The Concretization of Sinhalese into the Ethnic Identity by Buddhist Pilgrimages: A Historical Investigation

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Abstract

The Buddhist pilgrimages are a major factor that had an impact on the formation of the Sinhalese culture and the concretization of the people. By looking at it from a sociocultural point of view, certain stories relating to the lives of the early inhabitants have proved that it is a historical truth, that concretization of the Ceylonese occurred was through pilgrimages. The stories of pilgrimages that occur in the Buddhist literature are related to the sacred historical places and items that they visited. With reference to these facts the study observes how the pilgrimages demonstrated the social norms thus developing a Sinhalese ethnic identity.

Keywords: Concretization - Ethnic Identity - Pilgrimages - Rituals - Sacred Sites - Social Norms

The pilgrimages that are made by people belonging to all religions have formed the social norms and identities of the culture to which a particular group of the people belong. In the Buddhist society, it has played an important role in formulating the Sinhalese ethnic identity. To Buddhists, even today, a pilgrimage is a very important religious practice which comes from the history of Buddhism. With the

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distribution of people all over the island, it is noticeable that there had been a discrepancy of thought among the Ceylonese in the early period. Even if there were any social norms in existence at that time, it was not sufficient enough to concretize the people. When we consider their social aspirations in such an informal society, it is apparent that there had been no strong cultural ties to unify them. Before the arrival of Buddhism, there had been no historical evidence of an effective force to concretize the inhabitants in forming an ethnic identity.

Inhabitants in pre-Buddhist Ceylon could not be identified with common characteristics in socio-cultural, economic, or in any religious practices which formed the nucleus of the identity of the Sinhalese. Fishermen, farmers, traders and the Vādās who inhabited the island showed different characteristics of their own, which prevented the unification of them into congruity of ethnic group. It may be accepted that people of different occupations and different settlements could not build this ethnic identity, because there was no social harmony amongst them. Pre-Buddhist religious practices as recorded in the Mahāvamsa are the beliefs of natives such as the Yaksas, Devas and the Nagas who had no ethnic identity at all.

However, since the arrival of Buddhism, pilgrimages can be considered as a factor which enabled the concretization of the people in the island into a Sinhalese ethnic identity. Pilgrimage is an inherited religious practice that formed the culture and the behaviour of the inhabitants in the country. Buddhism is a religion open to all mankind, and it does not consider racism, caste or social partisanship. Buddhist pilgrimages created a common attitude and a common goal for the scattered inhabitants in the island. Religion, language and the customs are the basis on which the people were made to unite (Geerz, 1973.259). In order to determine some facts as cultural facts of concretization people in a society must use up the values and beliefs equally (Jayasingha, 2005.44). The very popular account of pilgrimages of Sinhalese as recorded in the old literature, contains their beliefs and values. These are the factors that reflect the concretization of Sinhalese in common attitudes and consistent behavioural patterns.

Under the mission of Mahinda Thero, the Ceylonese were united together with Buddhism functioning in diverse ways on the lives of all natives forming a common cultural trait. Since the embracing of
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Buddhism by the inhabitants, they also inherited an identity of their own, consisting of language, literature, art, ethics thoughts and social norms. Buddhism is the major factor that had an impact on the formation of the Sinhalese culture and the concretization of the people. This can be equated to something more than a blood relationship. When we look at it from a socio-anthropology point of view, certain stories relating to the lives of the early Ceylonese have proved that it is a historical truth, that concretization of the Ceylonese was through pilgrimages. Internalization of the accounts of pilgrimages in the minds of the Ceylonese was a major factor in the process of concretization.

Origin of Aspect of the Buddhist Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages and rituals are the practices approved by Lord Buddha. Kālīṅga-Bodhi Jātaka mentions about three shrines which are meritorious to visit and pay homage to (Rouse, 1901:44) The origin of Buddhist pilgrimages referred to in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta records that when the exalted one was passing away, even the Devās revered Him with heavenly flowers', sandalwood powder, music and songs. (Davids, 1901:150) According to the Sutta following are the four places the men of the believing class should visit with a feeling of reverence:

The place at which the believing man can say: "Here the Tathāgata was born!" is a spot to be visited with a feeling of reverence.

