

# *Monastic Patronage and Temple Building in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Caste, Ritual Performance, and Merit*<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

The current article examines temple building and shifting monastic patronage in twentieth and twenty-first century Sri Lanka. Drawing heavily on fieldwork conducted in two separate upcountry villages over the past five years, the author argues that far from passively accepting the failings of local monastics, lay Buddhists are actively and directly involved in shaping their own religious experiences. In examining closely numerous conversations centered on temple construction, this article pays particular attention to how notions about ideal ritual performance, caste discrimination, and merit-making provide lay donors with the needed impetus for building new monastic institutions and, thus, establishing a choice of temple patronage where little or no such choice previously existed.

One of the key features of Buddhism commonly noted in a number of studies is the symbiotic relationship that exists between the laity and members of the monastic community or *saṅgha*. The close ties between the *saṅgha* and the laity are oftentimes described as being based on reciprocity: That in exchange for the laity's food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, monks provide the laity with teachings (religious and secular), leadership, counseling, guidance, ritual performances, and the opportunity to make merit.

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What is particularly noteworthy to mention about the relationship is the degree to which each group is able to shape and influence the behavior and attitudes of the other. Several scholars examining Buddhist texts have argued that the dynamic and evolving nature of the lay-monastic relationship has a long history. Indeed, a close study of canonical (e.g., *Vinaya*) and postcanonical (e.g., commentaries and monastic injunctions or *katikāvata*) texts reveal that ideas about what does and does not constitute appropriate behavior is often negotiated and decided upon within specific social environments, geographical regions, and moments in time.

Scholars of the Theravāda tradition of South and Southeast Asia have also suggested that the same applies for today: That rather than being fixed upon some canonical norm, ideas about proper monastic behavior, roles, and demeanor are context-dependent. While it is certainly the case that monastic behavior is still informed by codes and precepts (such as the rules laid out in the *Pāṭimokkha*), monastic norms are oftentimes open to a wide range of interpretation, or, in the words of Ananda Abeysekere (2002), are oftentimes decided upon within specific conjunctures that are contingent upon a variety of factors.<sup>2</sup>

While such a portrayal might give the impression of a very harmonious relationship between the *saṅgha* and the laity, there are instances, both past and present, when the relationship between a temple, its group of monks, and their lay donors is challenged or even fails. When certain conflicts between what does and does not constitute appropriate roles, behavior, and deportment are not resolved, lay people are left with a choice: To direct their patronage toward different temples, to establish new institutions that are more in tune with their own religious and personal needs,<sup>3</sup> or to continue patronizing

<sup>2</sup> This notion of contingent conjunctures is discussed at length in Abeysekere's (2002: 3) recent book—*Colors of the Robe*—where he defines the concept as follows: "I want to demonstrate modestly some of the ways in which the relations between what can and cannot count as Buddhism, culture, and difference, alter within specific 'native' debates. That is, to demonstrate the ways in which what I call 'minute contingent conjunctures' make possible and *centrally* visible the emergence and submergence, the centering and marginalizing, the privileging and subordinating of what and who can and cannot constitute 'Buddhism' and 'difference.'"

<sup>3</sup> The former approach was particularly influential in the establishment of new monastic lineage and sub-lineages in Sri Lanka during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For a discussion of how the concerns and expectations of particular groups affected the structure of the Sinhalese *saṅgha*, see Kemper (1973, 1980), and Malalgoda (1976).

those monastics who fail to live up their (i.e., the laity's) ideals. The works of Martin Southwold (1983), H. L. Seneviratne (1999), and more recently Ananda Abeysekere (2002) have discussed this latter approach at length within contemporary Sinhalese society. Moreover, in considering that choice, these same authors have explored the various ways in which the laity justify their continued support of "bad" monks, such as by them arguing that they are actually worshipping the robe and not the wearer.

Although this "robe not the wearer" ideology can certainly be observed within contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhism, my own work in upcountry Sri Lanka reveals instances in which lay people are directly involved in shaping their own religious experiences. Discussing the experiences of lay people of the drummer or *beravā* caste from two upcountry villages, this article examines when and how hopes, expectations, personal histories, and social meanings shape the very structure of the Sinhalese *saṅgha*, thus complementing the current range of ethnographic research that has presented the lay-monastic relationship as one being based on feelings of apathy and helplessness. In the pages that follow, I argue that far from passively accepting problematic or morally corrupt monastics, the laity's desires for pleasurable religious encounters and ritual experiences become powerful impetuses for temple building and shifting monastic patronage in twentieth and twenty-first century Sri Lanka. I also contend that far from being based upon an "any monk would do" ideology, the laity's desire for accumulating merit demands working within traditional *saṅgha* structures and institutions to locate monastics able to provide their lay devotees with experiences that are deemed meaningful and pleasing.<sup>4</sup> Before turning to the first case study, however, a brief exploration of the "robe not the wearer" ideology may help us to situate the present conversations within larger discourses of caste, ritual performance, and merit-making.

## **I. Worshipping the Robe, Not the Wearer: Searching for Merit and the Performance of Rituals**

Several recent ethnographic studies of Sinhalese Buddhism have suggested that it is not uncommon for the laity to criticize monastics,

<sup>4</sup> This approach is quite different from the approach taken by the founders of the Vinaya Vardhana Society (Kemper [1978]) who created new types of institutions apart from the traditional *saṅgha* in order to satisfy their religious needs.

particularly those believed to be too “worldly” and “immoral” (*dussīla*). What is perhaps most surprising is not so much that lay people discuss, sometimes vociferously, the failings of particular monks, but that many of the same lay people continue to maintain contact with and support those very monks who are the butt of ridicule.

Martin Southwold’s account of village Buddhism, for instance, makes reference to the censuring of *saṅgha*-members that he frequently encountered in Polgama, a village where he did the bulk of his research. Making reference to the monk in charge of the village temple, Sīlaratana, Southwold (1983: 26) notes how the majority of the residents thought him to be a bad monk with little real interest in religion: “Few people in the village had a good word to say for him, and many of them, and other people round about who knew him, forthrightly criticised him,” by calling him a businessman (*mudalāli*), a politician, one who is only interested in boasting and self-advertisement, and someone who never meditated. These were not, however, the worst charges leveled against Sīlaratana; indeed, Southwold notes that “There were nastier and more specific charges. ‘That whore who lives next to the temple, has been his mistress for years. And he has had other women [several of them named].’”

What Southwold found interesting, however, was not so much that the Polgama villagers openly criticized Sīlaratana, but that their criticism was not concomitant with abrogating their own ties with the temple; indeed, most villagers continued to support Sīlaratana and the village temple. Why? In a later chapter, Southwold proffers a possible explanation. Discussing a group of monastics that Southwold believes best exemplifies Sīlaratana and most other village monks, a group he calls Ministry-Buddhists, Southwold notes:

Its members consider the activities of the ministering clergy valuable and important; often they will say that they are essential for the preservation of Buddhism. Such people do indeed often condemn the priests. . . . They condemn them . . . for being too worldly, inadequate in their actual vocation. Their ideal of what a cleric should be is so unrealistically high that in order to preserve the ideal they have to be unduly hard on the actual human beings who fail to live up to it. But in fact most laymen of this party are more realistic most of the time: they wish the clergy were better than they are, but accept the realities of life.

