. This *sīmā* serves the purpose of defining the space within which all fully ordained members of the Buddhist community have to attend to the legal procedure performed within. The rules for determining such a boundary are very complex.¹⁴ Thus there often exists an uncertainty as to the validity of the *sīmā*.

(4) The formula to be proclaimed during the ordination procedure has to be proclaimed in the right order and in the correct pronunciation. Each even a seemingly unimportant deviation from these rules, for instance the different pronunciation of one and the same word, may result in the invalidity of the ordination procedure.¹⁵

To be valid, the lineage of ordination has to go back to the Buddha in an uninterrupted lineage. Thus it is of utmost importance to preserve a valid and pure ordination lineage. As a consequence, each school handed down and cared for its own ordination lineage and did not mix with other Vinaya schools. Nevertheless, there may exist within one Vinaya tradition various groups which do not perform legal procedures together. Let us take for example the Theravāda tradition of Sri Lanka. Here we have three main lineages, the Syāma-, the Amarapura- and the Rāmaññanikāya. They differ from each other in terms of the origin of their ordination lineages and their attitude with respect to the possibility of ordaining persons of low castes. The Syāmanikāya from Siam only ordains people from the highest caste, the Goyigama, whereas the Amarapurānikāya, originating in Burma, ordains also persons from lower castes. The Rāmaññanikāya is said to pay no heed to questions of caste, but there exist monasteries of this *nikāya*, which only ordain Goyigamas.

Also within each of these *nikāyas* there are differing ordination lineages, whose members do not perform legal procedures together. In the Amarapurānikāya, for example, there exist two groups which for a very long time quarreled over the validity of a Buddhist monastic boundary and, directly connected with it, over the ordinations performed within this boundary. This quarrel led to a separation of these two groups, the Saddhammaṃsa and the Mūlavāṃsa. They are not able to perform legal procedures together since one branch does not accept the ordination of the other one.

The situation becomes even more complex if we take into consideration Theravāda traditions of different countries. The reports about delegations of monks from Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka in each others' countries, show that the guests received a new ordination in a so-called strengthening procedure (*dalhikamma*). This served the purpose that the guest monks could join the resident monks for legal procedures without making them invalid.

4. Legal objections to the reintroduction of the *bhikkhunī* ordination

The objections raised to the introduction of a nun's ordination from China to Sri Lanka are numerous. One of the most frequent objections certainly is that the nuns from China are Mahāyāna nuns and therefore corrupt. But not all objections raised to the reintroduction are only based on the mistrust of other traditions or on language problems or diverging terminology. The main point is the difference of the legal rules, i.e. of the Vinayaṭakās.

(1) Those who oppose the reintroduction of a nun's tradition declare that it is not possible, because the nuns' ordination lineage within Theravāda (in the narrow sense of the word) is

¹⁴ Petra Kieffer-Pülz, "Rules for the *sīmā* regulation in the Vinaya and its commentaries and their application in Thailand," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20, 2 (1997), 141-153. Petra Kieffer-Pülz, "Ceremonial Boundaries in the Buddhist Monastic Tradition in Sri Lankā," *Wilhelm Geiger and the Study of the History and Culture of Sri Lanka*, ed. Ulrich Everding, Asanga Tilakaratne, Colombo 1999, 43-90.

¹⁵ Oskar von Hinüber, "Das buddhistische Recht und die Phonetik des Pāli. Ein Abschnitt aus der Samantapāsādikā über die Vermeidung von Aussprachefehlern in Kammavācās," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 13/14 (1987), 101-127.

extinguished. The advocates of a reintroduction on the other hand reply that the nuns' tradition existent in China today was introduced to China from Sri Lanka in the fifth century, and thus originally is a Theravāda ordination lineage.

(2) The argument that the nuns' tradition of present day China follows a different legal school, namely that of the Dharmaguptaka, is rejected by some with the argument that the Dharmaguptaka school is a subgroup of the Theravāda school.¹⁶