The place at which the believing man can say: "Here the Tathāgata attained the supreme and perfect insight!" is a spot to be visited with a feeling of reverence.

The place at which the believing man can say: "Here was the kingdom of righteousness set on foot by the Tathāgata" is a spot to be visited with a feeling of reverence.

The place at which the believing man can say: "Here the Tathāgata passed finally away in that utter passing away which leaves nothing whatever to remain behind" is a spot to be visited with a feeling of reverence.
According to a discourse, whoever who shall die when journeying on such pilgrimages with a believing heart, shall be born after death, where the body shall dissolve, in the happy realms of heaven.

The Parinibbāna Sutta mentions that Lord Buddha advised Ananda Thero to treat the remains of the Tathagata, by erecting a Stūpa at the four-cross-road junction, and whoever, who shall be there, place garlands and perfumes and pay homage, they will become calm-hearted in its presence and will bring never ending rewards and joy to them (Davids, 1901: 156).

Lord Buddha appreciated the Vajjians' customs of worshipping the Cetiyās of their ancestors, because it assisted much to the well being of the society a long period. As long as the Vajjians honour, revere and support the shrines in their towns and in the country, and make proper offerings and observe religious rites as in the past, then, they can expect peace in the country (Davids, 1901: 80).

According to the Mahāvamsa the first stūpa was built by king Devanampiyatissa on his own accord. Ven. Mahinda advised him how to find the relics to be enshrined. (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xvii: verse 4) Since he introduced this first sacred monument, stūpa has been the subject of pilgrimages.

Padavittihāraya is the merits earned by a person from each step, he or she takes while walking to a sacred place. The early Buddhists believed that a hundred elephants, a hundred-horses, a hundred women and a thousand ear-rings are not worth even a quarter of a twelve of the merits one earns from one single step, one takes in walking to a sacred place. (Apadāna Pali, 1965: 228) The old stories that are still available to us, indicate its influence on the lives of the inhabitants and the Bhikkhus in Ceylon.

When Mahinda Thero brought Buddhism to the Island, pilgrimages had been well established and very much advanced in India. As reflected in the sculptures in the Asokan period there was in progress a new religious behavior that was started with the paying of visits to the Bo-tree and the stūpas. Emperor Asoka erected a pillar at Lumbini where prince Siddhartha was born (Thapar, 1961: 261) and
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Places such as Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sārānath and Kusinagar were built to commemorate events in the life of the Buddha. The Stūpa at Sārānath was built to commemorate the event of the Buddha preaching his first sermon. The Stūpa at Sārānath has been the Buddhist pilgrims practised paying homage at the sacred places such as those at Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sārānath and Kusinagar.

Stories of Pilgrimages in Ancient Ceylon

The stories of pilgrimages occur in the Buddhist literature, which depict the religious behavior of the early Sinhalese, and these confirm the congruity of the ancient Ceylonese. Historical records, Sīhala Aṭṭakathā and tales that have come down to us from tradition are very important evidence to establish a hypothesis for the revelation of concretization. In view of anthropology, folk tales are the stories based on the acts of the human being representing the form of society. They are the records which present the ethnographic characteristics such as the memory and beliefs of the early Ceylonese which cannot be put aside as mere nonsense, myth or legends. It is possible to demonstrate the social norms of early Buddhists by such stories, which report this phenomenon of pilgrimages and can be considered as facts in the history which are indeed believable. According to the Sīhala Aṭṭakathā and tales people from different types of early settlements and different castes met at the sacred places. With the gradual increase in the number of people at the sacred places, the people in various positions had an equal chance in the Buddhist society as Buddhists. On the other hand, stories relating to material culture created by the Sinhalese are important evidence that reflect the collective aspirations and religious wishes of the early Buddhists. It is accepted that the creative work of people in any culture indicates their aspirations, instantaneous thoughts, and spiritual identities. The stories have been referred to as symbols representing their common experiences, their mode of thinking and the way they functioned.