According to Southwold, then, even though many of these ministering monastics fail to live up to the laity’s high expectations—particularly their expectation that monastics should remain apart from the

world—the monks' weaknesses do not become the basis for shifting allegiances. Instead, most lay people he encountered coped with the difference between their ideal and reality by accepting the realities of life: That their own monk is simply less than perfect.

The idea that there exists a gap or sometimes chasm between ideal and reality is something also brought up in H.L. Seneviratne's recent anthropological study, *The Work of Kings*. According to him, lay people who continue to support immoral (*dussīla*) monastics do so not necessarily with feelings of respect toward *dussīla* monks, but out of a sense of deference toward the three jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. Seneviratne further argues that by claiming that they are “worshipping the robe, not the wearer,” such lay Buddhists are able to bridge the disparity between their monastic ideals and the reality of contemporary members of the *saṅgha*:

There is nothing in Buddhism that is more worthy of deference than the three jewels, the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, the “trinity” of Buddhism. The extreme respect shown to the Sangha by the laity is derived from this ideology.<sup>5</sup> Every overt encounter between a monk and a layman is characterized by the latter's expression of deference to the former . . . However, in the next breath, the laity can be extremely critical of the Sangha. This critique is expressed in the saying that the Buddhists worship the robe and not the wearer. Sociologically, this is not so trivial as it sounds. It encapsulates and expresses the entire problem of the Sangha of today in particular, but it is probably true of other ages as well, for it points to the gap between the ideal and reality. That is, the morality of the Sangha is an ideal to be talked about, but not practiced (1999: 278).

Rather than feeling compelled to locate more worthy objects of veneration, most lay people, Seneviratne argues, continue maintaining ties with immoral monks. Why is that the case? Seneviratne suggests that it is due to a general greed for merit:

The laity wants merit, by hook or crook. Merit is greater if the monk is virtuous. Often lay devotees rush to provide the needs of “ascetic” monks

<sup>5</sup> Kemper raises a somewhat similar point in his discussion of why the Vinaya Vardhana Society never became a very popular movement. He (1978: 226, 230) writes: ‘From the first, the Vinaya Vardana Society had a reservoir of Buddhist laypeople unhappy with the behavior of local bhikkhus. It is not difficult in Sri Lanka to detect vibrations, usually subtle, surprisingly often not, of hostility towards the sangha. What the Society, however, did not have was a reservoir of laypeople willing to commit themselves to the Society and at the same time break their relations with the monkhood. Diffuse sympathy is one thing; active and exclusive support, quite another . . . As for the bulk of the Sinhalese population, assaulting the monkhood at its strength, its knowledge of Dhamma, is altogether too much.’

because of this. However, for purposes of merit-making, any traditionally ordained monk will suffice; having access to a virtuous monk is just a bonus in the merit-making investment. The only requirement is that the monk is properly ordained, his inner state being immaterial. It thus follows that however useful the monk is for satisfying the lay greed for merit, or perhaps *because* the monk does that, the laity's true interest in the monk is narrowly defined. Hence the space within which the monk is accorded respect is delimited. Outside that space, the monk can be the butt of ridicule, or at least an irrelevance. Overt respect is accorded to the monk at all times, but covert critique is never far away (1999: 278).

Due to a greed for merit, the laity are less inclined to abrogate their ties with *dussīla* monastics. The spiritual and moral states of monastics are irrelevant. Any properly ordained monk is sufficient in allowing the laity to progress in their quest for merit.

Ananda Abeysekere also discusses this “worshipping the robe, not the wearer” ideology at length in his account of the chief incumbent of Pidurangala temple in Sigiriya, Buddharakkhita. Even though Buddharakkhita had an affair with a woman who moved into the temple to take care of the ailing head monk, many lay people continued to patronize the Pidurangala temple or, at the very least, show deference toward the wanton monk. When Abeysekere (2002: 55) asked one lay donor why he continued honoring a “bad” monk, the donor replied: “though we stopped going to the temple, there was no difference [*venasak nā*] in our respect for the monk. Whenever we met him on the road or anywhere, we worshipped him. That was not the problem. The problem was the woman living in the temple . . . . Whatever he may have done, the robe of the Buddha [that Buddharakkhita wore] is more noble than anything.” Another devout devotee (2002: 56) expressed similarly why he continued supporting the immoral Buddharakkhita: “For me all monks are good . . . . Monks descend from the lineage of Buddha’s disciples such as Sāriyut [Sāriputta] and Mugala [Moggallāna]. When we respect a monk we respect the Buddha’s disciples.” According to Abeysekere’s assessment of the Sigiriya case study, the laity are less likely to completely cut themselves off from the Pidurangala temple because Buddharakkhita continued serving them faithfully as a monk-physician as well as by developing the village temple.

This interpretation also helps us to make sense of the continued support of Buddharakkhita’s student Dhammananda, a monk also considered to be morally lacking by several of his own donors or *dāyakas*. Drawing on the voice of one of Dhammananda’s devotees, Abeysekere

(2002:61) notes: “One man I spoke to about Dhammananda did not mince words: he called him ‘a son of a bitch’ (*bällige putā*) and a *valattayek* (something like ‘womanizer’) . . . . But I was astounded when I learned that the same man was one of Dhammananda’s regular patrons. The man continued: ‘I do not even consider him a good monk (*honda hāmudurukenek*). I asked him the obvious question: ‘Why then do you give alms to such a monk?’ The answer: ‘That is the question . . . . We need him. Who will come to a funeral in the village? He is the only monk who lives close to us.’” What this *dāyaka*’s response implies, then, is that several lay Buddhists from Sigiriya, at least, are able to reconcile their continued patronage of immoral monks not only by focusing on the very symbols that are worthy of respect (e.g., the Buddha’s robe or the Buddha’s principal disciplines), but also by acknowledging that their own ritual needs limit or even eradicate the possibility of shifting monastic allegiances. In the words of another *dāyaka*: “Dhammananda is our village monk. He comes to our funerals and other occasions. No other monk from a different village will come to this village [to perform such Buddhist rituals] when there is already a temple in it.”

Although some lay people are quite vocal in their criticisms of particular monks and temples, their disapproval does not necessarily result in shifting temple patronage. Although most of the lay people discussed above acknowledge their own duplicitous attitudes toward the monks they support, they are nonetheless able to rationalize their continued support of *dussīla* monks by arguing that they are worshipping the robe, not the wearer or by acknowledging their own ritual dependency on such monks. Through focusing on what these immoral monastics symbolize, the same lay Buddhists are able to find meaning in their own religious experiences that, at least from an outsider’s perspective, seem meaningless or, at best, troubling.

