



A 'Routine' Interview

Ransiri had started to go to Venerable Isidasi for private Pali lessons. Ven Isidasi's temple was in Nuwara Eliya, about a one hour's bus ride from Ransiri's home. Having gone to Dhamma School, from beginning to end, Ransiri was interested in studying the Dhamma and Pali more. At first, she was very circumspect with the venerable nun because she had an immense respect for the robe. But very soon Ransiri's bubbling, irrepressible high spirits broke through the barrier of reserve and the Pali class became more lively and even hilarious at times. No doubt she felt relaxed in Ven. Isidasi's company and gradually began to confide in her.

Ransiri was not a respecter of persons, generally. Far from it! She had a nonchalant attitude towards almost everyone which was rather disconcerting to devotees and *dayikās* who visited the *ārāmaya* when Ransiri was there. The venerable nun, undoubtedly, molded in an entirely religious environment where formalities, rites, rituals and the pecking order were strictly observed to the letter, was also somewhat embarrassed.

Summing her up, the venerable nun conjectured that Ransiri had a haughty disregard for the echelons of power in the pyramid of a class structured society. Ransiri's stance arose from a kind of unconscious jumping to conclusions triggered off by external signs which she associated with the arrogance of power. Ven. Isidasi therefore, set herself the task of transforming Ransiri's defilement by selecting Pali stanzas for her that reflected a truly egalitarian attitude of mind.

As the lessons proceeded, Ransiri became visibly quieter and thoughtful. She often looked at Ven. Isidasi questioningly. Once, when the lesson was over for the day, she lingered and dilly dallied without leaving. When the nun looked at her and smiled inquiringly, Ransiri said "May I take up a little more of your time? I have something to tell you."

"Yes, of course. There is some time before our evening chanting begins. Come, roll out that mat again and sit comfortably here on the floor."

"When my father married my mother..." Ransiri said almost in a whisper, "his father and grandfather disinherited him completely..." she looked about her jerking her head this way and that as a nervous bird does when pecking away at a an isolated piece of ground. "My mother had ten children by him but one died at child birth. My father worked hard to support us but he died early. It was no joking matter for my mother to raise nine children and put them all through school. It was a tremendous struggle for her and all of us."

"I can imagine. Did she not have any relatives to help her?"

"My mother's people come from a different region. They were also very proud people though poor. They didn't like my mother marrying my father. Anyway, we managed. We had two cows and my father used to cultivate the upland forested hilly tract known as Kandeheha. He had no paddy fields in the valley below. Not even one *amuna*! His father and grandfather had seen to that! So he cultivated only the forested high ground which was commonly owned by all the villagers in the past. When my father died, my two older brothers had just left school and they began to cultivate the land at Kandeheha."

"But wouldn't that have been crown property?" Ven. Isidasi interposed.

"People are not encouraged to cut down forests on hill slopes because it causes soil erosion and landslides. Besides, weedicides, pesticides and insecticides pollute underground streams and the main rivers."

"My father never used pesticides, insecticides and weedicides. Neither

domy brothers use artificial manure, for that matter.”

“Forested high ground is crown property. Isn't that so? I always thought highland forests were out of bounds for farmers.” The nun repeated.

“My father had no option. When the police and government authorities found out, they came home to question him and told him to stop cultivating the Kandehena land. Soon after, my father had a heart attack and died. My brothers however were given one and a half acres of land on a lease.”

“On compassionate grounds, I suppose.”

“Perhaps. As I said before, it was no joking matter for my mother to bring up nine children and put them all through school. It was a tremendous struggle for her and all of us.”

“What did they cultivate?” Ven. Isidasi asked out of curiosity.

“Oh, they cultivated potatoes and all kinds of vegetables like beans, carrots, beetroot, leeks, cauliflower, and cabbage. A friend of my two brothers sent a truck regularly to collect the produce for export.”

“For export where?”

“I think to the Maldives.”

