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Studying the *Wāhāla Nāgā* ritual, Practised in the Siam *Upasampadā* in Sri Lanka

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During the Kandyan Kingdom, the *Upasampadā* and the Buddha Sasana in Sri Lanka was undergoing a crisis situation. Ven. Welivita Saranankara Thero identified this issue and invited the monks from Siam (Thailand) in 1753 to restore the *Upasampadā* in Sri Lanka. Upali Thero who arrived from Siam initiated the *Upasampadā* process. The influence of the Thai Buddhism could be observed in monks who have been ordained under the *Siayamolpali Maha Nikaya*. A great example for this would be the *Wāhāla Nāgā* ritual which is practised in the *Upasampadā* ceremony. The difference of those who were ordained by the *Wāhāla Nāgā* ritual is that it was done under the patronage of the king. Therefore in the *Upasampadā* ceremony only the *Wāhāla Nāgā* novices permitted to wear a crown.

This study focuses on the *Wāhāla Nāgā* ritual practised in the *Upasampadā* under the Siayame maha nikaya. In order to understand the history of the ritual, available literature and case studies were used as sources of information.

The word *Wāhāla* indicated that the ritual is associated with the king. King Keerthi Sri Rajasimha has initiated this ritual and *Wāhāla Nāgās* who have been ordained were given *Ata pirikara* by the king himself. *Wāhāla Nāgā* ritual starts on the *Vesak* full moon poya day and goes until the *Poson* full moon poya day. A group of 10 novices was be ordained from both *Malwatta* and *Asgiri* Chapters as *Wāhāla Nāgās*, while the High priests of the both chapters sponsor those who were ordained. This ritual is practised even today but instead of the king who donated *Ata pirikara* to the *Wāhāla Nāgās*, now they are given to the *Wāhāla Nāgās* by the *Diyawadana Nilame*. Interestingly, this ritual still has the impact of the Siam tradition since the crown that the *Wāhāla Nāgās* wear before the *Upasampadā* was donated by Thailand.

Key words: *Siam Upasampadā (Higher Ordination), Wāhāla Nāgās, Kandyan Kingdom, Buddhist Monks*

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