## II. Temple Building in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Sri Lanka

Having examined this “robe not wearer” ideology, I would now like to turn to two case studies which, I believe, provide quite different visions of lay-monastic relations in contemporary Sri Lanka. Unlike the lay people given voice to in Southwold’s, Seneviratne’s, and Abeysekere’s studies, the devotees discussed in the pages that follow show a deep need for having pleasing and meaningful religious experiences. Besides the need for locating compassionate and respectful monastics,

the discussion that follows insinuates that making merit is not based on “an any monk would do” phenomenon but, rather, on affective and aesthetic religious experiences, thus transforming the desire to amass merit into a powerful and vital force for shifting monastic patronage and temple building.

### A. Uturu Bodhigama<sup>6</sup>

Uturu Bodhigama is an upcountry village of several hundred residents, mostly from the drummer or *beravā* caste. I might note at the outset that although drummers in Sri Lanka are in charge of important temple functions, they come from one of many “service castes” (Kemper [1973: 93]). Vis-à-vis the high caste (*kulīna*) cultivators or *goyigama*, the *beravā* are considered to be of low birth (*hīna jāti*).

During the summer of 2003, I had the opportunity to attend a groundbreaking ceremony for a new temple in the village. Prior to the establishment of the new temple, the residents of Uturu Bodhigama were served by a Siyam Nikāya temple located approximately one kilometer away—Bodhigama Vihāraya. For those unfamiliar with the monastic orders of Sri Lanka, it is important to note that the Siyam fraternity, though open to many Sri Lankan castes when it was first introduced from Siam or Thailand to Sri Lanka in 1753, quickly became restricted to those hailing from the highest caste, the *govikula* or *goyigama*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> As the interview material contained in this article is extremely sensitive, I have used pseudonyms when referring to specific places or people.

<sup>7</sup> Although the head of the *saṅgha* or *Saṅgharāja* at the time—Vālivīṭa Saraṇaṃkara—did not initially endorse restricting the Siyam Nikāya to *Goyigama*, the king (feeling pressured from a number of monks threatening to leave the order if a caste restriction was not implemented) decreed that only members of the *Goyigama* caste should receive *upasampadā* (Mirando [1985: 136]; see also Blackburn [2001: Chapter 3]).

Steven Kemper (1973: 37) has pointed out that the rationale for restricting the Siyam Nikāya to *Goyigama* caste members pertains to the close relationship that exists between social and religious status. It is worthwhile to note, however, that there were earlier instances of caste biases or possible caste restrictions in the Sinhalese *saṅgha*. In a monastic injunction or *katikāvata* from the Dambadeni period, we read that a person seeking ordination should be checked in regards to his caste and lineage (Ratnapala [1971: 142]). This notion of caste-based ordination has been challenged both by members of the *saṅgha* (see, for instance, Abeysekere [2002: 174–200]) and by lay people who, like R. Amaravansa Bandhara (2005), express the need for eradicating all caste-based ordinations and monastic fraternities.



Although I was not present at the meeting where the decision to build a new temple first arose, I was told by several villagers that at that meeting “The Society for the Protection of the Royal Bo Tree” (Bodhirāja Ārakṣaka Samitiya) was established and that several members were given the task of exploring the possibilities for purchasing the land around a “powerful” Bo tree located on the outskirts of the village, for building a new temple, and for locating a suitable monk.

During one of the subsequent meetings I attended at Uturu Bodhigama with several of the committee members (and the novice or *sāmaṇera* slated to become the first head monk or *nāyaka hānuduruwo* of the temple), I inquired into the factors leading up to the decision to establish the new temple. Several donors or *dāyakas* had told me that the idea of building a village temple was related to the fact that the villagers were not being treated (*salakanavā*) well by the monks at Bodhigama Vihāraya. More privately, several of them whispered that monks from Bodhigama Vihāraya did not like to associate with people from this village. No further detail was given at the time.

It was during the groundbreaking ceremony on *Poson poya* (i.e., full moon during the month of June) that more details were given about the factors leading to the decision to build a new temple. Immediately following the actual groundbreaking ritual, speeches were given by several key *dāyakas*, a local politician, and two Rāmañña Nikāya head monks from nearby temples.<sup>8</sup> As is customary, the head monks spoke first. After addressing each of the special guests attending the ceremony, the head monk who was closely involved in locating a suitable head monk for the new temple said:

We have all assembled here at this historical Bo tree of Uturu Bodhigama. Our purpose is to perform an activity that protects Buddhism . . . That is why we have started this task. There are a couple of temples around the village. People [here] get their religious activities done by those temples. Since those temples are a little far away, it is difficult for the older mothers and fathers to go to those temples, offer flowers to Lord Buddha, receive the eight precepts, and perform other religious activities.

<sup>8</sup> One conception of the Sinhalese *saṅgha* frequently advanced is that while the Siyam and Amarapura Nikāyas are oftentimes caste conscious and established along particular caste groups, the Rāmañña Nikāya is open to members of all castes (see, for instance, Malalgoda [1976: 168]). Even though the Rāmañña *Nikāya* is more open to castes than the other two Nikāyas, it would be incorrect to assume that the Rāmañña Nikāya show no caste prejudices and biases, as Obeyesekere (1968: 35), Gombrich (1971: Chapter 8), and Abeysekere (2002: 177) have found.

After praising the Uturu Bodhigama residents' energy and devotion, and after commending the person who owned the land around the Bo tree for his decision to donate it "for the development of the Buddhist religion (*Buddha-Sāsana*)," the other Rāmañña Nikāya head monk was invited to say a few words. His speech was short; he praised the villagers' activities, especially the energy that they have devoted to building a new temple which, he noted, "protects the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha."

The next person to take the microphone was Mr. Gunasena: A government employee from the local assistant government agent (AGA) and principal donor or *dāyaka* of the new temple. After welcoming the attendees of the event and after commenting that the people living in the village are one hundred percent Buddhist, Mr. Gunasena expressed a desire "to add some facts" regarding why the society (*samitiya*) decided to build a new temple:

Now, I would like to add some other facts to the reasons given in the speech of the head monk about why we decided to build this temple here. Since the former head monk of Bodhigama Vihāraya died, there was no one who took upon themselves the duty of fulfilling our religious needs and activities. The present monks living in that temple have affected the residents of Uturu Bodhigama. Many of the villagers mentioned this problem. Understanding the situation, I felt that no other option existed than to build a new temple inside the village. In the meantime, some people living here have been going to more outlying villages to get their religious activities performed. This situation has motivated a group of people in the village to form the Bodhirāja Ārakṣaka Samitiya ("The Society for the Protection of the Royal Bo Tree"). From within that [society], a decision was quickly taken to build a new temple here.

The monk of Bodhigama Vihāraya who had recently died especially admired these villagers, telling people living in outlying villages that the people of Uturu Bodhigama are very religious, even though they are deficient and feeble (*aḍupāḍu durvalakam*). He had said that the villagers living here are faithful/devoted (*bhaktimat*) towards Buddhism. "When they give *dāna*, they do it with a sense of faith/devotion towards the Buddha and the gods." Whenever the [recently deceased] head monk [of Bodhigama temple] came to this village, he didn't meet a single drunken person, something that is not very common in other Sri Lankan villages. However, after his death, people here began facing a lot of problems in getting their religious activities fulfilled.