“Did you all have a house of your own to live in?”

“When my father married my mother, they had no home. My mother's people, as I said before, came from a different region. My mother was a teacher in a school in Nuwara Eliya. They met at a wedding in a hotel. My father was working as the Manager of that hotel which was owned by my grandfather. That was how they met first. When they finally eloped and got married, they were on their own. They moved into a small abandoned cottage, half way up to Kandehena where one of my grandfather's watchers had lived who was a bachelor. When he died, the cottage was abandoned. My parents moved in there and cleaned up the place. My father added some extensions to make the cottage more comfortable and made some furniture himself. Water was a problem. We had to go up to a mountain stream to fetch water in pots and buckets. Much later, some pipes were laid down to lead the water from the stream to our home and an overhead tank built with a motor fixed to pump the water up. My brother in the army did all that with his friends, recently.”

“Didn't the stream dry up in the hot season?”

“No, never. Thank heavens for that! It came tumbling down from some distant peak and then collected in an idyllic kind of pond after spilling over some boulders in quite an impressive water fall. That was where we used to bathe surrounded by tall fern trees and big rocks. It was quite private for no one would climb so high for a bath. There was a common well down in the village but my father did not encourage us to fetch water from there or bathe there. He did not like us associating with the villagers and we had to keep a certain distance from them with a minimum amount of contact.”

“But how did your mother manage to bring up all of you and send you all through school?”

“She was a remarkable industrious woman. She was a strict disciplinarian as well. She was a tall, well- built person and had endless energy. As children we were rather scared of her sudden bursts of uncontrolled temper. She made about fifty packets of rice and curry every day and placed them for sale at Banday Maama's boutique at the bottom of the hill, before four in the morning. They were snapped up by men commuting to work every week day to various big towns and cities. We also sell our cows' milk at the boutique. My mother grows vegetables in the back yard like okra, tomatoes, brinjal, sweet pumpkin, beetroot, vines of long green beans, cabbage, leeks, lettuce, and vines of spinach...”

“You all must be quite self-sufficient”

“Yes, we are. We buy only a few things at the boutique, like salt, dry fish, condiments and also rice, of course. My mother sold the excess vegetables at the Sunday *pola* (fair). When we girls were old enough we used to help mother with household chores and work in her vegetable garden. In her spare time, she sewed beautiful embroidered pillow cases edged with *beeralu* lace.”

“*Beeralu* lace made by her?”

“Yes”

“When was her spare time?”

“When we were all ta school or in the night. She sold the embroidered pillow cases only before the new year in April, at the *pola*. My mother

was a very religious person, too. Every Sunday after the *pola*, she would go to temple wearing white. She would pluck white jasmines and gardenias from the bushes in our front garden to offer at the temple. Every full moon day she would go with one or two of us girls, all dressed in white, and observe eight precepts or ten precepts. I, for one, derived much peace of mind when I visited the temple with her. Sometimes we took fruits from our garden for the head monk, mango, papaw, bananas, strawberries and green apples. He was always happy to accept our offerings knowing that we never used weedicides, pesticides or artificial manure."

"Always practise the five precepts..." He would advise us. "... then you all will be protected. You hear? Practise the path."

"Is he still living? Ven. Isidasi asked.

"Yes, He is very old now but he's a great strength to us. His deputy remembers us from our small days when he was a lively naughty little novice monk."

Ransiri became quiet and reflective.

"Have you finished your story?" the nun asked.

"No, there's lots more to tell."

"Then tell it all. There's still time for the evening chanting. I'm all ears."

"Well, as the days passed on, mother became weaker and weaker. She shrank visibly and became riddled with rheumatism and arthritis and osteoporosis. She became a mass of pain. Latterly, she could only hobble about on her feet. When I left school, I gradually took over her work. My two older sisters had married and had settled down in Kandy and in Matale, respectively. The two older brothers continued to cultivate the land at Kandehena and lived with us. A younger brother had joined the army..."

