

Ven. Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera Scholar monk par excellence

by *Gopitha Peiris Himbutana*

Ven. Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera was born in 1408 at Dematana, an attractive and fascinating village close to Dedigama in the Kegalle district. He was named in lay life as Jayaba Kumaru. As a result of his mother Keerawelle Kumari, (the elder sister of Queen of Parakramabahu VI) who passed away in the first year of his birth and his father Wickramabahu being ordained after a lapse of two years of his birth, he was taken by family members and well-wishers to the palace of Kotte and was placed under the guardianship of King Parakramabahu the VIth (Siri Perakumba) 1412 - 1467. Having been educated under both, his grandfather Uthurumula Rahula Thera and his uncle Wilgammula Thera, he was ordained according to the Buddhist traditional rituals and was known as Vachissara Rahula Thera (1425). In a short spell of time he procured a profound and wide knowledge in a variety of oriental languages and the following voluminous compositions written by him will adequately bear testimony to his inestimable erudition and intellectuality.

Buddhagajaya 1430, Vurthamala Sandesaya 1435, Paravi Sandesaya 1445, Selalihini Sandesaya 1447, Kawyasekaraya 1449, Panchika Pradeepaya 1457, Buddipasadiniya 1480, Sakaskada and Mawulu Sandesaya.

It is recorded that Ven. Sri Rahula Thera spent his prime of life at Thotagamuwa Temple and on account of this reason he was widely recognized as Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera.

Vijayaba Pirivena of Thotagamuwa in the Galle district served as the most popular centre of learning about nine and half centuries back. Thotagamuwa is a picturesque hamlet adjacent to Hikkaduwa town. King Vijayabahu I (1055 - 1110) was instrumental in inaugurating this extensively acclaimed Vijayaba Pirivena.

It is the presumption of our historians and archaeologists that this edifice would have been a five storeyed building and a dominant institution of education equivalent to a university where diverse subjects were in the curriculum including the Tamil language. It is assumed that this monastery was later renovated and refurbished as a two storeyed structure by King Parakramabahu IV (1302 - 1326).

Ven. Thotagamuwe Sri Rahula Thera succeeded as the chief prelate of the most reputed and renowned Thotagamuwa Vijayaba Pirivena followed by Uthurumula Rahula Thera and Galathurumula Thera.

He was a multi-linguist (Shad Bhasha Parameswara) and a lettered oriental scholar par excellence and was competent in reciting the Thripitaka (the three divisions of the Buddhist scriptures) by rote. Ven. Sri Rahula Thera was also a distinguished author, veteran astrologer and a proficient ayurvedic physician whose reputation pervaded beyond our shores.

Relating to the latter part of his life there are two legendary versions. After rendering an inestimable and monumental contribution at Vijayaba Pirivena he passed away peacefully. On hearing this distressing and agonizing news, the villagers inhabiting around the temple flocked in their thousand to bestow their last homage and rever-

ence.

Fearing a possible transference of this mysterious holy body (supposed to have growing hair and nails) by the Portuguese (1505-1658) to some other locality, the villagers had concealed the mortal remains at Ambana Indurugiri cave close to Elpitiya in the Galle district for safety and security. The second rendition is that he had departed Vijayaba Pirivena and had resided at Obbegoda Temple at Moneragala and Dikwella for a brief period and finally settled down at Ambana Indurugiri cave surrounded by a mammoth woodland at that period (1476). It is in the folk-tale and legend that he was also an exorcist who had decreed demons to execute manual labour work to intensify the protection and security of Ambana cave and the vicinity. In consideration of those facts, it can be assumed that his demise would have taken place during 1491.

After a considerable length of time, on receipt of information about this mysterious and miraculous cadaver, a Portuguese team had approached in search of this grotto and after three unsuccessful attempts, had taken control over the body and had prepared preliminary arrangements to despatch the holy body to Goa in India.

St Francis Xavier who had arrived from Portugal to propagate missionary activities here had participated as the leader of the expedition to shift the body to Goa.

While on the journey he had suffered and attack of dysentery and had passed away. It is supposed that the participants of the expedition cremated him here and had interpreted that the body they were carrying was of St. Francis Xavier. Finally this sacred body had been carried over to Goa and reposed at the Basilica of Bon Jesu.

It is presumed that the venerable monk had consumed some medicament which was prepared by himself (Sidualurasaya or Siddaloka Rasaya) before he breathed his last and as a result it is surmised that his body would remain approximately till the year 4230.

This fact is embodied in the final stanza engraved by him on a sheet of copper before his demise which is depicted below:-

Christians too are in possession of similar legendary and historical factors to prove and establish that this cadaver is of St. Francis Xavier. Hence time is opportune to focus the attention of the officials concerned to get this bone of contention cleared and resolved to ascertain whether this extraordinary mortal remains are of Ven. Sri Rahula Thera or St. Francis Xavier.

This is the space era and it will not be an intricate task or a complicated exercise to establish by the application of modern technology and science whether this prodigious cadaver is of Asian or Western origin.

The conspicuous and significant services rendered by Ven. Sri Rahula Thera especially in the poetical field cannot be characterized in abridged form as it is a herculean task. Particularly the Sinhala Buddhist community owes a deep debt of gratuity to Ven. Sri Rahula Thera for his multifarious and multiplex services.

