



c/o : 28 & 30, 1st floor,
Jalan Medan Taiping 4,
Medan Taiping 34000, Taiping,
Perak, MALAYSIA

Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary

The Making of Sāsanārakkhā Sīmā

• • • • • • • • • •

A report from the Vinaya point of view

Prepared by
Kumāra Bhikkhu

Co-written and edited by
Aggacitta Bhikkhu



Updated 31 Aug 2020

Contents

Acknowledgement	4
Introduction.....	5
Summary of Procedures	5
Preliminaries 1: Preparation to Ensure a United Saṅgha	6
Determining the Extent of Our Abaddhasīmā	6
Ensuring a United Saṅgha for Our Saṅghakammas	7
Preliminaries 2: Site Preparation	8
Why the ‘Extra’ Area?	10
Laying the Nimittas.....	12
Direction Signboards	12
Day 1: Removal of Possible Pre-existing Sīmās.....	13
Why Remove Pre-existing Sīmās	13
Removal of Sīmās	14
Day 2: Demarcation and Declaration of the New Sīmā.....	16
Announcing of Nimittas.....	17
Agreement upon a New Sīmā	20
Addendum: Sīmā Adulteration (Sīmasaṅkara) & Saṅghakamma	22
Appendix A.....	24
Sīma-samūhana-kammavācā.....	24
Appendix B	26
Sīma-sammuti-kammavācā.....	26
Glossary	28

Acknowledgement

It would certainly be sheer conceit on my part if I were to claim full credit for this work, since much of what is contained in this report was learnt from my Vinaya teacher, Bhante Aggacitta.

In fact, it was his idea that I wrote this report. At first, I thought he just wanted a record of the event as a document for the archives, and I agreed, thinking that if I didn't, then he would have to. As such, I'd be relieving him from his rather heavy workload, especially of managing and supervising the construction project in SBS.

However, as I began to work on it, I found myself having to analyse the details of the procedure involved in making a sīmā, and to seek his clarification over some doubts. That's when it dawned upon me that by the time I finished the report, I'd be among the very few monks in Malaysia who knew how to properly make a sīmā.

"That's why I asked you to write the report," said Bhante, when I told him of this realisation. The knowledge needed to be passed on, and I certainly felt honoured and privileged.

Bhante also graciously accepted my request to edit and fill in certain blanks, especially the citation of references to the Pāli Tipiṭaka and its commentaries. It is obvious that this work would not have been possible without his help and guidance.

The making of the sīmā also involved much work by the **Sīmā Declaration Organising Committee**, particularly the secretary, Sis. *Lim Lay Hoon*, who did a good job in coordinating. Special credit must also go to Bro. *Lim Eng Keat*, who was in charge of site preparation.

I must also thank all others who have contributed in one way or another to the success of making the sīmā and the preparation of this report.

Kumāra Bhikkhu
July 2003

May this report lead to a stronger Saṅgha and more vitalised Sāsana.
May the merits acquired in the preparation of this report
lead me to the elimination of all defilements
in comfort and with quick-witted insight.

My special thanks go to Sis. Looi Sow Fei for polishing the English of Āyasmā Kumāra's final draft before it was sent to me for approval. I also wish to express my heartfelt appreciation for Āyasmā Ariyadhammika's meticulous proofreading of this 2020 version and incisive comments and suggestions to improve the clarity of its contents.

Aggacitta Bhikkhu
31 August 2020

The Making of Sāsanārakkhā Sīmā

A Vinaya report



Introduction

Sāsanārakkhā Sīmā was successfully established at approximately 9.45am on Sunday, 1 July 2001, in Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS), Lot 1029, Mukim of Tupai, District of Larut & Matang, Perak, Malaysia.

This report provides technical details of significant events in the making of the sīmā. It is prepared mainly for two purposes:

1. To document a historical event of SBS
2. To serve as a dependable reference for future efforts in making new sīmās, particularly in Malaysia.

Note: This report is written with the assumption that the reader has a basic understanding of Vinaya terms. Therefore, no explanation is provided for them within the report proper. Nonetheless, for the benefit of those who may not understand certain terms, a glossary is provided after the end of the report. Throughout, the term “sīmā” refers to baddhasīmā unless it is otherwise qualified (e.g. abaddhasīmā, gāmasīmā, nagarasīmā). The words “monk” and “bhikkhu” are synonymous. “Saṅgha” refers only to a group of four (4) or more bhikkhus.

Summary of Procedures

The procedures involved in making the sīmā can be generally divided into four parts:

- Preliminaries 1: Preparation to Ensure a United Saṅgha
- Preliminaries 2: Site Preparation
- Day 1: Removal of Possible Pre-existing Sīmās
- Day 2: Demarcation and Declaration of the New Sīmā

The *Preliminaries* are the preparations carried out before the two-day formal ceremony. They are necessary to make sure that the saṅghakammas to be executed on the two days are valid beyond doubt.

Preliminaries 1 deals with issues related to determining the extent of the abaddhasīmā in which SBS is located. This is essential in order to ensure that the saṅghakammas are executed by a united saṅgha. *Preliminaries 2* describes the preparation done on the site of the proposed sīmā in order to facilitate the execution of

the saṅghakammas over the two days. In both sections, the rationale for the respective preparations is also presented.

Day 1 records the execution of saṅghakammas for the removal of possible pre-existing sīmās on 30 June 2001. It also explains the need to do so. *Day 2* chronicles the procedures on 1 July 2001, i.e. demarcation of the new sīmā by the announcing of nimittas, and the saṅghakamma of agreeing upon the new sīmā.

Preliminaries 1: Preparation to Ensure a United Saṅgha

All saṅghakammas must be performed by a united saṅgha within a sīmā—whether baddhā or abaddhā—in order to be valid. Here, “a united saṅgha” means that all bhikkhus, who are in that sīmā at the time the saṅghakammas are being executed, are either participating in the ceremony or have consented to the ceremony.¹

As the making of a baddhasīmā requires the execution of relevant saṅghakammas within an existing abaddhasīmā, our first task was to ascertain the extent of the abaddhasīmā in which the proposed baddhasīmā would be located.

