

Ven. Rerukane Candavimala

My Autobiography



as told to Ven. Ittepana Dhammālaṅkāra

translated by Dr. Doreen Perera

revised with additional notes by
Ānandajoti Bhikkhu

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Preface

Sri Lanka produced some of the finest scholar-monks of the 20th century, whose influence has been felt across the whole of the Buddhist world. One thinks of Ven. Soma, Ven. Nārada, Ven. Walpola Rāhula, Ven. Piyadassī and many others who helped shape our understanding of Buddhism during these times.

Ven. Rerukane Candavimala (1897-1999) was also one of the most important scholar-monks who was active in Sri Lanka during the 20th century. His works, which are written in lucid Sinhala, are standard in every field he wrote in, but so far only a very few have been translated into English,¹ and he is therefore much less known.

He wrote on diverse subjects, and had mastered them all, whether it was Discipline (*Vinaya*), Doctrine (*Dhamma*), Meditation (*Bhāvanā*) or the Abstract Doctrine (*Abhidhamma*). As he says himself in this autobiography: “My main aim was to understand the Dhamma for myself. Some Dhamma points I pondered over for weeks and months. I never wrote on anything that I did not understand fully.”

Besides his position as a leading scholar, Ven. Rerukane was also head of the Shwegyin Nikāya in Sri Lanka, and ran the founding temple for that sect in Sri Lanka (*Vinayālaṅkāraṛāmayā*); and was Preceptor for the whole of the Amarapura Nikāya, fulfilling many duties and responsibilities in these positions.

His life was quite extraordinary, and his beginnings did not presage what he was to become. He was ordained and taken to Burma at the tender age of 11, and didn’t return till he was in his 20s. He was and remained fluent in Burmese all through his life.

¹ These include an early translation of his book *The Four Noble Truths*, a translation of his book on the *pāramī* as *Analysis of Perfections*, and my own expansion of his collection of verses from the *Tiṭṭaka*, as *Buddhist Wisdom Verses*.

However, he had only received formal education in Sri Lanka up to the second grade, and when he returned he was unable to read or write the Sinhala language. It is even more extraordinary then that he became one of the most read authors and Dhamma propagators in his own language.

This short autobiography gives his recollections of his early years and the reasons he started to write, and outlines some of the works he wrote. It was told to his distinguished pupil Ven. Ittepana Dhammālaṅkāra in 1996, who transcribed it for its publication in the Sinhala language.

I really hope that some budding Sri Lankan scholars will undertake translations of his important works for the benefit of people in the rest of the Buddhist world.

My thanks go to Dr. Doreen Perera, who made the initial translation of this work, even when facing critical health issues, and whose dedication to the Sāsana is evident here and in other translations she has made.

I have revised the translation, added some explanatory notes, and a Bibliography at the end. I hope this work will go some way to bringing to the attention of the English speaking world one of the great monks of our time.

Ānandajoti Bhikkhu
July 2016

1. My Childhood

Ordination and Journey to Burma

I was born in the village of Rerukana, Raigama district in the Adikari borough of Sri Lanka. It is a small village near Bandaragama. It is surrounded by large paddy fields, and there is also a substantial area of cultivated land for other crops. Nowadays there are a lot of houses in our village, and so it is highly populated also. But in those days there were only about 10 or 15 houses in the entire village. Our houses can be seen still standing.² Initially the roof structure had beams made from coconut palm timber and covered with coconut leaves. Now it is covered with tiles. I have a feeling that our house is considerably older than myself. I was born on Monday, 19th July, 1897. My father was Don Bastian de Paulis Gunawardhana, and my mother was Munasinghage Podi Nona. They were both very pious people.

There were six brothers and sisters in the family including me, but I was the eldest. Now only my younger sister and I are alive. Her name is Selohami, and she was the second born. Neelis Gunawardhana, Edmond Gunawardhana, Ackman Gunawardhana, Aidyn Gunawardhana were my four brothers. They are all dead now.

I only went up to the second grade at school. I still remember a story we learnt in first grade, “the battle between sharks and whales”. I cannot remember much about what I learnt in second grade. I remember how I passed through to the second grade though. On the set day we were seated facing each other and the teacher dictated “tea drinking is healthy” and we had to write it on our slate-boards, in beautiful handwriting. I could not do that. The child opposite me had written it beautifully and I copied it. That is how I progressed onto second grade; I copied.

At the beginning of this century, that is in 1906, a Burmese monk named Ven. Vinayāṅkāra came to Sri Lanka. He visited many

² Originally published as the first four chapters in *රේරුකනේ වන්දනාමල මහ නාහිමි වර්ත කථාව*.

religious sites in Sri Lanka, to venerate and offer respect. On his travels he also happened to visit our district. He stayed in a cave on a rocky mountain for a few days, resting. The villagers became very impressed with this monk and started offering him food, etc. He could not speak much Sinhala but he would try to speak with everyone and even gave sermons in broken Sinhala. The villagers became very comfortable with the monk and started to offer robes and other allowable requisites in full.

