

# Siam (Thailand) - Sri Lanka Religious Relations and the Malwatta Viharaya (Chapter)

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## Abstract

Sri Lanka and Thailand are considered two of the most unique and important countries in the Theravada Buddhist world. These two countries are known as canthers for the preservation and maintenance of Theravada Buddhism throughout the world. Sri Lanka and Thailand can be identified as two countries that have a long-standing relationship based on Theravada Buddhism, connected by mutual trust, respect, and strong friendship. The foundation of this long-standing friendship between Sri Lanka and Thailand is Theravada Buddhism. After the Third Dhamma Council in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC, both countries received Buddhism under the Dhammavijaya Project, which was undertaken by Arahant Moggaliputtatissa thera with King Dharmashoka to spread Theravada Buddhism to nine countries. However, due to certain political crises in Thailand, Theravada Buddhism does not appear to have developed in Thailand until the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. Thus The Buddhist higher ordination ceremony, which was taken from Sri Lanka, was re-established in Thailand in the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. Also, from the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Sri Lanka was subjected to Western colonial rule by the Portuguese and the Dutch, and by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, pure Theravada Buddhism had disappeared from Sri Lanka. At that time Theravada Buddhism was re-established in Sri Lanka in the 18<sup>th</sup> century AD due to the higher ordination brought from Siam. It was happen Malwatta Viharaya (Chapter) in Kandy, Sri Lanka. Examine the latest religious relationship between Sri Lanka and Thailand based on Ven. Saranankara Sangharaja

Thero, with the support of the royal patronage of King Sri Rajasinaghe, based on the two Malwatta and Asgiri Viharayas, and under the leadership of the Venerable Prawana Upali of Thailand, are object of this article.

**Keywords:** *Theravada Buddhism, Upasampada (Higher Ordination), Malwatta Viharaya, Siam Nikaya (Sector), Asgiriya Viharaya.*

## Research Question

How did the 18<sup>th</sup> century religious exchange Upasampada (Higher Ordination) between Thailand and Sri Lanka, specifically through the Malwatta Viharaya, facilitate the revival and sustenance of pure Theravada Buddhism in both nations? is the Research Question of this article.

## Research Objectives

To trace the historical origins of the Buddhist connection between Sri Lanka and Thailand. To analyze the role of Ven. Upali Thero and Ven. Weliwita Saranankara Thero in re-establishing the Higher Ordination in 18<sup>th</sup> century. To evaluate the significance of the Malwatta Viharaya and Asgiriya Viharaya as a centres for modern religious relations are Research Objectives of this article.

## Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative historical method by reviewing primary and secondary sources like the *Mahavamsa* and *Syamopasampada* chronicles, alongside a comparative analysis of the similarities between Siamese and Sri Lankan Buddhist traditions and monastic lineages.

## Introduction

As a result of the third Buddhist Council convened under the patronage of Ashoka the Great in the 3rd Century BC, missionary groups have been sent to nine different countries and a group led by Soṇa and Uttara was sent to a place called Suvaṇṇabhūmi. Since the present Thailand is also a part of Suvaṇṇabhūmi, it can be said that Buddhism was introduced to Thailand during the era of Ashoka the Great. The current name Thai- The land of Freedom was adopted by the then government in 1940. The land of Siam or Thailand has been described using two historical eras; called pre -

Thai era and Thai Kingdom era. Kingdom eras prevailed in cities such as Suvaṇṇabhūmi, Dvāravati, Haribumjaya, Kamber Lophūri have belonged to pre-Thai era while the Thai Kingdom era has been designed including cities such as Sukkhodaya, Nabbisipura (Navapura), Ayudhya, Thonburi (Dhanapura) and Bangkok. Bangkok is the current capital of Thailand. The pre-Thai era expanded from 3rd Century BC to 13 Century AD. Accordingly, the “Sukkhodaya Era” or the Era of Thai was established by the Thais during the 13<sup>th</sup> Century AD. Although, elaborative information on eras and the rulers in the corresponding times of pre-Thai era cannot be found, details of the royal lineage of the Haribumjaya era in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD are available in *Jinakālamāli* written by Ven. Rathanapañña Thero (Jinakālamāli, 1956: p.55). Buddhism was established during the time of Ashoka. The royal lineage continued for 700 years under more than 50 kings starting from Queen Chamadevi or Chammadevi 663 AD to King Kilana and analysis on Thai Buddhist culture shows how these rulers worked towards the upliftment of the Buddhism during the respective ruling periods (Ven. Wimalasiri, 1970: p.05). Especially during this period, the Theravada Buddhism has been spreading in many parts of Thailand.

