

## *Nunneries & Monastic Schools*



*The **Shwechanda Nunnery** as we got to know it in 2010 (left) and this year in 2024 (middle). Daw Suchanda with some of her nuns in front of the beautiful shrine (right, above). They had a main sponsor from Yangon for the new three-story building.*

Despite the ongoing difficulties and the deteriorating conditions in this country (unfortunately, I cannot go into details), the nuns not only continue to teach, study, and practise the Dhamma, but also engage in social and community work. When I visited the various nunneries, they said that it was not easy to get enough food these days. But of course, this is the most important thing to keep going. The nuns still go out for alms twice a week as usual, but they get less rice and money than before the Covid outbreak and the abrupt change in the country's political landscape. To the question if they have enough food, a couple of nuns said that they buy cheap food and eat moderately – which I interpreted to mean: they do not really have enough to eat, they cannot eat until they are full. Daw Nipuna from Paññayaungkyi Nunnery said that they only serve meat or fish twice a week. Burmese people, including nuns and monks, are usually not vegetarian. As I have learned in my many years of staying in this country to eat vegetarian is like a punishment for the Burmese!



In **Mya Thita Oo Nunnery** they have a well-tended little vegetable garden. As always, their place was spic and span. They built a spacious shower area and an adjacent room for drying their laundry, both of them with a roof.



In three of the nunneries we support, the head-nuns legally **adopted orphans** during the past year.

In the **Sasanarmasi Nunnery** they have two adopted girls. The three and a half years old has already been ordained as a nun. Her father died, and the young mother was unable to care for her baby. If she went working to earn the much-needed money, there was no one to take care of the little girl. And, if the mother was to remarry, to bring a child into the marriage would be a problem. The father of the younger, one-year-old girl drowned in the sea. The mother could not look after all six children and, therefore, she gave away the smallest one.



*The plaques are an essential part of each dāna*







*Daw Uttara with the orphan and the abbess Daw Uttama*

At the **Laputta Nunnery** they have one baby orphan who is now nine months old. Her mother died in childbirth. The father could not deal with the loss of his wife and started drinking – he drank himself to death. A friend from Mingun called the nuns and asked if they would adopt the two-month-old baby. The younger sister of the abbess is mostly taking care of the little girl, being her foster-mother. To feed the baby they have to buy milk powder which is very expensive.



The adopted orphan at **Kyesinaye Nunnery** (picture on right side) is one and a half years old. The father is in jail, having dealt with drugs, and the mother ran away. A neighbour asked the nuns to adopt the girl. She only arrived at the nunnery twenty days before we visited. She was very shy and started crying as soon as I got too close to her.



Daw Obhasi of **Mingalagonwei Nunnery** is struggling with a poorly constructed upper floor of her new building. In the rainy season, it leaks because there is no roof yet, and water drips on the ground floor. To have a roof, at least a temporary roof, is essential to stay dry during the rainy season starting in June.



A young nun at the **Sukhacari Nunnery** had a car accident a few years ago while they were on alms round. She had to go the hospital and got the necessary medical treatment. However, she has difficulty learning since then. There is a washing machine at the nunnery, but all the 91 nuns have to wash their own clothes. Only for the very young nuns the elder nuns do it. They told us that with the washing machine the clothes do not really get clean (the machines only have cold programs). But more importantly, they said, the nuns should learn to do these things themselves. However, they use the washing machine to spin the laundry.





Daw Rupa, the abbess of the **Chanmyay Tharyar Nunnery**, was beaming when we arrived. Although it is a great responsibility to take care of her 25 nuns, she is happy to do it. During the first wave of Covid, they locked the gate and all the nuns, except Daw Rupa and her assistant, stayed inside the nunnery. Nobody got sick. During the second wave of Covid, one nun got Covid and everyone else got sick too. At that time, Daw Rupa's mother came and looked after the nuns, doing the cooking and everything else. Daw Rupa said that we from MIA are like her Sasana mother, meaning that MIA is her Dhamma mother.

The village of **Nwe Kwe** is located at the northern outskirts of Yangon and is home to a cluster of many nunneries, having between 2 and 35 nuns. Since our support began, we have been impressed by the sense of community in these nunneries. They view the other nunneries not as rivals, but as Dhamma sisters with the same basic goal of creating supportive conditions for the nuns; especially for the young nuns who go to school. They take care of each other and tell us what the others need, in case the abbess is too shy to tell us directly. It usually takes a whole afternoon to make the round in these 7 nunneries and see the improvements made since the previous year. At each nunnery, we had to sit at a table full of various fruits, lapet (pickled tea leaves with fried beans, a traditional Burmese snack) and tea. Their hospitality, as in ALL nunneries, is without equal.

