

to be found in the *Vamsatthappakāsini*. According to the information in this text, it appears that the Abhayagiri monastery had its own versions of the Bhikkhu-vibhaṅga, Bhikkhunī-vibhaṅga, Khandaka and Parivāra sections of the Vinaya, and, especially in the case of these last two sections, they apparently interpreted the Vinaya in ways which the members of the Mahāvihāra found to be objectionable. Similarly, the Jetavana nikāya had its own version of the Khandaka and Parivāra sections. During the reign of Dāṭhapatissa II in the seventh century, an attempt was made to compile a new recension of the Vinaya, incorporating the Bhikkhu-vibhaṅga and the Bhikkhunī-vibhaṅga of the Abhayagiri version, together with the⁸⁰ Khandaka and Parivāra sections of the Jetavana version. It becomes clear from the information cited above that it would be unwise to assume that the text of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, as it is known today, and the corpus of interpretations found in the *Samantapāsādikā* were the only versions found in the Theravāda tradition of Sri Lanka. In the light of this information, the material that the *Dīpavamsa* presents acquires a special significance. The chronicle pays great attention to the presence of a tradition of teaching the Vinaya within the community of nuns and traces the history of this tradition back to the time of Saṅghamittā. This long succession of teachers of the Vinaya is presented without reference to any links with the line of teachers among monks, as found in the *Samantapāsādikā*. Hence, it does seem likely that the community of nuns possessed their own versions of the Vinaya and distinct traditions of its interpretation. Further, the emphasis laid in the chronicle on the intellectual accomplishments of nuns probably represents an attempt to counter the tendency among some monks to underestimate their capabilities.

In respect of its numerical growth, however, the order of nuns probably lagged very much behind the order of monks. Nevertheless, the need to provide for regular sources of income to maintain the nunneries would have become evident at an early stage of its history. The earliest reference in the chronicles to donations of property to the

⁸⁰ *Vamsatthappakāsini*, Vol.I, pp.175-6.

order of nuns occurs only in the seventh century. In its account of the reign of Aggabodhi IV (667-683), the *Cūlavamsa* states that his queen Jetṭhā built the Jetṭhārāma for the nuns. She provided this institution with extensive endowments by donating three villages including Buddha-belagāma and two other villages which were in the Patta-pāsāṅga⁸¹ area, and assigned one hundred ārāṃikas to serve the nuns. Since an inscription which mentions Patpahaṅ-bim has been found near the Naccadūva reservoir, to the south of Anurādhapura,⁸² it seems justifiable to assume that this nunnery was in the vicinity of the capital, if not within the city. The contexts in which the term ārāṃika occurs in chronicles and commentaries show that it was used with a wide range of meanings to denote functionaries, workmen, bondsmen as well as slaves attached to monasteries and nunneries.⁸³ Donations of property to monasteries had begun several centuries before the time of Aggabodhi IV, and it would be most surprising if this was the first such donation made to the order of nuns. In this respect, information in the *Samantapāsādikā* proves, as usual, to be of great interest in directing our attention to the fact that, at least by the fifth century, ownership of property by nunneries had become a general phenomenon and a cause for concern among those interested in the practice of the Vinaya. The discussions on problems of discipline among nuns to be found in this work suggests that land and irrigation works as well as slaves, both male and female, were among their possessions, and that there were functionaries

⁸¹ *Cūlavamsa* ch.46 vv.27-8.

⁸² See C.W.Nicholas, "Historical Topography of Ancient and Medieval Ceylon," *The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New series, Vol. VI, 1957, p.168.

⁸³ For a discussion on the term, see R.A.L.H.Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka*, Tucson: Association for Asian Studies, 1979, pp. 97-9.

(*kappiyakāraka*) to administer their wealth.⁸⁴ What caused anxiety to the commentators was not the possession of wealth by nuns as such, which was taken for granted, but the ways in which it adversely affected their lives.

The passages in question, which have not received the attention of historians previously, do contain some surprises in store for individuals with romantic notions of harmony in ancient Sri Lankan society who are inclined to believe that the propensity for litigation is a post-colonial phenomenon. It is most interesting to note that the *Samantapāsādikā* refers to a category of people called *aṭṭakārakā*, literally "lawsuit-makers," who, "owing to their acute pride, intense hatred and predilection to cause discord," tended to get involved in litigation.⁸⁵ The commentators sought to prevent the nuns from falling into this category. It is perhaps significant that the discussion on "lawsuit-making" occurs in the *Bhikkhūṇī-vibhaṅga* section of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and the *Samantapāsādikā* rather than the earlier exegesis of the *Bhikkhu-vibhaṅga*. Though, at the end of the passage, the author of the commentary states that the observations should apply to the monks as well, it leaves the impression that litigation had become a serious problem within the community of nuns.

Evidently, the commentators were living at a time when petty theft and violation of property rights were rife, providing opportunities and generating motivation for "lawsuit-making." Thieves and village youths would enter the property of nunneries to remove the produce, cut down trees,

⁸⁴ *Samantapāsādikā*, Vol.IV, 1967, pp.907-8. For a discussion on the connotations of the term *kappiyakāraka*, see Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough*, pp.99-100.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.906. The phrase *manussayavasena* in this passage is probably corrupt and is best read as *mānussayavasena*. In fact, in contrast to the PTS edition, Pamaratana's edition gives the latter reading. See *Samantapāsādikā*, ed. Vāliviṭṭiyē Pamaratana, Colombo: Simon Hevavitarana Bequest, 1945, Vol.II, p.675.

and forcibly carry away equipment.⁸⁶ Presumably, to a greater extent than the monks, the nuns were considered to be easy prey by these individuals. An additional piece of advice that the commentator offered to the monks in this particular context is most interesting. The monk who finds an intruder felling trees on monastic property was advised not to seize the offender's axe and break its cutting edge by dashing it on rocks. If indeed he had already done so by the time he recalled this advice, he was requested to have the axe repaired and to return it to the owner.⁸⁷ In the light of the statement, it is not entirely difficult to understand that it was the nuns, rather than the monks, who had to seek recourse to legal action more often. One can imagine that such problems as forcible appropriation of belongings and intimidation would have been among the difficulties faced by rural nuns, rather than nuns at institutions like the Hatthālhaka nunnery within the "inner city." Recourse to litigation would have been one of the practical means available to women under such circumstances. However, it did not prove to be a simple way out of the predicament. If the accused were to be found guilty, the nun would be instrumental in causing injury to another, even if it was justified in terms of the law. Further, involvement in litigation would arouse disaffection among the laity. The advice tendered to the nuns appears to have been formulated after serious consideration of all these aspects.

It would seem that, from the point of view of the commentators, the judicial process performed two functions: i. the provision of protection to people and property, and ii. the punishment of offenders. In their advice to the nuns, they recognized the need for nuns to avail themselves of the first function but, at the same time, they were eager to prevent the nuns from being associated with the punitive aspect of the judicial process. The nuns were permitted to make an unspecific or general complaint (*anodissācikkhanā*) not directed against any individual and to request the judicial officials (*vohārike*) that they be provided with

⁸⁶ *Samantapāsādikā*, (PTS ed.), Vol.IV, Ibid., p.908.

⁸⁷ *Samantapāsādikā*, Vol.IV, p.910.

protection and that property taken from them be restored.⁸⁸ If the judicial officials were to investigate such an unspecific complaint, apprehend the culprits and punish them, even to the extent of confiscating everything they possessed, the nun would not bear any responsibility or be guilty of an ecclesiastical offence. Similarly, if the judicial officials were to announce by beat of drum that those who perpetrate such and such deeds at the nunnery would be punished in such and such a manner, and then apprehend offenders and punish them, the nun would bear no responsibility. However, under no circumstances was the nun to initiate a lawsuit, by herself or through an intermediary like a functionary attached to the nunnery. If she decided to file a lawsuit and approached the judicial officials, she committed an offence at each step she took, physically and metaphorically. Even if judicial officials had come to see her, she would commit an offence if she were to make a complaint to them, either personally or through a functionary, with a view to initiating a lawsuit. The first complaint involved a *dukkata* offence; the second an offence of the *thullaccaya* category; and at the conclusion of the judicial proceedings (*attapariyosāne*), she was held to be guilty of an offence of the *saṅghādisesa* category, irrespective of the results of the lawsuit.⁸⁹ Even if the judicial officials were to ask a nun as to who were committing thievery and such misdeeds, she was not to reveal their identity and should merely say, "It is not proper for us to say who did it. You yourselves will come to know."⁹⁰ In other words, emphasis was on desisting from making a specific complaint against another person.