"The one who laid the water pipes and helped to build the overhead tank?"

"Yes, that's right. By the time I left school there were two younger sisters and two younger brothers still schooling. It was a long struggle to make ends meet and my mother's health was failing rapidly so that we had to take her by a hired vehicle to get treatment from indigenous medicine practitioners who lived in distant places."

“Did she not take western medicine at the government hospitals?”

“No. She had immense faith in indigenous medicine, as her father had been a physician of indigenous medicine. Fortunately, by the time my two younger sisters left school and began helping me with household chores and mother with personal care like bathing her, cutting her nails, washing her clothes, and all the rest of it, I managed to find a job at a garment factory in Kandy district.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Nearly fifteen years ago. My job helped a lot in easing the burden of expenses at home, especially treatment for my mother. I had to take lodgings in a hostel for women close to the garment factory, run by a lady who was very kind to me. Of course, I had to pay for my meals, which I had to get from outside. I travelled home every weekend or so. Despite my expenses I was able to bring home quite a big pay packet. My army brother, too, contributed but now, all my brothers began to think of getting married, except for the farming brothers, who lived at home. Only my two younger sisters and I remained at home. My two younger brothers had drifted to Colombo after completing their apprenticeships, one at the Botanical Gardens in Peradeniya and the other at a technical institute for electrical technicians. My pay packet had contributed to their education.”

“You must have been very proud of both your achievement and their's.”

“Not proud, Venerable. I was very happy and peaceful in mind.”

“But now most of your family members are scattered all over the country, aren't they?”

“Yes, but we do get together during new year time in April. It was a very happy time. It was truly a celebration though none of them, except my army brother and the two farmer brothers and I were able to contribute to the family *ketay* (kitty). I didn't mind, neither did my mother. She was very happy to see them and their children. The house was filled with children's laughter and the patter of little feet. She said that their presence and the presence of their children reminded her of those happy, though lean, years we had before father died.”

“The fruit of an honest hard working family. Is that the end of the story?”

“No. There is some more... I want to bring it up to date.”

“So, do go on. I'm most interested in your story.”

“One fine day, about a year ago, I heard from one of my brothers in Colombo that a foreign embassy was calling for applications to fill vacancies in garment factories in their country. They wanted experienced skilled workers. I was immediately interested because I thought I might be considered eligible to apply. My brother was working as a gardener in that embassy. That was how he heard about the vacancies. Without losing any time I asked my brother if he could direct me to the various government departments I would have to visit in order to obtain applications forms, passports, visas, etc. as I did not know my way round Colombo. He, very obligingly took a day off and told me to meet him at the Colombo Fort railway station in the morning at 9 a.m. on an appointed day and time so he could take me around and showed me the bus routes. When the day arrived for us to meet, he even took me to the embassy where he worked and introduced me to an officer there who gave me the necessary documents to complete. So, then and there I began the process needed to apply for the vacancies.”

“So, did you go to the different departments by yourself later on, without your brother?”

“Yes, I did. That was how I found myself seated in a government department in front of a glass cubicle. From outside, I could see a busy official interviewing would-be temporary emigrants to foreign lands, to the Middle East and to East Asia, perhaps even to the Far East.

“Did you have to wait long?”

Ransiri broke into a peal of laughter. “Five hours! Can you imagine, Venerable? My name and number were announced at the very end, although I had started my day at 3 a.m. in the morning! Most of the other applicants had queued in front of the gate of the department from 5 a.m. till the gates were opened.”

“You started your day at 3 a.m.?”