One day the venerable thought of offering all that he had to other monks, 100 in total. He went to the nearby temples and invited them for a food offering (*dāna*), but they did not accept his invitation. It was a big problem for the lay people of the village. Ven. Waskaduwe Subhūti³ came to know about this and accepted the invitation and also made arrangements for the required number of monks to attend the *dāna*. He was a brave and very powerful monk. The *dāna* offering went very well. After that a group of pious villagers decided, since the monks from nearby temples did not attend the *dāna*, it was time to build a new temple. So they got together and built it on this land.

It was called *Idikati deniya* in those days. It was an overgrown piece of land. It was used to hide stolen bullocks and to release cobras and vipers and such like when they were caught. This land had a lot of owners too. So nearly all of them had got together and offered it to the Burmese monk, Ven. Vinayālaṅkāra, and that is why this temple is called Vinayālaṅkāraṃamaya.

I mentioned earlier that Ven. Vinayālaṅkāra gave sermons to all who came to see him, albeit in broken Sinhala. Most of the time it was about the benefits of being a monk and ordination. My father used to go frequently to listen to his sermons. Now I think Ven. Vinayālaṅkāra must have been thinking of Burma when he praised ordination. In Burma many more people will be ordained than in Sri Lanka. Anyway, our father used to regularly listen to his sermons and would come home and tell us about what he heard. One day he asked me, ‘Would it be a bad thing if you became ordained?’ I was

³ His biography is elsewhere on this website: <http://bit.ly/1r4zfvx>.

about nine. So I agreed to ordain, as in those days children liked to join the Sangha, and the parents liked it too. Not just me, another 26 children wanted to join. We were ordained by Ven. Vinayālaṅkāra. Before ordination I read books on the novice's Dhamma (*sāmaṇera baṇa daham*), Pali grammar and such like. I did that under the guidance of Ven. Batuwita Susīma.

The new novices though did not get much of an opportunity to stay in Sri Lanka after their ordination. On 27th January 1908 Ven. Vinayālaṅkāra took us to Burma. So I learnt all about the Dhamma and the whole of the Tipiṭaka over there. All of the novices were staying with the Head of the Shwegyin sect in Lower Burma. It was really difficult for us, mainly because of our lack of knowledge of the Burmese language. At first I could not pronounce some words at all but gradually it became more manageable.

In those days my retention of facts was very good and I read a lot of books. I stayed in Burma for over 10 years. In that time I learned the Vinaya and the Commentaries with respected Dhamma-Vinaya teachers of Burma. I also had the chance to return briefly to Sri Lanka.

When I went back to Burma it was also to obtain the Higher Ordination (*upasampadā*). On October 26th 1917 at Dhammikārāma Sīma in Burma I received my Higher Ordination.

I also obtained an in-depth knowledge of the Abhidhamma in Burma. There are a number of learned, scholarly monks over there. There are also many valuable books written on the subject. That is where I gained much knowledge of the various meditation methods and the practice. I can speak Burmese as if it were my mother tongue; I can also read and write in the same manner.

I would like to mention a unique and good method of teaching that exists in Burma. I do not know if this is used anywhere else in the world. Teaching is done in complete darkness. Both teacher and the group of students sit in the dark without books. The teacher explains the contents first and if the student has listened well he will be able

to recite it back word for word. Sarūpavibhāga in Abhidhammaṭṭha-saṅgaha, Mātikā, Dhātukathā, Yamaka, Paṭṭhāna were all taught like that. The method was called *ratrivacana*, or night recital.

For this students have to wake up at 4.30am. There is a bell. Then the morning worship. They note their attendance. When their name is read out they have to say 'here' loudly. If you do not turn up at that time a punishment is handed out. You have to take five pots of water, or more sometimes, and pour them away somewhere. I just could not wake up at that early time. So I used to get the punishment many times in the beginning. Then they stopped it, they must have realised I am not able to wake up so early.

Going back to *ratrivacana*, the lessons would go on for three to four hours. Sometimes I would fall asleep. After the lessons the others would go back leaving me alone. Those days I was very lazy, perhaps the laziest in all Burma at that time.

I will elaborate some more on the Burmese monastic methods of education. A special emphasis was given to Pāḷi grammar and language. They were taught at a very high and scholarly level. Also the Tipiṭaka and the Commentaries were taught in depth. When we were in Burma none of the secular subjects were given any special significance. I have heard that things are different now. Why, some Burmese monks even come to Sri Lanka to learn English nowadays.