Determining the Extent of Our Abaddhasīmā

To determine the extent of our abaddhasīmā, we required maps that indicated the extent of

1. our plot of land,
2. the smallest governmental unit (in this case, a mukim) in which the land was situated, and
3. the nearest municipality.

The maps were all obtained from the Land Office (Pejabat Tanah) in Ipoh months before the actual making of the sīmā. The composite map below is an approximate combination of those maps.

We found that SBS was located in Mukim Tupai (represented by the green area on the map), which is one of the mukims in Larut & Matang District (represented by the white area). The mukim can therefore, in the local context, be reckoned as an abaddhasīmā, or to be more specific, gāmasīmā as termed in the Vinaya Piṭaka. This could have served as *the* abaddhasīmā within which we had to execute the relevant saṅghakammas for making *Sāsānārakkhā Sīmā*. However, we discovered that the municipality of Taiping town (represented by the grey area) overlapped the said mukim. This overlap is shown as a darker green area on the map.

Now a municipality can be reckoned as a nagarasīmā, which is another type of abaddhasīmā. Hence, the question arose: “Is the overlapping area considered as part of the Taiping nagarasīmā or as part of the Tupai gāmasīmā?”

¹ Vinaya Piṭaka, Parivārapāli, Pañcavagga, 1. Kammavagga.



According to sīmā experts, the overlap should be considered as part of the municipality nagarasīmā. As SBS is located in Mukim Tupai outside of the overlap, the abaddhasīmā that we are concerned with (represented by the lighter green area) is *Mukim Tupai minus the area where Mukim Tupai overlaps Taiping municipality*.

Having determined our abaddhasīmā, we could then take steps to ensure that all saṅgha members within the sīmā participated in or consented to all saṅghakammas required for the making of the proposed sīmā.

Ensuring a United Saṅgha for Our Saṅghakammas

Our gāmasīmā encompassed mostly jungle and agricultural land, and a small slice of residential area. We were certain that there were no other monks residing there other than those in SBS. If there were, we would have to get them to do one of the following when we executed our saṅghakamma:

- participate in our saṅghakamma
- give their consent
- enter an abaddhasīmā
- leave the gāmasīmā.

These are the conditions of saṅgha unity required for a successful saṅghakamma. Bhikkhus not in physical contact with the ground of the gāmasīmā are excluded, so we need not worry about bhikkhus flying across, by airplane or psychic power.

Rather, our concern was with the following consideration: while a saṅghakamma is being executed, any bhikkhu who happens to enter the gāmasīmā

will invalidate the saṅghakamma if he does not satisfy at least one of the above conditions. Ignorance—on his or our part—is no excuse.

To prevent such an eventuality, sentries with mobile phones had to be stationed at all access roads into the gāmasīmā. This sounds rather daunting, but we were quite lucky. There were no main roads into our gāmasīmā. So, that took care of a potentially overwhelming task. The only road that we needed to guard was the access road to SBS through a cemetery.

A closer look at the map revealed that a railway track crossed the southwest corner of our gāmasīmā. There was still the possibility (no matter how slim) that a bhikkhu passing through the gāmasīmā by train, while we were performing our saṅghakamma, would invalidate it. To be on the safe side, we would have to avoid performing any saṅghakamma at the times when passenger trains passed through.

We obtained the train schedule and planned to post scouts armed with mobile phones to inform us when a passenger train passed through during the demarcation and declaration ceremonies. We would then stop the proceedings and wait for the train to be out of the gāmasīmā before continuing.

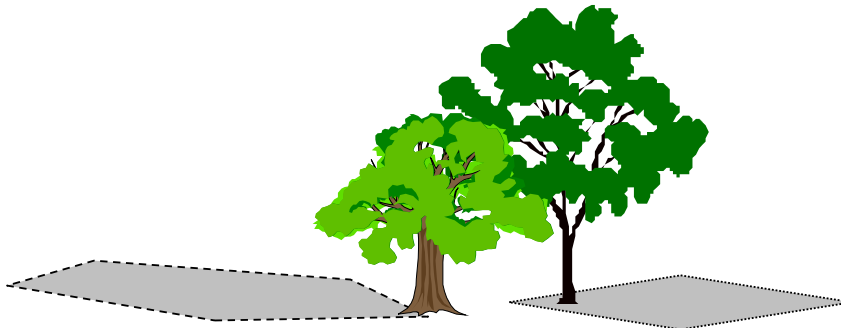
However, a pleasant surprise awaited us. It was announced in the papers that, for the purpose of building a second track, all morning train services would be temporarily suspended, with effect from a few days just before the execution of our saṅghakammas. What a stroke of luck, or whatever that was!

In the end, we only needed to take care of the access road to SBS. With a number of traffic control volunteers downhill, we had all the bases covered for the purpose.

Preliminaries 2: Site Preparation

The site earmarked for the ceremony of removing pre-existing sīmās must first be cleared of vegetation which has leaves or branches touching one another, and of other debris not considered part of the natural ground. That is to prevent what the commentaries call sīmā “adulteration” (*sīmasaṅkara*), e.g. two trees standing on two adjacent sīmās but touching each other.

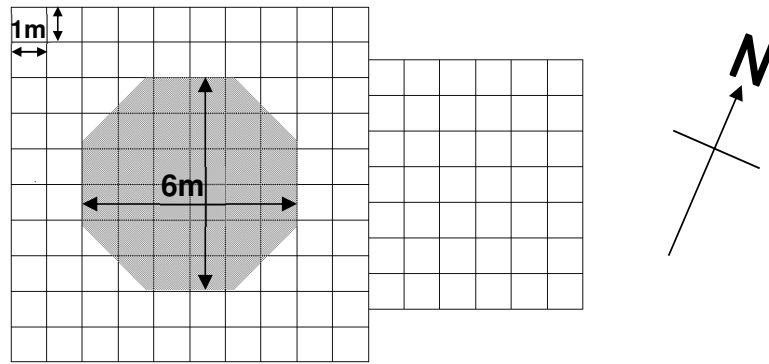
In such a situation, the two sīmās are considered as one. Consequently, a bhikkhu staying in one sīmā could invalidate the saṅghakamma being performed in the other sīmā if his consent or participation has not been obtained—a condition of saṅgha unity required for a successful saṅghakamma (see previous page).