“Yes. After my morning ablutions and after dressing myself in my best two piecework suit with pants and blazer. As I was rather tall and lean, I knew I looked smart in them. I thought an *osariya* would be too dressy. I made a cup of tea, drank it and yet I had only just enough time to get

myself to the bus stop a few yards beyond Banday Maama's boutique. It was still dark and bitterly cold; however, the bus came on time. Thankfully I got a seat in the bus. Soon the interior of the bus became warm with the warmth of human beings. We could see nothing from the windows for they were all misted over with the steam inside. With a loud, clattering noise, the bus took us crazily down winding mountain roads, suddenly jamming brakes at sharp bends, throwing us sliding down sideways in our seats. Anyway we reached the small railway station by 5.30 a.m. and we sat and waited in the station till the Kandy bound train came in. It came stealthily, silently, slithering into the station like a snake at 6 a.m. Everyone rushed forward to secure a seat and I was nearly thrown off my feet. Somehow, I managed to steady myself and push myself forward through the milling wall of people and get myself a seat. It was a tiny corner of a seat and I was squeezed tight against the side of the bus. The train thundered into Fort railway station three hours later."

"With great aplomb, no doubt, flags flying, announcing its great victory in its race against time..." Ven. Isidasi contributed to the narrative, *bringing a mass of humanity safely to their destination."

"Yes. Despite the discomfort it is a great friend of the people. From the Fort railway station, I took the bus bearing the correct number that my brother had instructed me to take. It stopped in front of the government department where I had to face an interview. I had managed to send my papers in much earlier.

When I presented myself there it was past 9 a.m. What had been the queue of would-be emigrants were now seated comfortably in leather upholstered chairs. I also sat in one of those chairs and stuck there, afraid to relinquish it even for one minute in case my name should be announced. In front of me, inside the glass cubicle I could see a busy official interviewing prospective emigrants..."

"Were you aware that you were also soon to be a significant fraction of a major source of revenue for the government?" Ven. Isidasi asked. "Sending women to earn low wages in foreign countries is a source of revenue for our government."

Ransiri shook her head. "I am unaware of such facts. By and by I fell asleep and got up with a start when a peon prodded me. I hurriedly got up and was conducted to the door of the glass cubicle. The official inside glanced up from his files of documents and scrutinized my face and

form..."

"... emerging from the papers in front of him." Ven. Isidasi interposed, smiling.

"After his sharp momentary summing up of me he asked me politely to sit down.

The official had taken off his coat. It was of a light brown colour. I saw it draped over the back of his chair. By the cut of the coat, lapels and all, and fabric I could make out that it had been cut by an expert cutter, perhaps in London, New York or Paris. His shirt was of a sky blue colour and the neck tie was a mustard yellow. His taste in clothes irritated me. He was no doubt a '*kalusuddha*' (a brown sahib) He was trying to show off his background, no doubt."

"You shouldn't be so harsh and so judgemental" Ven. Isidasi said. "Some people like to dress in a formal manner. And anyway, what were *you* wearing?"

"My local best" Ransiri laughed. "He got on my nerves. Fortunately, he had a civil tongue in his head. "From where are you?" He asked with a slight British accent."

"Why did he get on your nerves?"

Ransiri shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. Perhaps because he probably didn't know anything about clothes but depended on recognized foreign brands"

"With your long experience of working in a garment factory in Sri Lanka would you say your factory products adhere to international standards?"

"I know that for a fact. Many of our directors have had their training in London or New York or Paris. The measurements given us to do our work of cutting and sewing are nerve wracking. When three quarters of a millimeter is stipulated it has to be that, nothing else. You see, we meet all international standards but what we do not have is a recognized international brand name."

"Yes. There's the rub. That I suppose is dictated by those who manipulate the world market, the giant multinational manufacturing companies of the developed world."

“Well anyway, this official had polite manners. From where are you?” he asked.

“Its all in the file with my CV and everything else.” I responded abruptly. My tone was calculated to convey to him how irritated and exhausted I was with his department's slow procedure. If I was expecting a red carpet treatment, it was not forthcoming from this personage...”

“He would have represented the department's red tape and officialdom. You mustn't blame him for that.” Venerable Isidasi said

“I was very tired and hungry, Venerable. I wanted to hide the fact that I was somewhat intimidated by him.”

“So what did he say?”