After about a year after my Higher Ordination I came back to Sri Lanka. I stayed for some time at Dematagoda Mahā Visuddhārāmayā in Colombo.

I need to mention something special. It was Ven. Arangala Siridhamma the head monk at that temple who encouraged me to write. He used to say over and over, "there are many excellent books on Dhamma and Abhidhamma in Burmese – it would be good if you could write something like that in Sinhala."

2. From Burma to Sri Lanka

After arriving from Burma I first stayed at the Dematagoda Visuddhārāmaya temple. There was a special reason for this. In those days it was a requirement that when people return from abroad they had to present themselves to the authorities for quarantine purposes. So staying in Colombo was more convenient. I used to listen to Ven. Siridhamma's Abhidhamma classes. Since I had been in Burma for a long time, everyone thought I would be an expert in Abhidhamma. Some students asked me to teach the *Abhidhammaṭṭhasaṅgraha*. I did not like that, but they kept asking me, so one day I taught them the *Abhidhammaṭṭhasaṅgraha*.

Some started saying that I was a better teacher than Ven. Siridhamma. I thought that was not a very auspicious thing to say in his own temple, and that I should leave as soon as possible. At that time Ven. Siridhamma was a world-renowned Abhidhamma scholar. If talk started that a young person like me was a better teacher, it would be a slur to his good name. So I decided to leave but I did not like to tell anyone.

I gradually started staying away for a few days on and off, then completely removed myself from the temple. We remained on good terms that way. When I arrived first at Visuddhārāmaya I was in awe of the student monks who were coming to learn the Abhidhamma. I thought they knew far more than me. When I investigated closely though, none of them knew very much. They used to study really hard from morning until night. I never studied that way. If I read something even once I remembered it. I know most of the Tipiṭaka by heart even now in my old age.

After Visuddhārāmaya I stayed for a while in a temple in Panadure. The head monk was Ven. Dheerananda. It was close to the sea, so it was also called the seaside temple (Vallabada). It was very conducive to one's health so I stayed there for a while.

About a year and a half later I wrote my first book there, නිර්වාණ විනිශ්චය (*Nirvāṇa Viniścaya, An Enquiry into Nibbāna*). There was a

reason for this. There was a journal called Dharma Sri and the editor asked me to write an article on *Nirvāṇa*. After it was published a lay gentleman wrote a critique of it. I cannot remember his name. I wrote a few articles in reply but then decided it was not useful to write like that and decided to write a book on *Nirvāṇa*. *Nirvāṇa Viniścaya* was that book. I was about 29 at the time, and it was written in high scholarly language. Perhaps some may have read it, but may not have found it very palatable. *Nirvāṇa* is a deep Dhamma, and is not easy to understand. It is difficult to choose the right words to explain it too. Therefore I think it was not as popular as my other books. However my knowledge of Sinhala was also not very good at the time. In those days I learned my Sinhala from scholarly books like the *Jātaka Pansiyapot Vahanse*, *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, *Pūjāvaliya*⁴ and so on. I got used to that style of writing. I think many of the words that I have used in *Nirvāṇa Viniścaya* were from those ancient books.

The style of writing that I used to write *Nirvāṇa Viniścaya* I didn't use again. All the later books were written in simple language.⁵ In all honesty I did not want to re-print *Nirvāṇa Viniścaya*, but somehow even though I have objected, it has been reprinted.

I later wrote a book called පටිච්චසමුප්පාද විවරණය (*Paṭiccasamuppāda Vivaraṇaya, An Exposition of Conditional Origination*). In that I explained *Nirvāṇa* in greater detail. That is why I did not want *Nirvāṇa Viniścaya* to be published again. I had this idea to stop publishing that book completely. I did not write that book to earn money. I actually have no objection that someone else had published it, taking sections of it and not even mentioning my authorship, and putting their name on it. It is illegal but I did not forbid it.

⁴ These are three very popular books in Sri Lanka, that made a marked impact on the Sinhalese knowledge of the Dhamma. However, they are written in High Sinhala, and hard for most people to understand these days.

⁵ That is, in the common language of the people in the 20th century.

2. From Burma to Sri Lanka – 11

I wrote to eradicate my own ignorance rather than to share the sublime Dhamma with the people. It can be said that by learning and researching the Dhamma, one's ignorance gets eradicated.

3. This is a Burmese Temple

The Head Quarters of Shwegyin Nikāya

This temple is so-called because Ven. U. Vinayālaṅkāra from Burma founded it. Although it is called the Burmese Temple not everything is done in the same way as they do in temples in Burma, because that isn't possible. In the early days there was not much contact with the temples of the Siyam Nikāya (Thai tradition) though. We had two other temples belonging to our Nikāya, Batuwita Temple and the Bolgoda Temple, therefore we had close links with those. Very soon we also forged links with the temples of the Siyam Nikāya. Now there is no separation and we will all get together and perform religious services.