There were no trees at our site because it was an excavated depression (that would eventually become the bed of an artificial pond), so we only had to clear creepers, grass and debris.

The Buddha decreed that if a *sīmā* were made combining with or overlapping an existing *sīmā*, it would be invalid.² Therefore, before we made the new *sīmā*, we had to see to it that any pre-existing *sīmās* possibly existing in the area were removed. Details on the proceedings for the removal of such *sīmās* are discussed in the next section. We shall first detail the preparations carried out prior to the actual ceremony for the removal.

To facilitate the tedious process of removing possible pre-existing *sīmās*, the exact boundaries of which were unknown, our proposed site was marked with squares of $1 \times 1 \text{m}^2$ each, as shown below.



This was based upon the recommendation of some Vinaya teachers quoted in *Vimativinodanī Tīka*, a Vinaya sub-commentary.³ It recommends the site be marked with connecting bed-sized rectangles,⁴ each of which can accommodate four or five bhikkhus positioned within arm's length of one another (for saṅgha unity) but not touching one another (to prevent *sīmā* adulteration). They then execute the saṅghakamma to remove a possible pre-existing *sīmā* by moving systematically from one rectangle to the next, and so cover every inch of the ground.

However, since we had planned the saṅghakamma to be performed not by just four or five monks, but by about twenty monks, it was pointless to make bed-sized rectangles. Squares of $1 \text{m} \times 1 \text{m}$ were drawn instead, forming a grid of 142 squares. With that, the bhikkhus could cover the grid squares row by row.

Spray paint was used to mark out the squares. In Thailand and Myanmar, it is traditional to plant wooden pegs at the intersections. In terms of the validity of the saṅghakamma, the method of marking is immaterial—as long as it does not give rise to doubts about *sīmā* adulteration, which may well be the case for markings made with wires, ropes, wooden battens, etc. The purpose is only to facilitate the complete removal of possible pre-existing *sīmās* in an orderly manner.

² Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvaggaṇāḍi, 2. Uposathakkhandhaka, 76. Gāmasīmādi, para 148.

³ Avippavāsasīmānujānanakathāvaṇṇanā para 144.

⁴ Dimensions are not specified in the sub-commentary.

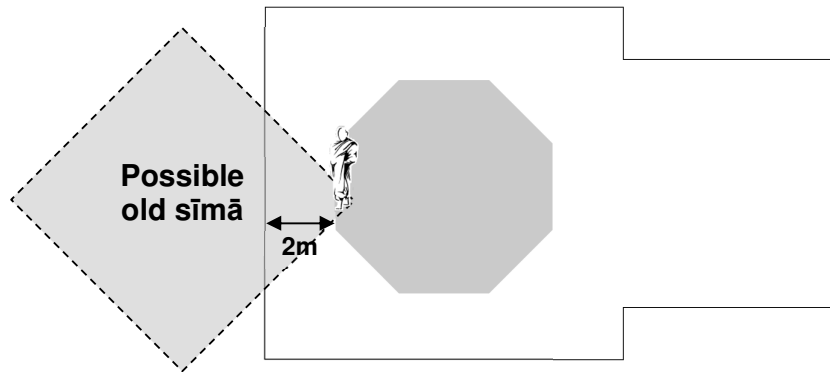
The shaded area within the grid represents the area of the proposed sīmā, which is an octagon of six (6) metres in width. On the site, its boundaries were not drawn on the ground. Only its eight corners were marked to show its position.

Why the ‘Extra’ Are?

Here, a reasonable question may be asked: “Why should we bother to remove possible pre-existing sīmās in the area that is shown in white, which is outside of the actual site of the proposed sīmā (the octagonal area shown in grey)?”

This can be logically explained in two steps: first looking into the area bordering the proposed sīmā, then the eastward protrusion.

The bordering area. This was solely a precautionary measure based on the unlikely possibility that there *might* be a pre-existing sīmā slightly overlapping the proposed sīmā as shown below.



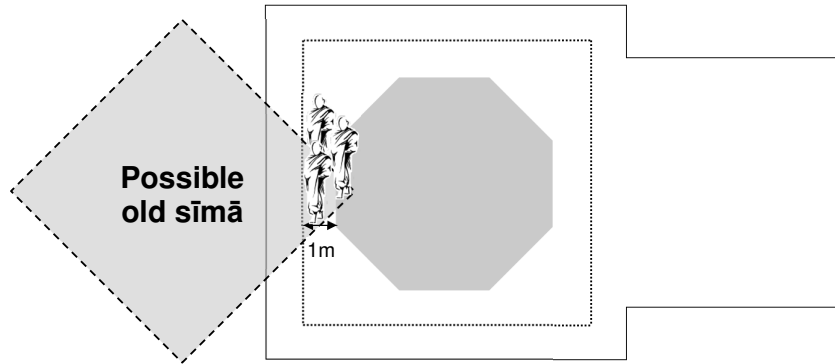
In such a case, if the removal procedures were done only on the exact area of the proposed sīmā, the possible pre-existing sīmā would not have been removed. The reasoning is as follows:

1. For such a saṅghakamma to be valid, one of the conditions is to have at least four participating bhikkhus *within* the pre-existing sīmā to be removed.
2. If the acts of removal were executed only within the exact area of the proposed sīmā, it would be impossible to satisfy the above condition because four bhikkhus would not be able fit into the corner of the pre-existing sīmā that overlapped the site of the proposed sīmā.

