

Kushinagar

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Kushinagar: Gotama Buddha entry's to Parinibbana (Parinirvana)

“Ananda:
 you may think: ‘The teacher’s instruction has ceased, now we have no teacher!’
 But it should not be seen like this. Let the Dhamma and the discipline that I
 have taught and explained to you be the teacher after my passing.” “Now,
 Bhikkhus, I say to you – all conditioned things are of the nature to decay –
 strive on untiringly.”

vayadhamma
 sankhara, appamadena sampadetha

Present Day –
 Kushinnagar

Kushinagar (Kushinara) is near the present day Kasia town, and easily reached by road, 55 km east on the NH28 from Gorakhpur of UP State, which has a railway station and small airport.

Historical Facts

As soon as Gotama had spoken his last few words uttered as above before his entry to Parinibbana (Parinirvana) and closed his eyes, those who were not yet enlightened wept and cried. The earth shook. Sal blossoms fell like rain. Everyone felt their minds and bodies tremble. They knew the Buddha had passed into nirvana. As desired by the Buddha, for the next six days, the Malla Kings of Kushinagar prepared for the funeral rites under the direction of Ashin Anuruddha. On the seventh day of Mahaparinibbana, the last cremation rite was performed by Ashin Mahakassapa (Mahakasyapa), the most celebrated disciple of Gotama Buddha, at the cremation site.. After the cremation, the relics and ashes were collected and distributed to Malla Kings and other representatives of the Kingdoms presented at the ceremony. Mallas Kings also erected a stupa - Makutabandhana-ceti (Rambhar Stupa) at the place of the cremation of Buddha.

After two centuries, Mauryan King Ashoka visited Kushinagar. He had built stupas with Buddha relics, and erected a pillar to mark the place of Mahaparinibbana. Both Chinese pilgrims – Fa-hsien (3rd century) and Hsuan-Tsiang (6th century), who visited this sites in Kushinagar, mentioned that the place had many stupas, monastic buildings, two pillars and several holy spots, but the area was almost deserted. Sir Alexander Cunningham, the Archaeological Surveyor of India, who visited Kushinagar in 1861-62, confirmed that it was an exact place where the Buddha

entered Mahaparinibbana. After 15 years, his assistant, ACL Carlleyle made extensive excavations, but not able to find any major proof.

It

was only in 1904-12, the excavations in the same area by J.Ph Vogel and H Shastri, unfolded numerous brick buildings, monuments, light seals and copper plate inscription, mentioning a Mahaparinibbana Vihara and a Parinibbana Ceti. Major renovation and restorations in and around Kushinagar Mahaparinibbana sites were largely due to the efforts of Myanmar Sayadaws – Venerable Bhikku Mahawira, Ashin U Chandramani and their successor Venerable U Nyanissara. A first Myanmar Buddhist Temple was built by Sayadaw Mahavira (an Rakhine-Barua Buddhist monk) at the donation of a plot of land and money for building by a Rakhine family in 1900.

Sayadaw Mahavira was joined by a young novice from Rakhine, Myanmar, Shin Chandramani, who later took over as Chief Resident Monk in 1920. In 1969, the ailing Sayadaw U Chandramani handed over the management of the Kushinagar Monastery and related works to Venerable U Nyanissara. Successive Chief Resident Monks of Kushinagar Myanmar Buddhist Vihara had maintained the archaeological treasures as well as maintenance of Buddhism in and around Kushinagar. Venerable U Chandramani had initiated, since 1924, the annual festival of full-moon day Kasone (May/June) for water pouring to the Bodhi tree on the occasion of birth anniversary of the Buddha, which is a popular event and attracts visitors of both Buddhists and non-Buddhists in and around Kushinagar. In 1956, coinciding with the 2500 years of Buddha's birthday celebration, this festival was named "Buddha Jayanti", and with the support of Indian Government, similar celebrations spread to other places. The annual Buddha Jayanti festival events is still conducted every year in May/June till today.

