D. CONCLUSION

12. Societal reflections onto monastic life

The hypothesis of the study was that monasticism should be studied not *per se*, but in relation to Sinhalese culture and society of which it forms a major part. This was an appropriate starting-point, for the findings of this case study indicate that the principal monastery concerned is to a considerable extent involved in a complex net of social relations, interactions and dependencies both within the monastic boundary and beyond its pale. By no means are Theravāda monks recluses; rather their mode of life is one of reciprocity, of involvement and participation in both monastic and societal affairs. As a result of this study, at least the following reflections of society onto monastic life can be singled out.

12.1. Reflections on the level of society. During the process of adaptation and interaction that extends more than 2000 years, the following circumstances in particular seem to have moulded Buddhist monasticism into its present shape. Ideologically, the frequent and indispensable interaction between monks and laity gradually gave birth to the idea that the monks provided a "*field of merit*" for the laity. Although it was generally considered impossible for a layman completely to put an end to "unease" (*dukkha*) and reach the Buddhist goal, *nibbāna*, the idea gradually gained acceptance that by performing meritorious deeds the laity could build up a kind of "spiritual bank account" and thereby attain a better rebirth. It was previously stated that *nibbāna* was the ultimate goal. In practice, however, it is rebirth that is in the focus of attention, a better rebirth generally being considered feasible solely through the acquisition of merit. A bad rebirth, on the other hand, is the lot of all who have erred on the side of demerit.

This merit-making has become institutionalized; merit is usually acquired by performing ceremonies such as veneration of the three objects: the Buddha image statue, the *dāgäba* and the *bo* tree, by arranging a "food-giving" (*dānē*) ceremony and by inviting monks to *pirit* chanting, a ceremony which is thought to avert evil. The belief that there are evil spirits is as old as Buddhism itself and seems in fact to be a pre-Buddhist belief that has prevailed in

Sri Lanka ever since the arrival of Buddhism in the third century. The popularity of *pirit* chanting can possibly be understood as a reflection of the fear inspired by the belief in evil spirits, a belief which is usually considered to be a part of the local or regional popular religion of Sri Lanka.

These observations lead us to conclude that the interaction between the monks and the laity can be viewed in the light of exchange. The monks provide a "field of merit" *par excellence* and therefore fulfill a *domestic function*. The laity, on the other hand, form a group of supporters (*dāyakas*) who through donations and gifts ensure the existence of the monastery. Owing to this reciprocity, the original or canonical idea that enlightenment, *nibbāna*, can be reached only by the monks has been modified in the sense that there are nowadays so-called secondary goals, which are meant for the laity. Through meritorious deeds the lay mortals can ensure themselves a better rebirth. With the establishment of these secondary goals, the gap between the monks and the laity has been narrowed and interaction has become meaningful for both parties.

Historically, Buddhist monasticism is an organization that dates back to the pre-Buddhist period of India. Yet another fact must be remembered. Monasticism, as it functions today, has many of its roots in the time of the Indian Emperor Aśoka, who created an ideology which posited a close and reliable relationship between the leading monasteries and the king. This ideology was also adopted by King Devānaṃpiyatissa in the third century, when Buddhism was officially established on the island. The close relationship between monasticism and the king gave birth to the following patterns, which are still in place today.

According to the ideology, the king (or, according to a subsequent interpretation, the state or government) are under an obligation to promote and protect monasticism. The direct result of this is that monasticism has during the course of time accumulated an enormous amount of landed and other property. Depending on the location of the monastery, a division between forest-dwelling monks and town-dwelling monks came into being. The village- or town-dwellers, however, acquired far greater social and political prestige and significance than their forest-dwelling brethren. By establishing recurrent contacts with the laity and the secular authorities as well as by arranging various ceremonies and festivals, these monks came to perform vital religious as well as *socio-political functions* in the society of which they became a major part. A rivalry ultimately emerged between the leading monasteries,

which resulted in a division of the monastic fraternity into several principal monasteries.