Before I arrived at the Burmese temple, I stayed in various places for short periods. I stayed for about a year at Kalutara Kumari Kanda temple. I spent one rains retreat there. There was an erudite monk there called Kotmale Saddhāvāsa.

I spent a considerable time at the Bolgoda Temple. After the monk who resided there, Ven. Dhammajoti passed away, I took over looking after the temple. While I was there I did as much as I could to rejuvenate the place. I brought monks over from the Burmese Temple to conduct many religious ceremonies.

I also stayed for a while at a temple in Kirivatthuduwa, belonging to the Ramanya Nikāya. That temple had been neglected, as the Head Monk had many other temples to attend to. Some people called him the Universal Monarch of Temples. He was a monk from Mullegama. I stayed in these other places because there was already a monk here, Ven. Aggadhammālaṅkāra.

I stayed in different places for about 10 years and after he passed away I came back. I came here after the venerable died, and since it is an important place I had an idea to develop it.

In the early days I did not have the idea that I should stay in a temple. I wanted to meditate in the forest. I went to two or three

such places. I fell ill and that prompted me to go back to temples. It is natural to have a change of mind like that.

From the beginning my foremost wish was to learn the Sublime Dhamma very well. There was no wish to write books nor teach others. My main idea was to learn it for myself and gain good results from it. I only wanted to cross over *samsāra* (the round of births and deaths). So how does one, while being in a temple, giving sermons, writing books and attending to various religious ceremonies work towards that? I do as much as I can to progress in meditation: I attend to everything and I also allocate some time for meditation. Now I feel, though, it would have been better if I had devoted all my time for meditation.

I would like to say something about our Shwegyin Nikāya. When Emperor Asoka sent Dhamma Emissaries abroad, one of the countries which benefitted was *Suvaṇṇabhūmi*. It is also popularly called the Ramanya Country in lower Burma.⁶ In the time of King Rāmādhipati, the decline in the Buddhist Dispensation was so deep that there dawned a time when it was difficult to be certain of the validity of the Higher Ordination. At that time they realised that an authentic Higher Ordination lineage still existed in Sri Lanka, and 48 monks were sent to bring back the pure Higher Ordination lineage from there.

It was the time of King Buvaneka Bahu whose kingdom was at Jayawardenapura and the Acts of Discipline (*Vinayakamma*) were carried out at the Boundary (*Sīma*) which was on the river Kalyāṇa, in the Water Boundary (*Udakukkhepasīma*). The 48 monks, after obtaining the Higher Ordination, returned to their own country of Ramanya and established all the other monks in Higher Ordination. In this sense, the lineage of the monk Soṇuttara ended and the Mahā Vihāra lineage began at that time in Burma.

⁶ Editor's note: in fact the exact location of *Suvaṇṇabhūmi* is not established. One suggestion is that it could be Ramanya.

But as time went on, even the Mahā Vihāra lineage started to deteriorate. This decline was a cause for much grief for Ven. Jāgarābhīdya Saddhammavaṃśa Dhammasenāpati Atulādīpati SirīPavāra Mahā Dhamma Rājādhīrājaguru and he removed himself from the immoral monks and refrained from having Dhamma-associations with them and established a group of moral and precept-abiding monks and lived in a border area.

The aforementioned name is an honorific title given to him by the King. His name was Jāgara, and he was born in the village of Shwegyin. Because of that he was also called Shwegyin Sayādaw. It is this name by which he was famous in Burma. But in Sri Lanka he was known as Jāgara. He lived in the time of King Mindon.⁷

That king was a devout and intelligent king. He sponsored the 5th Council (Pañca Saṅgāyana) and did other wholesome deeds such as engraving the Tipiṭaka on white marble blocks at Kuthodaw temple in Mandalay. He also established a constitution called the Dhammavinaya decree and attempted to purify the Buddha's dispensation, although it was not very successful.

King Mindon knew Ven. Jāgara from his early days as a prince and was his devout follower. The king established a new city called Mandalay and invited Ven. Jāgara there. He built five new temples and offered them to the venerable monk. He also tried to clean-up the dispensation with the help of Ven. Jāgara.

Ven. Jāgara established a list of 20 verses of Dhamma-advice to aid in the running of the five temples. Under his good rule the monks staying at those temples developed in both Pariyatti and Paṭipatti. Amongst Ven. Jāgara's group, there were 21 monks who were successful in obtaining the Rājaguru degree. Word spread and many monks started joining Ven. Jāgara's group, and soon there were more than 1000.

⁷ He reigned from 1853 – 1878.

