

VARIYAPOLA MAHA THERO AND THE PULLING DOWN OF THE BRITISH FLAG IN 1815

Sri Lanka, like India, happens to be a treasure house of edifying stories, hoary folklore, endless myths and unverifiable legends – not to mention historical fictions. While the rest can be treated as innocent and natural in a country with an ancient civilisation, the most perverse is this last, particularly when it entrenches itself in the sacred pages of the Nation's history under the garb of truth.

In this article, an attempt is made to investigate briefly the credibility of one such anecdote. That is the well known and high-spirited story that associates the name of Variyapola (Sumangala) Unnanse with the alleged incident of the pulling down of the British flag on the 2nd of March, 1815 before the formal signing of the Kandyan Convention in Kandy, under which the Kandyan Kingdom was conditionally transferred to the charge of His Britannic Majesty, King George III, (1760 – 1820) replacing the unpopular Vaduga King, Sri Vikrama Rajasinghe (1798 – 1815).

While paying attention to other factors arising in the course of our investigation, as primary theme, it is aimed here to redeem and rehabilitate the name of Variyapola Maha Thero from the artificial mess of misrepresentations and misconceptions it is now driven into, and to restore him to his honoured place in history as a hero of the Freedom Movement.

The story of the British flag appears to have been unknown in Kandyan history till 1939, when it emerged for the first time, as far as I know, in a Sinhalese booklet called *Sinhala Kodiya Nohoth Variyapola Sumangala Himiyo* published in that year, with no original sources of authority whatsoever cited.¹

The earliest English version of the story appears in an interesting book called *In The Days of Sri Vickrama Rajasingha* published in 1959.² Thereafter, in course of time, the story came to be quoted in odd publications occasionally and now firmly holds its ground in popular belief.

Then we have a couple of odd palm-leaf manuscripts bearing this same account, to which we shall advert in the sequel of this article.

Without taking into account all other recent writings that are in the affirmative, we may take notice of the same assertion made by no less an official than the Director of the National Archives Department, Dr. K.D.G. Wimalaratne, who states it is clear that an incident of the flag being hoisted before the signing of the Convention took place.³

¹ L.M. Premaratne, Situmina Press, Kandy p.40.

² Punchibandara Dolapihilla, Saman Press, Maharagama p.274.

³ *Lankave Britannya Adhipatyaya*, Colombo 1992, p.27.

Complying with public sentiments, the date of the Convention and of the supposed incident being 2nd March, the Postal Department made arrangements in 1985 to issue a special commemorative stamp bearing the imaginary bust of Variyapola Thero on that day. His name was already reverentially held in the highest esteem as a pioneer among the national heroes of the 1817 – 1818 Great Uva Rebellion of Independence, for staking his very life when he successfully arranged to take away the Sacred Tooth Relic from the Maligava and thereby depriving the British of their cunningly acquired overlordship of the Kandyan Kingdom and thus giving a firm foundation to the Freedom Movement. But the irony is such that, while this historical truth is virtually forgotten and unspoken of, the story of the pulling down of the British flag before the formal signing of the Kandyan Convention by both parties is the super-imposed popular version we have associated with his name. It is this story that nearly every school child is now familiar with.

With so much unfounded and unchallenged belief prevailing, I, too, was led to include this popular version (though of course with some hesitation) in the Postal Department Bulletin No. 171 that was prepared in a hurry and issued with the 60 cents value stamp bearing the imaginary bust of Variyapola Thero on 2nd March, 1985,⁴ at the official ceremony held at the Mahamaluva in Kandy. But without much delay, I rectified this error and clarified matters in a series of articles in the public press, both Sinhala and English, with subsequent continuations going unpublished under political pressure (as I was personally informed by the editorial authorities).⁵ My correspondences sparked an interesting debate, but owing to undue political interference, this academic discussion came to a sudden halt.

My primary contention was that the association of the name 'Variyapola Sri Sumangala' (as he is always referred to) with the alleged incident of the flag was fallacious.

Despite the fact that no recognised historian has accepted the story of the flag incident, to what deep levels it was rooted in the fabric of society as an article of national history can be gauged from the fact that we have now at least two life-size statues erected – one in the Mahamaluva in Kandy and the other at Variyapola off Kurunegala, depicting this episode, with the Government issuing a Bank Note of

⁴ Stanley Gibbon's No. 1985/882. Designed by G.S. Fernando, with 100 per sheet, vertically each in the size 24 x 29 mm, 1,010,000 stamps were printed in three colours on 100 G.S.M. Swiss Fritchly Chrome Security Paper by offset lithography process in Budapest, Hungary.

⁵ *Silumina*, 27.4.1986; 4.5.1986; 25.5.1986; *Sunday Observer*, 4.5.1986; 11.5.1986; 1.6.1986. Also see *Silumina*, 11.5.1986; 18.5.1986; 8.6.1986 and *Sunday Observer*, 29.6.1986 for reply articles. My counter-replies to the last two articles were suppressed; as a consequence, the discussion mysteriously ended with the readers not knowing the cause and the other rectifications of the Postal Bulletin that were included in it.

Rs. 200 value in 1998 which gives full coverage to the event by a spirited illustration on its reverse.⁶

At the ceremony of issuing the stamp, a friend of mine, an Attorney-at-Law, the late Mr. Sapumal Dolapihilla, after reading the Postal Department Bulletin of the stamp, making no comments, referred me to the book *The Kandyan Wars* by Geoffrey Powell (1973). As soon as I returned home, I checked this reference in my library. It goes "A tradition exists that British soldiers had previously tried to raise the flag, but that a *bhikkhu* had dragged it down, protesting that it should not be allowed to fly until the Convention was signed, an attractive but rather improbable account of the British soldiery yielding to moral coercion."⁷

When I met Mr. Dolapihilla the following morning and opened the discussion, he explained to me that his father had told him that although he had published this story in his book at that time, later on, he was able to verify it to be no more than a fiction and that he intended to rectify this in a revised edition. He died before this could be done.

Owing to the popular belief – excepting among serious historians – that this story now enjoys, it has acquired a high degree of sensitivity so much so that it anyone reviewing it as not otherwise than, as the Sinhala saying goes, like throwing stones at a hornets' nest. But none can honestly contest that our personal emotions must be subordinated or sacrificed for the purpose of properly recording our Nation's history.

To my knowledge, to date, no one has left for us an account of an investigation made into this popular story that has thrilled us for over a half century. It is indeed questionable whether historians of modern times have been dutiful enough to evaluate the part played by Variyapola Thero in the 1817 – 1818 Freedom Struggle. The most authoritative and the latest, *University History of Ceylon*, vol. 3, although it discusses the subject at some length, strangely refrains from mentioning even the name of this foremost patriot, seeking cover by a mere dull statement that the Sacred Tooth Relic "had been spirited away from the Dalada Maligava by a certain *bhikkhu* at an early stage of the revolt."⁸ Yet, this was the greatest achievement – though unfortunately short sustained – that consolidated the prime political and military objective sought by the freedom-fighters. They wished to deprive the British who had unlawfully annexed the Kandyan Kingdom of the Tooth Relic, which was the Symbol of Sovereignty.⁹ This also gave new impetus to the jubilant patriotic soldiers to fight on with renewed confidence and undaunted

⁶ G.P.S.H de Silva, *History of Coins and Currency*, Colombo, 2000 Pl. No. 225 on p. 165.

⁷ Geoffrey Powell, *The Kandyan Wars*, London, 1973, p.230.

⁸ 1973, Contribution by K.M. De Silva, p. 32.

⁹ H.L. Seneviratna, *The Rituals of the Kandyan State*, Cambridge, 1978; see pp. 16- 19.

heroism. They no doubt breathed a sigh of relief when Monaravila Keppetipola Disave displayed the Sacred Tooth Relic to the public in its golden casket at Hanguranketa on 5th July, 1818.¹⁰ For centuries the Sinhalese believed that the prerogative of sovereignty rested with whoever possessed the Sacred Tooth Relic. This fact was known to the British themselves.¹¹

Tradition holds that Sri Vickrama Rajasinghe believing that the Mahanayaka of the Malvatta Chapter who had been the officiating prelate of the Tooth Relic Shrine was hostile to him just like the general clergy and the chiefs, had replaced him with Variyapola Thero of the Asgiriya Chapter. There is little doubt that this was the case because till 1817,¹² he was the priest discharging that duty. It appears that with the British accession, when all previous appointments made by the ex-King became null and void, and when overall fresh appointments under their regime were made including other ecclesiastical posts,¹³ which resulted for the most part in re-appointments, Variyapola Thero had been re-appointed to the same post. It is this opportunity that facilitated his removing the Tooth Relic to safety.

