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Kinship and Property Rights in a Buddhist Monastery in Central Ceylon¹

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Celibate Theravada Buddhist monks at Malwatte Vihare in Kandy, Ceylon, form ordination lineages through a continuous succession of monk-teachers and their pupils. A statistical analysis shows a strong tendency for lineage heads to ordain relatives as pupils if they have temple property to transmit. The field data do not bear out claims of monks that the relationship is normally matrilineal. It is pointed out that informants translate expected behavior patterns between monks and their pupils into matrilineal kinship terms, but choose heirs to their property strictly bilaterally. Some conclusions are drawn pertaining to Sinhalese kinship structure and the social organization of the Buddhist Sangha.

THE Sinhalese kinship system has been described at length in other studies (Ryan 1953a, 1953b; Pieris 1956; S. J. Tambiah 1958; Leach 1960, 1961; Yalman 1960, 1962a, 1962b, 1967). I can therefore limit my discussion to a few remarks. The Sinhalese system is bilateral, though some writers have noted a unilineal emphasis in certain of its aspects (Sarkar and Tambiah 1957:57; S. J. Tambiah 1958:22; Leach 1960:117). Cross-cousin marriages are favored but not prescribed. Virilocal marriage (*diga*) brings higher status than uxorilocal (*binna*) and is therefore favored, but both types of marriage occur frequently.

Students of Sinhalese society have constantly stressed the close connection between kinship and property rights. One of Tambiah's main theses is "that the structure of kinship cannot be meaningfully understood unless it is related to residence and land ownership" (1958:25). E. R. Leach has devoted a whole book to this topic and insists "that kinship systems have no 'reality' at all except in relation to land and property" (1961:305). This argument is further substantiated by Obeyesekere's study on land tenure in Southern Ceylon (1967).

These discussions are based on data obtained in village studies. The social system to be analyzed in this paper is of a quite different nature: its members are all males, there is no marriage, and property cannot therefore be distributed among one's children. Nevertheless, kinship is of supreme importance for the structure of this social system in two ways: property-owning corporate groups are formed

on the model of patrilineages, and relations between members of lineages are in certain cases based on kinship through common connections with specific castes in Sinhalese society.

The social system under review is Malwatte Vihare (lit. Flowergarden Monastery, anglicized from Sinhalese *malwatu vihāraya*) in Kandy, Central Ceylon, which is the center of the Malwatte chapter of the Siam Nikaya (*siyam nikāya*), the largest and oldest sect of the Theravada Buddhist monkhood (*Sangha*) of Ceylon.² A brief description of the social organization of the Sangha will suffice before we can turn to our specific problem of kinship and property rights.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SINHALESE SANGHA

Although the Sangha is a very important institution in modern Sinhalese society and in Ceylonese politics, very little has been published about it so far. Even in recent sociological studies on Sinhalese religion the Buddhist monks have received only limited attention (Leach 1962; Obeyesekere 1963, 1966; Yalman 1962c, 1964; Ames 1963, 1964a, 1964b, 1966; Evers 1963, 1964a, 1964b, 1964c, 1965, 1967a, 1967b). There are, however, two studies on the modern Sangha written by indologists (Bechert 1966 and Bureau 1957). Bechert's recent publication is the most comprehensive study of modern Theravada Buddhism and its social and political role, and will most probably remain for a long period the basic handbook for field research on Buddhism in Ceylon.

