

Developments in Recent Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni History

- On 8 December 1996, at the Mahabodhi Society temple in Sarnath, India, Sri Lankan bhikkhus, aided by Korean bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, ordained ten Sri Lankan women. This event heralded the revival of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Sangha.
- In February 1998, at Bodhgaya, India, monastics from Taiwan's Fo Guang Shan monastery held a large, dual-platform ordination that included Mahayana as well as Theravada ordinees from twenty-three countries. Of the 132 women who ordained as bhikkhunis, twenty-one were Sri Lankan women who had been dasa sil matas (ten-precept women).
- On 14 March 1998, Inamaluwe Sumangala Thero organized the ordination of women on Sri Lankan soil, the first such event in over a thousand years. At the Rangiri Dambulla Monastery, in the same hall where men ordain, twenty-two former dasa sil matas ordained. Five senior bhikkhus and the newly ordained Sri Lankan bhikkhunis, who had ordained the previous month in Bodhgaya, performed the ordination.
- Since 1998, bhikkhuni ordinations occur annually in Dambulla, Navagula, and at the Dekanduwala Meditation Centre at Horana. Women can also receive training at the Sakyadhita Training and Meditation Centre in Panadura and at the Ayya Khema Mandir in Colombo, with additional training centers in the planning stage.
- It is estimated there are well over a thousand Sri Lankan bhikkhunis and over two thousand samaneris. Since there is no central registry of ordained women, an exact figure cannot be determined. Additionally, dozens of Sri Lankan women ordain yearly.
- Unlike Sri Lankan bhikkhus and dasa sil matas, Sri Lankan bhikkhunis do not receive any funding from the government for their pirivenas (monastic training centers), which prepare bhikkhunis to sit for the nationwide examination. Bhikkhunis must rely entirely on donations to manage these centers.
- Despite lacking any official recognition from the government or the monks' hierarchy, Sri Lankan bhikkhunis are now routinely invited to participate in religious services, serve as Dhamma teachers and counselors, give meditation instruction, and are accepted by the monks and supported by the laity in their communities.

—Susan Pembroke

*See also “In the Company of Spiritual Friends: Sri Lanka’s Buddhist Nuns”
by Susanne Mrozik in the Summer 2011 issue of Present, and the 2008 article
“Contemporary Bhikkuni Ordination in Sri Lanka” by Ayya Sobhana Bhikkhuni.*