Due to historical and ecological circumstances, the island of Sri Lanka has become divided into two regions, an up-country and a maritime region. The Sinhalese population has accordingly been divided into Up-country Sinhalese and Low-country Sinhalese. Moreover, the climatological and geographical circumstances have proved to be of vital importance as regards the survival of Buddhist monasticism in Sri Lanka. First, the up-country, as a result of the invasions of the maritime areas by the South Indian Tamils, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, became a more or less isolated area up to 1815. It was especially the terrain of the area that precluded its occupation until 1815, when the British succeeded in penetrating the narrow ravines and marched into the city of Kandy. Secondly, the up-country was situated in the Wet Zone area, which was relatively large and practically self-supporting: therefore, from the viewpoint of climatology and geography, this region provided a milieu where monasticism could flourish in isolation. The area guaranteed an autonomous position in the face of constant invasions, an autonomy the British respected in a way even after 1815. In practice, the region came to *function as a shelter* against invasions, and Sinhalese culture and the Buddhist "religion" (*āgamaya*) survived through monasticism in the up-country.

Socially, the majority of the Sinhalese population of the up-country region has belonged and still belongs to the *Goyigama* caste, which is the highest caste in Sinhalese society. For a considerable length of time monasticism flourished mainly in the up-country area. It is not surprising then that the leading monasteries have tended to recruit novices exclusively from the *Goyigama* caste. Not only does the majority of the population belong to this caste, but the principle of recruitment can be considered natural in reference to the ecological fact that the island was divided into two regions. Furthermore, we must bear in mind the historical fact that the refugees from the coastal areas as well as other people having relatives living in the vicinity could not easily be regarded as completely trustworthy in view of the constant invasions and attempts to conquer the interior of the island. Consequently, the *caste restriction* connected with higher ordination (*upasampadā*) can be considered as a reflection of these ecological, historical and social circumstances.

12.2. Reflections on the level of organization. From the viewpoint of the social setting of the monastic abodes (*pansalas*) and the houses of the laity (*gedera* and *pavula*), there is a resemblance noticeable whenever landed property is transmitted. In both social settings, the succession of lineage tends to follow the same pattern.

As Tambiah has quite correctly emphasized, the Sinhalese kinship system should not be viewed *per se*, but with reference to how it functions (§ 5.5.). Yalman has examined the ways in which the Sinhalese kinship categories regulate marriage and sexual relations. He sees the bilateral character of Sinhalese kinship system as directly related to the rights of women regarding property and particularly land. The kinship terminology, which Yalman finds extremely systematic, clearly indicates the rules and categories of kinship and marriage. Yalman writes:[472]

> "All the sisters of the mother are called 'mother'; all the husbands of these 'mothers' are 'fathers'. The same is true of the brothers of the father; they are called 'father' with prefixes for elder and younger. The wife of a 'father' is a 'mother'. All the children of these 'fathers' and 'mothers' are 'brothers' and sisters'."
>
> "As is well known, the really interesting terms are those MB, FS and affines. Thus, *māmā*, the 'brother' of anyone in the 'mother' category is MB, FS husband, and father-in-law. *Nändā*, the 'sister' of any 'father', is MB wife, FS, and mother-in-law. The daughters of *māmā* and *nändā* are 'cross-cousin' and 'wife' to *Ego*. They are called *nänā*, and *Ego* can have sexual relations with them or marry them. The sons of *māmā* and *nändā* are *massinā*, and the sister of *Ego* can be married or have sexual relations with persons standing in that category."

Yalman comes to the conclusion that sexual relations are in principle allowed only with those of the same generation as *Ego* and with someone in these categories, i.e. *Ego* - *nänā* and the sister of *Ego* - *massinā*.

When we diagrammatically compare the system of selecting a pupil with the system of selecting a marriage partner, the connections between the two systems becomes apparent and it seems as if the former is a *reflection* of the latter (see the following page).