## Discussion

During the era of Ashoka, the term ‘Suvaṇṇabhūmi’ has been used to refer to both Burma and Thailand collectively. Although, at present divided by borders, when *Soṇa* and *Uttara* introduced Buddhism to Suvaṇṇabhūmi, “Paṭṭhama chedi Stupa” the tallest pagoda (stupa) in Thailand with 375 feet height, renovated earlier by kings of Kamber lineage in the Lopburi era is in the current *Dvāravati* city. The Ashoka Dharmachakra found during excavations in the sites prove that Thailand was also a part of Suvaṇṇabhūmi. It is also evident from the facts that planning of cities on Suvaṇṇapura (Suenburi), Kāñcana pura (Kāñcaburi), U-ton (Ranburi) in Thailand and the names of these cities contain Suvaṇṇa, as well as the location of these cities are to the central and west of Thailand, Burma is also in the close proximity show that the term Suvaṇṇabhūmi has been used to refer to both the countries.

After recognizing, the Theravada Buddhism prevailed in Sri Lanka as the purest in its form, King Anavaratha, who ruled Burma during the 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD maintained close

and friendly relations with Sri Lanka (Le May, Reginald, 1956, p.52). Since his rule extended even towards *Dvāravatī* city in Thailand, the Theravada Buddhism was equally spread. Although the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism had an impact in neighbouring Java and Sumatra and Cambodia following the 4<sup>th</sup> Buddhist Council convened by King Kanishka, the Mahayana teachings did not spread across rapidly due to the Mon monarchy of Thailand and Burma combinly known as *Suvarṇabhūmi* being devoted believers of Theravada Buddhism. Since King Sirivijaya of Sumatra was a powerful ruler and his Kingdom expanded up to the upper part of Malay Peninsula, there was a minimal impact of Mahayana teachings there. It is believed through the discovery of statues of Mahayana Bodhisattva and thousands of other smaller statues in the cities such as Thalan, Padalun, Kheda and Patani that Mahayana Buddhism had spread to South Thailand as well. However, since no such statues were discovered in Nakhon Pathom area near southern Thailand, it can be explained that Theravada Buddhism was more widespread and Mahayana Buddhism to a lesser extent. This situation persists in Siam to this day.

During the reign of King Anavaratha, people of Northern Thailand followed Theravada Buddhism. Although, the people of Thailand were Buddhists since ancient times, they began to be more receptive towards the new Burmese Buddhism that emerged along with the teachings of Theravada Buddhism traditions in Sri Lanka during the 10<sup>th</sup> Century. After King Anavaratha, the Burmese kingdom declined, allowing the Thais to easily control borders and establish themselves as separate states. When Sukkhodaya was captured during the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, it was a colony of Cambodia. The prevailing religion was a combination of Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism. Cambodian language was their official language. Their customs, manners etc were also similar. The books were also written in the same language. Hence, the Thai people did not destroy everything at once. They preserved the good features of every religion, race and language while getting rid of the bad. Thus, there are evidence to prove that some areas in Thailand remained as vassal cities under other countries for a long time.

With people of Thailand emerging as independent and transformed citizens, the powerful Indraditya, who pioneered in bringing the reforms, was chosen to be the king and anointed in Sukhodaya. He and the King Rocharaja described in *Jinakālamāli* is the

same (Jinakālamāli, 1956: p.75). This era can be considered the founding period of the present-day Thailand. He fought the Khmers in 1800 B. E. or 1257 A.D. and was successful in expanding his rule throughout Siam by conquering Lannawa, Chiyanti and Northern Siam. After King Ramkanhan, the son and the successor of King Indradithya, people of Siam who lived closer to Burma kept the northwestern region under their control while remaining loyal to Burma making it easy for the Burmese people to spread the teachings of Theravada Buddhism. However, since the kings of Lavapura were not vassals of Burma, they were unable to eradicate Mahayana and Hindu beliefs completely from the Central and Southern Siam. This shows that Thailand, which currently exists as a united and sovereign country was ruled by different kings in the distant past. While kings of Sirivijaya lineage ruled the South, East by Cambodian kings and Central by Ramanya, there was a strong kingdom in the Northern region as well. Theravada Buddhism was widespread in Northern Thailand also known as Haribunjaya, as is well evidenced by the monasteries archaeological remains that exist there to this day.