Be that as it may,¹⁷ from the perspective of law the fact remains that the Dharmaguptaka tradition in China developed over more than two-thousand years independently from the Sinhalese tradition. If one wants to find reasons why the reintroduction of the nuns' ordination lineage is impossible, one will find enough deviations from the Theravāda school during that long development of the Dharmaguptakas to doubt the validity of the present day legal tradition of the Dharmaguptaka nuns. This holds true not only for the special case of the nuns' ordination, but would be applicable to every introduction of an ordination lineage from somewhere else. Unlike introducing a monks' ordination lineage to a country where there are no more monks who could reject the new ordination lineage, or where, if there still were some monks, those ordained according to the new lineage would not need their approval, nuns have to perform their ordination once in the nuns' community and once in a monks' community. Thus they need the approval of the ordination performed within the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* by some monks. The problem arising with the reintroduction of the nuns' ordination lineage from China, therefore, consists in the fact that a nun's ordination according to the Dharmaguptaka tradition has to be accepted by monks belonging to the Theravāda tradition. The ordained nuns would be Dharmaguptaka according to the ordination in the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* and Theravādin according to the ordination in the *bhikkhusaṅgha*.

Dharmaguptaka and Theravādin differ from each other in several ways, for example with respect to the rules for determining the Buddhist monastic boundary (*sīmā*). The Dharmaguptaka tradition knows a larger number of markers for such a boundary. Among these markers there are some which are explicitly forbidden by the Theravāda tradition—for instance, walls. This implies that if the present day Dharmaguptaka tradition once had performed a legal procedure within a boundary with markers consisting of walls, this *sīmā* as well as all legal procedures performed within its limits could be judged as being invalid by the Theravādin. Furthermore, the formulas for determining a *sīmā* handed down in the Vinaya of the Dharmaguptaka deviate from those of the Theravādin in their wording.¹⁸ Thus one could say that the Dharmaguptaka legal procedures for determining Buddhist monastic boundaries are invalid in the eyes of the Theravādin due to the difference in wording. That, however, would imply that even a nun's ordination performed perfectly according to Dharmaguptaka law would be invalid for Theravādin monks.

Thus it is a question of the acceptance or approval of one legal tradition of Hīnayāna Buddhism by another legal tradition of Hīnayāna Buddhism, and it depends on the monks' position regarding this question, whether they will accept the nuns' ordination performed according to the Dharmaguptaka tradition.¹⁹

¹⁶ Hema Goonatilake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy," pp. 2, 4 [PC manuscript].

¹⁷ Here two things are mixed up on account of the identical naming of two schools (only different with respect to the language, Sanskrit *sthaviravāda* is Pāli *theravāda*): (1) the school of the Sthaviravādin, being one of the two schools which arose in India after the first split of the community into Mahāsāṃghika and Sthavira, and (2) the school of the Theravādin, which is the designation of the schools that are preserved in Sri Lanka, etc. The Dharmaguptaka as well as the Theravādin form a subgroup of the Sthaviravādin, but the Dharmaguptaka are not a subgroup of the Theravādin.

¹⁸ See Jin-il Chung and Petra Kieffer Pülz: "The *karmavācanās* for the determination of *sīmā* and *ticīvareṇa avippavāsa*," *Dharmadūta. Mélanges offerts au Vénérable Thich Huyên-Vi à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, dirigé par Bhikkhu T. Dhammaratana et Bhikkhu Pāsādika, Paris: Librairie You-Feng 1997, pp. 18ff., 49ff.

¹⁹ Only in passing I want to remark that even within the monks' traditions belonging to the Theravāda school such

5. Survey of activities with respect to the reintroduction of the nun's ordination into Sri Lanka

In connection with the attempts to revive the nuns' ordination lineage in Sri Lanka, the Venerable Prof. Havenpola Ratanasara Mahāthera brought selected Sinhalese *dasa sil matas* to Los Angeles in 1988, where they were ordained by nuns from Taiwan as well as by Mahāyāna- and Theravāda monks. This ordination was rejected by most of the elder monks in Sri Lanka with the argument that Taiwan is a Mahāyāna country. Therefore the newly ordained nuns lived as before as *dasa sil matas*.²⁰

After the third Sakyadhita conference, held in Sri Lanka in 1993, the idea of the reintroduction of a nun's ordination spread more widely. In December, 8, 1996, the higher ordination of ten Sinhalese *dasa sil matas* was organised in Sarnath (India) by the Venerable Dr Kamburugamuwe Chandananda Mahāthera, the head of the *saṅgha* in India (*bhārata saṅgha nāyaka*), with the assistance of some Sinhalese monks under the guidance of the Venerable Mapalagame Vipulasara Mahāthera. The ceremony was performed by Korean monks and nuns and Sinhalese monks from the Mahābodhi Society. The whole ceremony was carried out in Korean, and therefore was unintelligible for most of those present. The protest arising in Sri Lanka subsided because the nuns remained in Sarnath.²¹

In February 1997 the Venerable Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera, head of the Golden Temple at Dambulla in Sri Lanka, established a *Bhikkhuni Educational Academy*. This institution offered an education program to *dasa sil matas* after a written and oral examination. One of the central aims was to enable women to learn the 311 rules of the Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha, which are the set of rules to be followed by every Theravāda nun.