It was not the intention of either the King or the venerable to establish a new sect (*nikāya*). However his group of monks had become quite outstanding in the country. Therefore people called them the monks from the Shwegyin Nikāya, after the name of Shwegyin Sayādaw. That is how the Shwegyin Nikāya was established. It spread country-wide and gained much fame.

Ven. Jāgara did not appoint anyone as the Head Monk. Everyone however regarded him as the Head Monk. The chief lay supporter was King Mindon. Since the Nikāya began in the temples of the King, it is a Royal Nikāya. When Ven. Jāgara was there, though it was termed a Nikāya, it is difficult to say that it was established in a systematic way.

In order to ensure the continuation of the Nikāya after his demise, a Head Monk was chosen, Visuddhācāra Dhajādhipati Pavāra Mahā Dhamma Rājādhirājaguru Mahā Thera. He was a revered scholar of the Tipiṭaka and was held in high esteem. He was also the author/editor of many highly acclaimed literary works. The English Government had conferred an *Aggamahāpaṇḍita* degree upon him.

It was during his time that the Nikāya was organised in a systematic way. He also established a constitution with thirty phrases to secure the future of the Nikāya. That is the current constitution of the Shwegyin Nikāya. Today, this Nikāya has spread to Sri Lanka and Thailand. In Burma there are about 15,000 monks and about 200 temples in the Shwegyin Tradition.⁸

The Sixth Buddhist Council (*Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana*) which was held in Burma was mainly carried out with the help of the monks of this Nikāya. Furthermore this Nikāya has many authors, meditation masters, yogis, meditators and austere practitioners. The monk who wrote numerous books on meditation, spread the Satipaṭṭhāna Meditation technique to the world, the great meditation master Aggamahāpaṇḍita Mahāsi Sayādaw Bhadanta Sobhana Mahā Thera was also a Shwegyin Mahā Thera.

⁸ In 1996 this means.

3. This is a Burmese Temple – 16

The founder of the Shwegyin Nikāya, the Ven. Jāgara Mahā Thera also came over to Sri Lanka in 1872. Following his visit, Sri Lanka too became influenced by the Shwegyin Nikāya. After that a student of the Mahā Nāyaka of the Shwegyin Nikāya came over to Sri Lanka, Ven. U Vinayālaṅkāra. It is under his leadership that this temple started, and for that reason this temple is known by his name.

With him as the preceptor, 27 young monks including me were ordained there. So we were the first batch of Shwegyin monks in Sri Lanka. In 1907, on the 20th of January, this temple was offered to Ven. U Vinayālaṅkāra and other monks, as a consecrated ground (*sīma*) for the Mahā Saṅgha. Therefore this temple in Pokunuwita, the Vinayālaṅkārarāmaya is the first Sri Lankan temple that the monks from the Shwegyin Nikāya have themselves established. Therefore I feel the Shwegyin Nikāya has become firmly established here. The first Head of the Shwegyin Nikāya in Sri Lanka was Ven. Uduwe Vimalaramsi Thera. The second was Devinuvara Nāṇāvāsa Mahā Thera. In Sri Lanka, the Shwegyin Nikāya is quite small compared to Burma: it has about 250 monks and about 70 temples.⁹

My Higher Ordination was in Burma

Those in Burma know exactly how to perform the Higher Ordination according to the Vinaya, the Disciplinary Code, and they do it very well. They also have an excellent understanding of the precepts. Some people in our country do not even know the precepts, let alone how to live accordingly.

In Burma, when the Rains Retreat period is coming to an end, they hold an examination for the monastics, which is entirely a memory test. Ubhaya Pātimokkha (*Bhikkhu and Bhikkhunī Regulations*), Mūlasikkhā (*Training in the Main Rules*) and Khuddasikkhā (*Training in the Minor Rules*) are some of the books that one gets tested on, purely by recitation. I too took this test. I recited the Ubhaya Pātimokkha first. I also remembered most of the Khuddasikkhā. In Burma it is a

⁹ In 1996.

very good thing that both written and recitation tests are conducted for the monks.

I only returned to Sri Lanka after my Higher Ordination and those recitation examinations. I could not do anything much in Sinhala. I faced some difficulties, due to this fact.

I mentioned earlier that I stayed a few months at Dematagoda Mahā Visuddhārāmayā. I listened to the teachings of Ven. Siridhamma as a bystander when he was teaching others. That is how I learned Sinhala. He taught the Tipiṭaka in Sinhala. I did not officially learn Sinhala writing from anyone, I feel even now that I cannot write Sinhala very well. I listened to Ven. Siridhamma when he taught others and that is the knowledge that I used to write all of those books. I do not know if my Sinhala is good or bad. I have written about 30 books with the knowledge that I possessed of the Sinhala language. I cannot remember exactly how many.

