

## The Concretization of Sinhalese into the Ethnic Identity by Buddhist Pilgrimages: A Historical Investigation<sup>1</sup>

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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 socio-anthropology 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 *Vāddās* 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 in 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 (Geertz, 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

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. *Kāliṅga-Bodhi Jātakaya* 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 Tathāgata, by erecting a *Stūpa* at the fourcross-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 *Cetiya*s 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 Dēvānampiyatissa 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.

*Padavītihāraya* 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 Siddhārtha was born (Thapar, 1961: 261) and

at Sārānāth where Buddha preached his first sermon. The *Stūpa* at Sārānāth was built to commemorate this event. It is remarkable that during the period of Asoka the Buddhist pilgrims practised paying homage at the sacred places such as those at Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sārānāth 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 casts met at the Buddhist 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 (Wijesuriya, 2006:15). In view of this work of the Sinhalese, pilgrimages 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

advent of Mahinda Thero, was divided into four major divisions, the *Brāhmaṇas*, *Kṣatriyas*, *Gahapatis* and the *Śūdras* (Ellawala, 1969:11). There is no doubt that *Brāhmaṇās* had separate dwellings and villages of their own. There was a village of the *Brāhmaṇā* called *Tivakka*. (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xix; verse 61) The *Paṇḍulagāma* village was another place where the *Brāhmaṇās* lived (Geiger, 1960: Chapter x verse 20). We have sufficient testimonies to determine that the *Brāhmaṇās* living in those villages embraced the Buddhism. Inscriptions show that they even dedicated caves to the *bhikkus*

*Kṣatriyas*, the kings and officers of royal families and their followers, were of noble class. According to the *Mahāvamsa* (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xix verse 62) they had separate settlements in *Anurādhapura*, *Kājaragāma*, *Kālāṇiya* and *Candanagāma* (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xix; 54). There was a *Kṣatriya* village near *Mahiyaṅga* too.

Many *Gahapatis*, or *Vaiśyas* 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 *Khaṇḍakavithi*, *Hundaṛivāpi* at *Rohaṇa* (Geiger, 1960: Chapter xxiii verse 45) and in the city of *Mahela* near *Anurādhapura* (Geiger, 1960: chapter xxv verse 48).

*Mahāvamsa* and the *Sīhalavatthuppakaraṇa* mention some of the names of low castes, weavers, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, potters, umbrella-bearers, washer men, barbers, leather workers, craftsmen, painters and fishermen. *Sīhalavatthuppakaraṇa* also contains some stories referring to the slaves, servants and labourers. The carpenters had also separate villages named *Vaḍḍakīgāma* (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 *Khum̐basela Vihāra* at *Rohaṇa*, *Kulalitissa Vihāra*, *Kumubalatissa 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).

*Caṇḍālas* and the *Veṇas*, the untouchables, lived in separate villages. The *Caṇḍālas*' villages were called *Caṇḍālagāmas* (Geiger, 1960: Chapter x verse 93). The *Rasavāhinī* mentions about a *Caṇḍālas* village called *Helloliḡāma* near Anuradhapura. *Rasavāhinī* also mentions that seven *Caṇḍāla* sons became *upāsakas* (Vanarathna, 1988: 117-119). According to the *Sahassavatthuppakaraṇa*, savages lived in the hill country (Vanarathna, 1988: 7-8). Hunters as mentioned in the *Sihalavatthuppakaraṇa* lived in separate villages. They had a place in the Buddhist society. According to a report, Buddhism was open to all these castes, for instance, Soṇa who became a *bhikkhu* was the son of a hunter, and also a wife of a hunter became a nun. Hunters, the uncivilized people, were also *upāsakās* who took refuge in the Buddha (Buddhadatta, 1959: 78).

These various groups of people met at the sacred places and the men were called as *upāsakas*, and the women as *upāsikās*, who took refuge in the *Tissaraṇa*. They were also the donors of the *bhikkhus*. In concretizing these people of unequal social classes, pilgrimages played a historical role, molding them into a regular pattern of behaviour.