It appears that the Tooth Relic had been removed by a small body of priests who were secretly led into the inner Shrine Room of the Dalada Maligava the previous night by Variyapola Thero, whereupon, he immediately locked it up for public worship for the day (This was in May, 1818).¹⁴ They remained in the chamber of the repository that night, and when the usual drumming started early morning the following day for 'aluyan dure' or morning services, amidst the din, they broke open the outer six caskets, which covered each in turn and removed the seventh golden casket along with the Tooth Relic and left the place unnoticed.¹⁵

Without delay the relic was conveyed to Keppetipola Disava who was now leading the Rebellion. The news of its public exposition by him at Hanguranketa

¹⁰ C.O. 54/71, No. 298 Brownrigg to Bathurst on 24th July, 1818 in Vimalananda, op.cit., p.176; Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon Under The British Occupation*, Colombo, 1948, Vol. I 1953, p. 192.

¹¹ A. Lennox Mills, *Ceylon Under British Rule*, New York, 1965 Ed., pp. 127, 162.

¹² Paul E. Pieris, *Sinhale And The Patriots*, 1950, p. 324.

¹³ See M.A. Durand Appuhamy, *The Kandyans' Last Stand Against the British*, 1995, pp. 17,18,19,68 for details of new appointments. Under mounting pressure by Christian clergymen not to give patronage to Buddhism, the Secretary of State sent instructions to the Governor Sir George Anderson in April 1853 to cease engaging in Buddhist ecclesiastical affairs in future despite it being obligatory under Section 5 of the Kandyan Convention for the government to do so.

¹⁴ C.O. 54/73, No. 317 Brownrigg to Bathurst, 8th January, 1819.

¹⁵ See *Dalada Itihasaya Ha Sanskrutiya* by Kamburugamuve Vajira Thero, 1983, pp. 160, 161, 162 (Sin.); Paul E. Pieris, *Sinhale and the Patriots*, pp. 324, 325.

soon reached the ears of the British. Coupling this news with the simultaneous and sudden disappearance of Variyapola Thero, the officiating priest of the Dalada Shrine, the British were seized with such great fear that in fact they dared not open the Tooth Relic Repository to verify the actual position, for they knew that the Sinhalese would never acknowledge them as legitimate rulers without the Sacred Tooth Relic in their possession.

In this crisis, Brownrigg had the audacity to ask his own superior Earl Bathurst whether "there was any foundation for the assertion of the rebel leader being in possession of the Tooth; . . . that no theft of the Relic took place at a prior date to that assigned by Keppetipola, and of the falsehood of which there is no doubt - but as there is some doubt, it is the opinion of Mr. D'oily . . . that a state of uncertainty is preferable than the possible reality of its absence . . . be kept from public knowledge."¹⁶

Eventually, Brownrigg was forced to admit the loss of the Tooth Relic. Realising the gravity of the consequences, and being driven to unprecedented fury, he ordered the arrest of no less than forty priests from both the Malvatta Mahavihara and Asgiriya Mahavihara, threatening them that unless Variyapola Thero was delivered to the authorities, they would not be released.¹⁷ This undiplomatic and despotic act which besmirched the much boasted 'British Justice' bore no results. In the eyes of the Kandyan people, it was nothing more than political and religious terrorism, unheard of in recent history. Among the people this created a confirmed fear of the new Christian Government.

The principal leaders Keppetipola and Pilimalavva were already arrested, followed by Madugalla. The latter's "capture was effected on the 2nd of that month (November 1818), and in the same evening the officer in command of the detachment, Ensign Shootbraid, 73rd Regiment secured from a Budhoo priest (Variyapola Thero) who had in his possession the Sacred Relic or Tooth of Budhoo."¹⁸

Now, in addition to the new threat of a formidable Indian military reinforcement armed with superior weapons in the battle front; food sources burnt and plundered; fruit trees cut down; cattle either dragged away or killed; all irrigation reservoirs devastated and the people thereby driven to starvation and thirst and fearing the prospect of a lengthy famine; dwellings and temples plundered and

¹⁶ C.O. 54/71, No. 298, Brownrigg to Bathurst on 24th July, 1818 (in *The Great Rebellion of 1818* by Tennakoon Vimalananda, 1970, pp. 183,184).

¹⁷ See *Dalada Itihasaya Saha Sanskrutiya*, 1983 by Kamburugamuve Vajira Thero, Sin., pp. 161, 162.

¹⁸ C.O. 54/73, No. 317, Brownrigg to Bathurst on 8th January, 1819 (In Tennakoon Vimalananda, pp. 311, 416).

burnt down; Brownrigg's Martial Law resulting in a killing spree; the parched land reddened and soaked with the blood of innocent, monks bereft of their mission, the sick, the aged including their children, all Sinhalese alike falling victims to the bloodthirsty barbaric soldiers in their thousands (while the local Muslims remaining staunchly loyal to the alien British intruder)¹⁹ there took place the most disastrous event of the capture of Variyapola Thero with the Sacred Tooth Relic. The Great Uva Rebellion begun with the highest spirit of patriotism by the Kandyans to regain the Nation's lost freedom, inevitably and pitifully depleted in strength collapsed to its very foundation! By November end, the saga of the Battle for Freedom was over.

Now let us pay attention to the contents of the tradition, the printed sources and the odd sheets of palm-leaf manuscripts which embody this fascinating story.

We have to primarily identify (1) Who this Variyapola Thero of the so-called Flag episode really is; (2) Whether this story truly has a historic basis, and (3) From where this celebrated monk hailed and a few other minor details.

It is stated in the palm-leaf manuscript that:

- a. "During the period of enemy commotion of 2358 too he (the King) proceeded to Dumbara entrusting the Sacred Tooth Relic to Ven. Wariyapola Deepankara Nayaka Thero who was holding the post of Anunayake of the Asgiriya Chapter".
- b. "The Kingdom was handed over to the English . . . on Saturday, the ninth day of the waxing moon in the month of *Navam*" (February)
- c. "On the occasion of hoisting of the English flag before the signing of the Convention, Ven. Wariyapola Nayaka Thera removed it by pulling it down and putting it on the ground and trampled on it."
- d. "Thereafter the English flag was allowed to be hoisted, and the Sinhala flag was lowered. At that time the Sacred Tooth Relic was with Ven. Wariyapola Nayaka Thera."²⁰

Now to comment:

- 1.a. As students of history are well aware, when the British forces entered Kandy and Brownrigg occupied the Royal Palace on 14th February,

¹⁹ Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon Under the British Occupation*, Vol, I, 1953, p. 185; C.O. 54/71, No. 298, Brownrigg to Bathurst on 24th July 1818 (In Vimalananda, op.cit., p. 173.

²⁰ For the photographs of the palm-leaves and relevant text see *Sunday Observer*, 29.6.1986, p.27 and reprinted text in English in *Shastriya Vada Lipi*, 1990, p. 169, by W.J.M. Lokubandara, Minister of Indigenous Medicine and M.P. for Haputale, refuting my negative assertions. This book has been published by the State Printing Corporation embodying my paper articles without my knowledge, even distorting some of my assertions.

1815,²¹ the Dalada Maligava was empty of the Sacred Tooth Relic. Since it was a symbol of sovereignty and needed special attention, Sri Vickrama Rajasingha had already made prior arrangements for it to be safely taken away and hidden in distant Kotmale.

After D'Oyly made strenuous efforts and finally discovered its whereabouts as Puhulpitiya Vihara in Kotmale, it was brought in procession and ceremonially re-enshrined at the Dalada Maligava only on the 1st Monday, May, 1815.²² This is proof that nobody in Kandy could have possibly possessed the Tooth Relic on 2nd March, 1815, by which time it lay hidden several kilometres away.

- 2.b. Although the palm-leaf manuscript asserts that the Kandyan Kingdom was handed over to the British on Saturday the 9th day in the month of *Navam*, February, everyone knows that the correct date is 2nd March, 1815. This was a Thursday. Also 9th February was not a Saturday, but a Thursday.²³
- 2.c. As previously stated, the earliest printed Sinhalese source for the Flag and Signature story is Premaratna's booklet of 1939, followed by P.B. Dolapihilla's '*In the Days Sri Wickramarajasingha*' as an English source published in 1959.

According to both these sources, pp. 40,41, this is what we find, with the latter mentioning that "Wariyapola Anunayaka saw the English soldiers hoisting the flag of the English in the Great Court Yard of the palace. He ran to the spot and pulling down the flag that was going up put his foot on it and cried.

"You shall not hoist any flag here yet. Sign the document before you do anything of the kind."

". . . The chiefs who were there signed the Treaty" p.274

Then we have Wimalaratna, as noticed previously, making this same assertion relying on the manuscript.

²¹ C.O. 54/55, No. 95, Brownrigg to Bathurst, on 25.02.1815.

²² *Diary of M r. John d'Oyly, 1810 -15*; Ed. By H.W. Codrington, 1917, pp. 245, 266, 267.