Rather than the issue of distance, Mr. Gunasena's speech focused on a central and more proximate reason for establishing a new temple: The attitudes of the monks living in Bodhigama Vihāraya toward the villagers of Uturu Bodhigama. Despite the fact that the recently

deceased head monk of Bodhigama Vihāraya “admired the villagers,” especially their faith in and commitment to Buddhism, the temple’s new leadership had largely neglected the residents’ religious needs, forcing many of them to travel even further, i.e., to “outlying villages.” This reason, which included the exclusion of the village residents from the temple’s societies and committees, had adversely affected the residents of Uturu Bodhigama.

In his speech highlighting the factors that led to the decision to build a new temple, Mr. Gunasena made reference to the villagers’ “shortcomings.” While the term *aḍupāḍu durvalakam* generally means deficiencies/shortcomings (*aḍupāḍu*) and feebleness (*durvalakam*), subsequent conversations with him and other key donors reveal that one specific component of the villagers’ shortcomings was their drummer or *beravā* caste status. Indeed, after another visit to Uturu Bodhigama, I was escorted back to my car with Mr. Gunasena and another gentleman, Mr. Jayasena. During our walk, both men mentioned to me, in very quiet whispers that oftentimes accompany discussions of caste, that the residents of Uturu Bodhigama are drummers (*beravā*).<sup>9</sup> They also mentioned that the monks and *dāyakas* of the nearby Bodhigama temple prefer not to associate with such “small people” (*poḍi minissu*), another euphemism that is sometimes used to refer to members of the service castes.<sup>10</sup> From my conversations with Mr. Gunasena and Jayasena, as well as several other residents and donors of the new temple, it became apparent that the Bodhigama Vihāraya monks’ poor treatment of the villagers was the impetus behind the Society’s decision to establish a new, nonSiyam, temple and that their low caste status, at least from the perspectives of several key donors of the new temple, was the main reason for their ill-treatment by the caste-conscious Siyam monks.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Though the *beravā* caste refers to the vocation of drumming, not all *beravā* are drummers. For a more complete description of the *beravā* caste, see Ryan (1953: 124f) and Yalman (1967).

<sup>10</sup> The term, small people, is oftentimes contrasted with the term “good people” (*honda minissu*) which refers to those of high birth or caste (see Gunasekera [1994: 201]).

<sup>11</sup> Gunasekera (1994: 112) mentions a similar impetus behind the establishment of new temples in the village of Rangama: “During the baseline period all castes in the community worshipped at the Rangama Vihāraya. In the 1940s, however, two new *vihāra* were built in the area—one in Devideniya and one in West Galewala. Both *vihāra* were financed by the people of these villages and significantly neither belongs to the Siyam Nikāya which restricts ordination to the Goigama. The establishment of these *vihāra* have enabled the majority of Batgam and Vahumpura of this community

Another resident of Uturu Bodhigama and principal donor or *dāyaka* of the new temple, Mr. Jayawardhana, approached the issue of temple patronage from a different perspective. When I asked him about the details leading to the establishment of the new temple, he first mentioned the distance to the Siyam temple as being a key factor in the decision to build a new temple: “Our main temple is Bodhigama Vihāraya. We don’t have a temple for our area. From our village, it is one and a half kilometers to Bodhigama Vihāraya. Since we don’t have a temple in our area, people are slightly moving away from Buddhism . . . . We have no opportunity to talk closely with a monk. That kind of problem is there.”<sup>12</sup> When I prompted him to carry on, he explained, “There is no connection with that [Bodhigama Vihāraya] temple. There is a belief that there should be a close connection between a village and its temple.<sup>13</sup> However, the temple is their on its own and our village is here on its own. From that, the village began to experience difficulties as people were unable to receive advice (*avavāda*) and instructions (*anuśāsana*) from the monks.” According to Mr. Jayawardhana, the desirably close and mutually-sustaining relationship that should exist between a village and a temple was lacking. Although the monks came to the village when the need arose, they did so without a strong sense of commitment and service toward the residents of Uturu Bodhigama. Jayawardhana explained:

They (i.e., the monks living in Bodhigama Vihāraya) started going off the [Buddhist] path. From that, the present situation arose. Our village also started declining. I thought about its future. We also have children. I thought about their future. If we start a temple, then the village will be shaped/made (*hadanavā*) automatically. That is why I thought of building a temple . . . . You need a close relationship to say that “Our monk visited the village to see an ill patient, attend a funeral, or see a patient in the hospital.” However, that connection was not there. That closeness was not there. They only came to a funeral service (*paṅsukula*) if we invited them. Though they came, they

to maintain a high degree of caste segregation.” Both Batgam (palanquin bearers) and Vahumpura (jaggry makers) are considered, like the *beravā*, to be service castes.

<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was unable to follow-up with this *dāyaka* about what he meant by “slightly moving away from Buddhism.” While his other statements may indicate that Mr. Jayawardhana means “moving away from the Buddhist path” in terms of morality, conversations with other lay people and head monks (including the head monk who spoke first at the grounding-breaking ceremony) in which the topic of “moving away from Buddhism” arose indicates a concern with the conversion of Buddhists to other religions, particularly Christianity.

<sup>13</sup> This close connection is expressed in the commonly repeated phrase “*apē gama, apē paṅsala* (our village, our temple).”

weren't even interested to know whether the deceased was a male or a female. In that way we couldn't say that the village would be shaped/developed as there was no close association, truthfully.

For Mr. Jayawardhana, the future well-being of Uturu Bodhigama is not simply based on monks performing rituals, as it was for Dhammananda's supporters that Abeysekere investigates. Instead, the villagers' well-being is based on the close and mutually-sustaining relationships between a temple and a village. Mr. Jayawardhana's response also suggest that he is not simply looking for monks to fulfill the laity's religious needs. Indeed, his discussion of the events leading up to the founding of the new temple points to something greater: Locating a group of monastics committed to providing the laity with a pleasing experience, one that is grounded in a heartfelt concern for the well-being of the villagers.

What did Mr. Jayawardhana mean when he said that the Bodhigama Vihāraya monks started "going off the path?" Did going off the path mean the path of monastic discipline? Was Mr. Jayawardhana, like the lay people from Sigiriya, criticizing monks for violating key monastic injunctions? Despite the fact that Mr. Jayawardhana called the novice who is to become the new temple's first head monk "moral" (*sīlvat*), it appears that Mr. Jayawardhana had something quite different in mind than monks closely adhering to the *Vinaya* code. Explaining an encounter he had with another monk and why he felt that that monk was ill-suited to take on the new temple's administration, he said:

First he inquired about our village by asking "What kind of people live there (*kohomada aya innē*)?" I have to tell you this. That monk was from the Siyam Nikāya, belonging to the Asgiriya chapter. At once he asked "How is the village?" I told him: "We are all dancers (*nartana śilpi*) in this village." After that, that monk asked: "Is anyone engaged in government service? Are any of them rich?" Those were the questions he asked. At that point I felt disgusted/dissatisfied. To ask that means that he has some type of expectations. At that point, I thought "He is not suitable." . . . After that, we selected this monk. This monk started coming [to Uturu Bodhigama] to work in the temple. He never caused any pain in my heart, even with a single word. My heart only became filled with happiness. Then only did I finalize it and we began [constructing the temple]. From that day on, in terms of the village or myself, there was nothing that made our hearts tremble (*kampā vennē*). We are happy. He is also happy. The villagers are happy. I think that this happiness will prevail in the future.