As stated, during the reign of King Anavaratha of Burma, Theravada Buddhism was spread in Northern Thailand and its expansion across the country also occurred during the same period. Earlier, even if the Thai people were Buddhists, the spread of the teaching was limited. Following the rule of King Anavaratha, the Burmese kingdom was weakened, allowing the Siamese to retain their country as an independent state. King Ramakamham, the son and the successor of King Indradithya in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century AD, was considered one of the outstanding rulers of Thailand. He reigned while his father was still alive, and during his period a new Thai Alphabet and letter shapes were created encompassing the Cambodian alphabet and several other alphabets. It is the current Thai alphabet and earlier there were two alphabets created by slightly modifying the Lanna Thai language. The alphabet which is in use today is the developed version of the letterforms created during the time of King Ramakamham (Buddhist Education in Thailand, 1971: pp.55).

During the same time when Sri Lanka had relations with Burma in the reigns of King Anavaratha, there were connections between Sri Lanka and Siam too. It was during the same time teachings of Theravada Buddhism was expanded in Sri Lanka and Burma. “After protecting Sri Lanka from the invaders and uniting the entire country, the second

attempt of King Parakramabahu of Polonnaruwa was to work towards the upliftment of the Buddhism. Just as the Emperor Ashoka purified the Buddha Sasana by cladding people in white robes who attempted to destroy the Sasana hoping material gains and convened the 3<sup>rd</sup> Buddhist Council, King Parakramabahu too convened a Buddhist Council, prepared a discourse, brought all the sects to a single practice and took steps to flourish the Buddhism in Sri Lanka once again ” (Mahawamso, 1970: pp 34). As elaborated, Theravada Buddhism was spread across Sri Lanka during the reign of King Parakramabahu. After some times, following the reforms and being aware of the pure nature of the Theravada Buddhism, Buddhist monks of Ramanna and Siam realised that harmony among all those from different sects with diverse ideologies in their respective countries should synergize their efforts similar to the that of Theravada sect in Sri Lanka. They also realized that it would be better to receive ordination in its pure form in Sri Lanka and visited Sri Lanka from time to time for the purpose of receiving ordination and returned to their countries having learned the religious practices and teachings together with some Buddhist Theros from Sri Lanka to play the role of their teachers (Upādyāya) (Ven. Wimalasiri, 1970: pp.15). This was around 1170 AD.

Theros of the Theravada sect from Sri Lanka arrived in Burma first and worked towards spreading Theravada teaching to a limited extend in the Southern Thailand. It was in 1277 AD when Sinhala Theros first arrived in Sukhodaya, the capital of Siam. Until then, they were only able to visit “Nakhonsiridhamrat” (Siridhamma) in the Southern end. The Sinhala Theros who arrived there were warmly welcomed by the people of the area. The Theros have also built a Stupa there in accordance with the Sri Lankan tradition. Upon hearing such a group of Buddhist Theros have arrived from Sri Lanka, King Ramakamham who was in Sukhodaya immediately invited them to visit the capital. Theros arrived in Sukhodaya and commenced to spread Theravada Buddhism.