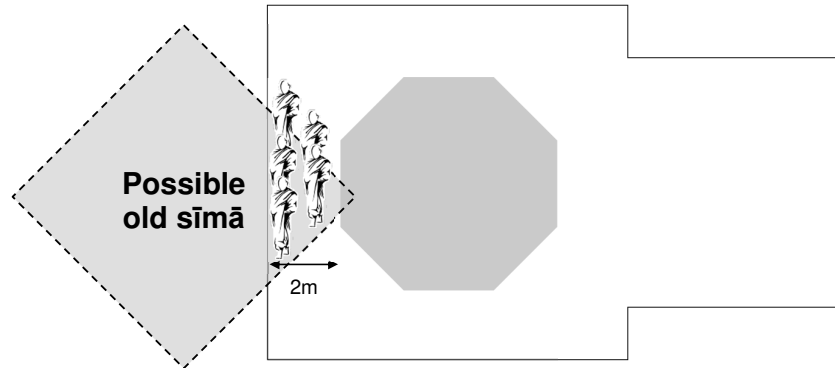
Subsequently, as explained earlier in [Preliminaries 2: Site Preparation](#), the new sīmā would not be valid as it would overlap the pre-existing one. Therefore, to be on the safe side, the saṅghakammas to remove pre-existing sīmās were also done on the bordering area of the proposed sīmā.

Then again, one may also ask, “Why go as far as two metres, then? Why not just one?”

If that were done instead, it would not be very likely to have four bhikkhus within the overlap to perform the saṅghakamma so that the possible pre-existing sīmā is removed (as illustrated below).

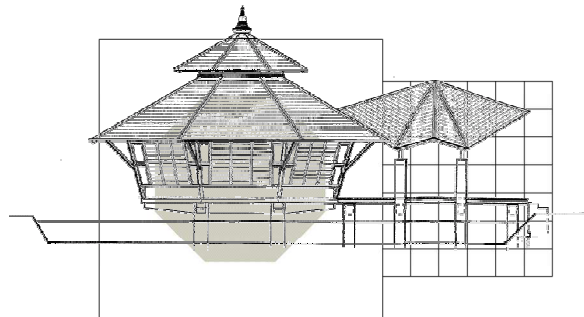


However, if an allowance of two metres around the proposed sīmā was included in the area to be removed of possible pre-existing sīmās, the criterion of having a minimum of four bhikkhus standing within the sīmā could easily be met when the sīmā removal saṅghakammās were performed (as illustrated below), thus ensuring that they would be properly removed.



As mentioned before, the likelihood of having an existing sīmā in that kind of position is slim. However, to be entirely clear of doubt, it would be better to include the two-metre border in the sīmā removal saṅghakammās.

The eastward protrusion. The next step is to explain the rationale for including the 6x7m² extension towards the east for removal.



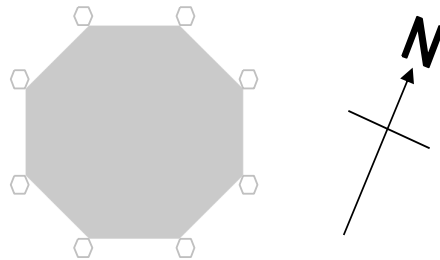
This is where a bridge on stilts would be built extending from the sīmā pavilion towards the east. As it would be connected to the pavilion that sits on the foundation where the sīmā is, the bridge would also be deemed part of the sīmā. Therefore, saṅghakammas for removing pre-existing sīmās also needed to be performed on the ground where the stilts would be standing. The purpose was to avoid possible sīmā “adulteration” should there be pre-existing sīmās at the foot of any of the stilts.

Therefore, it should now be clear why saṅghakammas to remove possible pre-existing sīmās had to be done on those ‘extra’ areas.

Laying the Nimittas

Another significant preparation done at the site was laying the nimittas to mark the border of the proposed new sīmā.

In the Vinaya Piṭaka, it is mentioned that the Buddha allowed the use of eight types of nimittas, including stones/rocks (pāsāṇa). However, it does not specify the limit in terms of size. According to Samantapāsādikā, a Vinaya commentary, each of them must be larger than the size of 32 palas of jaggery but not bigger than an elephant.⁵ According to research by Vinaya experts, 32 palas is equivalent to slightly over two kilograms. Two kilograms of jaggery put together is about the size of an average-sized pomelo or shaddock.



The stones that were eventually picked for the purpose were visually larger than the indicated minimum, but could be easily lifted by a man of average strength. They were placed neatly at the eight corners of the octagonal area demarcating the proposed sīmā. If one were to stand in the middle of the octagon, one would find the stones placed in the north, northeast, east, southeast, south, southwest, west, and northwest directions.

The actual laying of the nimittas was done after the removal of possible pre-existing sīmās, but before the demarcation and declaration of the new sīmā. Nonetheless, to be prepared and to avoid last-minute rush and confusion, the stones were picked in advance and placed nearby the site. That is why we have touched on the subject in this section, as it is part of “site preparation”.

Directional Signboards

To further minimise potential confusion, eight signboards were made, each indicating the eight directions: N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, and NW. They were to be planted

⁵ Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga-aṭṭhakathā, 2. Uposathakkhandhaka, Sīmānujānanakathā, para 138.

on the ground next to the rock nimittas. However, as the ground proved rather hard, the participants who announced the nimittas had to hold them upright instead.

Day 1: Removal of Possible Pre-existing Sīmās

Why Remove Pre-existing Sīmās

As mentioned in the [earlier section](#), the Buddha decreed that if a sīmā were made combining with or overlapping an existing baddha-sīmā, the new one would be invalid, while the existing one would stand as it was. Therefore, before we made the new sīmā, we had to first clear the area of any possible pre-existing sīmās.

One may ask: “Why should we worry about that? How could there be any baddhasīmā there when no bhikkhus were known to have ever lived around the area in the past?”

The answer is precisely “We don't know.” However, we do know that the Pāli commentarial literature speaks of a place called ‘suvaṇṇabhūmi’ (golden land) where Buddhism would take root. While the Thais believe that it is located in Thailand, and the Burmese in Myanmar, some historians believe it to be located in what we now call Peninsular Malaysia. They draw the conclusion from the belief that it had a substantial deposit of gold—so much so that Ptolemy, the famed Greek explorer, named the peninsular “The Golden Chersonese”.

Furthermore, archaeologists have found evidence of Buddhist culture here before the fourteenth century. One such evidence is a Buddha image found in Perak, the state where SBS is located.

Therefore, there is a possibility that there were bhikkhus around the location then. Who knows? Some might have moved to a nice, quiet place like Taiping and made a sīmā that might just happen to overlap or even touch our proposed sīmā. Then if we did not properly remove the pre-existing sīmā, our new sīmā would be invalid.