Mr. Jayawardhana's concern, then, is not finding simply a properly-ordained monastic but, rather, a monastic who is dedicated to

maintaining close contact with the laity, committed to fulfilling the laity's religious needs in a pleasing manner, and genuinely concerned about the villagers' well-being. It was due to these expectations that he decided upon the *novice* or *sāmaṇera*, who filled Mr. Jayawardhana's heart with happiness, instead of the Siyam Nikāya fully-ordained *monk* or *bhikkhu*, who appeared more concerned about the villagers' social and economic standings.

When considering the various factors that led to the founding of the new temple, Mr. Jayawardhana also made reference to the very important Buddhist practice of making merit. For Mr. Jayawardhana, making merit is not based on an "any monk would do" ideology. Instead, making merit is, once again, intimately tied to being treated (*salakanavā*) well by monastics as well as to having an experience of Buddhism that is deemed "pleasing/happy" (*satuta*).<sup>14</sup> Explaining why Bodhigama Vihāraya is no longer a suitable field of merit (*puññakkhettaṃ*), he said:

When we take *dāna* [there], some monks say "we will perform *Buddhapūjā* on your behalf and eat the food."<sup>15</sup> You can go now." When we go there, we often feel disgusted/dissatisfied. We go there expecting merit. We want to offer food to the monks and have them recite verses and do *bodhipūjā* for us.<sup>16</sup> These are the things that we expect. When something like that happens, then we get demerit. If we take *dāna* to another temple and the monks there perform

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Walters presents a similar understanding of merit and merit-making practice in Sri Lanka in his forthcoming article, "Gods' Play and the Buddha's Way: Varieties of Levity in Contemporary Sinhala Practice." (J. S. Walter, Gods' Play and the Buddha's Way: Varieties of Levity in Contemporary Sinhala Practice.) Discussing conversations he had with several of his long-term informants, he writes: "The Buddha himself is reported to have declared karma a matter of mental state/intention . . . . So merit is earned when the mind delights in the rituals, a connection also made explicit by Dr. Gunatilaka and others with whom I have discussed this question. They have suggested a number of different ways of conceptualizing this connection: That when performed with 'happiness' (*satuta*) or 'wholesome pleasure' (*prasanna*) the ritual produces meritorious seeds for future attainments."

<sup>15</sup> Usually, after offering the food to the temple, the monk-recipients take a portion of some of the dishes and offer that food to the Buddha (*Buddhapūjā*). The people bringing the alms-food or *dāna* to the temple take part in that offering during which they are administered, by one of the monks, the triple refuge and the five precepts. The monk commonly gives a short sermon, oftentimes about the merit associated with giving.

<sup>16</sup> This particular ritual, which has grown in popularity over the past three decades, is discussed in length in Seneviratne and Wickremeratne (1980), Gombrich (1981), and Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988).

*Buddhapūjā*, recite verses, and preach to us, then we would feel happiness after offering food to them. As a result, we would receive merit.

For Mr. Jayawardhana—and, as we shall see, for many of the lay people from Madugama who similarly shifted their temple patronage—merit (*piṇ*) is not concomitant with simply giving to a properly-ordained monastic. Rather, making merit is based on feelings of happiness (*satuta*) and pleasure (*santōṣaya*) that accompany a wholesome activity such as giving. Just as having pleasurable experiences becomes the very basis for making merit, so too does locating a group of monastics committed to serving and fulfilling the laity's needs become a powerful force behind monastic patronage and temple building in contemporary Sri Lanka.<sup>17</sup>

## B. Madugama

The second case study concerns the village of Madugama. Like Uturu Bodhigama, most residents of Madugama belong to the *beravā* (drummer) caste, in addition to several members of the *vahumpura* (jaggery-makers), and *radā* (washer) castes. Prior to the establishment of a new Rāmañña Nikāya temple—Polgoda Vihāraya—in the late 1950s, most Madugama residents were patrons of and served by an ancient (*rājamahāvihāra*) Siyam Nikāya temple: Sri Kirti Vihāraya.

Like the conversations I had with residents from Uturu Bodhigama, my exchanges with a number of Madugama villagers pointed to similar feelings of disenchantment with the village temple and the role that those feelings played in temple building and monastic patronage. When I asked one *dāyaka*, for example, about the factors leading to the establishment of Polgoda Vihāraya, he responded first by giving me a short history lesson on the three main sects (Nikāyas) in Sri Lanka

<sup>17</sup> Complaining about the monks living at Bodhigama Vihāraya, Mr. Jayawardhana interjected: “The monks in the village temple do not speak with us properly. Even though we have money, they don’t care. Even though we are well off, they don’t allow us to take on any important positions (e.g., on village or temple committees).” This relationship between making merit and having a pleased mind is also made in the Pāli canon (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* I.98) where we read that “*dāna* should be given where the mind is happy or pleased (*yattha kho mahārāja cittaṃ pasīdati*).” For a further discussion of the relationship between making merit and attracting the heart, see Samuels (J. Samuels, *Is Merit in the Milk Powder? The Pursuit of Merit in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, *Contemporary Buddhism*).

and then by outlining the key reason why the decision to build Polgoda Vihāraya was taken: “The monks from Sri Kirti Rājamahāvihāraya come from rich families. They don’t like to get together with small people (*poḍi minissu*). So, we decided not to invite them [to our events/rituals].” Although the *dāyaka* used the term “small people” to distinguish the (*poor*) villagers from the *rich* Sri Kirti Vihāraya monks, his next comment suggested that the meaning of the term “small people” may be somewhat ambiguous: “There are so many racist people here in Sinhala culture. Those monks have a very high status.” What did the *dāyaka* mean by the monks’ high status? While it is unclear exactly as to whether “high status” was referring to the Siyam monks’ caste status as members of the *goyigama kula* or the monks’ higher status as members of the *saṅgha*, one conclusion may be drawn: That due to the monks’ treatment of “small” villagers, the villagers took it upon themselves to create new opportunities for patronage where little or no such opportunities existed earlier.