Nirvana Temple and Stupa

The Government of India had renovated the Nirbbina (Nirvana) Temple in 1956 on the occasion of the Buddha's 2500th birthday celebration, just in front of the main Nirbbana stupa, built over the very place where Lord Buddha attained Mahaparinibbana. The stupa was originally built by Malla Kings and successively renovated by several kings and well-wishers from India and elsewhere. The inscription on the copper vessel excavated from this stupa site indicated that it was the actual place of Nibbana Ceti. The present form of the stupa was restored in 1927 by Venerable U Chandramani, Chief Resident Monk of Kushinagar Myanmar Buddhist Vihara, with donations from U Po Kyu and U Po Hlaing of Myanmar.

In the main Nirbbana Temple, a reclining Buddha statue, with the length of 6.1 metre curved out of a single block of reddish sandstone, represents the dying Buddha declining peacefully on his right side with the head towards the north, the face turning towards the west, the right hand being placed under the head, and the left hand resting on the thigh. Whole body was covered with the golden robe and the feet seem to be puffy.

The plinth underneath the Buddha statue has three small figures on its west side. The figure on the left is a crying human figure, probably depicting the grief of Malls Kings. The figure in the centre shows a monk meditating with his back to the viewer. Another figure on the right shows a monk resting his head on right hand overcome with grief. Both probably represent the monks who remained calm and those who cried at the

Buddha's Parinirvana.

Original statue may have been built by a monk "Hiribala" in 5th century CE, and donated to this Temple, as described in the inscription at the pedestal of the statue. This statue was seen and described in the same manner by Huien Tsaing who visited around 5th century. The Archaeologist Carlleyle, who excavated the Nirvana Temple in 1876, found this Buddha statue completely smashed, but he restored and repaired to its original shape.

Dhatu-ceti (Cremation Stupa)

Nearly 2 km proceeding from the Nirvana Temple, on the main road down south, is the Makutabandhana-cedi or the Dhatu-ceti (Cremation Stupa), which marked the site of cremation of Buddha's body. Being nearby is the Ramabhar Lake, the stupa was also called as "Ramabhar Stupa". It is a huge circular, drum-shape, about 34 metres in diameter and rests on a circular plinth that consisted of two or more terraces about 47 metres in diameter at the base. It has a height of 15.4 metres.

A replica of Dhatu-ceti (Kunwarkakot Matha) was built at a place about 2.5 km west of the existing stupa with a huge seated Buddha. The replica was constructed on the archetypal principle of the cosmic, representing the five gross elements of the organic life: the earth (the square base), air (the sphere), flame (triangular up-thrust), water (the crescent), and the ether (the conical dome).

Matha-kuar Shrine and Temple

About 200 meters southwest of the Nirbbana Temple, proceeding south down the main road, is the Matha-kaur Shrine and Temple, where a colossal statue of the Buddha is installed.

According to the local legions, this is believed to be the actual site where the Buddha died after he delivered his last sermon. The name of the stupa implies the "dead prince". The statue was found by the Archaeologist Carlleyle in late 1870s, as broken pieces, and being restored. Existing temple was built by Myanmar pilgrims in 1927 to shelter the statue.

Buildings around the Nirvana Temple and Stupa

Myanmar-Rakhine Sayadaw Mahawira, with donation from Rakhine Merchant U Kyi Zayi (Khee Zarhee) of Calcutta, purchased a plot of land in 1990, and built the first Myanmar Buddhist Vihara in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, India. Sayadaw Mahawira passed away in 1920 at the age of 85, and was succeeded by Venerable U Chandramani, who became the Head Sayadaw of Kushinagar Myanmar Buddhist Vihara.

Starting from a small temple and rest house built in 1900 by Venerable Mahavira, many buildings including health clinic, have been expanded mostly in late 1950s by venerable U Chandramani. One of the oldest building was 'Chandramani Bhikku Dhammasala'.