One month later (March 1997) the *Sri Lanka Bhikkhuni Re-awakening organization (Bhikkhunā Sāsanābhiviruddhi Samvidhānaya)*, with Ven. Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera as its president, sent about four hundred letters to *dasa sil matas* in Sri Lanka describing plans for a *bhikkhunī* ordination and invitations to apply for it. A committee consisting of four nuns, one monk, and one lay follower selected for interviews eighty *dasa sil matas* out of the two hundred who had applied for the ordination. Only thirty-one of them were accepted for ordination. One of the conditions was that the women had to have been *dasa sil matas* for five years and that they had to be between thirty and fifty-five years old. They also had to have certain qualifications accepted by the government and had to prove that they had received an education in Dhamma and meditation by respected teachers. Furthermore they had to bring two certificates of good conduct. During the interviews the knowledge of the candidates in texts of the Theravāda tradition was checked.²²

On July 12, 1997, twenty-six of these selected women were ordained as novices by Ven. Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera, and they were educated for nine months in a deserted meditation centre in Kalundewa near Dambulla.²³ It was planned to ordain these women in Dambulla by monks only. In this way they were to follow the early tradition of a nun's ordination as stated in the Vinaya.²⁴ This would have been an ordination performed exclusively according to Theravāda

problems arise. The Theravāda monks in Nepal, for instance, are educated in Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka. Thus their pronunciation differs from each other. And if they want to perform legal procedures together they have to decide for one pronunciation, or they have to repeat the procedure at least three times, each time with a different pronunciation (this in fact was the case in determining the *śīmā* in Kīrtipur, Nepal in 1989).

²⁰ Bhikkhuni Bhadra, *Higher Ordination and Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka*, Dehiwala 2001, p. 25.

²¹ Bhikkhuni Bhadra, *Higher Ordination*, p. 25f.; Hema Goonatillake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy," p. 7 [PC manuscript].

²² Bhikkhuni Bhadra, *Higher Ordination*, p. 31ff.

²³ For the training's program and the texts to be studied, see Bhikkhuni Bhadra, *Higher Ordination*, pp. 33ff.

²⁴ Bhikkhuni Bhadra, *Higher Ordination*, pp. 26f., 36f.

tradition. Nevertheless, they could have been reproached with the fact that this form of ordination was already obsolete.

This project of Ven. Sumangala Thera was given up when an invitation of the *Fo Guang Shan Centre* in Taiwan arrived to participate in the *International Full Ordination Program* in Bodh Gaya. This invitation was accepted under the condition that the ordination should be performed according to the Theravāda tradition.²⁵ Ten of the women educated in Dambulla were selected for ordination in Bodh Gaya.

The *International Full Ordination Program* took place in February 14 – 23, 1998, in Bodh Gaya, India. One hundred-forty²⁶ persons (according to Goonatilake one hundred and forty-nine) from twenty-two or twenty-three countries (fourteen men and one hundred thirty-five women) received their full ordination there. Among them were twenty-two *dasa sil matas*.²⁷ The Sinhalese women received their ordination by nuns from Taiwan, Korea and the USA²⁸ in the presence of monks of the Theravāda and Mahāyāna. The ceremony was performed according to the Dharmaguptaka tradition.²⁹ Then the women again received an ordination, this time by Taiwanese monks and nuns,³⁰ and finally they received higher ordination in the uposatha house in Sarnath in the presence of Sinhalese monks from the Mahābodhi Society in India. Among the monks participating there were Theravāda monks as well as Mahāyāna monks. The instructors of the Sinhalese nuns were Sinhalese monks. This is special, since generally nuns have to select a female instructor.³¹ The nuns ordained here returned to Dambulla, Sri Lanka, the same month. Their ordination has not been accepted by all Sinhalese monks.

