

PROGRAMME

9.45am – 10.00am	Registration
10.00am – 10.10am	Opening Remarks: Prof. Dr. Ong Puay Liu Principal Research Fellow, KITA
10.10am – 11.00am	Talk by: Dr. Sumana Ratnayaka Middle Way Philosophy and Dialectical Behaviour for a Peaceful Society
11.00am – 12.00pm	Q&A and End

About KITA Discourse Series

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KITA Discourse Series 2/2019

Middle Way Philosophy and Dialectical Behaviour
for a Peaceful Society

Dr. Sumana Ratnayaka

Department of Pali & Buddhist Studies,
University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya,
Sri Lanka

15th February 2019 (Friday)
10.00am – 12.00pm

KITA's Meeting Room
Level 4, Administration Building,
Kolej Keris Mas,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi

ABSTRACT

Middle Way Philosophy and Dialectical Behaviour for a Peaceful Society

Middle way philosophy with reference to the Pali canonical discourses refers to dependent arising. Philosophically, materialism and spiritualism are opposite to each other. Materially bias attitudes conduce to competition and unrest whereas spiritually bias attitudes contribute to blind faith and suffering. Comprehension of both extremes leads one to an integration of material and spiritual progress. During the Buddha's time, materialism was represented by annihilationism (*ucchedavāda*) whereas spiritualism was represented by eternalism (*sassatavāda*). Annihilationism was based on the view that the body and the soul were inseparably connected. At the death, both will die out. Therefore, their recommended behaviour was to enjoy one's life gratifying senses in one's fullest capacity. Eternalism was based on the view that the body and the soul were separable. If the soul was separated it would reach a permanent existence which was believed to be their salvation. For this purpose, their recommended behaviour was to weaken the body as much as possible through any austerity practice so that the soul would escape from the body. Both materialists and spiritualists were interested in happiness avoiding suffering either here or here after.

The Buddha's critical response to these contemporary views gave rise to a dialectical thought, which is the middle way philosophy of Buddhism, namely Paṭiccasamuppāda – Dependent Arising, which suggests new interpretations of suffering and end of suffering. Critical understanding of suffering itself initiates a process of cognitive transformation. In accordance with this process, the dialectical behaviour represented by the middle way practice plays the role of ethical edification with regard to one's entire personality bringing one physical, verbal and mental cultivation, which is wholesome, harmonious and peaceful for entire society as well as for oneself.

Presenter's Profile

Dr. Sumana Ratnayaka is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Pāli and Buddhist Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka since 2002. He obtained his Ph.D from the University of Peradeniya in 2018. His Ph.D thesis was titled "*Mindfulness: An Exploratory Study of Buddhist Meditation in Sri Lanka*".



He was born and brought up in a village called Paranagama, in the district of Kandy, Sri Lanka. He had his basic education from the primary and senior schools of the same village. At the age of fifteen, he volunteered to become a novice monk, and received full ordination in 1974. Having been a Buddhist monk for over twenty-five years, he disrobed in 1993 and started his graduate studies at Oxford University. Dr. Sumana is a Swedish citizen since 1992. In 2002, he was awarded dual citizenship by the Ministry of Interior, Citizenship Division, Govt of Sri Lanka.

In the area of community work, his professional training and leadership skills have helped him to engage in social campaigns, establish institutes and Buddhist centres in order to encourage and educate those who do not have access to proper education in some rural areas in Sri Lanka, collect and distribute aid to refugee camps, support rehabilitation projects in prisons, give moral and financial support to those with special needs and suffer from severe illnesses, and support building houses for the homeless. At the invitation of Sri Lanka-Sweden Buddhist Association in 1985, he became the founder chief monk of the Stockholm Buddhist Vihara which became the first ever Sri Lankan Buddhist Vihara in Scandinavia. A few more affiliated Buddhist Viharas were established afterward in Sweden, Denmark and Norway in the course of time. All these centres have developed projects for social welfare, counselling, meditation retreats etc. locally and internationally. Current research area is "Mindfulness-Based Practices in Various Institutes in Sweden: An Exploratory Survey".

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