Successor to U Chandramani, Chief

Abbot U Nyaneinda

expanded more structures mainly rest houses for pilgrims, Chanthargyi Ceti - a replica of Shwedagon Ceti of Yangon, a new Ordination Hall, extension of kitchen and dining facilities. Sayadaw also renovated the existing structures to reflect the traditional Myanmar architecture, and improvements are also made to have adequate water supply, sanitation, electricity, cooking facility and transportation.

There are

numerous Buddhist monasteries of various Buddhist countries, including Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, Japan and Tibet, and a Museum.

Myanmar Buddhist Pioneer

Venerable Baddanta U Chandramani Mahathera (1875-1972)

Chief Resident Monk from 1920-1972,

Myanmar Buddhist Vihara, Kushinagar, UP, India

'Buddha Sasana'

or the 'Dispensation

of the Buddha' is kept alive and prolonged through the support of ardent devotees and patrons from all over the world. Despite their efforts, history has witnessed aspects of its waning after the Parinibbana of the Buddha due in part to foreign invasions, usurpation, vandals and wanton destruction of pristine areas of original holy places, landmarks and artefacts. During such periods of unstable unsettled situations, particularly misunderstanding by local communities, devotees and patrons everywhere were prevented or deliberately barred from providing necessary assistance, a crucial factor that caused the partial decline of the Buddha Sasana.

Attempts at restoration and revival of the Sasana through reconstruction, repairs and developments to historical holy sites related to Gotama Buddha, and the perpetuation and propagation of the Buddha's Teachings had been made and carried out by various Monarchs, notable patrons and Buddhist Monks from time to time. We learned of such supportive works and activities from stone inscriptions unearthed during archaeological excavations and from books and articles.

The life story of one such pioneer and dedicated

supporter of Buddhism emerged from Myanmar who stands out as iconic stature deserving the accolade of “Dhamma Arzanee” (Dhamma Hero) was the late Sayadaw Baddanta U Chandramani Mahathera, the Chief Resident Monk of 1920-1972, at the Burmese Buddhist Vihara, Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh State, India. Sayadaw was the second resident monk of the Burmese Buddhist Vihara of Kushinagar, but the first resident monk of Migadawon Burmese Buddhist Vihara.

The Sayadaw was born on the 25th May 1875 (Burmese era Tuesday afternoon, on the 16th day after the full moon month of Kason in the year 1237) to the family of U Kyaw Aung and Daw Mi Win Yae of Pauk-pin-kwin village, Myo-haung Township, Sittwe District, Rakhine State, Myanmar. His name at birth was Tha Pan Oo. When he was 10 years old, his parents sent him to Sittwe to study at the Sandimar-Rama Monastery where his uncle, Sayadaw Ashin U Sandimar (Candima) was famous for Buddhist literature. After 2 years at this monastery, he was initiated a novice samanera titled: Shin Chandra (Shin Sandar) and continued Buddhist studies.

The Early Days

Around the mid-1889, Anagarika Dhammapala of Sri Lanka, a celibate full time worker for Buddhism, who despite donning a yellow robe but did not shave his head according to the Buddhist tradition, accompanied by Colonel Oracle from England, arrived in Sittwe to promote and establish a branch of Mahabodhi Society, similar to those they helped established in Yangon and Mandalay. There, the visitors exchanged views on how best to promote and re-establish declining Buddha Sasana in the middle-land – Majjhimadesa, and of their fervent intention to relocate a suitable person there which they had come to seek. Their choice for a candidate they propose to put to further training when chosen, would be a young Buddhist monk with good moral courage and qualifications.

From the Mahabodhi Society in Sittwe, they found young Shin Chandra, whose credentials matched those in their resume. When Shin Chandra, still a novice, was approached for a decision by the visitors, he agreed, and further proposed that he would be better encouraged if he was companied by his friend and colleague, Shin Thuriya (Suriya). They were thus chosen and assigned to join the monastery in Majjhimadesa. The teen-aged novices, Shin Thuriya and Shin Chandra, whose names if translated meaning - ‘sun and moon,’ were both happy to accept the responsibility and tasks of staying and propagating Buddhism at Majjhimadesa.