For a comprehensive account, see *ibidem* pp. 267-269.

²³ See Website <http://www.infoplease.com/calendar.php>

The cause of this supposed incident stressed upon by all these sources is that the British flag was hoisted before the official signing of the Kandyan Convention by both parties to hand over the administration of the Kingdom to the British. W.J.M. Lokubandara, the Minister of Indigenous Medicine at the time and the present Speaker of the Parliament and M.P. for Haputale, refuting writes that (my) contention that there was no formal signing of the Convention on 2nd March, 1815 does not however seem to stand critical examination when viewed against the following.

(a) Powell: *The Kandyan Wars*

“The Convention to establish the new order was signed on 2nd March, 1815 . . . p. 229”

(b) *The Ordinance No. 13 of 1859*

“Whereas it was agreed and established by a Convention signed at Kandy on the Second of March, the Year of Christ 1815”

(c) Introduction to ‘*A Sketch of the Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom*’ – Sir John D’Oyly – p.x.²⁴

Now to review :

- (a) Powell, to be exact is erroneous. He is merely repeating a rumour about an incident that never took place that day. *The Diary of Sir John D’Oyly* plainly discloses that the signing of the Convention had been done at leisure between the 10th and 18th March, 1815.²⁵ (to be seen in the sequel).
- (b) The Ordinance No. 13 of 1859 (which refers to marriages in the Kandyan provinces), or for that matter, any document bearing that date, for purpose of administrative needs, of course considers 2nd March, 1815 as the effective date. The question before us here is

²⁴ *Shastriya Vada Lipi*, 1990, p.167.

²⁵ *Diary of Mr John D’Oyly*, pp. 231, 237.

not what is referred to in theory, but to know whether the signing was indeed actually done on this day, because the reason was – to repeat, that the British flag was hoisted before (the supposed) signing of the Convention – which was not even thought of on this day.

- (c) The Introduction is written by Mr. S.D. Saparamadu who edited D'Oyly's book in 1975. Anyone can understand that he too speaks in conventional terms in referring to the date.

All of us at present, know that the signing indeed did not take place that day and knowing this to be the plain truth, at least academically viewed, there is no need for us to twist and misinterpret by word play such a patent and transparent fact of our history leading others to misunderstanding and confusion. What purpose does one hope to achieve by this?

In fact, it had been pointed out by Sir Paul E. Pieris that “The Convention was actually signed on the 10th of March . . . ”²⁶ Why cannot we accept this?

The question of raising the British flag before the signing of the Convention mutually by both parties is of course a reasonable point for argument. But it remains for us to investigate patiently whether such a situation ever arose.

Leaving aside the credibility of the story of dragging down the British flag and trampling it in the dignified presence of Governor Brownrigg at the Royal Audience Hall “with British troops drawn up in front of it,” it has to be emphatically stated that the question of the signing of the Kandyan Convention by our Chiefs or the British, in fact, is something that never arose. We have the Diary entry of Sir John D'Oyly.

1815, March 2nd . . . at 4 pm, the Govt. gives Audience to the Adikaras, Disaves & other Kandy Chiefs – The Proclamation or Act of Settlement of the Govt. of the Kandyan Provinces is read in the Magul Maduva – afterwards read to the Mohottales and other inferior Chiefs without & the Royal Standard hoisted - & the Royal Salute fired. – Fine hot day – Clear Sky.²⁷

²⁶ *Tri Sinhala*, n.d., First ed., Cambridge, p.163

²⁷ Ed. H.W. Codrington, 1917, p.224.

It is evident from this account that the proceedings took place at the ground of the Royal Audience Hall and not at the *Mahamaluva* as some believe – except perhaps, the gun salute. It was immediately through this ground that “the adikars and principal chiefs passed to the hall.”²⁸

If D’Oyly could record in his Diary such irrelevant details as the day’s weather and even the state of the sky, surely there was no reason for him to have omitted such a serious incident of utmost provocation as the dragging down by force of the ceremonially hoisted British flag and even trampling the same if really it happened? The flag, in fact, was no less than the personified symbol of their Britannic Majesty King George III.

On the other hand, the British had implicit trust in Variyapola Unnanse, for being appointed to an office that carried the highest responsibility, we find him continuing the *Dalada Tevava* as the chief officiating prelate, even holding the custodianship of the Dalada shrine for the next three years on behalf of the British Crown. If he really resorted to such a violent and disgracing act, could he have been possibly spared to continue in peace without being suitably dealt with, right from 2nd March, 1815 to May 1818²⁹ by a regime that was military in nature then under a harsh Governor like Brownrigg?

Although we do not have any reliable evidence of his presence, being the most important official of the adjoining Dalada Maligava, one must assume that he was among the ninety monks or so who participated in the ceremony with the two Mahanayakas.

Then we have the corroborative eye-witness account of Henry Marshall, who sat beside the Governor at this occasion.³⁰ It is manifest that he wrote not without some sense of sympathy towards the Kandyans. In his Preface he says that, “The object of the Author has been chiefly to narrate facts and to record events, not to discuss the policy of the measure, or the merits of the means employed to that effect.” His account, therefore, can be accepted as reliable and generally free from prejudice.

The document in question – or treaty, as it has been called – was read in English by Mr. Sutherland, Deputy Secretary to Government, and afterwards in Sinhalese. His Excellency’s part of the conference was communicated to Mr. D’Oyly, and by him to Molligoda Adikar, who delivered it aloud to the audience. . . . After the treaty was read in Sinhalese,

²⁸ Marshall, p. 123.

²⁹ Paul E. Pieris, *Sinhale and the Patriots*, pp. 324, 325.

³⁰ Marshall, p. 123.

the Adikar Molligoda, and the other chiefs, proceeded to the principal door of the hall, where the Mohottales, Coraales, Vidanes, and other subordinate headmen from different provinces, were attending, accompanied with a few followers, and the headmen being called upon by the Adikar to range themselves in order according to their respective districts, the treaty was again read in Sinhalese, at the conclusion of which, the British flag was hoisted for the first time in the town of Kandy, and a royal salute from the cannon, which had with infinite labour been dragged up the hills, announced His Majesty George the Third sovereign of the whole Island of Ceylon.³¹

As seen above, the British flag was hoisted, as scheduled, without any adverse incident, on the 2nd March 1815, nor does there seem to be any question of signatures. No British official or any Kandyan official signed this document on this day, a fact now forgotten.

As its very caption identifies, the Kandyan Convention was a 'Proclamation,' and accordingly, it was read out to the people in public as mutually drawn up by both parties.

Brownrigg himself signed it only eight days later, on 10th March, after some Adikars and Disaves had signed it the same day.³² Then we have the Diary entry for 18th March which reads as "Eyhelepola Adikar & Galagoda Disave of Nuwara Kalawiya subscribe their signatures to the Proclamation - & the Chiefs take leave at 9 PM. - N.B. Pilima Talawuwe Disave of the 4 K . . . subscribed the Proclamation this morning."³³

Thus, one can see that the Kandyan Convention was signed at leisure between 10th and 18th of March and the unwarranted question of signing it prior to the hoisting of the British flag on the 2nd March as mentioned in recent spurious

³¹ Henry Marshall, *Ceylon, a General Description of the Island and Its Inhabitants*, London 1846, Reprint, Kandy, pp. 124,125. Although Marshall considers that this was the first time the British flag was hoisted in Kandy town, in fact, when Brownrigg entered Kandy and occupied the Royal Palace earlier on 14th February, it was he who flew it first and even celebrated its first anniversary with great jubilation in Colombo. See *Sinhale and the Patriots*, p. 102.

³² *Diary of Mr. John D'Oyly*, p. 231.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 237. If it is asserted at least for the sake of argument that the British writers intentionally avoided reporting about the Flag incident, our own historians could have done so even at the present time. Although we have a continuation of the *Dipavamsa* updated to 1918 and a continuation of the *Mahavamsa* updated to 1935, both by two erudite Buddhist monks, though proceedings of 1815 are recorded, neither has made reference to and incident of this nature.

documents and other later publications is nothing more than deceptive distortion of history.

In this context, I think I must not omit discussing another aspect of the Convention; that is, the issue of Ehelepola Maha Nilame's signature which is raised in certain quarters from very recent years. In short, what is hinted at is that his signature has been forged by the British. In fact, Wimalaratna refers to a variation in his usual signature in the Convention, remarking a missing element in the first syllable in the name 'Ahelepola,³⁴ while G.P.S.H. de Silva, his predecessor, the former Director of the Department of National Archives, to whom the credit of the discovery of the long lost Original Set of the Kandyan Convention in 1979 is due, states that "The signature of Ahelepola as seen in the Convention is somewhat different from the other signatures of his, available at the Archives."³⁵

One can of course visualise the invariable difference occurring in the writing of a people, who for several centuries used a steel stylus with sharp point to scratch upon rough palm-leaf to write, when suddenly switching on to the strange quill pen with liquid ink and polished paper.