I mentioned earlier that it was Ven. Siridhamma who encouraged me to write, and so I started writing little by little. In those days it was very difficult to get books published. There were shop owners like J.B. Fernando but they were too scared to print books like these. They were very afraid that they would not be able to sell these books. Because of that I did not write for a long time. After leaving Visuddhārāmayā, in order to oblige others' requests, I used to write articles to newspapers and journals but did not have much enthusiasm to write books.

4. Why I Wrote my Books

If I had pondered over a certain Dhamma point for some time and had finally understood it completely, then I may decide to write about it. I put forth much effort and time to understand Conditional Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*). Once I understood it I wrote the book පටිච්චසමුප්පාද විවරණය (*Paṭiccasamuppāda Vivaraṇaya, Exposition of Conditional Arising*).

There have been many other publications on the Perfections (*Pāramī*), but I did not feel satisfied after reading those. So in order to elucidate the Perfections I wrote පාරමිතා ප්‍රකරණ (*Pāramitā Prakaraṇa, The Book about the Perfections*).

The impetus for writing the විනය කර්ම පොත් (*Vinaya Karma Pot, The Book on Disciplinary Actions*) came after I stayed at Bandaravela Mahā Ulpota Nigrodhārāmaya temple, in the hot summer months. The congregation after the *pūjā* asked me, saying it would be highly beneficial if I could write a book on the Disciplinary Actions, for those who do not know much about them. That was the reason for my writing the *Vinaya Karma* book. It is not enough for the disciplinary actions to be in a book. So I also explained what disciplinary actions entailed. That book is used by the Saṅgha of all three Nikāyas. I am very happy about that.

සුවිසු මහා ගුණය (*Suvisu Mahā Guṇaya, The Twenty-Four Great Qualities*)¹⁰ was written as my offering (*pūjā*) to the Triple Gem. I feel that by writing that book I have offered my highest *pūjā* to the Triple Gem. I wrote it purely because I wanted to do it.

Some monks started to criticise the way that the Mahāsi teaching Kanduboda Temple was doing Satipaṭṭhāna Meditation, so I wrote සතිපට්ඨාන භාවනා විවේචනය (*Satipaṭṭhāna Bhāvanā Vivecanaya, A Critical Analysis of Mindfulness*) to counter their views and explain the real situation.

¹⁰ Of the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha; the book runs to some 500+ pages.

I really value the book ශාසනාවතරණය (*Śāsanāvatarāṇaya, Entrance into the Dispensation*). I wrote it for the monks living today, as some monks do not know anything about the ordained life. One day an elderly monk came here and offered me the requisites and said, venerable Sir, without the grace of your books, the monks nowadays would not know what to do. He came the following day too and after offering me more requisites repeated the same words and was very happy.

I wrote පටියාන මහා ප්‍රකරණ සන්තය (*Paṭṭhāna Mahā Prakaraṇa Sannaya, Word-by-Word explanation of the Conditions*)¹¹ following a request from one Mrs. Munasinghe. She came to learn *Paṭṭhāna* from me. While learning she invited me to write a word-by-word explanation (*sannaya*) on it. I taught the *Paṭṭhāna* from the Burmese edition of the book. Afterwards I wrote the commentary according to the same, and later Mrs. Munasinghe had it published at her own expense. To be honest I was very reluctant to write the commentary. The reason was that there were few people in this country who study or look at such writing. It is good to get something useful out of such laborious work.

The book අභිධර්ම මූලික කරුණු (*Abhidharma Mūlika Karuṇu, The Basics of the Abhidhamma*) was written after I read a few books on the subject. I felt those books were written without understanding the facts properly. It is difficult to express some of the deep meanings of the Abhidhamma; there is a scarcity of the right words. So I had to choose my words very carefully but I wrote after understanding the facts.

The book චන්තාලිසාකාර විපස්සනා භාවනා (*Cattālīsākāra Vipassanā Bhāvanā, The Forty Methods of Insight Meditation*) was written after thinking that it is high time that I myself focused on this subject. I hope meditators will have found that book useful. My own meditation knowledge developed much due to my writing that book. Now that I have also arrived at the final stage in life I have made a

¹¹ Paṭṭhāna is the final book of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka.

determination to live according to the *Cattāḷisākāra Vipassanā Bhāvanā*.

The book බෞද්ධයාගේ අත්පොත (*Buddhayāge Atpota, Handbook for Buddhists*) is one that contains the basics of what a Buddhist should know. Although we are born-Buddhists we do not become Buddhists that way. One needs a primary understanding for that. It is my belief that this book helps people understand the basics.

Accruing of merits depend on the doer's good qualities. If one does not know about the Triple Gem, what to worship, how to do it or their powers and only mechanically follow rituals, there is not much in it. To gain higher levels of merit one should know how to do them correctly and systematically. It is for that purpose that I wrote the book පුණ්‍යෝපදේශය (*Puṇyopadeśaya, Instructions concerning Merit*).