On November 1890 (Tazaungmon of Myanmar era 1252), Shin Chandra and Shin Thuriya, were brought to India by a Government Official, U Tha Doe Wai, and an Inland Revenue Official, who were visiting Calcutta (Kolkata), the capital of British India. After passing through Calcutta, the two novices arrived and stayed at Mahabodhi Society in Bodh Gaya. At that period in time, Bikkhu Ashin Sandazawti (Candajoti), a Sri Lankan monk, was the chief resident at the Kuthodaw Myanmar Buddhist Temple which was built and donated by King Mindon of Myanmar. Along with an attendant Thar Doe Oo from Myanmar, Anagarika Dhammapala arranged for the two Myanmar novices to join the Sri Lankan monk. There, the two novices together with Thar Doe Oo would visit the Maha Bodhi Ceti

and the Bodhi Tree daily to do religious rites and to clean the compound. Among the littered rubbish and leaves, they also had to clean food offerings discarded by the Hindu priests after their ancestral religious rites.

In February 1893, local people who had been instructed and encouraged by the Hindu Mahant, a Zawgyi Raza (Sadhu), raided the Kuthodaw Myanmar Temple, with knives and batons and destroyed every thing in the temple and beat up people whoever were present there. A visiting monk Ashin Thumingala (Sumangala) suffered severe head and body injuries and had to be treated at the hospital in Gaya. The two novices - Shin Chandra and Shin Thuriya luckily escaped the assault, since they were visiting other Buddhist religious sites with pilgrims from Moe-gok of Myanmar at that time.

After the incident, Shin Chandra, Shin Thuriya and Thar Doe Oo were taken to the Mahabodhi Society building, established by Rakhine Merchants in Calcutta. They stayed there together with an Indian monk - Bikkhu U Zina-nanda (Jina-nanda), under whose guidance they continued their Buddhist study. There, Shin Chandra went for daily rounds of alms to obtain food from nearby houses of Rakhine families. One day, due to heavy torrential downpour, the Mahabodhi Society building in Kolkata collapsed and they had to move to another Buddhist Temple - the Maramargree Temple in Wari Pagan Road, Calcutta managed by Venerable Sayadaw Mahawira (Mahavira).

Sayadaw Mahawira was a Buddhist monk of ethnic Rakhine Maramargree parentage, who later became an Indian national. Sayadaw Mahawira, seeing the novices needed better education, decided to send the young and eager Rakhine novices to a Head Teacher, Gawwinna Sarsakareen for continuing their education, and thereafter, to another Head Teacher, Ziwa Nanda. Sayadaw Mahawira also rented a house at Gamma village in Wasipur district of Calcutta, for the novices to study Pali, Hindi as well as modern sciences.

The village became overcrowded with noise and traffic that Sayadaw Mahawira decided to look for a place in Kushinagar. A Rakhine merchant U Kyi Zayi (Khee Zarhee) who heard about the Sayadaw's plan offered to donate money. On his journey to Kushinagar, the initial one thousand Indian Rupees donated by U Kyi Zayi for the purchase of land and building of the temple was robbed by the Station Master and his associates. The robbers were eventually caught and tried and later jailed for 3-years.

Before long, Sayadaw Mahawira received additional donation in replacement for the same amount from Rakhine Merchant U Kyi Zayi that enabled him to purchase a plot of land and build the first Burmese Buddhist Vihara in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, India. Shin Chandra assisted Sayadaw in every way for three months until the completion.

Moved
to Moulmein

There was an outbreak of cholera at that time of epidemic proportion. Fearing the safety of Shin Chandra, U Kyi Zayi made arrangements to transfer him to a safe place. He was accompanied by U Doe Aung, younger brother of U Kyi Zayi, and

Moulmein City Commissioner U Kyaw Khine to Moulmein (Mawlamyaing), capital of Mon State in Myanmar.