While it can be argued that this is quite unlikely, still, it would be reasonable to do whatever we could to remove every iota of doubt. That proved to be quite a chore entailing a tedious process of performing many saṅghakammas to remove all possible pre-existing sīmās. Nonetheless, what must be done must be done.

These saṅghakammas require a quorum of only four (4) bhikkhus. However, it is virtually impossible to tell whether an apparent bhikkhu is really a bhikkhu. An apparent bhikkhu may not be a valid bhikkhu due to reasons such as having a disqualification for ordination, invalidity of ordination, a pārājika offence committed



A Buddha statue, bearing elements of a Theravadin style of robe wearing. Found in Pengkalan Pegoh, Ipoh, Perak.

Source: http://www.perak.gov.my/perak_250696/june/html/history2.html Courtesy of Perak Homepage

by him after ordination, etc. Therefore, to decrease the chances of performing invalid saṅghakammas due to a lack of regular⁶ valid bhikkhus, many more than the minimum number of bhikkhus were invited to take part in the procedures.

About twenty (20) respectable Malaysian monks were invited. Fourteen (14) of them attended; one (1) came as a replacement. Thus together with two (2) resident monks, seventeen (17) monks participated in the saṅghakammas.

Removal of Sīmās

After breakfast on 30 June 2001, Ven. Aggacitta guided the monks on the recitation of the kammavācā for sīmā removal until they could recite it in a satisfactorily accurate manner. At 8.15am, the monks walked in single file according to seniority into the area marked for the occasion. After the chanting of parittas, the saṅgha was ready to begin the long and repetitive sessions of removing possible pre-existing sīmās. Then, Ven. Ujukata fell sick and was unable to participate. He left the assembly to take a rest.

The Buddha made a rule that bhikkhus are not allowed to perform a saṅghakamma without the consent of *all* bhikkhus within the sīmā—baddhā or abaddhā. If it were performed anyhow, the saṅghakamma would be invalid. Therefore, Ven. Kumāra was sent to obtain Ven. Ujukata's chanda (consent), which was duly given. He then returned and conveyed it to the saṅgha. The 16 members of the saṅgha then resumed their task.

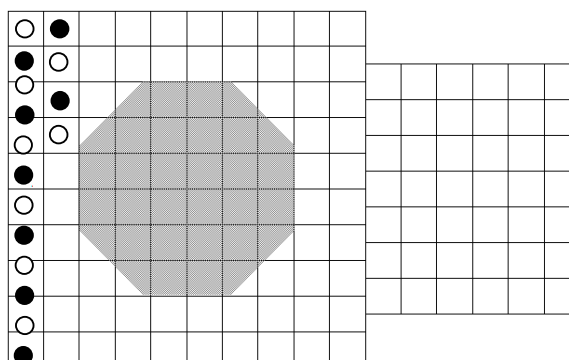
Ven. Aggacitta, who was the vinayadhara orchestrating the procedures, instructed the monks to position themselves along the grid at the west-southwest edge of the marked area. They were especially reminded to stay apart—within one hatthapāsa (approx. 1.25m) of, yet not in contact with, each other, not even with the robes.

The need to be within one hatthapāsa (arm's length) is implied in Pācittiya 80 (chandaṃ adatvā gamanasikkhāpada) as one of the requirements for bhikkhus participating in a saṅghakamma. The need for non-contact stems from the idea of sīmā “adulteration” as mentioned in [Preliminaries 2: Site Preparation](#). Instead of the case of two trees touching each other, it is two bhikkhus.



⁶ *Pakatatta*, meaning a bhikkhu who has not been formally suspended by the saṅgha for not seeing an offence he had committed or not atoning for it, or not relinquishing a pernicious wrong view; or a bhikkhu who has not been formally suspended by the saṅgha but declares himself to be the suspended bhikkhu's supporter or follower.

With all the monks now in position, they were divided into two groups according to their standing position alternately, as shown below. (White circles: Group A; black circles: Group B)



Note that it is not necessary to stand in the boxes like chessmen. It is only important to make sure that the monks were within *hatthapāsa*, and that the entire marked area was eventually removed of all possible pre-existing *sīmās*.

The *vinayadhara* then instructed Group A to recite the *kammavācā* formulated by the Buddha for the removal of a *sīmā*, while members of Group B just stood and listened.⁷ In other words, the recitation was done in such a way that only half of the monks within the formation did the recitation while the other half just listened. The reciting and listening monks stood in alternate positions. After the recitation all the monks moved to the adjacent squares which were previously unoccupied. At the same time, the positions of the monks within the formation were also reshuffled randomly. The recitation for the second round was then done by the other half who only listened in the first round, standing in alternate positions with the former



⁷ See Appendix A for the *kammavācās* in Pāli with the corresponding English translation.

reciters who now became just listeners. For subsequent rounds the same movement to adjacent previously unoccupied squares and reshuffling of positions were repeated. In any one round, the monks who had recited in the previous round became just listeners. As you can see, only half of the monks recited in any one round, although all remained in formation. This procedure was repeated until the whole area was covered.

One may question the rationale behind this procedure. Firstly, why divide the monks into two groups and have the groups recite alternately? Why must the monks in the reciting group and listening group stand in alternate positions? Moreover, why shuffle their positions?

Actually, to successfully remove a sīmā, only four regular valid monks are required to be within it, while one of them recites the kammavācā with accurate pronunciation. However, as mentioned earlier, an apparent bhikkhu may not be a valid bhikkhu. If only one monk were to recite and he happened, for whatever reason, to be not a valid bhikkhu, the saṅghakamma would be invalid. If a valid bhikkhu were to recite the kammavācā wrongly, it would also be invalid. So, with the end of each set of saṅghakamma, the participants were reshuffled for the next round. This was done to ensure that there were different sets of four monks covering the area they were standing on at any one time. Therefore, by taking the tedious steps mentioned above, the chances of meeting all the requirements of a valid saṅghakamma would increase so high that it would be virtually fool proof.