“I need your home address” he said crisply in English, an official sternness coming into his voice.

“Sorry, I don't speak English. I only speak my mother tongue.” I replied boldly.

“The official stared at me over his glasses. “That's too bad for someone going to a foreign country to work there. You need at least a link language if you don't know the language of the country you're going to.”

“All my details are in that file” I said stubbornly.” “The application form did not state that a knowledge of English was necessary”

“Nevertheless, I'm conducting a face to face interview” he said in Sinhala. “ It is for the purpose of ascertaining whether you're suitably qualified to go to a foreign country and work there for a period of time. Emigrants should know at least a smattering of English or they will get themselves into a lot of trouble and their mother country too.” His voice was polite but stern.

The acid juices in my stomach had begun to churn. I was at the end of my patience.

“Now answer me to the point. What is your home address?”

“Mudunpotha, Nuwara Eliya district.”

“The complete address, please.”

“Kandehena, Mudunpotha, Nuwara Eliya district.” I said in a peeved voice of exasperation. The tone of my voice made him raise his eyes to my face inquiringly. Then returned to the file of papers on the table again with a frown.

“I see you're very temperamental, Miss. You're highly strung. I wonder if you can last it out in a distant foreign country for several years.”

“I have lasted it out for fifteen years in a garment factory in Sri Lanka”

“All the same if you wish to go to a foreign country and work there for the contractual period of time, you will have to learn to be patient and polite, well disciplined and pleasant at all times. Did you not get any training in P.R. at your garment factory? Pity if you didn't. You must be aware that you're representing your country. Always keep that in mind.”

“My patience snapped. “I have been kept waiting for five hours in that lobby!

Don't you government officials have a head and a heart? Don't you care about the ordinary people of this country? I have had no breakfast, no lunch...”

“So what?” he demanded slapping down the file of paper onto the desk. I was taken aback by his sudden explosion of aggression. “We also go without breakfast and lunch sometimes. There are times when I want to dump all these papers in the waste paper basket and go home...”

“Why don't you?” I asked.

“Because I have a head and a heart. Because I have a sense of responsibility, a sense of loyalty, accountability and transparency when carrying out my duties.”

“Oh, is that why they've put you in a glass cubicle...for transparency?” I asked in an innocent voice.”

“Really, Ransiri, you're impossible! So what happened next? Did he throw you out?” Ven. Isidasi asked censuringly.

“He looked down at the file of papers silently for a moment as if debating what he should do with me. Then he said with a calm, quiet voice, “Let us finish this interview...after a cup of tea.”

He pressed a button at his desk and a peon appeared promptly. ” Bring

me a cup of tea and one vegetable *roti* and this lady here a cup of tea and two vegetable *rotis*."

"I can pay for that!" I protested. "I couldn't have anything while waiting in the lobby for fear I'd be called up anytime. I can pay..."

"It doesn't matter" he said between his teeth "I don't want applicants fainting all over my desk!"

"The peon made a strange noise in his throat but changed it quickly into a discreet cough and hurried out of the cubicle."

"You should have been thrown out of the place not given two vegetable *rotis* and a cup of tea!" Ven. Isidasi said. "So then what happened next?"

"The official continued to study the papers in front of him without asking me any further questions until the peon brought in the tray of cups and dishes and began to lay them out carefully on the table. The official eyed the dishes of vegetable *rotis* disapprovingly.

"Where are the paper serviettes?" he asked.

"Sorry, sir. I forgot. I'll bring them now"

"The official returned to his file, still frowning. "Have your tea and vegetable *rotis* while they are hot. Now tell me. Where are you working at present?"

"At a government factory in Kandy that specializes in sports ware."

"Do you go to the factory daily from home or are you given quarters?"

"I'm boarded at a women's hostel close to the factory."

"What is your present position in the factory and how long have you been there?"

"fifteen years. I was made a supervisor five years ago."

