

# **BUDDHISM APPROACHES TO CULTURAL ECOLOGY IN INDIA AND SRILANKA**

**Prof. W. K. Sarwade**

Dean, Faculty of Commerce and Management Science,  
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University,  
Aurangabad (M.S.) India.  
Contact No.: 9423780549.  
Email: walmik\_sarwade@hotmail.com

## **Introduction**

Sri Lanka has been referred as the 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean'. The land area is 65,610 sq.Km. It is bigger than eleven Indian states i.e. Goa (3,814 sq.Km.), Haryana (44,212 sq.Km.), Himachal (55,673 sq.Km.), Kerala (38,863 sq.Km.), Manipur (22,327 sq.Km.), Meghalaya (22,429 sq.Km.), Mizoram (21,081 sq.Km.), Nagaland (16,579 sq.Km.), Punjab (50,362 sq.Km.), Sikkim (7,098 sq.Km.) and Tripura (10,486 sq.Km.). Sri Lanka is almost half of the size of Tamilnadu and one-fifth of the size of Maharashtra. It is surrounded by sea. The climate of this island is tropical and the temperature of its different areas varies from 10°C to 32°C. Commercial capital is Colombo and Political administrative capital is Sri Jayewardenepura. The population is 18.8 Mn., and the population growth rate is 1.4%. Literacy rate is 92.1%, which is higher than that of Kerala (69.2%). Per capita GNP in 1998 was 823 US\$. This is equivalent to annual income of Rs. 53,000 or monthly income of Rs. 4,400. The Human Development Index is 0.716, which is higher than that of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. Sri Lanka has three national languages i.e. Sinhalese, Tamil and English.

It has, mainly, three ethnic groups, 74% Sinhalese, 18% Tamils, and 7% Moors. One percent of the population consists of Eurasians, Malays, and Veddas. There are four religious groups, 69% Buddhist, 15% Hindus, 8% Muslims, and 8% Christians. Prior to the year 1500 Sri Lanka did not have Muslims or Christians, and Sinhalese, Buddhists and Tamil Hindus population would have been 88.5% and 12.5% respectively. Muslims came to Sri Lanka as traders. Sinhala kings allowed them to settle down in Sri Lanka in order to protect them from Portuguese and Dutch invaders. Some Sinhalese and Tamil people were converted to Catholic and Christian religions during the Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial administrative periods. Five percent of the present population is Indian origin Tamil Hindus, whose parents were brought to Sri Lanka after the year 1815 by the British colonial masters to work in the Plantations. Today, these Tamil-speaking people are Sri Lankans and they live in Sinhala majority areas. More than 50% of the Tamil-speaking people live in Sinhala majority areas. The majority of the populations in the North and East provinces are Tamil-speaking. Sri Lanka is a multi-religious country with a Buddhist majority population. The Buddhists in Sri Lanka are not anti-Hindu. Similarly, the Hindu in Sri Lanka is not anti-Buddhist.

Rational behind the study

The Buddhist in Sri Lanka believes that, the Lord Buddha had visited Sri Lanka in three occasions. Once, it was to settle dispute between two kings of the Naga tribe. Another occasion was to reduce the power of the Yaksha tribe people who were harassing the others. In another occasion Lord Buddha placed his foot prints at the top of the samanthakuta, a big mountain.

During the period of Lord Buddha, two merchant brothers from Sri Lanka, Thapassu and Bhallukha had come to Banaras in India and met Lord Buddha. They become Buddhist. They were given 'Kesha Dhathu' from the 'shishya' of Lord Buddha for the purpose of worshipping. After returning to Sri Lanka they had build a 'Stupha' with it.