The Chief Monk stands in the *māmā* category as regards his relation to his pupil. In terms of the kinship terminology, the pupil is a categorical "son". Monks are not allowed to marry and therefore they cannot have children of their own. As all the children of the "fathers" and "mothers" are "brothers" and "sisters" in terms of the kinship terminology, it is quite evident that all the *bänās* are considered "sons" and thus provide the only natural cri-

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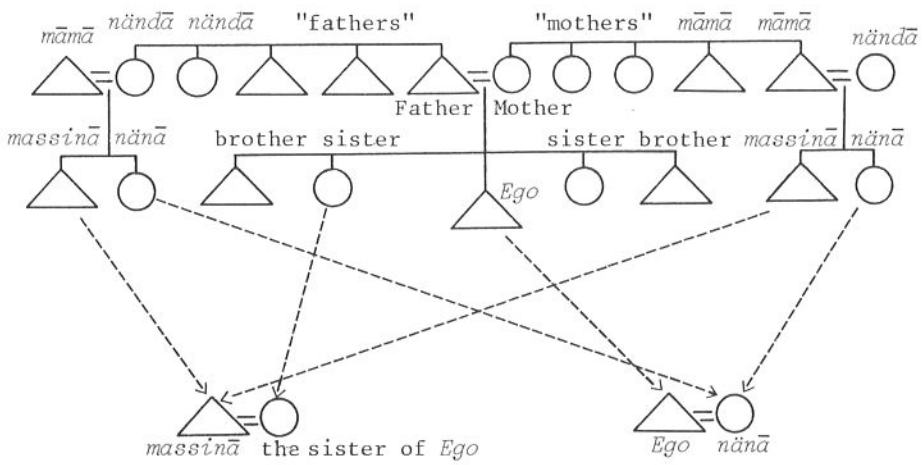
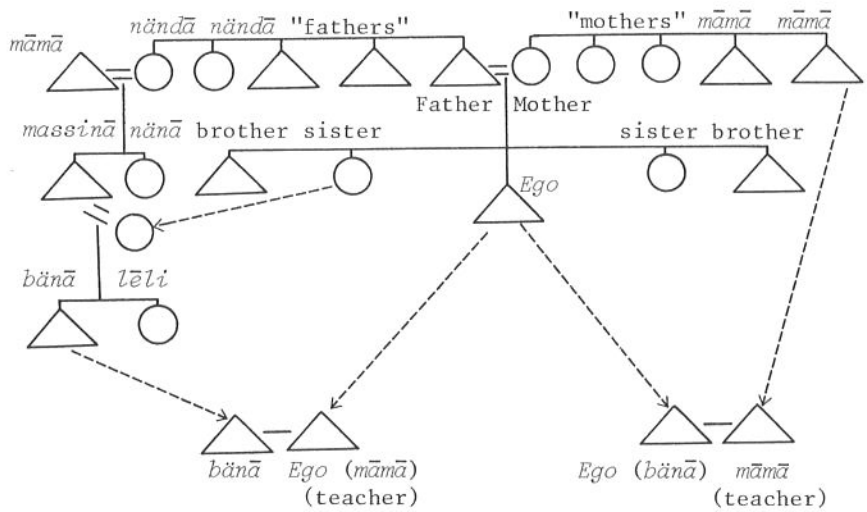
472 Yalman 1962b, 556ff.