The Sangha of Ceylon is divided into three

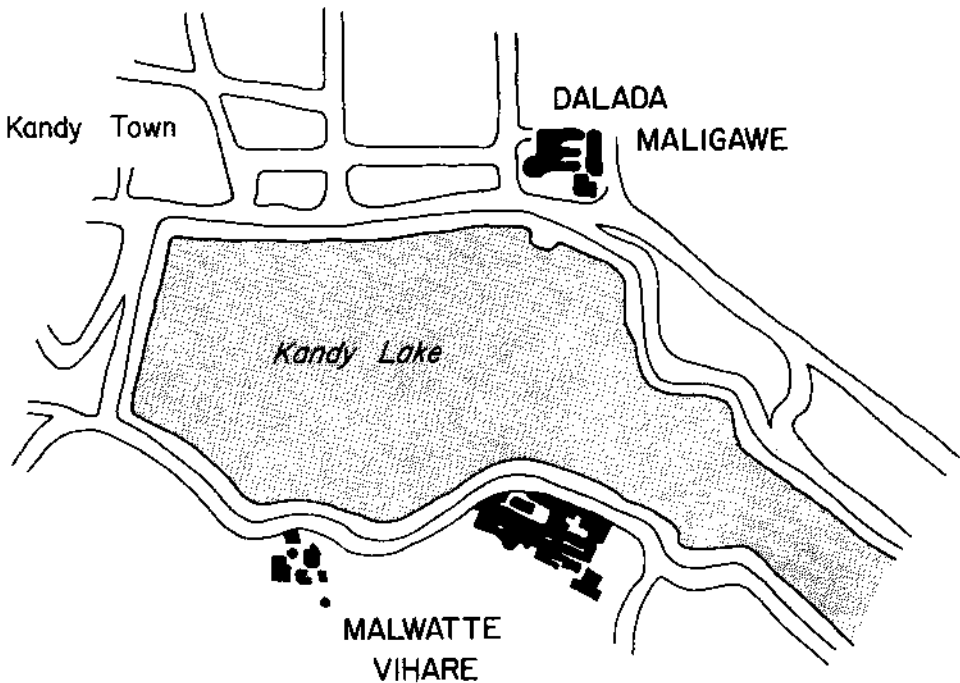


FIGURE 1

Malwatte Vihare is situated on the eastern bank of Kandy Lake. The Dalada Maligawe (Temple of the Tooth) on the opposite side of the lake is the central sanctuary of Ceylon and one of the most important holy places of modern Theravada Buddhism. Monks from Malwatte Vihare take yearly turns with monks from the Asgiriya chapter of the Siam Nikaya in performing the daily rituals.

"orders" (*nikāya*): the Siam Nikaya (*siyam nikāya*), the Amarapura Nikaya (*amarapura nikāya*), and the Ramanya Nikaya (*rāmañña nikāya*). Each of these orders has in the course of history been further subdivided into "chapters," each of which is headed by a Mahanayake Thero (*mahānāyaka*). The Siam Nikaya is divided into six chapters, the Amarapura Nikaya into at least 27 chapters, and the Ramanya Nikaya into two chapters. Most of the chapters have established and maintain a separate tradition of higher ordination (*upasampadā*) (Bechert 1966, Green 1967).

The process of fission is still going on, officially because of doctrinal disputes, usually on minor vinaya rules. In fact, however, most of the subgroups have been formed either on caste lines, or on account of power struggles within the Nikayas. There is no central authority or head of the whole Sangha like the Sangharaja in Thailand. The situation is indeed far more complex than is usually assumed in the existing literature.

The total number of monks is difficult to

ascertain, for the official register of bhikkhus and samaneras in the Registrar General's Office in Colombo is incomplete and not up to date. Bechert (1966:221) estimates a total of about 17,000 monks, out of which about 11,000 to 12,000 belong to the Siam Nikaya, about 3,000 belong to the Amarapura Nikaya, and about 2,000 to the Ramanya Nikaya.

The oldest and most important group is the Malwatte chapter of the Siam Nikaya. It has more members than the other chapters, its monks are recruited only from the highest Sinhalese caste, the Goyigame (*goyigama*), and its patriarch claims the highest status of all the Mahanayakes of Ceylon.

The center and the largest monastery of the chapter is Malwatte Vihare, situated on the southern bank of the Kandy Lake (Figure 1). Here resides the Mahanayake Thero, and here the monthly meetings of the council of monks (*kāraṅka saṅghā*) take place. The houses of the monks (*pansala*) are built along narrow lanes around the two temples (*pōyagē*), the stupa (*dāgaba*), and a recently constructed library.

For our present discussion, the *pansala* are the most significant buildings. There were 22 of them in 1965/66, each owned by a chief monk (usually referred to as *loku hānuduruwō*, but officially known as *vihārādhipati*). In addition to the *pansala* at Malwatte Vihare, each chief monk may control up to seven other temples in the Kandyan Provinces of Central Ceylon (Table 1) (Evers 1967a, 1967b).