Since then, inscriptions by King Ramakamham ordered that all Theros arriving from Sri Lanka should be treated with due respect, as they are devout in Dhamma, disciplined, erudite and well versed in Tripitaka. French historian Renald May states that King Ramakamham invited a chief Thero who had come from Sri Lanka and residing in Southern Thailand to Sukhodaya and had built a monastery for him. “Ramakamham is the third son of King Indradithya. He ascended to the throne in 1275 AD. The King

wanting to develop the Dhamma knowledge in his country, invited a chief Thero who was teaching Sinhala Theravada in Thramalingam to visit his country. When the Thero accepted the invitation and visited the country, the King built a monastery to the west of his capital city.” (Le May, Reginald, 1956: pp.54). There is also a belief this chief Thero could be Ven. Dhammakitti who composed Saddharma Sangraha. However, it is said that inscriptions clearly state that King Menrayi who reigned Nabbisipura at the same time as King Ramakamham had built Umon Vihara (Veluwana) in 1296 AD in present Chiyamna for the chief Thero Ven. Kashyapa (Magretta, B. Well, 1962: pp.36). The statue called “Buddhasīla” donated by Ven. Kashyapa Thero is still in the Chianman temple today. Although there are different views as to who were the Buddhist Theros from Sri Lanka to arrive in Siam first, it is clear from the historical accounts that it was Ven. Kashyapa Thero. Since then, Sri Lanka and Siam maintained close ties with Theravada Buddhism. During this period, Sri Lanka was ruled by two kings: King Vijayabahu III and King Parakramabahu III.

Although the Sri Lankan Theros who arrived in Siam established a monastic order called “Lankavansaya” and spread Theravada Buddhism in Thailand, Theros of the Thai Theravada sect which had existed since early days were also there. They mostly resided closer to cities. Theros from Sri Lanka lived in monasteries. A reason for this was the popularity of the monastery sect compared to city dwelling prevailed in Sri Lanka at that time. Although both the groups were from the same Theravada sect, they practised their disciplines separately. It is due to the fact that ancient Thai elites used the Sanskrit language while the Theros who followed the ordination practices of Sri Lankan Theros used Pali language. Elites being the disciples of Mahayana Buddhism was another factor. Therefore, Sri Lankan Theros have categorically refused to perform Vinaya Karma and other rituals with them. Same situation had prevailed in both Sukhodaya and Chiyanmi.

The public also had to face difficulties as the ordination ceremonies at monasteries near their homes were disrupted due to Sri Lankan delegates changing even the existing boundaries and norms set by the ancient elites. Then, on the initiative of the Kings, steps were taken to reestablish the boundaries of the ancient elites. Due to the installation of additional boundary posts in newly built border settlements, the number of stone posts were increased to 16, as an extra post was added to each existing

boundary post. Sixteen stone pillars can still be seen today near the vicinity of the Royal Temple in Thailand. Next to the dispute of the boundary, the other request of the ancient elite was to recite “*Buddham Saraṇam Gacchāmi*” in ‘ṃ’ ending system (*Makārantā*) during ordination. It is a practice in the Sanskrit language and the reason for this request is that the language of the Theros who followed Mahayana tradition was Sanskrit. However, according to some Pali grammar experts the present-day Sri Lankans have not yet decided if the unstressed sound is a vowel or a consonant in recitation. In both Kaccayana and Moggallana traditions, as well as their annexed texts such as *Rūpasiddhi*, *Payogasiddhi*, *Balavatara*, eight vowels have been presented as “*Tattho dantā sarā aṭṭha*” while the consonants of all the other letters in Pali have been presented as “*Sesā byañjanā*”. This issue has arisen due to *Niggahītha* has been explained again as “*Añ iti niggahītaṃ*” as per Sutta. However, this request has also been accepted by the Sri Lankan side.

It is clear from studying the above that the Theravada tradition brought from Sri Lanka during Sukhodaya period had gained more popularity within Thailand while that tradition possessed the ability to take many decisions. Later, the sects have performed Vinaya Karma together and have become close enough to call even a single sect. Theros of monasteries visited cities for purposes such as studying while Theros from the cities went to monasteries to engage in activities such as meditation. Over time, people of Thailand became accustomed to follow the practices of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. As a result, monasteries, temples, statues etc. were built as per the Sri Lankan tradition. They began to learn Pali instead of Sanskrit. Accordingly, during the reigns of Puchaulideyya after the period of Sukhodaya, there emerged a distinctive group of Thais who were influenced by the Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism religious practices (Jayawardena, 1998: pp76).