Further conversations about the founding of the new temple—Polgoda Vihāraya—with other residents of Madugama sheds light, I believe, on the issue of high status to which this *dāyaka* was referring. When I asked several laymen celebrating the full moon (*poḍa*) activities at Polgoda Vihāraya to recount the history of the temple, one of the men, Mr. Dharmadasa, explained: “This temple was built/established by our parents. We believed/had faith in the Sri Kirti temple earlier. However, the head monk there was very arrogant/conceited (*ahāṅkāra*).” Shifting his position with an uncomfortable expression on his face, Mr. Dharmadasa promptly continued: “Is it all right if I tell you the truth? It was regarding the issue of caste (*kula*). Look at this [Polgoda] temple. Anyone can come here, regardless of their caste.” After encouraging Mr. Dharmadasa to continue by asking him what he meant by *ahāṅkāra* (arrogant/conceited), he continued by recounting the actual event that resulted in the establishment of Polgoda Vihāraya:

That monk spoke with caste distinction/discrimination. [One day] there were some people sitting inside and outside of the preaching hall (*dharmasālāva*) while observing the eight precepts. Some of them were from Pallekanda and some from our group. Some were from Godavela.<sup>18</sup> At that time, there was a problem inside of the *dharmasālāva*. The person who [usually] blew the conch

<sup>18</sup> Further discussions with the lay devotees suggest that “our group” refers to *dāyakas* from the *beravā* caste. The neighboring villages of Pallekanda and Godavela are mostly inhabited by Goyigama.



had not come to the temple to perform his duties for two days.<sup>19</sup> However, he was there with the group [observing the precepts]. Then the monk came inside [the *dharmasālāva*] and, yelling at him, said “Hey you! Why didn’t you come” (*aiy adhō tō ave naettay*). He started yelling like that. The *dāyaka* replied by saying something like “I couldn’t come.” Hearing that, the monk said “You are all eating by using my temple land. Can all of you do that? You aren’t doing your *Rājakāriya* [duties] properly (*tōpi mage paṅsalē idam allāganna kanavā. Tōpiṭa puluwanda ehema karannē. Rājakāriya karannē nā*).” It is said (*kiyenavālu*) that that guy answered back after which the monk said “GET OUT! I won’t eat a single grain of [your] rice brought [here]” (*Palayan genena bat ulakvat mama kannē nā*).<sup>20</sup>

The monk had blamed that man in front of all the other *dāyakas*. At that time, the [*goyigama*] group from Godavela was looking at this other [*beravā- caste*] group and that group was looking back at them. That man felt really ashamed (*lajjāyi*). The following day he and the others came and asked me whether there is a monk who can be brought here [to this village]. They told me what had happened there. I said to them, “I will tell you the way [to a temple]. If you want to go, I will tell you how to get there . . .” They immediately agreed. We all went there. We met a monk who was from Harispattuva. We met him and he asked “What [would you like] son (*putte mokadda*)?” I told him that we are planning to get a good monk for our village from here. We told him that we were going to start a new temple.

Although the head monk from Sri Kirti did not refer to the conch-blower’s caste by name, the exchange, at least from Mr. Dharmadasa’s perspective, appears to have been based on the issue of caste.

One reason why Mr. Dharmadasa (and the other *dāyakas* of Polgoda Vihāraya)<sup>21</sup> interpreted the exchange as one based on caste

<sup>19</sup> Conch-blowers, like drummers, belong to the service castes.

<sup>20</sup> It is worthy to note that in Mr. Dharmadasa’s account, the head monk of Sri Kirti Vihāraya used the familiar form of the verb “to eat” (*kanavā*), rather than the form commonly used in reference to members of the *saṅgha* (*valaṇḍanavā*). What this implies, then, is that signs of respect are oftentimes mutual and that rudeness exhibited by one person (in this case a monk) is often returned by similar expressions of rudeness (the way in which the drummer is recounting the story). I thank Jonathan Walters for bringing this to my attention. For a discussion of the special vocabulary used in reference to members of the Buddhist monastic community, see Karunatilake (1979: 4, n. 2).

<sup>21</sup> When I asked another villager, an internationally-renown drummer, about the history of Polgoda Vihāraya, he began by noting, more generally, that “A problem (*praśnaya*) occurred in the village. When they went to observe *sil* at [Sri Kirti Vihāraya], there was a small division among the people. That is why our fathers got together and decided to start a small separate temple.” Having heard the story already from Mr. Dharmadasa, I asked the drummer, quite pointedly, if the problem had to do with caste (*praśnaya kiyannē kula gāna da*). He emphatically responded: “That *indeed* was the very problem (*anna ēka tama praśnaya*). Those were the very reasons that led to the construction of this temple (*anna ē hētu uḍa tamayi, mē paṅsala ārambha karannat*)”

discrimination pertains to the words that the head monk used in censuring the conch-blower and the other members of his group. As indicated in the chart below, Sinhala, unlike English, has several words for the pronoun “you” and its accompanying verbal imperative:<sup>22</sup>

Degree of respect/disrespect	Pronoun “You”	Associated verb (in the imperative)
Very respectful (monks)	Oba vahansē	Vaḍinna, vaḍinna (go, come)
Respectful (M.P.s, and so on)	Obatumā	Yanna, enna (go, come) <sup>23</sup>
Equality (friends)	Oyā, Ohē <sup>24</sup>	Yanna, enna (go, come)
Disrespectful	Umba	Palayan, varen (go, come)
Very disrespectful	Tamusē <sup>25</sup>	Pala, vara (go, come) palayan, varen yanna, enna
Extremely disrespectful	Tō	Pala, vara (go, come); palayan, varen (can also be used)

While some of the pronouns and verbs are considered to be very respectful (such as when addressing a monk [*“oba vahansē”*], a member of parliament [*“obatumā”*], or certain people of respectable professions such as doctors, lawyers, university professors [*“obatumā”*], other forms of the pronoun are not only more informal (like the French “*tu*” or the Sinhalese “*oya*”), but quite demeaning (*umba*, *tamusē*, and *tō*). While it is not uncommon to hear young friends using “*tō*” and “*palayan*” among themselves, or to hear grandparents endearingly address their own children and grandchildren by the pronoun “*umba*,”<sup>26</sup> the same words may be deemed quite inappropriate and disrespectful in other situations. In contexts such as the exchange between the head monk and the *dāyakas*, pronouns such as *tō* and *palayan* may indicate the relative social standing and caste status of each group, a point

*hētava*) . . . . That is why our fathers got together and decided to start a small separate temple. Then, they brought a different [*nikāya*] monk and asked him to stay here.”

<sup>22</sup> These forms are discussed in Chapter 5 of W. S. Karunatillake’s *Sīṅhalabhāṣā Vyākaraṇaya* (1997).

<sup>23</sup> Alternate pronunciations of this form of the imperative are *yaṇḍa* and *eṇḍa* (commonly heard around Colombo), as well as *yaṇṭa* and *eṇṭa* (commonly heard around Kandy). I have not found any indication that the more impolite forms of the imperative verb or pronouns have regional variations.

<sup>24</sup> Ohē is more prominently used in the Southern Province.

<sup>25</sup> While the verbal imperative that oftentimes goes along with the pronoun is *pala* or *palayan*, there is greater flexibility in terms of which verbs may actually be used.