Most of these temples have extensive landholdings, which are worked by tenants on a sharecropping basis, leased to estate companies (mostly tea, rubber, coconut), or held as irrevocable hereditary leases for which service to the temple is due (service tenure) (Evers 1964c). In any case, the property and the cash income over which the chief monk has control may be considerable by Ceylonese standards. For example, the declared cash income, which does not necessarily correspond with the actual total income, of Lankatilaka Vihara (*Lankātilaka raja mahā vihāraya*), controlled by the Mahanayake Thero of Malwatte Vihare, was Rs. 22,478.- in 1961/62; the cash income of another temple, owned by the same chief monk, Kobbekaduwa Vihare (*Kobbekaduwa raja mahā vihāraya*), was Rs. 10,196.99 in 1962/63.³

Even more important are the power and prestige connected with the ownership of land in Sinhalese society. It is therefore quite understandable that considerable importance is attached to the question of succession to the position of chief monk and to the attendant control of temples and the *de facto* inheritance of temple property (Bechert 1966:225).

SUCCESSION TO OFFICE AND INHERITANCE OF TEMPLE PROPERTY

Two sets of legal norms are known for regulating the succession to headship of temples and inheritance of property. One set forms part of the canonical "Book of Discipline" (*Vinaya piṭaka*) and is partly incorporated into the other set of legal norms, the Buddhist Ecclesiastical Law of Ceylon. The two sets of norms are very much in conflict in certain essential points. How the canonical laws of the Buddhist Sangha have changed, what parts are emphasized, and what sections are reinterpreted by modern Buddhist monk scholars are matters better left to an indologist. I shall only briefly discuss the rules of succession to office and inheritance as laid down in Ceylonese law.

Succession to headship of a temple is regu-

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF TEMPLES OWNED BY THE CHIEF MONKS OF MALWATTE VIHARE

No. of temples owned	No. of chief monks	Total no. of temples owned
0	2	0
1	2	2
2	5	10
3	3	9
4	1	4
5	2	10
6	3	18
7	1	7
N.I.	3	?
	22	>60

lated by the "rule of pupillary succession" (*Sīsyānu sīsyā paramparāva*).⁴ According to this rule, a deceased chief monk of a temple is succeeded by his senior pupil, if no deed in favor of another pupil has been issued earlier (Woodhouse 1917-18). Two ways of establishing a teacher-pupil relationship are recognized by Ceylonese ecclesiastical law. One is by the ritual of "robing" a person (*paḍḍajjā*), usually a boy of at least ten years of age, and thus ordaining him as a novice (*sāmaṇera*). The robing ritual is performed by a senior monk, the robing tutor, who by this act becomes legally the teacher of the novice. Very often the robing tutor will, later on, when his pupil has reached the prescribed age of 20, present him for the higher ordination (*upasampadā*), a more elaborate and highly important ritual. This is the second form of establishing a teacher-pupil relationship. Other forms of teacher-pupil relations, known in canonical Buddhism (Geiger 1960:184) and emphasized in other Theravada Buddhist Sanghas, as in Thailand (Evers 1966), are not recognized in Ceylon in connection with the transmission of property and succession to office (Disanayake and de Soysa 1963:289). If a young monk selects a senior monk other than his robing or ordination tutor as his spiritual teacher (*upajjhāya*), he is *not* regarded as his pupil in the legal sense. Although in Ceylon, as elsewhere, the tutor or legal teacher is expected to instruct his pupil, the emphasis is placed on the ritual relationship and on the fact that a senior pupil is the designated successor to the teacher's office of chief monk of one or more temples.

A Buddhist temple (*vihāraya*) is not a juristic person. According to Section 20 of the Bud-

dhist Temporalities Ordinance No. 19 of 1931, all property belonging to a Vihare is vested in the chief monk or in a trustee. The same ordinance, however, also allows the chief monk of a temple to appoint himself trustee, and this is in fact done in most cases where a trustee has to be appointed (Section 4 of the ordinance). Though a temple is in theory "Sanghika"—the property of the whole order—the actual control and factual ownership of the temple and the temple land lie with the chief monk, who usually is also the trustee in the case of important temples. It is therefore justified to speak of the property rights" of the chief monk, although the legal situation is more complicated.

It is sufficient for our present discussion to note that the rule of pupillary succession prescribes that rights in temple property be handed down from senior pupil to senior pupil in an unbroken line. A senior pupil is the one who has received the higher ordination first and has therefore spent more "rainy seasons" in the monastery of his teacher than his co-pupils. Other matters, such as the classification of property into personal and Sangha property, the inheritance of property from lay relatives, the transmission of property when no pupil has been ordained or when a chief monk has been disrobed for offences against vinaya rules, are treated at some length by Woodhouse (1917-18), H. W. Tambiah (1962), Dissanayake and de Soysa (1963), Wijekulasuriya (1963, 1964), and Bechert (1966).