The gravity of the offence that the nun committed through involvement in legal procedure was not related to the justifiability of her suit in terms of the prevailing

⁸⁸ kevalam hi mayam rakkham yācāma, tam no dethā avahata-bhandañca āharāpethāti vattabham. evam anodissācikkhanā hoti, sa vattati. Samantapāsādikā, Vol.IV, p.909.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.906-7.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.909.

law. For, if the person against whom she filed the suit were to be found guilty and punished at any level higher than a fine of five *māsakas*, in ecclesiastical terms the nun was considered guilty of having committed the most grievous type of offence, the *pārājikā*, involving expulsion from the order. The only exception to the rule was a situation in which a nun unwittingly found herself involved in a lawsuit which had gone on for quite some time earlier. Presumably, the author had in mind a lawsuit filed by a nun involving her unwilling successor as a party. In such a case, if the judges told the nun that she did not have to say anything because they themselves knew all about it and then proceeded to give their verdict, she was not guilty of having committed any ecclesiastical offence. Only the initiator was responsible.⁹¹ The rule prescribing expulsion from the order for involvement in a successful lawsuit in which the other party had been punished above a certain limit does not appear in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* and seems to have been a Sri Lankan innovation.⁹² Considered purely from a layman's point of view, this would appear illogical, since more justified the nun's complaint in terms of the law, and more grievous the offence of the accused against whom the nun filed a lawsuit, the more guilty was she in the eyes of the *Vinaya*. On the other hand, from the commentator's point of view, judicial punishment was a form of violence and, as such, abhorrent; and graver the violence, the greater was the gravity of the responsibility of those involved in that process. The gradation of ecclesiastical offences involving association with the judicial process was perhaps designed to encourage one who had filed a lawsuit to withdraw it at an early stage. The prescription of such a grave course of action as expulsion from the order perhaps reflects a situation in which litigation had become a serious problem within the community of nuns in ancient Sri Lanka. It may also be pointed out that the underlying assumption of the commentator was that access to courts was easy. The scenarios outlined by him involved situations of nuns going to

⁹¹ *Samantapāsādikā*, Vol. IV, p. 908.

⁹² Even in the later *Parivāra* section, the penalty was *saṅghādisesa*. See *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Vol. V, 1883, pp. 72, 83.

courts, the judicial officials visiting the nunnery to collect information, and announcements being made to ensure protection for the nunnery. They carry the implication that, by this time, a regular system of judicial courts with a penal code, designed to provide security for person and property, had emerged.

The statements in the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Vamsatthapākāsini* which claim that the Hatthālhaka nunnery retained control over the Upāsikā-vihāra complex even after the rise of other *nikāyas* carry the implications that the community of nuns was divided on *nikāya* lines and also that the Hatthālhaka nunnery flourished long after the rise of the other two *nikāyas* of Sri Lankan Buddhism. However, it is only in the tenth century that it is possible to find clear evidence pointing to the existence of other nunneries which accepted the leadership of the Mahāvihāra. Some of these nunneries were very closely associated with rituals pertaining to the Bo-tree. During the reign of Kassapa IV (898-914), Sena who held the office of the Grand Scribe built the nunnery Nālārāma, named after his mother. A pillar inscription from Mahakalattāva records that seven leading nuns at this institution were assigned the daily duty of "offering water" to the Bo-tree at the Mahāvihāra. A village called Gitelgamu which enjoyed special immunities was donated to meet the cost⁹³ of providing these nuns with their daily requisites. There is little doubt that the nuns of the Nālārāma accepted the leadership of the Mahāvihāra. The inscription does not provide information on the location of the nunnery, but, on considering the duties of its inmates, it would seem that the Nālārāma was located in the vicinity of the city. Another official of Kassapa, the General Sena, built the nunnery Tissārāma. It was assigned the income from land at Ayitigevāva, in the Kuñcuṭṭu Kōralē, about twenty-five miles to the north-north-east of Anurādhapura, but the nunnery itself was located within the "inner city" on the "ceremonial high street." The inmates of the Tissārāma nunnery were placed in charge of the shrine of the Bo-tree at the Mariccavaṭṭi-vihāra, a monastery affiliated to the

⁹³ Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. V, pp.339-40.

Mahāvihāra.⁹⁴ There was yet another nunnery within the inner city on the very same street. This was the Mahindārāma (Mihind-aram) mentioned in Kukurumahan-damana pillar inscription which was also set up by General Sena, but its affiliations are unknown.⁹⁵ During the reign of the next king, Kassapa V (914-23), Vajirā, the wife of the Sakkasenāpati, built a nunnery at the Padalañchana and donated it to the nuns of the Mahāvihāra nikāya.⁹⁶ Since the Padalañchana was located near the Thupārāma, to its east,⁹⁷ it appears that this nunnery was also at Anurādhapura. The last reference in the chronicles of Sri Lanka to the construction of a nunnery is from the reign of Mahinda IV (956-72) who built the Mahāmallaka nunnery for followers of the Mahāvihāra nikāya.⁹⁸ The tenth century was clearly a period of revival for the order of nuns of the Mahāvihāra nikāya when the patronage extended by royalty and the nobility resulted in the establishment of four new institutions, probably reflecting an expansion of their influence.

Information on nuns belonging to the other two nikāyas is much more scanty. In the inscription he set up in the grounds of the Abhayagiri monastery, Kassapa V speaks of the nunneries (mehēṇivar) which came under the leadership of

⁹⁴ Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. II, pp.34-8; Cūlavamsa ch.52 v.24. Their duties may have included the performance of the rituals connected with the Bo-tree. The term parihāra carries a wider meaning than mere "care." Though the passage mariccavaṭṭi-mahābodhi-parihāre in the Cūlavamsa may also be translated as "ritual connected with the Mariccavaṭṭi monastery and the Bo-tree," such an interpretation does not seem plausible, especially in the light of the material from the Mahakalattāva inscription.

⁹⁵ Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol.II, p.23.

⁹⁶ Cūlavamsa ch.52 v.63.

⁹⁷ See S. Paranavitana, "Padalañchana at Anurādhapura," University of Ceylon Review, Vol. XVI, 1958, pp.56-61.

⁹⁸ Cūlavamsa ch.54 v.47.

this monastery and thereby points to the presence of nunneries within that nikāya in the tenth century.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, the record carries no clues as to the identity of these nunneries. One very likely possibility is that the two nunneries built by Mahāsena (274-301), the Abhaya and the Uttara, were affiliated to the Abhayagiri monastery. Mahāsena was an opponent of the Mahāvihāra, and the Jetavana had just been founded. Moreover, the two names provide a link with the Abhayagiri monastery which was also known by the names Abhayavihāra, the Uttaravihāra as well as the Abhayuttara-vihāra. There is clearer evidence on the identity of a nunnery which accepted the leadership of the Jetavana nikāya. According to the Cūlavamsa, Moggallāna I (491-508) built the nunnery named Rājini for the nuns of the Sāgalika nikāya.¹⁰⁰ As evident from an inscription from the grounds of the Jetavana monastery and from the Nikāya-saṅgrahaya, Sāgalika was one of the names by which the Jetavana nikāya was known.¹⁰¹ In the latter part of the eighth century a nunnery called Silāmegha finds mention in the Cūlavamsa. Mahinda II (777-797) donated a silver image of a Bodhisattva to it.¹⁰² Later on, the same chronicle states in a rather cryptic verse that the queen of Udaya I (797-801) "built a nunnery called Silāmegha and gave it to the nuns at the Silāmegha nunnery."¹⁰³ As Geiger seems to have assumed,¹⁰⁴ the reference is most probably to the

⁹⁹ Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. I, p.47, line 16.