1) *THE CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGE*
(*Ego* - *nänā* and the sister of *Ego* - *massinā*)

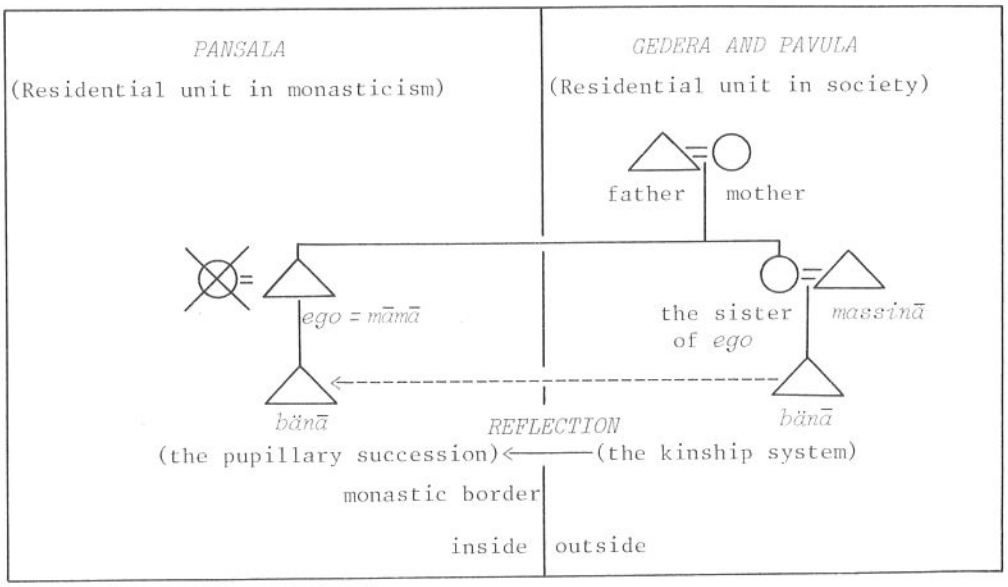


2) *THE RELATIONSHIP OF PUPILLARY SUCCESSION*
(*Māmā* - *bänā*)



teria for selection, since in this way the Chief Monk can have a "son" without a wife. One should bear in mind that the novices in this particular principal monastery were recruited between the ages of 10 and 15. It is also worth noting that if a monk were to marry, he would most probably wed a *nänā* and his son would be a *bänā* proper.

The reflection of society on the monastery as regards kinship and property as well as the system of pupillary succession and property transmission, can be illustrated as follows.



The interaction between the monks and the laity calls to mind the following reflections. When many monasteries in the course of time became great and wealthy — some monasteries as wealthy as the royal court itself — as a result of donations both of land and property by kings and wealthy laymen, there was no longer any need for alms-rounds (*piṇḍapāta*). Most of the monasteries had gradually become self-supporting. Instead of alms-rounds, such ceremonies as "food-giving" (*dānē*) and "protection-recitation" (*pirit*) came to constitute very central socio-religious settings of interaction between the monks and the laity. The ritualization of these two ceremonies must be seen in connection with the self-supporting nature of the monasteries on the one hand and the development of a distinct "merit doctrine" on the other. This new kind of reciprocity between monks and laity, or as Carrithers has called it, the "domestication of the *sangha*" seems to be a reflection of the *self-supporting* character of the monasteries.

In connection with this new kind of reciprocity we can also notice a *spatial shift* of such Buddhist symbols as the Buddha image and the *dāgäba*, formerly kept exclusively within the monastery compound, but nowadays also located in highly accessible places in the midst of the society. According to Obeyesekere, the use of the Sinhalese pilgrimage places and the Buddhist symbols are a

reflection of the Catholic model of proselytizing. The development after independence (1948) in particular, when we can notice the gradually growing practice of placing small Buddha images, as Obeyesekere has expressed it, "in the market place" and in private shrine rooms, indicates that Sinhalese modernism reflects a trend towards the reorientation and revaluation of traditional Sinhalese values and religio-cultural identity.

Finally, the westernization of the Sinhalese educational system has brought about a drastic change. Traditionally, education was in the hands of the monks and the nature of that education was more or less 'religious'. Nowadays, education, particularly higher education, is in the hands of laymen and along with westernization, a strong process of secularization of education has taken place. The reflection that results from the shift in education can be depicted as follows.