Concretization of People in the Early Settlements

There is no doubt in determining that the social classes, or the men and women of different positions who occupied the settlements were heterogeneous inhabitants who were not concretized at all. Many historians agree that the society in pre-Buddhist Ceylon, before the
The advent of Mahinda Thero was divided into four major divisions, the Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Gahapatis and the Sudras (Ellawala, 1969:11). There is no doubt that Brahmans had separate dwellings and villages of their own. There was a village of the Brahmans called Tivakka (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xix; verse 61). The Pandulagama village was another place where the Brahmans lived (Geiger, 1960: Chapter x; verse 20). We have sufficient testimonies to determine that the Brahmans living in those villages embraced the Buddhism. Inscriptions show that they even dedicated caves to the bhikkus.

Kshatriyas, the kings and officers of royal families and their followers, were of noble class. According to the Mahavamsa (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xix verse 62) they had separate settlements in Anuradhapura, Kajaragama, Kalaπiya and Candanagama (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xix; 54). There was a Kshatriya village near Mahiyangana too.

Many Gahapatis or Vaisyas who belonged to the category of merchants and resided in many regions in the Island were Buddhists. They too have dedicated caves to the bhikkhu (Archaeological Survey of Ceylon, 1936: Vol 111:437). A few of their settlements can be noticed in villages such as Khandakavithi, Hundarivapi at Rohaνa (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xx; verse 45) and in the city of Mahela near Anuradhapura (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xx; verse 48).

Mahavamsa and the Sīhalavatthuppakaraṇa mention some of the names of low castes, weavers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, potters, umbrella-bearers, washer men, barbers, leather workers, craftsmen, panners and fishermen. Sīhalavatthuppakaraṇa also contains some stories referring to the slaves, servants and labourers. The carpenters had also separate villages named Vaddakigama (Ellawala, 1969:113). Villages of Smiths were the other settlements. Several inscriptions have on record the donations made by them to the monasteries (Epigraphia Zeylanica, Vol iv:135). It has been suggested that Khumbaseila Vihara at Rohana, Kulalitissa Vihara, Kumubatissa Pabbata and Kuba Vehera were founded by potters at their villages. Weavers, potters (Ellawala, 1969:58) and cowherds (Ellawala, 1969:58) have also dedicated caves to the bhikkus (Ellawala, 1969:58).
The oldest Buddhist monuments located in many regions in the island are prominent factors of concretization of people through pilgrimages. For example, the yard of the great Stūpa, the great Bo-tree, Nāgādīpa, Tissamahārāma and Kālaniya were the centres at which the different crowds and the bhikkhus who came from all corners of the Island met. The Sinhalese who were resident in different regions in the country met at these sacred places through pilgrimages. Buddhist events recorded in historical documents and in inscriptions found in many villages, cities and sea ports, are sufficient evidence for the concretization of the people in various settlements. Going through the records we can name a few villages such as Bhumariyana Village at Anuradhapura (Buddhadatta, 1959:4), Haritīla village at Nāgādīpa (Buddhadatta,1959:6) Kambojā village at Rohana (Buddhadatta,1959:8), Dīghavāpi (Buddhadatta,1959:86), Gunvajaya Janapadaya (Buddhadatta,1959:159) and Ulurālū village (Gopaigama) (Vanarathana,1988:194) which came under Buddhist aculturalization.
The Mahātthā (Mannār), the ancient sea port, was a place where the pilgrims met before taking the ship to Jambudvīpa. This was also the meeting place for the merchants. Jambukolapitāna located in the Jaffna Peninsula was a sacred place where both local and foreign pilgrims met. The place became a Buddhist historical sacred site, since the bringing of the branch of the Bodi tree to this place.

Kāliya, which the Lord Buddha arrived at during his third visit to Ceylon was another sacred place. According to Valānassa Jātaka, Kāliya was a place well known place to the sages. Seruviya Stūpa built by king Kākavannatissa which enshrined the frontal bone of the Lord Buddha became a very much crowed place too for many centuries.