From this brief discussion of relevant legal norms, I now turn to the field data and to the normal process of succession to office and inheritance of property in the Malwatte Monastery in Kandy. The studies of S. J. Tambiah (1958), Leach (1960, 1961), and Yalman (1960) have shown the intimate connection between kinship and property relations in Sinhalese society. We could therefore expect that kinship is relevant to the social structure of the Sangha whenever property rights are involved. This might be formulated more precisely in the following hypothesis:

A monk selects a *relative* as his pupil only if he controls temple property that the pupil might inherit.

To test this hypothesis I made a list at Malwatte Vihare of all chief monks who were heads of a *pansala* and heads of a *paramparava*,

an ordination lineage. I also listed their pupils, their own teachers, and their own co-pupils (ordination brothers) and then recorded the kinship relations, if any, between teachers and pupils. The data are shown in Table 2. They allow us to conclude that, indeed, there is a well-pronounced association between kinship and property rights. It is statistically normal for chief monks to ordain relatives as pupils with a claim to temple property and nonrelatives as pupils without property rights. (It is perhaps needless to point out that according to the rules of the order of monks [*vinaya*], kinship relations are immaterial.)

My argument would, of course, be more refined and the nature of the relationship between kinship and property rights more clearly demonstrated if the size of the sample had been large enough to permit a finer breakdown of the variables involved. Table 3 represents an attempt at such a breakdown by measuring property rights through the total number of temples controlled by a chief monk. The correlation is low, but it points to a tendency to ordain very close relatives when important property rights are at stake. The greater the temple property to be inherited, the closer the kinship relation between teacher and pupil tends to be.

Having established that kinship relations are significant whenever property rights are to be transmitted from monk to monk, we shall now have a closer look at the form of these relations.

A general reclassification of the data according to matrilineal and patrilineal relationships might give a clue to how patrilineal the Sinhalese kinship system really is. Both Pieris and Ryan stress unilinearity (Ryan

TABLE 2. KINSHIP RELATIONS BETWEEN MONK-TEACHERS AND PUPILS, AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

TEACHER-PUPIL KINSHIP RELATION	PROSPECTIVE PROPERTY RIGHTS OF PUPILS		Total
	Yes	No	
related	28	8	36
not related	6	28	34
	34	36	70

Chi square = 12.58, df = 1, $p < 0.001$, with Yates' correction. Tetrachoric correlation coefficient: $r_{tet} = 0.81$.

TABLE 3. DEGREE OF KINSHIP RELATIONS BETWEEN MONK-TEACHERS AND PUPILS, AND AMOUNT OF PROPERTY

PROPERTY: NUMBER OF TEMPLES CONTROLLED	DEGREE OF KINSHIP RELATIONS BETWEEN TEACHER AND PUPIL			
	(a) no relationship	(b) distant relationship	(c) close relationship	
0	25	6	5	36
1	0	0	1	1
2	3	3	2	8
3	1	0	5	6
4	0	0	2	2
5	1	3	5	9
more than 5	4	1	3	8
	34	13	23	70

Column (c) "close relationship" includes: Br, BrSo, SiSo. Column (b) "distant relationship" includes all other relationships.

Biserial correlation: columns (b) and (c) combined yield an almost perfect median cut, at which point the standard error of the biserial is only about 1½ times larger than that of the product-moment coefficient.

$r_{bis} = 0.46$ with a significance of $p < 0.2$ p.c.

1953a:26, 1953b:145; Pieris 1956:219). According to Leach, "Sinhalese society... though broadly speaking cognatic in type, also contains marked elements of unilinearity" (1960:117). S. J. Tambiah notes that "the possession and inheritance of land becomes an important connecting link for the patrilineal kinsmen" (1958:25), but Yalman insists that "the kinship system of the Kandyan Sinhalese is bilateral" (1963:26) and that "unilineal descent plays no role in the social life of the village" (1962b:550). We might formulate the problem in the following hypothesis:

If temple property has been inherited or is likely to be transmitted, the relationship between monk-teacher and pupil tends to be patrilateral.

The data in Table 4 help to test this hypothesis. In 25 cases out of 36, complete data were available. In the remainder of the cases, it could not be established whether the relationship was patrilateral or matrilateral, partly (in the case of distant relatives) owing to constant intermarriage between the families concerned.

