

VISAKHA—The Chief Benefactress of the Buddha

By Ven. K. Dhammaratana

Visakha was the chief benefactress of the Buddha. By her dignified conduct, obedience, refined manners and compassion to those who are less fortunate she showed her exemplary qualities. Her biography is a noble example for all the women.

Before the time of the Buddha women were considered as inferior. The Buddha pointed to the world their excellent qualities and raised the position of women. For the first time in the history of the world the Buddha started the order of Bhikkunis and that was a great blessing for the women.

Visakha was born in the city of Bhaddiya. She was a very intelligent girl and was comparatively advanced in wisdom, though young. When she was only seven the Buddha happened to visit her birth place, Bhaddiya, on the invitation of her grandfather, millionaire Mendaka. The Buddha was very pleased with her refined manners and preached the Dhamma to her and others. She was able to attain the First Stage of Sainthood (Sotapanna).

During this period, Punnavaddhana, the son of a millionaire, Migara, was looking for a bride. He wanted to marry only if he could find a partner with Panca Kalyana - Five Beauties - otherwise he would remain a bachelor. His parents send Brahmins all over the country to find a suitable girl gifted with these five beauties:-

- 1) Kesa Kalyana — Beauty of Hair, i.e. hair like a peacock's tail and when loosened touches the ankles and the hair curl upwards.
- 2) Mansa Kalyana — Beauty of Flesh, i.e. mid-way between plumpness and leanness, and lips natural red colour.
- 3) Atthi Kalyana — Beauty of Teeth, i.e. teeth are white, evenly set and shine like a row of diamonds.
- 4) Chavi Kalyana — Beauty of Skin, i.e. Skin is as smooth as a blue lotus-wreath and of a golden colour.

- 5) Vaya Kalyana — Beauty of Youth, i.e. retain the youthful appearance even after she has borne several children.

On a certain festival day, Visakha with her attendants went to the river to bathe. Unexpectedly, a downpour came and all attendants ran for shelter and entered a hall where there were Brahmins who have come in search of a suitable partner for Punnavaddhana. Visakha proceeded at her usual walk and entered the hall, all her garments wet. The Brahmins criticised her for not running for shelter. Then she replied, "Dear friends, I could have run faster than my servants, but I have many reasons for not running for shelter. Then she explained that there are four persons in the world who do not appear to be proper while running.

They are:-

- a) A King with his garments and ornaments
- b) A State Elephant
- c) A Monk
- d) A Woman

The Brahmins were very pleased with her talk and thought she was an ideal wife for their master. They were fully satisfied with her Panca Kalyana. The arrangements were made to give her in marriage to Punnavaddhana.

In addition to a large dowry and ornaments her wise father gave her the following ten advices and asked her to observe those as long as she lived with her husband.

- 1) The indoor fire is not to be carried outside. This means you should not tell the faults of your husband or in-laws to outsiders.
- 2) The outdoor fire is not to be carried inside. If any outsiders talk bad of husband or in-laws you should not report it to them.
- 3) Give only to him who gives. Things should be lent to those who return them.
- 4) Give not to him who gives not. No articles should be lent to those who do not return them.
- 5) Give both to him who gives and to him who gives not. When a kinsman or

your friend asks for help, you should help them whether they repay or not.

- 6) Sit happily. On seeing your husband or in-laws, you should stand up as a mark of respect.
- 7) Eat happily. You should not eat before your husband or in-laws.
- 8) Sleep happily. You should not go to bed before your husband or in-laws.
- 9) Tend the fire. You should consider your husband and in-laws as a flame and hence should handle carefully.
- 10) Honour the household divinities. You should look upon your husband and in-laws as divinities and respect them.

Visakha accepted all these and followed them. Her husband was a non-Buddhist and with her wisdom she makes him to understand Buddhism.

Visakha constructed a monastary, Pubbarama, at a great cost in the east of Savathi. There was no other lady at that time who spent so much money for the Buddha Sasana. She played a very important part in Buddhist activities and sometimes she was deputized by the Buddha to settle disputes that had arisen among Bhikkunis.

Visakha was so much servicable to the Sangha, once she approached the Buddha and asked for the following Eight boons:-

1. To provide robes for the sangha during the rainy season.
2. To provide food for the incoming Bhikkus to Savatthi.
3. To provide food for the outgoing Bhikkus from Savatthi
4. To provide food for the sick Bhikkus.
5. To provide food for those who wait upon the sick.
6. To provide medicine for the sick Bhikkus.
7. To provide milk rice for the Sangha.

8. To provide bathing robes for the Sangha.

Every day she used to offer alms to the monks at her home, and also visited the temple every morning and afternoon to listen to the Dhamma, and to help the monks and nuns.

She was a very fortunate wife and a mother and spent a very happy marriage life. She was a mother of ten sons and ten daughters. She was very healthy and strong until she passed away at the age of one hundred and twenty.