<sup>26</sup> There are regional variations in terms of such pronouns. For instance, in the Southern Province, older parents and grandparents use the word “*tamusē*” as an endearing term for those who are close to them.

that Bryce Ryan (1953:171) makes in his study of caste in modern Sri Lanka.<sup>27</sup>

Looking closely at the dialogue that ensued between the head monk and the conch-blower, we see that when the head monk first inquired why the conch-blower did not show up, for instance, he used *tō* and continued using derivations of the pronoun (*tōpi* and *tōpiṭa*) throughout his rebuke. After hearing the man's response, the head monk ordered the conch-blower out of the temple by saying "Get out" (*palayan*).<sup>28</sup> The poor manner in which the head monk spoke to the conch-blower was made even more evident when contrasted with the way that the monk from Harispattuva addressed the *beravā* elders from Madugama: "what son (*putte mokadda*)?" Finally, the Sri Kirti head monk closed the door on the possibility for the conch-blower to make merit by refusing to eat any *dāna* that he (and possibly other *dāyakas* closely related to him) might bring to the temple.

It may of course be argued that the head monk's offensive speech had less to do with the conch-blower's caste status than it did with his own social and economic standing. While it is certainly true that caste is oftentimes an ambiguous and unstable category in Sri Lanka, the very fact that Mr. Dharmadasa and several other lay Buddhists interpreted

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Ryan (1953: 171) notes that while the term *umba* is a "soft" term used by a Goyigama to, or in reference to, one of the lower caste when the relationship is friendly... or if the lower caste person is wealthy," the term *tō* is used "by a Goyigama to, or in reference to, a low caste person generally... [and] in reference to, or in address to, a Beravāyā [drummer] or Roḍiyā [washer]."

In discussing the caste stratification and overt demarcations during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Lorna Dewaraja (1995: 375 and 379) points out that "The caste system entered into the administration, both secular and ecclesiastical, regulated taxation, determined judicial procedure and governed all social relationships.... An unwritten code of behaviour governed all social relationships between different castes and overt caste symbols were fixed by custom. The length of the lower garment, the right to wear an upper garment, the forms of address, the prefixes and suffixes added to the names were all fixed by social usage" (see also Gombrich [1971: Chapter 8]). This relationship between vocabulary and social status was also noted by Robert Knox (1911: 168) when he wrote that the Sinhalese "have seven or eight words for Thou, or You, which they apply to persons according to their quality, or according as they would honour them" as well as, more recently by Wickramasinghe (2000: 982) who writes that "in the Sinhalese society many such pronouns which indicate the social ranking or respect are used, for example, Obavahanse, tamunnaanse, oyaa, tamuse, umba, too, ban, bolan, etc."

<sup>28</sup> Commenting on the "bad words," Piyasena said: "Due to that problem, his (pointing to another of the *dāyakas* present during the interview) father and my father who were there and who heard the bad words from that monk came and asked me whether we can find a good monk. I told him 'there is a good monk in Atabage.'"

that encounter through a lens of caste discrimination indicates that, *contra* to the popular view that caste no longer matters in contemporary society, caste is still a very emotionally-charged and powerful issue in twenty-first century Sri Lanka.

What is most relevant to our present discussion, however, is not whether the exchange between the head monk and the conch-blower and his group was based on caste or class but, rather, how religious values, hopes, expectations, as well as personal and group histories play a role in temple building and shaping the *saṅgha*. Indeed, unlike Abeysekere's lay Buddhists from Sigiriya who rationalized their continued patronage of "bad" monastics by claiming that they are "worshipping the robe, not the wearer," or by noting that their own ritual needs make them dependent on immoral monks, the situation surrounding the establishment of Polgoda Vihāraya points to the active role that lay people play in locating particular religious experiences. Like the villagers from Uturu Bodhigama, conversations with lay Buddhists from Madugama point to deep felt needs for establishing close ties with monastics who provide emotionally satisfying experiences.

The role that personal and group expectations, histories, and values play in temple patronage is also expressed in my conversations with other Polgoda Vihāraya *dāyakas*, particularly one elder grandmother I interviewed along with her son and his family in their home. When I asked the family who had just sponsored a protection ritual commemorating the death anniversary of the grandmother's husband why they chose to invite monks from the farther Polgoda Vihāraya instead of monks from the nearer Sri Kirti temple, both the head of the household (hereafter called "father") and his mother (hereafter referred to as "grandmother") responded by simply noting that they preferred Polgoda temple. When I asked them why, the grandmother (who was probably in her seventies) and her son (probably in his late forties) provided very different rationales:

Father: The [Polgoda] temple is good. For us, there is no special difference between this one (i.e., Sri Kirti) and that one (i.e., Polgoda). However, we go to Polgoda.

Samuels: *Why do you go there [to Polgoda]?*

Father: From the beginning we started going there. So, we continue going there. As we take alms their on a monthly basis, we got used to of going to that temple.

Grandmother: I have a *dāna* card from Sri Kirti too.<sup>29</sup> On the particular day when I took *dāna* there, the head monk was sweeping the compound. He called me over saying “Get over here! Get over here! You need to give alms (*Mehe varen. Mehe varen. Umbaṭa piṇṇ dende ōna*).” I said to him “Don’t speak to me like that. I don’t like those words.” I didn’t like the way that he spoke to me. Every monk should say “[please] come” (*enna*) and “[please] go” (*yanna*). “COME!” (*varen*) and “GO!” (*palayan*) are ugly (*ketayi*).

Father: There are some monks who speak like that.

Grandmother: We are fed up with that place. [After that] I didn’t feel like going there again. The [Polgoda] monk would never speak like that.

Father: Mother doesn’t know much about those (i.e., Sri Kirti) monks. There is a monk living there whom I know quite well. He too speaks like that saying “*varen*” and “*palayan*.”

Grandmother: It is bad to say “*varen*” [and] “*palayan*.”

Father: There are monks like that.

Grandmother: (In a very angry and sharp voice) It makes no difference whatsoever. They should know how to speak . . . I don’t like it. Mothers like those who speak well.

What I found quite illuminating about this exchange between the father and grandmother is that while the father, who was clearly uncomfortable with my questions, claimed that his patronage of the Polgoda temple was simply because they went “there from the beginning,” the grandmother, who kept two *dāna* cards and continued patronizing both temples until her experience with the Sri Kirti head monk, was more forthcoming about her reasons for shifting her patronage: The way in which the head monk from Sri Kirti treated her. While the son claimed that there was no real difference between the two temples, the grandmother felt otherwise. Hearing “ugly” words such as “*umba*” and “*varen*,” led her to feel “fed up” with Sri Kirti and, as a result, provides her with the needed impetus to shift her patronage.

During another conversation, the same grandmother described further her preference for Polgoda Vihāraya by tying her ideas of proper speech with more general thoughts about the qualities of a good monk:

<sup>29</sup> Usually village temples issue cards to the *dāyakas* that indicate which date, each month, the family is responsible for bringing alms food to the temple. The fact that she was in possession of a *dāna* card from Sri Kirti Vihāraya indicates that she was a recent patron of that temple.

Grandmother: The Sri Kirti monks are not good.

Samuels: *Why?*

Grandmother: We gave alms to them. They don't know how to speak to the public. Not like these monks (i.e., from Polgoda). The monks of Sri Kirti don't know how to speak. They should have respect toward the people, shouldn't they? (*garukaranda minisunṭa unat, nē da*). As a result, I said "I am not going to give *dāna*."

Samuels: Is that right?