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, *Nāgadīpa*, *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 via 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 *Bhumāṅgaṇa* Village at Anurādhapura (Buddhadatta, 1959: 4), *Haritāla* village at Nāgadīpa (Buddhadatta, 1959: 6) *Kamboja* village at *Rohaṇa* (Buddhadatta, 1959: 8), *Dīghavāpi* (Buddhadatta, 1959: 86), *Girivajaya Janapadāya* (Buddhadatta, 1959: 159) and *Uturālu* village (*Gopalugama*) (Vanarathana, 1988: 194) which came under Buddhist aculturalization.



The *Mahātīttha* (*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. *Jambukolapittana* 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 Bodhi tree to this place.

*Kālaniya*, which the Lord Buddha arrived at during his third visit to Ceylon was another sacred place. According to *Valāhassa Jātakaya*, *Kālaniya* was a place well known place to the sailors. *Seruvila Stūpa* built by king *Kākaṇṇatissa* which enshrined the frontal bone of the Lord Buddha became a very much crowded 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 foot print there. Groups of men and women, and *bhikkhus* arrived from various regions in the Island and they all met at the *Samantha Kūta*. Providing accommodations for the faithful Buddhists, Sinhala Kings were encouraged them to visit the place. *Mahāvamsa* mentions the donation of Village *Gilimalaya* by King *Vijayabāhu* 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 *Samantha-Kūta* rock said he and village of *Gilimalaya* 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, 1992:64-65). 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 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

With the erection of the *Tūpārūma Stūpa* and the planting of the Bo-tree at *Mahameuna*, 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 *Cetiya*s in the *Vajjian* kingdom have been honoured and worshipped. Naturally customs such as conducting worships at *Cetiya*s have helped to concretize the people building their identity. The Buddha's recommending the erection of *Stūpa*s 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 *Jambukolapaṭṭana* 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 Anuradhapura to *Jambukolapaṭṭana* was a useful road for the pilgrims. Anuradhapura-Gokanṇa highway, Anuradhapura-Uruwelapaṭṭana highway, Anuradhapura-Pallawawāṇka highway, Anurādhapura-Māgama highway and the highway joining the *Mihintale-Kasātota-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 *Rajarata* to *Sripāda*, the road from *Kadambha Nadi* to *Cetiyaḡiri*, the road from Anuradhapura to *Mihintale*, the road up to the *Dakkhiṇa Vihāra*, and the road up to *Sudassana Padhānaghara* (Munasingha, 1998:27-29).

From its early times, the Buddhist city of Anuradhapura was rich in many sacred sites. After the establishment of the great *Stūpa*s, many visitors from all over the country were able to meet together. Ceremonies and festivals held at the places of *Stūpa*s 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 (Buddhadatta, 1951:151). The greatest *Stūpa*s 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 *bhikkhunis* participated in a ritual offering to the Mirisawētiya 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 *Vimānavattuppakaraṇa* 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 worshipping at the *Nāgadīpa Stūpa* with lily flowers. There was also a girl in the *Kinihiriya* village offering *Kinihiriya* flowers to the *Stūpa*, and a woman at *Thammānna* 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 Vihāra* with the approval of Lord Buddha. It

was expected that this tree was there, as a mark of salutation to Lord Buddha, especially when he was not present in the *Vihāra* premises. Lay people have exhibited their faith in the Bo-tree by visiting the *Jetavana Vihāra*. By the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C., the custom of Bo-tree worship became a popular practice among the Buddhists. Lay people from Sri Lanka also undertake pilgrimages by ship to India to worship the Great Bo-tree with spreading of sands, offering of flowers, and sprinkling of perfume water (Beal, 1884:136). For the pilgrimages *Bhikkhus*' guidance was essential. Tripitaka *Cūlabhaya* has guided five hundred *bhikkhus* during a pilgrimage (Vanarathna, 1988:208). The accommodations provided by faithful kings were reserved for these pilgrims arriving from faraway places. Hiuen-Tsang mentions, Siri Meghavaṇṇa is said to have sent two *bhikkhus* to India to the king Samudra Gupta, requesting him to provide shelter for the Sinhalese monks who were on a pilgrimage to the sacred tree at Bōdgayā (Beal, 1884:35).