¹⁰⁰ Cūlavamsa ch.39 v.43.

¹⁰¹ Nikāyasaṅgrahaya, ed. Veragoḍa Amaramoli, Colombo: Anula Press, 1955, p.14; Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. III, p. 227.

¹⁰² Cūlavamsa ch.48 v.139.

¹⁰³ silāmeghavhayaṃ katvā bhikkhunīnaṃ upassayaṃ
silāmeghavhayedāsi bhikkhunīnaṃ upassaye. Cūlavamsa
ch.49 v.25.

¹⁰⁴ Cūlavamsa, tr. W. Geiger, Colombo: Government Information Department, 1953, Part I, p.129.

construction of a new building for the nunnery mentioned earlier. The association of this nunnery with the Bodhisattva cult may imply that it was affiliated to either the Abhayagiri or the Jetavana nikāya, but this is not certain.

Kiribamune raises an important issue in pointing out that cults of the śaktis of Bodhisattvas and of female Bodhisattvas became widespread during the phase immediately preceding the collapse of the Anurādhapura kingdom.¹⁰⁵ Several figures of female deities found in Sri Lanka have been identified as representations of Tārā, Jāṅguli and Cundā. They are dated in the period from the seventh to the tenth century.¹⁰⁶ Though the rise into prominence of female deities may not necessarily be accompanied by an improvement in the status of women, it could be suggested that the influence of the Mahāyāna, especially of certain early Mahāyāna texts like the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, would have helped to bring in a positive change in the attitude of the Buddhist monks towards the problem. The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, which was translated into Chinese in the third century, presents an interesting episode in which the Elder Śāriputra encounters a female deity. According to the story, Śāriputra somewhat indelicately poses the question, "What prevents you from transforming yourself from your female state?" The deity points out to him that, since all phenomena are unreal products of illusion (*māyānirmita*), categorization by sex is irrelevant. She then proceeds to prove the point by transforming Śāriputra into a female. Before changing him back into a male, she tells him, "All women appear in the form of a female just as the Elder appears in the form of a female," and, in support of her position, quotes a statement supposedly made by the Buddha: "In all things (i.e. phenomena,

¹⁰⁵ Sirima Kiribamune, "Women and Social Identity in Ancient and Early Medieval Sri Lanka," paper presented to the 11th Conference of the International Association of Historians of Asia, Colombo, 1988, pp.25-6.

¹⁰⁶ Nandasena Mudiyanse, *Mahayana Monuments in Ceylon*, Colombo: Gunasena, 1967, pp.50-60, 65-7.

dharmā), there is neither male nor female."¹⁰⁷ In rejecting the categorization by sex as being fundamentally irrelevant and in challenging thereby those views which upheld the superiority of one sex over another, some of the early teachers of the Mahāyāna were far ahead of their contemporaries, both within and outside the Buddhist world. It is most likely that such ideas had great appeal for the community of nuns. The interpretations of the Vinaya adopted by the Abhayagiri nikāya, which maintained close rapport with teachers of the Mahāyāna, may reflect the influence of such views. It is tempting to surmise that, under these circumstances, the Mahāyāna and the Tantrayāna, and the nikāyas of the Theravāda which were more receptive to their influences, would have been more attractive to nuns than the Mahāvihāra nikāya. However, in the absence of clear evidence, such a surmise remains unsubstantiated.

The reigns of Kassapa IV, Kassapa V and Mahinda IV represented a phase in which the nunneries in the Mahāvihāra nikāya enjoyed considerable patronage, and, in fact, one does get the impression that it was also a time of revival for nuns in general. It seems very likely that the population of nuns at the capital rose in the tenth century, necessitating special arrangement for their upkeep. As noticed earlier, some of these nunneries had sources of income, and the fact that in certain cases the estates owned by the community of nuns were located at considerable distances from the nunneries would have meant that, as in the case of the monasteries of the time, the organizational evolution of the nunnery involved the provision of administrative machinery to manage such property. However, not all nunneries had such access to resources, and the increase in numbers would have meant greater hardships for the inmates of the poorer nunneries. In his slab inscription found in the grounds of the Abhayagiri monastery, composed in a

¹⁰⁷ Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa, tr. R.A.F. Thurman as Holy Teachings of Vimalakīrti, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976, pp.61-2. See also the translation by Etienne Lamotte and S. Boin (The Teaching of Vimalakīrti, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXXII, London: Pali Text Society, 1976) pp.169-71.

strikingly elegant turn of phrase, Mahinda IV states that he attended to the renovation of the nunneries of "helpless nuns" and that he ¹⁰⁸ set up a separate alms-hall to provide food for the nuns.

The tenth century represents the last major stage in the past history of the order of nuns in Sri Lanka. The long periods of warfare which marked the establishment of Cōla rule over the northern plains and its overthrow as well as the struggles among local chieftains for supremacy, did not augur well for the nuns or the monks. Even if the faith was not actively persecuted, the sources of patronage diminished. It was not a time when solicitous judicial officials would come to inquire insistently about individuals who disturbed the peace at the nunnery and to proceed to identify and punish the culprits even when nuns themselves were not keen to help them in their investigations. On the other hand, the petty thieving of earlier days had given way to plunder by a new breed of robbers who wielded political power. Pressed by the needs of warfare, ¹⁰⁹ even the rulers had taken to appropriating monastic property. Some monks fled the country to live in lands as distant as Burma. ¹¹⁰ Under such conditions of disorder and lawlessness, it is very likely that the nuns were adversely affected to a greater extent than the monks. It is significant that, when attempts were made to revive Buddhism, monks living in Burma were requested to come back, but no such attempt to revive the order of nuns is to be found in the extant records, despite the fact that there were Buddhist nuns in Burma at the same time. ¹¹¹ It is relevant to note that the

¹⁰⁸ yālin meheṇi maha peḷ karā ... asaraṇa meheṇi gaṇā meheṇivar nāvakaṃ karā. Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol. I, p.222 lines 32-3.

¹⁰⁹ See Gunawardana, Robe and Plough, pp.86-94.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp.271-4.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.39. The relevant inscriptions are to be found in G.H.Luce and Pe Maung Tin, Inscriptions of Burma, Oxford, 1933-56, Pls. 89, 92, 200, 268, 576.

new conditions in the order of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka at this time were not very favourable to nuns. In certain records of the twelfth century, women are referred to not as "the better half," but as *viṣabhāga* (Pāli *visabhāga*) meaning "the poisonous half" or "the inimical half." The term itself was old and had been used in the fifth century by Buddhaghosa. In the earlier usage it had a different connotation. For the male attempting to meditate, it was essential to avoid concentrating on the form of the female, but so was the male form for the female trying to meditate. In those contexts, each was *viṣabhāga* for the other.¹¹² Even in the twelfth century, there were authors like Gurulugomi who used the term in the more general sense of "inimical" or "antithetical."¹¹³ However, in certain other documents, the term was used specifically to denote females. The disciplinary rules for monks promulgated under the directions of the forest-dwelling monks forbid them to talk to members of "the poisonous half" in secluded places,¹¹⁴ even if the individuals happened to be their own mothers. The misogynistic tone of these statements reflects an ideological setting which was not favourable for a serious attempt to revive the order of nuns. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that there were no nuns at all in the island during the period after the Cōla conquest. This was a period which produced one of the finest luminaries among Sri Lankan nuns. Candramālī, who was a missionary, a translator and a follower of the Tantrayāna, has been completely forgotten in her own land, but her name is preserved in Tibetan and Mongol records.¹¹⁵ It seems likely that she was one of the Buddhist clerics who had left the island during the period of Cōla rule. A phrase in a short inscription on a pillar, found recently at Polonnaruva and datable in the twelfth century, has been read as *meheni mavā*. The first word has been translated as "nun," and it has been suggested that the record

112 *Visuddhimagga*, p.146.