On the evidence of these data, the null-hypothesis cannot be rejected. The conclusion is perhaps not final, as unilinearity might also be expressed in other features than inheritance, but I doubt very much that more detailed studies would yield contrary results. My data from the somewhat extreme case of

a monastic social system (Table 4) support Yalman's view of the strict bilaterality of the Sinhalese kinship system, at least with respect to succession and inheritance.

In a social system where the succession to office and inheritance of property are regulated by bilateral kinship, and where at the same time office-holders are not allowed to marry and do not have legitimate children who might inherit office and property, it can be expected that the heirs may be either brothers' children or sisters' children. That means, in the context of the Sangha, that pupil-teacher relations will tend to be between either a paternal or a maternal uncle and his nephew. This is confirmed by the data shown in Table 5.

In the light of these data, it is somewhat

TABLE 4. PATRILATERAL AND MATRILATERAL TRANSMISSION OF PROPERTY IN THE SANGHA

	TEACHER-PUPIL RELATIONSHIP		
	Patrilateral	Matrilateral	
No property transmitted	3	3	6
Property transmitted	11	8	19
	14	11	25

* Fisher's exact probability test: $p = 33.9$ p.c.

TABLE 5. KINSHIP RELATIONS BETWEEN MONK-TEACHERS AND PUPILS

	No. of Cases
(a) Teacher is mother's brother (<i>māmā</i>)	7
(b) Teacher is father's brother (<i>loku appā, bāppā</i>)	11
(c) Teacher is another or an unspecified relative	18
	36

surprising to hear the divergent normative statements of the monks themselves. When asked whom a chief monk should ordain as his senior pupil, the answer usually is that the teacher should be the pupil's mother's brother (*māmā*). This norm was also expressed when the kinship relation between teacher and pupil was not clear to an informant. In such cases, he tended to allege or take for granted that it was a mother's brother-sister's son (*māmā-bāna*) relationship.

A similar situation could be observed at marriages. The main functionary at the ritual was usually described as the bride's *māmā* or even more precisely as "mother's brother." When, however, I insisted on an exact description of the relationship between all persons present at the ritual, it was often revealed that the chief functionary was in fact *not* the mother's brother but another important person of perhaps distant relationship. I feel that this is more than just an indication of classificatory kinship terminology, especially as the term *māmā* is generally used with some caution. The equivalent of the English classificatory kinship term "uncle" would be *bāppā*, father's younger brother, in Sinhalese (Leach 1961:127).

Whenever special significance is attached to a mother's brother, Radcliffe-Brown's famous paper on "The Mother's Brother in South Africa" comes to mind (Radcliffe-Brown 1952:15-31). His main argument in this connection is that in patrilineal societies where a classificatory system of kinship has reached a high degree of development, the mother's brother is regarded as a "sort of male mother" (1952:19) and the sister's son-mother's brother relationship is one of friendliness and guidance rather than authority and restraint. In other words, the mother's brother's role is one of expressive leadership.

Now I could argue that, in contrast to the general Sinhalese kinship structure, the pupillary succession in the monastery very closely resembles a lineage organization. In fact, the Sinhalese word denoting this line of succession from teacher to senior pupil, *paramparāva*, means literally "order" or "lineage" (Carter 1924:358). Furthermore, the relation to the biological mother has to be severed when a boy is ordained; he has to renounce his ties with his family of orientation, and his relationships with all females must be restricted. His monk-teacher is now responsible for him and indeed becomes a "sort of male mother."

We may now ask how far this interpretation accords with the expected *māmā-bāna* behavior in Kandyan Sinhalese society. Pieris (1956:219-220) states that "a strong bond of affection exists between a maternal uncle and his sister's children." Leach noted in Pul Eliya (North Central Province) that the relationship is one of "respect, but much less than between father and son" (1961:126). In the temple villages in the Central Province where I did most of my field work, the *māmā* figured prominently in most rites of passage, and he was regarded as responsible for his sister's son or daughter, especially when a marriage partner had to be found. This position is strengthened by the tendency toward cross-cousin marriage, which makes the *māmā* a prospective father-in-law.