Anyway, I have observed that this same signature appears in one of the palm-leaf *Sittu* now at the Kandy National Museum Reserve Collection.

Even if all these documents are ignored, that he certainly signed the Convention on 18th March is independently proved by the Diary entry of D'Oyly for that day.

Although his Sinhalese signature (in Grantha script³⁶) had been the target of comment, so far, none had observed that Ehelepola is the only one who had indeed signed the Convention twice and in two languages, one of which is in English as '*Deveni Rajjuruvo*', sub-king. Thus called, and a rightful aspirant to the ancient Sinhalese Throne, he signed, not below as others did, but quite parallel to the signature of Brownrigg, keeping to his full status which was not below the rank of the British Monarchy represented by the Governor. This is shown in contemporary

³⁴ Wimalaratna, Dr. K.D.G., *Lankave Bratanya Adipatyaya*, 1992 Sin., p. 30.

³⁵ *The Sri Lanka Archives*, Vol. I, No. I, 1983, p. 74.

³⁶ It is a mistaken notion held by many that the Kandyan Convention was signed in Tamil. While three individuals who signed in Sinhala, the others have used the *Grantha Script*. This does not belong to a spoken language. It exists only as an alphabet, and has been used in Sri Lanka to engrave Mahayana Buddhist texts in Sanskrit language at least from the seventh century with some variations to those of *Pallava Grantha* script of South India. For e.g., The Tiriya Rock Inscription and the Trikayastava Inscription of Mihintale are in this script. (Ep. Zey., Vol. IV, pp 153, 243). There are also several other documents signed in *Grantha Script* during Kandy Period. Of course there are a few letters that are common to all three alphabets.

copies that are still in existence.³⁷ He was, after all, representing the Kandyan Kingdom. The British had promised him the Throne but subsequently reneged on this promise.³⁸

4.d. We do not have any evidence that the Sinhalese flag was hoisted or lowered at this function other than what is claimed by the legends embodied in the spurious writings under review.

The palm-leaf sheet implies that the Lion flag had been flying already before the hoisting of the British flag.

Can anyone imagine that the Royal Lion Flag, which denoted the presence of the King at the Palace would be left to fly in a barren place when "The Town was completely deserted of inhabitants and stripped of all property except what was not easily portable"?³⁹ With the King already gone leaving the capital days ago, what purpose would it have served?

The Sinhalese Royal Flag was the National Flag of the entire Nation of Lanka, so it could not have been left abandoned. There was a special officer in

³⁷ A photostat copy of a contemporary copy (there were several of them all separately signed) is available at the Kandy National Museum. For a reproduction of the signature page of the original, see Plate on p. 85. *The Sri Lanka Archives*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1983.

³⁸ D'Oyly insisted that Ehelepola be raised to the Throne, giving his own reasons, but when Brownrigg gave counter reasons declining it, D'Oyly considered the plea a lame excuse. See *The Great Rebellion of 1818* by Vimalananda, p. xxxvii. This was a turning point in history because from then onwards the British authorities in Colombo began to gradually isolate D'Oyly.

Ridiculed by the British as an 'upasaka' for not eating flesh but only fruits and vegetables, he was much attached to the Kandyans. Osborne, a missionary, wrote of the 1818 Rebellion, that 'We have every reason to expect this is a judgment to a Christian Nation for their iniquity. The Chief Civilian Servant in Kandy has for a long time been a worshipper of Budhu, & General Jackson told me & Mr. Erskine that Mr. D. was a Budhite. He takes off shoes and offers flowers to Budhu. Will not a Holy God visit these things' Osborne to J. Benson, Trincomalee, March 4th 1818." Yasmine Gooneratne, *English Literature in Ceylon: 1815-1878*, Dehiwela, 1968, p. 43, ft.nt.3.

D'Oyly's predilection was viewed with little sympathy by his fellows and on 2nd March 1810 Sir James Makintosh sorrowfully recorded in his Diary that he had 'almost become a native in his habits of life' Paul E. Pieris, *Sinhale And The Patriots*, p. 39. A bachelor, he died on 25th March, 1824 and was buried in the Old Garrison Cemetery in Kandy.

After his death, it was revealed that this convert was secretly supporting 115 destitute Kandyans out of his monthly salary which had amounted to 163 Rix Dollars. Among them was the natural son of Major Davie by a Kandyan woman.

³⁹Colvin R. De Silva, *Ceylon Under the British Occupation*, Vol.1, 1953, p. 160; Tennakoon Vimalananda, *The State and Religion in Ceylon*, 1815; 1971, P.70.

charge of the flags responsible to the King. None was allowed to possess any type of flag except temple-flags belonging to those institutes, and others gifted by the King in recognition of extraordinary performances as a mark of honour, and also the Disavas, Ratamahattayas including Heads of Departments denoting the insignia of the respective portfolios.

Since this flag was the supreme object of the identity of the Nation, priority was accorded to its security; consequently, it is not possible to lay trust in the story of this flag either.

The only flag we are aware of at his time is the one Brownrigg's son hurriedly took to England to lay at the feet of the Prince Regent, which was the Royal Lion Flag of the Tri Sinhala.⁴⁰ Obviously, this would have been taken from the concealed property found in the Royal Palace once it was captured.

The claim of the palm-leaf manuscript that, at the time of these proceedings "the Sacred Tooth Relic was with Venerable Wariyapola Thero" is equally untenable. I have already proved the unacceptability of this in paragraph 1a.

5.d. On the other hand, it is not possible to imagine that as a priest now bearing the enormous responsibility of protecting the stolen Tooth Relic (which was perhaps concealed in his robes), he would have foolishly dashed forward to commit the provocative offence of pulling down and trampling the ceremonially hoisted British flag at a spot guarded by so many armed soldiers. He would have been also aware of its instantaneous repercussion to self and the Tooth Relic if he actually had it on him.

He knew very well, that as long as the Sacred Tooth Relic was in his charge, he had the onerous responsibility of protecting this supreme treasure of the whole Nation. That is why, without appearing in public, he concealed himself with it in

⁴⁰ Paul E. Pieris, *Tri Sinhala*, n.d., First ed., Cambridge, p. 163. Since 1815, the British flew the Union Jack as the official flag of the nation. With the passage of time many had forgotten what the Sinhala flag even looked like. It was E.W. Perera, patriot, scholar and statesman, who discovered this flag in the Great Hall of Chelsea hospital where it had been transferred in 1835 by the British East India Company with the approval of King William IV. That this was indeed the ancient national flag of Sri Lanka is confirmed from the Court of Arms of Governor Brownrigg who was permitted by King George III to include therein the Lion Flag as an honourable augmentation of the fall of Kandy (See E.W. Perera, *Banners and Standards*, 1916, frontispiece for the original flag, p.3; H.A.J. Hulugalla, *The British Governors of Ceylon*, 1963, p.35 for Brownrigg's Court of Arms bearing the identical Lion Flag.) Had it not been for E.W. Perera's efforts, we would have never known what our National Flag was because even at the time of discovery it was in a very bad state of preservation. None other made this attempt. Although this flag is now depicted in red and yellow, the actual colours are crimson and gold. It has, furthermore, been distorted in other ways as well.

the deep jungles of Dambulla, keeping away from society, expecting the dawn of a suitable day to appear.

Therefore, this fiction presented to us in the palm-leaf manuscript must be allowed to die in its infancy along with its entailing other fabrications.

6.a. We have noted the palm-leaf manuscript specifically saying that the British flag was pulled down by "Variyapola Deepankara Nayaka Swamin Vahanse." Therefore, very plainly, if there is any truth in this story, it is NOT Variyapola (Sumangala) who had pulled down the flag, but Variyapola Deepankara – altogether a different priest.

But it is indeed curious to observe that Rev. Tumbulle Seelakkhandha, who seems to have discovered these odd palm-leaf manuscripts which had been attached to the end of another palm-leaf manuscript at the Asgiriya Mahaviharaya (this was subsequently in the possession of the late Attorney-at-Law, Walter Wimalachandra) and had contemporary knowledge of them (invariably not suspecting a future appearance of them and a consequent controversy) omitted the most important personal ordination name '*Deepankara*' recorded there as of the one who pulled down the flag, and published its text in a book entitled *Variyapola Mahimi* in 1984 merely as '*Variyapola Nayaka Swamin Vahanse*'⁴¹, that is, to say, only with his village name! It is pertinent to ask why he made such a grave omission, which denied that monk his rightful identity. Anyone can make a mistake, but this author made no attempt to rectify it despite having many occasions to do so. He repeated this omission when he published it in the *Silumina* of 18th May, 1986, challenging my denial of Variyapola (Sumangala's) involvement in the flag incident. (The palm-leaf had still not come to public light). What is still more surprising is, when his book was reprinted, the same omission was allowed to remain without rectification.

