

The Nunneries in Yangon (I)



Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon

Dear MIA Supporters and Friends

First of all, I want to thank you most sincerely for your steady and generous support over all these years. Due to your generosity MIA has been able to provide substantial financial resources to many nunneries, monastic schools, refugees (IDP, Internally Displaced People), and individuals.

This year, Carol and Greg were also able to come to Myanmar. Together with our Burmese friend Mimmi, we visited all the nunneries and monastic schools that MIA has been supporting for many years already. Each encounter with the nuns, the head nuns and the smaller nuns, was like meeting with friends. And the refugees from the village of Thaleba were like family members we had not seen in a long time. (Thaleba is Sayadaw U Indaka's native village where we have supported many projects to improve the infrastructure, education, and medical care. Four years ago, the village was attacked, and most of the villagers had to flee. Many of them found refuge in one of Sayadaw's meditation centers.)

As usual, we stayed at the meditation center on the outskirts of Yangon, where Sayadaw U Indaka provided invaluable support in our work.

Despite the difficulties faced by all Burmese people, monastics and laypeople alike, we were truly heartened to see that all the nunneries and monastic schools are still functioning, doing the best they can. Money is very tight, inflation is rampant, and at times food is not abundant, yet people seem remarkably resilient against the odds of their economic and political circumstances.

The nunneries in Laydaungkan, a neighbourhood at the outskirts of Yangon

I have selected some of the nunneries in this area to give you an idea of the living conditions and challenges they have to deal with.

Chanmyay Tharyar Nunnery



The old bamboo nunnery replaced by this brick building

Daw Rupa Singhi is the abbess of the nunnery and is now 51 years old. She came here 20 years ago and established a small nunnery in a simple bamboo hut, which was badly damaged during Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Later she was able to build a two-story brick building large enough for all the nuns.

Some years ago, as the number of the nuns was increasing, she has started to build another two-story building. It is a slow process dependent on the dāna (donations) she receives. But little by little the building is taking shape; now a wooden floor is needed so the nuns can live there.



The new building under construction

The small road going out to the road to the Shwe U Min Meditation Center has been blocked a few years ago. Although access to the nunnery is somewhat more



Left: Daw Rupa Singhi. Above: inside the new building

difficult, Daw Rupa Singhi says this makes the area safer and more peaceful.

Laputta Nunnery

Daw Uttara is the elder of the two sisters running the nunnery. Besides caring for the young nuns, she studies Buddhist scriptures. However, she suffers from some tensions in the head that make it difficult for her to sit down and memorize large portions of texts. This is the traditional way of studying in Myanmar.

Daw Uttama, the younger sister, does not look very healthy. She struggles with several health problems.



From left to right: Daw Uttama, Daw Uttara, three young nuns

There are 27 nuns and one young girl. Many of them were sick during our visit. It looked as if they had measles or chickenpox.

The young nuns have switched from the Zaloon Monastic School to the newly opened Saranagonyee Monastic School. This is mainly because Zaloon is quite far away and the nuns are at school until 5 pm. Daw Uttara does not feel comfortable with them walking home late in the afternoon, when it gets dark.

On their alms round twice a week, they mainly get money and some rice. Since it is not enough, they go to Laputta, their hometown in the Irrawaddy Delta, to receive rice from their

family and generous donors. Last year, they got 35 bags of rice. They would like to buy a car for going on alms round. The buses do not want to stop for the young nuns because they do not have to pay, and so the buses do not get money from them. To rent a car for the day is 140'000 Kyats (about 30 Euros), both ways. This is a considerable sum for them. Another concern is that some of the young nuns belong to the Shan or Pa-O ethnic groups and speak little Burmese. If they get lost on their alms rounds, they might not be able to communicate well enough to find their way back to the nunnery.



One has to look serious on a picture!

Mingalagonwei Nunnery



All the nuns, plus Mimmi, Ariya, Greg & Carol



Saying good-bye

Daw Obasi, the abbess, was so delighted by our visit that she jumped up and down with joy! This is a rare expression of joy and happiness for a monastic in Myanmar.



The new building

The second floor of the new building is ‘on its way’, as Daw Obhasi said. The roof and walls are finished, but the windows, doors, and wooden floor are still missing. Having received the MIA donation, she can continue the construction and hopefully soon finish the building.

There are 20 nuns, most of whom belong to the Pa-O ethnic group in Shan State. Some attend the Appamada, others the Zaloon Monastic School (both supported by MIA). Daw Obhasi teaches Pāli to the nuns.