We might thus conclude that in Sinhalese society the expected behavior of a *bāna* toward his *māmā* is to exhibit respectful confidence and that of a *māmā* toward a *bāna* is to exhibit responsibility and benevolence. These behaviors are re-enacted and strengthened in various rites of passage. They also correspond closely with the expected (and actual) behaviors between monk-teacher and pupil, similarly enacted in the ordination rites. If we now take into consideration that only a few teacher-pupil relations are at the same time mother's brother-sister's son relations (Table 5), we can conclude that the norm expressed by informants reflects general expected behavior and reciprocal ritual status translated into kinship terminology. The widely expressed cultural norm that a chief monk should ordain his sister's son as his senior pupil and designated successor to his office and property is therefore only a reflection of a ritualized and expected behavior pattern and not of blood relationship.

THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF A MONASTERY

We can now briefly describe the major feature of the social structure of the Flowergarden Monastery. There are 22 residential units (*pansala*), each belonging to an ordination lineage (*paramparāva*). A *pansala* may be occupied by the head of the *paramparāva*, his ordination brothers, and his pupils. Sometimes the chief monk himself or some of his pupils and ordination brothers live in the other village temples belonging to the same *paramparāva*. If there are not enough members of the ordination lineage living, other monks of other lineages may be asked to live in the temples and perform the necessary ritual. The chief monk remains, however, the head (*vi-hārādīpālī*) of all temples and transmits the headship with all attached property rights to his senior pupil.

All ordination lineages go back to one common "ancestor," Velivita Sangharaja (*Vālivīta Saraṅankara Sangharāja*), the founder of the Siamese Sect (*Sīyam Nikāya*) in 1753 A.D. (Sōmaratna 1954; Bechert 1966:211; Evers 1967a). New lineages have been formed by pupils of chief monks who, having no right to succeed to their teachers' office, built a new *pansala* in the Malwatte Vihare compound or acquired village temples and temple property donated by the king or wealthy noblemen.

The strength and continuity of an ordination lineage is further secured by kinship ties when temple property is transmitted from the monk-teachers to their senior pupils. While the initial recruitment of a pupil is in this case dependent on bilateral kinship choices, later on the norms of pupillary succession based on a linear-type corporate model prevail.

Figure 2 diagrams as an example an ordination lineage that originated approximately in 1780 A.D. Succession to the headship of temples of this lineage is shown in alphabetical order A to H. J is the senior pupil of the present chief monk H; K is his second pupil. J will succeed to H's office, but it is agreed that K, who was only a novice and 12 years old in 1966, will become the pupil of J as soon as H dies and J succeeds him. With the exception of K, only those monks who actually succeeded to the office of chief monk and their closest relatives have been included in the diagram. Other pupils of C, who are the ordination brothers of D, have most probably

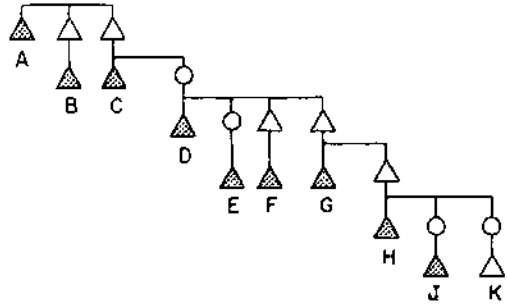


FIGURE 2. EXAMPLE OF AN ORDINATION LINEAGE (PARAMPARĀVA) APPROX. 1780 TO 1966, SHOWING KINSHIP RELATIONS BETWEEN LINEAGE HEADS

developed their own lineage. Over the past 180 years, at least four new lineages have branched off from the lineage shown in Figure 2 and established their own residential unit (*pansala*) in Malwatte Vihare.

If no property rights or only insignificant ones are involved, either the monks cannot attract any pupils at all, in which case the lineage will not be continued, or they may ordain pupils who are not related to them.

Rights to the headship of a temple, the inheritance of temple property, and kinship ties combine to make the ordination lineage the major institution of the Buddhist order of monks in Central Ceylon.

NOTES

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² Throughout the text the anglicized forms of Sinhalese names or words are used. In parentheses is given the transcription of the Sinhalese word in its singular form. Sinhalese words are spelled according to Carter 1924 or as used by informants, in which case the transcription follows the system of Geiger 1938.

³ Figures according to information supplied by the Public Trustee, Colombo. Further information on this temple will be found in Evers 1967b.

⁴ Another law of pupillary succession, known as *sīyam paramparāva*, is applicable only to a very limited number of monasteries and will not be discussed in this paper.

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