Not only did he by this omission deprive Deepankara Thero of his illustrious role in the supposed flag episode, but he dealt a double blow, by relegating Deepankara Thero to a wholly different, subordinate level as the priest-nephew of Variyapola Maha Thero (of the Tooth Relic Case). It surprises me how he would do such a thing especially when he says that there is no acceptable documentary evidence whatsoever on the genealogy of this priest. That he could have been the nephew is not denied, but what the palm-leaf sheet claims in favour of Deepankara Thero promptly negates the popular belief conferred on the Variyapola (Sumangala) his supposed uncle.

Speaking of his spiritual career, Seelakkhandha Thero says that Variyapola Deepankara Thero "was the only ordained pupil of Variyapola Sri Sumangala," and

⁴¹ *Variyapola Mahimi*, P.134, Tennakoon Vimalananda who wrote the Preface to this book, though he extols Variyapola Thero, does not mention one word about the flag incident in it, nor in many other books he wrote on late Kandyan history.

that he was his own younger sister's son.⁴² But, in an application made in 1880, seeking a placement in the Asgiriya Karaka Sangha Sabha, the applicant, this selfsame priest produced by Seelakkhandha Thero, identifies himself as "Variyapola Sumangala Deepankarabhidana," pupil of Idavalugoda Mahanayaka Thero of Asgiriya Vihara!⁴³

Now, both these clashing assertions cannot be correct at the same time. Since it is repeatedly mentioned that Variyapola Deepankara Thero was a pupil of Idavalugoda Mahanayaka Thero,⁴⁴ it is this that seems to be the more probable case.

Then quoting pp. 63, 64, (correctly pp. 66, 67) from the book, *Bhikshuvage Urumaya*, Sin., by Rev. Walpola Rahula, we are referred by Warakave Dhammaloka Thero to a palm-leaf document at Suduhumpola Vihara (of the Asgiriya Chapter) which, like the Asgiri Vihara palm-leaf manuscript previously cited, mentions that Variyapola (Vinayacharya) Deepankara, the Anunayaka of this Establishment, pulled down the British flag and trampled it. Dhammaloka Thero also upholds the view that the story of pulling down the British flag was true but he contends that it was done by none other than Variyapola Sri Sumangala. He adds that the Variyapola referred to in this document may well be a different Maha Thera.⁴⁵

Irrespective of the identities of Variyapola Theros, I do not think that we can go along with this suggestion for then, just within few years we run up against,

- (1) Variyapola Sri Sumangala of the so-called flag episode;
- (2) Variyapola Thero - the British appointee of 1836;
- (3) Variyapola Deepankara of the palm-leaf - the so-called nephew of No. (1).

All affiliated to the same establishment.

Without seeing the text of this document it is not possible to make much comment, except that, leaving out other details, what is patent is that we have a Variyapola Thero here and that this Variyapola Thero is none other than the long-standing British appointee to this *vihara* bearing the missing ordination name 'Deepankara'. Variyapola (Sumangala) Thero of the Tooth Relic episode, tenaciously identified with Suduhumpola Vihara, was dead by 1831, and the appointment of a Variyapola Thero to this establishment being made in 1836, and the presence of a priest bearing that name is confirmed by this document. Hence, we

⁴² *Variyapola Mahimi*, p. 134.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 170, 171.

⁴⁴ See also the article contributed by Seelakkhandha Thero to *Mahanuvara Sengavunu Toraturu*, Ed. Godagama Mangala Thero, Sin. Jour, 1992, pp. 9, 10.

⁴⁵ *Asgiri Mahavihara Itihasaya*, Sin., 1976.

are forced to admit that while No.(1) has no connection to Suduhumpola Vihara, No. (2) and (3) certainly refer to one and the same monk.

Now, to return to the main theme.

Mr. Lokubandara, taking up the debate as the last to refute me, fortunately published the palm-leaf manuscript with photographic illustrations, in the *Sunday Observer* of 29.6.1986, p.27; *Silumina* of 8.6.1986 and in his book previously mentioned.

The relevant portion of this is as follows:

During the period of enemy commotion of 2358 too, he (the King) proceeded to Dumbara entrusting the Sacred Tooth Relic to Ven Wariyapola Deepankara Nayake Thero who was holding the post of Anunayake of the Asgiriya Chapter. The Kingdom was handed over to the English under a written Convention at the asterism of *Rehena three horas* before sunset on Saturday, the 9th day of the waxing moon in the month of Navam, (i.e. 9th February, a Saturday). On the occasion of the hoisting of the English flag before the signing of the Convention, Ven. Wariyapola Nayake Thera removed it by pulling it down and putting it on the ground and trampling on it. Thereafter the English flag was allowed to be hoisted and the Sinhala flag was lowered. At that time the Sacred Tooth Relic was with Ven. Wariyapola Nayake Thera ... When the monks were taken into custody for the disappearance of the Sacred Tooth Relic realising that there was no danger, he handed it over. *Siddham*⁴⁶

I have already pointed out that in this palm-leaf document, the day, the date and even the month are incorrect. In addition,, even the time stated as "before sunset" is wholly inconsistent with records, for the Mahanayakas had still not arrived till 10 p.m.⁴⁷ at the Royal Audience Hall to commence the proceedings. They left only about the time of midnight after attending the function.⁴⁸ Nearly a thousand torches lit up the premises.

⁴⁶ Also see *Shastriya Vada Lipi*, by W.J.M. Lokubandara, p. 169.

⁴⁷ Tennakoon Vimalananda, *The State and Religion in Ceylon since 1815*; 1971, p. 71.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 73.

During the time of the Kandyan kings, it was the custom to hold official functions at the Royal Audience Hall only after sunset. Here too "in all these arrangements strictest Kandyan Court etiquette was observed."⁴⁹

It was very timely and fortunate that Mr. Lokubandara managed to trace these palm-leaf manuscripts and publish them in photographic illustrations, original Sinhala text and also English translation. If not for him, we would have had no physical evidence to prove that it is not Variyapola Sumangala Thero, but Variyapola Deepankara Thero who had pulled down the British flag - whether the alleged incident is true or untrue is a different matter.

However that may be, my primary contention that Variyapola (Sumangala) Thero had nothing to do with the flag episode is confirmed here, for it is Variyapola Deepankara who is in the scene.

They are clearly two different priests having two different ordination names.

Although Mr. Lokubandara argued repeatedly in favour of Variyapola Sri Sumangala Thero, the palm-leaf document which he produced to support it makes no mention of this name at all anywhere, as we can see in the text, leaving apart the incident of the flag.

Since the time I disputed the trustworthiness of this story, I came to understand that an attempt was made to identify both these names as representing one and the same priest on the interpretation that Deepankara is the *abhidana* - an honorific to the principal name. If accepted, then we will have Variyapola (as village name) and Deepankara (as the honorific). Then where is his personal ordination name? Who is this priest?

'Deepankara,' which is an ordination name, stands pre-eminent in Buddhist ecclesiastical literature. Being the name of the first twenty-four Sambuddhas,⁵⁰ it is more eminent than Sumangala, which is the name of no more than this Buddha's chief disciple.⁵¹ Thus, in its subordinate status, it cannot have any pretensions of augmenting the supreme name of no less a being than a Sambuddha (Deepankara, his own revered Teacher).

7.a. In the palm-leaf manuscript so much relied upon, we have observed that the name 'Variyapola Sumangala' is nowhere mentioned. The reference instead goes "Entrusting the Sacred Tooth Relic to Venerable Variyapola Deepankara Thera who was holding the post of Anunayaka of the Asgiriya Chapter. . . ."⁵²

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵⁰ Malalasekara, Prof. G.P., *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names*, Vol. I, 1960, p. 1087, Mahavamsa, 1.5.

⁵¹ Malalasekara, *ibid.*, p. 1236.

⁵² See English text in the *Sunday Observer*, June 29, 1986.

Even up to the present, the accepted version is that Variyapola Sri Sumangala Thero of the Tooth Relic episode was the Anunayaka of the Asigriya Chapter. The period of office assigned to him includes 1815.⁵³ But in reality readers might be surprised to know for the first time that neither he nor Variyapola Deepankara (as claimed by the palm-leaf manuscript) was ever an Anunayaka of this Chapter during this immediate period of time before or after 1815. But that the latter may have aspired to that position later is not contested here.