"Have your tea and vegetable *rotis* or they will get cold. They are quite fresh. And here are the paper serviettes coming up. Thank you very much, Mr. Sirisena"

He thanked the peon.

"Excuse me" I said "Do you have anything against me? Why do you keep

asking me so many questions when all my details are there in the file, including medical records and doctors' reports?"

"ke you to earn all this money?"

"I don't know" I shrugged "But I'm still young and strong enough to work hard. I'm a good work horse."

"Who is looking after your mother at home?"

"My two younger sisters who are unmarried. They are very good looking and they deserve good husbands. They are kind and very caring."

"You think good dowries will get them good husbands?"

"Better than no money at all"

"So, you are the hard- as- nails bread winner of the family?"

"My brothers also help. We are a team of skilled workers."

"Hm. Now drink up that tea and have those vegetable *rotis*"

"I was surprised by the authoritative yet considerate tone of his voice. It reminded me vaguely of my father and my two elder brothers. "I do not normally accept food from strangers" I said.

"I'm not a stranger" he said looking at me directly "You come from Kandehena, Mudunpotha, Nuwara Eliya..." he hesitated a little and said "I believe there is a path near BandayMaama's tea boutique that goes up to your home. Am I not correct?"

His face crinkled into a sheepish grin.

"I looked up at him startled. "How do you know all that? Are you from the Village...or did you have us all checked by the C.I.D?"

"He gave a short chuckle. 'No. We don't have to do all that. We have to conduct a thorough face-to-face interview with applicants along with their C.V.'s. That is what I have been doing. When you go home ask your mother if she knows R.M. Dhammika Bandara of Mudunpotha,"

"He returned to his files and I quietly finished the vegetable *rotis*, drank the the tea and stood up.

"Then may I go? Have you finished the 'routine' interview?"
I smiled a little.

He looked up with a broad smile. Yes, quite. You may go now."

"Many thanks for the vegetable *rotis* and tea. May I pay for them?"

"That will not be necessary. We shall let you know the outcome of your application as soon as possible. Don't worry about it."

He put up a hand in a sort of wave of dismissal." There was something about his body language which gave me courage."

"So then what happened after that?" Ven. Isidasi asked. "Were you selected to go?"

"I haven't finished the story yet"

"Finish it then. I can't wait to hear the end of it."

"Well, then here goes the last part of my story. After the interview, I found my way to the Fort railway station. The Kandy bound train was very late in coming in and it was crowded. I had no option but to struggle my way through the crowd trying to get on to the train. I managed somehow to get a foothold onto the train and got down safely in Kandy. I had then to get on to the last bus that stopped at the tiny hill station beyond Kandy in the N'Eliya district. When I got there it was dark and drizzling. When I stepped down from the bus a little beyond Banday Maama's boutique, I took out from my bag the torch, my faithful friend and constant companion and started the steep climb to our home. Every where all around me was dark and silent except for the incessant sound of crickets and an intermittent hoot of an owl. A light was shining in the kitchen part of our house.

"Amme!" I called as I entered the front doorway. I knew my mother was in the kitchen. She turned around from the hearth where she was frying some pieces of dry fish.

"I had a strange interview at the government department today." I said excitedly.

"Puthe, you had better sit down and have your dinner first. Did you get wet?"

I shook my head. "No, only a little. I had the umbrella." She served me a plate of steaming hot rice with a creamy jak curry, the dry fish and a very red coconut sambol. Then she served herself some food too. She had

been waiting up for me. "Has everyone had their food?" I asked.
"Yes. They are all sleeping. Its past 10 o'clock"

"The interview was long and the Kandy train came in late. It was crowded and I stood all the way to Kandy. I had then to take the rickety old bus to our region where it stops a little beyond Banday Maama's boutique."

My mother got up from her chair and hobbled up to the sink to wash her plate.

"Want a cup of *kahata* tea?" she asked.