The first group of Theros who arrived in Siam and taken steps to establish Theravada Buddhism there, the second group of Theros from Sri Lanka arrived during the period of King Puchaulideyya (1347 AD -1376 AD). The arrival of Ven. Sumana Thero, Chief Incumbent of Udumbaragiri Vihara from Sri Lanka to Siam took place during this time. Similar to previous groups, Thero too had first visited Ramañña region and the King who heard that a Arahant (liberated one) had arrived invited the Thero to his city

bestowing many honours upon him. In *Jinakālamāli* by Ven. Ratanapañña Thero mentioned details of a Thero named Sumana (*Jinakālamāli*, 1956: pp.96). It is clear from the ancient writings that later, King Puchaulideyya was ordained by this Thero (Ven. Wimalasiri, 1970: pp.20). The Theros who went to Siam for the second time had not much to do as the first group had already established Theravada Buddhism in Siam.

After this, Theros from Sri Lanka visited Siam only following a visit by a group of Siamese Theros to Sri Lanka. A group of 39 Theros comprising 25 Theros including Ven. Maha Dhamma Gambhīra Thero, Ven. Maha Medhankara Thero, Ven. Maha Gnanasumangala Thero, Ven. Maha Seelawamsa Thero, Ven. Maha Sariputta Thero, Ven. Maha Rathanakara Thero and Ven. Maha Buddhasagara Thero from Siam, 8 Theros led by Ven. Maha Gnanasiri Thero from Cambodia and 6 Theros from Ramañña visited Sri Lanka in 1425 AD. After receiving teachings from Ven. Vanarathana Thero and Ven. Dharmachari Thero at Udakukkhepa at Kelani Temple and obtained ordination they lived in Sri Lanka for couple of years (*Jinakālamāli*, 1956: pp.87). They returned to Siam together with two ten-year old Sri Lankan Theros named Wijayabahu and Uttamapañña. They were also gifted with two relics, a sapling of Jaya Siri Maha bodhi and some copies of Tripitaka from Sri Lanka. Many were of the view that this visit to Siam was made because the ordination practice in Siam had deteriorated by this time (Chandrakirthi, 2002:pp. 44). Most of this group were Theros who were dwelling in cities and villages.

The first group from Sri Lanka established a sect called “Lanka Vanshaya” while the second group started “Sinhala Vanshaya”. Although the names were different, both the sects comprised of Theravada Theros with equal grounds. After arrival, they formed Sinhala Vanshaya under the leadership of Ven. Gnanagambhira Thero who was residing in Thailand and also set up a temple named ‘Ratnavanaramaya’. Many are of the view that there existed a temple under the same name in the Ruhunu region of Sri Lanka. However, Mr. Mendis Rohanadheera is of the view that a temple called ‘Vanaratanaramaya’ has been built in honour of the chief priest Ven. Vanarathana Thero who presided over Kalyani Upasampada and later changed it to ‘Ratnavanaramaya’ for the easy pronunciation in Thai and then became ‘Ratnavanaramaya’ (currently What Pan Dhan Luan) (Chandrakirthi, 2002:pp. 47). Several other temples and monasteries were established following the Sri Lankan tradition during later periods as well. It is said

that during the reigns of King Jamraya in 1440 AD, the ‘Sinhalarattharāmaya’ (now in Watbalyan) was built and in order to revive the newly established sect. his successor King Khilaka Panattadhiraja ruled for 30 years since 1452 AD. During his period, the first Dharma Council was convened, led by Theros from Sri Lanka and with the participation of Theros from Thailand. During the year-long Council, the Tripitaka texts were collected, errors in Dhamma writings were corrected, a separate translation of Tripitaka in Thai was edited and research was carried out.

Since all the activities were carried under the guidance of Sinhala Theros, Sinhala Vanshaya too expanded throughout Thailand. Nabbisipura (Chiyantai), Khelangapura (Lampang), Haribunjaya (Lampung), Jayasenapura (Chiyansang), Khawyapura (Payong) and Janrai (Chiyantai) in Northern Siam were few such places. Information is available to prove that the new Sinhala sect, the ancient Theravada sect that were active earlier and Lanka Vanshaya sect coexisted harmoniously until the end of ancient Ayudhya period. The Chief Prelate (Sangarāja) position was divided among these three sects. Accordingly, the title of “Somsed pra Vanaratana” to Theros of the Sinhala Vanshaya, “Somsed pra Buddhaghoshacarya” to ancient village dwellers and “Somsed pra Buddhacarya” to Lankan monastery dwellers were accorded as honour (Buddhist Education in Siam, 1998: pp.36). However, these three sects were commonly called “Syama Vansha”.