To be doubly certain that the site was entirely cleared of any possible pre-existing sīmās, another round of removal was performed in the late afternoon, starting at about 5pm. Since by then Ven. Ujukata had somewhat recovered, he joined in too, making a total of 17 monks. In this round, the monks started from the south-south-east side of the large square area and worked their way to the north-north-west side. Then, to cover the bridge area, the bhikkhus began with the little squares along the perimeter of the area and then moved in a spiral formation towards the squares in the centre. *That should do it.*

Day 2: Demarcation and Declaration of the New Sīmā

On a bright sunny morning of the second day, 1 July 2001, the monks again went to the site, together with a crowd of devotees. Earlier that day, some devotees had already prepared the site as instructed by Ven. Aggacitta. The preparation has been described earlier in [*Preliminaries 2: Site Preparation: Laying the Nimittas*](#).

Since the removal of possible pre-existing sīmās had been thoroughly performed the previous day, it was certain that the site was now free from any pre-existing sīmās and the saṅgha could safely proceed to agree upon a new sīmā.

The monks took their seats in the centre of the marked octagon. After the customary chanting of some parittas, the monks were ready to begin their task of the day.

Announcing of Nimittas

In the Uposathakhandhaka of the Mahāvagga in the Vinaya Piṭaka, it is recorded that nimittas should be announced before the actual agreement upon a new sīmā.⁸ However, no details are given as to how the announcement is to be carried out. As with anything not clearly mentioned in the Vinaya Piṭaka, its commentaries undertook the task of prescribing a reasonable method, and later vinayadharas proposed several interpretations thereof.

Thus, in accordanāe with one of the interpretations, the following procedure was adopted. Eight appointed monks each stood next to a rock nimitta laid at each corner of the octagon marking the boundary of the proposed sīmā. A ninth monk, positioned inside the sīmā, moved from one monk to the next with a question, beginning and ending with the monk at the rock in the eastern direction, moving in a clockwise direction. The following verbal exchange took place with each of the monks positioned at the eight corners:

Question: *Puratthimāya disāya kiṃ nimittam?*
(What is the nimitta in the eastern direction?)

Reply: *Pāsāṇo, bhante.*
(Rock, bhante.)

Confirmation (by the questioning monk): *Ayaṃ pāsāṇo nimittam.*
(This rock is the nimitta.)

(Note: At each rock, the name of the direction was duly changed in the question to correspond with the direction marked by the rock.)



⁸ 71. Sīmānujānanā, para 138.

The names of the participating monks and the actual words are shown in the table below.

Position of nimitta	Question	Round 1	Round 2
		Questioner	
		Aggacitta	Uttara
		Responder	
East	<i>Puratthimāya disāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Vijitha	Caṭṭamālo
South-east	<i>Puratthimāya anudisāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Dhammavuddho	Khantika
South	<i>Dakkhiṇāya disāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Ujukata*	Samyamo
South-west	<i>Dakkhiṇāya anudisāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Ghosananda	Ujukata
West	<i>Pacchimāya disāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Rādha	Tejaddhamma
North-west	<i>Pacchimāya anudisāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Pasannacitta	Kusala
North	<i>Uttarāya disāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Vāyāmo	Kumāra
North-east	<i>Uttarāya anudisāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Jotipaṇṇo	Tissara
East	<i>Puratthimāya disāya kiṃ nimittam?</i>	Vijitha	Caṭṭamālo

Having completed the verbal exchange with all the monks involved in the procedure, the questioner returned to the first monk (i.e. the one in the eastern direction) and repeated the same verbal exchange with him, thus making a complete loop. After that, all the monks reassembled at the centre of the octagon.

With the nimitta announcement completed, the saṅgha was ready to proceed with the next step: the agreement upon a new sīmā. However, since this was such a rare and highly auspicious occasion, Ven. Aggacitta thought that more people should be given a chance to participate actively. As such, four more rounds of the announcing of the nimitta stones were carried out, each led by Ven. Uttara, Ven. Vijitha, Ven. Kumāra (replacing Ven. Mahāṇṇo who was not feeling well), and Ven. Caṭṭamālo respectively.

The second round, led by Ven. Uttara, followed a different interpretation of the commentarial suggestion for how to announce the nimittas. A very noticeable difference in this round was that neither the questioner nor respondents went to the nimittas. This time, they remained seated in the middle of the proposed octagonal sīmā.

The question and reply, however, were essentially the same as those used in the first round. Only the confirmation varied a little, i.e., *Eso pāsāṇo nimittam*. (Meaning: That rock is the nimitta.)

The three subsequent rounds were done following the first procedure, with the third and fourth conducted in English, and the fifth in Hokkien. The use of English and Hokkien in the later rounds was not merely for the sake of allowing more people to understand what had been said and done. They were by themselves perfectly

valid ways of announcing the nimittas because the procedure was not a saṅgha-kamma with a kammavācā specifically formulated by the Buddha. Therefore, as long as what was said was understood by the assembled community of bhikkhus, it was fine.

Furthermore, it is not mentioned in the scriptures that only monks can participate in the announcing of the nimittas. There being no rules against letting lay people join in too, a selected number of lay devotees were given the chance to take part in the three later rounds as respondents.



Agreement upon a New Sīmā

After the announcing of the nimittas came the actual agreement by the saṅgha upon a new sīmā. This was the purpose and culmination of the entire event.

Having taken all the steps mentioned earlier, what remained was comparatively straightforward and easy. The minimum requirements for the purpose of establishing a new sīmā are:

- A quorum of four regular valid bhikkhus to make up the saṅgha
- A capable bhikkhu among them to recite the kammavācā for the agreement upon a new sīmā
- All bhikkhus are within the proposed sīmā and not separated from each other by more than an arm's reach.

As this was a saṅghakamma, all valid bhikkhus within our gāmasīmā (as determined earlier in [Preliminaries 1: Determining the Extent of Our Abaddhasīmā](#)) were required to participate in it by being present, or by giving their consent to it. Ven. Mahāñāṇo was not feeling well that morning and decided not to attend the saṅghakamma. Therefore, his chanda (consent) was required. A monk was asked by Ven. Aggacitta to obtain Ven. Mahāñāṇo's chanda, which he did.