EDUCATION

Traditional monastic education	*Modern westernized education*
aims:	aims:
to learn to step into the sandals of a monk	to learn the way of questioning what is traditional
a tradition of consent	a tradition of dissent[473]

reflection ←

estrangement from tradition; requires a revaluation and reorientation of the modes of life of the Theravāda monks

a new attitude towards tradition

or it may result in disrobing →

The tension between being involved in a tradition and being alienated from it would be unbearable without a thorough personal revaluation and reorientation of the modes of life of the monks. Therefore, it is quite understandable that many of the senior pupils have disrobed due to the great tension of standing in a marginal position within the monastery and trying to function in a time of rapid change. Those monks who have chosen to remain in the monastery on the other hand show great adaptability to the situation and are well aware of the changes in the circumstances both within the monastery and outside it.

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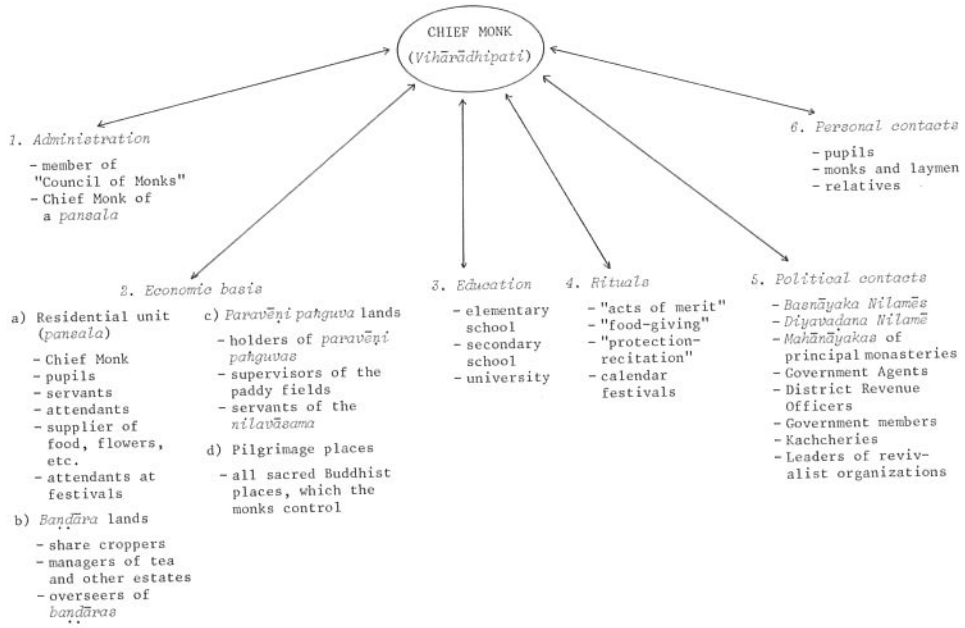
473 The idea that university education in general and the history of science, both natural and human, in particular has represented and still represents a tradition of dissent, especially in crucial periods, has been extensively discussed by Bronowski and Mazlish 1960, 502.

12.3. Reflections on the level of the individual: dilemmas of monkhood. On the level of the individual, the specific life circumstances of the nine monks varied to a considerable extent. When mapping the biographies and the life situations of the monks, it became obvious that quite a *gap* existed between the Chief Monks and the senior and junior pupils. From the viewpoint of history, the Chief Monks had grown up under very different social and cultural circumstances than do the pupils at present. Moreover, this gap between the two generations of monks was accentuated by the fact that the pupils not only got a different education than their Chief Monks but also became exposed to a different life model, a westernized intellectual model of monkhood. Although the principal monastery on the level of the society and also partly on the level of organization has managed to maintain the so-called traditional form of monasticism, a shift is nevertheless noticeable on the level of the individual, especially as regards life situation, values, attitudes and norms. This shift, which has gradually and insidiously begun to infiltrate the life of the principal monastery, will, as I see it, soon create a considerable *dilemma*[474] both for the Chief Monks and the pupils. So far only some of the monks were willing to discuss the problem, especially Ānanda, who frequently referred to the dilemma of neither being able to continue his studies at the university (before the tensions in the field) nor being able to get a monastic house (*pansala*) of his own. Indeed, a separate house is tantamount to being an "independent" monk who is not regarded as the pupil of his teacher.