#### **Malwatta Viharaya (Chapter)**

For more than 200 years thereafter, Theros from Siam visited Sri Lanka and vice versa on regular basis. They conducted their practices according to the traditions of respective country. After 1505 AD the decline of the Buddha Sasana in Sri Lanka gradually occurred with the invasions of Portuguese and Dutch. By the time of Most Ven. Welivita Sri Saranankara Thero (Sangarāja), it was impossible to find a single ordained Thero in Sri Lanka. Saranankara Thero, knowing that pure Buddhism and ordination practices only exist in Siam, took measures to bring ordination rituals to Sri Lanka (This Theravada tradition, known as the pure Buddhism, was the one that was brought from Sri Lanka during the time of Ven. Vanarathana Thero and efforts were made to bring back the same ordination rituals that were established). Accordingly, it was during this period that Siamese - Sri Lanka relations, which had been without close contact for a long time, were reestablished. In 1750 AD, under the patronage of King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe, during

the reign of King Parama Kosha (in some places introduced with the honorary title of “Parama Dhammika”) or King Koramkot of the latter half of the Ayudya period, a delegation was sent to Siam to bring the ordination rituals. It was not an easy task to bring Theros from Siam to Sri Lanka. Because the consent of the Chief Prelate of the country, second only to the King of Ayudya, was imperative for such activity. By this time, Theros in Siam were using Pali more than Thai in their work. King Parama Kosha was also possessed a vast knowledge of Pali. Having realised that the message from Sri Lanka should be written in Pali, Most Ven. Saranankara Thero composed the letter by himself and took measures to dispatch it via the King of Siam to the Chief Prelate (Sangarāja). Ven. Saranankara Thero was the only person at that time who was qualified enough to write such a letter in Pali. Upon receiving the letter, the Siamese King carefully studied its language, writing style and the vocabulary used and realised that it was from an erudite Thero. Having understood the importance of sending ordination rituals to Sri Lanka without fail, the King encouraged the Chief Prelate(Sangarāja) to do so.

With the approval of Siamese Chief Prelate (Sangarāja), a group of Theros led by Ven. Upali arrived in Sri Lanka to re-establish ordination rituals. It is noteworthy that the ordination which was brought back to Sri Lanka in 1753 AD was the same one that had been taken from Sri Lanka before. That too by a group of city-dwelling Theros known as Sinhala Vanshaya. There is no mention by the chronicle writers about the participation of monastery-dwelling Theros or Theros from ancient Thai lineage. The Kalyani Upasampada which was brought from Sri Lanka, had spread during this time and all the lineages were called “Syama Vanshika”. Even today, the Theros in Thailand believe that the ordination that was taken from Sri Lanka continued without disruption. Accordingly, the pure Theravada Sangha lineage existed in Sri Lanka was continuously preserved by the people of Siam and re-established in Sri Lanka 200 years later. Since it was brought from Siam, the term “Syama” had been used and since the mission was led by Upali Thero, the sect established in Sri Lanka is known as “Syamopali”. This was commenced with the Theros from Malwatta Vihara chapter. This is how the Syamopasampadavata, which contains the details of the re-establishment, narrates the occasion.

“That day, the majestic King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe went to the entrance and with due respect welcomed the Maha Sangha and welcomed them to the newly built adobe

at the Malwatta Viharaya.....a novice student of Ven. Upali Thero was inspected to be ordained as the first to perform all the rituals at the Dhamma Hall which is located within the village boundary....After, the ordination was conducted by the Chief Prelate of Uposhitharama Ven. Kobbekaduwe Thero, Ven. Weliwita Saranankara Thero, Ven. Hulangamuwe Thero, Ven. Bambaradeniye Thero, Ven. Thibbatuvave Thero and Chief Prelate of Asgiri Vihara Ven. Nawinne Thero” (Syamopasampadavata, 1998: pp. 48). After 12 years of the first ordination held at Malwatta Viharaya, there was held ordination at Asgiriya Maha Viharaya in 1756 AD. In recognition of the service rendered by Most Ven. Saranankara Thero, King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe with the consent of Ven. Upali Thero, appointed him as the Chief Prelate of both Malwatta and Asgiri Chapters and bestowed the title of “Sangharāja” (Syamopasampadavata, 1998: pp. 54).