People Get to Gather at the Sacred Places

The Adams peak or the mount Samanala became a sacred place for Buddhists since the very beginning of Buddhism in the island. It is believed that Lord Buddha placed his footprint there. Groups of men and women, and bhikkhus arrived from various regions in the island and they all met at the Samanala Kūta. Providing accommodations for the faithful Buddhists, Sinhala Kings were encouraged them to visit the place. Mahavamsa mentions the donation of Village Gili-malaya by King Vijayabahu 1 for the use of pilgrims who pay visit the mount Samanala. ‘Let no man endure hardship who go the along the difficult pathway to make obeisance at the foot-print of the Chief of Sages on the Samanala-Kūta rock’, said he and village of Gili-malaya that abounded in rice-fields and other land to be granted, wherewith to supply them (the pilgrims) with food and on the Kadalāgāma highway and Hūva path way he built resting places (sālā) (Geiger, 1992:64-85). Even today, we find massive crowds from all over the country gathering at the sacred place of Mount Samanala annually. Phillipus Balaeus identified the concretization of Sinhalese through pilgrimages which met at Mount Samanala. He noticed the fact that Sinhalese made pilgrimages as an excuse to have a glimpse of the sacred foot print. People come from hundred of miles away to see this famous shrine (Balaeus, 1958:352). This was a common religious practice for the Buddhists to establish an identity even as early as the 17th century A.D.

With the erection of the Tūpārūma Stūpa and the planting of the Bo-tree at Mahamouna, pilgrimages were undertaken with a lot of faith. The Bo-tree, the Stūpa and the image of Lord Buddha located
In the villages have given a cultural value to the pilgrimages. As we pointed out earlier, it is the un-degenerating Dhamma, that the old Cetiyas in the Vajjian kingdom have been honoured and worshipped. Naturally customs such as conducting pilgrimages at Cetiyas have helped to concretize the people building their identity. The Buddha's recommending the erection of Stūpas enshrining his remains at the junction of the four cross roads assisted in concretizing the people because that is a place where many crowds meet ceaselessly.

When we read through old records, we can picture in our minds the pilgrims straying from one Buddhist shrine to another along the roads and streets which have spread from main centres to the remotest areas in the Island. The highway from Anurādhapura to Jambukolappatana created a connection among the pilgrims. The Jambukolavihāra was a very popular centre even among the foreign pilgrims (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xix verse 60). One of the Bo-saplings, a sprout from the seeds of the Mahā Bodhi tree, was planted at this place. The highway running from the sacred city of Anurādhapura to Jambukolappatana was a useful road for the pilgrims Anurādhapura-Gokana high way, Anurādhapura-Unwelappatana highway, Anurādhapura-Pallawarawaka highway, Anurādhapura-Māgama high way and the highway joining the Mihintale-Kasıtota-Mahiyangana are the roads that connected the sacred places in the early period, and they were most useful in concretizing the people, The other roads that were useful to them were the road from Rajmata to Sripada, the road from Kadambha Nadi to Cetiya giri, the road from Anurādhapura to Mihintale, the road up to the Dakhinā Vilhāra, and the road up to Sudassana Padhānaghara (Munasingha, 1988:27-29).

From its early times, the Buddhist city of Anuradhapura was rich in many sacred sites. After the establishment of the great Stūpas, many visitors from all over the country were able to meet together. Ceremonies and festivals held at the places of Stūpas and Bo-trees in the sacred city, brought the people together with a common objective. Kings, officers, high class men, traders and the poor participated together in religious events. According to the old stories there were very attractive ceremonies performed continuously. King Saddhātissa conducted a ritual with great festivals for the Mahā Stūpa that lasted seven weeks (Buddhadasa, 1951:151). The greatest Stūpas located in various regions were sacred place where large number of devotees gathered to perform the ritual very often. For example
once hundred thousand bhikkhus and ninety thousand bhikkunis participated in a ritual offering to the Mritisawētiya Mahāvihāraya (Buddhadatta, 1951:151). The Stūpa, the sacred monument that inspired the people, not only became an object of worship for the pilgrims, but also a symbol where people gathered for their rituals. When we consider all this, pilgrimages can be defined as a religious behavior that is made up of multifaceted rituals of different people. These different partners of various rituals show their togetherness, by collectively wishing the blessings and enjoyment. Therefore, the pilgrims who become shareholders of these traditional practices and duties reach a common and an equal state which facilitates the concretization of the people.