113 *Dharmapradīpikā*, ed. R.Dharmāloka & K.Dharmārāma, Colombo: Government Printer, 1886, p.28.

114 *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol.II, 272, lines 39, 44.

115 See *infra* pp.55-8.

points to the presence of nuns in the island in the twelfth century.¹¹⁶ However, another equally valid reading of the phrase would be *mehe nimavā*, meaning "having completed the work (or the ritual)," and, if this reading is accepted, it would imply that the record is not relevant to the study of the history of nuns.

II

The achievements of Candramālī and some of her predecessors direct attention to an important aspect of the role of the nun in Sri Lankan Buddhism. Like the paradigmatic *Saṅghamittā*, they were all women who travelled to distant lands to propagate Buddhism and to establish the order of nuns in new locations. The earliest reference to the followers of *Saṅghamittā* playing the role of the missionary is to be found in the *Dīpavaṃsa*. *Sivalā* and *Mahāruhā*, who lived in the time of *Vaṭṭagāmaṇī*, are described as nuns who propagated Buddhism among many people in *Jambudīpa*. It is likely that they crossed over to the subcontinent with the monks who left the island during those troubled times and that they devoted the period of their exile to propagatory activities. After normalcy was restored, they were invited back to *Anurādhapura* by the king, and there they continued their teaching work.¹¹⁷ No extant Sri Lankan source refers to the second instance of missionary activity on the part of the island's nuns though it appears to have been much more remarkable. It was in the middle of the nineteenth century that James Tennent brought together information from several Chinese accounts of Sri Lanka which he had obtained through the British Mission at Shanghai as well as from the translations of Chinese sources that had been made by Remusat, Klaproth, Landresse, Pauthier

¹¹⁶ P.W. Gamlath, "Pillar Inscription from *Isipatana-rāma*, Polonnaruva." In P.L.Prematilleke, *Alahana Parivena*, Polonnaruva: Archaeological Excavation Report (October 1981-March 1982), Colombo: Central Cultural Fund, 1982, pp.25-6, 45 & Pl. 73.

¹¹⁷ *pāsādikā Jambudīpe sāsanena bahū janā. Dīpavaṃsa ch.18 vv.31-3.*

and Stanislas Julien.¹¹⁸ Tennent's work provided for the first time an opportunity for students with no knowledge of Chinese to form an idea about relations between China and Sri Lanka in premodern times. At the beginning of the present century, the French savant Sylvain Lévi directed the attention of the scholarly world to other references to Sri Lanka which he found in classical Chinese texts like the *Sung-kao-seng-chuan* and the *Pien-i-tien*. Extracts from these texts translated into French by Lévi provide information on the activities of Sri Lankan religieux in China.¹¹⁹ More than a decade later, John M. Senaveratne used subsequently published material for his notes on relations between China and Sri Lanka which were especially valuable for the light they shed on the missionary activities of Sri Lankan nuns in ancient times. The information on nuns was based on excerpts from Pao-chang's *Pi-chiu-ni-chuan* translated by Paul Pelliot.¹²⁰ In 1981, an English translation of Pao-chang's work was published by Li Jung-hsi,¹²¹ and this work provides more detailed information on the activities of Sri Lankan nuns in China, helping thereby to investigate certain

¹¹⁸ James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon: An Account of the Island, Physical, Historical and Topographical, with Notices of its Natural History, Antiquities and Productions*, Dehiwala: Tisara, 1977, pp. 514-531. The first edition of this work was published in 1859 and the fourth (revised) edition in 1860.

¹¹⁹ Sylvain Lévi, "Les Missions de Wang Hiuen-ts'e dans l'Inde," *Journal Asiatique*, 1900, pp. 411-440.

¹²⁰ John M. Senaveratne, "Chino-Sinhalese Relations in the Early and Middle Ages," *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIV, No. 68, 1915-6, p. 82; "Some Notes on the Chinese References," *Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIV, No. 68, 1915-6, pp. 107-8. Pelliot's translations were published in *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient*, Tome IV, 1904, p. 356.

¹²¹ Pao-chang, *Pi-chiu-ni-chuan*, translated by Li Jung-hsi as *Biographies of Buddhist Nuns*, Osaka: Tohokai, 1981.

questions on which no material was available earlier. Pao-chang lived in the time of the Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (A.D. 502-49), who was a great patron of Buddhism, and completed the *Pi-chiu-ni-chuan* in A.D. 517.¹²² Clearly the order of nuns was flourishing when Pao-chang began to compile his collection of biographical notes on sixty-five prominent nuns who had lived in China from the time of Ching-chien of the Chu-lin nunnery. This nun who lived in the fourth century is described as "the first Bhikṣuṇī in the land of China."¹²³

The main reference to the Sri Lankan nuns occurs in the biography of the nun Seng-kuo of the Kuang-ling nunnery. She was born at Hsiu-wu in the Chi prefecture and had obtained ordination from the nun Hui-tsung of Kuang-ling. Seng-kuo met the Sri Lankan nuns at Nan-jing. The rather long description of this episode is worth quoting in full:

In the 6th year of Yuan-chia (429) Nandi, the owner of a foreign ship, brought a group of bhikṣuṇīs from the kingdom of Sinhala to the capital of the Sung dynasty, where they were lodged in the Ching-fu Nunnery. Some time afterwards, they asked Seng-kuo whether any foreign bhikṣuṇīs had come to China previously. She told them that there had been none. They asked further how the Chinese bhikṣuṇīs could have obtained their ordination from the two sections of the saṅgha (if no foreign bhikṣuṇīs had come to China). Seng-kuo said that they had received their ordination only from the bhikṣu-saṅgha. Then the foreign bhikṣuṇīs said that the ceremony of ordination was only an expedient to rouse the feeling of respect in the minds of those who were ordained into the saṅgha. Therefore, Mahaprajāpatī had received her ordination through the acceptance of the Eight Rules of Veneration, while five

122 Pao-chang, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

123 *Ibid.*, pp. 25-8.

hundred women of the Sākya clan were ordained with Mahāprajāpatī as their preceptress. This was a good precedent for the ordination of bhikṣuṇīs. Seng-kuo still had doubts in her mind, though she agreed with what had been said. Then she went to a Tripitaka-master, who explained the matter in the same way. She then asked whether it was permissible for the Chinese bhikṣuṇīs to receive ordination for a second time. The master told her that as śīla, samādhi and prajñā were matters that must be developed from the lower to the higher stages, it was better for them to be ordained once again.

In the 10th year of Yuan-chia (433) Nandi brought to China from the kingdom of Sinhala another group of eleven bhikṣuṇīs, headed by Devasarā. Those who arrived earlier had by now mastered the Chinese language. Saṅghavarman was then requested to erect an ordination platform in the Nan-lin Monastery, and more than 300 Chinese bhikṣuṇīs received their full ordination from the Sinhalese bhikṣuṇīs.¹²⁴

It is evident from the preceding passage that the first group of nuns arrived at Nan-ling in the 6th year of the Yuan-chia era and that the second group arrived four years later in the 10th year of the same era. Thus Senaveratne's dating of these events in A.D. 426 and 429, which has been generally accepted by Sri Lankan scholars during several decades, seems to be inappropriate.¹²⁵ Li Jung-hsi dates the two events in A.D. 429 and 433 and, in doing so, he is following the method adopted by most scholars, including Sylvain Lévi, to convert dates in Chinese eras to

¹²⁴ The biography of Seng-kuo of Kuang-ling, Pao-chang, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-70.