There, arrangements were made for him to study under Sayadaw U Sagara at Kadoe-KawHnat Monastery. There were also a German Bikkhu, a Japanese Bhikkhu and 40 other local monks residing at the place. After the rain-retreat, Shin Chandra was transferred to Mandalay to continue Buddhist study at various monasteries under four Sayadaws. They include: Myataung Temple, Padamya Temple, Northern Khinmakan Temple and Visuddha-rama Temple respectively, where he specialized in the three main Buddhist Canons, namely the Suttas, the Abhidhamma and Vinaya.

From Novice to Bhikkhu

At the age of 28 in the year 1903, Myanmar era 1265, on the 9th day of Tapodwe, sponsored by the Rakhine Merchant U Kyi Zayi, his wife, Daw Mi Chan Mra and younger brother, U Doe Aung from Calcutta, Shin Chandra was ordained a full-fledged Bhikkhu titled Ashin Chandramani (Ashin Sandaramani), in Panwar (which is situated now in southern Bangladesh). The ordination ceremony was presided by Sayadaw U Sandima of Akyub (Sittwe), in the presence of Visudayon Monastery Sayadaw of Mandalay, and forty invited monks in the Myanmar era 1265 on the 9th day of Tabodwe month, Monday at 8:00 am. Maung Kyaw Zan Hla, son of U Kyi Zayi and Daw Mi Chan Mra, was also initiated a novice at the same time. The ordination ceremony was attended by famous Sayadaws from various places from Myanmar, friends and Arakanese relatives from Kolkata and Bangladesh, known as Baruas and Maramagree.

A few months after the ordination in Sittwe, Ashin Chandramani went back to Kushinagar to join Sayadaw Mahawira. He assisted Sayadaw complete the building of Kushinagar Monastery, and spent time teaching three fellow Myanmar monks in Hindi and Sanskrit, and Buddhist literatures to five local Indians.

For the next few years, Venerable Ashin Chandramani, who was well versed in Hindi and Pali languages, translated and published many books which include 'The Dhammapada'. He also translated into Myanmar, two well-established traditional medicine books, entitled 'Thaw-raw-da-ya' and 'In-sa-na Nidan', which were available in Sanskrit. Other religious books included Mahasatipatthana Sutta; Anatta-lakkhana Sutta and Singi-ti Sutta. Sayadaw had written many other Buddhist books, documents and journals and also translated them into Hindi to enable the Indians to understand and develop interest in Buddhism.

The Fight for Bodh Gaya Myanmar Vihara

A brick and mortar building located near the Maha Bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya, called the 'Kuthodaw Rest House', was donated by King Mindon of Burma

during his reign. Many years after, the local Hindu inhabitants one day attacked the residents, and the resident monk, Sayadaw Ashin Sanda Zawti sustained injuries and had to leave the building. Ironically, Burmese monks and lay Buddhist worshippers from that time on were driven away from the building and were not allowed to stay, as Hindu Zawti Razar, Mahanttiki wrested control of the building through a deed which they claimed to be the owners.

In 1891, Anagarika Dhammapala who was on a pilgrimage to the Mahabodhi Temple was shocked to find not only the Temple in hands of the Hindu priests, but the Buddha image was altered and desecrated into a Hindu idol. All Buddhists were barred from worship there. On behalf of Mahabodhi Society, Anagarika Dhammapala, in 1908, filed a lawsuit against the Hindu Brahmin priests at the local court to have the Mahabodhi Temple and related structures such as Myanmar Buddhist Vihara donated by King Mindon, be returned to the Buddhist community.

The Hindu Mahant engaged famous lawyers to defend the suit. Lawyers from Mahant side claimed that King Mindon had given the deeds of the building to them. The documents were presented to the court as evidence. The deeds were actually given for safekeeping, and thus, the Mahant had no authority to fully take over the Temple. The judge asked that more evidence be provided to prove that the building was intended solely for Buddhist monks and Buddhist pilgrims. Dhammapala indicated that King Thibaw, the son of King Mindon, exiled by the British to Ratanagiri, a place near Bombay, was still alive, and could therefore provide better information. Dhammapala requested Venerable Ashin Chandramani to assist him to get information from King Thibaw.

