

Siri Vajiraramaya Celebrates Its 125th Anniversary

by

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Siri Vajiraramaya in Bambalapitiya, Colombo, one of Sri Lanka's key Theravāda Buddhist centers, marks its 125th anniversary, reflecting on its foundation and contributions. Established in 1901 by the Most Venerable Peleṇe Vajirañāṇa Mahānāyaka Thero, the temple aimed to nurture monks and lay devotees dedicated to the Buddhasāsana. Initially starting in a modest preaching hall, its influence rapidly expanded both nationally and internationally.

A key innovation was the introduction of the one-hour Dhamma sermon, which replaced traditional all-night sessions, catering especially to working professionals. The first radio broadcast of a Buddhist sermon via Radio Ceylon was from the preaching hall of Siri Vajiraramaya. To enhance religious education, the Siri Vajiraramaya Dhamma School was founded in 1918, initially



offering weekend classes. The Most Venerable Narada Thero enhanced both the quality of education and the facilities, attracting many from Colombo's professional community.

The establishment of the Vajiraramaya Library in 1924 provided vital resources, preserving palm-leaf manuscripts and texts. In the 1930s, the *Bauddha Lamaya* periodical in Sinhala was launched for children, alongside the English-language Buddhist periodical, The BOSAT.

Siri Vajiraramaya produced distinguished monks, like Venerable Narada, Venerable Piyadassi and Venerable Ampitiye Sri Rahula, who contributed significantly to Buddhist education and missionary work. The temple coordinated a mission to



Nepal in 1946, helping restore Theravada Buddhism after monks faced expulsion. Another key phase of growth occurred under the Most Venerable Madihe Paññāsīha Mahānāyaka Thero, another distinguished pupil of Most Venerable Pelene Vajirañāṇa Mahanayaka Thero, who stressed the importance of developing its people if we are to build a nation. Significant educational and infrastructural developments were made, including the establishment of branch temples and a new educational policy for the Dhamma School.

Over its 125 years, Siri Vajiraramaya has had the benefit of having the leadership of three Mahānāyaka Theros. Furthermore there were many prominent monks who impacted Buddhism both locally and globally, like Venerable Soma and Kheminda Theras. The present era began with the Most Venerable Tirikunamale Ananda Mahānāyaka Thero, who significantly strengthened the temple's administration and faced institutional challenges effectively. Key achievements during this period include its designation as a Sacred Heritage Site and the formation of structured management systems to support temple activities.

Further improvements made include the construction of new facilities, meticulous restoration of the *Budu-ge*, and the introduction of modern administration methods and curriculum at the Dhamma School. The temple's commitment to training young monks continues, supporting both traditional practice and international outreach through various programs and retreats.

The 125th anniversary celebrations will entail several events, including a Saṅghika Dāna on September 8, 2026, to transfer merit to late Mahānāyaka Theros and resident monks, who had passed away. Four publications commemorating the temple's legacy will be released. An exhibition titled “The Journey of Vajiraramaya” will take place on November 28–29, followed by the culminating ceremony on November 30 at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall with special invitees including the President of Sri Lanka.