¹²⁵ Senaveratne, "Some Notes ...," pp.107-8. See also Robe and Plough, p.37; S.R. Hettitaratchi, *Social and Cultural History of Ancient Sri Lanka*, Delhi: Satguru, 1988, p.101.

the Christian era. In fact, Senaveratne's dating does not seem to derive from a rejection of this method of conversion, for he used the same method when he dated two other missions from Sri Lanka, which arrived in Nan-jing in the 5th and the 7th years of Yuan-chia era, in A.D. 428 and 430.¹²⁶ Li Jung-hsi's dating, which follows the accepted method of conversion of eras and is in accord with the description that the two missions were four years apart, is clearly preferable and has been followed by at least one scholar.¹²⁷ Despite this revision, it would be still correct to assume that both groups of nuns left Sri Lanka in the reign of Mahānāma (A.D.410-432).

Li Jung-hsi renders the name of the Sri Lankan nun as Devasarā. In an earlier contribution, Pachow suggested that it was a Chinese transliteration of the name Tri-sarāṇa.¹²⁸ The three characters reproduced below,¹²⁹ which were used to represent this name, may be read as T'ie-sa-lo or, if one were to use the ancient phonetic values of the characters as reconstructed by Karlgren, as T'iet-sa-la.¹³⁰

126 Senaveratne, "Some Notes...", pp.107-8.

127 Mahinda Werake, "Sino-Sri Lankan Buddhistic Relations during the Anurādhapura Period," paper presented to the Seminar on the Abhayagiri Monastery, 1983, p.4.

128 W.Pachow, "Ancient Cultural Relations between Ceylon and China," University of Ceylon Review, Vol.XII, 1954, p.184.

129 The author is indebted to Mr Zhang Cheng Li for his courtesy in getting the following characters drawn and to Mr Shi Yi for his calligraphy.

鐵薩羅

130 Bernhard Karlgren, Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese, Taipei: Ch'eng-wen Publishing Company, 1966, p.285, No.991; p.184, No.569. See R.H.Mathews, A Chinese-English Dictionary, Shanghai: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1931, p.746, No.5387.

Since one has to look for a trisyllabic name with similar phonetic values, it seems preferable to render it as Tesarā. In addition to these phonetic values, the characters selected by the Chinese writer carry the meaning "subtle silk of iron-like firmness,"¹³¹ and probably represent a poetic allusion to a delicate nun who was strict in her interpretations of the rules of discipline.¹³² Tesarā, who was the leader of the second group of nuns, is mentioned more than once in the Chinese source. Of the names of the Sri Lankan nuns who came to China, hers is the only one that has been preserved. It is quite clear that the Sri Lankans were the first foreign nuns to arrive in China. However, it is equally clear that there had been Buddhist nuns in China from the time of Ching-chien who had lived a century earlier.

An issue raised repeatedly in the Pi-chiu-ni-chuan relates to the validity of the ordination that the Chinese nuns had received earlier. Ching-chien of the Chu-lin nunnery and three of her associates had received the higher ordination from monks.¹³³ The nun An Ling-shou who founded

¹³¹ The second of the three characters is used only for transliteration and has the phonetic value sa. The character 't'ie (or t'iet), which is the first, denoted "iron" and was also the symbol for iron-like firmness. The third character which had elements meaning "silk" and "birds" was used to denote thin or fine silk and bird-net. See Karlgren, *op. cit.*, p.285, No.991; Mathews, *A Chinese-English Dictionary*, p.746, No.5387; p.915, No.6332.

¹³² Several years ago, while introducing the present writer to the rudiments of the system of Chinese characters, Professor Yoneo Ishii of Kyoto University drew attention to the fact that ancient Chinese writers who were rendering the phonetic values of foreign names sometimes tried to select characters with care so that their meanings also conveyed a message about the subject. The characters chosen to transliterate the name of the Sri Lankan nun seem to provide another example to illustrate this point.

¹³³ Pao-chang, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-8.

the Chieh-hsien nunnery had received her higher ordination from the monk Buddhasimha with Ching-chien as her preceptress.¹³⁴ Some of these early nuns like Tan-pei, Seng-chi, Tao-jung and Chih Miao-yin gained fame for their ability to expound the Buddhist teachings and their strict adherence to codes of discipline.¹³⁵ They were patronized by the royal family. However, it does not appear that there was a continuous tradition of receiving ordination from "both sections of the saṅgha," and at least some of the nuns had received their higher ordination only from monks. The Vinaya texts of the Mahāsāṅghika tradition had been translated into Chinese in A.D. 357 and Fa Hian had translated the *Bhikṣuṇī-prātimokṣa* of the Sarvāstivāda nikāya sometime before A.D. 420.¹³⁶ The Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka school was translated by Saṅghavarmī (?), a Sri Lankan scholar who arrived in China in A.D. 420.¹³⁷ It appears that some of the nuns who had studied the Vinaya had doubts about the validity of their higher ordination.

With the arrival of the Sri Lankan nuns at Nan-jing two distinct traditions relating to the ordination of nuns confronted each other. As noted earlier, one was a tradition which insisted on the participation of nuns in the admission of new members into the order and thereby expected the nuns to travel over long distances to facilitate the expansion of their order into new lands. The other was a more pragmatic tradition which was based on the realization that it would be a long and indefinite wait if the establishment of the

¹³⁴ Pao-chang, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-42, 45-7.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27; Paul Demiéville, Hubert Durt and Anna Seidel, *Répertoire du Canon Bouddhique Sino-Japonais*, Édition de Taishō, Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1978, p.123, No.1437.

¹³⁷ M. Anesaki, "Ceylon and Chinese," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1903, pp.368-9. It has not been possible to trace this name in the catalogue prepared by Demiéville et. al.

order of nuns in China were to be postponed till the arrival of nuns from South Asia. Since travel posed formidable problems for the nuns even within the vast territories of East Asia, it was argued that rules could not be applied in their original form but had to be modified, as had been done in the times of the Buddha, to suit conditions in "frontier places" where "conditions are not complete." Under such conditions, the ordination of nuns by monks was to be allowed, and it was further pointed out that the ordination of Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī, the first nun, was an excellent example to follow.¹³⁸ An extreme expression of such pragmatism is to be found in the foundation of the Japanese order of nuns during the reign of Bidatsu at the end of the sixth century. It is said that Mumako no Sukune, the patron of Buddhism, failed to find a monk to ordain Zen-Shin, the first Japanese nun, and her companions; he had them ordained by Hyephyon of Koryo "who from a Buddhist priest had become a layman again."¹³⁹

The statements attributed to the Sri Lankan nuns who went to China indicate their surprise at finding that the order of nuns had been established before any ordained nuns had come to China and reflect their view that the *upasampadā* of nuns had to be bestowed by both sections of the *saṅgha*. On the other hand, some other statements attributed to them seem to carry the somewhat contradictory implication that the procedure of the *upasampadā* did not constitute a matter of fundamental significance: it was merely a device to rouse feelings of respect. While the first view is in accord with the Sri Lankan tradition as found in several works including the *Dīpavaṃsa* and the *Mahāvāṃsa*, it is difficult to make an assessment of the authenticity of the other statements attributed to them.

138 Biography of Hui-kuo, Pao-chang, op. cit., pp.49-50.

139 A nun and a group of monks had come to Japan from the kingdom of Pechke seven years earlier, in A.D.577, but it is difficult to explain why they were not instrumental in the establishment of the order of nuns. Nihongi, ed. W.G.Aston, Tokyo: Tuttle, 1978, Vol. II, pp.96, 101-2.