There is almost no other discourse that has such an excellent list of advice as the Maṅgala Sutta. It reminds human society again and again the good qualities that they have forgotten. The 38 such Maṅgala advice which helps humans for their well being in this world and the next, are included in the book called the මංගල ධර්ම විස්තරය (*Maṅgala Dharma Vistaraya, Explanation of Auspicious Things*). It is a book that should be read by all, irrespective of religious differences and this was written by my pupil, late Ven. Godigamuwe Sorata Thera. When he was writing this he consulted my writings and sought my advice. This book is important in present times.

Supreme Buddhas come into world to expound the චතුරාර්ය සත්‍යය (*Caturārya Satyaya, The Four Noble Truths*). In order to gain supra-mundane states it is essential that one must understand the Four Noble Truths. I tried very hard to write in such a way that everyone could understand the Four Noble Truths clearly in my book. I believe my attempt was successful to a great extent. A valuable foreword was written by Most Ven. Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya Mahā Nāyaka. I confer merits to him to this day for that.

In order to remove unwholesome *dharmas* we need an understanding of *dharmas* that defile the mind. I wrote the book

වඤ්චක ධර්ම හා වින්තෝපක්ලේශ ධර්ම (*Vaṃcaka Dharma hā Cittopakleśa Dharma, Deception and Minor Defilements of the Mind*) with that aim in mind. The mind-defiling *dharma*s were explained according to the *Vattha Sutta*.¹² This book explains certain mind states that masquerade as wholesome and trick the mind. I think this is the only book written on this subject. I also know this book has been praised by many scholars.

The book that I put together, බුද්ධ නීති සංග්‍රහය (*Buddha Nīti Saṅgrahaya, Collection of Buddhist Wisdom Verses*) contains *dharma*s which are beneficial for this world and the next and for the realisation of *Nirvāṇa*. It contains a collection of 550 valuable verses giving advice from the *Tiṭṭaka*. I can say this book is applicable to everyone and can be used by all. It would be good for a lot of people, if such a book can be translated into other languages.¹³

There are three different ways Wisdom (*Bodhi*) can be gained, the Buddhahood, Pacceka Buddhahood and Mahā Rāhath. There are 37 *Dhammas* which help in realising that Truth. That was the reason for my writing the book බොධිපක්ෂික ධර්ම විස්තරය (*Bodhipakṣika Dharma Vistaraya, Explanation of the Factors of Awakening*). This book can be described as essential reading for those wishing to attain *Nirvāṇa*.

Apart from these I also wrote other books on several important topics. In addition to books on the basic tenets useful for all Buddhists, I wrote books on *Abhidhamma* for those investigating and attracted to the psychological aspects of Buddhism.

Meditation is hugely popular in this country now. I wrote many books on meditation, especially on විදර්ශනා භාවනා ක්‍රමය (*Vidarśanā Bhāvanā Kramaya, The Method of Insight Meditation*).

I also wrote for the benefit of monks, several book on උපසම්පදා සීලය (*Upasampadā Sīlaya, Higher Ordination Precepts*). I am extremely

¹² MN 7.

¹³ Translated and expanded by the editor here: <http://bit.ly/1REuaQM>.

pleased that before I lost the ability to read and write, to see and to hear, I was able to write all those books.

In all I have written about 30 books about various topics.¹⁴ I did not have a specific aim when writing. If that were so, I would have written a series of books in a systematic way. I wrote books as and when people approached me with a request. Sometimes someone would come and say that a certain Dhamma point is not clear to them and it would be good if I would write something on it. Most of my books were written like that. I wrote mostly to make clear some of the very important Dhamma points in the Tipiṭaka.

I also wrote some books in commemoration of the 2,500 Buddha Jayantī (1956). But I cannot say that I started writing because of the Buddha Jayantī.

I learnt the Dhamma with much difficulty. Because of that I thought I must know the Dhamma well and use that knowledge to teach others. But at first I did not have that thought. Buddha-Dhamma is very deep. I had the idea that it is pointless to write without a clear understanding first. I also thought that it was not right to do so. My main aim was to understand the Dhamma for myself. Some Dhamma points I pondered over for weeks and months. I never wrote on anything that I did not understand fully.

I wrote on Bhikṣu Vinaya (The Monastic Discipline), Vidarśanā Bhāvanā (Insight Meditation), Abhidhamma (The Abstract Doctrine) and Mano Vidyava (Psychology) and so on, in a way that I thought would be useful in general to everyone.