The first higher ordination to be performed on Sri Lankan soil took place one month later, on March, 12, 1998,³² in Dambulla. A group of twenty-two *dasa sil matas* was ordained. According to some sources the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* acting at that occasion was constituted by Sinhalese nuns ordained in Sarnath in 1996 and in Bodh Gaya in 1998. According to other sources twenty nuns who were ordained in Bodhgaya in February performed the act. The place for the ordination was the Buddhist monastic boundary (*sīmāmālaka*) of the Dambulla temple. Up to then this boundary had been reserved for monks. This implies that a monastic boundary for nuns did not yet exist. The *dasa sil matas* first took the vow as a novice and received higher ordination the next day. The portion of the nuns' ordination to be performed by monks was carried out by monks from the Rājamahāvihāra in Dambulla and from the Paramadhamma Chetiya Pirivena of Ratmalana. Obviously no negative statements regarding this ordination by other Sinhalese monks arose.³³

It is peculiar for this development that the women were strictly selected for the admittance to education and that they had to undergo a long education before they were allowed to be ordained. Furthermore, ordinations as a novice and as a nun were separated by one day only. This implies that the period as a *sikkhamānā* which lasts for two years and precedes the ordination as a nun seems to no longer be necessary. Possibly the monks regard those five years which women had to have been

²⁵ That should mean according to the Dharmaguptaka tradition, since that is the tradition of the Taiwanese monks and nuns.

²⁶ *A New Dawn for Women's Rights*. Hsi Lai Temple's WebSite, California (<http://english.hsilai.org/english2/newdawn.htm>), p. 1.

²⁷ Bhikkhuni Bhadra, *Higher Ordination*, p. 27.

²⁸ This information I owe to Ven. Thubten Chodron.

²⁹ Hema Goonatilake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy," p. 8 [PC manuscript].

³⁰ Possibly the Taiwanese *sangha* wanted to secure that the nuns were ordained with an ordination valid also according to the present day method of the *sangha* in Taiwan. Otherwise no need existed for that second performance.

³¹ Hema Goonatilake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy," p. 8 [PC manuscript].

³² Bhikkhuni Bhadra, *Higher Ordination*, p. 27.

³³ Hema Goonatilake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy," pp. 8-9 [PC manuscript].

dasa sil matas before they started to participate in the education program as equivalent to the *sikkhamānā* period.

After the first ordination had taken place on Sinhalese soil, several other ordinations followed. In August 12, 1998, fifty novices were ordained in Passara, and on October 22, 1998, five in Levangama/Ruwanvella.

Some people consider the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* to have been reconstituted in Sri Lanka since the first ordination on Sinhalese soil in 1998 took place. Others date the complete restoration of the *bhikkhunīsaṅgha* to March 24, 1999, when higher ordination took place in the Rājamahāvihāra in Dambulla. Here twenty *dasa sil matas* were ordained by a group of high monks and Sinhalese nuns who had been ordained in foreign countries during the preceding years. The ordination was headed by Bhikkhu Dhammasara of Mt. Lavinia (Colombo).

At least one of the three *nikāyas* of Sri Lanka, i.e. the Amarapurānikāya, accepts and supports the higher ordination of nuns. A high representative of this *nikāya* was a member of the committee of the *International Full Ordination Program* in Bodhgaya. The monks' monastery in Dambulla with its head Ven. Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera played an especially active role in the process of the restoration of the nuns' ordination. Ven. Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera himself is a member of the Syāma Nikāya, which ordains only members of the highest caste. The monastery at Dambulla, a very rich monastery, belongs to the Asgiriya branch of the Syāma Nikāya. This, however, does not mean that the whole Syāma Nikāya supports the restoration of the nuns' ordination. Rather, Sumangala Thera played a special role. As early as in 1985, he introduced a higher ordination for monks without distinction as to caste. This was against the wishes of the Asgiriya temple. He thus constituted a new ordination lineage independent from the Asgiriya monastery, and therewith also made the Dambulla temple independent in some way.³⁴ Since he won broad public support for his activities, he obtained a somewhat special status. This was, I think, one of the preconditions for his being free enough to initiate the education programs for nuns and establishing a new *bhikkhunīsaṅgha*.

The new *bhikkhunī* tradition receives great support in Sri Lanka. This is proven by the fact that several new education centres arose, i.e. in Newgala, Panadura, Kalundewa and Anuradhapura.³⁵ The education centre in Ambepussa connected to the Newgala monastery is headed by a monk, who guides eighteen nuns' monasteries. Fifteen nuns from these monasteries obtained education as a nun in the centre and were ordained by the Fo Guan Shan monastery in Taiwan. As of the end of 2003 thirty women from this centre had received higher ordination. In the meantime the nuns themselves establish education centres, in order to teach younger women.³⁶ The academy in Dambulla started with its tenth education program January 10, 2004. Following this, some women are regularly ordained as nuns every year.³⁷ At the end of the twentieth century two-hundred nuns were counted, in August 2005 there were already more than four-hundred nuns.