"I'll make it myself, mother. Don't trouble yourself"

Nevertheless, she took down from a shelf a tin and shook out some tea leaves into a tin mug. Then she lifted a blackened kettle that was smoking over the glowing embers of the hearth and poured the boiling water into the tin mug. By that time I had finished my meal and came up to the sink. She handed me the mug and a piece of jaggary which she shook out of a jar. She also poured for herself another mug of tea and taking out another piece of jaggary brought them to the table.

"So how did the interview go? Now tell me everything that happened today."

"I think the interview went off all right. The official who conducted the inter view is from this area. Do you know someone by the name of RAM Dhammika

Bandara of Mudunpotha?"

"The name sounds familiar" she said staring up at the ceiling less roof.
"Did he show any hope?"

"Yes. He wanted me to ask you if you remember that name. He even remembered the path by Banday Maama's boutique up to our house."

"My mother frowned and looked down at her hands.

"If I remember correctly your father's younger brother had that name."
"But this official looked very much younger than our *Bappa*. He must be about my age or a little older, perhaps."

"Then it must be one of his sons. They were residing mostly in Colombo,

We hardly met them. Huh! They were big big people! When your father married me they dumped us all in the dustbin. What was wrong with me? If you ask me we were much better human beings than they! When your father married me your grandfather disinherited your father completely. He became a pauper overnight. They had a lot of property around here...tea as well as rubber. They were non-resident owners. Big big government officials living in Colombo! Your father died of overwork. It must have been they who told the authorities that he was doing chena cultivation illicitly a Kandahena..."

My mother lowered her head into her hands and covered her face. "Poor man! I was so shocked when the police came and questioned him like a common criminal. Then he died of a heart attack. He was such a good, kindly, man."

"Mother, don't think about all what happened in the past. We are all doing fine. Don't make bad karma for yourself. You'll only be adding to your bad *sankharas*. That will not do any good for all of us. But I shall never visit that government office again!" I said emotionally.

"There now you're making bad karma for yourself! Yes, let us be dignified and keep our distance from them but I want you to do your duty. If your papers are passed I want you to visit that office and thank that official. We must show them that we are good human beings, much better than them."

"If you want me to. But I do not think we need to show him any gratitude. He would have done his duty scrupulously, without partiality."

"Never mind his motives. We must remember our principles." My mother said pulling herself together. Now, do you know what happened here in your absence today? The black cow gave birth to a pale gold colored calf with a white half moon sign on its forehead. But the mother cow fell ill after giving birth and *Loku Putha* had to go and fetch the veterinary surgeon. He pushed his whole arm inside of her and pulled out a lot of unwanted stuff that should have come out with the calf and had given her an injection and instructions concerning its medication and diet to *Loku Putha*. She is all right now and the calf is drinking milk from her?"

“Good. I must go and see the mother cow and calf before going to bed.”

“So did you get the o.k. to go abroad?” Ven. Isidasi asked.

“I did not pursue the matter because halfway through the process my mother had a heart attack and died. I was so grief stricken that I broke down completely. I don't remember clearly what happened to me. The doctor said I had suffered a nervous breakdown. It took me a year to recover. My two younger sisters looked after me very caringly after the funeral.”



“You did not tell me all this before. I'm indeed sorry about your mother. So now You have re-applied to go abroad, I gather?”

“Yes. I want to go and work for some time and collect enough money for my two sisters' dowries before they become too old to marry. They are still young and good looking. There will be suitable men in the village who will want to marry them. Everyone in the village respects us and we are known well to the head monk of the village temple who has been like a father to us all.”

“I wish you success in all your efforts to help your family. Now what about yourself? You cannot always remain young and able...”

“Why I told you this long story is because I want to become a nun after I return. I wish to take ordination under your guidance and remain here in your *ārāmaya*. will you ordain me and let me be here for as long as I live?”

“Yes, of course. But let us take one step at a time mindfully, like as if we are doing the walking meditation and you must go home before its very late. It is getting late and your family will be most anxious.”

she said rising from her chair.

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