

Podi Hamuduruwo: On the path of virtue

Posted on



Ordained at the age of 10, the Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple, Ven Galaboda Gnanissara Thero continues a legacy that has spanned decades. 'Podi Hamuduruwo', has long been known to uphold the temple as one that transcends divisive boundaries of society and faiths. It remains true to its values, all the while committing to endeavours that nourish the spiritual, social and cultural aspects of the country.



The year is 1954, a time when the temple precinct was accessed by boat as the Beira Lake submerged much of the roads and lands. A young boy from Galaboda Matara is ordained at the temple and begins his education as a monk. As early as 16 years of age Podi Hamuduruwo shoulders the responsibilities of the temple as the Chief Incumbent Ven Vacissara Thero is afflicted with an illness that leaves him blind.





While the temple flourishes, gaining a diverse flow of devotees, the eclectic aesthetics that adorn temple structures are representative of a universal approach. In 1979 non-Buddhist devotees, the Moosajee family, built the picturesque Seema Malaka upon the Beira Lake. It remains as a testimony to the Thero's all encompassing doctrine. The Seema Malaka was built to hold ordination ceremonies and special religious observances.



December 31st, which was usually a night of drinking and dancing for youngsters, where exorbitant sums were spent as entrance fees for clubs and venues, was transformed into a night of blessings and merit by Podi Hamuduruwo. In the

early 1980s, following a tragic incident that occurred due to an accident caused by a 16 year old driving under the influence, Podi Hamuduruwo thought of ways to change the culture of clubbing and drinking that had taken root with the open economy. Initially, sweetmeats and blessed coins were given to the devotees coming to the temple on 31st night. However, since only few people would come, Podi Hamuduruwo placed an advertisement to announce the initiative. From that day forth, all Buddhist temples, churches, Hindu kovils and mosques conduct ceremonies and parents were able to take their children to a religious place to receive blessings and earn merit at the eve of the new year. Families were able to avoid spending unnecessarily and save money. This is another commendable service by Podi Hamuduruwo to society and the entire country.



The Sri Jinaratana Vocational Training Centre at Sir James Peiris Mawatha

During youth unrest in the early 1970s Podi Hamuduruwo established the vocational training centre to steer youngsters on to the right path. The centre provides them with necessary skills and tools so that they may aspire to a gainful future. It has ensured employment to as many as 4,000 youngsters to date.



Traditional drum performance at the Nawam Perahera

In 1979 the Nawam Perahera, the annual cultural pageant of the temple, takes root and each year flourishes under the resourceful guidance of Podi Hamuduruwo. Hundreds of artisans return to their cultural roots motivated by a platform afforded by the cultural pageant as it provides due recognition and in turn a revival of fading traditions. The pageant also represents a diverse procession representing different faiths and beliefs.



Podi Hamuduruwo's renown reaches across the oceans establishing long standing cordial relations with many foreign temples. As a result of such an affiliation, the Sacred Hair Relic of Lord Buddha is offered to Gangaramaya, a gesture of benevolence by a temple in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The Sacred Hair Relic arrives at the temple premises to mark the 2,600th Sambuddhatva Jayanthi.



Sacred Hair Relics of Lord Buddha placed at Gangaramaya Temple

With resourceful foresight Podi Hamuduruwo has been instrumental in reinstating the Pinda Patha among the clergy - the practice of carrying alms bowls to seek alms from lay people. The dearth of good quality alms bowls had led to the decline of this practice. Each year the Thero imports stainless steel alms bowls in the tens of thousands to distribute among rural temples in a religious ceremony.



Due to his unfailing forthrightness and ability to administer sound advice at pivotal moments, many arrive at the temple, from political leaders, business magnates to regular devotees in search of blessings, guidance and direction.



Philanthropy and spiritual and social upliftment endeavours go hand in hand with the religious practices that the temple engages in. The numerous programmes and projects that the Thero initiated and maintained, serve the needy, unemployed, elderly and orphaned as well as filling voids in infrastructure needs for pilgrims and visiting monks. These measures contribute towards the greater welfare of society while instilling a sense of responsibility among communities.



Suhada Nivasa-the children's orphanage in Kotte

Preserving culture and heritage remains an instinctive role of the temple. The extensive museum and the art gallery within the temple premises are resounding examples. The museum is a voluminous expanse of valuable artefacts from both Sri Lanka and overseas, donated to the temple. They include priceless relics, antiquities, Buddha statues and volumes of ola leaf manuscripts. The art gallery displays temple art reproduced from archaeological sites so that the public have access to an immense cultural heritage.



The museum with a large collection of valuables and antiques

As Podi Hamuduruwo commemorates his birthday this December 14, a look back on his exemplary journey and his continuous endeavours and commitment to meaningful causes reiterates a legacy of merit and purpose.