According to Mahavamsa, about 2550 years ago, there were three tribal groups in Sri Lanka, Yaksha, Naga and Deva. You may have already read about the Yaksha tribe and one of their great kings, 'Ravana' in the book 'Ramayana' by 'Valmiky'. According to Prof. Paranawishana Aryans had come to Sri Lanka and settled down in different parts of the country. On the day of Mahapaarinibbana of Lord Buddha, an Indian Aryan prince, Vijaya had landed in Sri Lanka from the province of Lata in India. He was chased away by his father from India due to his bad conduct. He married the then queen of Sri Lanka, Kuveni. She was from the Yaksha tribe. They had two children. Prince Vijaya killed Yaksha tribe leaders with help of the queen. Subsequently, he chased away the queen Kuveni and two children and married a princess from India. This princess had come to Sri Lanka from the Indian port, Supparaka. This port has been identified at present Sopara in Maharashtra. Today in Sri Lanka, tribal groups of Yaksha, Naga and Deva cannot be found or identified. They may have been mixed with the Aryans, and present communities of Sinhala and Tamil would have been formed. Sinhala community consider themselves as descendants of Aryans. Tamil community consider themselves as descendants of Aryans. This may be a misinterpretation. Both communities may be a mixture of Aryans and Anaryans. Sinhala community has been highly influenced by a North Indian common people's language of "Pali", and a North Indian religion of "Buddhism". The Tamil community has been highly influenced by an Aryan language of Sanskrit and an Aryan religion of Hinduism.

At the time of Lord Buddha of subsequently, there were followers of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. However, the Buddhism was not widely spread or generally accepted by the people of Sri Lanka. People were worshipping trees, mountains stones, sun, moon, and etc.

Sri Lankans received and accepted Buddhism as a whole nation during the period of king Devanampiyatissa. King Dharmashoka in India sent a group of Buddhist missionaries to the king in Sri Lanka a son of king Dharmashoka, Arahath Mahindra was the leader of the Buddhist mission. And He established the Bhikku Sasana in Sri Lanka. A daughter of king Dharmashoka, Arahath Sangamitra came to Sri Lanka, subsequently, and established a Bhikkuni Sasana in Sri Lanka. The king in Sri Lanka and his people become a Buddhists. King Dharmashoka had sent Buddhist missionaries to his friendly neighboring countries. Allahabad Inscription in India contains a list of Bhikkus sent as Buddhist missionaries. Receiving of Buddhism can be considered as a turning point of knowledge. Sri Lanka does not possess any evidence of a written language prior to receiving the Buddhism. Sinhala language has been developed with the help of the "Pali" language. Present Sinhala characters were originally based on

the Brahmi Scripts, which could be seen in stone inscriptions in Sri Lanka. Even the Sanskrit language has influenced in the development of the Sinhala language.

Even the people of Maldiv Islands, who speak a language closely related to Sinhalese were Buddhist in the past. A considerable number of dilapidated Buddhist “Stuphas” and ruins can be seen in Moldive Islands. At present, It is a Muslim Nation.

From time to time South Indian kings invaded Sri Lanka. They killed Buddhist monks, destroyed Buddhist monasteries and ruined the irrigation system. Sri Lanka had a highly developed irrigation system, which may have been introduced by the Aryans. This was the blood stream of the nation. Once the irrigation system is destroyed the whole nation could be ruined. The South Indian invaders used this as a strategy cup the power in Sri Lanka. In early days capitals of Sinhala kingdoms were in the North-Central part of Sri Lanka, South-Indian invasions have forced the Sinhala kings to shift the capital to central and southern area of the country. Prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there are no evidence of Tamil kingdoms in Sri Lanka, exact for the South Indian invaders. Even Today, lot of Buddhist ruins can be found in North and East provinces of Sri Lanka. A considerable number of Buddhists may have lived in the North and East provinces during the good old days. In couple of occasions Sri Lanka kings also had invaded South India. Sri Lanka had been marrying from royal families of South India. The people who came to Sri Lanka on friendly terms were absorbed into the Sinhala Buddhist community, while Sinhala kings had more problems with the Tamil dynasties; the relationship with the Pandya and Kerla dynasties had been very friendly.