Dhammapala accompanied by Ashin Chandramani and team went to Ratanagiri and met with King Thibaw. The King explained to them that while he was a prince, he organized a collection of diamonds, emeralds, gold and other valuable items from the Palace to be decorated at the Mahabodhi Temple. He also sent a Myanmar mission led by Nyaungwun Scribe, Mahahminhla Thinkharya to construct a Vihara for accommodating the monks and pilgrims at a cost of around five thousand silver rupees.

King Thibaw mentioned to Ashin Chandramani that the eleventh Haymanarayan Guru, the Hindu Mahant was given one thousand silver rupees by his father King Mindon to look after the safety of the building. The twelfth Mahant, Trishargardayar Guru who defended the law suit, succeeded Haymanarayan Guru upon the latter's demise, was not aware of the arrangement made by King Mindon. Although Dhammapala recounted the evidence of the meeting and the discussion held with King Thibaw, the Judge decided in favour of the Mahant since such evidence was inadmissible.

The losing of the court case meant that the highly valued Myanmar Buddhist Vihara at Bodh Gaya, donated by King Mindon, which was primarily meant for the benefit of Buddhist monks and pilgrims to Bodh Gaya, was lost forever to the Hindu Mahant (Zawgi Razar) and their descendents.

Expansion of Myanmar Viharas

Around 1905, Venerable U Chandramani managed to acquire a plot of land and built a small monastery near the Migadawon Dhammekha Ceti, long before the Government of India declared the Migadawon Deer Park as an

archaeological site. It is the prime property adjacent to it and west of Nandiya Vihara, donated by the rich man Nandiya during the time of the Buddha. A two-storied rest house - DHAMMACHAKKA VIHARA - was built for pilgrims in 1908 and completed in 1910 with donations from U Mya Tun and family of Rakhine State.

In 1921, Venerable Ashin U Kittima, son of Ashin Chandramani's sister Daw Hnin Nyo from Rakhine, joined U Chandramani at the Migadawon Monastery. In 1928, U Kittima took over the management of Migadawon Dhammachakka Vihara. Venerable U Kittima organized and supervised the construction of additional buildings at the Migadawon Vihara, such as Pilgrim rest house, Maha Wizatawi Sima House, and Thadhammayanthi Pitaka Library with the donors from Myanmar, under the guidance of Ven. U Chandramani.

Venerable U Chandramani of Kushinagar with the support of Venerable U Thuriya of Tha-yet-taw-taik, Yangon, Venerable U Kittima of Sarnath, Venerable U Kawthala of Pha-yar-gyi-taik, Yangon, together with four Upasakas and four Upasikas established the "Sarnath Buddhist Society" with the sole aim of reviving the decadent Buddha sasana in the land of origin.

Around mid-1940s during the Second World War period, Venerable U Kittima organized and supervised the construction of a monastery in Sigara, Varanasi, with the donations from his Arakanese devotees from Sandarvan (Bangala-awa island). The monastery was named as "Sigara Burmese Buddhist Temple". In 1958, a Dhamma Hall was added to this Temple, with the donation from Sir U Thwin and family. The Sigara Myanmar Buddhist Vihara in Varanasi still exists to date and pilgrims from Myanmar, Bangladesh, and elsewhere from India are still using as a pilgrim centre.

Taking the helm of Kushinagar Vihara

Venerable

Mahawira was responsible for restoring the main stupa of Mahaparinibbana to put it back to its right place as a sacred shrine. Sayadaw also built a Buddhist Vihara and Dhamma Hall in 1902-03. In

1920, Sayadaw Mahawira passed away at the age of 85, and Ashin U Chandramani succeeded as Head Sayadaw of Kushinagar Vihara, its related structures and other assets. Sayadaw changed the name of the Vihara to "Kushinagar

Myanmar

Buddhist Vihara". Many people around Kushinagar knew the temple as "Chandramani Bhikku Dhammasala". Sayadaw