We see that on the level of the individual there exist potentially as many *channels of reflections* as monks through which infiltration may find its way inside monastic life. In practice reflection is actualized in particular social settings. In order to arrive at a close empirical picture of the various channels of reflections, these must be depicted from two different viewpoints: from that of the Chief Monk and from that of the pupil. This is important, since the Chief Monk has a proper social position within the monastic setting, being a *Vihārādhipati* ("Chief Incumbent") who constitutes an important linking element in the social setting of the monastic system as a whole. The senior pupil, on the other hand, occupies a marginal position in the monastic community and therefore constitutes only a potential element and link in that social setting, particularly as there is a strong tendency among the pupils to disrobe. The channels of reflection as seen from these two points of view

474 The term *dilemma* here refers to a problem which is seemingly incapable of a satisfactory solution. It involves a choice usually between two equally unsatisfactory alternatives.

are as follows. I have here assembled the maximum of sub-units in each channel, although in practice of course, most of the monks are concerned only with some of the sub-units, depending on the life situation of each monk.



The channels of reflection connected with the senior pupil consist of the settings of education (3), ritual (4) and personal contact (6). The senior pupils stand outside the first, second and fifth settings, because these are the ones particularly actualized in connection with the status of the *Vihārādhipati*.

The dyadic and the triadic social configurations have in this study been constituting the simplest and the most relevant units of analysis for the micro-social configurations. First, there is the notion that a dramatic change in relationships takes place when a dyad is enlarged to become a triad. A triad cannot be considered merely as a sum of three persons who are involved with one another (i.e. 1+1+1 =3), but should rather be seen as a social unit with its own dynamics. Such a unit is relatively more impersonal than a dyad and relatively less predictable. These two micro-social configurations reflect different social circumstances and involvements.

Analysis of the dyad configurations in the social network of the monastery reveals that they are channels of reflection of such different trends of westernization as education and a form of estrangement from the very core of the monastic hierarchy. The senior pupils were particularly involved in west-

ernizing trends in education. Indeed, my own entry into the monastery is a telling example of these new directions.

The twofold orientation typical of the dyads distinguished in this study reflects a social tension which is at the same time a manifestation of the vitality of monastic life in Sri Lanka. Because the monastery has opened up new channels of interaction, particularly towards university education, the awareness of the gap between traditional and modern has of course resulted in various individual and institutional dilemmas. Yet a new vitality and a reinforced continuity of the monastic tradition will emerge from this currently tense situation.

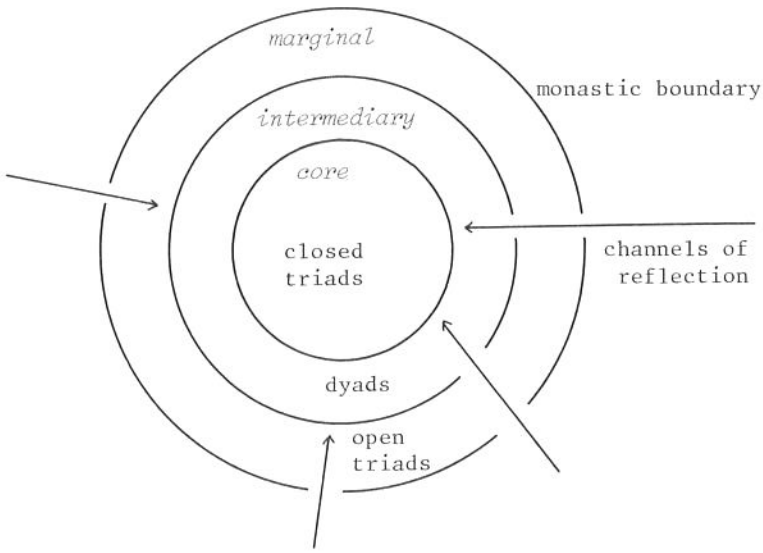
There was a very significant analytical distinction between open and closed triads as well. The open triad clearly reflects the marginal position of the monk(s) involved. It seems to be a reflection of the unsolved dilemma of an asynchronic education, in which ritual status is acquired before the social process of learning has been completed. This applies all the more to the monks who study at the university. The open triad is a social configuration which reflects a highly ambivalent and unstable position on the periphery of the monastic hierarchy and there is a noticeable tendency towards dyadic contact either inside or outside the monastic area. The closed triads, on the other hand, represent the diametric opposite of the open triads as regards the dynamics of the configuration. It is a compact configuration which reflects the centrality of the monks involved.