Even the deepest Dhamma point was written only after I understood clearly about them. I only wrote a little each day. It was not my habit to break rest and write. I only wrote in daylight. I never wrote after dark, with the lights or the lamps on. I never wrote sitting at a desk and a chair. I used to sit on a custom-made large, wide chair and used a wooden plank to write on. I never edited my writing. The first

¹⁴ See the Bibliography at the end of this book.

draft was sent to the publishers. Sometimes while the first part was being printed I wrote the subsequent sections and sent them on to the publishers. Those days people used to say that my handwriting was beautiful. It is not like that anymore.

One should write in daylight, it is better for the eyes too. I only needed a pen, paper and a plank of wood. I did not collect other things. That would have been a hindrance.

I most happy that I was able to write a few books on Abhidhamma. Why, because many people say ‘it is very difficult’, and can’t understand it and were afraid of the Abhidhamma. Furthermore pupils of Dhamma Schools only had to learn by heart the list of Citta (Mind) and Cetasikā (Mental Concomitants). But I think my *අභිධර්ම මාර්ගය* (*Abhidharma Margaya, Abhidhamma Path*) and such like were of use to many.

Some say that I am an Abhidhamma Scholar, but I am not concerned what they say. I do not hold such views. I only say one thing: it is my way to learn something properly, whatever it is or however long it takes. Because of this I have managed to solve many questions. Some facts took months, even years for me to fathom.

I can advise people like this: Whatever it is, know it well. I do not see this amongst the clergy or the laity of this country today. They know a little of everything. Nothing is known well. It is better not to know it at all.

I am weak now, and I can no longer write. My fingers have no strength. For the last 7 or 8 years, even if I write a short note, letters are missing in parts. I have it read by someone else before posting. Now I spend my time in meditation, in awareness and mindfulness. I don’t say all my time is spent like that. I try however to spend as much time mindfully, and also to reflect on the Three Characteristics (*Tilakkhaṇa*).

I think that my books have been of benefit to both the clergy and laity. I am happy about that. When I started to write there were

4. Why I wrote my books – 24

many in society who had a thirst for the Dhamma. Especially the educated lay Buddhists. They did not have enough Sinhala Dhamma books. The general population too benefited from my writing. Some books were written purely for the clergy. Both clergy and laity who had benefitted, would come to see me from afar with gifts.

I only wrote the books, the publishing side was undertaken by my pupil, Ven. Godigamuwe Sorata Thera. The first book that he had published was in commemoration of the Buddha Jayantī, *The Four Noble Truths*.

Publication cost of Rs 1000/- came from Most Ven. Vinayālaṅkāṛārāmaya and the chief lay supporter, Valigampitiya A.D. Suwaris Appuhami, Rs 1000/-, Valigampitiya Liyoris, a businessman, loaned Rs 1000/-. After selling the books the loan was settled and it was republished.

At present my student Ven. Hengoda Kalyāṇadhamma Thero is undertaking the publishing work, promoting and looking after the Temple and the resident monks, and he is also seeing to my basic needs. I am very happy about that too.

I could write another book on the achievements of others gained after reading my books; there are so many of them. But now I can't do that as I am too weak.

Who would have thought that with me only going up to the second grade I would get these titles and degrees? But here they are. I did not have anything at the beginning. I only had some knowledge from the Burmese training of the Tipiṭaka Dhamma and the Pāḷi language.

After coming back to Sri Lanka, when people requested, I wrote a few books. That is when I started receiving these titles. The first was *Sammāna Paṇḍita Degree*¹⁵ from the Oriental College.¹⁶

¹⁵ Equivalent to B.A. with honours.

¹⁶ A leading study institution in Sri Lanka.

4. Why I wrote my books – 25

Then the post of *Professor of Abhidhamma* from the University of Vidyālaṅkāraya.¹⁷ Actually I was reluctant to accept that. I was invited to go at least one day a week. That invite came from the Most Ven. Yakkaduwe Nāyaka Thera. That is why I accepted it.

If one can teach someone else what he has learned, it is a source of happiness to them. But even in those days the monks were not that interested in learning what was being taught. Sutta, Abhidhamma or the Vinaya was not well received even in those days.

I need to say something here. I never expected to be paid for teaching at the University. I donated a portion of what I received for improvements of Vidyālaṅkāraya itself.

In 1963 I was honoured with the degree of Sāhitya Cakravarti (Master of Literature) from the University of Vidyālaṅkāraya. In 1976 I received the Mahā Nāyaka post of the Sri Lanka Shwegyin Nikāya.

In 1995 the United Amarapura Mahā Saṅgha Sabhā, conferred on me the title, Amarapura Mahā Mahopadyāya Śāsana Śobhana and the Anuradhapura Buddha Śrāvaka Dharma Piṭhaya offered the title Pravacana Viśarada.

I must have received these titles and degrees because I may have done some service to the country and to the Sammā Sambuddha Śāsana.

¹⁷ A top monastic university in Sri Lanka.

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