Podi Hamuduruwo: Setting an Example

Posted on



The spiritual environment of the Seemamalakaya upon the Beira Lake
Photo credit: Menaka Aravinda
Ven Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Chief Incumbent of Gangaramaya Temple, fondly known as Podi Hamuduruwo is a pillar of strength to the nation
Photo credit: Menaka Aravinda

The Hunupitiya Gangaramaya Temple in Colombo has since the late 1800s been a pillar of strength to the nation. The Chief Incumbents of the Temple have always been strong and vocal, ensuring that the right decisions are made for the people of the country. The Temple has always been a sanctuary for all religions and communities. Ven Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple continues to set the example, always remaining true to the beginnings of the Temple.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe

Ven Galboda Gnanissara Thero, affectionately known as Podi Hamuduruwo was ordained in 1954 at the age of 10. Born on December 14, 1943, with his birthday approaching, Podi Hamuduruwo reflects on the spiritual and social service done by the Temple over the years and the projects presently in progress.

“Since 1870, the Gangaramaya Temple in Colombo has strived to provide vocational training to the youth of the country that included printing and publishing. We have created programmes to promote peace and harmony in the country while working towards the betterment of all Sri Lankans regardless of their religion, ethnicity, creed, background and income,” explained the Venerable Thero. Appreciating the exposure provided by Explore Sri Lanka, Podi Hamuduruwo elaborated that the publicity provided the opportunity for people to know about the work and programmes offered by the Temple and its Jinarathana Vocational Training Institute; “For the past 30 years, Mr Mathi K Parthipan has always given special attention to the Gangaramaya Temple. As a result, youth and children of all religions and ethnicities have come together, and received vocational training and pursued English education.”

The Jinarathana Vocational Training Institute was one of the first private institutions to introduce the Diploma in English, which received Government recognition. By following this course many individuals were able to learn through example to work with discipline, continence and unity, and work in a timely manner with humility towards success. The Venerable Thero further explained that the first audio-visual language learning platform was introduced to Sri Lanka by the Gangaramaya Temple, as no other university or educational institute used this technique.

“I brought this learning technique to the country in 1976, after a visit to England,” Podi Hamuduruwo further added, “the audio-visual learning technique was not introduced to Sri Lanka by the Europeans. In Sri Lanka, especially in Buddhist places of worship, paintings illustrate the walls, these are visuals. Then a monk or an educated person would explain the story, which is audio, while illustrating with the murals. This was also followed in Hindu Kovils and Churches. Therefore, we already had this learning technique in the country.”

The first vocational training programmes on electronic media were also introduced by the Gangaramaya Temple. Podi Hamuduruwo elaborated that the original staff firstly at ITN, and then thereafter at TNL, which were both started by Shan

Wickremesinghe, were those who had been trained at the Audio Visual and Video Units of the Temple.

> The World Peace Association together with the Gangaramaya Temple and the Kalutara Bodhi Trust will be organising a ceremony to invoke blessings on our Motherland and the World on January 1, 2019, from 5pm to 7pm at the Seemamalakaya.

The Venerable Thero reflected that there were many who had received their vocational training from the institute and were doing well in their careers. Another endeavour introduced by the Temple long years ago, is the protection of the environment, which has become a much spoken about topic today. The concept of ‘tree banks’, where a tree planting programme was initiated by the Temple. “Even today, if you walk through the temple grounds you will see plant nurseries. In addition to creating awareness, Gangaramaya led through practical example. By donating equipment such as mammoties to other temples in villages, we created a culture, where those who were unable to afford tools, could borrow the tools and return them after use. We donated plants and seeds.We did not merely speak about issues, we took action,” asserted Podi Hamuduruwo. The first ‘tissue culture’ project was also initiated by Podi Hamuduruwo after seeing a potato variety that was the size of a pumpkin in Japan. Though the first attempt failed, the Venerable Thero persevered and provided guidance and thus the endeavour resulted in success.

Podi Hamuduruwo emulates the teachings of the Buddha
Photo credit: Menaka Aravinda

Podi Hamuduruwo is very strong on his stance regarding the provision of education for children, and the importance of private higher education institutes in the country. As the Government cannot support the requirement and precious funds leave the country as many opt to study overseas. The Venerable Thero further elaborates that the many programmes of the Jinarathana Vocational Training Institute provided opportunities to the youth, yet its expansion was hindered as those who receive training at temples, churches/mosques and kovils or any similar religious institution do not offer due credit to these institutions. “If people who studied at the Gangaramaya Temple spoke up, you would find institutes in every village, town and every province in Sri Lanka”.

With the approach of December, many initiatives are in progress and will be declared open on Podi Hamuduruwo’s birthday on December 14 this year. A Sakman Maluwa, where devotees can engage in the Sakman Bawanawa, has been created at the Temple where a specific path has been placed starting from the Bodhi Tree and along a corridor with statues of the Buddha in Samadhi posture. Further, a 52 perch land in Piliyandala together with a three-storey building was donated by Priyan Attygalle and his wife in memory of their son, this has been developed to provide educational programmes in selected subjects together with English and computer skills to young children who have left school, so that they will have employment opportunities. Programmes in yoga and counselling too will be provided at these premises.

A 50-acre land in Nuganda Watte in Ingiriya was donated by the family of Parakrama Fernando. They are from the same family as the Badrawathi Charitable Trust that donated the 1,000 acre estate known as the Urumuththa Watte in Akuressa. The Ingiriya land has been gifted to the Bhikshu Abyasa Vidyalaya. Similar to the three acre property in Kalalgoda, Pannipitiya, which was donated by an aunt of Prof Maithree Wickramasinghe, wife of Ranil Wickremesinghe, where a Vipassana Meditation Centre has been established, the Ingiriya property too will be developed to provide facilities for meditation. Presently in Kalalgoda, both Sri Lankans and foreign visitors participate in meditation programmes and facilities for accommodation are provided as well. The property in Ingiriya will be a larger extension of the Vipassana Meditation Centre where facilities will be developed so that a greater number of people can be accommodated. This will be an important place for foreign visitors to seek spirituality. The aim is to complete the project in time for Podi Hamuduruwo’s birthday. Ven Galboda Gnanissara Thero is always thinking ahead. He has a heart full of kindness that has transcended to great service to society. Podi Hamuduruwo sets the example for all to follow.

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