U Chandramani was granted permission by the court with the responsibility to supervise and manage donations only from pilgrims coming to the Mahaparinibbana temple, but not the monuments and temple ground. He nevertheless continued the good work of his predecessor by gaining the management, cleared the forest growth by cutting away trees and bushes and maintained and managed the actual site of Buddha

Parinirvana, founded by archaeologists during the excavation in 1877. The present form of the stupa and the temple with reclining Buddha in nibbanna posture was restored in 1927, by Venerable U Chandramani, with donations from U Po Kyu and U Po Hlaing from Burma. The Indian Government in 1954 celebrating 2500

years of Buddhism, rebuilt the "Parinirvana Ceti" and a monastic cave to house the statue of the reclining Buddha.

The Sayadaw also established the "Kushinagar

Bhikkhus Sangha Association” and was able to buy and manage 50 acres of land for cultivation and produce paddy and other crops for use at the monastery. Sayadaw started a primary school, called “Chandramani Primary School,” to give education and accommodate the children of poor families. Within a year, the school population increased to more than 350 students and 3 full-time teachers were hired. The school was later upgraded to middle and high school levels, and eventually handed over to the Government to run as public school. A few years later, Sayadaw built the Kushinagar Degree College, with a capacity to accommodate 500 students, using donations from local wealthy well-wishers. This college still stands today as a symbol of the Sayadaw’s love and affection for the poor people in and around Kushinagar. Sayadaw also built a traditional medicine clinic in the compound of Vihara to provide health care to the poor people from nearby villages.

Since 1924, the Sayadaw organized an annual event of a month-long Buddhist festival, in conjunction with water pouring for the Bodhi tree commencing from the Myanmar months (Kasone and Nayone) or May and June, in commemoration of Gotama Buddha attainment of enlightenment under a Bodhi tree on the full-moon day of Kason (vasek). In 1956, coinciding with the 2500 years of Buddha Sasana, the celebration was named “Buddha Jayanti”, and with the support of Indian Government, similar celebrations spread to other places of India. This traditional annual Buddha Jayanti festival in May/June is still conducted till date.

Around 1930, Sayadaw asked all Buddhist monks staying at various Buddha Places to join him as “Majjhimadesa Maha Sangha Organization”. Since the Indian Government would not accept an organization formed by non-Indian nationals, Sayadaw U Chandramani of Kushinagar and Sayadaw U Sandimar of Varanasi decided to become naturalized Indian citizens. The Sangha organization was formed with Sayadaw U Chandramani as President, and Ashin Sandimar as Secretary. Sravasti Jetavana Sayadaw U Mahinda, Migadawon Sayadaw U Kittima also served as members.

Sayadaw also participated as a representative of Buddhist monks from India at the Sixth World Buddhist Council Conference, organized by the Government of Myanmar under the leadership of Prime Minister U Nu, held at the Mahapasana Cave in Kaba-aye, Yangon in May 1954. The Sayadaw was involved in the discussion of a topic in Hindi and Sayadaw U Kittima of Migadawon translated them into Myanmar. In 1955, Sayadaw also joined the World Buddhist Conference organized by King Mahindra of Nepal, in Kathmandu.

Sayadaw received thousands of lower caste ‘untouchable’ Indians to become Buddhists, and one of the largest one was the ordination of over 200,000 people on a single day at the gathering at Nagpur in the presence of their leader Dr Ambedkar in October 1956.

Sayadaw passed away at the age of 97 years, in the second month of Tagoo, Myanmar era of 1334 (May 1972) at the Myanmar Buddhist Vihara, Kushinagar.

Successors

Sayadaw

Venerable Acharya Buddharakkhita, founder-President of Maha Bodhi Society, Bangalore was born to a Bengali Brahmin family in the then eastern state of Manipur in Imphal, India, on March 12, 1922, a full moon day. A bright student, he graduated from the Institute of Engineering Technology, Calcutta in Automobile Engineering. He joined the Government of India Defence Ordinance. The job took him to various places during the Second World War. He saw destruction of life and property and misery that the war brought to the lives of people, which led him to turn towards spirituality. He resigned his job and left his home in search of truth and freedom. For some years, he travelled through the length and breadth India and studied Indian religions in various institutions.