Through regular and continuous pilgrimages to sacred places for rituals, they followed the characteristics of the devotees in the past; mentioned in the Buddhist stories like Vimānavattupakaranā and this brought a new light to concretization of the Ceylonese. In participating in these ritual performances at these sacred places, caste was of no consideration. If she or he had done any meritorious deeds, then that she or he is worthy of achieving a heavenly state irrespective of his or her caste. For instance, among the four goddesses at Thāvatimsa heaven, was a potter girl who offered flowers to Lord Buddha, and there was an old woman worshiping at the Nāgadīpa Stūpa with lily flowers. There was also a girl in the Kīnihirīya village offering Kīnihirīya flowers to the Stūpa, and a woman at Thammanā offering Lunuwila. They were all reborn in heaven Thāvatimsa as goddesses (Buddhadatta, 1951:10).

The religious awareness, gathered by the practices and the duties at pilgrimages led them to build a relationship amongst each other. It is recorded that elder bhikkhus guided the lay Buddhists and both local and foreign novice bhikkhus during pilgrimages. Great upāsakas also did their duty as guides on these pilgrimages. A well known name ‘nadeguru upāsaka’, familiar to Buddhists even today is the organizer of a Buddhist pilgrimage.

Planting of Bo-trees at different places in the Island had in many ways a big effect on the concretization of the people. As mentioned earlier during Lord Buddha’s time, Ananda Thero planted a Bo-Tree at Jetavana Vihara with the approval of Lord Buddha. It
and ninety thousand bhikkunis and ninety thousand bhikkhus guided the lay Buddhists and bhikkhus on a pilgrimage to the sacred tree by planting Bo-trees at different places in the Island.

A pilgrim visiting a Bo-tree for worship, created a new culture, a change in social pattern, customs, streams of new thoughts and occupations. A considerable change in the culture of Ceylon was brought about by planting Bo-trees at different places in the Island. The Bo-tree was considered as the living Buddha. Most Buddhists like to go on pilgrimage to Nāgādīpa travelling long distances, because this is the place Lord Buddha visited when he made his first visit to Sri Lanka. According to folk tales nine hundred bhikkhus went on pilgrimage to Nāgādīpa with the intention of worshipping at this sacred place. The place was provided by faithful kings who were reserved for these pilgrims arriving from faraway places. Hiuen-Tsang mentions, Sri Meghavanna is said to have sent two bhikkhus to India to the king Simudra Gupta, requesting him to provide shelter for the Sinhalese monks who were on a pilgrimage to the sacred tree at Bōdghaya (Beal, 1884:35).

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centre of Buddhist culture for the devotees to gather. In the early period thousands of devotees made pilgrimages to Bot-tree at Digavāpi (Buddhadatta, 1959:204). Seven bhikkhus from GirivajanaJanapadaya made a pilgrimage to Cetiya Vandana at Kirivehera walking sixty four Gavwas (A Sinhala measure of length roughly equal to three miles) (Buddhadatta, 1959:37) and a further eighty four Gavwas to Magama, and from there another twenty eight Gavwas to worship at the Mahā Bodhi, carrying with them gold flowers, incense, perfumes, vermilion and lamp oil. Thirty seven bhikkhus were shipped from Koranda Patuna to worship at the Bo-tree (Buddhadatta, 1959:48).

The manual of Buddhist Dhammapada was very popular among the early Buddhists and is rich in stories of pilgrimages. The narrative of Cunda, the pork butcher has been etched in the minds of the Ceylonese even today. According to the narrative, although the Buddha was in residence at a neighboring monastery not a single day did Cunda do him honour by offering him, so much as a handful of flowers or a spoonful of rice. Besides, nor did he do a single work of merit (Weragoda, 1993:31). Such narratives encourage the people in Sri Lanka to pay homage to the Buddha. In the post Buddha period, the image of the Buddha in the shrines of monasteries compensated for the absence of the living Buddha and was an object of worship. Mahavehera at Māsaka pawwa where there were many complexes of shrines and Avirana, Sāssuruwa, Polonnarwa Galviharaya where colossal images of the Buddha stood were historical sacred sites that devotees always gathered to pay homage to the Buddha.