When the time came to perform the saṅghakamma, Ven. Aggacitta recited the kammavācā among the assembled saṅgha.⁹ Halfway through, he remembered that the monk had yet to convey Ven. Mahāñāṇo's chanda to the saṅgha. While it could be an offence on the part of the monk if he did not do so deliberately, the situation did not invalidate the saṅghakamma since the chanda had already been given to a bhikkhu participating in the saṅghakamma. Bearing that in mind, Ven. Aggacitta continued the kammavācā, which concluded as follows:

“Whichever venerable is pleased with the agreement upon that sīmā..., he should be silent. Whoever is not pleased should speak.

That sīmā is agreed upon by the saṅgha.... It is pleasing to the saṅgha, therefore it is silent; thus do I understand it.”

At the conclusion of the kammavācā, the saṅghakamma for agreeing upon the sīmā was completed, and thus a new sīmā—**Sāsanārakkhā Sīmā**—was officially established by the saṅgha.

Ciraṃ tiṭṭhatu saddhammo!

Long live the Good Dhamma!

⁹ See Appendix B for the kammavācās in Pāli with the corresponding English translation.



From Top, L-R: Notice the *nimittas* at the foundation of the *sīmā* hall in the first two images. At first, we thought that the dam would be able to retain the water from the brook to form a pond naturally, but it leaked due to water pressure when the water level rose. So, we tried to use mud to seal the cavities between the rocks, but that did not work either. Finally, we had to concretise the entire bed for the water to fill up and overflow at the top of the dam. The last image shows the current scenario in 2020.

Addendum: Sīmā Adulteration (Sīmasaṅkara) & Saṅghakamma

The validity of a saṅghakamma carried out within a sīmā is dependent on 5 major conditions:¹⁰

- 1) Fulfilment of the base (application of the right saṅghakamma to the specific matter to be addressed)
- 2) Fulfilment of the motion (correct phrasing and pronunciation of the motion)
- 3) Fulfilment of the proclamation (correct phrasing and pronunciation of the proclamation)
- 4) Fulfilment of the sīmā (freedom from the 11 points of disqualification)
- 5) Fulfilment of the assembly (correct quorum of qualified bhikkhus, conveyance of consent, absence of objections from the assembly).

All the points in condition 4 have already been covered in the above report, but there is one point not included in condition 4 which was also covered in the report and which is particularly relevant to the usage of a proper baddhasīmā: [sīmā adulteration \(sīmasaṅkara\)](#). This is not a point of disqualification of a sīmā, but relates to condition 5.

Sīmā adulteration refers to connecting two baddhasīmās together with any solid object apart from the ground and its constituents (e.g. stones, sand, soil, minerals). Practically, this means that while a saṅghakamma is being conducted in a baddhasīmā, there must not be any such solid objects protuberating from its boundary (determined by its nimittas). If there were any such objects, they might connect the baddhasīmā to another baddhasīmā, whether far or near, known or unknown. Consequently, any bhikkhus staying in the other baddhasīmā would invalidate the saṅghakamma in the first baddhasīmā, unless they had given their consent beforehand. This issue would arise because both baddhasīmās were now connected and therefore considered as one.

In respect of this matter there is some controversy among vinayadharas on its interpretation. Most assert that overhead power cables carrying electricity into the sīmā could invalidate the saṅghakamma because the cables are connected to the national grid and thus every place where electricity is thereby supplied would be connected, including known and unknown sīmās.

Some maintain that if the power cables are underground, then they become part of the ground (bhūmigatika) and would therefore not jeopardise the saṅghakamma. Yet others argue that whether overhead or underground, all electrical power cables connected to the sīmā could cause sīmā adulteration.

To be on the safe side, it may be best to plan for a weather-proof junction box just outside the sīmā so that the plug can be pulled out and the cable kept inside the sīmā while a saṅghakamma is being performed, but otherwise plugged in at other

¹⁰ Vinaya Piṭaka, Parivārapāli, Pañcavagga, 1. Kammavagga.

times. If electrical supply is required when saṅghakamma is being performed, it can be generated from solar panels installed within the sīmā. Another alternative is for the facilities within the sīmā to rely solely on such solar power, or any other independent power source without any external connection to the national power grid.

*Addendum inserted by Aggacitta Bhikkhu
27 August 2020*

Appendix A

Sīma-samūhana-kammavācā

Avippavāsa-sīma-samūhanana-kammavācā

Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho.
Yo so saṅghena ticīvarena
avippavāso sammato,
yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ,
saṅgho taṃ ticīvarena
avippavāsaṃ samūhaneyya.
Esā ñatti.

Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho.
Yo so saṅghena ticīvarena
avippavāso sammato, saṅgho taṃ
ticīvarena avippavāsaṃ
samūhanati. Yassāyasmato
khamati etassa ticīvarena
avippavāsassa samugghāto,
so tuṇhassa; yassa nakkhamati,
so bhāseyya.

Samūhato so saṅghena
ticīvarena avippavāso.
Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī,
evametaṃ dhārayāmi.

Samānasamvāsa-sīma-samūhana-kammavācā

Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho.
Yā sā saṅghena sīmā sammatā
samānasamvāsā ekuposathā,
yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ,
saṅgho taṃ sīmaṃ samūhaneyya
samānasamvāsaṃ ekuposathaṃ.
Esā ñatti.

Kammavācā to Abolish a Sīmā

Abolishing a sīmā as “not staying apart from the three robes”

Bhante, let the saṅgha listen to me. Whatever was agreed upon by the saṅgha as [a place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from the three robes, if the saṅgha is ready, the saṅgha should abolish that [agreement of the place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from the three robes. This is the motion.

Bhante, let the saṅgha listen to me. Whatever was agreed upon by the saṅgha as [a place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from the three robes, the saṅgha abolishes that [agreement of the place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from the three robes. Which-ever venerable is pleased with the abolition of that [agreement of the place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from the three robes, he should be silent. Whoever is not pleased should speak.

That [agreement of the place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from the three robes is abolished by the saṅgha. It is pleasing to the saṅgha, therefore it is silent; thus do I understand it.

Abolishing a sīmā for the same communion

Bhante, let the saṅgha listen to me. Whatever sīmā—for the same communion, for a united Uposatha—that has been agreed upon by the saṅgha, if the saṅgha is ready, the saṅgha should abolish that sīmā—for the same communion, for a united Uposatha. This is the motion.

Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho.
Yā sā saṅghena sīmā sammata
samānasamvāsā ekuposathā,
saṅgho taṃ sīmāṃ samūhanati
samānasamvāsāṃ ekuposathaṃ.
Yassāyasmato khamati etissā
sīmāya samānasamvāsāya
ekuposathāya samugghāto,
so tuṇhassa; yassa nakkhamati,
so bhāseyya.

Samūhatā sā sīmā saṅghena
samānasamvāsā ekuposathā.
Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī,
evametaṃ dhārayāmi.

*Bhante, let the saṅgha listen to me.
Whatever sīmā—for the same communion,
for a united Uposatha—which has been
agreed upon by the saṅgha, the saṅgha
abolishes that sīmā—for the same
communion, for a united Uposatha.
Whichever venerable is pleased with the
abolition of that sīmā—for the same
communion, for a united Uposatha—
he should be silent. Whoever is not pleased
should speak.*

*That sīmā—for the same communion, for a
united Uposatha—is abolished by the
Sangha. It is pleasing to the saṅgha, there-
fore it is silent; thus do I understand it.*

Appendix B

Sīma-sammuti-kammavācā

Samānasamvāsa-sīma-sammuti-kammavācā

Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yāvata samantā nimittā kittitā.
yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ, saṅgho etehi nimittehi sīmaṃ sammanneyya samānasamvāsaṃ ekuposathaṃ.
Esā ñatti.

Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yāvata samantā nimittā kittitā. Saṅgho etehi nimittehi sīmaṃ sammannati samānasamvāsaṃ ekuposathaṃ. Yassāyasmato khamati etehi nimittehi sīmāya sammuti samānasamvāsāya ekuposathāya, so tuṇhassa; yassa nakkhamati, so bhāseyya.

Sammatā sīmā saṅghena etehi nimittehi samānasamvāsā ekuposathā. Khamati saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī, evametaṃ dhārayāmi.

Avippavāsa-sīma-sammuti-kammavācā

Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yā sā saṅghena sīmā sammatā samānasamvāsā ekuposathā yadi saṅghassa pattakallaṃ, saṅgho taṃ sīmaṃ ticivarena avippavāsaṃ sammanneyya, ṭhapetvā gāmañca gāmūpacārañca. Esā ñatti.

Suṇātu me, bhante, saṅgho. Yā sā saṅghena sīmā sammatā samānasamvāsā ekuposathā, saṅgho taṃ sīmaṃ ticivarena avippavāsaṃ sammannati, ṭhapetvā gāmañca gāmūpacārañca.

Kammavācā to Agree upon a Sīmā

Agreeing upon a sīmā for the same communion

Bhante, let the saṅgha listen to me. To the extent of the nimittas all around that have been announced, if the saṅgha is ready, the saṅgha should agree upon a sīmā—for the same communion, for a united Uposatha—in accordance with these nimittas. This is the motion.

Bhante, let the saṅgha listen to me. To the extent of the nimittas all around that have been announced, the saṅgha agrees upon a sīmā—for the same communion, for a united Uposatha—in accordance with these nimittas. Whichever venerable is pleased with this agreement upon a sīmā—for the same communion, for a united Uposatha—in accordance with these nimittas, he should be silent. Whoever is not pleased should speak.

A sīmā—for the same communion, for a united Uposatha—in accordance with these nimittas, is agreed upon by the saṅgha. It is pleasing to the saṅgha, therefore it is silent; thus do I understand it.

Agreeing upon a sīmā as “not staying apart from the three robes”

Bhante, let the saṅgha listen to me. Whatever sīmā—for the same communion, for a united Uposatha—was agreed upon by the saṅgha, if the saṅgha is ready, the saṅgha should agree upon that sīmā as [a place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from the three robes, excluding [any part of] a village and its vicinity. This is the motion.

Bhante, let the saṅgha listen to me. Whatever sīmā—for the same communion, for a united Uposatha—was agreed upon by the saṅgha, the saṅgha agrees upon that sīmā as [a place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from the three robes, excluding [any part of] a village and its vicinity.

Yassāyasmato khamati etissā
sīmāya ticīvarena avippavāsāya
sammuti, ṭhapetvā gāmañca
gāmūpacārañca, so tuṇhassa;
yassa nakkhamati, so bhāseyya.

*Whichever venerable is pleased with the
agreement upon that sīmā as [a place where a
bhikkhu is reckoned as] not staying apart from
the three robes, excluding [any part of] a village
and its vicinity, he should be silent.
Whoever is not pleased should speak.*

Sammatā sā sīmā saṅghena
ticīvarena avippavāsā, ṭhapetvā
gāmañca gāmūpacārañca. Khamati
saṅghassa, tasmā tuṇhī,
evametaṃ dhārayāmi.

*That sīmā is agreed upon by the saṅgha as
[a place where a bhikkhu is reckoned as]
not staying apart from the three robes,
excluding [any part of] a village and its vicinity.
It is pleasing to the saṅgha, therefore it is silent;
thus do I understand it.*

Glossary

Abaddhasīmā	[area with a] boundary unbound [by <i>saṅghakamma</i>]
Baddhasīmā	[area with a] boundary bound [by <i>saṅghakamma</i>]
Bhikkhu	fully ordained monk
Chanda	consent
Gāmasīmā	[area with a] village boundary
Hatthapāsa	arm's length
Kammavācā	legal statement
Nagarasīmā	[area with a] town boundary
Nimitta	[boundary] marker
Pācittiya	a class of monastic offence; the rule related to this offence
Pala	a unit measure of weight
Pārājika	a class of grave monastic offence, the committing of which entails “defeat”, i.e. the offender automatically becomes a layman and is irrevocably disqualified from re-ordination as a <i>bhikkhu</i>
Pāsāṇa	stone, rock
Saṅghakamma	legal act of the community [of monks]
Sāsanārakkha	guardian of the [Buddha's] dispensation
Sīmā	[area with a] boundary
Sīmasaṅkara	“adulteration” of <i>sīmā</i>
Vinaya	monastic law and regulation
Vinayadhara	expert on monastic law and regulation