During his stay in Sri Lanka, Ven. Upali Thero ordained 700 novices and trained 3000 children to Bhikkus. Since several Siamese Theros passed away during this process which spanned over a period of 3 years, a second batch of Teros led by Ven. Vishuddhacharya Thero from Ayudya arrived in Sri Lanka to fill the void. After their arrival, some from the original group prepared to return to Sri Lanka, but the passing away of the Ven. Upali Thero prevented them from doing so. Only 7 Theros were able to go back to Siam. Since Ven. Vishuddhacharya Thero possessed a profound knowledge of Vidarshana meditation, the Thero imparted his wisdom to several Theros in Sri Lanka. After 4 years these Theros returned back to Siam (Ven. Wimalasiri Thero, 1970: pp. 25). However, the close ties between Siam and the Malwathu Viharaya where the Siamese ordination was established continued with regular feedback. The medium used in this was the Pali language. Accordingly, information about many of the communication exchanged between the two countries can be found in the Pali Sandesali written by Ven. Polwaththe Buddhaththa Thero (Ven. Buddhaththa Thero, 1962: pp 46).

Following the ordination Sri Lanka and Siam maintained strong relations for several years. However, the relations between the two countries were not so strong after passage of time. This was due to the Siamese war with Burma and Sri Lanka’s war with British. Since Burma burnt down the entire capital of Ayudya together with its Viharas and libraries, and the Siamese had to shift their capital to Thonburi (Dhanapura) and from there to Bangkok. The atmosphere in Siam at that time was tense as the army had

to fight to regain the control of areas it had lost. The hero who liberated the country from Burmese army was Praya Dakshin, who made Dhanapura as the country's capital. Then Bangkok served as the capital led by King Prabuddha Yod. He is also called as Rama the First. When he was ruling the country, he heard that a group of Buddhist Theros had visited Nakhon Siridhamma and the King sent letters and brought the Theros to Bangkok and hosted at Dhathu Viharaya and Jethawana Viharaya (Ven. Wimalasiri Thero, 1970: pp. 26). This marked a relation with Siam after a long time.

Details of the groups who went to Siam for the second time following the establishment of the Siamese ordination in Sri Lanka have been included in the message sent by Ven. Dhammaguththika Thero. This message was written around 1840 AD. Accordingly, the fact that such a message was written after 87 years following the establishment of Siamese ordination shows that the importance given by people to the delegation. The message describes the information on the date and the delegates who visited Siam in following manner:

*“Buddhassa kho bhagavatho parinibbhaṇato tisāṭṭhikānaṃ dvinnam vassasahassānamupari tyāsītiyā samvacchaesu atikkantesu caturāsītime vaccare imassa paramadhammikamahārañño sattarasavassābhisittakāle āyasmā saddhātisso ca, āyasmā kakusandho ca, vipassī ca, revato ca, siddhatto samaṇero, lekama mahatmaya, bhandō ca upāsako sāñcidārako’ti ime pūgadīpato āgantvā ratanakosindadeva mahānagaraṃ sampatta”* (Ven. Buddhadaththa Thero, 1962: p 08).

As described, all these people had visited that country from Puga island in the year 2384 BC or 1841 AD. Puga is an island belong to Sri Lanka. This is also called as Puwagu Island. This group comprised of 05 Theros, a secretary, a follower and a child. The King had ordered to be cautious of this group. The Siamese Theros had sought information about the discipline of the group and after having realized they are similar to Dhammaguththika only by wearing robes. They were treated well by the Theros. It can be said that these people were on a tour to Siam. Because after the rainy season, Theros in the group had visited ancient shrines such as the first Maha Stupa (This is the oldest stupa in Siam. This is called “Nakonpatham” in the past as well as today), Sripada

and Swarnapuri, under the patronage of Siam. During the journey, Ven. Kakusanda Thero and the novice Siddhaththa had fallen ill and the novice had dies 7 days later.