It is clear that there was a division of opinion among the Chinese nuns in the fifth century on the question as to which of the two traditions was to be followed. A large number of Chinese nuns evidently saw the arrival of Sri Lankan nuns as an opportunity to remedy a situation which they considered to be inappropriate and to establish the order of nuns on a valid and legitimate footing. The ceremony for awarding the *upasampadā* could now be performed with preceptresses and teachers belonging to an order of nuns with an ancient heritage and tradition. Hui-kuo of the Ching-fu nunnery was one of the concerned nuns, but her story in the *Pi-chiu-ni-chuan* has some contradictions which cannot be resolved. In one place, it is mentioned that she received "full ordination anew" from Guṅavarman in the ninth year of Yuan-chia (A.D. 432), and that she died at the age of seventy in the following year.¹⁴⁰ However, in a later context, the text states that Hui-kuo, along with her associates including one nun called Ching-yin, had consulted Guṅavarman and had been assured that her previous ordination was valid. Nevertheless, after the arrival of Tesarā and her companions at her nunnery, she and her companions had received the higher ordination for a second time at the ceremony held at the Nan-lin monastery in the eleventh year of Yuan-chia (A.D. 434).¹⁴¹ This contradicts the earlier statement that Hui-kuo had died during the previous year. A more certain case of a nun who came into contact with the Sri Lankans is to be found in the biography of Te-lo who was born in Pi-ling as a member of a family of officials. She had come to live at the South Yung-an nunnery in Nan-jing, and won the support of the Emperor Wen (A.D. 424-53) of the Early Sung dynasty. She, too, received her higher ordination at the Nan-lin ceremony. Subsequently, she lived at different times at the Eastern Ching-yuan nunnery as well as at the Chao-ming vihāra and the Chi-ming vihāra. The last two institutions were in the district of Yen.¹⁴² Evidently, all these nuns were among the group of three hundred nuns who,

140 Pao-chang, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

141 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

142 *Ibid.* pp. 110-1.

as mentioned earlier, received their higher ordination at Nan-lin.

Though there had been Buddhist nuns in China quite some time before this, the ceremony at the Nan-lin monastery marked an important landmark in the history of Buddhism in China. In the minds of the participants, it would have been a ceremony which linked the Chinese nuns with its founder Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī through a long chain of preceptress-disciple relationships stretching over many generations. Thereby it gave a sense of unbroken tradition to the institution of Chinese nuns. Further, the conferment of higher ordination in strict adherence to the codes of the Vinaya endowed the institution with the legitimacy it lacked in earlier times in the eyes of several of its members. The ceremony had the potentiality of initiating a Sri Lanka tradition of nuns in China, as in the case of the Sinhala saṅgha tradition which emerged under similar circumstances in some Buddhist countries in Southeast Asia, but, as will be evident later, this promise was not to be fulfilled.

If the Sri Lankan mission did not bear out its promise, it was not due to a lack of initiative on the part of the missionaries. The two groups of nuns, who were perhaps the first women in history to have undertaken voyages over such a distance, had braved the dangers of the South China Sea feared by most travellers in these parts to preach the word of the Buddha in China and to help women in that land to place their order of nuns on a firmer footing. As Pao-chang noted, the first group of nuns who arrived in China in A.D. 429 had acquired a proficiency in the Chinese language by the time the second group of Sri Lankan nuns arrived at Nan-jing in A.D. 433. This difficult accomplishment would have greatly facilitated their work in Nan-jing.

It appears that, even before she arrived at Nan-jing, Tesarā had won some followers among Chinese nuns. This is evident from the biography of the nun Seng-ching of the Chung-sheng nunnery. As a young child Seng-ching had become a disciple of the nun Pai of the Chien-an nunnery. It is said that a certain official called Kung Mo took Seng-ching to Kuang-chou when he went there to assume duties as the

chief of the garrison. The nun Tesarā and her companions, who were on their way to Nan-*ching*, were at Kuang-*chou* at the time. Seng-*ching* was quite impressed with them and she decided to receive ordination from them. She then intended to take to the sea and go on pilgrimage, probably to South Asia, but she could not obtain the necessary permission. For more than thirty years she lived as a most influential nun at Ling-*nan* where the Chung-*chao* nunnery was built for her. Emperor Ming (A.D. 465-72) of the Early Sung dynasty invited her to the capital where she stayed at the Chung-*sheng* nunnery till another nunnery was built for her. She lived into a ripe old age and was a favourite of Emperor Ming as well as of the princes Hsiao Chang-*mao* and Wen-*hsuan*.¹⁴³ It is evident from the biography of Seng-*ching* that the Sri Lankan nuns had spent some time at Kuang-*chou* (modern Guangzhou) or Canton.¹⁴⁴ This was perhaps the most important Chinese port in the South Sea trade. It is very likely that the Sri Lankan nuns first disembarked here and, after a period of rest to recuperate from the effects of their long voyage, proceeded by land or by boat to Nan-*jing*.

It will have been evident from the foregoing account that Chinese nuns like Seng-*kuo*, Ching-*yin*, Te-*lo* and Seng-*ching* were among the leading supporters of the Sri Lankan nuns. Among the disciples of Te-*lo* was the nun Fa-*hsuan* who became famous for her knowledge of the scriptures.¹⁴⁵ These nuns were associated with the Ching-*fu*, Kuang-*ling*, South Yung-*an*, Eastern Ching-*yuan*, Chao-*ming*, Chi-*ming*, Chung-*sheng* and Chung-*chao* nunneries, and these were the prominent institutions where the influence of the Sri Lankan nuns would have persisted. The Ching-*fu* nunnery, the Nan-*lin* monastery and, as will be seen later, the Tsin-*hsing* monastery appear to have been the main centres of Sri Lankan activity. The Ching-*fu* nunnery had been founded in A.D 422 by Chuan Hung-*jan*, the governor of Ching-*chou*, with

¹⁴³ Pao-*chang*, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-90.

¹⁴⁴ 廣州 See *The Grand Buddhist Tripitaka*, Taipei: The Chinese Buddhist Culture Institute, Vol. 50, p.942.

¹⁴⁵ Pao-*chang*, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-40.

Hui-kuo as its abess.¹⁴⁶ Some of its inmates¹⁴⁷ were known for the practice of meditation leading to dhyāna.

In the ceremony held at the Nan-lin monastery, the Sri Lankan nuns were associated with the monk Saṅghavarman (Seng k'ie pa mo) who is mentioned in three¹⁴⁸ of the biographical accounts in the Pi-chiu-ni-chuan. This monk, described as an Indian, arrived at Nan-jing in A.D. 423 (or 433 according to some accounts) and worked in China till 442 when he took ship to return home.¹⁴⁹ In the Taisho Tripitaka, he is credited with the translation of Nāgārjuna's *Suhṛllekhā* as well as a work by Āryaśūre and two other texts, the *Samyuktābhidharmahṛdaya* and the *Abhidharma-sāra-pratikīrṇaka*, attributed to Dharmatrāta.¹⁵⁰ It is possible that he also translated a work the Chinese name of which has been identified by Demiéville and his co-researchers as representing the Sanskrit text *Sarvāstivāda-vinayamātrikā*.¹⁵¹ As noted earlier, Hui-kuo and her companions had contacts with the Kashmirian monk Guṇavarman who arrived at Nan-jing in A.D. 431 after visiting Sri Lanka on the way. Anesaki was of the opinion that this monk would have been interested in introducing the Sri Lankan monastic traditions to China and that the arrival of the Sri Lankan nuns was

146 Pao-chang, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-9.

147 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

148 *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 81, 111.

149 See Paul Demiéville et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 281.

150 *Ibid.*, pp. 71 (No. 723), 132 (No. 1552), 141 (No. 1673).

151 Demiéville et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 123 (No. 1441). Demiéville et al. identify the translator as Saṅghavarman. It has to be noted, however, that the Chinese characters indicating the name of the translator are not the same as in the other colophons cited above.

probably the outcome of his initiatives.¹⁵² He is credited with the translation of several works including texts identified as the *Upāli-pariprocchā*, *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, *Bodhisattva-caryā-nirdeśa* and the *Suhrillekhā* another translation of which has been made by Saṅghavarman.¹⁵³ Pachow has suggested that he was a follower of the Sarvāstivāda school.¹⁵⁴ Apparently, Tesarā was not a translator, and she is not credited with any work in the Chinese Tripitaka. This makes it difficult to ascertain her views, but it would appear that both Guṇavarman and Saṅghavarman were close to the Sarvāstivāda school. The information available on the scholarly activities of Saṅghavarman is particularly relevant. The Sri Lankan nuns who came to China performed the ceremony of higher ordination in association with this monk, and such a close association with a monk who appears to have been a follower of the Sarvāstivāda in a formal ecclesiastical act of primary significance implies that these nuns were not opposed to the Sarvāstivāda, if indeed they were not themselves followers of this school. On considering the information available to us, it seems justifiable to infer that Tesarā and her companions belonged either to the Abhayagiri or to the Jetavana nikāya, if not to a group outside the three nikāyas of the Sri Lankan saṅgha.¹⁵⁵ It is most unlikely that they were members of the

¹⁵² Anesaki, *op. cit.*, p.369

¹⁵³ Demiéville et. al., *op. cit.*, pp. 123 (No. 1434), 125 (No. 1466), 126 (Nos. 1472, 1476, 1487), 127 (No. 1503), 135 (Nos. 1582-3), 141 (No. 1672).