According to the clarification of Justice Lawrie, the Asgiriya Establishment consisted (as he wrote in 1896) "of a *Mahanayaka* and an *Anunayaka*."⁵⁴ He specifically states that at the time of the British accession in 1815, "Mavatagama was the Chief Priest, Imbulange was the Anunayaka"⁵⁵ This has to be the situation unless one would think Imbulange Anunayaka Thero stepped down from his post, was not re-appointed or even passed away in the intervening period. In the Diary entry of Sir John D'Oyly against the 10th March, 1815 what is recorded is that,

The Governor confers the following Appointments of Chief Priests:⁵⁶

Malwatte Wihara	Kobbekaduwa	Nayaka Unnnanse
	Weylivita	Anu Nayaka
Asigri Wihara	Mavatagama	Nayaka Unnanse
	Tumbagoda	Anu Nayaka.

Always referred to by village name then, here in either case there is no '*Variyapola Unnanse*' - whether *Deepankara* or *Sumangala* - as *Anunayaka* for the Asgiriya Chapter. Even up to the present time, the old constitution with one *Anunayaka* for this Establishment remains unchanged to one post, as against that of the Malvatta Chapter, which has two.⁵⁷

Thus it becomes further evident that the information contained in this so-called old palm-leaf document, relied upon with such fervour as authentic, is nothing but fictitious.

8. The Director General of the Department of National Archives Dr. K.D.G. Wimalaratna says that Variyapola Sumangala Thero of the flag episode was the

⁵³ Seelakkhandha, Rev. Tumbulle, *Variyapola Mahimi*, Sin., 1984, p. 14, ft.nt.

⁵⁴ Lawrie, Vol. I, p. 71.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, Vol 1, p. 70, 76.

⁵⁶ *Diary of Mr. John D'Oyly*, p. 231.

⁵⁷ M.A. Durand Appuhamy, *The Kandyans' Last Stand Against the British* in the listing by the Wesleyan Missionary R. Spence Hardy in his vicious pamphlet of 1839 attacking the British Govt. for their obligatory involvement in Buddhist activities, p. 68.

Chief Incumbent - *Viharadhipati* of the Suduhumpola Rajamaha Vihara in Kandy, besides holding that position of the Shailatalarama Raja Maha Vihara⁵⁸ as well.

The work on the famous Suduhumpola Rajamaha Vihara was begun by Kaduvela Thero and completed about 1777 AC. He died in 1813. It was claimed that Sri Vickrama Rajasinghe had appointed the Mahanayake of Asgiriya Chapter, Mavataagama Thero, as the Chief Incumbent of the Suduhumpola Vihara after the death of Kaduvela Thero, but this was challenged by the rest of the inmate priests among other things on the ground that he had no relationship to the Kaduvela fraternity. Consequently, Mayilaveve Thero succeeded in becoming its Chief Incumbent. He was originally of the Siamese Sect, but had later ordained himself in the Amarapura Sect, at Dadalla, Galle. As a result of this, he was dismissed by both the Mahanayakas of Malvatta and Asgiriya Chapters from the Siamese Sect.

Mayilaveva Nayaka Thero was afterwards appointed by the Government as the Nayaka Thero of the Mahiyangana Vihara in Bintenna in addition to his being the Nayaka of the Suduhumpola Vihara. After his death, he was succeeded by Rambukwelle Thero and the British Government recognised his position in 1829 as Chief of this establishment. Formerly, he, too, belonged to the Siamese sect, but later, though not re-ordained, to quote his own words, he "purified his former ordination, which was that of Siam, by adopting the tenets of the Amarapura Sect."

But the British Government, unmindful of D'Oyly's policy not to interfere in Buddhist religious matters, dismissed Rambukwella Thero from his high office on 16th September, 1836 in consequence of his conversion to the Amarapura Sect,⁵⁹ and in 1837 filed a case in the Kandy District Court for even his ejection from the *vihara*, claiming that it belonged to the Crown under the provisions of the Kandyan Convention. Dismissing Rambukwella Thero, the Government appointed Variyapola Unnanse of the Siamese Sect in his place as the Chief Incumbent of the Suduhumpola Rajamaha Vihara.⁶⁰

However, his authority was not recognised by Rambukwelle Thero and the rest of the resident priests because he did not belong to the Kaduvela pupillary line and hence also the Siamese Sect. In 1839 and 1840, some of them, including the dismissed ex-High Priest, instituted legal proceedings in the Kandy District Court charging Variyapola Thero for refusal to provide paddy from the temple granary for their sustenance.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Lankave Bratanya Adhipattaya*, Sin., 1992, p. xi.

⁵⁹ Archibald S. Lawrie, *A Gazetteer of the Central Province*, Vol. 1, 1896, pp.361, 362.

⁶⁰ Lawrie, Vol. 1, p. 362.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 360

Now, Wimalaratna shows from Archival Records that the aged Variyapola Thero of the Tooth Relic Episode died on 5th February 1831,⁶² after he was pardoned and released from prison. Therefore, we have clearly here TWO Variyapola Unnanses, proving that the respondent of the Suduhumpola Vihara cannot be the hero-priest Variyapola Unnanse, whose personal ordination name too is unknown. Even assuming it to be 'Sumangala', he cannot have been the hero-priest as he had already passed away 9 years previous to the filing of the second case against the other Variyapola Thero.

This is further confirmed by the fact that Variyapola Unnanse of Suduhumpola Vihara, now in his capacity as the *Nayaka Unnanse* of the establishment, appointed *Konveva Buddharakkhita Unnanse* in the year 1846 as the Chief Incumbent of Gunadahe Pirivena Kasagal Vihara at Tumpane, which was an associate temple.⁶³

This goes yet further to prove that Variyapola Unnanse, the British appointee, still continued to live at least for 15 years after the death of Variyapola Unnanse of the Sacred Tooth Relic episode.

Thus, Dr. Wimalaratna's assertion that Variyapola Thero of the Flag Episode was the Chief Incumbent of the Suduhumpola Rajamaha Vihara is incorrect.

9. The name of Variyapola Sri Sumangala Thero, or, for that matter, any Variyapola Thero, appears nowhere in contemporary history connected with the accounts of the proceedings of the 1815 Convention. Variyapola Unnanse (without Sumangala) however surfaces for the first time associated with the removal of the Tooth Relic only three years later, and he is none else than the hero-priest who was jailed at Colombo and Jaffna.

10. The booklet by Premaratna, which has misled all of us for so long, and which is evidently our earliest printed source (1939) of the flag story, states that Variyapola Sumangala Thero, when arrested with the Sacred Tooth Relic, frankly admitting its removal, showed it to the British authorities on condition that he should not be punished for it and that the British, who were surprised and pleased with his boldness, instead of punishing him, gifted him the Darane Temple⁶⁴

This is nothing more than the author's own fabrication. In a list of prisoners, this priest's name appears as "Wariyapolla Unnanse" . . . (setting out the charge) "Concerned in the Robbery of the Sacred Relic from the Temple of the Palace." He was prosecuted for this offence and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Supreme

⁶² *Directory Of Dates And Events*, 1988, p. 227; *Lankave Britannya Adhipatyaya*, p. xi.

⁶³ Lawrie, Vol. 1, p. 302.

⁶⁴ *Sinhala Kodiya*, Sin., Sithumina Press, Kandy, 1939, p. 46.

Court.⁶⁵ (See further below). Not only that, the old Darane Temple which existed till 1828 (when Variyapola Thero was yet in jail) falling into ruins, was re-built only in 1856,⁶⁶ 25 years after the death of Variyapola Thero.

The Darane (Darande) Temple was the property of Kehelvatugoda Sumangala and not Variyapola (Sumangala). Evidently, the two ordination names have been confused here. Originally, it was the property of Yatanvala Sri Sunanda (1827 – 1835), Mahanayake Thero of the Asgiriya Chapter from whom he inherited it.⁶⁷

11 In a book published by the Central Cultural Fund, Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1983 entitled *Kandy*, Anuradha Senaviratna, in referring to Variyapola Thero, evidently having doubts about the incident, but without committing himself one way or the other says, "It is said that it was this same monk who took with him the Sacred Tooth Relic during the Kandyan Rebellion in 1818 and handed it over to Keppetipola Disava."⁶⁸ Elsewhere in the same book, however, with positive firmness, he writes "it was the same ground where Wariyapola Sumangala Thera brought down the *Kathira Kodiya*, the Union jack of the British and hoisted the *Sinha Kodiya*, the lion flag, as a protest against the British occupation of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. For that heroic act the monk had to pay the supreme penalty on behalf of the nation"⁶⁹ - which means that he was executed. Even up to the present day Variyapola Thero is supposed to have been shot dead or hanged! (see the *Island* newspaper, 26th May, Thursday 2005).