About a year later, all of them returned to Sri Lanka by ships provided by the Siamese government. They brought copies of the *Tīka* (Sub-commentary) of *Abhidhānappadīpika*, proposals by *Abhidhammathavibhāvinī* *Mangalattadīpani*, *Ganthābharaṇa Tīka* of with them. Similarly, when the Theros visited Siam, they brought books such as Tripitaka from Sri Lanka and worked towards popularizing the Buddhism.

Relations between Siam and Sri Lanka renewed with their visit. Information were exchanged between the two countries using Pali language. Accordingly, Ven. Galhiriya Siri Sumangala Mahanayaka Thero who was residing at Malwatta Vihara (chapter) has sent a letter to Siam Chief Prelate named Ven. Vajiragnana Thero. The letter was sent through Ven. Amaramoli Thero of Dhammayukthika sect in Siam, when the Thero visited Sri Lanka in 2388 BC or 1843 AD. It has information about two Bhikku groups from Siam who visited the island. The first group led by Ven. Subhūthi Thero and Ven. Amara Thero included 05 Theros while the second group led by Ven. Subhūti therā and Pilindivaccha Thero included 07 Theros. One group visited in 2384 BC while the other group came in 2387 BC. It is said that while in Sri Lanka they were given the opportunity to venerate the Sacred Tooth Relic and they left the country with gifts. These gifts included Cullavagga, Mahavagga, Parivara and Samyutta nikaya books for King Parama Dhammika, a crystal mirror and an ivory pangolin fan from Ven. Vipassi Thero to Ven. Vajiragnana Thero, and two seated metal statues to the Chief Prelate of Maha sect and to Ven. Jinarasa Maha Thero who was residing in Jethavana Vihara.

An important point in this message is the inclusion of the names of the Theros led by Ven. Upali Thero who visited from Siam to Sri Lanka in order to establish Siam ordination. King Keerthi Sri Rajasinghe sent gifts to Siam and invited 1. Ven. Upali 2. Ven. Ariyamuni 3. Ven. Brahmajothi 4. Ven. Mahapunna 5. Ven. Chandasara 6. Ven. Sarachanda 7. Ven. Manijothi 8. Ven. Indasuwanra 9. Ven. Chandajothi 10. Ven. Brahmasara 11. Ven. Sudinna 12. Ven. Suwanra 13. Ven. Dhammajothi 14. Ven. Saguna and provided accommodation at Malwatta Viharaya in Kandy to revive Buddha Sasana by ordaining 700 Bhikkus and entering 3000 qualified children to Buddha Sasana (Ven. Buddhaththa Thero, 1962: pp 88).

After this message, there was a message written in Pali from Siam. It describes how various Theros visit Siam from time to time seeking ordination there. When they were told that such was not necessary, they went to Ramañña (Burma) and received ordination before returning to Sri Lanka. The reason why the Siam did not offer a ordination was because the ordination they had established was already secured in Sri Lanka. This clearly demonstrate the mutual relations between Siam and the Siam sect in Sri Lanka.

## Conclusion

The above evidence is testimony to the strong religious relations that existed between Sri Lanka and Siam since ancient times which remains intact to date. Also the two countries can be named as leading countries that practice Theravada Buddhism. This research discovers the deep-rooted religious ties between Sri Lanka and Thailand, emphasizing their public role as global custodians of Theravada Buddhism. It highlights a historical cycle of mutual restoration. Sri Lanka introduced the Higher Ordination to Thailand in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and Thailand later returned this sacred tradition to Sri Lanka in the 18<sup>th</sup> century through the mission of Ven. Pra Upali Thero. Centered on the Malwatta and Asgiri Viharayas under the patronage of King Kirti Sri Rajasinha and Ven. Saranankara Sangharaja Thero in Kandy, the study examines how this reciprocal exchange revived pure Buddhism in Sri Lanka and continues to define the modern religious partnership between the two nations.

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