He studied Buddhism as a novice under the guidance of Sayadaw U Chandamani, Chief Abbot of Maha Parinirvana Myanmar Buddhist Vihara at Kushinagar. He undertook extensive Buddhist studies, both in India and Nepal, the same year. Sayadaw Chandramani sent him to Sri Lanka to study Pali and Buddhism. He worked hard and passed Buddhist study examinations gaining the title of "Tripitaka-cariya". In 1948, he returned to Kushinagar Burmese Temple, and took ordination as a Buddhist monk sponsored by pilgrims from Sittwe. He was sent to Burma (Myanmar) to study Buddhist literature and to practice meditation under the renowned master Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw. He was a member of the Indian delegation to the Sixth World Buddhist Congregation held at Yangon (Burma) in 1954, and served as a member of editorial board, which published a complete edition of the Pali canon. He taught Buddhist literature for a few years at the Nalanda Pali Postgraduate Institute, Bihar.

In order to spread the teachings of the Buddha in his own way, he established the Mahabodhi Society in Bangalore, southern India, on a piece of land offered by Maha Upasika Mrs. B. Moonasinghe, niece of Anagarika Dhammapala, which she received from the Maharaja of Mysore for the purpose of building a Buddhist centre in Bangalore. Thus, the Maha Bodhi Society of Bangalore was founded in 1956. In 2001, seeing the urgent need of training good monks in India, Sayadaw Buddharakkhita started another historic movement by opening Mahabodhi Monastic Institute in Bangalore, on the auspicious day of 2545th Buddha Jayanti Celebrations. At age 85 years, he went on to establish the Mahabodhi Academy for Pali and Buddhist Studies, the first of its kind in the whole of India, which provide Diploma courses with the aim of spreading the teachings of the Buddha as widely as possible. This is one of the fruits and trees grown by Myanmar Buddhist pioneer Sayadaw U Chandramani, in his revival of Buddha Dhamma in India.

Sayadaw U Nyanissara

Sayadaw

U Chandramani called Ashin U Nyanissara (present Chief Resident Monk, Kushinagar Myanmar Buddhist Vihara) from Myanmar to join him at Kushinagar in 1963, to study Buddhist literature and modern education in India, and also to help him to manage the Monastery. In 1969, the ailing Sayadaw U Chandramani handed over the management of the Kushinagar Monastery and related works to Ashin Nyanissara.

After Sayadaw U Chandramani passed away in 1972 at the Myanmar Buddhist Vihara, Kushinagar, Ashin Nyanissara succeeded as the Chief Resident Monk of Kushinagar Myanmar Buddhist Vihara.

In 1987, Sayadaw U Kittima of Sigara Monastery handed over to Sayadaw Nyanissara, the control and administrative responsibilities of Sigara Burmese Buddhist Monastery in Varanasi and Migadawon Monastery in Sarnath.

Later Sayadaw U Nyanissara requested Sayadaw U Wannadhaza to look after the Migadawon Monastery at the same time.

Epilogue

Through out his entire life, Sayadaw U Chandramani had dedicated his unselfish services and efforts towards the restoration, revival and reclamation of the Buddha Sasana. He shines like a beacon that lights the path for those who had lost their ways and became deluded, thus putting Buddhism back on track to its rightful place of origin. He was the proud son of Myanmar, of Rakhine-Arakanese parentage.

A Burmese poem roughly translates his attributes:

 “When an opportunity
arises

 and
the time is ripe,

 he
will become well-known and

famous like a lotus leaf

 fully
spreads out in the midday sun.

 Compare and observe.”

Compiled by Dr. U Than Sein, 6 November 2007

Edited by Harry Than Htut,

November 30, 2007.

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{Ashin U Nyanissara is also known as Sant Gyaneshwar}

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