Now, as if to give life to this priest declared "dead" in 1815, we find him charged three years later "Connected in the robbery of the Tooth Relic from the Temple of the Palace in Kandy" and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Supreme Court appearing as No. 4 in a list prepared in 1820,⁷⁰ and again in a "List of Buddhist Priests Whom His Excellency Has Thought It Expedient To Confine In the Fort of Jaffnapatam" assigned No. 3 in a list among 20 priests,⁷¹ and also No. 9 in a

⁶⁵ Wimalaratna, Sin. pub. p. 38; M.A.D Appuhamy, *The Rebels Outlaws and The Enemies of the British*, p. 96.

⁶⁶ Lawrie, Vol. I, p. 224.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 583, but also see, *ibid*, Vol. I, p. 224.

⁶⁸ Their publication No. 10, 1983, p. 102.

⁶⁹ *ibidem*, p. 109.

⁷⁰ Vimalananda, *Udarata Maha Kerella*, Vol. 3, p.176.

⁷¹ M.A.D. Appuhamy, *The Rebels Outlaws and Enemies to the British*, 1990, p. 96. It appears that Buddhist priests even of the Maritime areas participated in this Rebellion. (See Vimalananda, *op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 370. *op.cit.*, p. 100. Of the 20 Buddhist priests, 10 were pardoned. In writing the Preface to Rev. Seelakkhanda's book, *Variyapola Mahimi*, Prof. Tennakoon Vimalananda, by obvious error, had mentioned that Variyapola Thero died in the

"List of Prisoners Enlarged From Confinement" who were pardoned and released from Jaffna Prison under the Proclamation issued by Governor Sir Edward Barnes dated 13th April, 1821 in view of "the approaching celebrations of His Majesty's (King George IV) Birthday, being twenty-fourth day of this month"⁷²

Variyapola Unnanse was released perhaps because he was deemed to be too old to remain in prison. He passed away only on 5th February, 1831.

12. At no time was there any charge against Variyapola Thero for pulling down and trampling the British flag in 1815; he continued services at the Maligava at the pleasure of the British Government till 1818 May. The one and only charge against him was "Robbery of the Tooth Relic." If a number of Buddhist priests were charged for comparatively simple offences like giving shelter to freedom fighters and inciting people etc. and sentenced to jail as punishment, one would have invariably expected Variyapola Thero to have been charged for the flag episode, which would obviously have been viewed by the British as an offence of the highest degree, if such an act was actually committed.

13. 'Variyapola Sri Sumangala' is the name by which we now popularly know of this priest who is associated with the Sacred Tooth Relic episode. But except by his village name of 'Variyapola', so far as studies have progressed, I have not been able to find any reference to him by his more important ordination name in any 19th century document, except always merely as 'Variyapola Unnanse'.

In the authoritative 19th century sources, I have been able to trace the following:

- (i) Several 'Sumangalas' bearing village names other than 'Variyapola' and a couple or so not bearing any village name at all. I see no point in discussing them here since they obviously do not include the personality of our concern.
- (ii) One 'Variyapola Sumangala' Thero who is from the Katudeniya Vihara in Matale South near Variyapola of the Matale Disavanny. He gave a Deed of

Jaffna Prison on 5th February, 1831. The date of death is correct, but he was pardoned and released ten years previously as can be further seen in the sequel.

⁷² *op.cit.*, p. 100.

Transfer of his Temple and lands to Talawinne Indajoti Unnanse also of the Central Province in the year 1873, and ceased to be a monk.⁷³

By 1873, Variyapola Unnanse of the Tooth Relic incident had died 42 years previously. Thus, the name of the Katudeniya priest cannot by any means refer to the former - they are clearly two distinct personages.

Leaving the Order at an advanced age could not have been of any temporal benefit—he ought to have done so in mid age if not in youth. Given the time period that set them apart, these two Variyapola priests, in all probability, could not have been contemporaries either. There is then no doubt that this Variyapola Sumangala priest was ordained after the death of the Variyapola Thero of the Tooth Relic case and would have yet been very young at the time he left the priesthood.

(iii) Variyapola Unnanse with no ordination name.

(a) Appointed by the British in 1836 as the Nayaka Unnanse of Suduhumpola Raja Maha Vihara in Kandy.⁷⁴ I have already pointed out in paragraph No.8, that this priest still lives till 1846 for 15 years after the death of Variyapola Unnanse of the Tooth Relic case

His name appears as "Variyapola Anunayaka Unnanse" as respondent in the Kandy District Court Cases 18138 and 18147 filed by Mayilawewe Vanaratana heading the entire ten inmates of the Suduhumpola Vihara, claiming maintenance from the Vihara produce - just two years after his being appointed by the British⁷⁵

To be so designated at this late stage suggests that he may have been the Anunayaka of the Asgiriya Chapter confounded with Variyapola Unnanse of the Tooth Relic case. There is no need to check on this further as it is irrelevant, five years having passed after the death of the former.

(b) Who has signed as witness in two Deeds of Gift of *paraveni* lands situated in South Matale, executed by Dewategedara Abeykone

⁷³ Lawrie, Vol. I, p. 192. Unless the temple was wholly abandoned, some of its lands were sold by the Crown, and by 1896 if formed a part of the Variyapola village and the Godapola Estate.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* 361.

⁷⁵ *ibid.* 364.

Mudiyanse Duggannarala from his death-bed in Kandy in the year 1798.⁷⁶

- (c) Who signed as a witness in the Yatihalagala Temple Settlement Case taken up for hearing and decided at the Asgiriya Mahavihara in the year 1829, that is 31 years after the signing of the above Deed of Gift.⁷⁷
- (d) Who is the priest associated with the removal of the Sacred Tooth Relic (and the supposed pulling down of the British flag which is the subject of our present investigation).⁷⁸ The fact that 'Variyapola Unnanse' has been a witness in the Yatihalagala Temple Settlement Case decided at Asgiriya Mahavihara is proof that he belonged to the Asgiriya fraternity. Tradition too upholds this claim. Evidently, in his last years, he may have lived at one of the several temples at this Establishment to be so readily available to witness the proceedings and sign the document mentioned at (c) above.

Referred to by the British as "Maha Thera", he ought to have been a very senior priest too.

It is equally important to note that he had come to visit the dying man in Kandy, and also to sign two Deeds of Gift of his property referred to in (b) above, and not for any other reason. He would have known him quite well as a fellow-villager of Variyapola in Matale, and possibly as a dayaka too. Both parties would not only have known each other intimately, but even been quite aware of the ownerships of their property and land holdings.⁷⁹ Otherwise no sensible and responsible person would ever have taken the high risk in standing witness to such an important legal document, which besides, was of no benefit to him.

The above cases (b) and (c) having been effected in Kandy, there can be no doubt that the signatory in both these is the selfsame priest, i.e., Variyapola Maha Thera of the Sacred Tooth Relic incident.

This confirms the fact that he hailed from the present village of Variyapola in South Matale of the old Disavanny of Matale in the present Central Province, and

⁷⁶ Lawrie, Vol. II, pp 705, 706, 853, 854.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 968.

⁷⁸ See List Of Buddhist Priests In Custody, in *Udarata Maha Kerella* Vol 3, 1963, p. 176 by Tennakoon Vimalananda.

⁷⁹ Although it need not be stressed upon that both parties – donor and the witnesses, should have known well each other it is confirmed by some Kandyan deeds reproduced by F.A. Haley in his *The Laws And Customs of The Sinhalese and Kandyan Law*, 1923, pp. 108 ff of the Appendix VIII.

not from Variyapola in the old Hat Korale Disavanny of the present Kurunegala District, as Tumbulle Seelakkhandha Thero of Hat Korale makes a vain attempt to assert. Even today, a Notary will not accept, as legal requirement specifies, a stranger or outsider to sign a deed as a witness.

Since Variyapola Maha Thero of the Tooth Relic episode ought to have been from Matale South as is evident from iii (b) and (c), and the fact that the Katudeniya Vihara had existed in Variyapola in Matale South, we have no hesitation in identifying this *vihara* as having been the establishment to which this priest must have originally belonged. It may be also noted that, according to records, this is the only temple by that name that existed in Variyapola in Matale South.

Variyapola Sumangala of this temple, who disrobed himself in 1873 (discussed at (ii) above) appears to have been ordained at this temple after the demise of the former in 1831, taking, as sometimes was the practice, the ordination name of a precursor. This seems to be the only explanation why tradition holds the latter to have been Sumangala by name.

This array of details tends to reveal information on the hitherto unsettled but most vital biographical questions surrounding Variyapola Maha Thero as regards his (i) ancestral village of birth; (ii) the temple to which he originally belonged, and (iii) his ordination name as well. Therefore, it is clear enough that this particular Variyapola Thero had nothing to do with that Korale.

In the light of this investigation, the genealogy of sacerdotal succession prepared by Rev. Tumbulle Seelakkhandha, which includes the name of Variyapola Unnanse of the famous Tooth Relic drama and also listing himself as coming down the same lineage, must necessarily collapse.⁸⁰ I do not contest the fact that it could be another Variyapola Unnanse of that area, Still, they are two different priests - not the hero-priest of Matale.