¹⁵⁴ W.Pachow, "The Voyages of Buddhist Missions to Southeast Asia and the Far East," *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol.XVIII, 1960, p.202.

¹⁵⁵ Mahinda Werake (*op. cit.* p.4) and S.B. Hettitaratchi (*op. cit.* p.104) have suggested that the missions to China were undertaken by the nuns of the Abhayagiri nikāya. As the present writer has pointed out elsewhere (*Robe and Plough*, p.16), it is likely that there were monks from the Abhayagiri monastery among the Sri Lankan envoys who came to the Chinese court in A.D. 428. However, it is noteworthy

Mahāvihāra nikāya.

The failure of the Nan-lin ceremony to initiate a Sri Lankan tradition within the Chinese order of nuns and thereby to leave a more durable impact on the history of Buddhism in that country is not easy to explain. However, the information in the Pi-chiu-ni-chuan seems to be relevant to the search for an explanation. It is very likely that the ceremony at Nan-lin had the approval of Emperor Wen and at least some of his officials. Nuns like Te-lo and Seng-ching had received patronage from the Emperor, the royal family and officials. The close contacts that some of these nuns maintained with the political world was a decisive advantage in attracting patronage, but links with court circles could also be hazardous in involving religious in political intrigue. It is evident from Pao-chang's comments that the South Yung-an nunnery where Te-lo lived was involved in an unsuccessful plot organized by one Kung Hsi-hsien in A.D. 444. On the discovery of the plot, the nunnery was demolished and, in the words of the chronicler, "the Dharma [was] adversely affected." There is no information on the fate of the nuns Fa-ching and Tan-lan who were parties to the plot, but Te-lo, the former royal favourite, moved to another nunnery. It seems possible that the influence she had wielded earlier was affected by these later developments. Later on she is said to have left the capital.¹⁵⁶ While the changing fortunes of nunneries which were associated with the Sri Lankan nuns could have affected the influence the latter could wield, the main obstacles appear to have arisen as a result of problems within the community of nuns.

It is not difficult to understand how the idea of a "second" higher ordination could cause problems and raise issues which would be controversial in Chinese society. For one, it meant that seniority of certain nuns could be affected. Since seniority would be computed on the date of the second ordination, those who were lucky enough to

that the nuns had not accompanied them and evidently came as a separate group in the following year.

¹⁵⁶ Pao-chang, op. cit., p. 111.

undergo the second ordination earlier would have an advantage over senior nuns who had not been able to participate in such an ordination ceremony before their erstwhile juniors. In such cases, the order of seniority would be seriously upset. Moreover, to some of the Chinese nuns the "second" ordination under "foreign nuns" would have appeared to be a rejection of a tradition within Chinese Buddhism which was about a century old. Thus, it appears that, while there was a considerable number of nuns who received the ordination from the Sri Lankan nuns, there were many others who did not do so. It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that the Sri Lankan nuns were received at the Ching-fu nunnery which had been constructed only a few years earlier while the nuns of the Chien-fu nunnery, the oldest at the capital, and famous nuns like Seng-tuan and Ye-shou of the Yung-an nunnery (also known as Empress Ho's nunnery)¹⁵⁷ which was another of the oldest institutions at the capital, appear to have kept aloof from these activities. It becomes evident from even Pao-chang's statements that the question of the "second" ordination was quite controversial. Pao-chang gave prominence to the Nan-lin ceremony in his account but, at the same time, he is careful to state that "this did not mean that their previous ordination was ineffective." He further speaks of the "confusion to the system of ordination" caused¹⁵⁸ by "curious people" who sought a second ordination.

The account of the life of the nun Pao-hsien brings out in graphic manner the opposition displayed by certain nuns who wielded influence at the court to the idea of a second ordination. Pao-hsien was well-known as a person with a thorough knowledge of the methods of meditation and the codes of discipline. She had gained the patronage of the Emperors Wen, Hsiao-wu (A.D.454-464) and Ming. During the reign of Ming she had become the abbess of the Pu-hsien

¹⁵⁷ Ye-shou later moved to the Ching-yuan nunnery as its abbess, and this institution had about two hundred inmates at this time. See Pao-chang, *op.cit.*, pp. 37, 63-4, 74-5.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

nunnery. Ming had extended patronage to Sing-ching who had obtained her ordination from the Sri Lankan nuns, but it was Pao-hsien whom he appointed by imperial decree as the Directress of Nuns at the Capital.¹⁵⁹ This nun who held such an important position was not among those who opted to have a second ordination. On the other hand, she appears to have used her authority and influence to curb the practice:

In the 2nd year of Yuan-hui (474) the Vinaya-master Fa-ying lectured on the *Daśādhyāya-vinaya* in the Tsin-ying Monastery, and one day more than ten *bhikṣuṇīs* from the audience wished to receive full ordination for a second time. In this connection Pao-hsien went to see the authority in charge of monastic affairs and brought back an order to the lecture hall, where she beat a wooden instrument to proclaim the order that *bhikṣuṇīs* were not permitted to receive full ordination for a second time thoughtlessly. The teachers of those *bhikṣuṇīs* who had received their full ordination below the proper age-limit should assemble their disciples to make a repentance and then go to the authority in charge of monastic affairs to ask for permission. When permission was granted by the authority, they might receive their full ordination anew with proper witnesses. Anyone who acted against this order would be reprimanded and expelled.¹⁶⁰ Thenceforth the situation was rectified.

It is evident from this passage that the practice of obtaining "second ordinations" continued for four decades after the Nan-lin ceremony, but it would seem that, by that time, at least some of the influential officials had decided, evidently on being urged to do so by nuns like Pao-hsien, that there was a need for strict control over the nuns and especially of this practice. The imperial decree to appoint a Directress of Nuns was evidently one of the steps

¹⁵⁹ Pao-chang, *op.cit.*, pp. 81, 90.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2.

in this process. The order issued in A.D. 474 forbidding nuns to receive "second ordinations" on pain of expulsion seems to have brought the practice to an end. The vexed question of the validity of the higher ordination that the Chinese nuns had earlier received was evidently settled by this official ruling. It is noteworthy that the only group of nuns allowed to obtain a "second" ordination were those whose first ordination was considered to be invalid because they had not been of the proper age at the time. Even in such cases, they had to obtain official permission before the ceremony could be performed. It would seem that those elements who were opposed to the idea of a "second ordination" had gained the upper hand and had succeeded in imposing their will on the others. In a sense, it amounted to the legitimation of a pragmatic solution to a problem in the order of nuns. The historian Pao-chang, too, was evidently among those who accepted the view that it was a correct decision, and, as noted earlier, he traced the beginnings of the order of nuns to Ching-chien, the Chinese nun who had been ordained by a monk. However, the consequence of this decision was that the Nan-lin ceremony held by the Sri Lankan nuns came to be assessed not as an event marking the formal beginning of the order of nuns in China but as a ceremony which had catered to over-zealous nuns who were unduly concerned about an imaginary problem.