Over the years, all the nunneries have been able to build solid buildings; the nuns no longer live in shabby bamboo huts or slanting wooden buildings. In this way, the living conditions of the mostly young nuns have improved immensely, including bath rooms and toilets. For example: look at the transformation of the **Shwechanda Nunnery** on the pictures on page 1. Or below, the transformation of the **Paññayaungkyi Nunnery**.



*Paññayaungkyi Nunnery in 2010*



*..... and in 2024*



*A heartfelt welcome*



*The new kitchen and bathing area at the Shwechanda Nunnery (left), and the joy of offering (right)*







**Daw Dhamma Nandi** is now 87 years old and is becoming increasingly frail. At the age of twelve, her daughter, who is slightly disabled, ordained to take care of her mother. Since 17 years they live in their tiny building in the village of Nwe Kwe, embedded in the community of seven other nunneries.

The two nuns cannot go on proper alms round, they just do a short

walk in the village. The mother said that when they lack something, things often come out of the blue. She spends her days meditating, reciting prayers, and offering rice to monks on alms round.

### Monastic Schools and Nunneries

Daw Paññasiri is the abbess of the **Chanmyavati Monastic School and Nunnery**, assisted by Daw Kesara. They have been a good and able team for many years with a clear vision for their 46 nuns and for the monastic school with 6 employed teachers and 280 students. A good secular and spiritual education is the foundation for a virtuous and compassionate life. The two nuns embody these qualities by tirelessly working to provide food, shelter, clothing, and education in a caring and disciplined way. A little while ago, they only had three bags of rice left (1 bag lasts for three days). They started to worry that they would soon run out of rice, so they decided to only make rice porridge for breakfast to save on rice. Just on that day they received a large dāna of rice and oil worth 2.5 million Kyats. It came from a local bank who heard of this nunnery and decided to give them the dāna.



*The new building, replacing an old wooden building*



*In front of the Buddha Statue*



*Offering fruits, cakes, coffee to us Daw Paññasiri, Daw Kesara*

The **Zaloon Parahita School and Nunnery** is teeming with many kids from KG to Grade 9, in total there are 627 students and 14 teachers. To accommodate all the students, they recently built a two-story building. The school is open from 11.30 – 17.00 hours, the children have already eaten at home or in their nunnery/monastery before coming to school.

Daw Aye Singhi, the abbess, was not as exuberant as in previous years because she was diagnosed with breast cancer in December. Fortunately, it is still in its early stages. She is now receiving chemo therapy. When I saw her again in late February, she had undergone two rounds

of chemo, feeling a bit weak and unable to eat much. Daw Aye Singhi expressed her gratitude for the many years of financial support, for the school and for herself. She said that MIA is offering her ‘life’. To express her immense gratitude for this life-saving support, she had had another surgery a few years ago, she wanted to bow to me. I objected strongly because it is not appropriate for a nun to bow to a lay person. On our second meeting I could not hold her back any longer and let her gracefully do her bows – which are also meant for *each of you* who support the MIA projects.



*The new building*



*In the class rooms*



*Offering to Daw Aye Singhi*



*Chart of students*



*These girls are proud to wear a uniform*



*Daw Aye Singhi and a teacher*

The **Paññasinghi Monastic School and Nunnery** has 250 students, 6 teachers, and 50 resident nuns. Here, the school is open from 10.00 – 15.00 hours, and the kids bring their tiffin box with lunch. Some children come empty-handed (the families being very poor), but they receive lunch from the nunnery. This means no child stays hungry after the lunch break.



When I visited the **Appamada Monastic School and Nunnery**, there was no the school and the nuns were out on alms round. Daw Sumana’s sister and assistant received the MIA dāna. There are 212 students from KG to Grade 5, 8 teachers, and 20 resident nuns. The teachers were students of the Appamada Monastic School, after their teacher training they came back to be teachers at the school that had provided their education (see picture on the left).

Each year, they organise an ‘End-of-School-Year Celebration’ for the parents with songs, dances, and skits.





*End-of-School-Year Celebration at Appamada Monastic School*

This is one of the many plaques found in many of the monastic schools and nunneries supported by MIA. When we make the offering, we always emphasize the fact that the donation comes from so many people from around the world and that we who offer the dāna are only the conduit for this beautiful and open-hearted generosity. When receiving the donation, the nuns chant a blessing, dedicating, and sharing the merits with all donors – including YOU – and all living beings. This is such a joyful occasion: for the nuns who receive much needed support, for us who are able to provide this support, and for everyone who witnesses the offering.



May you and all living beings be safe and protected, happy and peaceful.

With mettā

Ariya Baumann, March 2024