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 *Nāgadīpa* 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 *Nāgadīpa* with the intention of worshipping at this sacred *Cetiya* (Buddhadatta, 1951:86) and sixty *bhikkhus* visited *Nāgadīpa Rājāyatana* (Buddhadatta, 1959:35). According to the *Mahāvagga vpāli*, *Rājāyatana*, a memorial site to the Buddhists was one of the seven places where Lord Buddha spent seven whole weeks after his enlightenment. While *bhikkhus* on pilgrimage were able to meet men and women of different classes, they in turn, got an opportunity to attend on the *bhikkhus* and supply alms, etc. The people organized pilgrimages in the country for worship in such a manner that they met the other pilgrims on their way to these sacred places. Ariyagāla Tissa story mentions about a five hundred *bhikkhus* on a pilgrimage from Anuradhapura to *Māgama*, worshipped every sacred place they encountered on their way (Buddhadatta, 1959:18-20).

To Buddhists, *Dīghavāpī* is a historical sacred place where Lord Buddha spent time in concentration. This place was a famous

centre of Buddhist culture for the devotees to gather. In the early period thousands of devotees made pilgrimages to Bo-tree at Digavāpi (Buddhadatta, 1959:204). Seven *bhikkhus* from *Girivajana Janapadaya* made a pilgrimage to *Cetiya Vandana* at *Kirivehera* walking sixty four *Gawwas*-(A Sinhala measure of length roughly equal to three miles) (Buddhadatta, 1959:37) and a further eighty four *Gawwas* to *Māgama*, and from there another twenty eight *Gawwas* 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* of *Missaka pawwa* where there were many complexes of shrines and *Avukana*, *Sässeruwa*, *Polonnaruwa Galvihāraya* 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 *Dēvadūta-Sutta*, thousands of people gathered (Geiger, 1960:Chapter xi verse 64). By hearing the discourse of *Bālapaṇḍita-Sutta*, thousands of women attained the first stage of salvation (Geiger, 1960:Chapter xv verse 5). This group entered different positions in society. *Aṭṭakathā*, *Sīhalavattuprakaraṇṇa*, *Rasavāhini*

and *Sahassavattuprakaraṇa* present a comprehensive picture how *Dhammacārikā* 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. Pussadēva Thero at *Kalakaṇḍara Vihāraya* was a very popular *bhikkhu* who practised 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 *Uddalolaka Vihāraya* 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 *Mahāsūmā* Thero (Vanarathna, 1988:140).

A tremendous number of people from far away places assembled to listen to the *Ariyavaṃsa Desana*, a very interesting deliverance. A monastery at Mahawewa where a hundred *bhikkus* dwell had an annual ceremony of *Ariyavaṃsa* (Buddhadatta, 1959:169). People in the *Mahakaraṇḍa* village of *Seruwila* went on pilgrimage to *Udumbara Vihāraya* to listen to *Ariyavaṃsa Desana*, taking with them rice, curries and sweets etc (Vanarathna, 1988:173). There were always Dhamma talks in the hall at *Māṇikvehera*. 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 (Sadhu!) 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 *Dhammacārikā*. 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 Vihārawent* 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 Abahayagiri Vihāra. Fa-Hsien mentions that there was a tooth relic exhibition lasting ninety days at that Vihāra (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 17<sup>th</sup> 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



cared for these trees more than they cared for any other thing. They play around under these 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 *Vimānavattuppakaraṇa*, 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 it 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.

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