Further information on the activities of Sri Lankan clerics is to be found in the Tibetan and Mongol sources. As evident from the Tibetan Tripitaka, an extensive exegetical work by a Sri Lankan monk named Pṛthivibandhu had been brought into Tibet at an early time. The work had been translated from the Chinese language, but the author is introduced as a "Sinhala teacher" (siñ-ga-laḥi slon-po).¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ The Tibetan Tripitaka, Beijing edition, ed. Daisetz T. Suzuki, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, Vol. CVII, 1957, p. 60, No. 5518, folio 347a, line 7. The author is indebted to Professor Ratna Handurukande for help in verifying this reference. Unfortunately, no translation of this Tibetan text is available, and, consequently, the present writer has not been able to determine the views expressed by this Sri Lankan scholar.

If the influence of Sri Lankan scholarship reached Tibet early through the intermediacy of Chinese clerics, it would appear that the honour of being the first Sri Lankan to participate in the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet belongs to a woman, the nun Candramālī (or Candramālā Tib. Candiramāle, Candiramālā) mentioned earlier. Though the exact details about Candramālī's travels are not known, like her spiritual forebears of an earlier epoch who had braved the hazards of voyages to China, she appears to have successfully overcome the rigours involved in the long journey over rugged terrain infested by highwaymen to reach Tibet.¹⁶² This second Sri Lankan whose name appears in the Tibetan Tripiṭaka was remembered for her contributions as a translator.

Candramālī reached Tibet in the early part of the eleventh century when a revival of Buddhism was beginning in that land under the leadership of Ye ses, a monk of noble origin, who was opposed to those Tantric traditions which placed emphasis on seeking deliverance through sexual ecstasy. As Bu-ston points out, Ye ses was bent on directing Tibetan Buddhism along different paths and, with this end in view, sent many young monks to study in India and invited renowned Indian scholars to come and work in Tibet. Tibetan scholars who were to play a vital role in later times like Rin-chen-s'an-po were among those sent by Ye ses for higher studies in India. Several leading Buddhist scholars from India, especially from the centres in the Northeast, came to Tibet to participate in this new awakening. Among them were Dīpankaraśrījñāna, Dharmapāla, Śākyaprabhā¹⁶³ Buddhapāla, Padmākaragupta, Gayādhara and Kamalagupta. Some of the other Buddhist scholars from India who worked in Tibet as contemporaries of Ye ses were Jinamitra, Śilendrabodhi,

¹⁶² For a description of the difficulties faced by travellers to Tibet, see the translation of Mar-pa's song in David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, London: Widenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, pp.118-29.

¹⁶³ Bu-ston, *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*, tr. E.O. Obermiller, Heidelberg, 1921, Vol.II, pp.212-6.

Jñānasiddhi and Dānaśīla.¹⁶⁴ There is a strong possibility that Candramālī accompanied the scholars who came from the Indian centres of learning.

In the Tibetan as well as the Mongol versions of the Tripiṭaka Candramālī is introduced as a yoginī from Sri Lanka, and a translator of Buddhist texts of the Tantra-yāna.¹⁶⁵ In the Beijing edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka, she is credited with the translation of five texts, and in these tasks she was a collaborator of Ye ses himself. The works in question are 1. Śrī-jñāna-guhyā-tantrarāja (No. 37), 2. Śrī-jñānamāla-tantrarāja (No. 38), 3. Śrī-jñāna-jvala-tantrarāja (No. 39), 4. Śrī-vajrarāja-mahātāntra (No. 48) and 5. Śrī-rāgarāja-tantrarāja (No. 50).¹⁶⁶ There is another text in the same edition of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka which bears the name Śrī-candramāla-tantrarāja (No. 40) and, as such, raises¹⁶⁷ the possibility that it was one of her original works. In Bischoff's list the first five as well as the sixth are cited as Candramālī's translations and two more added to the list: 7. Śrī-ratnajvala-tantrarāja-nāma, 8. Śrī-sūrya-cakra-tantrarāja-nāma while, in the case of another, 9. Śrī-ñca na na saṃtantrarāja, she is cited as a co-translator with Ye ses.¹⁶⁸ In the catalogue of the Mongol

¹⁶⁴ See A.F. Bischoff, *Der Kanjur und seine Kolophone*, Bloomington: Selbstverlag Press, Band I, 1968, pp. 92, 112.

¹⁶⁵ S'iṅgala-yin diib (dvib ?)-un Candir-a-mala yogini. Louis Ligeti, *Catalogue du Kanjur Mongol Imprimé*, Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica III, Budapest: Societe Korosi Scoma, 1942-4, p.14. See also Bischoff, *op. cit.*, Band I, p.30.

¹⁶⁶ *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka*, Beijing edition, ed. Daisetz T. Suzuki, Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation, Catalogue and Index, pp. 7,8.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁸ The name of the ninth work appears to be corrupt, and the text has not been identified. Bischoff, *op. cit.*, Band II, pp. 31-5.

Tripitaka prepared by Ligeti, Candramālī occurs together with Ye ses (Belge) as the co-translator of the first five works while Gayādhara and Ye ses, ¹⁶⁹(Belge) are cited as the co-translators of the sixth work. What is of interest here is not merely that Candramālī was a Sri Lankan scholar and translator who worked in Tibet: she is in fact the only Tantrist nun from Sri Lanka known to us from historical records. It is hoped that in the future a scholar well-versed in the Tibetan language and the teachings of the Tantrayāna would undertake a study of these works with a view to assessing the scholarly contributions made by this nun.

III

The evidence available to us on the history of the order of nuns in Sri Lanka can at best be described as uneven. While it points to the establishment of the order in the island at a very early date, it only indicates the presence of nuns in discrete stages in the history of Buddhism in the island. Thus we have references to nuns and nunneries in the reigns of Devānampiyatissa, Kākavaṇṇatissa, Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, Vaṭṭagāmaṇī, Kutakanna Tissa, Bhātikābhaya, Vasabha, Bhātika Tissa, Mahāsena, Mahānāma, Moggallāna I, Jeṭṭhatissa III, Aggabodhi IV, Aggabodhi VI, Mahinda II, Udaya I, Kassapa IV, Kassapa V and Mahinda IV. In addition to these references which have been cited in previous contexts, the chronicle *Cūlavamsa* contains two other references to the presence of nuns. In the reign of Aggabodhi II (608-618), the king of Kaliṅga fled to Sri Lanka with his queen who became a nun here. ¹⁷⁰ The next reference is from the reign of Mahinda I (A.D. 730-733) who is said to have built a nunnery and endowed it with property. ¹⁷¹ This material does not provide us with a continuous history, but on careful consideration of the chronological distribution of these references, it would appear that there is no reason to doubt that there was continuity in the order from its earliest days till at least the end of the tenth century.

¹⁶⁹ Ligeti, op. cit., pp. 12-7.

¹⁷⁰ *Cūlavamsa*, ch.42 v.47

¹⁷¹ *Cūlavamsa*, ch.48 v.36.

The legend of Saṅghamittā points to the close association that prevailed between the order of nuns and the shrine of the Bo-tree. Records of the tenth century reveal that nuns did play a prominent role in the ritual of the Bo-tree. While it was claimed that Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī who was to become the first nun had "like unto a mother, with compassion, fed the Buddha with her own breasts"¹⁷² though he was not her own son, the Sri Lankan nuns cast themselves in a "maternal" role as the individuals who tended to and nourished the tree which symbolized him in Buddhist ritual. It is perhaps significant that watering the Bo-tree was one of the functions that they assumed. The "maternal" role was to give the nuns prominence in ritual, and it was a role that no monk, whatever his views were on the "nature" of women, could object to: it found acceptance even within the Mahāvihāra. While an influential section among the monks was reluctant to acknowledge the intellectual role of nuns within Sri Lankan Buddhism and was critical of their propensity to easily turn into "lawsuit-makers," some of the "subtile silks of ferreous firmness" did in fact gain repute as specialists in the Vinaya while others made significant contributions as scholars who had mastered the Buddhist Canon, as translators of religious texts, as pioneers in historiography, and as missionaries who sought to propagate their faith in certain parts of the Indian subcontinent, in the kingdom of the Early Sungs, and in Tibet.

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¹⁷² Dīpavaṃsa, ch.18 v.7.