Today in Sri Lanka, the terms “Sinhalese” and “Buddhist” are considered as inseparable Sinhalese means Buddhist. Buddhist means Sihalese. This may be a misnomer. Since for the past 2000 years Sinhala kings and their people had been protecting the Buddhism from the South Indian invasions, Sinhalese community may be considering themselves as protectors of Buddhism. When Buddhism was destroyed in India, It was protected in Sri Lanka by the Sinhala kings and Buddhist in Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka had been a land of protection for the displaced Indian Buddhist monks. Anagarika Dharmapala who worked for the revival of Buddhism, mainly in Gaya and generally in India is a Sri Lanka.

Today in Sri Lanka, full moon day is a public and mercantile holiday, meat, fish and liquor cannot be sold on full moon days. The poson full moon day, on which Arahath Mahindra introduced Buddhism to Sri Lanka, and the subsequent day are holidays. Two days are holidays for the Vesak. On full moon days Buddhist temples are full devotees. People wear white clothes, observe sil and participate in Buddhist religious activities. In my opinion, pure Buddhism can be found in Sri Lanka. This does not mean that all the Buddhists in Sri Lanka are highly religious and all the monks are well deciplined. Infiltration of some Hindu concepts can be seen in practices of some Buddhist temples.

Every village or town where Buddhists reside has Buddhist temples. Every Buddhist temple has a group of families directly connected to the temple. They look after the welfare of the monks. The connected families provide foods and other requirements including the money for education of monks. There are special institutions called “Pirivena” to provide education and training for small and young Buddhist

monks. Facilities are available to learn Buddhism, Pali, Sanskrit, Prakrutha, English and etc. A changing trend in the traditional education system of monks can be seen in Sri Lanka.

Generally, boys are ordained as novice monks when they are very young and education is provided. In Sri Lanka a person cannot become a Buddhist monk for a short period. Generally, uneducated Buddhist monks cannot be found. If a monk leaves the monkhood, he is out-casted by the Buddhists. They are called 'Heeraluwas', it is not a respectable identification. However, since they possess the education and knowledge of different disciplines it is possible for such a person to find an employment. A Buddhist monk can be either "Gramavasi" (living in villages or towns) or 'Aranyavasi.....' monks participate in Buddhist rituals and activities of the people such as funerals, Pirith ceremonies aims giving and etc. However, monks cannot be seen at ..... Meet them. They can be seen only during the breakfast and lunch times. One has to be in the waiting list even to provide alms for them.

For a long period, Sri Lanka did not have lady Bhikkus (Bhikkuni Sasana). Recently, Bhikkuni Sasana was again establish.

The Sri Lankan Government supports all religions. There are three separate government department of Buddhist affairs, Hindu affairs, and Muslim affairs. Generally, Christians are more wealthy, educated and hold better positions. Mainly due to past historical reasons. Religious harmony among different communities prevails within the country. This does not mean Sri Lanka did not have communal riots. Sri Lanka had to communal riots. One was in 1950s. The other was in 1980s. During the period of communal riots Sinhala families in the North and East were attacked and looted by the Tamil thugs. However, Tamils in those areas provided protections for the Sinhalese. Tamil families in the Sinhala dominated areas were attacked and looted by the Sinhala thugs. It was the Sinhala people who provided protection for them. I have visited Tamil refugee camps with food and provisions for my Tamil friends who were displaced, and had seen lot of Sinhala people including Buddhist monk helping the Tamil refugees.

During the last 18 year period, the LTT terrorist movement, which is a being funded by International Organizations, has been killing Sinhalese and Muslims in the North and East. The North and East provinces of Sri Lanka have attacked important Buddhist religious places in Sinhala Buddhist areas, such as Sri Maha Bhodhi at Anuradhapura and Lord Buddha's Tooth Relic at Kandy. Once they massacred about 30 monks travelling in a bus through a jungle area called "Aranthalawa" these are just a couple of incidence. They may be trying to instigate and antagonize Sinhala Buddhists against Hindu-Tamils, who are living together in Sinhales majority areas. The LTT organization is anti-Buddhist.

Concluding remark

Buddhism in Srilanka and India

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