

# Bināra poya - Poṭṭhapāda uposatha

(September)

## Month of Bināra poya

According to astrology the sun travels in the house of Virgo in Bināra. This month is one of the four in the rainy season. The vegetation wet and clean in the rain adds beauty to the nature. As if to help farmers to prepare their fields and lands to sow seeds, the earth soaked with water becomes soft. Rivers, streams, lakes and ponds filled with water cool the nature around. In the field of agriculture Bināra is the month when farmers prepare their land specially to plant yams.



## Tapassu and Bhalluka

Bināra *poya* is especially important to Buddhist history as the holy hair handed over to the pilgrims Tapassu and Bhalluka by the Buddha is enshrined in the Dageba of Girihadu temple. This temple holds its special holy festival on Bināra *poya*. These two brothers Tapassu and Bhalluka are the first devotees who took refuge in the Buddha. Then there were no monks in the *sāsana*. When living in the soothing cool, natural surrounding with a peaceful mind to think of merits and demerits is the nature of one's mind. This benevolent nature of one's mind becomes better when one believes in a good religion.

In those days, the people from Orissa (Ukkala, Utkala) who had gone to reside at the mouth of Irāvati river of Myanmar built a city and named it Ukkala in the memory of their own land. Businessmen from many different parts of India settled in Ukkala. Tapussa and Bhallika, two brothers, also lived there. But they were from Balhik, known today as Balakha, which is 18 km to the west of Afghanistan's Majār-e-shareef.

When the Buddha attained enlightenment, Ukkalapati was the king of Ukkala. Tapussa and Bhallika both did business there. Both traveled to India and back from Ukkala for their business. Their goods brought to Tamralipti from Myanmar via the sea were loaded on 500 carts to be sold in India. While passing through the Uruvela jungle, they had met the Buddha. At that time, the Buddha had just spent seven weeks in the blissful state of liberation and was seated under the Rajāyatana tree, close to the Bodhi tree. Both



*Businessmen Tapussa and Bhallika offering the Buddha rice and honey cakes from Myanmar. This was the first meal taken by the Buddha after enlightenment.*



offered him rice and honey cakes from Myanmar. This was the first meal taken by the Buddha after enlightenment. They received eight hair tufts from the Buddha and returned to Ukkala. King Ukkalapati enshrined these hair relics respectfully in the Botahtaung, Sule and Shwe Dagon stupas, which are revered by people to this day.

Tapussa and Bhallika took the five precepts from the Buddha at that time but did not hear any discourse. (The Buddha gave his first discourse in the Deer Park at Vāranaśī.) After enshrining the hair relics of the Buddha in Ukkala, Tapussa and Bhallika again returned to the country of Magadha and received the teachings from the Buddha. Bhallika took robes and reached the stage of arahathood. Tapussa reached the stage of *sotāpanna*, remained a householder and continued his business. He developed in the Dhamma and served many others. The Buddha gave both the brothers the title of being 'the foremost' (*agga*). It is believed that these two gave a few hair relics of the Buddha to Myanmar and kept the remaining few to themselves so that they could construct a monument (stupa) and meditate there. They wanted both their motherland and adapted land to be blessed with the valuable gift of the Buddha. Therefore, they went to Balakha (Bāhallika, Bhallika) the land of their ancestors in the north.

These two brothers were born in a small town named Asitanjana near Balakha. After going there, close to the main gate of the town, they constructed a huge pagoda (*stupa*) and respectfully enshrined the hair relics there. Blessed are Tapussa and Bhallika, who were instrumental in building stupas and enshrining the hair relics in both the eastern and the western neighboring countries of India.

In the rainy season human mind becomes soft (if there is no flood or any other danger) A *bhikkhu's* mind is the same. The Buddha had advised the *bhikkhus* to train Soma Jayakody the mind for meditation and the teaching of the doctrine in this season. *Kamathāna* or topic for the meditation had been given to suit the mind of each *bhikkhu* and induced them to understand the direct Path to *Nibbāna*.

During the *vassāna* season A *bhikkhu* should develop his inner liberation. *Bhikkhus* got used to sew and darn the limited robes they had previously used, during this season when they stayed in one place. This sewing laid the foundation to the great festival of *Kaṭhina*; at the end of rainy season. Robes worn by monks become old, faded and soiled during the rainy season. Buddhists of the whole island are keen on offering new robes to the Saṅgha. They are of opinion that donating robes is a great meritorious deed.



## Establishment of bhikkhunī Saṅgha

The most important happening on Bināra Poya day was the admission of Nuns to the *Sāsana* or founding of the *Bhikkhunī* Order. When we talk about women's emancipation, we cannot forget the two thousand five-hundred-year-old histories of the Buddhist era.

That is why all Buddhist countries, including Sri Lanka, celebrate this day as a significant day. This day is specifically important for women. Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, the



stepmother of Prince Siddhartha, together with the other 500 royal family mistresses, urged Lord Buddha to ordain them as *bhikkhunīs*. After some reluctance initially, the Buddha consented to their request, and it took place in the fifth year of Enlightenment.

The facts for this incident were as follows. While Buddhism spread very fast at this period, many people understood the Dhamma, and the *bhikkhu* order flourished with the ordination of the male party. But as there was no *Bhikkhunī* ordination, women did not have the opportunity to be Ordained. This phenomenon brought about outside unrest among women. They were worried about this situation and then, after discussing it with The Queen Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, came up with the idea of getting them ordained. Therefore, those 500 women with queen Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī, on a full moon Poya day, visited The Lord Buddha and urge that they would like to get ordained as *Bhikkhunīs*. But, without answering them, The Buddha kept silent for the first, second, and third times when the same request was made without any avail of their request.

Later again, queen Mahā Pajāpatī Gotamī accompanied by 500 grieving women, since their husbands had already been ordained, having shaved their heads and wearing yellow robes, went to Visala Mahānuwara to request the relevant matter to The Lord Buddha. After much thought and consideration over this request, The Buddha allowed the women to get ordained as *Bhikkhunīs*, after laying down eight rules (eight *Garudhamma*) and regulations for them to abide by. After obtaining the approval to get ordained as *Bhikkhunīs*, many women subjected to misogyny and oppressed by men were allowed to get rid of such stigma.



Another holy festival held on the Bināra poya day is the annual celebration of Soma Jayakody the Maṅgala Mahā Seya of Seruvavila. It is believed that Lord Buddha's *Lala ta Dātu* is enshrined in the Mahā Seya. In the same way annual Buddhist perahera of the royal temple of Mahiyangana is also related to the Bināra poya day.