³⁴ Ananda Abeysekara, "Politics of Higher Ordination, Buddhist Monastic Identity, and Leadership in Sri Lanka," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 22,2 (1999), 255-280.

³⁵ In November 2003 the first novice ordination of an Ayukusala nun in Sri Lanka in the Ayukusala-Assama in Kananvila near Horana (Ayukusala Central European Sangha) took place. In April 2005 the first higher ordination of nuns was carried out in the new Ayukusala-Assama in Hokandara.

³⁶ Hema Goonatilake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy," p. 10 [PC manuscript].

³⁷ Hema Goonatilake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy," p. 9 [PC manuscript].

6. Organisation of the nuns' community in Sri Lanka

Now nearly every district in Sri Lanka has a nuns' community. There exists a law-court of the community (*saṅghādikarama*) of nuns which has to regulate possible problems which might arise by nuns' unacceptable activities. Such a case has to be dealt with according to the rules of the Vinaya before all nuns of one district. If a nun does not repent the case has to be dealt with within an uposatha house, i.e. within the Buddhist monastic boundary of the nuns' community, in front of nuns and monks.

As of 2004 seven Buddhist monastic boundaries (*sīmāmāḷaka*) for nuns have been established. Each of them belongs to a nuns' monastery. Two other boundaries were planned at that time, which means that they should be established by now. The nuns living close to such a boundary assemble every fortnight for the performance of the uposatha ceremony, at which time the 311 rules constituting the Pātimokkha for the Theravāda nuns are recited. Other nuns use temporary Buddhist boundaries. The newly ordained nuns have to go to the main uposatha house in Dambulla during the first year.

Each year candidates for higher ordination may apply. The selected persons then have to enter an education centre. The higher ordination generally takes place in June, before the rains retreat. Foreign women, who want to be ordained according to the Theravāda tradition have to send an application to the *International Unit of the Board of the Bhikkhuni Sasana in Sri Lanka*. At least six months before the ordination as a novice and up to the time of the higher ordination, they have to live in Sri Lanka. This may be changed only if a woman has an instructor in her home country.

Since the first higher ordination in Sri Lanka, education has been separated into education before ordination and education afterwards. After having received higher ordination the fully ordained nuns have to assemble once a month in the Academy to receive guidance in monastic practices.³⁸

7. Thailand and Burma

Concerning the situation in Thailand and Burma, there seems to be nearly no acceptance of the *bhikkhunī* ordination. In Burma the monk Shin Adicca initiated a movement for the restoration of a *bhikkhunī* ordination during the 1930s. This, however, failed. A second effort is ascribed to the teacher of the well-known Mahasi Sayadaw, i.e. to Jetavana Sayadaw. In a commentary on the Milindapañha which he wrote in the 1950s he proclaimed the reintroduction of a nun's ordination. In 1970 a Burmese woman submitted an application for ordination to the government without success. A Burmese woman who was ordained as a Buddhist nun in the course of the reintroduction of the nuns' ordination to Sri Lanka, was forced to leave the order by the Burmese government.

In Thailand there existed attempts to reintroduce the nuns' ordination too. A Narit Phasit, famous as Narin Klueng, had his two daughters ordained as nuns and a monastery for nuns, Wat Nariwong, built. On account of that, in 1928 the Sangha Supreme Council forbade monks to ordain nuns, novices, or *sikkhamānas*. This rule is still valid. Therefore the ordination as a nun of Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (monastic name: Dhammananda), formerly Professor of Thammasat University in Bangkok and founding member of the *Sakyadhīta* organisation was discussed a lot. In July, 2001, a second woman (Jamnian Rattaburi) followed her example. Since the monks form a relatively closed front against the reintroduction of the nuns' ordination there do not exist comparable education programmes as in Sri Lanka. Persons who support the reintroduction of the *bhikkhunī* ordination are mostly employed at the universities or/and are women. Even progressive monks, however, are very restrained.³⁹

³⁸ Hema Goonatilake, "Regaining a Lost Legacy," p. 10 [PC manuscript]

³⁹ See the article by Martin Seeger (University of Leeds), "The *Bhikkhunī*-Ordination Controversy in Thailand" [unpublished manuscript].