Dhammacārikā and the Religious Festivals

As part of the pilgrimages Dhammacārikā and the religious festivals were historical event which formed the ethnic identity of the inhabitants. People in the city of Anuradhapura who assembled to listen to the Buddha's discourses, preached by Mahinda Thero became one-minded nation. When the number of devotees that gathered to listen to the Dhamma increased, according to Mahāvamsa, there was not enough space for all. To hear the Devadatta-Sutta, thousands of people gathered (Geiger, 1960:Chapter xi verse 64). By hearing the discourse of Bālapandita-Sutta, thousands of women attained the first stage of salvation (Geiger, 1960 Chapter xv verse 5). This group entered different positions in society, Attakatha, Sīhalavuttuprakarama, Rasavāhini
devotees to gather. In the early pilgrimages to Bo-tree at Dīgāvāpi bhikkhus from Giravajana Janapadaya Asta, at Kinnērāna walking sixty four length roughly equal to three miles) or eighty four Gawwas to Māgama, at Gawwas to worship at the Mahāvihāras, incense, perfumes, vermilion were shipped from Koranda Patuna (Buddhadatta, 1959:48).

Dhammapada was very popular in stories of pilgrimages. There has been etched in the minds of listening to the narrative, although the boring monastery not a single day among him, so much as a handful of verses, nor did he do a single work of narratives encourage the people in ddhā. In the post Buddha period, groups of monasteries compensated ddhana and was an object of worship, there were many complexes where there were historical sacred sites that image to the Buddha.

**Festivals**

Dhammacārika and the religious formed the ethnic identity of the people who assembled to listen to Mahinda Thero became one devotees that gathered to listening to Mahāvamsa, there was not considered Sutta, thousands of people (verse 64). By hearing the discourse women attained the first stage of enlightenment (verse 5). This group entered different Jātaka story complexes, Rasavāhini and Sathassavattupakarana present a comprehensive picture how Dhammacārika helped in concretizing the people.

At evenings, residents in the proximity of the monasteries assembled in groups to listen to the Dhammaa displaying disciplined and a collective behavior. Popular stories used by Arahants for lectures encouraged the people to undertake pilgrimages regularly and continuously. The many stories of well disciplined and virtuous bhikkhus attracted the people's minds. People started pilgrimages to such monasteries where these bhikkhus resided to pay homage and for giving alms, Pussadeva Thero at Kalakandara Vihārāya was a very popular bhikkhu who practiced meditation and was worshipped by Buddhists (Buddhadatta,1959:160).

The narratives belonging to the early period in the history of Ceylon, present a comprehensive picture of evening discourses held at monasteries. Men and women arrived at monasteries to listen to the Dhamma. Sounding boards at monasteries were rung, indicating the time for the sermon. There was such a sounding board at the Uddatolaka Vihārāya for the devotees to assemble and listen to the Dhamma (Buddhadatta, 1959:171). Devotees from far away places gathered here. One householder accompanied his wife and children with luggage in a chariot to listen to the Vessantara Jātaka story preached by Mahāsīmha Thero (Vanarathna,1968:140).