We do not have the faintest indication in contemporary writings that Variyapola Maha Thero ever had a pupil. All that we know is that he had a servant - a layman to serve him mentioned in the document of his release from the Jaffna Prison.⁸¹

The Period concerned is 1798 to 1829. Variyapola Thero was not involved in any issue that led to imprisonment till 1818, and being released from the Jaffna

⁸⁰ On this basis, The genealogy of priestly succession shown under this Variyapola Thero on p. 33 of the book *Sacerdotal Succession of Sri Lankan Buddhist Monks, Vol. 2, Asgiriya Chapter* by Kapila Pathirana Vimaladharma, 2003 is wholly inaccurate. Without independent research, he had cited Seelakkhandha Thero's book *Variyapola Mahimi* as the authority.

⁸¹ Vimalananda, *Udarata Maha Kerella*, Vol. 3, p. 176.

Prison in 1821 and now free, this time period falls quite well within the dates of the deeds mentioned at (b) and (c) above. He lived till 1831.

This conclusively proves that Variyapola Thero of the Tooth Relic episode was never the Anunayaka of the Asgiriya Chapter, as claimed by the much spoken of palm-leaf manuscript sheet, for, what is specifically mentioned in the *Sittu* cited at (c), is that the Yatihalagala Temple Case was heard and decided by "Yatanvala Mahanayaka Unnanse and Kotagama Anunayaka Unnanse," both of whom signed it as judges. Variyapola Unnanse was only its third witness.⁸² He passed away two years later.

Rev. Tumbulle Seelakkhandha Thero, writing the History of Asgiriya Vihara and quoting from page 4 of the '*Asgiriya Viharaye Lekam Pot Mitiya*,' states too that Variyapola Thero of the flag incident was the Anunayaka of the Asgiriya Chapter.⁸³ No date is given by him for this and if this unpublished manuscript is old, this portion is obviously a much later addition written by a monk who had confused matters. In the light of the above discussion, it is clear that this listing is incorrect and therefore should be discounted.

For facility of reference, the three Variyapola monks here can be lined up in the following chronological sequence.

- (1) Variyapola (Sumangala) Maha Thero of the Tooth Relic case – died in 1831.
- (2) Variyapola (Deepankara) Thero appointed by the British in 1836 to the Suduhumpola Vihara still living in 1846, late contemporary of No. 1 (died in 1871?).
- (3) Variyapola Sumangala Unnanse of Katudeniya Vihara, ordained sometime after 1831, but left the priesthood in 1873, perhaps when still a novice, or *samanera*.

According to Lawrie, vol. 2, p. 916, all three are very clearly from Variyapola of Meda Siya Pattuwa in Matale South, and none is from the Kurunegala District.

We have already seen that although the British prosecuted Variyapola Thero before the Supreme Court, there was no charge for the alleged 'Pulling down of the British flag,'⁸⁴ the only charge being 'Robbery of the Sacred Tooth Relic.' Rev. Seelakkhandha, though he repeatedly upholds the veracity of the flag incident, quoting authority from his own book '*Variyapola Mahimi*', 1984 previously cited, at the same time states that "there is no documentary evidence to prove it either in the Sri Lanka Government Archives or among the holdings of the British Museum, and

⁸² Lawrie, Vol. II, p. 968.

⁸³ Published, 1997, pp. 43, 180, 193.

⁸⁴ Wimalaratna, p. 27

that for Sri Lankans it is a mere legend handed down from generations."⁸⁵ Truly, this is the correct position.

Owing to the high profile held by this priest as a national hero in our history, many individuals have made fantastic attempts to identify themselves as hailing from this priest's territory of birth in recent times. I know of at least one recent writer who is making a desperate, but futile attempt to search for 'evidence' to identify this hero-monk as a scion of Dumbara Rata, for the very petty and incidental reason that he himself derives his ancestry from a village that bears the name of that old county.

We know that, as a rule, any Buddhist monk has the name of the village of his birth prefixed to his ordination name, so much so that, particularly during the period concerned, in British and Kandyan documents they are nearly always referred to only by their village names. I can understand anyone claiming this priest as belonging to Hat Korale - the present Kurunegala District, because there is a village by the name 'Variyapola' there. But during the 19th century there was no village by the name Variyapola in the whole of Dumbara Rata.

No doubt, following the earliest (1984) details published by Rev. Tumbulle Seelakkhandha, Wimalaratna says the lay name of Variyapola Thero was (Variyapola) Herath Mudiyanseleage Kirihamy and his father's name was Herath Mudiyanseleage Bamunukotuva Rala.⁸⁶

Rev. Seelakkhandha reconstructs his genealogy (with also another slightly different one), as he says, on the basis of local tradition. The very tone in which they are presented leaves us in no doubt that the details cannot command serious attention, for also the very good reason that he says emphatically that **"up to now, no acceptable documentary evidence whatsoever disclosing the ancestral genealogy of Variyapola Sri Sumangala Thero of Devamedi Hatpattu of Kurunegala District is to be seen."**⁸⁷ In view of this clear assertion, it requires us not to have any trust in this genealogy.

Despite the facts thus revealed, as the latest to attempt to trace history of Variyapola Thero is S.B. Karalliyadda who also believes in the flag story. He writes, "Based on *Dumbara Vittipot*, *Kadaimpot* and Oral Traditions, and proceeding from the known to the unknown on principles of educational psychology,"⁸⁸ He

⁸⁵ *Asgiri Maha Vihare Prabhavaya, Vikashaya Ha Tadanubadha Adhyapana Sampradaya*, Sin., 1997, p. 53.

⁸⁶ *Lankave Bratannya Adhpatyaya*, Sin., p. XI.

⁸⁷ *Variyapola Mahimi*, 1984, p. 157.

⁸⁸ We are at a loss to understand as to what he means by proceeding from the known to the unknown according to the "*Adhyapana Manovidya Muladharmā*." But such effort is not needed if there is cogent evidence.

constructs a most fantastic genealogy for Variyapola Thero, beginning from Tunayama of the 15th Century as descending in the royal line. He states that his father was Devamedda Bandara and Variyapola Thero was the eldest of his three sons, all along gradually arriving at the ultimate destination of Dumbara and even connecting him directly to the Kandyan Royal Dynasty!⁸⁹ He quotes no specific authority for any of his speculations.

It is needless to state that this story, which anyway contradicts the claims of Tumbulle Seelakkhandha Thero, too, is a fiction. At this rate, as Sir Paul E. Pieris says about the legends surrounding this priest,⁹⁰ it would not be surprising if we encounter more and more similar fabrications in the future as well.

Summary

1. The story of pulling down of the British flag either by Variyapola Deepankara, (the so-called nephew of Variyapola Sumangala Thero) as stated in the palm-leaf manuscript sheet, or, on the contrary, by the latter as present tradition popularly holds, is a very recent creation, (by at least four gentlemen in Kandy, who are deceased.)⁹¹
2. Variyapola Thero was the officiating priest of the Dalada Shrine from 1815 to 1818 May, when he secretly took away the Sacred Tooth Relic and absconded, for which single offence he was charged, convicted, and sentenced to life imprisonment.
3. Variyapola Thero was not executed for the so-called offence of pulling down the British flag in 1815, nor did he die in prison, but he was pardoned due to old age and good conduct, and released on 24th April, 1821 on the birthday of King George IVth.
4. Very certainly he was a native of Variyapola village in Meda Siya Pattuwa of South Matale, and not from Variyapola in the Kurunegala District or elsewhere.
5. This Variyapola Thero is confused with the long lived Variyapola Thero - the British appointee to the Suduhumpola Rajamaha Vihara in 1836; a second, Variyapola Deepankara of the spurious palm-leaf manuscript sheet; a third, the Variyapola Sumangala Unnanse of the Katudeniya Vihara in

⁸⁹ Article in *Divaina* paper, 9.03.2005, Wednesday supplement. For a very scholarly article on Kandyan Dynasty by A.S. Hettiarachchi, See *JRAS CB (NS)*, Vol. XLL, 1968, p. 123 ff.

⁹⁰ *Sinhale and the Patriots*, p. 396.

⁹¹ Disclosed to me personally by two sons of two of them, now deceased, on request not to disclose their names and not to write a paper while they were alive. However, this study has no reference to that discussion.

Matale South, who, apparently was ordained after the death of No. 2, but disrobed not long after when still in youth, and also a fourth, Kehelvatugoda Sumangala.

6. There is no reliable evidence disclosing either his parental ancestry or spiritual genealogy. Evidently, he belonged to the Katudeniya Vihara in Matale South.
7. He lived in Asgiriya Mahavihara and passed away on 5th February, 1831 in old age, 10 years after being released from jail.

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