Last we turn to the teacher-pupil relationship. The strong tendency of the junior and senior pupils to avoid social interaction with their teachers (Chief Monks) seems to reflect an estrangement in the traditional relationship. The teacher is no longer considered a spiritual leader but rather a ritual authority, a superior in rank but not necessarily in education. The estrangement seems to me to reflect the dilemma between upbringing on the one hand and the process of acquiring independence on the other. In this sense the relationship can also be regarded as a "father-son" relationship, which of course involves various kinds of tension during the process of maturation.

The channels of reflection in connection with the micro-social configurations and their relative position within the monastic setting can be illustrated as follows (see the following page).

I have divided the monastery into three spheres. These should not be considered as absolute, but relative. The reflections from society come mainly through the dyads and the open triads. The marginal sphere is relatively more

THE PRINCIPAL MONASTERY



open to reflections than the other two spheres. This reflection does not, however, necessarily find its way into the other two spheres. Similarly, the intermediary sphere is open to reflections through the dyadic contacts, but the reflections do not necessarily affect the core itself. My entry into the monastery illustrates the openness of the monastery; the other side of the coin is that the monastery was very effective in closing the doors and functioning as a shelter. The dyadic contacts represented the doors, while the closed triads proved to be efficient shells for withdrawal.

Viewed against the background of these notions, the dilemmas of monkhood seem quite human and understandable. Most of the monks had entered the monastery as young boys between thirteen and fifteen years of age. They had made their decision at a tender age and the procedure had thereafter followed an institutionalized pattern of rites of passage. Since many of the monks had been chosen by the Chief Monk of the monastery (*pansala*) concerned, the teacher-pupil relationship tended to be a kind of "father-son" relationship. As the young boys grew up, the process of maturation involved tensions similar to those in lay families.

The dilemmas endemic in the role of the monks are to a great extent the result of change in the practice of the traditional life model of the monk. Nowadays monks are more occupied outside the monastic area than ever before. Previously they were drawn outside the monastic setting mainly in connection with ritual performances and ceremonies, i.e. domestic functions. Today the

monks become involved in society in a variety of ways, especially during the first years at the university. The young monks move to another monastery near the university campus so that they can live out of reach of their teacher's eye. In the secular setting at the university a number of new temptations give rise to dilemmas. The fundamental conflict lies in an encounter between the traditional domestic life model and the westernized intellectual model. Life at the university is quite different from the everyday situation at the monastery and this is why many of the young monks ponder whether to continue as a monk or to disrobe and get married.

The dilemmas of the Chief Monks are in many ways connected with those of the younger monks. First, there is the question of continuity. Secondly, in order to keep the education of the monks up to date it is necessary to send the younger monks to the university, albeit there is a danger of losing them. This fear is not wholly without grounds. To sum up, the dilemmas of monkhood are in various ways a result of the ongoing changes in the surrounding society and the encounter with new life situations. For Theravāda monks as for other mortals, *involvement creates dilemmas*.