A tremendous number of people from far away places assembled to listen to the Ariyavamsa Desana, a very interesting discourse. A monastery at Mahawewa where a hundred bhikkus dwelled had an annual ceremony of Ariyavamsa (Buddhadatta,1959:169). People in the Mahakaraṇḍa village of Seruwila went on pilgrimage to Udumbara Vihārāya to listen to Ariyavamsa Desana, taking with them rice, curries and sweets etc (Vanarathna,1988:173). There were always Dhamma talks in the hall at Manikvehera. After the founding of the monasteries at village level, there is no doubt that the villagers were converted Buddhism. Faithful villagers assembled to listen to the Dhamma regularly. As we hear hurrah (Sadhul) at temples today, in the past at Māgama, men and the women were wandering around to hear the Dhamma, chanting Sadu! Sadu! (Giles,1923:71). They adopted the righteous way of life through the Dhammacārika. Fa-Hsien reports that
at all points where four roads meet there are chapels for preaching the faith; and on the eight, fourteenth and fifteenth day of each month a lofty dais is arranged, where ecclesiastics and laymen come together from all quarters to hear the faith expounded (Buddhadatta, 1951:54). Attended by kings and devotees, well mannered bhikkhus were praised. King Khuddatissa on hearing about a well disciplined bhikkhu of Mangana Vihara went on pilgrimage to his monastery with a crowd covering about five yojanas (Giles, 1923:71).

In pilgrimages, the organized behavior representing the allures and attractive forms associated with the various rituals are the other factors that had an impact on concretization. Men and women, although engaged in diverse duties formed a common social behavior through these allures and attractive forms of the rituals such as purifying and decorating the sacred places. There were the other pre-requisites such as seeking refuge in the Triple Gem; celebrating, reciting the Buddha’s virtues, singing devotional songs, offering flowers, oil lamps, foods and performing in processions etc. These components being the common features of the rituals, shaped the identity of Sinhalese from the very beginning forming into a cultural tie.

At the beginning a lot of people participated in the ceremonial custom of exhibiting the tooth relic at Abhayagiri Vihara. Fa-Hsien mentions that there was a tooth relic exhibition lasting ninety days at that Vihara (Balaeus, 1958:382). Such rituals that were performed on a regular basis continuously, assisted the concretization of the people forming common characteristics as the today rituals functioning in the Temple of the Tooth at Kandy and such like. We see similar rituals being continued by Buddhists even during the dark period of the 17th century. It was a common thing to see processions, being conducted through the streets in the country, playing horns, blowing trumpets, beating Tom-Toms and sounding bells and symbols followed by many men, women and children. They lay prostrate on the ground, and on rising they clasped their hands over their heads and pray (Paulusz, 1989:29).

Reports of Robert Knox disclose that even in the colonial periods, pilgrimages have played a big role in forming the ethnic identity of the Sinhalese. His reports present the organizational behaviour of the Sinhalese which tied them to each other. In his words, there were many of these Bo-trees which they planted all over the land and people
there are chapels for preaching the law and fifteenth day of each month a pious mass is celebrated by priests and laymen come together and expounded (Buddhadatta, 1951:54). The well mannered bhikkhus were being about a well disciplined bhikkhu session in the temple and keeping the public to his monastery with a crowd of people participating in the rituals such as purifying the heart, offering flowers, oil lamps, foods and other necessary pre-requisites such as the Buddha's image, flowers, blowing trumpets, beating tom-toms followed by many men, women and children from all ages, they set trees, sweep under them often to keep them clean. They light lamps and set up their images under them, and a stone table is placed under some of the trees to lay their sacrifices on. They set them everywhere in convenient places in towns and highways, where these trees also serve as shades to the travelers (Paulusz, 1989:29). According to him, the Sinhalese considered it as a meritorious deed to plant these trees and he who does this, shall go to heaven within a short while after his death (Paulusz, 1989:29). His report further states that the Sinhalese had a clear understanding about the other world and they were not any different from the early Buddhists who showed the same characteristics of a pilgrim. As the reflection of stories in the Vimānavatappakaraṇa, the internalization of Buddhist concepts of pilgrimage in the minds of the people of the early period, and in the colonial period are the same.

Remains in the traditional villages which present us a comprehensive picture of a pilgrimage culture prove that is was a historical fact that concretized the people in the island. For the benefit of the pilgrims rest rooms close to sacred places, and ambalams (wayside rests) near main roads and fruit bearing trees and trees for shade planted at the traditional villages are praise worthy service fitting to the accommodation of Buddhist pilgrims. In view of cultural anthropology (Phillip; 2004:350) the traditional rituals which perform at the Buddhist temples today are the results of pilgrimages in ancient Ceylonese.

References