All the nuns go on alms round, even the youngest who is only 7. They rent a car to drive into Yangon, near the Shwedagon Pagoda. If have collected too much rice to carry home, they sell it. In this way, they receive almost 200’000 Kyats (43 Euros) in a day. A devotee in Yangon offers them breakfast before they start going for alms. For lunch, they bring a tiffin box. Because Daw Obasi’s knees hurt, she rarely goes along on alms round.



Many of the head nuns have invited us to lunch at their nunnery to express their gratitude for our support. It would be impossible for us to accept every invitation – we would need another two weeks to have lunch at every nunnery or monastic school. Nevertheless, we accept several invitations each year.

The nuns prepare a feast with so many different curries and a wide selection of various desserts. It is almost impossible to try every curry or

dessert. At least we know that the remaining food goes to the nuns!



Above & left: Mimmi, Ariya, Kyaw Soe, main dishes & desserts. Below: The young nuns eating at the table



Chanmyaygonyee Nunnery



The construction site in January and March 2026

The new building under construction started last November. During our visit in January, many workers were busy laying the foundations. According to the plans, it will be a four-story building with living quarters. With 44 nuns, the current building is very cramped, they all have to sleep together in the large common rooms.



The plan for the new building

Over 30 of the young nuns go to Zaloon, some to Paññasingi Monastic School.

They are fortunate to have a small pick-up truck – 38 nuns fit into the car! – to take the nuns into Yangon for alms round. The driver receives 25'000 Kyats (5.3 Euros) per day. They get about 12 to 13 viss of rice (about 44 kg) and bring it back to the nunnery. In addition, they get around 700'000 Kyats

(150 Euros) in cash. However, this is not enough to feed all the 44 nuns. They need 9 viss a day eating rice and curries for breakfast and lunch. Twice a week, they eat meat.

Daw Gandhama Siri, the abbess, has a calm and peaceful demeanour and takes her duty to care for the nuns seriously. She has this unwavering confidence, common to many of the nuns we know, that everything will be alright. With patience and perseverance, she ensures that the nuns entrusted to her receive a good secular and spiritual education.



Some of the nuns in front of their shrine



Small children are naturally included in offering the dāna

Sukhacari Nunnery

Daw Aye Cari and her sister Daw Tejavati care for 70 young nuns who go to the Zaloon Monastic School. To improve the facilities and create more space for the nuns, they are building a new kitchen and planning to construct a new building.



The chimney from the rice steamer



The rice steamer



The stoves and rice steamer in the new kitchen

Fortunately, they own a large plot of land with a huge Bodhi tree and a Buddha Statue beneath it. In the space between the Bodhi tree and the existing building, they intend to construct a three-story building with a meditation hall and living quarters.

Daw Aye Cari told us a story about eight nuns who wanted to visit their families near the Chinese border. A few monks accompanied them. On their way home, the monks and about twenty other cars were stopped by armed robbers who stole their bank cards.

During the last rainy season, many nuns got sick. Three of them had to be hospitalized for various ailments. This cost them 2'700'000 kyat (575 Euros). They received 1'000'000 kyat back from their parents.

To the question, if they have enough, she replied that she was managing to make ends meet. This means that they do not actually have enough but rather have to set priorities and wait for better times and further donations.



The plan for the new building



Daw Aye Cari and Daw Tejavati explaining the plan for the new building



Mora, Carol, Daw Aye Cari, Daw Tejavati, Ariya, Ma Kaing & her daughter



The nuns are memorizing their texts

Mya Thita Oo Nunnery

This nunnery never fails to impress us with its impeccable facilities, cleanliness, and order throughout the entire property. Daw Sucari, the abbess, is not as outgoing as other nuns, but she is wholeheartedly committed to provide excellent conditions for her nuns.



The dining area

Last year they were able to connect to the government water system, which was a great relief as their old well was no longer good. They receive sufficient rice and cash on their alms round. However, they want to replace the old, cracked floor in the room adjacent to the main room.

As she showed us around the grounds, she pointed out that they collect rainwater in the gutters and use it for bathing.

When we were commenting on the cleanliness, she explained that during her time in the study monastery, they had to clean every week, and this had become a habit. The 15 nuns are organized into five cleaning groups, each responsible for a specific area of the nunnery. The groups rotate weekly, cleaning a different area.



The water meter for the government water supply



Bathing room



Drying space



Kitchen



Washing up area



Second from left: Daw Sucari

It is a pity that you cannot hear the dedication and sharing of merits from the nuns after offering the dāna. It always brought a deep sense of satisfaction and great joy when the nuns chanted with such fervour.

May all the donors be healthy and well.

May all the donors be happy and peaceful.

May all the donors become fully liberated and attain to nibbāna.

Ariya Baumann
April 2026