Grandmother: That temple (Sri Kirti) is not clean. The head monk who was in the Sri Kirti temple was chased away to Kandy. It is said that he is bad (*honda nātīlu*) . . . .<sup>30</sup> I mostly go there (i.e., to Polgoda Vihāraya) to observe the precepts (*sīl*). I don't go to Sri Kirti. There are seven or eight people around here who go [to Sri Kirti]; however, the majority of the people's hearts/minds are fixed/caught (*hita allanavā*) by the Polgoda temple. That is why.

Samuels: Do you go there because the majority are there?

Grandmother: No. I go because I feel that it is good. That's it. . . . The monk [at Polgoda] teaches us meditation and preaches *baṇa* well. One should go to a place which is good for oneself. Now I feel that Polgoda is good.

Unlike the male *dāyakas* interviewed at Polgoda Vihāraya, this devotee did not mention caste when discussing the factors leading up to her decision to shift her patronage away from Sri Kirti Vihāraya. Instead, temple patronage was more about the place which is, and group of monastics who are, able to catch her *hita*. This devotee's ideas about who constitutes a good monk and ideal ritual performance is also intriguing: "Now, when we invite one monk [for reciting protection verses], four monks come. That's it. It is good, isn't it . . . . Since we feel that [they] are good, we feel happiness when we go there." Rather than being based on an "any traditionally-ordained monk will suffice," attitude, her decision to patronize Polgoda Vihāraya and invite monks from that temple to her home for the protection ritual indicates much wider concerns and needs.

<sup>30</sup> Even though that head monk had been "chased" away to Kandy, Sri Kirti's caste division that led to the establishment of the Polgoda Vihāraya is still present. In fact, when I visited the Sri Kirti temple with my research assistant during the summer of 2004, the younger monks who were staying at the temple at the time immediately asked my research assistant: "Do you have any relative living in this village?" (*mē gama nādāyo inneva da*), a question that both of us interpreted as an attempt of assessing whether or not my assistant is a *beravā* caste member.

Before concluding, I would like to return to a point that Mr. Jayawardhana raised when discussing his decision to establish a temple in Uturu Bodhigama: making merit. Several residents living in Madugama mentioned to me how merit is dependent upon happiness in the heart/mind or based upon experiences that grabs or attracts the heart (*hita ādaganavā*). When I asked one of the male *dāyakas* of Polgoda Vihāraya whether there is any difference in terms of merit earned between bringing *dāna* to Sri Kirti temple and bringing *dāna* to Polgoda Vihāraya, he emphatically replied “yes.” Explaining further, he used an example that was almost identical to Mr. Jayawardhana’s experiences: “Let’s imagine that we have taken *dāna* to the temple. The monks haven’t come to perform *Buddhapūjā*. We would not feel any happiness and, as a result, there would be no merit. Undergoing many hardships, we provide *dāna* in order to get merit. If the monks don’t come, then we would just go there, leave it, and come back. Happiness in the heart is merit (*piṇ kiyaṇṇē hitē satuṭak*); merit does not depend on just going to the Buddha.” Emphasizing this point, he continued: “Imagine that we are fed up. Then that activity will not be correct. Then, there will be no merit.”

The grandmother quoted above replied similarly when I spoke about the differences between Sri Kirti and Polgoda Vihāra. During yet another conversation I had with her and several other female devotees (*upāsikā ammala*) during a *poṃya* day, I brought up the topic of merit-making. When I asked her and two other donors or *dāyakas* specifically how one makes or obtains merit (*piṇ labannē kohomada?*), I received the following response:

First *dāyaka*: If the heart/mind (*hita*) is not happy, then there won’t be any merit.

Grandmother: You need to have happiness in the heart/mind (*hitē santōṣaya*) to get merit. If we give anything with an unhappy *hita*, there would be no merit at all.

Second *dāyaka*: If we give something with happiness, even a little bit, it would be good.

Grandmother: Giving even a little with happiness bears results.

Although the grandmother did not mention merit when I asked her about which temple she patronized, it could nonetheless be argued that this important Buddhist *social* activity is not unrelated to her decision to become a donor of Polgoda Vihāraya. While she noted that her decision to shift her patronage to Polgoda Vihāraya was based on

the way in which she was treated by the head monk at Sri Kirti, other conversations with her about making merit reveal that her experiences at Sri Kirti may also be tied to her ability to earn merit.

### **III. Temple Building and Shifting Patronage: Robes and Rituals in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Sri Lanka**

As previous studies and my own research on Sinhalese Buddhism suggests, conversations about monastics who fail to live up to lay ideals or who covertly and overtly break monastic rules and regulations are quite common within Sri Lankan culture. Although many lay people openly discussing monastic impropriety are clearly dissatisfied with particular monks and temples, several previous anthropological studies have shown that the laity's unhappiness does not necessarily, or even often, result in shifting allegiances or in seeking new expressions of Theravāda monasticism. Indeed, despite their displeasure, most lay people justify their continued support of bad monks by adopting a "worshipping the robe, not the wearer" ideology, or by acknowledging that their own ritual dependency gives them little alternative to supporting *dussīla* monks.

While the "robe, not the wearer" ideology may certainly be found within Sri Lankan society, the two case studies discussed in this article point to a group of lay people who are much more actively involved in locating an encounter with Theravāda monasticism that is believed to be suitable and pleasing. Over and against the more passive lay people that Southwold, Seneviratne, and Abeysekere discuss, conversations with lay devotees from Uturu Bodhigama and Madugama intimate an overarching need for locating monastics who treat them kindly and who please and satisfy their own religious wants and needs. Due to such needs, the laity's religious values and expectations become powerful impetuses for locating pleasurable religious experiences and shifting personal allegiances.

In addition, the two case studies also suggests different ways to understand Buddhist ritual performance. While the interests of Dhammananda's *dāyakas* that Abeysekere discusses are quite narrowly defined—simply having a monastic or group of monastics perform rituals on behalf of the laity—conversations about ritual performance and temple affiliation with lay devotees from Uturu Bodhigama and Madugama point to much wider concerns and needs. Like the laypeople from Sigiriya, the lay devotees from the two upcountry



villages want and need monastics to perform rituals for them and their deceased relatives. However, rather than expressing an “any monk would do” ideology, discussions with the upcountry lay devotees illustrate a need for being pleased with and treated well by the ritual performers. It is this need for locating a group of monastics able to please the laity before, during, and after a Buddhist ritual that forms another powerful force for temple building and temple patronage in contemporary Sri Lanka.

Finally, conversations with the lay devotees from Uturu Bodhigama and Madugama imply very different understandings of merit. While it is certainly the case that devotees from both villages are concerned with making merit, their desire to accumulate merit does not insinuate that “any traditionally ordained monk will suffice.” As the very basis for making merit for many of them is happiness (*satuṭa*) and pleasure (*santōṣaya*) in the heart/mind (*hita*), the laity’s desire for accumulating merit demands that they locate a group of monastics who treat their own lay devotees well by maintaining close and meaningful relationship with them. It is out of this need for merit that the laity’s own hopes, expectations, ideals, and personal histories play a vital and powerful role in shifting monastic allegiances and temple building in twentieth and twenty-first century Sri Lanka.

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